**blood and dirt**

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**blood and dirt**

by *ralf*

**Summary**

Canon Rewrite. After the Seelie Queen betrays Jonathan and leaves him to die, Clary is more determined than ever to find a way to save him. Alec's single aim is getting to Magnus before Lilith does, no matter the cost or how slim his chances. Meanwhile Izzy fights the heavenly fire burning hotter and hotter in her veins. Only one thing is certain: Time is running out for all of them.

[Diverges from Canon halfway through 3x21. Jonathan gets a real shot at redemption, the Edom rift drama gets resolved in a less ridiculous way, Magnus gets to show off the real extent of his power, etc.]

**Notes**

My first multi-chaptered fic in english, I'm low-key terrified. The chapter count is a guess for now, I have everything plotted and outlined but I want to keep the chapter length somewhat consistent and I don't know how long certain sections will get since I haven't written them yet... which also means I don't have a fixed posting schedule, but I'm reasonably sure and pretty optimistic it won't take overly long to finish this.
Hope

Flames lick under Jonathan’s skin, burning through his veins as if his blood had turned to lava. The pain is inescapable but he still tries to crawl away, a useless instinct designed to keep him alive.

 Alive.

The prospect has lost all appeal to him. There's nothing left for him. Everything he desperately hoped for, everything that was almost within his grasp, so close he could almost taste it, crashed right before his eyes. All that remains are smoldering ashes, choking the last breath from him. He gasps for air, bark and roots digging into his arms and stomach, the black tar that keeps oozing from his back and legs scorching hot and ice cold at the same time. It's a slow agony that feels like it's been going on forever. He just wants it to stop.

He wants everything to stop.

He only realizes he's not alone anymore when feet enter his field of vision. Tilting his head with an effort he recognizes the Seelie Queen, flanked by two of her guards. She contemplates him, a smug little grin tugging on her lips.

For a moment she just sways in place before inclining her head daintily. “Administer the serum,” she orders.

One guard steps forward, a syringe filled with golden liquid and swirling dark in his hands. Jonathan pushes off the ground weakly, a vain attempt to get out of reach.

“What is that?” he rasps, voice cracking.

The Seelie Queen turns cold eyes on him. “This will obstruct your transformation.” She cocks her head. “I should thank the Shadowhunters. They carelessly left the remaining splinters of Glorious in my realm, providing me with just what I needed to squash you.”


The Queen laughs. “Oh, you silly boy. Did you really think I was going to let you become a threat to me?” She chuckles, lifting her hand to cover her mouth in the mockery of coyness.

It's foolish but he can't stop the words tumbling from his mouth. “But you said you were a preservationist.” He'd stupidly thought at least her perverse fascination with him was something to count on. Some dubious sort of security. How naive he's been.

The Seelie Queen smiles at him, full of false sweetness. “I am. I do strive to preserve my subjects and my kingdom and my power.” She steps closer with every word until she's looming over him, the seam of her dress brushing his arm. “Did you never wonder what happened to Lucifer after his transformation?”

He hadn't. A careless oversight, one he likely won't have much time left to regret.

“My predecessor happened to him. Unfortunately for her she wasn't smart enough to dispose of him in a way that left her unscathed.” The Queen shrugs with pretended pity. “After his transformation he was too powerful to be put down with mere blades. I surely won’t make the same mistake.”

“If you planned to kill me from the start, why did you offer me shelter?” It feels like futile arguing
but he can't help asking. He doesn't understand.

The Seelie Queen scoffs. “Just a way to keep tabs on you. Tracking you has been a hassle. I don't like wasting my resources.” With that she nods at the guard standing by his feet and turns to go, clearly done with their exchange. As if he's nothing more than a fleck of dust on her shoe, easily brushed aside and forgotten.

“Oh, and destroy his blocking rune,” she calls over her shoulder. “Let the Shadowhunters take care of him.”

The guard with the syringe kneels next to his shoulder, plunging it into his flesh mercilessly. Even if he wasn't half paralysed by the beginnings of his transformation Jonathan isn't sure if he would have tried to stop him. He watches numbly as the guard emptied the contents of the syringe into his shoulder.

The second guard unsheathes a dagger, slicing through the sleeve of Jonathan's jacket, revealing the blocking rune on his left arm. The blade cuts through the rune neatly, rendering it useless. The pain of it barely registers compared to the serum taking hold of his body, a fire meeting the one already raging through his being, right to his core. He can feel it attacking the wings nestled into his back, can feel it eradicating the soothing presence of them, but it doesn't let up after that. Instead it seems to be getting stronger. It feels like it's warring against his very soul, and won't stop until there's nothing left of him.

His eyes flutter shut. He can't move where he lies crumpled to the ground.

There's nothing but him and endless agony.

~ ~ ~

That's how Clary finds him.

He lost all sense of time. It might be hours since the Queen's guards left him here to die, but with every Shadowhunter alive searching for him it was probably considerably less. The pain in his limbs has dulled a little, leaving him raw and aching but he hasn't attempted to move yet. What for? His stele was lost in the fight that destroyed the twinning rune and he has nowhere left to go. And there are worse places to die than nestled between the roots of a tree, surrounded by the calming swoosh of the wind.

He doesn't try to hide or flee. Instead he watches Clary approach him with determined strides. She's as beautiful as the first day he laid eyes on her, fierce and fiery and everything he's ever wanted to call his own.

At least this time around she will be the one to kill him, not Valentine's other son experiment.

The thought doesn't bring him the comfort he'd hoped it would. As much as he wishes for Clary's face to be the last thing he sees he can't bear the disgust and hate that will be simmering in her eyes.

He lets his own eyes fall closed. Better not to see anything at all.

Her steps falter when she draws near him. Maybe because of the black ichor he can still feel clinging to him. Or because she expects a trap. He doesn't care. He just wants it to end.
Clary is hesitating.

“What are you waiting for, Clary? Finish it.”

There's the sound of shuffling. He thinks Clary is squatting down beside him, silently looking him over for a moment.

“You're not fighting back.”

It's more assessment than question, but he answers anyway. “I'll never be free. And you'll never love me. What would I be fighting for?”

Clary's clothes rustle as she shifts. Jonathan imagines her lifting her kinjal, placing it right over his heart, ready to strike. Ready to wipe him off the face of the earth and finally forget about him for good.

He lets out a breath. “Do it. Release us both.”

He waits, but the stab to end his life never comes. Instead her hand cups his cheek gently. He flinches away from the touch but she follows, resting her hand more securely, more firmly against his skin.

“Look at me,” she demands softly. He doesn't want to obey but he does, because he would do anything for Clary. It's his fatal flaw, or at least it was supposed to be.

Clary is sitting by his side, her eyes shimmering with an emotion he can't identify.

“Just get it over with, Clary,” he pleads. “Why are you dragging out the inevitable?”

She shakes her head slowly, caressing his cheek tenderly. The motion squeezes around his heart.

“When you were in Edom, crying out for me, I was dreaming about you,” she says, and the words pierce him through more painfully than any knife could. “Night after night I fought to reach you but I was always too late. I tried to save you, I tried so hard. But I never made it. I thought I never could. I gave up on you.”

He feels flayed bare. His voice is little more than a choke when he forces it out. “Why are you saying this?” Why is she saying this when she'll just abandon him like everyone else?

Clary's lips pull into an unhappy frown, her eyes shining clearer. “I never started to believe in you again. That there was still good in you. I never gave you a chance. I was so focused on fighting you that I never stopped to look.”

She brushes a tear off his cheek that he hadn't even noticed escaping. “And now that we're here and the fight is over, I finally do.”

He blinks up at her uncomprehendingly, her gaze soothing and warm in a way he never thought he'd get to see directed at him. Never at him.

“I want to do it right this time,” she whispers. “No twinning rune, no mind control. Just you and me.”
You and me. Hearing her say it makes his heart throb with yearning. But it's her next words that make it lurch in his chest.

“I won't kill you,” she declares, her brow setting in determination. “I'm going to save you.”
“You can't be serious.”

Guilt sits clear as day in Clary's eyes, but she doesn't shrink back one bit under the force of his scowl, sitting defiantly in the visitor's chair in front of Alec's desk.

“He opened a rift to Edom. He's responsible for the death of hundreds of Shadowhunters,” Alec recites, feeling a little ridiculous and a lot aghast that he apparently needs to remind Clary of all her brother's numerous and very recent misdeeds. “He could have killed every living being in this dimension. And you want me to spare him??”

Clary swallows but still gears up for an objection. “I know how that sounds.”

Alec whole-heartedly doubts that because if she did she'd stop talking.

“But... he's not beyond saving,” Clary continues. “He was lost all his life and that's why he did these things. He thought if he did he'd get to have a family.”

Alec blinks. Clary's words unsettle him, the conviction coloring her words, the determination radiating off of every fiber of her being. When she'd entered his office and announced that she'd managed to capture Jonathan and he was currently in a holding cell, he'd felt relief that at least one of their crises would be resolved soon and he could focus all his energy on finding a way into Edom and a solution for the Lilith problem. Clary's sudden belief in her brother's humanity and redeemableness is not something he'd calculated with. He feels blindsided by it in the worst way possible.

His first instinct is to confront Clary head-on with the extent of Jonathan's atrocities and not relent until her unfounded faith in her brother is squished, but he's handled Clary enough times to realize that this line of reasoning won't get him anywhere. Better to stick to the irrefutable facts than arguing over feelings.

“His motivation is irrelevant. He's too dangerous to be left alive.”

“The Morgenstern sword is destroyed,” Clary counters.

Alec shakes his head. “He's still dangerous enough on his own. We couldn't contain him before that either.”

Clary bites her lip, something haunted entering her gaze. “You didn't see him, Alec. When I found him he was.. lifeless, almost. He would have let me kill him without resistance. He didn't even protest when I put the cuffs on him and brought him in. There's no fight left in him.”

Alec frowns. Reconciling Clary's description with the destructive creature he remembers, that wreaked havoc just for havoc's sake, seems impossible. And yet, something in Clary's voice rings undeniably true.

Taking his short silence as an in, Clary quickly resumes. “Something happened to him. He's weakened. Even if he tried we could overpower him.”

“Clary...”

“He could help us. If anyone knows of a way to kill Lilith it would be him. He can be useful. Just
give him the chance to prove it, Alec.”

The mention of Lilith makes his stomach clench. Fear for Magnus has been gnawing at his insides since the portal closed behind him, increased tenfold after they’d learned that Lilith was gearing up for a war. He’s been shoving it down viciously, knowing full well that if he slipped up and let himself think about it he’d spiral into panic and he can’t afford to lose his mind when so much depends on him making the right decisions.

Which is exactly why he can't let the reckless hope that's starting to claw at him cloud his judgement. They've tried to stop Jonathan for so long now, and every time they hesitated he escaped, leaving more death in his wake. They need to end it now that they can, and find another way to defeat Lilith.

“Clary. I can't. I'm sorry but I can't. The risk is too high.”

Tears spring to Clary's eyes. “Please Alec, please. Only one chance. If he does anything, anything out of line I'll kill him myself.” Her lip starts quivering. “Please. He's the only family I have left.”

The words hit Alec like a punch to the throat because he's the reason for that. It's thanks to him that she has to cling so desperately to that abomination she calls brother. Because if it wasn't for him she'd still have her mom.

He knows Clary doesn't think like that and that she forgave him, but that only makes it worse. It makes him the only one left to recognize his guilt for what it is: deserved. If he'd just--

He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. All his senses scream at him to deny Clary and finally rid the earth of the unparalleled evil that is Jonathan Morgenstern. But as soon as he looks at Clary's tear-stained face he knows those words of rejection won't leave his mouth.

“Just one chance,” Clary pleads again, her voice breaking.

He can't rip any more family from Clary than he already has, no matter how demonic and monstrous in nature it might be. He doesn't have the right to refuse her.

“One chance,” he chokes out. “And I want to talk to him first.”

The relief and gratitude that comes to light in Clary's eyes squeeze at his heart while his gut twists with the sinking feeling that he made a horrible mistake.

~ ~ ~

Jace is there keeping watch when Alec and Clary arrive at the cell Jonathan is currently occupying. Jace's arms are crossed and he's staring at Jonathan's slumped form as if he could incinerate him with the force of his gaze alone.

He turns around towards them as soon as he hears their steps and a wry smile tugs at his lips. “Here to finally finish him off?”

Alec contemplates Jonathan through the glass pane. He's cowering in a corner, shackled hands in his lap, unmoving. He didn't look up even though he must have noticed their approach. It's a sharp contrast to how he was carrying himself last time he was in this cell, all hostile, daring glares and self-assured smirks.
There's no easy way to relay this piece of news, so he simply says, “I'm here to talk to him about the terms of his release.”

He wisely didn't face Jace for that particular revelation but he still feels shock, rage and betrayal exploding through their parabatai bond.

“What?! You're kidding, right?”

I wish I was. Alec ignores Jace's outrage and walks over to the keypad but Jace intercepts him before he reaches it.

“No no no wait. What's going on here? Are you actually serious? You want to let him go?”

“Of course not,” Alec scoffs. “But we're granting him a stay of execution. He gets a chance to prove himself to us.”

There's a storm brewing in Jace's multi-colored eyes. “Alec, he is pure evil. What more proof do you need? What the hell?!”

Alec sidesteps him and starts entering the code, but Jace beats his hand away before he can type in more than the first digit.

“I'm not letting you do this.”

“This is not your decision to make,” Alec snaps. It's unfair, he knows that, he knows that reason is on Jace's side and that it's not Jace's fault Alec is so on edge. But that doesn't change the fact that he feels one second from crawling out of his skin with nerves and nausea, and consideration isn't something he can spare right now.

Jace shakes his head, staring at Alec in utter disbelief, and Alec takes the chance to punch in the rest of the code.

“There's no way the Clave approved this,” Jace says, just as the lamp of the keypad blinks green, the door disengaging with an audible grate.

Alec pauses with his hand on the door handle and turns to Jace. “You're right, they didn't. As far as they're concerned Clary killed Jonathan this morning near the south corner of central park.” Jace's gaze flickers to Clary who hunches her shoulders guiltily. “So either you report to the Clave that the Head of the New York Institute has gone rogue or you help me with this. It's your choice, parabatai.”

He doesn't like using their parabatai bond as a bargaining chip, as a means to manipulate Jace emotionally and cut off this argument before it has any chance to really begin, but he can't have this conversation right now. And it's not like Jace hasn't done the exact same thing countless times to win him over on a less than sensible (or legal) venture.

Jace looks struck, hurt even, but Alec clenches his teeth and pushes past it and him, walking into the cell with confidence he doesn't entirely feel, but enough determination not to screw things up to compensate for it.

Alec dislikes manipulation, mostly because he's not very good at it. Subterfuge and twisting the truth don't lie in his nature and while he's found that brute honesty and thinly veiled threats work just as effectively when it comes to outmaneuvering political adversaries this isn't a comparable situation.

Clary's report and Jonathan's demeanor paint a certain picture of his frame of mind, but Alec isn't inclined to built his approach on something he can't verify yet and is less than convinced of. Showing
his hand is not an option if he wants Jonathan to feel like he's the one at a disadvantage and get him to cooperate.

Pulling the cell door closed behind himself he takes one last steeling breath and carefully considers what to say. He has to get this right. For Magnus.

Jonathan still hasn't looked up when Alec reaches him, far away enough that he can react if Jonathan tries a surprise attack but close enough to be looming.

“The only reason you're still alive is because Clary told me you have information on how to kill Lilith. Despite that I won't hesitate to kill you if you do anything out of line.”

“And if I don't,” Jonathan asks, still staring at his hands.

Alec weighs his words. “I promised her not to harm you as long as you do exactly what you're told.” He lets that hang in the air between them for a moment. Now that the red line is established some enticement is in order. “Clary thinks there's still good in you. That you can be saved. I'm not so sure about that but I intend to keep my promise regardless. It's up to you if this arrangement works out.”

“It's not like I have a choice.” It sounds matter-of-factly rather than spiteful.

