A Mark on the Heart

by LaCroixWitch

Summary

It’s been three years since Alec Lightwood was stripped of his runes, three years to build a new life for himself as a mundane. Now, he runs a tattoo shop catering to downworlders, where anyone could stumble in.

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After helping prevent the second uprising of The Circle, Magnus Bane traded in his position as High Warlock to pursue his second calling: fatherhood. With two young warlock children, life is far from mundane.
This story is a slow burn of numerous meet-cutes, generous fluff, and feel-good kid-fic moments. Constant fluff, eventual smut. Lots and lots of smut. Follows a timeline that includes a ton of holidays.

Updates every Sunday.
Chapter 1

It was a rainy Tuesday evening, the cars sloshing puddles out on the Brooklyn streets, overpowering any other noise of the city. The streetlights hadn’t turned on yet, and with the light fog, they wouldn’t do much to brighten the street anyway. Alec didn’t have another client until 7:00pm, just after sunset, so he busied himself organizing his inks and tidying up his work-spaces.

He had one in the front, where he took drop-in clients, mostly mundanes, and then he had a backroom for shy clients and downworlders who wanted to keep a low profile. Raphael Santiago—his 7:00—was one of those downworlders, not wanting to draw unnecessary attention to the fact that his tattoos needed to be touched up every few weeks so that they wouldn’t fade. The ink didn’t stay well in vampire skin, which was a challenge Alec was determined to fix. His tattoo parlor was downworlder-friendly, so he put extra effort into making sure his practices were inclusive.

Some standard tattoo inks contained silver nanoparticles—for werewolves this would be at best an inconvenience, at worst, a death sentence. For vampires, certain religious iconography signs could cause skin burning once they were completed, but Alec learned his way around this by very carefully leaving gaps between lines. Seelies wanted plant, crystal or mineral derived inks, allowing them to harness their power more effectively in an urban environment. Anything animal derived or overly ferrous was considered uncivilized by the fair folk.

While it made things more complicated, catering to downworlders had an added advantage. Deruned shadowhunters often found themselves targets for demon and rogue downworlder attacks. Without the power of their runes and weapons or the support of the Clave and the Accords, they were completely vulnerable. Building a strong rapport with the downworlder community ensured that Alec had a network of protection. It kept him in their good graces.

In the back of the shop, Clary was practicing on some pig leather, testing out some of her latest flashes. Alec loved it when she practiced—it meant she wasn’t bothering him with questions or watching him while he worked. If he could convince her to use headphones for her music, then he would be able to enjoy complete silence, but Clary and Maryse fired back that it was important for a Tattoo Shop atmosphere to have an appropriate soundtrack. Thankfully, the music was a mixture of his taste with Clary’s, so most of it was tolerable; alternative rock, mellow indie, fringe pop and classics.

Since she remembered nothing of the downworld after being deruned by the angels, Clary reverted back to her art-school era interests, going to concerts, clubs, and galleries. Simon was still her friend, but he kept a safe distance to avoid her catching on that he was a vampire, which left Alec to be reluctantly dragged around by the redhead to concerts. Before, he would have just said no; he would not have entertained the idea. But he had this new life as a mundane, and part of mundane life was going out and participating in things. If that meant he had to go places with Clary Fray, so be it.

“Hey, Alec?” Clary chimed from the back room. “Could you come take a look at this stippling? I don’t know if I assembled the shading needle properly.”

Even now, Alec was responsible for teaching Clary Fray. ‘At least now I’m not teaching her how to use swords...’ He thought to himself, rolling his eyes.
“Alright, gimme a sec.” He gave the cabinet of inks a once over before gingerly closing the door. He stored all of his inks in an antique wooden cabinet with stained glass doors. It reminded him of the windows in the training room. Since taking over the shop, he redecorated a bit, making the studio look like a fluid continuation of bookstore next door. Maybe in a few years, he’d save up the money and bust out the wall, combine the two family businesses. There wasn’t enough money for that right now.

He walked into the back room, finding Clary leaned over a table tapping her foot in concentration. Her pale face was flushed with red, something Alec learned was a signature of her frustration. Clutching the needle with white knuckles, she touched it to a piece of test leather, drawing a small patch of shading and quickly pulling back.

“Ugh I just can’t quite get it to look right.” Clary righted herself, tucking a stray strand of wavy hair back into her top knot.

Alec leaned over her worktable, taking a look at her practice squares. The first one was a watercolor design, an iris. To be a good watercolor tattoo, an unorthodox style, the colored shading needed to look melted, the edges delicately blurred. Next to the leather square, Clary had placed a painting she was using as the basis for the design.

“This is a good start.” Alec learned that with Clary, and with most people, it was always good to start with a positive. When he worked for the Clave, he was always in positions of authority; people listened without question. Now, living as a mundane, Alec learned that social skills were much more valuable. “I think you tried to take on too much all at once. See this—” He gestured to the purple petal on the warm leather. “It looks like you started off with too much ink. When you’re doing shading like this, you want to make sure you start light. You can always build, but you can’t take away. But this—” He gestured to the square where she’d only marked a few simple lines. “This is much better. Remember, you have to learn the basics, get really good at the individual pieces, before you put everything together into one picture.”

It was the same advice he used to give when training younger shadowhunters, word for word. Only now, he was talking about actual pieces of a picture, not the basic skills of hand-to-hand combat.

“You put together a bunch of different lines of this light stippling,” He pointed again to her practice line, “...build it up to create depth, and I think you’ll be a lot happier with the final result. Maybe try messing around with the darkness of the purple too.”

“Oh, so it’s like doing grey-scale shading?” She squinted her eyes at her line of stippling, drawing a few more strokes next to it to create a small square. “Oh my gosh I’m so dumb…” She whispered. “Of course it is. Just because I’m not working with black doesn’t mean the technique changes.” She leaned in closer to the table to focus on her work. Alec knew she was about to get pulled into a black hole, practicing her new technique. She turned her head to the side, throwing Alec an ice-cream melting smile. “Thanks, Alec, you’re the best!”

“Don’t thank me yet, thank me when I can see you do that on a person.” He moved around the table, cleaning up around her. He shook his head dismissively; she was always surrounded by a spiraling hurricane of mess. “You have to keep your station tidy even when you’re in the middle of work. I know sanitation doesn’t matter as much in those…” He waved his hands vaguely in the air. “...painting studios at the Brooklyn Academy. Here though—”

“I know, I know. You tell me this every day Alec.” She giggled, shaking her head. A loud buzz whirred through the room as she continued to practice.
“Yeah, well it’s not every day that I have a 7:00 appointment, specifically in the back room. I’ll need you to wrap this up within a half hour. I’m gonna step out, get some dinner. Want me to grab you something?”

“Oh, I’m good! Luke and I are going to Alberto’s for pizza. He’s been on night duty for a while, and we want to catch up.”

“Catch up? Don’t you guys live in the same apartment?” Alec grabbed his leather jacket off the front hook, shrugging it on. He didn’t wait for her to respond, opening the door to the chilly, damp air.

“Bye!” He heard her yell, her voice harmonizing with the bell clanging as the door closed. The rain now fell in heavy drops, pelting his jacket and quickly soaking his hair. It was only one door down to his mother’s bookstore, not enough time outdoors to warrant an umbrella.

The smell of the bookstore was intoxicatingly comforting, rushing his senses when he opened the door. In the past two years, the shop had blossomed from a dusty, abandoned shop into a treasure trove of obscure manuscripts, the shelves dotted with various antiquities. There were, of course, some standard mundane bookstore elements. The displays closer to the front housed leather-bound copies of classical literature, luxurious journals, and even a small rack of tapestry bookmarks. This was all to distract from the vast selection of downworld volumes, of course, but like Alec’s tattoo shop, keeping some mundane elements helped pay the bills.

An inside joke, there was even a ‘spiritual’ corner near the front window, stocked with spell candles, various types of incense, and ‘grimoires’. It was the most profitable inventory, and it was always fun to see what type of people floated in to peruse it.

“Mom?” Alec called. This late in the day, his mother wasn’t usually at her desk, instead busying herself among the maze of tall racks near the back. “I’m grabbing some dinner, you want anything?”

A rustling came from behind a floor-to-ceiling shelf, Maryse Lightwood emerging haphazardly. A pair of delicate reading glasses were perched on her nose, her arms clumsily full of paperwork for logging the more valuable inventory.

“Alec!” She shuffled over to a small table, depositing the stack of folders, freeing her arms so she could pull him into a tight hug. Despite being a deruned shadowhunter, she still had nephilim strength, making her hugs a near-deadly suffocating force. Through squeezed lungs, Alec chuckled.

“Okay, calm down, you just saw me this morning.”

“It was a slow day! I haven’t really seen anyone.” She released him taking a step back. “To answer your question, yes—I’m starving. I’d offer to come out with you, but I have someone stopping by the store soon who’s interested in one of my Seelie poetry books.”

“I don’t have much time either, I have a touch-up session with Raphael again. You good with banh mi sandwiches and spring rolls from the place down the block? I can grab you some tea too.”

“That sounds absolutely lovely. There’s a bit of a chill in here, I’ll have to find a space heater that isn’t a fire hazard…” Maryse trailed off, losing her train of thought, analyzing her shop. She wrapped her crimson cable-knit sweater tightly around her core.

“I’ll be back in a few minutes.” He leaned down kissing his mom on the cheek. “Can I borrow your
“Of course.” She beamed. She was proud of how Alec had grown into himself, evident in even the simplest of gestures. He was always a kind soul, but the layers of responsibility had steeled him for years. Somehow, he’d adjusted to mundane life relatively well, so much so that sometimes he almost seemed relaxed.

The bell clattered on the front door, a pale man in a black trenchcoat stepping in. He closed his long-handled umbrella and slid out of the coat, hanging both on the front rack.

“Clarissa, it’s always a pleasure.” Raphael nodded to the redhead, who had taken her place working the front desk. He always paid before getting his tattoos, something that struck Clary as rather strange. She didn’t have much room to question it though, since he usually slipped her a very hefty tip for doing basically nothing. Since he came in at least twice a month, she was incredibly grateful, making him her favorite client despite his reserved demeanor.

“Welcome back, Raphael. Alec’s ready for you. Want me to walk you back?”

“I should be fine, I know my way.” He gave her a smile so small that if she blinked, she would have missed it.

“Raphael.” Alec stood to greet the vampire. “So what are we doing today?”

“Just a touch-up on the crucifix.” Raphael shut the door behind him. “It stayed for almost three weeks this time. That’s a new record. I’m impressed.”

“I decreased the amount of ferrous oxide in the ink. Isabelle suggested that vampire metabolisms consume it faster since it might be mistaken for blood.” He didn’t get to see his sister often, but when he did, she was more than eager to utilize her biochemistry skills to help him develop new techniques, usually arriving with tiny vials in tow. Alec dug around in a cabinet hidden behind a mirror. Certain supplies had to be artfully concealed, hidden from any health inspectors when they came by. “Instead, I mixed this new formula replacing it with lead. This time, I tweaked the ratio even more.”

“That wouldn’t be particularly safe for your mundane clients, now would it?” Raphael smirked, unbuttoning his simple white button down shirt. At this point, he and Alec had a very simple routine. Neither of them were pointed conversationalists, so once Alec got to work, they settled into a comfortable silence.

Alec pulled out his phone, opening up his music app and selecting a playlist labeled ‘R. Santiago’. He made playlists for all his regular downworlder clients— Raphael had been his first. The traditional immortal preferred a mix of calming Latin music a la Buena Vista Social Club and classical guitar music. With a few taps, the soft guitar melodies floated through the room.

“Do you want anything before I get started? I had Maia bring by some blood, it’s in the fridge.” Alec offered.

“I’m fine, thank you. That’s a great idea to attract other clients though. Good call. You’re gaining quite a reputation amongst the New York downworlders. I feel like soon, my investment will pay off.” Raphael took a seat, backwards in a leather chair.
The piece Alec was working on today was a large crucifix, entwined with greyscale roses. Like Raphael had mentioned, it held up much better this time, but many of the lines were heavily faded, almost all the shading gone. It would take him about two hours, maybe a bit less to finish up the piece. Alec was looking forward to the peaceful, methodical work.

“Let’s get started then.”

It was always surprising to Alec, how vampires still felt pain in the tattooing process. As a shadowhunter, he always viewed vampires as invulnerable, immortal creatures, their only weakness being the sun. But each time he touched the tattoo gun to Raphael’s pale, flawless skin, the muscles underneath rippled, tensing with the sensation. Every once in a while, if the needle passed over a plane of his back close to a bone, the vampire even winced.

Half an hour in, Alec had fallen into a peaceful rhythm. *Ink. Buzz. Wipe. Check*. It was a comforting routine, reminding him of his old archery mantra, *Nock. Draw. Aim. Release*. Just like with shooting his bow, tattooing took his mind completely off of everything else, the focus dominating his thoughts. Even more so than fighting at the MMA gym, it was Alec’s most relaxed state. Sometimes, he even found himself singing along to the music if it was familiar.

> “El cariño que te tengo

> *No te lo puedo negar

> *Se me sale la babita

> *Yo no lo puedo evitar."

He barely noticed he was singing. His voice was quiet, delicately gracing over the syllables. Alec had a decent singing voice, something he discovered once his days weren’t consumed with hunting demons. That same freedom was what revealed his love for tattooing— not only honing his creative energies but also utilizing his years of rune studies. As it would turn out, drawing runes all over one’s body was excellent practice for inking designs.

> “Since when is your Spanish so passable, Lightwood?” Raphael teased, his tone bemused. This was the best reaction Alec could hope for, cursing himself for singing in front of Raphael Santiago of all people.

> “Oh, I’ve been practicing. I never had time to learn as a kid like Izzy did, and my mom never had time to teach me. But my family is Spanish, so I figured it might be fun to learn.” It was one of the hobbies Alec picked up to help bond with Maryse. Both deruned and living together, they were all each other had. It took effort to reconnect with her, to get back to the closeness they shared when he was young, before she became more of his boss and less of his mother. Sharing the apartment above the bookstore also helped, since close quarters made it hard not to spend time together.

They fell back into comfortable silence as Alec continued to trace over each line, careful to not let the corners of the cross meet entirely. Compared to most vampires, Raphael was very resilient to religious iconography. He wore a cross pendant, he could easily say ‘God,’ and he often frequented late-night mass. This strong tolerance didn’t mean that it was completely comfortable for him, so Alec always encouraged him to go for the safer designs, so that his skin wasn’t in constant irritation.
The time flew by, and soon the work was finished. With the speed of vampire healing, it wasn’t necessary to wrap the work with a bandage—the only necessity was to wash it. He didn’t want to risk dirtying the vampire’s shirt. Alec handed Rafel a small mirror, turning the chair to face the larger one on the front wall.

“How does it look?” Even though he’d tattooed Raphael at least fifty times prior, each time Alec was still a bit nervous of his handiwork.

“Perfect, as always.” Without much ceremony, he rose from the chair, putting back on his shirt. “I left my payment with Fairchild at the front.” With the safety of the door between them, Raphael used Clary’s shadowhunter name. With her memories gone, she still went by ‘Fray’. She didn’t remember the days when her last name was Fairchild, Morgenstern, or when her romantic trajectory would have certainly ended in her becoming a Wayland or Herondale. “I’m telling you, you should let me encanto her so she doesn’t notice my tattoos fading. I’d be honored to wear some of her designs.”

Alec laughed, shaking his head. “I told you, no encanto-ing my shop attendant. She does a pretty good job.”

“Sure, as if you didn’t hire her only because Luke and Maryse are nearly married, making Clary almost your step-sister. And you never cared for her back in the day, did you? Isn’t that some interesting kismet…” He taunted Alec, knowing full and well that the girl used to be the bane of Alec’s existence. “Well, see you in a few weeks, Lightwood.” Raphael dipped out.

After cleaning up his station, Alec walked back out to the front, ready to relieve Clary of her desk duty. “You can go home for the day if you want. I don’t expect anyone else to come in on a Tuesday night.” While he’d been tattooing Raphael, Clary had stepped out for her pizza date with Luke, returning back to man the desk in case there were any walk-ins.

“Are you sure? I don’t have much else to do.” She lowered her charcoal back to her sketch pad, wiping her fingers with a soot-stained cloth. The heavy-weight drawing paper was alive with design, sweeping spirals giving an illusion of movement. From a distance, the intertwined lines could have been mistaken for a fearless rune, Alec noticed with a twinge of remorse. It was probably just a coincidence, though.

“Even better. It’s good to have downtime.” It was the truth. Between going to school and working with Alec, Clary rarely had a day off. It hardly showed—she had seemingly boundless energy. She tagged along with him to fighting classes, always impressed with herself by how quickly she mastered the skills.

“Oh, before I head out, we got a call while you were with Raphael. Someone asking about whether or not you do henna tattoos? I know it’s not your standard work, but we do have a few kits that you used at the Brooklyn street festival this year. I didn’t want to turn away any business…” She chewed her lip nervously. Despite their fondness, Alec was still her boss, and she didn’t enjoy the idea of making a misstep.

“No, you made the right call. If I can get someone in for henna, maybe I could eventually twist their arm for a permanent piece. If we start to get enough requests for henna, you can jump in doing some of that work yourself. We could put up a sign or something.”

Clary threw her sketchbooks into her satchel, slipped into a thick wool sweater, and grabbed her umbrella. “See you tomorrow, Alec? 5:00 shift, right?” It was cute that she spoke about shifts, as if Alec had any other employees.
“Yep, 5:00 pm.” Alec sighed as she finally left, happy to have the place to himself. He put on a playlist of mellow 90’s alternative rock, cozying up in the leather chair by the window usually used by waiting clients. It wasn’t the most professional choice to sit in the front reading a book, but it was better than closing the shop late on weeknights altogether. Sometimes a few werewolves would pop in, or a drunk college student. If he was going to read anyway, what better place than in the shop? Growing up, he hadn’t had much time to devote to reading fiction, so he was slowly working his way through the classic literature section in the book shop. Today, he was starting “The Sun Also Rises.”

It was only about fifteen minutes until he was startled from his reverie, a tiny dark-haired girl bounding through the door. Her glittery purple rain boots splattered water on the floor, forming a small puddle. A chorus of giggles, ten-children strong, erupted from her grinning mouth. Her bouncing movements were less than graceful, and Alec watched in slow-motion as the child slipped backward on the tile floor. It suddenly occurred to him that he should buy a doormat. His shadowhunter reflexes kicked in full force. He sprung from the chair, diving to the ground to support her head, catching her before she hit the ground. When the chaos died down, Alec finally had a chance to take in the scene in front of him.

“Aerulei!” A silky voice called after her through the open door. “What have I told you about running around in wet shoes?” The voice tsked. Despite the apparent frustration, there was a delicate fondness to his tone. “And in a place of business no less.”

Alec froze in place on the floor. The voice sounded so familiar. But it couldn’t be. The door closed, footsteps crossing the floor over to where the little girl had tumbled.

“I’m so sorry, she’s just been very excited since I told her she could come get her henna tattoo today.” The girl hopped to her feet, bouncing carefully while quietly chanting ‘ henna henna henna henna.’

As Alec looked up, his eyes first caught a glimpse of purple velvet boots, untouched by the rain. Tracing up further, black fitted pants, a golden silk tunic, an assortment of necklaces…

Magnus Bane.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Alec discusses serious (henna) tattoo business with his youngest customer.

Chapter Notes

There are a few non-English words peppered in. Some are in Indonesian (Magnus' native language) and some are in Aya's ethnic language, Filipino. If they are incorrect, feel free to correct me, I validated them with someone at work but everyone makes mistakes!

Translations:
sayang: Indonesian, 'darling'
bunsó: Filipino, endearing name for a youngest child in a family
prinsesa: Filipino, princess

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Alexander...” Magnus’ voice was barely a whisper, nearly a gasp.

It had been years since he last saw the eldest Lightwood, the courageous ex-shadowhunter. Through the downworld grapevine, though predominantly through Isabelle Lightwood herself, he’d known Alec stayed in New York after his deruning, and Magnus thought that perhaps their paths would cross again, but this must be some kind of mistake. Alec Lightwood, the archer who saved him at Pandemonium, who gave him his strength to heal Lucian, who gave the middle finger to the Clave and faced a painful deruning to save the people he loved— now apparently owned this tattoo shop.

The warlock’s mind was spinning wildly from one direction to the next, like water into a drain that was quickly being swapped above and below the equator. His mouth opened, but words escaped him. Honestly, the entire encounter shouldn’t have caught him quite so off guard— after all, he’d only known the shadowhunter for a week or two, years ago. So why was he so nervous?

‘You’ve unlocked something in me, Alexander.’ The words echoed in his head. They were words from another lifetime. A lifetime where Alec Lightwood was an esteemed, yet closeted, Shadowhunter hailing from the New York Institute. A lifetime where he didn’t share his life with a boisterous five-year old warlock daughter— who was now fidgeting, brushing off the multiple levels of tulle in her shimmering gold skirt. She was a bit antsy, sensing the weight of the uncomfortable silence shared between the two adults. Her father’s daughter, she couldn’t stand to be left out of the conversation— or in this case, the lack thereof, so she decided it was time to steal the scene. Narrowing her crystal-blue, slit-pupiled eyes, she scrunched her face in contemplation for a brief second, calculating her plan.

“Mister Alexander,” She had a barely audible lisp that she was fighting back with remarkable success. “...thank you for helping me not fall.” She nodded her head in acknowledgement, proud of
herself for catching the name her father had whispered. Aerulei loved picking up small details, it suited her natural wit.

Alec rolled up gracefully into a standing position—a motion that could easily be mistaken for instinct by someone who didn’t know he had decades of intensive combat training. Shadowhunters are sworn to protect. Those were the words Magnus expected Alec to rattle off. It was what most shadowhunters would have said, one of their many overused haughty statements. But Alec—this Alec—wasn’t a shadowhunter anymore.

“Well, I hear you’re excited for your tattoo. I wouldn’t want you booping your head on the floor and having to go home.” Alec tapped her on the head, gently enough not to mess up her hair.

Did Alexander Gideon Lightwood just say the word… ‘boop’…? Magnus was at such a loss for words that he was now in debt to the dictionary.

“Now, down to business…” Alec continued. Magnus was thankful that Alec solely addressed Aerulei, partially because he needed to recover from his shocking mute episode, but also because he was enraptured watching the way Alec interacted with his daughter.

“Tattoo business?” She smiled, showing off her missing front tooth.

“Yes, super serious tattoo business.” He furrowed his dark, bushy eyebrows. “As you heard, I’m Alec. Who do I have the pleasure of tattooing tonight?”

“I’m Aerulei Bane.” Her head lifted slightly as she spoke her name, as if an invisible string was pulling her toward the ceiling. She was proud—proud to be a Bane, proud to be his daughter. Moments like this would never be lost on Magnus, no matter how distracted he was by the tall, toned, ebony-haired man in front of him. Alec’s eyes widened in realization, darting from Aerulei back to Magnus, before shaking his head and dismissing his surprise. It was a common reaction of people who hadn’t seen the warlock in a while, who were suddenly realizing that the fearsome High Warlock of Brooklyn was now a father.

“Eye-rue-lai” Alec sounded out slowly, kneeling down to speak to her at eye level. “Did I get that right?”

“Yes, that was satisfactory.” Aerulei’s face was smug. Alec blinked in astonishment at her word choice and the gravitas her voice carried, her demeanor so similar to her illustrious father. The thigh-height girl in front of him couldn’t be more than five years old. In fact, she was four and a half. Magnus chuckled, enjoying Alec’s reactions as he struggled to size up the warlock girl, still unsure what to make of her. Aya, however, was unamused by her father’s laughter, planting her hands on her hips. She couldn’t make sense of what was so humorous.

“What Aya means is that, unlike you, most people struggle to pronounce her name, settling for just her nickname, Aya.” Magnus threw Alec an apologetic glance, justifying his daughter’s sass. Sass that she had very obviously learned from him. He kicked himself—he needed to try to tone down that behavior of hers or else her teen years were going to rival the fearsome hellscape of Edom.

“Uncle Ragnor says it’s because my papa gave me a name that’s ‘complete and utter lunacy’.” She mimicked a British accent—with little success. Magnus blushed lightly before firing back in an amicable quip.

“Aya, aya, aya—” Magnus chided. “Where did you learn to banter like this?” Alec shot him a side eyed, knowing look. “Oh, right—that was probably me. It’s already far past your bedtime, so if you want your tattoo, you’ll have to stop airing all our dirty laundry to poor Alexander.”
“You can call me Aya if you want. Everyone else does.” She shrugged, her hands relaxing back to her sides.

“I'll stick with Aerulei if that’s okay with you. Your papa always called me Alexander— it made me feel special, you know— having someone use my whole name.” Alec glanced up through his thick dark lashes at Magnus. The warlock would be lying if he said his heart didn’t catch a bit. It was an overwhelming set of images— Alec looking at him with wistful nostalgia while simultaneously treating his daughter like she was the most important thing in the universe. Magnus thought this about her, of course, but to see someone else treat his warlock princess with such respect melted his heart. It was sugar piled on with honey, drizzled with syrup. Aerulei did not share his admiration, steeling herself at Alec’s claim to know her father.

“You knew papa?” She raised one eyebrow, her face becoming guarded and cautious. She was a downworlder, a warlock no less; she knew to be wary of strangers. Especially strangers who knew her father was Magnus Bane. Magnus could tell that she couldn’t quite place Alec, that she couldn’t put her finger on what he was. _Was he a downworlder too?_ The question was plastered across her face. Just as it was rude to ask warlocks to show their mark, he’d taught her it was rude to ask someone what kind of downworlder they were, and Magnus wasn’t prepared to have a conversation with her right now about the fact that Alec used to be a shadowhunter. Trying to avoid a potential inappropriate misstep, Magnus jumped to redirect the conversation.

“Aerulei— ” Her father said her name in a tone that was gentle, yet commanding. “— why don’t you tell Mister Alexander what tattoo you would like.” Magnus offered, placing his hand on her shoulder. She was wearing a golden shirt that matched the tule in her skirt, making her outfit a flurry of gold, purple, and black that complemented Magnus’ ensemble perfectly. They looked as if they were dressed for candid family photos, ready at any moment.

“Do you have a picture you could show me?” Alec leveled his voice, locking eyes with the tiny warlock, trying to reel in the girl’s waning attention span. Aerulei snapped her fingers, a neatly folded piece of paper appearing in a tiny cloud of glimmering lilac sparks.

“Magic.”

“I want a _rune_ tattoo.” She sat heavily on the ‘u’, holding it into a strong ’oo’ sound. “I heard shadowhunters have all sorts of runes that make them stronger fighters, and I’m a fighter too.”

“Jiu-jitsu, if you’re wondering.” Magnus cut in.

“Miss Izzy at the Institute has runes _all_ over, and she is the strongest coolest lady I’ve ever met.” Aerulei unfolded the piece of paper, holding it out to Alec.

A wispy drawing of black lines, it was the _courage in combat_ rune; a fierce yet elegant abstract dragon. Magnus knew the mark well— he’d seen countless shadowhunter warriors wear it proudly throughout the years. He knew that Alec used to bear the mark himself, on his back just above his hip bone. Not that Magnus should know that, after all. He’d only spent time with Alec a handful of times before they parted ways. But who could blame him if he’d caught a glimpse of the rune while Alec had been bent over his couch cleaning up after Luke? It would have been disrespectful not to commit every curve, muscle, and rune to memory, a sin to not notice how his black t-shirt rode up with his movements. A black t-shirt, just like the one Alec was wearing now. The one stretched across Alec’s arms, a ghost of a six-pack visible through the fabric. Magnus’ mind was drifting. He needed to pull it together.

“And is your _papa_ okay with this?” Alec looked to Magnus for final approval. His hazel eyes glimmered as he noticed that Magnus and his daughter sported matching gold glitter in their dark, silky hair.
“The nephilim are remarkably courageous, and if it’s what she wants, who am I to deny her?” Magnus hardly ever denied his daughter anything. Warlock children, historically, were awfully treated, and he couldn’t imagine what might have happened to his precious Aerulei had he not adopted her as an infant. In his opinion, more warlock children deserved to be spoiled. They deserved to be loved and nurtured as well, but his daughter was going to be spoiled rotten if he had any say in the matter. If she was poorly behaved, he might dial back on it, but his precious Aya has always been polite and sweet, so no holds were barred.

“Alright then, follow me Miss Aerulei, I’ll get everything set up for you.” He reached out for the little girl’s hand, leading her toward the back room, Magnus following close behind. The gesture was so simple, but to reach down to her, Alec had to slump over uncomfortably—but nobody would ever be able to tell from the crooked grin stretched across his face. Magnus had never seen a Shadowhunter who was so good with children. But he’s not a Shadowhunter anymore.

From this angle, Magnus caught a glimpse of a small, simple arrow tattoo on Alec’s wrist. A line-drawn arrow? That’s a bit…delicate? Basic? He shook off the judgement. It’s an arrow. Alec is…was? He is an archer.

Alec made quick business of setting her up at his station—the same seat occupied by Raphael Santiago mere hours before. He hoisted her up onto the oiled black leather chair, stifling a laugh as he watched her feet dangle, swinging wildly back and forth. She followed his every move, her eyes locked on Alec as he shuffled between his station and the supply cabinet. Dark brown powder was mixed with water, the stirring stick clinking against the small glass bowl.

“Do you want to give it a try? Stir some yourself?” Alec offered her the henna ink, mostly stirred. She shook her head adamantly.

“I don’t want to get it on my skirt.” She huffed, eyeing the dark, oddly-smelling paste with distrust.

“Better to leave it to the professionals.” Magnus added. “Four year-olds can get messy.” He leaned in close to Alec, whispering against his ear to shield his words from his daughter. “And that skirt was Anna Sui Fall 2003 children’s collection. It’s vintage at this point.”

Alec continued to stir the ink, unsure how to respond to that comment. He didn’t know much about fashion—and he knew even less about designer children’s fashion. The ink was ready, but he kept stirring. His thoughts were scattered, and something about having Magnus stand so close to him made it impossible to think. Thankfully, the odor of the henna was his savior.

“Ufh, I always forget how pungent fresh henna ink is.” The warlock crinkled his nose, taking a step back.

“Don’t worry though—” Alec assured Aerulei, who was putting two and two together, worrying that the ink would also make her stinky. “What I’m going to do is paint the rune on, let it sit for a while, and then wipe it off.”

“If you wipe it off…” She stared into the bowl, looking back up at Alec. There was a slight waver in her voice, the tone drifting and meandering away from excitement and joy. “Then I don’t get a rune tattoo to show my friends at the dojo.” The buzzing energy she carried since she bounded through the door flickered. Her cheeks flushed as her lips pressed into a firm line. The slit pupils of her snake eyes narrowed, making her irises into two separated half-circles. Where electric blue once lit her face, the color was replaced with a deep cobalt.

Magnus knew that face, he knew those eyes, he’d memorized that tone. They were on the precipice of a tantrum. Through some divine sense of intuition, Alec seemed to pick up on these cues as well,
despite only meeting Aerulei a handful of minutes before. To Magnus’ surprise, Alec was already prepared, jumping into a soothing explanation and redirecting her energy.

“What happens is that it stains your skin.” He lifted her arm, pushing up the edge of her shirt. “It sinks into all the layers…” She giggled as he tickled her wrist. “Deep into the layers…” He tickled her again. “And then after a few hours it gets darker, and it will stay there for a week or two. Does that still sound good to you?” He delivered the last sentence with the utmost professionalism.

“Is that true papa?” She whipped around in the chair. “You have to promise it will look cool.”

“I’m not the one who can make that promise, sayang. For that, you’ll have to default to Alexander.”

“I’ll make you a deal.” Alec said. “If you don’t like how it turns out, you can draw whatever you want on me.”

“Even your face?” A wicked grin stretched across her eager face.

“Even the face.” He sighed in defeat. “So where do you want me to place the rune?” He pulled the conversation back on track.

“I want it right here, so you can still see it when I’m wearing my Jiu Jitsu uniform!” She pointed to her inner wrist.

“Uff.” Alec huffed. “That’s going to be very tiny, but I think I can manage.” Her wrist was barely wider than an inch, and the design— with all its curling lines— would pose a challenge. “It would be a bit easier on your shoulder, but then you couldn’t show it off to your friends. That wouldn’t be much fun.”

He lifted her wrist, placing it on the armrest of the chair. Placing all of his supplies on a metal cart, he sat down on a tall stool and got to work. The sleeve of her shirt refused to stay put, so Alec carefully folded it over itself, cuffing it above Aya’s elbow. He started by wiping the area with a damp rag, removing any oils and general kid-grime from her unmarked caramel skin.

“Are you going to use a stencil?” Aya asked as she saw Alec fill up a clear plastic bag with the ink.

“Normally for tattoos, I use an outline. Kind of like coloring. But even if this was a grown-up tattoo, I know this rune by heart.” His voice lowered. He could never need a stencil for this design — all of the runes were still burned into his memory, knowledge he’d never be able to shake. Memories flooded back of years studying the grey book, of marking himself, of marking his parabatai. Leveraging years of practice, he took a quick breath, letting any tension leave his body as quickly as it floated in. “I’m going to start drawing now… hold still.” Magnus didn’t know how to comment, keeping quiet while Alec gracefully painted out the lines in thick, puffy ink.

“So that’s it for the drawing. You need to keep still until it dries though.” Alec wiped the tip of the bag with a paper towel, carefully placing it back into the bowl to not spill the ink.

“I’ll be as still as if Elsa froze me.” Aya tensed her muscles, making a strange face as she pretended to be frozen solid. Alec did not understand the reference.

They spent the next thirty minutes chatting, the conversation dominated by Aerulei’s meandering stories about fighting class, warlock lessons, or her baby brother. Alec played along, occasionally holding her arm still when she got too excited and started talking with her hands. A true New Yorker.
“Your baby brother Keris sounds wonderful, Aerulei.” Alec said, wiping off the flaking henna. “You’ll have to bring him next time you need another rune.” He looked over at Magnus fondly. “After all, runes fade after you use them too much, unless they’re permanent runes.”

“Yeah papa, next time we’re bringing bunsó, not leaving him with Auntie Cat.” She slid out of the chair, her boots squeaking when they hit the tile.

“Next time Aya, we won’t be bothering Alexander all the way until closing time. So yes, when it’s not 10:00 at night, we can bring Keris.” He grabbed her little hands, swinging her into his arms with ease. “Now, you’re going to have to let Mister Alec go, no more stories.” They locked eyes, golden cat irises meeting a matching vivid cerulean serpentine pair.

“Okay.” She groaned, wiggling to be put down. “Goodnight Mister Alec.”

“I believe in payment for services rendered.” Magnus winked, twirling his wrist to reveal a few folded hundred-dollar bills. “Keep the change.” Alec stared at the pile of money in mild disbelief. “Never trust a stingy warlock.”

Magnus went to grab Aya’s hand, turning toward the door.

“Magnus! Wait.” Alec fumbled around the counter, digging out a pen. Picking up a business card from the pile, he flipped it over, scribbling violently. “Here.” He walked back over to the warlock, handing him the card. “It’s my number— my personal one. In case you have any questions about the tattoo… or anything.” Alec winked before quickly walking away, back to his station to start cleaning up.

Forward. Magnus never would have suspected forward from Alec. Giving the warlock his number was one thing, but the wink— that wink was something else altogether. One eyelid blinking closed, a flash of amber-green hazel and a flutter of black eyelashes conspired against him, threatened to reduce him to a million moonstruck pieces, only for Alec to flee to the back room at breakneck speed. The Alec he knew before was blunt, but never forward, brave in battle yet afraid of his own feelings. This new Alec was different. Although he lacked the ease and confidence of a natural flirt, his efforts were endearing in a way Magnus had never quite experienced in a man before. Even the rapid retreat from the scene of the flirtation was unbearably charming.

He was still an introvert, but he was less anxious, more relaxed. So many things were different about him, yet so much was still the same. To say Magnus was intrigued was an understatement. If before, Alec had unlocked something in him, now he’d opened a door.

“Papa?” Aerulei pulled at the hem of his tunic. Her voice drew him out of his exponentially deepening introspection.

“Apologies, Aya.” He smiled warmly at his daughter. “I lost track of myself for a second there.”

Magnus turned over the card, looking at the digits etched out in black pen. Not wanting it to be ruined in the rain, he placed it between his palms, a soft glow of blue magic circling his hands. The card— Alec’s number — was now safe and sound on the desk in his apothecary, anxiously awaiting to be tapped into Magnus’ phone, begging him to talk to Alec again.

He reached down and took Aya’s hand, using his magic to open the shop door. Cool, damp air rushed in their faces, sending wisps of dark hair in every direction and flecks of golden glitter dancing toward the ground.

“Now princesa, do you remember the spell we practiced on the way here to keep the rain away?”
His voice was full of wistful playfulness.

“Of course, papa!” She raised her free hand high, pale purple twirling around her little fingers.

“Come on, then.” Matching his daughter, he lifted his arm, the magic sparking from his fingertips the same dazzling blue as Aerulei’s eyes. “Let’s go home.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: coffee shop AU feels anyone?

Drop me a line on my tumblr! Link: fanfic-fugue

Again, comment with any and all ideas, suggestions, fan theories about where the plot is going, saying hi, aything!
Thanks again to my amazing beta DianaCloudburst who just posted her second installation of her series, the sequel to Send/Delete... Speak/Hush.

Link: Speak/Hush

And follow her tumblr too while you're at it!!!
Link: cloudburst-ink
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Being a barista wouldn't be so bad if all of Alec's customers were as charming as Magnus Bane.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I have a cardamom Madagascar cortado, hemp milk for Diana.” Alec called out, sliding a paper to-go cup across the reclaimed-wood counter. He dusted off his hands on his black canvas apron before starting on the next intricate beverage order thought up by some bored, self-indulgent millennial.

Although Alec was technically a millennial, he was thankful he hadn’t developed the traits of must mundanes his age— always on their phones, constantly talking about themselves, hooked on every late breaking trend, usually vegan, and incredibly particular about alternative milk options. But in Dumbo, the up-and-coming hipster mecca nestled between the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges, these late-twenties and early-thirty-somethings were surprisingly well off, and very liberal with their tips. It was worth the twenty minute commute to work in this neighborhood for the extra cash.

Brooklyn Roasting Company was close to the river, with a view of an industrial plant on the right and the waterfront park on the left. The old space used to be some sort of factory, but after being hollowed out and stripped to the bones, it was transformed into a spacious, airy cafe with coffee roasting machines in the back. They served up every type of coffee an alternative imagination could dream of, from nitrogen-infused rosewater cold-brew to fair-trade honeysuckle bee-pollen lemonade. Before taking the job, Alec hadn’t heard of any of these fancy drinks— the only things on his radar were black coffee, coffee with milk, espresso, and tea. By practicing at home with Clary, Luke and Maryse as his captive taste-testers, he picked up on the elaborate menu quickly, becoming a master oat-milk frother and even dabbling with latte art. Non-dairy milks, favored by the majority of the customers, are notoriously difficult to work with, and Alec took pride in his skill— a skill that earned him even more tips and a handful of loyal customers.

“Hey Alec…” His coworker, an auburn-haired girl named Drew tapped him on the shoulder. She looked on edge, speaking quickly. “I know I’m supposed to be on register but my social anxiety is flaring today, would you mind switching with me?”

“Are you okay? I could cover for you if you want?” Alec grabbed two cups of espresso, just finished brewing, and poured them into a cup of black coffee. “Red eye for Matt!” He called out, turning his attention back to Drew.

“Thank you for offering but no, I’m just not up to talking to people today. I should be fine making drinks, calling out orders is virtually no face-time with customers.”
“Say no more, I got this. My tickets might be a bit messy, the next one up should be the iced matcha latte, and I have a frozen pumpkin spice going in the blender. Let me know if you need anything else.”

He walked over to the register, running a hand through his hair before addressing the next customer. The lunch rush was busier than normal, but it wasn’t something Alec couldn’t handle. Faces blended together as he jotted down names, wrote out tickets, and grabbed pastries from the glass display. It all was a blur until his next customer was a certain warlock, with two kids in tow. Aerulei was at his side, her small hand gripping his firmly, and Keris was cradled snugly against his chest in a paisley-print baby wrap. He was a bit big to be swaddled in that type of carrier, covering Magnus’ entire torso. Alec wasn’t the best at estimating baby ages, but judging by the size of the fabric-covered lump, he was at least a year old.

“Hi Magnus!” Alec cracked a crooked grin. To his relief, Magnus was the last in line, and the rush was starting to die down.

“Alexander, I had no idea you worked here.” Magnus smiled, mindlessly stroking the head of his baby boy while he spoke. “Normally I just conjur——” Magnus’ eyes darted around the crowded coffee shop, taking in how many people there were. “I mean I send someone else to get my coffee from here, but the kids needed to get out of the house today.”

“You should come in more often, it’s not every day I get to see my favorite warlocks.” He leaned over the counter, looking to Aerulei. “Hey Aerulei!”

“Hi Mister Alec.” Aya grumbled. She rocked back and forth on her feet distractedly.

“She’s grumpy, I woke her up from her mid-morning nap and made her walk one whole block over here.” She glared at her father.

“I’m only here for the cookies.” She ripped her hand away, crossing her arms against her chest and pouting. Alec and Magnus each stifled a laugh— she was too cute, but they couldn’t let her know that.

“And this must be your little brother you told me so much about!” Alec looked to Magnus’ chest, but he couldn’t see anything besides a lick of silver hair poking out the top of the wrap.

“Yes it is.” Magnus smiled, turning to the side and pulling down the top of the wrap to reveal Keris’ chubby, sleepy face. His right cheek was red from where it was resting against Magnus, and his copper eyes were glassy, a sign that he’d just woken up. “Keris, say hello to Alexander.” Instead of listening to Magnus, the baby yawned, laying his head back down and closing his eyes. His tiny smile gave him away though— he was faking it. Just like his daughter, Magnus’ son had a flair for the dramatic. Magnus tickled under his double chin. “Keris, I know you’re being silly, show Mister Alec how well you can use your new words.”

Keris opened his eyes halfway, two flashes of bronze against his pale skin. Magnus leaned in, whispering. “If you’re a good boy, I’ll let you put the money into the jar.” That was all Keris needed to hear, perking up.

“Hi!” Keris barked, kicking his feet against Magnus’ stomach. “Hewo!” He bounced again, turning his head to his father. “Papa!”

“What a good little boy——” Magnus started, cutting off when Keris slapped his palm to his father’s cheek. Alec swore he saw a faint glow from beneath the baby’s chubby hand. Magnus closed his eyes. “Yes, this is the same mister Alec who gave Aya her pretty rune.” Magnus re-positioned
Keris, turning back to Alec. “He thought Aya’s rune was pretty, he wanted me to tell you.”

“Oh, um. Thanks?” Alec didn’t know what to make of that interaction. His only experience with babies was limited to his little brother Max, who in addition to being a shadowhunter— not a warlock like Keris— was an incredibly quiet infant. It was shocking enough that Keris could say even a few clear words, but whatever the telepathic conversation with Magnus was— that was far more impressive.

“It is pretty.” Aya agreed. The mention of her tattoo seemed to lighten her mood. “Look! It’s still pretty and it’s been a whole week!” She pulled up her sleeve, showing the slightly faded courage-in-combat rune that decorated her wrist.

“I see that! Your papa sent me a picture to show me how well the ink developed. That means I won, you don’t get to tattoo me now.” She giggled, remembering their deal.

“Everybody at my class this week thought I was really cool. But they didn’t know it was a rune, they just thought it was a boring dragon…” Her voice trailed off.

A customer came in the door, falling in line behind Magnus, pulling him away from the bubble he shared with his children and Alec, snapping him back to reality.

“I just realized I haven’t given you our orders yet. How rude of me.”

“It’s not a problem at all.” Alec smiled, not wanting to peel his attention away from the warlock. The way he looked at Magnus seemed to scream ‘I don’t care who else walks through this door, I’m paying attention to you right now.’ Or maybe Magnus’ eyeliner was smeared on his face from wandering baby hands. “What can I get you?” Alec picked up a paper cup, opening up a sharpie and writing ‘Magnus’ in bold block lettering.

“An iced cinnamon almond milk breve, with an extra shot.” Magnus suddenly looked embarrassed. “I’m sorry… that was ridiculous and extravagant sounding, wasn’t it?”


“Large— I need the caffeine today.” Magnus sighed.

Alec wrote down the order on the side of the cup. “And for you Miss Bane?”

Aya stood on her toes, barely able to peer over the counter. She gripped the wood with blue glitter polished fingernails— precisely the color to match her true eyes. Currently, her eyes were lightly glamored, her snake pupils rounded to a normal shape, her irises muted to a pale blue.

“May I have a hibis-kiss tea?” She struggled through the word with her lisp. “The foamy one?”

“One small nitro rose-hibiscus tea? I’ll get that for you actually.” He pulled out a small plastic cup, placing it underneath the tap. The spout hissed as frothy pink tea filled the cup— a sign the keg would kick soon. “Drew! The hibiscus keg needs swapped.” Alec yelled out while he placed a lid on the drink.

“Got it, Alec!” She called back.

“You’re lucky, Aya— you got the last cup!” Alec smiled, leaning over the counter to hand her the tea. “You got it? Make sure you hold it with both hands.” He warned, waiting until her fingers wrapped around the cup before he let go.
“Oh! And a sugar cookie for Aya as well.” Magnus added. “She was so caught up talking to you that she almost forgot. Believe me though—I would have never heard the end of it once we got home.” Alec reached into the glass cabinet to grab a sugar cookie, planning to hand it directly to Aya, but Magnus snapped it up instead. “I’ll hold onto that for her... She’s got her hands full with her tea.” The warlock slid the cookie into the baby wrap, tucking it between one of the numerous folds.

Alec swiveled the payment tablet and Magnus tapped a black metal credit card, one Alec hadn’t seen anyone use before.

“Don’t worry, I’ll tip in cash.” Magnus winked, walking over to the other side to wait for his drink. Alec barely paid attention to the next customer, jotting down his first initial on his cup instead of bothering to listen to his name. The drink order was probably wrong too, but he couldn’t focus on anything except Magnus bouncing Keris, who was now slung across his hip, both hands free from his wrap. Aya had a bamboo straw in her hand, struggling to poke it through the plastic lid, determined not to let Magnus help. Luckily, nobody came in after the last customer, so when Alec placed that cup on the line, he swooped in for Magnus’ drink.

“Hey, Drew.” He whispered, smirking. “I got this one.”

“Iced horchata latte for Magnus Bane.” He leaned over, smiling at the warlock. It took every fiber of Magnus’ being not to blush at the way Alec’s voice rolled over a single Spanish word. He imagined that an entire sentence would be the death of him.

“Thank you Alexander.” Magnus reached over to grab his drink, his fingers brushing against Alec’s. For a moment, they let their hands linger there, until a tiny voice snapped them from their reverie.

“Moneeyyyyyyyyy” Keris whined. “Papa!” He squealed, beating his fists against Magnus’ chest.

“How could I forget, my little macaron.” Magnus snapped his fingers, two folded 100 dollar bill appearing in the baby’s hand. “There you go. Now... one has to go to Alec, and the other has to go to the other nice lady. Can you do that?”

Keris babbled, nodding enthusiastically. He clapped his hands together, trying to separate the two bills, pulling at them until he had one in each hand. Squinting his eyes, he crumpled one hand in a fist, tendrils of copper seeping through his knuckles, crackling with the faint smell of ozone. The first bill appeared in the tip jar.

“Great job, papa is so proud of you.” Magnus cooed, reaching into the wrap and tickling his son’s belly. “Now give the last one to Alec.” Keris scrunched his face, concentrating hard. “Keris... not too much magic, if you’re tired, you can just hand it to Alexander.” Magnus grabbed a straw, stabbing it into his coffee lid with a loud squeak.

“Nuh-uh.” The baby shook his head, still concentrating. A few seconds later, he opened his hands. The paper folded itself into a tiny bird, flapping toward Alec and diving into his apron pocket.

“Wow! You did such a good job Keris!” Alec cheered, not caring if any mundane noticed the spectacle. He reached out, mussing up the baby’s silver hair. Keris looked up at Alec, his copper eyes wide, his little mouth hanging open in admiration—it was his first time getting a good look at the towering ex-shadowhunter. Alec was accustomed to this. Babies often looked at tall people with a sense of wonder.

“Papaaa,” Aerulei whined, pulling at Magnus’ shirt. “K-K isn’t supposed to make magical
spectacles in public.” She rattled off what was obviously a practiced and familiar admonishment within the Bane Warlock clan. “That’s what you always tell me!” She was grumpy, chewing on her straw as she glared at her father.

“That’s right Aya, we can give him a stern talking to about it later.” Magnus furrowed his brow, trying to look serious. Alec could see right through the facade. “Okay then, let’s go home. Say bye to Alexander everyone!”

“Wait no!” Aya stomped. “I have a question for Mister Alec!”

“Oh, okay!” Magnus laughed. “Go ahead.” He sipped at his iced coffee, rolling his glamored eyes.

“Can you please give me another rune tattoo next week? When this one fades?” She dropped her hand from Magnus, waving her arm in the air again. “I want it to look cool forever!”

“Of course! You can come by anytime you like, I’ll always have time for you!” Judging by how long Alec was willing to neglect his barista job to spend time with Magnus and his children, this was a very believable sentiment. If Alec didn’t have time, he’d make time.

“Papa!” Aya lit up, a thought popping into her head. “You should get one too! A tattoo! But like… a real one. Because you’re a grownup!”

“That’s a fantastic idea Aya.” Magnus winked at Alec. “I’ll have my people call your people?”

Magnus purred, letting his gaze stay on Alec for a strong second before hopping back into ‘dad mode’. “Now, say bye you two!”

“Byeee!” The two voices harmonized, although for Keris, it was more of a garbled buhhhhhe. After they left the store, Alec had a hard time concentrating, his mind focused on the possibility of tattooing Magnus Bane.

There wasn’t a convenient way for Alec to get home from the coffee shop. In the summer, when the water wasn’t blisteringly cold, he took the ferry from the Brooklyn Bridge to Williamsburg, with only a six minute walk book-ending the boat ride. But in the cooler months, like this early October day, he liked to enjoy the more breathable air afforded by fall and winter in the city, opting to bike to work instead. Bikes were utilitarian, effective, and most importantly: cheap. If Alec was honest with himself, which he was getting better at each day, he could use the exercise. When training and fighting were no longer his full-time job, he realized how difficult it was to fit in enough physical activity to stay in shape. The twenty minute bike ride each way was better than nothing, and if he combined that with morning jogs and his four fighting sessions a week, he could still give his past self a run for his money.

His mind always wandered to things like that while he biked. In a way, it was both relaxing and alarming; that feeling of not remembering the majority of the journey home. This late afternoon was no different, and before he knew it he was chaining his bike up to the fence outside the back entrance to the apartment. He climbed the rickety wooden stairs two at a time, in a bit of a rush to eat dinner and shower before taking on a few clients this evening. As he unlocked the door, the smell of fresh roasted vegetables and baked chicken assaulted his senses. Someone made dinner. Alec walked down the narrow hall toward the kitchen, excited yet suspicious for the delicious
meal. Maryse wasn’t a great cook, which left only one viable culprit.

“Alec! You made it for dinner!” Luke spun away from the oven, holding a glass dish of roasted fall vegetables between two oven-mitt clad hands. Without looking behind him, he closed the oven door with his foot, kicking backwards. “Maryse said you wouldn’t have time today between your shift at the cafe and opening the shop tonight, but I made enough for you anyway!” Luke sat the dish down on a cooling rack atop the counter, sliding off his oven mitts.

“It looks great, I’m absolutely starving.” Alec pulled out a chair, flopping onto it. “Where are Mom and Clary?” He slipped his jacket over his shoulders, hanging it on the back of the seat. It wasn’t strange to find Luke in the apartment— not only did he have a key, but he also conveniently lived just a block over. There were discussions on Maryse moving in with Luke and Clary moving in with Alec, giving both the young and old a bit more privacy, but Luke didn’t think Clary was ready to be ‘on her own’ yet— even if Alec was there with her. Until then, the four of them spent time shuffling in and out of the two separate apartments, spending ample time at each.

“They’re downstairs in the bookshop. Clary had some artsy ideas on how to set up the new inventory— just the mundane stuff in the front though.” They preferred to keep Clary out of the back of the shop, worried that the downworlder texts might spark unpleasant memories of the life she’d lost. It was better to protect her from such things. “It’s going to be about ten minutes until dinner’s ready by the way, if you want to take a shower or anything.”

“Ya saying I look dirty?” Alec joked as he stood from the chair. Luke laughed a bit at the way Alec spoke, his New York accent getting thicker the more he distanced himself from Shadowhunter culture.

“I’m saying you have some dead leaves in your hair.” Luke reached over, plucking half an amber leaf from Alec’s black hair.

“Hey, all the people who come into the coffee shop love fall.. Like they really love it. Maybe they’d think it’s a look.” Alec yelled behind him as he made his way to his room.

It wasn’t as big as his room at The Institute, nor was it as polished and fancy, but it somehow felt even more like home. When they first moved in, Alec and Maryse spent a day painting the walls a deep royal blue. It was an act of minor rebellion— he didn’t have the agency to make many design decisions on his room at the Institute, and putting in petitions for redesign like Izzy did would not have helped Alec’s heterosexual facade he fought so hard to maintain. But now, Maryse encouraged him to express himself more, even if that just meant making everything dark colors and muted tones.

His king-sized bed, a non-negotiable feature given his height, took up the majority of the floor space, leaving just enough room for a side table on the left and a dresser in front. He had a few older photos of his family placed around in frames— Izzy at her rune ceremony, a smiling pre-teen, Alec and Jace at the party after their parabatai ceremony, and one full-family photo, taken when Max was only four. Unfortunately, he didn’t have any more than that, thanks to the aversion shadowhunters had toward frivolities like posed photos. There were a few newer photos though— Maryse getting her first tattoo from Alec, a selfie taken on the ‘family’ camping trip with Luke and Clary, and a Christmas photo from last year where Clary had made them all wear antlers.

One of those photo frames was knocked over when Alec came in the room, but the suspect couldn’t be bothered to leave the scene of the crime. Sprawled out on his bed, half-burrowed into a grey cable-knit blanket was The Clave. The Clave was what Simon Lewis lovingly referred to as ‘a unit of an animal’. Alec took offense to that terminology, but this cat was remarkably large. According to her dodgy internet research, Maryse derived that the cat was at least part Maine Coon, providing
some explanation for the fact that this cat was almost as large as a Border Collie. He had long tufted fur that started cream at the cuticle and tipped with a warm shade of rust, and his eyes were a sleepy, cloudy blue. Despite getting into unspeakable mischief— warranting his ironic name ‘The Clave’ — he was a comfort to the deruned Lightwoods during their darkest times. Alec hadn’t grown up with animals. When he was very young, The Institute had a cat named Church, but he lived in the barracks— not the standard living quarters— and largely kept to himself. The Clave was constantly involved in the daily comings and goings, gluing himself to Alec and Maryse, or finding his way down into the shops if he was lonely. Evenings though were largely spent lounging on Alec’s bed, waiting for him to come home.

“Okay Clave. What do you have against Mom?” He held up the picture of Maryse getting her tattoo. “Did she not give you the canned food today? Just kibble? Does that violate the feline accords?” Alec placed it back on his dresser. “I don’t have time for this.” He leaned over, giving the giant orange cat a generous head scratch before ducking into his bathroom.

As Alec quickly showered off to get ready for the second half of his long day, his mind kept drifting to the words Magnus said earlier.

“*I’ll have my people call your people.*”

It was an obvious flirtation, even if the warlock hadn’t winked a glittering eyelid. But Alec couldn’t make sense of the intention behind his words. Did it mean he would text Alec directly? After all, he did have his number. He’d used it to text him about Aya’s tattoo. Would he call the shop, since this would be an actual appointment? Maybe he tried calling earlier and got the answering machine? Most likely, Alec assured himself, it was a joke. Magnus would never come get a permanent mark on his body just because his child mentioned it— and he certainly wouldn’t get a tattoo just to follow through on a flirtatious comment. That would be ridiculous.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this generous slice of life! Also, this was my first shot making a mood board, it’s not my forte, but I had to try it at least once.

Next chapter, Magnus leaves the kids with a sitter to handle something on his own. ;)
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Magnus leaves his children with Ragnor while he attends to some personal business.

Chapter Notes

Some people mentioned that Keris’ age was ambiguous in the last chapter, so just to clarify he is around thirteen months. Warlock babies do develop a bit faster as well.

A quiet buzz of energy permeated Magnus’ loft, the type of undirected restlessness typical of a morning with two young children. Keris and Aya, with little idea of was planned for their day, were milling about, occupying themselves with random tasks, generating an inconsistent murmur of various sounds.

Before Magnus escaped back to his bedroom he took an inventory of his kids. Keris was rolling on the floor, bumping repeatedly into The Chairman, giggling wet, bubbling baby giggles each time the cat scurried further away. Aerulei was intrigued by Keris’ new talent— at thirteen months, he’d just learned how to roll over repeatedly last week, barreling himself across the apartment at any chance he got.

She sat cross-legged on the floor a few feet from him, splitting her time between observing her brother and fingering through her new favorite book ‘Practical Botany for the Young and Magical’. It was a gift from her Uncle Ragnor for her fourth birthday, the inside cover inscribed with a message of how proud he was of her, being able to read at age four. Ragnor was stingy with comments, and it made Magnus’ heart swell with pride to know that his friend thought so highly of his daughter. Despite her advanced reading capabilities, the book was still very dense, and she could easily bury herself in it for hours without making much headway, compared to a more simple children’s book that would lose her attention in mere minutes.

“They’ll be occupied for a few minutes at least…” Magnus assured himself, dipping away to his room to prepare himself for the day.

After suffering through breakfast— Keris had felt the need to express his distaste for Magnus’ homemade yogurt by levitating it and dumping it on his father’s head— Magnus had far less time to get ready than he would have liked, and a head of yogurt covered hair to wash. Thankfully, the mess had been isolated to Magnus, sparing Aya and Keris, so it had been simple enough to use magic to get them dressed and cleaned up. He could easily magic himself ready as well, of course, but there was something soothing and self-indulgent about getting ready the mundane way. When he became a parent, these moments of self-care became even more precious, his shower becoming a five-star retreat from his hectic life.

Ragnor would be here in less than fifteen minutes, and his warlock friend never took well to Magnus sticking around long after he arrived. ‘Why did you call me to watch your brood of
children only for you to still be here? Do you know how many things I could have done with those precious fifteen minutes?’ He’d echo similar sentiments each time, maintaining an unbelievable facade and pretending he didn’t enjoy spending time with his oldest friend. Normally, he’d be fine to face Ragnor’s sass, but today he had a greater incentive to stay on schedule—he was getting a tattoo.

Stripping out of his red, dragon-embroidered pajamas, Magnus crossed his bedroom and into his en-suite bathroom. His hair was atrocious, a cast of powdery dried dairy and chunks of fresh blueberry coating each strand, his locks pieced in spikes pointing in every direction. He would need to find a solution to Keris’ thirteen-month-old obsession with throwing food, but until then, he could at least find solace in the cleansing and soothing ritual of a good shower. With a flick of his wrist, the walk-in shower roared to life, heating immediately to his favorite temperature. Thick clouds of eucalyptus steam billowed through the dark-tiled room, already helping him feel clean and alert. He scrubbed his hair vigorously, the milky berry smell fading away, replaced by his signature sandalwood scent. With time running out, he made quick business of the rest of his shower, foregoing his normal body scrub and deep conditioner routine for a more spartan suds-and-rinse approach.

Even with paring down his routine, the shower still had taken most of his time, forcing him to resort to using magic for his clothes, makeup, and shaving. He found himself deliberating over what to wear, dismissing numerous outfits with the wave of his hands. Nothing felt quite right. There were some necessary restrictions, which should have made it easier to narrow down an outfit, but it did little to help. A button down shirt was a necessity—the tattoo would be on his chest, and he needed to make sure he could easily expose the patch of skin. That made a dress shirt, with its front buttons and flattering lines, his only option.

“Or is it?” Magnus thought to himself. “No. Bad warlock. You’re being ridiculous. Anything else and… you’d have to take your whole shirt off.”

It was a terrible idea, but he mused it anyway, trading in his more formal moon-print button down shirt for a simple black v-neck.

“Gods and goddesses no. I look like a playboy shadowhunter. Or a wannabe rockstar.” He chastised himself. Biting his lip in concentration he tried out something a bit more daring—a maroon silk tunic with a reflective golden brocade pattern. It was the same shirt he’d worn the time Alec stayed for drinks—the time Alec accidentally fell asleep at his apartment. “Surely he won’t notice…” Magnus thought, admiring how his necklaces sat perfectly in the deep slit down the front. The slit was deep enough that if Alec was truly uncomfortable with the warlock being shirtless, he could maybe push the neckline to the side and have plenty of access to Magnus’ pec. The entire outfit looked perfect, but Magnus still wasn’t sure, tempted still to try out a few more options.

Keris, however decided for him, wailing loudly from the living room. With ‘dad-mode’ activated, Magnus sprung to life, dashing out of his room, down the hallway past the nursery, and into the living room.

“Now is that any way to treat your Uncle Ragnor, knife-baby?” Ragnor reprimanded, scooping the infant into his arms. “My, my, my. You’re even more portly than the last time I saw you.” Ragnor adoringly pinched the roll of fat on Keris’ leg.

“Ragnor, we have discussed this. You don’t portal without notice! You know how portals startle Keris.” Magnus reached forward to grab his son, to comfort him, but Ragnor took a step back, clutching him tighter. Magnus huffed, crossing his arms. “And knife baby? My son is not a piece
of cutlery!"

“Then maybe you shouldn’t have named him after a knife. Right Keris?” Ragnor lifted the boy higher, turning him around so they were face to face. Keris promptly clapped both his palms against Ragnor’s forehead, copper magic radiating from his chubby fingers. “My apologies, Keris. Yes. You named yourself. The whole 'library book selection' spectacle, I remember. Thank you for the correction.” Ragnor narrowed his eyes, scowling at Magnus.

“He did name himself!” Magnus threw his arms in the air in defeat. “There’s no time for this, I really need to get going. I was supposed to leave…” Magnus looked at his old grandfather clock. “I was supposed to leave five minutes ago! You were late, Ragnor! Ugh!”

“Shoo, then! Skedaddle!” Ragnor shifted Keris to his hip, grabbing the boy's little wrist and waving his hand. “Where are you going anyway?” Ragnor raised a bushy grey eyebrow, nearly all the way to the base of his horn.

“I’m going to get a tattoo, I have an appointment that I shouldn’t be late for so I really need to—” Ragnor cut Magnus off.

“A tattoo? I suppose it's never too early for a mid-century crisis. What shop are you going to?” Ragnor passed Keris to a young green warlock boy, who up until this point, Ragnor had neglected to acknowledge—‘ward’ Dorian Antony. Antony was his given name, but Ragnor said it wasn't suitable for a warlock of any acceptable status, helping him instead pick the name ‘Dorian’. This led to much confusion, some people calling him Dorian, some calling him Antony. Despite all of his fatherly efforts, Ragnor refused to call the boy his son. Although he'd adopted him around the same time Magnus adopted Aerulei, he preferred instead to call Dorian his ‘ward’ or ‘apprentice’. Everyone in sound mind told him to never use the term ‘ward’— it was strange and uncomfortable — but Ragnor refused to believe the word had fallen out of fashion.

“I’m going to—” Magnus started, but Ragnor never gave him the chance to respond, cutting him off again.

“No! Let me guess… Inkwell? Next to the bookstore, Scroll and Quill?” The horned warlock deviously smirked.

“Perhaps…” Magnus did not enjoy where this line of questioning was bound to lead.

“Inkwell. Isn’t that the shop run by Alec Lightwood? The ex-shadowhunter from the New York Institute? The one you were absolutely smitten with when you first met him?”

Magnus fiddled with his ear cuff, avoiding any glimpse of eye contact that might give him away. He was no match for Ragnor, who could see right through his fidgeting. They'd known each other far too long for those kinds of games.

“How did you describe him to me again… Oh yes: ‘Dark wavy hair, eyes the color of late-summer leaves—and as tall as the trees they hang on?’” Ragnor taunted, imitating Magnus’ aloof voice and dropping his British accent.

“You mean Alec Lightwood, Max Lightwood’s brother?” Dorian chirped, his voice cracking slightly; one of the many woes of being thirteen. He was a lanky boy, struggling to hold up the writhing warlock baby. Red marks were already sliced across his green arms, standing out vividly — a product of Keris’ bare silver scales. The baby wasn’t completely covered in scales, but a smattering of them decorated his shoulders and forearms, from a distance appearing to be thick-
grained body glitter. It was an aesthetic Magnus was certain Keris would be pleased with when he was older, but for now he was a prickly, sharp, squirming baby.

"I'm not quite sure how that’s relevant, Antony—" Magnus started, hoping he could divert the subject. Noticing the marks on the boy’s arms, Magnus snapped his fingers, trading Keris’ short sleeved onesie for a long-sleeved one. Ragnor was having none of that.

“I mean honestly, Magnus. You have done absolutely ridiculous things for the sake of flirtation before, but permanently marking your body?” Ragnor shivered, appearing disgusted at the thought.

“Mister Alec is really good at it though, Uncle Ragnor!” Aya bolted up, running to Magnus’ defense. “See!” She pulled up her sleeve, revealing her nearly faded rune tattoo.

“And you’ve introduced him to your children?” Both eyebrows shot up this time.

Keris excitedly smacked Dorian on the cheeks, a cloud of glittering magic falling through the air like dust.

“Keris says that he thinks Mister Alec is very pretty, and that he made papa — well, er, Magnus’ heart speed up when they were talking.” Magnus stared at the boys wide-eyed, his mouth agape, vividly displaying his perceived betrayal. Dorian clammed up, trying to roll back his words, inherently afraid of upsetting a warlock as powerful as Magnus, even if he was family. “I mean—that’s just what Keris said. He was wrapped against your chest, your heart could’ve sped up for a million reasons, right? Too much coffee?”

“You four are awful, the whole lot of you!” Magnus stomped. “And my own children, betraying me like this?” Keris and Aya giggled in unison, Aya darting back to join Dorian and Keris. Magnus huffed, storming out of the loft. Before the heavy door could close behind him, he yelled grumpily. “I love you all!”

Dry leaves whirled in the air and crinkled under his boots as Magnus stepped through a portal, depositing him in an alley just a block away from Inkwell. It was daytime, so he couldn’t risk portaling directly in front of the store, and apparating inside was ill advised considering that Clary was most likely working the front desk. For someone who remembers nothing of the shadow world, it would be alarming to see someone appear out of thin air. Though Alec hadn’t mentioned this to him, he picked up on it the two times he called to make appointments and Clary’s cheerful and perky voice was on the other end of the phone.

Before he rounded the corner, Magnus took a moment to make sure he was presentable. A leaf had attached itself to the plush silver velvet of his overcoat, causing the warlock to search in a panic for other stray pieces of detritus, sliding his hands meticulously over his clothes and combing his fingers through his hair. When he was convinced he didn’t look like an un-raked lawn, he reclaimed his trademark confidence and strutted into the tattoo parlor.

The seat behind the counter was empty, Clary Fray nowhere in sight. A tiny bell— the type usually found in hotel lobbies or dry cleaners— served as the only attendant to the front of the house. Magnus didn’t want to be intrusive or insulting, and he worried that ringing the bell might seem impatient, but he didn’t have any other options. He was about to tap the bell when a warm voice jolted him from his indecision.

“Hey Magnus.” Alec smiled, one side of his mouth stretching wider than the other. There was something dizzying about a crooked smile on a handsome man — and it drove Magnus wild.
“Sorry if I made you wait. I let Clary go for the day. Figured it might not be the best idea for her to… Well since she…” Alec struggled to articulate the uncomfortable sentiment. When he came in the room, there’d been a washrag tossed over his shoulder, but now he busied himself with it. As he spoke, he wrung the fabric, crumpled it, unfolded it. Magnus decided to finish the thought for him.

“It might best not to test her with anything that could trigger confusing memories of the past. Understood.”

“Or… maybe I just wanted to spend some time with you.” Alec blushed.

‘Maybe his loss for words hadn’t been Fray-related at all.’ Magnus thought to himself. But before the warlock could fire back with his own flirtatious remark, Alec cut back in, getting down to business.

“So if you follow me, Magnus, I have the back room setup for you. It’s where I work with most of my downworlder clients, since it’s a bit more private.”

‘Private. I like the sound of that.’ Magnus shuddered at his own thoughts. ‘Pull yourself together, you’re someone’s father for Lilith’s sake. You’re just here to get an adorable and tasteful tattoo.’ He could live with that lie, as long as he made an effort not to be a complete tart the whole time.

“I might not be the High Warlock of Brooklyn anymore, but I do still appreciate a bit of protective seclusion.” The floor creaked beneath their boots as they reached the back room, the tile of the front two rooms replaced with worn wood. Compared to the more traditional tattoo-shop style of the front of the studio, the back took after the bookstore next door. A Persian rug was rolled diagonally across the floor, and floor-to-ceiling shelves lined the back wall. Deep green brocade wallpaper made the room feel moody, but a bright work-light kept the space alive and less stuffy.

“You’re not the High Warlock anymore?” Alec raised a dark, full eyebrow— the one marked diagonally with a gorgeous scar— as he gestured to the seat in the center of the room. Magnus graciously took a seat and crossed his legs.

“Honesty, it’s a very long, boring, political story— I’m sure you don’t want to hear about it.” Alec pulled a lever beside the chair, raising the foot rest. Magnus looked at him skeptically, lifting his crossed legs and stretching out.

“I thought you’d be more comfortable with your feet up.” He gestured vaguely, turning back to the shelves to grab a sketch pad. “You won’t get off that easy by the way, but lucky for you, we have plenty of stuff to go through before I can get started with the tattoo.” Alec flipped open the notebook, grabbing a pencil from the spine. “First off: do you already know what design you want? I know you booked a slot for something small, two hours, so you probably have something in mind?”

“I came prepared.” Magnus smirked. His eyes twinkled as he raised his hand, twirling his wrist to transfer the image from his mind onto the blank paper. This summoned a gasp from the ex-shadowhunter. It was endearing that after being exposed to the shadow world his whole life, Alec was still impressed by basic magic.

“So a snake…” Alec stared carefully at the design. “… with thick dragon scales. Do you mind if I sketch around it a little bit? Make a few modifications to make it more of a tattoo and less of a picture?”

“By all means, Alexander. I’m the canvas— you’re the artist.” This comment was lost on the other
Alec sketched furiously, eyes darting between Magnus’ design and the new one he was working on. “So the blue snake eyes—those are for Aya, right?”

“For my darling Medusa, yes.” Magnus scoffed, to Alec’s surprise. He’d only seen Magnus speak fondly of his children before, so even a hint of negativity was new. “I mean it lovingly, of course. She was just being a bit of a nuisance before I left the house. Thankfully, she’s Ragnor Fell’s problem now.”

“I mean it must be stressful sometimes, two warlock kids running around.” The graphite scratched methodically against the paper, Alec absorbed deeply in the work. “The scales are for Keris, I assume?”

“His warlock mark is a bit complicated, but yes, the scales are for him. I wanted to have them silver in the design, like his, but I know it wouldn’t show up on my darker skin.”

“You’d be surprised what you can do with the right type of shading…” Alec glanced up at Magnus, analyzing his skin. He paused for a second, tapping his chin with his pencil. “Keris—were his eyes glamoured at the coffee shop?”

“No, his eyes are just that gorgeous amber color naturally. I’m so envious, I’ve considered changing my glamour to be a closer shade to match his eyes. That way, you know, unglamoured, I look like Aya, glamoured, I look like Keris. I don’t know, maybe it would be a bit too much…”

“I think it’s adorable.” Alec flipped his pencil, erasing something with determination, twirling the tip back to the paper as he revised the sketch. “Where are we placing this?” Alec pushed the pencil behind his ear. He looked like a sexy student, or a sexy librarian, or a sexy architect, or a sexy artist. A sexy tattoo artist.

“I was thinking right here…” Magnus patted his chest. “…right over my—”

“Heart.” Alec smiled a closed-mouth smile—the smile equivalent of cooing ‘aww’. “That’s really sweet. They’re lucky kids—I hope they know that.”

“They know they’re spoiled, that’s for sure.” They both laughed.

“Here’s what I drew out, the size is perfect, I think, for the placement. What do you think?” He held out the paper to Magnus, the original and modified designs side by side. There were slight modifications, mostly to the shading and highlighting, but the line work seemed to pop off the page. The snake twisted in an S-shape, its head pointing upward, both eyes visible. Its spine was coated in wide, prominent scales, shaded to look shimmering and almost metallic.

“You changed the eyes.” Magnus said, his voice soft.

“I had a bit of help with that, actually.” Alec poked Magnus in the chest with the eraser of his pencil. “I hope it’s okay that I stole your idea.”

“No it’s… it’s perfect Alexander.” Magnus’ cheeks felt warm. He wasn’t sure if he was fighting back a blush, or fatherly tears, but either way, he needed to keep his cool.

“Alright then, I’m going to go make the stencil for this. In the meantime, take your shirt off and make yourself comfortable.”

“All the way off?” Magnus clarified.
“Of course, how else am I going to be able to reach your chest? I mean... If you’re not comfortable I can lend you a hoodie that you could wear open...” Alec trailed off, his posture tensing. He assumed his standard social-panic position, lips pursed, chin down, leaning against the wall. He hadn’t taken Magnus for someone burdened by modesty, but now he felt an awkward pang of regret for making that assumption.

“No! It’s fine, I just didn’t want you coming back here only to unexpectedly find a half-naked warlock.” Magnus raised both his eyebrows, uncrossing his legs and worrying the hem of his tunic.

Alec swallowed, and Magnus swore he could see the crimson flash of a looming blush. He coughed lightly, changing the subject. “Do you have any preference for music?”

“I’m not very picky... well, about music that is.” Alec disappeared back into the front of the shop, but not before Magnus heard him laugh.

“So I’m going to shave you first, before I place the stencil, are you ready?”

Magnus nodded. Alec wiped his skin with a moist towelette, opening a fresh disposable razor and pausing just above the warlock’s skin. Looking at Magnus again for approval, he shaved the area above his heart on his upper left pectoral. The sensation was strange and cold, making the warlock’s nipples jolt to attention.

“Your nipples are pierced.” Alec mumbled as he turned over to his work stand, grabbing the stencil.

“Is that a problem?” Magnus was worried that he somehow sabotaged the entire ordeal, or worse, that he scared Alec away with his deviant piercings. He briefly considered glamouring them away, convincing Alec he’d just been seeing things, but he wanted to err on the side of honesty.

“No, of course not. Just... unexpected.” Alec looked up through his lashes as he gently pressed the stencil down on Magnus’ pec. As he peeled away the paper, he brushed his fingertips across the warlock’s hard nipple, grazing the barbell piercing. Magnus internally cursed. He knew that Alec might have done that by accident, but the possibility that it was purposeful was driving him wild. He needed to calm down.

Soon, he didn’t have to make an effort to distract himself— the pain of the tattoo needle did a good enough job on its own. The buzzing sound was deceptively welcoming and safe, but it felt like he was being scratched by The Chairman underneath his skin. He could feel his eyes watering, and he was fighting a silent battle, serving as Switzerland in the war between his tears and his eyeliner.

“How’s the pain?” Alec paused, lifting the needle.

“It’s nothing. I can barely feel it. Only a tickle!” Magnus chirped. He couldn’t let Alec know it hurt like hell— that wouldn’t be very dignified. He couldn’t even use his magic to redirect the pain, since Alec would recognize the crackle of magic from a mile away.

“I can take a break, if you want.” Magnus was about to feign confusion, but Alec wasn’t having it. “The way your muscles are tensing— I can tell it hurts. I don’t want to overwhelm you.”

“How much is left?” Magnus chewed the inside of his cheek.

“I’m about halfway done. The outline is done. Next are the scales, last are the eyes. Do you want me to get you a glass of ice water or some Tylenol? Both can help.” Alec sat down the tattoo gun.
“I’ll just use a little bit of magic…” Magnus finally conceded, snapping his fingers before pressing them to his chest. “I wasn’t going to do that, but now that I’ve been found out, this will be much better.”

“Magnus, there’s nothing wrong with it hurting. Your chest is a sensitive area— especially if it’s your first tattoo.” Alec picked back up the needle. “I’d assumed it wasn’t, since you’re—”

“Ancient? Yes I am. And I have had tattoos before. Just either… glamoured on… or acquired while heavily under the influence of inebriating substances.”

“Well I’m glad you showed up sober— I have a very serious no-drunk-tattoos-for-immortals policy.” Alec laughed.

“What, not for mundanes or werewolves?” Magnus jabbed.

“Eh, we’re only going to be here so long anyway. Less time to regret.” Alec buried himself back into the work— not out of sadness or nostalgia, but out of comfort. Magnus could tell that Alec was more relaxed now that he knew the tattoo wasn’t causing him too much pain. They didn’t speak for a while, and though it didn’t seem to bother Alec, long stretches of silence made Magnus nervous. He needed to say something ridiculous, provoking, to get the conversation rolling again.

“You know, Alexander—” Magnus paused, taking a slow, relaxed breath.” —some people find tattoos arousing.”

“Uh.. because they look nice?” Alec pressed his lips together, leaning in closer to focus on his work. His tone was disconnected, but there was still a hint of curiosity that didn’t escape Magnus. The warlock wasn’t sure if Alec was completely oblivious, if he was playing dumb, or if he was just trying to avoid awkward sexual conversation. But with all the flirting, the subtle touches, the coy smiles, Magnus figured it was one of the first two.

“No, I mean…” Magnus added another pause, drawing out the suspense. He wanted to make Alec sit with the thought, let his mind drift around to the possibilities. “They find the process of being tattooed arousing.”

There was a long pause as Alec took a deep breath, turning his attention fully to shaping out a line of scales. Magnus wasn’t sure if he should elaborate on his statement, worried that if he explained it in terms of a pain-pleasure balance, that might breach Alec’s comfort zone, but right now Magnus couldn’t tell what was going on in the other man’s head. There was clearly something— Alec’s hand stopped moving and he leaned back, fiddling with his inks and making himself look unnecessarily busy. Would he respond? Would he move on as if Magnus hadn’t said anything? The tension was thick, each clink of a glass vial or shuffle of equipment a loud siren, a beacon calling out to anyone who would listen, urging them to triage the social discomfort. Still without saying a word, Alec leaned back over Magnus, placing his free hand on the warlock’s chest for stability. The needle buzzed as he got back to work.

Magnus couldn’t hear it, but inside his head, Alec was adamantly chanting the mantra ‘Don’t be weird, be chill. Don’t be weird, be chill.’ Magnus could feel the change in technique— Alec had moved onto shading. Whether it was minutes or seconds, Magnus couldn’t say, but Alec finally broke the silence.

“Do you?” Alec didn’t look up, didn’t meet Magnus’ eyes, just continued working. As the silence was shattered, the sexual tension hit a fever pitch. Somehow, the fact that it took Alec so long to respond made it all so much more powerful, the anticipation and denial of instant verbal gratification adding weight to the two simple words. Magnus didn’t know how he was going to
survive the rest of this tattoo— he might die with it unfinished, his heart stuttering under the hand
of Alexander Lightwood.

He needed to choose his words wisely— he was venturing into uncharted territory with Alec, and if
he took things too far, pushed the tension over the edge, he wouldn’t be able to take it back. There
was always the Seelie way out: plausible deniability. But that would only drag the game on longer,
and it could be intimidating or confusing for an introvert like Alec. The warlock’s lips parted
slightly, his mouth opening in hopes that the right response would make an unexpected
appearance. Before he had time to say anything, the front door clanged open loudly, the bell
audible even from the back room.

Alec cursed under his breath, his hands pausing as he glanced up at the clock.

“My next appointment is thirty minutes early.” He sighed. “And this was already taking longer
than expected… ” Alec stood up, placing the tattoo gun on the tray hastily. His face paled, flashing
an unmistakable realization that he misspoke. Magnus hadn’t taken it the wrong way at all, but
Alec anxiously rattled off an apology regardless. “Not that it’s your fault at all. I tend to get lost in
my work when I’m working on something I really like.” He smiled, but it was strained and
nervous. “Just give me a second, I’ll go let them know that I have about an hour left on your piece.
It shouldn’t be a problem— they’re one of my regulars.” He was halfway out the door when he
turned back around, his face soft, his voice warm, his smile genuine. “I wouldn’t want to rush and
mess up something so meaningful and special.”

As Alec left the room, the air was sucked out of Magnus— a vacuum forming from his sudden
absence. ‘What just happened…?’ he thought to himself. He could barely catch his breath,
flustered by the sudden onslaught of feelings that blindsided him during the tattoo session. Every
subtle touch, each candid sentence, and the coy expressions took him by surprise, unaware that
Alec was capable of keeping up with the warlock’s signature brand of seduction. Complicating
matters further, there was a strong possibility that Alec wasn’t doing most of it on purpose— that
he was just intrinsically that irresistible. It was so much at once that he couldn’t accurately parse
the meaning or discern the intention. He needed to get a handle on himself.

He thanked the stars of his resonant constellations for the interruption, giving him time to calm
down. It was fast— too fast— and he didn’t want to stop. He focused on the murmur of voices in
the front of the shop, the ticking of the clock, and the whir of the heating system. He allowed the
pain of his throbbing skin to sober him, glancing down at the snake that had taken shape on his
pectoral muscle.

Alec had been right— it was meaningful, incredibly special. Just the sight of the snake with its
prominent scales had him fighting back tears. The two snake eyes— one with a slit pupil, the other
with a round pupil— though they weren’t filled in with their corresponding colors yet— reminded
Magnus of how much he had waiting for him back at home. He couldn’t be reckless with his heart
anymore. If he wanted things— and he couldn’t deny how badly he wanted this— he needed to
things the right way. He needed to do right by Alexander, by himself, and most importantly— by
his children.

There were three hearts now that he had to protect.

Chapter End Notes
Magnus and Alec both feel like they need to take a 'beat'. Next chapter, we get to see Alec blowing off some steam.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

An unexpected visitor makes an appearance at Clary and Alec's fighting class, leaving Alec more than a bit distracted. To get his mind off things, Clary invites him to a concert.

Chapter Notes

This chapter ran away with me, and got a bit long. For the sake of continuity and scheduling, I decided not to split it up. I hope that’s okay!

There was something special about a fighting gym that made Clary feel inherently powerful. She couldn’t place her finger on it, but the feeling of padded floors beneath her feet, the strange smell of fake leather equipment, and the thrumming music backed by the constant percussion of punches and kicks— it all made her feel strangely at ease. Before she met Alec, she never would have considered fighting classes, but Luke encouraged her to give it a shot, take some classes with Alec. It was hard not to follow Luke’s advice, especially with how protective he was since her mom died, so she humored him. The first time she hit the mats she was hooked. It was like breathing for the first time. Each combination clicked with her, and she picked up on new techniques faster than anyone in her classes. She wasn’t sure why Alec went to the fundamentals classes with her— he normally was in the expert level classes— but all the same he was her sparring partner.

It made her feel safe that Alec was always there— his reliable, knowledgeable, and patient personality just the right fit for a fighting partner. She trusted him, and what’s more, he trusted her — something she deduced didn’t come easily for Maryse’s son. The discipline of martial arts was new to Clary, though. Years of her bohemian artist lifestyle with her mother made it hard to adjust to keeping a strict regimen and training schedule, which is why she felt guilty any time she was late or her head wasn’t in the game. Today, she was nearly late, cutting it close to the start of class and missing the first five minutes of stretches.

Alec was already at the wall, his leg up as he stretched his hamstrings. He bent his standing leg, bouncing slightly to get a deeper stretch. Despite his impressive flexibility for a tall man, Clary caught him wince at the deep stretch. She also caught him glancing at his phone, which was perched on the wall beside him. Compared to most people their age, Alec was the least attached to his phone of anyone Clary had met, so it struck her as odd that he would have it out at the gym.

“Alec!” She called, jogging to close the distance between them. She grabbed her hand wraps from her bag and tossed it into a cubby, joining him on the wall. “I’m so sorry I’m late, the model was late to my sculpture class, but we still had to sketch him for a whole hour so we can finalize our plans for the clay sculpting next week.”

“It’s fine, no worries.” Alec said distractedly. He lowered his leg, switching to the other. As he
mimicked the stretch, he tapped his phone, unlocking the screen and checking his messages. He frowned, locking it again and reaching out to Clary, signaling her to partner stretch. He lunged forward, grabbing her foot as she placed it on his thigh, stabilizing her knee as she leaned forward. She rocked back, straightening her leg, and he bent her foot back, stretching her calf. They went through the motions, going back and forth to warm up their legs. Most partner stretches required careful balance, else jeopardizing their effectiveness and safety. Just one move in the wrong direction and it was an easy kick to the groin or splat to the floor— which is why when a tiny body collided with Alec’s, he nearly toppled to the ground.

“Mister Alec!” The tiny, dark-haired girl cheered. “I didn’t know you took fight classes here too!” She jumped up and down, her Tae Kwon Do belt flopping wildly.

Alec gently lowered Clary’s leg, steadying himself as he adjusted to the sudden shock.

“Aerulei, it’s always nice seeing you.” Alec gave her a small bow, the universal sign of respect in martial arts. She made her most serious face, bowing in response. The second she righted herself, she was back to being an uncontrollable bolt of excitement.

“Papa! Come here! It’s Mister Alec!” She yelled, looking behind her for her father, who was already striding over to her, looking perturbed. The man apologized to Alec, and the two drifted a few feet away, just out of earshot, leaving Clary and Aya alone.

“Who are you?” Aya turned and looked at Clary.

“I’m Clary, I work for Alec at his tattoo shop.” Clary smiled, leaning down to be at eye level. “And you’re Aerulei, right? That’s a beautiful name, like a fairytale princess.” Clary spoke to her in a bright, gentle tone, pandering to her young age.

Aya narrowed her eyes. She didn’t like it when people spoke to her as if she were just a little kid. She was a warlock, more powerful than some ten times her age, and Magnus always reminded her that she deserved respect. But Clary was being kind, and Aya had to remind herself that if people were being nice, she should try to be nice back. Something was bothering the child though, so she couldn’t follow through with her manners.

“Are you Mister Alec’s girlfriend?” She crossed her arms.

“Oh god no. He’s like my brother. Plus Alec is gay—” Clary started, before realizing she probably shouldn’t loudly boast Alec’s sexuality to a random child. Even if it was a random child who seemed to know Alec. It didn’t matter though, because Aya wasn’t going to wait for an answer.

“Because I thought Mister Alec liked boys. And papa thinks he’s really pretty, and—”

The impeccably stylish man came back over, paling as he overheard the last part of his daughter’s tirade. He was mortified. “Aya, it’s time to go. We have to pick Keris up from Miss Dorthea’s. Say goodbye to Miss Clary.”

For a moment, Clary looked perplexed. She’d never been introduced to this man before, although she recognized his voice from the phone. Magnus, the customer who’d asked about henna tattoos. He’d scheduled an appointment a few days ago. She didn’t even realize when they left; she hadn’t moved from her kneeling position, staring into space. It felt like she was swimming inside her own head— like she was trying to look out from a snow-globe, but everything was distorted and curved, obfuscated by drifting images of things that felt like cold static. Suddenly she was very tired, her skin was warm, like someone was drawing across it with a hot poker. Alec shook her by the arm, bringing her back to reality, and everything was fine again.
“Clary— class is about to start, we need to line up.” He offered his hand, lifting her off the ground. They jogged through their warm-up in silence before getting back together for the first round of combo practice. Today, their assignment was to work on a combo of knee hit, two punches and a swing kick. It wasn’t hard. For the pad-holder, it was three simple positions with a tombstone pad: kneel with pad down, pad to chest and pad low for the kick. In combat training, it was often harder to be the pad holder than the one punching and kicking— it required anticipating your partner’s movements, protecting yourself from getting hurt while also providing tactile feedback for their movements. Just a little distraction could mess up your timing and earn you a punch to the face or a knee to the stomach.

Alec’s form was normally flawless, so Clary was surprised when Alec moved the pad just a second too late, nearly missing her swing kick. She wrote it off, didn’t say anything, until he missed the mark again, forgetting to raise the pad to his chest for the second part of the combo. She barely stopped her fist before punching him right in the sternum.

“Alec, are you okay?” She huffed, out of breath at this point in the rotation. “You seem a bit distracted?”

“Switch!” She heard the instructor yell, Alec passing her the pad. She could tell he was trying to use this shift as a distraction, an opportunity to drop the question, but she wouldn’t back down so easily.

“Was it something with that guy?” she questioned. Alec wordlessly started with his first combo, going lighter on the kicks and punches than he usually did. “He was the guy who called about the henna, right? His daughter was very cute. But I don’t think she liked me very much….”

“It doesn’t have anything to do with Magnus.” Alec said between grunts, increasing his pressure as he hit the tombstone. Each time he kicked, his shirt hiked up on the sides, showing the bottom of an angry scar on his side. He told Clary it was a bad tattoo he had removed, but she’d never seen tattoo removal go so poorly before, his side mangled with a swirling design she could only assume followed the outline of the old tattoo. It looked familiar somehow, like a billboard you’d seen in passing on a road trip but hadn’t taken notice of. Sometimes it would distract her when she saw it — he never told her what the tattoo originally was, and she couldn’t help but wonder. She couldn’t let her mind think of that today, because Alec was the distracted one. She needed to get to the bottom of this.

“That’s a really weird name. His daughter’s name was weird too…” Clary nearly missed her mark for the knee hit. They were starting to circle each other, Alec leading even though he was the attacker. It was the job of the pad holder to lead, and Clary wasn’t used to not being in control of the movement. Alec was falling into a fighting style she wasn’t as familiar with. He kept the combo, but the grace and agility behind the movements was beautiful. She knew he was holding out on her in their lower level class, but it seemed like today he was slipping into his more natural movements.

“Look, it’s nothing Clary.” He kicked upward with such force that she felt her arms struggle to keep their grip on the pad. “He got a tattoo a few days ago, we were just talking about how it healed.”

“Is he why you’ve been checking your phone?” Clary taunted. “Come on, I notice these things. I spend enough time with you to notice when something’s up—”

With that, she was knocked to the floor. Alec had substituted a push-kick for the swing-kick, and she hadn’t braced herself for the horizontal force. Her back arched as she hit the ground, the air rushing from her lungs all at once. She sat up slowly on her elbows, steadying her breathing and
taking inventory for any potential injury. As she looked up, she expected to see Alec scowling at her—he’d seemed annoyed by her questioning—but instead she saw a look of shock and horror on his face.

“I’m so sorry!” He knelt beside her, supporting her back to help her sit. “I don’t know what came over me there. Sometimes I forget I’m not fighting with Ja—” He stopped, correcting himself. Clary figured he was just talking about one of his expert-class partners that she didn’t know. “I forget who I’m fighting with.” He swallowed, his eyes searching her face for a reaction. “Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine, I think. Just got the air knocked out of me.” She pushed up to her feet, walking over to her water bottle and guzzling it down. “Are you still going to claim you’re not distracted now?”

“You win…” Alec admitted, taking a sip of his own water. “Maybe Magnus was the one I was texting. Well, wasn’t texting.” He took another sip of water, not wanting to explain himself further. Clary just stared at him with knowing eyes, and a facial expression that said ‘You’re going to tell me everything whether you like it or not.’ “You’re the worst—do you know that? Fine. We were texting since I gave Aya her henna tattoo. He came in this week to get his piece done, but after that he stopped texting me back.”

“Well, what did he say to you just now?” Clary leaned forward, linking her arms to stretch her back.

“Nothing. He said a whole lot of nothing. Just ‘sorry for my kid literally running into you, I didn’t know you trained at this gym, it’s nice to see you, I have to go.’ I didn’t have time to get a word in edgewise.” He walked back to their space on the mat, picking up the tombstone and signaling for her to start.

“Well I mean, maybe he really didn’t have time to talk…he does have a kid after all.” She kicked swiftly, trying to mimic some of the smooth transition movements she’d seen him use before he knocked her over.

“Two kids. He has two kids.” Now that he had gotten the tension off his chest, he was back to his precise technique, even while talking.

“You… seem to know a lot about him.” Clary raised an eyebrow, her distraction making her half-miss her swing kick.

“Make sure you ground yourself before that kick. You should be able to have it land right back into a fighting stance. Try that one again by itself.” She listened, but wasn’t happy about him changing the subject.

“Is he single?” She cursed herself for asking the question as soon as the words left her mouth. Judging by how much his daughter favored him, they were likely related. If the daughter was biologically his, there was probably a mother in the picture, and if there was a mother in the picture, maybe Magnus was straight. Poor Alec…she thought.

“Yeah but he has two kids, remember? He flirted with me, sure, but he probably won’t let it go further than that. I mean, if he did want to, he’d be answering my texts, right?”

The instructor called out, changing the combination they’d be working on to be a push kick, a front kick, and a lunging punch. They traded off the pads, with Clary holding them now. She was nervous about being on the receiving end of another one of Alec’s push kicks.
“Go easy on me with the kicks this time, okay?” She laughed. Alec landed the first push kick with barely a tap of his foot, doing all to taunt her but sticking out his tongue. “Look, I can’t tell you why he’s not texting you back. His daughter seems to like you…” She left out the part about how Aya said that Magnus did like Alec. It wasn’t her place to say. “But the best thing to do would be to get your mind off it. Why don’t you come with me to a concert tonight?”

“I don’t know Clary, I just went with you to a concert last week and it was terrible. It was full of weird fraternity boys and obnoxious party girls.” He hated front kicks, they always felt silly to him.

“Hey, back when I started listening to Passion Pit, the only people who liked them were chill hipsters. I didn’t know they were popular with the jock crowd now!” She reached the pad a bit higher for his kicks, testing his flexibility. “This is MARINA, it’ll be different.”

“Never heard of her.” Alec said, switching to left-handed stance to challenge himself.

“She’s very popular with the LGBT community….” She hinted. “Maybe you’d meet someone else, it could be a good distraction.”

“Ugh. Do I really have a choice? If I say no, you’re just going to tell Luke you’re going alone, and then he’ll call me and ask me to go with you for protection.” He landed the last kick a bit harder. “I’ll go, but I’m going to complain about it the whole time.”

“No you won’t, you always say that and then you always have fun! Well, except for Passion Pit. Plus, we can pregame before, have some fun!” They switched off the pads, Clary kicking now.

“What if I have clients tonight? Did you think of that?” He started to move around a bit, forcing Clary to follow him with her movements.

“I do your scheduling. I know for a fact that you’re free tonight.” She swapped out one of the front kicks for a roundhouse, but it was weak. Alec pushed the pad against her foot to add resistance, causing her to sway and nearly fall.

“No substitutions—you have to get good at the basics. That roundhouse was awful, by the way.”

As they kept fighting, she could tell that Alec was more relaxed—even if the difference was subtle. They focused on the training, their sparse conversation consisting of plans for the evening. It was going to be fun—Clary would make sure of it.

“Good Evening Brooklyn!” The band screamed above the roaring crowd, the PA system pleasantly buzzing. Sound echoed against the steel ceiling of the abandoned factory, the dusty metallic smell of rusted iron beams overpowering the potentially unpleasant scent of approximately five hundred bodies crammed into the medium-sized space.

Clary had disappeared sometime during the opener, sticking to her typical script. By now, she’d probably made quick friends with a group of people, cajoling them into taking shots and dancing with her. Clary had a habit of getting pretty drunk at these types of events, but it was never particularly worrisome. In an enclosed environment like this, it was simple enough to keep track of her; Alec could easily see above a crowd. He didn’t mind that she split off from him at concerts—he preferred it actually. While flirting wasn’t his primary objective, it didn’t do him any favors
hanging around one girl all night. People might assume he was straight, or worse— that Clary was his girlfriend. At this concert in particular, it wasn’t a risk Alec wanted to take. According to Clary — and judging by the appearance of the audience— the band was very popular with the LGBT crowd. Clary had pointed out several times that it might be a good situation for Alec to meet someone, although he was doubtful that it was possible to meet anyone in such a loud, chaotic environment.

The anonymity of being a face in a crowd appealed to Alec’s introversion, staving off the insecurity that would make him too timid to dance. Electro-pop music wasn’t his favorite— he would never listen to it on his own— but it was great for dancing. It was the kind of music anyone could dance to— calling for bouncing bodies and flailing limbs, swaying in relative time with the beat. Flailing, bouncing and swaying were things even Alec could manage. Shadowhunters carried themselves with grace and agility, but that didn’t transfer naturally to casual dancing.

The first few times Clary dragged him to a concert, he was all sharp angles and stiff limbs, struggling to feel natural, but after some practice he learned how to let go, loosen up, just move with the crowd. It helped that tonight, he’d indulged in sharing a joint with Clary while they waited in line, although he knew that halfway through the main set the effects would wear off. He didn’t need that crutch anymore, but it still felt good, his body buzzing, his mind warm.

Clary was right, there were plenty of guys at the concert, and at various points through the set, a few drifted over to dance with him. He didn’t get any of their names over the pounding bass and trilling synth solos, but they were all nice enough. There was a redhead who danced with him through the second song before floating back to his friends with a wink. He looked too much like he could be related to Clary for his taste. There was the dark haired, tan boy with wandering hands, who’d slipped his number into Alec’s back pocket before meandering back to the bar. And then there was the muscular blonde, who, despite being the type of dancer who could make anyone feel sensual and comfortable, reminded him far too much of Jace to be an option.

It was nearing the end of the show, and the call for the first encore was Alec’s cue to find Clary. Standing on his toes, he towered above the crowd. Her flash of red hair was usually easy to spot, her curls bouncing like licks of fire from a pale, tapered candle flame. She was near the front of the stage, surrounded by a group of boys with hair bleached and dyed to various pastel tints. Based on their dancing, it was clear she wasn’t their type, but they were all having fun regardless. Navigating through the densely packed floor wasn’t easy, but he could make it before the end of the set. He muttered a few ‘excuse me’ s and ‘pardon’ s, trying to squeeze around the dancing drunk people without being rude.