Alec cocks his head. “You could fight back.”

Finally Jonathan lifts his head to meet his eyes. His gaze is hollow. Alec's not even sure if he really sees him. “I don't want to fight anymore.”

Up until a heartbeat ago Alec would have sworn whatever facade Jonathan was presenting them with was just that, a front, to lull them into a false sense of security so he could strike at the right moment. Now he's not so sure anymore. He's not sure anyone could fake an emptiness like this. It's disconcerting.

Alec pushes it aside. “Fine. As long as you keep to that, things can remain peaceful. Now tell me about Lilith's weaknesses.”

“There's only one,” Jonathan answers, eyes glazing over as if drowning in a memory. “The only thing that can harm her in Edom is angelic power. She's as vulnerable to a seraph blade as any mundane is to a sword. One stab through her chest and she'll be dead.”

Alec blinks. It seems too easy, and at the same time impossible. “So she's basically invincible. Because nothing angelic can survive in Edom.”

“There's a reason she's been ruling over Edom since the dawn of time,” Jonathan simply replies.

Alec forces down the impulse to scrub over his face. He won't show any sign of insecurity in front of Jonathan.

He's about to ask him how he knows this when his phone buzzes. Taking a careful step back he reaches to check it. A notification from Underhill flashes across the screen.

Catarina Loss is here to see you.

Alec peers at Jonathan, wondering what he's done with this short instant of inattentiveness, but he hasn't moved one inch.

With one last pensive frown he turns on his heel and leaves the cell.
Alec exits the cell with determined strides, turning off the cell comms Jace had activated to hear their conversation as soon as he'd overcome the shock of Alec leaving him out in the cold like that.

“I need you two upstairs,” Alec says. After a glance over his shoulder to Jonathan he adds, “Don’t interact with him without me in attendance.” He levels Jace with a flat stare. “Neither of you.”

Jace crosses his arms, sure that Alec can feel his displeasure and simmering anger through their bond. Alec holds his gaze for another moment, mouth twisting unhappily before turning abruptly and marching off towards the elevator.

Jace turns to Clary who's been silent since she arrived with Alec. “Please explain this to me Clary, because I don't understand it.”

“Jace...”

Jace shakes his head. “Clary, he almost killed my brother. He's evil.”

“He's my brother,” Clary retorts, her eyes shining traitorously. “He's never had anyone in his life. I don't think he's evil, Jace. He's just lonely.”

A shiver runs down Jace's spine. It's like when they were in Prague, Clary watching him with intensity and determination while defending that monster, claiming he's harmless and deserving of anything other than death.

“This isn't you, Clary.”

Clary takes a step towards him, settling her hand on his arm. Jace resents that the touch grounds him despite everything.

“It is. You know Izzy cleared me of any influence of the twinning rune. My mind is entirely my own.”

“Then why do you keep insisting on this? Not even two weeks ago you wanted to kill him yourself.” He searches Clary's face for an answer that will make sense of her change of heart but all he sees is misplaced faith devoid of all reason.

“I was wrong about him,” Clary answers. “I realize that now. He can be good and he'll prove it to you.” She shoots him a smile that's probably meant to be reassuring but only raises trepidation in his gut. “Just give him a chance, Jace. That's all I'm asking.” Her hand slides down to his, lacing their fingers together. “Please?”

Jace feels himself nod even though it's the last thing he wants to do. First his parabatai, now Clary. It seems he's the only one left with any common sense.
He straightens a little. He'll keep a sharp eye on all of them. And if Jonathan so much as twirls a finger without permission he'll be there to take him out. It's only a matter of time.

Clary squeezes his hand. “Let's go find Alec.”

They walk to the spacious training room, their hands still laced together, where Izzy and Simon are already gathered.

“Where's Alec?” Jace asks. Before either of them can answer him Alec enters the room with Catarina by his side.

“--as soon as I could,” she's saying.

“Madzie?” Alec inquires.

“I left her with Raphael. He'll look after her for however long it takes to resolve this.”

“Good.”

Jace feels the slightest fraction of relief through their bond. Alec and Catarina have reached the circle of them now. Catarina's gaze sweeps over everyone present. “What do we have so far?”

“Only an angelic blade can kill Lilith, so we have to get to Edom as soon as possible,” Alec opens.

“Whatever Magnus can throw at her will only slow her down.”

“I can open a portal to Edom,” Catarina offers, “but...”

“We've been over this,” Izzy cuts in. “The demonic atmosphere will fry us before we'll achieve anything.”

“And I'm still not too keen on siring you,” Simon adds.

Catarina's eyes snap to Alec in alarm but he doesn't even notice, waving Simon off. “It would take too long. And as a vampire I wouldn't be able to wield a seraph blade anyway.”

_Glad to know that_ rational arguments _convinced you not to throw away our parabatai bond_, Jace thinks viciously and regrets it a second later. If he had to choose between a shot at saving Clary's life and their bond he's not sure he could hesitate either.

“We need to find a way to fight off the demonic atmosphere in Edom,” Alec continues. “Any ideas?”

“Maybe I could create a rune that will let us withstand Edom,” Clary suggests.

“That's a very big maybe,” Alec says with a frown.

“I can try.”

Alec shakes his head. “We have no way to test if it works before going in. I'm not risking anyone's life for a trial run.”

Clary opens her mouth to protest but Izzy interrupts. “I honestly don't think it can work, Clary. A rune is always fuelled by angelic energy, tapping into our angelic blood to draw power. The demonic energy in Edom is so dense that it destroys anything non-demonic. A rune can never cloak its own energy signature.” She turns to Catarina. “Would it be possible to create a veil or a shield that keeps the atmosphere separate from us?”
Catarina thinks it over. “It might be possible, but a spell like that would require copious amounts of magic. And there's no knowing how long it'll last or how much ground it covers.”

Alec huffs a breath and Jace can feel his anxiety climbing higher. So far he's been keeping it at bay with practiced suppression but it's starting to seep through. Despite his lingering ire Jace reaches out through their bond and forces some calm on him. He can feel Alec relax some and shoot him a clipped smile.

“There has to be a way though,” Clary persists. “Jonathan lived in Edom for years and he has angel blood.”

“He also has demon blood,” Simon remarks.

A thoughtful glint enters Clary's eyes. “What if I could create a rune that allows us to do the same?” She gestures towards Simon. “A temporary bond that allows us to share blood. Abilities too, possibly.”

“It's tangible enough to test,” Izzy says. “It could work.”

Alec looks skeptical, so Jace chimes in, “We should give it a try. If it doesn't work we can still search for an alternative.”

Alec gives a tight nod but Clary hasn't waited for his approval anyway. Her stele is already in her hand, hovering over her wrist as she closes her eyes in concentration.

Witnessing Clary create new runes isn't something Jace thinks he'll ever get used to. The room charges with energy, the sparks of power pricking along his skin. It feels similar to when he activates a rune without his stele, but much more intense, an encompassing surge of electricity washing over them. The air around them whispers in a gust of imperceptible wind, the ground rumbles and then, after one last flourish a loopy design adorns Clary's wrist that no living soul has ever seen.

Simon holds his arm out wordlessly and Clary copies the rune onto his skin. He winces at first contact but bites his teeth and doesn't retract his arm. Clary finishes and they look at each other for a heartbeat before she reaches for the hilt of her kinjal and hands it to him. “You should be able to use it now.”

Simon takes a deep breath and grabs it from her. For a long second nothing happens but then the telltale *singing* sounds and the blade emerges from the hilt. Simon is so startled he almost drops it. “Wow.”

Tension drains out of them for a moment. Jace senses something from Alec he hasn't felt in a while: Hope. It aches in his chest to realize how resigned his parabatai has been, and a small part of his feeling of betrayal melts away. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Jace understands that. And if keeping Jonathan alive for now can help Alec save the man he loves Jace might be able to comprehend it.

“I think it'd be safer if Simon paired with me,” Izzy states. “We still don't know exactly how the heavenly fire might interact with the rune but I think it'd be better if the Downworlder I bond with already has angel blood in his system.”

Alec raises a hand. “You're staying here, Izzy.”

Izzy's eyes flash and Jace braces himself. He knows that look.
“I'm coming with you.”

“No you won’t.” Decisiveness is the only thing in Alec's tone but Jace can feel him twisting together in renewed fear for a loved one. “Being close to anything demonic is harming you. I'm not letting you go into a literal hell dimension.”

“You can't forbid me to--”

“I can!” Alec's voice rises. “I'm your superior and I forbid you to go. That's an order!”

“You can't!” Izzy snaps. “My family is going to face off the Queen of Hell and you expect me to stay back? Forget it.”

“Izzy--”

“That's final.”

They stare at each other, fire crackling between them, an unstoppable force meeting an immovable object.

Seconds tick by.

“Would you let anything stop you if you were in my shoes?” Izzy asks, her voice gone unexpectedly soft. Alec looks away and Jace feels him crack.

“I swear by the angel, Iz, if anything happens to you...”

“I know,” Izzy assures, walking over to him and leaning heavily into his side. Alec pulls her close and Jace thinks that she doesn't know. She doesn't realize the extent to which she'd ruin Alec if she got hurt.

He silently vows that he won't let it come to that.

“Can I take a look?” Catarina asks gently. “At the heavenly fire?”

“Your magic could set it off,” Alec warns. “It can hurt you both.”

“I've been a healer for a few centuries now,” Catarina says with a benevolent smile. “I know how to handle a delicate condition.”

Alec hesitates but ultimately nods and Catarina goes to check Izzy over.

Jace turns to Clary. “If Izzy pairs off with Simon that leaves Cat and three of us.”

Clary purses her lips. “You're right.”

“I'm not letting Alec bench me on this one.”

Clary nods in agreement. “Me neither.”

Before they can pursue that line of conversation any further Catarina finishes her examination spell. “I can sense the heavenly fire inside you. It's spread everywhere, much like a metastasis.” She pauses. “And similarly to a case of cancer I could layer a containing net around it.”

Alec looks alarmed. “Wouldn't that worsen her state?”
“Very likely,” Catarina replies. “But I imagine contact with my magic to be less harmful than direct exposure to Edom's atmosphere.”

“Then do it,” Izzy demands.

“Wait,” Jace halts them. “First we should get our bloodswitching rune arrangements figured out. We're short two Downworlders.”

“I'll call Luke,” Clary declares, fishing her phone out of her pocket.

Jace belatedly realizes that Simon is still holding her kinjal and, with growing confidence, is juggling it from hand to hand. It's only a matter of time before this ends in a bloodbath, so Jace surreptitiously edges closer until he can snatch the dagger from mid-air. He won't let Clary's best friend kill himself while she's distracted with a phone call.

Simon splutters indignantly. “I was just starting to get good at it.”

“Don't worry, I'll let you practice some more before we face off Lilith. You might even get your own weapon.” He winks at Simon. Nothing eases his nerves quite like pulling Simon's leg.

“He's not answering.” Clary stabs at her phone. “And I have no idea where he is right now.”

“We don't have time to wait for him to pick up his phone,” Alec urges.

Clary takes a deep breath. “There's someone else with demon blood we can use.” She shares a significant look with Alec and he nods.

“Might be the better option anyway,” he mumbles.

Jace balks. Any trace of goodwill he might have developed towards Alec's recent course of action vanishes. “You can't be serious.”

Alec shoots him a look that says there will be no argument about this. “I'll go get him,” he says to Clary.

“You want him to come along on this mission? Are you kidding me?! He's a risk!”

“I'm aware,” Alec replies, unimpressed.

Jace scoffs. “I doubt that, otherwise you wouldn't do this. Or do you suddenly trust him?” He can't help the mocking edge of his voice.

“Obviously not,” Alec bites back. “But I'm not going to let Jonathan Morgenstern stay in our Institute unsupervised. And,” he glances in Clary's direction, “if things go wrong we can just leave him to rot in Edom.”

Jace presses his lips together.

Clary looks equally affected, for opposite reasons. “I'm coming with you.”

“Fine,” Alec says and makes for the door, Clary on his heels.

“Jace, what is going on?” Izzy asks sharply.

Jace huffs. “Alec and Clary decided it would be a good idea to keep Jonathan alive.”
Izzy stares at him in shocked silence and Jace feels vindicated by her reaction after Alec and Clary seem to have simultaneously lost their minds. “Yeah.”

“Why?!”

Jace shrugs. “Maybe you can get them to see reason. I can't.”

“I'm going to kill Jonathan myself,” Izzy hisses.

“Good luck with that. I don't think they'll let you. Alec promised him a truce.”

“A truce?” she splutters. “After everything he's done? I can't believe it.” She shakes her head, anger growing with every passing second. “I can't believe he didn't tell me about this.”

Seeing his rage mirrored in his sister doesn't ground Jace the way he expected it to. Somehow, after the first moment of feeling affirmation it drains him. He hates fighting with Alec, and at the dawn of taking on the Queen of Hell on her own turf is the worst possible point in time to have a fallout with him. Now, more than ever, they need to have each other's backs and stand together.

It's easier said than done though when Alec returns, with Clary and a still shackled Jonathan in tow.

“The official report says he's dead,” Izzy accuses.

“Yes.” Alec meets her piercing gaze unflinchingly. Before she can start on another attack he cuts her off. “I know what you're about to say. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters. The decision is made and we're not talking about it now because the only thing that matters is that we get to Magnus in time. Everything else can wait.”

Izzy shuts her mouth but she radiates a clear air of This is not over.

Alec nods in acknowledgement. “Thank you.”

His eyes find Jace. We okay too?

Jace clenches his teeth and nods. He feels Alec's relief like a sigh through their connection. It helps him relax in turn.

At least until he realizes that they're still short one Downworlder.

“I'm not staying behind,” he declares firmly.

Alec frowns. ‘I'm certainly not staying behind either.”

“Maybe you can share Catarina,” Simon throws in.

Everyone turns to him and he squirms under the attention. “I just mean, you two have a connection anyway, right?” He gestures between Alec and Jace. “You can share stuff already? If you're both runed to Catarina it could work.”

Alec blinks and Jace feels just as confused. That was surprisingly helpful and thought-out.

“Only one way to find out.” Clary draws her stele and starts with Jace.

The rune sears into his arm, sitting hot and inactive while Clary moves on to Alec and finally Catarina.
Jace can pinpoint the exact moment the rune takes hold. It's a strange sensation, part safe and familiar where his energy touches and melds with Alec's, part wildly peculiar and foreign. A swirling mess of power that feels untamed and docile at the same time. That must be Catarina's magic.

Jace hones in on that and tugs on it and feels a tendril of it sweep into his consciousness. There's a lazy curl of magic flowing from his hand. It's incredible.

“I knew reading all those fantasy novels would pay off one day,” Simon mutters under his breath.

“Alright.” Alec is staring at the sparks dancing on his fingers, mesmerized. “Alright.”

He blinks up at Jace and the awe between them needs no words. “We're ready to go.” It sounds disbelieving, as if he'd never thought they'd actually get this far. He snaps himself out of it quickly though. “Have you ever fought with a blade?” he asks Catarina.

She shows her teeth in a dangerous smile. “Among other things, yes.”

Alec dips his head. “Very good.” He turns to them all. “I want everyone to have at least two spare blades. We're not taking any chances on this.” His gaze drifts to Izzy. “Cat, can you prepare the spell for Izzy? Clary and Jace will get the swords in the meantime.”

Catarina nods her assent and turns to Izzy.

Alec steps closer to Clary but Jace still hears him when he says, “Pack weapons for Jonathan, too. We're not going to unshackle or arm him if there's any other way, but...” He trails off.

“We're going to save Magnus,” Clary reassures softly, hand grazing his arm.

Alec takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. “Yeah. We're going to save him.”
The magic simmers under Izzy's skin uncomfortably. It feels like ants crawling along her veins, never settling, chipping away at her flesh wherever they go. Alec’s concerned gaze rests on her unerringly, so she straightens her posture and tries her best to look unaffected. She doesn’t need to give him any more reason to worry than he already has.