“Alecccc!” Clary slurred, her green eyes watery and distant, but cheerful. “Guys! Guyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!” She tapped a few of her companions shoulders, seemingly at random, gesturing for them to turn to Alec. “Thisss— ” She poked Alec in the chest a bit too hard, her nail digging into the fabric of his shirt. “ — is my friend Alec. He’s suuuupper single.” She mock whispered, winking at the shortest boy in the group, whose pink hair matched his starched pink oxford shirt. Not his type— at all.

Alec never had a chance to reluctantly respond, a forceful bump knocking him away from the Clary-centered-circle.

“Scatter pastel gays! Sleepy kid coming through!” Magnus was confidently striding through the crowd, walking in a straight line as if there weren’t bodies cramped every few feet in his path. His daughter sat on his shoulders, her arms wrapped around the top of his head— her stacked bracelets forming an endearing makeshift tiara. “Oh Alexander— I didn’t realize you were there. Sorry for steamrolling you.” The warlock spun, clutching tightly to Aerulei’s tiny legs to stabilize her. Her
holographic glitter sneakers tapped against his chest to the beat, flakes of glitter snowing downward. Large noise-blocking headphones protected her ears, outfitted with LED lights that appeared to flash along with the music.

“Aya, Magnus!” Alec smiled, reorienting himself.

“I never would have pegged you for a MARINA fan.” Magnus smirked, the flashing lights reflecting in his dark glamoured irises.

“Ah,” Alec fumbled over his words slightly. “Clary brought me.” Alec shrugged. “Speaking of Clary, I was about to just drag my child home, too.” He gestured over his shoulder with his thumb. “She’s pretty drunk and it’s always easier to leave before the encore is over—” While Alec spoke, Magnus’ face paled, his mouth falling open wide.

“Yes, we need to get her home—now.” Magnus said, punctuated seconds later by the sound of Clary vomiting. “Don’t worry, I’ve got this.” The warlock instantly sprung into action, passing Aerulei over to Alec and pushing his way over to Clary, who continued to get sick, to the dismay of her fast friends. They edged away, an open space growing around the crying, vomiting Clary.

“Hey there, biscuit…” Alec heard Magnus start in a gentle voice. She probably didn’t remember Magnus from earlier that day, and certainly not his familiar nickname for her, but even if he’d called her by her first name, she was too far gone to notice.

Alec couldn’t pay attention to what was happening between the two of them, all of his attention commandeered by the wiggling child abruptly thrust into his arms. His long arms easily lifted her high enough above his head to allow her to plop down on his shoulders, knocking a little wind from his lungs.

“HI MISTER ALEC!” She yelled loudly, unable to gauge her voice volume over her noise-dampening headphones. “YOUR FRIEND WILL BE OKAY! PAPA WILL TAKE CARE OF HER. HE ALWAYS FIXES MY SICK TUMMY.”

Alec grabbed her calves, swinging her legs around to the music. She giggled into his hair, burying her head on top of his. Magnus was already walking back to them, cradling Clary in a bridal carry. He gestured toward the back of the venue, signaling for Alec to walk toward the exit. It was surprisingly more stressful navigating a dancing crowd while carrying a child. Suddenly, every pair of flailing arms was an enemy, threatening to jeopardize his precious cargo. He had no idea how Magnus would possibly make it through carrying Clary sideways, but he was almost certain some amount of magic was involved. The journey felt like ages, but in reality had only taken half a song. Once outside, Magnus walked half a block down the street, out of the way of the anticipated crowds flooding the venue at any moment.

“Ugh.” Magnus grunted, lowering Clary to her feet and leaning her still-unconscious body against the brick wall. “She is so tiny—” He stretched his arms in front of himself in a display of physical exertion, although Alec had a sneaking suspicion that he’d been heavily supplementing his physical strength with magic. He knew Magnus would never admit to that— he had too much pride. “—but she weighs more than Ragnor after a dessert buffet.” The warlock continued to stretch, cracking his neck and bolstering the ruse. “I always forget that the nephilim blood that runs in your veins makes you lot deceptively heavy.”

Alec wasn’t sure if this was an insult, a compliment, or just a casual non sequitur. His natural response was to shrug, but that wasn’t exactly possible with a four year old sitting on his shoulders. It didn’t matter much that he didn’t respond— Magnus kept talking anyway. It struck Alec that maybe spending most of his time with children made the warlock very comfortable keeping a
“Clearly, Clary is in no shape to make it home by herself, so I’m going to portal her to Luke’s. It’s not like she’s going to remember it, so no worries about the whole ‘revealing the downworld’ thing… That’s a discussion for a rainy day by the way, Alexander. I mean you run a tattoo shop catering to downworlders, but you’ve managed to completely conceal those details from Clary? Either you’ve done an impressive job keeping her in the ‘magical witness protection program’, or she’s not as… observant… as I thought…”

“Yes Magnus, we can table that discussion. But for now?” Alec could feel Aya playing with his hair, twisting it into individual curls. She was very quiet, although that might have been because she couldn’t hear their conversation over her headphones.

“For now, I take her back to Luke’s. I’ll do a quick physical scan of her with my magic as well, just to make sure she wasn’t drugged or has alcohol poisoning.” Clary slumped against the wall, but the warlock’s reflexes were quick, catching her with ease.

“I’m sure she’s fine. She does this all the time. This is kind of her thing.” Alec rolled his hazel eyes, but he couldn’t notice himself how the streetlights refracted off the golden flecks in his iris. He didn’t notice how Magnus had to blink, momentarily speechless when he did notice. Thankfully, the warlock recovered quickly.

“We all have our things, don’t we?” He winked, turning back to Clary.

While supporting her with one hand, he used his other to make a portal. As he picked her up again, Alec caught the delicate tendrils of magic below Magnus’ fingertips, confirming that the bravado was just that—a show. ‘Could he be trying to impress me?’ Alec thought, and fought hard to dismiss the idea. He found himself coming up short, his only option to accept that yes, the gorgeous man in front of him was flirting. ‘He’s always been flirting, you idiot’ he heard his sister’s voice in his head. ‘He’s been flirting ever since you fired that arrow at Pandemonium’.

Alec was getting lost in his head, the social chaos of the evening catching up with him as thoughts split up in all different directions.

“I’ll be right back. Two minutes— tops.” Magnus glanced over his shoulder to Alec. “Will you be okay with Aya?”

“Of course. She’ll be fine. I have an enchanted butterfly knife on me.” The younger man stood up straight, taking his assignment far too seriously, he realised as he heard Magnus chuckle.

“Coming from anyone else, that is the last thing I would want to hear someone say while holding my child.” As he walked into the portal cradling Clary, he yelled. “You shadowhunters, always thinking with your weapons!” The portal crackled, closing behind him.

With that, Magnus was gone, and Alec was alone with the young warlock. Aya was quietly humming the melody to one of the songs from the concert, ‘Primadonna’ if Alec was remembering properly. Her hands went from playing with his hair to wrapping around his head as she used his now curled hair as a pillow. Without the energy of the music to keep her awake, it became incredibly apparent that it was far past her bedtime. She was fading fast.

“Aerulei…” Alec whispered, reaching his arm up to lift up one side of her headphones. “You awake?” He didn’t get a response. Her humming was replaced by tiny, gentle snores. Keeping her perched on his shoulders was difficult as her body went limp with sleep. It no longer felt stable or safe, so Alec slowly shifted her around, lowering her down so he was holding her normally, clung to his chest like a monkey with her arms around his neck. She was a little too old to be carried like
this, a little too big, but he was strong enough to manage it. He knew that as a shadowhunter child, affection was not given freely. Children would get scolded for asking to be picked up once they were able to walk on their own. But that was one of the limitless opinions of The Clave Alec took issue with. He believed children should be nurtured and loved.

“Well, she went down easier than Keris!” Magnus laughed as he hopped out of another portal.

“Ssh!” Alec glared, pointing to the sleeping girl. “She’s asleep.”

“Ah, she’s always tuckered out after a concert.” Magnus walked closer to Alec and Aya, looking at his daughter with the warmth of years of memories. “The second the music stops it’s as if someone pushed her ‘off’ button.” He brushed a strand of hair from her forehead. Still asleep, she smiled at the light touch.

“I didn’t know four-year-olds had those.” Alec whispered.

“They’re located outside our realm of knowledge.” Magnus reached his arms out for Alec to give him Aya, but Alec hesitated to hand her over. “What is it? Is something wrong?” Magnus went through a roulette of paternal emotions, clicking just past ‘defensive’ and landing on ‘confused’.

“I just… don’t want to wake her up.” Alec’s cheeks flushed. The words felt silly, but they were the truth. As Alec cradled her a bit tighter, Magnus took a step back and stared at the scene in front of him; He was thinking. A second of silence from Magnus was terrifying, at least in this context, but the tension was finally split by the familiar sound of a portal forming.

“It’s settled then—you’re coming back to the loft with us, and you can put her to bed.” As Alec stepped toward the portal, Magnus followed close. Before they went through, he leaned over and whispered in Alec’s ear. “On one condition—you have to stay for a drink”

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact, I get in trouble frequently with my sparring partner at the gym for throwing unsolicited roundhouse kicks.

I know I normally give you a hint for what happens in the next chapter… but I think the last sentence said enough.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

So there is some light angst in this chapter, but it's just the growing pains of the relationship, I promise! This is as 'dark' as any chapter will get to be honest, so if you are here for fluff do not fret, there is still lots of fluff in this chapter, and there are some cute moments too. At least I think they're cute!

There were two songs that inspired me for this chapter. So give 'em a listen if you want to get in the mood.
-Weak by AJR
-Late Night Feelings by Mark Ronson/Lykke Li

Also, my editing on this was a tiny bit less thorough, so please be gentle.

“I can’t believe she slept through all that movement.” Alec whispered. “I tried not to jostle her, but I wasn’t as smooth as I thought…” He scratched the back of his neck awkwardly, cursing his own actions as he walked back to the hall.

“You did fine, Alexander. More than fine, actually. Normally I end up waking her.” Magnus backed out of the room quietly, making his footsteps as quiet as a shadowhunter with a soundless rune. He loved watching her sleep, and he didn’t want to miss a second before he turned off the lights. Walking backwards hadn’t been the best decision, he realized as he tripped over the fluffy rug and fell backwards. A pair of strong arms caught him, wrapping around his waist. It shouldn’t have been a surprise—Alec was the perfect protector. But the feeling of contact, the safety and security of the gesture, it was almost too much.

Neither of them said anything. There was no ‘thank you’, no remark about Magnus’ clumsiness. The shared tension was palpable, even at such an innocent touch. Even though the touch was through layers of clothing. They were, however, still standing in the doorway to his daughter’s room—not the most appropriate place to be having these thoughts. Alec seemed to pick up on this as well, clearing his throat as he gently placed Magnus’ feet steady on the ground. Magnus closed the door to his daughter’s room, carefully twisting the knob closed so it didn’t make a sound.

“So, how about those drinks?” Magnus broke the silence, walking down the short hallway and back to the living room.

“That sounds great.” Alec said. He flopped down into the couch. “You’ve redecorated. It’s more cozy.” His legs stretched out comfortably on this sofa and he eyed a plush blanket with a curious desire. Magnus wondered how the tough nephilim would look snuggled up in blankets, but he shook away the thought.

“I err on the side of practicality these days.” Magnus pulled a key out of his pocket, opening a tall cabinet. “Two kids will do that to you.” The doors swung open, revealing a well stocked wet bar, the bottles of liquor occupying the topmost shelf. “My bar cart, for instance, was the first casualty.” Waving his hand lazily, he conjured up two old fashioneds, giving them a quick swirl with the wooden stirrers. He handed the drink to Alec sheepishly, a bit ashamed. “It’s no glowing
martini, but this is my favorite nightcap.”

“No, it’s great actually. I don’t need anything fancy.” Alec took a sip of the dark amber liquid, savoring the taste.

“That’s new’. Magnus thought to himself. Last time they were here, having drinks in the loft, Alec winced at the taste of alcohol in his martini. The scrunched up face he’d made was endearing, sure, but there was something alluring about how suave the man looked now, swirling his glass slowly between sips.

“When life gets complicated, simpler pleasures are somehow the most rewarding.” Magnus sat down on the other side of the couch, curling in his legs into a ball.

“You’re still so cryptic.” Alec laughed, a warm, full-bellied sound. “Some things never change.”

“If I was direct, that would make things too easy for you, wouldn’t it?”

“Hmm?” Alec feigned ignorance, raising his eyebrow as he sipped more of his drink. “You know, I see through it now, the riddles, the jokes.”

“Oh do you?” Magnus taunted.

“Give me a little credit here, I work with people all day.”

“How did you end up doing that? I mean, working in cafe, you probably can't beat those tips, but the tattoo shop? There has to be an interesting story there. I’ve been dying to ask, but I didn’t want to in front of the kids. I mean, given that you are an ex-shadowhunter and all…” Magnus trailed.

“You had plenty of opportunities to ask while I was inking you.” Alec smirked, and Magnus found himself blushing beet red.

He felt like he needed fresh air, like the room was suddenly too hot. Stifling even. If there had been a map for navigating a conversation with Alec Lightwood, it had been ripped out from under him. Every twist and turn of the dialogue caught him off guard, unprepared for the flirtation. It was one thing to be coy and a flirt, or an egregious extravagant flirt, but Alec was something much more dangerous: he was a direct flirt. Blunt flirts know how to get under your skin. They leave even the most eloquent at a loss for words, they smack you in the face with your own feelings.

“Fresh air. That was exactly what they were going to get.

“You know what I just thought of?” He spoke quickly, not waiting for an answer. “This might be one of the last nights where it’s warm enough to sit outside!” With a flick of his wrist, the french doors swung open.

Alec looked a bit dejected. Magnus had clearly underestimated just how enamored Alec was with his couch. The thought hit him that maybe the exiled Lightwoods didn’t have the most comfortable living conditions. Maybe Alec didn’t have a couch he could stretch out all the way on. A confusing surge of protectiveness swelled in Magnus. He swiftly brushed it aside; it wasn’t his place to feel that way.

Reluctantly, the archer stood, grabbing his drink and catching up with Magnus.

“Plus… maybe I have an ulterior motive here.” The warlock's voice dropped low, nearly to a purr.

“What?” Alec looked flustered, freezing in place. A tiny blush crept up his pale cheeks
Magnus was proud—he might be kicking and clawing, but he was determined to get the upper hand again. Closing the distance between himself and Alec, he stopped when they were very close—painfully close—mere centimeters apart. The little distance between them meant that Magnus could feel the way Alec’s breath hitched in his chest, he could feel the man stiffen with a nervous anticipation. It was obvious that Alec had no idea what was happening, which was what Magnus was banking on. He wanted to let Alec sweat, watch as his head spun trying to figure out what trick Magnus had up his sleeve. Magnus tilted Alec’s chin, staring eye-to-eye with the archer. Alec swallowed, his lips pressing into a line—he was clearly uncomfortable with this suspense, so Magnus gave in and finally broke it. With deft fingers he reached into the watch pocket of Alec’s skinny jeans, sliding out a metal card case.

“I might not be the High Warlock of Brooklyn anymore,” He flicked open the case. “... but that doesn’t mean I still can’t be a high warlock.” He plucked out a joint, holding it up playfully.

“How did you—” Alec stammered.

“I might be old, but I’m not oblivious.” Magnus scoffed, leaning in a hair closer, whispering in the other man’s ear. “Even if I couldn’t smell it, the green in your hazel eyes makes the redness look even more obvious.”

“Did it really give me away?” Alec grinned.

“I’ll only judge if you won’t share.” Magnus pulled Alec onto the balcony, shutting the doors behind them.

“Nah, it’s okay. I get it from Bat in exchange for work on his sleeve. He’s still got half his arm left to go, so my supply won’t dry up anytime soon.”

Just as Magnus was about to light the joint with magic, Alec pulled out a red lighter from his back pocket, plucking the joint from Magnus hand and lighting the tip. He passed it back to the warlock, giving him the first puff. It wasn’t something Magnus was used to. He didn’t indulge nearly as much anymore—after all, he was someone’s father. But he was still a nightclub owner, still a freewheeling bisexual warlock, and still a connoisseur of myriad vices.

“Speaking of tattoos—” Magnus spoke as he exhaled, holding in some of his breath. His voice deepened, becoming a bit raspy. “For a tattoo artist, you don’t seem to have many tattoos at all. The only one I’ve seen is the small arrow on your arm.”

“Well, this might sound dumb, but it’s kind of liberating to have mostly bare skin. When I was a shadowhunter, I didn’t get to choose whether or not I wanted runes. My only option was to have permanent or temporary runes, and I’m sure you know this, but temporary runes always leave thin silver scars behind. That’s why most of us prefer permanent runes—the black ones. It looks nicer over time.”

“I never thought of it that way. Nephilim always wear their marks with such… “ Magnus was searching for a descriptor that wouldn’t be insulting.

“Arrogance?” Alec didn’t beat around the bush. He said exactly what Magnus was thinking. “We — well they I guess— see them as our birthright from the Angel. They show everyone our power. But what I never realized is that you lose agency over your own body. It becomes just a tool, another weapon in the honorable and dutiful fight.”

“I don’t think it’s all so bad.” Magnus mused, dancing the line between making a statement and playing devil’s advocate. “I mean, clearly some shadowhunters take artistic liberties with their
rune placement. I know a lot of downworlders like to berate the appearance of runes, but I’ve seen some that are particularly… flattering.”

“What, like Izzy?” Alec took a hit, holding in the smoke for a few seconds before blowing his smoke out into the open air. “You should have seen how angry mom was when she put the Angelic Power rune on her chest. I actually ended up doing something to get in trouble just to take some of the heat off of her.”

“I always wondered how both of Maryse Lightwood’s children got away with such daring runes. To be honest, I thought the nephilim rejected pandering to beauty altogether, but I was proven wrong.”

“Both? Oh, I mean, Jace never put much effort into his placements— actually I put most of his permanent runes on him—” “Not Jace Wayland, Morgenstern, Lightwood, Herondale—- whatever his name is this month.”

“Oh, I heard through Izzy that he settled on Herondale actually—” Alec pointed out, his voice a bit distant.

“That’s beside the point. I was talking about you, Alexander.” Magnus was not going to let him change the subject.

“You… you were?” Alec seemed so surprised that anyone would talk about him that way. Magnus remembered when the shadowhunters had come to summon the memory demon— when he’d said ‘pretty boy’ and Jace stepped forward so confidently. Alec might have been showing Magnus a new side of himself with his novel flirting and confidence, but there was still an echo of the old Alec, who wasn’t so sure of himself. Maybe now, out of his parabatai’s shadow, something changed in Alec— but the journey away from that clearly wasn’t complete.

“There’s no way you placed that deflect rune on your neck just for convenience’s sake.” Magnus deadpanned, plucking the joint from Alec. “You had to know how gorgeous that looked.” They were both leaning against the railing, and Magnus scooted closer, close enough to touch the nephilim’s neck. “Right here…” He started to trace the deflect rune that used to mark the now flawless skin. “It emphasized your bone structure, made your impeccable jawline impossible to ignore.”

“I’m sorry if you miss it.” Alec turned away abruptly, snatching up the joint and taking a long hit.

“No such thing. Seeing you this way, I don’t see the burden of the shadowhunter life, and all the negativity that comes with it. All I see is an incredibly irresistible, beautiful, handsome, sexy man — who really knows how to leave a mark on a guy.” Magnus winked. It briefly occurred to him that he might already be feeling the high— or maybe the whiskey— or maybe both. It had been years since he’d been crossfaded. What does this boy do to me? I’m someone’s father for Lillith’s sake. He knew there was no real danger here. With his magic, he could easily sober up instantly. But he didn’t want to. Both kids were peacefully asleep, and he had a gorgeous man standing in front of him. And not just any hot guy— this was Alec Lightwood.

“Well, uh— thanks?” Alec clearly didn’t know how to take the compliment, adding more evidence to Magnus’ suspicion that his ramblings were heavily influenced by his mild intoxication. He secretly waved his fingers by his side, easing up the heady feeling he had, and making his mind just a tad clearer. He didn’t want to risk making a complete fool out of himself.

“Speaking of marks—” Alec continued. “How is your tattoo?” Alec snuffed out the joint, sitting it on the patio table.
“Do you want to see it?” Magnus smiled innocently—but they both knew it wasn’t innocent at all. He started to unbutton his shirt, but suddenly his hands were covered by Alec’s long fingers, gently pushing his out of the way. Was Alec trying to stop him? But Magnus’ panic only lasted a second, as Alec undid the buttons himself. His movements were languid, unhurried, as his long fingers slipped each button open. It was torturous how the man’s attention was completely focused on the task, because if Alec looked up and made eye contact with Magnus, the warlock was certain it would have been one of the hottest events in the history of the world. But instead, Alec continued, literally head-down in the work. Around button three, Alec’s index finger brushed just underneath Magnus’ collar bone, giving the warlock goosebumps that had absolutely nothing to do with the autumn chill and everything to do with how this man was seemingly undoing him rather than just undoing the buttons on his shirt. Each moment stretched out for an eternity, and Magnus wondered if maybe this was his heaven, and Alexander would never finish unbuttoning his shirt. He did eventually stop about six buttons down, splaying the sides of the shirt open and fully exposing the planes of the warlock’s chest.

Magnus was thankful that he’d decided to speed up the healing a bit. Tattoos had a habit of flaking after a few days, and there wasn’t much sexy about that.

“It looks great— but I can tell you had a little help here.” Alec reached out, tracing an outline around the serpentine design. “You know if it hurt after, I could have given you an ice pack— you didn’t have to magically heal it.” Alec was talking, but it was barely a murmur. The words didn’t matter. They were standing so close that in the chilly fall air, they were sharing one envelope of heat.

With Alec’s hand on his chest, Magnus didn’t have a chance of finding a coherent thought. His mind was just one word, one general concept, one entity: Alexander.

He barely felt it happening. He didn’t know who blinked first. But slowly their lips found each other, brushing together hesitantly to ask permission in a way neither of them were capable of vocalizing. They each gave in freely, their bodies pulling even closer, Alec fistng Magnus’ shirt and holding on tight. This chaste kiss couldn’t maintain its sweet innocence, begging for them to give into the passion, the static, the spark, and deepen it. Just as Magnus wrapped his arms around Alec’s neck, he heard the door open, a small voice interrupting their tryst before it even really began.

“Papa, I had a bad dream, could you warm up my blankie for me—” Aya stood in the doorway, clutching a green fuzzy blanket against her chest. She was so small that it was dragging the floor behind her.

Alec and Magnus broke apart, nearly jumping to create space between them.

“Aya, sayang, of course. Why don’t you go wait for me in your room while I pop this in the dryer.” Instead of dealing with his embarrassment, Magnus chose to throw himself completely into responsible-parent-mode, or his Momnus Bane role as Caterina called it.

Alec stood there with a look of shock on his face, eyes darting from Magnus, to Aya, and back to Magnus— clearly not over the fact that he was just caught kissing him by his daughter.

“Oh— Hi Mister Alec. Are you and papa having a sleepover?” She furrowed her brow, her already sleepy eyes narrowing further as she cocked her head to the side.

“Oh… no Aerulei… I was just… I was just going home actually. Good night.” Alec ran his hand through his hair nervously, abruptly walking hurriedly toward the front door.
The front door closed quietly behind Alec, despite his hasty exit. He was clearly flustered, but still considerate. Magnus felt his absence almost immediately, it was like a blanket had been ripped off of him and now he was shocked by the cold. He was actually rather cold, as a light breeze flowed through the open patio doors. Aya stood there, staring up at him, looking incredibly confused. He closed the doors, shuffling Aya back into her room. Instead of going to the laundry room with her to warm the blanket, he used his magic. The comfort of his daughter’s warm blanket helped her drift right back to sleep, but sleep didn’t come so easily for Magnus that night.

All he could think about was how natural it felt to put Aya to bed with Alec. To go out to the living room and lounge on the couch, to hang out on the porch and idly chat for however long they liked. That adult connection was something that he hated to admit he missed. Sure, he had friends, he had Ragnor, Catarina, Dot, even Tessa—but he didn’t have an Alec. He had his whole world with him, both of his children were there, but he still felt alone. The vacuum that Alec left behind as he left so suddenly made Magnus admit something he’d been trying to avoid—Alexander wasn’t just someone he was attracted to, he wasn’t just someone who he liked. Somehow Alexander made the house feel more like home. It was exciting, if not potentially dangerous. Magnus poured himself another drink. He knew he was being melodramatic, letting his mind make such sweeping assumptions about a man he barely knew, but he couldn’t push it down. He ended up falling asleep on the couch that night, curled up in his blanket, trying not to think about how the couch smelled like Alec, and definitely trying to forget how perfect his lips felt when they kissed.

“Fuck.” Alec mumbled, angrily pressing the buttons on his phone. He was hoping and praying that maybe it had just turned off in his pocket, that it wasn’t dead.

But as the screen flashed with the ‘low battery’ symbol, he had no option but to admit defeat. There was no way he was getting an Uber home. Magnus’ loft was almost an hours’ walk from home, the same route he biked from the coffee shop, and at this hour the ferry wasn’t running. A bus would have taken almost as long as walking, since it was an indirect route. Maybe if he hadn’t fled so quickly, he could have asked for a portal, or even just ordered a ride from Magnus’ phone, but it was too late now; there was no way of recovering from the awkward way he left that situation.

It was almost poetic, really, having to walk an hour home. Alec absolutely did not want to think about what had just happened, but now he had an hour with nothing to do except think about it. Making matters worse, he was only lightly buzzed—just enough for his emotions to be tumultuous, but not enough to be able to forget about it. He fished in his pocket to get out a joint, but came up empty. ‘Great. I left my drugs behind. That’s a super responsible thing to do in a house with two young kids. I’m sure that’ll definitely leave a good impression on Magnus.’

As he walked down block after deserted block, he came up with new theories about how he already messed things up with Magnus, how the warlock would never want to see him again. Then he found himself wondering why he cared—he’d been okay being single for this long, why did he have to push the issue now? A casual date here and there had always been good enough. Hell—having grown up in the Institute, he never even thought he could have a one night stand, let alone a relationship. And so, Alec’s revolving narrative of self-loathing continued to spiral.

That’s why, when he walked past a 24-hour bodega, he entered it with a terrible idea. If he was being honest, he wasn’t even sure why he was doing it—when he saw the screw-top bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon on the checkout counter, it was just as much of a surprise to him as it would have been to anyone else. The man behind the counter seemed ambivalent to the whole ordeal,
neither commenting or judging.

The crinkling sound of unscrewing the bottle cap signaled a welcome start to the second-leg of the walk. He took a long swig, swallowing down an inch of the volume in one go. The taste was warm on his tongue, bitter and tangy, but just a bit sweet. Cabernet was Alec’s comfort food out of all the types of alcohol. Even if it was swill-quality—as this bodega wine undeniably was—something about it made him feel secure. It was the first alcohol he’d grown to like, it was what he always drank with his mom at dinner, he’d order it when he went on dates. Cab Sauv was his safety blanket.

He held the bottle by the neck, taking a sip each time his thoughts felt too negative, trying instead to focus on the positives. The concert had been great; for once, he genuinely liked the music, even if it wasn’t his style at all.

‘Yes, but you danced with a lot of guys who weren’t Magnus. You didn’t even get to dance with Magnus.’

Alec took another sip, redirecting his thoughts. He was only about halfway home, he couldn’t afford to let his mind spiral again. He found another positive: he didn’t have to deal with drunk Clary—Magnus had taken care of her, carried her home, and made sure she was okay. That was one less responsibility he had to deal with tonight. Usually, he didn’t have any help.

‘Sure, but he takes care of his kids all day, and then you made him feel like Clary was his responsibility too.’

That notion was easily dismissed. Even though he was incredibly cross-faded, Alec knew that thought had no merit and was ridiculous.

There was one thing about the night, though, that ate at his mind for the rest of the walk. Once he started thinking about it, he couldn’t stop, flopping back and forth on the positives and negatives, fighting with himself to understand the objective significance of it all: the kiss. Sure, it had been interrupted, that was awkward. Could Alec really blame himself for running off after that? He didn’t want to intrude on Magnus’ family responsibilities. To be honest, it had been rather presumptuous to go back to the loft with Magnus in the first place. Alec had known what he was getting into—the warlock hadn’t been shy about asking him ahead of time to stay for drinks.

The subtext behind that statement could have meant many things, after all. After a date, being asked to come back to their place for a drink almost always means ‘come home with me and have sex’. But this hadn’t been a date. Alec cursed himself for even following that train of thought, since it was absurd. He looked down at his bottle, half-empty now, and decided not to be too hard on himself—he was most definitely drunk.

Random thoughts, conspiracy theories, fantasies and bouts of self-sabotage fired off one after another, making time pass alarmingly fast. Either that, or Alec blacked out for part of the walk—neither option was preferable. His nephilim blood, despite his lack of marks, meant that even drunk, he wasn’t particularly clumsy, making it possible to safely climb the rickety stairs into his apartment. Maryse was asleep, and he didn’t want to wake her up, so he tried his best to be quiet. This attempt was thwarted when the screen door decided to spring closed, with a force that rattled the pictures on the wall.

Her reflexes were still sharp, and before his drunken brain could process his misstep, Maryse had rushed out of bed, grabbed a knife, and bolted down the hall. Her face was relieved when she saw that it was only Alec.
“Alec, it’s just you.” She sighed, putting down her knife on the kitchen table. “You had me a little worried when you didn’t come home, but I figured that maybe you stayed with Clary and Luke and you just forgot to text me…”

As she rambled on with motherly affection, Alec couldn’t really process much of it. He had the urge to explain himself, but it was overpowered by the urge to go to sleep. Settling for a middle ground, his brain formulated what he thought was a succinct explanation.

“Left the concert with Aya.” Despite his best efforts, his words were still slurred. “Had some drinks. Walked home. Goodnight Mom.” Maryse stood there speechless, not sure how to process this string of vague information. Alec walked right past her down the hall. It would have been a great idea to grab a glass of water before going to his room, but Alec wasn’t in the state of mind to have great ideas.

As soon as he clambered into his room, he flopped down face-first on the bed, lucky to have not flattened The Clave on his descent. Thankfully, the cat was laying near his pillow, rather annoyed to be woken up. It didn’t take long for Alec to fall asleep, but until he did, all he could think about were two undeniable facts about the events of the night: that kiss was amazing, and he really, really, potentially problematically, liked Magnus Bane.

Chapter End Notes

So next chapter, Alec has a hangover, Magnus need some coffee, and of course, there’s going to be some kind of situation that inevitably brings the two together ;) Side note, there will be a Halloween chapter coming up soon, it’s just a few chapters away!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Everybody needs breakfast, right?

Chapter Notes

Normally I wait until midnight to post, but I’m sleepy. So here you go, a whole 28 minutes early!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“For the charges raised against you in regards to your interference in the interrogation of the Seelie Knight Meliorn, the council finds you guilty on all accounts. By the laws we serve to uphold, you have committed high treason, and will be sentenced accordingly.”

Nobody spoke up. Not a word of outrage. That’s when he knew it was over.

“Alexander Gideon Lightwood, by order of The Clave, you are to be stripped of your runes and exiled from the society of the shadowhunters. Do you have any last words to say to the council?”

No matter what he said, it wouldn’t change anything. He didn’t even remember what he’d said. It felt like all of this was happening to a stranger.

“Very well. The process will begin today at sundown. Preparations shall be made for you to adjust to mundane life. Please gather your personal belongings and say your goodbyes. After today, you will no longer be allowed to step foot into any Institute. Do I make myself clear?”

Then there was Lydia, offering the closest thing to words of kindness.

“Thank you for the years you have given to serve the cause in the fight against demon kind. We do not wish ill upon you, Mr. Lightwood. With time, perhaps you can find a new path.”

The smell of fresh coffee stirred Alec awake. Not the type of fancy, fresh-roasted coffee he made at the cafe— no, this was just regular, black, grocery-store pre-ground coffee. It was just what he needed for a hangover, thank the Angel. As he rolled over, he nearly crushed The Clave, who managed to plaster his furry body to Alec’s side while he slept, subsequently taking up almost half the bed. With a rumbling growl, the enormous animal leapt from his bed, escaping to the hall. There were many things about being awake that were disorienting. First off, he was still in his clothes from the night before, ripe with the smell of concert sweat, marijuana smoke, whiskey, and something else much more alarming: the Cabernet. That led Alec to the second uncomfortable detail— he vaguely remembered stumbling home, drinking on the street like a hobo. It suddenly
occurred to him that this was illegal, carrying an open container and most likely being heavily intoxicated in public, so he thanked his stars he wasn’t waking up in jail.

Luke probably would have bailed him out, since he still worked for the force, but that was beside the point. As if all of this weren’t bad enough, unsurprisingly, his sleep had been fitful at best, triggering and terrifying at worst. He was clammy and agitated, and when those sensations combined with his pounding headache, he could almost lie to himself and claim he had the flu. That would be far easier than owning up to the disaster he’d been the night before. He still didn’t want to process any of it, so he reluctantly rolled out of bed to take a quick shower, the promise of a stiff dose of caffeine calling him to action.

A few minutes later, he was clean, warm, and he didn’t smell like a back alley. By some miracle, he’d only slept until 7:30, so he wasn’t going to be late to his 10:00am shift at the coffee shop. Just thinking of all the clanging cups and clinking glasses sharpened his headache to a fever pitch. He wasn’t sure how he would survive the day. He shimmied into a pair of looser black jeans, feeling bloated from the copious amounts of alcohol he consumed the night before. Sticking with the cafe uniform, he pulled on a plain, black crew neck t-shirt, slipped on black socks, and slid his feet into a pair of black converse. Although combat boots were still his preferred footwear, after stepping on his fellow baristas’ toes one too many times, he put aside his preferences for the greater good.

“Good morning.” Maryse’s voice was gentle, but bright. She was clearly aware of her son’s hangover, and was trying her best to be considerate. “I made you some coffee, I figured you might need it after last night…”

“You have no idea.” Alec made an attempt to smile, but it came out as more of a grimace as a stray ray of sun hit his eye. “You’re a lifesaver.” Alec poured himself a large cup, the warm steam billowing in thick clouds, nearly filling the air of the tiny kitchen. He pulled out a chair, sinking down into it, desperately waiting for the coffee to cool to a drinkable temperature. Maryse didn’t say anything, instead flipping through a book between sips of coffee. “Look mom— I’m sorry about waking you up. I know it was really late, and I think I was probably being a bit of a sloppy jerk, but um, thank you for taking care of me anyway.” He gestured to his mug.

“No apologies are necessary, Alec.” She closed her book, reaching across the table to push a damp lock of hair from her son’s forehead. “You’re young— it’s normal to lose track of yourself sometimes.

“By the Angel, I know Clary does.” Luke chuckled as he swung open the door, carrying a box of warm donuts from their favorite bakery. “You should have seen the condition she was in when Magnus brought her home last night.”

“Magnus Bane?” Maryse tilted her head in confusion as she took the box of pastries she was handed. “The High Warlock of Brooklyn?”

“Ex-High Warlock.” Alec corrected, warranting even more confusion from his mother. After pouring himself a cup of coffee, he settled down at the table, grabbing a maple-glazed donut and digging in. Luke seemed less phased by Alec’s tidbit of information. Most of the time, Alec was more in touch with the comings and goings of the downworld, just from his interactions with clients at his shop.

“I see. When I was still…” Maryse trailed. She wasn’t able to easily discuss her deruning like Alec was. In the midst of her son’s exile, she’d sacrificed herself freely, bargaining with whatever chips she had left to protect Isabelle and Jace from the same fate— to restore the Lightwood name. “Well, he was still high warlock then, but what’s he up to now? Besides, I mean, carrying Clary home, apparently?”
“Don’t worry, she was completely knocked out, she didn’t suspect a thing. I told her Alec brought her home when I woke her up to drink some water this morning. Magnus must have done a number on her though, she doesn’t even have a hangover.” Luke laughed again. Alec liked that about him, he always had a way of bringing light into whatever room he was in. But right now, his remark just made Alec bitter, as he grumbled into his equally bitter coffee.

“Must be nice…” Alec took a big swig of coffee, not caring that it mildly burned the back of his throat.

“You and Clary were at that concert together, right?” Luke said. “How did you two get split up? Magnus didn’t mention anything.”

“Were you with that girl Aya?” Maryse smirked. “I mean, I assume that’s a girl’s name, right?” She sheepishly sipped her drink, Luke and Alec staring at her with wide-eyed confusion. “Loose lips sink ships, as they say. I’m not judging you at all Alec, I just didn’t know that… well.”

“Yeah, uh, aren’t you kind of a ‘man’s man’?” Luke raised an eyebrow as he snatched up another donut.

“Ugh no, stop being ridiculous.” Alec cringed as he grabbed a donut of his own. He wanted the powdered sugar, but settled for honey glazed, not wanting to dirty his work shirt. “If even a tiny part of me liked women, don’t you think I would have gotten married to get the Clave off my back?” It was common knowledge that Alec’s suspected homosexuality was a factor in why his sentencing had been so harsh, although the Clave of course vehemently denied this.

“Actually, Alec—you almost did, with Lydia—” Luke started.

“Lucian, nobody believed that ruse for a second. Plus, he only proposed because his father and I were pressuring him to.”

“Maryse, you know I love you… but damn that was… something.” He made a vague sound as he slurped his coffee—something between an oof or a very muffled ‘fuck’. It was impossible to discern, but regardless, Maryse cringed.

“Can we please change the subject?” Alec said between bites. “This is uncomfortable in more ways than I can count.”

“You’re not getting off so easy, Alec.” Maryse quipped. “If she’s not a girlfriend, than who is she?”

“She’s Magnus’ daughter. Magnus left her with me while he took care of Clary, but Aya fell asleep, so I went home with Magnus to help put her to bed, you know, so I didn’t wake her up.”

“He let you watch his child while you were that intoxicated?” Maryse dropped her donut, her motherly proclivities screaming at her that everything was wrong and that she needed to retroactively panic.

“Magnus Bane has a kid?” Luke nearly spat out his coffee. “That’s not something I would have guessed in a thousand years. Although when you’re immortal, I guess you end up trying everything at least once.”

“Actually, he has two. Aerulei—Aya—is four and a half, and Keris is just barely older than one.” Alec finished off the last bite, washing it down with coffee. “And no, mom. I wasn’t drunk then. You know I don’t go wild at concerts, what with Clary always getting herself into trouble.”
“Always the older brother.” Maryse smiled.

“She’ll— even out eventually. After all, she just turned 21 a month ago.” Luke looked about as confident in his explanation as Maryse and Alec were, which was not saying much. “I know that at 21, we were all Shadowhunters, and things were different for us. Mundanes are barely adults at that age. They’re still in school, a lot of them don’t even have jobs. More often than not they live with their parents—”

“Alec still lives with me, does that mean he’s having the real mundane experience?” Maryse laughed as she poked fun at Alec.

“Ugh you two are the worst.” Alec cradled his head in his hands. “The laughter— it feels like you’re taking a cheese grater to my brain.”

“Why didn’t Magnus heal you up with his hangover cure?” Luke was on his third donut, and Alec was briefly concerned for the man’s blood sugar.

“Yes, and while you’re at it, care to explain why you walked home cradling a bottle of wine when we know Magnus is more than capable of portalling you home?”

“It’s complicated.” Alec lifted his head only to drain the last few drops from his cup. He stood, shuffling back to the coffee pot and going for seconds.

“Uh-huh.” Luke was skeptical. “Complicated enough to break open container laws?”

“Fine. Magnus made cocktails. That’s all, nothing else happened.” This time, Alec chugged the cup, eager to get out of this kitchen and escape this apartment, where the walls felt like they were caving in on him just from Luke and Maryse’s innocent inquisition. “Aya woke up and Magnus had to deal with it, so I let myself out and walked home. My phone was dead, so I couldn’t Uber.”

“And how did that result in you being wine drunk?” Maryse raised a meticulously groomed eyebrow, just one of the many ways she looked like Isabelle that sometimes made Alec’s heart ache.

“Would you believe me if I said I was just bored, walking over an hour home?” Alec placed his mug in the sink, shuffling over to the coat rack to throw on his leather jacket.

“We’ll believe that… for now.” Luke shot him a knowing glance. “But don’t think we’re letting you off so easily.”

“Fine. See you guys later. I won’t be at dinner, my plans changed and I suddenly decided to open the shop early tonight.”

With that, Alec grabbed his keys and wallet from the shelf, and darted out the door. He didn’t care if he would be early for work, he couldn’t get to his bike fast enough.

To say Catarina hated mundane fads would be an understatement, and the current *hipster* phenomenon was no exception. She couldn’t discern why Magnus had insisted on meeting up at an atrociously hip cafe when they just as well could have had coffee at the loft. At least at the loft, she wouldn’t have to bother with maintaining a glamour to conceal her sapphire-hued skin. It was
exhausting enough maintaining it at work, but in her free time, it was just an unnecessary hassle.

Magnus was already there, huddled in a corner table with both children, protecting his extravagant cappuccino from Keris’ flailing hands. The baby sat happily on his father’s lap, babbling across the table at his sister who was attempting to maintain a civilized conversation with the infant. Her frustration was mounting, but Magnus distracted her by pushing another cookie—likely her second or third—in her direction. When Magnus spotted his friend, relief flooded over him.

“My dearest Catarina!” He beamed, struggling to contain a now aggressively squirming Keris, who was eager to greet his auntie Cat.

“Always a pleasure Magnus. And hello to you too Aerulei.” She addressed the little girl, who took a brief recess from nibbling at her cookie to mumble a quiet hello. She was definitely in a grumpy mood today. “And of course, my little prince—” She snatched up the boy from Magnus’ arms, squeezing him tight as she planted kisses all over his soft cheeks. He giggled uncontrollably, kicking his little legs and pressing a determined palm to her forehead.

“And what words of wisdom did you receive from my little oracle today?” Magnus sipped at his beverage, now free of the chance of his baby throwing it to the floor.

“Oh not much, just the same thoughts that I have, really.” Cat slid into the bench. She snapped her fingers in a familiar way, creating a magical barrier between them and the children, shielding their conversation from little ears. “Mainly, why did you stumble in last night with Alec Lightwood, and why was he holding your daughter? Your daughter that, might I add, didn’t even let me hold her past the age of two. She’s not the most trusting child. So again… care to explain?”

“I’ll have you know that Aya has started to come out of her shell—“

“Save it, Magnus. The only person she really talks to is Madzie. She still doesn’t even trust Flora, and they shared a cradle.” At the same time Magnus adopted Aerulei, Catarina adopted Flora, a warlock child with a rather interesting mark. She had the traits of a jellyfish, her skin fluorescent and her hair long, transparent tentacles that had a mind of their own.

“Oh, your lovely daughters. Where are they today? I miss them.” Magnus failed to change the subject.

“I’m going to work a shift after this. They’re with Ragnor and Dorian. Now, stop changing the subject.”

“Alright, fine. Perhaps I’ve become acquainted—” Manus drew out his words, as if maybe he spoke slowly enough, Catarina would forget what they were talking about.

“Enamored.” Cat corrected. She knew her friend too well, and she could tell last night just from that brief interaction how the warlock was feeling.

“Fine—rather fond of the ex-shadowhunter. When Aya wanted that henna tattoo, I somehow ended up at Alec’s shop, and since then maybe I’ve run into him a few times. And yes, for some reason, Aya really seems to like him.”

“For some reason? You’re telling me you can’t see any reason why someone might like him?” Catarina snickered.

“You’re insufferable” He downed the last of his cappuccino. “I’m going to go order more coffee, do you want anything? Your usual Cafe Vienna?”
“No, I’ll go order myself. If I came all the way to this place, I might as well see what they have on their seasonal menu.” She would never admit to liking pumpkin spice, not even if she had a rowan wood spike pointed toward her heart. “Here, you can have him back for now. And don’t worry—I know what you want, a cardamom vanilla cappuccino.”

Cat stood impatiently in line, glancing over the menu while she waited. She hoped that by the time she got back to the table, Magnus would have the nerve to properly explain himself, but he would probably still be on his bullshit. She still didn’t know what had gotten into him, and worse why he made her come to this cafe. But when it was her turn to order, everything made more sense.

“Hi, what can I get started for you?” Alec looked up, looking tired and flustered. He blinked a few times, struggling to place Catarina’s face.

“Alec Lightwood, isn’t it?” She did her best to smile without looking intimidating, although she knew she still looked severe. “I didn’t get the chance to properly introduce myself last night. I’m Catarina Loss.”

“Sorry, I didn’t recognize you. I’m a bit out of it today.” Alec rubbed his eyes, roughing up his eyebrows and adding to his already disheveled look.

“And I’m a little less blue.” She said, smirking. “I’m here with Magnus and the kids getting coffee. He’s uncharacteristically exhausted too. What a coincidence.” She winked, and she let her glamour slip over her eyes, her iris flashing bright blue.

Alec opened and closed his mouth, wordless, looking akin to a fish. Cat decided to be merciful and save him.

“Anyway, I don’t want to hold up the line, so I’ll have a pumpkin Vienna with an extra shot, and Magnus will have—”

Alec cut her off, writing down both the orders.

“Cardamom vanilla cappuccino, I remember.” She swore she saw Alec smile a little. “Are these still ‘for here’?”

Cat handed over her credit card, nodding.

“I’ll bring them over when they’re ready, then.” And then Alec smiled— really smiled— and Catarina saw the appeal. That crooked smile, the way his hazel eyes crinkled up at the sides— she had to admit it was rather charming.

Cat made her way back over to the table, This time, sitting next to Aya and directly across from Magnus.

“So were you going to mention Alec worked here, or were you going to just hope I didn’t notice? He’s looking just as worse for the wear as you… How long did he stay last night?”

“Maybe I made drinks, smoked a little. But he didn’t spend the night or anything. He went home.” Magnus was defensive, but there was still incriminating evidence that hadn’t yet been revealed. His daughter was about to fix that.

“Yeah! And he even kissed papa goodnight!” Aya cheered, brushing cookie crumbs on her burgundy sweater. “I thought they were going to have a sleepover but…” Her little voice faded out as Cat snapped her fingers again. Normally, she would curse herself for forgetting that the spell broke when she walked away, but this time, it had proven auspicious.
“So Ragnor was right. I was skeptical when he said you went so far as to get a tattoo just to spend time with this boy, but the way you’re blushing right now… he hit the nail right on the head. You really like him, don’t you?”

“Ragnor is being absurd. I would never permanently mark my body for the sake of flirtation!” Magnus huffed. “And besides, the tattoo is very cute, I think.” He pulled his designer cardigan to the side and began to unbutton his shirt, ready to show off his ink.

“God, keep your clothes on, I’ll take your word for it.” She swatted his hand away from his buttons. “But you kissed him. That counts for something, doesn’t it? When’s the last time you kissed anyone?” She gave him a knowing look, because she knew more about Magnus’ romantic history than perhaps even the warlock did himself.

“Well there was Marzieh, that Seelie I met at Pandemonium…” Catarina remembered this encounter, and it had been pathetic. It had been the club’s 40th anniversary, and Magnus got too drunk at the party, and in a rather undignified act of debauchery unbecoming of a father, took the woman up to his office and had a very meaningful one-hour relationship.

“That was a one night stand, and it was almost a year ago! Keris was barely two months old.” She shot him down.

“Exactly! I have a baby, Catarina. I can’t be dating people left and right, I have responsibilities!” His frustration was mounting.

“So you’re going to imply that Alec would be just a fling? I saw you both together for all of five minutes and I can already tell that isn’t the case.” She took a deep breath, centering herself and changing her tone to be more gentle. “Yes, you’re a parent and you have responsibilities, but you have a responsibility to yourself, too, Magnus. What kind of father would you be if you never put effort into your own happiness? Are you worried he won’t be good with your kids? Because I saw him carrying Aya in last night, and he looks like a natural.”

“It’s not just that, I just feel like there’s no way he would really want this. I mean sure, he’s met the kids, but those have all just been random happenstances. He’s young, and being in a relationship with me would mean being in a relationship with the whole family— that’s too much responsibility to ask of anyone, let alone him.” Magnus rambled, fussing with a stray string on Keris’ jumper as he refused to meet her eyes.

Cat wasn’t convinced at all— this was just Magnus rationalizing why he didn’t deserve something, and she wasn’t going to have it. But there was no reasoning with this Magnus, when he was stuck this far in his head. She was going to have to take matters into her own hands. In an act of divine intervention, Alec arrived with their coffees.

“Here you go Catarina, Magnus.” He said hi to the kids, but they didn’t respond, still in their kids-only bubble. Alec smiled and turned to walk away, but Cat reached out and pulled him back by the apron strings.

“Alec— I have a question to ask you! Magnus and I have a meeting at the Spiral Labyrinth later this week, and since all of his normal sitters are warlocks and will also be in attendance, he’s been having a hard time finding someone to watch the kids. Now, I saw how great you were with Aya last night, and it got me thinking— you’d be a great babysitter. I mean, Princess Bane hates almost everyone. I doubt we’d be able to find someone she likes nearly as much as you, isn’t that right, Magnus?”

He shot daggers at her— his betrayal written all over his face.
“Aya is fond of you, Alec.” He assured the man. “But Catarina, I’m sure Alec has more exciting things to do than watch two rambunctious children. I mean they’re quite a handful.”

“It’s nothing I can’t handle, I basically raised Max since Mom was always in Idris.” Alec laughed, leaning over to tickle Keris’ stomach. The baby giggled, reaching out and grabbing Alec’s finger, refusing to let it go. “Besides, I think it would be fun. What night would it be?”

“Wednesday!” Cat chirped quickly before Magnus could protest again.

“Oh, that’s perfect. My shop’s closed Wednesday nights.”

“Well then it’s decided, isn’t it, Magnus?” Magnus glared at her. She knew she’d get a thorough talking to once Alec was gone. “You’re a doll, Alec.”

“Just text me the time, and I’ll be there.” He smiled at Magnus. “Sorry, I’ve gotta get back to work!”

Alec walked away, leaving Catarina to deal with her fuming best friend.

“Why are you this way?!” Magnus seethed, his focus completely on Catarina. He didn’t notice that Keris was giddily dipping his chubby hands into his cappuccino, clapping them in the foam and making a bit of a mess. Cat waved her hand, conjuring a napkin to clean up around the mug.

“What? I wasn’t lying. You need a sitter, you’re worried that Alec isn’t willing to deal with your baggage, this is killing two birds with one stone.”

“What you failed to mention was that I could have easily left my children with your sitter, who’s already going to watch Madzie and Flora. Unless you’re planning on dumping them on Alexander too.”

“He could have said no! I didn’t force him to do anything. And did you see that? He looked excited!”

“I can’t even with you.” Magnus finally picked up his coffee— well, what was left with it after Keris used it as a splash pool.

“Maybe he’s just hoping you’ll invite him to stay afterward for drinks again…” Cat winked.

With a sigh, Magnus admitted defeat, from that point on giving in to whatever questions Catarina had for him. She knew he was thankful, even if he acted grumpy about it. Because at the end of the day, she always had his best interest at heart, and he knew it.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter.... adventures in babysitting (sorry, I couldn't resist the cliche)
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The Bane children know how to live up to their name.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Three hours. It had been three hours since Magnus walked out of the Loft, into a portal to the Spiral Labyrinth. Three hours spent alone with two children who Alec had now determined to be completely feral.

“Kay-Kay!” Aya screamed, her voice shrill and piercing. “The Chairman does not look good in pink, you know this!” She darted across the living room, following the cat under a table and over the back of the couch—her goal to remove a frilly tutu that her brother dressed the cat in against its will. Where the tutu came from, or how Keris had wrangled the cat into it, were both a mystery. There were so many things to take issue with in this situation—primarily Aya’s disregard for her safety as she continued to maneuver around furniture— but apparently in the Bane household, wearing a color that didn’t suit your appearance took precedence above all else.

“PUPPLE!” Keris cooed from his playpen, trying his best to say purple. It was a noble attempt to describe an ignoble action. Suddenly, the cat—not his tutu—transformed into a bright shade of grape. The Chairman was not phased. Was this just a normal day for the poor animal?

Aya flung herself face down on the rug, grumbling as she admitted defeat. “This is hopeless. Absolutely hopeless. Look at what we have come to.” Alec had never seen a child so wrought with existential dread. It was a much more endearing form of a tantrum, although just as difficult to reason with.

With few other ideas, Alec decided that maybe picking up Keris and giving him more attention would stop him from magically painting things around the apartment—specifically living things. He did not want to be next.

“Hey there, Keris.” He leaned down into the playpen, hoisting up the hefty baby. “Are you having fun?”

“Yuh!” Keris chirped, wiggling his head side to side. Even though he was wearing a long-sleeved shirt, Keris’ scales still made holding him a bit uncomfortable for Alec, akin to wrapping legos in a sheet and still stepping on them. It wasn’t the baby’s fault of course, it was more about learning different techniques of cradling the child than Alec learned back when he had helped with Max.

“Well, if you want to play with color—how about we get out some crayons and draw? Would you like that? I’m sure your sister could help.” Alec looked over to Aya. She lifted her head up an inch from the floor, turning just enough so she could glare at him with one eye. Crossing her arms, she buried her head, grumbling something under her breath that vaguely sounded like ‘fine.’

The baby seemed pleased with this idea, eager to play with his sister. Or at least that’s what Alec gleaned from the vague images that popped in his head when Keris placed his palm to Alec’s
cheek. He still wasn’t used to that, but he had to say, it made communicating with a one-year-old much easier.

“There’s one condition though, you have to change The Chairman back. Can you do that?” Alec raised an eyebrow at the child, trying to look both serious and compelling. Keris responded by blowing a spit bubble. It was easy to forget just how young both kids were, considering that in many ways they had intelligence beyond their years, but right now, it was unavoidably evident that they were one and four — and it was total chaos.

“He doesn’t know how.” Aya reluctantly sat up, settling into a cross-legged position. “I think once he does it, he forgets what kitty looked like in the first place.” She shrugged. “Babies are dumb.” She waved her hand, a cloud of pale purple magic glistening as it floated through the room, finding and enveloping the cat, and returning him to normal.

Before they could embark on the adventure of coloring, a fire message appeared in Aya’s hand.

“It’s for you, Mister Alec.” She said, scrunching up her face. “I wonder why I got it though…” She glanced over to Alec, who was still holding her brother. “Maybe because your hands are full.”

Alec put Keris back down, and took the letter from Aerulei. It was in handwriting Alec hadn’t seen before, but would still somehow recognize anywhere.

Alexander—

Unfortunately, the council meeting has gotten out of hand and off schedule. Despite literally kicking and screaming, they would not allow me to leave. Considering this, I will not be able to make it home until late in the evening, likely after midnight. I apologize, and will definitely pay you accordingly.

The kids will need dinner. Aya will eat any kind of pasta, and there is formula milk for Keris in the freezer. Their bedtime is 8:00. Do NOT let them convince you otherwise.

Tell Aya and Keris I love them and miss them, and that they shouldn’t stay up for me. I’ll see them in the morning.

If anything happens and you can’t stay with them until I get back, call Rafael Santiago.

— Magnus

The notion of Rafael Santiago babysitting nearly distracted Alec from his new reality — these children were his responsibility for the rest of the day. Originally, the plan had been for Magnus to come back around 5:00 pm, meaning that he left after lunch and would come back before dinner. But now, Alec was on dinner duty, not to mention responsible for putting both children to bed.

Looking at them now, that was going to be an impossible task. Neither of them would go down for naps, and Alec wondered if it was a matter of trust. After all, they didn’t know him very well, and sleeping was vulnerable. But surely Keris didn’t have trust issues. Could babies have trust issues? He wondered if perhaps there was an anxiety there he couldn’t see — a dependency on their family, on Magnus, on Cat or Ragnor that Alec couldn’t fulfill. If that was the case, bedtime was most certainly going to be a nightmare.
“What did it say?!” Aya jumped up, standing on her tiptoes to try to read the message in Alec’s hand. But it was a fire message, quickly blackening and turning to ash before disappearing.

“The meeting at the Spiral Labyrinth is going to take longer than your papa thought, and he won’t be back until very late. He said that he loves you, and that he’ll see you in the morning.”

“Does that mean you’re staying for dinner? Do you know how to cook?” The girl eyed him skeptically.

“Well, I hear you like pasta… and if that’s true, you’re in luck. I can make some pretty good pasta.” He bent down her level, eyes glinting as he noticed how surprised she was that he knew her favorite food.

“Can you make spaghetti?” Her lisp made the final word almost indiscernible, but Alec understood.

“Well, as long as the ingredients are here, of course!” He stood up, walking to the kitchen. As he turned away, Keris— still in his playpen— complained loudly. Doing his best to stand against the walls of the pen, his hands grabbed fistfuls of air, signaling he wanted to be picked up. “Oh, did you not want to be left behind?” Alec acquiesced, picking up the boy. “We were just going to the kitchen, but I’m sure you have a high chair in there we can put you in, right Aya?”

“Mmmhmm.” She mumbled, distracted, as she made her way into the attached kitchen. “Can I help with the pastas?” She hoisted herself up on one of the bar stools at the expansive granite island. Alec found Keris’ high chair there as well, sliding him in and making sure he was secure before turning to take a look through the cabinets.

“Well, it’s not quite dinner time yet, but sure.” He figured he’d make up some task for her to do that wouldn’t be dangerous but would occupy her and make her feel like she was participating. It’s not like he would need help, even if he did have another adult there to assist him. All he had to do was make some pasta and heat up some milk. How hard could it be?

Hard. It could be very, incredibly, insurmountably hard, Alec realized. Upon further inspection, the formula in the freezer was a strange stack of plastic bags, filled with an opaque, creamy, green slush that wasn’t completely frozen. If it weren’t for the ‘use by’ date explicitly written on each bag, Alec would have sworn it was expired, because nothing consumable had any right being that color. He had no idea what to do with it, beyond a vague idea that it should be warm. Somehow, it didn’t seem right to microwave it, but pouring it into a pan and heating it up seemed wrong too.

The label didn’t help much— it was all written in nearly illegible handwriting. A doctor’s handwriting Alec thought, leading him to blame Catarina. He could discern the word ‘milk,’ prepended by something that looked like it could possibly be the word ‘breast.’ Everything clicked into place, and Alec nearly dropped the bag in a panic. A ridiculous thought popped into his head that the milk was somehow Catarina’s— or worse: Magnus’— but he realized that was impossible for many reasons, primarily that warlocks were infertile. The rest of the label was just random scratches of things, added to the word ‘milk’ with a string of plus signs. It appeared to be some sort of specially-crafted magical formula, but that didn’t help Alec with preparing it at all.

He pulled out his phone, hitting a few buttons to quickly speed-dial the only person who could
help in this situation.

“Alec, is everything alright?”

“Uh… yeah, Mom, everything’s fine but I have a weird question.”

“You’re watching children— everything related to children feels like a weird question when you’ve never had kids of your own. What is it?”

Alec took a deep breath, trying to release his mounting embarrassment on the exhale. It didn't work, but prolonging the silence wouldn't make the question go away.

“How do you heat up frozen breast milk?” He asked hurriedly.

“These are Magnus’ warlock children you are watching, right?” She sounded speculative, as if she were entertaining an unusual thought.

“Uh— yes?” Alec wasn’t sure if her question was literal or figurative, and in his confused state, he was suddenly doubting everything.

“And Magnus is a single father?” Maryse spoke ponderingly.

“I’m not sure what you’re getting at here?”

“Oh, nothing. I just— never mind. So, heating frozen breast milk is very simple. Since I was on patrol or missions often when you were little, usually I would pump when I had the time, freeze or refrigerate the milk, and one of the nannies would feed you.” She stated matter-of-factly.

“Okay…” Alec wondered what it would have been like for the other people in the Institute, opening the fridge to find vague bags of breast milk. Certainly, they kept it somewhere else. That was beside the point. “So what do I do?”

She walked him through the process step-by-step, Alec following along with the instructions as he held his phone between his shoulder and his ear. Putting the call on speaker would have been easier, but he didn’t want Aya to listen in and realize that Alec was completely out of his depth. It was a surprisingly simple process, mostly just holding the bag under running warm water until it thawed. Avoiding the microwave had been the right call— apparently it could kill the enzymes in the milk and make it harmful to drink. Eventually, he had successfully prepared a bottle, just the right temperature, of the oddly sweet-smelling green milk.

He rounded up the children in the kitchen and got to work on finishing the pasta. His timing was almost perfect, with the noodles finishing only a few minutes before the bottle was ready.

“Aerulei, I have a job for you.” He said solemnly. “Do you want to be in charge of putting the cheese on top of the pasta?” In lieu of the standard shaker of Parmesan, Magnus had a container of fresh shaved cheese, so Aya would have to wash her hands before digging into the container, which she did with enthusiasm.

“Look, you’re a natural!” Alec cheered as they finally sat down to eat, their plates of spaghetti piled high with cheese.

“Can Keris have some too?” She looked at her brother, who was sucking down his milk all by himself.

“Well, spaghetti can get stuck in baby’s throats, since it’s so long.” Alec pointed out, swirling a
long piece of pasta around his fork. “Plus, your papa said that Keris should have formula for dinner, and I wouldn’t want to make him upset later.”

“That’s okay, more pasta for me!” She smiled, spinning her fork until it was wrapped in so much pasta that it could barely fit in her mouth.

In that moment, Alec felt a strange sensation of peace, watching both children sit at the table, happily eating. It had been harder than expected, but it was incredibly rewarding, so he decided to just sit back and enjoy it.

Until the pasta started flying— then it was a bit harder to enjoy it.

“I guess Keris wanted spaghetti after all!” Aya laughed, sharing a knowing glance with her brother before turning back to Alec. “You have pasta in your hair.”

“Thanks… “ Alec scooped a handful of pasta off the top of his head. “I noticed.”

“Red is not your color.” She remarked, going back to her dinner as if nothing happened.

Mister Alec was asleep now — Aerulei was sure of it. It wasn’t a guess at all, since she could see it for herself. Last week in her magic lessons, Dorian taught her how to do a ‘window spell’ allowing her to create a small portal to see into the living room.

After he put her to bed just an hour before, Alec fell asleep on the couch, sprawled out and clearly exhausted. She wondered if that was her fault, but determined it was probably more her brother’s. While her babysitter seemed comfortable around children, she could tell that he had been a bit overwhelmed, especially when Keris started throwing things. It hadn’t stopped after the spaghetti — Keris threw his cup of milk, his cookies, and even his pajamas while Alec was trying to put him to bed. Normally papa just used magic to change Keris’ clothes, since he was so squirmy, but Mister Alec didn’t seem to have magic. Aya couldn’t seem to figure out what Mister Alec was, and she was starting to worry he was a mundane.

This was why she was sneaking out of bed, on a mission to figure out if her babysitter was a downworlder or not. First, she would need supplies, so she tiptoed into her papa’s office, going over the list of objects in her head. Iron, holy water, cross, silver, rowan wood. Miss Dot taught her that each of these things could hurt magical creatures, so she would have to be careful, using just enough force to see if it stings, but not enough to wake Alec up or hurt him. Although the shelves stretched all the way to the ceiling, she didn’t need a step stool, using her magic to pluck each thing from the immaculately organized shelves. Everything barely fit in her arms, and she was afraid that if she dropped anything, it would make too much noise, so she conjured up a basket to put everything in.

Walking as quietly as possible, she padded into the living room. Her only potential adversary was Chairman Meow, who was sleeping on the armchair in the corner. While he did hear her approach, he didn’t pay her much attention, lazily opening one eye to give her a look before going back to sleep. Whew. She crossed the rest of the distance to the couch, kneeling beside it and taking in her subject.
Alec was snoring just a little, and Aerulei couldn’t help but find it funny. Something about him seemed so serious and grown-up while he was awake, but while he was asleep he looked like a kid. More of a kid than her papa at least, who normally just looked old and tired while he slept. Alec was long and a bit gangly, and the thought suddenly occurred to her that maybe he was just a small giant. Are giants real? Aren’t they just big seelies? Or are they unseelie… She couldn’t remember. Giants were boring and ugly, and she never paid attention when Dorian discussed the ugly demons or downworlders—they weren’t very exciting, and the pictures were usually gross. But Mister Alec wasn’t gross, so she came to the conclusion that he wasn’t a giant.

First, she decided to check to see if he was a vampire. Although she’d seen him out in the sun, she knew that Miss Izzy had a friend who was a daylighter, a very special vampire who could even go in the sun. The mean lady papa used to like couldn’t go in the sun, and she thought that was fair since Miss Camille seemed like she was really bad. She was apparently so bad, that the shadowhunters killed her. Aya didn’t like to think about the shadowhunters killing people, but if they were bad people it must be okay. Since it was the middle of the night, she was sleepy and it was making her distracted, but she tried to keep herself on task. First, she tried the holy water, using the tear-dropper on the vial to drip just a tiny bit onto Alec’s hand. She waited for a few seconds—nothing. Next she tried the cross—again, nothing.

Next she tested to see if he was seelie, by shaking a little iron dust on him. Again—nothing. His hair was a bit wavy and hid the tops of his ears, so moving as stealthily as possible, she pushed aside his hair to see if he had pointed fae ears. No, they were normally shaped. She poked him with the rowan stick; there was no reaction.

After that, she tested what she thought was the most likely option—werewolf. She probably should have tried that one first. It was so obvious. Mister Alec was big and strong, and moved like he knew how to fight. Holding her breath, she tried the silver, waiting for his skin to burn or for him to wince in pain. But the silver didn’t do anything at all. This was starting to make very little sense.

He couldn’t be a warlock, there was virtually no way. Aerulei, just like most warlocks, could sense another person’s magic, but with Alec, she didn’t feel anything. She lightly touched his hand just to be sure, pushing a little of her magic into him. If Alec had magic himself, his would naturally push back—but again, nothing.

She felt defeated, huffing and sitting back on her feet. It was feeling more and more likely that Mister Alec was a mundane, and that was what she feared the most. Mundanes weren’t supposed to know anything about the downworld, even if they could naturally see things. Surely papa knew Mister Alec wasn’t a mundane? She started thinking of any situations where her father had shown Alec his magic. There was the coffee shop, she remembered, where papa had let Keris use magic to give Alec the tip after he gave them the coffee. And Keris had used magic to tell Mister Alec things a bunch of times.

Maybe papa was wrong too; maybe Mister Alec was just a mundane. But papa was hardly ever wrong… If papa thought Alec was a downworder, but he wasn’t, then they would have to take away his memories, and probably send him away forever. Keris was too little to control his magic most of the time—it would be hard to hide that from Mister Alec for too long. Aerulei wasn’t going to accept this just yet. There was still a possibility that Mister Alec was something, anything.

Using her stick, she lifted the hem of his worn black sweater, looking at his stomach for any evidence that he wasn’t just an ordinary mundane. Maybe he was a shadowhunter, and his runes were all just hidden. That was a possibility, right? That he was an undercover shadowhunter? Or maybe he didn’t have a belly button. Auntie Cat told her that this was common in a bunch of
different downworlders, like her daughter Flora. Aya didn’t like Flora— she was weird and slimy.

No— Aya realized was getting distracted again. So she dared herself to look, but all she saw was a runeless stomach and a hairy chest. It was kind of funny looking, and she stifled a giggle. Papa didn’t have hair on her chest, but it looked like Mister Alec had a beard there— she thought it was a silly choice for him to have it. She searched again, determined to find something unusual. All Mister Alec had were a few tattoos, and a weird scar on his side.

She was out of ideas. There was nothing left to try. The line of objects on the coffee table mocked her, each one reminding her of her failure. Mister Alec had to be mundane, and that meant he probably couldn’t hang around anymore. How would she tell papa what she found? She pouted, rubbing at her sleepy eyes as she continued to stare at Alec. Maybe if she stared hard enough, something would appear. Maybe he would stop being just a normal mundane. Otherwise, she was going to have to find a way to convince papa to let Mister Alec stay, to keep his memories, to keep hanging out with them. She didn’t like most people, but she liked him— and she didn’t want to lose him.

Chapter End Notes

As always, comment with what you thought! I love all your questions, suggestions and theories. You all are the best!
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Magnus comes home and has to deal with the aftermath of his meddling daughter's antics.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was five in the morning when an exhausted Magnus stepped through a portal into his living room. He found Alec asleep on the sofa, sprawled out on his back. He had prepared to tip-toe into his childrens’ rooms to check on them before he went to sleep, but he didn’t have to look very far for Aerulei. His daughter was curled up on the couch with Alec, situated in a nook between the cushions and Alec’s side. Aya had a habit of doing this, crawling into bed with Magnus for even the slightest reason— a chill, a nightmare, a shadow across her window— but he knew deep down that she had attachment issues, probably from her early infancy. Unlike Keris, he hadn’t been with Aya since day one. When he’d found her at Iris’ operation, she was nearly one year old. Since then he’d been beyond doting, but echoes of her past still remained, though normally they were silenced by his constant reassurance and unconditional love.

Still, it was surprising to see her snuggle up to Alec. He’d never seen her show this much affection to anyone before— not Ragnor, Dorian, Madzie, Flora or even Catarina. Her long braid draped across Alec’s chest in a way that almost looked possessive. ‘Alec must have braided her hair,’ Magnus noticed. It was a miracle that anyone could get her to sit still long enough to do her hair, and she struggled to learn how to use magic to style it herself. There had been previous attempts from numerous babysitters, but not a single one was ever successful. Even Magnus usually waved a hand to braid her hair, surrendering to her antics. So how did Alec do it?

He noticed Aerulei’s dark feathery eyelashes flutter lightly. She was playing possum, pretending to be asleep. Magnus had suspected as much, since his daughter was so attuned to his magic. Even if she hadn’t heard the portal open, the shift in the energy in the room would have alerted her right away, pulsing through her tiny body like a magical doorbell, quietly nudging her with the message ‘papa’s home.’ He wasn’t sure if he should leave her there or carry her off to her own bed; this was too adorable to interrupt. In all honesty, it was one of the cutest things he’d ever seen. He was tempted to take a picture, but he cursed the thought, thinking it might make Alexander uncomfortable if he ever found out. Fighting with himself, he stared at the pair, wrought with indecision.

But upon further examining the scene in front of him he jolted awake, catapulting himself into complete, all-consuming mortification. The fondness drained from him instantly, shock taking over its place. A basket lay on its side on the floor, surrounded by an array of magical miscellany she’d clearly stolen from his office. A few choice objects were lined up on the coffee table, like a back-alley surgeon’s instruments. The evidence was incriminating, suggesting a clandestine operation that made Magnus’ blood boil— it was so inappropriate, improper, and distasteful.

“Aerulei Diana Bane!” He spat, trying to whisper despite the fact that he was seething. Whenever he was angry, he made up some sort of middle name for his daughter. He believed that to some
extent, each warlock deserves to choose their own name, so reminding her that he could have chosen for her was a unique yet meaningful threat. It was normally enough to get her to stop whatever bad behavior or calm any tantrum. She begrudgingly rolled off of Alec, hopping to the floor to await the scolding she knew was coming. Magnus hadn’t been as quiet as he had intended, and Alec woke up, awkwardly scrambling onto his feet.

“Magnus— I’m so sorry I fell asleep.” Alec was completely frazzled. He looked down at his feet, noticing that one of his socks was missing. Magnus’ unglamoured eyes scanned the room, finding Alec’s sock in Chairman Meow’s clutches. The cat kicked at the sock, chewing on the tip as he attacked it like a small rodent. It was not a rodent— it was a sock— and it belonged back on Alec’s foot. Magnus snapped his fingers and returned the sock back where it belonged.

“Shh—” Magnus held up his finger to Alec, addressing only his daughter. “Care to explain yourself?”

She paled, her eyes widening in panic. With a wide yet uncoordinated sweep of her arms, all of her plundered supplies disappeared. Things didn’t go as expected though, and instead of the objects returning to Magnus’ office, they appeared in random places in the living room, landing midair and dropping to the floor. The bottle of holy water fell on Magnus’ head, the force popping open the lid, water soaking the warlock’s hair.

Magnus made a dismissive gesture, lazy flashes of magic dispersing through the room, floating each thing back to his office. Aya flinched. She was clearly embarrassed that her magic had failed, and she was jealous of how easy it was for her papa. Later, Magnus would remind her that she needed to keep a level head if she wanted her magic to work predictably. But now was not the time.

“Aya— please explain what you were doing.” Magnus repeated, his tone heavy, even, and stern.

“Papa I… I… ” She stammered. Tears were welling in her serpentine eyes. Normally the piercing color and slit pupils looked intimidating and fierce, but right now, with the pupils wide and covered in a gloss of tears, she looked completely the opposite. She blinked, taking a deep breath—just like her father taught her. Even though he was angry, Magnus was proud of seeing her try to collect herself. She let out her breath, opened her eyes, and spoke remarkably clearly for a distraught child. “I was worried Mister Alec was a mundane, and since he’d seen us practice magic, that we would have to take his memories and send him away.”

“And what did you conclude?” Magnus raised an eyebrow. Although he was mortified that his daughter experimented on Alec in his sleep, he was interested to hear her results.

“He’s a mundane.” She mumbled, clearly despondent about the revelation. “And mundanes can’t know about the shadow world.”

“So what methods did you use?” Magnus crossed his arms, leaning against the armchair. Alec continued to sit on the couch in silence, confused about the entire scenario unfolding.

“I tried rowan wood and iron dust to see if he was fae, holy water and a cross to see if he was a vampire, I tested to see if he was a warlock by forcing in a bit of my magic and by checking for warlock marks, and I checked to see if he was a werewolf by testing him with silver. I also looked for marks to see if he was a shadowhunter.” She said matter-of-factly. Magnus would never get used to how knowledgeable she was for a tiny child. It was amazing how astute warlock children were, if they were raised in a loving and nurturing environment. He wondered how much she would know by the time she was four centuries old. She would be much smarter than him, that was for certain.
“Well Aya, those methods were very thorough, although it was wrong to do that while Mister Alec was asleep. Next time, maybe you could try asking him first. Doesn’t that sound more polite?”

“But it’s rude to ask about warlock marks so I thought…” she started.

“Yes, but if you were concerned he was mundane, that’s actually a very valid thing to worry about.” He walked over to her, scooping her up in his arms. She wiped her face on his jacket, her tears disappearing. “But it’s okay. Don’t worry sayang. He’s not going anywhere. Except... to the diner. For breakfast. Because I’m starving.”

“Food sounds great, actually.” Alec grabbed his shoes from the floor and slipped them on, making quick business of the laces.

“It’s settled then, I’ll go wake up Keris and we’ll head out to Taki’s. My treat, of course.” He stopped for a moment, reconsidering his choice of restaurant. “Oh, are you okay with Taki’s, Alexander?” He had to ask. After all, it was a downworlder-focused establishment.

“Of course, I go there all the time. I love their pancakes.” Alec smiled.

Aya wiggled out of Magnus’ arms, sliding down to the floor.

“I’ll wait out here with Mister Alec, papa.” She shuffled over to the taller man, looking up at him with wide, innocent eyes. Magnus could tell that in her own way, she was apologizing to Alec—even though the words were hard for her to say. She was Magnus’ child, that was for sure.

“Do you want to try some of my juice, Mister Alec?” Aerulei pushed the cup to Alexander, angling the straw toward him.

From across the table, Magnus stared intently at the interaction. It was an oddly serious gaze, but Alec chalked it up to Magnus’ curiosity to see his reaction to what was most certainly a disgusting beverage. The juice was a strange, glittering color that oscillated between shades of green and purple. It didn’t particularly look appetizing, but it was rather interesting. Not wanting to insult the girl, Alec accepted her offer, taking a tiny, cautious sip.

“That’s actually... really good.” Alec was wide-eyed, caught off guard. He was tempted to order one for himself when the waitress came to take their food orders, but Magnus quickly snuffed out that idea.

“Aya—that is warlock juice. You shouldn’t be sharing that with Alec. It could affect him in weird, unpredictable ways.” He grabbed the cup from her hand, placing it on the far side of the table away from Alec.

“So... you’re saying Mister Alec is not a warlock then?” She smiled sheepishly.

“Enough.” Magnus gave her a look that carried a parental gravitas that reminded Alec of how Magnus used to say ‘I’m the High Warlock of Brooklyn.’ It was the type of look to make anyone shake in their boots, especially an almost-five year old. He dropped his voice to a whisper, nearly too low for Alec to hear. “We are not discussing this now.”

“But—” She protested.
Her eyes darted to Alec, full of curiosity, begging to ask him the question: *what are you?* Alec would have told her if she asked him directly, no matter how uncomfortable or difficult it would be to explain, but he wasn’t going to side-step Magnus’ authority by giving in. It wasn’t his place.

Alec looked away, awkwardly flipping through the menu, even though he knew every page of it by heart. Taki’s had always been one of his post-hunt staples with Izzy and Jace, since they were open all hours and didn’t mind serving someone with a little ichor on their jacket or mud on their boots. It was different being here now, in such an innocuous and rather mundane way. He never thought he’d be sitting at a table with two kids and another man. It felt dangerously close to a family—something he still never could dream of having for himself. Or could he?

Before the conversation could become even more tense, the waitress walked up to the table to take their orders.

“So then,” The fae woman spoke in a gentle voice that sounded like a stream murmuring over smooth pebbles—quiet, cool, and soothing. It almost carved through the thick tension between Aya and Magnus. Almost. “Have you made a decision on what you want to order?” She tilted her head as she poised a pen over her notepad, a silky curtain of long, white hair dusting the edge of the table.

“Lingonberry pancakes for me.” Alec spoke first, handing over his menu. “And a side of bacon with some scrambled eggs.

“Do you want cheese on your eggs?” She looked up with piercing eyes—just a tad too big for her face, and the color of an early morning sky.

“Of course.” Alec laughed, as if it hadn’t been a question.

“And what about you, sugarplum?” She leaned over the table closer to Aerulei. Aya recoiled, pulling herself into the corner of the booth, as far away as possible. The waitress took the hint, standing back.

“I want waffles, with coconut and pineapple.” She said in a commanding tone, like a Queen leading an army. On the surface, she sounded confident, but Alec was all too familiar with that social strategy. He was guilty of it himself. When he was uncomfortable, steeling himself made him seem formidable, but it created just enough distance between himself and others that he didn’t have to deal with them for too long. It was a rather advanced shyness strategy for someone so young. Alec was simultaneously impressed and distressed. *Why was he so protective over her?*

“And you, tiny warrior?” She reached out to Keris to tickle him gently on the cheek, a grin showing off her mouth full of delicately pointed teeth. Keris chuckled, reaching out to grab her finger.

“Keris…” Magnus said in a placating tone. Alec could tell that he was trying to be gentle, but the warlock was exhausted. He wondered how long it had been since he slept. Taking the hint, the baby released his grip, looking up at her through silver eyelashes. “He’ll have the guava guyabana yogurt with bananas.”

The waitress scribbled down the order, smiled and walked away, leaving the little group back where they were before, in an uneasy quiet. Alec decided to break the silence.

“So… **guayabana,**” he said, rolling over the Spanish word in his easy yet irresistible way. “That’s soursop, right? I haven’t had that in years.”
“It is rather unusual that Keris is so fond of it.” Magnus added. “It’s a bit aggressive of a taste for most children’s palettes.” Magnus stirred his coffee, pouring in a bit more cream. “I mean it’s nowhere near as offensive as durian fruit, but still…”

“I hate it.” Aya chirped in. Now that the waitress was gone, she was back to her chatty self, keeping up in the conversation like a mini adult. “But you know what I don’t hate.”

“What’s that?” Alec sipped his black coffee, turning back to Aya.

“You, Mister Alec.” She said plainly. “You’re my favorite ever of all of papa’s boyfriends or girlfriends.”

Magnus’ eyes went wide, and he was poised to shut her down, but she continued on.

“I’m happy papa pays you to hang out with us.”

“Babysitting, Aya.” Magnus groaned. “That is an incredibly uncomfortable way to describe babysitting. Plus Alexander is not—”

Keris started to grumble, threatening to cry at any moment. Whether it was because of the conflict at the table or that he was in need of a diaper change, no one could be sure. Regardless, Magnus hopped up, grabbing the baby and marching off.

“I’ll be back. Aerulei, I hope when I come back you’re on your best behavior.”

Almost in unison, Alec and Aeruei shifted uneasily. They turned their entire attention to their beverages. Their food arrived shortly after Magnus and Keris returned, and they ate in a mutual silence, concentrating on the food. Magnus fed Keris yogurt in between bites of his own food, the baby slapping his lips together as he enjoyed the sour flavor. Alec shoveled in his food at record speed, deciding he’d overstayed his welcome in this familial quarrel.

“Oh sh— shoot.” He corrected himself before spewing out a profanity. “I have a shift at the cafe in half an hour. Glad I’m already wearing black… I have to go.” Alec hastily threw down some money on the table. After Aya’s comment on ‘paying him to hang out with them’ he couldn’t let Magnus cover the bill for him. The excuse to leave was partially a lie; his shift didn’t start for another hour and a half. But it got him out of there, and didn’t raise any suspicion, so as he downed his last sip of coffee, he didn’t feel guilty for his brisk exit. “Bye Aerulei, Keris… Magnus.” Alec bolted, running to the door.

He didn’t want to walk home before his shift, even if he walked quickly he’d barely have time to get there and back, so he went to work anyway, hoping he could pick up some extra hours by showing up early. He needed the distraction of making drinks, the routine of brewing espresso, the comforting ding of the register, the calming shuffle of busy feet bustling about the cafe. It was going to be a long day.

Chapter End Notes

Fan-fiction... double feature....
LaCroixWitch wrote and lost track of her word count
plotlines conquered
Magnus and Alec
in a fanfiction, double feature, archive show
do you want to go?

(I wrote this embarrassing spoof of science fiction double feature just to tell you that tonight, I'm posting two chapters instead of one. Friday will be the halloween chapter, and instead of bumping it back since I wrote too much, I'm giving you guys a little extra! <3 )
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

After the uncomfortable breakfast at Taki's, Magnus needs to release some tension.

Chapter Notes

If you want to listen to a tense fighting song while reading this, Friction by Imagine Dragons is a fantastic option.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Magnus had been putting off starting back up his fighting classes. It had been nearly two decades since he sparred regularly, but each time he took Aya to classes, he realized how much he missed it. Fighting was the perfect stress relief, and the post-class endorphin boost couldn’t be matched. So after the uncomfortable breakfast, he dropped Keris and Aya with Dorothea and headed to the gym. Thankfully, she didn’t question his sudden appearance at her door, sensing that he needed some time to himself— even if it was just a few hours.

Even with his nerves on edge, he managed to lose track of time, walking onto the mats a few minutes late. His training clothes felt foreign, the stretchy loose fabric reminding him of how his body changed since becoming a father. Although he was still naturally rather fit, and carrying heavy children kept him stronger than most, he wasn’t in prime condition. There was a chance that this intermediate class might be a bit difficult to keep up with, but the instructors assured him that with his experience, he’d be just fine. As he hurried onto the mats, he joined the line up, barely making it before they bowed and muttered the initiating kida.

It was a bit strange— it wasn’t a Krav Maga gym, yet the instructor used the Hebrew word for ‘bow.’ Magnus realized then that he might have ended up in the wrong class— the MMA gym offered Jiu Jitsu, Judo, Krav Maga and general MMA classes. If this was Muay Thai— his martial art of choice— he would excel. If this was Krav— which he hadn’t trained in since its origination in the early 1900’s— this class was going to kick his ass.

After a short warm-up of jogging, the class split into pairs. Unfortunately for Magnus, it was a rather close-knit group where everyone seemed to have familiar partners. Making matters worse, there was an odd number of students, so he would have to be a squeaky wheel in a cumbersome thruple. Just before he resigned himself to his fate, he heard someone rush onto the mats. Magnus turned to see who he would be partnering with; it was a certain tall, dark and rather annoyed looking ex-shadowhunter. Alexander. Magnus had to stop himself from whispering his name out loud. Alec was sweating, looking like he jogged all the way here, his breath ragged and strained.

Alec’s eyes darted around the room in a panic, with no pretense of subtlety. It was painfully apparent that he was looking for any option other than to partner with Magnus, and he wondered for a moment if maybe Alec would just turn around and leave. He thought about it himself— especially considering their incredibly awkward family breakfast that morning— but Magnus
wasn’t the type to completely back out of a situation just because it was uncomfortable. He was bolder than that.

Reluctantly, Alec stepped up beside Magnus. Thankfully there was no time for conversation. The instructor got to business quickly, barking out a combination of attacks and defenses. Today, apparently, was focused on groundwork; how to fight your opponent once you’ve been knocked over, breaking away from the attacker as they try to hold you to the ground. It was going to be a lot of close contact. Magnus tried to separate himself from any provocative thoughts, but as he struggled to swallow down the unwelcome images, his throat felt parched and scratchy. His face was beginning to flush, and they hadn’t even started yet.

Alec didn’t waste time, dropping to the floor in a standard break-fall.

“You can attack first, I’ll defend. I can already tell you’re going to be rusty at this,” Alec taunted, his eyes sliding up and down as he assessed the warlock’s figure. Insulted, Magnus knelt to the ground and instantly pressed his hands around the other man’s neck to choke him. His fingers brushed the space where the deflect rune used to be, but Magnus shook away any images of the once flattering mark. Alec took advantage of that millisecond of distraction, thrusting his hips upward and promptly knocking Magnus forward, maneuvering his leg upward so that he could easily flip the warlock over.

Magnus landed with a thud, the air knocked out of his lungs. In his years-long hiatus, he’d lost the muscle memory of how to handle the force from being slammed to the ground, and it made him momentarily dizzy.

“That was—” Alec started to critique him, but Magnus waved the comment away.

“I know, I haven’t fought since the nineties, I’ll—” It was Alec’s turn to cut him off.

“The 1990’s or the 1890’s?” He scoffed, pushing up to his knees. It was his turn to be the attacker, signaling for Magnus to lay back down and prepare for his turn defending.

Magnus wiggled his hips, adjusting his torso on the ground so he was laying completely flat with his knees up and feet firmly on the floor. Instead of a choke-hold, Alec pinned Magnus’ arms down. While it was a bit easier to maneuver out of, it felt immensely more intimate. Suddenly, his mind was flooded with images— Alexander pushing him down onto a bed of golden silk sheets. Alexander tying his arms together to further restrain him. Alexander doing countless unspeakable things as he dominated him. Heat welled in his core, burning and threatening to boil over. He willed it all away, purging each thought from his mind, praying that he could attack before his body could give away his desire. Alec did not seem to be in a flirting mood, and even if he were, he doubted his body’s reaction would be appropriate right now.

Before he could make an embarrassing faux pas, he went in for the attack. Alexander was bigger than him— and heavier than him— but Magnus put all of his strength into bucking his hips up, knocking Alec off balance and forcing him to lunge forward. His muscles finally remembering a faint echo of his combat training, Magnus broke his arms free, launching his entire weight against the other man to throw him to the side. Alec landed on his back soundlessly, absorbing the impact with ease. He didn’t even seem phased as Magnus hiked up his knee and flipped Alec onto his stomach, adding a bit of flourish to the given combination. Instead of being combative, Alec laughed a dry chuckle.

“Oh you’re trying to be fancy?” Alec sprung up to his feet in a graceful jump.

“Please, Alexander.” Magnus pushed to his knees, waiting for Alec to fall back into the defensive
position. “If I was being flamboyant, it would be obvious.” Magnus snapped his fingers, trading in his black tank top for one that shimmered with gold glitter, the words ‘fight me, bitch’ written across the chest in sequins. He didn’t even care that it was a blatant display of magic—nobody noticed anyway. Alec rolled his eyes, wiping the sweat from his brow. Magnus responded with a wink.

“Don’t flirt with me.” Alec’s voice was authoritative, his face severe. He threw himself back to the floor in a break-fall, and Magnus moved into the attack position, straddling him.

“I wasn— oof.” Alec threw him hard, this time to the other side, catching Magnus off guard. He immediately got into the attacker position, not giving Magnus any time to reset. In a clouded panic, with Alec’s arms around his neck, Magnus fumbled, his efforts to flip the other man proving wildly unsuccessful.

“Is that the best you’ve got, Magnus?” Alec leaned down and whispered into Magnus’ ear, pushing his weight into his elbows so as not to crush the warlock’s throat. Alec was confident—Magnus was barely challenging him. The influence of his past parabatai was showing, and his demeanor was cocky and self-assured. While Alec was being provocative, the warlock was certain that it was more to taunt him and rile him up, rather than being suggestive.

With Alec’s breath hot on his neck, he took advantage of the taunt, using a different technique to grab Alec’s wrist and twist it backward, using the force to twist him to the side just enough so Magnus could edge his leg between their bodies. He pushed upward as hard as he could, sending Alec a few feet into the air before flipping him. Sure, it wasn’t strictly Krav Maga, but it got the job done.

“Do you want to ask me that again?” Magnus rolled to his feet, towering over Alec as he lay on the floor, panting. “A little less rusty than I thought.” He grinned, his eyes glowing haughtily. “Oh, I forgot to mention, I apprenticed under the Grand Master Mitsuyo Maeda—” Magnus’ foot was pulled out from under him, and he twisted to absorb some of the impact, rolling as he fell to the floor.

“Is that where you got your black belt in name dropping?” Alec laughed, a coarse, breathless sound. He nudged the warlock with his foot, kicking him lightly. The tease was casual, but still salted the wound, even if it was just a superficial blow to his pride.

“Oh low blow.” Magnus propped himself up on his forearms, rolling his neck to the side to try to ease the pain of not supporting his head when he fell. “Quite literally a low blow, seeing as that I’m on the ground.”

“You deserved it. This is an advanced class, the whole point is that we have the freedom to vary from the combinations. Catch each other off guard. And those—” He offered his hand to Magnus to help him up. “Would have been your last words.” They stalked each other in a circle, orbiting their shared tension, poised to attack.

Magnus pushed Alec to the ground, but Alec fell back as if it was what he’d anticipated, looking almost comfortable as he hit the floor. The warlock lunged down, pinning Alec’s hands high above his head, trying to leverage Alec’s likely lack of shoulder flexibility to make him struggle. Again, Magnus underestimated Alec, who easily rolled his shoulders, twisting his arm to grab Magnus by the wrist and flip him again. In the blink of an eye, Magnus was in a similar position, but with his thigh latched over Alec’s shoulder, stretching him almost to the point of discomfort. At any second, Alec could easily lift his thigh and send him spinning airborne, landing on his stomach, but instead he paused, gasping for air. He made intentional, weighted eye contact with Magnus. It was heated, heavy, and made the warlock’s head spin. Alec’s eyes slid over the warlock’s body, trailing down
his chest to his waist, and gliding back up. His hazel eyes were hungry when they locked eyes again, his lips parting as he let out a wavering breath.

Magnus felt his glamour waver, his eyes flashing golden-green before returning to their usual safe, deep chocolate color. His breath hitched in his chest, and he realized they’d been frozen in place.

“You know, if you keep trapping me in these compromising positions, I might start to get the wrong idea… unless there’s something you’re trying to tell me…” Magnus purred, forgetting where they were. He squirmed under Alec’s firm grip, his wrists straining to break free as his hips bucked slightly.

Alec responded by roughly flipping him, Magnus’ ribs aching as he forgot to break the fall with his arms.

“We’re supposed to be working, not flirting.” Alec said in an exasperated tone. He lifted his shirt to dab the sweat from his forehead. His muscles were tense as his eyes darted around the room, struggling to maintain his focus. He was clearly on edge.

Just the sight of Alec’s bare stomach drove Magnus to the edge of insanity; he couldn’t help but stare. But it suddenly occurred to Magnus that he did have an advantage here, a way he could have the upper hand. His flirting was distracting to Alec, and he was going to take advantage of that as much as he could. Not just because it was fun, but for the sake of his ribs as well, which were now most certainly bruised.

“Oh, you’re so cute when you’re serious.” Magnus leapt toward Alec, knocking him from his kneeling position back onto the mats. Straddling Alec, he took in the sight of the man’s toned body, biting his lip suggestively. Not entirely of his own volition, his hips rolled against Alec, the other man’s muscles tensing uncomfortably from the sensation. Magnus poised for another attack, but the instructor called out, signaling the end of class.

“I told you not to flirt with me.” Alec growled, rolling Magnus over with a natural ease that made it feel like no work at all. Their clothes clung tight to their bodies, soaked in sweat. The heat between them was almost unbearable, worsened still by their heavy, hot breaths. Rather than the standard way Alec pinned him down during class, Alec leaned forward on his forearms and knees, hovering above the warlock. Magnus’ legs spread open in response to Alec’s movement, his knees falling to the ground beside him. Footsteps shuffled around them as the rest of the class left the mats. They’d barely noticed class had finished, and they’d been in this position for far too long.

Alec coughed, releasing Magnus from his grasp. The sudden absence of Alec was a shock to Magnus’ system, and before he could register that they were no longer touching, Alec had fled.

Dusting off his aching body, Magnus sighed. He was filthy, but he felt dirty. Caught up in the moment, it was easy to forget how he should not have been having those kind of thoughts. How thirsty was he? Compared to most people, Magnus was shameless. But this was a lot, even for a self-proclaimed free-wheeling bisexual. He needed to calm down, and with a cold shower in mind, he headed to the locker room.

It was surprisingly empty in the changing rooms, with only a few stragglers changing out of their sweaty clothes and packing up their bags. Magnus was thankful for that— he didn’t feel like interacting with people right now, at least not until he calmed down a bit. He hadn’t actually brought a change of clothes with him, nor did he have a towel, but that was easily fixable. Opening up a locker solely as a ruse, he reached in, conjuring up a few things from home. He draped a towel over the edge of the locker as he started to disrobe, but before he got very far, a familiar face caught his eye.
Spinning in place, he saw him— Alexander Gideon Lightwood— and in all his glory. Well, half of his glory. He was naked from the waist up, his sweaty t-shirt still in his hand. Magnus caught him in the middle of undressing, and Alec was frozen in place, a look of shock plastered across his angular face. His lips parted, his lashes fluttered— and just like that the brave, strong warrior who had pinned him to the floor just minutes before looked vulnerable. Magnus couldn’t help but stare at Alec’s perfectly chiseled chest; he liked what he saw. But he was gawking, and it wasn’t polite to gawk. Unless he was going to do something about it.

That was how he decided. That was his rationale. At least, that was what he told himself as he not-so-discreetly closed the distance between them, striding across the locker room to Alec before the warlock lost his nerve.

“What are you—” Alec gasped, his breath visibly catching in his chest. Magnus leaned in, the warmth of his breath stirring up the scent of the other man’s post-workout musk.

“Dressing room. Now.” Magnus looped his finger into the waistband of Alec’s shorts and pulled him into one of the private, curtained dressing rooms. He was a man possessed, yanking the curtain closed so hard it nearly tore from the rod. Pushing Alec against the wall, their bodies crashed together clumsily. “Is this ok—” Magnus started, but Alec was just as hungry as he was, wrapping his arms around Magnus’ neck and pulling him tight.

“Just kiss me.” Alec growled.

Magnus didn’t need to be asked twice, immediately giving in. Compared to their first kiss— which was merely a brush— this was a full-on attack on their senses. There was no pretense. The second their lips touched it became a full open-mouthed kiss, their tongues re-enacting their fight from class. But if it was a fight for dominance, Magnus was winning. Although Alec was holding his own, it was obvious he was unraveling beneath the warlock’s touch. When they broke apart for a brief moment to breathe, Alec’s pupils were blown wide, barely any of the hazel visible around their edges.

Magnus trailed his hands across the planes of Alec’s chest, combing his fingers through his thick chest hair and grazing the peaks of his nipples, causing Alec to stifle a moan as he tossed his head back.

“Shh...” Magnus kissed down Alec’s neck. “We have to be quiet,” he whispered, his mouth moving back up to nip at Alec’s earlobe. At that, Alec snapped. Reaching his arms below the warlock’s ass, he hoisted him up and turned so that Alec was holding him against the wall. Magnus instinctively wrapped his legs around Alec’s waist, grinding down against Alec’s groin as he re-positioned his hips.

Alec devoured Magnus, sucking a dark mark into the skin just above his collarbone. Magnus arched his back in response, fisting his fingers through Alec’s hair, still damp with sweat from their time on the mats. Magnus was wearing too much clothing, even the thin tank-top seeming restrictive in the moment. The pair shared the thought, and Alec made quick business of the shirt, lifting it over Magnus’ head in one swift motion.

“I have magic for—” Magnus was silenced by another kiss.

For what felt like a timeless eternity, they kissed, Magnus pressed against the wall while Alec kept a steady rhythm, rolling his hips and grinding against the warlock. Magnus met his movements, bucking his hips and bouncing lightly as they engaged in high-school level dry humping. At one point, Alec lifted Magnus up just a little higher, giving him access to the other man’s chest. His tongue meandered downward, tracing designs from his clavicle to his sternum and back around to
his nipple, circling yet purposefully avoiding his most sensitive area. It was torture. Alec stared up at Magnus toyingly, reaching his tongue out to flick at his nipple piercing. The sight of it was so filthy that Magnus couldn’t stand not kissing Alec for a second more, leaning down and sliding lower into Alec’s arms, tightening their embrace.

Magnus wasn’t hungry—he was starving. He wasn’t thirsty—he was parched. Alexander was a ten-course meal at a Michelin-starred restaurant. He was fresh glacial water from the Swiss Alps. Pulling away only as much as necessary, he snaked his hand between them, sliding past his own arousal and reaching down into Alec’s pants. Alec pressed into Magnus’ grip, groaning as he buried his face in the warlock’s neck. He was hard, thick and—pulling away? Before Magnus could take it in, he was being lowered to the floor, and Alec was stepping away from him.

_Did I do something wrong?_ Magnus stared up, eyes wide, still kiss drunk, but somewhat terrified.

Alec rested both hands on Magnus’ shoulders, kissing him chastely on the forehead. He could see the tension in Alec’s shoulders, as if his arms were the only thing keeping him from crashing back into Magnus and picking up where they left off. Alec closed his eyes, taking in a deep breath in a vain attempt to calm himself down. Magnus didn’t even bother to do the same—he knew it would be pointless. Alec finally spoke, pressing their foreheads together.

“Not like this, Magnus.” He whispered, reaching to the floor to retrieve Magnus’ discarded top. He handed it over to a still stunned warlock, who clutched the fabric to his bare chest defensively. Alec pursed his lips and ran his fingers through Magnus’ spiked, messy hair. Magnus could sense how easy it would be to break Alec’s resolve, to lean in and close the distance and get back to kissing. But Alec was determined, his eyes tracing over every inch of Magnus and committing it to memory, an act of silent admiration. Cupping his hands around the warlock’s stubble-shadowed jaw, he pressed one more kiss to his lips—gentle like a promise. “I want this so much. We should do this right.”

“You’re right, Alexander.” Magnus bit his lip, unable to place what emotions he was feeling right now. He couldn’t believe that he had just gotten hot and heavy in a dressing room, in a public place, like a teenager. What had come over him? He felt an overwhelming urge to flee. He could not bring himself to say anything else, afraid he might screw things up. Magnus waved his hands to open a portal, hopping back inside and going home. He would go back and fetch the kids from Dot soon, but for now, he still needed that cold shower.

Chapter End Notes

I promise that smut wasn’t really so angsty, and that it is mostly them being dramatic! Next chapter is *** drumroll *** the Halloween chapter!!!!! It’s going to have so much fluff and so much slow building romance that you won’t be able to handle it! Again, I love you all, and I love your reviews more than anything!!!

1000 kisses to DianaCloudburst, for not just their normal beta-ing, but the tremendous beta-ing that they have done on this chapter. Really, it was open heart fanfic surgery, both of us hovering around the same document simultaneously. If you haven’t read their story send/delete yet, I highly recommend. Link:
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Love is in the air at the Central Park Halloween Fair. Wait, is it love, or is it just pumpkins?

Chapter Notes

Before you read this chapter, this is necessary viewing. I reference it a lot, and as my beta pointed out, some of the comments will seem OOC and strange without it.

Matt Daddario Talking About Pumpkins

Anyway, enjoy these next two chapters of pumpkin fluff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec adjusted his bow and quiver over his shoulder, a habitual gesture learned so long ago that he felt like he was born knowing how to carry his weapon of choice. The crisp breeze wove its way through Central Park, swirling up a spiral of fallen leaves and tickling the skin on his bare arms. Given the temperature, his leather vest might have been an ill-advised choice, but he reminded himself that he had to dress for the task at hand—not just for comfort. Even though it was midafternoon, the sunglasses felt unnecessary considering the blue-grey, cloud-covered sky. Leather gauntlet-gloves stretched from his hands up his forearms, his muscles straining against the straps in a familiar way as he flexed his hands.

Reaching behind into his quiver, he methodically counted how many arrows he was carrying, even though he knew he had more than enough. Unless disaster struck, he’d be leaving with as many as he’d come with.

A little boy dashed past him, his mother chasing after him as he giggled, evading her grasp by mere inches. The dinosaur tail of his costume waved wildly with his choppy steps as he screamed about how much candy he was going to eat.

Alec continued along the tree-lined path, admiring the way autumn painted the leaves in shades of red, yellow and orange. When he was still a shadowhunter, he never took the time to notice these things; he was thankful now to be able to appreciate them. Another child dressed as a fireman passed by, hand in hand with his father, but stopped in his tracks directly in front of Alec.

“Oh my goodness, daddy look, it’s Hawkeye!” His eyes widened so much they threatened to pop out of his little head. “He’s got a bow and everything!” His dad mumbled that it wasn’t kind to get in the way of strangers, giving Alec a nod before pulling the child away.
The fair was finally in view, a sea of colorful tents, banners and Halloween decorations. Fake spiderwebs stretched across the walkway, woven between fairy lights that would surely look beautiful once the sun set. Alec spotted the navy blue tent set up for Inkwell, ducking in and giving Clary a quick side-hug.

“Sorry I’m late, Fray. My client this morning threw it on me at the last minute that he wanted color instead of black and white. It’s like it never occurred to him that it would take more time, money, setup.” Alec rolled his eyes, scanning the fabric tent. Clary had already finished setting up, supplies spread out on a table next to a set of chairs.

“Are you sure you weren’t late throwing together that costume?” She raised an eyebrow, tucking a stray strand of hair into her side braid. “I thought you said you weren’t dressing up?”

“Well, I mean I didn’t want to make you look silly if you were the only one dressed up.” Alec hid a small smile as he looked down at his phone, checking for any messages. He was really only looking for messages from one person in particular—a certain warlock who hadn’t texted him back since their steamy make-out session almost three days ago.

“Right, but you do know that Black Widow and Hawkeye are… er… were … together, right?” She smirked at him. Even with her high-heeled black boots on, she was still tiny compared to Alec. The henna design board still wasn’t finished, and Clary leaned over the easel, sketching away with her charcoals.

“Oh, no, I didn’t. You know I’ve only watched a couple of those comic book movies, and that’s because Simon made us go to that movie marathon at the bar-cinema thing for his birthday.” He threw himself down in his chair. “I figured you know, I already had a bow, and the vest is just an old leather jacket I ruined by falling off my bike…” The last part was a lie. The vest was one of the few things of Jace’s he had left. It was a little short on him, but with the black utility pants he was wearing, and the longer black t-shirt underneath, it was fine. He prayed Clary didn’t notice that the vest was too well-tailored for him to have made himself, or worse—that she would recognize it. He told himself he was just being paranoid, and he threw the thought out of his mind.

“Oh! Have you seen your mom? She’s doing the spooky storybook reading for the kids! Her costume is adorable.” Clary looked around awkwardly to make sure nobody was near their booth before pulling at her tight body suit, readjusting the clingy vinyl material over her slight curves.

“I’m sure I’ll run into her at some point.” He yawned. “I’m so tired, is there anywhere to get a coffee around here?” He flipped up his sunglasses so they were on top of his head before pinching the bridge of his nose, massaging in small circles.

“You had a shift this morning at the cafe… couldn’t you have had coffee before you hopped on the subway?”

“I did. But now it’s time for third coffee.”

“Third?” Her eyes went wide, mildly horrified.

“Breakfast. During-shift. Afternoon.” He said it like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“If you really need a fix that badly, there’s a stand on the other side of the festival marketplace selling coffee and cider. I went over there earlier to see if they had cocoa, but apparently it’s not cold enough for cocoa. Which is honestly a crime—”

Alec couldn’t handle that much conversation without another coffee.
“So you’re saying you don’t want me to get you anything?”

“I’m good, I’ll hold down the fort. People should be heading in soon. We have like 5 minutes until the fair officially opens.”

“You’re more than capable of handling it.” He dashed off. Their booth was at the front of the market place near the entrance, but the walk to the coffee booth would be a great opportunity to scope everything out before it got crowded. He knew there was a huge ‘pumpkin patch’ set up, and he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t excited to see the pumpkins. There was something magical about the perfect pumpkin. He couldn’t explain it.

Vendors set up various booths, selling all sorts of Halloween miscellany. Peppered between were stations with kid’s activities, photo ops, and stages for musicians. In addition to the pumpkin patch, there were pumpkin carving stations, pumpkin painting, a hay-bale maze and tons of food. Belvedere Castle was dressed to the nines in spooky decor, and guides were leading tours around the park recounting the dark historical details of the area. The Central Park Halloween fair was one of Alec’s favorite events, and even though it didn’t drum up that much business for the shop to offer face painting and henna tattoos, he and Clary always had enough fun to make up for it.

He scanned the territory, trying to follow what he thought was the teasing smell of caffeine with complete tunnel vision. There was nothing else, only the hunt for coffee.

“Mister Alec!” A familiar voice squealed, and soon a familiar set of tiny arms wrapped around his leg.

“Aerulei! Look at you in your costume! You’re… uh…” He looked her up and down, trying to make sense of what she was wearing. She wore an old-fashioned dress with a red silk shawl, her head wrapped up high in golden linen. No particular person came to mind for Alec.

“I’m Marie Laveau, the voodoo queen.” She wiggled her fingers, trying to make a menacing face. “And Keris is my voodoo dollie, come look!” She tugged at his pants, pulling him toward an ornately decorated tent. “Papa! Show Mister Alec K-K’s costume!”

“Alexander.” Magnus turned, a flush painting his cheeks, apparent even through his heavy, pale make-up. From the looks of it, he was dressed like a baroque vampire of sorts, wearing a suit that was all ornate brocade and ruffles, with a powdered wig. His mouth gaped in surprise, showing off a pair of delicate, pointed fangs. Shaking his head, he reached into an antique pram, picking up his squirming baby.

Keris was indeed dressed as a voodoo doll, wrapped in rough burlap fabric, with a red felt heart on the front of his suit. Tiny pins were poked ‘through’ him at various angles, and he wore a little hat that covered his eyes, making them look like hollow holes. Overall, the baby looked very uncomfortable.

“He is too cute to look like a torture instrument.” Alec remarked, pouting slightly. He thought babies should have cute, cozy costumes— especially babies who were as perfect as Keris.

Giving Alec a better look at Keris’ costume, Magnus picked up the baby, hoisting him onto his hip like it was the most natural thing in the world. Somehow, Magnus managed to do this without wrinkling any of the numerous ruffles of his jacket, and Alec was amazed. What amazed him more was the thought that Magnus’ jacket was likely as old as it looked.

“And you are…” Alec raised an eyebrow, still unsure what to make of the warlock’s costume.
“Well, we have a New Orleans family theme this year.” Magnus was proud of himself, a twinkle in his eye as he started to explain. “Aerulei is Marie Laveau, voodoo queen of New Orleans. Keris is her voodoo doll. I debated making him a grunch or a coffin girl, but it seemed too complicated. Plus, I didn’t want him to look too… dead. That might be unsettling to strangers. And I am Le Compte de St Germain, the famed fun-loving vampire of the French Quarter. Although he was much less handsome in real life. Pity he got too drunk and stumbled into the daylight in the 1950’s…” He sighed. “But enough about that. You’re dressed like Alec Lightwood, the sexy shadowhunter and archery expert?”

It was Alec’s turn to blush.

“Well, we have a New Orleans family theme this year.” Magnus was proud of himself, a twinkle in his eye as he started to explain. “Aerulei is Marie Laveau, voodoo queen of New Orleans. Keris is her voodoo doll. I debated making him a grunch or a coffin girl, but it seemed too complicated. Plus, I didn’t want him to look too… dead. That might be unsettling to strangers. And I am Le Compte de St Germain, the famed fun-loving vampire of the French Quarter. Although he was much less handsome in real life. Pity he got too drunk and stumbled into the daylight in the 1950’s…” He sighed. “But enough about that. You’re dressed like Alec Lightwood, the sexy shadowhunter and archery expert?”

It was Alec’s turn to blush.

“Actually, I’m Hawkeye, like from the Avengers. The bow isn’t even mine…” Alec shifted uncomfortably.

“But it is most certainly not for show, either.” Magnus was correct. Alec wasn’t allowed to take his treasured bow and quiver with him when he was exiled—he was forbidden from wielding any shadowhunter-runed weapons. This was a relatively plain black bow, just fantasy-like enough to not draw alarm from strangers. It didn’t look threatening, with its various symbols gracefully carved into the wood. He’d bartered it off a visiting warlock in exchange for a tattoo.

“I must say, I feel safer now that I know you’re here to protect me.” Magnus winked. He was trying a bit too hard to flirt, making up for the discomfort shared between them.

Saving Alec from attempting to flirt back—or worse, addressing how Magnus hadn’t answered any of Alec’s texts since the dressing room tryst—Keris started to wail loudly, commanding everyone’s attention. Aya winced, covering her ears from the sound, dramatically expressing her distaste in the situation.

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“Papa, make him stop.” She whined.

“Madame, I can’t just make him stop crying, you know that’s not how babies work.” Magnus bounced the baby, looking exasperated. Alec had a hunch that this was not his first tantrum of the day. Magnus tried to continue setting up the fortune telling table while juggling his screaming infant, struggling to maintain his composure.

“Hey, why don’t I help out?” Alec offered, intending to help set up the tent. Instead, Magnus held out his son to Alec, looking incredibly relieved. For a brief second, Alec froze, the baby stretched out in both arms. This was not what he expected, but it was just as well. Alec wrapped one long arm around Keris, cradling him with ease. He swayed side to side, using his free hand to tickle at the baby’s cheeks. Immediately, his cries quieted as his copper eyes stared up at Alec. His little face relaxed as he leaned into Alec’s chest, nuzzling into him. Alec reached up to stroke his hair, nuzzling him back.

“What type of sorcery is this?” Magnus looked dumbfounded.

“Keris really likes Mister Alec.” Aya shrugged. “I think it’s because Mister Alec doesn’t even get mad if Keris throws pasta at him. Or because he’s big and warm. I’m not sure which.” She stood over a crystal ball, dramatically trying to look into it for answers. It was adorable. “He tried to show me once, but all I got were pictures of pasta and cozy feelings. It wasn’t helpful.” “Oh, is he the only one who likes Alexander?” Magnus teased, adjusting the wrap on Aya’s head. Alec remembered how Magnus said Aya didn’t like most people, yet she was always chatty with Alec, even letting him braid her hair, and apparently falling asleep on his chest without him knowing. But either Aya didn’t pick up the hint, or had a different course of conversation in mind.

“No, he’s not the only one. You really like Mister Alec, papa.” She looked up at Alec, more smug
than any four-and-a-half year old had any right to be. “Papa said you used to be a *shadowhunner*, but it’s good that you’re not anymore because he doesn’t like to date them because they don’t like warlocks or gay people.”

Alec was desperate to change the subject.

“So, what are you guys doing here?”

“I thought it might be fun to teach Aya how to read tarot, and get more comfortable talking to strangers. Plus, it raises a little money for charity. For the orphanage in Rafael’s neighborhood.”

Alec looked closer at the table to see three small stacks of cards lined up. They were elegant and old with faded, gilded edges. Most likely, they were older than Alec, maybe even older than Central Park itself.

“All right, you need to let me do your Tarot! Like your real tarot. Papa says I’m not allowed to use magic to do tarot for the mundanes, but you’re not really mundane, so…” She rushed away from the crystal ball stand to the table of cards faster than Magnus could follow her, purple sparks dancing from her hands as she picked up a card. Before she could flip it over, Magnus snatched it from her hands and slid it into the pocket of his jacket.

“Aerulei, you can’t go predicting someone’s future without their consent. It’s not a decision to be made lightly!”

Hearing Magnus’ tense tone, Keris commenced his crying.

“Hey, you have a lot going on here with Aya.” Alec whispered. “Why don’t I take Keris off your hands for a bit? Give you some time with her?” Alec was sincere, absent-mindedly reaching out and stroking Magnus’ back with his hand. He caught himself, and quickly jerked his hand away.

“That would be a blessing, are you sure though? I saw that *Inkwell* has a tent set up for face painting and tattoos, don’t you have to help there?”

“Clary’s got it covered. Plus, people will think it’s less weird for me to walk around the pumpkin patch if I’ve got a kid with me.”

Magnus looked at Alec strangely.


“All right then.” Magnus scanned the walkway to make sure nobody was watching before transforming the decorative pram into a fancy, modern baby stroller. He loaded up a diaper bag into the bottom, and pushed the contraption toward Alec. “Do you know your way around one of these?”

“I’m sure I can figure it out. Can he eat candy?” Keris cooed at Alec’s mention of sweets, kicking his feet in excitement.

“He can have some, but he’s got anything he would need in the bag. Just don’t let him eat too much sugar, okay?”

To Magnus’ surprise, Alec placed Keris into the stroller with ease, buckling him in as if it was second nature. Keris tried to wiggle his legs through the wrong holes, and protested being put down, but Alec managed to soothe him and make the entire thing go smoothly.
“You’re good at this, you know.” There was a unique fondness in Magnus’ voice. “Now, be careful out there.” Magnus teased flirtatiously, his eyes dancing. Alec raised a dark, thick eyebrow; he wasn’t sure what Magnus was getting at. Magnus crossed his arms, looking sly. “You have no idea, do you?” He popped his tongue. “Let me spell it out for you: you look like a hot, young, dad. All the women—and probably a few men, but mostly thirsty women—are going to swarm you like vultures. Good luck fending them off. Text me if any of them try to abduct you.”

With that, Alec blushed and mumbled goodbyes before heading off with Keris, disappearing into the slowly growing crowd.

The fair had just opened—Dorian was eager to be on time. He checked his phone over and over, making sure he’d read each text correctly, making sure he knew the meeting spot, making sure he had the correct time. Although Central Park was one of his favorite places, he still felt the need to walk to the meeting spot early to scope it out. There were lots of snacks and drinks for sale, and his fourteen-year old boy metabolism was rearing its head already.

*Should I get something for him?* He wondered. *No that would be far too presumptuous.*

There was something uniquely liberating about not needing to glamour himself. It was easy to forget how much energy it took to maintain a full-body glamour, but with his chosen costume, the green skin fit right in; all he had to glamour were his horns. Nobody would give the horns a second glance on Halloween, but they weren’t authentic to Dorian’s costume.

He had around an hour to kill, so he continued to mill around, looking at the different stalls and keeping an eye out for anyone he knew. Magnus would be here with the kids, and their costumes were sure to be interesting. Maryse Lightwood would be here as well. He was on a first-name basis with her, since Ragnor frequently sent him on errands to the shop buying and selling various arcane manuscripts. Simon Lewis, the daylighter, would likely be here since he never missed an opportunity to cosplay, and if he was there, Isabelle Lightwood might be on his arm. Through the rumor mill, he heard that Alec Lightwood—Magnus’ crush Ragnor was teasing him about—set up a booth for his tattoo shop, although Dorian had no clue what they would offer at a Halloween fair. It wasn’t as if they could tattoo people outside; that would be incredibly unsanitary.

Far too many Lightwoods would be at this fair—too many for comfort. He wouldn’t have any privacy, that’s for sure. They wouldn’t be able to keep their guard down like he’d been hoping. But after all, they shouldn’t need privacy, Dorian shouldn’t be thinking that way. Getting his hopes up, especially over a mortal shadowhunter, would only end up hurting him in the end. Ragnor preached that over and over. This wasn’t a date, he was just meeting a friend at a Halloween Fair. They would eat food, make jokes, carve pumpkins—it’s not like they’d be riding the swan boats and holding hands. Max Lightwood was a shadowhunter, and shadowhunters didn’t date warlocks—especially not warlock boys.

Dorian was so lost in thought that he didn’t even notice the stroller in front of him. He tripped over the front wheel, a perpendicular collision that sent him flying.

*Date or not, there is no way I’m showing up injured.* Dorian thought as he sent out a pulse of magic, surrounding his body and cushioning the fall. Sure, it was ill-advised to blatantly use magic in public, but hopefully the entire encounter was fast enough that the other person didn’t notice. The baby wouldn’t notice, at least.
“Are you okay?” A tall figure knelt beside him, offering an outstretched hand. The face in front of him was familiar, but still a stranger. He was all angles—a sharp jawline covered in a little stubble, high cheekbones underlining hazel eyes, a narrow nose and temples that were thin enough to see a pulse through. He was beautiful enough to make Dorian’s teenage mind malfunction.

“Yeah, I’m Dorian.” He stuttered. “I mean I’m okay! I’m okay and I’m Dorian and... I’ll stop talking now.” Taking the stranger’s hand, he rose to his feet.

“Oh, you’re Dorian? Ragnar’s kid?” There wasn’t any judgement in the man’s face, he even smiled. “I’m Alec. Alec Lightwood.”

“So I’ve heard...” Dorian imitated Ragnar in an attempt to regain his composure and dignity. He ran his hand through his hair, noticing that a few strands sprang back into their natural curls. He’d spent hours trying to master his flat iron technique before giving up and using magic, but apparently his hair was too strong-willed even for that. He smoothed through the strand, stamping out the curl with magic. “Magnus’ Alec, yes?”

“Uh, no...” Alec’s eyes darted to the side. “I’m just, Alec’s Alec, I guess.”

Dorian looked into the stroller. He had his pulse on all the current shadow-world gossip, and from what he’d heard, Alexander Lightwood, the deruned and exiled shadowhunter, did not have children. He also figured Max would have mentioned something. Peering into the stroller, he spotted his favorite baby warlock—Keris.

“Ah, not Magnus’ Alec then... So I suppose you’re just toting around Keris Bane for some other reason?”

“Well Magnus and Aya—” Dorian raised an eyebrow at Alec’s use of her nickname. “Aerulei, they’re running a tarot card and fortune telling tent.” Alec knew that wasn’t enough explanation, but he paused to fiddle with something on the stroller. It was likely an unnecessary gesture, a product of his discomfort. “Keris was being fussy, so I offered to take him off their hands.” Alec shrugged, trying to appear nonchalant, but Dorian was still skeptical. Magnus was very particular about who watched his children, especially when they were babies like Keris. This was growing more and more peculiar still.

“Hmm...” He pondered, until he remembered he’d made a grave mistake. “Oh bloody fu—I mean fluffing hell!” He was thankful that ‘bloody’ wasn’t a curse word in the US, because Keris was just old enough to start repeating things. “I have to take over for that later. The tarot cards. How did I forget? I didn’t even bring my change of clothes. Magnus is going to kill me.”

“You’re a warlock— just conjure your clothes. I promise, your secret’s safe with me.” He reached down into the bottom of the stroller, plucking out a bag of rice puffs for Keris and placing them in his cup holder. “Not about the warlock thing, that’s nothing to be ashamed of, I mean I won’t tell Magnus you forgot.”

“And you’re still saying you’re not Magnus’?” Dorian laughed, dusting off his bodysuit. “You don’t need to answer that. Well I have to go, I’m meeting someone.” He could feel himself blushing.

“Wait, what’s your costume by the way?” Alec looked confused.

“I’m Beast Boy, from Teen Titans. He’s green, so I didn’t have to glamour my skin.”

“Oh, I actually know that show!” Alec smiled a crooked smile. “It’s one of my little brother’s
In some untimely act of Lilith, at that moment, Max Lightwood made his appearance.

“Alec?” Max looked up at his brother and then back to Dorian, then to the baby. He was unsure what to make of the ordeal.

“Max? What are you doing here? The Institute let you out to go to a fair?” At first, Alec was surprised, but when he let the thought settle, a quiet pause in speech Max was all-too familiar with, Alec’s expression shifted toward wistful and happy. “You’re so lucky. When I was your age, every weekend was grunt patrol, just to prove a point.

“Oh um…” He lifted up his Robin mask. “I’m…” He coughed, looking nervous. “I’m on patrol. The costume helps me blend in with the mundanes.” The breeze blew his cape over the front of his shoulder, and he tossed it back into place.

Dorian looked to the ground, already preparing himself for how awkward it felt for Max to lie, to pretend he didn’t know him. He knew it wouldn’t mean anything. It wasn’t his brother’s business what he was doing, but he also wanted Alec to at least know they were friends.

“Right, sure.” Alec wasn’t convinced. “Well the shop has a henna tattoo booth, if you want to have Clary give you one for free. Just don’t forget to glamour your runes first. Remember, Clary doesn’t have the sight anymore. Oh, and you’re more than welcome too, Dorian.” Alec stepped behind the stroller, ready to head out. “Well, I’ll leave you two kids to it.” He started to walk away, but Dorian stopped him.

“Wait… how did you know?” Dorian looked to Max, searching for some detail that gave them away.

“Matching costumes. Robin and Beast Boy, both from Teen Titans?” Alec rolled his eyes, cocking his lips to the side in a joking grin. “Are you sure he’s not your Max?” Alec walked away confidently. His comebacks weren’t great, but he made an effort.

“So while we walk over to the fresh donut stand…” Max started, linking elbows with Dorian. Dorian’s breath hitched at the friendly-yet-intimate gesture. “Why don’t you tell me why my brother was pushing around a baby?” Max and Alec weren’t incredibly close, since Max lived at the Institute with his dad, and Alec was forbidden from entering Clave property. From what Dorian gathered— since Max wasn’t forthcoming with much information— he and Alec occasionally texted, but not much else.

“Where do I start?” Dorian sighed. “You know those kids I babysit for?”

They walked down the walkway, chatting away. Dorian wasn’t sure what to make of this physical contact, but either way he was here, he was happy, and even if the entire Lightwood family got in the way, they were going to have a great day.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Pumpkin picking is more fun when you have a little pumpkin with you to help out. Also, bookstore owners make the best storytellers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Keris, look! Caramel apples!” Alec veered the stroller toward the apple stand. “And they even have little slices, so you can eat them too!” Alec passed over a few dollars and got a cup of caramel, with fresh slices of apple dipped in. The caramel was so thick that the apples stood completely straight. Since he couldn’t hold them in his hands, he placed them in the cup holder in the stroller, right in front of Keris. “Why don’t we go find ourselves a spot to sit down and eat these, so we don’t make a mess.”

It was quickly evident that Alec had made a terrible mistake. By the time they made it to the benches, only about twenty feet from the apple stand, disaster had struck. When Alec pulled the stroller around to face him, Keris was covered in caramel. The caramel was so thick, Alec wasn’t sure how the baby had even gotten the caramel out of the cup, let alone all over himself. He had one of the apple slices in his hand, sliding it across the front of his costume to cover it in caramel, but most of the caramel was just smearing onto his already-sticky fingers.

“Oh no, Keris… Why did you do this?” Alec pouted dramatically, leaning down so that they were almost face-to-face. “I was really excited for those apples.” Sensing Alec’s disappointment Keris shoved his slice of apple forward into Alec’s face, right to his mouth. Caught off guard, Alec accepted the apple, cringing as he felt the caramel coat his skin. This was going to be hell to clean up.

“Come on, sticky-fingers, let’s find somewhere to get you cleaned up.” Alec set off in search of a bathroom, praying that the men’s room would have a changing station, since he was pretty sure most didn’t. He certainly couldn’t return Keris to Magnus in this condition. If he remembered correctly, the closest Central Park bathrooms were on the outskirts of the fair, so he had a decent way to go. They were men on a mission—nothing could distract them. Nothing except vendors selling baby costumes. More specifically, pumpkin costumes.

He couldn’t resist. Chubby babies in pumpkin costumes were one of the cutest things in the world. Before he even realized he’d done it, the costume was purchased and shoved into the diaper bag under the stroller. Would Magnus be mad? Certainly. But he would be more mad if his baby was caught at a Halloween fair wearing only the plain black long-sleeved onesie that had been underneath his costume.

Thankfully, the caramel hadn’t seeped through the fabric, and Keris’ underclothes were clean. Alec made quick business of giving Keris a diaper change and wiping off the caramel before dressing him in his new costume. At almost fourteen months, Keris was round and chubby, all squishy rolls and thick limbs. He filled out the pumpkin costume, and the little hat sat perfectly on his head, rounding out the ensemble.
“Look at you! You’re my perfect little pumpkin, aren’t you?” Alec cooed, lifting Keris high in the air and blowing a raspberry to his stomach before putting him back in the stroller. “Now, little pumpkin, what do you say we go hit up that pumpkin patch?”

He parked the stroller outside the pumpkin patch and carried Keris on his hip. It was a sight to see: a huge rectangle of central park carved out, with pumpkins spread out between winding bales of hay. Keris looked around as if he’d never seen pumpkins before, and grumbled, gesturing for Alec to sit him down.

“Pumpkin, the hay is scratchy, it will poke right through your costume! Don’t worry, I’ll show you all the best pumpkins so we can pick one.”

“Oh. My. Gosh.” A blonde woman stopped next to them, patting Alec’s arm. It almost felt like she was feeling up his bicep. “You are the cutest dad I’ve ever seen! What’s his name!” She leaned into Keris, but Alec stepped back protectively.

“Uh…” Alec wasn’t sure if he should be giving out the name of Magnus’ children to strangers, so he thought on his feet. “Kenny.” He waved Keris’ chubby hand at her.

“Hiyaaa” Keris drew out the word. He cracked a little smile, soaking in the attention he was getting from the stranger. She was utterly enamored.

“I can’t even, this is too adorable. You’re like, taking him to a pumpkin patch? Honestly, hashtag dad goals.” She sighed dramatically, eyes constantly sliding from Alec to the baby and back.

“He’s not—” Alec started to say that Keris wasn’t his, but the woman continued to rant.

“Do you want me to snap a picture of you two? It would be a crime not to.” She clutched her hands in front of her chest, scrunching up the front of her vest.

“That would be great actually. What do you think Ke— Kenny?” Alec corrected himself. This woman was likely harmless, and now his ruse was just annoying.

“Why don’t I take it on my phone and then send it to you…” She smiled sheepishly.

Alec wasn’t the best flirt, but he could smell her game from a mile away. She’d take the picture, send it to him, and have his number. He’d rather risk this stranger running off with his phone, so he fished his from his pocket and handed it over.

“It’ll just be easier on mine, that way I can send it to his dad easier.” It wasn’t his style, but Alec winked to prove a point.

“Oh… oh.” She realized what Alec was implying. “Two daddies, you are a lucky little boy. Umm…” A blush spread across her cheeks. “Why don’t you two sit on that bale of hay….” She knelt down, grabbing a few perfect round pumpkins and placing them around Alec and the baby. “And with these pumpkins there….” She shifted Alec’s shoulders and maneuvered Keris into a different position in his lap “This will be perfect for Instagram.” She snapped away, holding the phone at weird angles and crouching in different positions. When she was done, she handed back over the phone.

“These are amazing, thank you so much.” Alec slipped his phone back into his pocket.

“No, it’s really nothing.” She smiled. “Have fun with your little pumpkin.”

Eventually, Alec settled on a small, round pumpkin, nearly devoid of flaws. It was a perfect
pumpkin that could almost hold its own against Keris. He snapped a picture of it and sent it to Magnus, along with the best few pictures the woman had taken. They were captioned: ‘Picking pumpkins with my favorite pumpkin. He picked the prettiest one for papa!’ There was just enough room under the stroller for the pumpkin, and with Keris strapped back in and ready to go, they set back out on their adventure, Alec’s mind set on finding some snacks. This time, though, he was going to stay away from caramel.

The storytelling nook in the park was magical. Tiny paper lanterns hung from the orange and red trees, setting a glow in the natural shade. A fountain babbled a soft and soothing background noise, drowning out the sounds of the city. New York seemed hundreds of miles away. Maryse had a bench to herself, but there were layered rugs spread out on the cobblestones for the children, with various stools and pillows scattered about.

This was the third reading of the day, and it was the most crowded yet. Almost every spot on the rug was full, with some kids hanging on the edges, clinging timidly to their parents’ legs. Each little face glanced up at her, anxious for the story to begin. There were still a few minutes before she could start, and she hoped the kids wouldn’t get too restless. She sipped at some warm spiced cider, taking care to make sure she wasn’t straining her voice.

With only a minute or so left, one more guest joined in, shuffled onto the only free space on the rug, right in the front.

“Aya, sayang, I’ll be right over here at the side. I know it’s a little kids book, but you are still a little kid.” He reached under her chin, raising her face back to him and placed a kiss on her forehead. “Behave for Miss Maryse, okay?” The little girl nodded furiously. Her dad stepped back, taking a seat on the stone wall.

It couldn’t be… but it is? More handsome and fearsome than ever, it was the High Warlock of Brooklyn: Magnus Bane. The same Magnus who, she had a sneaking suspicion, had a crush on her son. At least, she hoped so, since it was painfully obvious that her son had a crush on him.

Maryse cleared her throat and introduced herself, trying to ignore the fact that she had quite the audience.

“Hello children, and Happy Halloween.” Almost every face snapped up and locked on her, and seeing their happiness and curiosity touched her heart in a way she hadn’t felt in a while. She shoved down the thought about how badly she wanted to be a grandmother. Now wasn’t the time. “Now I’m going to share with you all, my favorite little witches and wizards, one of my favorite spooky stories. Written by Oscar Wilde, this is a version of the story written just for little ones like you. It’s called ‘The Canterville Ghost.’”

Some of the kids gasped at the mention of ghosts, but Maryse’s warm face and motherly demeanor calmed them. Out of the corner of her eye, she swore she saw Magnus’ eyes twinkle at the mention of Oscar Wilde. “It is not a scary ghost story, but rather a bit funny.” She grinned, “Now, let’s begin.”

She read through the abridged and simplified version of the story, making sure to go at just the right speed so that the kids could follow. Playing around with voices, she threw on an exaggerated British accent when necessary, eliciting a cacophony of giggles from the crowd. It was all so fun,
so easy. Each time she got to the edge of the page, she paused for a brief second, relishing in how the kids were jumping for her to continue. Almost as soon as she started, it was over, and she was closing the book and placing it back down on the bench.

“I hope you all enjoyed your story. Stay safe, and have a Happy Halloween!” At that, the crowd of tiny bodies rolled and clambered up, finding their parents and skipping off, most likely in search of candy. But one little girl—and her warlock father—stayed. Maryse’s heart raced, and she wasn’t sure why. She didn’t want to intrude on what felt like Alec’s personal world, but at the same time, she didn’t have the best reputation with Magnus. She had an urge to mend that relationship.

“Miss Maryse.” The little girl walked up to her. Her Marie Laveau costume was impeccable. She wondered if it was because Magnus had known Marie herself. “I’m Aerulei Bane. I liked your story. Papa used to be friends with Oscar Wilde.” She said, not understanding the significance behind her words. To her, it was as plain as saying that her dad knew one of Maryse’s friends, so incredibly casual. “You’re Mister Alec’s mom, right?”

“I am.” Maryse nodded. “And you’re the famous Aya I’ve heard so much about?”

“In the flesh.” Magnus joined them, wrapping his arm around his daughter. “It’s wonderful seeing you Maryse, you look well.” Magnus winked. It wasn’t flirtatious, but rather knowing. “Nice costume by the way.”

“I wanted to wear a traditional mundane costume, how did I do?” She stood, spinning around. She wore a purple velvet dress with a matching witches hat, and a broomstick leaned against the back of the bench.

“Absolutely perfect. Spitting image of a mundane Halloween.” Magnus adjusted his powdered wig.

“Where’s baby Keris?” Maryse looked around for a stroller. “Ah, I suppose maybe the fair is a bit chaotic for a baby.” She kicked herself. Her baby fever was kicking in, and she realized that Magnus was probably surprised that she knew who his son was, let alone that she was asking about him. She probably seemed creepy.

“Oh, he wouldn’t miss it for the world. He’s with Alexander. He was being so fussy at the fortune teller tent that Alec offered to walk around the fair with him. I’m actually off to go look for them now, since Dorian showed up to take over with the tarot cards.”

“Ah, Dorian! My favorite customer. I’ll have to go see what the cards have in store for me.”

“Curious, though. He showed up with your son…”

“With Alexander? I thought you were looking for him.”

“No, young Maxwell.” Magnus raised an eyebrow. “You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you?”

“Why would I?” Maryse didn't follow.

“Oh, no reason. Maybe I just found it strange that they parted ways before they thought they were in my line of sight… and maybe they were wearing matching costumes… and maybe they were walking arm in arm.” Magnus winked. “Well, I must be going. Alec has been blowing up my phone with pictures of Keris, and he seems to have switched out his voodoo doll costume for a pumpkin one. That just won’t do in the Bane family.”
Magnus and Aya said their goodbyes before shuffling along, leaving Maryse alone in the reading nook, daydreaming about babies in pumpkin costumes.

Alec and Keris were on the move, and there was nothing Magnus and Aya could do to stop it. Judging by the copious pictures he was receiving from Alec, they were following right behind him, missing him by a hair at each spot. At this point, it was like a game, and Magnus finally decided to text Alec to just meet him back at the fortune telling tent.

Aya was tired from running around all day, but she’d eaten enough candy to keep her awake for hours. It was mostly Clary’s fault. While the redheaded artist painted henna designs on Aya’s hands and pretty flowers on her face, she’d mistakenly left the candy bowl in arms reach of Aya. Magnus was dead on his feet, Aya was cranky, and honestly, he just wanted to go home. The fair would be over in another hour or so, the park transitioning over to more scary events for teens and adults, and he was counting the minutes. It was making him antsy that Alec and Keris weren’t back yet, but he knew he didn’t have anything to be worried about.

Even his faintest worries were calmed when he heard a familiar voice zooming toward them. Alec was maneuvering the stroller around, making buzzing and rumbling sounds while Keris giggled uncontrollably.

“I see you two had a fun day, Alexander.” Magnus smiled.

Alec’s eyes lit up the second he saw Magnus.

“We did, didn’t we pumpkin.” Alec swooped around, and in one graceful motion lifted Keris from the stroller and lightly tossed him in the air, catching him before passing him over to Magnus. “Why don’t you tell papa all about it.”

Alec likely meant that figuratively, but Keris had other ideas, placing his sticky hands on his father’s cheeks, magic pulsing beneath them. Magnus winced at the sensation of wet sugar coating his skin, but the discomfort was replaced by laughter and smiles as Keris shared his memories of the day.

“Keris tells me you even got him to take a nap? Outside? That never happens. He usually gets fussy and I have to take him indoors to nap.” Magnus hugged Keris tight. He’d missed his son, even though they were only apart for a few hours.

“I mean, he had my mom reading him a story. It’s very peaceful. Even I was almost dozing off.” His gaze jumped to Aya, who looked a bit jealous that the conversation didn’t include her. “Aya, I heard you met my mom today. She told me all about it.”

Aya perked up when Alec addressed her.

“I did meet her, she was really cool. Papa told me she runs a book store, and I want to go!”

“She would love to have such an avid reader visit. It’s right next to my tattoo shop.” Without the baby in his arms, Alec didn’t know what to do with his hands, shoving them in his pockets.
“Well then I must stop by.” She said as if she were an adult who kept a planner and made her own schedule.

“I’ve gotta go, I have a client coming by for a huge nautical design soon. Thanks for letting me watch him, Magnus. I really mean it—I had a great time.” Alec smiled timidly.

“You’re thanking me? You were a lifesaver today Alexander. I don’t know what I would have done if you didn’t step in.”

“Any time.” Alec turned to the kids, giving hugs and mumbling goodbyes.

This was it. Alec was about to say goodbye and walk away. But something cracked in Magnus. He couldn’t let himself be a coward anymore.

“Alexander! Wait.” Magnus squeezed Keris tighter for moral support. Alec hesitated. He stared curiously at Magnus, ready to listen. Something about him said that he had wanted to linger as well, that he hadn’t quite been done with the conversation yet. Magnus just hoped it was for the same reasons.

The warlock took a deep breath. He needed to rip off the band-aid, and ask this much overdue question, but that didn’t make it any less awkward. It shouldn’t be awkward— he’d done it thousands of times. Literally. Something about this was different, though, and that was why it was even more important to ask.

“Alexander, would you like to go on a date with me? Say, dinner by the water with an outdoor movie? Wednesday night, when the shop’s closed?”

All three members of the Bane household stared at Alec, holding their breath, awaiting his answer.

“Of course, I’d love to.” Alec’s eyes glistened and he smiled that earth-shattering crooked smile that Magnus would never tire of.

This time, when Alec rushed off, it didn’t leave Magnus with a sense of emptiness, but rather a flame of hope.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, we ramp up to their first date! In other news, within the next few chapters... this story is going to earn it's 'E' rating ;)

Please comment how you felt about these two chapters, ask me any questions you have, and throw suggestions at me. I live for your feedback!

I'll be going through and doing some cleanup for this soon as well, naming chapters, adding song recs, and building more mood boards, just putting that on your radar!

Also:
In frantically writing these chapters, I decided to write a poem for you all:

A brief discourse on fanfiction writing:

“Yeet me off a cliff
Put my ashes in Cassandra Clare’s frappuccino”

-La Croix Witch 2019
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Magnus invites Tessa over for afternoon tea before she babysits the kids.

Chapter Notes

Advance apologies for too many notes, I know I hate when there are too many when I'm the reader!

I've been dying to add Tessa into the story since I just finished reading The Infernal Devices, but don't worry! If you haven't read them this still makes sense. Jem is in the TV show as 'Brother Zachariah' and Tessa is mentioned a few times for her work in the Spiral Labyrinth. I headcannon that Jem was cured of the disease that made him join the brotherhood, so in this fic, he is a plain, normal nephilim.

Some translations, I apologize if any are wrong:

hanto: assistant in Japanese tea ceremonies

Tatay: filipino for father

Sinta: filipino for darling

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The whistling of an antique tea-kettle rattled Magnus from his daydreaming, not only signaling that the water was boiling, but also alerting him of the time. Tessa would be here any moment, and he wanted to get the tea started before her arrival. Walking to the stove, he moved the kettle from the burner. If everything went according to plan, the loud noise from the kettle would stir both children from their naps, and give them time to slowly wake up before Tessa arrived. Aerulei hated finding guests in the loft that weren’t there when she went to sleep, and Magnus wanted to avoid a tantrum. Thinking ahead, he flicked his wrist to conjure white chocolate hot cocoa mix so that the kids would have something to drink while the adults chatted. For the tea, however, he wasn’t going to use magic—tea was too sacred.

Similar to the shelves in his office, Magnus had a wall of jars in the kitchen, each filled with various herbs, powders, leaves and dried fruits. Wooden sticks poked out of the lids of rounded pots, containing luxurious honey varietals, carefully selected for their pollen localities and botanical profiles. The short form of the story: Magnus was a tea snob. His favorite cast-iron teapot was beautifully patinated, layered from years of heavy usage and meticulous care taking. He learned the hard way when he acted as hanto at a Japanese tea ceremony in the mid 1800’s to never wash the pot with anything except warm water. He never showed up late to a tea ceremony again—as the last guest, the tsume almost always ended up being the assistant, and he didn’t want to embarrass himself again by ruining a host’s delicate pottery.

One thing Magnus would never be embarrassed by was his natural talent at creating tea blends. He
was a master who reveled in his skill. He had a special blend in mind for Tessa, and he hoped that it would finally get her to own up to her secret and admit that she was pregnant. Starting with a base of *rooibos*, Magnus shook a generous amount of the finely-chopped herb into the tea basket. Next, he opened a jar of home-made crystallized ginger. Not only did that come in handy for tea, but it was a great snack for the children when they had stomach aches, or for Magnus when he had a hangover—although that was rarely the case anymore. Turning to a glass container of flowers, he added a few beautifully preserved chamomile buds. Not too much though, as they could easily overwhelm the flavor profile. In this blend, chamomile was solely for its calming health benefits. A pinch of dandelion added liver support to the mix, something everyone needed. To add a pleasant fruitiness, he used dried raspberry fruit. Finally, there was the last ingredient— the one that he knew Tessa would never miss: raspberry leaf. Although it was more useful in later pregnancy, just a small amount of the herb early on helped support the womb, and its potent flavor would drive his message home.

Satisfied with the blend, he shook the tea basket, making sure to mix the ingredients before pouring the water. Sweet yet pungent steam billowed from the pot, a film of it spreading beneath the trivet when he placed it onto the living room tea table.

“*Tatay*?” From the hallway, Aerulei called out in Filipino, looking for her father. Although Magnus’ native language was Indonesian, when he’d found out that his daughter was Filipina, he decided she had to learn her native language too, and he encouraged her to use it at home as much as possible. At this point it was second nature.

“Hello *sinta*. My little darling.” He stepped away from the tea, heading back into the kitchen and making quick business of the cocoa. Soon, he’d go to wake up Keris, but for now he would let the baby sleep a bit longer.

Aya shuffled into the living room, her clothes rumpled from her nap. She blinked her eyes a few times, adjusting to the afternoon sunlight that flooded the loft through the balcony windows. “*Papa, what is that smell*?” She crinkled her nose tight, her face pinched with disgust.

“It’s hot cocoa. Do you not like it? You always love white chocolate cocoa.” He realized he had a terrible case of *mommy brain.* She wasn’t talking about the cocoa, but rather the tea. “Oh! The tea. That’s something special I made for Auntie Tessa. Could you please open up the doors to the balcony and air out the living room?”

“Is it warm enough outside?” She raised a thick dark eyebrow, looking skeptical.

“It is. Probably one of the last warm days of the year though. It’s almost November!”

“I know, I’m not stupid papa.” She grumbled, using her magic to open the french doors.

“Aerulei. You know how I feel about using magic for small tasks like that.” Magnus scolded, making intense eye contact across the open living space. His un glamored cat eyes conveyed more than any amount of verbal scolding ever could.

“But you do it all the time!” Aerulei whined.

“Yes, but there is value in doing things the mundane way, at least for a while until you’re older and your magic is stronger. Even little bits of magic like that can tire you out.”

“Hmph.” She crossed her arms, throwing herself down on the chaise lounge near the balcony. Chairman trotted over, hopping on the velvet lounger with her, stretching out and demanding back scratches.
“No huffing from you, missy. If I’d wanted you to open the doors with magic, I’d say ‘Aerulei, please open the doors with magic.’ You’re lucky that my hands are already full making your hot cocoa, or else I’d close the doors and make you do it again.” He reached over to his tea shelves, grabbing a pinch of a special herb to fortify and replenish magic.

“Sorry papa…” She mumbled, reclining to the side to hug Chairman.

“You’re forgiven. Now, are you excited to see Auntie Tessa?”

“I suppose it would be rather unfortunate if she wasn’t!” A warm and cheerful voice called. Tessa had portaled in silently, catching Magnus off guard. There would never come a day where the power and depth of her magic ceased to surprise him.

“Auntie Tessa.” Aerulei nodded, not leaving her spot next to the cat. “I can’t move, it will upset The Chairman.”

“I wouldn’t dream of asking you to, rosebud. My Jem reminds me every day just how important it is to respect our feline housemates. Church is the king of our house now.”

“Ah yes, your stolen cat!” Magnus smiled as he walked over to one of his oldest friends, wrapping her in a bear hug. “I knew that he’d be happy to escape the Institute.” Magnus gestured to his lofty couch for Tessa to take a seat. He sat down in a leather armchair beside her. “I made us some tea.” With a flicker of magic, two matching porcelain cups appeared, handle-less and bearing an ornate design of herons and castles—for her two loves. The pattern wasn’t lost on her, her eyes glistening at the sight.

“I don’t recall teacups being a part of the china set you got me for my wedding.” Tessa smiled sheepishly. Magnus had commissioned the design as a wedding present for Jem and Tessa, gifting them an entire set of dishes. “But I have a sneaking suspicion that when I go home, I’ll find a tea set in my cupboard.”

“Perhaps.” Magnus winked. He waved his hand, the teapot levitating and pouring out two cups.

“Papa! You need to do things the mundane way!” Aya sat up on her elbow. His daughter and their cat glared at him with matching expressions.

“Apologies, Aerulei, you’re right.” Heeding her words, Magnus held both hands up in surrender, letting the pot lower back to the table safely.

“Ah— you’re teaching her when it’s appropriate to use magic? I’m sure Ragnor and Dorian are going to make that lesson more difficult.” Tessa picked up her cup, cradling it gently in her hands, enjoying the warmth.

“You’d be surprised, Dorian actually has a level head on his small shoulders.” Magnus turned to Aya, who had already bothered The Chairman enough for him to hop off the chaise and disappear to less popular locales, likely out on the balcony. “Aya, why don’t you go get your book and read outside while Auntie Tessa and I talk. I’ll bring out your hot chocolate.”

Magnus caught Tessa’s face green at the mention of chocolate, her least favorite food. Definitely, most decidedly pregnant. Magnus quickly set Aya up on the balcony with her book, before settling back down in the living room.

“So, where do we begin, Tessa? How have you been?”

“Everyone is always asking about me. I’m the one married to an ex-Silent Brother. I want to hear
“I promise you, there is nothing interesting about me. I’m not even working right now. I chase around two young children.”

“So is that why you’re asking for me to babysit tonight? So that you can do absolutely nothing?” She sipped her tea, furrowing her brow at the taste. She didn’t crack yet though, not mentioning it. Maybe Magnus was being too subtle.

“No. I’m asking you to babysit tonight because I have a… thing.”

“And you’re not asking Ragnor or Catarina because?”

“Because I missed you, of course!”

“Magnus.” Her tone demanded respect while seeming completely gentle, the product of years of motherly, grandmotherly and even great-grandmotherly experience. It was hard to lie to her.

“Fine. I’m going on a date. Ragnor would tease me about it, and Catarina has already meddled enough. And Dot… well Dorothea might be a bit sensitive to the idea of watching my children while I’m on a date.” It was common knowledge that Dorothea had a crush on Magnus, and that he’d firmly turned her down last year.

“I see.” Tessa took another sip, growing more suspicious not just of Magnus’ story, but also the tea itself. “This date is with Alexander Lightwood, isn’t it?”

Magnus opened his mouth to speak, but Tessa continued,

“We talk Magnus, we are warlocks. We love gossip. It keeps our immortal lives interesting!”

Magnus decided to divulge everything to Tessa. She was the best listener, and of all his friends, the most experienced in love. Although she’d only had two great loves in her life, she loved fully and with every fiber of her being. Despite being born in the Victorian era, she was rather libertine in terms of the more intimate aspects of relationships— she enjoyed hearing about all the steamy details.

“Get comfortable, then. I’ll start from the beginning.” Magnus snapped his fingers to produce an ottoman and stretched out.

“But the tarot card, Tessa!” Magnus snapped his fingers, a single gilded tarot card appearing between his thumb and index finger. “The tarot card is the most frustrating part!” Magnus deftly flipped the card in and out of his fingers, his rings sending rays late-afternoon sunlight dancing across the walls.

“I think you’re taking too much stock in it.” Tessa readjusted her seating position, bringing her legs up underneath her and leaning to the side. “From everything else you’ve told me about Alexander, I don’t think that something as trivial as a tarot card could ever get in the way of how he feels about you.” It was just like Tessa to wax romantic. In matters of love, compared to her Magnus was a cynic and Ragnor was a soulless monster.
“Ugh, I need wine for this conversation.” Magnus grumbled, placing the tarot card on the coffee table and burying his face in his hands. “My date isn’t for another two hours— there’s plenty of time to pregame with a little wine.” He turned his attention back to goading a confession out of Tessa. She would normally never turn down a glass of wine, so denying it would be a sure giveaway, and the perfect opportunity to admit she was pregnant.

“Do you need liquid courage for the date?” She answered the question with another question. Magnus couldn’t tell if she was being coy or stubborn, but she was dodging him either way. He wasn’t going to bend and ask her outright— not only would it be rude, but it would also be a sign of weakness.

“No I’m just brooding. Wine and brooding go hand-in-hand. Should I open a bottle?” He raised an eyebrow, gesturing to his wine racks in the kitchen. One wall used to be lined with a floor-to ceiling rack, but with children in the house, all of the alcohol was either stashed in racks above the cabinets or in a locked armoire. For once, Magnus didn’t really want to drink wine, he was just seeding Tessa further, waiting for her to confess.

“I’m alright, but I will only judge you a little bit for drinking alone.” She sipped at her cup of tea, which was most likely cold at this point. Magnus waved a hand to refill the pot, steeping the leaves in fresh boiling water.

“It’s not alone if you’re here, technically, but I never want to be the only one drinking.” He narrowed his eyes, searching for any sign that she would finally crack. Nothing.

“Back to this tarot card?” Tessa pushed the issue further.


“I can believe it. It is a minor arcana card in a standard tarot deck.” She smiled smugly, taunting him.

“No, but it’s the ‘fairy-tale ending’ card! And Aya drew it for Alexander.” There were copious things about that particular card that bristled Magnus.

For one, a fairy-tale ending wasn’t something Magnus took stock in— he found the whole concept ridiculous. He lived each day to the fullest, and even now that he had children, he made a pointed effort to stay in the present. Being immortal, there is no ‘ending’ to have, so he never even considered what kind of ending he would want. What bothered him more was that this card wasn’t for him— it was for Alec. Alec was mortal, his life had a certain inevitable trajectory. A fairy-tale ending for him carried a more immediate gravity, and maybe it was something he’d always wanted. Magnus chewed at the inside of his cheek nervously. What was driving him up the wall was that he didn’t know enough about Alec to know what his storybook ending would entail. Would it involve marriage and kids like the traditional interpretation of the card? Or would it be something else. For someone who usually had all the answers, he was coming up empty, and he hated it.

“It’s just a game Magnus, a parlour trick at best.” She attempted to dismiss his anxieties, but a certain tiny warlock decided to offer her perspective instead.

“Nu-uh Auntie Tessa.” Aya skipped in from the balcony the second she heard her name. “I was using magic. The tarot cards are true when I use magic.” Tessa raised her eyebrows, staring at Magnus accusatorily.

“Have the record show that I specifically told her not to do that. And for downworlders, only do it
if they ask.” Magnus turned to his daughter, addressing her directly. “Alexander did not ask for a reading, especially not a real one.”

“But I wanted to see if you and Mister Alec are in love. Do you blame me, papa?” She batted her eyes, dramatically pouting. “And you never even let me see the card!” Aya peered over to the card on the table.

“It was ten of cups, Aerulei.” Tessa smiled, patting the couch beside her for Aya to join. “What do you make of that?”

“Well it is the fairy-tale card. It means getting everything you want and being really happy. Usually it means getting married, having babies, and having a house.” She smirked at her father. “Papa already has two of those things, Mister Alec has none. If they get married, they’ll both have all three.”

Tessa held back laughter, turning to Magnus with her questioning grey eyes. “So then, Magnus, I suppose you simply must propose to Mister Lightwood tonight. The cards have spoken.”

“Tessa, not all of us get proposed so quickly.” Magnus teased. Tessa narrowed her eyes at him. “Thrice.”

“Thrice?” Aerulei struggled through the word with her lisp. “Auntie Tessa, how have you been married three times? I thought you were only married to Uncle Jem.”

“That’s a very long story Aerulei.” Tessa smiled, but her eyes suddenly became distant. “It’s a story for another time, when you’re older.”

“Yes, and a story about certain famous shadowhunters turning into worms. Shadowhunters who might be related to my date. I would rather not think about that connection right now, thank you.”

“You still have yet to give us your opinion on the card, Magnus.” Tessa steered the conversation back on-topic. She and Aerulei looked fixedly at Magnus, waiting for his answer.

“Aerulei is correct in her interpretation,” Magnus confirmed. His daughter knew her tarot cards well. “although I’m not sure if it is so literal.”

“The traditional Rider-Waite version of the card has a couple holding hands with two dancing children, a boy and a girl.” Tessa observed as she poured herself another cup of tea. “Although unlikely, it has the potential to be literal indeed.”

“Yes, but the wife is wearing a blue dress in the card. I would never be caught dead in something so dowdy.” He shuddered at the thought.

“Continue,” Tessa urged.

“Fine,” Magnus huffed. “Ten is the completion card for the suit of cups, the emotional suit of the deck. It’s about being fulfilled and thankful, but sharing that joy with others— mostly family. The nine of cups is the less mature version of the card, mostly about fruition. There’s still emotional self-satisfaction in that card, but it’s lonely. The ten of cups is about finding that paradise at the end of the journey.”

“That was impressive. You should write a book on it.” Tessa was sweet yet sarcastic.

“And if I did, you would read it, wouldn’t you? Always the bookworm, never the book.”
At the statement, Aerulei and Tessa looked equally puzzled.

“I know that when you’re as old as we are,” She purposefully left out the word ‘immortal’ in front of the children. “You tend to lose track of current slang, but I’m relatively certain the phrase is ‘always the bridesmaid, never the bride.’”

“Yeah papa, it doesn’t work if you switch it around!” For a moment, Aya was a normal child, climbing into Tessa’s lap and undoing the ribbon around her dark silky hair. “Auntie Tessa, will you braid my hair? You always do the best job.”

“Of course I will. It won’t be anywhere near as good as Sophie Lightwood’s braids, though.” Tessa raked her long fingers through Aerulei’s hair, tickling her scalp as she divided the hair into thick sections starting at the crown.

“Lightwood?” Aya cocked her head to the side, but Tessa’s gentle hands guided it back in place so she could keep the braid straight. “Like Mister Alec?”

“Ah, yes.” Magnus chirped, ready to show off his limited knowledge of shadowhunter lineages. He kept up just enough so that he knew who to make fun of for careless incest. “Not a direct ancestor, but rather a great-great-great-great aunt.” Magnus sipped his tea. “Married to his middle-namesake, Gideon Lightwood, if I recall?”

“Either your memory is still sharp as a tack, or you are far too interested in blackmail. I’ll assume it is the second one. Back to this tarot card though…”

“Are you ever going to stop asking questions, Tessa?”

“William used to ask me the same thing. My answer was always the same: no.”

“Your tombstone will be inscribed with a question, just so you taunt us for eternity.”

“Questions make you wise. Now, have you considered if the card was reversed?”

“Of course, but I know how important it is to know if a card is a reversal.” Magnus fixed himself another cup of tea before leaning back and loosening his posture. “When I slid it in my jacket for safekeeping, I maintained its orientation.”

“How can you be sure, papa?” Aya added. “Are you sure you remember what side of the card would have been pointed to Mister Alec?”

“I’m sure, because I glanced at it immediately. Trust me. If I thought this was ten of cups reversed, I’d be on an island somewhere in Southeast Asia drinking away my troubles with a bottle of dark rum.”

“Magnus, you have two children.” Tessa rolled her eyes at Magnus’ histrionics.

“Aya, you like to swim. Would you be okay living at the beach?” Magnus said in a dry tone of mock-despair. Unsure if her father was joking, Aya nodded furiously, causing Tessa to fumble the delicate french braid she was working on in Aya’s hair.

“And the baby?” Tessa undid the last few folds of the braid, redoing it with motherly precision.

“Jem can have him. He looks more like him anyways, with that mop of silver hair.” Magnus mused. “Are we even sure he’s mine? He looks nothing like me.”
“Magnus, he’s adopted.” Tessa deadpanned.

“Oh yes— right.” Magnus sat up straight, realizing that Keris had been asleep too long. “Speaking of my little prince, I need to wake him up from his nap. He hardly ever sleeps this soundly through an afternoon.”

“All done.” Tessa whispered to Aya, patting her shoulders. Magnus wasn’t sure where the ribbon fastening his daughter’s hair came from, but it looked too old to be something randomly conjured. Aya hopped off the couch, no doubt off to find the cat. “Magnus, may I come with you?” Tessa’s gaze had softened at the mention of seeing the baby, but now her eyes had a distant glimmer.

“You’ll be watching him all evening. That would be pretty difficult if you couldn’t go into his room.” Magnus laughed.

They rose in unison, walking down the hall to Keris’ room.

“What would you say to Jem and I keeping the kids for the night?” Tessa spoke cautiously. “At my home in Devon?”

Magnus paused before entering Keris’ room, propping himself up on the door frame. Was she finally going to tell him?

“Any reason why?” Magnus smirked.

“Well I know how things can get carried away after a date…” Tessa started. Magnus was fully aware of how ‘carried away’ Tessa Gray could get. He walked in on her with Will Herondale enough times to be confident in her sexual nature.

“Any other reason, besides hoping that I get laid?”

“Jem thinks it would be good for him to spend some time with Keris, to familiarize himself with babies.” Tessa fiddled with the long-corded jade pendant around her neck. “He’s never had one, you know.” It was an odd detail to add. For nearly a century and a half, Jem was a Silent Brother. They were not known for having children.

“And?” Magnus was dying to get the answer out of her. He wanted her to say it already. If he hadn’t been in a painfully smug position, arms crossed and leaned cockily against the door, he would have been jumping up and down in anticipation.

Tessa paused for a long second, as if she wanted to watch him squirm.

“He ought to get used to it,” She spoke slowly, her smile coating each syllable in a peaceful joy. “... so that he’s ready when our baby arrives.” In the stereotypical fashion, she placed a hand to her stomach, cupping a barely-visible bump.

“Finally!” Magnus wrapped her in a hug, rocking her side to side. “I have been waiting for you to tell me for weeks!”

“Weeks?” Tessa asked curiously. “How did you know?”

“I spent a lot of time at those ‘mommy-and-me’ classes.” Magnus shrugged. “All the women complained about all their pregnancy symptoms. I think my pregnancy radar is better than my gaydar now.”

“To be fair, I was enjoying torturing you. Especially after you gave me the raspberry leaf tea.”
“To answer your question, it would be wonderful for you to take the kids. Let’s wake him up and start packing overnight bags. And then I have to get dressed. I’m meeting Alexander in…” Magnus snapped his fingers, a transparent clock appearing before him. “Shoot, in an hour and a half.”

“You’ll be fine, Magnus. You have magic.”

The pair giggled, heading into the nursery to wake up Keris. While they packed bags with onesies, diapers and other supplies, Magnus was distracted by what all of the packing meant—that he would have the loft to himself all night. If everything went well, that meant that tonight he would have Alexander in his apartment, alone—and hopefully, in his bed.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this helps to tide you over until I write the date scene! Writing four chapters last week took a lot out of me, so this teatime scene was all I could muster!

Next chapter, Alec gets ready for his date with Magnus. The important women in his life are dying to help him out, and bombard him with outfit options. They finally meet up for the date!

The date will be two chapters, and I’m already bracing myself for your frustration when I cut it off mid-chapter but... pacing!

Again, I love you all. Your comments last week really gave me the motivation to put out this chapter today, since I was feeling a bit low. So comment with your thoughts or things you want to see in the future! Even the simple comments like 'this is cute' mean so much to authors!

Also, I can't give DianaCloudburst enough love for being my beta!
“No more hair creme, Iz!” Alec swatted away his sister’s perfectly manicured hand. Worried the impact messed up her nails, she took a step back, inspecting each red-painted tip with care. He didn’t see his sister enough anymore—it was a bit taboo for a shadowhunter to visit people who had been deruned, even if it was family. Apparently, helping her brother get ready for a date was serious enough business to drop all of her plans and visit.

“You don’t have to be so aggressive about it, hermano.” Izzy rolled her eyes. “I’m here as a favor, remember? You could pretend to be thankful?” It didn’t feel like a favor to Alec—it was more of a nuisance. Izzy spent the last two hours digging through his closet, tossing clothing all over his room, and throwing some pieces in the garbage as she went. At one point, she even dashed down the street to a clothing store, returning with bags of what she deemed were ‘essentials’. How she shopped for him that quickly was still a mystery.

“No, you’re here because mom told you I was going on a date.” Alec said, turning to his mom. “Thanks again for that by the way.” Her eyes were as apologetic as her smile, but he could tell she was having fun with this as well, despite her guilt.

“Maybe that’s true, but it’s not every day my brother goes on a date with Magnus Bane.” Izzy swooned. “I mean come on, have you seen the guy?”

“I’ve seen Magnus at least…” Alec tried to count in his head, but gave up. “A bunch of times. I don’t see how this is different.” He tried to comb his fingers through his hair, but Maryse tactfully dragged his hand away. With both women hovering around him, Alec felt claustrophobic. He thanked the Angel, Lilith, and every lesser deity that Clary was busy, or else she would be invading his space along with them.

“You are so dense.” Izzy threw her hands in the air.

“Your sister is right, Alec.” Maryse stepped over, assessing Alec’s outfit again from multiple angles. Her tone was gentle yet firm—she wanted to make sure Alec knew that this was a date and
that someone wonderful wanted him. Her son deserved that confidence boost. “Magnus explicitly said this is a date. That means he’s purposefully distinguishing it from other times you’ve seen each other, like at the studio, or babysitting—”

“Babysitting!” Izzy exclaimed. She spun around, her face frozen in a state of utter shock, red-painted mouth agape, thick-lashed eyes wide. “Magnus let you watch his children?”

“What do you mean?” Alec furrowed his brow, confused. “Magnus… well Catarina actually… asked me to watch the kids, so I said yes. I’ve seen them a bunch of other times anyway. I sent you those pictures of Keris and I at the Halloween fair, didn’t I?”

“You don’t understand— I’ve been trying to get Magnus to let me watch Aya for years. But he hardly lets those two precious warlock babies out of his sight. The most I get is an hour or two with them while Magnus deals with business at the Institute.” She turned to her mother to fill her in on the details. “Mom, they are literally the cutest kids I’ve ever seen.”

“I’m well aware.” Maryse said, adjusting Alec’s collar. Since it was his mother fussing, not Isabelle, he gave in and let her have her way. “I met miss Aerulei at my storybook reading last weekend.”

“Alec, that means this is super serious.” Izzy’s eyes widened. “He trusts you with his kids and asked you on a date. That’s so different than just asking you on a date. That means he might be looking for a more serious relationship.” Isabelle tossed herself on Alec’s bed. Padding into the room, The Clave joined her on the bed, tufts of burnt amber fur floating in the late-afternoon light. “This is so exciting! Magnus has never seriously dated anyone since I’ve known him, this is just amazing.” Izzy was gushing. She laid down completely on her back, hauling the enormous cat onto her chest and petting his head. “Can I start planning your wedding?”

Alec groaned, counting down the minutes until Magnus would be there to pick him up. He’d insisted on picking him up and portaling him to the restaurant, citing the reason ‘That’s what you do when you take out a nice lady on a date. You have to use your best manners.’ At the time, Alec rolled his eyes, pointing out that he was not a lady, nor was it the 1950’s, but there was something special about it. Nobody had ever treated him that way before. Tradition was something Alec still valued, even if he wasn’t a shadowhunter anymore. He pulled out his phone, seeing how much longer he would have to endure his mom and sister.

Just thirty minutes.

Magnus straightened the cuffs of his shirt beneath his blazer, making sure they weren’t twisted or wrinkled, that he wasn’t missing a cuff-link. Before he left, he’d been given the stamp of approval from Tessa, Aya and even Keris. For some reason, he still felt self conscious, which wasn’t like him at all.

But that’s because usually he wasn’t doing anything that mattered, not really. Until he’d had his kids, few things made him nervous. Since then, Aya’s first fever, Keris hitting his head, both kids coming into their magic. Every battle carried a certain anxiety now that he had people who depended on him. This anxiety was different… there was something electric about it. It made his
skin tingle, his legs jumpy. When he fisted his hand to knock on the door, he could feel that his palms were a touch sweaty, so he cast a quick spell to lower his heart rate and settle himself down.

Three raps on the door, and he was face-to-face with Alexander. Someone had clearly helped him get ready for their date, because the outfit wasn’t something he’d expect Alec to put together on his own. Beneath a navy pea-coat, Alec was wearing a grey cashmere sweater over a delicately patterned button down shirt. It was hard to find colors to properly match Alec’s unique eye color, but this combination complimented them perfectly, making shades of gold, green and even dark blue appear within the deep hazel. Magnus slowly scanned downward, taking in the well-fitting dark wash jeans and the toned thighs beneath, all the way to the other man’s shoes—freshly polished dress boots. Not a scuff in sight. If he didn’t know better, he would think the more stylish Lightwood sibling was involved, but given her work at the Institute that was unlikely.

“Magnus!” A high-pitched voice yelled around Alec, nearly knocking him out of the way. “It’s so nice to see you!” Izzy rushed forward, scooping Magnus into an overly enthusiastic hug. “Now you better take care of my brother tonight or else…”

“Really, Iz?” Alec crossed his arms gruffly. He was so cute when he was grumpy. “The shovel talk?”

A new voice joined the audience, cool and melodic. “Just because you’re grown doesn’t mean we aren’t allowed to look after you, Alec.” Maryse joined the crowd in the doorway. Between the sea of legs, Magnus caught a glimpse of an enormous cat, likely plotting a way to bolt out the open door.


“It was lovely seeing you too!” Magnus yelled cheerfully as he opened up a portal. It was charming how much Alec’s family loved him. He hoped one day he would embarrass his children just as much before each date.

“I hope you’re a fan of Mediterranean food?” Magnus said as they exited the portal. Before they’d stepped in, Magnus grabbed Alec’s hand, presumably so Alec wouldn’t get stuck in limbo. But now that they were walking on the sidewalk near the Brooklyn Waterfront, Magnus still held Alec’s hand tight, swinging it lightly as they made their way to the restaurant.

“I hope you’re a fan of Mediterranean food?” Magnus said as they exited the portal. Before they’d stepped in, Magnus grabbed Alec’s hand, presumably so Alec wouldn’t get stuck in limbo. But now that they were walking on the sidewalk near the Brooklyn Waterfront, Magnus still held Alec’s hand tight, swinging it lightly as they made their way to the restaurant.

“Honestly, I’m starving. I’d eat anything right now.” It was true. Alec had been so nervous for the date that he’d skipped lunch. “But yeah, what is it? Like falafel, hummus?”

“I suppose. I didn’t really pick this place for the food, but more for the view.” Magnus pulled Alec to the right, turning down the street toward the river. “It rivals the view from my loft. You can see the Manhattan and the Brooklyn bridge.” They reached their destination, a big white brick building that was as close to the water as it could be without falling in. Magnus dropped Alec’s hand, holding open the door.

“Hello! Do you have a reservation?” A stylish waiter with teal hair and a canvas apron greeted them at the door.

“Yes. Last name, Bane.”
“Why hello Mister Bane. It’s nice to finally meet you!” they beamed. “Would you like a table inside or outside?”

“It’s up to my stunning date.” Magnus turned to Alec, who tried not to blush. “Do you have a preference?”

“Isn’t it cold outside?” Alec looked confused.

“Oh, we have heaters outside, of course!” The waiter took a pen out from behind their ear, scribbling something onto a notepad. “What will it be?”

“Outside then.” Alec gave them a shy smile.

“Perfect. Right this way.” They led them through the dining room past large glass doors, opening up to a beautifully landscaped patio. Warm heat lamps dotted the space without putting off enough light to distract from the sparkling Manhattan skyline. The sun had just set beyond the horizon, and the cooling glow reflected off of Magnus’ glittering cheekbones. “Here’s your table Mister Bane. Oh silly me, I didn’t get your name sir!”

“Alec.” Alec took the menu the waiter offered.

“Nice to meet you Alec.” They flipped over the wine glasses and straightened the place settings. “I’ll bring over a bottle of Moet et Chandon for the two of you. It’s so nice to finally meet one of our owners.” As they walked away, Alec raised an eyebrow at Magnus.

“Owners? You own this restaurant?” Alec fiddled with his napkin, playing with the hem.

“Part owner. Of the building, not the restaurant itself.” Magnus corrected. “I invest in a lot of property in Brooklyn. I don’t make all my money from being a warlock for hire, you know.” Magnus smiled sheepishly, leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs. He looked like a model, his lithe yet toned body reclined and ready for photos at any time. Alec took a mental picture, admiring how Magnus’ perfectly tailored blazer shimmered in the light. Was it satin? It only looked like it was from certain angles. Alec didn’t know much about fabrics or fashion, but he could tell everything the warlock was wearing was expensive. Lavish lifestyles were foreign to Alec, and he wasn’t sure how he could ever keep up.

“Oh… I uh…” Alec stammered.

“I’m sorry, I don’t like to flaunt my assets.” He reached across the table, taking Alec’s hand. “That’s a lie. There is one asset that I love to flaunt.” Magnus let his glamour drop, winking. Alec’s breath hitched in his chest. It was such a simple set of gestures— Magnus’ soft voice, the natural way their hands linked, the cheeky wink. Compared to the searing fire they’d been at the fighting gym, this was a warm glowing ember, safe and comforting.

“I like to hear about you though.” Alec flexed his wrist, stretching their fingers playfully before tightening his grip, “You’ve been alive for centuries. I’ll never run out of things to learn about you.”

“You’re the one who surprises me Alexander—” Magnus started. The conversation was starting to get deep, existential even, but they were saved by the waiter returning, scooting over an ice bucket with a bottle of champagne.

“Can I start you two off with any other drinks or appetizers?” They reached into their apron to get out the order pad. Alec shook himself back to reality. He hadn’t even looked at the menu yet. Thankfully, Magnus knew what he was doing, rattling off a list of appetizers to try. Alec wasn’t
“I actually knew what most of those were.” Alec’s mouth quirked up to the side. He picked up the bottle of French champagne, pouring a glass first for Magnus, then for himself.

“To us.” Alec said, raising his glass. Magnus did the same.

“To us.” Magnus repeated, a glint in his eye.

Neither of them could shake the memory of the first time they’d uttered those words, all those years ago in the loft. But there was another memory of the simple phrase— after the concert, before their first kiss. And now there would be a third: their first date.

“So what movie is this again?” Alec said, settling down into the cushions Magnus had spread out on their blanket. Originally, the warlock offered to conjure a couch, but Alec thought it would be too conspicuous.

“It’s Rocky Horror Picture Show. A Halloween classic.” Magnus unscrewed a metal thermos, pouring two cups of steaming cocoa. “I remember when it came out. It was far ahead of its time. Bless Tim Curry and Susan Sarandon for at least bringing it mainstream-adjacent.” They clinked cups taking a sip.

“Huh, never heard of it.” Alec took another, more cautious sip. “What’s in this by the way?” With his free hand, Alec pulled out his phone, making sure it was set to silent.

“You are a terrible gay, Alexander.” Magnus bumped their shoulders together. “And it’s spiked cocoa. It has a bit of Irish whiskey, and a dash of Kahlua.”

“What does a movie have to do with that?” Alec furrowed his brow, looking confused. “Also, this is delicious.” He took a long sip, foam coating his upper lip. It was undeniably adorable.

“You’ll see…” Magnus tossed Alec a conspiratorial grin. “You’re lucky I didn’t dress up for it this year.” Magnus reached out, wiping off Alec’s lips with his thumb. Alec blushed at the affectionate gesture.

“Dress up? Like Halloween costumes? What’s so weird about that?” Alec was still clueless. Magnus wondered if Alec would like him in a sexy kitten costume— tight sparkly boxers, kitten ears, maybe whiskers drawn on his face. Maybe next year.

Remembering the conversation at hand, Magnus sighed, preparing his explanation.
“For this movie, people dress up like the characters and act out the scenes in front of the screen.” Magnus wrapped his blanket tighter around his shoulders. “I feel bad for them though, it’s normally not this chilly out. I hope they have heaters up there.”

“Perhaps some kindly warlock could conjure some for them.” Alec squinted at the stage, where actors were wrapped tightly in thick jackets, hiding their costumes from view and conserving their body heat.

“And use my powers for the greater good?” Magnus joked.

“It’s busy up there,” Alec waved his hand. “Nobody would notice if a few heaters showed up.” Alec gave him a conspiratorial glance from the side.

“Oh, so when I want to conjure us somewhere cozy to sit, it’s all ‘Magnus you shouldn’t use your magic so obviously in public, let’s just sit on the ground like mundanes.’ But when it’s scantily clad strangers, suddenly it’s okay?” Magnus checked to see if anyone was staring before waving his hands in a small sweep. Even from their spot relatively far from the screen, Alec saw two heaters appear near the stage.

“Hey, doing things the mundane way isn’t so bad. I’ve adjusted just fine. Plus, we have blankets, pillows and cocoa to keep warm. I’m assuming those people up there don’t.”

“You’re such a gentleman, Alexander,” Magnus purred, scooting closer even though there was no distance between them. He wanted to tack on an innuendo, something to drive Alec wild while the movie started, but before he had a chance, the string lights over the lawn shut off and the projector flared to life—the famous red lips singing the first bars of ‘Science Fiction Double Feature.’

Alec switched his cocoa to the other hand, reaching under the blanket to hold hands with Magnus. This was going to be a long movie.

When the remaining cast members appeared in front of the screen for the ‘Sweet Transvestite’ number, Alec’s eyes went wide. "Oh... now I see what you mean," he mumbled. Magnus explained to Alec that when this movie came out, that term wasn’t as controversial as it was today, and in this case it wasn’t a slur, just a term for someone who wore gender-atypical clothes. “Oh...” Alec repeated when Frankenfurter removed his cape, revealing the hot-pants and corset combo. Magnus chuckled, knowing that compared to the rest of the movie, this was all very tame.

“Wait until you see some of the later ones... Some of them would really suit you in my opinion.” Alec in satin and leather would be the filthiest fantasy, but it was not something Magnus should sit here and think about in public—even if they weren’t in polite company. The audience at Rocky Horror shadow-casts could never be considered polite company.

“Wait... are you talking about this scene?” Alec whisper-screamed later on in the movie, horrified. It was ‘Rose Tint my World’ where each of the characters started out frozen before strutting across the stage in all manners of debauchery. The whole cast, regardless of gender—both in the movie and in the shadow-cast—were dressed in heels, fishnets, and latex corsets. Magnus grinned, watching as Alec’s eyes jumped from the live actors to the screen, comparing the dancing and clothing. “You were! Magnus, that is ridiculous. I’d look stupid. I have so much—” Alec gestured vaguely at his chest. “You could pull it off, but—“

“You think I could pull it off?” Magnus raised an eyebrow, making Alec blush. He would wear anything if he thought it would turn Alec on. Cursing his wandering mind, Magnus briefly wondered if Alec had any visual or clothing kinks.
“I mean, you look good in that kind of stuff. Makeup and like— “

Alec was cut off by someone loudly shushing them from behind. Alec shut up immediately, but Magnus only giggled. The warlock was beyond being told what to do by strangers. Beneath the blanket, he let go of Alec’s hand, warm and clammy from holding hands the whole movie. He slid his hand down to Alec’s thigh, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

“You wanna get out of here?” Alec whispered, looking down at the blanket, angling in so he was half-facing Magnus. The screen reflected in his eyes, washing out his pale skin. A hint of five o’clock shadow already peppered his jawline. He was absolutely beautiful.

“Normally, I’d have already have whisked you back to my place, but this film is required viewing for anyone who wants to date me. The movie is almost over, we’ll survive.” Magnus pressed a quick kiss to Alec’s cheek before resting his head in the crook of Alec’s broad shoulder. This was the 147th time Magnus watched this movie, so for the last two songs he let his mind wander to all the things he was going to do to Alec if they went back to his loft.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter.... Alec and Magnus go back to the loft.
The pitter-patter of little feet was a welcome sound at the Gray-Carstairs household. The speed of the pitter-pattering though, was rather alarming, rousing Tessa from her book and becoming her from the library toward the noise. She stole a glance at Keris, asleep in his bassinet for a nap before leaving the room.

“Jem?” She called out. “Aerulei?” She trailed her hand along the wallpapered corridor. Jem nearly knocked her over as he crashed into her, his stocking-clad feet sliding on the wooden floors.

“Tessa!” He breathed, holding his chest. It wasn’t clear if he was trying to catch his breath or if he was laughing so hard it was painful. Either way, it wasn’t alarming. Since being blasted with the heavenly fire, Jem was in optimal health, no drugs required. “Ahh!” He laughed again. “Rue and I were just playing with a dust sprite we found in the pantry while we were looking for snacks. She was right on its tail, did you see where she’s run off to?” He tossed his wife a boyish grin just as the sound of shattering pottery came from the dining room. “Oops?” His grin cocked to the side, but Tessa barely reacted, simply nudging him out of the way. “Jem, my love. Please go sit with Keris while I help Aerulei clean up, I can already hear him stirring from the noise.” Her voice was firm and even, yet kind and soft— maternal. He turned, stealing a kiss to her cheek before dipping into the library.

“Aerulei?” Tessa walked into the dining room, preparing herself for the mess at hand. Magnus’ daughter stood frozen over a pile of shattered china, her lower lip quivering as she assessed the damage.

“My sweet princess…” Tessa knelt, gently resting her arm on Aya’s shoulder. “It’s alright, accidents happen.” She wiped away some of the girl’s tears with the sleeve of her blue sweater. “But isn’t it lucky that you’re a warlock?” Tessa smiled, and it was contagious.

“I can put it back together!” Aya beamed, hopping up and down.
“Why don’t you give it a go on your own first, and then I can help you out. How does that sound?” Tessa’s grey eyes sparkled as she tucked a lock of hair back into Aerulei’s braid. Aya responded by nodding furiously.

Scrunching her little face in concentration, her almond eyes pressed into tight slits, Aerulei channeled her magic, purple sparks licking from her fingertips.

“Beautiful, but don’t be frustrated— you need to stay calm.” Tessa encouraged her. “Take a deep breath with me. Breathe in.” She held her breath. “Breathe out.” Aya exhaled loudly, and her magic flared to life twice as bright.

Aya felt the surge, opening her eyes and drilling her focus to the shattered pottery. She spread her hands apart, moving them in a slow circle. Piece by piece, the plate reformed, the cracks sealing together as it levitated.

“I am so proud of you!” Tessa grabbed the fixed plate from the air before it dropped again, placing it on the buffet table. She wrapped Aerulei in a big hug, holding her tight.

“Careful Auntie Tessa! You don’t want to squish the baby!” Aya whisper-screamed, pointing to Tessa’s stomach.

“Don’t worry, she’s safe and sound in there, snuggled up. Do you want to see?” Tessa raised an eyebrow at her.

“I can? Isn’t it gross in there?”

“No, watch.” She pressed Aya’s small hand flat to her rounded stomach, focusing just a touch of magic, sharing it with Aerulei. They both saw the image of the small baby, floating around safely inside Tessa.

“Whoa, Autie Tessa she looks like a bean! A big bean!” Before they could get deeper into the talk about the facts of life, Tessa guided the subject elsewhere.

“Yes, and she’s a hungry little bean! Why don’t we go find your Uncle Jem and baby brother, and we can all get some ice cream from the kitchen! Then we can put on a movie, maybe Aristocats?”

At that, Aya got so excited she dashed down the hall back to the library, singing her favorite song from the movie.

“Ev’ry body wants to be a cat!” Out of nowhere, Church appeared beside her trotting along. Tessa hung back, looking down the hall at the scene before her. In a few years, that would be her little girl running down the halls, and Tessa couldn’t be more excited.

She never thought she would have this again.

She never thought she would have Jem again.

It was all so lovely.

“Hello beautiful baby boy.” Jem cautiously reached into the crib, picking up the fussy infant. His cries were akin to the ripping sound of an un-rosined bow scratching across an out of tune violin.
To most, that analogy would mean it was unbearable, but for Jem, it meant that it was familiar, something he knew how to tolerate after years of playing violin.

Keris grumbled as Jem wrapped his long arms around the chubby baby. He’d met Keris before, but he wasn’t particularly familiar. But a cautious hand raised up to Jem’s forehead anyway, a stream of images flowing in and out of the child. It was like sending out feelers, making sure Jem knew he was, and he knew who Jem was. A memory was sucked from Jem, and suddenly his mind flashed with an image of himself in a mirror, 1860’s, straightening his silver hair. At that Keris giggled, clapping both hands against Jem. Now they shared an image side by side. Keris seeing himself in the mirror, Jem in his, both shaking their silver hair.

“That’s right Keris! I used to have silver hair too.” He bounced the baby on his thin hips. “I actually think your Auntie Tessa might have been quite fond of it… but I think she prefers this—” He shook his dark fringe into Keris’ forehead, making the baby giggle. “To me being a Silent Brother. Do you know of the Silent Brothers, baby?”

Keris pouted. “No!” He chirped.

“Good, they’re a dour lot.” Keris slapped his face again, trying to tell him something. “Oh wait, I’m supposed to tell you to use your words. That’s what papa Magnus said anyways.” Keris pouted again, and Jem wasn’t sure if tears were imminent.

“Talk funny!” Keris leaned back, pointing at Jem, who laughed so loudly Keris shook in his arms.

“You mean my accent? I say words funny?” Keris nodded. “Do you want to hear me say words that sound wildly different than the way you Americans say them?”

“Ye!” Keris smiled, showing off his new teeth.

Jem plopped down in the armchair, still warm from Tessa sitting there, and held Keris in his lap, babbling words into the baby’s ear. Jem wasn’t sure what happened with the china, but everything seemed rather silent. For now, he was happy occupied with Keris, giggling in unison, snuggling in the library.

Chapter End Notes

Wasn't that cute! Now onto the next chapter! (click the button)
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Alec and Magnus go back to the loft. There's only one way that can end.

Chapter Notes

The 'E' rating is finally warranted. If this makes you uncomfortable, feel free to jump away after the first page break! Since this chapter is mostly smut, the plot can stand alone without it for the most part.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec had been waiting for what felt like ages, even if it was barely two songs. The show was interesting enough— silly, catchy and absurd— but his focus had been elsewhere. The credits started rolling, and before the string lights even flared back to life, Alec was shooing Magnus off the blanket, rolling it with the precision of a trained sushi chef. With the blanket in a compact spiral, he grabbed both pillows and squished them under his arm. This was it— the movie was over. Magnus stared at Alec, clearly in awe of how quickly Alec was moving. Who could blame him though? The boy was on a mission. Final destination: the bedroom of Magnus Bane.

At least, Alec hoped that was the next step. He suggested it during the movie, and Magnus’ answer was more of a ‘not yet’ rather than a ‘no,’ which was a good sign. During the entire show they were touching, hands wandering just enough under the blanket for it to be infuriating yet still appropriate in public. Alec imagined that was what it was like being a teenager. He wouldn’t know — his years growing up in the Institute weren’t spent holding hands with boys or going out on dates to the movies. Once Alec started dating— after he was deruned— ‘dates’ almost always entailed just meeting up at a bar or going to dinner, then if it all went well, fucking. He never was looking for anything serious, so there was never any trepidation about messing things up.

Something about this date though— a real date — filled Alec’s stomach with fireflies. As if the warm, silky taste of the cocoa encircled him and Magnus in their own little whirlpool of euphoria and bliss.

Though, by contrast, what they were about to do wasn’t cute at all. It would shift the entire tone of the evening— hopefully for the better. Not better, different, Alec thought, busying his hands by readjusting the pillows and shifting them to his other arm. He could tell his nerves were showing.

“You know I have magic for that, right?” Magnus giggled, stepping closer to him. He wrapped his arms around the pillows and blanket. Alec watched as they disappeared, consumed in the warlock’s grasp. “And so they appeared, now they disappear.” Magnus stepped back just enough to give Alec a flamboyant bow, offering out his hand. Alec bit his lip and blushed, snatching up Magnus’ grasp quickly, some secret part of him worrying that the warlock would change his mind.

“So…” Alec trailed.

“So…” Magnus mirrored, returning the blush. “What was it you wanted to do before? If I recall, it
was so enticing that you simply had to disturb that poor woman behind us with your whispering?” He bumped his shoulder playfully against Alec.

“Hey— her shushing was definitely more of a disturbance,” Alec protested, bumping Magnus back.

“Whatsoever you say. But if I was a librarian,” Magnus stood on his tiptoes to whisper into Alec’s ear, “I’d be scolding you right now for being a very naughty boy.” Magnus grabbed Alec’s hand tighter, circling his thumb over the soft skin behind his knuckles.

Alec swallowed. His blood was boiling hot—lava just beneath his skin. Was he going to make it back to the loft? Was he even going to make it to when Magnus actually asked him to go back to his place? The outlook wasn’t very good.

As if he could tell that he had blue-screened Alec, and that the tattoo artist’s operating system was not responding, Magnus pulled the conversation back to the matter at hand.

“Back to your suggestion from earlier. Do you want to go back to my—” Magnus started.

Alec was so enthusiastic, he cut Magnus off.

“Yes!” he exclaimed, but Magnus maintained his composure, straightening the collar of Alec’s shirt and brushing his fingers across his neck. Alec sucked in a deep breath— a little too loud.


“You have a planet?” Alec’s eyes went wide before he realized it was only a joke.

“See? There you go again, not letting me finish.” Magnus narrowed his cat eyes, smirking. It felt so dangerous when he lowered his glamour in public. He pulled Alec to the side of the pathway, pressing him against the fence separating them from tumbling into the water. To an outsider, this wouldn’t seem inappropriate at all. Magnus held their hands between them, swinging them playfully, wiggling their fingers. They looked like any couple having a romantic moment. Magnus’ words, however, were anything but innocent. “I don’t like it when people don’t let me finish.” He smiled, and it looked so pure that Alec could barely believe what the warlock was implying. “Are you going to be good? Are you going to let me finish?”

Alec wanted to keep up with this aggressive flirtation. He wanted to show Magnus how he wanted to be in charge. But he was too flustered—and if he was honest with himself, he was far from an expert in discreet erotic flirtation in public. A crimson blush bloomed on his pale cheeks, so hot that he was afraid it might burst his blood vessels, leaving him blushing forever. And then Magnus laughed. He pulled Alec back on the path and had the audacity to laugh while Alec was still torn to painfully aroused pieces by the warlock’s words.

That wasn’t going to fly. Throwing all caution to the wind, Alec yanked Magnus’ wrist so hard that the warlock came crashing into him, their chests pressed together. He pulled Magnus back on the path and had the audacity to laugh while Alec was still torn to painfully aroused pieces by the warlock’s words.

Through the kiss, Alec hissed, “Your place. Now.” His voice was the perfect blend of frustration, desire, and authority.

“Mmmhmm.” Magnus said, chasing after Alec’s mouth for another kiss. But Alec took a step back,
pulling himself out of reach. “Portal or walking?” The warlock tried to catch his breath.

“Whichever is faster,” Alec spat out eagerly.

“But if we walk, I can kiss you against every building between the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges. Or at least the ones that are along the two blocks to my loft.” Magnus wiggled his eyebrows.

“That— let’s do that.” Alec said, leading the way. He already knew how to get back to the loft—it was close enough to the coffee shop where he worked. Magnus followed along, latched onto Alec’s hand in a death grip, giggling as they breezed by the other pedestrians, walking twice as fast. They had important business to get to.

They did kiss against each building. Just pecks, nothing obscene—a mess of held hands and laughter, warming Magnus’ cheeks against the Autumn chill.

“What about this one?” Alec smiled, picking Magnus up just an inch as he swept him into a kiss.

“We got this one last block, before we turned the corner. It’s the same building.” Magnus stuck out his tongue as Alec placed him back on the ground. “And… it’s my building.” It was Magnus’ turn to drag Alec along. They opened the lobby doors and Magnus let go of him, skipping over to the elevators to frantically press the up button.

“Is there no magic for calling an elevator?” Alec joined Magnus in staring at the closed metal doors and glowing arrow lights. Magnus tapped his foot anxiously, the hard leather sole of his designer shoe sending a sharp echo through the open space foyer.

“Unfortunately, Alexander, elevator scheduling is a problem that eludes both computer scientists and warlocks alike.” The joke didn’t land, but Magnus chalked it up to shared tension. This was finally happening! Or, well, it was about to happen.

Taking a step closer to Magnus, Alec wrapped his arm around the shorter man, nuzzling his head into the warlock’s impeccably styled hair.

“You know, even your hair gel smells like sandalwood.” Alec sighed.

“What?” Magnus looked up, confused. How was the elevator taking this long? Was this purgatory? What lesser god or goddess did Magnus upset this time?

“It just, how you smell. I like it.” Alec smiled, taking another sniff.

“You’re such a weirdo.” Magnus laughed, slapping Alec playfully on the arm. With that the elevator pinged, its doors gliding open to reveal the spacious, mirrored interior. Magnus caught one glimpse of his stunning date in their reflection and couldn’t last another second without touching his gorgeous lips. Before the doors even completely closed, Magnus backed up against the wall, pulling Alexander into him. Alec lowered his head to Magnus, and then they were kissing. It had the sweetness of their kisses on the walk home, and the fire of their dressing room tryst. It had the hunger of not eating for days, but the satisfaction of finally getting something long awaited.

Magnus wanted to be closer. To close the height gap, he stood on his toes, positioning his ass over the handrail on the wall. On his own it wouldn’t be wide enough to hold him, but Alec quickly got
the hint, pressing Magnus harder against the wall and hoisting up the warlock’s thighs. The paneling rattled against his back. Magnus wrapped his legs around Alexander as they kissed, still wanting him closer.

“Oh, goodness!” An old woman shrieked. Alec jumped back, dropping Magnus in the process. The warlock tumbled to the floor, struggling to find his feet. The old lady—Eleanor, Magnus remembered—leaned against the open elevator doors, clutching her heart. The boys had clearly given her a shock she wasn’t prepared for.

“Um… this elevator is going up.” Stumbling to his feet, Magnus gestured to the elevator buttons to show Eleanor where they were headed. Then Magnus’ cheeks flared darker, a deep maroon on his tan complexion. He’d never pressed any buttons. In his race to bed Alec, they had tumbled into the elevator without telling it where to go. Presumably, it went to Eleanor.

“Honestly, Magnus.” She chided. “I thought you had more class.” She pushed her glasses up deeper onto the bridge of her nose, glancing down at the buttons and selecting ‘L’.

Fumbling for words, Magnus reached over and slammed his hand down on ‘PH’. During the whole fiasco, he had nearly forgotten Alec was there, and realized that it was because the eldest Lightwood was rendered mute. Magnus hypothesized he might never speak again. Then Alec would have to learn sign language, and so would Magnus— it would all be an ordeal, and all because Magnus couldn't keep it in his pants for a single elevator ride. He was too focused on the next ride.

Thankfully, by some strange luck, the elevator lurched upward instead of down, and after a few painfully long seconds of shared travel with the crotchety old lady, Alec and Magnus were finally alone.

“I’m sorry that was— “ Magnus apologized, linking hands with Alec as they walked to PH1. It felt good to be touching him again. The few seconds apart in the elevator made Magnus feel empty.

“That was hilarious.” Alec leaned forward, nearly letting go of Magnus’ hand as he doubled over in a belly laugh. “Aaahh, Magnus I… I want to be mortified. I mean I was. But now… Can you imagine? Do you think she’s going to tell her knitting club?”

“I don’t think Eleanor knits, Alexander.”

“She does! I ran into her when I came to babysit. She told me all about it.” He righted himself and managed to continue walking down the hall.

“She’ll probably never tell you anything about anything ever again.” Magnus rolled his eyes, smiling. When they got to the door, he pulled Alec back into another kiss, this time slower and deeper. They’d run the race, and now it was time for endurance. Alec groaned as Magnus slipped his tongue in, tracing the edge of Alec’s tongue with his own.

“Magnus…” Alec sighed, but the warlock already knew what he was asking. Magnus snapped his fingers and the door flew open. Alec nearly fell backward, but Magnus grabbed onto his shirt, holding him in place. Once the door slammed behind them, Magnus pulled at Alec’s jacket, sliding it off his shoulders. He shrugged out of his own jacket, and without ever breaking the kiss, walked Alec back into the center of the room.

“Magnus, wait—” Alec broke away, looking side to side nervously. “Aren’t the kids here? And the babysitter. Shouldn’t we wait until we’re in the bedroom, or… should we wait until they’re asleep? I’m not sure what the protocol there is but…” Alec was rambling, nervous and a little bit bashful.
Magnus wasn’t sure what Alec was most nervous about— the sex, or the possibility of the kids walking in— but the warlock wasn’t having it. He pressed a finger to Alec’s rapidly moving lips.

“The kids are with Tessa. She has them for the night. In Devon.”


“Yes, they are literally an ocean away. I can assure you, we have the place to ourselves.”

“Oh, good— then—” Whatever words Alec was going to say were consumed by Magnus’ ravenous open-mouthed kiss. The tension was still coiled up in Alec’s body, his muscles still too taught beneath Magnus hands. He was clearly still nervous. Magnus wanted to show him he had nothing to be worried about— that he was in good hands, that he was gorgeous— he was ready to offer Alexander any assurance he needed. Magnus pulled away just a millimeter, his lips brushing against Alec’s as he spoke.


Kissing and walking was too slow. Magnus was tempted to open a portal straight to his bed, but that might ruin some of the natural magic of the situation. As a compromise, he slid back, his hand trailing down Alec’s chest and hooking his index finger through the other man’s belt loop. Alec’s breath hitched as Magnus pulled him to the bedroom by his waistband.

The sliding door to the bedroom rolled out of the way so quickly that it threatened to escape its track. Once they were past it though, there was no more need to rush. Everything Magnus needed was there. He wasn’t about to have sex with Alexander for the first time on a couch. That was uncomfortably enough for most people, but for someone of Alec’s size, it would be a nightmare. A California King bed with silk sheets would get the job done much better.

“Magnus.” Alec’s panting slowed to quieter breaths. “Your clothes are very nice, and very expensive.” He closed his hazel eyes, pressing a kiss to Magnus’ forehead. The warlock cocked his head to the side, confused. “What I’m trying to say is…” Alec trailed his hands from Magnus’ face down his shoulders, then forward to his chest, settling there and letting his fingers toy with the buttons— not undoing them, just playing with them, circling each opalescent clasp. “… If you don’t get out of these soon, I can’t be held accountable for what happens to them when I rip them off your body.” He slid his hand back up, one finger resting under Magnus’ chin to lift his face up into another kiss.

“Why don’t you do something about it then, Alexander?” Magnus dragged Alec’s hands back to his shirt buttons. “Unbutton me.” He demanded.

“So, is that how this is going to go?” Alec yanked his hands away, smirking. “Do you think I’ll just stand here and take orders? No— undo your own buttons. I want to watch.” Alec took two steps back, sitting on the bed. He leaned back on his hands, spreading out his legs, staring up at Magnus. This wasn’t something Magnus anticipated— Alec knew what he was doing. But Magnus was happier for it. He was afraid Alec would be too bashful and inexperienced, still the repressed shadowhunter he was all those years ago. But this man knew what he wanted and wasn’t afraid to ask. He was waiting for a show, and Magnus was more than eager to give him one.

“I’m waiting.” Alec smiled mischievously. Magnus wondered what would happen if he played the brat, if he didn’t listen. What would Alec do? The thought drove Magnus wild. But tonight wasn’t for that. This was their first time, and Magnus wanted to give Alec everything he wanted. It wasn’t a fight— it was them finally coming together after somehow resisting for this long.
Sucking his lip between his teeth, Magnus started with the top button of his shirt. It was a new enough couture piece that the buttons didn’t glide through the holes easily, but when they did, the force of pushing them through caused the shirt to pop open dramatically. With each button, Alec’s hungry eyes grew wilder. Even with a few feet of distance between them, Magnus could see how ragged Alec’s breathing was, how his erection strained against his pants. When Magnus got to the fifth button, his entire tattoo was now on display. Neglecting the buttons, Magnus let his hand slide over the freshly inked skin, tracing the outline of the design he now knew by heart.

Goosebumps pricked on his own skin, his nipples hardening and tightening around his nipple rings. For the occasion, he had chosen gunmetal barbells housing a polished carnelian stone on each end. Carnelian was the perfect crystal for this type of first date—sensual, spicy, sexual—glowing red like embers threatening to set the forest ablaze. Magnus was making a display of it, arousing himself even more with his own delicate touches. He unbuttoned a few more buttons, his shirt now hanging mostly open. Showing off some less orthodox magic, he popped his tongue and the room lit up with a dim candlelight glow that had no visible source. If he was performing, he wanted to make sure Alec could see the whole show. The light caught the deep orange-red of the stones, showing off the full depth of color as Magnus lightly flicked each nipple. Alec groaned at the sight of it, one of his hands sliding down his thigh and gripping hard, white-knuckled.

Magnus could go on like this for days. Making Alec squirm like this, seeing how much the man wanted him—it was intoxicating. Enhancing it further, Alec asked for this teasing, and Magnus obeyed. It was such perfect chemistry—but Magnus couldn’t control himself any longer. He snapped his fingers and his shirt was gone, and then he was closing the distance between himself and Alec, standing between his legs and leaning down to kiss him. In one graceful motion, Alec stood, lifting Magnus like he was weightless and tossing him onto the bed. Alec was on top of him immediately, and Magnus wasn’t entirely sure how they got there.