They all sense the moment Catarina finishes drawing the pentagram. A wave of dark power washes over the room and Izzy feels a cold that has nothing to do with the temperature seep into her bones.

Cat motions for them to step closer to the black star on the ground. “I've never opened a travel portal to Edom before. Holding on to each other will stabilize our journey.”

“But we'll make it there safely?” Alec presses with a frown.

Cat graciously doesn't comment on him not so subtly doubting her skills. “Opening portals to Edom is easy. It's summoning and containing stuff that is difficult.” She snaps her fingers and executes an intricate hand movement. The pentagram erupts into bright flames. Izzy can feel their tingling heat. It's daunting.

Alec is the first to step into the fire. His face twists in pain but he doesn't make a sound. Jace's fingers twitch in her grip so she knows to brace herself. She squeezes his hand back before walking into the pentagram.

It burns, even more than she feared. She clenches her teeth, holding back the scream building in her throat with all her might. The flames lick over her limbs and she can feel them pressing against the magic inside her. The fire climbs higher while the pain sears hotter and hotter to unbearable levels. It's tearing her apart from the inside and just when she thinks she can't take it even a second longer it's over.

Red. Everything is red.

There's heat in the air but compared to the portal it's little more than a tepid breeze. The ground consists of grainy sand, rocks and boulders with barely any vegetation in sight. The sky is painted a dark crimson and there it is: the rift, overlayed with sparkling, glimmering blue miles and miles above them, the softest color in this harsh world they've entered.

“Is everyone accounted for?” Alec calls, voice strung tight.

They are.

“Okay, I want everyone on high alert. Keep your weapons at the ready.”

“Uhh...”
Alec turns to Simon sharply. “What.”

“It’s not working.” Simon replies, waving the hilt of a seraph blade around. It doesn't transform. “Is it just me or...”

Izzy concentrates on her bracelet, willing it to transform but nothing happens. The connection she feels to her weapon of choice is muted and as much as she tries to reach through the snake remains cold and unbudging on her wrist.

The others are experiencing the same thing. Clary stares at her kinjals with incomprehension and a hint of betrayal in her eyes, Jace balances two sword hilts in his hands to no avail and Alec's bow refuses to fold out. Cat is sending magic into her blade but the result is the same. Their angelic weapons don’t cooperate.

“No no no,” Alec mumbles, shaking the riser of his bow. “Come on.”

“I don't think there's anything we can do,” Catarina announces carefully. “The shift in atmosphere calls forth the demonic properties in us. They overlay the angel blood we share.”

Silence follows her words and reality sinks in. If they can't use their weapons they can't harm Lilith. Even though they made it to Edom they're back to square one.

“I can use seraph blades in Edom,” Jonathan says quietly.

All eyes snap to him and Izzy feels her hackles rise, just like every time she thinks of his presence here among them.

Alec is the first to recover. He walks over to him with long strides and unceremoniously pushes a sword hilt into Jonathan's shackled hands.

The weapon activates immediately. It gleams in the red light and the shine of runes along the blade seems to mock them.

Alec draws back a step. He doesn't look relieved. Instead his breath goes heavily and he rakes his fingers through his hair. “So the only person capable of actually killing Lilith is you.” He shakes his head. “This can't be happening.”

“Alec...” Jace starts in a cautious tone but Alec cuts him off with a raised hand. “No. No. I'm not going back to regroup.” He turns and starts stomping away. “I'll stop Lilith with my bare hands if I have to.”

For a moment they all stare after him. “This is insane,” Simon mutters. It's what they're all thinking. Jace shakes it off, his gaze flickering over their group. “Well, you heard him. No regrouping.” He hesitates. “If you're still with us.”

“We are,” Clary states with determination.

Jace nods, his eyes softening when he looks at her. “Okay then.”

He makes to follow Alec along with Simon and Catarina. Before Clary can move along too, Izzy catches her attention. She sends a scalding look in Jonathan's direction and Clary hastily snatches the weapon from his slack hands. “Izzy, look, it's...”

“I can't do this right now, Clary,” Izzy interrupts her.
Hurt flashes across Clary's face and Izzy regrets putting it there, but not enough to stop and attempt to have this conversation. Nothing productive would come of it anyway.

Traveling through Edom is strenuous. Walking on sand in sweltering heat with no shade gets pretty tiring pretty fast. They don't even have their runes for a little boost because just like their weapons their steles are useless here. For a moment Izzy muses that Jonathan should probably be able to wield a stele if he can operate a seraph blade but no way in hell is she going to hand him one. She suspects Alec had the same thought and reached the same conclusion.

So they push through, without pause. The wraith demons screeching in the sky suggest that settling down on an open plane with no cover isn't the best idea. They have to keep moving.

Still, it's only a matter of time until one takes notice of them. The wraith spirals downwards and sets course for them, flapping its huge wings and letting out screams that would make shivers run down Izzy's spine even if she was armed. She remembers facing off five wraiths not even two days ago, how she'd looked at Alec in desperation and prepared for the end. Even with his bow and her whip it had seemed hopeless. The wraiths were so large, it felt like facing off a dragon with only a toothpick.

But Magnus had saved them in the last possible moment. The thought steels her resolve. It's their turn to save Magnus. They'll find a way to make it through to him.

Cat forms a ball of light blue energy between her hands and hurls it at the approaching demon. The seconds it takes the magical blast to reach the beast is enough for it to evade the attack with an elegant rotation maneuver. Actually hitting the demon like this will only work in close range and even if they should manage a killing blow the momentum of the creature would be enough to bury them under it and its sharp talons. Not an appealing prospect.

"Any ideas, Alec?" Jace asks, voice strained.

"We need to scatter, in the exact moment it tries to strike. Too early and it'll go after one of us, too late and we'll be its lunch."

"No pressure then," Simon mumbles.

"We can't do that forever, Alec," Izzy calls, eyes glued to the wraith's dark form that's steadily coming nearer.

"I'm aware, but one problem at a time," Alec shouts back. "Hold!"

The wraith is closing in on them. It emits a triumphant scream as it brings its claws towards them, ready to slice through its prey. The stone in Izzy's bracelet that's been shining a steady ruby since they entered Edom flares brighter.

"Now!"

They sprint away in different directions as fast as they can. Magic crackles. The wraith screams.

A few adrenaline-filled seconds Izzy keeps up her breakneck pace, the turbulence of the wraith's wings tearing on her clothes, before she hears it veering off. She stops hard and runs back for a regroup.

"Join us next time, Jace." Alec's voice is harsh with tension.

“We hardly dealt it any damage,” Catarina observes, taking in the wraith's slightly charred side and underwing as it flies a wide circle, no doubt turning for a new attack. “This won't work.”

Outrunning isn’t really an option either. Izzy spots a group of crooked trees to their left and is just about to suggest they try to find at least some flimsy cover there while coming up with a better plan, when, like a delayed rush of wind from a train passing by she feels a wave of smoldering heat wash over her. She stumbles to her knees. Her blood is on fire.

“Izzy!”

“Can you get up?”

“I don't think she can.”

“We need a distraction when that wraith comes back.”

The concerned voices of her family blur together. Izzy tries to get back up but when she props up on her arms and her center of gravity shifts she falls to the ground completely.

“Izzy!”

There are hands on her shoulder, urging her up. The wraith wails on the wind. Her body hurts with swirling hotness.

“What is with her?”

“I think the proximity of the demon triggered the heavenly fire.”

“We need a distraction! Now!”

“Alec, stop, what are you doing?!!”

“Hey, demon, I'm here!”

Through the haze of pain Izzy imagines Alec running towards the wraith waving his arms around wildly. The thought lances hot and sharp through her mind. The lava in her veins surges.

“Isabelle, can you hear me?” Catarina. “I need you to concentrate on my voice. Can you do that?”

Izzy nods her head weakly. Overhead the air swooshes with the powerful wing beats of the approaching wraith.

“The fire inside you is responding to the demonic energy of the wraith. It needs out. Focus on your hands.”

Izzy does. She can feel the white hot sand under her fingers... and a sliver of coolness passing through her hands, up to her wrists. “What,” she croaks.

“I removed the containing shield around the heavenly fire from your hands. You need to try to push it out.”

After the initial chill her hands start prickling with fiery sparks too, burning even hotter than the rest of her. Direct exposure to Edom’s atmosphere, her mind supplies. Izzy closes her eyes and tries to channel the seething heat inside of her to her arms.

“Stay calm. Take a deep breath.”
Izzy follows the instructions the best she can when she can hear her family fighting for their lives.

“Focus on my voice. In and out. You've got this, Isabelle.”

_For Magnus._

She feels the moment it clicks. The fire ascends, glistering and piercing, raging inside her, rushing to her hands.

With the last of her strength she flips on her back, and only years of training allow her to target the demon flapping above them in the split second before literal flames burst out of her hands, aiming in a straight line towards the hell creature.

It only takes moments for the wraith to be engulfed in a ball of blazing fire. It screams in an earsplitting way before plummeting down, down, down, crashing in a heap barely five feet from Jace and Alec. They jump away from it but the demon remains motionless, tiny flamelets darting and dancing over its corpse.


Izzy falls back into Edom's dirt with an exhausted sigh.

Her siblings are by her side in a heartbeat.

“Will she be alright?” Jace demands to know.

“The immediate effects have passed,” Catarina says calmly, hand sweeping over Izzy's. “I sealed the shield again, but the outburst worsened her condition. It will keep worsening with every demon encounter.”

“We have to send her back,” Alec decides, unsurprisingly.

“No,” Izzy groans.

“Izzy, you could have died!”

It takes a lot of effort but she manages to open an eye to glare at Alec. “Didn't you run straight at a demon just now.”

Alec crosses his arms and huffs.

“Even if we send her back, we need a solution for the heavenly fire,” Simon points out.

A small smile appears on Izzy's lips. The pain feels more bearable already.

“We could kill to birds with one stone,” Clary says slowly. “Well, two demons.”

“Explain.”

“If we could find a way to extract the heavenly fire from her, we could use it as a weapon against Lilith.”

“Is that possible?” Alec asks, looking at Cat. “Can it be extracted?”

Catarina contemplates Izzy pensively. “With enough magic, it could.”
“Meaning?” Jace prods.

“Meaning I alone won't be able to do it.”

“Magnus,” Alec says.

Cat nods.

“Can you get up?” Simon asks gently.

“I will,” Izzy answers and scraping together energy she didn't know she had she gets to her feet, Simon's hand a steady guide on her shoulder.

The pain has subsided, but it's there, and it's more intense. It's not simmering heat anymore, but smouldering embers, ready to flare up at any moment.

Their time is running out in more ways than one.

Chapter End Notes

This is only half of what I had planned for this chapter content-wise but it got so long (also I ran out of time ahaha) that I decided to cut it off here. Writing action was a ride. Please let me know if you liked it!
Also, spoiler alert, prepare for some Malec Feels (finally!!) next week :3
Magnus thinks of Alec because it's the only thing he can do. Recalls his smile, his laugh. The desperation in his eyes when Alicante was falling apart around them. Reminds himself that this sacrifice is worth it if it means Alexander is alive and safe.

Maybe even happy.

Fingertips running over the smooth metal of his ring he wonders if, years down the line, Alec will remarry.

He knows he wouldn't, if their roles were reversed. If Alec was the one trapped in a world beyond and Magnus was left behind on earth.

Magnus closes his eyes and focuses on Alec's smile again. The unrestrained one when he catches sight of Magnus after being apart for longer than a few hours. The shy one when Magnus flirts with him that he still gets, even after everything they've been through together. The soft one of their shared mornings when he whispers his first I love you of the day.

He realizes with a jolt that these are the only images of Alec he'll ever have. He'll never learn what Alec looks like ten, twenty years from now, when his laughter lines grow deeper and his hair starts streaking gray. He'll never know what Alec looks like old and content, having lived a life of joy and no regrets. The thought hurts in ways he never thought it could.

He'd give his soul to see Alec again, if only for a second. Just a breath of reprieve from this devouring hopelessness that's set to last forever.

“Magnus.”

His foolish heart throbs in his chest even though it hasn't been the first time his mind tricked him into thinking he'd heard Alec's voice calling out to him. And just like all the times before he turns in search for Alexander even though he knows he'll only be greeted with empty spaces and the unforgiving red of Edom.

Only this time--

Alexander is there, precious happiness blooming on his face as he closes the space between them with long strides, eyes sparkling like the stars in the night. He's beautiful. He's so beautiful and this can't be real. It has to be an illusion.

Alec draws to a halt in front of him. “Magnus,” he says again, a reverent whisper, his voice low and rough and achingly dear.

Magnus sways in place.

Alec's palm cups his cheek and the familiarity of it startles him out of his daze. He pulls Alec close to his heart, holding him even closer. Alec's arms wrap around him just as tightly and Magnus lets out a shuddering breath. Alec is warm and solid underneath his fingers, breathing and real, and Magnus burrows deeper into his embrace, soaking in his presence like it's the only thing he'll ever need. It is.
He swears in this moment that he'll never let go again. No matter what happens, he'll never let anything separate them again.

“How can you be here? How is this possible?” The words barely make a sound against Alec's neck, but Alec hears them anyway. He moves back the slightest fraction, just enough to look into Magnus's eyes, and even that feels like too much space between them.

“Clary created a rune.”

Of course she did, some remote part of Magnus thinks fondly while the rest is still firmly focused on drinking in Alec's face. He lifts his own hand to caress Alec's cheek, and Alec leans into the touch.

“I thought I'd never see you again,” Magnus confesses, hushed. He sees the same fear reflected back at him in Alec's hazel eyes, hidden behind relief and joy and happiness. He knows Alec feels what he feels.

Alec leans in and their lips connect in a firm kiss that washes away all traces of sorrow still trying to cling to them.

“I'm never leaving you again,” he vows when they part, a soft promise settling warmly in Magnus's chest.

What about Lilith? What about the rift? Magnus wants to ask, the worries he had momentarily forgotten when he caught sight of Alec coming back with a vengeance, fear flaring up that he might lose again what he's just regained.

Alec beats him to it. “We'll find a way to deal with Lilith,” he states with certainty as if he's not talking about taking down the most powerful being in all known dimensions. “But first you need to help Izzy.”

Magnus finally manages to tear his gaze away from Alec and belatedly realizes that he didn't enter the ruins of Asmodeus's home alone. He zeros in on Isabelle who's hanging off Jace's arm limply, Cat bent over her and prodding at her with examining magic.

He and Alec make their way over quickly, hands still intertwined. Magnus isn't ready to let go of Alec yet, and Alec must feel the same.

Up close Izzy looks even worse. She's barely conscious, sweat covering her pale skin and her fingers are trembling. Jace is lowering her to the ground carefully, brushing a strand of hair from her face before his eyes meet Magnus's. “Hey Magnus.”

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“Hey Magnus.”

Magnus nods in acknowledgement before turning to Cat. They share a long look that needs no words, a mixture of I've missed you and I was worried about you and Look at what mess we've found ourselves in now and You're an idiot for risking your life like this. Cat ends it with a small smile and Magnus focuses back on Izzy.

“What happened to her?” he asks, magic sparks flowing from his fingers and over Izzy's slack form.

“After we separated Clary and Jonathan with Glorious the sword shattered and some of the splinters hit her,” Alec says. “They've infused her body with heavenly fire and it's burning her up from the inside. It gets worse every time she comes into contact with something demonic.”

“I've created a containing shield around it,” Cat picks up the explanation. “It's slowed down the process but on our way here we encountered two wraiths and that's worsened her condition considerably.”
Magnus has detected her shield already, snugly encasing the heavenly fire swirling through Izzy's limbs. It's a filigree he never could have created himself. A work of art. “How am I supposed to help?”

“We need to extract the heavenly fire, pulling it out by the shield but I can't do it alone. I'll need your magic to support mine.”

Magnus nods. They've worked together like this many times before, one lending magic and one guiding it for a specialty spell. They've healed like this more often than not, Magnus supplying more raw strength than Cat could muster herself and her weaving intricate enchantments that Magnus never mastered like she has.

“What will we do with it once it's out?”

“Smack it in Lilith's face,” Jace chips in.

Magnus blinks. That's not actually a bad idea. He can feel how potent the fire is, dormant as it is now, and he can't imagine anything more demonic than Lilith herself.

He surveys the containing shield again to get a better feel for it and pauses. His eyes meet Cat's again. She looks tired but it's more than that. She's exhausted.

Checking one more time Magnus retracts his magic and bites his lip. “I have good news and bad news.”

Jace tenses visibly and Alec's hand in his squeezes hard.

“Isabelle will be alright,” Magnus assures quickly and they both relax a little. “Cat and I will be able to extract the fire. But... we won't be able to contain it for very long after that. Right now Izzy's angelic blood keeps it somewhat balanced, but once it's outside it will attack the shield and our magic. In fact it's constantly eating away at the shield even now.” He looks at Catarina. “You've been sensing it, right? The way maintaining the shield drains you?”

Cat nods. “I thought it was Edom's atmosphere though.”

“How long are we talking?” Alec inquires.

Magnus considers it. “Cat is already depleted and she needs to save her resources to guide me through the extraction. I'll have to handle the heavenly fire alone once it's out.” He exhales slowly. As much as he wants to give them time he can't calculate too generously. This will shape their battle plan for facing off Lilith and his estimate needs to be realistic first and foremost, not heartening.

“Taking into account the corrosive force of the fire and the fact that I constantly need to keep the rift closed.. I'd say a few minutes. Three, maybe four.”

“Okay.” Alec squinches his eyes shut. “Okay. We can work with this. As long as we keep Izzy away from demons she should hold out long enough for us to form a plan of attack.”

Magnus looks Catarina over again. “Let me help you take some of the weight for now.”

The fact that Cat nods instead of telling him he should save his strength for the battle that lies ahead speaks volumes of how low her magic is running.

Blue tendrils of magic flow into Izzy's chest. Magnus closes his eyes and follows the lead of Catarina's shield, letting her magic guide his into the last crannies of the fragile structure.
When he opens his eyes again Izzy looks less pale and her fingers have stopped quivering.

“She's stabilizing,” Jace assesses, feeling Izzy's pulse. “What did you do?”


Cat tilts her head. “It might be something about your magic. Asmodeus was a fallen angel so your magic might be more compatible with the fire. Less prone to set it off.”

“That gives us a little more time.” Alec takes a deep breath. “So, how do we do this?”

“First we should rune you to Magnus.”

That's Clary's voice. Magnus looks up from his crouch by Izzy's side now that he knows her life isn't in immediate danger and at last takes in the rest of their companions.

There's Simon and Clary standing closely together behind Jace's back, and a little off to the side there's Jonathan Morgenstern.

Magnus darts to his feet, defensive magic at the ready even though a second later he registers that Jonathan's hands are shackled and that the others wouldn't leave him so unguarded if he really was a danger at the moment. Still. “What the hell is he doing here?”

Alec gets up beside him, laying a calming hand on his arm. “The rune Clary created binds Shadowhunters to Downworlders... demon-blooded creatures,” Alec amends. “The connection protects us from Edom's atmosphere. Jonathan was... available and is cooperating. As long as he behaves he lives.”

Clary walks over to Magnus and gently lifts his hand. “I'll draw the rune on you.” She shoots him a small smile. “It's safe, I promise.”

Magnus frowns, watching her take out her stele. “If you need to rune me.. wait, you're four Shadowhunters and three...” He trails off.

“Alec and I have been sharing the rune connection to Catarina through our parabatai bond,” Alec explains. “But it's probably safer if we make pairs.”

Magnus turns to Alec, noticing the loopy rune on the back of his hand, and smiles at him softly. Even without logical reason he'd never relinquish the opportunity to be connected to Alexander in any way.

The tip of the stele grazes his skin and he prepares for pain or heat, but nothing happens.

Clary curses. “Of course,” she grouses, gripping the stele tighter and trying again.

“What is it?” Magnus asks concerned.

Beside him Alec tenses. “Our steles don't work in Edom.”

“What?”

“Neither do our blades,” Jace adds.

“What? Alec, you can't-”

Alec cuts him off. “Magnus, we're not leaving you to fight Lilith alone. Besides, we're not
completely unarmed. The rune will allow us to share magic.”

The image of Alec with his hands tinted in the light blue of his magic flickers before Magnus's eyes and his breath catches for a moment.

“Looks like that's not going to happen,” he forces himself to say as neutrally as possible.

Alec stares at Clary's continued vain attempts to get the stele to work before determination sets in his mouth. “I'm not taking any chances with Jace's safety.”

Jace's safety, not his own. Magnus opens his mouth to tell him what exactly he thinks of Alec's prioritization but Alec is looking away. Following his line of sight he lands on Jonathan.

Jonathan isn't looking at them, head turned down and standing unmoving a few steps away from the rest of them. He doesn't seem hostile or aggressive as Magnus expected him to be. Instead he looks withdrawn, like he wants to become invisible.

As if sensing Alec's gaze on him he looks up slowly, eyes cautious and guarded. Alec beckons him over and he follows the cue unresistingly.

“Clary.”

Clary looks at Alec. “I'm not sure this will work. We don't even know if anyone beside me can draw my new runes.”

“We can't exactly test it here. It's worth a try.”

Clary hesitates for a moment before she nods. She gently places the stele in Jonathan's shackles hands. The adamas lights up immediately, a steady vibrant white, not at all the weak flickering it did in Clary's grasp.

Alec leans in to loom over Jonathan. “If you even think of drawing one wrong line on Magnus I'll kill you. Don't think I'll need a blade for that.”

Jonathan nods wordlessly, eyes cast down, vaguely on Magnus's hand.

“Jonathan won't do him any harm,” Clary assures. “Trust me.”

Even though he doesn't say anything, Magnus can feel Alec's doubtfulness loud and clear. He wonders what happened in his short absence that their nemesis is now apparently their reluctant ally.

Jonathan swallows and slowly raises his hands, pointing the stele at Magnus. This time it hurts when the heavenly metal makes contact. Magnus lets out a hiss but keeps his hand steady. He can feel heat on his skin, but the energy of the stele seems to reach deeper into his flesh, as if searching for something.

“What's taking so long,” Alec snaps when Jonathan doesn't start drawing.

“I.. I can't move the stele,” Jonathan replies. His knuckles turn white, fighting against an invisible force that keeps the stele in place.

“It's like I feared. Only I can draw my runes.” Clary looks distressed. “And I can't hold the stele!”

“Maybe if you both hold it it'll work,” Simon suggests, gesturing between Clary and Jonathan.

Clary looks at her brother, then steps closer to his side and cups her hand around his shackled ones.
Her brow furrows in concentration but the steele stays stubbornly in place.

“It has to work,” Clary mutters under her breath, fingers wrapping tightly about Jonathan's.

The steele doesn't give and Alec is growing more restless by the second, when Clary blinks in realization. She turns to Jonathan. “We are connected. Our bond means that we share Ithuriel's blood, the blood that allowed me to create this rune in the first place.” She looks at him intently. “We can do it. You can do it, Jonathan.”

“I'm trying, Clary. Please believe me,” he says meekly, fingers shifting on the stele.

“I know you are. You just have to reach deeper for it to work. Remember,” she says, eyes flickering between his. “We are one.”

The words hang heavy in the air between them and it's clear that they shift something in Jonathan. The barest hint of a smile flashes over his face, his breaths deepen and he looks less like a colorless shadow.

“We can do it,” he repeats, focusing back on the stele with something like purpose.

There's another long moment of strain before the stele moves, curving into an elegant design of loops. The path it traces stings on Magnus's skin but it's bearable, and the pain subsides after the rune is completed and has flared in a dark orange.

“Alec,” Clary demands but he's already holding out his hand adorned with the same rune. Clary and Jonathan swipe the stele over it. The black lines flash for a second and Magnus feels the connection form.

It's not so much snapping in place as it's a dim awareness creeping in, growing brighter each second. He can feel Alec standing next to him, and the half-step of distance between them seems to fade until they're one and the same. He can feel Alec's angelic energy and, when he dips deeper into the sensation, his heartbeat.

“Look.” Alec brings their runed hands together and blue sparks appear on them, dancing along their fingers. It's Magnus's magic, beyond question, but seeing it guided by Alec's mind and having no control over the little bursts feels intriguing. Electrifying. Almost as much as Alexander's smile.

Magnus is roughly ripped from their tender moment when he catches the tail end of Jace's sentence that's probably supposed to be his contribution to battle strategy.

“...punch Lilith with all we've got.”

“But we don't know where she is,” Clary points out.

“I don't think we'll win if we openly attack her. We need a sound plan.”

Magnus smiles. Catarina, the voice of reason in the face of all that hot-blooded Shadowhunterness.

“Yeah, we need to plan when to remove the heavenly fire from Izzy,” Simon adds.

“The first thing we need to decide is if we wait until she comes for Magnus or if we bring the fight to her,” Alec says.

“Better surprise her where she doesn't expect it,” Jace states, and they all agree. Waiting around for Lilith to strike feels too much like waiting for fate to run its course, and aside from him none of them
“But again, do we even know where she is?” Clary asks.

“She'll probably be in her castle,” Magnus presumes.

“Okay, great... and where is that?”

A beat of silence follows Clary’s question.

“I can lead you there,” Jonathan remarks quietly.

Tension rises and Magnus can feel suppressed upheaval from Alec, and judging by the scowl on Jace's face this must be their parabatai bond.

Alec gives a sharp nod. “Okay. Any information you can give us on Lilith's place would be helpful.”

Jonathan hesitates for a moment, then says, “I'll draw a groundplan.” He squats down and gets to work.

Magnus uses the short reprieve to lean into Alec's side and lowly ask, “When you said he cooperates I guess that means we won't be using him as a bargaining chip.”

Alec turns to him, confusion plain on his face. “Bargaining chip?”

Magnus frowns. Since Alec and the others knew that Lilith was going to attack him, he'd thought they knew the reason for it, too. But maybe not?

“Lilith wants war because I refused to reopen the rift for her. She wants to go to Earth to kill Jonathan.”

Alec's face scrunches up further. “Why would she want to kill him? She did everything to bring him back.”

Magnus shrugs. “Apparently he tried to kill her first.”

“He did,” Clary confirms, and it seems their private conversation hasn't been very private at all. “He told me when... when the twinning rune was still active,” she exhales in a rush.

Alec glances at Jonathan who's still drawing lines into the sand. “Why did he try to kill Lilith?”

“Oh, hold up for a second,” Jace butts in. “Am I getting this right? The only reason Lilith is attacking Magnus is because she wants to get to Jonathan?”

“Yes,” Magnus affirms.

“Then why do we want to risk a fight at all?” Jace waves at Jonathan who's crouching beside the outline of Lilith's castle. Jonathan flinches back from the motion. “Why don't we just hand him over?”
1) Did ralf actually manage a cliffhanger? Yes she did! At least if you're invested in Jonathan's fate lol

2) I know it's total bullshit that only Clary can draw her runes, but it's heavily implied by Canon (that or they're all idiots, just think of all the shit that could have been easily prevented if someone besides Clary used her fancy new runes) and while I usually deny it, it suited my purpose for this fic and I'm a shameless Slytherin so yeah.

3) I'll be severely busy with RL stuff in the forseeable future, so I will very likely miss a few updates. But don't think I'm abandoning the fic or anything, I've come way too far for that XD
Auf Wunsch einer einzelnen Dame.... Spaß XD
This chapter really gave me some grief, for several reasons I'm not going into because who cares.
Special thanks to skceh and Bohemian for respectively giving me the kick I needed to start on this chapter and cheering me all the way through writing it. I hope you (all, but especially you two) like the end result.
I'm not making any promises for weekly updates, but I probably won't need another month for the next chapter. Also I took some liberties with Lilith's castle (as in it's a castle, not a trashy back yard ruin without roof ahaha) but anyway, please enjoy!

Lilith's dark castle looms ahead like a stifling shadow. Its countless turrets and oriel, the intricate patterns carefully worked into its stuc laden frontage and the sheer elegance of its built would leave Magnus impressed, awed even, if he didn't feel like every step was bringing him closer to his doom.

Clenching his teeth he tightens his grip around Jonathan's scruff and pushes him towards the imposing gateway.

The entrance hall is as richly ornamented as he expected. Marble floors, glossy pillars, sconces spreading gentle light. But not even all this opulence can hide the fact that they're in Edom. A red tinge overlays everything, the sharp tang of demonic energy permeates the air. Grains of sand crunch under Magnus's boots.

"Lilith!" he calls into the vast emptiness of the hall. "I've come to strike a truce."

Jonathan tenses under his hand.

There's no answer but Magnus feels a shiver in atmosphere, senses watchful eyes on him even though they're alone in the hall. Wherever she is, he knows Lilith heard him.

He sets a brisk pace, pushing Jonathan along. The strain of his magic feels like a muscle cramp and he clenches his fist and takes a slow breath. Stay calm. It's hard though, knowing that every second ticking by works against him.

They reach the throne room. The double door is wide open, revealing a plush red carpet lined with countless candlestands, leading up to an elevated area. There, lounging on a carved wooden throne, she is. Her dress shimmers in the low lighting, her eyes blazing fire even across the wide expanse of the room. She tilts her head when she catches sight of Jonathan, taking in his shackled hands before settling her gaze back on Magnus.

"Magnus," she greets in a lazy drawl. Her demeanor is a far cry from how she handled herself when she sought him out. Gone is the diffidence in her voice, the timid gestures, the formal Mr Bane. Her confidence is as palpable as the dry hot air around them and when Magnus stretches his senses her presence registers as a swirling black mass of power. Whatever she did in preparation for their fight restored her strength in full. Magnus swallows tightly.
“Lilith,” he answers steadily. He walks towards her with measured steps, slowly, as if his nerves aren't raw, as if his heart isn't beating in his throat, as if there isn't a flame of fear flickering in his chest, growing with every passing moment.

The room is wide and at least three stories high, with a gallery running around the length of it on the left side and a stained-glass window facade on the right. Sleek pillars support the high ceiling and the sound of Magnus and Jonathan's footfalls would echo through the stillness if it wasn't for the thick carpet swallowing every sound.

Magnus draws to a stop a fair distance from the steps leading up to Lilith's throne, giving Jonathan a shove that sends him stumbling.

“I've brought you a conciliation gift,” he says. “I'll leave you to your.. business and we can iron out the details of our peaceful coexistence here in Edom over a cup of tea. What do you say?”

Lilith rises form her throne in one fluid motion, gliding down the steps towards Jonathan like a snake would towards her prey. Her gaze lingers on Magnus, only turning to Jonathan when she's reached him. A spark appears in her eyes, a joyous hatred the likes of which Magnus has never seen in a living being before. She lifts her hand and Jonathan flinches, but she doesn't strike him. Instead her hand smoothes over his cheek in a tender caress.

“I will enjoy killing you,” she whispers to him as if it's an endearment. “More than I could have ever enjoyed keeping you.”

Jonathan shrinks away from her touch, head bowed down. Lilith laughs.

She focuses back on Magnus, the hint of a smile playing on her lips. “I can tell things between me and you will be much easier than they were between me and Asmodeus. You're nothing like him.”

Magnus does his best to force a convincing smile and hide the way his fingers are starting to shake with effort. “I'm glad to hear that.”

Now. Now is the perfect moment. Lilith is standing close to Jonathan, her attention elsewhere, her chest exposed. But Jonathan is not moving. Magnus's breath catches. They were wrong. Of course they were wrong, to put their faith in a creature this corrupted and--

Slowly, almost too slow to be noticeable, Jonathan is inching the dagger from is left sleeve into his right hand.

It takes all of Magnus's concentration to stop his gaze from straying to Jonathan's subtle movements. Just one more heartbeat of keeping Lilith's eyes on him and it'll all be over. Just one more...

“You're really not like him,” Lilith repeats in the same moment Jonathan yanks the dagger upwards and aims for her heart, his blow so quick it blurs with his demonic speed.