Even Alec was surprised he pulled that one off. It required a lot more agility than he was used to leveraging now that he wasn’t a shadowhunter.

“That was graceful.” Magnus panted, his chest heaving and showing off his toned pecs. His nipple piercings caught the light, flashing red. Alec never knew he was into piercings until he saw them on Magnus. Ear piercings, nipple piercings, and maybe more. He wanted to find out.

“Ex-shadowhunter.” Alec leaned down to give him a quick kiss. “It has some perks.”

Magnus moaned when Alec ground his hips down, creating delicious friction. Alec’s back arched as Magnus slid his hands beneath his grey cashmere sweater, pulling it up over Alec’s head. He liked that for things like this, Magnus didn’t use magic. He enjoyed the slowness of it, even if it was torture. Taking one look at the button down shirt underneath though, Magnus frowned.

“Alexander, I can undo these buttons by hand, or I could just—”

“Less clothes.” Alec breathed. “Less clothes would be good.” Alec didn’t have enough bandwidth in his mind to handle proper speech. With a crackle of ozone, Alec felt the cool air of the room tickle his skin. His shirt was gone. “What about our—” Before Alec could finish the sentence, their pants were gone too. They sighed in unison at the freedom their dicks had been craving—near complete, though it still preserved a modicum of mystery. It wouldn’t be fun if Alec asked for Magnus to remove their underwear, too.
"These, we deal with ourselves." Magnus slid his hand down to the waistband of Alec’s black boxer briefs. He was strong, but not strong enough to easily flip Alec when he was so steadily planted on all fours, so when he tried to, Alec helped him along. Above him, the gorgeous man smiled a wicked Cheshire grin, licking his lips and skating his eyes up and down Alec’s torso. Suddenly, Alec felt very naked.

“No— I see that look in your eyes Alexander.” Magnus shifted his weight to one hand, lifting the other to slide down Alec’s chest, combing his fingers through his chest hair. “You are glorious. My dark-haired Adonis.” He dropped his eyes, kissing Alec’s collar bone, nipping at his nipple, grazing his teeth across his toned abs. His chin grazed the delicate skin just above the waistband of his underwear, and Alec’s chest lurched as he felt Magnus’ stubble tickle below his navel. “You look so pretty from this angle, but I think there’s one thing missing from my view…” Magnus slowly slid down Alec’s boxers until his cock was released, popping up and standing to attention. “Much better.”

Magnus wiggled his butt in the air as he lowered his chest, resting it between Alec’s open thighs. He was in the perfect position to be taken from behind, but that wasn’t the task at hand. The task was Magnus’ hand— wrapping around Alec’s needy cock. Undignified was the only word in the English language that could properly describe the sound that escaped Alec’s throat at Magnus’ first touch.

“So beautiful when you moan for me, Alexander.” Magnus looked up, his chartreuse eyes flashing gold in the dim light. He dragged his tongue up the base of Alec’s dick, tracing along the vein as he made his way to the tip. With one hand still wrapped at the base of Alec’s cock, Magnus cupped his other around Alec’s balls, rolling them gently in his hand. Alec drew in a sharp breath. It was almost overstimulating. Almost.

“Magnus, please. Take it all in,” he pleaded as Magnus continued to tease him, pressing feather-light kisses from the head to the shaft, and even to his balls. Magnus listened, taking Alec’s full, thick length into his mouth before sucking back with a pop. Alec’s dick bounced against his stomach, and he grunted in frustration.

“Isn’t there someplace else you’d like to put your dick in, Alexander?” Magnus held onto Alec, his breath hot on the tip of his cock.

“You love saying my name, don’t you?” Alec swallowed. Before Magnus could come up with an answer— that would be too much talking for Alec’s taste anyway— he continued, “I’d rather hear you scream it.” It was Magnus’ turn to gasp when Alec flipped them, crashing down onto Magnus in a string of kisses that were questions, confirmations, affirmations of mutual need. When they finally broke away, Magnus’ lips were kiss swollen.

“I’ll scream your name so loudly they’ll hear us all the way in Manhattan.” Magnus breathed. “Just across the East River? I’ll make you do better than that.” Alec bent down, biting Magnus’ ear gently, swirling his tongue around his ear piercing.

“How do you want me?” Magnus asked breathlessly, getting to practicalities. He was so eager, so ready for Alec to take him. It drove Alec wild.

“I want you just how you were when you were sucking my dick.” Alec whispered into his warlock’s ear. “Face down, ass up. So I can grab onto those fucking perfect hips as I take you from behind.”

Magnus roughly grabbed Alec’s chin, turning it so they were face to face, kissing again.
Eventually he rolled over, getting into position, still wearing his underwear. It was like nothing Alec had ever seen before. Tight silk boxers clung to every curve and dimple of Magnus’ ass, light reflecting off of them emphasizing his glorious curves. It was a mystery how he moved in such restricting material, but if it caused the warlock any difficulty, Alec was thankful for the sacrifice. Alec yanked at the waistband, shimmying boxers down Magnus’ legs and tossing them to the floor.

He snaked his hand around, finally grabbing Magnus’ cock. The warlock pushed his hips back into Alec, letting out a ragged sigh.

“Hey…” Alec whispered, tracing spirals between Magnus’ shoulder blades with his free hand. “Turn around.”

“Huh?” Magnus craned his neck back.

“I changed my mind.” Alec pumped Magnus’ dick, feeling a dribble of precum as he ghosted his index finger around the tip. “I just want to see you. All of you.”

Magnus turned over, eyes wide as he took in the sight above him. Alec straddled his legs, kneeling as he looked at the warlock’s bare body. His hand returned to Magnus’ cock as he sat back on his feet. He pumped with one hand, the other gripping Magnus’ hipbone.

“I didn’t want to get too carried away without seeing you first, seeing the faces you’d make when I did this—” Alec leaned forward, taking Magnus’ nipple into his mouth. Magnus groaned, and Alec looked back up at him. “Or this—” Alec slid down, taking Magnus deep into his mouth. He moaned at the taste, all salt and heat— so hot for him. He slid off. “But what I realized I couldn’t miss…” He shifted a bit awkwardly so that he was between Magnus’ legs, rather than straddling him. Alec leaned in, until they were chest-to-chest, cocks trapped between their bodies. Kissing Magnus slowly, he sighed sweetly before speaking, as if he was about to say something romantic. “I couldn’t miss how you look when you first feel me inside of you.” Alec could feel Magnus’ heart racing through his chest.

“Good, because I want to see your face when you cum.” Magnus reached his head up, taking Alec into another kiss. “But you can’t take me just yet, Alexander, you have to—”

Alec cut him off by answering his demand, quickly licking his finger before reaching down and entering Magnus. As he gently pushed at the warlock’s hole, they continued to kiss, relaxing into each other. To Alec’s surprise, when he fully inserted his finger Magnus was already well-lubricated, allowing him to slide in and out easily.

“Warlock perks,” Magnus mumbled between kisses. “It deals with all the annoying boilerplate and dirty work.” Both men giggled as Alec slipped in a second finger, pumping it in and out of Magnus in time with their kisses.

“Are you ready?” Alec breathed, testing the waters by scissoring his fingers within Magnus.

The simple movement made it hard for Magnus to speak, groaning out his words. “Not to be cliche, but take me now, Alexander.” It was just like Magnus to make a dramatic joke in any situation.

Removing his hand, Alec moved back, shifting their position slightly to give him better access to Magnus’ eager ass. Magnus took the opportunity to lift his legs higher, resting them on Alec’s shoulders. It shouldn’t have surprised Alec that the warlock was flexible. More than anything, Alec wanted to thrust deeply into Magnus, but one thing was missing.
“Condom?” Alec raised an eyebrow. He had to be sure. He wasn’t sure if warlocks could get STDs, and his whole life he’d been warned about the terrors of Demon Pox, and how it killed his great-great-great-great grandfather. Of course, Magnus wasn’t a demon, so he still wasn’t sure of the protocol.

“Not necessary, but for the sake of Lightwoods throughout history,” Magnus waved his hand, a golden foil wrapper appearing between his fingers. He seemed incredibly comfortable even with his legs linked around Alec’s neck.

“Magnums?” Alec frowned as he plucked the condom from Magnus. Instead of responding, the warlock just looked pointedly down at Alec’s dick, and back up to Alec. “If you say so.” Alec deftly tore open the foil, sliding the slippery latex down his shaft. There was nothing stopping them now. In one unified breath, one long moment of eye contact, they clung to the moment. The moment where there would be a before, and an after. A moment they couldn’t take back—not that either of them would want to. Alec held his dick with one hand, guiding it into Magnus in one fluid motion, making sure not to break eye contact.

There weren’t exactly eyes to make contact with. The second Alec was completely sheathed in Magnus, his cat eyes rolled back into his head as he screamed Alec’s name. If that was what he felt from the first thrust, then Alec had no idea how he would look when he finally came—it would be gorgeous.

“Alexander, please. We have waited long enough.” Magnus reached his head up, demanding kisses. “Please.” Another kiss. “Fuck.” Another kiss. “Me.” The kiss was faster this time, their lips barely touching. “Faster.” The last word came out as a growl.

Alec didn’t need to be asked twice, his hips taking the reins as he rocked into the warlock, his thrusts round, rolling against Magnus’ prostate with each movement. He wasn’t about to just drill him into oblivion, jack-hammering him. There would be time for that later—secret closet quickies or depraved shower fucks—but this was more sacred. Alec wanted to milk every ounce of pleasure out of the man splayed out beautifully beneath him. Time hung infinitely motionless as they fucked. Magnus’ hands meandered on their own volition, fisting Alec’s thick dark hair, scratching deep marks into the muscular expanse of his back, reaching down as far as he could for a squeeze of ass.

Soon, Alec’s motions became more jumpy, needy, less in his control. Magnus was thrusting up to meet him now, their bodies slapping together with a force that was sure to leave residual soreness in its wake. Right now, neither of them cared. They were chasing the same moment.

“Alexander!” Magnus cried as Alec leaned in deeper, stretching Magnus’ legs nearly to the pillows. “More…” The warlock panted, and Alec sped up his thrusts even more, pushing Magnus into the mattress. “Just a little more…”

“Me too, Magnus. I’m so close…” Alec huffed. Magnus bit onto his shoulder, kissing up to his neck, sucking a deep bruise there. “Magnus, beautiful—” Alec pushed up on his hands, his thrusts never slowing. “Look at me. I want to see you.” Alec pushed his entire weight into a thrust, relishing in how Magnus’ head tilted back. He couldn’t help himself, leaning in for a kiss even though it was difficult when they were fucking so ravenously.

Magnus screamed out Alec’s name, and Alec knew that was it. He watched as the centuries-old warlock unraveled before him, a writhing mess screaming out a mixture of moans and ‘Alexander’. He couldn’t hold back any longer, pushing deep into Magnus as he let his own orgasm pull him to surrender. They held on tightly as their bodies buzzed with electricity, as waves of pleasure consumed their senses.
Alec wasn’t sure how long they stayed like that— how long they came, how long they laid there as their breath synchronized, kissing whatever skin was close to their face— arms, cheeks, hands, chests. Magnus shifted beneath him so they were both lying on their sides, and in a lazy wave of blue sparks, cleaned up the sweaty, sticky mess they made of the bed.

“Mmm… Alexander.” Magnus shimmied closer, nuzzling his nose against Alec’s. It was so demure, so cute— especially in light of what they were just doing. “Are you hungry?”

That was not what Alec had been expecting Magnus to say. He wasn’t exactly sure what he’d been expecting— his head was too foggy and blissed-out to think that far ahead. But he was certain he hadn’t been thinking about food. His growling stomach betrayed him.

“What kind of food?” Alec gave a shy smile, reaching out his leg so that it tangled with Magnus’. The warlock’s own leg jumped at the contact. “What?”

“You’re so hairy! It tickled me.” Magnus giggled.

“Of course not— it’s sexy as hell. That doesn’t mean that in my post-coital overstimulated and starving bliss, I won’t be a bit more ticklish.” He pressed a kiss to Alec’s forehead. “I was thinking about ordering Chinese take-out. Those fancy tapas restaurants always leave me hungry anyway—even without a vigorous bought of exercise.” Magnus winked, hoisting himself up and magicking on a robe.

“Wait—” Alec half-buried his head in the pillows. “Can’t you just…?” He floundered his hands above his head, sloppily gesturing for Magnus to conjure the food.

“No— it’s too confusing to the poor shop owner if I just keep poofing away orders of sesame chicken. This is one of the things I do the mundane way.”

With that, Magnus padded off to the kitchen, presumably to call the takeout place down the street. Alec never heard Magnus make the call though— he didn’t even realize that he was drifting to sleep, a huge grin spread across his face. Magnus would wake him up when the food got there, or maybe he would let him sleep, and in the morning he’d eat cold lo-mein for breakfast. The intricacies of Chinese delivery were low on Alec’s list of priorities at the moment. After all, he just got what he’d wanted most for weeks— a date with Magnus Bane.

Some time later— it could have been minutes or hours— Magnus nudged Alec awake with his elbow, his arms over-encumbered with bags of food.

“Hey, sleeping beauty.” Magnus leaned forward, setting down the bags on the bed. He made quick business of crafting a makeshift tablecloth by tearing the paper bag in half and spreading out the paper. Sweet-smelling steam billowed into the air as he snapped the lid off of a container of sesame chicken. He opened a pack of chopsticks, cracking them apart and rubbing them together. The loud scraping sound was enough to force Alec to completely wake up.

“What are you doing that for?” Alec squinted, letting his eyes adjust to the light. Magnus had turned on the lamps in the room.

“It gets the splinters off!” Magnus said, sounding shocked that Alec didn’t know “What do you do? Just shove the splinter-covered sticks in your mouth, using an iratze each time you get stabbed in the tongue? Do you enjoy eating tiny pieces of wood?”

“I don’t use chopsticks.” Alec sat up, shifting into a cross-legged position. He stared as Magnus
expertly shoveled sticky rice into his mouth with the chopsticks. It amazed him how it didn’t just fall through.

“I guess I’ll just have to feed you, then. I didn’t bring any silverware.” Magnus winked.

“Couldn’t you just conjure—” Alec was silenced by Magnus shoving a piece of sesame chicken into his mouth. He hummed at the delicious, greasy but sugary taste. It was better than the restaurant Alec normally ordered from.

“No. I’m going to fill our stomachs with food, then we are going to take a shower— only if you want, I mean I could just clean us with magic— and then we are going to end the night in a food coma, snuggled under my silk sheets. Does that sound good to you?” Magnus held out a ball of noodles to Alec, holding his hand beneath them in case some fell.

“Magnus—” Alec spoke while he chewed. “I can’t answer if you keep feeding me.”


Alec grabbed both of Magnus’ wrists, and the warlock dropped the chopsticks as Alec pulled him into quick, salty-sweet kiss. Their lips were a bit greasy, but neither of them cared.

“As good as a shower sounds, I don’t think I’ll be able to stay awake much longer.” Alec pulled away from Magnus yawning.

“Fine, but let me finish feeding you noodles. You’re very cute when you slurp them.”

They sat like that on the bed—Alec naked, Magnus in a robe—giggling and talking as they finished up the food. Eventually, they collapsed back into bed, and Magnus didn’t even bother to magic away the takeout containers—he was too satisfied to care. Once his head hit Alec’s chest, snuggled up with those strong arms around him, nothing else mattered. Somehow Alec lasted a few minutes longer than the warlock, and stroked his messy hair until he drifted off. They were greasy and sweaty and sticky and gross—but it was still the best sleep they ever had.

Chapter End Notes

Is it hot in here, or is that just me?

Next chapter, we deal with the morning after! And the kids come back!

Thank you all for reading <3 And thanks to all of you who comment, you always make my day!
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new thing for Alec to overthink.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Good morning.” Alec stroked Magnus’ hair, grazing the fringe that fell flat against his forehead. He loved seeing this softer side of the warlock, his hair unstyled, his face clean save for a ghost of leftover eyeliner staining his bottom lashes.

“Mm, Alexander.” Magnus whispered, his breath raspy with sleep. “It’s too early. Not all of us are used to waking up for early-morning barista shifts you know.”

“Oh yeah, what time is it?” Alec nuzzled closer to Magnus. “I’m going to be late.”

Magnus’ face twisted up in disappointment. “I understand…”

“No, Magnus.” Alec smiled reassuringly. “I was just kidding. I don’t have an appointment at the shop today until three. I thought maybe we…” Alec reached out, intertwining their fingers. A light blush painted itself across his cheeks in broad strokes.

“Maybe what?” Magnus kissed Alec’s knuckles, feather-light touches against his skin.

“Maybe we could go get brunch? Like mimosas and all, you’d like that, right?” Alec’s mouth cocked up at the side, dotting the statement with a hopeful question mark.

“Are you already asking me on a second date?” The warlock’s voice was cheerful. He couldn’t stop the amusement from dancing across his un-glamoured eyes. The warm morning sunlight filtered through his irises, transforming the feline color into unquantifiable shards of green, gold, and copper. Alec was mesmerized—he could stare all day and never grow bored. But his body had other plans—two vastly different types of hunger clawing at him from the inside demanding action. Hopefully Magnus would be able to help with at least one, but if last night was anything to go off of, there was a possibility that Alec would leave the loft completely satisfied in every way imaginable. How had he ended up so lucky?

“What if I was?” Alec traced his nose along the contours of Magnus’ jaw, taking in his glorious morning musk. “Would you say yes?” Although he was pretty certain of what Magnus’ answer would be, there was still a tiny sliver of insecurity deep inside Alec’s heart that worried Magnus would take it all back, that he would say it was all a mistake and send him packing.

“Alexander…” Magnus growled, hopping on top of Alec. “There is no way I would ever say no to a date with you.” He leaned down, pressing a kiss to Alec’s neck, directly over the memory of his deflect rune. Tracing his mouth back up, he looked up at Alec through still sleepy, hooded eyes. “Do you want to do this one backwards? Sex then food?”

“That’s what we did last night.” He placed a kiss on Magnus’ forehead. “How is that backwards?” Alec slid his hands down Magnus’ sides, resting them on his hips.
“Fine.” Magnus arched his back as Alec tightened his grip. “Sex then restaurant.”

“What about just the sex?” Alec’s tongue darted across his bottom lip as he eyed the warlock’s lips hungrily. “Now that I think of it, I don’t really want to leave this bed.” Alec flexed his feet, bringing some life back into his long legs. He pulled Magnus down into a leisurely kiss, their mouths waking up to each other as their tongues slipped past their lips, noncommittally exploring and teasing. When they finally broke away, Magnus answered the question, smiling around his words.

“I could be on board with that.” Magnus sat up, straddling Alec completely, wrapping his length in his fist. Alec’s hips bucked up at the contact.

“You don’t think this is too much too—” Alec tried, but was cut off with a kiss. If Magnus wanted to talk, he wasn’t going to, or maybe he didn’t need to. Maybe they didn’t need to. Perhaps this was all okay, and Alec didn’t need to question it all so much. Letting himself enjoy something just wasn’t Alec’s strong suit.

“I’ve been thinking about this far too long.” Magnus combed his free hand through his hair, making it beautifully messy. He locked eyes with Alec, and the gesture carried a strange, steady weight that made Alec’s heart flutter. Magnus continued, his voice soothing and reassuring. “At least let me ride you first before we start getting caught up in words.” The warlock went from romantic to sinful in an instant— maybe those two things weren’t as separate as Alec had previously thought. Magnus’ deft hand started to pump up and down, and Alec swore he felt magic pulse from Magnus other hand, which worked its way beneath his length to the soft skin below his balls.

“By the Angel,” Alec choked out. He grabbed Magnus’ hips harder, his knuckles whitening— he was going to leave ten finger-shaped bruises on the warlock’s skin. “You’re going to look so gorgeous bouncing up and down on my—”

“Papa!” The bedroom door suddenly flung open, and in a panic, Magnus threw himself off Alec, pulling the sheets up to their necks.

“Aerulei…” Magnus tried to hide the panic in his voice. He swallowed hard, his adam’s apple bouncing in his neck. “Auntie Tessa didn’t mention she’d be bringing you back so early… Actually I thought I mentioned I’d come pick them up this morning to see your house in Devon.”

“Pleasant afternoon to you too, Magnus.” Tessa shifted Keris to her other hip. She completely ignored Magnus’ bitter tone, remaining peaceful and collected. “I’m very sorry to have bothered you— obviously you were in the middle of something important— but it’s two o’clock.”

“And we wanted to see you papa! Auntie Tessa kept saying ‘Papa will be here soon,’ but then you weren’t coming so finally we came here! And Mister Alec is here too! I am so happy!” Aya rushed to jump on the bed, but Tessa pulled her back.

“Come on my powerful princess, why don’t we give papa and Mister Alec a few minutes.” Tessa turned back, winking at Magnus before closing the bedroom door.

“Two PM? Shit.” Alec jumped out of bed, scrambling across the floor for his clothes. “Wait, are some of my clothes out in the living room… Fuck.” Alec pulled his hands through his hair, but when he lifted his arm, he winced at the smell. “And I really need a shower. Why didn’t you tell me that I stink?!” Alec’s eyes were wide with panic. All the ease and comfort of this morning was
quickly replaced with all-consuming embarrassment.

“Some people enjoy that masculine musk.” Magnus lightly sniffed himself in solidarity. “I’m repulsive right now, but if I recall... just a few minutes ago you were sniffing me. So my guess is you like it, too. Would you like to take a shower?” Magnus batted his thick eyelashes.

“I—” Alec stammered. “Yes but—” He paced at the foot of the bed “Ugh! Time!” He gestured vaguely for a clock that didn’t exist.

“Look, no funny business, just washing. There’s plenty of room in there for the both of us. There are even two separate shower heads. I’ll conjure you some clothes too, and make you a portal to your studio. It will all be fine.” Magnus’ voice was gentle, warm, soft—it made Alec confident that everything would work out, which was strange for Alec, who was always a worrier.

“You’re amazing, you know that?” Alec walked over to Magnus’ side of the bed, pulling down the covers and hauling him to his feet. “Let’s go.” As he led his warlock to the bathroom, Alec didn’t try to think of any conversations they would need to have about last night—about what they were, or about how they weren’t going to have time alone to talk this morning even if they wanted to. For now, Alec was going to just let himself enjoy the hot, steaming shower, and the gorgeous man in there with him.

Clary had spent only five minutes trying to entertain Alec’s client, but it was proving exceedingly difficult. All she’d been able to gather so far was that her name was Diana Wrayburn, she was from Los Angeles, and she was a family friend of Alec’s. Clary didn’t think that Alec’s family had many friends, so it struck her as strange. Maryse and Alec rarely spoke of family beyond Max and Izzy—even then they were hardly ever around. Apparently, they lived with Alec’s dad in a different part of town, and they were technically estranged. Izzy always acted like it had to be hush-hush whenever she visited. Diana wouldn’t stop staring—it was driving Clary insane. She was intimidatingly beautiful, all high cheekbones and gorgeous chocolate eyes, emphasized by the elegant silver koi tattoo on her cheekbone. Did Alec do that? She wondered.

“Are you sure I can’t get you anything Diana?” Clary grimaced, making another likely futile attempt at small talk. Clary thrived on tips (Alec shared whatever he got with her), so she needed to try her best at all times with her customer service, even when it was difficult. Diana didn’t seem bothered by her attempts to drum up a conversation, or her frequent offers of coffee or tea, but she didn’t seem pleased either. There was something unsettling about a person sitting quietly, not on their phone, not reading, not even listening to music. She sat there in silence, with tight posture, like a well-trained soldier awaiting orders.

“No thank you, Fairchi—Fray.” The woman uncharacteristically stumbled over her words. Had she forgotten Clary’s last name? How did she even know her last name? Maybe, in her attempts to be polite, Clary used her whole name. That had to be it.

“Okay...” Clary busied her hands straightening the papers on her desk. Normally, she would be sketching, but Alec told her it was rude to do when there were customers waiting. Suddenly, the door flung open, creating a vacuum in the waiting area, sending all the neatly stacked papers flying.

“Clary, Diana—My apologies.” Alec ripped off his coat, throwing it hard enough onto the rack
that the narrow base threatened to topple.

“It’s fine, Alec.” Diana half-smiled. She gestured a scarred hand at Clary. Why were Alec’s friends always covered in scars? “Clary here was keeping me company.”

At that, Clary let out a sigh of relief. At least she wasn’t going to get chewed out by Alec today for poor customer service. Her skin still crawled from the social discomfort, making her eager to get out of the shop and get some fresh air—even if it was just to walk next door to Scroll and Quill.

“Alec— I have to go to the bookstore and help your mom with something! I’ll be back within an hour!” At that, she hopped out of her chair, shrugging on a thick purple cardigan. A coat wasn’t necessary for such a quick journey. The second she was out of the shop, though, she could already hear Alec and Diana’s voices perk up, falling into comfortable conversation. Maybe it was a coincidence, but Clary read into it, feeling like they were going out of their way to keep something from her.

You’re being ridiculous, Fray. She assured herself. You’re the one who bolted out of there, Alec had just gotten in the door.

That was all the thinking she had time for before she was in the bookstore, ready to busy herself with alphabetizing the new children’s literature section. Clary wasn’t sure what had prompted Maryse to start carrying books for kids, but she was happy enough to help sort the cheerful and colorful hardbacks.

At first glance, they seemed like normal children’s books. But upon inspecting the titles, they were anything but. There were classic fairy tales, but the illustrations were darker, with detailed fantastical creatures replacing the princesses and witches on the covers. There were books on learning alphabets Clary had never heard of, like ‘Let’s learn Ctholian!’ or ‘Purgatic with Piggies’ — that one was strange, with cute pigs holding hands and jumping in a circle that looked like an octagram. She shook her head in surprise, and the cover of the book became ‘Three Little Pigs.’

No that can’t be right—I know what I just saw.

Clary closed her eyes tightly, taking a deep breath before opening them again. Something melted away, like a liquid curtain coating the cover, and the title shifted again to ‘Purgatic with Piggies.’ It had to be school stress that was making Clary see things. Maybe she hadn’t had enough coffee this morning, or maybe she’d had too much.

“Maryse— I don’t think I’m feeling well.” Clary walked over to Maryse’s desk, rousing the woman from her current battle with a label-maker.

“Clary, dear what’s wrong?” Maryse searched Clary’s face for clues. “You look so pale, have you been sleeping enough? Or is it cramps?” Somehow Maryse’s concern made Clary feel more unwell, validating her symptoms.

“No— I mean yes, maybe?” Clary’s head started to ache, her cheeks grew hot, her thoughts blurring together. There was a fog between her eyes and the outside world. “I just really think I need a nap.”

“Go upstairs, and lay on the couch. I know your apartment is close, but I wouldn’t feel right with you even walking that far right now. I’ll bring you up some tea and crackers in a bit, but you need to sleep first.”
“Yes. Sleep would be good.” Clary knew she wasn’t sounding like herself, but she couldn’t do anything about it. It was like she was outside her body, watching everything happen in slow motion.

“Do you need my help getting up the stairs?” Maryse’s brow knit in concern. Clary felt the room spinning, swaying— maybe she was too.

“No, I’ll be fine. Sorry about the kids’ books. I’ll help later.” Clary needed to lay down— it was all she could think about. She didn’t remember getting upstairs, or opening the door. She didn’t recall flopping down on Alec’s bed like she did on movie nights, or when they all drank too much wine at family dinner. All she knew was that she was finally asleep, and that was all that mattered.

Maryse felt her stomach drop the moment Clary left the room.

The children’s books. She ran across the small store to the tiny corner she’d reserved for kids and frantically started digging through the books. It occurred to her that maybe the last one Clary put on the shelf was the one that affected her— ‘Purgatic with Piggies.’ All of the shadow-world children’s books were heavily glamoured, and by the fuzzy edge around this one, Maryse could tell the glamour was still intact. Since the angels stripped her of her marks, Clary no longer had the sight— there was no way she could see through the glamour.

But Clary had looked like she saw a ghost— and the headache. Was it the same headache shadowhunter children felt when peeling away complex glamours without a voyance rune? Maryse hit the book against her forehead, collapsing into a puddle on the floor.

What have I done?

The door chimed, sending Maryse in a panicked frenzy to collect herself and reclaim a degree of professionalism. Regardless of Clary’s situation, this was still a place of business, and Maryse had a job to do. She rose to her feet, brushing off her skirt and smoothing her hair. She took in a sharp breath, deep yet brief, and put on her best customer service smile. Her standard and rehearsed greeting was pouring from her lips before she finished turning around.

“Welcome to Scroll and Quill. Is there anything I can help you with—” She realized quickly that her greeting was unnecessary. It was just Luke.

“Actually, there is something you could help me with.” He laughed— a warm, full-bodied sound— and Maryse felt some of her tension calm immediately. “I’m looking for my girlfriend. I’d like to take her to dinner tonight.”

Maryse bit her lip, trying not to blush. It felt silly to be called someone’s girlfriend— after all, she was the mother of two adults and a teenager— but at the same time, it was nice. Something about it made her feel carefree and light, something she hadn’t felt for years.

“I’ll be sure to pass on the message.” Maryse wrapped him in a firm hug, hoping that maybe Luke would pick up on the problem with Clary through touch alone and that she wouldn’t have to explain. This was going to be much more painful for Luke than it was for her, no matter how attached to Clary she’d become. “Dinner would be perfect, actually. There’s something we need to discuss. Clary won’t be joining us, will she?”
“Well, it wouldn’t exactly be a date if we brought the kids, now would it?” Luke half smiled, realizing the weight in her ‘We need to talk’ statement. “Is something wrong though? What do you need to talk about?”

Maryse centered herself, standing tall and trying to not come off as overly emotional. She knew from her experience running The Institute that showing too much emotion in tough times can make other people too vulnerable, unable to properly think through situations. Although she has loosened up over the years, for issues as serious as this, strategizing was still the priority.

“Clary might be regaining her sight.” Maryse stared at Luke, waiting for his reaction.

“Oh.” That was all he said, his eyes going distant. After a stretch of silence, he finally spoke again. “How?”

Maryse had reduced the effervescent man to one-word statements. This was not going well.

“She was organizing the new children’s section when she started to behave strangely. I made sure all the materials were heavily glamoured, but I think she was able to see through it. She left here in some kind of fit, and it seemed an awful lot like the symptoms of a sighted mundane overwhelmed by a complex glamour—headache, dizziness, fatigue. I sent her upstairs to take a nap. I was about to check on her.”

“I was afraid this might start to happen.” To Maryse’s surprise, Luke pulled her into another hug, nuzzling into her hair. “Don’t worry Trueblood, I’ve got this. It’s going to be fine.” He pulled her in tighter before letting her go. “I’ll head up and check on her. I’ll bring you down some tea. Chamomile?” He quirked up an eyebrow.

“That would be lovely.” She spoke quietly. It all but brought her to tears, Luke taking the time to care for her even though there was a crisis with Clary. In all her years with Robert, he never prioritized her the way Luke did. Luke made her feel loved, safe, and cared for—the same way he cared for his pack, for Clary but coated in an eros that was strong and passionate. As soon as Luke left, she settled down into a reading chair in the back corner of the store, allowing herself to relax for a moment, to take everything in and acknowledge how she was feeling.

Maybe Luke was right. Maybe it would all be okay.

“So Diana, what can I do you for?” Alec released her from a bear hug. She’d looked surprised when he hugged her, but most Shadowhunters were relatively surprised at Alec’s new calm and laid-back demeanor.

“I’d like a ring of ivy around my arm. Nothing too fancy. I know that color won’t show up well against my skin, so black with shading is fine.” She smiled, but her composure faltered when she mentioned color.

“I’ve been working on some inks recently that have worked really well on dark skin.” Alec led her back to his workstation. “I will warn you though, they have magical properties. I know some Shadowhunters wouldn’t like that.” He sat on his stool, grabbing his sketchbook and beginning on an ivy design. His plan was to draw it out in a line, make a stencil, and then wrap it around her arms in a way to emphasize her muscles. Shadowhunters always loved to show off their strength.
“You know, that sounds nice, but at the same time I’ve thought about it in black and white for so long that I’ve grown attached to the idea. Plus, I have some teenage artists back home who would be pretty upset if I messed with their design.” Diana pulled out a folded piece of paper from her jacket pocket, before shrugging off her jacket and hanging it on the back of the chair.

“Oh, you already have a design?” Alec raised his eyebrows. “That makes this even easier.”

“It’s a Julian Blackthorn original.” She handed him the paper, and he unfolded it, revealing a delicate design of curling English ivy. It was much more elegant than what Alec was envisioning for the fierce warrior in front of him, but it was undeniably beautiful.

“Is this the size you want?” He stood, ready to go make the stencil.

“Yes. Jules already lined it up with my arm, just below the deltoid.” She pointed to a spot on her arm, just below the cut muscle.

“Perfect. I’ll be back in a second with the outline, and then we can finalize placement. This will probably take me two and a half hours. Is that okay?”

“Anything less and I’d question your work, Lightwood.” She laughed. “I’m just joking, apparently you come highly recommended. Lydia Branwell served as Envoy for a mission in Los Angeles, and she mentioned that if I wanted any more ink, that I should come to you. It’s lucky I ended up here for a joint mission.”

Hearing Diana talk about Shadowhunter business made Alec feel an odd amalgamation of emotions. First, nostalgia— there was something to be said about a good mission. It was exhilarating, saving mundanes and hunting demons, fulfilling the inborn duty of the nephilim. At the same time, Alec was thankful that the Shadowhunter life was behind him. Working at his studio, spending time with his family— now he had a chance to be young and forge his own path. Finally, he felt like he was becoming his true self. Sometimes, his life was peaceful, uneventful even. As he went through the motions of creating the outline for Diana’s tattoo, he relished in the routine, how familiar his new life had become.

A buzz in his pocket snapped him out of his bought of soul-searching. It was a flurry of short messages, coming in faster than he could read them.

**Magnus Bane 2:15 PM**

Hey 😊

I know you had to leave for real reasons...

I’ll pretend not to be a bit hurt 😊

But I want to take you up on that offer

For a second date, that is.

Before you do the Alec thing and overthink it.

So, dinner?

Tonight at 8?
Just something simple, since I’ll have the kids?

I know a great place that does all day brunch? 😊

Alec had no idea how Magnus could type so quickly. As much as Alec wanted to jump at the offer, part of him was thankful that he had a valid excuse. It might be prudent to take a beat, to think about what happened and how it might impact them in the future. Alec didn’t like to rush into things.

**Alec Lightwood 2:17 PM**

Can’t. I work at the shop until 10 tonight.

The second he sent the message, Alec cursed himself. He sounded too impartial, like he was just blowing Magnus off. That was the last thing he wanted the warlock to think. He really liked him—wanting a bit of time to think had nothing to do with that, especially since Alec really did need to work tonight. Taking a moment to think about his words, he typed out another message.

**Alec Lightwood 2:18 PM**

Rain check? Saturday brunch? I promised you a mimosa, and my word is my vow.

Alec kicked himself for using a Shadowhunter line. He had to recover this, stay casual. At least his idea was sound. He’d have a few days to think things over and know what he wants before seeing Magnus again. Maybe he would even know what to say—Alec liked time to prepare his words ahead of time, since they didn’t always come naturally. He quickly typed out another message, which he swore would be the last one for now. He had a client to get to.

**Alec Lightwood 2:19 PM**

And bring the kids 😊 It’ll be fun.

I’ll swing by the loft around 10? We can go from there?

Alec didn’t have time or emotional energy to wait for a reply, so he set his phone down by the workstation and left it there as he walked back to Diana. He didn’t know what was going to happen with Magnus, but right now he didn’t need to know. It was time to do his favorite thing and dive into a design, focusing on the lines and the technique, and in the end, making someone very happy. Allowing himself to indulge in one more comparison to his old Shadowhunter life, he smiled, knowing that he had a job that brought him joy, that could calm him in any situation. As long as he
was doing what he loved, everything was going to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter didn't have as much excitement as the last one! It's hard to top a 'first time' scene! Also, sorry I was late posting!

For any of you 'Dark Artifices' fans, I hope you liked seeing Diana!

Next chapter, Aerulei expresses how she feels about Magnus dating Alexander, and we get even more classic Alec Lightwood overthinking! Perhaps one or two more characters jump into the Fray (pun intended). I promise this subplot won't take away too much attention from Malec, and will actually lead to some super cute moments!

Love you all, and thank you for all your lovely comments! See you Wednesday!
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Magnus and Alec each try to take some time for themselves.

Chapter Notes

I apologize for what feels like angst at the beginning. I promise you, it's just a device to mix in even more fluff. Think of it as an ingredient in a cake that's gross on its own, but necessary. Like baking soda. Sure, let's go with that. Enjoy this baking soda.

Also, my beta reader pointed out that 'grey sweatpant season' and the reason why people find grey sweatpants attractive might not be common knowledge, so if you aren't sure what I'm talking about, give it a quick google search <3 (I promise it will make sense later!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Luscious aromas of jasmine, sandalwood, and vetiver oils diffused in Magnus’ cavernous en-suite. In the true vein of a self-care night that would make any hopeless romantic swoon, candles stood on every flat surface of the room and white flower petals floated on the surface of the bath. Magnus knew it was just a little over the top, but he needed to relax and clear his head. Once Alec left that morning— or rather afternoon — Magnus went back into single-parent mode— his day consumed by chasing around two children who were particularly rambunctious. Staying with a friend or relative for the night always left the kids brave, as if the tiny bout of independence meant they were equipped to stage a full-on revolt. So when Magnus was finally able to put them down for bed— and had waited long enough to make sure they would stay there— he decided to dedicate the rest of the night to himself. He left his phone behind in the bedroom, vowing to not give it a second thought— though that was harder than he wanted to admit.

After a string of text messages about a second date that initially left Magnus worried that Alec was going to emotionally pull back into his shell and blow him off, Alec had quickly made sure to clarify the situation and set concrete plans for Sunday. Magnus swore he felt the entire universe sigh in relief along with him. Alec did have to work, and the weekends were the most lucrative time to be in the studio. Their texting hadn’t stopped there though. Alec texted him a photo of Diana Wrayburn’s new tattoo, and it was stunning.

I really need to talk to that boy about setting up an Instagram to showcase his work. It would be a great thing for Biscuit to take on while she sits behind that front desk...

Magnus slid out of his royal blue kimono and hung it on the back of the door. One by one, he deposited each piece of his jewelry onto the counter before sliding a terry cloth headband on to keep his hair off his forehead. It looked silly, but if he didn’t do it, he wouldn't have enough free real estate for his Korean sheet mask. Masks were one thing he did not do the mundane way— there was nothing relaxing about trying to unfold the cold, slippery fabric or gel just to have to
struggle through lining it up properly with his eyes, mouth, and nose. Radiating Mulan, he waved a hand over his face, a white mask appearing on his skin. Sometimes he did facials with his daughter, and they sang the song ‘Reflection’ as they conjured on the masks. He paused, allowing himself to absorb that memory. Tessa always reminded him that as immortals, they needed to catalog each one, keep them fresh, and to never let a precious memory flash into his head without giving it the respect it deserves.

Feeling nostalgic and already well on his way to relaxation, the warlock stepped into his steaming soaking tub and conjured up a glass of champagne. He didn’t even have music playing—as a parent, the stark silence marked only by tiny splashes of water was the most beautiful music he’d ever heard. And he’d heard Beethoven in concert. And Mozart, Chopin, Debussy, Tchaikovsky. This silence was still better—no competition. Beads of condensation swelled quickly on the outside of his champagne flute, catching the flickering candlelight. He took a long swig, relishing how cold his throat felt in contrast to the steaming heat of the water on his skin. It was heavenly.

Nothing about this scenario was overly magical, but it was absolutely divine. As he sank his shoulders beneath the water, careful to keep his chin from dipping in and disrupting his face mask, he felt his tension melt into the water. Stiff muscles slowly loosened—sore from carrying a disgruntled Aya to her bedroom three times and holding an overly-attached Keris all day. But there were other reasons why his body was feeling ragged. Namely, Alexander Lightwood. His hips thanked him for the kind treatment, bruises blossoming where Alec had gripped just a bit too hard. His neck begged him to dip lower, to soothe the hiccups that showed the whole world just how fantastic his date had been last night. From his displays of near acrobatics, the backs of his thighs felt overly strained, giving the stretched feeling in his ass a run for its money.

The water flowed around him like a warm hug, reminding him that every discomfort came from a source of joy. His pain was not from suffering. He took a deep breath in, holding his lungs full for two beats before exhaling. There was so much in his life that he still needed to figure out, but in this moment, he gave himself permission to focus only on happiness. And on not falling asleep in the bath.

The latter ended up not being an option, the bathroom door timidly opening to reveal a trembling Aerulei, clutching a displeased Chairman. Hearing the splashing of the water, Chairman Meow yowled, flailing out of Aya’s arms and bolting from the bathroom. Although it was an expected reaction from a cat hearing water, it broke whatever frail barrier that separated her from tears. She fell to the floor, clutching her legs and crying.

Magnus snapped his fingers, putting out the candles and turning on the lights. He hopped out of the tub and wrapped up in his warmer, cotton-weave robe, rushing to his daughter’s side. He rubbed circles on her back, his alarm growing when he felt how ragged and shallow her breathing was.

“Papa!” She sniffed, wiping her face on her purple striped pajamas. “I can’t feel it! I just feel cold.” Her voice trailed off, sounding defeated as she resumed sobbing.

“Aerulei, what can’t you feel?” He cupped her face in his hands, sending diagnostic pulses of magic through her to see if there were any physical symptoms. Her body temperature was a bit low and all of her bodily systems seemed lethargic. Her blood pressure, heart rate and lymphatic flow were also slow. Other than that she didn’t seem too unwell, no obvious viruses to be seen.

“Papa.” She looked into his eyes, tears streaming down her splotchy cheeks.

Magnus’ heart nearly stopped when he realized what he was seeing. Two blue eyes were looking up at him. Not snake’s eyes—not his daughter’s beautiful warlock eyes—just two normal, circular-pupiled eyes.
“Aya…” He spoke slowly, not wanting to hear the answer he was expecting. “Are you glamouring your eyes right now?”

Her lower lip quivered as she shook her head.

“No papa, I told you— I can’t feel it.”

He pulled her into a deep hug, and this time sent out different pulses of magic, testing to see if her magical reserves were low, or worse— gone. But as blue sparks radiated from his palms, her body fought back with its characteristic purple tendrils of magic. It was faint and pale— nothing compared to the incredible strength his daughter normally had— but it was still there.

“Don’t worry sayang, I’m calling Auntie Cat right away.” He gripped her tighter, pressing kisses into her hair. “You’ll be okay.”

“Magnus, it’s just like a cold. Give it two or three days, giving her this medicine morning and night, and Aerulei will be just fine.” Catarina reassured him, glancing back at his now peacefully sleeping daughter. She quietly closed the bedroom door, making her way back to Magnus’ office and continuing to mix up batches of medicine for Aerulei.

“But a magic cold?” Magnus huffed. How could he be so stupid? Two warlock children, and he knew nothing of the specific ailments they could face. He read countless books on mundane children, and he thought that his innate magic could help him with anything else thrown his way, but instead he had to call Catarina to supplement his shortcomings. While she did specialize in healing magic, he couldn’t help but feel like he failed his children somehow.

“You’ve never had one?” Cat raised her eyebrows at him, her blue forehead wrinkling. Magnus shook his head, and she shrugged. “You probably have, but you spent so much of the past three hundred years hungover that you didn’t notice.”

“So what you’re saying is that maybe I lost my dinner onto the Nazca lines from a warlock cold and not from the liquor?” Magnus tried to joke, but the mirth didn’t reach his eyes. He was too worried about his daughter. He was too worried about his competency as a parent. Threads of his well-practiced confidence were pulling loose and he was too slow at mending the stitches.

“I see that look in your eyes, Magnus.” Cat paused her mortar, looking up from the large worktable in the center of the room. “This isn’t your fault— you did the right thing calling me here.”

“But this— all this—” He waved his hands at the mixture of ingredients laid out. “I already had the supplies to fix her, to make her feel better. If I’d just known— If I’d taken more time to learn—”

“You’re being ridiculous. When a child is sick, their parents take them to a doctor.” Her tone was firm and unmovable. The stark tone rattled Magnus, demanding his respect. “I am a doctor— a warlock one at that. It doesn’t matter how powerful you are, you can’t know everything. If you let something like this eat you up, your pride will get in the way. Do you know how many times in the past you let yourself suffer when others could have helped you? When I could have helped you? At least in your advanced age you have the sense to look out for your children better than you’ve ever looked out for yourself.”

“Catarina, I—” Magnus stammered. It wasn’t often that he affected his friend this strongly.
“No. Don’t apologize. Just take my advice.” She busied herself again grinding herbs and pouring them into a small cauldron. “I’m making you up a few extra batches so that you can have it ready in a pinch. It’s not that different from the magic supplements I make for them, but there are some ingredients to help them sleep, bring up their body temperature, and speed up the course of the illness.”

“Is this going to happen often?” Magnus eyed the alarming number of vials lined up on the table. “What can I do to prevent it?”

“There’s no way around it, it just happens. It’s like a common cold. It wouldn’t be common if it wasn’t common in warlock children. Oh—and it’s highly contagious. So don’t be surprised if Keris catches it soon.” She carefully poured the contents of the cauldron into the glass bottles and sealed each one with a thick, natural cork.

“You’ve been amazing tonight, Catarina.” He pulled her into a tight hug, her dark blue braids tickling his face. “I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Magnus whipped up a portal back to her house, picking up on the hint that she was done with her work and wanted to go back to sleep.

“Don’t thank me yet.” She smirked, taking a step toward the portal.

“And why’s that?” Magnus would have been concerned at her words, but her expression made him worried about something else altogether—being the butt of a joke with one of his oldest friends.

“It’s not just a childhood disease—adults can catch it too.”

With that, she was gone, and Magnus leaned over the work table, bracing his weight against it. Each little vial of medicine taunted him, warning him of just how unpleasant the next few days would be.

“It’s just you and me against this cold.” Magnus spoke to the bottles. He was becoming delusional. Sleep was begging him to return to bed, and he was more than happy to bend to its demands.

His son had other ideas, dissonant, piercing wails shattering the quiet of the loft. There was no way Aya would sleep through that. And Keris rarely woke up in the middle of the night anymore—which was definitely a harbinger for his second child coming down with the magic flu.

It was going to be a long night.

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Fridays were always hit or miss at the studio. Alec opened the doors at noon, but unless he had an appointment, he would never get any drifters until at least early evening. It never hurt to keep the shop open though, as long as he had nothing else to do. Today he didn’t feel like going to the gym, he couldn’t snag a morning shift at the cafe, and his mom didn’t even need help in the shop, so Alec opened even earlier than usual, heading downstairs and setting up right after his first cup of coffee. One cup was never enough, but he had a small coffee pot set up in the office that he usually kept going all day.

Flicking on the lights, he shuffled to the coffee pot, grabbing the carafe and filling it with water from the workstation sink. The overhead cabinet housed coffee filters and plain medium-roast coffee Alec got for free from the roastery. He peeled out a paper filter, gently separating the diaphanous material before putting it in the machine and filling it with generous spoon-fulls of rich
and bitter grounds. After he poured the water in the top, he pressed the button and got to work on with his task for the morning.

Alec grabbed his sketchbook from the back room, flipping through the pages to find the design he was looking for. A few weeks ago, he found himself sketching quills, scrolls and inkwells—paying homage to the names of the bookstore and tattoo parlor. The more he worked on it, the more he realized how perfect it would be as a tattoo, with the right placement and styling. It became his go-to boredom sketch, and now he had at least twenty designs to choose from. One spoke to him the most though. An exercise in American Traditionalism, it had thick lines and lots of character—a quill stabbing through a scroll, dipping into an inkwell. It was very representative of the ‘new’ Lightwoods—aggressive and to the point, but still creative and artistic.

With the strong vertical lean of the quill, he wanted to place it somewhere on his body that would compliment its shape—somewhere with bold bone structure. His neck was out of the question, not just because it wasn’t the right design for the location, but also because it was simply impossible for the task at hand—he was putting this design on himself. This meant he was limited to places he could easily reach with his right hand, and where he would be stable enough not to mess it up. Orientation didn’t matter, because if he used mirrors and made his stencil detailed enough, it wouldn’t matter if he was looking at it upside down. After deliberating in front of the shower mirror for an hour the night before, he settled on a space right above his hip bone, with the feather running parallel to his v-lines. It was a bit provocative, but it was a pretty enough tattoo to have there.

I wonder if Magnus would like it? He found himself thinking about the warlock’s opinion, but he pushed down the thought. His tattoos were his choice, on his body, and no matter who he was with romantically, Alec would go with his gut and pick what made him happy. Something inside him nudged at his heart, telling him that Magnus would support his choices no matter what. It brought a little smile to Alec’s face, but he quickly snapped back into focus and got to work tracing the stencil.

For once, it felt too quiet in the studio. Alec couldn’t let his mind wander when he was doing something that required so much focus, and just the right amount of music could keep him on track. He connected his phone to the speaker and picked his favorite working playlist of alternative rock. Pouring himself another cup of coffee, he dove into the work, copying the lines meticulously, making tiny edits to spots he felt like weren’t polished enough in his sketch. It was risky to make modifications during the stenciling process, but sometimes Alec liked the thrill.

A few songs and cups of coffee later, the stencil was complete. Alec turned up the thermostat in the studio, knocking off any encroaching chill that could make this process uncomfortable. He took off his black t-shirt and walked to the mirror, getting to work on shaving the area and prepping his skin. Once he was satisfied, he carefully lined up the stencil with his hip bone, pressing down on it before peeling it away. He twisted his torso, checking to see how the design would move with his skin, how it would look in action. As with any tattoo, a touch of vanity had to be taken into account—and this piece looked good. Very good.

With his confidence solidified, he drilled down to work. The familiar routine of inking the outlines mixed with the scratching sensation of working on his own skin. It was cathartic, it was distracting, and most importantly—it looked cool as hell.
“Aya please, I understand this type of macaroni was apparently offensive, but you’re too old to throw your food across the room!”

“Not too old!” She yelled like a hellion, her hands smearing cheese sauce along the wall as she ran around the kitchen. “Different macaronis!”

Magnus was at his wits end. It was only mid-morning and already Aerulei had thrown five tantrums. He called Catarina, who reminded him that without her magic, Aya would revert to more standard almost-five-year-old behavior, and that he took for granted how much her magic matured her. She prescribed patience. He couldn’t believe the gall of that woman— he had no idea how he would survive the day. He was already exhausted, and his magic was feeling strained from the constant clean up. The only thing to be thankful for was that Aya’s magic was too weak to cause any significant damage.

Immediately after he conjured Aya a different type of macaroni, Keris wailed from his nursery. Up until now, he’d been sleeping off his first dose of medicine. Magnus was not ready for two against one. As if things couldn’t get more chaotic, someone was rapping at his door.

“Magnus, I know you’re in there!” Ragnor taunted. “I hear you and your little miscreants causing commotion. I tried to portal in, but it seems you’ve blocked me from your wards. I’d be insulted, but I’m sure you can explain this all to Dorian and I over tea.”

“Stay away! This is a quarantine zone!” Magnus yelled, refusing to open the door.

“Some of us are smart enough to take our vaccinations! We’re immune!” Ragnor’s voice was overly cheerful. Magnus reluctantly opened the door.

“Am I the only one who didn’t know about magical colds?” Magnus slumped against the door frame.

“Of course. You’ve spent the majority of your life too hungover to notice. You contracted witches warts once and didn’t even notice. I’m certain you wouldn’t have noticed a dampening flu.”

“Witches warts!” Dorian gasped in horror. “How do I avoid those?”

“Unless you’re a complete and distasteful tart with a sweet tooth for sleeping with the Thames river nixies, you have nothing to worry about.”

“I’m insulted mon chou.” Magnus narrowed his eyes. “You know for a fact that I got those warts from that eidolon demon I thought was Oscar Wilde.”

“And you knew he wasn’t really Oscar Wilde. You were already sleeping with the real Oscar Wilde. You invited fake Oscar to have a menage a trois with the genuine article!”

“Uncle Ragnor, this is disgusting.” Dorian buried his head in his hands, futile at concealing his blush. “Can we get to business? Tutoring the children who likely shouldn’t overhear this conversation?”

“By all means, Antony.” Magnus waved him in. “Don’t expect to get anywhere with them today, though. Apparently being sick makes them revert to mundane maturity. Even Aerulei is all tantrums today.”

“You underestimate your children Magnus.” Ragnor chided. “They’re much brighter than you.” Ragnor waved his hands, conjuring a pot of tea and pouring three cups. “Drink this— you’ll need it. It’ll boost your immune system and fix those dark circles.”
Magnus raised his hand to his eyes, lightly tapping at the skin. Ragnor was right, he felt puffy and his skin dragged dryly under his fingertip.

“You do look dreadful.” Dorian quipped. “But I mean that in the best way possible! Er, by that I mean maybe you should go out and get some air. If Ragnor decides the kids aren’t in good enough shape for lessons, I’d be more than happy to babysit for a few hours?”

From the other room, Keris’ wails hit a fever pitch. Likely from his fever.

“Normally, I’d be insulted at you implying my shortcomings, but I’m covered in child sweat and my whole life smells like camphor from Cat’s medicine.” Magnus sipped his tea, making a face. “Ugh but this is worse. Fennel? Really? You know how I abhor fennel.”

“And you know how good it is for you!” Ragnor turned to Dorian. “Go get the little knife prince. Figure out why he’s making those unholy sounds.” He turned back to Magnus. “And you— go get dressed and take a shower, and then get out of this house. You look like you just woke up in a gutter. And not the clean gutters of this century!” He yelled as Magnus grumpily walked away. “At best, 17th century gutters!”

Magnus wasn’t even sure where he was going to go. Actually, that was a lie. He was definitely going to get coffee, but after that he was straight out of plans. He headed to Brooklyn Roasting Company, fetched his favorite latte, but still left feeling incredibly empty. Alec hadn’t been working today. That’s when it hit him— he should stop by the shop and see Alec. With both kids sick, he would probably have to call off their Sunday brunch date, and for the sake of not wanting to seem like he was blowing Alec off, it would be better to say that in person, right? It was either that, or he already insanely missed Alexander after just one day.

He dipped into an alleyway, opening a discreet portal and hopping through, landing right outside Inkwell. It was a bit hasty to show up unannounced— for all Magnus knew the shop could be closed— but in the worst case, he could open another portal and head back home. The lights were on in the studio, and as he pulled open the door, he was relieved that it was open. The front desk was empty. He figured Clary was likely at classes this time of day. Judging by the loud alternative rock pounding from the speakers, the studio wasn’t empty. The current track: ‘R U Mine’ by Arctic Monkeys.

He tiptoed back into the studio, afraid of startling Alec if he was in the middle of working on a client. The stations in the front and middle of the studio were empty, but the door to Alec’s private studio in the back was ajar, the buzz of the tattoo gun giving away his location. He heard Alec’s rough deep voice quietly singing along. What client would he feel comfortable enough singing in front of?

This was a terrible idea, sneaking in like this, but it was too late to go back now. Magnus peeked through the door. If he hadn’t already been silent, the picture in front of him would have rendered him speechless.

Alec was standing shirtless, hips propped up against his chair. His grey sweatpants hung sinfully low on his hips, drawing Magnus’ eyes lower still to the visible bulge in his pants.

*Lilith bless grey sweatpant season.*
The half-nakedness wasn’t close to the most alluring part though—it was what Alec was doing with his hands. His torso was slightly curved, his abs rippling as he leaned over his hip bone, absorbed in his work. Alec was tattooing his own skin, one hand holding himself steady or dabbing away plasma while the other hand switched between painstakingly working on the lines and refilling the ink. With every small stroke, the muscles in his arm rippled, completely engaged and in control. Magnus could tell that it hurt—Alec's hips tensed and lightly bucked at each first contact of the needle, relaxing after a few seconds. From what he could see of the outline, the design was beautiful. The feather lined up sinfully with Alec’s v-lines, emphasizing the toned and muscular path from his hip bones to his groin.

It was better than any porn Magnus had watched, sexier than any scenario he’d been in. Tattoo fetishes are a thing… He noted. But are tattooing fetishes a thing? If they weren’t, they should be. Magnus watched as Alec brushed a bead of sweat from his forehead, and it made the warlock realize he was sweating as well. He was positively flushed. He licked his lips, ruining the gloss he’d applied after finishing his coffee. It couldn’t be helped—seeing Alec this way took away any control Magnus had over his own actions. Even when a tiny rivulet of blood dripped across the artist’s pale skin, he was still turned on.

The trance was broken when Alec put the tattoo gun down on his tray and assessed his work.

“Enjoy the show?” Alec spoke, unable to hide the hint of a smile in his voice.

Magnus’ mouth hung agape as a blush painted his already flushed cheeks.

“It’s okay, I knew you were here. I heard the door open, and I could tell it was you right away.” Now he looked up at Magnus, his pupils blown from the post-needle endorphins and the rush of adrenaline.

“How did you…” Magnus was at a loss for words again, something he wasn’t used to.

“Your shoes, they’re always fancy. And you shuffle your feet a tiny bit, like you’re always dancing.” Alec winked as he walked past Magnus to his coffee pot and poured a generous cup.

“Are you really going to drink that?” Magnus tried to regain his composure with small talk. An amateur strategy. “It smells stale.” He wrinkled his nose in disgust.

“It’s dark, it has caffeine, and it’ll keep me alert for the second part of this—” Alec gestured to his hip, the skin pink around the edges of the finished outline. “Which, I assume you’re staying for?”

“Whatever gave you that impression?” Magnus crossed his arms, looking up at Alec, now less than an arm’s length away. He was thankful he wore mascara, since he knew it looked better from Alec’s height.

“Besides the fact that you were standing here for almost thirty minutes?” Alec bit his lip, his gaze darting down the warlock’s chest and settling at his crotch. “I think I have one pretty good hint.”

If his dick was going to betray him like this, Magnus was going to do something about it. He snapped the coffee cup from Alec’s hands and put it on the table, lunging forward and pressing the tall man against the wall. Picture frames housing design flashes rattled at the hard contact, but he didn’t care. All he cared about right now was kissing Alec completely senseless. When their lips finally made contact, Magnus let the feelings flow out of him all at once. The stress from his sick kids, the pent-up sexual frustration from watching Alec work on himself, the strange longing he’d felt from being apart from this man for only a day. His entire body rocked into the kiss, his hands gripping desperately at the back of Alec’s dark hair.
“Fuck.” Alec breathed as the warlock kissed along his jaw, up his cheek bone, and sucking at his earlobe. “How do you manage to even make ears sexual?”

Magnus nuzzled into Alec’s neck—he was in the perfect position for whispering filthy things.

“It’s easy when I’m working with the most beautiful body I’ve ever seen.” Magnus raked his fingers hard down the back of Alec’s head, settling on his shoulder. “An artist works best with the finest materials.”

At that, Alec tilted his head and caught Magnus’ mouth, the kiss sloppy, needy, wanting. His long arms easily lifted Magnus off the ground, securely linking under his ass and carrying him over to the drawing desk. Pencils, paper and art supplies tumbled to the ground in a cacophony of crashing sounds, but the artist clearly had other priorities. Magnus let those strong hands push him back flush to the table, allowing his body to be pliant and willing. This was Alec’s home—more intimate still, his studio—and he was ready to let the artist work his magic.

At least he was until in the pocket of the leather pants Alec was just starting to remove, Magnus’ phone rang.

“Oh shoot.” Magnus threw his hand over his eyes in frustration. “I have to take this, it’s the babysitter Dorian. The kids are sick right now and…”

“It’s important, take it.” Alec laid his head on Magnus’ stomach, his hands continuing to gently massage the warlock’s thighs. It was adorable, but still far too arousing for a phone call.

“Dorian, is everything okay?” Magnus tried to hide the panic in his voice, but Alec picked up on it, his brow furrowing in concern.

“In the background, bellowing screams echoed through the loft.

“My children are sick, now is not the time to be vague!” Magnus jumped off the table, zipping up his jeans.

“Aya threw up on the couch, and Keris pooped… everywhere.” Dorian whispered in absolute terror. “And I can’t clean it with magic, and I don’t know where the cleaning supplies are and—”

His voice was quick and panicked.

“I’ll be there immediately.” Magnus whipped open a portal. “I would love to continue this, Alexander. You have no idea how badly I want to. But unfortunately I have to go. I’m so sorry…”

His kids cock-blocked them again, for the second time, and Magnus was nervous about how Alec would react. He was young, he didn’t have anything tying him down, and yet two tiny warlocks were raining on his parade.

“Magnus, you have no reason to be sorry.” Alec cupped the warlock’s face in his calloused hands, pressing feather-light lips to his forehead before taking his mouth for a single, grounding kiss.

“You have two little people who need their papa. That is more important than anything else.” Alec kissed him again. “Promise you’ll call or text if you need anything?” He punctuated the last statement with one more kiss, and it took everything Magnus had not to drag Alec into the portal with him, to say ‘you, what I need is you.’ But right now, with his kids covered in filth, was not the right time to express and act on that sentiment.

“I promise, Alexander.” Magnus turned and stepped into the portal, knowing he couldn’t go as long as he was looking at that gorgeous, shirtless man. He should have taken one more breath of
fresh air before entering his loft, because the sights and smells he walked into were Edom on earth. At least now, he knew he had one extra person on his team, willing to help. He knew that Alexander put his kids before everything else just how he did— he wasn’t selfish, he wasn’t one-track-minded, and that knowledge was enough wind beneath Magnus’ proverbial wings to give him the energy to deal with the chaotic mess he was standing in.

Chapter End Notes

Immediately next: An interlude that gives us more questions than answers! Coming up after that: Magnus is home alone with two sick kids, and Alec won't stand for that.

Again, thank you all for reading, commenting, kudos-ing and hitting me up on tumblr! Every piece of feedback I get makes me so happy! I'm working on responding to each comment, sorry if it's taking a while!
Interlude: Sometime Around Midnight

Chapter Summary

If being a band's #1 fan is about showing up at every show, Jace is Simon's biggest fan.

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the fic, Jace.

If you've never heard the song 'Sometime around midnight' by Airborne toxic event, give it a listen while you read this! It's a classic, and exposes this chapter for as cheesy as it is!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Up on the stage, some nameless kid was tuning his guitar— and doing a poor job of it. Jace was becoming too well-acquainted with the inside of seedy bars. He spent his whole life doing his best to avoid mundane culture, but he still found himself out almost every weekend at a concert, an art gallery, or something incomprehensibly dumb like a hipster late-night farmers' market. If he were to interfere with Clary’s life in any way, or go out of his way to contact her, it would be a direct violation of Clave orders. Watching her from afar while heavily glamoured was a grey area that he was happy enough to exist in if it was the only way he could see her. Tonight, Simon’s band was playing. It was surprisingly hard to track down their shows, since the band name was constantly changing, but he made it a priority— Clary would always be there. Their name changed last week from Sideways Applesauce to Derelict Cat Flaps, both of which were still better than Champagne Enema. Simon was tapping the mic, the ice in Jace’s drink was melting, but Clary still wasn’t at the bar. With every minute she didn’t show up, his muscles tensed. Simon, on the other hand, didn’t look concerned in the slightest. It drove Jace up the wall.

“Hey there Alphabet City! I’m Simon Lewis and we are Derelict Cat Flaps!” The drummer tapped his sticks together, signaling the start of the first song. Jace wasn’t drunk enough for this. He un glamoured himself just long enough to buy another drink, making his way back to his dark corner to scan the room. She would be here. She had to be here.

The first three songs came and went, and soon Jace was hitting his pocket flask. This was a low point. Jace Wayland-Herondale — one of the best shadowhunters alive, with angel blood running through his veins— was at an awful indie rock concert in one of the worst neighborhoods in Manhattan. He was waiting for a girl he could never talk to again, torturing himself just to get a glimpse of her face, to maybe hear her laugh, or see her smile. He was a dying dog waiting for the paltriest scraps to survive.

“Alright, this next one is a cover actually, by Airborne Toxic Event.” Simon spoke into the mic, his voice breathy from exertion. A few people in the audience clapped at the mention of the mundane band Jace had never heard of. “I think you all might know it… and judging by the time
on the clock, it’s rather appropriate. Here’s ‘Some Time Around Midnight’. The guitar strummed some incessant repeating series of notes and Jace was ready to finish off his liquor and throw his body into the East River. If he was lucky, he would look alright as a bloated corpse.

Through some act of fateful, twisted, kismet, at that very moment, Clary walked through the doors. Cold late-fall night-time air rushed into the stuffy room, blowing her hair around her in an angelic halo. She was angel-blooded too— though she didn’t know it— and in that white dress, he swore she could have wings.

_She shouldn’t she be cold in that? It’s freezing!_  

It couldn’t be her— it was obviously a ghost. Jace bought whatever was in his flask from an unsavory downworlder who said the whiskey had an extra ‘kick’, so he was likely just hallucinating. At least he could let himself enjoy the picture.

Clary’s lemongrass-tinted eyes searched for the small stage in the corner, plotting out a pathway to make it to the front to see Simon. To see through the small crowd, she had to stand on her toes, the rubber soles of her ragged converse sneakers straining against the movement. She was so short— Jace always forgot until he saw her do something adorable like that. A dress and sneakers was so Clary that it made Jace’s heart ache.  

But before she walked into the crowd, she looked to the side, almost like she was checking over her shoulder. And then she saw him.

_No, that was impossible. She can’t see me. I’m glamoured._ Jace checked his invisibility rune again— it glowed faintly, showing it was still in effect.

She was staring right at him though.

_By the Angel._ Jace’s throat went dry, all the moisture in his body collecting on his profusely sweating palms.

She was walking toward him. When she stopped in front of him, he still couldn’t believe it.

“Hi.” She smiled at him— a _t him_— Something he never thought would happen again. “I’m Clary. You look awfully familiar, do I know you?”  

Jace stared at her in disbelief.

“You can see me?”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter picks up where the last left off. With Magnus’ kids sick, Alec feels like he has to do something to help, even if Magnus isn’t asking for it. I know when you saw a double post, you probably hoped it was a continuation of the ‘magnus and his sick kids’ story, but this Clace scene had to happen! It doesn’t imply though that clace are endgame in this verse :P Maybe they are, who knows?

Can’t wait to see you all for the next chapter, and I hope you enjoyed this ch 18-19 double feature! I might try to do more of these double posts with a full length chapter and a tiny interlude, especially now that a few different tiny plots are growing! I
promise though, this fic is still fluff! Any plots that build up are being built for maximum fluff. I won't hurt you I promise, this fic is emotional bleach for me just as much as it is for you! Good feels only my dudes!

Again, hit me up with your theories, thoughts, comments, concerns, favorite lines, chains of emojis or whatever!
Three raps on the door caught Magnus off guard— usually he would’ve felt someone come through his wards before they reached the door. Sometimes a warlock could slip by unnoticed, but he didn’t feel any foreign magic either. Putting Keris down in his playpen, Magnus cautiously walked over to the door and peered through the peephole. It was Alexander, and Magnus was in no way prepared to see him right now. He hadn’t showered since the day before, he had half of Aya’s dinner smeared on his pants, and there was a strong possibility some of Keris’ projectile vomit made its way onto his sweater— which was a shame, it was cashmere. He didn’t even want to look at his hair— he could feel how dirty and unkempt it was.

Alec knocked louder. “Magnus?” His voice was full of concern. “Is everything alright? I can hear you in there.. ” Magnus could hear shuffling sounds on the other side, like a rustling plastic bag. “Do you uh… want me to go? I know I should have called first…”

“One second!” Magnus yelled through the door, taking a deep breath and cleaning himself up with a snap of his fingers. The simple action reminded him how tired he was— taking care of the kids must have been more exhausting than he originally thought. Until this point, both children had never been sick at the same time. He flung open the door, trying to look as suave as possible given his situation. “Hello, Alexander, sorry for the wait.”

“No worries.I’m sure those two little warlocks are driving ’ya up the wall.” Alec pressed a quick kiss to Magnus’ cheek, pushing past him into the apartment. “I brought soup!” He lifted up the bag in acknowledgement before setting it on the counter and getting down to business setting out various containers.

“Food.” Magnus groaned. “Food sounds amazing. I don’t remember the last time I ate.” Walking up behind Alec, he hugged his back, wrapping his arms around the taller man’s waist. “You’re amazing, do you know that?”

“Well I’m about to get more amazing.” Alec smiled confidently, popping the lid off a glass bowl. “This is a family recipe I learned how to make when I was a kid. I brought everything separate so I could finish cooking it here, if that’s okay?”

“By all means—” Magnus made a grand gesture toward his stove. “My kingdom is yours. Although, my invitation might have been a bit premature.” He hadn’t been prepared to do any cooking. Remnants of Aya’s thrown dinner were stuck to walls and cabinet doors. The sink was
piled full of dishes, for no reason Magnus could think of— he could have easily magic-ed them clean, and wasn’t sure why he didn’t. With everything going on, it likely slipped his mind.

“Don’t worry about a little mess.” Alec patted Magnus on the back, rolled up his sleeves, and got to work on the dishes.

“You don’t have to—” Magnus started, but Alec wasn’t standing for it.

“Nah, let me. You’ve clearly had a lot on your plates right now.” They both laughed, scruffy undignified sounds.

“I might be the one with two kids, but I think you just made a dad joke.”

“Alright then, papa.” Alec wiped his hands on a dishtowel, fumbling around in his duffel bag on the floor. “I brought some of this for Aya— it always made me feel better when I was little.”

“They had Pedialyte at the Institute? That’s shadowhunter approved? Can’t you just iratze electrolytes?”

“Iratzes don’t fix everything.” Alec rolled his eyes. “Plus, you can’t rune children. It’s all standard mundane medicine until your first rune ceremony.”

“I learn something new every day.” Magnus picked up the bottle of grape-flavored drink. “I’ll magic this cold— “ Gripping the bottle in both hands, icy sparks trailed up the sides. “Do you want the honor of delivering the chalice to the princess?” Magnus turned to the cabinet, grabbing a sparkly green sippy cup and filling it to the top.

“I will happily take on the mission, my liege.” Alec bowed, reaching out for the cup. Magnus wasn’t used to seeing Alec act so silly, but it melted some of the tension from the warlock’s shoulders. Before he handed it over to Alec, he tipped it upside-down to check the seal.

A few minutes later, Alec was back in the kitchen, and Magnus had finished up magically cleaning it.

“Before you get started with cooking… there’s one very important thing you’re missing.” Magnus smirked, eager to show off what he was holding behind his back. “Now before you accuse me of stealing it from somewhere, I actually got this as a gift from Ragnor about twenty years ago. It was a joke of course, because at the time I was painfully single but—” He held out the apron in front of him, putting it on full display. It was red canvas, with the words ‘Kiss the cook’ written in white sequins. “In terms of a joke about my lack of a sex life from Ragnor it’s incredibly tame, but still —” He looped the top around Alec’s neck, letting his hands linger on his broad shoulders. “Let me just get the back—” He wrapped his arms around Alec’s waist, threading the apron strings into a bow. It wasn’t his best work, but he wasn’t doing this for practicality, he was doing it for the romantic effect. “There, now you’re ready.” Magnus skirted his hands down lower, smacking Alec lightly on the butt.

“Are you going to follow the instructions?” Alec’s mouth quirked up at the edges, managing to get even closer to Magnus, even though their bodies had already been nearly flush.

“Instructions?” Magnus raised an eyebrow.

“Kiss the cook?” Alec whispered, leaning his head down. Magnus could feel his breath against his face.

“I’ve never been very good with instructions…” Magnus tilted his chin to the side. “But I’m
feeling particularly motivated.” He melted into the kiss— it wasn’t hurried or hungry— everything about it was warm and comforting. Magnus wanted those arms to wrap around him entirely, to absorb him in a new type of safety, to tell him that everything was fine, and that he would always be fine, that his kids would always be fine. When they finally broke apart, it was too soon. Something told him it would always be too soon.

“Do you have a big stew pot I could borrow?” Alec broke away slowly, tracing his hands along Magnus’ arms. He investigated the cabinets, opening and closing them with enthusiastic abandon.

“The Banes aren’t really a ‘stew’ family, but I do have a pretty big pot under the island.” Magnus bent over, digging through the mostly empty space below the island. He didn’t really have the type of pot Alec was asking for, so he covertly conjured one as he rifled through the cabinet, making a show of clanking the pot against the other dishes as he pulled it out. “Here you go!”

“This looks brand new…” Alec turned it over in his hands, examining the pristine condition of the stainless steel. “Do you ever actually cook, or do you just magic everything?” Alec placed the pot on the stove, stopping abruptly. “I didn’t mean that in a bad way, just a joke.”

“Why would I think you meant it as a jab?” Magnus furrowed his brow and walked closer to Alec— far enough that he wasn’t crowding the cook, but still near enough to make the conversation feel more intimate. He didn’t know why Alec was second guessing his words, or what train of thought prompted him to apologize, but he braced himself for whatever explanation Alec was about to give— he was always here to listen.

“Shadowhunters— we have our prejudices. I mean, I don’t. But still, you might think—” He hesitated.

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Magnus gently rubbed circles on Alec’s back. He tried to make his voice as reassuring as possible— he could tell Alec was being hard on himself. He didn’t see how much he had grown. “You run a tattoo shop for downworlders, your pseudo-stepfather is a werewolf, you’re dating a warlock—” Magnus stood on his tip-toes, pressing a kiss to Alec’s cheek. “— not to mention you were exiled by the people who harbor those awful prejudices just for saving a fey from torture. I’m quite confident you don’t judge me for my magic.”

“It wasn’t just for helping Meliorn.” Alec’s voice was quiet as he dumped the first container of broth into the pot. The gas stove clicked as the pilot light caught, Alec turning the dial to medium heat. Magnus didn’t know what to say, but the sounds of sloshing liquid were deafening in the silence of their conversation. Alec grabbed a wooden spoon from the utensil rack on the counter and methodically stirring the salty-smelling broth. Finally, he let out a breath he must have been holding in for a while, finishing his statement. “They also suspected I was gay. Of course, they wouldn’t put that in any of their official reports, but it was a factor in my sentencing.”

“You’re not implying that if you were straight, your punishment would have been more lenient?”

“That’s exactly what I’m implying. It’s likely the reason why nobody would represent me either.”

“You went into the trial alone?” Magnus spoke through a gasp, his tone dripping in disbelief. “That’s awful…” It was more than awful, but Magnus didn’t want to reopen wounds by saying too much, or saying the wrong thing. How could anyone do that to someone as kind as Alexander?

“The only people who offered were Jace and Izzy, but neither of them were allowed due to conflict of interest. The Inquisitor forced Lydia to act as prosecutor in the case, but since we were engaged she wouldn’t have been able to represent me anyway.” Alec flicked on the over-stove vent fan on and wiped his forehead with his sleeve. In that moment, Alec was the old shadowhunter he used to
be— tightly wound with a hard-set jaw. His muscles rippled beneath his shirt, and his posture was closed-off and stoic. There was something Magnus wanted to ask, but he wasn’t sure it was his place. He hesitated, worrying the inside of his cheek with his teeth. But Alec was opening up to him, and sometimes asking the right question was the encouragement introverts needed. He decided to take the plunge.

“Do you regret that they found out?” Magnus paused, giving Alec space to think, to decide whether or not he wanted to answer. He didn’t want to push Alec into a conversation he wasn’t ready for. “Would you have wanted to stay with an organization that would do something so awful and painful to you just because you were gay?”

“At the time, it blindsided me. I thought I was doing such a good job hiding it. I still have no idea how they found out, to be honest. My wedding to Lydia was only a few weeks away—we were still engaged during my trial.” Alec dumped the next container into the pot, something that looked like boiled chicken. “She knew. After she saw me with you, apparently she thought we were already together—or saw the way I looked at you.”

“And she was okay with that?”

“She stood by me no matter what.” Alec’s voice softened, and Magnus swore he heard a ghost of a smile in his tone. “After her fiance died, she had no interest in falling in love again, and she would have been fine turning a blind eye to any… affairs I might have had.” Alec cleared his throat awkwardly, yet endearingly. “But I wouldn’t have risked that. I respect her too much to risk putting her in a hard situation like that. In terms of loveless shadowhunter marriages, she and I actually would have made a great team.” He spoke with a fondness Magnus would never have expected.

“You miss her, don’t you?” Magnus was perplexed.

“Every day. She comes by the shop every once in a while though, mostly to see how I’m doing. It’s a huge risk for her to see an exiled shadowhunter—especially one who isn’t family—so it means a lot.” The wooden spoon loudly scraped against the metal pot with each methodical circle, and it suddenly occurred to Magnus that maybe Alec didn’t cook often either. “I’m sorry, this is pretty heavy conversation for soup-making. I shouldn’t be bothering you with this while you’re so exhausted from dealing with the kids.”

“Never apologize, Alexander. I’m always here to listen when you need to talk, even if it is just to pass the time while you aggressively stir chicken soup.” Magnus leaned over the pot, taking an exploratory sniff. Something about the soup smelled off, but he chalked it up to his nostrils being contaminated by smelling the various vile stenches of childhood illness the past twenty-four hours.

“Do you want a taste?” Alec thrust the spoon to Magnus’ mouth—he didn’t have time to refuse. The only pleasant sensation of the entire experience was the warmth in his throat. Other than that—it was absolutely horrible. Saying it was one of the worst things he ever tasted would have been an understatement—and by comparison, Keris once spat up in his mouth. By some act of divine politeness, Magnus swallowed.

“Mmm. It’s good.” Magnus strained through the sour taste in his mouth, managing a smile. Alec’s beaming grin in return made it all worth it, but not worth enough to let the flavor linger. Magnus searched frantically for his now abandoned coffee cup, finding it near the sink and knocking back the lukewarm, bitter liquid. At least now his mouth tasted like stale coffee, not whatever constituted Alec’s ‘soup’.

“It’s ready.” Alec sounded proud of himself. “Why don’t I go wrangle the kids in here for you
while you dish it out into bowls?” Alec snuck another quick kiss to Magnus’ cheek, striding out the room in search of the kids.

Thankful for Alec to finally be out of the room, he waved his hands over the pot, replacing it with the comforting chicken soup from the Polish diner across town. Hopefully, Alec didn’t recognize it — but given that the owners barely spoke English and that the storefront was nestled in a particularly bad part of the Bronx, he was sure it was safe. The noodles were wrong though, so Magnus swapped them for the same type of noodle Alec used, taking the extra step to remove any ingredients that weren’t in Alec’s recipe, and adding back the ridiculous amount of carrots that had been in the original. It was passable enough for Alec’s soup, and Magnus crossed his fingers that he wouldn't notice the swap.

Alec came back to the kitchen, clutching Keris tightly in one arm and holding Aerulei’s hand with the other. Aya looked like she had been bothered mid-nap, and Magnus crossed his fingers that she wouldn’t start another tantrum. Alec maneuvered Keris into his high chair like a pro, lifting Aya up into her chair after. Both children glared at the soup for reasons Magnus was sure they were going to tell him all about— by screaming and yelling. As if he could sense the oncoming storm, Alec put his jacket back on and checked his phone.

“Alright, I really have to go. I’m going to be late.” Alec shoved the phone into his back pocket.

“You’re going already?” Magnus pouted.

“Mister Alec do not go!” Aya yelled, banging her spoon on the counter.

“No!” Keris screeched.

“Not fair, you three.” Alec rolled his eyes. “I have a job. I own a tattoo shop, remember? I have to go draw on people?”

“I want more rune tattoos…” Aya was already distracted, stabbing at noodles in her bowl.

“You’ll get one soon sayang ,” Magnus kissed the top of her head, smoothing flyaway hairs. “when you’re feeling better.”

“I’ll come by after work and check on you guys. I hate that I can’t help more.” Alec affectionately patted Keris head, frowning when the baby coughed. “Are you sure you’ll be okay on your own? I can always call and close shop for the day?” Alec bit his lip as he searched Magnus’ face for any signs or signals that he should stay.

“We’ll be fine, Alexander.” Magnus pulled him into a hug. He could never be so selfish to let Alec sacrifice his job for something like this. “But I won’t say no to seeing you later. I can’t promise that I’ll hear you knock though— who knows what these two will get into— so take these with you.” Magnus released Alec, showing off a shiny new set of keys. “One for the building, one for the front door. And you shouldn’t have any issue with the wards if I’m not here. I modified them for you, so that they don’t register you as a threat.” It had taken a bit extra work to do this, but he hated the idea of Alec not being able to enter his house under any circumstances, and he hated that feeling of intrusion each time Alec stepped through the door.

“Not here? You’ll be staying home with the kids, right?” Alec was obviously not getting the picture.

“I mean for other times.” Magnus winked.

“You mean—” Alec stammered, blushing.
“They’re yours.” Magnus couldn’t hold back any longer, pressing his lips to Alec’s. What he didn’t expect was for Alec to wrap his arms around him, nearly lifting him off the ground, deepening the kiss until it made Magnus’ head spin.

“Eww! That’s gross! He’s spitting in your mouth!” Aya yelled in disgust, flipping her bowl of soup over and sending its contents to the floor in a broth-waterfall.

“I think that’s my cue to leave.” Alec stole one more chaste kiss before shoving the keys into his jacket and heading out. “Bye you two. Be nice to your papa until I come back!”

Magnus appreciated the sentiment, but he was sure his children were going to be anything but ‘nice’. Magicking away Aya’s mess this time was the straw that broke the camel’s—warlock’s—back, and Magnus wished he’d been selfish enough to take Alec up on the offer of staying. He could do this. He’d always done it on his own before, and he could do it now.

Alec unlocked the door with the keys Magnus had given him. It felt strange to enter someone else’s home like that, to have that level of agency, but it was more than that. Magnus trusted him with keys to his home—to his children—and Alec didn’t take that lightly. That only made the scene he walked into that much worse.

“KERIS!” Aerulei screamed, throwing handfuls of uncooked rice at her brother. “Stop being mean to me!”

“Aya, he is a baby!” Magnus groaned. “How could he possibly be mean to you?”

“He’s being mean to me with his mind!”

“You are not telepathic, you don’t even have any magic right now. Please just finish making your rice sock and I’ll heat it up and you can go to bed.” He was exhausted—Alec could read it all over his face.

“I do too!” She yelled, raising her hands to the ceiling. Alec wasn’t sure what she was trying to do, but nothing happened. “No! You were supposed to lift up off the ground! Why are you still on the floor?” She stomped her feet in frustration.

“Oh you want me to jump?” Magnus quipped. “How high?” His voice was raised, and it bristled the baby, who started to fuss.

“Through the roof and out of here!” She screamed at the top of her lungs. “You’re mean, too!” She threw more rice at Magnus, walking over to the bag and dumping its entire contents on the floor. Everything was so chaotic that they hadn’t noticed Alec walk in, so to get their attention, Alec loudly slammed the door shut. “Mister Alec save me! Papa is being mean!” Aya bolted to Alec, knocking his duffel out of his hands and jumping onto him. He scooped her in his arms, feeling her hot tears dampen his sweater.

“He’s being mean, huh?” Alec said, smiling over at Magnus.

“Yeah, and K-K, too!” She looked up at him, rubbing her face against his neck. A line of snot smeared in her wake. “Mean to me! You’re not mean, you are good.”
“Well then, why don’t we get you away from all these mean boys. Come on, I’ll get you in some fresh PJs, and read you a story. But only if you promise to drink a glass of the feel-better juice.”

“Is it the grape one?” She said meekly.

“Are grapes purple?” She nodded. “Of course.”

“Grapes are sometimes green, Aya!” Magnus narrowed his eyes, grumbling.

‘Not helping!’ Alec mouthed to Magnus, pulling Aya tighter into his arms and walking down the hall to her room.

“What’s gotten into your papa, Aerulei?” Alec hoisted the girl a bit higher in his grasp. “He seems awfully grumpy, doesn’t he?”

“He took the feel better potion. He was feeling sick too.”

Shit. Alec thought to himself. Now not only would he have to take care of the kids, but he would have to take care of Magnus. He was more than happy to do it of course, but this was more of a challenge than he expected. It was too late to consider calling in his mother, and Clary wasn’t an option since the entire nature of the Bane family’s illness was magical. Catarina had her own children to take care of, and Ragnar and Dorian already had their turn taking care of the kids. It was just going to be Alec.

He set Aya up in her bedroom, helped her change into pajamas— blue with unicorns this time— and tucked her into bed. After bringing her in a spill-proof cup of Pedialyte, he gave her the nighttime dose of Catarina’s medicine. The effects were nearly instant, Aya’s eyes drooping and her breathing becoming easier. She was peaceful and sleepy, drifting off before Alec even made it to page three of her favorite bedtime story, ‘If you give a mouse a cookie.’ Nobody ever read those types of books to Alec growing up. Shadowhunter children usually read the original Grimm fairy tales— the dark terrifying ones, or different shadowhunter legends doctored up with fancy images to keep them interested. They were never cute and peaceful, and never put him to sleep in the content way these stories did for Aya. Closing her door without making any noise, Alec steeled himself to deal with the two rowdy boys in the living room.

“Magnus, Keris. Aya is asleep, so we can’t be making too much noise.” Both of them looked up at Alec, their faces matching masks of disbelief.

“I’m not going to have you coming in my house and treating me like a child.” Magnus spat the words out, sneering. Alec took a deep breath. Magnus was acting ridiculous, irrational, and he didn’t know any specifics on how this illness or its medicine would affect an adult. This was not going to be fun.

“Magnus, you are cross-legged on the floor, wearing a crop top, throwing rice at your son.”

“This is why I’m scolding both of you.” Alec reached down, scooping up the fussy baby. “I’m going to put you to bed, little prince. It’s late, and you’re sleepy—” Alec sniffed. “And stinky. By the Angel.” Alec coughed, turning his head away.

“Here, let me get that.” Magnus snapped his fingers, an anemic handful of sparkles jumping from his fingers. It looked like a candle flickering out. Instead of Keris’ diaper swapping out for a clean one, Keris’ dirty diaper appeared over-top his onesie. “No— that’s not right.” Magnus scowled, this time making sweeping motions with his hands, face scrunched in deep concentration. The blue
magic trailing the motion was faded and lifeless—the illness was affecting him more than Alec thought it would. The diaper remained unchanged, but a fresh diaper fell from the ceiling, promptly getting stuck on the chandelier.

“Why don’t you sit down and rest, Magnus? I’ve got this handled.” Alec walked over and guided Magnus to the couch, pressing a kiss to his temple. Jealous of the affection, Keris tilted his head up to Alec to request a kiss. “I could never forget you, pumpkin.” Alec gave Keris a loud smooch. “Now let’s get you cleaned up and cozy.”

Putting Keris down was easier said than done. As if his blowout hadn’t been disastrous enough, his entire onesie was covered in the mess from Magnus’ attempt to change the baby’s diaper. Finding the laundry room was the top priority after getting Keris to sleep. Like most baby boys, Keris jumped at the opportunity to pee mid-change, ruining Alec’s clothes as well. His shirt joined the soiled onesie in the hamper, which was already full of dirty clothes. Every pair of pajamas Alec picked made Keris scream at first sight, until Alec finally found what the picky child wanted—his rubber duckie footie pajamas. Each limb fought him as he slid on the garment, and Alec was convinced that Keris kicked him hard enough to leave a bruise. He fussed in his crib while Alec made him a bottle, and tried to spit out his medicine more than once. Eventually, he was down, and Alec left the room in an exhausted triumph, carrying off his treasure—a full laundry basket.

If he wanted to do the laundry, his only option was to try to get Magnus to cooperate. When Alec returned to the living room, Magnus was sprawled on his stomach, blankly staring at the TV. He was watching some kind of reality show, mumbling insults at whoever was on the screen.

“Hey Magnus. I need to wash some clothes, could you show me where everything is?” Alec shifted the basket to his other hip.

“I’ll show you yours if you show me mine?” Magnus slowly sat up, clumsily winking. That statement couldn’t qualify for anything in the realm of sense, and Alec admitted defeat.

He opened and closed doors until he found the laundry room, threw everything in the wash at once, and put it on a cold cycle. The machine was so fancy that Alec had to guess where the liquid soap went, but once he pressed the button the deed was done, and there was no going back. All he could hope for was that the apartment didn’t explode with suds. He went back to the living room carrying a glass of Pedialyte and some crackers, scooting on the couch next to Magnus.

“I need you to drink this for me, okay?” Alec handed over the glass. “I know it’s for kids, but you’re probably dehydrated too.” He held his tongue, not wanting to tell Magnus that it was obvious based on his dark circles. Magnus wouldn’t appreciate that comment. “And I’m sure since you’ve been busy taking care of the kids, you haven’t eaten much. These are easy on your stomach, and might make the medicine go down easier. When did you take your last dose of medicine?”

Before he answered Magnus chugged the entire glass of fluids and made a face at the taste.

“I took it um…” Magnus counted on his fingers, which had nothing to do with time. “Before rice.” He gestured to the rice still covering the living room floor. “So… two hours?” That meant that Alec couldn’t give him more, and that this was the Magnus he was going to deal with for the rest of the night. Putting down Keris would be much easier than Magnus. He needed to get him to sleep.

“Oh, okay, so maybe we should move this party to the bedroom.” He lifted the warlock to his feet and pulled him toward the bedroom.

“I like where your mind is going, Alexander.” Magnus purred.
“No, I mean for sleeping. You have a TV in there, I can set you up with your shows.” Alec tried to pull Magnus along, but the he planted his feet and refused to move forward.

“But you are shirtless.” Magnus stared at Alec’s torso. “You are shirtless, and you are leading me to my bedroom.” He licked his lips. “You are shirtless, you are leading me to my bedroom, and you are very good in bed.”

Alec blushed, causing Magnus to erupt into a flurry of giggles.

“You’re blushing! You look like a turnip! You’re my little turnip!” Magnus squealed like a schoolgirl. “Well not little, it still hurts to walk from the other day…” He turned around, wiggling his ass at Alec. He was being adorably infuriating, and Alec needed to take control of the situation.

“If it hurts to walk, then I’ll carry you.” He hoisted Magnus over his shoulder in a fireman carry, efficiently moving him down the hall and onto his bed.

“Oof.” Magnus huffed as his back hit the mattress. “There are many sexier ways to hold me.” He pouted, and as Alec looked at Magnus’ face, he noticed a ring of eyeliner threatening to smear to his temples, stray glitter on his eyelids, and a light shimmer on his cheeks. He was disheveled and messy— Magnus had never removed his makeup.

“Where do you keep your makeup remover?” Alec called from the en suite bathroom. He opened and closed different cabinets, looking for cotton balls and some kind of liquid makeup remover. Izzy and Clary each used something clear in a big bottle, but he wasn’t seeing anything like that.

“I don’t use any of that sub-par swill!” Magnus scoffed. “I double cleanse with tsubaki oil and a foam cleanser.”

“Well are you going to come wash your face then?”

“Magic!” Magnus yelled, swiping his hand in broad strokes. Nothing happened— his face stayed dirty.

“That’s not an option right now, but if I get you cleaned up and in bed, maybe your magic will be back in the morning.” Alec walked back to the bed with a damp washcloth. It wasn’t ideal, but it would have to do. Using gentle, circular motions, he wiped Magnus face, starting at his forehead and working his way down. The warlock humming into the warm touch, pushing his head into Alec’s hands like a pleased cat. When Alec was finished and pulled away, Magnus whimpered.

“Pajamas?” Alec raised an eyebrow, gesturing toward the various dressers and closets.

“I’m too warm!” Magnus ripped off all his clothes— into shreds. He didn’t bother with buttons or zippers, he just burst out of his clothes like the Incredible Hulk, left only with his underwear.

“Okay then.” Alec found the remote and turned on the TV, clicking through the channels until he recognized the network logo as the same from the living room. “There you go. Isn’t this cozier than the living room?” He joined Magnus on the bed, sitting on top of the covers.

“It will only be cozy if you snuggle me.” Magnus whined, scooting closer to Alec. He knew he should say no, that he should go check on the kids, call Catarina to tell her Magnus is sick, do anything more useful than snuggling and inevitably falling asleep next to his clammy sick warlock. But he couldn’t say no— there was no way he could refuse. Wrapping his arms around Magnus, he shifted his weight so that his head rested on Alec’s bare chest, just beneath his collar bone. With the white noise of the tv in the background, Magnus drifted off quickly, Alec following shortly after. He knew he was going to fall asleep, but he let it happen. The shop was going to be closed
tomorrow—he made sure to put up a sign and let Clary know—and he planned on spending all
day with Magnus and the kids. Whatever sleep he could get was valuable currency, and he allowed
himself to enjoy this quiet moment before the next waves of chaos. The day had been stressful and
hectic—at times, downright unpleasant—but somehow, Alec had never felt more at home.

Maybe he could do this after all.

Chapter End Notes

Next interlude: Clary works on an art assignment
Next full chapter: Alec wakes up to an empty bed.

Stay tuned! Thanks for reading! You all are the best!
Interlude: Painting

Chapter Summary

Clary can't get a picture out of her head, so she puts it on a canvas.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Avocado?” Clary stepped back from the canvas. Lost in thought, she tapped the brush handle against her lips, too enraptured in her work to notice the drips of yellow-green paint sprinkling the floor. She didn’t even notice she was talking to herself. “Gah! Avocado green isn’t right at all!” Tubes of acrylic paint were lined up on the old stained table, ready for her to make another attempt at mixing just the right shade of gold-green on her palette. It had to be just right. The subject of this painting was a buff colored cat with black tipped ears and stereotypical yet striking chartreuse slit-pupilled eyes. It was a decorative choice, as her least favorite professor Clarissa Martez pointed out, so the details had to be just right if Clary wanted the painting to stand out and make a statement—or at least if she was going to pass this class.

“Why a cat?” Luke wandered into the living room, walking over to the well-lit corner Clary used as a makeshift studio.

“I don’t know…” Clary’s voice was dreamy, a contrast to the calculated and precise strokes she was making with a narrow-tipped brush.

“Alec has a cat.” Chewing and crunching sounds echoed through the open-space room. Luke was eating a BLT. It reminded Clary how starving she was, highlighting how long she’d spent on what should have been a simple assignment.

“This doesn’t look anything like The Clave.” She was still answering very literally, her mind consumed by her work.

Luke chuckled at that, laughing with his mouth full. “Was it something your teacher assigned? It’s not that awful one you share a name with, is it? I swear she has a vendetta against you just because you have the same name.”

“No, I woke up the other day and I couldn’t get a picture out of my head. Green cat eyes. Not just green—” She hovered over her paints, squirting a few different shades onto the palate and mixing together furiously. “A very specific magical green. The rest—” She waved at the other parts of the cat. “— worked themselves out. The assignment was just to paint something from close range. Since the eyes were what I wanted to focus on anyway, it was perfect.”

“Did you have a dream about adopting a stray or something?” Luke came closer, examining the image.

“No.” Clary shook her head defiantly, her curls dipping into the paint and drawing green lines along her arms. “In my dream the cat kept touching my forehead, and its paws were glittering and blue. It was bizarre.”
“Well, maybe when you crashed in Alec’s room the other day, The Clave was pawing at your head. That beast has been known to leave an impression.”

“Yeah… maybe that’s it.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Alec wakes up to an empty bed, Magnus and the kids are still sick. What antics will they get into?
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

The warlock flu is making Magnus wild, and Alec is doing his best to keep up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ping

An unfamiliar crystal-chime notification sound jolted Alec awake. Instinctively, he reached toward the sound to check the notification, not realizing in his sleepy stupor that it wasn’t his phone. The bright screen burned his eyes as he read the bubble on the screen.

You made Duo sad! 😌

It only takes 5 minutes a day for your Filipino lesson!

What else are you doing with those 5 minutes...

Alec wanted to punch the owl in the app icon. For starters, it woke him up— and it probably woke up Magnus, too. It was too peaceful a night to be woken up abruptly. Rain pattered against the windows, calling for Alec to drift back to sleep. Apparently, this owl took offense to that. Second, it seemed overly aggressive and judgmental for a cartoon creature. He didn’t like that. Clearly, Magnus was trying to learn Filipino to connect with his daughter, and this was how the app shamed him? As he mulled over all of his grievances, he sought out the comfort of his warlock, ready to fall back asleep. But as he rolled over, the bed felt unusually cold— something was wrong.

Magnus. Alec’s heart pounded, reaching out further beside him only to feel empty space. Where’s Magnus? Alec shot up, looking around the room for the warlock. He was nowhere to be seen. Stumbling to his feet, he checked the bathroom first before checking in the walk in closet— only to curse himself for thinking there would be any reason Magnus would be in a closet in the middle of the night. The medicine had made him irrational, sure, but not huddling in his closet irrational. Panic sank in as Alec realized that if something happened to Magnus, the kids were in danger, too. He reached into his duffel on his way out of the bedroom, grabbing a discreet bowie knife and sliding the sheath into his waistband. On his way to the kids’ rooms, he checked the kitchen and living room— both clear of danger and devoid of sick warlocks.

Even with the potential of danger he still didn’t want to wake the kids, carefully opening the door before entering their rooms and checking on them. Nothing was out of place in either room, both kids sound asleep. That left Alec with one task— find Magnus. Considering the lack of suspicious evidence and the heavy wards surrounding the loft, nefarious activity seemed unlikely. He couldn’t have gone too far. Last time he tried to use magic, Magnus couldn’t even properly change a diaper,
let alone open a portal. The balcony off the living room was empty, and Alec was just about to call
Izzy to get a patrol out for Magnus when he spotted the rarely-used spiral staircase near the wall. It
was easy to forget that it led to a terrace and wasn’t just a wrought-iron decoration, considering it
was usually covered in vines or garlands or fairy lights.

Currently, it was covered in paper flags left over from Magnus’ Diwali party. Alec had heard about
it and would have gone— he was invited— but it was a warlock party, and Alec didn’t want to
intrude. Plus, it had been on a Friday. As much as he cared for Magnus, he couldn’t justify giving
up his most profitable day in the shop. Lately he was already losing valuable sketching time— he
couldn’t sacrifice his working time or client list.