Lilith is quicker.

She intercepts his hand, twisting his wrist until it cracks audibly, the dagger falling from his limp fingers. Jonathan screams, bowing under the force of pain as Lilith keeps twisting his arm until he falls to his knees.

And through it all she stares Magnus dead in the eye. The blade hasn't even nicked her dress.

“Yes your father never would have been so foolish to believe he could deceive me,” Lilith continues, anger blazing to life in her eyes, a sharp furrow splitting her brow, her mouth curling in disgust.
“You think I don't notice if Nephilim enter my realm?”

With a flick of her hand she sends Jonathan flying against the wall. He falls to the floor with a sickening crunch, lying in a motionless heap.

“Luckily for you we took this possibility into account,” Magnus retorts, mustering his fraying magic one last time, tightly seizing the heavenly fire he's been cloaking and confining, and blasting it at Lilith with a firm rush. Relinquishing his hold on the destructive force is not unlike dropping a hot potato, it still burns but the brunt of pressure and searing is gone. He can finally breathe again.

The flaming ball of heavenly fire hits Lilith square in the chest, making her stagger back a few steps. She's engulfed in angry red and blazing white, and for a moment time stands still.

Magnus's heart hammers against his ribs, dangling on the precipice of relief. Not even the sound of Alec, Jace and Clary's arrival makes him take his eyes off of her burning form.

Through the alliance rune he can feel Alec's concern and nerves, and he hears Clary's shocked “Jonathan!” when she sees him slumped against the far wall.

Before either of them can step farther into the room though Lilith sinks to her knees, a bloodcurdling scream tearing from her chest. She slams her fist down on the ground and Magnus feels a wave of forceful, enraged magic wash over him, sizzling in the air. The fire embracing her snuffs out, her dress stained black and covered in flakes, and when she lifts her head slowly her eyes are alight with so much hate that Magnus stumbles back.

“You dare to attack me?” Her voice is shaking with the force of her ire. “YOU DARE?”

“Magnus!” Alec yells. Magnus feels a spike of unadulterated fear from him, and glances over his shoulder on pure instinct. The shadowhunters are rooted to the spot no more than three steps into the room, the air flimmering in front of them. They're clawing and punching at the translucent veil and Magnus realizes that Lilith created a barrier to keep him trapped.

Magnus's throat closes up. So much for backup.

“You will regret the day you were born,” Lilith hisses, teeth bared, and then she throws her head back and lets out another scream.

The castle rumbles. The walls tremble and Magnus can feel the ground shifting underneath his feet, feels Edom's energy boiling to answer her Queen's call.

There's tapping and scratching, the scuttling of hundreds of feet on marble floor.

Demons.

With a deep exhale Magnus forces himself to relax. As much as every fiber of him screams to rush to the barrier, dismantle it and protect his friends and his love he needs to save himself first. He has to trust that they can handle themselves for now. They're Shadowhunters, they should be good against a few demons, he tries to calm himself. A few hundred.

Magnus reaches deep inside himself and calls on his magic. He imagines it swirling to life in electric blue, visualizing a bottomless well for him to draw from and feels it responding, seeping along his arms and flowing through his veins. He gathers all of it closely under his skin, in his fingertips, in his eyes, his neck, his heart. He's all in.

In preparation for the fight Catarina helped him set a temporary seal, tying the spell that keeps the rift
closed to his life force instead of his magic. A seal like this will drain him until he dies if it's not revoked, but it's a necessary evil. It's a better solution than going into a fight knowing he'll have to focus on keeping the rift closed at all times. This way he can throw all of his magic at Lilith without worrying about holding back.

He's not sure defeating Lilith with magic alone is possible. But it's the only weapon he has right now, and he'll be damned if he doesn't try. In any case it'll buy them time to come up with another plan. Considering Clary's continued existence Jonathan must still be alive. There's still hope to get things back on track.

Magnus zeroes in on Lilith while the racket of the demons draws closer. He lets the rising tension inside him snap, unleashing all of his magic to race at Lilith unbridled. Tendrils of blue shoot from his hands, combining to a ripping storm, swooping for her.

In the last possible moment Lilith crosses her forearms in a protective block, a shield of crimson magic deflecting most of Magnus's attack. He tries to pour more, stronger, but despite his best efforts Lilith gets to her feet, flicking her arms outwards before lunging.

Magnus braces for impact, reins in his magic and condensing it to a shield of his own. Not a second later Lilith's magic crashes into him with full force, making his teeth rattle and his bones vibrate. He's never felt magic so wild, so untamed. It's nothing compared to the time she choked him in his loft. That was a single, focused attack. This is something else entirely.

He throws himself against the onslaught of energy, digging his heels in, willing his magic to hold. His breathing turns ragged in moments. He can't even think of forming a counter attack, just maintaining his shield is like trying to keep a mountain from crashing on his head. Impossible.

His boots lose grip and he slithering a few steps back which gives him an idea. He glances at the pillar to his right, then gathers together enough energy for a strong burst and throws it into the shield. One leap and he's under short-lived cover. Lilith breaks off her attack for the moment, an unarticulated shriek expressing her displeasure at this turn of events. Her feet stomp on the ground as she closes in on him and Magnus quickly needs a better plan than hiding behind a pillar because it's obvious he's no match for Lilith in an open fight.

He smirks. Good thing he learned how to fight dirty very early on in life.

He makes a break for the next pillar when Lilith comes close, gaining a few more precious moments to recover his magic, then steps into the aisle to draw her attention.

She attacks again right away which was to be expected and Magnus meets her sparkling red magic with his shield, surreptitiously separating a handful magical impulses from it and sneaking them around Lilith. A snap and they form sharp points, lodging themselves deep into her unguarded back.

He can sense that the heavenly fire weakened her, it's even clearer now that he has a direct connection to her essence, but the power flowing through her veins is still unmatched by anything he's ever seen.

Lilith wipes his stealth attack aside with a huff and twirls her wrist. Before Magnus can react he's lifted off his feet and tossed across the room. He barely manages to soften his impact against the wall. The unforgiving stone still hits his back and right arm hard, shooting tingles of pain through him. Falling to the ground adds a sharp twinge in his leg.

The throne room swims in and out of focus for a moment. Magnus groans, hand going to rub at his temple. It comes away bloody.
Tingling, a hiss. Magnus tears up his uninjured arm, conjuring a protective shield around himself before conscious thought sets in. A wave of crimson magic crashes against it, missing him by a hair’s breadth. He shakes under the assault.

Staring past the flares of battling magic he sees Lilith approaching in him with wide steps. He needs to get up.

His leg protests the treatment but Magnus pushes through, getting to his feet, poised to deal out his next attack. He just needs an in.

He calls forth his magic again. It's battered, but there's still more than enough to go around. He hopes. There has to be.

A strand of it curls and tugs at him, urging him to get away from the wall, spurring him on, fizzing and bubbling with new energy. Magnus belatedly realizes it's him and not him – it's Alec. He's sending Magnus every ounce of power he has to spare. Has been this whole time.

It's what gives him the strength to push against the force Lilith is throwing at him, to turn away until his back is no longer against the wall. He's facing the entry now, for the first time catching a glimpse of the others fighting tooth and nail against a tide of demons in all shapes and forms that doesn't seem to end.

Lilith is closing in on him relentlessly, a red shimmer surrounding her like a second skin. No doubt a precaution to ward off any more sneak attacks. Magnus curses.

He pushes every bit of his magic into a reflection spell, building it behind his shield so Lilith won't notice what he's doing. It's a risky maneuver. He has to drop his defense for it to work. Either his spell holds and reflects Lilith's magic back at her or... well. Best not to find out.

Agonizing seconds pass before the spell is smoothed out. Lilith is only three steps away, her magic burning hotter against his weakening shield. With a grunt he tears the quivering remnants of the shield down, shoving these last drops of extra power into the reflection spell.

It's flawlessly executed. The reflecta holds, Lilith's magic coiling in its concave form before shooting right back at her.

But instead of blasting her, her magic merely dances around her in a graceful arc, not even flicking a hair out of place. He's never seen anything like it.

There's no time to wonder how Lilith did it though, because she's on him the next moment.

“You still think you have a chance against me, don't you?” she snarls into his face.

Her fingers curl into claws, sharp and vicious, and when she rips them back he feels a resonating rip through his soul. His magic, the remaining tatters of his reflection spell are shred from him, yanked from his hands, his chest, his heart. Lilith took his magic.

He's completely defenseless.

Spells like these don't last long, he knows, only a few heartbeats, but it'll take Lilith less than that to finish him off.

Her magic hits him like a tsunami wave. It sweeps him up and knocks the air from his lung before smashing him back against the wall. Searing pain races down his spine, his hip creaks, plaster rains on him. His skull throbs. He can't move.
A frantic current races through him, a flurry of sparks fluttering along his damaged bones. He fears it's Lilith's magic, invading his body to destroy him from within before he recognizes Alec's muted panic and forced calm. The sparks settle in his core, coaxing his own magic back to life, guiding it to his wounds. Alec is helping him heal himself from across the room while battling for his own life. Magnus's heart lurches.

But despite both of them tending to Magnus's injuries he's only halfway put back together when a shadow falls over him. He blinks up at the figure, ready to fight back with whatever magic he can conjure and startles when he finds Jonathan in front of him. He's facing away from Magnus, eyes fixed on Lilith who's striding over to them. He's facing away from Magnus, eyes fixed on Lilith who's striding over to them, her deadly red magic swirling in her hands.

Jonathan takes a step towards her, cutting her off from Magnus. He's limping but he's no longer shackled. He must have managed to get the stele Clary insisted they hide in his boot, but apparently not even a healing rune could undo everything he suffered from Lilith's wallsmacking.

Not slowing down Lilith raises her hand threateningly. “Get out of my way or I'll incinerate you where you stand.”

Jonathan doesn't move. “Mother, please,” he rasps, “let them go.”

Lilith's cocks her head, her lips thinning. “And why would I ever do that?”

“I'm the one who tried to kill you.” Despite the waver in his voice Jonathan seems unyielding. “Kill me. Take as much time as you wish. But please, let them go.”

She contemplates him with a piercing stare, closing the last distance between them. She lifts her hand to his cheek and he doesn't flinch back even when a red tendril curls along his skin.

“Please, Mother,” he whispers.

Lilith's eyes soften.

“My sweet, sweet boy,” she hums, before her smile turns vicious. “If you think pity is in my nature then you really don't know me at all.”

With that she shoves him aside and even across the distance Magnus can feel the twisted magic behind it. Jonathan falls to the floor and Magnus knows he won't be getting up again anytime soon.

“Now where were we?” Lilith asks, her gaze meeting Magnus's.

Magnus braces himself. He's managed to heal most of his injuries and his magic has welled back up again, but even if he can counter Lilith's attack he won't be able to withstand her for long. Even at full strength he didn't last more than a minute against her. With Jonathan down stalling for time is pointless. If he wants to make it out alive he has to find a different way to defeat Lilith.

As Lilith closes in, visibly gearing up for a final hit he realizes there is one last thing he can try.

He's been feeling it since he set foot into Edom. The power lurking under the surface. He tapped into it, it's what allowed him to close the rift after all, but he's been shying away from its full potency, only strengthening his earthbound magic. And it's been enough. His magic has been more powerful, more condensed than he ever imagined it could be, achieving things he thought impossible.

But he sensed a layer underneath that he hasn't dared to touch, a current of purely demonic energy. The full potential Asmodeus had spoken of, a streak of magic so dark it couldn't exist outside of Edom. Magnus has been steering clear of it, unwilling to find out what a magic like this was capable
of doing – or turning him into.

But now, in the face of Lilith's venomous smirk he has nothing left to lose. And so he reaches inside himself, deeper than he ever has before, past the warm familiar glow of his trusty magic, and brings forth the worst of his demonic side.

It invades his bloodstream like a foreign being. His glamor drops. He feels it like a live wire buzzing under his skin, uncontrollable, erratic. Lethal.

Lilith aims a coil of destructive energy at him but the shield he forms holds easily. The demonic magic tingles and bites along his arms and he notes the shield's blue is lighter than before, carrying a tinge of sickish yellow. The color of his father's magic.

He pushes against it and Lilith's attack shatters into a thousand splinters.

“I'm impressed,” Lilith mocks, rage darkening her eyes. “But if you think this little trick will save your sorry life,” she flings out her arm with a wave of red that Magnus deflects with a swipe, “then you are sorely mistaken.”

Magnus flashes her a sharp smile, the new power crackling in his hands. “I guess we'll see about that.”

Lilith throws two more spurts of magic at him. Magnus blocks them and they wreck a pillar and tear a hole through the stained-glass window.

“Shouldn't you be more careful with your castle?”

Growling Lilith reaches out and tries to toss him into the wall again, but this time he's prepared. He transforms the momentum of her spin into a leap across the room and uses that new vantage point for an attack. He can sense the difference in this magic. It's belligerent, tearing from him and towards its target with single-minded focus, taking joy in destruction. Any other time he'd recoil from a force this malicious, but now he welcomes it. It might just be what he needs to tip the scales in his favor.

He catches Lilith's side and she stumbles back under the assault but her shield remains intact. Magnus sends another wave of magic in her direction, channeling it up above her head where it rips into the wall and ceiling, burying Lilith under a ton of rubble. It won't slow her down for long, but it grants him a moment to steal a glance behind the barrier keeping him separated form the Shadowhunters.

It takes him a second to find Clary. She's tearing into demons with her bare hands, moving so quickly she's nothing more than a blur. Demonic speed.

Jace and Alec are armed with two chair legs and a poker respectively, somewhat holding their own as well. Determinately Magnus pushes some of his magic through the connection towards Alec. He knows Alec is holding back on using their shared power for his sake, but Magnus can see that they're fighting a losing battle. For one demon they kill three new ones appear. With magic Alec might be able to staunch the continuous flow of demons coming their way and allow them a breather to regroup.

He can't wait to see Alec's reaction though because Lilith has freed herself from the debris and she looks angrier than ever.

Inspired by Lilith herself Magnus pulls up a barrier in front of her feet. It shimmers a light blue, spanning across the room from wall to window. She's forced to stop her advance, punching her fist against the barrier and a spiderweb of red spreads from the point of contact. Magnus feels it
revibrating in his spine. He clenches his teeth, pushing more magic into the spell.

“You think you can contain me,” Lilith spits.

He sends more power into the barrier, driving the red lines back a little. “Like father, like son,” he quips.

It's the wrong thing to say. Lilith lets out a vengeful roar and the barrier shatters under her hands.

She doesn't stop there. Endless rolls of crimson shoot from her fingers and all Magnus can do is shield himself.

It's nothing like her other attacks. The current of magic nearly sweeps him off of his feet. He leans into it to keep from falling over, groaning at the strain. Lilith's magic scratches at his shield, corroding the surface and he pushes more of his magic into it, of his life, of everything he has. The shield turns brighter and brighter until it has lost all traces of blue, only pale yellow remaining. And yet Lilith's magic chips away at it steadily.

Even though his cover still holds the pure charge of her onslaught has him struggling to stay upright. It's like standing in the middle of a raging storm. There's no way back or forth, no option to dodge away from the blunt force hitting him.

Magnus throws a hand out, forming a pike in his shield, pushing outwards to create a scission in the stream coming at him, anything to divert the energy trying to evaporate him alive. It works, the pressure lessening for a moment before Lilith catches on. With a thrust of her hand she flattens Magnus's deflector and the shield cracks dangerously. Magnus pants with the effort of keeping the shield in one piece. Once it's stabilized he starts a second attempt but it proves impossible. Whatever Lilith did prevents him from transforming his shield. She has him trapped.

Magnus grits his teeth and digs his heels in. There's nothing left he can do except stay in place and wait it out.

But Lilith doesn't cease. Rush after rush beats against his shield, a merciless pounding of rampant magic crashing into him, melting his defenses. Magnus draws on every last grain of power Edom will grant him, feels the demonic energy sweeping through him, prickling hotly under his skin. He opens up every last cell of himself to welcome this twisted magic, and channels everything into countering Lilith's attack.

They're almost evenly matched... but in the end she's the Queen of Hell and he's just a prince.

Lilith's magic flares, biting chunks out of his shield, and the first tendrils break through. Magnus gasps when they hit him, ripping through himself for a last surge of resistance but it's not enough.

His shield breaks.

The unadulterated force of Lilith's magic hits him. The breath is punched from his lungs. Sound falls away as he's tossed back. His impact registers as a numb jolt that tears his head back. A heartbeat later pain sets in. He's burning up from all sides, smashed into Lilith's barrier and pierced through by her magic. It's like being flayed alive. He screams.

After an eternity her attack finally relents. He crumbles to the ground, the harshness of cool stone against his cheek almost soothing. His vision is spotty. Everything aches.

“Magnus!”
Dimly he notes Alec's panic underneath all of his agony, and a swell of guilt washes through his anguish. He can't even move his head to see him. Maybe it's better that way.

Sharp clacking signals Lilith's approach. Magnus can't so much as form the thought of fighting back before she's reached him, lifting him up and flinging him through the air again.

Searing pain explodes across his back as he crashes into the steps leading up to Lilith's throne. His spine cracks. He can't feel his legs anymore. Every breath is torture.

He realizes that this is it. This is how he dies.

The thought isn't as frightening as he imagined it'd be. Instead he just feels hollow. In the end, everything he did was for nothing. Everything he sacrificed was in vain, everything he accomplished will be lost.

His death isn't just his own demise, it will reopen the rift. It means ruin for every living creature on earth. But selfishly there's only one person his thoughts stray to.

Using the last of his strength he turns his head to look at the barrier. Alec is pounding his fists against it, calling his name desperately. Behind him Jace is fighting with all he's got to cover his parabatai's unprotected back. The sight squeezes at Magnus's bruised heart.

_I'm sorry, Alexander. I'm sorry I couldn't save you._

He notices Lilith's arrival, notices her leaning in close but he ignores her, keeping his gaze fixed on the love of his life. If this is the end he wants Alec's face to be the last thing he sees.

Lilith has other ideas. She grabs his chin and forces him to look at her. “Any last words?”

Magnus stares up at her. A spiteful light shines in her eyes, a gruesome smile curling on her lips.

It wakes a flicker of defiance in him. He doesn't want to give her the satisfaction. He won't just lie here and admit defeat. If anything, he'll go fighting.

His magic is still completely drained so he settles on searching the ground with his hands, hoping for a stone to smack into Lilith's smug face, sand to fling into her eyes, anything.

His fingers close around something sleek and cold. Metal.

The hilt of Jonathan's dagger.

It's like fate is mocking him. The one weapon that can harm Lilith, and it's entirely useless in his demonic hands.

He's a second from throwing it at Lilith regardless when Cat's words echo in his mind. _Asmodeus was a fallen angel._ Tainted and corrupted as his blood might have become when he was banished to Edom, he still carried angelic proportions.

And by extension, Magnus does too. For all intents and purposes he should be able to operate this blade, just like Jonathan.

He tightens his grip around it and focuses inward. The metal warms to his touch, humming with dormant energy and a spark that he reaches out to instinctively. He feels a whisper in his core when it surges to life. His breath catches. He didn't actually think it would work.

“No smart parting words?” Lilith taunts. “What a shame.”
Magnus looks her square in the eyes. “Actually I have something to say,” he rasps. “Tell Asmodeus I said hi.”

He yanks the blade up and sinks it between her ribs.

He's healed enough times to know how to kill with a single strike. His aim is true.

Lilith jolts, her lips parting around a gasp that transforms into an inarticulate screech. Her fingers dig into Magnus's shoulder like vices. The air around them crackles. Magnus feels a swirling, oppressive might pushing him harder into the ground. Lilith's skin shimmers, a dark shade coloring her from within like a living being is moving inside of her.

It's her magic, unraveling.

Her scream reaches a crescendo, piercing in its volume. A flash of red light blinds Magnus, a sound like tearing fabric chases a shiver through his soul. Scorching heat burns him, the offset of untamed, rabid power.

Then it hits him full force and Magnus's world falls into darkness.
And I thought last chapter was giving me grief, lol. Anyway, hope you enjoy this. (Also be aware that there definitely won't be an update next week because I'll be away. I'm aiming for the week after that, but no promises.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Magnus comes to in increments.

The first thing he notices is the absence of pain. He's lying on a soft surface, fabric scratchy where it meets his hands but comfortable nonetheless. There's the whisper of a conversation but it's too low for him to make out words.

A touch appears on his cheek, tentative and tender. Magnus relaxes. He'd know these calloused fingertips anywhere.

“Magnus?”

He blinks his eyes open, squinting even in the dim lighting. Alec swims into focus slowly, a careful smile on his face that can't hide his concern. “How are you feeling?”

Magnus swallows drily, hand going to his throat. It's not even the slightest bit raw. “Fine, surprisingly.” His voice sounds normal, too. He frowns.

“Cat patched you up,” Alec explains while Magnus pushes up onto his elbow. “She told me you'd be fine but it's good to hear it from you.” He quickly supports Magnus with an arm around his shoulders and Magnus leans into him even though he doesn't need the help. Nothing calms him quite like being able to feel Alec's heartbeat.

“Where is Catarina?” he asks, looking around. They're not in Lilith's castle anymore. In fact Magnus is very familiar with the cobwebbed candlestands and endless book towers they're surrounded with. He's been resigned to call them his home for the rest of eternity after all. Asmodeus's lair. “How did we get here?”

“After you killed Lilith the demons were disoriented. It lasted long enough for Simon, Cat and Izzy to fight their way through to us. Cat portalied us here and healed you.”

Magnus listens, doing an internal checkup at the same time. His toes respond when he wiggles them surreptitiously, he feels lax and there's not a single ache left in his muscles. His magic flares up eagerly when he calls it, blue sparks dancing over his fingers with not a trace of yellow in sight. The sigil is gone from his life force and he feels a string of his magic connected to the rift, keeping it shut. Deep inside he senses the familiar echo of Cat's healing magic lingering in his bones. She really outdid herself once again.

“The demon's confusion didn't last,” Alec continues. “They've traced us here but Cat and Jace have a ward in place so we're safe for now. Jonathan is still recovering as well, but the others are outside checking the perimeter. Thankfully this place is easy to defend.”
“Guess my father's humble housing preferences are finally paying off,” Magnus mumbles. He scans the room and spots Jonathan in the far corner, huddled into himself. Clary sits cross-legged beside him and they're talking quietly, the source of the whispers he heard before.

“How did Cat manage all that? She was drained after we extracted the heavenly fire from Izzy. She should be recovering. Especially after healing me,” he adds absentmindedly. “I can't even imagine what that must have taken out of her.”

Worry coils low in his gut. Despite feeling fine he's on edge. Uneasy. Waiting for the other shoe to drop. He knows he should be grateful to still be alive, not to mention well, but even with all evidence pointing to the contrary he's hesitant to believe his senses. Maybe when he's filled in all the blanks he'll be able to trust that it's over, that they really managed to defeated Lilith and there's hope again that he might get to leave Edom and go home.

Alec's lip curls into a frown. “A lot. She had to draw strength from all of us.”

Magnus looks at him in alarm, but Alec is busy kneading his hands. “She really should be resting.”

“She did,” Alec assures him quietly.

His tone jolts Magnus from his anxious thoughts. Something is off. It's in the way Alec's shoulders are tense, his hands clenched together. How, Magnus realizes belatedly, his retelling of events was too clinical and detached, their connection from the alliance rune muted down to nothing. He's missing something and whatever it is it's grave enough that Alec can't even meet his eyes.

“Alexander?”

“Hm?” Alec turns towards him but still evades his gaze.

The others are alright, Alec wouldn't lie to him about something like that, so what could possibly...

“Alec, how long did I sleep?”

Alec gives a shrug that's not half as casual as he probably thinks it is. “It's hard to tell,” he hedges, “since Edom doesn't have a day cycle or a sun--”

“Alec.”

Alec bites his lip before he lets out a long exhale, his fingers twitching. “I don't know. Fifteen hours. Maybe longer.”

Almost a whole day. The time has left traces on Alec's skin, has dug lines of sorrow into Alec's face that weren't there before. Now that Magnus lets himself look he sees that Alec looks tired in a way that has nothing to do with exhaustion and everything to do with being caught in his own head, of pre-emptive grief while trying to brace himself for an incomprehensible loss. Magnus knows by now how Alec's mind works. Cat's reassurance that he was fine grounded Alec very little, if it grounded him at all.

“Alexander?”

He doesn't move so Magnus tries again.

“Please look at me?”

Alec takes a shaky breath and does, and not a second later his expression crumples and he starts crying. Magnus rushes to meet him, pulling him into a tight hug and Alec collapses into him as if he's
got no strength left, but when his arms close around Magnus they squeeze him fiercely. Alec's head is buried against Magnus's neck and he's trembling with choked off sobs. Magnus cards his fingers through Alec's hair and down his back, murmuring “I'm fine” over and over again. It's so easy to forget sometimes how fragile a heart hides behind Alec's sharp exterior.

Alec's fingers claw into his sides and Magnus's skin grows wet with his tears, but after a while Alec calms enough to speak.

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry,” he rasps and Magnus's heart aches. “I was so scared. I thought I'd lost you. When we got to you--” He breaks off and pushes himself even closer against Magnus.

Magnus can vaguely guess what he looked like. He's seen corpses of warlocks who were exposed to too much raw energy. It's not a pretty sight, and with a force as powerful as Lilith's magic he must have had it much worse. It's nothing short of miraculous that Cat managed to salvage him. Another thing on the long list of things he'll never be able to make up to her.

“It's alright,” he soothes. “I'm alright now.”

“I know.” Alec's voice sounds muffled against his neck. “Catarina kept telling me you'd be fine but I..” He snuffles. “I'm just so relieved. Sorry.”

Magnus hugs him tighter and lets his eyes fall closed for a moment. “Please don't apologize. You're allowed to feel things.”

Even without seeing his face he senses Alec's dissent. Maybe one day he'll be able to change Alec's mind on the matter, but clearly not today. He settles for patting Alec's hair some more.

Eventually Alec disentangles from him, rubbing his cheeks roughly. “I didn't mean to make this about me. Is there anything I can do for you? Anything at all?”

Magnus contemplates him for a moment before leaning in to rest their foreheads together. “Just this. And.. tell me about the others? How's Izzy?”

Alec relaxes against him slowly. “She's good. She woke shortly after you got the heavenly fire out of her and helped Simon defend Cat when the demons were called.”

“That must have been tough.”

“Not really. Izzy told me the demons barely paid them any mind. Just a few even noticed their hideout. Most of them where too drawn in by Lilith's call.”

Magnus hums. That sounds about right.

He's about to suggest they get up and take a look outside when Clary calls his name softly. He turns towards her, reluctantly breaking his contact with Alec in the process. Relief shines in Clary's eyes and she shoots him a smile. “You're awake! How are you?”

“Good as new,” he says with a grin before his gaze flutters over to Jonathan. He seems skittish under the scrutiny but he doesn't shy away from it.

Magnus remembers the bargain Jonathan offered Lilith. No matter if it was just to save Clary or if it was only intended as a distraction, Magnus appreciates the short reprieve it bought him in the fight, so he inclines his head. “Thank you.”

Surprise flickers across Jonathan's face and he starts, but nods in acknowledgement. Beside him
Clary beams.

Alec is still frowning in their direction when Magnus turns back to him. “What is it?”

Letting out a long sigh Alec focuses back on him, a light smile forced onto his lips. “It's nothing.”

“Alec.”

“It's...” He sighs again, then shakes his head. “I don't know what to make of Jonathan,” he admits lowly. “I was sure he'd betray us within the hour but I was willing to take that risk. And now... I'm not going back on my word but how can I let him live? He's evil.”

“He did evil things,” Magnus corrects gently.

Alec stares at him. “He opened the rift, Magnus. He's the reason you're trapped here in Edom.”

Taking a deep breath Magnus ponders how to phrase this. The thoughts aren't new, blinking in and out of his mind from the moment they got Clary back after Lilith's banishment, shoved aside by his own world falling apart without his magic, then without Alec, then without a future. He never thought he'd get to a point where he shared them.

“When I was with my father,” he starts carefully, “I did terrible things. Unspeakable things that I'll never be able to atone for, no matter how hard I try. But I learned that even a darkness like this can be overcome. No one who wants to be saved is beyond saving.”

Alec's eyes are wide and full of disbelief. “Are you seriously comparing yourself to Jonathan? You're nothing like him. Magnus. Nothing at all.”

Magnus gives a joyless laugh. “No, not anymore.”

He blinks against the memories of a time long past that he'll never be able to leave behind. Asmodeus was no friend of plain brutality and murder but he taught Magnus the art of merciless indifference. Of fulfilling wishes in the cruelest way possible, of never once granting a favor without demanding a harrowing price in return, of excessive revenge for imagined slights. At the time Magnus very rarely ended lives with his own hands but there's a lot of blood on them nonetheless. He can't escape the guilt of his actions. He'll never forget how easily he shaped into a monster.

“There's a strain of desperation that you never unlearn if you've known it once,” he says. “And I recognize it in Jonathan.”

Unable to meet Alec's gaze any longer he looks down, reaching for Alec's hand to have something to hold onto, to anchor himself. Alec provides acceptance and comfort without a second's hesitation and Magnus's throat closes up.

“The lengths a lonely soul will go to in the hopes of family are unimaginable, Alexander.” He squeezes Alec's fingers tightly. “But they don't have to define someone.”

Alec looks like he wants to argue but whatever he was about to say gets lost in the return of the others.

“Told you Magnus was up,” Simon triumphs.

Jace rolls his eyes. “Not everyone here has vampire hearing.”

“I have vampire hearing,” Izzy pipes in. “But I didn't hear anything over my growling stomach.”
They're making their way towards Magnus's makeshift bed and he gets up to greet them. Catarina is the first to embrace him, short and firm like she always does, smiling at him in that fond-amused way of hers. He opens his mouth to thank her but she interrupts him before he can get a word out. “Don't mention it. I know you'd do the same for me.”

Izzy is next, hugging him tightly. “It's so good to see you back on your feet.”

“Right back at you.” He pats her back gently.

Simon hugs him, too, which is unexpected but less awkward than it could have been. “We were really worried.”

Alec tenses beside him and Magnus takes his hand, lacing their fingers together. Jace observes that with a crooked grin and claps Magnus's shoulder. “It's good to have you back,” he says flippantly, but Magnus easily sees the relief behind his nonchalance.

“Not that I'm not happy to see you all alive and well but.. what are you doing here? Lilith is history and I can deal with the lesser demons alone. Cat should be able to open you a portal back to earth.”

Izzy sends him a look as if he's a student in class who just asked something particularly silly. “We're not leaving Edom without you, Magnus.”

“More like Alec won't leave without you, I'm not leaving without Alec, Izzy won't leave without us and so on,” Jace chimes in. “You get the idea.”

Despite expecting something along those lines it still catches Magnus off-guard. Since he woke up there's been low hope simmering in his gut that there might be a way back home for him, now that the deadly threat of Lilith is dealt with. Gaining this unlikely victory has lit a flame of naive faith within him that everything will turn out alright now.

But it's not that easy. Lilith wasn't the reason he's shackled to Edom after all.

“I appreciate the show of support,” he says, and he really does, “but as long as the rift exist I can't leave. You know this.”

“We do. And we've been working on that while you...” Cat's eyes dart to Alec. “Rested.”

Magnus wants to protest because he's been searching for a loophole from the moment he set foot into Edom and came up empty. He hates that his hope flares brighter even though he knows there's nothing they can do. “I'm willing to try anything, but I don't think we'll find a way around this one.”

“You've closed rifts before though. Why is this one different?” Clary asks.