Alec had never been to the terrace before, so when he opened the heavy metal door, the warmly
appointed space surprised him. It was nothing like the roofs he’d spent long nights on when he did
aerial patrol. A gazebo of wood beams covered one end, wrapped in twinkle lights, and an
assortment of couches and chairs were arranged into intimate nooks. On a nice day, it would be a
lovely space to read a book or sketch. It wasn’t the most pleasant place to be in the current
conditions, though. The waterlogged cushions sank, moonlight reflecting off of their slick puddled
fabric. The dark fairy lights were thorns against the wooden beams, their rough chopped finish
darkened with water. Rain rippled in a current down into discreet gutters beneath the stone walls,
but it didn’t prevent a thin layer of water from collecting on the stone patio. Pots that must have
once held brilliant summer plants were now vessels for rainwater, the remains of dead leaves and
foliage floating on the rippling surface. It was dark, dim, dour and damp. It made Alec want to
wrap up in a blanket and get back inside as quickly as possible, a chill already sinking into his
bones.

And then there was Magnus— naked. Reclining on a lounge chair, his limbs spread out
comfortably around him, the entire front of his bare body was on display for the moon, stars, and
any helicopters in New York City to see. Drops of rain pelted his skin, collecting in the crevices
near his hips and belly button, puddling near his sternum. For someone who usually looked so
virile and strong, Magnus looked too frail. His dark hair hung down in his face, clinging to his
forehead in sharp swooping points. Comparing him to a lost animal in the rain wouldn’t quite be
accurate, because Magnus looked happy, a grin on his face as he raised his chin upward.

“Magnus?” Alec kept his tone gentle as he slowly approached. If Magnus was in an altered state,
he didn’t want to startle him.

“Alexander.” He turned to Alec, opening his eyes. His grin stretched twice as wide as he slid his
gaze from the man’s dark wavy hair, over his toned chest, down to his bare feet.

“What are you doing out here?”

“I’m rain bathing. It’s good for your energy, especially if you are a water sign.”

Alec didn’t know much about the traditional zodiac outside of the constellations covered in his
required astronomy studies growing up, which were likely irrelevant to the situation. Knowing
Magnus, he was talking about the type of pop-culture astrology that plastered the front pages of
trash magazines at the grocery store. The magazines Izzy used to grab on snack runs, pestering
Alec about how he was ‘such a Virgo’. Out of spite, he vowed to never learn what that meant.
Even if he knew the dates associated with the signs, he didn’t know Magnus’ birthday— that was
likely information he either hid from everyone, or something he chose at random, changing it at
will to fit his fancies.

“And you’re a water sign?” Alec stepped closer.
“No.” Magnus sighed wistfully, turning his face back to the sky and closing his eyes. He held out his tongue, catching a few raindrops. It seemed like he was done with that conversation.

“You shouldn’t drink rainwater, you know. It’s polluted.” Confident that Magnus wouldn’t bolt if approached—he looked altogether too relaxed—Alec sat down beside him on the lounge chair.

“I lived for centuries without running water.” He cracked his neck side to side, the tension releasing with loud clicking sounds. His hand reached out, searching for Alec’s, sighing as their fingers laced together.

“You lived for centuries without cars, too. Cars which cause smog, pollution, acid rain…” Alec cursed himself for not having a jacket to wrap Magnus in. He was half-naked himself and could barely tolerate the cold. “Come on, let’s get inside. You’re freezing.”

“No!” Magnus huffed. “It’s too hot in there! I was boiling! Do you want me to cook? Are you an Unseelie? Are you going to eat me?”

Alec rolled his eyes, ignoring the histrionic comments.

“It’s too cold out here, you’ll get even more sick.” If they didn’t get inside soon, Alec would get sick himself. He couldn’t really afford that considering he worked two jobs.

“Sick? I’m not sick.” Magnus broke away, rolling off the chair. He hit the ground with a thud, dragging himself upright. Naked, soaking wet, and covered in goosebumps, he looked both pathetic and ridiculous.

“You can tell me all about how sick you aren’t while you take a nice warm bath.”

“I’m not! Could a sick person do this.” Magnus brought his magic to his hands, the faint shimmer barely visible in the darkness. It was unclear what he was attempting, but seconds later a vintage boom-box appeared, blaring 1990’s dance music. Magnus was a fantastic dancer—it was something deeply woven into the fabric of his identity. The horrific quality of how he was dancing in the rain was testament to how unwell he really was. Alec wasn’t the best judge of his own dancing, but it was possible Magnus was dancing worse. If he wasn’t sick, it would have been amusing. Getting down on his knees to dirty dance on the ground was the final straw—the sound was audible as Magnus skinned his knees.

“Alright, that’s enough.” Alec resorted to relying on his brawn, scooping up Magnus despite his thrashing and protests. Settling Magnus into a fireman’s carry, he opened the door with one hand and carefully descended the spiral staircase. If he had the proper runes, he could have jumped over the staircase, landing carefully without hurting himself—without them, he would likely break his ankle.

“Alexander, put me down!” Magnus beat his fists against Alec’s back, drops of water flinging to the carpet.

“Quiet.” Alec shushed. “Do you want to wake the kids? You can yell at me as much as you want when we get back to your room.”

“Oh, you can yell as loudly as you want in there.” Magnus giggled. “I increased the soundproofing after you left the other day. I couldn’t stand the idea of not being able to hear you scream my name at the top of your lungs.”

Alec’s throat suddenly became dry, his chest tightening as his heart fluttered. Now was not the time to let Magnus seduce him, even if the warlock was already naked and in his arms.
“Or would you rather hear me scream your name?” Magnus purred, wiggling so that his arms could reach Alec’s ass. His hands grabbed each cheek, taking in generous handfuls of ass, clawing through the fabric of Alec’s pajama bottoms.

“I’d rather hear you snore, sleeping off your next dose of medicine.” Alec used his hip to slide open the bedroom door, cognizant to close it behind them.

“I don’t snore.” Magnus grunted, his hands releasing Alec’s ass and hanging limply. “You snore. You’re the snore-er. Like a tiny chainsaw. It’s the worst. And the best. It is cute.”

“You’re rambling.” Alec smiled. “Maybe I should record you like that kid who went to the dentist. Clary showed me the video once.”

“If you recorded me now it would be a sex tape. I’m naked.”

“It’s not a sex tape if you’re not having sex.” Alec rolled his eyes. “I don’t even know why we are having this conversation right now.” He nudged open the bathroom door, sitting Magnus on the closed toilet. There were towels hanging on the wall, and a big fluffy bath robe hanging from a hook. He wrapped Magnus in the robe and pushed his wet hair from his face. “I’m going to fill up the tub for you. Is there anything you want me to put in it? Like… bubbles or something?” Alec didn’t take baths—he didn’t fit in most bathtubs—so he wasn’t familiar with what an adult might want in the water. Kids liked sweet smelling bubbles, but he didn’t think Magnus would want Mister Bubble in his fancy jacuzzi tub.

“I want to put you in it.” Magnus pointed at Alec. His hands were shaking—either from cold, dehydration or both. Even though Alec was concerned for Magnus, he still blushed at the compliment. Any other time, he’d obey him without thought, stripping out of his pants and hopping in. Since that was not in the cards, he rifled through cabinets looking for something comforting to dump into the running water. Finally he found a shelf in the linen cabinet with containers of salts, bottles of liquids, and paper bags covering large colorful fragrant and sparkling shapes. Alec picked the least ostentatious of those—if they looked so special, they must be relaxing or comforting—hoping it would lift Magnus’ spirits. It was hard to discern what it was supposed to smell like, the mixture of fragrances assaulting his nostrils, but he determined it at least had lavender oil. He dropped it into the steamy water, watching as it exploded into a froth of blue and purple, the sweet and relaxing scent quickly filling the bathroom.

“I don’t even want to take a bath and you waste one of my Lush bath bombs on it?” Magnus crossed his arms, pouting. “They’re expensive!”

“You dress your children in Gucci, I’m sure you can afford to buy more.”

“Gucci? We are a Louis Vuitton household! I’m insulted.”

“Magnus.” Alec squinted his eyes in frustration, focusing on testing the water temperature. “I know nothing about fashion, but I know you have multiple belts with the two ‘G’s on them.”

“How do you know that’s not Louis Vuitton?” Magnus stuck out his tongue.

“That’s not how the alphabet works.” Alec stood, wiping the water off his hands onto his pants. “You should get in now, the bath is all purple and stuff, and it’s the right temperature.” He unfolded Magnus’ arms, pulling him to his feet and disrobing him. “Are you going to get in yourself, or do you need me to pick you up again?” Alec deadpanned.

“I can do it myself.” Magnus sneered. If he wasn’t being so annoying right now, Alec would be
consumed by how adorable he was. He stomped around Alec and nearly threw himself into the
bath, water splashing up around him. As he sank into the warmth, his body relaxed and he hummed
in contentment. His eyes drifted shut, but Alec wasn’t worried about him falling asleep—he was
right there with him.

“Feels better, doesn’t it?” Alec smiled, his voice warm.

“Maybe.” Magnus blinked open one eye, looking at Alec narrowly. “But it could still feel better
—” In an unexpected flash of movement, Magnus reached over the edge of the bathtub, grabbing
hold of Alec and forcefully pulling him in with him. Water splashed onto the bathroom floor,
making a huge mess that Magnus obviously didn’t care about. Completely satisfied, he wrapped
his arms around Alec’s waist, hugging him fiercely as he nestled into his body. “Much better.”

“If you were going to be this insistent, you could have at least let me take my clothes off first.”
Alec groaned. His pants were soaked, the fabric heavy and clingy.

“I can take care of that. Perks of having a warlock boyfriend, remember?” Magnus wiggled his
eyebrows.

“So I’m your boyfriend—?” Before Alec could finished the question—ill advised considering
Magnus’ current state—he felt the familiar sensation of the warlock’s magic dancing over his
skin. He assumed the desired intention was to remove his pajama pants, but instead, he now found
himself wearing a t-shirt, which immediately started to soak up water. “You really should rest your
magic. You’re going to tire yourself out if you keep doing that.” Alec pulled off the shirt and
peeled off his pants, resigning himself to the fact that he was now in the bath with Magnus. There
were worse things to resign himself to.

“I hate this.” Magnus sniffled. The illness was giving him severe mood swings—something Alec
was not well-equipped to handle. “Without my magic, I’m nothing!” Tears streamed down his
face. He was a mess.

“It’s just temporary, don’t worry.” Alec turned around, cupping Magnus’ face, wiping away the
tears. The warlock leaned into the touch like a cat bunting its owner’s hand. “Catarina made you
that medicine to get you better as fast as possible, and I’m going to call her in the morning to make
sure you don’t need anything extra since you’re an adult.” He stroked Magnus’ wet hair, his touch
soothing and reassuring. “I’ve got you.”

“And I’ve got you.” Magnus smirked, breaking the sentimental and romantic mood. “I’ve got you
naked, in the bath with me.” He suddenly grabbed Alec by the shoulders, yanking him forward.
“I’m going to kiss you now.” He crashed into Alec’s face—the kiss all teeth and uncomfortable
head tilting. When Alec pulled away, Magnus whimpered in defeat.

A crackling sound in the air demanded their attention, just before an acorn landed hard in the
middle of Magnus’ forehead, bouncing into the water. Magnus was too incoherent to register what
happened, so Alec hastily fished the acorn out, cupping it in his hands.

“It’s from the Seelie Court.” Alec remarked. “What would they be asking you at this time at
night?”

“It won’t open for you—you have to hand it to me.” Magnus snatched the acorn, the shell
disintegrating at his touch. A tiny scroll unfurled in his hands, and he carefully held it over the
edge of the bath to avoid dropping it in the water. “Oh, they’re inviting me to a dinner party. I love
parties—I hate fairy food.”
“So you’re not going? I thought when the Seelie queen invites you to her court, you have to go. I never knew there was an option to decline.” Alec was nervous. He didn’t like the idea of the Seelie queen wanting anything from Magnus. She was trouble.

“Of course I’m going, but I’ll just complain the whole time.” He turned over the scroll, investigating another block of text Alec couldn’t read. Fae letters were almost always encrypted, revealing themselves only to the intended reader. “Oh, they want me to RSVP. And I can bring a guest!” His eyes lit up jovially.

“How will you respond without your magic?” Alec was concerned that if Magnus couldn’t respond right away, it would upset the Seelie court. He might have to call someone who could send a fire message in Magnus’ stead.

“No need.” Magnus tapped the paper four times. “It came with a return envelope so to speak. Ha! Speak.” Magnus laughed so hard he snorted. “That’s a good joke, because you have to speak your response.” A small bronze bell appeared in his hands. He held it between his fingers, flicking it five times. The entire process was unnecessarily complex, but that’s what fae loved more than anything: inconveniencing others.

“I, Magnus Bane, High Warlock of Eastern America accept the invitation of the Seelie Queen.”

High Warlock of Eastern America? Alec thought to himself, puzzled. Magnus never mentioned this to him before, and it didn’t even sound like a real title. The delirium must have been taking its toll even more than Alec initially thought. But as Magnus continued, there were much more confusing things about his response.

“I will bring with me one guest, Alexander Gideon Lightwood-Bane.” Magnus closed his hands, crushing the bell.

“Magnus…” Alec said quietly, a smile ghosting across his lips. “I think you misspoke.”

“No, this is you messing with me. I know your middle name! You can’t convince me otherwise.” He poked Alec. “Raphael does this to me all the time! He acts like I forget things because I’m old!”

Alec bit his lip, blushing. He looked down at the glittering water as he paused, reaching in to grab Magnus’ hands. With their fingers interlaced, his thumbs stroked Magnus’ warm, soft skin.

“Alexander Gideon Lightwood-Bane?” Alec wasn’t going to lie— with fae on the mind, he almost felt like he couldn’t lie, even to himself— he loved the sound of Lightwood-Bane. “When you say it like that, it sounds like we’re married.”

Magnus stammered, a bit flustered.

“Maybe you’re right— I could use that extra dose of medicine.” He gripped Alec’s hands tighter, his blush matching the other man’s.

“Let’s get out of this bath and dry off— I’ll get you all settled.” Alec pressed a kiss to each of Magnus’ cheeks, helping him out of the water. As they went through the motions of getting Magnus into bed, the warlock was more quiet and agreeable, sinking into sleep shortly after his head hit the pillow.

Even though he hadn’t heard any signs of the kids being awake, Alec figured it would be smart to check on them anyway. After switching the laundry from the washer to the dryer, he made his way to the kids’ rooms— Aya was asleep, but the second he entered Keris’ room, the baby started to
“Shh… it’s okay pumpkin, I’m here.” Alec picked him up, bouncing him lightly. Keris latched onto Alec’s fresh pajama shirt, nuzzling into the fabric. “I think someone needs a diaper change. That might make you feel better, wouldn’t it?” He quickly got Keris changed, and noting that he was a bit cold, picked out some warmer pajamas. The illness affected the presentation of a warlock’s mark, and Keris had fewer scales coating his arms and legs. He felt terrible for thinking it, but Alec was grateful for it—it made maneuvering a squirming baby into footed pajamas much easier, and resulted in fewer scratches. Every time he tried to put Keris back in the crib, he fussed and cried, leaving Alec no choice but to hold him so the baby could sleep. Tiny footsteps pattered across the floor into Keris’ room—the crying must have woken her up.

“Daddy.” She rubbed at her eyes. Still tired, Alec realized she’d mistaken him for Magnus. “I don’t feel good, I want to go sleep with papa.” His heart fluttered before it stopped for a second. In any other circumstances, he would have been alarmed—concerned that maybe he’d grown too close to the kids—but with as delusional as Magnus was from this illness, he assumed the kids weren’t lucid either.

“Does papa usually let you sleep in his bed when he’s not feeling well?” Alec knew some parents had strong opinions toward their kids sleeping in their beds.

“Uh huh.” She nodded her head, walking over and pulling on Alec’s pajama pants. Normally when kids did that, they wanted to be picked up.

“Aya, I can’t pick you up, I’m holding your brother.” He smoothed her hair with his free hand, gripping Keris tight with his other arm.

“Both!” She cried, and Alec acquiesced. It was hard, but he managed to hold Keris on one hip and Aya on the other. It likely looked as ridiculous as it felt. He carried them swiftly to Magnus’ room, eager to lighten his load. When they were within dropping-distance of the bed, Aya wiggled out of his arms and flopped onto the mattress, snuggling up close to her father. Magnus didn’t even stir, he was so sound asleep. Determined to get Keris to lay down in his crib, Alec left the room to tackle that issue again, only to be stopped by Aerulei.

“K-K too!” She whisper-yelled. “And you!”

“K-K is too little to sleep in such a big bed by himself.” Alec whispered. “But he and I can sit here for a bit until you fall asleep. Does that sound good?”

She nodded her head furiously. Alec slid into bed on top of the covers, resting the baby on his chest. Keris sighed happily at the new position, nuzzling closer to Alec. He was old enough to sleep on his stomach—normally when Alec walked in to check on him, he had maneuvered to his stomach while sleeping—so Alec didn’t worry. Careful not to jostle any of the sleeping Bane clan, he grabbed his phone from the nightstand, tapping out a quick message to Catarina.

Alec Lightwood 3:43 AM

Hey Cat. Magnus is sick now too. I gave him the same meds as the kids, I hope that was okay. He seems to be worse off than Aya and Keris though, so if you could come by in the morning when you have a chance, that would be a huge help.
He lightly set his phone down and rested his hand across Keris’ back, rubbing soft soothing circles as he felt the baby’s breathing relax. Aya readjusted her sleeping position, not quite asleep yet, so Alec decided to stay in the bedroom a bit longer. He didn’t intend to fall asleep, but he did anyway. It was inevitable.

Catarina stepped through a portal— it was 6:00 AM. Given how late Alec had sent her a text— or rather how early in the morning— she felt bad for coming this early, but she had a shift at the hospital at 8:00, and wanted to stop by beforehand. The living room was empty, and so were the children’s rooms. For anyone else, it would be rude to walk into their bedroom unannounced, but considering both kids were likely in there, and more importantly that it was her oldest friend, Magnus, she assumed it would be fine.

Carefully sliding open the door, she found everyone asleep sprawled out on the bed. Alec had one arm draped around the pillows, holding hands with Magnus, touching even with a wide space between them. Aerulei had flipped in her sleep, her head pointing toward the foot of the bed, her feet shoved in Magnus’ face. Keris copied his sister, his arms cuddling her ankles as he lay diagonally on Alec’s chest, his foot squishing Alec’s cheek. Catarina’s face grew warm, hot tears welling in her eyes. As uncomfortable as the sleeping arrangement looked, it was a perfect image of family affection. She never thought Magnus would have this, no matter how many centuries he lived, but here it was right in front of her. She wasn’t much of a picture-person, but she pulled out her cell phone and snapped a picture of the sleeping family. Because that’s what it was— whether he liked it or not, regardless of if any of them were aware, Alec was a part of the Bane household now. Catarina couldn’t think of anyone more deserving of Magnus and his two beautiful children.

With all the sentimentality out of her system, she got back to the job at hand.

“Wake up, sleepyheads!” She yelled. Everyone on the bed jolted awake, stirring, grumbling, and complaining. “Time for your checkups!”

Chapter End Notes

As we approach Thanksgiving, what does that mean for Magnus and Alec? We'll see! Also, what are Jace and Izzy up to?

Again, thank you for reading <3 Let me know what you think.

Also: apologies for the Duolingo owl reference, I saw some Alec vs Duo fanart/fanfic and I had to include it.
Magnus didn’t care for doctors. When you’re immortal, not only are they normally unnecessary, they also dig up all sorts of unpleasant feelings— reminders that he wasn’t mortal, he wasn’t going to get old and die, but those around him would. By now, he thought thinking about that would have become easier, but it never did. At least this was Catarina taking care of him, and they were in his home, not a hospital.

“Breathe in for me.” Cat pressed a cold stethoscope to his back. Magnus wanted to recoil from the foreign sensation, but he knew that was counterintuitive.

“I thought this was the warlock flu. Why are you checking my lungs as if I have consumption?” Magnus sucked in a deep breath, letting it escape as a huff.

“It’s called tuberculosis now, and your magic keeps you immortal and healthy. When it’s weakened, you are susceptible to other diseases.” She wrapped the stethoscope back around her neck, pulling out a thermometer.

“Couldn’t you use magic to check my temperature? Healing magic has always been your forte.” He eyed the mercury-filled glass tube with unease.

“I could, but it’s best not to interfere with your own magic. It seems like you’re on the mend, and I don’t want to frighten your magic off.” It was bad enough that his magic was dampened by the illness, but it was another for Catarina to be coddling him like this as if he were fragile and breakable.

“You’re saying my magic has become a recluse? A hermit?”

“No, what I’m saying is that it was taking a nap, and it could easily be tempted to take another nap. God, I’ve been spending too much time with children— all my analogies are about snacks and naps.” Cat shoved the thermometer into Magnus’ mouth. “But whatever Alec was doing worked— most adults take much longer than children to recover.” She removed the thermometer, taking note of the temperature before magicking it clean and returning it to her bag.

“I don’t remember much to be honest, it’s all one big blur. Kind of like the 60’s.” Magnus
remembered how much fun he had in that decade— that was it, he only remembered fun — the details were all fuzzy. “Whatever you put in that cold medicine, I’d pay top dollar for.”

“I’m sure you would.” Cat rolled her eyes. “But if anyone deserves a drug-induced delirium to escape… it’s your Alexander.” Her eyes looked toward the bedroom door, through which Alec and the kids were playing in the living room. “So I take it things are going well with you two?”

“Is now really the time?”

“It better be, because that man just stayed at your house for two days taking care of you and your children. He did all of this after one date. Now I’m sure you said some batshit stuff while you were taking the kid’s medicine, but you need to brush that off and treasure that man, because whether you like it or not, you let things get pretty serious.”

“Where is this coming from, Catarina?” Magnus felt strangely attacked. Her onslaught of words was sudden, and he wasn’t sure who she was trying to protect. Instead of answering him, she tapped at her phone. Seconds later, his phone buzzed, and it was all the answer he needed— it was the picture of the four of them sprawled out on the bed, exhausted, sick, and peacefully asleep. They looked like a real family.

“You can’t be playing house unless you’re really considering things here, Magnus. I’m just saying — don’t screw this up.” Cat packed up her things swiftly, opening up a portal. “And by the way— you seem fine. Take a tablespoon of that new medicine I gave you every three to four hours. You’ll be lucid this time.” And with that, she was gone, and his door was sliding open.

“Hey, Magnus— I made some pancakes.” Alec smiled, and Magnus noticed a dash of flour on the tip of his nose. He wanted to reach out and touch it— not just to wipe it off, but just to touch— so he did. Alec’s eyes fluttered closed at the simple gesture, his body inching forward on its own volition.

“You had a little flour there.” Magnus murmured.

“Mhm.” Alec licked his lips. “What did Cat say?” While their lips were talking, their bodies incongruously continued to gravitate together, as if they were making up for all the moments where they couldn't be alone, eager not to waste any time.

“I’m on the mend. I get new, less fun potions.” Magnus played with the hem of Alec’s ragged sweatshirt. Alec angled his hips closer to Magnus, dipping down to steal a quick kiss. It was chaste, innocent even, but a carnal sound ripped from Magnus’ throat. Now that his mind was clearing, he only had one thought— Alec. He spun them around, pressing Alec against the wall next to the door, kissing him with quick determination. With his magic halfway back to normal, Magnus easily slid his bedroom door closed with a flick of his wrist.

“Good— because if you were incoherent, this would be taking advantage of you.” Alec’s hands slid under Magnus’ light, flowing pajama shirt, blunt nails scraping down his sides— he was cutting right to the chase.

“Always the gentleman, Alexander.” Magnus purred.

“I love it when you say my name.” Alec’s head dipped to Magnus' neck, planting a trail of warm, wet kisses from his jaw to his collarbone. “Even when you say it wrong.”

“Wrong?” Magnus pulled back slightly in confusion. He had no idea what Alec could possibly be talking about. From the moment they met, all those years ago, Alec’s name had been branded into
his brain— something he could never forget: Alexander Gideon Lightwood.

“Don’t worry about it— you were completely out of it.” Alec smiled, nuzzling affectionately into Magnus’ unstyled morning hair. “Oh, by the way, I was wondering if— ” Suddenly, Magnus remembered what Alec had been doing the past two days— taking care of him and the kids— and he felt guilty. When Alec’s hands slid up farther, grazing the other man’s nipples, Magnus put his arms between them, creating distance. Alec’s hands slipped out of his shirt, falling to his sides.

“No, Alexander— I— “ Magnus pursed his lips, still tingling from the feeling of Alec’s kisses. “You shouldn’t have had to deal with any of that. It wasn’t your responsibility.” A strange sense of worry and dread was seeping through the cracks of Magnus’ confidence. In the moment, he couldn’t determine if it was unfounded, but Alec’s reassuring hazel eyes soothed him before his emotions got out of control.

“Magnus,” He said, his voice soft and gentle. “I want to be here— for you and for them.” Alec reached up, placing his hands on Magnus’ shoulders— the gesture was steadying, but not particularly intimate. “Now, I have to get going for work— I’m already late.” Alec leaned down to give him a quick kiss, and Magnus savored every millisecond of the touch. “Pancakes are on the counter, the kids already ate.”

“Thank you.” Magnus pecked Alec on the cheek. “You’re an angel.”

“Nephilim.” Alec chuckled, his crooked smile making its first appearance of the day.

With that, Alec left for the day and Magnus went back to the kids. Every time he saw his phone, he was tempted to type out a text, but he didn’t know what to say. Everything about this morning was awkward and weird, and he hated it. He busied himself with dishes, diaper changes, TV shows and bath times, hoping maybe he could find some answers in the routine. But by the time he put himself to bed, he still hadn’t texted Alec, and Alec hadn’t texted him either. He never knew a phone could make him feel so lonely.

“A… b… c….” Maryse whispered to herself as she trailed her hands down the rows of books jammed into the shelves. The wood bowed under the weight of the books— the volume of the volumes as Clary always joked— reminding Maryse that she should invest in sturdier shelves soon. It wasn’t top priority, since she was in the front of the shop where the books were less valuable and mostly for show. Her only client today was picking up an obscure Bengali spell book at some point this afternoon, so she was on the hunt to find something to read and keep herself busy.

“D… Diana! I found it.” She yanked out a worn paperback, the used first-edition ragged and tattered. It wasn’t high-brow literature— it skirted the line between fantasy and trashy romance novel— but she’d heard good things from reviewers. The shop was chilly and a touch damp, and warming up under a blanket in her corner chair while reading a book sounded like heaven to Maryse. Just as she made her way back to her chair and sat down, the door flung open, the wind taking advantage of this new opportunity to expand, spreading it’s dry, freezing air through the shop. Parchment and papers bristled from the airflow, disrupting their quiet pages and making the room smell even more like old books as soon as the cold air passed.

“Magnus?” She stood, taking a good look at the warlock in front of her. He was alone, both kids likely with a tutor or nanny.
“Maryse.” He opened his arms, beckoning her for a hug and kissing her on both cheeks. His skin was cold, and the early-stages of a goatee pricked her face. “I apparently placed an order for the strange water-nomad spell book. Is it ready?”

“That was you? It didn’t sound anything like you on the phone.” The voice on the other end of the call had been British—she was sure of it. In terms of strange occurrences though, this was lowest on her historic list—she didn’t give it too much thought.

“Ah…you see I don’t actually remember ordering this book, or why I thought it was a great idea to try out some silly accents, but I’m certain it was me.” He pulled out a small moleskine notebook from the pocket of his fancy brocade overcoat. “See—right here.” He held out the book to Maryse.

**WEIRD SEA WITCH BOOK, ALEC’S MOM’S BOOKSTORE.**

“I wrote it in blue ink, which means I haven’t paid you for this yet, correct?” He put away the notebook, smoothing out his coat in the process.

“You have not, but it is incredibly expensive. Alec told me about your illness, and if you don’t remember ordering this, there’s no way I can hold you to the deal.” Expensive didn’t even begin to describe it. When Magnus called, she already had the book in the store—on consignment from a Bavarian vampire who wanted the money to install sun-blocking windows in his summer home. He’d had some difficulty getting anyone to sell the book for him since it was protected with a panic spell that could flood a whole room, but Maryse was always up for a challenge—especially if she got 25% of the sale price.

“Nonsense, Maryse. Never—” Magnus started, waving his hands—he was wearing fingerless gloves, his numerous rings on full display.

“Trust a stingy warlock, I know.” She scurried back to the special shelf where she kept advance orders, grabbing the book for Magnus. Carefully lowering it to the counter, she sighed nervously. Although Magnus said he was going to pay, there was still a chance he would back out—and she wouldn’t blame him. “The price is 18,000 dollars.”

She expected at least some reaction out of him, but instead, he nonchalantly waved his hand and a pile of neatly stacked hundred dollar bills appeared next to her on the counter.

“I guess it’s always good to add to my collection…” The book disappeared when Magnus clapped his hands on it. “My dear friend Catarina Loss has two water-inclined warlock children. Maybe it will come in handy.”

“How are your children, Magnus?” From what Alec told her, Magnus’ children were a delight. Maryse had only met Aerulei before at the Halloween book-reading, but that was all it took to fall in love.

“We all came down with a case of warlock flu recently, but we’re on the mend.”

“Alec mentioned you weren’t feeling well, but he didn’t elaborate. That’s probably smart actually. I’m sure you wouldn’t have appreciated people knowing that you were vulnerable with less magic.”
“I suppose not.” Magnus shifted uncomfortably. Maryse was aware she was being awkward. Small talk didn’t come easily to her— it was the trait she had most in common with Alec.

“Have you decided what you all are doing for Thanksgiving?”

“It’s a mundane holiday, we normally don’t do much of anything.” Magnus distractedly scanned the shelves, tracing his fingers over the spine of each book.

“But you’re going to this year, right? Alec told us he wasn’t sure if you could come yet, especially since it’s a bit of a drive away.”

“I’m sorry— what?” He froze mid-movement, his hand trapped reaching for a book on ornithology.

“Our family Thanksgiving? I told Alec he was more than welcome to bring his boyfriend— but only if you brought your lovely children of course. He said he invited you?”

“It must have slipped his mind.” Magnus tried to smile, but instead his lips were pressed in a slightly upturned line. “Where is this family dinner?”

“Luke owns some property upstate— a farmhouse and some cabins. You and the children are invited! We would love to have you, and I’m sure the kids would have fun on the farm. Last year, we even roasted marshmallows.”

“Is Alec doing any of the cooking? Because that would be a huge factor.”

“By the Angel, no. The only edible thing he makes are pancakes.” She smirked. “But I’m sure you already know that.” Maryse knew it was rude to taunt her son’s boyfriend, but she couldn’t resist. “I just wanted to let you know you’re invited.”

There wasn’t much time before his next appointment— matching triple goddess tattoos for a pair of werewolf girlfriends— but Alec still managed to run to the deli and grab some lunch. He hadn’t heard from his mom all day, which normally meant she was lost in the stacks, completely unaware of the time. Worried she might have forgotten to eat, Alec picked her up a sandwich and some hot tea, planning on eating lunch together in the shop before he had to pop back next door for his appointment.

Any possibility of a quiet lunch with his mother went out the door he had just opened when he saw there was someone else in the shop— Magnus.

“I just wanted to let you know you’re invited.” He heard her say.

“Invited to what?” Alec placed the bag of food on the counter, handing Maryse her tea.

“Your mother just invited me to Thanksgiving.” Magnus said curtly. “I must get going though, thank you for procuring this for me, Maryse.” Magnus walked out of the store, leaving Alec in a flustered panic.

“Thanks for that, Mom!” Alec grumbled, chasing after the warlock.

“Magnus, wait!” He yelled as he caught Magnus dip down an alley— likely to discreetly open a
portal back to the loft.

“Yes?” It was obvious he was making an effort to seem cool and collected— he was putting on a facade. Alec couldn’t blame him for feeling left out or forgotten considering he thought he was snubbed for a Thanksgiving invitation, but it didn’t make it tear at his heart less. He had to fix this — he wouldn’t let a misunderstanding create undeserved distance between them.

“That’s what I was going to ask you.” Alec got straight to the point. He didn’t want to create any more confusion, and he didn’t want Magnus to have to go before he got to the point. “At the loft, the other morning.” His breathing was labored and anxious, his chest was tight. “When I said ‘would you like to’—”

“That’s right, I didn’t let you finish.” Magnus’ face softened. He turned to face Alec, stepping a bit closer— close enough to touch, but not close enough to kiss, Alec noticed. Kissing in a dirty Brooklyn alley wouldn’t be appropriate anyway, and definitely not Magnus’ style. He pulled his thoughts away from kissing, remembering he had an explanation to finish.

“I was going to ask you if you and the kids wanted to come to Thanksgiving at Luke’s.” Now the truth of the situation was out, and Alec had to hope Magnus believed it. When Magnus reached out and linked their hands, all the tension in Alec’s shoulders melted away. Magnus trusted him, but something behind his glamoured eyes still looked sad.

“Why didn’t you ask me after?”

“You didn’t text me back that day, and I didn’t want to overstep. I’d just spent two days with you uninvited.”

“So ask me again.” Magnus smiled sheepishly, his eyes glimmering with a playfulness that was a far cry from the tension between them barely a minute earlier.

“What?” Alec blinked blankly, still trying to process the change of tone. Keeping up with dynamic conversation wasn’t one of his strengths.

“Invite me, Alexander.” Magnus gripped Alec’s hands tighter, the leather of his fingerless gloves slippery against Alec’s clammy palms.

“Magnus,” he breathed. “would you like to come to Thanksgiving dinner?”

“As much as I want to just say yes and have this be a perfect, romantic moment, my real answer is…” Magnus paused, biting his lip. His eyes danced playfully, enthralling Alec in suspense. “Maybe.” Alec tensed, surprised by the warlock’s answer. All of that flirting, teasing, making a show of it, just to give such a non-committal response?

“No, Alexander, don’t do that— I can see you overthinking this. I would love to go, and so would the kids. My lack of a solid ‘yes’ is nothing personal, it’s about logistics. Thanksgiving is this week, and I have some things I need to get out of the way. I’ll see how much of my schedule I can rearrange and how much I can get done, and then I’ll let you know.”

It wasn’t the answer Alec wanted, but it was realistic, truthful, and hopeful. It meant so much that even though he had so much going on, Magnus was going to make an effort to make this work, to fit Alec into his life. He wasn’t sure if Magnus and the kids would be coming to Thanksgiving, but that wasn’t what mattered. What mattered was that Magnus wanted to.

Their relationship still wasn’t perfect, and it still was undefined, but Alec still had so much to be thankful for— and that’s why he couldn’t mess this up. He couldn’t crowd him, smother him, or
push him. He needed to give Magnus time to think about things, to make decisions on his own. A Thanksgiving invitation implied a serious relationship, and Alec knew it might be too much too soon. Whether or not he liked it, it was time to take a beat—ease up on texting, try to avoid unnecessarily running into each other, and give everything time to cool off so they didn’t rush into things too hastily. Alec cared about this relationship too much to ruin it by hovering.

“Dios mio, brujo loco.” Raphael shook his head, gazing out the window.

“Diyos means God!” Aerulei piped in cheerfully, albeit with Filipino pronunciation. She was always in good spirits when Raphael visited—he was one of her favorite people. “I know that word!”

“Would you like to know what the other parts meant?” Raphael addressed her with the same signature respect and reverence he gave to any deserving adult, never treating her like a child. Curious to learn what he said, she nodded her head.

“Ah ah—” Raphael scolded. “You need to answer me, Miss Bane. I’m not one for many words, but it is important that you learn how to use them. Be confident in your answers and decisions.”

“Yes, Mister Raphael.” Her lisp had become less pronounced as her tooth grew in. “I would like to learn the Spanish.”

“Well then. Brujo means warlock. Bruja is witch. The endings change based on the gender of the person you’re talking to.”

“Raphael, you do not get to come into my house and enforce your bigoted gender binary!” Magnus mock-scowled.

“Unlike your father, I am not old enough to have had an influence on the development of modern languages.”

“Papa is very old.”

“Great, and now she’s using Seelie inflection.” Magnus took a bite of the insalata caprese bruschetta Raphael brought. The fresh sliced mozzarella, hand picked basil and impeccable heirloom tomato were accented perfectly by the high-quality balsamic vinegar. For someone who couldn’t eat, Raphael was still a phenomenal chef. “This is great by the way.” Magnus pointed to the plate, speaking with his mouth full.

“It’s the last harvest of the season.” He sighed. “The first frost will be this week, so I had to pick whatever was left. Unfortunately, that means too many fried green tomatoes down at the soup kitchen.”

“Green tomato soup?” Aerulei looked up from her coloring book, looking confused.

“No magdalena,” Raphael used his pet name for her, ‘cupcake’. “It is called a soup kitchen, but it serves more than soup. People who can’t afford food go there to eat.”

As Aerulei contemplated the concept of charity, a knock at the door distracted Magnus from his intimate relationship with some fresh cheese. Looking through the security portal, he could see it
was a knight from the Seelie court—Meliorn. He rolled his eyes as he opened the door, unenthused to be dealing with any faerie matters.

“Yes, Meliorn?” Magnus tried to sound as bothered as possible. Fae craved entertainment, and if he seemed as boring as possible, maybe Meliorn wouldn’t stay too long.

“You sound unpleased to see me, Magnus Bane. Are we ill met?”

“Il met.” Magnus returned to his spot on the couch, already tired enough of the conversation to sit. “And my full name, Meliorn?” He scoffed. “Aren’t we past that? I’ve known you for decades.”

“I come with the words given by my queen.” He smiled as if he’d heard a joke that nobody else had. Magnus didn’t like that—it made him nervous. “Although names are what bring me to you.”

“Spit it out, Meliorn.” Raphael narrowed his eyes. “My poor friend Magnus here is nearly five hundred years old, he could die at any day. I cherish my conversations with him.”

“Papa…” Aerulei’s blue snake eyes opened wide, staring blankly. “You’re five hundred? I thought you were only four hundred.”

Meliorn smiled and the leaf-mark on his cheekbone crinkled near his eyes. He kneeled on the floor in front of Aya, looking down at her drawings before making direct eye contact with her.

“Would you like to know how old your papa really is?” He tilted his head to the side. “I have the information you seek, and Seelies can’t lie.”

“But they can evade and distract.” Aya rattled off the line, obviously memorized and drilled into her.

“I see you are teaching your daughter well, Magnus.” Meliorn stood again.

“Aerulei, go play in your room.” Magnus said.

“I shall not be long enough to require that, and the information I have is not sensitive.”

Alright then.” Magnus waved him along. “Proceed.”

“The court received your response in regards to dining with the Queen. We are pleased you shall be attending, however we cannot pass on your confirmation to the Lady due to a fallacy in your correspondence.”

“I don’t follow.”

“For your guest.” Meliorn pulled out a neatly folded scroll from his armor. “You stated you are bringing ‘Alexander Gideon Lightwood-Bane’, however no being of that name exists.” His voice was thick with amusement, but Magnus swore he saw something else dance across his faerie eyes. “The invitations are binding and absolute, only those who have been granted explicit advance entrance can enter the sacred glade.”

“Lightwood-Bane?” Raphael blinked, sitting further back in his chair. “Is there something you need to tell me, Magnus?”

“There is nothing for him to tell. No man of that name exists.” Meliorn smirked. “Can you explain why you lied to the court, Magnus?”
“I must have misspoke— I wasn’t feeling well when I received the invitation.”

“So then the guest you are bringing is Alexander Gideon Lightwood, I presume?” There it was again— something flickered in Meliorn’s eyes when he said Alec’s name. Something incredibly distant from the standard shallow mystique of the fae, something closer to gratitude. Magnus suddenly remembered the initial reason for Alec’s deruning trial— saving Meliorn from the Clave’s torture. Torture not unlike what Meliorn was engaging in now, taunting Magnus about a paltry slip of the tongue. “Not, as you said…” The smirk was back. “Lightwood-Bane?”

“Is that what boys do when they get married Papa?” Aerulei looked up to her father for answers. Not only was he not going to give them in this very moment, he wasn’t going to have this conversation at all with her just yet. The last thing he wanted was for her to start thinking of him marrying Alec. He couldn’t even decide if dating him was the right choice— he couldn’t have Aya asking him questions about marriage of all things.

“Yes Magnus, she brings up a valid point. Our Lady will be intrigued indeed by this situation. Nevertheless, send Alexander my regards. For what he sacrificed, I am, and will forever be in his debt. I shall see you on the fortnight. Well met.” He bowed, not waiting for a response before leaving.

“Aerulei, could you go play in your room now? I have some grown-up things to discuss with Uncle Raphael.”

“Awh.” She whined. “But I never get to see him!”

“That’s because I can only come at night.” Raphael flashed his fangs at her, sending Aya into a fit of giggles. “Now, listen to your papá. I’ll make sure to say adios before I go. ¿Claro?”

“¡Sí!” She quickly grabbed all of her coloring supplies, bolting obediently to her room.

“I wish she would listen to me like that…” Magnus wistfully shoved another piece of cheese in his mouth, savoring the rich balsamic.

“What can I say? I’m a natural born leader.” Raphael shrugged. “Now back to where I was before… Dios mio, mi brujo loco. What do you think you’re doing with Lightwood?”

“I have no idea what I’m doing! That’s why I’m talking to you!”

“That is true.” Raphael sipped at the red liquid in his glass. “If you come to me for relationship advice, you must be desperate.” He paused. “What? Did you not like the answers Cat and Ragnor gave you?”

“Their answers were dumb, and I chose not to take stock in them.” Magnus pulled at the sleeves of his sweater. He hated wearing sweaters, but the winter chill had already begun to seep into the loft, and until it was cold enough to turn on the heat, he had to live with the slight draft— even if it meant resorting to sweaters. Although the piece was from a top designer, it was altogether too plain from this angle— the bold lightning bolts were only around the neck, and while it looked dazzling to others, it didn’t give Magnus much to look at himself. Rubbing gently at the fabric, tiny lightning bolts appeared woven into the threads, outlined in silver.

“Maybe you didn’t like their answers because you were too busy playing fashion designer while they were talking. I charge by the word, it would serve you well to listen.”

Magnus didn’t respond, because he knew Raphael was right. No matter what his friends told him, Magnus was headstrong in his decision to enforce some space between himself and Alexander.
Things were going too strong, too fast, and if he didn’t pull the emergency break he— and his children— would be stuck on a runaway train. It was bad enough that in his delirium, he invited Alec along to dinner at the Seelie court— an invitation Alec couldn't choose to back out of due to the rigidity of Seelie guest lists— but that was two weeks away. By then he will have figured out exactly what they were doing, what they mean to each other.

“Since it seems like you’re actually ready to listen,” Raphael took the last sip of his drink, discarding the cup on the table. “I can’t tell you what you are doing with Lightwood. I like him— he stands up for what he believes in, he’s made a good business for himself— and in the time I’ve known him, he’s never had a serious relationship. Neither have you, not since Camille.”

“These are just facts Raphael, not advice.”

“Exactly. There is no advice to give. None of us have been in your shoes. The advantage I have is that I know Alec. I see how kindly he treats downworlders in the community, and the impact he’s been able to leave even though he was exiled. Most shadowhunters don’t survive in the mundane world, and those that do shun the shadow-world forever. Instead, Alec and his mother chose to remain in the shadow-world, working with downworlders all day even if there is little to gain. From what you have told me about how he is with you and your children, he takes that attitude home. He takes care of you, even when there is nothing to gain.”

“That’s not what I’m worried about, Raphael.” Magnus’ voice was softer— he could feel his vulnerability bubbling to the surface.

“You’re worried that you can’t do the same for him, I know.” Raphael was so confident. Even though relationships weren’t his domain, he was still wise beyond his years, knowing Magnus better than the warlock knew himself.

“He’s going to see how hard it is, and eventually he won’t want to take care of us anymore. I’ll be —” He corrected himself “— we’ll be too much.”

“You say this about the man who took care of you and your family for 48 hours while you were sick, even backing out of a tattoo appointment to do so?”

“Back out? He said he was going to work anyway.” Magnus felt awful. He knew it hadn’t felt like Alec had been there for two days— the second day was a complete blur— but he knew he told Alec to go to work. He didn’t want Alec’s life to be even more difficult, or for his finances to suffer. Even though Magnus could easily make any of Alec and Maryse’s money issues go away, he knew neither of them would take his money— the hard-working Lightwood spirit never left them.

“The first day? Yes, he did. But the second one, no my friend. Apparently, you needed a babysitter more than Keris. He turned down almost twice as much money as he would normally make in a week so that he could take care of you. And before you feel guilty about that, I simply rescheduled for tonight. So I must get going.” He stood, smoothing out the lapels of his well-tailored suit jacket. “Alexander does great work.”

“I know.” Magnus roughly pulled down the neck of his sweater, showing off the healed design on his chest.

“You are in deep, my friend.” Raphael clapped him on the shoulder— the most affectionate gesture he would ever get out of the man— and slipped out the door.

Raphael’s advice rang truer than he would ever know, and now that Magnus was alone with his
own thoughts, it was unbearable. Screw being an adult with adult relationship problems— he was going to go color with his daughter.

Chapter End Notes

You're about to get another double feature, so buckle in folks!
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

Again, this is very hard to write, so thank you for reading it and sticking with me! I promise things are going to get happier, fluffier and more easygoing soon!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec tossed a hacky-sack at his ceiling, following the rise and fall as it methodically left his hand, only to return to him each time. That was the thing about repetitive movements that he loved—they were consistent, they never changed, and he could always rely on them. There was nothing predictable or safe about Magnus, and right now his mind could barely comprehend how convoluted and intertwined the situation had become. Every time he tried to think about it, he hit a brick wall, unable to see past the indisputable happiness entangled in every memory of the warlock, every minute of time spent with his children. He was a single young guy in his twenties—he knew objectively, the prospect of a life with two young kids should be daunting or even annoying, but when he was in the loft with Magnus and his family, he felt so complete. He couldn’t think past that, he couldn’t think critically or logically about it, and it was the most frustrating thing in the world.

“Hey, you weren’t answering your phone, so I let myself in.” Clary invaded his room, flopping down unceremoniously on his bed. Knowing he couldn't turn her away, he rolled over, making more room to accommodate her. “Did you forget it was wine Wednesday again?”

“It’s Wednesday already?” Alec was losing track of time. He hadn’t seen Magnus for days, and instead of the purposeful space clearing his head, it made him distracted, time flowing together as he was consumed in thought. “I don’t really feel up to getting drunk on a weekday.”

“Which is exactly why you should get drunk on a Wednesday!” Simon joined them on the bed, laying across both Clary and Alec in a way that made Alec’s knees ache. There were too many people in his bed.

“Fine, whatever, just…” Alec scooted back so he was hugging his legs to his chest. “Could we move this somewhere else?” He leaned back against the wall, only for a loud growl to rip through the room.

“Alec, your angst is inconveniencing and troubling The Clave.” Clary reached out, wrapping her arms around the cat to comfort him and resting her head on his warm, fluffy belly.

“ It wouldn’t be the first time…” Simon mumbled quietly so Clary couldn’t hear, winking at Alec who then smashed a pillow across Simon’s head. His fake glasses flew across the room.
“Not cool, Lightwood!” he yelled “Party foul!”

“This is not a party. This is never a party. We drink wine and watch movies.” They did this almost every Wednesday, and although it wasn’t Alec’s perfect idea of fun, he still usually had a pretty good time.

“Alcohol, entertainment, what more does a party need?” Simon reached off the bed to grab his glasses.

“Dancing and cute boys?” Clary lifted her head off the cat, winking at Alec. He couldn’t handle this many people winking at him for such disparate reasons. How did he get here, with Simon Lewis and Clary Fray in his bed teasing him like a group of teenagers? It wasn’t as awful as he would have previously imagined, but it was still more social than Alec was comfortable with.

“Whoa wait, lift your arms again!” Simon wiggled his glasses back onto his nose, tugging at Alec’s shirt. “Is that new ink?”

“It is, actually.” Alec wasn’t thrilled about the idea of disrobing anywhere near Simon, but he was proud enough of his work that he made an exception, pulling up his shirt and sliding down the waistband of his pants by an inch. “I started working on it the other day. I still have some details I want to touch up.”

“You did this yourself?” Simon leaned in, examining the piece with disbelief.

“I mean yeah,” Alec blushed humbly. “I used a stencil and stood in front of the mirror for a few hours.” And got interrupted halfway through and ended up making out with Magnus … but he left that part out.

“He’s so talented, isn’t he Si?” Clary beamed— she was proud of him as if he were her real brother. “I mean that whole quill, scroll and inkwell idea? He drew that all himself. It’s so poetic. Not to mention I have no idea how he gets it to heal so well.”

Simon and Alec knew— Nephilim blood. Even without runes, Nephilim healed faster. Clary did too, but she didn’t notice as much as Alec did. It was one of the reasons he’d advised her not to get any tattoos just yet, citing that she was too young and would change her mind later.

“Are you kids having fun?” Maryse popped her head in the door. This was the last straw— there were too many people in his room now.

“No, we’re breaking fire codes in here.” In a graceful movement, Alec rolled over Simon and Clary, landing on his feet in a crouch. “We were just going—”

“To the roof!” Simon cheered. “There’s a super moon tonight, and we were going to do wine Wednesday under the stars.”

“Is that a good idea?” Maryse’s motherly concern was showing. ”I heard the first frost is on its way.”

“I brought a bunch of extra blankets.” Clary smiled. “And mittens. I knitted them for one of my multimedia finals. They’re an early Christmas present for all of you.” Alec didn’t like the idea of wearing mittens— they seemed impractical. But as she pulled out a pair of tight-knit utilitarian black mittens and handed them to Alec, he was less skeptical. They had little flaps so his fingers didn’t have to be constricted, and the thick wool thread would wick away moisture.

“I’ll leave you to your fun then. Let me know if you need snacks or anything.”
“Thank you Ms. Lightwood.” Simon chirped.

“Simon, we’ve been over this. It’s just Maryse.”


“If you say so…” Maryse rolled her chocolate-brown eyes— Isabelle’s eyes, Alec remembered whenever he noticed them.

“Wait. Four children? Clary was taken aback, her soft features contorted in confusion. “I know you have two other siblings that aren’t around a lot, but I didn’t know you had a third.”

“He’s—” Simon started.

“Adopted. Well, more like a foster son. We… weren’t very close.” It was hard to lie, but he wasn’t about to explain this to Clary. He never wanted to explain it to her, afraid that mentioning Jace would trigger some uncomfortable memories.

“Oh…” Clary suddenly froze the second Simon looked at her.

Simon gazed intently into her eyes, holding her still with his *encanto*.

“Are you sure we should do this?” Alec sighed, weighing their options. It would be inconvenient for everyone if Clary knew information that was even Jace-adjacent, but it wasn’t fair to continue altering her mind. Luke had given them the green light on it years ago, back when she was returned to them by the Shadowhunters after the Angels stripped her of her marks, but that didn’t stop it from feeling wrong.

“We’ve done it before.” Simon shrugged, trying to look confident, but it was apparent that this still weighed heavily on his conscience.

“But this time it’s entirely your fault for saying Mom had four children.” Alec tried to deflect the guilt, pushing the blame entirely to Simon. That didn’t make him feel any better.

“Exactly, my fault, my *encanto*.” Simon sucked in a deep breath, readying himself for the difficult decision he was about to make. “We’re just as bad as Magnus and Jocelyn.” Simon cursed.

Alec tried to focus on how Magnus had stolen Clary’s memories for years, as if that information would make it easier to distance himself from the warlock, even temporarily. He was grasping for anything to convince him not to rush to the loft, pull Magnus in his arms and continue playing house, ignoring how irrationally they were rushing into things.

“You shouldn’t be bringing up Jocelyn in front of her.” Although Jocelyn was real, Alec didn’t think it was fair to bring up Clary’s dead mother.

“I froze her with my *encanto*!” Exasperated by the back-and-forth, Simon threw his arms toward the ceiling before gesturing to Clary. “She can’t even hear us right now!” He waved his hands in front of her face to prove she wasn’t even seeing them. It didn’t even look like she was blinking—Alec was concerned if that was bad for her eyes.

“You can freeze people without saying anything? When did you learn that?” Alec knew quite a bit about vampires, so he knew it was possible to do such complex things with an *encanto*, but Simon was still comparatively a young vampire, so his skills were impressive.
“Raphael taught me. He did it to me when I was a thrall when he wanted me to shut up. It’s come in handy for me a few times, actually.” Alec wished he could do that to Simon sometimes—it would make so many things easier.

“What are we going to tell her?” Alec was hoping Simon had an answer for this. He wasn’t ready to fabricate a lie right now.

“I’m not going to make her forget you have an adopted brother, but I’m going to make her never ask about it again.”

“Sounds good.” Alec crossed his arms, nervously looking away. He still hated the idea of manipulating her memories, but it was safer this way. “Get it over with.”

“You have to admit that you and Magnus spend a lot of time together.” Clary crossed her legs, tracing the rim of her wine glass with her finger. Her nails were paint-stained, tiny flecks of green and grey trapped underneath them. “I mean, you spent the last few days playing Daddy Alec.”

Alec spat out his wine in disbelief.

“Come on, it’s not so bad.” Clary defended. Alec made an attempt to blot up the blooming maroon stain from the wool blanket, but his ungraceful spit-take might have left a permanent mark. At least his favorite grey sweater was unscathed—he hated breaking in new clothing, preferring the comfortable lived-in feel.

“Daddy Alec?” Simon snorted. “That’s pretty awful, actually. And something I never wanted to think about.” He swirled the glass in his hands. “I’m never going to get that picture out of my head.”

“But you should see him with the kids Simon! It’s just just like… Ugh!” Clary swooned, burrowing deeper into her cocoon of blankets and quilts. “I know you’re gay Alec, so it doesn’t mean much coming from me, but seeing you with Magnus’ kids was beyond sexy.” She sighed wistfully. “I’ll admit I was pretty drunk at the concert when I first saw you with—” Clary paused, trying to remember Aya’s name. “Aya! But at the Halloween fair, you came by with baby Keris. You were a total pro! Honestly, I’m in love with the whole situation—I ship it. It’s 100% certified Daddy status.”

“I don’t think you know what ‘daddy’ means.” Alec spoke through his teeth, mortified from the second that word left Clary’s mouth.

“Oh I know—” She winked at him poorly, both of her eyes closing slightly instead of just one. “—and I stand by my words.”

“Can we please change the subject, guys?” Alec offered, spinning the corkscrew to open the second bottle of wine. “Who wants more?” Simon and Clary eagerly held out their glasses, Alec filling each before refilling his own.

“Change the subject from discussing Alec’s new mysterious boyfriend?” Simon jabbed. He knew Magnus wasn’t mysterious, but he played it up for Clary’s sake. It would be too confusing to explain how Simon could possibly know Magnus outside of the subject of the downworld.
“Never!” Clary and Simon cheered in unison, clinking their glasses. A late-night breeze blew over
the roof, kissing Clary’s cheeks and nose with a pink glow. Simon stood out—his vampire skin
was still a smooth alabaster, unaffected by the elements.

“He’s not my boyfriend, okay?” Alec took a sip. “If he was, I would tell you. I have no reason to
hide it.” If he was confident Magnus was his boyfriend, if they’d gone far enough to have the ‘
what are we’ talk, Alec would be proud to tell everyone. But they hadn’t, and everything was
weird, and even though Magnus had called him his boyfriend, it hadn’t been under ideal
circumstances. They were postponing having a serious talk, and that alone was enough evidence to
ensure they weren’t boyfriends yet.

“We’ll be the judge of that. Okay Fray—start listing undeniable pieces of evidence that Alec and
Magnus are boyfriends.” Simon adjusted his glasses, sitting up straight and acting like he was
taking this task entirely too seriously.

Alec groaned, accepting that Clary and Simon were going to continue whether he wanted them to
or not. All he wanted to do was sit on the roof and stare at the larger-than-usual moon and get a bit
drunk—he hadn’t signed up for this.

“One: They go on dates.” Clary smiled.

“It was one date.” Alec corrected. He fiddled with the flaps of his mittens, already feeling anxious
about being confronted with details of his relationship. The relationship which he was trying his
best to take a mental break from.

“Two:” Clary was counting on her fingers, but since she was wearing mittens, it looked goofy and
was unhelpful. “Alec gave Magnus a tattoo.”

“Come on, that can’t count.” Alec kicked back a generous swig of wine. He wasn’t fond of this
spiced Cabernet, but it did fit the late-fall atmosphere. “I run a tattoo studio. I’ve tattooed hundreds
of people. Are they all my boyfriends too?”

“No, by that logic some of them are your girlfriends, or nonbinary partners.” Simon pointed out,
high five-ing Clary triumphantly.

“Three: When he was sick, Alec took care of him and the kids.” Alec regretted telling her anything
at this point. He cursed himself for making small talk at the shop, for answering any of her
prodding questions.

“Ooh! Wait, that reminds me!” Clary bounced up and down in her folding chair. “Four! Alec has
keys to Magnus’ fancy loft!”

“You have keys to his apartment…” Simon stared down Alec as he sipped his wine slowly,
drawing out the statement. “... and we are still sitting here having a conversation about whether or
not he’s your boyfriend?”

“We are not having a conversation.” Alec grumpily clarified. “You two are having a conversation,
and I’m choosing not to take part in it.”

“You’re right Simon, maybe the conversation should be about whether or not they’re husbands.”
Clary clasped her hands under her chin, looking at Alec like a girl waiting to catch the bouquet.

“That’s true, Magnus RSVP’d to an invitation with Alec as his plus one... under the name
Alexander Gideon Lightwood-Bane.” Alec looked at Simon as if he’d been betrayed. “What?
Raphael told me. He tells me things, you know!”
“Magnus knows your middle name?” Clary looked surprised.

“That’s what you took away from that?” Alec looked at her skeptically. Sometimes her head was so far up in the clouds that he wondered if her frequent bouts of crying were just naturally occurring precipitation. Aggravated by the line of questioning, Alec finished off his glass of wine, refilling it this time all the way to the brim. “Guys, seriously, enough. Have you ever considered that maybe I want to talk about something else? My whole life isn’t about him you know.”

“Five: Alec is talking about him or texting him all the time.” Clary kicked Alec playfully. “Don’t even deny it! I see you smiling at your phone! You even send him selfies!”

“Hell is freezing over, Alec Lightwood is taking selfies. God help us all.”

“Six— sex.” Clary bit her lip, blushing.

“How did you get that information?!” Alec panicked. Was Magnus going around telling people what they’d done? Had Alec accidentally butt-dialed Clary while he and Magnus were in the act? None of the potential ways of her finding out were pleasant.

“I didn’t, but you just confirmed it.”

“You’re the worst.” Alec kicked up his feet on one of the milk crates they used as makeshift stools and tables.

“Seven! He’s coming to Thanksgiving!” Clary pumped her fist, proud of herself for thinking up yet another justification. Alec was thankful that Simon apparently didn’t have many contributions of his own, but that was likely because they didn’t spend much time together.

“That one is just untrue.” Alec shut her down. “Mom was the one who invited him— I mean I was going to but somehow she managed to first. Anyway it doesn’t matter, because he said he’d ‘think about it’ and that he’d ‘come if nothing else came up.’” Those weren’t Magnus’ exact words, but Alec didn’t want to give a word-by-word replay of the conversation— he wanted room to embellish for emphasis and prove his point.

“You can’t be that blind.” Clary finished off her glass. It was time to cut her off soon. “If you think there’s even the slightest possibility he’s not going to show up, then you’re an idiot.”

“It’s all the way upstate. He can’t just decide to come on a whim. That takes planning. I don’t even know if he has a car.” It was an objectively fair consideration— most New Yorkers don’t own cars, although most New Yorkers were not the ex-High Warlock of Brooklyn.

“That’s not an excuse and you know it! I’m sure Magnus can just por—” Simon caught himself before he said ‘portal’. “He can just pull his car out of the garage and head up.” That was a poor save, but it was better than nothing. “He’s loaded, right? Like he has to have a car.”

“We’ll see.” That was all Alec offered. “Shouldn’t you be worried about your finals or something?”

“I’m done almost all of them. I have one piece to finish because I was out last weekend and didn’t have enough time.”

“That’s not like you, is something up?” Alec was genuinely concerned. For an art student, Clary was incredibly organized, always on top of her schedule and finishing things on time.

“Well…” She trailed off, her eyes darting to the side. “I might have had a date too.”
“Who is the lucky guy?” Simon looked like he was ready to give the ‘shovel speech’, even though he wasn’t her brother. Clary didn’t look eager to give any more details, but Simon wasn’t having it. “You didn’t even tell me you went on a date, you can at least give me the guy’s name.”

“Maybe it’s not a guy, Simon.” Alec sipped sheepishly at his wine.

“Yeah Simon. Stop projecting your toxic heterosexuality.” She stuck her tongue out at her best friend, scrunching up her nose.

“I’m not heterosexual.” Simon looked offended. “I’ve been curious before!”

“I think I found a subject I want to talk about even less than my love life.” Alec grimaced. “I would rather live in a world where Simon is not a potential sexual partner. The ladies can keep him.”

“Good job distracting from letting Clary answer, Alec.” Simon shot daggers at Alec.

“Hey, just because you guys don’t respect my privacy doesn’t mean I won’t respect yours.” Alec bumped Clary on the shoulder playfully. “I’m nice like that.”

“Fine! His name is Jace.”

Oh shit.

It was more difficult unlocking Papa’s phone than Aerulei expected. She didn’t know the password, and he hardly ever left it lying around. But she had to call Mister Alec. It was stupid that he wasn’t hanging out with them anymore, and she wasn’t sure if it was his fault or Papa’s fault. Adults were dumb sometimes. Phones couldn’t be manipulated easily with magic, so she had to think really hard to come up with a solution. She was running out of ideas, until Aunt Tessa came over for tea again. She was part Eidolon demon— shapeshifters— and it gave Aya just the idea she needed. When she held hands with her father that morning, she reached out with her magic, copying the fingerprint of his thumb to hers. She knew from watching detective TV that fingerprints were unique to a person, and the phone scanned them.

Careful to maintain the spell, she held her hand open awkwardly until her father finally left his phone unsupervised while he was in the shower. She held her breath as she pressed her thumb to the sensor, worried it might not work. The screen unlocked— she was in. With free reign of the device, she tapped on the FaceTime app, tapping first on the ‘Favorites’ list and then selecting Alec’s name.

The phone started making a lot of noise as it made the call, and Aya worried that Papa might hear her from the bathroom— she was still in his bedroom, only a door away. Holding the phone carefully so as not to press any buttons or end the call, she bolted across the loft to her own bedroom, locking the door behind her. A few beeps later, Alec answered the call.

He was walking somewhere, headphones dangling from his ears, the camera angled upwards to his face. It made his head look funny, and Aya wanted to laugh, but this was serious business. He wasn’t looking at the screen, and didn’t realize it was her.

“Magnus, hey. I don’t have time to talk right now, I’m on my way to work.”
“But Mister Alec, this is important!” she yelled, grabbing his attention. She could see he stopped moving, the background now a still wall.

“Aya— how did you get into Magnus’ phone?” He narrowed his bushy eyebrows. They looked like the caterpillars that could tell you how cold winter could be— wooly bears. She remembered that if the wooly bears were all black, winter was going to be really cold. His face was really distracting, taking her focus off the mission.

“It doesn’t matter. You need to talk to Papa!” She tried her best to convey the severity of the situation.

“I can’t talk to him if you’re using his phone, can I?” He scolded, but he was smiling— he was just teasing her.

“You’re deflecting!” She copied the word she heard Uncle Ragnor use all the time when he was having serious grown-up conversations with Papa. Alec widened his eyes, looking confused.

“Aerulei, it’s more complicated than that.” He sounded the same way all adults did when they thought you were too little to understand something, and it was insulting. Uncle Ragnor and Dorian never sounded like that, even when they were teaching her something really hard.

“Do you not like us anymore?” Even though she’d practiced the conversation in her head, all the planning went out the window and she cut right to the point.

“Of course I love you guys, don’t ever think otherwise.” That was good, but if he wasn’t going to hang out with him, it didn’t fix anything.

“Even Papa?” She bit her lip, nervous about what she would do if Mister Alec said no.

“Even Papa.”

“So it’s Papa’s fault that you aren’t hanging out with us?” Now she was angry. She wanted to storm back into Papa’s room, burst into the shower, and yell at him right there and tell him to be nice to Mister Alec.

“It’s nobody’s fault. Sometimes—”

A loud knocking at her door pulled her attention away from the phone.

“Aerulei Bane! Open this door immediately!” She heard Papa huff from the other side. “Don’t make me use magic to open it.”

“Mister Alec— We’re running out of time! You need to listen to me!” The door swung open, creaking on its hinges. Aya worried it might fall off and then she wouldn’t have a door at all. That didn’t seem very fun.

“What are you doing with my phone?!” He reached down, snatching it out of her hands, lifting it up out of her reach. “Alec.” He sighed. Papa sounded tired or sad— she wasn’t sure which.

“Hey Magnus. Aya just called me to say hi.” He was lying. Aya knew that when people were your friends, they would tell lies for you. That was good— Alec was still her friend.

“Next time you want to call Mister Alec, you need to ask me first. We’re continuing this conversation later, Aya.” Papa turned the phone to his face and walked out of the room, closing the door behind him.
Aya didn’t want to cry— she hated crying— but she didn’t have time to finish. She didn’t get to explain to Mister Alec how dumb he and Papa were being, how much she and K-K missed him, how much Papa needed him even if he didn’t admit it. She had so much she had wanted to say written down in her notebook, and she was mad at herself for not having it ready when she got on the phone. It might have been her last chance, and she failed.

A small fog coated the front windows to the studio— it was much warmer inside compared to the bitter air outside. For November, the weather was unseasonably cold, influencing everyone to hide inside until the chill lifts. Walk-in customers were few and far between, but on the bright side, more patrons were flooding the coffee shop, leaving gracious tips in exchange for their frothy holiday-spiced beverages. This morning though, he got to sleep in, unable to snag an extra shift. He took the opportunity to do something nice for Clary and hopped around the corner to Java Jones before coming in. She was struggling through finals, but still found time to have a heart-to-heart about his relationship woes— even if she had to coax every word out of him.

At first, he’d loathed the way Clary and Simon tried to chip away at his stony facade. He worked hard enough to maintain it for years, and the last thing he wanted to do was let his Mom’s boyfriend’s kid sabotage it. Without downworlder troubles though, apparently Clary found it fun to discuss other people’s problems, insistently forcing him to elaborate and articulate his thoughts. Now, he was used to it. It made him regret turning away Izzy for all those years. She was always eager to share her problems with him, and he always listened, but he never offered anything in return. In that way, he supposed his relationship with Clary was more of a functional sibling relationship than to his and Isabelle’s, even if the deep-rooted familial love didn’t run as strong. It ran deeper than he wanted to admit though— the redhead had her own unique way of weaving herself into other people’s narratives. To say thank you for everything she did, even if he sometimes hated it, the least Alec could do was bring her coffee.

“Good morning!” He yelled through the studio door, awkwardly opening it with his hip, his hands occupied with both coffees.

“Shh…” Clary held up her hand, silencing him. The edge of her palm was darkened by charcoal, tracing up her pinky— the result of tirelessly working on her last set of portfolio sketches for her finals. Since she’d been sleeping on the desk, head cradled in her hands, a smear of grey stood stark against her pale face. If artists were soldiers, this was their war paint.

“How long have you been up?” After wine night, they passed out around midnight, so she had no reason to look so exhausted.

“I didn’t sleep. After I went home last night, I decided to start working on these—” She held up a few sheets of thick paper, showing off beautiful drawings of Alec, Simon and Luke. “I forgot my male character study final is due tomorrow. I didn’t even get to ask you guys to pose, I based them off of pictures from my phone.”

“Then you need this more than I thought.” He carefully placed the coffee on the front desk, conscious of the fact that if it spilled, it would destroy her artwork and her grades would suffer. “You know, I have some clients today, but they’re regulars. You don’t really need to be here right now.”

“No, I want to be. The lighting is better here, and the practice studios at school are too busy for me.
“Then at least go work at the drafting table in the back, you’ll have more room.”

“Eh—” She took a sip of her coffee, humming at the sugary-sweet taste. “Your sketch is the only one I’m struggling with, I could use some time staring at your face.”

“Whatever the artist needs.” Alec dropped into the chair near the window, taking the lid off his coffee to help it cool. “So do I just sit here?”

“No, you can keep talking.” She buried her head close to the paper, her hair hiding her busy hands. “It’s actually better. I can see how your face moves.”

“When I was on my way to Java Jones, guess who called me?” Alec took a hesitant sip, checking the temperature. It was still a bit too warm, but he needed the caffeine.

“Who?” Clary’s charcoal scratched at the paper, pausing as she looked up to stare intently at Alec.

“Aerulei.” He chuckled. “She stole Magnus’ phone and video chatted me. Apparently she misses me.”

“Of course she does, you haven’t been over to Magnus’ place in almost a week. I’m sure you miss them all too.” Clary narrowed her eyes, observing Alec’s movements. It was unclear exactly what she was looking at, but whatever it was sent her hands into a flurry of light, calculated strokes on the paper.

“Yeah, I guess I didn’t realize how much it would affect them, you know?” He thought taking a breather from the relationship would make things less confusing for the kids, but maybe he was wrong— maybe it was making things harder.

“Why haven’t you been there, though? I know you’re trying to take a beat with Magnus, but are you sure it’s the right thing to do?” Clary went back to scribbling at her drawing, giving Alec plenty of time to think before he spoke.

“I’m not sure. It’s not like there’s a rule book for this.” He knew the phrase was cliché, but it was the best way to describe his feelings— he wasn’t great with words, and sometimes relying on tried-and-true colloquialisms made it easier to get his point across.

“But you like him, and he likes you, and the kids like you. Can’t it be that simple?” She shrugged. Her oversized green sweater slipped off her shoulder, bunching up around her elbow.

“I guess it could. But if I don’t take some time to think about it, I could mess everything up.” Alec thought about how easy it would have been to never leave the loft. Everything with Magnus felt so natural that after those two days, he could have just stayed, ignoring that Magnus had his own life, ignoring that they’d only been on one date.

“I’m sure he feels the same way, but that doesn’t mean you stop. Maybe it means you just have to accept that everything isn’t going to be perfect and go for it anyway. Luke always said having kids is a lesson in learning all the ways you can mess up.”

“That sounds about right.” Alec laughed.

“Maybe you should talk to him about it. I know you guys always head up to the farm a few days before us.” She had a point— in a lot of ways, Alec and Luke were in similar situations. Luke was an exiled shadowhunter who fell in love with a single mom, yet somehow he made it work for
eighteen years. If he could do it, maybe Alec could too.

“You’re surprisingly full of great ideas, Fray.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Aya finds a new extreme way to meddle, and it causes Alec and Magnus to have a hard, but necessary conversation. Alec and Luke head up to the farm early to spend some quality stereotypical male-bonding time with axes, beer, and strangely emotional conversations. Then... you get a Thanksgiving chapter!
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Alec and Magnus are trapped in a weird situation, forcing them to finally have 'the talk'. When Alec still can't leave, they find other ways to pass the time.

Chapter Notes

Here's some much-needed relationship clarification followed by a gratuitous smut scene nobody asked for. If you don't want to read explicit smut, you can stop after the page break. You won't lose any content that way :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec swore he took a left onto Front Street. But instead of Vinegar Hill, he was deeper in Dumbo, literally sandwiched between the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges. When he looked to his right, between the rows of buildings he could see the arching suspension cables and formidable steel and stone structures, stretching across the East river. They were beautiful, but not what he should be looking at. Even if it wasn’t a one-way street, to get home he needed to be going in the opposite direction. Everything about his direction was wrong. Checking the traffic, he made a U-turn at the first opportunity, whisking around in the other direction on his bike. It wasn’t like him to get all turned around— not in such a familiar neighborhood, not on the routine route from the Roasting Company back toward home. Thankfully he caught the mistake, and it only added about four minutes to his commute.

He quickly realized, however, that he was still in the same neighborhood, now heading down Washington Street. This didn’t make any sense— the neighborhood was tiny and nearly impossible to get lost in. It was difficult to navigate around pedestrians and other cars, since he was going the wrong way on a one-way street again. A right on Plymouth would get him back on track, passing the cafe again and getting him closer to his route home. The last few days had been distracting— his messages with Magnus were few and far between. Conversation wasn’t organic and didn’t flow easily, as if Magnus was in his head about things as much as Alec was. Alec didn’t think it was possible for anyone to overthink things as much as he did, and Magnus always seemed so confident and self-assured that he assumed the lack of communication must be intentional on his part. Aya’s foiled attempt at a clandestine video call was the last time he’d spoken to Magnus, and it pulled at his heart in a way he didn’t know he could feel from just one week apart from someone.

Despite the weather being chilly and dry, the sour-salty smell of the river permeated the air, making Alec eager to get out of this neighborhood and farther away from the water. Sometimes the water was comforting, with its predictable sloshing sounds and pleasant artificial parks hugging the coastline, but that was on days where pollution was lower, or there was a crisp breeze carrying the unpleasantries away. In the moment, it exacerbated Alec’s growing frustration. He had an appointment at 4:00, and he wanted to sneak in a quick workout at the gym before that. Now he had wasted over ten minutes, and he would have to rush to change into his clothes to get to fight class on time. The ride home was smooth sailing though, feeling like it took no time at all. Alec
dismounted his bike, rolling it over to the bike rack in a memorized movement. Except, this wasn’t his bike rack— it wasn’t the rusty, green-painted one Luke set up beneath the stairs to the apartment. This one was fancy yet industrial— new and well maintained. He was still in Dumbo, standing in front of a large fancy building of remodeled lofts— Magnus’ building.

What the fuck? Alec thought to himself, running his hand over his face in frustration, as if the wiping movement would remove the view in front of him and replace it with home. It didn’t. Alec wasn’t sure what to do now. Did he go in? The entire situation felt strangely like fate, but he didn’t take much stock in fate or divine intervention. Huffing out a strained breath, he got back on his bike and pedaled as fast as he could, heading away from the loft, determined to get home. A few minutes later he ended up back in the same spot, Magnus’ building taunting him. After three more attempts, Alec gave up, chaining his bike to the rack and stomping upstairs. Magnus was known for being dramatic, but this was ridiculous. Some sort of magic was bringing him here, and Alec couldn’t help but find it insulting. If Magnus wanted him to come over, he could have just texted. They weren’t fighting, just slowing things down— if Magnus only asked, Alec would come, which made this whole thing outlandish.

Normally, he tried to take the stairs, but considering how exhausted he was from his frantic cycling, he took the elevator instead. When he was upstairs, he didn’t bother to knock, using his set of keys to come in.

“Magnus?” Alec called out. “If you wanted me here, you could have just called.” He looked around, expecting the warlock to be waiting for him— he did apparently spell him to come over, it would make sense for him to be expecting Alec at any minute. But Magnus was nowhere to be found. Alec cautiously walked around the loft. What if this was some form of distress signal? Was something wrong? Nothing seemed out of place, and if Alec looked hard he could see the slight rippling of the wards around the balcony. He wasn’t sure if anyone with the sight could visibly see issues with wards, but it didn’t hurt to try.

“Aya? Magnus? Is anyone home?” Still no sign of the Banes, he decided to check the kids’ rooms. Keris’ room was empty, as was Aya’s— they must have gone somewhere together. It was making less and less sense to Alec why this was happening— maybe it wasn’t Magnus’ magic at all. Maybe someone was trying to keep Alec away from his house, away from the shop. He frantically pulled out his phone, dialing his mother.

“Hello.” Alec could hear a small smile in his mother’s voice through the phone— it didn’t sound like she was in danger. “How was your shift this morning?”

“Uh, it was fine. But I can’t come home.” Alec realized how absurd it was now that he was saying it out loud. None of it made sense to him, and he was struggling to explain it over the phone.

“Can’t come home?” She sounded suddenly worried. “Do you mean something else came up?”

“No I mean— I physically can’t. I think someone put a minor curse on me. Every time I try to bike home, I keep ending up somewhere else. Is there any reason I’d be blocked from our house or the shops?”

“None that I can think of, everything here is normal. This is very intriguing though— I’ve read about this in a few of the spell books here in the shop, but without a warlock, there’s nothing I can do. Have you called Magnus?”

“Well, that’s kind of the problem. I keep ending up at Magnus’ loft.” He swore he heard his mom giggle.
“I don’t think that’s such a problem then, is it?” She sounded amused. Was this some kind of joke to her?

“Of course it’s a problem! What are you talking about?! I have clients!” Alec huffed as he paced around the floor with a determination that threatened the integrity of the Persian rugs.

“And he’s not there?” She asked.

“No he’s—” Alec started, cut off by the sound of the door swinging open. “Sorry, he just walked in. I gotta go.” He clicked the button to hang up, turning his attention to Magnus, who didn’t seem particularly surprised he was there.

“I was wondering when you’d come by.” Magnus pulled him into a friendly hug— the touch comforting but not amorous. “Your sweater is on the coat rack.”

“My sweater?” At first, Alec was confused by what Magnus could possibly mean. He was currently wearing his sweater— a dark green cable-knit v-neck his mother bought him for Christmas last year. He couldn’t wear it at the coffee shop— it wasn’t black— but he wore it today in lieu of a coat. He didn’t remember taking it off and hanging it up when he came in.

“The one you left here? The one that, judging by the condition of it, you’re very fond of?” Magnus pointed to the dark grey sweater hanging limply next to Magnus’ designer coats. At one point, it had been blue, or maybe green, but now it was nearly threadbare, the fabric pilled and dotted with holes. Of all the articles of clothing to leave at a fashionable person’s home, this might be the worst. He was surprised Magnus hadn’t thrown it out— he was more surprised that Magnus would think he came back for it.

“I didn’t even realize it had been missing.” It was the truth. He vaguely remembered wearing it recently, but none of his clothing stood out enough to remember exactly when or where it was worn. Even though Magnus never wore the same outfit twice, everything was so unique and left a strong enough impression for Alec to always remember. He cataloged what the warlock was wearing right now— A deep purple button down shirt, tight ankle-length dress pants with matching purple stripes, a military-style jacket in deep silver, a collar chain around his neck. His hair had matching purple and silver streaks, his eyes were outlined in a deep plum, making the green-gold color shine.

“Oh.” Magnus looked sincerely curious. “Then to what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I can’t go home.” Alec said curtly. This entire thing was likely Magnus’ fault, yet he was acting like nothing was out of the ordinary.

“Is something wrong?” Magnus was genuinely confused, concerned even. If this was his fault and he was playing dumb, he was doing a very convincing job.

“No, I mean I can’t. I physically can’t.” Alec was a bit annoyed, explaining the same situation twice in such a short amount of time.

“Do you want me to portal you?” Magnus wasn’t getting it— either Alec was doing a terrible job explaining himself, or Magnus was enjoying the frustration he caused by cursing Alec to come back to the loft.

“Maybe, yeah, eventually, sure.” Alec squinted his eyes in frustration. “But what I mean is that every time I try to go home, I keep ending up here.” He pointed to the floor. “At the loft. I can’t go home. Care to explain that to me?”
“You think *I* did this to you?” Magnus stepped back, looking insulted. Instead of defending himself, he answered the question with another question. “What reason would I have for doing that?”

“I dunno.” His New York accent was slipping out as it usually did when he was distraught, but he didn’t care. He resumed pacing around the coffee table, talking with his hands for emphasis. “Maybe because things have weird, and we haven’t been talking. And—”

“So you assume that instead of just calling or texting to tell you things are weird, I would make things more uncomfortable by cursing you so that you are forced to come to my home?” When Magnus said it that way, it sounded ridiculous, Alec had to admit.

“Look, can you just undo it?” Alec stopped, turning to Magnus and crossing his arms. “I thought you were much more knowledgeable about magic than that. I’m disappointed.” Magnus pursed his lips disapprovingly, his temper still bristling from Alec’s prior accusation.

“What?” Alec didn’t know what Magnus was talking about. Compared to most shadowhunters, Alec knew quite a bit about warlock magic and even the menial magic mundanes were capable of. Warlocks could easily undo spells.

“Only the warlock who cast a curse can un-curse you. If it was a normal spell, I could reverse it, since I’m almost certain of what kind of curse it is, but it’s still a curse— my hands are tied.”

“How do you know it’s definitely not a spell, that it’s a curse?” While he was relieved Magnus hadn’t cursed him, he was confronted by the possibility that someone else had, which was something he didn’t want to deal with right now.

“I can see it wrapped around you, like tiny purple spiked ropes spun around your whole body.”

“Why can’t I see them— I have the sight.” Alec’s skin bristled, even though the curse wasn’t physically noticeable.

“Only well-trained warlocks can see that type of magic.” Magnus shrugged.

“So what now?” Alec shifted uncomfortably, conscious of the invisible threads entangling him, producing a phantom itch.

“While you’re here, I did want to talk to you.” Magnus walked to his bar cart, pouring out one finger of whiskey— a far cry from his old standard three fingers. Fatherhood had changed him.

“Are you sure you weren’t the one who cursed me?” Alec joked, but Magnus’ fierce cat eyes threw him a defensive glare. “Kidding! I’m just kidding.” Alec sat on the couch, Magnus joining him, drink in hand. “I kind of wanted to talk to you too, I guess.”

“What a coincidence.” Magnus sipped his drink, his eyes awkwardly darting to the side, avoiding contact with Alec’s. His free hand was busy fiddling with his ear cuff— it was the warlock’s signature nervous tick.

“What are the kids?” Alec thought it was strange for them to not be with Magnus in the middle of the day. From his albeit limited experience, they were usually spent their days in the loft with either Ragnor or Dot, taking lessons— although the jury was still out on how much Keris could ‘learn’ at his age.

“Changing the subject before we’ve even started I see? That’s the old Alexander we know and lo
—” Magnus cut off, crossing his feet on the coffee table. “They’re with Tessa and Jem at the British Museum today. It’s one of those days where they let you touch lower-quality artifacts, and Jem feels weird going to them without bringing children.”

“There’s nothing weird about wanting to touch things at museums. Growing up, we had all sorts of historic stuff locked up in the library at the Institute, and I always wanted to touch them.”

“Did you ever touch them?”

“Of course, but never tell Jace. I always told him we weren’t allowed to because it was against the rules.”

“So you were a rule breaker.” Magnus laughed.

“Well you see how far being the guy who listed off how many Clave rules were broken on a mission got me.” Alec laughed, joining Magnus in resting his feet on the table. Alec knew he was deflecting and stalling, but he didn’t know what to say. It was a weak move, but he tossed the ball back in Magnus’ court. “So what did you want to tell me?”

“I miss you.” Magnus spoke gently, like the words he said were the truest he’d ever spoken. Even his genuine sentiment couldn’t stop the conversation from being a bit awkward.

“I—” Alec swallowed. “I miss you too.”

“Then why haven’t you...” Magnus trailed off.

“Why haven’t you...” Alec mimicked. It was clear they were both referring to their lull in calls and texts.

“I guess it is a two-way street.” Magnus settled as they fell into an uncomfortable silence. Every sound in the loft was deafening—the whir of the refrigerator in the kitchen, the scratch of swirling leaves against the balcony doors, even the sound of Magnus’ breathing. Eventually, Alec took the leap, breaking the silence.

“It was a lot, Magnus. Everything was a lot.” He didn’t need to elaborate on what ‘it’ was, Magnus knew from context.

“I know, and I understand if you don’t want this— any of this. It’s too much— ” Magnus took a sip of his drink, trying to hide a subtle worried frown.

“No, you have it all wrong. It’s not too much, never say you’re too much.” Alec was hyper-aware of the pained pace of his own breathing, of the tightness in his body—all stemming from the desire to reassure Magnus, to get his point across. “I was the one who chose to be here, to take care of you. That was all my choice. I wanted to be here. I’d do it again in a heartbeat.”


“It’s a lot for you, for the kids. Me being here—” Alec gestured widely around the apartment. “Isn’t it confusing?” He thought about how involved he’d been while the kids were sick, how natural it had been for him to fall into ‘parent mode’, and how easily the kids trusted him to take care of them. But then he remembered points where it maybe crossed a line—when Aya called him Daddy, when Keris wouldn’t go to sleep without Alec—and the worry that he was getting too close to them reared its unwelcome head.

“I never have brought anyone around them before, that’s true— definitely no one like you. To be
honest, I haven’t dated anyone like you in decades— someone so special.” Magnus moved his feet, brushing them accidentally against Alec’s. In response to the touch, Alec subconsciously scooted closer. “But what I wanted to say is, I don’t think that makes it a bad thing— you being here, being a part of their lives.”

“I mean bringing someone around, dating, getting serious— what if things don’t end up working out? Kids need stability, right?” Alec said. He didn’t know much about children, but he knew that too much chaotic change wasn’t good for them— it was confusing and wasn’t a good environment to grow up in. The last thing he wanted for Keris and Aya was to jeopardize their childhood and learning— he cared about them too much.

“Mhm.” Magnus took a long sip of his drink. “That is a thing children need. Although some people would argue that by virtue of electing to be a single parent, I’ve already ruined their chance at a stable family unit— but it seems like they’re doing okay so far.” Okay was an understatement— Magnus’ children were amazing, and it was clear he knew it.

“I guess what I’m trying to say is— I know that for some reason with us, things go so fast.” Alec paused, taking a deep breath. He was explaining how things were going to quickly— he didn’t want to explain that with the same spirit of haste. “And maybe it’s too fast— but I don’t think distance is what we need, I don’t think it should stop us.”

“I was going to say the same thing.” He put his glass down. “It feels a bit silly, almost childish, avoiding each other like this.”

“So you have been avoiding me?” Alec narrowed his eyes, giving Magnus his best grumpy face.

“Only if you’ve been avoiding me.” Magnus smirked. “Like I said, two way street. So is this the point where you ask if we should ‘DTR’?” Alec paled at the acronym. The only similar one he knew was ‘DTF’, so the sudden shift in conversational goals was jarring.

“What do you think DTR means, exactly?” Magnus cocked up a perfectly styled eyebrow. Alec wondered how much effort it took for Magnus to have such flawless facial hair— he felt like after just a few hours in the morning, his face was already threatening to have a full, dark, messy beard.

“Uhh… down to…” Alec blushed. “I’m not going to lie— I have no idea what the ‘r’ means.”

“You’re adorable, and completely off course.” Magnus brought his legs up onto the couch, curling closer to Alec. “It means ‘define the relationship’.”

“Oh. Then that actually makes sense in this conversation.” Alec tried in vain to steady himself, suddenly feeling incredibly vulnerable. “So… what are we?” Alec asked awkwardly.

“I think a better question is what do we want to be?” Magnus scooted even closer, grabbing Alec’s hand. The warlock’s hands were smooth, soft, and unmarked— his rings were cold against Alec’s fingers.

“Well… If you—” Alec started.

“No, I want to know what you want first.” Magnus gripped harder. Was he worried about Alec’s answer?

“I want this. I want you.” Alec spoke quickly, nervously. “I want to be your boyfriend.” He braced himself, preparing for potential rejection, but none came. Words didn’t come either— Magnus’
response was to dive forward, pushing himself against Alec, locking him in a hungry kiss that felt thankful.

“Alexander.” Magnus sighed in relief. “You have…” He kissed Alec again. “No idea…” His breath was labored, his body trembling— he’d been nervous too. Something about that made Alec feel better, like they were on the exact same page. Even though he could kiss Magnus forever, Alec needed to hear him say it— he needed that final piece of confirmation. He pushed his hand between them, holding their bodies a few inches apart.

“So does that mean you want to be my boyfriend too?” Alec searched Magnus’ eyes for any trace of hesitation, worrying his kiss-swollen bottom lip with his teeth.

“That is the stupidest question you could ever ask me. Of course I want you to be my boyfriend.” He pushed his body down, putting his whole weight on Alec so that they were close enough to kiss. Before their lips touched, he whispered. “I accidentally told the Seelie Queen you were my husband, I think when I was strung out on Catarina’s meds, I already thought we were much more than boyfriends.” Alec nudge his head up, pressing a quick kiss to Magnus’ lips.

“You said much crazier things than that.” Alec laughed. Magnus leaned down, stealing another kiss.

“Why don’t I make it up to you by doing some things that are much crazier? After all, it’s not like you can go anywhere else…”

“As long as it doesn’t involve naked dancing on the roof.” Alec giggled against Magnus’ mouth, coaxing out a deeper kiss.

“Naked? Yes.” Magnus pecked his lips between words. “Dancing? No. I don’t need to see you dance to know you have two left feet.”

At that, Alec sat up, cradling Magnus in his arms and lifting him off the couch in one swift motion. The warlock whimpered, wrapping his legs around Alec, looping his arms securely around his neck.

“What, you don’t want to be carried like a princess?” Alec stopped in the middle of the loft, halfway to the bedroom.

“No.” Magnus leaned forward, capturing Alec’s lips. “I can’t kiss you that way.”

“Yeah, but this way makes it harder to see the door.” Alec did it again— he giggled. It drove Magnus wild. This was taking too long— Magnus wanted to be in the bedroom now. He unlinked one of his arms, focusing all his magic into his palm, channeling it through his fingers. Pointing behind Alec, he opened up a portal to the bedroom—not just the bedroom, but in the air just a few feet above his bed. If his calculations were right, they would land directly on the mattress. Catching Alec by surprise, he shifted his weight forward aggressively, sending Alec stumbling backwards through the portal. “Oof, well that was graceful.” Alec huffed, hitting the mattress with a light thud.

“Warlock.” Magnus winked. “And you stole my line.”
“Yeah, well—” Alec looked up at Magnus through his dark feathery lashes, his eyes heavy with desire. “What are you going to do about that?”

“Alexander, are you asking me to punish you?” Magnus raked his nails down the front of Alec’s shirt— too much fabric for the moment, but Magnus wasn’t ready to undress them yet.

“You said it, not me.” He bit his lip, looking somehow both mischievous and shy. Maybe this power-play was different for Alec, something new.

“Be careful what you ask for— because I will always give you everything you want.” Magnus purred, yanking Alec’s shirt up his torso and over his head, with a bit of compliance from the ex-shadowhunter. Magnus was still wearing his shirt, and Alec used this to his advantage, balling it in his fist and pulling Magnus down onto him, Magnus’ head buried in the crook of Alec’s neck.

“And that’s what I want.” Alec’s breath was hot as he whispered against the warlock’s ear. “I want you to give it to me.” This was heavenly— Magnus wasn’t sure who had the upper hand right now, who was in control. None of it was rehearsed or practiced, and they didn’t have enough experience with each other yet to fall into a simple power dynamic, but it was still lovely. Every bit of it made Magnus want more.

He couldn’t stand another second of the torture, removing all of their clothes in a swift and barely noticeable gesture. A ragged moan escaped his lips as he felt their chests touch, their skin already warm and a bit sweaty. Magnus didn’t remember the last time his body responded to someone so strongly before they were even fucking. He might be hundreds of years old, but in that moment he felt like a teenager. And like an eager teen, he didn’t want to take it slow. Resisting the urge to kiss Alec’s lips, he slid downwards, blazing a trail of kisses connected by light touches of his tongue until his head rested at Alec’s inner thigh. His dick jumped at every bit of contact, a skyscraper in the glorious city of Alec’s body.

“You are so beautiful, darling.” Magnus said, his words a preamble to the line he licked up Alec’s shaft, his bottom lip catching the edge of the head, bouncing lightly. Magnus knew it was dramatic— but it was dramatically sexy— and he wanted his first time taking this glorious man to be as dramatically sexy as possible. Wrapping his hand around the base of Alec’s cock, he opened his mouth, taking in the tip and creating a seal. Applying a little suction, he felt Alec’s hips buck off the bed. His methods worked, precum dripping from the tip when he pulled back.

“Shit, that was—” Alec stuttered. Magnus loved watching Alec squirm, and wanted to see more of it. He repeated the action again, sliding Alec’s tip into his mouth and sliding off with a light ‘pop’. Alec was more flustered than ever. “— you just sucked my dick.”

“My naive little pup, it brings all the blood straight to the tip. It’s… stimulating.”

“Pup?” Alec huffed in disbelief. “Absolutely not. That’s it for you talking.” He playfully grabbed the back of Magnus’ head, pushing him down toward his dick. Magnus obediently opened wide, taking Alec deep into his throat. Bobbing his head slowly, Magnus slid his hand beneath Alec, snaking between his cheeks. Circling his finger in unison with the rhythm of his head, Magnus began to prepare Alec for him. He felt Alec’s hole pucker and tighten when he swirled his tongue around the tip of his dick, relax when he took Alec’s entire length in his mouth. Feeling how Alec’s muscles worked together, how stimulation affected different parts of his body— it drove Magnus wild.

He pulled away, nudging Alec’s hips up higher and shimmying so his head was lined up just where he wanted it to be. For Alec’s comfort, he conjured a pillow to rest beneath his hips, reducing the
tension on his lower back. The anticipation was thick in the air. Alec knew what he was about to get, and Magnus was eager to give it to him. He tentatively closed the small distance, swirling his tongue around the rim. Alec moaned, the sound reverberating loudly against the high ceilings of the loft. If that was the reaction from just the initial touch, Magnus was anxious to see what else he could tease out of the other man. Increasing the pressure of his tongue, he slipped inside—barely a centimeter. To his surprise, Alec didn’t tense—instead he sighed, making an effort to keep his muscles relaxed. \textit{Impressive}. Confident that he was ready, Magnus gradually slipped in one finger, continuously lapping around the rim to distract from the discomforts of any initial stretching— and also because he knew from experience it felt fantastic. He pumped his finger, pressing a wet kiss to Alec’s perineum.

“\textit{More, Magnus.}” Alec breathed, releasing his hands from Magnus’ hair and reaching for his own dick. Magnus slapped Alec’s hands away, looking up at him and locking eyes. He gently removed his finger from Alec, huffing out a laugh as Alec subconsciously whined from the sudden lack of touch.

“Not yet—” Magnus sat back enough so Alec could see what he was doing. As he swirled his wrist his fingers became slick and smooth, shining as they were covered in lube. “Now, I’m going to prepare you with magic…” Magnus raised an eyebrow—Alec knew exactly what he was talking about. “Is that okay?” Alec nodded furiously. Magnus snapped his fingers, a small cloud of blue magic swirling over Alec’s stomach, goosebumps taking the lead from his dick and rising to attention.

“That was…” Alec furrowed his eyebrows, experimentally shifting his hips. “Cold? Definitely not what I expected.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll warm you right up.” Magnus leaned down to Alec, grinding their bodies together. For the first time in what felt like hours, they were kissing, Alec’s taste heavy on Magnus’ tongue. It was a bit awkward, but Magnus threaded his arm between them, reaching to the sweet spot between Alec’s cheeks. This time he slid in two fingers— with the assistance of lube, they went in easily, allowing him to get right back to pumping in and out in time with their kisses. A slight curve of his fingers had him grazing Alec’s prostate, a stream of curses and tiny moans following as Alec gripped the sheets beneath them. Magnus scissored his fingers, testing to see how open Alec was, to see if he was ready. When Alec moaned into the touch rather than tensing, he knew Alec was good to go.

Magnus wanted to flip him over so badly— to see that beautiful man on all fours, poised and ready for the taking. But even though this wasn’t their first time, it was his first time topping Alec, and that engendered its own sentimentality. He pulled his fingers out, tracing up the contours of Alec’s toned body, busying his hands while he debated positions.

“Yes, Magnus—” Alec cut in. “It feels better for me from behind. Is that okay?” He looked nervous, almost worried that Magnus would be disappointed at the prospect of fucking him doggy-style. Magnus was ready to silence any of those doubts.

“It’s more than okay.” Magnus growled, grabbing Alec’s hips roughly and flipping him over. Warlocks might not be inherently stronger by nature, but with just a little magic he could easily manhandle Alec just as easily as any nephilim. No longer necessary, he tossed the support pillow to the side, making as much space as possible on the bed. Alec readjusted his position, shifting his hips from side to side in a way that was part practical, part taunt—mostly taunt. Magnus couldn’t help it—he grabbed both sides of Alec’s ass, digging his fingers in to fully appreciate it. It defied all laws of matter—toned and firm while also squishy and plump. Spreading him wide, he dipped down, swirling his tongue around Alec’s lubed hole, giving him one final tease.
Pulling back into a solid, steady, kneel, Magnus lined himself up, the head grazing Alec’s rim. They took one shared breath, a firm of nonverbal acknowledgement. He pushed forward at a frustratingly slow pace, his body screaming at him for more. Since he spent most of the time focusing on Alec, he was psychologically aroused to an uncomfortable level, making the need for release that much stronger. When he was hilt-deep in Alec, he paused for a second— allowing Alec’s body to acclimate to the fullness. He raked his blunt nails down Alec’s back, tracing a design of Angel wings he hoped would leave a mark later. It was cheesy— but still oddly satisfying. Alec’s hips bucked back, calling Magnus to move. That was all Magnus needed to allow himself to snap— letting his body take over as he pounded Alec rough and hard. Each thrust into Alec was met with Alec’s hips eagerly pushing back into him, wanting more depth, pressure, speed, and wanting it faster. Magnus pressed his palm between Alec’s shoulder blades, pushing his chest down onto the mattress and bending him at a beautiful position.

“I’m wishing I had that flexibility rune right now.” Alec mumbled into the mattress as Magnus kept thrusting. This position made it harder to push his hips back, leaving him bent forward onto the bed with his back curved at an intense angle.

“No mentioning runes.” Magnus lightly smacked Alec’s ass, unsure of whether or not he would like it. Judging by Alec’s responding moan, he loved it. “You like that?” Magnus asked, both for the effect of dirty talk and to confirm that Alec was okay with spanking.

“Yes, green, please.” Alec begged. Magnus filed away the information that Alec was familiar with the BDSM coloring system— something he never would have expected, but was really happy to learn.

“Is this the punishment you were joking about?” Magnus slapped Alec’s ass hard enough to leave a hand-print. “Does it feel like a joke now?” He couldn’t quite remember why Alec brought up punishment earlier in the first place— that was before they got naked, making it ancient history.

“Yes, because you’re treating me like I’m made of glass.” Alec spat against the sheets. “Harder!” Magnus listened, but not in the way Alec asked for, instead doubling the speed of his thrusts. Each time his dick grazed Alec’s prostate, Alec moaned loudly enough that Magnus worried it might penetrate his soundproof warding. He was so close to release, and he wanted Alec to be right there with him. He was surprised Alec lasted this long, but now was not the time to compare stamina. Magnus released his grip on Alec’s hip, snaking his hand around to his dick. He pumped his hand in time with his thrusts, sending small stimulating tendrils of magic through his fingertips— he was making a show out of how good he could make Alec feel.