“It's too large. Most rifts are the size of a summoning pentagram. Even the one Lilith came through was less than twenty feel long. This one though...” Magnus frowns at the sky where they can see his handiwork thanks to the lack of a ceiling. “Those are, what, seven miles? That's a little much, even for me.”

“But you could close it?”

“In theory. I tried to, at first, but it was way too slow and I had to act quickly. Every second the rift stayed open more wraiths escaped Edom. Sealing it off with a ward was much easier that knitting the dimension's rims back together.”

“How slow are we talking?” Izzy inquires.
Magnus shakes his head. “Even with my magic enhanced by Edom I can’t close more than thirty feet before I need a break. And it’s not just that. Someone needs to keep the ward up while I work on the rift because I can’t do both.”

He’s barely finished the sentence when Cat is already raising her hand, sparks crackling along her fingers. He feels her magic prickling along his as she layers a ward of her own over the rift, snugly fitting over the fraying edges of the sky and she lifts her eyebrows at him as if to say ‘What are you waiting for?’

“Catarina, even if you help me this will take years.”

“Then you better get started.” Her tone books no argument but Magnus shakes his head. “You have a daughter to think of now. You can’t stay in Edom with me.”

“I’m not leaving you here when there’s something I can do,” she counters stubbornly.

“Me neither,” Alec adds and squeezes his fingers.

The thought makes his heart throb. He wants nothing more than to keep Alec by his side but he can’t damn him to the same fate he’s signed himself up for. He shakes his head again. “Alec, you have responsibilities on earth. You can’t ignore that.”

“Izzy can take over the Institute for me,” Alec contends. “She should go back and be checked over anyway. Who knows what kind of long-term effects the heavenly fire might have on her system.”

“You couldn’t stop me from going to Edom with you and now you think you can make me leave without you? Don’t be stupid, Alec.” Izzy snorts. “I just need a bite of whatever Magnus has been eating and I’m good to go. Camping in Edom sounds fun.” She pointedly plants her feet on the ground.

Alec glares at her while Magnus slowly realizes that they mean it. They’re really not going to leave him alone. The knowledge settles warmly into his chest and he can’t fight a tiny smile.

“I could really use something to eat, too,” Simon confesses and turns to Magnus. “You don’t happen to have anything vampire compatible there?”

“Oh.” Magnus blinks. “I didn’t eat anything.”

“What?” Simon asks, sounding aghast. “Nothing at all?”

“No.” Now that Magnus thinks about it he hasn’t felt hungry at all. Or tired. “I haven't slept either before you arrived. Huh.”


A moment’s pause, then Izzy mumbles, “I’ve always wondered what demons eat in Edom.” She frowns. “Wait, so Simon and I are the only ones who are hungry?”

Jace nods. “I think the alliance rune supplies us, too. When Cat was exhausted I felt tired, but as soon as she recharged I was fine. What are you getting at, Izzy?”

“What if Magnus doesn’t have to keep the rift shut? If you could tap into the energy Edom provides to power the ward you could leave, right?”

Magnus admires her creativity but sadly she’s not the first to have that idea. “I tried that already. My
blood connection to Edom isn't strong enough. Without me as a living conductor to cast the magic the wards collapse.”

Izzy bites her lip in frustration, clearly searching for a different approach.

“I guess you've tried a blood seal, too?” Cat asks.

“Yeah.”

“Maybe your connection wasn't strong enough because you're only half demonic,” Izzy suggests. “If we had something stronger…”

Her words hang there for a moment before Jace breaks the silence. “You mean the blood of a Greater Demon.”

Izzy shrugs.

Alec rubs his brow. “Just because Magnus won against Lilith doesn't mean we should go up against the next Greater Demon. This is insane.”

Izzy looks ready to argue her point but Simon is quicker. “Sorry, I may have gotten that wrong because I only had like the synopsis of the synopsis but…” He points at Jonathan. “Didn't he get an injection of Lilith's blood at some point?”

All eyes turn to Jonathan who stiffens under the sudden attention.

“It should work,” Catarina says pensively. “Lilith's blood is still in his system or he couldn't prevail here.”

“Well,” Jace drawls and makes a step towards him but Cat holds him back with a hand on his shoulder.

“Blood magic is very powerful because it works with very clear, simple rules,” she states calmly. Magnus can still see her nerves in the slight crease between her eyebrows. “One is that any blood has to be given willingly and in full consciousness of what it's used for. No amount of trickery or blackmail can lever out this condition.”

For a long moment the air stills between them. Magnus can sense Alec's emotions coiling tightly, too many to decipher, can see the anger in Jace and Izzy and the defiance emanating from Clary as she sways closer towards her brother. He focuses on that, rather than his own heart drumming against his ribs with fearful tension.

Jonathan's eyes find his and he says, “I'll give you my blood.”

A wave of relief crashes through Magnus and he can't tell how much of it is his own and how much is Alec's. He squeezes Alec's fingers in a reassurance meant for both of them.

Clary lifts her chin and Jace deflates, an ocean of unspoken words between them. Izzy can't look at her either.

Unheeding of the emotional upheaval around her Catarina straightens. “There's no time to lose, then.” She catches Magnus's gaze and they just look at each other, gratitude and joy exchanged with a glance, and then Cat motions him and Jonathan a few steps away to a bit of empty space.

“Together?” she asks.
He smiles. “Of course.”

The spell for the seal is a simple one, most blood magic is. It draws its power from raw intent and, well, a blood sacrifice. The complexity lies in finding a suitable and willing donor, not in the spellwork itself.

With a flick of her wrist Catarina carves a pentagram into the floor between them, the artless lines impeccably placed. It's unimaginable that something so plain will set him free.

*We still don't know for sure if it will work*, Magnus tries to call himself to order, but hope has already dug her roots deeply into his soul.

He draws a deep breath and with a snap synchronized by centuries of working together they call forth the pentagram's energy. The lines flare to life in a muted gray, everchanging and flickering until he and Catarina pour their magic inside it, a swirl of his darker and her lighter blue merging in a slate color. A low hum fills the air and Magnus can feel it settling on his skin.

“With this magic a seal is forged,” he and Catarina intone in unison. He can sense the spell taking hold with a jolt, claiming the magic they've fed into the pentagram.

They reach deeper into it, beyond the restricted circle on the surface of the floor, down into the thrumming core where Edom's power lies.

“In this soil a seal is grounded.”

The blue lines flare brightly, gaining strength and forming a connection to Lilith's energy. The force of it is almost enough to make Magnus stagger, but he leans into the flow of magic instead, willing it to accept him as its wielder. It resists him for a moment, challenging his claim, but he stirs it to mold around him, bending to his command.

When it has calmed he indicates for Jonathan to extend his arms. He does, one hand pointing towards Catarina and one towards Magnus, held above the blazing magic on the ground.

“With this blood a seal is set,” he and Catarina chant, each slicing a curved cut over Jonathan's open palms, neatly bisecting his life line and his heart line. Blood wells up a heartbeat later, coaxed to flow freely by the pentagram's call. Three dark drops fall from each of Jonathan's hands, staining the sand before they're absorbed into the spell and the pentagram, tinting the blue a shade of red.

Magnus and Catarina turn towards the sky, focusing on the rift and the glittering ward keeping it shut. Closing his eyes Magnus gather the spell close and visualizes its purpose, overlaying the rift in an elegant sweep, impenetrable and immovable. He feels Cat grasping the spellwork as well, and after one last breath they *push*.

The pentagram trembles for a moment before it vanishes with a hiss, taking the heat of magic with it. Above them a shimmer of dark red magic weaves itself over Magnus's ward, spanning from one side of the rift to the other, a fluorescent veil that glints in the sky.

“Did it work?” he hears Clary whisper.

Only one way to find out. Magnus raises his hand and slowly, carefully retracts his ward. He feels it slip against the magic that was his but is an autonomous entity now, peeling away from the dimensional tear. Excruciating seconds tick by until the last of his magic has returned to him.

The seal stays in place and doesn't flicker.
Magnus stares at it, unable to comprehend that it really worked until Catarina beams at him. “It's done,” she breathes, her eyes alight with happiness. “You're free.”

He's free.

Suddenly he's in Alec's arms and all Magnus can do is hold on tight. He's free. He gets to keep Alec, not in the searing planes of Edom that would have choked them both. He gets to keep this.

Alec presses soft kisses to his temple until Magnus finally finds the strength to pull back. Together they watch the seal, opalescent crimson lazily flowing into burgundy.

“Will this really hold for the rest of eternity?” Alec wonders.

“Probably not,” Magnus admits. “But it will for a decade or two. That's more than enough time for me to close the rift bit by bit, even from outside Edom.”

“Of course,” Alec laughs and squeezes him to his side. “Please don't forget to send your bill to the Clave.”

“Oh, I most certainly won't,” Magnus assures and turns to see Alec's smile. When their eyes meet something inside Alec's gaze melts and he leans in to place the softest kiss against Magnus's lips. “There you are.”

Magnus frowns but before he can ask he realizes his glamor is down. It must have slipped during the ritual. He's about to raise it back up but Alec stops him with a hand on his cheek.

“Don't. I've missed them.”

The words lodge themselves in Magnus's heart and tug gently. “Alexander.”

Alec just smiles and steals another tender kiss. “Let's go home.”

Chapter End Notes

From an intermediate stage where I thought they'd try the Cat-maintains-the-ward-and-Magnus-works-on-the-rift-plan:
“Uhh... I really don't mean any offense but is it even working?” Simon asks. “Because I don't see a change.”
“I think I saw the corner over there twitch,” Jace remarks helpfully.
“It is working,” Catarina interjects. “I can feel it.”
“Of course it's working,” Magnus scoffs. “I'm not an amateur.”

also
ralf: *gives Jace the line “It's good to have you back”*
ralf: It's good to be back
ralf: *screams in sheith*
The Institute is in surprising order when they return. Jace peeks outside the door of the training room they arrived in, the same one Catarina first opened the portal from, and takes in the Shadowhunters busily walking down the hallway and milling around the Ops Center. “Huh. I expected things to be a little more chaotic after our impromptu disappearance for a day and a half.”

“I left instructions before we went to Edom,” Alec scoffs behind him. Jace turns just in time to catch his scowl, as if the concept of him not preparing everything days in advance is absurd.

“Oh course you did,” Izzy mumbles fondly, rolling her eyes.

“The schedules I prepared cover the next ten hours,” Alec continues, unfazed, “and I'm taking those off.” His gaze drifts to Jonathan, and Jace sees Alec squeeze Magnus's fingers once, tightly, before letting go. “But first I need you, Izzy, to check in with Underhill if any complications occured that I have to deal with. And you three come with me.” He nods towards Jace, Clary and Jonathan before stalking off towards the elevator.

Clary and Jonathan share a look and Jace's heart throbs. He clenches his fists and follows Alec.

“So what's the plan? Huh?” He sees and feels Alec tense.

“You won't like it,” Alec says, a deep furrow between his brows. His eyes flicker between Jace's as if he's searching for something. “But you need to be open-minded about this. For your own good.”

Jace crosses his arms defensively. “What's that supposed to mean?”

“It means this issue isn't going away and you need to accept that. Pretending otherwise isn't doing you any favors.”

The elevator dings its arrival before Jace can reply and they get in. Alec holds the door open for Jonathan and Clary, then pushes the button for the sub cell level. It doesn't go unnoticed. Clary turns to him immediately, mouth already opening in protest but Alec cuts her off. “This is a temporary measure. At least let me explain before you start yelling.”

Clary relents, her lips pursed, while Jace pauses. Temporary. Somehow he doubts the next stop on Jonathan's journey will be the Gard. Taking a deep breath Jace forces himself to stay calm. Alec's words are still ringing in his ears. He can stay open-minded.

Alec leads the way towards an older, secluded cell without windows and unlocks it. The door creaks and scrapes over the floor when he pulls it open and he peers into it for a moment before turning to them. Jace can sense his nerves even though Alec's face betrays nothing.
“You're officially dead,” he addresses Jonathan. “There's no way the Clave would let you live if they knew you weren't and there's nothing we can do about that. Redeeming your name is impossible, so you're getting a new one.”

The words drop like lead into Jace's stomach. “You're giving him a new identity?” he asks incredulously.

Alec nods tightly, no doubt feeling Jace's rising anger. “It's the only way to keep him around.”

No wonder Alec said Jace wouldn't like this. He hates this. Every blood cell in his body is revolting at the idea of keeping Jonathan around.

“And why are we staying in a cell for this?” Clary asks sharply.

Alec straightens. “Because I'd be an idiot to trust Jonathan. After everything he's done it'll take more than a single day of good behavior to persuade me of his changed intentions. Until then he'll be closely monitored. You and Jace will watch him twenty-four-seven.”

Clary stares at him assessingly. “And how is he supposed to prove himself when he's locked up all day?”

“Like I said, this is temporary. There are tracking devices that are entirely unsusceptible to manipulation from angelic or demonic energy. Once they're in place and Jonathan's new identity is established he'll be just another Shadowhunter doing his duty here in New York. But until then no one can see him, so he'll stay in this cell.”

Jace feels like he's misstepped and entered a dark, alternative universe. This can't be happening. This can't be happening.

“You want to implant a tracking chip into him?!” Clary's eyes spark fire, but Jonathan touches her arm gently.

“It's alright, Clary,” he soothes. To Alec he says, “I accept your conditions and I won't break your rules, I promise. I...” He swallows, eyes bright. “Thank you.” He turns without waiting for a reaction and retreats into the cell. Clary glares at Alec for another moment before going after him, leaving Jace and Alec in frigid silence.

“You can't mean this,” Jace finally speaks, voice hoarse as if he'd screamed himself raw. “You can't.” He feels out of touch with reality, with himself. With Alec.

Alec reaches out to touch his shoulder but Jace flinches back. Hurt flashes across Alec's face and through their connection, but Jace barely registers it. Everything about this feels wrong. Alec was never supposed to betray him like this. “You're letting him stay, with us? With Clary?”

“It's the only way,” Alec answers gravely.

Jace shakes his head. “No. No, we could--”

“Clary would never forgive us if we harm him without cause,” Alec interrupts. “Not now. She believes in Jonathan. The more you fight him, the more you push her away. Do you understand that?” Alec stares at him intently, the same way he's done countless times before and it settles heavily in Jace's chest. “I'm on your side, Jace.”

“How can you say that? Jonathan is a danger and you want us to keep him close.” He draws a quick breath and Alec reaches out to him again slowly, carefully. Jace doesn't pull back. Despite the fear
churning in his gut and the restless fluttering of their bond Alec's hand is a comforting weight on his shoulder.

“Jace, listen to me. Stop thinking with your heart for a second. Take a breath.” Jace closes his eyes and obeys, letting Alec's calming voice wash over him. “Jonathan won't harm Clary, okay? That's the only thing I'm absolutely certain of. And our agreement is clear. He'll do whatever we tell him, and if he doesn't he's dead. You'll be keeping a close eye on him and if he tries anything we'll end him together. Alright?”

Alec's hand squeezes his shoulder, eyes piercing and earnest, and Jace nods. He feels a shred of relief through their connection, but Alec remains mostly tense.

“But Jace.. you need to prepare for the possibility that this might not happen. And then Jonathan will stay, as a part of Clary's life. As a part of all our lives.”

Dread curls inside Jace at the prospect, at the thought of never being rid of Jonathan, a constant shadow looming over them, or worse, prying Clary away from him. “I don't want this,” he rasps, and Alec's grip on his shoulder turns almost painful while a wave of commiseration flows through their bond.

“I know,” Alec whispers, pulling Jace into a tight hug. “But our hands are tied. The only thing we can do is try to make this work, for Clary. Can you do this? For her?”

Jace sinks deeper into Alec's embrace, drawing the strength he needs to brave this because for Clary he'll try anything.

“Yes. For Clary.”

~ ~ ~

Magnus watches Alec march out the door brusquely, Jace, Clary and Jonathan trailing after him. Izzy gives a displeased huff and turns to Simon. “You heard him. I need to catch Underhill.”