“Magnus,” Alec groaned, his body tensing and his toes curling into the mattress. “I’m so close—”

“Come with me, Alexander.” The second his name slipped from Magnus’ tongue, they came together, a dizzying explosion of sensations both physical and mental drowning out any reality other than each other. Magnus held onto Alec, riding out their waves of pleasure until their bodies slowed down.

He rolled Alec onto his side, slotting in next to him to cuddle. Sweat and come dirtied their skin, soiled the bed sheets, but Magnus couldn’t even be bothered to clean it away with magic— it was the farthest thing from his mind. His senses were consumed with Alec— his smell, his taste, the feeling of his body next to his — and Alec was the last thing he thought about as they both drifted off into a quiet, post-orgasmic sleep.

Chapter End Notes
Next chapter! Jem brings back Aya and Keris, Magnus asks the kids an important question about Thanksgiving.

Plus:

Thanksgiving at the farm with Luke!
Featuring:
Beers with the boyz (Alec and Luke drinking beer)
Maryse cooking!
Magnus and the kids wearing hats!
Surprise guests!
Lots of stuff related to farms!
Archery!
Clary problems!
And... Barns ;)

Due to the holidays, the Thanksgiving chapter might be delayed. I tried to get it out today as a double-post, but it wasn’t ready in time. So see you Saturday, hopefully, with the Thanksgiving chapter!
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

As Thanksgiving grows closer, everyone has a lot of feelings they want to talk about.

Chapter Notes

If you don't speak/understand Spanish, I try to make sure anything makes enough sense with context clues. Nothing plot-important will ever be in another language, only small-talk! I hope that's okay!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Shit.” Magnus swore, rolling abruptly out of bed and wrapping himself in a robe. “Get dressed. Jem and Tessa are going to be here with the kids any minute.”

“What?” Alec groaned, groggy and sleepy. “Ugh, what time is it?”

“3:30. Which is when the kids were due back, since it’s a five hour time difference between here and the U.K, making it the kids bedtime there.” He threw Alec his pants, not bothering to find his underwear.

“Fuck, I have to go. I have an appointment soon, and I have to shower—” Alec combed his fingers through his sex-mussed hair, the sudden anxiety of his schedule tightening his shoulders and creasing his forehead.

“No need.” Magnus snapped his fingers. “I got you. It’s not as satisfying as a shower— definitely not as satisfying as a shower with you, but it’s practical.” He paused, his eyes hungry as they raked over Alec’s body. “While I’m at it, you’re breathtaking nudity is distracting.” He snapped his fingers again, a fresh outfit appearing directly on Alec’s body. Dark wash designer jeans, a modal cotton black v-neck, and a maroon cashmere cardigan combined for the perfect lived-in casual hipster aesthetic. Not visible were the luxurious boxer briefs hidden beneath the jeans, their deep garnet shade complementing the cardigan, but mostly complementing Alec’s alabaster skin tone.

“A cardigan? Really? I look like a dorky professor.” Alec yanked at the sleeves, pulling the cuffs further down his wrists.

“No, you look like a man who knows how to dress himself. I know this might be strange and scary for you— it doesn’t have a single hole in it— but I think you’ll adjust.” Magnus slid his hand into Alec’s leading him toward the bedroom door. “Now come on, if Jem and Tessa get here on time you can say hello to all them before I portal you to the shop for that appointment.” Like clockwork, a portal opened into the living room just when Alec and Magnus left the bedroom.

“Papa!” Aerulei darted forward, slamming into Magnus. “Uncle Jem took us to the British Museum and I saw a mummy!”
“Mum-mee” Keris clapped his hands, wiggling in Jem’s skinny arms. Jem was healthier looking than he was when Magnus knew him in the 1800’s, but he was still lithe and rangy compared to most nephilim. His once silver hair was dark, with only a single platinum streak down the front.

“Yes, we saw mummies, but more importantly we saw sarcophagi, and recreated murals— they even let me— I mean us — touch a tiny pot taken from a real tomb.”

“It used to hold makeups Papa!” Aerulei squealed in delight, her excitement growing to an unsurmounted degree when she spotted Alec. “Mister Alec you’re here!” She jumped up and down like a rabbit, hopping over to Alec and holding up her hands for him to pick her up. He didn’t oblige, instead giving her a pat on the head and ruffling her hair. “You came back I knew you would!”

“He did Aya, but mostly because someone cursed him— he can’t go back to his house.”

“Curses?” Jem opened his dark eyes wide. “Keris— I hope you never learn how to curse people, that’s bad.” He turned back to Magnus. “So now I suppose you have to track down the warlock who set the curse? Do you need Tessa and I to keep the kids? We really wouldn’t mind—”

“Where is the lovely Tessa?” Magnus looked around Jem to see if she was lurking behind him. “I was hoping to introduce both of you to my boyfriend, Alexander.”

“Tessa had a terrible bout of nighttime morning sickness, but she sends her regards.” Jem took a slow and calculated step toward Alec. “Actually, I think we’ve met before, Alec Lightwood.” Jem looked at Alec with a curious, yet knowing smile. “Although I’m not sure you remember me this way, do you?”

“I’m sorry, I’m terrible with faces.” Alec shook his head. Keris turned his attention away from Jem, reaching out for Alec, opening and closing his little fists in a silent plea to be held. Jem passed over the baby, looking altogether disappointed.

“I’m Jem Carstairs, but for over a century, I was known as Brother Zachariah. I, like you, no longer bear my marks.”

“Brother Zachariah? From my parabatai cerem—” Alec was cut off by a very defiant Aerulei.

“Hold the phone!” She yelled. “Hold. The. Phone. Papa are you and Mister Alec officially boyfriends now?”

“Yes, sayang , but that doesn’t mean you can interrupt Alexander while he’s talking to Uncle Jem.”

“So that means it worked!” Aya did a little dance, shaking her butt and waving her arms around. “It worked! It worked! It worked!” She chanted. Magnus’ jaw tightened as he realized what she was so excited about— he knew who placed the curse on Alec. It was a simple enough curse, requiring just an object of the target, a basic casting pentacle, and enough magic to siphon the life energy from the object.

“Jem, I hate to kick you out, you’ve been lovely and such a help with the kids, but I think I have a lead on the warlock who cast the curse. I should find them and make sure they’re properly apprehended for their transgressions.” Magnus gestured to Aya with his head and Jem quickly got the hint, quickly stepping back through the portal Tessa never closed. “Alexander, I think you should go too—” Magnus waved his hand, opening a portal to Inkwell. He grabbed Keris from Alec’s arms, bouncing the baby on his hip. “Just so you don’t get lost in limbo, this goes directly inside of Inkwell, into your back room. Don’t worry—” He winked at Alec. “I’ll text you. After I
deal with a certain daughter of mine who apparently doesn’t know it’s okay to cast curses on people we like.”

“Actually— before I go. I wanted to ask you—all three of you—if you wanted to come to Thanksgiving at the farm. Last time I asked, it wasn’t under the best, well—” Alec scratched the back of his neck nervously. “Well it’s a family invitation. I’d love to have you guys there, so would everyone else. So, would you all like to come to Thanksgiving Dinner?”

“I would love to— what about you Keris?” Magnus pressed his forehead to his son’s. With a faint copper glow passing between them, Magnus’ mind was filled with images of trees, farm animals, food, and colors—all of them happy and cheerful. “Can you say yes to Mister Alec?”

“Yes!” Keris cheered and kicked his feet.

“Now Aerulei, before you answer, is there something else you need to say to him?” Magnus’ tone was fatherly and stern, making Aya squirm and pout. She clearly knew what she did was wrong.

“I’m sorry Mister Alec.” She looked down at the floor, her hands clasped behind her back as she shifted from side to side. “I’ll undo it.” She pulled a knotted blue piece of string off of her wrist, yanking it to break it in half. Magnus was kicking himself—he’d noticed the string earlier that morning, but he assumed it was some kind of friendship bracelet she’d made at Catarina’s the other night. He felt like a complete idiot, but at least he hadn’t had to ask Aya to break the curse—at least she had enough sense to break it herself.

“Sorry for what, Aerulei?” Magnus flexed his jaw in frustration—he knew she was dragging this out. The longer it took, the angrier he became with her actions. He nuzzled into Keris’ silver hair and breathed in his comforting baby smell, taking the edge off his nerves.

“For cursing him.” She snapped her head up, her blue eyes glistening as she smirked at Magnus. “Even if it did work and it made you guys be boyfriends.”

Magnus took a long breath, steadying himself. Keris played with the necklaces Magnus didn’t remember putting on—in honesty he didn’t remember magicking on clothes at all—just putting on his robe. Too many moments of dealing with things like his children cursing people must be making him lose his mind.

“Once Alexander is gone, we are going to have a long talk about this young lady. Now, would you like to go to Thanksgiving dinner at a farm with Mister Alec and Miss Maryse? Miss Izzy will be there too, if that impacts your answer.” It did—he knew she loved Izzy, and selfishly Magnus didn’t want her to say no. It was sweet of Alec to ask the kids, but it also meant that if one of them said no, he’d look like a jerk for going anyway. Despite saying ‘maybe’ to Alec’s first invitation, there was no way Magnus was going to say no now.

“Yes! Yes! Thanksgiving!” She cheered.

“Then it’s settled, Alexander. We will be taking you up on that invitation.” Magnus kissed Alec on the cheek, a brief smile on his face before he fell back into fatherly annoyance. “Now go—you’ll be late for your appointment.” He smacked Alec on the ass, nudging him toward the portal. Once he was through, Magnus’ anger bubbled over.

“Aya. I am going to put your brother in his crib. When I come back, you’re going to be sitting at the dining room table, and we are going to have a serious conversation about how dangerous curses are. Do you understand?”
She nodded, tears welling in her eyes. Before Magnus could lose his resolve via her waterworks, he walked down the hall, clutching Keris tight.

“Bunsó, please promise me when you get older, you’ll know better than to curse people.” He pressed a kiss to the top of his head, not missing the way it made Keris burrow deeper into his chest. Just a few more days and he would be away from the city, on a peaceful farm, spending time with Alec and his family. Just a few more days of dealing with all of this on his own. He could do it.

Wood, fire, leather, mothballs—all the smells of a cabin untouched for months. Every year for Thanksgiving, Luke, Maryse, Alec and Clary made the trek upstate to Garroway’s rustic farm. Most of the time, the house sat empty—being in the NYPD didn’t leave much time for weekend trips—but it still fostered a feeling of togetherness that couldn’t be matched by anyplace in New York. Alec and Luke arrived first, getting the heavy labor out of the way before the girls arrived. It wasn’t that they were misogynistic, or that they considered it ‘men’s work’, but Alec and Luke enjoyed the male bonding time wielding axes. Maryse was just as proficient with sharp objects as they were, and could carry double her weight in firewood, but Clary hated flying up alone, even if it was only an hour-long flight. So for a full two days, it was just the guys enjoying the serene quiet of rural New York.

The daytime was occupied by chopping wood, fixing the shutters, and cleaning the inside of the house. Alec took some of the exterior work, trimming bushes and raking leaves, while Luke insisted on checking the gutters and more importantly cleaning out the chimney. The warm fires in the house always reminded Alec of living at the Institute. Although the rugged farmhouse was nothing like the formidable cathedral of the Institute, it shared the same theme of a fireplace or wood burning stove in almost every room. The smell would hang in their jackets for weeks after, reminding them of what was always a fun and wonderful time spent with their patchwork family. It was strange to Alec how much he’d learned to look forward to mundane holidays. Before being deruned, he’d barely even heard of Thanksgiving, outside of the fact that the Macy’s parade was always a huge target for nefarious activity.

After a meditatively exhausting day of work, with evening quickly encroaching on nearly-gone daylight hours, Alec zipped up his jacket and took a seat out on the porch. One of his favorite things about coming up to the farm early was watching the early-evening sunset dip below the treeline, not a skyscraper sullying the landscape or car horn breaking the silence. His lungs thanked him for the fresh air, and his muscles were grateful for the practical exercise. Weathered and sturdy boards creaked beneath the chair as Alec meditatively rocked back and forth.

“Mind some company?” Luke threw himself down in the other rocking chair, kicking his boots up on the railing. He held out his arm to Alec, offering him a beer. Alec took it gratefully—Luke always had the best beer, never the fancy I.P.As that tasted like fruit, or the cloudy sour beers—just a rotation of classic, non-offensive ales and lagers. This time it was Bass Ale, the simple red and off-white label safe and familiar.

“Thanks.” Alec took a sip, watching the glow from the sun melt slowly to darker colors.

“I know I needed this after all that work today.” Luke grunted, adjusting his position to get more comfortable on the slatted wooden chair. “My old body doesn’t hold up as well as yours does.”
“You’re a wolf.” Alec rolled his eyes. “Even if you’re older, you’re still at least twice as strong as I am. Especially without my runes.”

“Runes or not, you still have game, Lightwood.” He took a long swig of his beer, savoring the taste. “I sure as hell still wouldn’t want to run into you in a dark alley.” He whistled. “From what I saw at your fight classes, you’re fighting even better than you ever have.”

“That’s not true.” He squinted his eyes, counting all the colors he could see. Pink, blue, yellow, red, orange, navy. Clary would have weird, complicated names for each of them— funny words like ‘cerulean’ or ‘burnt umber’. Alec was an artist too, but he never saw things in the same studied and refined way she did— he never used fancy ways to describe things. Alec drew designs, he put them on bodies. It was that simple.

“You don’t give yourself enough credit.” He paused. “You’re doing all of this on your own. And I know this might not mean a whole lot, but when I became a werewolf, I lost all of my Shadowhunter abilities— but they were replaced with new abilities. You lost your Shadowhunter abilities and essentially became a nephilim-blooded mundane. And you’ve done so much.”

“I just feel like I could be doing more, ya know?” Alec slapped off a fly that landed on the sleeve of his red and grey flannel shirt.


“I don’t know, it’s just—” Alec sucked in a sharp breath. “I’m not good enough. Not mature enough, or adult enough.” He gestured widely with his hands, his beer sloshing precariously in its bottle. “There’s so much I don’t have figured out because I spent so much time outside the mundane world.”

“Let me tell you a secret.” Luke angled his chair toward Alec, which took some effort since it was a rocking chair. “Everyone feels that way in their twenties. Unsure, lost, like everyone else has something figured out that you don’t. Even if your entire world didn’t get turned upside down, you’d still probably feel this way. It’s normal.”

“I just used to know exactly what I was supposed to do, you know? My whole life was planned out for me, I had clear goals.”

“You didn’t have very many choices back then. But you do now. You chose to open up the shop— which from what I hear from my pack has been drumming up an excellent reputation. You work an extra job to help out with the bills, and you took Clary under your wing like one of your own.” Luke laughed. “I know I’m being a huge sap, but cut me some slack. It’s Thanksgiving, and I think you have a lot more to be thankful for than you know.”

“Well there are some things I know I’m thankful for.” Alec squinted at the treeline, darkening deeper by the minute. Right now the dominant color was a coppery-orange, the same color as Keris’ eyes.

“You’re not referencing a certain warlock and his two beautiful children, are you?”

Alec blushed, sipping at his beer. “That’s the first thing that comes to mind, yeah.” He spoke through his smile— an action that was new to Alec. His whole life, until a few years ago, he wasn’t known for smiling. Now, he felt like he did it all the time.

“And I’m guessing that nothing else in your life comes close to that.” Luke finished off his beer. “Hey, did you invite him up here for dinner? Last time I asked you just said ‘we’ll see’. If he’s
coming, we can clean out the smaller cabin in the back for him and the kids if he wants.”

“Yeah, he just told me yesterday that they can make it. I didn’t want you and mom to get your hopes up until I knew for sure.”

“Good call. If Maryse thought Keris would be here and then Magnus didn’t show, she’d be broken.” Luke popped back inside quickly, the screen door rattling closed behind him. Moments later, he returned with two more beers.

“She knows she can’t steal either of them, right?” Alec sucked down the remainder of his first bottle, reaching out for the second. Luke opened it with his Swiss army knife key-ring and passed it over.

“Why? Because you already have dibs?” Luke raised his eyebrow, popping off his own bottle-cap.

“I think…” Alec paused, searching for the right words. “I think the kids have already kind of stolen me. They’re very… attached.” Alec peeled back the corners of the bottle label, needing something to fidget with.

“You say that like it’s a bad thing. What are you worried about?”

“I don’t even know what I should be worried about. But I feel like I should be worried about something, right?” Alec shook his head. “To be honest, I was so nervous even inviting them to this. I know mundane traditions don’t mean as much to downworlders, but I’m still inviting Magnus and his family to a holiday dinner, far from home, with you and my mom. It’s a pretty big step, I think. I have no clue if I’m doing any of this right.”

“Any of what right?” Luke asked earnestly, but it sounded like he knew something Alec didn’t—like this conversation was familiar to him.

“Dating? The kids? It’s all so confusing.” Alec took a long sip of beer he didn’t know he needed until those words left his mouth.

“Let me throw you a bone here. I was in the same boat with Jocelyn. She was a single mom with a young kid. And just like Magnus, she had some major baggage.”

Alec snorted. “At least Magnus doesn’t have Valentine Morgenstern coming after his kids.”


Before the conversation could dive any deeper, Alec’s phone pinged, grabbing his attention.

“I didn’t know you got phone service out here.” Alec remarked.

“If it’s from Magnus, I almost guarantee he’s not using any of the major phone carriers’ networks.” Luke chugged down three noisy gulps of beer. “What’s he saying?”

“Nothing, it’s just a picture of the kids. Apparently they went shopping for outdoor gear today. Look—” He held out the phone to Luke. “They got matching hats.”

The picture was a selfie, Magnus straining his arm out as far as possible to get everyone in the shot. They each wore sherpa-lined hats with big ear flaps. Keris was yanking at Aya’s, pulling the front down over her eyes.
Before Luke could comment on the picture, another came through. It was Magnus’ beautifully manicured golden nails holding another hat, captioned.

“*We got one for you too.*”

“Rafe, are you excited to meet Grandma and Uncle Alec?” Isabelle leaned into Simon’s van, unbuckling the cumbersome car seat. She wasn’t used to these things yet, but her mom assured her hundreds of times on the phone that she would adjust—it was just a long time coming. Rafael was five—old enough to unbuckle himself—but he was reluctant to leave the safety of the car. Ever since she took him in, Rafael was shy, suffering from anxiety and nightmares, remnants of the trauma he experienced at the Buenos Aires Institute. He was small for his age, and barely spoke English, but Isabelle was confident that with time, she could get him out of his shell. And now that the adoption was officially approved by the Clave, all she had was time.

“Iz, you need any help with Rafe?” Simon huffed dramatically as he lifted heavy suitcases from the back of the van. He was a vampire—he could easily handle things twice as heavy—but to be on the safe side, he needed to put on a show and pretend to keep up the ruse for Clary. “If not, I’m going to start taking all of… *this* in.”

“I think we have it handled, you can head in.” She dismissed him with a wave of her well-manicured hand, her red coffin nails in pristine condition considering she was a mother of a five year old. Her attention never drifted from Rafe, her eyes coaxing him to get out of the car on his own. The more this was his own idea, the easier the rest of this would go. He wouldn’t budge, leaving her only option to scoop him up in her arms. “Alright then, *vamanos*. Everyone is so excited to see you!” She nuzzled into his dark wild hair, making him quietly giggle.

“*Estoy nervioso.*” He whispered when his giggle slowed. As they got to the steps of the house, she put him down, kneeling to his level.

“I know *mijo*, but it’s going to be fine.” She smoothed his hair, adjusting the hem of his too-big wool sweater. “Now remember, Grandma and I speak Spanish. Uncle Alec knows some, but everyone else doesn’t. So we can practice our English this week, okay? I know it’s hard, but I’m here to help, ¿*claro*?”

“*Claro*.” He nodded with the austerity of a Shadowhunter accepting a top-secret mission from the Clave. “I try my best, promise.”

“I know you will.” She held out her hand for him, and he gripped it tight. “Are you ready?” He nodded. “Okay then!”

They walked up the steps and the door was already opening, Simon scooting past them to go back to the van for the rest of the bags.

“Is Simon leaving?” Rafe said, his voice slightly panicked.

“No, of course not. He’s just going back to the van.”
“Oh, okay.” Rafe mumbled.

“Let’s find Grandma!” She walked through the house, checking the kitchen first, but Maryse wasn’t there. The living room was empty too, and the master bedroom on the ground floor didn’t have any of her things. Someone was clearly home—a well tended fire roared in the hearth, begging for someone to curl up on the couch with a book and lose track of time. She might take it up on that offer later, but for now she needed to figure out who was here. “Huh, it seems like she might not be here yet. Hello? Anyone here?” Isabelle called out.

“Izzy!” Alec opened the door from the basement looking rather haphazard, his dark hair dripping wet and clinging to his forehead. He’d just taken a shower, and he was now dressed in well-worn sweatpants and a dark blue t-shirt, the hem riddled with holes from opening twist-cap bottles. Emerging from his subterranean domain, he looked cozy and relaxed. True to his introvert nature, Alec had claimed the dark, cold basement bedroom for himself, as far away from everyone else as possible. It even had its own bathroom, so he could hide out down there alone forever and nobody would notice. Clary’s room in the attic was technically more isolated, but she wasn’t going to give up that well-lit studio space. On the second floor, there were two more bedrooms, one for her and Simon, and one for Rafe.

“Hi big brother.” She pulled Alec into a one-armed hug, careful not to let go of Rafael’s hand. “This is Rafael.” The little boy had already hidden himself behind her, so she shifted him sideways so Alec could see him.

“Hey,” Alec knelt, aware his towering height was intimidating to kids. Isabelle beamed at the gesture, proud of how fatherly her brother was. She could only imagine how good he was with the Bane children. “I’m Alec. I’ve heard so much about you.”

Rafael buried his head in Isabelle’s pant leg, his shyness getting the best of him. He peeked one eye out occasionally before hiding back away. Clearly he was curious about Alec, but wasn’t comfortable enough to engage yet.

“It’s okay, I get nervous around strangers too. Are you hungry? Do you want some mac and cheese?”

“Mama Isabelle no puede cocinar. Todo lo que cocina ella es horrible.” He mumbled. “But I like macaronis.” At that, he finally looked directly at Alec, his face vulnerable yet somehow trusting. In terms of introductions, this was one of Rafael’s best yet—and for it to be with someone as hard to crack as Alec was remarkable.

“Okay, well I’m not the best cook either, but reliable sources say my boxed macaroni is pretty good. Do you want to help stir the noodles?”

“I’m too short.” Rafe bit his lip, looking to the side. He was self-conscious of his size. The other kids his age were much bigger and stronger, and he had a hard time keeping up with their basic fight training.

“Nonsense. You’re a Shadowhunter, you can do anything. Some of the best Shadowhunters I knew were short.” He was referring to Clary, of course—not that he could say it. Alec ruffled the boy’s dark wavy hair, heading to the kitchen. To Isabelle’s surprise, Rafe followed behind him step for step.

Isabelle then remembered that Magnus and his kids were likely coming up too. But last time Isabelle heard, it was a definite maybe—yet to be confirmed. With the limited number of rooms in the house, that meant that Magnus’ daughter Aya would have to share a room with Rafael, which
depending on first impressions could be a fiasco for everyone involved. For now, she allowed herself to enjoy this easy peace, to watch this new easygoing side of Rafael come out. She couldn’t be happier that he liked Alec— it was one step closer to making Rafe feel like a part of the Lightwood family.

The ride home from the airport was hell— over two hours spent on I-87 North for what should have been an easy forty-five minute drive. Maryse and Clary were tired from their flight, complaining about the woes of holiday airport crowds, lamenting over missing lunch, and vowing to ride up with Luke next year, avoiding the hour long flight at all cost. It took longer to get to the airport and go through security than it did to fly to Albany, and even then it was still almost an hour to the farm. Clary and Maryse brushed off any and all suggestions of getting a license, claiming it was useless since they never left the city.

“Clary, can you please leave the radio alone. There are only three channels out here, and flipping between them constantly isn’t going to change the fact that you don’t like any of the music.” Luke sighed as Clary pressed the seek button again. His truck was old— it didn’t even have an AUX port, let alone the fancy Bluetooth kids were used to these days. “Why didn’t you just bring headphones?”

“I did, but my ears are tired from wearing them on the plane.” She put her bare feet up on the dashboard— at some point she’d discarded her shoes. Her toes were painted different shades of orange and red, each nail a different color like the hand-print-turkey crafts she brought home in elementary school. Maryse was in the back seat, laying horizontally and taking a nap, her jacket bunched under her head serving as a makeshift pillow.

“We’re almost there, I think you can survive twenty more minutes.”

“Fine. But in twenty minutes, Simon, Alec and I are popping open the beers and completing the shotgun ritual.” The shotgun ritual was something stupid the three of them came up with— likely Simon— where they each shotgunned a beer and then Clary took Luke’s shotgun and pointed at the sky, shooting with reckless abandon. There was a bonfire involved, and they drank until they eventually stumbled back inside and fell asleep in the living room.

“There are so many reasons why that is a bad idea this year.” Luke shook his head. Simon, Clary and Alec might all be adults now, but they still acted like such children sometimes. It made him nostalgic for his youth, even if his youth was spent in Alicante at the Shadowhunter Academy.

“Why? If this is because of the window last year, I promise we’ll be more careful.” She sounded disappointed and confused.

“First off, Isabelle came with Simon this year. She isn’t fond of guns.” Most Shadowhunters weren’t fond of guns— they were a coward’s weapon, and couldn’t be runed or forged with adamas, therefore they couldn’t kill demons. “Second, there are going to be kids there. If Simon’s already there, Rafael is already there too. No guns around kids.”

“Raphael? Like Raphael Santiago, Alec's client? I knew he was young, but I wouldn’t consider him a kid…”

“No.” Luke scrunched his face in disbelief— the thought of Raphael at a family dinner was
preposterous. “Rafael Lightwood. Isabelle recently adopted a little boy. Plus, Alec’s boyfriend Magnus is bringing his kids too.”

“Boyfriend!” Clary squealed. “They’re *boyfriends* now!”

“Who? What are you talking about?” Maryse stirred, pulling up her sleeping mask.

“Oh, sorry Maryse! I didn’t mean to wake you up!” Clary glanced in the rear-view mirror, flashing her best apologetic puppy-dog eyes at Maryse.

“It’s okay Clary, I’ll have to wake up sometime. So what were you so excited about?”

“Magnus and Alec are officially *boyfriends* now.” Clary proclaimed with unbridled glee.

“I assumed they already were. But anyway, that’s wonderful news.”

“And Magnus is bringing the kids to Thanksgiving! And Isabelle’s kid Rafael will be there, and I’m already convinced it’s going to be the cutest thing. Oh my god, that means Simon is kinda like a step dad! I mean he and Isabelle aren’t married or anything, but they live together so—”


“Especially Rafael— he’s a bit shy. He’s been through a lot.” Maryse’s voice was quiet as she stared out the window. Luke knew there were so many things about little Rafael’s story they couldn’t explain to Clary, things about Shadowhunters she couldn’t know— so Maryse contemplated them in silence.

“Well then, he’ll fit right in.” Clary smiled, and for a minute it felt like she understood there was more to the story than the superficial details. Luke knew how risky it was having her at Thanksgiving dinner with two ex-Shadowhunters, two active Shadowhunters, three warlocks and a vampire, but he had a feeling that it was all going to be fine— or at least there was a possibility it might be. Either way, they were about to find out.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, the multi-chapter saga at the Garroway farm continues!
That next chapter should be coming out ahead of schedule!
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

As the ramp-up to Thanksgiving continues, Magnus and the kids arrive at the farm. Also: Izzy tries to make cranberry sauce.

Chapter Notes

I know this is posted off-schedule but... here you go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Magnus drove up to the old farmhouse— it was just as he remembered it, if only a little better maintained. It was a formidable cabin-style home, but in a nontraditional and unique design, still had the standard two levels and a basement of a farm home. It wasn’t Magnus’ style, but he had to admit it had a certain rustic charm.

“Magnus!” Simon and Izzy bumbled down the stairs the second he shifted the rover into park, racing to pull him into a hug.

“Slow down, you two,” Magnus slid out of the car, snapping his fingers and opening the back doors to start unloading the children. “The Bane Clan has not exited the Range Rover yet.”

“My sincerest apologies, O’ High Warlock. Actually, wouldn’t it be Grand Warlock?” Simon bowed dramatically. Magnus kicked himself for discussing his future job responsibilities with Simon. Simon was too easy to talk to— his existence had to be the work of some terrible demon— which was why he always seemed to know things he shouldn’t.

“Simon! No downworlder talk! What if Clary hears you?” Isabelle was seething— this clearly wasn’t the first time she’d warned him about this today.

“I’m not sure it’s going to matter soon, what with her dating Jace and all.”

“She’s dating Jace?” Magnus’ jaw nearly dropped to the gravel floor. “We don’t have time to deal with all of that right now, but we are definitely talking about it later. With booze— and potentially hypnotism for the Fairchild girl.”

“Fray, Magnus.” Isabelle warned. “Speaking of which, do you have the kids under control?” She spoke through the car door as Magnus wrestled Keris out of his car seat. Aya already let herself out, pushing past her dad and brother and hopping out of the car.

“Yes. We are well controlled!” She cheered, holding up her wrists. “Keris has some, too.” Magnus emerged holding Keris, looking frazzled.

“What she’s neglecting to tell you is that she didn’t need to be wearing hers— she can handle her magic on her own. But someone decided it was a good idea to set a minor curse on Alec, so she’s
in magical quarantine for one week.” Magnus awkwardly reached into the car, pulling out an oversized and overstuffed Marc Jacobs backpack, looping it around Aya’s shoulders.

“Papa, can’t I please use magic to make this lighter? This is impossible.” She stomped her feet, whining and pulling at the straps.

“Not until you learn your lesson about cursing people— especially Alexander. Until then, it’s dampener bracelets for you, sayang.”

“I hate you.” Aya proclaimed with the vengeance of a fearsome dictator.

“No you don’t, you just hate dealing with the consequences of your actions.” Magnus rolled his eyes, not in the mood for childhood drama and travel in the same day. “I think one-week was a gracious punishment.”

“A whole week is forever.” She pouted, looking to Izzy for some kind of support.

“Curses are no joke mija.” Isabelle shook her head. “Are you excited to meet your new friend?”

“A new friend?” Aya furrowed her brow, turning to Magnus for an explanation. “You didn’t say anything about new friends, Papa.”

“It’s okay Aya— he’s quiet like you.” Isabelle said.

“I’m not quiet.” She crossed her arms in frustration. “I just don’t like people.”

“That’s not polite, you should give him a chance.” Magnus’ tone bordered sweet and scolding.

“Fine. But only if I get cookies.” Aya huffed. “Lots of cookies.”

“I might have promised her some of Luke’s sugar cookies.” Magnus winced. “I hope he still makes them?”

“Oh he does!” Simon beamed. “Why else would I be here?” Isabelle slapped him on the back of his head hard enough to make his glasses rattle, threatening to fall off his nose.

“Well then, why don’t we get inside and get settled?” Isabelle sighed, wrapping Aya up in her arms and carrying her into the house while Simon unloaded Magnus’ bags from the car and dragged them up the stairs. This was it— Magnus was really here. Once he entered the house, he was literally taking a step into a new stage in his relationship with Alec— a stage where they shared the holidays, and eventually where they would share families. He pushed down any jitters, squashed any ill-intentioned butterflies, and smiled to Keris.

“Come on sayang. We’re going to have so much fun.”

“Mister Alecccccc!” Aerulei whined. “My marshmallow is on fire again.” Everyone thought it was funny until they looked over, her marshmallow a flaming torch.

“Aya— no.” Rafe snatched the stick from her hand, commandeering the marshmallow.

“Rafe, give it to a grown-up please.” Isabelle pleaded, holding out her hand. He ignored her,
sucking in a deep breath. Puffing out all the air in his lungs at full force, he extinguished the marshmallow and handed it back to Aerulei, who was amazed at his bravery.

“Wow! Rafe! You did that without magic?” She was amazed. Her eyes were wide, two glamourd baby-blue irises reflecting the firelight. Magnus refrained from throwing her a warning glare— while Aya knew she needed to not discuss magic in front of Clary, this was innocent enough. Kids talked about magic all the time. The marshmallow was black— burned to hell— but Aya munched on it happily anyway.

“Aerulei, sweetheart—” Maryse scooted over onto the log the kids were sitting on, bag box of graham crackers and bag of chocolates in hand. “Don’t you want to make s’mores?”

“I love you Miss Lightwood— but you should leave this to the professionals.” Simon pushed up his fake glasses, joining the kids and Maryse on the now very crowded log. Aya eyed him with suspicion, leaning in closer to Maryse.

“No, I want Miss Maryse to help.”

Rafe pulled at the sleeve of Simon’s worn denim jacket, the one covered in pins and patches from indie bands and terrible puns. Simon leaned over to listen as the little boy whispered to him, grinning ear to ear at whatever he heard.

“Of course little hero, I’ll help you.” In their own unique maternal and paternal ways, Simon and Maryse went about helping the kids build s’mores. Maryse’s was perfect, all clean edges with only a single piece of chocolate. In contrast, Simon’s creation was a monstrosity— a tower of marshmallow and chocolate, oozing out the sides and creating a mess. Neither of the kids seemed pleased with the outcome, eyeing each other’s s’more enviously. Aya cautiously poked Rafe on the shoulder, holding out hers to him, and he eagerly obliged, swapping them out.

“Is it good Aya?” Magnus asked, watching with concern as his daughter wrapped her whole mouth around the steaming mess of sugar— he knew she’d have a hard time going to bed tonight, but it would be worth it. “You’re getting marshmallow in your hair.” Magnus stood up, walking around the fire to go tame Aya’s long hair, pulling it back into a braid and discreetly removing the marshmallow with magic as he crossed the pieces into a neat plait.

“Hey pumpkin—” Alec shifted Keris’ weight to his other knee, carefully pulling off a cooled marshmallow from his stick. “Do you want to try a little marshmallow?” Alec held up the toasted marshmallow to the baby’s mouth, watching eagerly as he took a huge bite, fluff covering his chubby cheeks and red lips. He was bundled up like a mummy, a fuzzy jumpsuit, jacket and hat protecting him from the chilly late-November air. It was a sight to be seen— the picture of domesticity— Alec feeding the warlock’s son sticky marshmallows. Alec and Keris had matching crooked smiles, completely enraptured in each other. “What are we gonna do about this sticky face, huh?” Keris laughed, placing a big sticky kiss on Alec’s stubbly cheek. “Hey there mister—”

“Yeah baby-K, a man’s beard is sacred.” Simon chimed in.

“Baby-k? No— not going to happen.” Magnus shot down the nickname. “It makes my child sound like a b-list rapper from the early 2000’s.” Satisfied with the state of Aya’s hair, he walked back to join Alec on their bench, snuggling up close. He leaned in, wrapping his Pendleton wool blanket around their shoulders, and whispered in his ear. “Here, let me get that for you.” He reached out with his tongue, licking the sticky sugar from Alec’s cheek.

“Eww! Gross!” Aya yelled.
At the same time, Rafael yelled. “¡Que asco!” While Aya didn’t understand Spanish, his sentiment was clear.

“Get a room, you two.” Clary joked, kicking Alec in the thigh, nearly falling off her seat in the process.

“We can and we will!” Magnus huffed, grabbing Alec’s hand and trying to yank him up. Alec didn’t budge, gripping tightly to Keris.

“Simmer down, enjoy the s’mores, have another beer.” Luke wasn’t asking, reaching over to hand Magnus a cold beer wrapped in a koozie to protect his hands from the chill.

Alec discreetly turned to Magnus, whispering. “Don’t worry— we’ll go to bed soon enough. You can make as big of a show about it as you want.” Magnus turned and kissed Alec straight on the mouth, a quick chaste kiss. Alec tasted like beer, chocolate, and sweet smoky tobacco from a cigar he shared with Luke— it made Magnus’ head spin with desire. The kids squealed again, covering their eyes, Izzy and Simon making lewd jokes.

“You have no idea how much I like the sound of that.” He linked his hand in Alec’s and wrapped tighter into the blanket, taking in the peaceful sight around him. Everyone was grouped around the roaring bonfire, smiles on their faces, wrapped in blankets, hats, and coats. It was a makeshift family, but it was more of a family than Magnus had ever seen. He was honored to be a part of it, and honored his kids got to be there. Most importantly, he was thankful.

Aerulei wasn’t sure how she felt about this house— it was big and cold and smelled kinda funny. Miss Maryse made her snuggle under an extra blanket, and it felt itchy. On top of that, she had to share a room with Rafael, which made her nervous. Keris was there too, and while he was annoying, at least he was her brother. She didn’t know Rafael, and he didn’t say much, so she wasn’t sure if she could ever get to know him. As she lay awake in bed, listening to the creaking walls, the wind against the windows, and Rafael’s snoring, she couldn’t help being a bit homesick. She debated going downstairs and bothering Papa, but he told her she wasn’t allowed to come into the bedroom if he was with Mister Alec, which was unfair in her opinion. Mister Alec liked snuggles just as much as Papa— she didn’t understand why they couldn’t all snuggle. If she wasn’t already in trouble from cursing Mister Alec, she would have risked it, but she didn’t want to be in trouble any longer than she already was.

The sound of muffled screaming broke her from her reverie— it was coming from the twin bed next to hers. Peeking over at Rafe, she saw his face was scrunched up, tears wetting the pillow below his face. Whenever she had nightmares, Papa always woke her up, told her a story, and made sure she went back into a happy sleep, not a scary sleep. She was nervous to intervene, but decided it was the right thing to do, rolling out of her borrowed bed and crossing the short distance to Rafe’s.

“Rafael.” She poked his shoulder, trying to wake him up. It didn’t work. “Rafe?” She shook his shoulder, but he barely stirred. She couldn’t make too much noise or else she’d wake Keris, and she didn’t want to hear him crying right now. “Rafe, wake up!” She hopped onto the bed, grabbing both his arms and shaking him.

“No me mates, por favor, por la Angel.” His eyes were squinted tight, his dark hair plastered
against his forehead with sweat

"Shh— Rafe, it’s okay. You are safe.”

"Mama Izzy?” He blinked his bleary eyes open.

“No, this is Aerulei.” She said in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Whoa— ojos de serpiente.” He said a mixture of wonder and caution.

“This isn’t going to work... Just don’t tell my Papa about this, okay?” Rafael nodded, and although it might be a bad idea, she trusted him. She looked around the room, making sure nobody was watching before slipping off her magic dampening wristbands. Waving her hands around in the air, she muttered to herself in a mixture of Latin and Purgatic, ending the spell with Lingua Franca. “Okay, do you understand me now?” She spoke slowly, testing out the translation spell Dorian had taught her.

“You are a very good warlock for a little girl.”

“I am not little! I’m almost five.” Whisper yelling was hard, and Aya almost lost track of her volume. Keris stirred in his crib, but calmed down after a few seconds— it was a close call.

“I’m almost six.” At first his voice was confident, but then he sounded a bit sad. Aya didn’t know why Rafe was so sad— she was hardly ever sad. “But I’m too small and short.”

“You are almost as small as me, but that’s okay. You’re a Shadowhunter— you need to be sneaky.”

“You know I’m a Shadowhunter?” He opened his brown eyes wide in surprise. Aya thought they looked like two chocolate truffles— the good kind she stole from the kitchen when Papa wasn’t looking. “How? I don’t have marks.”

“Nephilim blood.” She shrugged. “It makes your aura weird and funny.”

“Well your eyes are funny.” Rafael quipped.

“That’s not very nice, but at least you don’t seem scared anymore. What was your nightmare about?”

He got quiet, unable to respond. Curling up into a ball, his face went pale as he remembered something that was clearly awful.

“It’s okay, you don’t have to tell me. Can I tell you a story?”

“Huh?” He pouted his lips, looking confused. Did nobody tell him stories?

“Whenever I have a nightmare, my Papa tells me a story and then I go to sleep thinking of the story and not the bad stuff.”

“Oh, but what kind of story?” He sounded skeptical, but Aya knew just the right story for him.

“A pirate story.” She smiled, her grin wicked in the moonlight. She hopped off the bed, grabbing her blanket from her own bed and dragging it over to Rafe’s. Crawling up, she laid down next to him on top of the covers, wrapping up in her blanket.

“I love pirates.” Rafe burrowed under his covers, pulling them up to his neck.
“Okay, so this is the story of this one time where my Uncle Ragnor, Auntie Cat and Papa were pirates in Peru…”

“Left or right?” Alec fluffed the pillows on the full-sized bed, giving it another disapproving glance. It was too small for him to sleep comfortably in by himself, so squeezing Magnus in as well would be a challenge.

“Whichever is farthest from the drafty window.” Magnus yawned. Fresh from the shower, his dark hair was still wet, and he rubbed at it furiously with a towel in a futile attempt to make it dry. The basement was incredibly damp, so there was a very good chance his hair would still be wet in the morning.

“Right it is, then.” Alec pulled back the covers on Magnus’ side, giving the pillow one last fluff. Magnus dropped his towel, hanging it on the corner of the oak shaker-style bed frame. He pulled on a pair of loose-fitting jade silk sleeping boxers and flopped down on the bed. The springs on the old mattress creaked beneath him at the impact, making Alec wonder how much strain the bed could actually take. He logged away the question in his brain, not having enough energy to entertain the idea of anything sexual tonight.

“Is that all you’re wearing to sleep?” Alec asked, flicking off the overhead lights and joining Magnus on the bed. “It’s freezing down here.”

“Well some of us didn’t come prepared with turkey-printed pajamas.” He poked Alec in the stomach, and it tickled so much he nearly rolled off the bed.

“Hey!” He scratched his fingers at Magnus’ side, knowing it was one of his ticklish spots. “They’re flannel! It’s very warm!”

“And the turkeys?” Magnus scooted even closer to Alec— something he didn’t think was possible in this small of a space— and pressed a warm kiss against his laughing lips.

“Clary and I have matching pajamas. She thought it would be funny.” He wrapped his arm around Magnus, pressing their chests together as he kissed him slowly, taking his time to appreciate that after a hectic day, they were finally alone. When he broke away, he looked into eyes he couldn’t see in the dark, brushing their noses together playfully. “We didn’t always have all these kids around to keep us entertained, we had to get creative.”

“With pajamas? You guys must have been really desperate.” Magnus kissed Alec once more before rolling over, fitting their bodies together. He wiggled his ass tauntingly against Alec, but Alec only used it as a means to shift closer together.

“You know, Magnus.” Alec nuzzled against Magnus’ head, not caring if he was still damp, savoring the scent of his sandalwood shampoo— a scent which was now incredibly grounding. “I was so worried about you coming here. Worried somehow it would mess things up, or go too fast or—” Alec sucked in a deep breath. “All those things I was worried about— they seem silly now. Seeing you and the kids here today— how well everything just fits — I’m glad I didn’t let the anxiety get the best of me.”

“You, Alexander Lightweight, are tipsy and sappy.” Magnus scoffed. Alec didn’t understand how Magnus wasn’t at least a bit buzzed— the warlock had at least three more drinks than him, and
was much smaller than him. Smaller in terms of height and weight, at least.

“What?” He kissed Magnus neck, wrapping his arm around his waist tighter. “I’m not allowed to tell my boyfriend how happy I am that he’s here?” He kissed Magnus again. “Or how happy I am that he’s my boyfriend?” Alec loved that he could say that now— Magnus was his boyfriend. He was officially his. There was a word to solidify and justify what they meant to each other, and while he didn’t want to admit how much that mattered to him— it did.

“If you keep kissing me like that, I am not going to be responsible for my own actions, and neither of us will get the sleep we desperately need.”

“Good— I don’t want you to be responsible.” Alec didn’t— his heart wanted Magnus so much right now, but his body was pulling him closer to sleep by the second.

“Yes you do, or else you never would have put on those horrific pajamas.” Magnus snuggled into the fluffy down pillow, getting more comfortable.

“You laugh now— but you’ll thank me later. My cuddles are much warmer wrapped in flannel.” Alec pulled them together even closer, relaxing into their shared warmth. “Goodnight Magnus.”

He whispered. Exhausted from working around the farm, his mind muddled by the fireside beers, he drifted asleep immediately, not remembering if he even heard Magnus say ‘good night’ back. It didn’t matter if he did or not, because they were together, as close as they could be— it made Alec so happy he forgot that he barely even fit in this tiny bed.

Magnus jolted awake to the sound of the fire alarm blaring through the farmhouse. Immediately his heart raced, worried his children were in danger, that the house was burning down. Jumping to his feet, he noted Alec wasn’t in bed before he bolted upstairs to the kids’ room to grab them and make sure they were okay. Much to his relief, the tightness in his chest quickly dissipated once he came up from the basement. The source of the smoke was clear— Isabelle was cooking.

“¡Mamá! ¡Callate! ¡Puedo cocinarla!” Isabelle yelled loudly, clattering pots and pans warring for dominance to see who could make the most noise. It sounded like a telenovela— the spanish soap opera levels of histrionics. “¡Solo es la salsa de arándanos agrios, tengo capaz de prepararla!”

“I do not care how old you are, or that you are someone else’s mother now— you do not tell me to shut up, young lady!” Maryse already sounded exhausted by the whole situation in the kitchen, and judging by the clock in the living room, it was only 7:30 in the morning. The fire alarm was still going strong with no sign of it stopping any time soon. Maryse and Isabelle were too occupied arguing to notice. Magnus snapped his fingers and sound stopped. He decided it might be time to rescue them.

“¡Sal de la cocina hija inútil!” Maryse demanded angrily that Isabelle leave the kitchen, and Magnus didn’t blame her. Izzy’s cooking skills were notoriously awful. It was definitely time to mediate.

“Need any help in here ladies?” Magnus walked into the kitchen before Izzy could storm away, convinced he could easily smooth over the situation. Both women paled as he entered the room, looking embarrassed that someone overheard their argument. It was possible they’d forgotten they had guests this year. Isabelle was wearing a simple red sweater and black velvet leggings,
completely covered in powdered sugar. She was wearing a full face of makeup, the deep berry shade of her lips coordinating with the splattered cranberry sauce smeared across her forehead and cheeks. Maryse was the picture of domesticity in a fall sweater with embroidered leaves and well-worn jeans—a far cry from the serious and cold Shadowhunter she was when Magnus first met her. Her dark hair was tied back in a loose braid, matching Isabelle’s. There was one critical thing both of them were missing—at least in Magnus’ opinion.

“This won’t do, you’re missing a vital element of holiday cooking!” Magnus *tsked*. “Aprons!” He waved his hands and three matching aprons appeared in his hands, each with goofy prints and silly messages. These weren’t something he conjured from a store—these were his own personal stash, straight from his own pantry. Maryse and Izzy looked at their options, Maryse not keen on the prospects, Isabelle unable to choose which she wanted more. One said “Whip me” with a whisk below it. Another said “Once you put your meat in my mouth, you’re going to want to swallow.,” and the last one said “Kiss me, I’m Irish” in sequins with four leaf clovers on the chest. Maryse went for the clovers, Izzy for the whip, leaving Magnus with the dick jokes. He was pleased with everyone’s selection. “There, this is so much better.” Magnus put his apron on over his silk pajamas, not bothering to change. “I’m feeling more in the holiday spirit already! Well… not in the *spirit.* We should fix that too.”

“Great idea, Magnus!” Isabelle smiled, spinning around the kitchen and grabbing a bottle of rosé from a humble wine rack in the corner. “I hope you like rosé!”

“You little minx. You found out my secret.” Magnus opened and closed different cabinets until he found the wine glasses. Dramatically setting them on the counter, he spoke in his most serious voice. “I am a *slut* for rosé”

“Are you two really about to start drinking before breakfast?” Maryse scolded them. “Do I have to remind you that you both are *parents*?” She sighed, scrubbing at the mess of burnt sugar on the stove.

“That’s why we drink!” They said in unison, clinking their glasses.

“Exactly, Mama Lightwood. Look at your rowdy daughter—is she not driving you to drink?” Magnus poured a glass for Maryse, pushing it into her hand. “Let me get that,” He waved his hand, making the mess on the stove-top disappear.

“Oh you didn’t have to—” She started.

“No—you can say thank you by drinking up, mama.” Isabelle smiled, pushing the glass toward her mother’s mouth.

“Have you two been cooking without music this whole time?” Magnus realized in disbelief that aside from the earlier racket, the room was quiet.

“We haven’t exactly been cooking. Isabelle wanted to make the cranberry sauce early so that it would have time to set before dinner. I simply came in to make coffee and start breakfast and she’d nearly burned the house down already.”

Magnus couldn’t argue against that—she had set the fire alarms off.

“Well, what do we need to do to get breakfast ready?” Magnus offered. “Are we doing—”

“Pancakes!” Alec walked in, pecking Magnus on the cheek. Alec’s face was cold and prickled with a thick stubble bordering on a short beard. He smelled like firewood, smoke, and autumn leaves. “I
cook breakfast on Thanksgiving since Mom and Clary cook the rest of the day.” He leaned against the counter, wedging himself next to Magnus. It was like he just wanted to be as close as possible, but in an innocent way.

“Plus, breakfast is less complicated.” Maryse laughed. “Pancakes are something Alec is more than capable of.”

“Wait, are you guys drinking already?” Alec looked at their hands, all occupied with wine glasses. “Wine before coffee?” He shook his head. “And you guys get funny aprons? I feel left out.” He jokingly pouted, warming his hands by mindlessly rubbing Magnus’ shoulders.

“There’s no need for that, big brother.” Izzy smiled. “Because I think I’ve already overstayed my welcome in the kitchen.” She took off her apron, reaching high to loop it around Alec’s neck. “I’m going to go find the kids, make sure Simon hasn’t turned them all into anime nerds yet.”

“Oh, they’re outside with Luke. He’s driving them around in circles on the tractor. He even let Rafe pretend he was driving.”

“Rafe is never up before breakfast— I can barely get him out of bed most days. I drag him down to the cafeteria in his pajamas. The firetruck footie pjs go over great with all the Shadowhunters.” She rolled her eyes. “I swear they wouldn’t know fun if it slapped them in the face.”

Chapter End Notes

Check out this new fic by my beta, DianaCloudburst! Link: Red Ink

Next chapter will be the last Thanksgiving one, and then we return to our regularly scheduled programming of the plot, starting with the dinner at the Seelie Court! Are you excited? I’m excited
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

It's time to gather around the table— there's a lot to be thankful for.

Chapter Notes

Enjoy the last bit of Thanksgiving!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Aya, widen your stance.” Izzy yelled from the sidelines— she’d taken up residency on a stone bench in the backyard. Even if Magnus hadn’t heard her speak, he would have noticed her right away. Sunlight reflected off of her impossibly-shiny hair, her bright blue jacket contrasted with the half-dead grass.

“Yes, Miss Izzy.” Aya adjusted her feet, testing her balance in the new position. Circling Rafael, she stalked her opponent, throwing in a few light hits. To keep things safe, the kids were marking their blows since they didn’t have practice pads with them.

“Perfect!” Izzy praised. “Rafael, don’t go too easy on her, she’s trained.”

He nodded solemnly, redirecting his attention to the spar. His next punch landed on her thigh, catching her by surprise as he dipped under her outward block. Aya grunted in frustration, speeding up her movements to try to get a hit or kick in edgewise.

“What the hell are you doing with my daughter, Isabelle?” Magnus made his presence known, walking down the back porch to the yard.

“She said she wanted to fight, so she’s fighting.” Izzy shrugged, not taking her eyes off the kids— she was watching to see if they took her critiques. “Rafe trains every day, so I figured she could join him. That way he doesn’t have to skip a day, you know? So— I let them fight.”

“With no supervision?” Magnus huffed, placing his hand on his hip.

“I’m here, I’m supervising!” She waved her arm at the general expanse of the farm, signaling that she somehow had eyes on the whole thing, from the house to the lake to the property line.

“They’re at least ten yards away from you and you’re drunk.” She was trying to be discreet, but he saw through it. Protected from the elements in an insulated tumbler, her cranberry-wine certainly fended off the late November chill— if not also shielding her nerves from how rambunctious children could be during the holidays. “Speaking of more suitable supervision, where’s your darling Sydney?”

“Simon is helping mom with the cooking while Alec and Luke do weird farm stuff.” She made a face as she mentioned the agricultural nature of the house, but it was fitting. Isabelle Lightwood
baling hay or riding a tractor was something he was sure never happened in any of the infinite number of dimensions.

“ Weird farm stuff, you say?” Magnus sat down next to her, stealing the cup from her hands and taking a generous swig. Izzy looked at him skeptically, raising a perfectly arched and well-filled-in eyebrow—even on a holiday at a farm, Izzy’s makeup was perfection. “Don’t look at me that way, Lightwood!” Magnus slapped her arm. “If you get to be the drunk Aunt, I get to be the drunk Uncle.” He wrinkled his nose at the taste. Cranberry was an alright flavor—even the white-people obsession with the fruit couldn’t take that away from it—but fermented down into wine, it was repulsive. To cut the tartness, what had to amount to a cup of sugar a glass was added, making the whole beverage syrupy. It was suspicious that a berry with such a fragile flavor profile was successfully fermented at all, leading him to believe this was fortified with some other alcohol in the bottling process to make it passable. The entire concept was everything Magnus hated about the modern alcohol industry.

“Hey! I’m not drunk, I’m cranberry-sauced.” She snatched back her cup, taking a sheepish sip.

“So is that what you call the fire you set this morning?” Magnus stole the cup back, taking another sip.

“Sugar burns quickly! Okay?” She whined. Somewhere in the distance Magnus heard the kids scream. Izzy heard it too, their heads snapping around in unison. He didn’t like what they were looking at—Aya stood firm with both hands out, purple magic licking from the tips of her fingers. Rafe was on the ground, crouched, gripping a seraph dagger.

“Casthiel!” Rafe loudly named the blade, his lisp slurring the name of the angel. Apparently, even the angels heard through a speech impediment, since the blade flared to life, glowing in his tiny hands. His chest heaved as he took a steadying breath, all his muscles tensing—he was ready to pounce. Aya analyzed his every motion, the sparks coming from her hands blooming stronger and more threatening,

“Aerulei, Rafael! Stop!” Magnus commanded. In mere seconds he crossed the distance to the children. Outstretching his arms, he froze both of them in place. Like a puppet on a crumpled string, Rafael slowly rose to his feet, not of his own volition. “Care to tell me what the two of you were doing?”

Izzy ran up behind him, her breathing jagged. Magnus hadn’t even realized he’d portalled across the yard—he was too worried about the kids to notice.

“Rafael!” She panted. “Where did you get that dagger? I thought we said that stays with me.” She walked over to the little boy, kneeling at his side. Slowly releasing his magical hold on Rafe, he let Izzy take over on his parenting. He then turned all of his attention to Aya. Frozen in his grasp, quiet tears streamed down her face.

“Papa I’m sorry—I didn’t mean to make you scared!” Her frown deepened as her tears picked back up in speed.

“Aerulei, this is serious—a Nephilim blade won’t turn you to dust, but it will still hurt you. It can still kill you, do you understand? Shadowhunter weapons are extraordinarily dangerous.”

“But Papa— it’s not Rafe’s fault!” Her frown deepened as her tears picked back up in speed.
“That’s not what I’m saying at all—you need to let me finish.” Magnus firmly placed his hands on her shoulders, kneeling down to eye level. “You are too little to be having these types of scary grown-up fights. You both could get really hurt. Do you want to hurt Rafe?”

“No, I like Rafe!” She aggressively shook her head.

“So how would you feel if you accidentally hurt him, sayang?” Magnus kept his voice even, steady—authoritative but not aggressive.

“Bad! Really really super bad!” She chewed on her bottom lip, her unglamored eyes two glass marbles overfilled with tears.

“Now put back on your dampening bracelets.” Magnus wanted to press the issue further, but it was Thanksgiving. He didn’t want to have her memories be tainted by too much yelling. In the children’s defense, it was easy to get the wires crossed about what fight training was safe and what wasn’t. Magnus looked over to Izzy, who from the looks of it took a similar approach to discipline with Rafe. Izzy whispered something into Rafe’s ear, and they both made their way over to Magnus and Aya.

“Aya.” Rafe said quietly, staring at the ground. “I’m sorry I tried to fight you with knifes. Do you want to watch a movie? I’ll let you eat some of my popcorns.”

“I forgive you!” She jumped, giving Rafe a hug. It was amazing how at the mention of a movie, her waterworks dried up, as if her cheeks had been a desert for centuries.

“Aya, what do you say to Rafael?” Magnus warned.

“I’m sorry I tried to magic you Rafe!” She didn’t break away, hugging him tighter. “I’ll let you pick the movie!” She finally released him, grabbing him by the arm and pulling him toward the house.

“So, you’re on movie duty, I suppose?” Magnus asked Izzy as they slowly followed their children into the house. “I mean, it was your idea.”

“Yeah, sure.” She sighed. “I am the one who let Rafe get a hold of that dagger, so I deserve to watch Frozen for the 20th time.”


“I look forward to it. Oh—you should probably go check on Alec by the way. There’s only a few hours until dinner, and sometimes he gets carried away out in the barn and loses track of time.”

“What possibly is there to get carried away with in a barn that doesn’t house animals?” Magnus scoffed.

“It’s more of a workshop, really. It’s one of Alec’s favorite places. It’s right there!” Izzy pointed out.

“You don’t say?” Magnus mocked surprise. “The big red-and-white building? Wooden, taller than a house? Huge sliding doors to the outside? I never would have guessed.” He rolled his eyes, bumping their hips together. “But fine—I’ll pay Alexander a visit, remind him there’s a world outside.”
There was something oddly comforting about the smell of singed wood. In theory, there wasn’t much different about wood-burning than tattooing— the soldering iron even felt like the tattoo gun in Alec’s hand— but removing that human element made it much more relaxing, making his art completely solitary. Despite the chill of the barn, heat radiated from the worktable, motivating Alec to create more and more. Every line, twist and spiral delivered much-needed warmth, meditative and sustaining. A thick layer of grime coated his forearms, bare from rolling up the sleeves of his well-worn and heavily patched flannel shirt. Dust clung to his forehead and permeated his hair, a grey cast muting the black waves.

He wasn’t even working on a particular project. There was no goal set. A large, rough-hewn scrap of wood took up most of the table, low enough quality for it to be appropriate practice material. The only central theme on the board was lettering— different forms of script, serif and sans-serif, block-letter and variable width, cursive and print— random words spelled out for learning’s sake. Five swirling letters deep in the word ‘menagerie’, Alec didn’t notice the barn door slide open until he felt the chill permeate the open space.

“Alexander?” Magnus’ melodic voice sounded out of place in such a rugged, spartan space. It was classical music in a dive bar, caviar in a burger joint.

“Hey.” Alec switched off the soldering iron, careful of the hot tip as he placed it on the table. Magnus looked beautiful in a way Alec had rarely seen before. His makeup was minimal— Alec didn’t know much about makeup, but it seemed like Magnus was just wearing some eyeliner. His lips looked soft, but not glossy or pigmented— kissable. Anything Alec planned on saying was forgotten, his thoughts consumed with the idea of kissing his warlock boyfriend.

“Izzy mentioned you were probably in here working on something, and judging by the looks of it, you are. Care to share?” Magnus slinked over to the work table, planting his hands wide on the edge, leaning over to assess Alec’s work. Seeing Magnus bent over like that, his ass pressed out, his lower back arched, was a heart-stopping sight. Confounding matters worse, Alec knew the warlock wasn’t even trying— he was just naturally this sexy.  All the moisture left Alec’s throat, his tongue felt hydrophobic, his lungs strained against his ribs. As a secondary symptom, Alec coughed, trying to clear his throat in the process to little avail.

“I um…” Alec blushed. He didn’t know why he was so shy about being turned on by a man he’d had sex with twice. A man who was his boyfriend. “I’m practicing lettering for wood-burning. It’s something fun to learn to make gifts and stuff. It’s stupid, I know but—” Alec was ranting, the speed of his rambling picking up the more he looked at Magnus.

“Uh huh…” Magnus narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips— he could tell where Alec’s mind was, which only made Alec more flustered. Of course Magnus knew— he always knew— that’s why he was irresistible. Confidence was sexy, but coy confidence was fatal. “That seems… stimulating.” He leaned forward a bit more, wiggling his ass as he got closer to the table. With his deep-ruby manicured finger, he traced each letter of the word ‘nightingale’. Barely touching the surface, his movements were deft and nimble, broadcasting subliminally the other obscene talents of those gorgeous hands. “By all means, if I’m interrupting, I’ll leave you to it and fetch you when dinner is almost ready.” Magnus pushed back off the table, drifting toward the door. His gaze never left Alec, passive yet taunting.

Alec couldn’t stand it anymore— he let go of any self judgement for being aroused so easily, and acted on his impulses. An advantage of long arms, he was able to reach across the table, grabbing the warlock by the wrist before he was even a foot away from it. “Oh, you’re interrupting, but it’s
okay— I have something better to do anyway.” In an agile leap, Alec was over the table to Magnus in one swift movement, wrapping the warlock’s body from behind.

“And is that something better to do… a someone better to do?” Magnus sighed, bucking his hips back into Alec’s groin. Alec grunted at the unbelievable friction, wrapping his hands around his partner’s obliques and pulling their bodies flush together.

“It is.” Alec whispered to Magnus, nipping at his earlobe just enough to make the warlock quietly yelp. “But there are a few rules.”

“Are you getting kinky with—” Magnus started.

“Rule one.” Alec interrupted him. “You have to be quiet. The barn echoes.” He rolled his whole body, rubbing himself along every curve of Magnus, eliciting a moan from the warlock. “Rule two: this has to be quick— no locks. Rule three: follow rules one and two.”

“I think I can handle that.” Magnus voice cracked as Alec kissed the back of his neck, his stubble grazing his sensitive skin. It was amazing how much Magnus seemed to like his stubble, and Alec relished the new sexual leverage it gave him.

Before Alec realized what he was doing, he was reaching around, unbuckling Magnus’ belt and unbuttoning his jeans. Yanking his pants down to his knees, he left Magnus bare, his cock rubbing against the rough edge of the table, leaking and needy. Alec only unbuttoned his pants enough to expose his fly, pulling out his dick through the hole in his boxers. He was operating on some base, primal instinct, his body taking control of his every action.

“Do you need me to prep you?” Alec spoke through jagged breaths as he slid his hand up and down his cock, taking in the sight of Magnus’ ass spread out over his work bench. If he wasn’t careful, soon he would be coming, covering that gorgeous ass in come. As hot as that would be, now wasn’t the time.

“No, I’m ready for you darling.” Magnus arched his back, his body inviting Alec in.

Without any more pretense of ceremony, Alec lined his cock up with Magnus’ tight and hungry hole, pushing in with a single, fluid motion. Magnus’ shoulders tensed and his jaw flexed as he suppressed a groan. Only a ghost of the sound was audible, but Alec felt the vibrations rip through the warlock’s body. Fully hilted, the electricity surged beneath Alec’s skin, igniting his every nerve ending, pushing away any thoughts, feelings or sensations other than Magnus wrapped around him. He pulled back, thrusting back in rough and hard, moaning when Magnus pushed back greedily to meet him halfway.

There was nothing elegant or nuanced about this sex— it was nothing more than Alec pounding his boyfriend into a table, Magnus struggling to stay quiet as Alec destroyed him. Feeling the tightness build in his groin, Alec spat into his hand, reaching around to pump Magnus’ cock. Even if this was fast and dirty, he wanted— needed— them to come together, to feel everything all at once. Magnus switched from pushing back onto Alec’s cock to thrusting into his hand, letting Alec take full control of crashing into him. Betraying his efforts to stay silent, a guttural moan escaped Magnus’ lips— a single word dancing from his tongue.

“Alexander…” That was all it took for Alec to come, pleasure surging through his body as he rode out the waves of his orgasm, his hand never stopping as he tugged on Magnus’ cock. Through the cloud of his carnal bliss, he felt warm, thick wetness spread over his hand as he pumped through Magnus’ orgasm. As their bodies calmed, Alec nearly collapsed onto his boyfriend, satiated, happy, and relaxed— until he remembered they were naked from the waist down in the middle of a
barn. He hastily pulled out of Magnus, tucking away his dick in his underwear and zipping up his pants.

“No, too soon,” Magnus whined, burying his head in his arms on the table. “I like it when you stay inside of me and cuddle.”

“Magnus, we can’t cuddle here. You’re still bent over a table.” Alec rolled his eyes.

“Oh, would you look at that...” Magnus lifted his head, looking around the large drafty space. “I am, aren’t I?” He slowly stood up, swiping a cloud of magic over his body to clean himself before he pulled up his own pants. Even though he was just engaged in undeniable debauchery, Magnus looked adorable. His cheeks were flushed pink, his hair was rumpled, and his slit-pupils were dilated. “Hey— what are you staring at?” Magnus furrowed his brow defiantly.

“You have something in your hair.” Alec smiled, reaching out to pluck away a stray piece of hay. “I don’t know how it got there, since we don’t use this barn for animals, but...” He tossed it to the side. “I’m happy it found its way to you, because it was pretty cute.” He leaned in, capturing Magnus’ lips in a slow, comforting kiss. It was quiet and soft, no sexual pretense behind the affection, only pure and happy emotion.

“Well the bit of soot on your nose from burning things is pretty cute too.” Magnus giggled, rubbing his nose against Alec’s.

“You just had sex with me even though I had ash all over my face?” Alec tilted his head, kissing Magnus again.

“I would have sex with you no matter how you looked. Even, say...” Magnus kissed Alec, tracing his lips playfully with his tongue. “... if you were wearing turkey pajamas.”

“Is that an invitation for later tonight?” Alec smirked, squeezing his arms around Magnus.

“You never need an invitation, Alexander... but if it was, would you accept?” He looked up at Alec with his glorious, earth-shattering golden eyes, his cheeks still rosy, his hair still rumpled. How could he possibly say no?

“Of course— unless the turkey-coma sabotages our plans.” Alec chuckled.

“Are you saying that I could be cock-blocked by a turkey? That’s the wrong type of bird!” Magnus pouted. “Well, if that bird knows what’s good for it, it will back off. If it doesn’t, will you beat it up for me?” He fluttered his eyelashes, sending little flakes of mascara to his cheekbones.

“I’ve already beat it up plenty. There isn’t much more that can be done after I shot it with my compound bow.”

“You killed our dinner?” Magnus said with surprise, taking a step back from their embrace to properly look Alec square in the face.

“Uh, yeah? Is that a problem?” He untwined their arms, nervously scratching the back of his head. The thought had never occurred to him that Magnus might find hunting barbaric or cruel—it was much more innocuous than hunting demons, tamer than anything Alec had done as a Shadowhunter, but maybe it was different when it was an innocent animal.

“That’s good then, you had me worried for a second there.” Alec stepped back in, lightly pressing his lips to his boyfriend’s.

“Why, because you killed something?” Magnus spoke against Alec’s lips, his tongue pressing into his mouth. “I know what I signed up for, my beautiful nephilim. Shadowhunter or not, you’re a deadly force. At least… I know you’ll be the death of me. Especially if I get to see you work you magic with a bow…” He kissed Alec harder, fist ing his flannel shirt in his hands. If they kept going like this, Alec knew he wouldn’t be able to resist— they’d be going for round two, fucking in the barn again. From the deep recesses of his brain, a tiny bell reminded him that they had to sit down for dinner soon. This was a holiday— why they were here in the first place. Someone else made the decision for them, stopping any more potential action in its tracks.

“Alec? You still in here?” Simon called. The door slid open before Alec and Magnus had time to break apart. “Oh, I, uh—” He stammered. Vampires couldn’t blush, but Simon’s body was doing his best to try. “Sorry to interrupt, but the food is ready, and we could use some help setting up? No rush I mean just—” He shifted his weight uncomfortably. “I’m just going to turn around and go, and if you come in soon that would be cool. Okay, bye.” He nearly sprinted out of the barn.

“Do you think we should maybe head back inside?” Alec offered, looping his hand through Magnus’.

“Yeah— it might start to get suspicious otherwise. People might think we were having a romp in the hay.” Magnus nudged against Alec as they made their way out of the barn, still hand-in-hand.

“They’d be wrong— it wasn’t in the hay, it was bent over a table.” Alec was proud of himself— he was able to make a sexual joke, he wasn’t embarrassed by being caught, there wasn’t a hint of shame in his mind, not a trace of judgement. He just fucked his boyfriend in a barn before a family dinner, and he couldn’t be happier.

Certain mundane cooking tasks made Maryse miss the comforts of the New York Institute. The most particularly offensive of them all was carving a turkey. Everything about it was inconvenient — the shape of the bird, the bulky skeleton, the crispy but slick skin. There was no comfortable way to do it, leaving her to saw at the carcass dramatically with a serrated knife. Luke offered to do it in the past— she obviously declined— and she scoffed at the idea of an electric carving knife. This job was sheer muscle power, and she was more than capable. With each piece she shaved off, two piles grew on the table— one for dark meat, one for light meat.

“Magnus, I don’t know your preference, dear.” She looked up from the turkey, staring across the table at Magnus. “Do you want to claim any particular piece? Drumstick, perhaps?”

“I am absolutely fine with whatever you give me. I love a good breast… but I also love thighs, legs, gorgeous hazel eyes…” He winked.

His eyes were glamoured— so were Aerulei’s. Keris didn’t seem to be glamoured, but it was hard to tell. He was all chubby limbs wrapped in copper-orange wool, a flash of wispy silver hair, and matching copper eyes. While warlocks were known to be marked more subtly— Malcom Fade, the high warlock of Los Angeles only had white hair and purple eyes— it was highly uncommon. She knew it would be rude to ask, but she selfishly hoped that she could take over a diaper change or two. Her curiosity was rooted in the fact that she wanted to know everything beautiful about these
children that were quickly stealing her heart.

“Aya.” Rafe tugged nervously at Aya’s fluffy silver sleeve. He didn’t know why she was so dressed up for eating inside a house, but he liked the sparkles. “How do you say that food—” He pointed over to a glass pan of shiny orange vegetables covered in marshmallows. Maybe it was fruit, but it didn’t have any seeds. He was thoroughly confused. “And…” He continued nervously. “What is it?”

“I think it’s sweet potatoes.” She scrunched her face up in concentration, like she was trying to find out through intimidation. “But I don’t know why there are marshmallows.”

“Maybe it’s the extra from s—” He struggled through the word. “S— s’mores.”

“Hmm.” She pursed her lips tightly, twitching her mouth to the side. “These are too small. The other marshmallows were bigger.”

“It looks yummy.” Rafe whispered to Aya. He licked his lips, watching Luke dish out a generous helping to his plate.

“It probably is. I’ll ask for some so you can try too.” She was confident— Rafe was jealous of that— but somehow she used it to help. He would have been too nervous to ask Mister Luke if he could try it— so far, all he had on his plate were the things Mama Izzy put there for him. Having a friend like Aya was new and weird since he never fit in with the other kids at the Institute, but somehow a warlock liked him better than the other Shadowhunters. If these were the types of people Mama Izzy knew, Rafael was even more excited to be a part of this family— he was thankful.

Luke triumphantly held the wishbone above his head, raising it to the heavens in a dramatic offering.

As he made the grand gesture, Clary chanted. “Oh all-powerful wishbone… Give us your infinite wisdom and ever-flowing truths.”

“Ohm …” Simon hummed.

“Wishbone, I command you to select your most loyal subjugates!” Clary raised her upturned hands. “It has spoken! The chosen two are…” Her green eyes snapped open wide as she pointed across the table. “Alec and Magnus!”

Luke held out the wishbone to the couple with a reverence Alec couldn’t understand. “Take it, it won’t bite, just divine your entire future.”

“You know Alec doesn’t believe in superstitions.” Izzy laughed.

“Well, I think this is wonderful.” Magnus smiled, delicately holding the other half of the arched
bone. “I always love a good mundane fortune-telling ruse.”

“I wanna do it!” Aerulei kicked her feet under the table.

“Sweetheart,” Maryse soothed her. “It’s just a yucky bone from the turkey. It’s dirty, and pieces of the bone can get stuck in your fingers.” Aya wasn’t convinced, but quieted down.

“Now— you each must make a wish!” Clary proclaimed. “And whoever gets the larger piece— their wish is destined to come true!”

“What are you wishing for, guys?” Izzy asked, a twinkle in her eye, only to be slapped on the arm by Simon.

“You can’t ask them! It jinxes it!” Simon shook his head. Even though he was a vampire, and had been for years, he still clung strongly to mundane tradition. Alec hoped he never lost that.

“Okay, are you ready?” Luke asked.

“I am.” Magnus winked at Alec— making him wonder what his wish was.

“Alec?” Luke raised an eyebrow at him. Normally, he wouldn’t put much thought into a wish— they were silly and meaningless, Alec knew that. This time though, there was a different gravity to the atmosphere. Almost everyone he cared about was here, he had so much to be thankful for. He wanted to make a wish that reflected that. After a minute of pause, he finally answered.

“Yeah, I know what I’m wishing for.” Alec said confidently.

“Now you must channel your wish into the bone!” Clary said in complete seriousness.

“Has your wish been properly channeled?” Simon asked, Alec and Magnus both nodding.

“Okay then— on the count of three.” Luke started, everyone else joining in. “One… two… three!”

Alec pulled on his side of the wishbone, feeling Magnus tug against him. Without much effort, it broke in half— not just in half, but into two equal parts. They were surprised that it split down the middle perfectly, and something about that spoke of fate and destiny. Maybe Alec could believe in superstitions if they were about Magnus.

“Huh, I wonder what that means.” Izzy furrowed her brow. “Is it like a tie? Do neither of them get their wish?” She turned to Simon for answers, but he was as clueless as she was.

“No— it means they had the same wish.” Clary said confidently. “Its common with lovers …” She giggled at the word. “… since lovers usually wish for the same thing— their happily ever after.” There were a few awes shared around the table, and even Magnus blushed.

“So is that what you wished for?” Maryse asked, unable to hide a cheeky smile on her face.

Not a man of many words, Alec responded by Kissing Magnus chastely on the mouth— just enough to get his point across. Magnus had a different idea though, grabbing Alec by the collar of his shirt and pulling him in for a deeply passionate, borderline publicly-inappropriate kiss. Izzy wolf whistled as the kids covered their eyes. Normally, Alec would be mortified, but the fact that Magnus wished for the same thing too— that they wanted each other so much— was enough to make him not care. Magnus was his, and he was Magnus’. He couldn't be more thankful.
Next chapter, we are back in New York, back to the normal plot!

I should be back to a more normal post schedule soon, sorry for the inconsistencies!
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

An unwelcome guest stops by Alec's shop.

Magnus and Simon set the plan in motion to see how much of Clary's sight has returned.

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! So if you've been following me from day one, you know this chapter is much shorter than normal! I decided to give you what I have on schedule instead of waiting longer! It's only partially beta'd, so there might be more mistakes than normal!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was bitter cold—even inside the shop, Alec couldn't escape the chill. Bundled in black fingerless gloves, a navy blue knit beanie and a worn grey sweater, he un-boxed the new inventory. With all of the holiday excitement, he'd nearly forgotten that Clary designed t-shirts, sweatshirts, stickers, hats and mugs with the Inkwell logo. Like all of Clary’s art, it was a bang-up job—the perfect mix of edgy, artistic, and traditional. An inkwell lay on its side, pouring out dripping ink over the lettering of the logo. Although she assured him people bought this kind of stuff from their favorite tattoo shops, he didn’t particularly care—the branding looked professional and put-together regardless. Something about it made pride surge through him—this shop was his, he built it from the ground up when he had nothing else. It was something that was uniquely his, not tainted by his past, and only representing his future. Maybe that was why it was where he felt safest, and most at peace.

He loved mornings like this when he could spend time in the shop alone. With a pot of coffee on the warmer, some relaxing background music playing, and the ‘closed’ sign flipped in the window, it was his happy place. It was a long way off, but one day he wouldn’t have to work in the cafe anymore—the shop would be enough money to keep him afloat—and then he could spend every morning this way. Hanging shelves, framing new flash designs on the wall, organizing his workstation, sketching new designs—all the little things he didn’t have enough time for these days. Now that he spent so much time with Magnus, he had even less free time, but he wouldn’t trade that for anything. Even if it meant sacrificing sleep down the line, it would be worth it.

It might be early to be thinking this way, but Alec already couldn't imagine his life without Magnus, Aya, and Keris. After Thanksgiving, it all started to feel even more natural, like they had fallen into a strange little family without realizing it. Perhaps they had, and maybe that was too fast, but it was too late to run away—the time for fleeing when things got too much was over. Isabelle always told him that one day, when he fell for someone, it would be with his whole heart, his whole body, his whole soul, and he was starting to believe there was more truth to that than he’d ever realized.
Not everything in life was perfect, though, Alec realized as the front door opened with a clanging clamor. He cursed himself for not locking it behind him after he signed for the packages.

“We’re closed.” He said, not turning his attention away from carefully folding the t-shirts.

“Is that any way to greet your parabatai?” An all-too familiar voice, warm and comforting with just a hint of mirth shook Alec to the core. Suddenly, he could barely breathe, his knuckles turning white as he gripped the cotton shirt hard enough to stretch the fabric. He hadn’t seen Jace in years, and even when he wasn’t around, he tried his hardest to avoid even thinking about him. After what he did, it was hard to face even the idea of Jace Herondale, let alone face him in person.

“You’re not my parabatai, not anymore.” Alec squeezed his eyes shut, taking a deep breath as if he could exhale the drama away, or blow Jace back out the door.

“Does ‘If aught but death part thee and me’ ring a bell?” Jace chuckled and Alec couldn’t help but turn to look at him. He missed that smile, that laughter that always made things better and could pull him out of any angsty funk. With Alec finally looking, Jace pulled up his shirt, showing off his still intact parabatai rune. The edges were a bit faded, the black closer to a pale grey, but it was there nonetheless.

“Enough, Jace.” Alec swallowed. His throat was painfully dry, so he reached for his lukewarm coffee on the counter, taking a grounding sip. “Why are you here?” He suspected it was about Clary. After she mentioned she met Jace, that they were going on dates, Alec handed over the situation to Luke. It wasn’t just that he didn’t want to deal with it, but Luke was still in contact with Jace, putting him in a better position to shake Jace up and get him to back off. Clearly, it was ineffective, or else Jace wouldn’t be here right now. “If this is about Clary, she isn’t here. And I’m not going to tell you where she is, although I’m sure you can figure that out on your own.”

“Can’t I just be here to talk?” Jace flopped down on one of the waiting chairs, and Alec suddenly felt extremely violated— Jace was an intruder in his safe space, his sanctuary. “Or what if I’m a customer? If I pay you good money to put a tatt on me, would you hear me out then?” Jace pulled out a wad of hundred dollar bills from his leather jacket. Alec was ashamed to admit he was tempted— if Jace gave him that wad of cash, that could pay off most of the bills for a month. But he couldn’t do that for so many reasons.

“If you want a tattoo, come back during business hours. Make an appointment. Hours and contact info are all online. Google it.” Alec quipped, his voice curt.

“This has been going on for too long, and you know it. You still keep in touch with Izzy, Max— hell, even Robert said you sent him a message on his birthday. But me? How come I get nothing?”

“You want to know what you get?” Alec threw his cup down on the desk, sending coffee splashing down the sides and onto his jeans. “This—” Alec pulled up his sweater, his mangled scar on full display. “This is what you get. The satisfaction of knowing that I get to live with this forever because of your stubborn ignorance.” Alec dropped his shirt back down. He wanted more than anything to fight Jace right now. When they were younger, it was how they settled any argument. A few minutes in the training room and all was forgotten. But this was different, and that wouldn't work this time. Jace paled as he looked at the scar— of course it never occurred to him that there would be consequences for his actions. He never thought about what might happen if they completely de-rune a shadowhunter who still had a parabatai rune.

Every other rune came off easily, but a parabatai bond had to be broken first before the rune could be removed. A brief severing ceremony would have to occur, where the parabatai removed each other’s rune— but Jace never showed up. With no other choice, The Clave continued with the de-
running process adding on the final mark—a rune to prevent Alec’s body from accepting any more angelic marks for the rest of his life. The mark disappeared quickly into his skin, but the searing pain on his side lasted for days. The parabatai rune burned, his skin unable to tolerate it. Jace probably felt the pain too, but Alec had no way of knowing, tossed out into the street with only a duffel bag of his personal belongings and a small sum of cash, unable to say goodbye to his friends and family.

“Alec—” Jace’s voice cracked. “I—”

“No— save it.” Alec held up his hand, silencing him. He could see right through those shimmering blue eyes—the same charming, terrible Herondale eyes that had ruined countless lives throughout the years. They were the eyes that got Jace off with a warning when Alec was issued official reprimands. Eyes that betrayed everything reckless about Jace’s soul by making him seem wholesome and good. Eyes that pushed every Herondale parabatai to the brink of insanity with their narcissistic tendencies covering up inherited self-loathing. But Alec was immune now—even if he had to remind himself that he was. “Why are you really here?”

“I want you to tell Clary everything— slowly. She’s getting her sight back, and according to Luke, you’re almost closer to her than Simon is now. You’re also not a werewolf or vampire, so she’s less likely to be afraid of you.”

“Luke sent you to tell me this?” Alec searched Jace’s expression for any hint of betrayal. It didn’t seem right. Luke was like family to him— he wouldn’t hide things, especially not about Clary. He trusted Luke much more than he trusted Jace right now. Alec pushed the question further, seeing if Jace would crack, or if his facade would waver. “Why didn’t he just tell me himself?”

“He said it had to come from me— ” Jace shut his eyes tightly— his signature move to hide uncontrollable eye-rolls. To an outsider, it might look like he was in distress, having a hard time expressing himself, but Alec knew better— this was Jace being frustrated about not getting what he wanted. “That I was selfish for even asking this.”

“Because you are. My answer is no. And my suggestion is to stay away from her. She’s happy— doing well in school, has a job, a stable family— she doesn’t need you pulling the shadow world into that and confusing her. Worse—you could be putting her in danger. She’s still Valentine’s daughter, or did you forget that?”

“Calm down— you’re going to burst a blood-vessel if you don’t.” Jace chuckled lightly, the sound out of place. While Alec remembered how Jace joked and deflected in any situation, he still found it hard to believe the audacity he had. Alec was completely done with Jace’s act.

“Shut the fuck up, Jace.” Alec said in an exasperated tone. It wasn’t a conscious choice, but cursing helped sturdy Alec’s narrative in a nontrivial way. He wasn’t one for profanity—any proclivities toward it were beat out of him at The Institute— but it made it that much more powerful in times like this. It would catch Jace off guard— remind him things were different, Alec was different.

“What? You can’t use iratzes anymore.” He shrugged. “I wouldn’t be able to save you.” Jace wasn’t going to pick up the hint. He never grew up or learned that this isn't how you approached someone—ambushing them while making light of the situation.

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“Are you ready, Rue?” Clary squatted, patting her ripped-denim wrapped thighs as if she was calling over a dog. She was buzzing with energy, her curls perky and twirled into tight spirals from the damp outside air. Tiny flakes of snow had already melted on her knit hat and eyelashes, blurring the edges of her makeup. Thrown over her arm, she carried her green canvas backpack, stuffed with art supplies and Studio Ghibli DVDs— her battle gear for the great war of babysitting a Bane child.

“Rue?” Magnus questioned as he raised an eyebrow at Clary. “That’s… different.” Ten seconds into babysitting Aya with Clary, and things were already weird. Fantastic.

“Ae- rue -lei. Have you never considered the nickname Rue before?” Her cheerful expression threatened to crack, but she managed to smile wider as she looked back and forth between Magnus and Aya.

“I hate it.” Aya grumbled, reluctantly shuffling over to Clary. She sized her up, starting with Clary’s worn out purple sketchers. Simon caught her grimace in the hole near the toe, Clary’s pizza-printed socks showing through. She dismissively scanned over her jeans, narrowing her eyes at Clary’s ‘All the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park were female!’ shirt. It looked like Aya switched clothes with Clary, her ensemble leaps and bounds more mature than her babysitter’s. Soft black-leather boots were laced over ruby velvet leggings. Looking strangely like a miniature version of one of Magnus’ shirts Simon had seen before, she had on a silver embroidered tunic, topped with a sheep-fur vest that likely cost more than most people’s paycheck. She was the most intimidatingly adorable child he’d ever seen— and she certainly wasn’t going to tolerate Clary’s new nickname.

“Isn’t that the child who dies in The Hunger Games?” Simon laughed.”Well technically they’re all children, but she was like…” He laughed nervously, his words trailed off. “I, uh… read all the books, seen all the movies. Bit of a fan. Maybe if you hadn’t fallen asleep during the movies, Fray, you’d remember too!” Simon scooped up Aya, bouncing her around with ease. It lifted the funk Clary had put her in, evident in her flurry of giggles.

Clary continued to look around the loft in awe of every little detail. It was easy to forget that to her, this place was completely new. All the time spent here doing spellwork, saving Luke, getting her memories back— the time was lost to her. She was trying and failing to look cool, eyeing the art that easily pass for an original. Little did she know, it probably was. Not only was it real, but knowing Magnus, he’d been friends with the artist. Or even friends with benefits— based off the story he would tell anyone who would listen about Michelangelo.

“Now, if you need me, you have all my contact information. Cell reception at the party will be spotty, so I won’t have data, but calls and texts are fine.” Magnus lied through his teeth. Simon was impressed by how naturally it came to Magnus— maybe it was a skill that aged like fine wine along with immortality. Probably not though— people skills seemed more… personal rather than learned. The story they’d spun for Clary was that Magnus and Alec were going to an underground party— very exclusive, high-profile guest list, poor cell reception. Magnus being Magnus, he peppered in copious details about the artist hosting the party, who else would be there, how he knew these people— all a complete lie to cover up the fact that he would be dining with the queen of people who could never lie— Seelies. “Now, I have to take this little boy—” Magnus hoisted Keris’ bulky baby carrier off the ground. “Over to Alec’s!”

“But I thought Alec was going with you to the party?” Clary’s head snapped back around to
Magnus, looking confused.

“He is! But a certain Maryse Lightwood insisted she watch Keris. I think she has a bit of a baby-crush.” Magnus rolled his eyes, keeping up the game. The real reason Clary could never babysit Keris was that he couldn't control his magic yet. One slip of a magic dampening bracelet and Simon would be stuck trying to encanto Clary while taking care of a four year old. Aya had a hand in all of this too, though—she was the spy on the inside. Apparently she had been well-trained by Ragnar’s kid Dorian, given little spells to see how sensitive Clary’s sight was without being obvious—non-startling things like a waft of fragrance, fog on a window, sparkles in the air. Simon was beyond impressed—when he was her age he barely knew the alphabet. Warlock children were remarkable.

Shadowhunter children were remarkable too—at least Rafe. Simon was sad he wasn’t going to be there with them tonight— the play date would have been good for Rafe — but Izzy didn’t want to raise suspicion with The Clave. If Magnus had been here to discreetly portal her in and out of the institute, that would be one thing, but with Clary here and Magnus gone, that wasn’t an option. He wished it was though—he loved Rafe, and while Izzy curried him some favor at The Institute, he still wasn’t there anywhere near as often as he’d like. That’s why he’d jumped at the opportunity to help Magnus with his plan to test Clary’s sight—he missed the kids. As a vampire, he didn’t feel like he had much to contribute to society, he’d never have kids of his own, but it made him like he was a part of something bigger when he was taking care of kids.

“Well then!” Magnus opened the front door with his free hand, making a show of leaving even though he would walk down the hall and open up a portal. “I’ll be off! Don’t have too much fun, you three!”

“Papa! Kisses!” Aya slid out of Simon's arms and stormed over to the door, crashing into Magnus. He leaned down, pressing four loud kisses to the top of her head with a loud mwah. She lifted up her face and kissed Magnus on each cheek twice, and they finished the whole ritual with eskimo kisses. “There! Yay! Now you can go!” She declared.

The door shut behind him, leaving Simon alone with his best friend and a tiny rambunctious warlock. It was going to be a long, interesting night, but it wasn’t anything he couldn’t handle. To Clary, it would just be a straightforward ‘playtime, food, movie, sleep’ babysitting job. For Aya, it would be the same, but with some magic thrown in. But Simon was the ringleader, the fixer, the one who was going to hold everything together and make sure they steered clear of near downworld sight-inducing disaster. No matter what happened, it was far better than a dinner at the Seelie Court, that was for sure.

Chapter End Notes

So I was in a car accident, which is why I didn't finish writing yesterday! I'm fine, and the other person's insurance is paying all of it! But it really cut into my fanfiction time... damn! (I am incredibly grateful I'm okay, and I know fic is the least of life's priorities) Anyway, this is what I had ready for my 'wednesday' post, and by Saturday I should be back on schedule with full, meaty updates! Love you all so much!

Next chapter... Alec and Magnus go to the Seelie court... what could go wrong?
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Alec and Magnus attend dinner at the Seelie Court.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Have I told you yet that you look absolutely stunning?” Magnus huddled closer to Alec as they walked through Central park. Snow from a previous flurry dusted the grass alongside the path. Some was grey and stained by the city pollution, but choice drifts were still pure white. Alec had seen the pristine untouched hills of Idris, covered in blankets of blemishless snow, but something about New York in the winter was much more heartwarming. The city rose high around all sides of the expansive park, pocketing a safe-haven all its own just steps away from the hubbub. It was like stepping into a dream from an unexpected nap— welcome, refreshing, a sharp contrast from the day’s activities. With Magnus by his side, it was better than any winter before, the smile stretched across his chill-rosy cheeks evidence of his happiness.

“You might have mentioned it once or twice.” Alec chuckled, his words turning to puffs of smoke in the dry, freezing air. “But I don’t know why you’re so surprised— you picked out everything I’m wearing.” A mysterious garment bag arrived at Alec’s front door this morning, monogrammed with the same, familiar ‘MB’ of Magnus’ rings. To Alec’s relief, it wasn’t anything too flashy— a pair of dark grey, slim-cut dress pants with a black side stripe, a delicately patterned light-colored dress shirt, and a plum blazer that was slightly shiny. Everything fit perfectly, unsurprisingly, and he had to admit— he looked good.

“And it looks fabulous— I have exceptional taste. It emphasizes all the right parts.” He reached around, slapping Alec on the ass. They were glamoured invisibly, but they were still in public with people walking all around them, and Alec felt embarrassment flush his face. His cheeks were already rosy and borderline raw, hiding his blush, but he knew Magnus was aware of the effect on him. Magnus kept Alec on his toes, finding new ways to leverage his affections that were surprising, embarrassing, alluring, or a combination of the three. They continued to chat comfortably as they navigated the winding paths toward the entrance to the Seelie court, thankful they’d started the trek early so they could enjoy the stroll.

An invitation to the Seelie court might sound glamorous and lavish, but it was anything but. For the entire duration of the evening, they would be under heavy scrutiny and on high alert— constantly looking out for trickery, listening for half-truths, and deftly avoiding plots and schemes. Alec suggested that they take some time for themselves first— unwind and relax, look at the Christmas lights, clear their heads — before they dive into a hostile environment.

“Why are we entering through the lake instead of the forest glade?” Alec frowned, eyeing the freezing water. It wasn’t cold enough yet for it to be frozen over, and he wasn’t sure if it ever would be. Could magical portals freeze?

“The glade entrance is under construction.” Magnus said with annoyance. “I highly doubt that’s true— I’m convinced they’re just doing this to inconvenience party guests.” This portal was still in Central Park, but everything about it was awful. It was in a more populated area, meaning Alec and
Magnus had to both be carefully glamoured to avoid the tourists walking around looking at holiday lights.

“That sounds about right. How can a dimensional portal be under construction anyway? I thought they were naturally occurring?” Little was known about the fae realms— they predated Shadowhunters by millennia, perhaps even older than mundane civilization as a whole. Documentation and literature on the subject wasn’t always reliable, the fae taking joy in tainting any information available to the outside world, weaving myths, rumors, and fantastical tales that skirted the line between truth and untruth.

“Exactly.” Magnus sighed. “So how do you want to do this? We can either jump in backwards from the bridge, or slowly walk backwards in the reflection of the moon, wading through the water.”

“Honestly, jumping will be less painful.” Alec wiggled his toes inside his shoes, his feet preemptively protesting the awful sensation of waterlogged shoes and soaking socks. “We’re going to get soaked either way, right?”

“Unfortunately yes, but fortunately…” He wiggled his fingers, showing off his icy-blue manicure in the process. “Warlock boyfriend, remember? Much better than a fan or hairdryer.” Magnus climbed up onto the stone ledge of Gapstow bridge, balancing with precarious swagger.

“Yes, you are preferable to any small appliance.” Alec jumped up with ease into a crouch, gracefully rising to his feet. His muscles tensed in anticipation, already bracing against the frigid water.

“Large appliances though? Or is the verdict still out on that one?” He held out his hand to Alec, a silent acknowledgement that they were about to jump. They heaved in a unified breath, gripping their hands tighter. His palms were a bit sweaty— or maybe Magnus’ were, it was hard to tell.

“You ready?” Alec squeezed Magnus’ hand encouragingly, the gesture grounding and reassuring in a way Alec hadn’t felt since when he had a parabatai, but a thousand times more meaningful seeped in the fuzzy safety of love. Maybe not love yet, Alec had to remind himself. He didn’t want to be naive— he knew love was something that took time to grow and develop, and he didn’t want to risk going there too fast— or worse, accidentally letting the word ‘love’ escape his lips too early. It could jinx things, or could push things past a line they weren’t ready for yet. If he let his mind entertain the idea, his thoughts could easily become words. He wasn’t great with expressing himself anyway, and he didn’t want a slip-up to sabotage him. This meant too much.

“Always, darling.” Going on body language alone, two well-trained, agile fighters, they leaned back and took a wide backwards step off the ledge. The water soaked through Alec’s dress clothes immediately, delaying the shock of the frigid water by milliseconds. His gut instinct was to scream, but he knew that breathing in pond water was unwise. It felt like an eternity of falling slowly through water that was too thick, as if time was moving at half-pace. He kept his eyes tightly shut, focusing only on his hand in Magnus’— their interlaced fingers an anchor to each other, to sanity, protecting them in their entrance to the realm. His feet slid out first, the damp forest air barely a different texture from the water, differing only in its lightness. Bracing for impact, he softened his knees, knowing that he would hang for a moment before suddenly dropping. He’d gone through this entrance a few times before with Izzy and Jace, without the benefit of someone who could dry him off, resulting in the miserable ordeal of trudging into the Seelie court dripping wet.

This time, as his feet hit the ground and he was still holding hands with Magnus, it wasn’t quite as awful. He even took a moment to look up and admire the ceiling, where the water floated above as if separated by glass. Magnus had a different opinion altogether, the journey downward ruffling his
feathers. He’d chosen to wear an ensemble mostly of silk and fur, going for a ‘winter fairy’ look that Alec though bordered on cultural appropriation. The rich, luxurious, dry-clean-only fabrics hung loose on Magnus’ slim frame, stretched and soaking wet. His platinum hair stuck to his forehead, but his makeup was somehow still intact.

“Thank the gods and goddesses for Urban Decay setting spray.” Magnus sighed as he lifted his arms, a twirl of blue-tinted air swirling around him. The sheep fur of his vest puffed back to life, slightly curling. The bright pastel shades of cyan and lavender became blindingly radiant, no longer darkened and waterlogged. Still strange to Alec, his white-blond hair swooped into Magnus’ signature coif, partly spiked, partly smoothed—a bit aviary, but it worked for him in a way Alec knew he could never pull off himself.

“I’m still not used to this hair.” Alec shook his head. It wasn’t how he pictured Magnus. The dark, spiked, colorfully-tipped hair was something as inherently ‘Magnus’ as his cat eyes or caramel skin. He’d never seen the warlock with any other style, although he reminded himself that at four centuries old, his current style likely was younger than Alec was.

“What? You don’t like it?” Magnus jokingly pouted. “Be careful—you’re still soaking wet. Are you sure you want to insult the person who has the power to dry you off?”

“No, it’s not that I don’t like it, it’s just so different.” Alec corrected. In honesty, it wasn’t his favorite, even though it looked objectively attractive. It set off Magnus’ features in a way that was foreign to him. He loved how Magnus looked dressed up and peacocking about, but he cherished the natural Magnus that only a few people got to see—dark messy hair in the morning, face free of makeup, wearing cozy house-clothes.

“Well, Aya tried to do this to me as a punishment during her tantrum, so I decided to get back at her by rolling with it.” Magnus pushed a stray spike of hair back into place, pressing it to another strand to cement it to the pouf secured by generous pomade.

“It was a great punishment—she didn’t get the rise out of you she wanted.” Alec held out his arms as Magnus wove a tornado of air starting at Alec’s feet, swirling up around his body to his head. “And you look great, I mean it. I think you’d look great in anything.”

“Well, enjoy it while it lasts—I’m changing it back tomorrow. I just thought it was the perfect final touch for my Princess Elsa Fairy look.” He stopped, holding his finger in the air as he remembered something. “That’s what’s missing!” He snapped his fingers, bright blue streaks painting themselves across the tips of his hair. “Now come on—” He grabbed Alec by the hand, pulling him into a quick kiss, likely leaving a cast of glitter on Alec’s lips. “We don’t want to leave the fair lady waiting.”

A knock on the door caught Simon off guard. Magnus would have mentioned if somebody was going to stop by, so an uninvited guest could only spell trouble. Lifting up his glasses so that he could press his eye closer to the peephole, he looked into the hall. Once he saw who it was, immediately flung the door open.

“Iz!” Simon pulled her into a tight hug. He was tempted to kiss her, but opted for a peck on the cheek instead, considering who she was with. “And Rafe! What are you two doing here? More importantly… why didn’t you text me?”
“Eh, I was already in the neighborhood.” Simon knew that was a lie. She was on her way to the Seelie court, and all the entrances were in Central Park. This was completely out of the way. “I decided it might be more fun if you two babysit Rafe instead—I think he misses Aya.” Rafe looked up at Simon quietly. Even though they saw each other all the time Rafe still hadn’t completely warmed up to Simon yet. He was attached to Simon, but still stuck inside his shell a bit.