Simon steps closer to her, no doubt hoping to draw out their last moments together but Magnus's attention is on Catarina who gives a soft sigh. She catches his eyes. “I should get going too. See how Raphael fared against Madzie.”

“You think your apartment is still in one piece?” Magnus asks, lips quirking.

“Only one way to find out,” Cat retorts with an amused smile. “Walk me out?”

“Of course, my dear.”

On their way to the Institute's doors Magnus can't help but be hit with a wave of appeased nostalgia. He never thought he'd get to see these archways again, or anything other than the burnt ruins of Edom. He's never cared much for the Nephilims' Institutes before meeting Alec, but even then he never thought walking these barren hallways could spark such fond reverence in him, a bone-deep gratitude to be here.

“I know you don't want to hear this,” he starts when they've reached the door, Catarina already watching him for their farewell, “but thank you. I owe you more than a life dept for this, and I could
never repay you.”

Mirth glitters in Cat's eyes. “Then it's a good thing you don't even have to try. We agreed to stop
counting sometime around 1850, remember?”

Magnus snorts a laugh. “We did. But even without keeping track I know the scales are tipped
heavily in your favor.”

Cat bumps their shoulders together. “I'm the healer, it'd be concerning if it was different.” She turns
serious a moment later and adds, “I can't take all the credit this time though. I had to burn through all
the Shadowhunters and Simon to heal you.” She shakes her head, caught in a memory before
focusing back on Magnus. “Especially Alec. He almost ripped himself apart for you.”

The thought stings, but it's soothed by the soft smile of approval on Catarina's face. Magnus knows
how hard-earned Cat's regard is and knowing Alec has it makes his heart flutter.

“I'd tell you he's a keeper,” Cat continues, her gaze flickering to Magnus's hand, “but I see you
already put a ring on it.”

Magnus laughs, eyes drawn to the plain silver band on his finger as well. Despite its simplicity
Magnus knows it will forever be his favorite ring.

“I can't believe I wasn't invited. I thought we were close,” Cat teases.

“It was a hurried affair. Very rushed. But I assure you there'll be an appropriate remake.”

“Appropriately ostentatious, you mean?” Cat inquires innocently.

Magnus fiddles with his ear cuff, equal parts caught and coy. “It's not everyday you get married,
right?”

A mischievous grin plays on Catarina's lips. “You want to tell Alec he's getting demoted to boyfriend
again?”

Magnus hums pensively before shaking his head. “No. I quite like him as my husband, even if we
haven't had our wedding celebration yet. Or our honeymoon.” Vivid images spring to mind, all the
possibilities lingering at the tips of his fingers. Flashes of what their wedding ceremony might be like,
all the places they could visit after, just the two of them indulging in each other's presence without
any looming danger threatening to tear them apart.

“I don't know about the vacation, but you're definitely in the honeymoon phase,” Cat pulls him from
his thoughts.

Magnus blinks, shooting her a guilty smile. “Sorry.”

“Never apologize for being happy,” she says, affection palpable. “It's a good look on you.”

Instead of an answer Magnus hugs her tightly and she squeezes back just as firmly.

“I'll see you soon, Magnus,” she promises, smile in her voice, before she leans back to smirk at him.
“Now get back to your husband.”

~ ~ ~
Alec has barely settled down in his office and rifled through the pile of reports that's cumulated on his desk when Izzy opens the door and enters, her heels clicking sharply on the floor and her expression spelling trouble.

“According to Underhill everything is handled,” Izzy says dismissively, radiating that this matter is entirely secondary to her.

“I guess you're here to talk about something else,” Alec mutters, steeling himself for another round.

Izzy doesn't beat around the bush. “Just because Jonathan helped us get Magnus back doesn't mean he’s a good person now.” She stares him down resolutely, but he still sees the turmoil she's trying to hide. “Max almost died because of him. How can you think about trying to save him when he's already hurt our family and could do it again?”

“You still don't get it, do you? This isn't about saving Jonathan. It's about saving Clary.” At Izzy's perplexed frown he continues. “It's clear she believes there's still good in him. If we don't give him a chance to prove it to us she'll never forgive herself. She'll think she failed him. That if she'd been better we could have been persuaded.” Alec shakes his head, fighting back some inner turmoil of his own. “And I don't want her to feel guilty for the rest of her life. I can handle the risk Jonathan poses if it means sparing her that.”

Just like that, Izzy deflates. Her shoulders slump and the combative spark leaves her. “You're right,” she concedes, lips turning down unhappily. “I hate it, but you're right.” She contemplates him for a long moment. “You wouldn't take that risk if you thought it was completely hopeless though, would you? If you believed that Jonathan was putting on an act for us and just waiting for the right moment to strike?”

They lock eyes for a few heartbeats while Alec ponders how much to tell her. Eventually he settles on the truth. “I didn't at first,” he admits. “But... I don't really see how his behavior makes sense if his only goal was destruction. It's undeniable that Clary means everything to him and he'd die to keep her safe. That's more than could be said for Valentine.” He shrugs. “I don't know, Izzy. Maybe there really is some good left in him. We should help Clary to try and find it, don't you think?”

Izzy purses her lips, her gaze darting away. “I don't know. I don't trust him.”

Alec gives a chuckle. “Yeah, me neither, and I wouldn't ask you to. Just let him misstep before we cut his head off, alright?”

Reluctant amusement flickers over Izzy's face. “Alright, big brother. I can do that.”

“Thank you,” he says, intently.

Izzy's expression softens further and she nods.

A quiet knock sounds from the door and a second later Magnus pokes his head in. “I'll leave you to it”, Izzy announces quickly, waving Magnus off when he starts to apologize for interrupting. “Don't worry, I was heading out anyway. You should get some rest.”

“You too, Isabelle. Sleep well,” Magnus wishes.

She disappears with one last smile over her shoulder and Alec's attention focuses back on Magnus. Even though they've only been apart for a short while something unclenches in his chest at the sight
of him alive and well, and he bridges the distance between them so he can sink into Magnus's embrace. Magnus's arms are a warm comfort around him and he lets out a long sigh.

“So bad?” Magnus asks gently.

Alec gives an indeterminate *mmmh* before shrugging. “No. It was fine. But...” He heaves another sigh. “I'm just exhausted. I want to go home.”

Magnus cards his fingers through his hair once, then pulls back to create a portal. “As you wish, my love.”

They realize their mistake only after they've stepped into the loft's main room and are greeted with the unpleasant sight of Lorenzo in a fluffy bathrobe contemplating his reflection in a tea spoon. For a shocked moment they all stare at each other until Lorenzo catches himself and sneers, “I think you've got the wrong door.”

Magnus groans. “I had forgotten about the squatting.”

“Squatting?!” Lorenzo echos, an irritated crease appearing between his eyebrows. “This loft is *my* property.”

He vanishes the spoon with a casual snap and the action sparks fury in Alec. Lorenzo has no right to make himself at home here. This place belongs to Magnus. Seeing Lorenzo here like this, cozy and comfortable and claiming it's his, is *wrong*.

“Listen, Lorenzo,” Magnus placates, “we both know you don't really want this loft. There isn't enough wall space for all of your paintings anyway. Why don't we settle this manner in a civilized way?”

Lorenzo haughtily crosses his arms. “Actually I love living in such a modest place. I don't see myself giving it up just because you demand it.”

Magnus rolls not just his eyes but his whole head. “Just name your price, Lorenzo.”

“I can't be bought,” Lorenzo spits.

“You took my loft so I would suffer,” Magnus forces out between clenched teeth. Alec instinctively leans into his side, his fists clenching with protective rage. “I suffered. Your work is done. Whatever grudge you hold against me, we're even.”

Lorenzo waves an angry finger at Magnus. “I decide when we're even, Bane. You collaborated with a Greater Demon--”

“Enough,” Alec interrupts forcefully, glaring Lorenzo into silence. “Magnus gave away his life to save the world and risked it again when he faced off Lilith alone and still won. Good luck trying to ruin his reputation.” Lorenzo's jaw drops in disbelief but Alec ignores it. “My husband and I are going to rest now, here in our home, and you are going to leave. And your next words better be ‘Congratulations on your wedding’ or I don't want to hear them. Understood?”

Lorenzo's lip curls into a snarl but he lasts only a few seconds against Alec's piercing gaze before he summons a portal with a sharp flick of his wrist. “This is not over,” he scowls and beats a hasty retreat.

The portal flickers out a second later, leaving them in blessed silence. Alec exhales a long breath of relief, his anger dissipating slowly. Tiredness takes its place, making his bones heavy. “I didn't
actually think that would work.”

Magnus gives a soft laugh. “Well, you did deliver a sparkling performance.” He indicates Alec's hands and Alec catches the tail end of red magic swirling on his fingers before it blinks out.

“Lorenzo probably thought you'd explode in his face if he didn't move,” Magnus snickers.

Alec reaches for the magic reflexively and can feel the last vestiges of it simmering under his skin. He tries to coax it out again to no avail. The rune's effects must be wearing off and only his ire was strong enough to call it forth. The realization tugs at his heart and he leans closer to Magnus.

“Chasing him off like this will have consequences,” he sighs wearily. “But that's a problem for another day.” He laces his fingers through Magnus's. “All that matters right now is that I'm here with you.”

In answer Magnus presses a long, sweet kiss against his temple and Alec knows he feels the same.
I'm second-guessing all of my life choices and specifically this epilogue so hard right now X_X but it's too late to back out now?! If you like it (and this fic as a whole) here's a tumblr link where you can advertise it if you feel like it! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

One year later

A persistent knock drags Alec from sleep. His first instinct is to reach for the blade he keeps under the edge of the mattress, but Magnus is still resting comfortably against his chest and he would be awake if anyone with ill intentions breached the wards on their floor. Alec untangles carefully from him and grabs one of Magnus's robes on the way to the door.

On the other side he's greeted with the sight of Clary, her hair pulled into a messy ponytail and a slightly disconcerting spark shining in her eyes.

He blinks at her, unimpressed. “You know which day tomorrow is, right? I swear if this isn't ultimately important--”

“It is,” Clary cuts him off decisively and sweeps past him into the loft.

Alec closes the door quietly and takes in Clary's demeanor. Those are definitely sleeping pants peeking out from under her coat and there's a nervous energy surrounding her that makes him raise is guard.

“Is this about Christopher?” he asks suspiciously. It would be just like Clary to show up the night before his wedding to make demands on behalf of her brother. Though if she hoped to take advantage of his mood she showed up a day early. “Because I'm still not convinced it's time to remove his GPS tracker yet.”

Clary has been putting out feelers about that for a few weeks now. She claimed that they haven't needed the tracker once in the past year and while that's true Alec doesn't think Jace and Izzy are ready for that yet. After establishing the identity of Christopher Greenwater, an associate of the Clave assigned to monitor Clary after her possession and consequent desertion, Christopher has been nothing but obedient, following every one of the strict requirements set for him. He went on missions with Clary and Alec when he was told to, reported back whenever Alec demanded it and never objected to the unannounced searches of his room. After a few months Alec loosened the restrictions a little, allowing him to leave the Institute with just Clary for company.

Christopher kept true to his word and never broke the rules Alec set. He's mostly quiet around anyone except Clary, no doubt sensing the distrust and resentment the others harbor towards him. But the slow changes in his behavior are still noticeable to Alec. He's not restless like Alec assumed but calm, relaxing the more time Alec held up his end of the bargain. He rarely smiles, but the contentment he feels when Clary is around is palpable. He never takes any kindness for granted. It took a long while for him to trust Alec's attempts to be civil, and even when he did it was with
caution.

It's jarring how much he reminds Alec of Jace sometimes. It shouldn't come as a surprise, considering the first half of their lives are practically identical. But while Jace got them to look after him, Christopher had Lilith. He will always be the person that almost killed Alec's little brother, but he'll also always be the person that got abused his whole life by two of the cruelest creatures the Shadow World had to offer. As hard as it is to force forgiveness some days, it's equally hard not to feel empathy.

“It's not about Chris,” Clary assures quickly. “It's about you.”

“This doesn't sound ominous at all,” Alec mutters.

Clary stops pacing and shoots him a smile. “It's not. It's.. I have something for you.” She digs a piece of paper from her cloak pocket, biting her lip. “Tonight I had a dream about your wedding.”

Alec snorts. “Yeah, same.”

She laughs, but reins herself back in. “I had a vision of a rune. And it's... here,” she says, thrusting out the paper. “Just look at it.”

He takes the offered piece of paper and unfolds it. Broad dark lines show a simple design with three loops and a couple curls. It vaguely resembles a tree, Alec thinks, simple and elegant. Beautiful.

But it's the word underneath, scrawled in Clary's curvy hand, that knocks the breath from his lungs.

_Immortality_

Suddenly his heart beats in his throat and his fingers clench around the paper, crinkling it slightly.

“Alec?” Clary asks cautiously. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” Alec whispers back, breathless.

Soft footfalls signal Magnus's arrival and Clary squeezes Alec's shoulder quickly. “I'll leave you two alone,” she grins before slipping away.

The door shuts behind her and not a second later Magnus drapes himself over Alec's back, firm and warm. “Was that Clary?” he mumbles sleepily. “What did she want?”

“I think she gave me her wedding present,” Alec says faintly.
Magnus chuckles, his breath tickling Alec's neck. “Did she mix up the dates? She'll be so upset when she notices her mistake tomorrow.”

“No, it's... it's...” Words evade him and so he just holds up the paper for Magnus to see.

He feels the exact moment Magnus realizes what Alec is showing him because he goes tense, his fingers twitching where they settled on Alec's stomach.

“Alexander, I...” He swallows. “I can't ask this of you.”

“You don't have to. It's my choice and I know what I want.”

Some part of Alec has known from the moment Magnus was bound to Edom, when he thought he'd lost the love of his life for good and realized that no price was too high to pay if it meant being with Magnus. He knows without a doubt that he would have stayed with him in Edom if they hadn't found a way to leave together, and this is no different. If there is a way to stay with Magnus, he'll always choose it.

He turns in Magnus's arms to face him, gently cupping his cheek, the sight of his shining eyes tugging at Alec's heart. “I love you, Magnus.”

“I'm not letting you make any rash decisions in the middle of the night,” Magnus protests, his voice trembling traitorously.

Alec laughs and steals a kiss. “Alright. Let's get married first.” He grins. “But you won't be able to change my mind.”

Magnus looks at him searchingly before his gaze melts, soft and tender. “I love you, too,” he breathes and hugs Alec tightly as if he never wants to let him go.

Smiling Alec pulls him even closer, knowing that he never will.

Chapter End Notes

Headcanons (that I didn't manage to include in the fic for pacing reasons):
- Jonathan
  Sorry, Christopher is now blond with bright blue eyes. Basically he looks like you'd assume he looks like based on his kiddie actor.
  - At some point Max transfers back to the NY Institute and he's immediately fascinated with the reclusive Clave Official hanging around Clary, mostly because he senses intense displeasure from his siblings whenever he tries to interact with him and he lives to rile them up. The Lightwood siblings are Majorly Uneasy at first, but they can't really prevent Max from poking around Christopher without rousing suspicions. With time watching these two interact helps them accept the fact that Chris really isn't putting on a show or pretending to be good, but is actually enjoying being a good person.
  - A few years later, when Max is less prone to impulsive, stupid decisions (e.g. confronting then-Sebastian about his real identity with zero backup) he figures it out – admittedly, re-naming Jonathan 'Christopher' was a little obvious – but, after having a lot of fun with dropping increasingly ambiguous comments about his identity he confesses to his siblings that he knows (and also promises to keep the secret).
- First it's Alec who (apart from Clary ofc) has the best relationship with Christopher – not least because he's the most capable Lightwood when it comes to compartmentalizing feelings – but after a few years, some soul searching and forgiveness Izzy is the one who becomes his best friend.
- Twenty years later Chris and Jace have reached a point where they can bond over how shitty Valentine's parenting techniques were.

If you've managed to stick through til here I'd love to hear your thoughts, positive or negative alike (though of course I hope for the former lol). Thank you for reading, I really hope you enjoyed it :)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!