“Isabelle!” Clary yelled, running to the door. Her hair was in disarray—she made the mistake of letting Aya try to style it, and without her magic, Aya was not the best hair stylist. “And you brought Rafe! This is so exciting Oh my god I can’t wait to tell Aya! Wait, Rafe!” She knelt, addressing the shy boy even as he hid behind Izzy. At the mention of Aerulei, he peeked around Izzy’s legs, interested yet still cautious. “Let’s go surprise her!” She pulled him along into the depths of the loft.

“I’ll take that as a yes on babysitting him, then?” Izzy smiled. “I’ll be back around the same time as Magnus.” She hugged her boyfriend tight. Simon had to admit he was nervous about her going to the Seelie court, but as a Shadowhunter, at least she was protected by the Accords. “This dinner reminds me—I owe you a date soon. It’s been too long… for a lot of things.” She grabbed his shirt, flipping him around and pushing him hard against the door-frame. He barely had time to register what was happening before her lips were on his, her sweet rose and coconut scented lipstick slick against his mouth. Her hands gripped his hips, pulling him flush against her body. She was a dominating force he was more than happy to submit to. Although he could have kissed her forever, it was abruptly over as quickly as it started. “We’ll finish this later. That’s a promise.”

She strutted away in her platform heels, giving Simon a view he’d kill for. That’s how Isabelle Lightwood was—a whirlwind that flew in when he least expected it. Five minutes ago, he was setting up a game of Just Dance on Magnus’ TV, and now he had one more kid to take care of, and kiss-swollen and abandoned lips. It was a storm he would happily weather any day.

“Fair lady, I present Magnus Bane and Alexander Lightwood.” A nameless Seelie knight bowed before the queen, gesturing Alec and Magnus forward. Magnus detested the formalities of the court—it killed any possibility of actual fun happening. Parties were where he thrived—he could save the dullest gathering from the brink of boredom—but even the Bane touch couldn’t bring life into this affair. It was about to be hours worth of florid language, dancing around opinions and avoiding stepping on toes—talking and talking but discussing nothing. At least he looked fabulous.

“Magnus Bane, well met.” The Seelie queen nodded. “And I see you bring with you a guest, although his identity was fraught with confusion. I must ask: Is this Alexander Lightwood, or Alexander Lightwood-Bane?”

“He is—” Magnus started, only for the queen to hold up her hand, silencing him.

“I ask the man himself. Are you, or are you not bonded in heart to Magnus Bane?” Her eyelids drifted lower, narrowed not in contempt, but in blasé curiosity. This act was absurd—she already knew the answer to her question. All of this was just to get a reaction from Alec or Magnus, likely just the start of a night full of inconvenience.

“What she means is ‘Are we married?’” Magnus whispered to Alec, barely moving his lips.
“Hopefully, nobody heard him.”

“Fair Lady— I am Alec Lightwood, and I am bound to no one.” Alec swallowed, standing confidently.

“I am aware— your chains are infamously free. You have no attachment to the nephilim, nor do you pledge loyalty to any faction. Curiously still, you do not fully merge with the mundane, choosing to stay in the vagueness of ‘middle’. I am wary of those who bow their heads to none.” She tapped her finger across her lips, as if she were trying to figure out just what to do with Alec. Magnus didn’t like this at all— bringing him here was a mistake. It was too dangerous, even if he’d covered Alec in warded clothing. “Sit, drink, be merry. The night is younger than any of us have ever been.” She gestured to the long glass table, plush silk cushions lining either side. Magnus bowed to the queen, scanning along the line of place-cards for his name. Unsurprisingly, he had the pleasure of being seated directly next to her majesty— it was near impossible to stop himself from rolling his eyes.

“So... oof.” Alec threw himself down onto the cushion next to Magnus, struggling to fold his legs beneath the low table. “Tell me again why you were invited to this? Maybe things have changed since I was sort-of in charge, but these types of dinners were usually reserved for diplomats and leaders of different factions. Could the new High Warlock of Brooklyn not make it?”

“No, that’s not it. This is a bit above Lorenzo’s pay-grade.” Magnus shifted awkwardly, picking up the fluted glass on the table. He sent a covert pulse of magic through it, testing it for any malicious curses. Satisfied it was safe, he took a tentative sip. It didn’t taste like Seelie wine, or any kind of alcoholic wine at all— in fact, it tasted like white grape juice, sweet and a bit bubbly.

“Wait should you be dr—” Alec sounded concerned, but Magnus elbowed him to shut him up. It was rude to make a display of distrusting the offered food and beverages.

“It’s delicious, you should try some.” Magnus reassured Alec, taking another sip. Alec was still skeptical, but he picked up his glass, humming as the sweet taste hit his tongue.

“Mm. That is good.” He took another sip. “So if it’s not about that, then is it about that High Warlock of Eastern America thing you mentioned?”

“When did I mention that?” Magnus put down his glass, fiddling with the diamond-studded cuff in his cartilage. Normally, he went for clip-ons, but for this occasion, he reopened his real piercing— far superior for fidgeting.

“When you were sick, somewhere around the time you pulled me into the bathtub with all my clothes on. I thought you were just talking nonsense when you accepted the invitation, but now that we’re here... I mean all the other place cards are for really important people.” There weren’t diplomatic titles on any of the place cards, but Alec knew most of the guests there by face or by name, still well versed in the politics of the downworld. Magnus was caught— he couldn’t hide the truth anymore. It was ridiculous that he’d waited this long to tell Alec, as if he’d forgotten that there would be no way to hide it once they were in the court.

“Well...” Magnus took a deep breath, hitting back the rest of the juice as if it were alcohol. “I was talking nonsense. I’m not the High Warlock of Eastern America, I’m the Grand Warlock of North America. The High Warlocks answer to me— at least they do in a few more years, once I officially take the position. Until then, I’m on fatherly sabbatical.”

“So when you said you gave up the position of High Warlock for the kids... you—” Alec’s eye twitched slightly as he spoke— he was fighting a grimace.
“Stretched the truth a bit, yes. You have to understand the advantages the position of Grand Warlock will afford my children. The reputation alone is worth it.” Magnus reached down, lightly holding Alec’s hand. “It’s nothing, really. The High Warlocks manage well on their own—a Grand Warlock works more with the Spiral Labyrinth, but mostly is just a figurehead.”

“You’ll still live in Brooklyn though, right?” Alec stroked the back of Magnus’ hand with his thumb. His fingers were still as calloused as any Nephilim, but most of his scars had faded, the skin a bit smoother.

“Darling, I’m a warlock— I can live anywhere I damn please. I’m a portal away from almost anywhere in the world.” He rested his head on Alec’s broad shoulder— just the perfect width for the purpose. “So don’t tense that perfect jawline of yours, don’t encourage any premature worry lines on that handsome face. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Good, because some of us can’t.” Alec gestured over one of the court’s maidens, carrying a tray of drinks. Alec snapped up two glasses, passing one to Magnus. “Consider this my congratulations on the new job then.” He smiled, his lopsided grin a bit more rigid than usual— but it still did wonders to calm Magnus’ nerves. “To this night, to us, to your family, and to you, my boyfriend— Grand Warlock Magnus Bane.”

“Pulled into Nazareth, was feeling well half-past dead.” Maryse sang, bouncing Keris on her hip as she danced around the bookstore.

“I just need a place where I can lay my head.” She rested her head on top of Keris’, nuzzling in before pressing a wet kiss to his soft silver hair. He giggled, blowing spit bubbles excitedly. “Hey mister can you tell me where a man might find a bed. He just grinned, shook my hand, no is all he said.”

“Take a load off Annie.” A new, familiar voice joined in— Luke had quietly entered the shop without her noticing. “Take a load for free, Take a load off Annie… And put the load right on me.” He pulled her into a hug, scooping up Keris into his arms. “I haven’t heard this song in years.” He said with a smile. “Shoot, it really brings me back to…”

“To that concert we snuck out to? In Basel? Third year in the Academy?” For a trip on horseback and train, the journey had been more adrenaline-filled than any demon battle she’d faced at the time. Rebellion in Idris was a relative term, but Luke formulated plans to rebel into the mundane world— an unspeakable taboo for most Shadowhunters.

“And nobody else would go, they were too nervous to ride out to the border, take the train in Switzerland. But an American band was going, how could we miss out?” He laughed, lifting the baby up high in the air. Keris gaped at the new height, his copper eyes wide as he noticed how close he was to the ceiling. Luke tossed him lightly, lowering him back down. Maryse never understood why men always felt the need to do near gymnastics with babies, but it was adorable nonetheless.

“You were always the fun one of the group, Lucian.” She thought back on how young she was back then— how only a few years after that concert, she was a Circle member, married and pregnant with her first baby. She remembered how once upon a time, Alec was as small as Keris— how her whole world could fit in her arms.
“And I could somehow always bring out the fun in you.” He used his free arm to grab her hand and twirl her around to the music. “Although look at you now— you’re basically a book hermit. You should really take this up with your boyfriend— clearly he doesn’t take you out enough.”

“Well, I’m a bit busy at the moment. But maybe I’ll ask him to take me out tomorrow night. Pasta can fix anything.” She cupped Keris’ face in her hand— the baby was getting tired, she’d have to put him to bed soon. Secretly, she was hoping she could get him to fall asleep on her chest— it was one of the things she missed most about babies.

“And wine. Don’t forget the wine.” He wrapped his arms around her, the three of them swaying softly to the music that had long since ended, the record skipping on the turntable.

“You look so beautiful!” Alec whispered in awe of his boyfriend, admiring how the bioluminescence of the hanging-vine canopy cast an orchid glow to his glittering cheekbones. His voice was quiet, but full of surprise, like he’d never seen anything so beautiful before, and he was baffled that something so beautiful could exist. “Magnus, you need to look at yourself! Where is a mirror?”

“I don’t know if they have mirrors here. I always assumed the queen checked her appearance based on the doting feedback of her court.” He giggled.

“Shh! She can hear us! She has ears!” Alec covered Magnus’ mouth with his hand, widening his eyes in mock-alarm as his laughter fell in line with the warlock’s. “Ears everywhere.” Magnus grabbed Alec’s wrist roughly, pulling it away from his mouth.

“Keep me quiet then.” Magnus breathed. His full lips parted slightly as his glossy eyes challenged Alec— taunting him, pushing him to act. Pushed against a lush, moss-covered forest wall, they were in a world of their own. Any trace of the party felt miles away— it was just them.

“I can’t make any promises.” Alec dove down to close the distance, relishing in the soft, supple loft of Magnus’ lips against his. It was the type of kiss that punctuated a ‘happily ever after’— romantic, surreal, and magical. His body felt like it was made of buzzing gossamer, floating alongside his warlock’s in perfect harmony. The heady, sweet breeze entangled them, Alec’s arms wrapping tightly around Magnus’ waist, Magnus’ arms looping around his neck. They were lighter than air.

Magnus hopped eagerly, hooking his legs on Alec’s hips, letting his weight be held up mostly by the cool wall behind them. Green flakes of moss were dusting the shoulders of Magnus’ silk shirt, planting themselves in his freshly white-blonde hair. Alec thought it looked like green glitter. Did the moss glow in Faerie? Nothing could glow as much as his warlock— nothing could ever compare.

With fumbling hands, Magnus started working on the buttons of Alec’s shirt, unable to contain how giddy he was in this stolen moment. The air against Alec’s exposed chest was electric— tickling his chest hair and sending goosebumps across the planes of his firm chest. It bordered on over-stimulation, but he was reveling in it. From Magnus’ labored breathing and uncontrollable giggling, the warlock was just as lost as he was— it was heaven.

And then it was hell— a bright spotlight on them, leaving them exposed.
“My, you two are absolutely lovely. Many have paid a fine sum for such beautiful entertainment.” The Seelie queen flicked open a fan made of stained-glass butterfly wings, fanning her face as if toning down a flush. Her cheeks were as alabaster as ever though—emphasizing how her every action was a well-choreographed show. “My guests have been thoroughly pleased by the performance. Now if you are ready to join us, drinks are over, and dinner is served.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Alec and Magnus recover from their accidental exhibitionism, but the chaos has only just begun! Clary and Simon scramble around taking care of two rambunctious kids while Aya schemes to test the depth of Clary's sight. Perhaps we also get to see a sleepy Keris? Who knows! I don't! We'll see!

Thank you for everyone who gave me kind words after my accident, you really made my week so much better <3

See you Wednesday!
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

After getting caught in a compromising position, Alec and Magnus have to save face and weather through the dinner at the Seelie court. Back in Brooklyn, Simon and Clary take care of Rafael and Aerulei.

Chapter Notes

Sorry I was late posting... I was on a date.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It won’t be any fun having you under the effect of an aphrodisiac the entire evening.” The Seelie queen sighed, brushing her long red hair over her shoulder. Each loose curl flared to life in the dim light, the tips wispy as delicate flames. “Rajah—” An attendant of the court scurried over to her, bowing gently. “Fetch them the antidote so we can continue with the feast.”

Alec wasn’t sure he needed an antidote. The sobering effect of being caught in the act was almost enough to clear his mind. He couldn’t believe how close he was to disrobing and taking Magnus right there— what if the Queen had let things go further? It wasn’t helpful to entertain that thought. He felt too hot beneath his clothes, the humidity of his sweat— partly from anxiety, partly from having Magnus’ hands all over him— making him uncomfortable. Wiping his palms on his pants did little to help, the clammy feeling returning immediately. His body was a live wire, nowhere close to discharging.

“Alec—” A familiar voice called over to him. Through the lingering fog of the tainted wine, it took him a second to realize it was his sister. “I’m so sorry. Are you okay?”

“I’m…” Alec hiccuped. Whether it was from the intoxication or his nerves, he wasn’t sure. “Fine, really.”

“Yes you are fine, my gorgeous nephilim—” Magnus purred, warranting a slap on the back of the head from Alec. “My hair!” Magnus squealed.

“Okay, both of you need that antidote, stat.” She rose on her toes, peering around the crowd for the fae the queen had addressed. “Oh— she’s heading this way now.”

“The antidote, gentlemen.” The girl— Rajah— curtsied. Seelie ages were deceiving, but she appeared to be no more than a teenager— her dark skin unmarred by battle, covered in colorful tattoos symbolic of the high courts. She wasn’t a night, or even Seelie gentry, but a handmaiden. Golden flowers decorated the swirling braids of violet hair, piled gracefully on top of her head. He didn’t find her attractive, yet Alec couldn’t drag his eyes away. Captivating features were how faeries snared people in their traps, why usually victims followed them willingly. Alec accepted the small vial of dark green liquid she handed him, drinking it in one gulp. The fog tainting his mind dissipated immediately, welcome acuity returning to his thoughts.
“Don’t get me wrong, I love a good, heady, high—” Magnus blinked his cat eyes rapidly, struggling to adjust to the onslaught of sensory stimulation. “But whatever that drink was? I’ve had my fill of that for at least a century or two.” Magnus cracked his neck, steadying himself as he made his way back to the table.

It suddenly struck Alec just how close they’d been to the party. It felt like they were deep in the forest, far away from everyone else, but now that he was remembering things clearly, he had no memory of walking anywhere. They had just run off down the closest passage, turning against the garden wall— mere feet away from the small crowd. Another wave of embarrassment flushed over him, but now that he was seated at the table it was at least easier to bury his head in his hands.

“You look distraught, Alexander.” Magnus placed a comforting hand on Alec’s back, but for once his body tensed at the touch, threatening to recoil. It made Alec’s stomach sink— why was he feeling this way? Everything felt wrong and he wanted to run back to New York, back to where everything was good, where everything was safe, but he was stuck here for the rest of the night. “Was that your first time getting caught with your pants down?”

“My pants were still up.” Alec spoke through his teeth, his embarrassment turning into aggravation.

“They wouldn’t have been for long…” He didn’t need to see Magnus’ face to know he winked at the end of the sentence. “Don’t worry— downworlders, but Seelies especially, don’t view physical intimacy with the taboo mundanes and Shadowhunters do. This might be hard to believe, but their amusement was more genuine than you think. When they say it was beautiful and entertaining, they can’t lie. Actually, they probably got off on it a little bit.”

“You’re just making it worse.” Alec slunk down, his forehead hitting the table. “My sister is here. She saw that.” It wasn’t as if Alec hadn’t walked in on his siblings in compromising positions before, but that was different. He was the older brother— the responsible one, the one with his life together. Not to mention, he was a much more private person than Jace or Izzy in general, even more so about his personal life.

“Well, that’s not ideal, but—” Magnus was cut off.

“Damn!” Someone wolf-whistled in Alec’s direction. “That was something else. You really know how to get it.” A strong arm elbowed Alec in the side, letting him know exactly who was taunting him.

“Jace—” Alec’s head snapped up from the table. If he thought Isabelle was the last person he wanted to be there, he clearly hadn’t counted his blessings. “What are you doing here? And Izzy too for that matter?” He tensed his jaw, turning to face Jace square-on.

“We’re the representatives for the Shadowhunters. The Clave thinks Izzy and I are the best options for Seelie meetings given our diplomatic history.” Jace winked and clicked his tongue.

“Was Helen Blackthorn not available? What about Mark?” Magnus was resolute. It amazed Alec how he could transition so easily between personal and professional conversation. Alec could barely manage one type of conversation at a time. There were two separate versions of Magnus— this one was the warlock who was infamous and famous, fearsome and powerful. It made Alec’s skin prickle, remembering this was the same man he snuggled in bed and helped into pajamas after a little too much holiday wine. “Is the Clave too prejudiced to send their half-fae Shadowhunters?

“Helen and Aline had other assignments.” Jace stated dispassionately. That was a convenient excuse for the Clave not wanting to send a lesbian representative. “Mark— well that’s a long story,
but he rides with the Wild Hunt. He’s no longer a part of Shadowhunter society.” *Good for him.* Alec thought to himself. Getting out was the best thing that ever happened to him—and if the rumors were true, Mark was living his best life as well. The Wild Hunt might sound cold and horrific to some, but it could also be liberating—especially if you had a Seelie Prince boyfriend at your side. They were only rumors though, passed on from Diana, so Alec couldn’t be certain.

After that flagrant display, Alec and Magnus’ semi-public make-out session was sure to fuel its own slew of rumors, and he was already wincing at the thought. Since it was a diplomatic dinner, there were representatives from every faction of the downworld as well as famous and influential people from around the world—people Alec barely knew, didn’t trust, and definitely didn’t want to see him doing *that*. Worse, if Jace went around the Institute blabbing about it, it would drag the Lightwood name through the mud again, making things worse for Max and Robert.

“Whatever Jace—” Alec sighed. “Just—” Alec stammered, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Discretion.” Alec pointed both of his hands at Magnus. “Don’t get into trouble, and don’t run back to the Institute and weave crazy stories about it. No going ‘*Big Fish*’ on this.”

“Big Fish? What does any of this have to do with fish? The queen is just serving like—” Jace looked up and down the table, surveying the food he would probably eat even though he knew it was unsafe. He was reckless like that—Alec was thankful it wasn’t his responsibility anymore. He wouldn’t be the one to drag Jace out of Columbus Circle at 5:00 AM, covered in maple syrup after he proposed to a police horse—not this time. Did Izzy clean up after his messes like Alec used to? He didn’t discuss Jace with his sister, so he had no way of knowing, but he doubted Izzy would stand for wasting her time on a sloppy man. “Actually, I’m drawing a blank here. I have no clue what most of this stuff is.” He eyed a dish of blue, sparkling jelly-drops suspiciously. “Especially not that.” He pointed.

“You actually pay attention on Tim Burton movie night?” Magnus ignored Jace, instead looking up at Alec, his glamourd eyes wide and glistening. When he looked Alec like that, it was obvious his boyfriend was made of magic, and it made his heart swell. “I figured you only tolerated it for Aya’s sake.”

“Pft,” Alec scoffed. “Sure. Tim Burton night is for Aya’s sake. Definitely not her papa’s.” He had to admit—it took awhile for the fantastical, over-the-top dark movies to grow on him, but some of them were fairly cute. With only a few years’ worth of experience in the mundane world, he was still mostly a blank slate for film knowledge. Since they hadn’t been dating very long, Alec was still new to the Bane family rituals, but the routine of sitting down every week, working through the complete catalog of Burton Films was one of his favorite things.

“Did you just refer to Magnus as *papa*?” Izzy laughed, nearly spitting out her drink. Alec trusted her discretion with consuming Seelie food, since she spent her fair share of time in the realm when she dated Meliorn. “Do you call him *daddy* too?”

“Only when I’ve been *very* good.” Magnus smirked. Alec’s cheeks flared at the comment. He’d never called Magnus ‘*daddy*’—the thought never crossed his mind. He wasn’t the kinkiest person in the world, and things with Magnus were too new to even consider crossing those lines. Magnus was unaffected though, somehow finding Isabelle’s innuendo amusing. Too much of Alec’s personal life was on display right now—literally and figuratively—and it was almost too much to bear.

“Ah, this is an interesting line of conversation, nephilim.” The queen silently slid over to the group, lowering herself delicately into her chair. “If the word ‘*daddy*’ is of any concern to you—” The word sounded strange and foreign on her tongue. “Then Alexander is the one called by that
affectionate name.” Isabelle struggled not to laugh, but the queen picked up on her reaction, silencing her by raising her pale, bony, hand. “Not by his lover, Magnus Bane. No, more curious still— by his daughter, the beautiful Aerulei. You should have brought her with you, Magnus— I adore children, especially young ladies fair enough to be of my court.”

“That's a new one,” Magnus balked. “What the hell are you talking about?” Magnus raised his voice. Alec shot him a warning look— few have spoken to the Seelie Queen that way and lived to tell the tale. Magnus ignored him though. “Let me clarify my question— how do you have knowledge of anything my daughter has said?” She couldn’t lie, so Magnus had to know what she said was the truth. His anger was boiling, and Alec was hoping it was only for her knowledge of the goings-on in his home. Alec was nervous— he was hoping he would never have to address this with Magnus, especially not in front of a crowd of people. He hoped Magnus would be understanding, knowing it wasn’t anything Alec did that made Aya call him ‘daddy’.

It was just a silly mistake— a slip up from a tired, sick, delirious little girl caught in the grasp of a warlock flu, too out of it to know what she was saying. At the time, it had sent a shock of confused emotion through the core of Alec’s mind. It made him conflicted and uncomfortable to the point where he didn’t even bring it up with Luke when they discussed parental boundaries of significant others, but with some effort he was able to brush it off as a random and meaningless happenstance. He told himself that she must have thought he was Magnus, that she called him ‘daddy’ instead of ‘papa’ on occasion. It made things easier telling himself what he knew was likely a lie— to pretend boundaries hadn’t been crossed between him and the children, that he hadn’t accidentally become such an important part of their lives.

How did she know what his daughter said inside his own home? That was the question on the forefront of Magnus’ mind. It was the only thing he was worried about— it had to be. He knew Seelies couldn’t lie, but this was utter nonsense. Aya wouldn’t call Alec ‘daddy’ — that wouldn’t make any sense.

“Tell me now or I’ll use your true name, Fair Lady.” The threat carried weight— those who knew the true name of the Seelie Queen or Unseelie King held power over them. It wasn’t complete control— the only way to completely control either of them was to steal their crown— but it was sure to get her to cut the act and answer his question directly. When it came to his children, Magnus had no tolerance for mind games.

“As if you know my true name, Bane.” She rolled her eyes. “But fine. Keris Bane is of fae descent. Although it is but a drop in the ocean of his blood, he is not beyond my reach, no matter the strength of your wards and protections. Did you think it luck that the baby possesses the power of telepathy?”

“My son is none of your concern.” Magnus spat. The tension in his body was unparalleled. He’d been under attack before— he’d been vulnerable— but people never dared come for his children. Most people knew better. The Queen, as untouchable as she was, knew she could dig her daggers into the cracks in Magnus’ armor, into those soft and raw spots. It was hard to breathe, his rib cage turning into welded steel in an attempt to guard his heart.

“Do not fret, warlock. Normally I take no interest in the affairs of your misfit children. When you opened my invitation though, my attention was drawn to your household— just for that night. The boy has power— he was able to hear his sister through the walls.”
“So right now, can you reach out to my son?” Magnus knew she couldn’t lie in response, but she could evade. He calculated as many questions as he could, prepared to ask as many as it took until he was certain that at least for now— until he could get home and add additional protections over his son— Keris was safe.

“I shall save you the effort of trying to out-wit me, warlock. No— under normal circumstances, I am unable to obtain any knowledge on your ‘son.’” She grimaced at the word. Magnus’ blood boiled— he’d seen that expression in people before who didn’t consider his adopted children legitimate. Seelies were the worst— bloodlines meant almost as much to them as it did to the nephilim. He didn’t know why he was surprised. “The invitation to my court opened a line of communication for me to see through. Now that you know the truth, tell me— does it upset you that to these children, Alec is becoming like a father to them? He could be just as much their father as you are— what if they were to choose him over you? If he were to become their favorite? If they were to turn from you completely? What binds them to you, Magnus?” She smiled, tilting her head to the side inquisitively.

He was seeing red— he wanted to kill her, to burn this glade to the ground. It would be so easy to harness the power in his demon blood, for his magic to become flames of destruction. His children were just as much his as any flesh and blood children a parent could have. And they weren’t anyone else’s— just his. Unwelcome thoughts flashed to the forefront of his mind of moments where maybe Alec overstepped. In these memories, he could see some ammunition for the Queen’s claims, where maybe the kids would like him better. At the Halloween fair, Keris looked happier with Alec than he’d seen the baby in a while— like there was an understanding between the two boys that rivaled his own connection. He remembered Aya stealing his phone to call Alec because she missed him so much after not seeing him for just barely a week. He shouldn’t be nervous about this— these were all good things. He wanted his kids to like Alexander just as much as he did. Regardless, the Queen was successful in planting seeds of doubt.

“Magnus,” Alec whispered, shaking Magnus’ shoulder lightly. His large hand was steady and grounding, but it wasn’t enough. “Don’t buy into her— that’s what she wants.” Nearly out of his control, magic seeped from Magnus’ palms— bright orange and red from anger. In moments like this, it was his father’s magic— brutal, unforgiving and dangerous. “Ouch!” Alec hissed, his hand recoiling from where it had been resting on Magnus’ arm. Magnus’ stomach bottomed out— he felt faint, disconnected and yanked away from the situation. What had he just done? He just hurt Alec. The man he cared about so much was just a victim of his impulsive and chaotic magic. His rage flared again— this time partly at himself. He couldn’t stand the part of himself that hurt Alec, but that’s how much the Queen had gotten under his skin. Despite Magnus’ outburst, Alec didn’t leave his side, continuing to whisper words of reassurance. Magnus didn’t deserve this level of care and understanding. How could Alec still be comforting him considering what he just did? “I know this is about the kids, I know you want to fight but—”

Magnus sucked in a sharp breath, his mind and body switching from defense to offense. He had to take control of this situation, to remind everyone who he was. Overpowered by the roar of his emotions, even Alec’s soothing words were too bristling, too much to process, adding to the chaos he was trying to sort through.

“My children. This is about my children. Not yours, Alec.” Magnus hated the way the name felt— harsh and acerbic. This was his Alexander that he was treating this way in front of the whole party. He was being harsh and mean, but he couldn’t stop— he couldn’t think straight. Not that it mattered anyway— he probably ruined everything already. He was already pushing Alec away. Who would want to stay with him once they saw how temperamental and barbaric he could be? So many thoughts and emotions were bouncing in his head all at once, making him feel physically sick. Even though he regretted the stinging words the second he said them, he couldn’t back down.
in front of the Queen or look weak by apologizing to Alec. “This is my fight.”

“Just don’t forget who else is in your army.” Alec whispered, taking a deep breath. It was a struggle, but Magnus breathed with him, trying to steady himself—a futile attempt to mitigate everything awful about this conversation. “You aren’t in this fight alone.” Alec stayed by his side—he didn’t get up and leave like Magnus figured he would. Other people would have.

“I seem to have hit a sore spot with dear Magnus.” She laughed and it was an evil bell-like sound. “I’ve known this man for centuries, but never before has he been so genuinely…” She tapped her fan against her rosebud lips, searching for the right word. It was a farce, completely for dramatic effect—someone as sure of herself as the Seelie queen knew exactly what she was going to say sentences ahead of time. “Reactive.”

“Have you heard about my son?” Isabelle offered, sounding oddly cheerful. “I recently adopted him…” Isabelle managed to direct the runaway train of a conversation onto a track that hadn’t been there before. Detail after detail she artfully unwrapped a superficial version of her life to the Seelie Queen, giving her information about Shadowhunters Magnus was sure had to be mostly false. Either way, she ate up every morsel, moving on easily from tormenting Magnus. Alec was right—she was just trying to get a rise out of him, and she’d succeeded. In her success, Magnus found complete and utter failure—managing not only to give into her whims, but hurting Alec in the process. While he never left his side, the man next to him now was more rigid, tense, and stoically silent. Alec was reserved and closed off in a way Magnus’ hadn’t seen since he met him all those years ago, blasting into Pandemonium to slay a Circle member. Back then, though, Alec had plenty of reasons to be closed off—the Clave and his zealot parents the main culprits. Now, he had only one reason—Magnus himself.

“Have you seen the Totoro movie?” Aya asked Rafael, scooting in between him and Simon in their makeshift blanket fort. The living room was torn up—both couches turned sideways with sheets draped over them. Every pillow they could scavenge and each couch cushion they could dismantle was shoved under the canopy, and Clary had even found some string lights to plug in to give it some light. Rafe offered out his blanket to Aya, letting her share with him. She already had a blanket—her favorite purple one trimmed in a thick fringe—so she layered the two so that they were both wrapped in two cozy and soft blankets. “I’ve seen it a bunch but I’m being nice to Miss Clary by pretending.”

“No, I don’t see many movies.” Rafael shook his head. His hair was a bit too long, ruffling with movement. Simon watched their conversation, unable to look away from how comfortable Rafe was with her. It was nice seeing him like this—just a regular ragamuffin of a kid sitting on the floor, not a Shadowhunter-in-training who had lost everything in a war. Simon thought it wasn’t fair that the kid couldn’t be carefree like this all the time. Aya had just as much future responsibility as Rafe did—her dad was one of the most famous warlocks in the world—but her life was so much easier, so much more mundane even. Well-rounded was the type of word a parent would use for it.

“Rafe!” Clary pushed Simon out the way, squeezing between him and Aya. “I had no idea you spoke English so well! You’re improving so much! Over Thanksgiving, you and Aya only spoke Spanish with each other.”

Aya leaned forward, not-so-subtly addressing Simon. “Oops. I thought I was speaking Spanish?”
She spoke slowly, exaggerating as she winked at Simon. This was the third time tonight Aya pointed out things Clary shouldn’t have been able to notice. The translation spell Aya used made it sound like Rafael was always speaking English. To Simon, Magnus, Alec, Aya— anyone with the sight—he sounded like he was speaking English too. But to a standard mundane, it still sounded like Spanish, and it sounded like the spell-caster was speaking Spanish too.

“Oh—” Simon jumped in, trying to explain it away. “Izzy and I have been practicing with him like all the time.” He exaggerated. Was his lie believable? It was based on a seed of truth, and he hoped that was enough. Clary was his childhood best friend—she had no reason to believe he’d be hiding the truth from her, and that made him feel a thousand times worse for doing it so frequently. It was easier when she had her memories. Even though life back then was fraught with danger and drama, at least he could be truthful.

“So we don’t need subtitles on the movie then?” She pointed the remote at the TV, grumpily looking poking at the buttons. “Because I’m not very tech-savvy and I have no idea how to turn them on.”

“I got it, Fray.” Simon grabbed the remote from her hands. Three button clicks later, Spanish subtitles were enabled and the movie was starting. Cheerful and bright music poured from the speakers, lightening the mood of the dark room in its playful air. “Now shush—all of you. This is one of my favorites, so no talking.”

Alec struggled to keep his composure—he couldn’t stand the way the queen had treated Magnus, but he knew better than to mouth off to her. Izzy swooped in to save the day, feeding the Queen information about Rafael and the Institute that was just correct enough to not raise suspicion while still being complete lies.

“How lucky your son is to have such an elegant and powerful mother.” The queen nodded. “Hopefully it reflects through his blood.” Her expression was dispassionate and barely readable. Ethereal beauty like hers was a veil that could easily be leveraged to hide her true emotion—if she had any at all. At her ambiguously ancient age, perhaps her perceived boredom was exactly as it appeared on the surface instead of a mask to camouflage what lies beneath.

“Rafael is adopted.” Jace reiterated. It wasn’t a good move—acting like the Seelie Queen missed something in a conversation, implying she forgot. She was incredibly sharp, and any hint otherwise was an insult. Jace shook his head dismissively, downing an entire glass of wine in one gulp. Alec clenched his jaw in frustration for his former parabatai’s blatant ignorance. Or was it arrogance? The latter appeared to be more and more accurate the longer Alec objectively monitored Jace’s behavior.

“My poor Shadowhunter. Your naïveté is both refreshing and tragic.” She turned to Jace, observing him with pity. “Your beauty has dulled your mind. Over the years, all of that inter-breeding has made the nephilim blood one in the same. Although, I suppose that appeals to the purist ideals of Raziel’s children.”

“Well, that explains my club foot and hemophilia, then.” Izzy laughed, holding up her glass to the queen in acknowledgement. Alec admired how his sister could lasso any jibe, reeling it in and seamlessly transitioning into a topical joke. Thinking on her feet was a strong suit that made her an invaluable asset to the Shadowhunters—a group who lacked poise, charisma, and social
intelligence. The mundane ‘soft-skills’ were foreign to them, useless in battle and a frivolity they didn’t indulge in. It was partly due to their lack of inspiration, Alec learned the more he spent time as a mundane. They never read books, watched films, went to the theatre, or consumed media in general. Art, music, and literature were all but absent in his upbringing. It was no wonder they weren’t creative and dynamic conversationalists.

“The Romanovs— “ Magnus clicked his tongue. “I’ll always miss the glory days of the Tsar’s parties. Although Rasputin was a terribly greedy lover.” Alec had no idea if Magnus was recounting a true memory or creating a vividly specific tall-tale. With Magnus, it was usually a mixture of both— morsels of truth garnished with tantalizing details that contributed to his air of glamorous mystery. It was charming and intimidating at the same time. How much was there about Magnus he didn’t know? He imagined he’d never learn a fraction of the history of his warlock.

“Eww—” Jace curled his lip. “Wasn’t he the one they tried to kill and dropped in the river?”

“Only for him to claw his half-dead corpse back out again?” Magnus sipped at his wine. “That’s the one, but thankfully I’m not a primary source of that information. Camille, or so I heard, had the pleasure of that experience.”

“Your Camille stories are the best Magnus.” Izzy brushed the corners of her lips, making sure her lipstick was still in place. “And the worst, of course— what a she-demon.”

“I’ve met demons with more class.” Magnus snorted. Alec felt completely isolated from this conversation— he had nothing to contribute, he didn’t know what they were talking about, and he couldn’t decide if he should be laughing or not. At the very least, Magnus had calmed down considerably, but Alec was still shell-shocked. A pang of hurt was ringing like an ignored alarm clock, growing quieter the further they were away from the conversation, but its insistence could still drive Alec mad. He knew Magnus didn’t mean it— he couldn’t begin to understand the rage the father must have been feeling. If it was even just twice as strong as Alec’s anger, it would be enough to burn down the entire Seelie realm.

Dinner couldn’t be over soon enough. All he wanted to do was get out of here— to take Magnus home and tell him everything was going to be okay. To let him know Alec forgave him— that he didn’t take it personally. Wrapped beneath the covers of Magnus’ warm bed, within the safety of the loft’s walls, they would be fine— even if right now they felt everything but. He had no idea what time it was in the mundane world, but here in the realm it had only been a few hours. Every passing minute was one minute closer to being alone with Magnus. He prayed he could hold it together until then.

“That went just about as well as we could have expected.” Simon huffed, flopping down on the couch. “I’m surprised Rafe was able to go to sleep alone in that guest bedroom— honestly even I get nervous sleeping in a king-sized bed alone. I doubt he’ll stay there though— five bucks is on him climbing into Aya’s room at some point.”

“They’re really two peas in a pod, aren’t they.” Clary walked around the loft. She was restless for some reason— just a bit on edge. “I mean I haven’t spent too much time with either of them, but both kids seem a little… prickly on their own.”

“Rafe? I wouldn’t say prickly. He’s just really shy— he had a really rough go of things. Sometimes
I wish I could just wipe his memory, you know? Give him a clean slate.” Simon stretched out his
legs on the coffee table, yawning.

“Aya is definitely prickly. I think she kinda hates me.” She traced her hand along the wall of
bookshelves, reading the names on the spines of the old-looking books. It made her head hurt for
some reason, like she needed gasses and was straining to see the letters. Maybe the writing is just
blurry. She assured herself. It didn’t matter what the titles were anyway— they weren’t her books,
she had no intention of reading them— they were just pretty to look at.

“Hate is a strong word, Fray. She’s just very opinionated.” Simon reached over to the side table,
picking up a fresh glass of dark red grape juice. “And she could probably kick your ass, so there’s
that.”

“I missed out on the Rafael vs. Aerulei prize fight at Thanksgiving. I heard it was a match for the
ages.”

“It was on pay-per-view and everything.” He sipped at his drink, a thick film of red coating his
upper lip.

“Nice grape-stache.” Clary stuck her tongue out at her best friend. It was moments like this where
they were just the same as they’d always been— she was catapulted back to when they were just
like Aya and Rafe, huddled in forts and making up goofy stories. Back when life was easier and
she wasn’t stressed about school or adult responsibilities. The nostalgia made her feel warm inside,
but something was scratching at the back of her mind— something that didn’t feel quite right. It
was probably nothing, so she continued to scan the odd assortment of objects and antiques placed
decoratively in the bookshelf. There were antique vases, pictures, statues— and many things she
couldn’t identify. One simple silver frame caught her eye— it’s edges blurred in her vision,
everything about it telling her to look away.

“Hey Simon…” Clary picked up the picture frame from it’s relatively hidden spot on the shelf. In
the photo, she was smiling ear to ear, holding a tiny baby tight in her arms. Magnus was next to
her, hugging her around the shoulders but not taking his eyes off the bundle of joy. When was this
picture taken? The baby didn’t look anything like Keris— their skin was the same color as
Magnus’, and a dark streak of hair poked out of their purple hat. Her heart sank into her stomach
when she realized who the baby was— it was Aya. It couldn’t be true. The picture had to be about
four years old— Clary only just met Magnus when Alec introduced them a few months ago.

“Yeah Clar—” Simon looked over her shoulder at the photo, only to be cut off by shattering glass.
He’d dropped his cup of dark red grape juice, likely staining Magnus’ expensive rugs, but he didn’t
care. He tried to rip the picture out of Clary’s hands, but she refused to let go— she had to know.

Bits and pieces of memories were coming back to her. The softness of the blanket beneath her
fingertips and that distinctive baby-smell. A strange cavernous room full of computers, the walls
formidable stone dotted with beautiful stained glass. There was a boy outside the field of the
camera— his blonde undercut catching the different colors from the windows, a smile plastered on
his face as he watched Clary hold the baby. Jace. This was real, but why didn’t she completely
remember? It felt like it happened to someone else— like mental vertigo, she didn’t know what
was up or down.

“Simon— tell me the truth. Why am I in this picture?”
So that was heavy. Next chapter, we get to see Maryse with Keris (I know you all have been dying for some of that action), Alec and Magnus have a much needed talk (don't worry! this is a fluff story, they will be okay!) and we get some good Christmas feels. Might throw in the Lewis family Hanukkah. Who knows?

Side note, I might only post once before Christmas. I'm working on a secret santa challenge from Tumblr, and I need to finish this fic for my secret santa before Christmas! I will be posting the fic as well, although it's something VERY different from this since it was prompt-based.

I love each and every one of you, thank you for continuing on with this story, and there's so much more to come. Spoilers: I have the plot for the second installation lined out even though this installation is barely halfway done. I think you'll love the plot of that one even more than this :D

<3 Happy holidays to all <3 LaCroixWitch
Magnus and Alec leave the Seelie court, and they have a lot to talk about.

The walk from the court through the glade was excruciating and silent. Moss and twigs crunched beneath their feet, the vegetal smell of crushed foliage combining with the subtle sounds to assault their senses. When it was so quiet, even the smallest sensory stimulus was deafening, overwhelming, pushing the tension between Alec and Magnus to a near breaking point. What was only minutes felt like hours, what could have been a comfortable lull in conversation turning into a brutal torture. Every word Magnus had said was a pickaxe creating fissures in the brittle ice—both of them waiting to see which would shatter first. The climb upward through the suspended water was reanimating, clearing Magnus’ head just enough to regain his resolve. He had to fix this—he couldn’t push Alec away. He couldn’t lose him over this outburst.

“Alec please—I can explain. Let me explain—apologize—whatever you need me to do.” Magnus begged, grabbing the arm of Alec’s jacket. Alec’s muscles tensed at the gesture, unwilling to be touched in his heightened, activated state. He knew he shouldn’t take any of the things Magnus did to heart, that his words were just a valid reaction to the Queen’s taunts—but that didn’t completely save him from being on edge right now. Utilizing the advantage of his long legs for all it was worth, Alec took a few wide steps away to create some space between them.

“Just give me a second Magnus.” Alec held up his hand, brushing off his clothes. They’d just gotten out of the Seelie Realm, deposited back in Central Park. Magnus dried both of them off the second they hit the shoreline, but Alec was left looking particularly rumpled. “That’s what I need—a second.”

The park was so silent, Alec could hear Magnus swallow nervously. Alec was nervous himself, sucking in a deep breath, sending billows of warm breath into the frigid late-night air. Yellow incandescent street-lamp light illuminated the clouds, but cast a strange unnatural glow over the paths and foliage. Maybe it was the experience with the Seelie wine, or maybe it was his tumultuous emotions, but Alec felt unsteady. Finding reliable support in the form of an iron lamp post, his fingers were chilled to the bone. His skin prickled as it started to go numb, but he used the painful sensation to ground himself.

“Look—why don’t we do this.” Alec finally spoke, not offering a question, but rather a suggestion. It was his only offer, and he hoped Magnus would accept. “Let’s go get Keris from my mom.”

“I’ll make a portal to take you home then…” Magnus couldn’t hide his frown even though he was trying—his lip wavered as he bit it hard enough to ruin his lipstick. Alec wasn’t going to let his
boyfriend beat himself up like this. No matter what they were going through, nothing about tonight was completely Magnus’ fault. Of course it didn’t feel good, and there were some things they definitely needed to discuss, but he wasn’t going to run away or give Magnus the cold shoulder. They were going to deal with this tonight, face-on, and hopefully go to sleep happy.

“After we pick up Keris, let’s go home and put him to bed.” Alec crossed the distance back to Magnus, putting his hands gently on the warlock’s shoulders. Magnus melted at the touch, a confused relief splashed across his face. “Then we are going to make tea, sit on the couch, and talk through everything that just went on. I don’t care if it takes all night— well actually, all morning at this point— but I’m not letting us go to bed upset.”

“There’s no way you mean that. What I did was awful. I hurt you. I hate myself. I—” Magnus rambled, tears that had been welling since they made it back to New York finally spilling. Alec cut him off, pulling him into a quiet, gentle, reassuring kiss. When he pulled away, he traced the outline of Magnus’ cheekbone, wiping away the fugitive tears with his thumb. A streak of holographic blue highlighter further smeared Magnus’ makeup, but it didn’t matter to Alec.

“Just because we had one bad night doesn’t mean I’m going anywhere. It doesn’t change how much you mean to me. Am I completely happy right now? No, but that’s okay.” Alec slid his hands down Magnus’ arms, until their hands met. With their fingers intertwined, Alec leaned in for one more chaste kiss, leaning his forehead on Magnus’ for a brief second before pulling away. “Now come on, let’s go get your little pumpkin. Fire up one of your portals, Grand Warlock.”

Maryse clutched Keris close to her chest as she leaned back on the couch, the TV playing quietly in the background. It didn’t matter what was on— she wasn’t paying attention. His little chest rose and fell, the familiar scent of his baby breath calming and relaxed. He knew he was safe— she gave him that comfort. It was a unique form of pride she would never get over. A few minutes prior, a soiled diaper roused Keris from his sleep, pulling Maryse into the land of the living with him. He didn’t fuss much during his change, but he was restless afterward, whimpering each time she placed him in the travel bassinet. Wrapped in her arms though, he was at peace, already drifting off. It was nothing to complain about. Not in the slightest. Having a baby sleep on her was something she hadn’t experienced in over a decade. The feeling of holding a little life in her arms made her feel like she had a purpose. Maybe it was grandmotherly fever— for a child that wasn’t even her grandson— but this was her bliss.

When she heard Alec’s key slide into the lock, she realized her time with Keris was up. Magnus would gather up the baby and go home, exchanging the chubby bundle of joy for her adult son. Only one of them still fit in her arms. Both of them were equally precious to her.

“He’s probably asleep in the living room in the foldable crib.” Magnus whispered, tiptoeing into the apartment via the kitchen. The linoleum squeaked under the weight of his feet.

“I don’t know, sometimes mom is still awake at this hour. I don’t know how she does it.” Alec’s footsteps were less subtle, even in his dress shoes. It was amazing how Magnus was affecting him — Maryse had never seen her son look so fashionable before. Without a soundless rune, his size betrayed him, making it hard to be sneaky.

“Okay well if she’s not awake, I can’t just take the baby and go— she’ll think he was baby-napped. Wait, that’s ridiculous— if anyone were to babynap him, it would be Maryse herself. She looks at
“him like she’s... hungry.” Magnus’ words were followed a slapping sound— Alec must have hit Magnus— playfully, of course. Taunting, bickering, giggling— they were adorable. She knew they were falling in love. The boys didn’t know she could hear them, which only made their banter more amusing.

“He’s your son, Magnus. Just leave a note or something.” Alec rolled his eyes as he walked into the living room, blushing when he realized his mother was awake and listening. He was hand-in-hand with Magnus, and while they looked a bit tense they were still each in one piece. That was good considering they were just at the Seelie court, where anything could have happened. “Oh— Mom— You’re up.” Alec stuttered.

“Well this little prince decided to make a big stinky mess of himself in the middle of the night.” She pressed a kiss to his head, and he didn’t wake, merely stirred.

“Well with as much as he eats, what goes in must come out.” Magnus laughed. At the sound of his father’s voice, Keris bolted awake. Babbling and kicking his legs, he demanded to be handed over to his papa. Reluctantly, Maryse obliged. It was adorable how he reacted to finally being in Magnus’ arms— he nuzzled into the scent of Magnus’ jacket, cooing excitedly. Knowing what the boy wanted, Magnus lifted him up, giving himself access to plant messy kisses on Keris’ cheeks while also letting Keris press his palm to Magnus’ forehead. Pale orange— no, that descriptor didn’t do it justice, it was copper— magic glowed from his tiny sausage-like fingers as he shared whatever thoughts were in his head— likely memories of his night with Maryse. She suddenly felt self-conscious— she hoped he had as much fun as she did.

“Well, Mama Maryse— he loves you. According to him, you did a phenomenal job. And... what’s this?” Magnus furrowed his brow, patting Keris’ little butt. “Someone is feeling chunkier already— Mister Luke brought you an eclair. What am I going to do with you, my little sweet-toothed sugarplum boy?” Keris giggled, but he was running on empty— a dramatic yawn stretching his lips into a tiny ‘o’.

“It’s far less sugar than s’mores night at the farm, I assure you.” Maryse stood up, looking longingly at the baby. “Bring him by anytime— it was a pleasure.” She pulled Magnus into a hug, careful not to squish Keris. To her surprise, Alec joined the hug, wrapping his long arms around all of them.

“Thanks again, Mom. You saved Simon and Clary a bunch of trouble. I’ll see you tomorrow— for now we have to go relieve the babysitters of their duty.” Alec backed away, folding up the travel crib. Magnus had magic for that kind of thing, but her son showed his affection with actions. Even after spending all night together, Alec was staying with Magnus— not for any romantic reason, but mostly to help with the kids, to just go home and collapse in bed together. If that was the type of love that was blossoming, she couldn’t be happier for the two boys— because that was the kind of love that would last.

Getting back to the loft was uneventful— just a step into a portal and they were there. Clary was passed out on the couch, but Simon paced back and forth frantically, his vampire speed making the nervous gesture look unnatural.

“Magnus! Alec! Thank— You’re finally back.” Even though Alec knew Simon could say ‘God’ now with little difficulty, the habit of tactfully avoiding the word still remained. “I had to encanto
her to knock her out.” He pulled at his hair, stopping in his tracks, looking at her guiltily. “She saw this picture on the bookshelf— she was holding Aya in it— and she remembers. What are we going to do? She remembers!”

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Magnus rolled his eyes. “Are you blind, or do you not see this sleeping baby?” Magnus tapped his foot, waiting for an explanation.

“Okay— clearly you are both on edge. Both for good reasons.” Alec stepped between them, holding out his hands to discourage any further conflict. “Simon— take Clary home, we’ll figure out a plan for this in the morning. Magnus will open a portal for you.” He turned to his boyfriend, commanding him with a simple, warning glare. “Magnus and I had a really long night, and he has to put Keris to bed right now.” Simon opened his mouth to speak, but Alec wasn’t letting this conversation continue. “This isn’t negotiable— I’m too exhausted to deal with this right now. There are other things on my plate that aren’t Clary’s issues. For once, Simon, let me focus on myself.”

Simon looked hurt, but he listened anyway— he picked up Clary in a bridal carry, walking to the portal Magnus had unceremoniously opened.

“Um, good night then. I’ll—” He stumbled over his words awkwardly.

“You’ll see me tomorrow. It’s a promise, Si.” Alec sighed, making sure to take a moment to reassure him. He didn’t want to make it seem like he didn’t care about Clary— she was like a second sister to him. But right now, his focus was on Magnus, on talking through what happened at the Seelie Court. He couldn’t deal with two things at once. Simon walked out, leaving him Alone with Magnus.

“I’m just going to go put Keris in his crib.” Magnus whispered.

“Do you need any help?” Alec offered. Magnus shook his head, retreating down the hall.

There were a million things Alec could say— but he wasn’t good with words. It was hard to navigate tough conversations. When he was a Shadowhunter, conflict was resolved in the training room or forgotten after a battle. Now that he had to confront things head-on, it was a minefield harder than any den of demons. A den of demons would be preferable. He didn’t even realize he was doing it, but as he tried to plan out what he was going to say, he’d found his way to the bar cart, his hands busying themselves preparing a Manhattan for Magnus. After he’d seen Magnus order them and make them a handful of times, Alec had researched how to make them himself, practicing on Luke and Maryse at home until he got them right.

It was a skill he wanted to pull out some night after a date— a romantic gesture he wanted to use to woo his boyfriend. The warlock’s bar cart was well stocked, and as Alec added the final garnish, he realized this was an even better time. Maybe this would show Magnus that Alec was going to forgive him— that even though right now things were uncomfortable, that Magnus had said some hurtful things— Alec still cared more than anything.

“Alexander—” Magnus said, returning from the nursery. “What is this?” He looked at the glass in Alec’s hand with disbelief, frozen in place as he took in the sight.

“I thought after everything— well tonight was hard for you. After a hard day, I thought you’d like a drink.” He walked over to Magnus, lifting the hand that was frozen at his side and wrapping the warlock’s fingers around the short rocks glass.

“I don’t deserve this.” He bit his lip, the slightly glitter-coated skin threatening to burst. “I hurt
“Considering what she said to you, I’m surprised the whole court didn’t go up in flames. If I was you, it probably would have.” Alec led Magnus to the couch, nudging his shoulders to coax him to sit. He was still rigid, reluctant— lost in his own thoughts.

“Well, if you weren’t with me, it might have.” Magnus clutched the glass until his knuckles were white. Alec picked up a cable-knit blanket from the winged back chair in the corner of the room, draping it over their legs as he settled down next to his boyfriend. They were touching— just barely, Alec’s knees bumping Magnus’ thighs— but the contact was enough to remind them that they were there— together. “I know I did a terrible job of showing it, but you being there— it grounded me, it helped to keep me in control. I don’t know how you did it. You continued to support and soothe me even after I was so horrible.” He rolled the glass in his hands, looking at the amber liquid as it clung to the sides of the glass.

“Try it—” Alec lifted Magnus’ hand, directing the drink toward his lips. “I’m not as good at cocktails as you, but I tried.”

“I’m sure it’s perfect, you made it—” Magnus took a sip. “Fuck.” He whispered, taking another eager sip. “This is amazing.”

“Good. I was hoping it might make you feel a bit better, calm your nerves. Before we, you know.” Alec scooted closer. “Talk.”

“I don’t know where to start.” It wasn’t like Magnus to not know what to say, and that made Alec even more anxious.

“Neither do I.” Alec whispered.

“She hit me where it hurt the most—” Magnus paused, gritting his teeth. “— my children.”

“I guess that might be a place to start. Some of the things she said got to me too.” Alec felt nervous and prickly as he prepared to address what he was most worried about. A sheen of sweat coated his palms and his muscles tensed. “I know it wasn’t my place to get upset— and I know it doesn’t even compare to how you must have felt— but it reminded me about boundaries.” He spoke quickly, hurriedly, trying to get the words out in the open as fast as possible. Magnus needed to understand that Alec was feeling.

“I didn’t even notice that she was mentioning that— all I could think of was that she was attacking me as a father.” Magnus’ voice was distant and quiet. Alec couldn’t exactly pinpoint what the emotion was behind it.

“When she said the kids could choose me over you— that was ridiculous.” Alec swallowed, but his mouth felt like sandpaper— he still wasn’t sure how Magnus was going to respond. “But maybe there are some times where I’ve crossed a line— when I’ve gotten too close. I’m sorry I didn’t talk about it with you more— that I didn’t ask about boundaries, or stop and think about how this might affect you more.”

“Don’t apologize for how great you are with the kids— and especially don’t apologize about how much they love you.” Magnus put down his drink, taking Alec’s hands. His thumbs stroked the sensitive skin between Alec’s thumb and index finger, the affectionate touch making Alec’s heart flutter. “I hope this isn’t too forward, but it has been one of my greatest joys watching you with them. It’s one of your most attractive qualities— what draws me so strongly to you.”
“Are you saying that I’m a ‘hot daddy’?” Alec felt his cheeks flare at the thought of Magnus finding him attractive. Even though he knew it was true— Magnus told him often enough— he would never get used to it. “Because that’s what Clary and the girl at the pumpkin patch told me, and I don’t appreciate being objectified.” He joked, lifting Magnus’ hand to his lips, kissing each knuckle fondly.

“Aya seems to think so.” Magnus rolled his eyes, and Alec’s heart sank— somehow, in the soft glow of this heart-to-heart conversation he’d forgotten that the Queen had revealed the secret that Aya called Alec ‘daddy’. Alec cursed himself— this was why he didn’t make jokes, why he didn’t get too comfortable in social situations— he would always suck at it. “Stop. I see you beating yourself up. None of that is your fault. Children—” Magnus took a deep breath, his shoulders raising to his ears before relaxing completely. “They see things so black-and-white. They see what they want to see. Sometimes, they get confused, or they take things too seriously. To be honest, I wasn’t that surprised.” He shrugged, dropping Alec’s hand and picking back up his drink.

“What do you mean?” Alec roughly combed his hands through his hair, loosening a wisteria tendril that had been trapped in his wavy dark locks, an unwelcome souvenir of the court now gracelessly discarded on the floor. “There’s no way that didn’t bother you.”

“Of course it bothered me. But…” Magnus took a long sip, wincing as the strong alcohol burned his throat slightly. “Last week— she asked me when I was going to marry you. She was completely lucid— not consumed by a magical fever— and she wanted to know when she and Keris would have a second daddy.”

“I can’t do this—” Alec stammered.

“It’s completely understandable if you want to walk away.” Magnus uttered quietly, but his words were deafening to Alec’s ears. Was Alec imagining it, or was moisture pooling in the warlock’s eyes?

“No— this isn’t about me at all.” Alec stood, walking toward the balcony door, craving the cold air he didn’t dare let into the warmth of the loft. “I’ve done this. I’ve walked into your family. I’ve crossed lines I shouldn’t have— and all because I was selfish. I wanted you— I want you so much that I didn’t care about the consequences. It’s hard to explain, and maybe it doesn’t make sense, but—” Alec turned around sharply, walking back to the couch. “I am lost for you. If you asked me to stay— to never leave— to live here— if you asked me anything— I would. And that’s selfish, that I do things without thinking, that I dive right in.”

“Do you mean that?” Magnus whispered.

“I know it’s wrong, but I do.” Alec knelt on the floor in front of Magnus, taking the drink out of his hand and placing it on the coffee table. He was offering himself to Magnus like a pilgrim bowing to a god. That’s how much his warlock meant to him— his orations were truth, each word a prayer.

“I want you here.” Magnus cupped Alec’s cheeks in his hands. His palms were soft— not scarred like the ex-Shadowhunter’s. The band of each ring was cool against Alec’s cheekbones. “I don’t mean I want you to move in right now— I’d never want to push you. That would be selfish of me. But you are not crossing boundaries. Maybe you already did— but if you did it’s because I opened the gates wide and welcomed you in.” He leaned down, pressing a kiss to Alec’s forehead.

“Are you sure? Magnus— your family is everything to you.”

“Alexander—” The way the warlock said his name was a prophecy from the gods— a promise of so much more, a harbinger for the good things to come. It was sacred knowledge shared with Alec
alone. “My family is my world— but for better or for worse— I want you to be a part of it. You— my angel— fell from the sky. You were a comet sparkling in the night sky, and I was lucky enough— we were lucky enough— for you to find your way to us.” Magnus pulled down the neckline of his shirt, grabbing Alec’s hand and guiding it to his chest— resting it right over the tattoo Alec had marked on his body.

In the fray of everything that had happened, Alec nearly forgot the meaningful design he’d placed there— that he’d drawn. Somehow, even back then, he knew just how important the Bane family was.

“I wish I was good enough with words to say something even a fraction as beautiful as that.” Alec licked his lips, rising to his feet and rejoining Magnus on the couch. “But maybe I can show you.” He leaned forward, cautiously pressing his lips to Magnus’. It wasn’t close enough— he wrapped his arms around Magnus, pulling him in as tight as possible, showing his warlock that there was no place else in the world he wanted to be. Magnus’ mouth opened up to his, their tongues gently sliding together— a far departure from their normal fiery hunger and needy passion. There was nothing sexual behind this kiss— only a promise, only love. Love they hadn’t confessed yet, but that was obvious nonetheless. They melted together on the same couch where years before, Alec fell asleep after helping heal Luke— after offering a warlock he barely knew his strength.

If they had known then what they knew now, they would never have believed it. Eventually, they pulled apart, the warmth between them barely dissipating with the small distance.

“Alexander— my Alexander.” Magnus purred. “That was more eloquent than anything I’ve ever heard.” He leaned into kiss his boyfriend again.

“Papa! Alec! You’re home!” A tiny, determined body crashed between them, knocking them back on the sofa. She hooked her arms around both of their necks, hugging them with all her strength.

“Yes we are, Aya.” Magnus kissed her cheek. “Dinner was very tiring— but you should be sleepy too. Why aren’t you in bed, sweetheart?” Alec leaned back as Magnus hoisted his daughter onto his lap.

“I woke up and I heard talking and I couldn’t not see you! I missed you!” She bounced, bobbing her head side to side as she hugged her papa harder. “I missed you soo much! You were gone forever!”

“It was just one night.” Alec laughed, ruffling her hair. “And your papa missed you just as much as you missed him— I promise.”

“Alec—” Aya declared confidently, clearly ready to dish out orders. It was strange, hearing her drop the ‘mister’ when she addressed him, but it was far better than her slip up in calling him ‘daddy’. “You are staying for brekkie, right? I want to tell you all about your sister Miss Clary. She is not doing good.” Aya shook her head. “Plus— Papa always takes us to Taki’s for pancakes when he comes back late, and you need Taki’s too! He made you go places so late! Aren’t you sleepy?”

“Not as sleepy as you should be.” Alec poked her playfully.

“Aerulei,” Magnus warned softly. “If you don’t go back to bed, there will be no Taki’s.”

“I’ll go to bed when Alec says he’s staying!” She crossed her arms against her chest, huffing as she blew a stray strand of hair off her face.
“Well, Alec—” Magnus smiled and it sent Alec's heart fluttering. It threatened to fly out of his chest and right into Magnus' hands. “Are you staying?”

Alec kissed Magnus on the cheek.

“How could I refuse?”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter we get... Christmas stuff! And maybe a little Lewis-Family Hanukkah because I'm firing up my Menorah tonight and it's time to party. I hope it doesn't light my mini Christmas tree on fire.

See you guys next chapter!
Interlude: And Baby Makes Two

Chapter Summary

It's 2016, and the Shadowhunters are gearing up for another mission. When they call in Magnus Bane to help, someone pays a surprise visit to the New York Institute.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for not updating yesterday, it was Christmas! Happy Boxing Day and 5th night of Hanukkah! Here's an interlude to hold you over!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2016

The click-clack of fancy dress shoes echoed through the open halls of the Institute, every Shadowhunter turning their heads to look at the guest. Clary didn’t need to look to see who it was, she’d recognize the sound of his footsteps a mile away— it was Magnus Bane.

“Yes, yes, my daughter is beautiful everyone— I understand your little nephilim babies could never hold a candle to this warlock beauty. But look— I just want to be in and out of here, go home, enjoy the spoils of parenthood. Doesn’t the New York Institute’s pet warlock deserve paternity leave?”

“She’s beautiful,” Izzy cooed, peeling back the blanket partially covering the baby’s face. Chubby, caramel-colored cheeks, flushed a salmon pink from being swaddled tightly, stretched into a smile as she took in the world around her. Her eyes were half-lidded almonds, sleepy yet curious. It was hard to see from this far away, but Clary swore her eyes were a brilliant blue.

“Trust me Magnus,” Lydia sighed, tapping away at a large rune-covered screen in the ops center. “I wouldn’t have called you in unless it was important.” She turned the screen around to face the rest of the group, a series of disturbing images flashing across it. “Iris Rouse had a second warlock breeding operation, setup in an abandoned hospital in North Jersey.”

“If it’s in New Jersey, shouldn’t the Trenton Institute be taking care of it?” Andrew Underhill looked up from his task— sharpening a silver dagger.

“Calling that an Institute would be generous,” Jace snorted. “It’s in a strip mall, and only like…” His brow furrowed as he seemingly began to count off the staff in his head. “… five people work there I think.”

“Jace— if you mention such lurid things one more time, you’re getting one week of ichor duty.” Lydia looked at Jace with a warning glare that spoke of an overly familiar knowledge of his antics. “You know it’s not an empty threat— I’ve done it before, and I’ll do it again.”
“This might surprise everyone, but for once, Jace actually isn’t being inappropriate,” Clary defended her boyfriend, but was still careful to make sure she didn’t come off as combative to Lydia. Even if they were good friends, she needed to maintain a modicum of respect for the co-head of The Institute. “A strip mall is just a row of stores, usually in the suburbs, Lyd.”

“As much as I’d love to discuss mundane suburban architectural sins, this is a serious matter. If Iris is involved there are women and children in danger.” Magnus clutched his daughter closer to his chest protectively. “Not to mention, there is bound to be at least one demon at her beck-and-call, perhaps multiple if this location is larger. Last time, it was a relatively powerful lesser demon, but I wouldn’t put it beside her to summon a greater demon. She’s more than capable.”

“Exactly, which is why we want to pull in the best for this mission— you included, Magnus.” She nodded. “I also know your friend Catarina Loss, the talented healer, has a vested interest in this. I didn’t think it was my place to ask her to volunteer, but if you could discuss it with her…”

“I’m sure she will be more than willing to oblige.” Never forgetting the bundle of joy in his arms, he stroked the top of her head lovingly, playing with the tiny wisps of black hair that stuck out from under her purple knit hat. “When are we doing this? I’ll need to call a friend to watch the children.”

“Children?” Clary raised an eyebrow, looking confused. “You just have her, right?”

“Catarina has Madzie, if you recall. You met her multiple times, biscuit.” He rolled his unglamoured eyes. It was strange to Clary— before, Magnus always covered them with a glamour to make them appear a rich brown, but lately, he never hid his cat eyes at all. From this angle, she couldn’t get a good look at the baby, but she didn’t have any visible warlock marks— maybe it was something hidden by the bundle of blankets, something not hidden easily by a glamour— and he didn’t want her to grow up ashamed. If Clary was a warlock parent, that’s what she would do— just like if she had a red-haired child she would never even consider hiding her natural hair color.

“My dear friend also adopted a daughter from those rescued.” Magnus snapped his fingers, a soft white cloth appearing in his hand to dab drool from his daughter’s face. It was a sight to see— the High Warlock cleaning up baby drool. “While I’m dishing out the hot gossip, Ragnor Fell even hopped on the bandwagon. Iris had a few older warlock children who worked for her— some as old as ten, eleven years old— although it’s hard to be certain since we have no birth records and the children were highly isolated, poorly socialized. Birthday’s weren’t exactly a priority.”

“Noted. We’ll make sure to give you ample time to make arrangements. Our initial plan is going to be a surveillance mission tonight.” Lydia swiped her hand over the screen to reveal a detailed map of the location. “If all goes well, in two days time we will liberate the operation.”

“What’s going to happen to the women?” Izzy whispered. “Last time— the ones that were still pregnant— they—” She swallowed, her eyes darting first to the baby and then to the floor. Clary hadn’t seen as much as the others that day, since Iris locked her in the basement to be bred by a demon— but she heard the story second hand. The pregnant women all went into labor at once, dying in the process. Some of the children— like the one in Magnus’ arms— lived, but others weren’t so lucky. They suspected it was a curse of sorts protecting Iris’ operation, but the magic was hard to trace and they couldn’t be sure.

“If at all possible, we are going to get them out of there, make them comfortable, and help them for the duration of their pregnancy,” Lydia said, avoiding eye contact and trying to maintain some professionalism. Of course she was just affected as the rest of them, but she still had a mission to organize, a position of power that Clary still didn’t understand. At first it made her seem cold, an ice queen and soldier who did everything by the book, following orders to a T. Now, Clary
understood why Lydia was this way. By keeping her head down, she was able to get more done, save more lives, make a bigger difference. “Ideally, we could have them in a hospital anywhere but Idris. They’ve been through enough, they don’t need additional prejudice even if it’s harmless Clave taunting.”

“It isn’t always harmless,” Isabelle growled. The tone of her voice bristled the baby, Magnus bouncing her to soothe her as she squirmed and grunted.

“I will discuss it with Catarina.” Magnus shifted the baby to the other arm, pressing a kiss to her cheek in an attempt to calm her impending tears. It was obvious Magnus wasn’t exactly sure what to do with an infant— he was putting up a good front, but as far as Clary knew he’d never been a father before. His love was visible and overflowing, but she could see the trademark fear of a new parent with a fussy baby. “She works at Beth Israel hospital— they would be safe there. I own a few hotels in the city— I can reserve a block of rooms there and make sure each woman is comfortable and safe. The Clave will—”

“Just send your bill. Whatever the price it will be worth it.” Lydia looked to the bundle in Magnus’ arms with a strange type of longing. Why hadn’t Clary noticed it before? Maybe Lydia’s facade was fading. “And if you can— although I’m already sure you were going to— send out word to those you trust. We will try to open up the adoption process for these children as soon as possible for…” She trailed off, not wanting to finish the statement. Everyone knew what she meant though— if the mothers died from a curse again, or if they didn’t want these children that were the product of assault by demonic forces— and it wasn’t pretty. Lydia cleared her throat, determined to finish the sentence. “... for any children that require a new and loving home.”

“Your kindness and empathy is unique amongst Shadowhunters, Miss Branwell. You remind me so much of your ancestor Charlotte— she always had an open heart for children in need as well. Even if they were smart-mouthed Herondales.” Jace looked insulted and opened his mouth to defend himself, but Magnus clearly wasn’t in the mood for his antics. “I’ve seen you making eyes at my daughter the whole time— no matter how hard you were trying to deny it. Would you like to hold her?”

“I think we all do,” Izzy admitted. It was clear Izzy was in love, even though she wasn’t particularly the maternal type. Clary didn’t know if Izzy ever wanted children— she was dating Simon and they were pretty serious, but that didn’t mean that one day they couldn’t adopt. Long pointy nails and high heels didn’t scream ‘motherly’ to Clary, but maybe one day Izzy would surprise her.

“Not so fast— the Clave Envoy-turned-humanitarian gets first dibs.” He held out the bundle to Lydia, the blonde accepting Magnus’ daughter into her arms. It was amazing to see someone who used to hold fast to the Clave’s ideals about downworlders looking so smitten with a warlock child.

“She’s so beautiful.” Lydia held the baby with much care— it was clear she was ready to be a mother herself. She was unmarried, though, and it would be a Clave scandal if she were to pursue becoming a single mother. Even if there were a few closeted-gay shadowhunters who would happily donate to the cause, happily co-parent with her, Lydia would never go through with living a lie— not anymore. In what felt like a distant past, she had been ready to be Alec’s fake bride, but she’d grown past that. She learned how to love herself, deciding she didn’t need to fall into the Clave ideal of getting married off just for political appearances. Lydia was more confident now, more self-assured. “And what name would get the honor of being given to a princess like this?”

“Aerulei,” Magnus beamed.

“Does it mean anything?” Underhill questioned, standing from the table to get a better look.
“No.” Magnus reached out to gently lift her from Lydia’s arms. “That’s the best part— she is the first of her name— she will create the meaning.”

“My turn!” Izzy hopped up and down eagerly, her eyes never leaving the baby.

“Biscuit is next, calm yourself Isabelle,” Magnus chided. Aerulei kicked her feet restlessly as she was passed into the next set of arms.

“Hello little girl.” Clary lifted her up in the air, holding them face-to-face. She was so tiny, especially for just over a year old. “Look at those eyes! So much like your papa’s!” Brushing their noses together in Eskimo kisses, she lowered her to cradle her into her arms. Aerulei’s skin was cashmere-soft and smelled starchy and sweet— that elusive baby smell, Clary wanted nothing more than to protect the life she held, to watch her grow into a beautiful, strong, warlock woman in the world now free of Valentine Morgenstern.

“Look at that— she yawned.” Jace walked up behind her, leaning over her shoulder. “She’s got teeth. I didn’t know babies had teeth. Won’t that hurt when they— you know.”

“I’m sure Magnus isn’t breastfeeding her, you goof.” Clary giggled, tickling Aerulei under the chin. The baby reached out, grabbing her finger with her determined little hands.

“You have no idea how good you look holding her.” Jace reached around, brushing the top of the baby’s head delicately with his rough palms, similar to the way someone would pet a cat. “You’re going to look even better holding our babies.”

“Is that a promise?” Clary whispered, their voices were too quiet for anyone else to hear.

“I need a picture of Auntie Biscuit with my little Aya!” Magnus handed his phone to Lydia, skittering over to join Clary and Jace. “I’ll even let the Herondale in the photo— but only because I have a bad feeling I’m going to be stuck with him bothering me for at least a few more decades.”

“That’s because I get to be the cool uncle, right?” Jace laughed, a warm mirthful sound that made Clary’s heart bloom with hope for the future. He would be a great uncle— but he’d be an even better dad.

“Okay— I’m going to take it in three.” Lydia smiled. “One— two— three!”

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**Present Day**

The flashbulb was nearly blinding, and when Clary opened her eyes, she was staring at the ceiling, blankets clinging to her sweat-dampened skin— someone was holding her hand.

“You were having a nightmare, Clary.” Simon scooted closer to her.

“The picture— the one I saw yesterday. I was remembering the day it was taken. What happened Simon?” Her heart clenched in her chest— she felt dizzy and hot. “Why don’t I remember? Everything seemed so good… Valentine was gone, we were saving people…”

“It was all good… until it wasn’t. I can explain everything, but we really should take it slow. Everyone cares about you so much, and we’ll be here for you every step of the way— but you
can’t go head first into this. I know it’s the Clary Fairchild— well, Fray— way, but trust me on this. Do you think you can handle that?”

“I did everything to get my memories back once— I remember that much now— and I’m willing to do everything again.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry there wasn't any Malec... but I promise I'll make it up to you. The next chapter is going to have something I think you'll really really like it!

See you guys next chapter! Thank you for all the holiday well-wishes and comments! I'm trying to catch up responding to each one! I love your comments, please bury me in them. I want more of you <3 You're all the best!

Also! I know I'm not perfect with updating on schedule, so if you want to know when new stuff drops, make sure to hit the subscribe button!

Final note (I promise) I wrote a Christmas fic called Feliz Navidad Means Merry Christmas, and it's super different and weird but maybe you'll be interested! It was only partially beta read, so apologies in advance!

Link: Feliz Navidad Means Merry Christmas
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Alec attends Simon's found-family/real-family Hanukkah dinner, the normally peaceful event plagued with uncomfortable emotions and a barrage of questions.

Magnus prepares for Christmas morning and finds himself more overwhelmed than usual.

Featuring: gross babies being gross :P

Chapter Notes

I was on the fence about doing holiday chapters, but I went to my family Hanukkah dinner a few days ago and decided 'to hell with it, holidays bring out a ton of emotion and we deserve to see Alec/Magnus feeling that'. So a day late, here you go!

I tried to explain any yiddish/Jewish traditions/germanic Christmas traditions in context, but if anything is confusing, feel free to comment about it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Clary, I’m surprised to see you here.” Alec pulled her into a tight hug, mostly to hide the pained look on his face. He’d only just walked in the house, and it was already hard and awkward. Clary had been hiding out in the hall, away from everyone else, looking tense and anxious.

“What? Who wouldn’t want to sit down at a family dinner full of people who lied to them?” Clary laughed, her normal melodic toned tainted bitter.

“Come on, it won’t be so bad. Not everyone here knows what’s going on either. You aren’t the only one in the dark,” he tried to reassure her. They were standing in the hall, the sounds of clinking and clanking dishes signaling that it was almost time to eat.

“You’re right— Rebecca and Elaine don’t know.” She took a deep breath, steadying herself.

“Actually— Rebecca knows,” Alec sighed. “Simon didn’t tell you?”

“Simon didn’t tell me anything!” She raised her voice. Alec shushed her— he didn’t want to cause a scene at someone else’s family event. Her frustration growing, she scrunched her nose until her pink cheeks kissed the bottom of her eyes. “He didn’t tell me anything, he only said ‘trust me’ and then hasn’t said a word since. The only reason I haven’t completely freaked out about it yet is because I have no idea what to do, no idea who to talk to— and my oldest friend asked me to trust him, so I should give him the benefit of the doubt.”

“But you don’t trust him.” Alec’s eyes fell to the floor.

“Not really— the only person I trust right now is you.” She shook her head, a few curls escaping
“Me?” Alec stammered. “Why?” When he first met her, he never thought he’d hear such a genuine statement from Clary Fray.

“You weren’t in any of the memories I got back so far. I know you’re a Shadowhunter—or, you were—you had to have been, you’re Izzy’s brother. But all I know is that you aren’t now, and neither is your mom. Whatever happened to you, they left you high and dry like they did to me, so you know what I’m going through.”

“It was a bit more complicated than that, but believe me Clary—you’re better off. Shadowhunters aren’t the good guys.” Five years ago, Alec would have never dreamt he’d say those words—he was an obedient Shadowhunter through and through. He lived by ‘sed lex, dura lex’, following the law as if it were the only option. He could barely believe he was at a place now where he would admit with complete confidence that Shadowhunters were problematic—that their laws often did more harm than good. At least he could pass on that knowledge to Clary to dissuade her from digging too far, or worse—rejoining the fold.

“Oh—I know. If they were, don’t you think one of them would have tried to get me back?”

“Jace did—” Alec started, pushing past the tightness in his throat to at least give Jace a meager defense, whether he thought he deserved it or not.

“No, Jace is just chasing after some girl who doesn’t exist anymore. Even if I get all my memories back, I’ll never be that girl again.” Her mossy eyes were hard and cold—a stark departure from her normal effervescent demeanor. Even in this unfathomable complex situation, her headstrong resolve was admirable. It was clear how much she’d matured over the years, how differently she was handling things compared to when she first found out she was a Shadowhunter.

“No Clary listen—” Alec took a deep breath. He didn’t want to say what he was about to—he was going to get it over with as fast as possible. Maybe it was better here, where she couldn’t freak out and cause a scene, or maybe that made it even worse, but he had to tell her the truth. “Jace tried to get you back. He tried many, many times—killing himself looking for ways to get your memory back. He got numerous reprimands from the Clave for pursuing it. He hung out near your apartment, the shop, your school—I had to get him to stand down. It wasn’t doing anyone any good, and it would have just resulted in him being deruned. My brother needed Jace at the Institute—Izzy needed him too. Hell, Jace is probably the most talented Shadowhunter of the generation.”

“I know. I’m not mad at you.” Her shoulders lowered as she released a breath Alec hadn’t realized she was holding. “You did the right thing. I think seeing him—it started all of this, my memories coming back. You were just protecting me.”

“I’ll always protect you, Fray.” He clapped his hand on her shoulder.

“Even from Simon, because apparently he’s a vampire, and like, I don’t know how to unpack that?” She said it like a question, a mixture between curiosity and amusement. It was nice to see her smile and joke, even when her whole life was being turned inside out. Clary was stronger than he could have ever imagined.

“Especially from Simon.” Alec rolled his eyes.

“What about me?” Simon appeared out of nowhere. “It doesn’t matter, there are more important things—fried, sweet things.” Simon looped his surprisingly strong arms around both of their shoulders. “Come on! The sufganiyot are still hot! Let’s light the menorah so we can start eating!”
“Well if there are jelly donuts involved, all is forgiven I suppose.” Clary smiled, leaning her head into Simon’s shoulder. The gesture was friendly and familiar—the type of natural contact resulting from a lifetime of friendship. As beautiful as it was, something about it pricked Alec in a sore spot he fought hard to ignore—a deep place in his heart that missed his only friendship he had that was so close—his parabatai.

“I’ll always know the way to your heart! Your sweet tooth will be your ultimate downfall!” He sat down, gesturing to two open seats for Clary and Alec. The table was more than full—Izzy, little Rafael, Rebecca, Elaine, Maryse, Luke and Simon were huddled around a table that could barely hold six, let alone the eight it was about to. An elaborate antique menorah sat on top of a sheet of tin foil—breaking the perfect aesthetic, but much more practical for catching dripping wax. Elaine was busying herself adding three candles to the menorah from right to left, carefully wiggling them into place.

“Simon—you do the honors.” Elaine handed her son a lit match, holding it over the shamash candle in his hand. This first candle was the attendant, used to light the other candles. Holding the candle in his right hand, Simon straightened his posture and began the blessing.

“Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam,” Simon read in Hebrew. Of all the languages Alec learned in his studies, Hebrew wasn’t one of them. It was a beautiful, ancient tongue, and something about the blessing made him feel warm and safe. Since he didn’t understand the words, he focused instead on the spirit of the holiday—how the oil burned for eight days when it should have only lasted one—how life could provide even when everything was running on empty—how things weren’t as dark as they seemed. There was something beautiful about the concept of fighting off the forces of dark and evil with light instead of swords.

Simon quieted, finishing the blessing. He’d made it through the entire thing without a hint of hesitation or even a flinch—the product of what had to have been hours and hours of practice for the vampire. Rafael watched in awe as Simon used the shamash to light the three candles from left to right before placing the shamash back in the center. It was only the third night, but it was the only night everyone could get together for dinner. It wasn’t ideal—Elaine would rather have everyone around a glowing fully lit menorah, but she had to settle for this instead.

“Alright then,” Elaine beamed, clapping her hands. “Let’s eat!”

“L’chaim!” Izzy cheered and kissed Simon on the cheek. “You did great, babe,” she whispered to her boyfriend.

Looking around the table, it would be so easy to believe that nothing had changed. That Clary was still blissfully unaware. Even though that wasn’t the case, everyone was keeping up a good act and enjoying the holiday anyway—that was the best they could have hoped for. The delicious meal did wonders at smoothing out any uncomfortable emotions—any food cooked by a loving Jewish mother was made of magic. Alec filled his plate full of heavy, fatty foods—moist pot roast, pan-fried latkes, deep fried jelly donuts. A pitcher of deep red liquid was passed around, skipping over Elaine.

“My contribution to the dinner everyone!” Izzy smiled. “It’s vodka cranberry sangria!”

“Iz—” Maryse smiled pitifully. “This is just a pitcher of cranberry juice and half a bottle of vodka.”

“Okay, so maybe I tried to make fancy cranberry sangria, and maybe I failed—but is anyone complaining?”
“Me, I’m complaining.” Clary piped up, raising her hand. “I miss the kosher concord grape wine.”

“Clary, sweetheart—” Elaine handed over a glass bottle. “— here you go. Sparkling grape juice. Just make sure you leave some for me and the little guy.” She smiled at Rafael, who was quietly gnawing at an applesauce-covered latke, holding it with both hands.

“You’re the best, lifesaving really.” Clary handed the pitcher over to Alec without pouring any for herself, opting for the non-alcoholic juice instead. Feeling bad for his sister’s culinary missteps, Alec filled his glass to the brim, eyeing the floating cranberries skeptically. They were deflated, looking both under and overripe at the same time. He took it like a champ regardless, sucking down two large gulps and topping off his glass before passing the pitcher along. If he kept this up, he was going to get a bit too tipsy— but it was okay, the sweet, powder-sugar covered dough of the sufganiyot would absorb all the alcohol.

“Hey Alec—” Luke pointed at him from across the table while wiping his mouth with a napkin. “I figured you’d be bringing Magnus and the kids.”

“Yes, where are our favorite little warl—” Maryse was cut off by Alec kicking her from under the table. “Our favorite children!”

“He went to a party with Cat and Ragnor, but he’d love to be here, of course,” Alec assured Elaine. “Especially since Aerulei and Rafael get along so well,” he added. Seeing Rafe without Aya to interact with was odd— he was so much more quiet and withdrawn. He watched everything around him, taking it all in without speaking a word. Alec was like that at his age— especially before Jace came along to help nudge him out of his shell.

“I didn’t know you were seeing anyone, Alec.” Elaine clicked her tongue. “Simon never tells me anything anymore. A son should really call his mother more,” she chided. “Maryse, I hope Alec talks to you more than Simon talks to me. Oy vey.”

“When your son lives with you, it’s hard not to keep in touch.” Maryse winced as she took a sip of her beverage, chasing it down with some water and bread. “Plus, his shop is right next door to mine.”

Elaine nodded and poured herself some sparkling grape juice. Looking across the table, something caught her eye. She pointed with a butter knife. “Isabelle— Rafael has a little schmutz on his face. Applesauce I think. Get a napkin.”

“Busting out the Yiddish for Hanukkah, Mom? Really?” Simon rolled his eyes. “You literally never talk like this.”

“What? Can’t a bubbe make sure her grandbabies are taken care of?” She narrowed her eyes. Despite the strange tension between Simon and his mother, it was comforting to see that Elaine was welcoming Rafe into their family just like Maryse and Luke did with Magnus’ kids and Izzy’s son. It warmed Alec’s heart.

“It’s still pretty new, Magnus and Alec. That’s why Simon hasn’t told you” Isabelle clarified, changing the subject back to her brother’s love life and taking the spotlight off Simon.

“Is it? Because Alec’s been staying there almost every other night recently.” Maryse smirked, sheepishly poking at her slice of pot roast.

“And, you did bring him and the kids to Thanksgiving…” Luke added flame to the fire.

“Are you going over there tomorrow for Christmas?” someone asked, but at this point all of the
questions were swirling around his head and making Alec feel overwhelmed. Through the barrage of voices, he reached out and sucked down more of the sticky-sweet cranberry booze, bracing himself for the rest of the dinner. With a plate full of fried food to cushion any uncomfortable emotions, he was more than prepared to take it. There were worse things they could be questioning him about. At least they were asking about the thing—or rather the person—he cared about the most.

It was almost midnight, and Magnus was decidedly overwhelmed. The living room was a certified mess—piles of unwrapped presents circling the haphazardly decorated Christmas tree. Crumpled balls of paper—evidence of failed attempts at gift wrapping—littered the entire open space of the loft, discarded after Magnus threw them aimlessly. Last year, since he had just adopted Keris, they’d forgone most of the holiday traditions, Aya too enamored with her new baby brother to notice the season passed by without ceremony. This year, though, it was back to normal. He wanted to give his children the warm, loving, holiday experience that he never got—something that represented family in the most basic and traditional terms. But family was a two-way street. If he did everything with magic—the cooking, the decorating, even the present wrapping—it would ruin the meditative and reflective aspects of the holiday. Although he knew that wrapping the presents himself made him cherish each gift more—thinking of how much the kids would enjoy it, musing about how next year, the gifts will be more advanced, his kids one year older.

Keris will only be one once—by this time next year, he’ll be toddling around the living room freely on his own two feet. Aya will be almost six years old—hardly a baby anymore. The stuffed animals sat naked in a group, their stitched eyes blankly staring at him. One day, both kids would be too old for stuffed animals. Something inside his heart broke at the thought. He sighed, taking a long sip of brandy, munching on one of the cookies left out for Santa. The carrots left out for the reindeer would be promptly magicked away to the feeding trough at the Prospect Park Zoo—Christmas Eve was not the time to worry himself with his vegetable intake.

Breaking him from his introspective fugue, his phone buzzed on the coffee table. He clambered over the mess of the living room, reaching over a rocking horse to grab the device.

Alec 12:01AM
You up? I just left Simon’s Hanukkah dinner, and I’m too awake to go to sleep.

Magnus 12:02AM
I’m trying and failing to wrap presents. The rolls of paper and stick-on bows are taunting me.

Alec 12:02AM
If you don’t mind me being a bit tipsy, I could come help?

Magnus 12:02AM

I’m sure you will do a better job tipsy than I will sober.

Magnus 12:02AM

I would love your help, and your company

Alec 12:03AM

Good, because I’m already here.

Magnus heard the still unusual sound of a key turning in his front door— Alec’s key. He’d nearly forgotten that he gave him one.

“Hey,” Alec whispered, stepping over the islands of mess. His long legs looked clumsier than normal as he navigated the minefield of toys and wrapping supplies. Magnus pushed things to the side with abandon, clearing out a spot for Alec to sit next to him on the rug. Alec lowered himself down, nearly collapsing into a cross-legged position with an emphatic huff. He leaned over to kiss Magnus gently on the mouth— his breath smelled of cranberry, vodka, and a hint of spiced orange.

“Hi,” Magnus finally spoke as they broke away. “You don’t have to be quiet, you know. The kids rooms are sealed shut, the living room has a temporary soundproof ward.”

“They’re sealed in? What if they need you?” Alec leaned back on his hands, stretching his neck from side to side, the vertebrae popping as they released lactic acid.

“No worries, I have this,” Magnus grinned as he raised up his wrist, the beaded bracelet on his arm rattling. “One for Aya, one for Keris. They’re spelled so that if one of them wakes up, it turns blue, and if they’re in distress, it glows red. Basically baby monitors, but much more stylish.”

“You’ve thought of everything, haven’t you?” Alec smiled.

“Except how to wrap all of these presents,” Magnus sighed in near-defeat.

“Just say the word and I’ll get to work. I’m actually really good at gift wrapping.” Alec searched the room with his eyes, finding what he was looking for in the form of a roll of wrapping paper and a tape dispenser. “I’m also good at bow-tying, if you don’t want to use those things.” Alec pointed at the bag of stick-on bows.

“Oh you mean these?” Magnus taunted, conjuring one of the bows into his hand before sticking it to the top of Alec’s head. “Judge my cheater-bows all you want, but try doing that with ribbon.” He stuck out his tongue.

“I find it surprising someone as fashionable as you doesn’t know how to tie gift bows.” Alec
unrolled a length of paper. Reaching into the mound of gifts, he grabbed one of the lowest-hanging fruits, an introductory warding spell-book for Aerulei. “Do you have scissors—” He didn’t finish the statement before Magnus snapped his fingers, scissors appearing in Alec’s hands. In one swift motion, the scissors slid across the length of paper, making a clean-cut line.

“It’s not that I don’t know how, it’s more that I’m a parent, and we tend to get lazy when we spend a good chunk of our day changing diapers and feeding hungry little mouths.” Magnus shoved a sugar cookie into Alec’s mouth.

“Mm— these are really good.” Alec finished chewing the bite of cookie. “But I’m ridiculously full — Simon and his sister cooked so much food.”

“Was Clary there?” Magnus asked curiously. Her sudden influx of memories was problematic for everyone around her, and nobody was sure how to deal with it. Thankfully, this time, Clary didn’t come at him with threats, begging for her memories back. He wished he had them though—he wished he could give them back to her. Sadly, the angels themselves were the ones who stole them from her, and there was no chance of stealing them back.

“Yeah— but, let’s not talk about that right now. It’s Christmas Eve. We can deal with the stressful stuff later.” Alec waved off the topic, focusing instead on folding crisp lines in the paper, making quick business of meticulously wrapping the book and putting it to the side. “We can wrap first, and then if we have time after I’ll tie real bows. If not, I’ll concede, and we can use the stick-on ones.” Alec smiled—that lopsided grin that made Magnus fall head over heels all over again—and he couldn’t help but lean in and kiss his boyfriend again.

“Magnus, if you keep kissing me like this, I’m going to get distracted,” Alec spoke against Magnus’ lips. “Then the presents will never get wrapped.” He chuckled, playfully pushing Magnus away.

“Fine,” Magnus huffed. “But I’ll need more liquid courage to tackle this daunting task.” Magnus reached over to the other side of the tree, taking a sip of the spiced brandy.

“Do you make your kids leave out booze for Santa?” Alec stole the glass, taking an exploratory sip. He winced at the taste—sweet and bitter—and it reminded Magnus of the first time he had drinks with Alec, all those years ago. This was better than back then—this Alec was more relaxed, self-assured—and not closeted.

“No, don’t be ridiculous. The booze is for Krampus. Krampuslauf is the term actually,” Magnus said matter-of-factly.

“Krampus— like the one who punishes bad children?” He looked at Magnus, his face scrunched in confusion.

“That’s the one. Long story short, you leave out brandy for Krampus, cookies for St.Nicholas in hopes that the former doesn’t hurt you and the latter gives you gifts.”

“That’s awful! Your kids think there’s an evil Christmas demon hell-bent on hurting them unless they give him alcohol.” Alec sheepishly grabbed another cookie—clearly trying to mask his thievery with his hysterics surrounding Krampus.

“Ugh, you just don’t get it. Krampus is the motivation to not be bad, St. Nicholas is the motivation to be good. You’d be surprised how effective it is at encouraging good behavior, when children think they could be eaten by a goat-demon.”
“Is Krampus really a demon?” Alec raised an eyebrow.

“Are you asking me if Krampus is real?” Magnus laughed.

“Well, as Shadowhunters, we were always told that ‘All the legends are true.’” Alec shrugged.

“Oh, so maybe there is a goat demon that is relatively the same as Krampus, but he is trapped in the deep bowels of Edom somewhere. He’s not out on the loose terrorizing children.” Magnus sipped at his brandy again. “So if you were searching for punishment yourself, you’d have to look elsewhere.”

“If anyone should be punished, it’s you,” Alec smirked, leaning in closer to Magnus to the point where the warlock could feel the other man’s warmth radiating off his skin. It made him realize how cold it was in the loft. With a flick of the wrist, a fire roared to life in the hearth, its flames licking red and green in the spirit of the season. Alec turned his attention to the fire for a brief second before honing in on Magnus. “Are you trying to set the mood for something?” the nephilim purred, his voice husky and rough.

“What if I was? You were the one coming in here boasting about how skillful you are at tying things up. It makes a man wonder— sends his mind off to darker places.” Magnus reached over, lightly pulling the bow off of Alec’s head. Although he would have sex with Alec no matter how he looked, he’d rather not have a goofy bow tainting the potential debauchery that was about to occur.

“Well how about I pull you out of the dark—” Alec abruptly pulled Magnus off the floor and into a bridal carry. “— and into the firelight. Your golden eyes will look so beautiful with the glow of the fire.” Alec lowered Magnus onto the rug in front of the fire, the space thankfully not taken over by Christmas presents. Magnus snapped his fingers, an assortment of fluffy pillows surrounding them— no matter how sexy it was being taken in front of a roaring fire, he still wanted both of them to be comfortable. Alec lovingly scooted a pillow under Magnus’ neck before crashing their mouths together, ravishing Magnus body and soul.

Now, Alec tasted like sugar cookies, a hint of brandy on his tongue. They tasted the same— they tasted like home. Alec’s hands combed through Magnus’ unstyled hair, already wispy and disheveled. Even without his armor— wearing loose pajama pants and a cheesy Christmas shirt, no makeup, his hair loose— Alec managed to make him feel more beautiful and confident than Magnus had ever felt in his life. Magnus felt wanted.

Alec wanted Magnus in more ways than one— evident by the bulge he felt pressing against his hipbone as Alec rolled his hips against him. Just the friction of their clothed bodies grinding together made Magnus moan, made Alec’s full name rattle off his tongue.

“I love it when you say my name,” Alec breathed, taking a moment to nip at Magnus’ ear before returning his lips to Magnus’ mouth. “You take away every memory of it being used as a warning or in anger—” He spoke between kisses. “— you make me feel proud of it.”

“Oh, Alexander. I want you to feel proud of every single aspect of yourself.” Magnus leaned his neck up, chasing Alec for another kiss, sucking on Alec’s plump lower lip. “I want you to love yourself as much as I do.”

“You love me?” Alec planted both hands on the floor, on either side of Magnus’ torso. Holding his body above the warlocks, his eyes were searching Magnus’ face— Alec looked nervous. Magnus wished he could take the words back— it was too soon, clearly Alec wasn’t ready. He was expecting the man to dash straight out the door, to run for the hills— but when Alec broke into a
warm smile, any fear and panic melted away.

“So what if I do?” Magnus tried to sound confident. Even though his fear was gone, a bit of trepidation remained. If Alec didn’t reciprocate his level of affection yet— it would be fine by him. It would still hurt, sure, but he would take Alec however he could have him.

“That’s pretty convenient then,” Alec stuttered, his shaking voice betraying his cocky words, “because I love you too.” He dropped down, kissing Magnus so thoroughly Magnus felt like he’d never been kissed before— like this kiss was an ‘after’, and everything else was ‘before’. That’s because it was— this was a kiss with a man he loved, and a man who loved him back. The next time they broke apart to breathe, they were already naked. Magnus wasn’t sure if they’d removed each other’s clothes, or if he’d disrobed them with magic, but it didn’t matter. It didn’t matter because Alec was peppering kisses down his neck, across his chest— his hand resting on the tattoo right over the warlock’s heart. His mouth continued to travel downward— his prickly stubble made Magnus arch his back at the tickling sensation.

“Alexander—” Magnus’ breath hitched as Alec nipped at his hip bone. “I don’t know if I’ve ever wanted you this badly.” He writhed beneath the pressure of Alec holding his legs wide, his body twisting away from the overwhelming stimulation of having Alec kiss the delicate skin of his inner thigh.

“You’re so beautiful Magnus—” Alec trailed his tongue up Magnus’ thigh, into the crease between his legs and his perineum— he took time to add just enough pressure there to make Magnus’ cock twitch. “You’re so beautiful, and I’m the luckiest man alive because I get to fuck you right here, in front of this fireplace, on Christmas eve, You’re the best present I could ever hope for.”

“You’re not so bad yourself— they say good things come in small packages, but I, for one, am more than happy to accept your large package.” Magnus giggled— he couldn’t resist making a crude joke. The whole night was setting up for it.

“I’m going to kiss you more— just to shut you up.” Alec dove forward, capturing Magnus in another kiss. It took his breath away— breath he didn’t know he had in his lungs in the first place.

“You know you love me,” Magnus taunted.

“I do, terrible puns and all,” Alec hummed, kissing Magnus’ neck almost hard enough to leave a mark, releasing the suction to focus back on the warlock’s lips. As they rocked together, Alec snaked his hand downward, his fingers heading toward Magnus’ hole. “Do I get to open up this present early?” Alec laughed, kissing Magnus again as he traced his finger against Magnus’ rim. His eager body responded by spreading his legs even wider, welcoming Alec in.

“I’ll let you open that one up early.” Magnus smirked. “But only if you’re going to use it— thoroughly.” Alec slid his finger into Magnus— the warlock had already lubed himself up generously.

“You’re already so ready— I— can I just—” Alec moaned, sinking a second finger into Magnus, this time grazing Magnus’ prostate. Magnus yelped at the touch— he wanted more.

“Use your words, kitten,” Alec growled.

“Kitten?” Magnus cocked an eyebrow at Alec. He didn’t realize his boyfriend was the type for pet-names, especially not names of literal pets.

“Sorry—” Alec bit his lip, pulling a few inches back. “it’s just… cute? And you’re… cute?” Alec
sounded a bit embarrassed.

“Well just be warned— you’ve opened the floodgates of pet names now. And I can be a real animal with them.” Magnus’ mind was already reeling with all the possible options.

“Yes… an animal…” Alec tickled his sides lightly. “… a real kitten.” Alec giggled—the sight of his grown-ass boyfriend giggling would always make Magnus weak.

“Please fuck me,” Magnus panted. “You’re gorgeous, and naked, and on top of me, and fingerling me—but I need you inside of me.”

“You want me to deliver my package?” Alec grinned, Magnus crinkling his nose at the terrible pun.

“I don’t care how you say it—I’m literally begging you. Fuck. Me. Now,” Magnus commanded. The second the words left his mouth, Alec was hitching up the warlock’s legs, lining up his dick and thrusting in with practiced ease. It was so gloriously familiar—being filled to the brim with Alec—but he would never grow tired of it. It would be just as magical each time. All pretense and games aside, Alec picked up a rapid pace, rutting in and out at a speed that Magnus struggled to thrust into. It was glorious—letting his man pound him into the floor in front of a fire, the taste of sugar cookies on his tongue. He latched his legs around Alec’s toned core, freeing Alec’s hands to grip into Magnus’ hair, to cup his face. They kissed, Alec never letting up on the relentless pace of thrusting hilt-deep into Magnus.

It was almost too much—the constant back and forth pressure on his prostate sending Magnus closer and closer to the brink. Sweat pooled between their chests—from the heat of the fire and the frantic movement of their bodies. Magnus loved the way Alec’s chest hair tickled his skin, the way Alec leaned his forehead against Magnus’ as he concentrated on moving his hips.

“I’m sorry—but I’m not going to hold on much longer,” Magnus managed to get the words out between moans.

“It’s okay—let go. I’ve got you. I’ve always got you.” Alec kissed him hard, and Magnus obeyed. He let go of any hang-ups about coming too quickly, letting his entire body be consumed by how good he felt—how loved he felt.

“I love you, Alexander.” Magnus moaned. “I love you so much.” He cried out, feeling his balls tighten—he was about to come untouched.

“Fuck, Magnus. Hearing you say that—it”” Alec huffed. “I love you too.” He dipped down, kissing Magnus deeply, their tongues sloppy and messy as the last few thrusts pushed them both over the edge together. As they rode out their orgasms, their tired bodies were near collapse. Alec rolled off of Magnus, pulling him into a sticky, too-warm hug, pressing kisses into the warlock’s hair.

“We didn’t get any of the presents wrapped,” Magnus yawned.

“Don’t you have magic for that?” Alec spoke through his yawn, his voice adorably distorted.

“Where’s the fun in that?” Magnus nuzzled into Alec’s damp neck. He smelled like musk, shampoo and something else—latkes. It was the fried potato smell of latkes from Simon’s Hanukkah dinner.

“The fun is that we get to go to sleep earlier—because I know the kids are going to wake up at the crack of dawn.”
“Mmm.. you have a point.” Magnus dragged his tired naked body up, sweeping his hands lazily over the living room, sparkling blue smoke clouding the air. Every present was suddenly wrapped to perfection, stacked neatly underneath the tree. “Come on Alexander—” Magnus reached out to help Alec up off the floor before the nephilim fell asleep. “Let’s shower off quickly and get into bed.”

“Okay, but only if I get to use your shampoo,” Alec said sleepily. “Because it smells so good. And no funny business in there,” he grumbled. “I’m too sleepy.”

“Fine by me. After that, I’m more than satisfied.” Magnus dragged Alec behind him into his bedroom, the domesticity of the evening not lost on him at all. All the stress he’d felt hours before about the holiday was gone— he had everything he needed now.

“Come on, let’s wake him up—” Magnus stage-whispered, just loudly enough to wake Alec up. He squinted his eyes closed, refusing to accept that he was about to leave the warm, comfy bed.

“Alec!” Aya screamed, jumping on the bed. “Alec wake up! Wake up! Wake up!” She jumped with each word, the mattress bouncing up and down. “Papa it’s not working he’s not waking up! Doesn’t he know it’s Christmas?” She whined.

“Hmm… Seems like I might have to call in the backup troops!” Magnus laughed, a new weight plopping onto the bed. “Get him, sayang,” Magnus encouraged. A babbling, bumbling baby crawled up to the pillows, stopping right in front of Alec’s face.

“Up— Up!” Keris yelled, his voice cheerful but urgent.

“Do you know what day it is Keris?” Magnus cooed. Alec heard his footsteps approach the side of the bed.

“Crimbo! Chrimbas!” Keris struggled through the syllables, siphoning all his energy into trying to wake Alec. He slapped his hands across Alec’s cheeks— his hands were oddly damp. It was likely drool— babies were always covered in drool. “Up, up, up, up,” he chanted.

“Alec, Krampus didn’t kill us and Santa left us presents!” Aya flopped on the other side of him, pulling at his eyes to try to pull them open.

“Aya! Don’t poke people in the eyes, it’s impolite. It’s still not too late for Krampus to change his mind…” Magnus warned. At that, Alec cracked open one eye.


“You’re finally awake!” Aya wiggled with excitement.

“No I’m not.” Alec closed his eyes again, desperate for more sleep— it couldn’t be later than five in the morning. “I’m still sleeping.”

“But there’s coffee! I helped make it!” Aya grumbled. “It’s mean to me if you don’t get up!”

“Up, up, up,” Keris continued to chant. He was right in Alec’s face, his soft skin clammy against Alec’s ear. Wet spit bubbles popped, the gurgling sound simultaneously endearing and close. Keris
crawled on top of Alec’s chest, bouncing his entire weight as best he could by bending his knees and shaking his butt. Alec wrapped one arm around Keris, scooping the other around Aerulei.

“See how comfy this is?” Alec mumbled. “We could just go back to sleep.” He nuzzled into Keris, stroked his hand through Aya’s hair.

“No! I’m not tired! Aya scooted away. Why are you so sleepy? Don’t you want to know what Santa got for you?”

“Santa doesn’t bring gifts for old people like me, Aerulei.” Alec’s voice was muffled by Keris’ belly. The baby was an ally on the mission to wake him up too— crawling up over his face.

“I don’t know… maybe if you check under the tree you’ll be surprised,” Magnus teased. Alec could hear the smile in his voice.

“Just five more minutes, pl—” Alec tried.

**Pfft**

A tiny fart squeaked from Keris— and right into Alec’s face.

“Eww…” Alec sat up, lifting Keris off his face and high into the air. “Pumpkin, that is the worst alarm clock in the world.” He twisted the baby around, sniffing at his back to see if he needed a change. It was all clear. “On second thought, I’m awake now. Come on guys— let’s go see what’s under the tree.”

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think?

Hit me up with comments, questions, anything of the sort.

Here’s my tumblr if you want to bother me there:

[https://fanfic-fugue.tumblr.com/](https://fanfic-fugue.tumblr.com/)
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Alec goes back to work after Christmas.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The presents had all been opened. In a corner of the room, thinking he was hidden from the eyes of his owner, Chairman Meow munched on a ball of ripped up wrapping paper and unraveled silver ribbon. He alternated between sticking the string in the back of his mouth and sinking his teeth in the paper, taking an occasional pause from the routine to smack blown-glass ornaments and low-hanging evergreen branches with his paws as loudly as possible just to make sure he’d properly ‘killed’ the festive intruders.

“Chairman Meow! No-No! Get that out of your mouf!” Aya yelled as she sprinted over to the cat, her words muffled by the sugar cookie hanging from her mouth. Caught in the act, the fluff ball darted out of the living room, fur flying, hoping to find respite down the hall.

“I’m so proud of my little girl— she already knows how to be such a good cat parent.” Magnus sighed, snuggling in closer to Alec on the couch. His boyfriend smelled like pine, maple syrup, and Magnus’ custom brewed shampoo. Everything about Alec— even his new cashmere sweatpants— was stamped and marked by Magnus and his family. In this moment, Alec felt entirely his.

It was already past noon— they’d eaten pancakes for breakfast and lunch. Snacks were limited to chocolate popcorn, sugar cookies, and hot chocolate. Keris was already asleep on Magnus’ shoulder, and after her sugar-rush crashed, Aya would be down for a nap soon too. Everything was warm, safe, and loving at the Bane household. Magnus finally understood the true meaning of ‘comfort and joy’ and why people incessantly caroled for ‘good tidings’ of it.

“Drew, I didn’t know you were working during the holidays.” Alec passed her by, dipping into the back room to clock in, throw down his messenger bag, wash his hands and slide into his apron. The water from the backroom sink was always scalding hot, a shock to his raw, nearly-numb hands. With the damp, slushy morning, after last night’s surprise snow storm, his gloves failed miserably at keeping out the moisture. The frayed tips had even grown stiff— moisture dripping from scaffolds and sloped awnings freezing solid within their acrylic fibers. After barely making it to work on time, he finally released the breath he was holding for too long— it was 5:00 on the nose, and winter weather be damned, he was ready to get to work.

“Gotta ‘get that bread’ as they say.” Drew giggled nervously, her voice a bit hoarse and breathy. Since the shop just opened, there weren’t many customers yet, just the one guy Pete who came by every day at 4:58, picking up a large black dark roast and leaving a 30 dollar tip. Technically, he was taking advantage of whoever opened and brewed the first batches of coffee, but the tip well made up for it.
“You’re not going home to Vermont?” Alec questioned as he set up the espresso machine for the first real customer bound to pop through the doors soon. The grinder roared to life as he watched it devour the slightly oily whole coffee beans, savoring the rich freshly-roasted smell as he scooped the grounds into the machine filter and tamped them flat. Satisfied it was ready to go, he stretched his arms high to the sky, working out the signature soreness of too many days spent lazing on the couch. At least this year, he’d been losing track of the days with Magnus, not taking any clients in the shop or taking on any cafe shifts for a whole three days. “I thought you loved it? Seeing the dogs and all?”

“Yeah well—” She halfheartedly rearranged the gum and mints next to the register, straightened out the rows of multicolored holiday gift cards. “My student loans are a bit behind, so I decided to stay in the city, take the time and a half holiday pay.” She shrugged in defeat. “It’s fine though—totally. My mom and brother took the train down for Christmas day and even crammed up in my studio apartment with me.” Alec caught a hint of a smile quirk at the corner of her lips. “I’m just still feeling drained, ya know?”

“So… you want to swap me for drink duty then?” Alec winked. It was the least he could do— she looked miserable. It seemed more unfair to him now that he had such a perfect Christmas with Magnus and the kids, a great Hanukkah dinner with his family, and a New Year’s party to look forward to in a couple of days. He didn’t feel like talking to customers today either, but if switching with Drew would make her happy, he would do it. “Say no more, I’ll happily write down names and orders.”

“Just make sure to spell a couple names wrong for me?” Her auburn hair was a bit darker now that it was officially winter and the sun wasn’t out as much to bleach it on her bike to work. It made her look even more like a depressed social work student. She slipped a wireless headphone artfully beneath her hair. Alec pretended not to notice. They were gifted with a surprising ten minutes of quiet before someone came through the rattling door, bringing with him a reminder of the chilly and damp snow-melt covered mess outside.

“Cold morning out there, what can I get started for you?” Alec started his standard wintertime script— management approved. It was lazy, rehearsed, and he wasn’t in the mood to try too hard at seeming personable. “Something to warm you up?” As he finally looked up, he was met by two piercingly gorgeous grey-blue eyes. The sharp jawline, peppered in dark and handsome stubble, the meticulously clean-cut side parted hair— it might have been a few years, but the guy still looked almost exactly the same. Alec’s stomach tied in an uncomfortable, awkward knot, holding hostage any chance at having a conversation.

“Oh hey,” the man smiled. “You’re Al…” He played with his obviously hand-knit red scarf awkwardly as he searched the deep recesses of his brain for Alec’s name. Alec decided it was best to stave them both from discomfort.

“I’m Alec. And you’re Conner, right?” Alec didn’t need to ask it as a question— of course he remembered this guy’s name. They met once, two, maybe three years ago— Alec wasn’t sure— at some random New Year’s Eve party Clary made him go to. It was a shitty party— Clary had just lost her memories, wasn’t in art school yet. Simon was the opener to the opener for a hipster dive-bar party, and apparently that made the event attractive enough for Clary to want to go. Everything about it had been awful— until Alec saw Conner standing with his friends by the bar, drinking some strange-colored shots Alec didn’t recognize. It wasn’t as if Alec hadn’t kissed anyone before— he’d experienced the wide world that dating apps had to offer shortly after being out on his own— but something about Conner was different, beautiful, and he wanted to get to know him.

“Yeah, Conner.” He smiled a bit, and Alec didn’t know what else to say. All he could think about
was how things went down, how awkward it was and how shitty it had felt— how it almost made him swear off New Year’s parties for good. “I’ll take a cappuccino, hemp milk, double froth.” He anxiously tapped his credit card against the machine until it lit up green and he could tap to pay.

Of course he wanted double froth on a milk that wasn’t always cooperative. Alec scribbled a ‘
sorry Drew’
on the bottom of the ticket, sticking it to the side of the cup and sliding it back. It always felt good when the person on register commiserated with the baristas. He hadn’t bothered to ask if it was for here or to go— he didn’t want this guy hanging around. Hopefully, Conner would take the hint. Without another word the man shuffled along in his fancy pea-coat and surprisingly fashionable snow-boots over to the drink counter. He busied himself staring at his phone, tapping away at what was likely a whole lot of nothing.

“Alec,” Drew whispered, her spearmint gum hanging heavy on her breath. She was holding up the cup, pretending to ask a question about the order, like she always did when gossiping about a customer. “What did he do to you? Do you know each other? Ex-boyfriend?”

“He didn’t do anything— that was the problem. Never called me back, that’s all.” Alec shrugged. He knew it wasn’t the most convincing gesture, but at least it reflected how little he wanted to care about something stupid from years ago.

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New Year’s Eve, two years ago

Alec waited until after the group took their shots— he didn’t want to interrupt someone mid-sip, ending up with liquor spit all over him. Clary had been egging him on the whole night. It was as if she’d never had a gay friend before, and she was being supportive to the point of pandering. He had to cut her some slack— she’d just lost all her Shadowhunter memories, she thought her mom just died a few months ago, and her brain was likely memory-wiped mush. All she had left were Luke and Simon, and since when she came to, Luke and Maryse were already together, that made Alec her honorary new step brother— or at least friend. She was even working in Inkwell on a trial basis. He was rethinking allowing her into his place of business as she shoved him the last few feet of the way, nearly sending him tripping into the bar.

“Hey— what are you drinking?” Alec felt his chest clench as he tried to start a conversation with the handsome stranger next to him.

“Not sure actually—” The dark haired man laughed, his blue eyes twinkling under the haphazard string lights snaking around the roof of the bar. “The bartender called it a ‘ball dropper’. Want one?” He visibly sized Alec up, his gaze sliding from head to toe. Good Alec thought to himself. It was always a risk— meeting people organically. What if he wasn’t gay? That would be humiliating. And if he made that mistake with the wrong person, it could be dangerous. This time, though, it looked like Alec had been right. “My treat?” he added. This time, Alec was definitely right.

“Sure!” Alec said with a bit too much enthusiasm. “Alec—” He smiled, realizing he hadn’t said a coherent phrase. “I’m Alec.”

“Conner,” he said more passively than Alec would expect as he flagged down the bartender, pointing to his shot, signaling for another two.
“So, uh— what do you do, Conner?” Alec sat down on the bar stool next to him, angling himself just close enough to seem interested.

“Auction sales— art, mostly.” Conner straightened the collar of his already impeccably ironed shirt. It had a weird pattern of tiny birds— flamingos, maybe? Alec couldn’t tell unless he leaned in to take a closer look, which would be a strange, socially awkward thing to do. The bartender, on her A-game, already had their shots ready. The two men tapped glasses and Alec tossed back the shot without taking a second to think about what was in it. Normally, he was a bit picky with his alcohol— meaning, he hated most of it. He turned his nose up at most hard liquor, which made it extremely difficult to hide his instinctive wince after taking the shot. He didn’t want to seem like a guy who couldn’t hold his alcohol— but damn, that shot was terrible. A mixture of cherry cough syrup, mint, and burnt sugar coated his tongue— syrupy and unpleasant.

“What do you do?” Conner asked, squinting at Alec as if to further size him up. Alec couldn’t tell what parts of his body Conner’s eyes lingered on. “If I had to guess… personal trainer?” He raised an eyebrow, making Alec blush. He wasn’t used to compliments— he never had been. The worst of it was when he’d met Magnus Bane, the High Warlock of Brooklyn— a flirtatious force to be reckoned with that nearly blew Alexander of his feet. By comparison, this was nothing, and Alec was determined to keep his cool.

“No. I used to—” Alec tried to come up with a believable answer. The most believable answer always was rooted in near-truth. “I used to do a ton of martial arts, although I took a break for a while and just started again. But for work I run a tattoo shop.” He left out the fact that he worked part-time in a cafe to pay the bills. That didn’t seem like a sexy detail.

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“What, are you making fun of me?” Conner pouted, linking his arms around Alec’s neck and pulling him closer.

“You’re just— cute.” Alec swallowed, suddenly noticing how dry his throat was. Conner was only a few inches away— kissing distance. It made Alec’s heart flutter. He didn’t have much time to think though, because to their surprise, the crowd around them began to chant the New Year’s countdown. Alec licked his lips, looking nervously at Conner as the numbers rattled off and passed them by.

“Three! Two! One!” The crowd cheered, and Alec went for it. He took the universe as his cue. Each falling piece of confetti emboldened him, nudging him forward until he closed the meager distance between them. He pressed a light kiss to Conner’s lips, tasting the sheen of liquor and some kind of pear chap-stick. It was Conner who pulled him in deeper, pressing his body against
Alec’s and pressing his eager tongue into Alec’s mouth. The kiss was decent—but Alec was too drunk to properly judge the kiss quality.

“Wait!” Conner panted as he broke away. “We need a New-Year’s selfie! His tone carrying the laughable severity that only a drunk person could have—especially when discussing Instagram photos. He pulled out his phone, holding it out well above their heads and pulling Alec in for a quick kiss. “Perfect! Here, I’ll text it to you.” He shoved his phone into Alec’s hands, forcing Alec to quickly punch in the digits.

“I hope that’s right—it’s hard to type right now.” Alec laughed as Conner tapped away at his phone.

“Well, you can check…” Conner reached slyly into Alec’s front pocket, hitting the unlock button. “See—there it is!” He turned around Alec’s phone as proof.

“So…what are you doing after this?” Alec was nervous to ask, but he had to at least try.

“Nothing…you?” Conner winked. He was still so close. Alec could smell his cologne—cedar, juniper, and something a bit smokey. It probably wasn’t anything remarkably out of the ordinary, but to Alec it was foreign, exotic, and his inebriated brain was incredibly invested in appreciating the scent even closer up.

“I—” Alec started.

“Alec, jeez—there you are! I’ve been looking for you forever—never would have thought to look on the dance floor.” Simon pushed up his fake glasses higher onto the bridge of his nose. “Clary is not having a good time. Apparently she had six of those ‘ball dropper’ shots, and she’s currently in the girl’s bathroom. I tried to go in there, but I figured since you’re gay, it would be less weird? Maybe girls wouldn’t hit you with their purses when you go in? Also… I can’t carry her…” It was a lie—Simon could obviously carry her, but with his build, it would look suspicious.

“Rain check?” Alec hoped his smile looked convincing. “She’s kinda my sister, and—”

“Just text me, okay?” Conner faded back into the crowd. Alec’s eyes lost him quickly.

Alec texted Conner the second he got home. And the morning after. And the day after. And one final time the week after—he never responded once. It was the first time Alec was ever ghosted. When the haze of the night wore off, Alec didn’t even like Conner that much. Sure, he was beautiful, but they had nothing in common, and the kiss might have very well been terrible. It was the principle of it that hurt though—but it was a lesson Alec figured he would have learned sooner or later. That was the price of forging your own path—there would be bumps along the way. Two tubs of ice cream and one moping session with Clary later, Alec felt much better.

Present day

“It’s barely after Christmas and you’re already burning the candle at both ends.” Maryse kissed Alec on the cheek as he hung his coat up on the rack. Since Clary was regaining her memories, he decided to give her some much needed time off—paid, even though he could barely afford it—to begin to process everything. Keeping a calm mind, she could iron out exactly what she remembered, take time to journal and paint before the spring semester of school started. Someone
I still had to work the front desk of the shop though, and Maryse was more than happy to step in. Apparently the book-selling business was near non-existent between Christmas and New Years, so she was content leaving a sign on the door that directed people to go into the tattoo shop if they really were pressed to buy something.

“I took off for three days, I’ve gotta make up the money somehow.” Alec unwrapped the scarf from around his neck— navy-blue cashmere that likely cost more than he made in a week. It was a Christmas gift from ‘Keris’ according to the gift tag, but it had Magnus written all over it.

“Plus, it’s not like I have people lining up around the block for tattoos this week either. If I pick up a few extra shifts at the cafe, I should be able to make up the difference.” It would be worth the baked-in espresso smell that would linger in his hair for weeks. He could power through the long hours on his feet, keep a straight face when entitled customers were particularly annoying. Nothing was as relaxing as working at Inkwell— drawing, tattooing, meeting with clients who were excited to be there, and patient with the artist— but he knew the harsh reality that passion didn’t always keep the lights on.

“Actually, I have some good news. You’ll be glad to hear that a bunch of calls came in this morning.” She walked over, holding out his appointment book. “You’re booked for the whole day, and some tomorrow even. There was a group of werewolf girls who want friendship tattoos— they’re visiting from out of town and heard about you through Maia at the Hunter’s Moon. Then Rafael called saying he needed a quick touch up before a holiday party. Someone named Lilly Chen wants a consultation— had to be at night though, so I’m assuming she’s a vampire. And then I got a call from a girl named Charlotte— wouldn’t give me a last name, but she says she’s seen you before? So she’s booked for today before the werewolves.”

“I need more coffee if I’m going to make it through this.” It was true— he was bone-weary and it was only the halfway point in the day. His eyes felt heavy and dry, and the lighting of the shop was a bit too bright.

“I thought you’d say that.” Maryse walked into the back room, returning with a steaming mug. “I made a pot a few minutes ago.”

“You’re spoiling me.” Alec smiled as he took the cup. It was warm on his cold, sore fingers. He was struggling to think of how his hands would last the day— tired and crampy. Back at his station, he had hand exercising tools— stress balls, elastics, compression wraps— but the hot ceramic of a mug lovingly filled by his mother was doing wonders to aid the cause.

“Does Clary not make you coffee?” Maryse looked shocked. “Isn’t that a thing secretaries do?”

“Mom, she’s not a secretary. She sits here and answers the phone, yes, but most of the time she’s just doing art, practicing tattooing or even napping.”

“And you pay her to do this?” Maryse raised an eyebrow. It was like she was itching to be busier. Alec wasn’t sure why— it wasn’t as if there was particularly more to do at the bookstore. She did always seem to have something she was working on though— rearranging the order of books, dusting off the back of the stacks, doing restorative maintenance on an old volume. Maybe he should get creative— make up a task for her to do. It was odd to think of assigning chores as a kindness.

“Pay is a relative term— I give her what I can, which is the minimum wage. I can’t do everything alone. It helps to have an extra pair of hands sometimes.”

“I’m sure Magnus feels the same way when you’re around with the kids. I don’t know how he
does it by himself.” Her voice was gentle and sweet—a tone that only mothers could master—but it was also laced with an intricately woven thread of empathy for the single-parent warlock.

“He does have magic.” Alec laughed. “That makes a lot of things easier. But yeah, I think he deserves more help—he needs a break sometimes.”

“I can imagine. Having a five year old is exhausting enough, but a baby too—it reminds me of when I had Isabelle.” Alec barely remembered when Izzy was born—he remembered Max clearly though. He was so tiny and fragile compared to the gruff Shadowhunters Alec was used to seeing at The Institute.

“Aya’s not five yet,” Alec corrected.

“Alright—four and a half.” Maryse rolled her eyes.

“More like three quarters.” He felt smug—arguably too smug, but what could he say. If Aya was here, she’d say the same thing, so in her stead it his was his responsibility to be as accurate as possible.

“Well, I’m sure miss four-and-three-quarters is going to be a blast on New Year’s eve. I doubt she or Magnus will make it to midnight.”

“Actually, Magnus is throwing some big ‘Roaring-Twenties’ themed party. Something about the 100-year nostalgia?”

“That’s right—he’s lived through a few different twenties, hasn’t he.”

“The accepted answer is somewhere between four and eight.” Alec chuckled, recalling all the different answers he’d heard Magnus give.

“That’s quite the range, although I don’t blame him—it’s within his rights to maintain an air of mystery. Especially now that he has kids, he has to keep the glamor alive somehow. Being a parent tends to strip that away from you.” Alec thought about all the moments he’d spent with the kids that fell into that category, focusing on how Magnus handled those situations. He could understand how it wasn’t glamorous, but he thought Magnus was just as glorious with spit-up on his shirt as he was dressed in fine silk with a full face of makeup. It probably didn’t feel that way from Magnus’ point of view though.

“Maybe he’ll start claiming it’s a thousand years—a full millennium.” Alec could hear it now, Magnus claiming he lived in a time when the years were in the hundreds, not thousands. Fabricated stories of Ancient Rome. Accounts of seeing the first contraptions that used the newly-invented Chinese gunpowder. Meeting the real Macbeth who defeated Duncan, or Magnus the Good, king of Denmark. Charging into battle to push the Moors out of Spain. The list would go on and on—it would give Magnus a new arsenal of conversation fodder at parties, and it would be incredibly entertaining.

“And I’m sure you’d back him up on it 100%. That’s what you do when you love someone—you stand up for them even when they’re wrong or ridiculous.” She paused. “Oh—I’m sorry, I know love is a strong word, I shouldn’t assume you two boys are there yet.”

“No, um…” Alec swallowed awkwardly before clearing his throat. “We actually are there now. I uh…told him on Christmas eve.” It felt weird talking about this with his mom—especially considering the position he was in when he first uttered the words. Or the amount of clothes he wasn’t wearing. Regardless, he powered through it, because he thought she would appreciate the
“Alec,” She dropped what she was doing, pulling him into an organ-bruising hug. “I’m so happy for you. That’s such a big step! And Christmas Eve? So romantic. And you were the one to say it?”

Alec nodded against her shoulder. She was warm and comforting— she smelled like jasmine and some other type of flowers he didn’t know the name of. The only reason he could place the jasmine was because it was Magnus’ favorite late-night herbal tea.

“I’m so proud— you’ve grown so much. You express your emotions so well. I’m just so happy.”

“Oh— you’re invited to the party, by the way.” Alec pulled back from the hug, feeling a bit smothered. “I think I was supposed to hand you the invitation, but things have been crazy with the holidays and I’ve been a bit frazzled.”

“Actually, I think I was already invited. Luke mentioned we’re going to some party, but I didn’t ask for more details, I trusted it would be a good time.” Maryse shrugged, seeming passive about the entire situation. It was unlike the mother he’d grown up with to be so easy-going.

“You just… trust his plans?” He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Maryse Lightwood was a premier strategist— always knowing exactly what she was walking into, doing thorough research, accounting for every type of uncertainty. It was what made her a phenomenal Shadowhunter. To see her trust Luke so much that she would just go along with his plan was remarkable. Alec realized he wasn’t the only one who’d grown emotionally over the years.

With Clary getting her memories back, he found himself growing more and more reflective, but in that spirit, he hadn’t taken the time to consider his mother’s personal growth. Of course he’d thought about the cut-and-dry aspects— her bookstore, the apartment, her relationship with Luke— but he hadn’t put much thought into the depth behind that. The journey taught her more along the way than just the easily tangible elements.

This wasn’t Maryse Lightwood anymore— this was Maryse Trueblood, the woman who loved her family, loved her boyfriend, and worked hard to build a name for herself outside of Shadowhunter society. This was the woman who supported her gay son, who fought to have a relationship with her daughter no matter the hurdles. Maryse opened her heart to Clary, to Aya, Rafe, Keris— she had so much love to give. She gave it freely without worrying about seeming soft, and in Alec’s mind, that made her so much stronger.

The bell chimed— their mother-son moment was cut short by Alec’s first client showing up.

“Lyd—” Maryse stood up straight, looking startled.

“Charlotte!” Alec corrected, side-eyeing Maryse. Lydia came by every time she killed a demon, adding to the tally-count on her back. With her high position in The Clave, she was careful not to leave a paper trail, electing to go down in the client book as Charlotte— a nod to her ancestor Charlotte Fairchild. His mother looked confused, but he’d explain it all to her later. For now, it was time to catch up with an old friend, “Right this way.”
I'm back guys! New year, new flow! Another chapter is posting immediately after this one, so enjoy your new year's two for one!
New Year's has a way of making people reflect on the past. Warlocks who've lived for centuries have even more to look back on.

PSA: this chapter was posted as a double feature. If you are here looking for the latest update, please go one chapter back! I don't want you to miss anything!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Year’s Eve, one year ago

Freezing rain pelted against the window, hard and loud— even though the loft was covered in protective wards and well-insulated, Magnus still felt the chill creep into his old tired bones. For someone four centuries old, he prided himself in being a particular brand of spritely, but leave it to a two month old baby to throw a wrench in his meticulously molded exterior. Normally, he was so much fun on New Year’s Eve. Even the first year he had Aya, he just brought her with him to the party. Simple noise-blocking earmuffs and a warm bottle put the one-year-old out cold. A two month old was an entirely different beast, and he was ashamed to admit he was barely treading water. He’d done so well with Aerulei, he mistakenly thought he could handle this, too.

That was the difference between his sweet Aerulei and this grumpy bundle of joy that had yet to name himself properly. Every time he pulled out the books and let his son try to divine a name, he came up with something terrible like Chandler or Fiero— all of the options so far were too candle-related, which seemed a bit cliche for a boy who would grow up to practice the occult. Until then, he simply called the too-small baby he cradled in his arms sayang— dear, beloved, darling. Aya opted for ‘brother’, which was the best option he could have hoped for after bringing an intruder into his daughter’s life.

She’d taken relatively well to him so far, even if it meant she was getting far less attention. Her tantrums were getting worse, but maybe that was just what three year olds did. At this point, Magnus had no idea what children did. Any grasp on the concept of parenting knowledge he had was gone, kaput, down the drain. He was a nervous wreck— pacing around the loft on New Year’s Eve, praying Aya would stay in bed, hoping his precious boy would stop crying soon. There were so many different things to worry about that he never had to with Aerulei.

Babies this small had to sleep on their backs because of something called ‘Sudden Infant Death Syndrome’ — a term baby books threw around left and right as if it weren’t the most horrific sounding thing in the world. It meant he had to put the baby into a barren looking crib without even a stuffed animal to snuggle, wrapped in special pajamas that kept him warm and swaddled. Swaddling was an entirely new concept too— hours spent mastering the elusive wrap that deceived
him by looking too similar to the way he wrapped the obi on top of a kimono when he spent a stint in Japan doing Kabuki theatre.

The crying was different too— maybe this baby cried more than Aya in general, but smaller babies cried nearly nonstop. There was something disheartening and lonely about tiny infants, too— they couldn’t play, they didn’t smile, they didn’t laugh. The only indication he had that he was doing a good job was if the baby fell asleep peacefully— which tonight, he wasn’t. He’d warded Aya’s room against sound as best he could, not wanting to disrupt the sleep her growing body needed. Either it wasn’t enough or she was up anyway, because he felt a shift through her bedroom wards followed by the pitter-patter of little feet. That sound somehow always cheered him up no matter what— even when his son wouldn’t stop crying.

“Papa, is it the New Year yet?” She rubbed at her sleepy eyes, the normally piercing blue color dim and muted in the poorly-lit living room. The only light was from the fireplace, and the golden flames had a way of muddling her glamoured snake eyes.

“I don’t know, Aya.” He smiled, patting the baby’s back as he spoke softly. “Let me check the clock.” He glanced across the room at the antique grandfather clock he’d recently decided the loft needed for a more ‘homey’ touch— and so that his kids could learn how to read an analog clock. “You have perfect timing— it’s 11:58. That’s pretty suspicious,” He walked over to her, ruffling her hair. “Back in the day, when ladies were smart like that, they used to say they were witches.”

“I’m not a witch— I’m a warlock, silly.” She laughed, but the second her mouth was open, the giggles turned into a yawn. She climbed onto the couch, pulling on Magnus’ shirt to get him to sit with her. He shifted the baby in his arms, being careful of his incredibly delicate neck and soft head. Snapping his fingers, the u-shaped baby pillow appeared on his lap and he gently oriented his little sayang comfortably in it. The baby’s cries diluted into whimpers, leaving Magnus amazed. Aya hovered over her brother, staring intently into his copper-colored eyes. The baby was fascinated by her— she rarely got this close to him, and since babies his age couldn’t see farther than about 18 inches, that meant he didn’t get much of a picture of his sister. His little face contorted into what might be a smile as she whispered things to him too quietly for Magnus to hear.

“What are you saying to our little bunso, Aya?” He stroked both of his children’s hair at the same time— Aya’s was becoming thick and dark just like his, while Keris’ was like silver candy floss, silky and weightless. The two children couldn’t look more different, but they were both so beautiful — they were his.

“Oh, I’m just telling him he shouldn’t cry— it’s a new year! And he gets to be with us.” She leaned against Magnus side, nuzzling into his sleeve. He didn’t mention it, but everywhere else across the city, everyone was probably starting the final countdown for New Years.

“He does— and we are so happy he is here, aren’t we?” Magnus turned to the side to kiss her on the top of her head. She smelled like the lavender essential oils he put in her humidifier.

“Yeah! He’s lucky you picked him, papa.” She reached out, touching the baby’s soft little nose. Magnus could already tell it would be more defined and pointy than his or Aya’s. His bone structure would likely be phenomenal one day.

“I think he picked us just as much.” He sighed contentedly, thinking about how warm and cozy the three of them were compared to the wretched, cold, mostly-drunk city outside. He’d been to so many parties— glamorous, epic, star studded adventures. This year was remarkably different. He no longer felt like Magnus Bane, the warlock who added a warlock daughter into his life. No— now he was Magnus Bane, a father. These two children weren’t additions to his life, they were his life now. Even if it was hard and stressful, even if the night had been less than perfect, there was no
other way he’d want to go into the new year than with his little family by his side.

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Present Day

“Magnus, why did you invite us over here three hours before the party to help set up when I know for a fact you’re just going to snap your fingers five minutes before the rest of the guests arrive?” Cat lumbered through a portal dragging her daughter Flora by the hand. Madzie followed behind her, tapping away at her phone, already dreading being around a room full of adults—dreading the fact that she’d likely be relegated to childcare duty with Dorian. Apparently, ten-year-olds these days had better places to be than at the house of Magnus Bane.

“I invited you here for your company Catarina, is that so bad?” Magnus turned his attention to Madzie. “Sweet-pea, you look like you don’t want to be here in the slightest.” Magus pulled his god-daughter into a hug, blocking her phone from view. “I remember when you were so little—you used to love coming to stay at the loft with me. You were so precious, playing sharks and minnows.” Magnus cupped her face in his palm. “How times have changed.”

“No, you just have a ton of babies here. Even more than I have at home.” She glanced sideways at Flora—who to Magnus’ surprise, was heavily glamoured, looking like a mundane child.

“Flora, dew-drop, why have you hidden your beautiful self? Your mama Cat has her blue skin proudly on display, I have my eyes out, Madzie isn’t covering her gills…you can be yourself here.”

“Oh—it was my doing actually.” Cat rolled her eyes—sparks of past frustration flickering to the surface. “Apparently, when your warlock mark is Jellyfish-like skin and hair, you can camouflage yourself like an octopus, isn’t that right, Flora?”

“Yes.” She stared down at her toes. “Sorry I hid in the closet at the hospital again.” Magnus could only imagine how stressful that must be. He lost track of his children, and they weren’t even invisible.

“For over an hour.” Cat sighed. “Even my magic couldn’t find her.” Cat stroked her daughter’s head lovingly. It was plain to see she had Flora’s best interests in mind, even if the little girl couldn’t understand that yet. “Here—at least you can have your natural hair for the party. Show off those beautiful locks of yours. After that, you go back to being glamoured until you’ve learned your lesson.” Cat waved her hand over Flora’s head, revealing a mess of translucent dreads, identical to the tentacles of a jellyfish.

“Thank you mommy!” She squeezed Cat’s legs. “I’m going to find Aya. Madzie do you want to come?” Flora bounced up and down, her clear blue tentacles swaying and bouncing around her round, dark-skinned face.

“Do I have a choice?” She rolled her eyes. Madzie slipped her phone into her pocket, yanking on her pouf-pigtails, straightening the hair ties and smoothing down her edges.

“Yes.” She stared down at her toes. “Sorry I hid in the closet at the hospital again.” Magnus could only imagine how stressful that must be. He lost track of his children, and they weren’t even invisible.

“Of course you do. Jem is in the nursery with Keris, and Aya is in her room.” Magnus gestured down the hall. “They don’t need a babysitter right now. Now when the party guests are here, we might need some help keeping an eye on the little ones, but only if you want to help.”
“Oh Mister Jem is here?” Madzie perked up. “So is Miss Tessa here too?” She looked around, searching the room for her favorite Victorian-era warlock. Not covered by a scarf, Madzie’s gills were on full display, opening and closing eagerly with her excitement. It was one of those endearing things Madzie would never notice about herself.

“Just stepped out to put on a kettle for tea!” Tessa proclaimed, ambling into the living room and promptly falling into the cushiest armchair in the living room. She was heavily pregnant, her stomach fully filling out her sequined blue holiday dress. Magnus would never say it to her—but she looked a bit like an uncomfortable disco ball. “Oof, I’m already out of breath from that. The little one is having fun practicing their Judo kicks on my lungs. Jem did warn me the Carstairs tend to train more in the classical martial arts than the Herondales…”

“Eww… if you’re going to talk about Shadowhunter stuff, I’m out of here,” Madzie snorted, making her way down the hall off to Aya’s room. It was partially an excuse—everyone knew Madzie was more fond of Aya than she let on.

“It’s nice to see you’ve raised her to be open minded, Cat,” Magnus scoffed.

“That’s not fair and you know it—” Tessa defended. She kicked her feet up on the ottoman—a feat that required her to maneuver around her own belly. “She grew up during the dark war. During Valentine’s reign. I think ‘eww’ is possibly one of the nicest things she could say about Shadowhunters.”

“I forget, with how old I am, how little life she’s lived.” Cat settled down across the tea table from Tessa on the couch. “Something that’s a blip in the radar for us has been her entire life. Can you believe this will only be her tenth New Year’s?”

“One day she’ll be like us—well into the hundreds.” Tessa laughed, cupping her round belly. Her brown hair was curlier than normal, bouncing cheerfully along with her laughter. “Speaking of hundreds, what were we all doing a hundred years ago for New Year’s?” She looked curious and pensive—it was a genuine question.

“You have a terrible case of what we in the medical industry would refer to as ‘pregnancy brain,’ Tess,” Cat pinched the bridge of her nose, shaking her head. “It’s about to be 2020—one hundred years ago was 1920.”

“And on January 1st, 1920, prohibition went into effect in America, outlawing the sale and consumption of my favorite thing—” Magnus kicked his feet up on an ottoman, summoning a drink into his hand. “Booze.”

New Year’s Eve, 1919

“What’s the password?” Magnus whispered through the sliding peep-hole in the door—the hidden door, obscured by a large display of ostentatious wigs. When he’d heard that the United States was outlawing alcohol come January 1st 1920, he immediately started to draw up plans for an underground operation. He wasn’t about to let a pesky political fad put a stain on his city. That’s how he came up with Mister Dry’s—a bar hidden in the basement beneath an innocent wig shop. The design of the front was elaborate, ostentatious and perhaps a bit gauche—a parody of the fanciful Perruquier’s Shops in pre-revolutionary France, when the wigs were towering, spiral-
curled, and starched with enough orange and lavender powder to cover up the stench of the
economic disparity of Paris.

“Magnus— I’ve been your best friend for over a hundred years.” He could have heard Catarina
rolling her eyes, even if he wasn’t looking at her through the slat in the door.

“I’ve been his friend longer, and I’m worse off for it.” Ragnor huffed. “Really, you make me portal
to this awful city, trample into a wig shop, and you have the gall to ask me for a password to enter
your dodgy establishment? Couldn’t you host this affair at your suite at the Plaza? I quite like their
room service— it’s most certainly better than whatever I’ll be eating in a damp, dark, musty
cellar.” Ragnor beat his cane— just for fashion of course— against the floor. “Honestly, couldn’t
you at least have the decency to make it a haberdashery instead of a wig store? Wigs are so dusty
and tasteless.”

“Speak for yourself, I’m wearing a wig tonight.” Cat said as she smoothed out the fringe on her
dark black bob. The wig sat a bit oddly on her head, as if it were a size too small. Her beaded shift
dress was hard to see from this angle, but it looked a tad wide in the shoulders. Cat never was the
best at dressing herself— that was Magnus’ job in the friendship.

“Password?” Magnus repeated, ignoring his friends’ squabbles.

“Ugh,” Ragnor groaned. “Monkey’s paw.” Ragnor huffed. “There, are you pleased? You had to
dredge up old memories of that dastardly monkey you named after me, didn’t you?”

“You slay me, Ragnor,” Magnus opened the door quickly, welcoming his friends in.

“I haven’t had the pleasure.” Ragnor removed his hat, proudly sporting his pointed horns and
shaking off the glamour from his green skin.

“It’s a new phrase— it means ‘you’re hilarious!’” Magnus quipped. “You must keep up with the
times, old man. Wait, where’s our lovely Tessa? Magnus peered around the door, looking for her.

“I’m right here, actually—” Before his eyes, Catarina transformed into Tessa— whose clothes and
wig now fit much more appropriately. “Ragnor and I portalled together from London after we rang
in the New Year five hours ahead. But I fooled you, didn’t I!” Her ability to change into someone
else— not with a glamour, but to change completely— never ceased to amaze Magnus. He
remembered the first time he experienced it— it was uncanny how much she looked like Camille,
and it was endlessly entertaining how Tessa overflowed from Camille’s corsets when she
accidentally changed back too soon. He said something incredibly crude back then— more than
one thing actually, and in more than one language. He’d like to think he’d matured a bit since then,
but put a few drinks in him and there was a strong possibility he’d do it again.

“I’ll never tire of your charm, Miss Gray. Or your ravishing beauty. Quite contrary to Ragnor’s
obtuse hideousness.” He kissed her on both cheeks, ushering them down the stairs and into his bar.
“Catarina is on her way then, I assume?” He raised an eyebrow, turning to look at Ragnor.

“Yes, yes,” Ragnor said dismissive tone. “She already sent me a fire message complaining of a few
new Spanish Influenza patients that were brought into the hospital. She’ll be a bit late.” The flu
outbreak had started over a year ago, but it was still hanging on, torturing the few poor souls left
who either weren’t immune or hadn’t died yet. It was nearly fatal, and Catarina found purpose in
helping those who didn’t have time left. Magnus wondered how she did it— her heart was so full
and open to complete strangers.

“So when she gets here, I’ll make sure Max makes her drinks twice as strong.” Magnus winked,
trying to lighten his thoughts from the dour place thinking of the flu always put him in. Tonight was a night to party—to get completely zazzled and thumb their noses at the United States government and the coppers of New York and reject their attempts to stop them from partaking in what was arguably Magnus’ favorite activity—drinking. Specifically, drinking until he did something incredibly stupid and remarkably memorable. If he didn’t do something wild now and again, was he really Magnus Bane?

“Welcome to Dryonis’ paradise, friends!” He spun around, gesturing dramatically at his bar, already buzzing with guests. There were french marble counters, fancy leather chairs, and plenty of booths and nooks to slink into for some privacy. Most importantly, behind the bar were shelves stacked floor to ceiling with booze—gorgeous expensive bottles from all over the world, brand new and full to the brim. In the back, he had a rather dramatic space to do even more clandestine business from—a speakeasy within a speakeasy per se—and he spared no expense decorating either space. Considering it was underground, a strange ethereal glow spread from no source in particular, the same tone as the diffused light just after the sun dips below the horizon.

It was mysterious and a bit hazy from all the tobacco smoke—women balancing long cigarette holders between their gloved fingers and men puffing on imported cigars. Some of the women weren’t actually women though—Magnus was proud to say that he was remarkably popular with the growing cross-dressing community in New York. They seemed like the type of people he wanted to be around. Despite the government fighting to impose their puritanical ideals on the country, New York seemed to be going through an underground progressive cultural revolution. It reminded Magnus of French Bohemia—especially with the welcome comeback of absinthe, which was now fashion nouveau.

It wasn’t the haute boheme Magnus frequently found himself sucked into in the 1800’s—full of the overly educated elite who had nothing better to do than lean on their family’s money and pretend to be a part of the artistic struggle. This was different— grittier, and more authentic. A product of the fact that as people were being forced into the shadows to indulge in life’s pleasures, they were starting to dabble into other things they would have only done behind closed doors before but were too afraid to pursue.

“It’s quite the place you’ve got here, I’ll admit.” Ragnor hauled himself up onto a well-oiled leather bar stool.

“What Ragnar is trying to say, through his layers of crusty arrogance, is that it’s beautiful down here. You’re definitely no dew-dropper anymore—you’re a businessman now. I’m happy to see you’ve found something to fill your days. Idle hands on a man of unlimited means can be a dangerous thing.” Tessa gracefully sat between Magnus and Ragnor, carefully positioning her legs to stay modest in her short-hemmed dress.

“I don’t know, my flippant and extravagant nature has brought me worlds of fun.” Magnus came to his own defense. “Remember back in the last twenties, Ragnar?”

“The 1820’s were incredibly dull, if I recall.” Ragnar accepted a drink from the bartender—something dark, golden, and garnished with a twist or orange peel. He eyed it suspiciously, taking exploratory sips. The delicate and vaguely mammaric crystal glass looked comical in his large green hands. Of course Ragnar wasn’t familiar with it—it was a Negroni, something Magnus had become well-acquainted with in the last year or so. It was a drink of the modern age.

“You didn’t feel that way when I got us into every single debut of Beethoven’s works. Or when I got us onto the first railway-cars in England, or the maiden voyage of the London Omnibuses.” Magnus sipped his own drink, a Princess Kaiulani—made of crisp dry gin, orangeat and succulent
pineapple juice he’d conjured from the Hawaiian islands.

“So Transportation. Titillating.” Ragnar sipped more eagerly at his cocktail— Magnus knew what Ragnar liked. A bit sweet, a bit bitter— particularly moody.

“I wouldn’t know anything about the 1820’s,” Tessa smiled. “I wasn’t even born yet. What am I drinking by the way? I can’t place the flavor.”

“It’s the bee’s knees!” Magnus proclaimed gleefully.

“I know— it’s very good. That, I’m aware of. But what exactly is it?” She repeated.

“I just told you— it’s called a bee’s knees. Gin, honey, and lemon. Like tea— but it’ll get you half-seas-over !” Magnus wiggled his shoulders excitedly, kicking back his beverage with gusto. “They don’t call alcohol giggle juice nowadays for nothing!”

“A true man of the modern age!” Tessa clinked her glass to his. “I only hope that I keep up with the times like you do— constantly learning, evolving, never losing touch with the world. In a hundred years I’m sure you’ll be ringing in the new decade in just as much style as this— if not more.”

Magnus felt an odd shiver down his spine— he wanted to take Tessa’s words to heart, blindly accept the compliment. He found it more difficult than expected though— instead, he felt empty.

One hundred years ago, he was doing exactly what he was doing now— getting heinously drunk to welcome in a new decade. The thought that a century from now he would be doing the same thing felt like the opposite of metamorphosis and progress— it felt like self-indulgent and hapless stagnation. Never one for resolutions, he decided then and there that he would build something for himself by then— a life beyond being a ‘cares to the wind’ fool— something that a mundane might consider as a legacy, but a legacy he’d get to live in.

Chapter End Notes

As you can tell, I recently updated the post schedule to be Saturdays only. This story is nowhere near done, but at the same time, the deeper we get, the more time it takes me to build out chapters.

I also am going to start off on a few other projects I have queued up, as well as planning out the second installment of this story ;)

Anyway, I’ll see you next Saturday!

Hit me up with comments, questions and concerns!
Chapter Summary

Everyone knows the best way to ring in the new year is with a kiss... but those warm-and-fuzzy feel-good moments don't last forever. Life goes back to normal, but for the Banes and Lightwoods, normal is a relative term.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Magnus didn’t know when it became a tradition to count down the last seconds to the new year on his roof, but surrounded by his friends and family, with Alec pressed close against his side— it was clear to see why. Huddled together against the blistering winter chill, everyone who could be was tipsy, and everyone who couldn’t be was just as merry— or stuffed to the brim with sugar. Aya ran giddily around Magnus’ feet, waving around a sparkler she was arguably too young to brandish. Alec said it was fine though— her magic was a far more dangerous weapon than a sparkler, and she carried that with her each day. Even though they were shoulder-to-shoulder and holding hands, Alec still felt too far away.

Normally, Magnus would play the needy one, try to get Alec to wrap his long, strong, nephilim arms around him— Magnus swore the blood of the angels burned warmer within his boyfriend’s veins— but Alec’s arms were otherwise occupied, bouncing Keris up and down, pointing out every premature firework glittering across the night sky. It was too precious— Magnus wished he had a camera, but no lens could capture the way Keris’ face lit up each time he saw the fireworks, or the way Alec’s eyes shined every time he looked at Keris. There was no magic he could use to lock in the memory— there was no way to be sure he wouldn’t forget in a hundred years.

Maybe he’d save the spent end of Aya’s sparkler— Maybe he’d keep the resolution Alec wrote down and clipped onto the chain of string lights. Another stupid tradition— clipping resolutions to lights— but it was the symbolism that made intentions come to life. Stretching across the wooden beams, dim globe-shaped lights minimally illuminated the terrace. Intentions, resolutions, and words of gratitude were written on crisp cards of white paper, clothes-pinned to the wire like inspirational flags.

As Magnus wrapped his arm around Alec’s broad shoulders, Magnus reached around to pat Keris’ head too— the baby’s head snapped around, looking for the source of the hand that was touching him, grinning wide when he saw the painted fingernails and shiny rings, knowing immediately it was his papa. Keris made no move to signal he wanted out of Alec’s arms though— he was perfectly content snuggled up against Alec’s ragged black sweater. Earlier that evening, Alec wore the sharp-cut suit Magnus gave him to fit the ‘Roaring Twenties’ theme, but when he’d heard they were going outside, Alec immediately changed back into his cozy, practical clothes. Although it made no logical sense, somehow Magnus liked Alec better this way. Alec managed to look better in a thrift store sweater than bespoke Ted Baker.

“Hey— I think it’s almost midnight.” Magnus whispered to Alec, sliding a vintage engraved pocket watch out of his coat. It was a trinket he’d picked up in Victorian England— actually, he might have stolen it. Sometimes, the particulars about things grew fuzzy with time. Pressing the
brass button on the top, it popped open, revealing the time. “Actually, I know it is.”

“Shouldn’t someone start the countdown?” Alec raised his bushy brow, and as Keris looked up at Alec’s face, he tried to mimic the expression. The baby failed miserably yet adorably, his forehead wrinkling up into an expression that looked more frustrated than curious. His silver eyebrows caught the moonlight, two highlighted streaks sticking out underneath the edge of his knit cap.

“Hmm… it’s a bit trite to get so specific, but I suppose you’re right.” Magnus slipped his watch back into his coat pocket. With a wave of his hand, a digital countdown timer appeared on the terrace, showing 28 seconds on the clock. “There— that should suffice.”

“Papa!” Aya whined. “My sparkler burnt out!” She held up the singed stick to him, shaking it with disapproval, as if to say ‘How dare it stop sparkling! I have some words to say about that!’

“Aya— it’s almost midnight. Don’t you want to countdown with us?” Magnus plucked the stick from her hand. It joined his pocket watch in his pocket.

“We could use your help,” Alec chimed in. “Keris doesn’t quite have his numbers down yet, but you’re quite the pro.” She looked over to Alec, weighing the offer.

“Sure— but I want to be held too!” She jumped up, linking her arms around Magnus’ neck and kicking Alec in the side as she locked her legs on Magnus’ waist.

“Sayang— you’re going to be too big for this soon.” Magnus had no choice but to release Alec and regain his other arm— holding Aya required all his strength. “But for this occasion, I’ll power through it.”

“Look!” She exclaimed. “Only twelve seconds!”

“Well we start at…” Magnus paused one second for the clock to click to ten. “Ten!”

“Nine!” everyone joined in.

“Eight!” Magnus felt Alec press up closer behind him.

“Seven!” Keris’ legs kicked excitedly, managing to hit Magnus right above his kidney.

“Six!” Aya lisped on the last letter.

“Five!” Magnus leaned closer to his daughter’s ear. “That’s how old you’ll be this year,” He whispered, not caring if he missed a few numbers in the countdown.

“Four!” Keris was yelling along too— intelligible, loud squeals that mostly sounded like variations of ‘yay’.

“Three!” Aya lisped again. This time next year, she might not have a lisp. Next year, Keris might be yelling out the words with her.

“Two!” Magnus felt Alec press even closer to him. How was it possible to be so close?

“One!” Alec’s breath was warming Magnus’ cheek.

“Happy new year, Magnus,” Alec whispered, leaning over to kiss Magnus, deftly maneuvering around both children. It was a quick, soft kiss— Alec’s lips were cold and dry from the night air— but it was pure magic. If his instincts weren’t telling him not to drop Aya, Magnus’ weak knees might have collapsed. It was amazing how such an innocent kiss could affect Magnus so much. But
it wasn’t the kiss that was making his stomach flip-flop, that was making him see stars that weren’t
the flurry of illegal fireworks shooting into the New York sky. It was Alexander— loving
Alexander, being loved by Alexander. It was going into the new year surrounded on all sides by
love.

Balancing Keris on his hip, Magnus scrunched his hair with a soft microfiber towel, blotting out as
much moisture as he could with only the use of one hand. In times like this, he could see the
advantages of being a mother over a father— primarily in the curvy hip department. All sexism
aside, women’s hips in general seem better suited for awkwardly balanced one year old babies to
perch on. Upon stepping out of the shower into the steamy bathroom, he’d found Keris restlessly
rolling around on the vanity rug, a dark line of drool staining the fabric. He hadn’t intended for
Keris to barge in on his sacred shower time, but it unfortunately came with the territory of
parenthood— especially once the little one became a confident crawler. How Keris escaped his
crib was a mystery, but he had a sneaking suspicion that his older sister was to blame. Keris could
stand up against the rail of his crib well enough, but climbing out of it was still an insurmountable
task— for now at least.

“You know Keris, if you wanted to spend more time with me tonight, maybe you shouldn’t have
fallen asleep the second your little head hit the mattress.” Magnus tossed the hair towel onto the
bathroom floor. He’d clean it up later with magic. “When you do this, I assume you’ve checked in
to the hotel bedtime— at least for a couple of hours.”

“Uh—” Keris opened his rosebud mouth wide, staring up at his papa. The gears in his tiny brain
were spinning in double time as he tried to process the flurry of words Magnus rattled off. He was
still catching up. After a few seconds, he reasonably understood. “No!” he replied confidently,
giggling up a storm and smiling with his bright new front teeth.

“I see, well then, why don’t we watch some T.V and snuggle. Is your sister awake too?” Magnus
deposited Keris on the bed, much to the baby’s dismay— but he had to get dressed somehow. The
damp Turkish towel wrapped around his waist joined his hair towel on the bathroom floor, only
this time he had a mind to conjure them both into the hamper. Digging quickly into his dresser, he
grabbed a simple black pair of loose boxers— the comfy kind for sleeping — and plucked his
robe off the hook near the bedroom door. He tied his robe tighter before picking up Keris and
walking down the hall. He didn’t need Keris to answer— if he was awake, so was Aya.

“Aerulei…” He rapped lightly on her door. He didn’t get a response, save for a few muffled
giggles. She was faking it, playing possum, pretending to be asleep. “Aya, sayang — K-K is
awake, and we are going to watch the next episode of the Great British Bake-off. Do you want to
watch with us?” There were more giggles, but still no words. He peeked in her room. Illuminated
by a few magically glowing nightlights, he could see her in bed, duvet pulled over her head. “I see
you under there… I know you’re awake. I’ll sweeten the deal— I’ll make popcorn?”

“You didn’t know I was awake!” Aerulei threw the covers off dramatically. “You thought I was
asleep— I tricked you!” She laughed— big full belly laughs— nearly knocking herself to the floor.

“Keris look!” Magnus mock-exclaimed. “She actually is awake! You really had us fooled there,
Aya. Now come on— baking show. One episode, and then we are all going back to sleep.

“And popcorns! Don’t forget the popcorns!” Aya yelled as she bolted past Magnus. The couch
huffed beneath her weight as she catapulted onto it. Magnus put down Keris next to Aya, knowing she wouldn’t let her brother roll onto the floor.

“Now, I’m not going to start it before I make popcorn because I don’t know what happens in this season. Can you two handle being out here for two minutes?” He raised his eyebrow at Aya knowingly. She nodded, aggressively clutching Keris to her side.

“I got it, papa!” She yelled, poking her head up over the back of the couch.

“Okay— be back in a jiffy!” Magnus laughed at his own pun— the kids were too young to know what ‘jiffy pop’ was— ducking quickly into the kitchen to make microwave popcorn. Too lazy to open the pantry, he snapped his fingers; a bag appeared in the microwave. He hit the popcorn button and waited. Unsure what to do with a haphazard two minutes to himself, he took his phone off the charger in the kitchen to check his messages. He had one missed call— Alec. In lieu of a voicemail, he’d sent a text.

**Alec 12:15 AM**

Hey. I tried to call, but I guess you’re asleep. The Clave absolutely destroyed the bookstore— there are ripped pages everywhere, and a few shelves fell over. My shop is fine though. I might be busy the next few days helping mom rebuild.

The Clave destroying Maryse’s bookshop was an emergency— albeit not a surprising one. Shadowhunters were historically a vengeance-driven bunch. Thankfully, according to the text, they were already gone. Still, Magnus wanted to go by, make sure everything was okay for Alec and Maryse. It was already morning in England— he could portal the kids to be with Jem and Tessa while he helped Alec. While Magnus was reading the message and calculating quick plans, another text shot through.

**Alec 12:21 AM**

Spoke too soon. Clave is destroying the apartment too. worried maybe the shop will be next.

That was it— there was no time for deliberation.

“Kids— I’m sending you to Auntie Tessa’s and Uncle Jem's—” Magnus rushed to the living room, opening a portal to the Carstairs family home. “It’s an emergency— come on.” He grabbed Keris and held Aya’s hand tightly, dragging her into the portal. Always prepared for disaster, he was able to go from his kitchen in Brooklyn to Devon, England in less than one minute flat. “Aya— find Auntie Tessa and tell her that I’m helping Alec with an emergency.” He kissed her head, putting Keris down on the floor next to her, giving him a quick kiss as well. “Selamat tinggal malaikatku. Ayah sangat mencintai kalian berdua.” It was the same farewell he gave his children no matter what— whether it was a quick evening out, or a three-day-long council in the Spiral Labyrinth: ‘Goodbye my angels. Papa loves you both so much.’

He turned to the portal, still licking at the rim with rabid magic. In times of stress and anger,
Magnus’ magic had a particular edge to it—a ferocious spark that radiated power. For a moment, he considered closing the portal to the loft and directly going to Alec, but he didn’t want to open a door connecting his children to whatever peril Alec and Maryse were experiencing at the hands of The Clave. If they were coming for two deruned Shadowhunters, chances are, they would be even less kind to warlocks. Realizing he was standing in his friends’ home wearing only boxers and a robe—not particularly practical clothes for battle—he snapped his fingers, dressing in a powerful ensemble of dark pants, a roomy dress shirt, and a well-tailored jacket with tails. He was comfortable, confident, and ready to take down anyone who was putting the man he loved in danger. The second his well-worn wingtips made ground in his loft, he closed the portal to Devon, opening one that would land him directly in the middle of Alec’s living room. Without hesitation, he stepped directly into the portal, red tendrils of magic snaking around the rings on his fingers—he was a warlock ready for battle.

Perhaps it was the shock of jumping back and forth across the Atlantic too quickly, but what he saw in the living room left Magnus more confused than shocked. He wasn’t sure what he expected. Honestly, he hadn’t put much thought into the ordeal—he sensed danger, and he barreled in, metaphorical guns blazing. In hindsight, it wasn’t Magnus’ best decision. In reality, it was anything but dangerous—if Magnus wasn’t pumped full of adrenaline, it might have even been hilarious. Maybe he would have laughed.

Instead, he found himself annoyed—the soldier in him felt cheated. Magnus wasn’t the type to revel in battle, but once he got into fighting mode, it was hard to dial down quickly. Normally, this wasn’t a problem—Magnus was rarely caught by surprise. He was usually the one who knew what was going on in any situation—who had information other people didn’t, who caught tiny clues and subtleties. Alec was always surprising him, though—and this was no exception. There were no Shadowhunters in the apartment—just a frazzled Maryse and Alec, and an aggressive, frantic cat.

When Magnus stepped through the portal into Alec’s living room, the already uncontrollable chaos only grew remarkably worse. The chaotic red magic twisted around Magnus like a threatening tornado—which if Alec wasn’t in the middle of wrangling a cat, he might have found incredibly sexy. Adding to their neverending list of problems, The Clave apparently had the sight, because he jumped three feet into the air, back hunched, each hair on edge, hissing louder than Alec had ever heard before. Magnus looked dumbfounded, his face a blank, unreadable slate. Coming from someone as expressive as Magnus, this was terrifying, and wasn’t a harbinger for anything good.

Alec didn’t have time to ask why the warlock was here—he had to catch the cat. More specifically, he had to catch the cat before it destroyed the entire apartment Alec and his mother took so much time to renovate and decorate. Magnus was a cat owner—he’d understand. Surely he’d had incidents with Chairman Meow or some other cat he’d had throughout the centuries. Alec couldn’t be that bad of a cat parent, could he? The Clave was darting across the tiny apartment, throwing himself from wall to wall, clawing at the old kitchen wallpaper, peeling up the edges of rugs in all the bedrooms.

“Clave no! Stop!” Maryse dove to the floor, trying to grab the ball of fur as he ran past her into another room. Alec already bruised both elbows and wound up with five sets of scratches on his arms from trying to restrain their possessed cat. He’d fought Shax demons that were less rowdy—and possibly less deadly. Magnus hadn’t left the spot where he’d entered. Even though he’d only
just arrived, he already looked finished with the situation.

Meow! The cat nearly growled, screaming at the walls. His wails bounced against every surface, making the cramped apartment an echo chamber. Grraaawww! The cat’s slit-pupil eyes were furious— hungry— murderous.

“Mom— are you sure it’s not rabies?” Alec huffed, wiping sweat-soaked hair off his forehead. “I think this cat has rabies. It’s gotta be,” he groaned, throwing his arms in the air. He was running out of options. Making matters worse, now Alec was growing more and more embarrassed that he couldn’t control his own cat. Magnus could control two children and a cat. It made Alec feel suddenly very useless. The Clave, having evaded Maryse, dashed past Alec as well, nearly hitting Magnus head-on. Noticing the insane determination of the enormous red feline, Magnus sidestepped out of its trajectory.

“It’s roaches,” Magnus sighed. With a snap of his fingers, the cat found himself suddenly trapped in a carrier. The Clave pawed anxiously at the metal grate door, tufts of fur poking through the plastic holes in the side as he rubbed up against it. The cat was absolutely massive— Alec wondered if it was actually a dog carrier, not a cat carrier. “And some rats— but that’s more understandable for New York.” Magnus leaned against the doorjamb between the kitchen and living room, looking particularly bored as he examined his manicure— the mirrored chrome polish was chipped at the edges, visible even at a distance. Something about the calm indifference, the aloof posture put Alec on edge. This was the Magnus most people had the pleasure of knowing— closed off, ostentatious, powerful yet disinterested.

“Well, can you get rid of them?” Maryse’s chest heaved as she took in her first post-panic breath. Alec didn’t even need to look at Magnus to know she’d said the wrong thing. He didn’t want to look at Magnus— he didn’t want to see his reaction. In that split second, his mother seemed like the rigid Shadowhunter she once was, who viewed warlocks as tools to solve problems instead of viewing them as people. Even though Alec was sure she wasn’t thinking about it that way, there was a possibility it would come off that way to Magnus. Alec wished he could take back the words for her.

“I’m a warlock, darling— not an exterminator. Sure, in my younger days I wouldn’t have flinched at killing pesky vermin, but with old age comes a certain wisdom.” His voice was distant, yet a bit playful— he was playing a role, and he was playing it well. “Who am I to say that this thriving community of roaches and rats deserves to die? Am I to be an agent of genocide just because I don’t understand the rat or cockroach brain?” Magnus’ cat eyes danced as he rattled off absurdities.

“Mom— he’s right. He’s not an exterminator. Even if he was, you couldn’t just ask him like that.” Alec hoped pointing this out would curry some favor with Magnus— at least enough to buy him some time until they could talk in private. He still didn’t know what Magnus was upset about, but Alec wanted to start damage control as quickly as possible. “Plus… we can’t afford him.” Alec winked at Magnus— trying his best to seem suave despite his growing anxiety. The adrenaline of the cat rodeo was wearing off, and the reality of the aftermath was sinking in. To Alec’s relief, the wink cracked something in Magnus’ facade— he saw his boyfriend again, not the famous High Warlock.

“Oh… there are plenty of ways you can pay me…” Magnus purred, making Alec’s cheeks flare red. Even from across the room, even in this strange situation, Alec was still so weak for him. “In fact, I think if that’s the currency we’re dealing in, I might actually owe you a debt.” Magnus pushed off from the wall, slowly taking inventory of the apartment— assessing the damage. As he trailed his finger along the wall, things pulled back into place. Rugs and wallpaper knit back
together, picture frames rotated back into place. “I wasn’t joking— I can’t get rid of the bugs. But I
can at least fix the damage caused by the cat trying to kill them for you. Clever name by the way—
*The Clave*. Magnus rolled his eyes. “I’m sure you understand, you had me worried there for a
second. I shouldn’t judge… my cat is named ‘The Chairman’. If we’re basing things on history, he
wasn’t an angel either…” Magnus walked over to the last crooked frame— a family photo of Luke,
Clary, Maryse, and Alec. In lieu of magic, he gingerly placed his hands on the silver frame,
straightening it carefully as he admired the photo.

“You didn’t…” Alec started. He felt so dumb— of course Magnus didn’t know his cat was named
The Clave. Alec went over to Magnus’ loft constantly, but he could count on his hand the number
of times Magnus had been in the Lightwood apartment. They had plenty of other things to talk
about, so it was understandable how talking about The Clave hadn’t made an appearance in casual
conversation. “You didn’t know he was named The Clave. So when I texted you saying The Clave
destroyed the bookstore…”

“Precisely.” Magnus popped his tongue, raising his eyebrows— he was still bristled. “I thought the
nephilim had invaded, Seraph blades blazing, hacking and slashing through your well curated
volumes.” He narrowed his eyes at Maryse this time. “I’ll let the knee-jerk request for me to
exterminate your home slide, Maryse. Faced with chaos, it’s understandable that you’d ask the all-
powerful warlock for help. If it was from anyone else, I might be insulted, but instead, I’ll choose
to be flattered. Anyway, I have two kids I need to go pick up from Devon— I treat Tessa and Jem’s
house like a rural panic room. Want to come with me Alec? I’m sure they’ll all be happy to see
you. I did tell them you were in trouble, so it might be nice for them to see you’re safe and sound.”

“Well I should probably deal with the exterminator…” Alec scratched nervously at the back of his
neck. Magnus opened a portal in the middle of the living room, presumably to Devon, England.
Alec swore he could smell the fresh, verdant smell of an English garden, the crisp smell of dew
soaked grass. Maybe it was just his imagination, longing to get out of the cursed, pest-infested
apartment.

“No Alec— you go ahead,” Maryse said, shaking her head. “I’ll call someone in the morning. It’s
too late now anyway.” She shooed Alec away toward Magnus, toward the portal to England.
“Don’t have too much fun boys— and say hi to those precious darlings for me.”

To Alec’s surprise, Magnus grabbed his hand before they walked through the portal. Before he
could doubt the reason, Magnus cut in.

“It’s not just so that you don’t get lost in Limbo.” He raised Alec’s hand to his lips, kissing his
knuckles lightly. “Just because I’m annoyed doesn’t mean I love you any less, and you deserve to
know that.”

Chapter End Notes

Apologies if the Indonesian was wrong. I used Google Translate.

Next chapter:
How did Alec adopt The Clave?
The apartment, Inkwell and Scroll and Quill get fumigated.
And maybe… Alec and Jace talk.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

After their scare with 'The Clave', Alec and Magnus go to Devon to pick up the kids. Once the children are asleep, Magnus decides its time he and Alec have a 'talk.'

Chapter Notes

I'm so excited about this chapter. There's Tessa, Dorian, pants, Aya, Shadowhunter history!

Oh, and there's smut too. Although that's way less exciting then herbology, of course!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec’s hand in his was warm and comforting— it assured him that Alec was fine, he was okay, even though Magnus’ residual adrenaline still had him in fight-or-flight mode. As they stepped through the portal into Cirenworth— the historic home of the Carstairs family— Magnus couldn’t help but think they felt like a team, going to fetch their children. He knew this wasn’t the case. It was too soon to feel that way about someone he wasn’t even living with, but that solid, safe feeling in the deep recesses of his heart, that glue that was knitting his cracked walls protecting him and his family back together, was telling him otherwise— telling him to accept it, not to fight it.

All was forgotten when he heard Tessa’s voice floating from the kitchen down the hall. Looking around the home, Magnus wondered if he should change his primary residence, give the children somewhere more peaceful and calming to grow up rather than gritty, bustling, newly-gentrified Brooklyn. Somewhere Aya and Keris could practice magic freely outdoors, where they wouldn’t need to be constantly glamoured. Somewhere with a yard, a garden— a treehouse. It would have to be something more luxurious than Luke’s farm of course, and perhaps more modern than Cierenworth. He briefly wondered what the Lightwood estate looked like in Idris— their Chiswick mansion in its glory days was a bit ostentatious, but he did enjoy the lavish style. The Lightwoods he’d known in the past were much flashier than his Alexander.

“Magnus Bane,” Tessa raised her voice to address him, too engulfed in whatever she was doing to come and greet them. “I hear you wandering the corridor, and I’d recognize the calculated footfall of a nephilim anywhere, so I assume you brought Alec?”

Magnus followed the sound of her voice, Alec’s hand still gripping firmly to his as he followed on the warlock’s heels. Kitchens in Victorian-era homes were cavernous and plain— all plaster and brick, tall chimneys and roaring fireplaces. Both over a century old, Tessa and Jem hadn’t renovated too much beyond adding a refrigerator and a gas range, opting for simplicity. A whistling kettle was just nearing a boil, its song only a high-pitched whir. Bent over a well-loved oak table, Tessa stretched uncomfortably at a near right angle, a hand on her lower back to support the weight of her painfully rotund stomach. The pungent aroma of fresh-chopped ginger filled the space, carefully minced piles of the sharp-spiced root neatly aligned on a cutting board, some
dumped into a large stoneware mug.

“Tessa dear, are you alright?” Magnus raised an eyebrow, joining her in her awkward stretching, enjoying how the position opened up the vertebrae of his lower spine, creating space in the compressed joints near his sacrum. Alec stayed near the doorway politely, looking like he felt he was intruding on a particularly female moment— despite the fact that Magnus was most definitely not female. It was a common occurrence actually, since Magnus tended to bond so well with women.

“I’ve been more alright in the past, that’s for sure.” She turned her face to Magnus, resting her cheek in her palm. “But it’s a happy discomfort. Though, I’ll be much happier when the baby is actually here.”

“When you can pinch chubby little cheeks and snuggle them close? Of course that’s preferable.” Magnus sighed. “At least, that’s what I’d assume. I can’t begin to understand the chasmic and complex depths of pregnancy.”

“Trust me, it’s not as mysterious as much of an enigma as you’d think— mostly it’s just nausea, stretching skin, and a fickle bladder.” She laughed— Magnus loved the crisp sound of Tessa’s laughter, remembering how refreshing it had been during the 1800’s when most women were too caught up in maintaining proper appearances to be genuine and transparent. “But you know this isn’t anything new for me.” Although she smiled, he could see a cast of sadness in her fog grey eyes. She was remembering her first two children— Lucie and James— long gone from the world, though never forgotten. They’d been honorable Shadowhunters, carrying on the Herondale name all the way down to Jace, now an iconic and revered hero of the nephilim.

“I’ll admit, I’m thankful for that,” Magnus chuckled, trying to lighten her spirits. “My two terrors are stressful enough without the physical pain and discomfort. Speaking of which— I apologize for depositing them here without warning. I mistakenly thought that Alexander was in danger.”

Magnus’ eyes darted over to Alec, who averted his gaze to intently study the knots in the hardwood floor.

“It’s perfectly alright— Aerulei told us that it was ‘disaster protocol’ as she eloquently put it. Impressive vocabulary for such a young age.”

“Although I’m flattered— and don’t get me wrong, she is incredibly literate for her age— I’m afraid that’s just rote memorization. I’ve been teaching her ‘disaster protocols’ since she was young enough to speak.”

“A smart precaution when your father is Magnus Bane— fame can be an occupational hazard.”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Magnus sighed. “I don’t want to inconvenience you any longer than I already have. Just point me to my children and Alec and I will take them back home.”

“It’s far from an inconvenience, I assure you,” Tessa huffed, rolling her eyes. “I think if Jem had his way, Keris would never leave. Plus, Dorian probably appreciates a second pair of hands in the greenhouse. Your princess was more than happy to help him tend to the herbs and flowers this morning.”

“Dorian is here?” Magnus was taken aback in passive surprise. “Did Ragnor get tired of his teenage angst again?”

“Perhaps,” Tessa smiled wistfully. “His official reasoning though was that Jem and I could use the assistance around the house with the baby coming so soon. Ragnor described it as Dorian being ‘
on loan to the Gray-Carstairs household.’”

Magnus snorted—it was so typically Ragnor.

“It might be good to have him around though—I’m sure ‘the lost Herondale’ you’re taking in could use a friend as he adjusts, and a warlock companion will help ensure he doesn’t become blindly prejudiced like the other nephilim.”

“Why am I not surprised you know about Kit sooner than most of the Shadowhunters.” Tessa smirked. “You’re always at the top of the rumor mill.”

“I tend to enter conversations and situations at particularly opportune times.” Magnus winked. A carnation-pink flush painted Tessa’s cheeks as she recalled the events in reference—when Magnus caught her in compromising situations, giving him first-hand accounts of juicy gossip. Alec, still planted in the doorway, raised an eyebrow at Magnus, who threw him back a look that ensured ‘I’ll tell you later.’ Tessa, on the other hand, was eager to change the subject.

“Regardless, I’m sure you’ll like to fetch your beautiful children,” Tessa huffed as she stood upright, attending to aggressively whistling kettle, pouring the steaming water into the ginger-filled mug. “Keris is in the study with Jem, and Aya is still out in the greenhouse with Dorian.”

“I’ll leave you to your tea then,” Magnus said warmly, kissing Tessa on the cheek and turning on his heel toward the door. “If you need anything, absolutely anything, I hope you don’t hesitate to send me a fire message,” Magnus added, talking over his shoulder. Already familiar with the layout of the home, Magnus strode off to fetch his children. He was about to accidentally leave Alec in the dust before he realized that the kids might want to see Alec right away—to have reassurance that he was okay. They cared about Alec just as much as Magnus did. He was already such an ingrained part of the Bane family. His family, that he was about to take back home safe and sound.

They went to grab Aya first, Alec pointing out that it might not be a good idea to take Keris into the greenhouse with all the strange plants. Bolstering Alec’s argument, Magnus knew that the primary reason for the indoor garden was for growing rare spell ingredients and colorfully decorative flowers—both things that might prove irritating to infant nostrils.

“I think he has allergies, Magnus!” Alec defended. “When I spent the day roasting the rose oil coffee beans, he sneezed until I changed sweaters.”

“Fine, but we’re going to test this hypothesis by visiting the New York botanical gardens, and I’ll prove you wrong.” Magnus hated that Alec was probably right in his assumption, but he loved a good bet.

“How do I know you won’t just give him some magical allergy medicine ahead of time?” Alec turned the corner with him toward the back of the home, where the greenhouse was attached to a cozy reading room.

“First off, Benadryl is more than a sufficient antihistamine—why would I expend valuable magic on one of the few things mundanes were able to formulate properly?” Magnus pushed open the greenhouse door, warm, humid air kissing his dry winter skin.

“We’ll just have to see won’t—” Alec was cut off by his own surprise as they entered the lush greenhouse. Every type of plant—small trees, snaking vines, plush ferns, full-bloom flowers, stout bushes, and even aquatic plants covered every surface. The paths between the rows of foliage were narrow from partially overgrown flower beds, much better suited for Aerulei’s small body as opposed to Dorian’s growing and gangly frame. His pale-sage skin blended in with the leaves,
almost making him hard to spot save for his denim working overalls and grey rag-knit sweater. His horns were dusted with loamy soil, flecks of brown caught in his humidity-spiraled curls. Aya was practically glued to his side, her arms overflowing with bushels of freshly cut vervain. This was a bit unusual— he’d never seen Aya warm up to Dorian this much, she usually regarded him in an oddly professional manner, but this looked like she was treating him like a friend. The orchid-pink dainty vervain blooms were almost the same color as her magic, which Magnus could see she was using to help her not drop a single stem, a thin sparkling thread wrapped around the snipped stalks. Fully absorbed in conversation with Dorian, hanging on his every word, she didn’t notice Alec and Magnus enter.

“Now, Aerulei— TV might tell you that *Verbena hasata* is harmful to vampires, but what did we learn in our herbology studies last week?” Dorian was referencing their weekly tutoring sessions— something Magnus could not thank the teenager enough for. Even though Magnus paid him handsomely, it was still admirable that the boy would spend so much of his time devoted to teaching Magnus’ children. It was a shame there weren’t many official warlock schools— Dorian would be a phenomenal teacher.

“Um…” Aya furrowed her brow and pursed her lips, her entire face pinched in concentration as she tried to recall one of the hundreds of species they studied. Magnus couldn’t believe she wasn’t even yet five— though her birthday was coming up soon, she was still more advanced than any child he’d ever met. Magnus waited anxiously for her answer to see if she would get this one right, although he had faith in her recall. “Shapeshifter potion, fird eye—” Aya still struggled through her ‘th’es, giving away her age just a bit. “— and talking to dead people.” Magnus didn’t know that much about the herb until he was well over fifty years old.

“Very good, but you missed one— if you think too much about the exciting parts, you miss the more useful ones like ritual cleansing. You can put it in water to clean tools or even your body for rituals. I’m sure you’re going to use it for that much more often than for shapeshifting.” She giggled as he tickled her nose with a stem of blue vervain. Her laughter didn’t send a single hair out of place on her head— each strand held tight by one of Tessa’s perfect braids. “But Auntie Tessa is a shapeshifter!” She quipped back— she was just as sharp witted as her father.

“She has the blood of a specific type of demon, she doesn’t need potions to shift.” Dorian rolled his eyes — purple Magnus noticed, although he could have sworn they were a graphite black before — snipping more stems with his shears and handing them off to Aerulei. “What types of demons shapeshift?” He continued to quiz her.

“*Eidolon.*” She said confidently, like the question was too easy. Secretly, he wished he could hire Dorian as a full-time nanny, but he could never ask a teenager to give up that much of their life.

“Very good Aya!” Alec piped up. “I wish I was half as smart as you!”

Hearing Alec’s voice, Aya’s head snapped up, her slit pupils widening and consuming her bright irises. Her magic faltered, the stems of vervain tumbling to the ground, revealing just how much she’d been holding on her own and how much the magic had assisted her.

“Alec!” She bolted over, hopping into his arms. Whereas the gesture would have caught Alec off guard before, now he snatched her up on instinct, clutching her to his chest. “You’re okay! Does that mean Papa saved you?”

“Um…” Alec’s hazel eyes darted over to Magnus, who subtly sneered at him. “I was actually
never in danger, my cat was just acting up.”

“You have a kitty too? Can I meet him? Or her, maybe it’s a her?” She kicked her legs against Alec’s sides.

“Aya, perhaps the cat doesn’t abide by gender binary,” Magnus scolded. “For all we know, Alec’s kitty could use they pronouns.”

“Oh no! I’m sorry! Did I upset your kitty?” Her eyes widened further in concern, two almond-pointed saucers on her round face. Like Dorian, she was dirt-stained as well, freckles of soil dotting her nose and cheekbones. It was so cute, he didn’t care she’d need a bath once they got home—after all, he did have magic to assist him with those sorts of tasks.

“No Aya,” Alec smiled. “It’s fine. His name is ‘The Clave.’” Dorian coughed, as if he were choking on air.

“What a terrible name for a cat.” Dorian tapped the sweat on his brow with a conjured handkerchief. “Although I can imagine yelling at him is incredibly cathartic.”

“See! That’s why mom and I named him that!” Alec defended, feeling validated.

“We’ll talk about this later,” Magnus warned, narrowing his eyes at Alec. “Thank you for watching her, Antony,” Magnus said warmly, using Dorian’s second name in a habit of familiarity. “Come on you two—let’s go fetch Keris and go home. I’m sure we could all use a rest.”

“After all of that chaos of dropping them off so suddenly in Devon, I’m surprised both kids fell asleep so quickly,” Alec remarked, sliding off his jeans the second they got in the bedroom, a habitual gesture to get more comfortable the second the couple was in their shared, private space. It wasn’t necessarily a sexual invitation, just something that showed how relaxed they felt alone in each other’s presence.

“Yes, no thanks to you and that scare you gave me.” Magnus pounced on him, pushing Alec against the wall as he hungrily kissed him. Alec melted into the kiss, letting Magnus take the lead. Magnus cradled Alec’s stubble-coated jaw in both hands, as if he were worried that if he let go, Alec would disappear. Remembering the wrath of the Clave and their closed-minded Shadowhunter ideals, he knew Magnus’ anxiety had been warranted. He was still kicking himself for the ambiguity of his text messages, for not explaining that The Clave was his cat. He could only imagine how scary it was for the warlock, thinking that nephilim were busting down the doors, raiding the shop and destroying the Lightwood’s home and businesses.

“Never—scare me—like that—again.” Magnus spoke between kisses, not wanting their lips to separate for more than a second. Alec could feel the shared, all-consuming love in every word. He chased Magnus’ lips, wanting more—he wanted to consume every ounce of love he was being given, to savor it and cherish it. Soon, the warlock’s hands were sliding possessively down Alec’s body, clutching him as close as possible, aligning all the crooks and curves of their bodies.

“I’m so sorry, Magnus,” Alec breathed. “I can’t say I’m sorry enough.” Alec squeezed his arms tighter around Magnus’ back, encircling him in a way that he hoped was reassuring. They continued to kiss, their bodies clinging to each other like a promise—expressing the love and passion in their hearts in ways words could never properly describe. Magnus’ silk tongue moved in
Alec’s mouth with a strong familiarity— practiced, knowing every turn and curve by heart. A heat grew between them, but it wasn’t purely sexual— rather amorous and all-consuming.

“I can think of a few ways you can atone,” Magnus whispered into Alec’s ear, the heat of his breath making Alec shiver. With a quick wave of his hand, extra sound-dampening wards covered the bedroom door. Alec’s breath hitched with anticipation as they continued to kiss, caress, and cling tightly to each other against the wall. “I’ll have you begging,” Magnus paused.

Suddenly the room went dark, lit by a dim, ethereally blazing glow. Magnus’ golden eyes were the brightest thing in Alec’s field of vision as the warlock pushed away from him, arms outstretched and rigid. “Begging for forgiveness,” Magnus growled and suddenly his eyes were outshone by a forceful flow of red magic, rushing toward Alec and pinning him against the wall. “Begging for release.” The magic wrapped tightly around Alec as it raised him higher against the wall. It constricted his ribs as his feet dangled inches above the floor— his breath strained in his lungs. “A Shadowhunter begging for mercy from a warlock. Do you remember how to use your colors, Alexander?” Magnus asked, easing up on the magic around Alec’s throat just enough to allow him to respond.

“Yes,” Alec gasped.

“Then I trust you’ll be good for me— that you won’t hesitate to use your colors— that you’ll color out if you have to. There are no judgments in saying ‘red’,” He paused, his voice momentarily reassuring. “If I ask you your color right now, what is it?” Magnus inched closer.

“Green!” Alec nearly yelled. He’d wanted Magnus to take control like this for a while, but he’d been a bit too nervous to ask. The first time asking for something kinky was always a strange hurdle to jump in a relationship. While spontaneous BDSM could be ill-advised, Alec was eager to take the plunge— ready to play victim to the whims of the warlock he loved.

“So you think the punishment fits the crime, Alexander?” The dominance of the warrior-warlock was intimidating, dangerous, and painfully arousing.

“Yes, please—” Alec heard his voice like it was a stranger’s— he was whining. If he wasn’t so turned on, he’d be embarrassed.

“Yes, please ‘my warlock’,” Magnus growled, his eyes growing so brightly it felt like it was burning Alec’s soul. “Say it,” Magnus commanded.

“Yes, please my warlock.” Alec’s body squirmed against the magic pinning him to the wall, only for the red ropes to wind even tighter against his now sweat-sheened body. His shirt stuck to his chest, his black boxer-briefs felt overly humid.

“Very well then—” With a flint-spark snap of his fingers, Magnus removed Alec’s clothes, leaving him hanging on the bedroom wall, his half-erection jumping at the sudden change in temperature. At a dramatically slow pace, Magnus lowered Alec to the ground with his outstretched hand, closing the distance between them to study Alec further. He was deciding exactly what he wanted to do with him. Alec was dizzy with anticipation.

“I could take you like this—” Magnus gripped Alec’s hips, flipping him around to face the wall. While the magic paralyzed Alec, Magnus was able to move against it easily. It emphasized the power play in a way that made Alec’s knees weak, made his head spin. “I know how much you love to be fucked from behind. I could bend you over until your hamstrings ache, making you pray for the angelic magic of a flexibility rune. But I don’t think that’s exciting enough— it would be too quick, too easy. There’s no struggle in that.” Magnus clicked his tongue. “No— I want you...”
He paused. Looking over his shoulder, Alec paled as he saw the calculated expression on his warlock’s face—that same cool, calm, distant exterior he’d seen in his apartment when he realized Alec wasn’t actually in danger. The sexy, mysterious warlock of legend. Alec’s breath heaved faster in his chest as Magnus tapped his manicured index finger to his glitter-glossed lips as he surveyed the room. “Here!” Magnus swept his hands from Alec to the bed, sending Alec careening through the air until he hit the mattress with a soft thud. Alec’s stomach lurched at the sudden, jarring movement.

“On your stomach—” Magnus smacked Alec’s ass, chastising him for immediately bracing himself on his hands and knees. “Already so eager to be fucked. Not even your angel blood can counteract your primal disposition to be a little whore.” Magnus slapped Alec’s ass a bit harder—more exploratory. “Color?”


“Yellow, pause or Yellow, it’s not your thing.” Magnus asked respectfully, pausing the scene without compromising his dom facade.

“Second one,” Alec confirmed. Almost reassuringly, Magnus caressed both lobes of Alec’s ass before moving onto his next idea.

“Arms behind your back—” Magnus ordered. “Stretched long and straight, wrists together. I’m sure you know where this is going,” Magnus paused. “Color?”

“Green—” Alec nearly moaned, obeying Magnus without hesitation. Rich, silk—too buttery smooth to be satin—kissed Alec’s skin as Magnus looped it around his wrists artfully in a bound figure-eight format. The attention to detail was impeccable, showing off Magnus’ experience. Silk wouldn’t tug at Alec’s arm hair—it would bind him without hurting him. In a reinforced bind, it was just as effective in restricting Alec’s movements, despite his nephilim strength.

“You’re so good for me, Shadowhunter,” Magnus purred. “So good for me that maybe I will take you from behind…” Magnus straddled Alec on the bed, his knees on either side of Alec’s hips. “But I have other plans for you first.” Magnus flipped him over roughly—Alec’s breath vacating his lungs at record speed, his pulse quickening. If Magnus wasn’t going to fuck him yet, what other things did he have in store? Magnus was still fully clothed, and the disparity in nakedness made Alec feel that much more vulnerable. “Are you going to be good and stay still?” Magnus scolded. “It doesn’t look like you’re going to obey…” Magnus licked the sensation, his hips bucking up in an attempt to gain any type of friction. “It doesn’t look like you’re going to obey…” Magnus scolded. “I’ll bind you with miles of silk if that’s what it takes to teach you a lesson.”

Magnus flicked his hands toward Alec’s legs, ribbons of red silk sliding on its own volition in a complex formation of knots and loops, binding Alec’s calves to the back of his thighs. A blanket of red magic pushed against every inch of Alec’s skin—the color tricking his brain into thinking it might burn as he braced against it. No matter how hard he tried, Alec was unable to move a muscle. He couldn’t even feel the rise and fall of his breath in his chest. The thudding of his heart was missing. There was something he wasn’t understanding—how could Magnus sexually torture him if his body was numb? Magnus conjured something unexpected into his hands—a bottle of black calligraphy ink and an old-fashioned Japanese shodo brush.

“Like I said—you’re never going to scare me like that again.” Magnus settled on his knees between Alec’s legs. He dipped the brush into the ink with the precise severity of an archer nocking an arrow. “You never will because I won’t let you.” He touched his brush to the least-
hairy portion of Alec’s torso— his side, just above his hip bone. It mirrored the same plane of skin where Alec had recently worked on his quill and inkwell tattoo. “I’m going to mark you— not with a precious rune from the Grey Book, but with dark, demonic magic.”

Looking down to his chest, Alec couldn’t get a good look at the design, but he felt it. Whatever magical numbing spell Magnus was using, he’d voided in that area— he wanted Alec to feel the sensation of cold ink against his skin, of animal hair tickling him as he couldn’t squirm away to escape. Magnus drew a large circle before tracing what felt like a seven pointed star— Alec counted each directional shift of the brush. Then he began to trace characters— in what language, Alec couldn’t say.

“This sigil allows me to know when you’re in danger— real danger. No magic can mask or override it,” Magnus’ voice rumbled.

Between strokes, he returned the brush to the pot, refreshing the ink before the brush ever had a chance to dry. The ink was wet as it slid against Alec’s skin, as Magnus concentrated on the more delicate details of the design. For a heavy moment, Magnus worked in silence, the only sound in the room was Alec’s labored breathing.

“This magic— it’s impenetrable, because it says you’re mine.” Magnus’ eyes flared even brighter at the last word. “That’s what these Chthonian runes say.” Magnus sat back on his heels, admiring his work. His thumb brushed the skin just below the sigil. He bit his lip to mask a trace of a smirk.

“‘Property of Magnus Bane.’ A demonic binding like this ensures that anyone who would harm you would be at my mercy, and they would receive a fate worse than death.” Alec stared up at Magnus in disbelief— without asking, he’d branded Alec as his. It was dangerous, it was scary— it was exhilarating. “It connects you to me, so I can sense any threat immediately. I don’t want to even give you the chance to mislead me like that again.”

“I’m so sorry, Mag—” Alec faltered, remembering the scene. “I’m so sorry, my warlock.”

“This would be a lot more effective if it was permanent, but now isn’t the time for that— we can visit that later. For now, I’m not wasting a precious second when I have more lessons to teach you still.” Magnus magicked away the calligraphy supplies, leaning forward over Alec’s groin. For a moment, Alec had the misled assumption that Magnus was going to wrap his mouth around his neglected cock— but he should have known better than to think he’d be receiving any release yet. Instead, Magnus blew frigid breath over the drying ink— sending goosebumps across Alec’s entire body— even his arms that were covered in sweat, pressed uncomfortably between his back and the mattress.

“Please— Please touch me—” Alec strained against the dryness of his throat, begging.

“Tired already, nephilim?” Magnus roughly scratched his fingernails across Alec’s pecs, combing through his chest hair. The fabric of Magnus’ shirt felt like sandpaper on Alec’s skin. His pants were even worse. If the warlock’s fully-clothed form was a harbinger for how long he planned on torturing him, Alec wasn’t certain he would survive. “Where’s that famed angelic stamina?” The defenselessness of the moment heightened Alec’s arousal fuller, made the heat pooling in his core double.

“Maybe I’ll go a bit easy on you— it has been a long day after all,” Magnus massaged Alec’s shoulders, relieving a bit of the discomfort resulting from the tight bound angle. Sensation had now fully returned to Alec’s body— Magnus must have only needed complete paralysis to ensure the precision of his rune. “Would you like that?”
“Yes, my warlock.” Alec was able to buck his hips, to grind against Magnus, to nudge just a bit closer to his love.

“Mmm… since you asked so nicely…” Magnus roughly flipped Alec over again, holding his bound legs to shift them enough so that he was on his knees. Alec’s calves were still bound to the back of his thighs, his arms were still taught against his lower back. “You’re beautiful like this, you know.” Magnus traced spirals across Alec’s ass. Alec clenched in surprise when Magnus slid his finger down his crack, sliding around Alec’s tight, unprepared rim. When Magnus applied a bit of pressure to his hole, Alec felt a cool, slick sensation fill him— Magnus had lubricated his channel magically. The magic continued to work inside of him, stretching out his walls with a warmth that was neither pleasant nor uncomfortable. “I’m a bit impatient, I know. How does it feel to have my demonic magic working inside of you—” Alec gasped as a tendril of magic encircled his dick, which until then had laid neglected, brushing against the silk sheets. “How does it feel that you could come just from the touch of my magic alone?”

“No—” Alec breathed. “I want you too.”

“Making demands, Alexander?” Magnus pressed himself against Alec from behind— Alec could feel his warm skin against him. The warlock had magically divested himself of his clothes. “If you weren’t so irresistible right now, spread and bound for me, that could have made me draw out your torture even longer.” Grabbing the soft flesh at the meeting of Alec’s ass and thighs, Magnus teased Alec, sliding his dick between his cheeks. “Do you want this dick, nephilim?” Magnus taunted.

“Yes!” Alec nearly screamed. “Please, my warlock.” He tried to just back against Magnus, but the warlock held him still.

“That wasn’t very convincing,” Magnus growled, pushing up against Alec again.

“Please fuck me,” Alec breathed. “Show me I’m yours. Show me who I belong to. Make me scream your name.”

“Since you asked so nicely—” Magnus thrust into Alec in one swift motion. Resting hilt-deep for a moment, he didn’t wait long before starting to rut back and forth. The head of his dick massaged Alec’s prostate in a way that made Alec feel like he’d never had a single thought in his life before, like his tongue had never spelled out the shape of any word besides Magnus’ name. He moaned when Magnus bent over, nipping at his ear, sloppily kissing his neck, saliva mixing with sweat.

“Magnus,” Alec Moaned. Magnus pushed into him and pulled out of him with unnatural strength, his magic still wrapped around Alec’s cock, stroking it intermittently and milking all means of sinful, debauched sounds from the nephilim— sounds Alec didn’t even know he could make.

“Who do you belong to, Alexander?” Magnus grunted. “Who do you promise not to scare like that ever again?”

“You! I’m yours. I’ve always been yours, I’ll always be yours!” Alec wasn’t sure how he managed to use so many words in his current position. Suddenly, Magnus’ facade cracked— Alec found himself on his back, his limbs freed, Magnus’ mouth crashing down on his with an unprecedented fervor.

“I love you so much, Alexander,” Magnus purred, his thrusting more gentle as he rocked in and out of Alec. “You have no idea how much,” He moaned into Alec’s mouth as they kissed again. That carnal, primal sound was all Alec needed to push him over the edge. As he was coming nearly untouched, he felt the blooming warmth of Magnus’ orgasm inside of him. They continued to roll...
together, riding out the remaining waves of their shared orgasm before collapsing on the bed. Sated and safe in his lover’s arms, Alec felt sleep encroaching on him at a pace he was almost ashamed of. He usually prided himself in not being the type of man who fell asleep immediately after orgasm, but he could barely keep his eyes open.

“Come on, Alexander.” Magnus whispered in his ear. Alec could hear a roar of water fire up from the bathroom. “Let me take care of you— I already started a warm shower, and I’ll conjure up some lo mein from my favorite carry-out in Los Angeles that’s still open right now.”

In his post-orgasmic daze, Alec continued his pattern of obeying Magnus, following him into the bathroom. He never trusted anyone more, he never felt so relaxed— he was never more safe than he was right now, legs and wrists sore from his restraints, covered in sweat and come, and holding hands with the infamous and powerful Magnus Bane. His boyfriend.

Chapter End Notes

A second chapter is coming your way as soon as I finish doing the edits! Be on the lookout for a second email if you subscribe, or if you read immediately, come back for chapter 39!
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

The origin story of Alec's cat, 'The Clave'

Chapter Notes

Hey! This was posted at the same time as chapter 38 as a double feature, so just make sure you've read that one first :) I know when authors do double updates, sometimes it can get confusing.

If you don't remember gardening or fun dom!Magnus, then you missed a chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I’m so happy you’re spending the night with me, Alexander.” Magnus hummed against Alec’s ear as they spooned. Magnus never wanted to leave this position— he never wanted to release Alec from his embrace.

“I’m happy too— I’m naked in bed with the man I love, my stomach is full of noodles, and I don’t have work in the morning.” Alec adjusted the pillow beneath his neck.

“I have something to ask you,” Magnus paused. “Your apartment is probably going to need to be fumigated, and that can take a while. You can’t stay there while there are noxious fumes, and I don’t want you to have to stay in a hotel somewhere.”

“And…” Alec trailed, waiting for Magnus to finish.

“Stay with me.” Magnus said quickly. “You can even bring the cat.”

“Are you sure?” Alec turned over to face Magnus, touching their foreheads together.

“Of course—” Magnus stopped, pursing his lips. “Actually, on one condition.”

“Name it,” Alec yawned. “Tomorrow over breakfast, you have to explain to me exactly why you named that cat ‘The Clave’, and how you even found an animal that big in New York. A cat which — if I’m not mistaken about New York pet laws— is too large to legally reside in the city limits.”

“Deal.” Alec kissed Magnus gently, his lips soft from using Magnus’ lip balm, his skin still warm from their shower. Alec linked their feet together and nuzzled even closer to Magnus, falling into a soothing rhythm of soft snores within minutes. The comforting sound lulled Magnus to sleep, his favorite lullaby— one he wanted to hear every night for as long as he could.

Three Years Ago
The difference between winter and spring was that in spring, the sweat on Alec’s brow didn’t threaten to freeze. Puffs of smoke no longer punctuated his heavy breaths. The unpaved stretches of ground gave slightly beneath his feet, no longer solid from the seasonal hard frost. His first winter deruned— as a mundane— no, as a normal person— had been one of the coldest in New York City history. Temperatures dipped into the single digits, even going as low as -1 Fahrenheit, and the mercury sometimes hovered around zero during the daylight. Nighttime was another story, forcing Alec to stuff sand-filled socks under the drafty doors and windows in his apartment. Space heaters and heated blankets were a necessity until he could learn how to fix the faulty radiators. In mid-March, the frost was lifting, tips of green were pushing shyly from tree branches, and more birds joined the chorus each day. Alec acutely cataloged these seasonal changes. It wasn’t necessarily a conscious choice, but taking a five-mile run in Prospect Park each day was more than a passive dabble into nature.

By comparison, the 40 degree weather felt like a hot summer’s day. It made him want to shed his layers of clothing, let the sun hit his skin, but he knew it wasn’t warm enough for that yet. Seizing the opportunity to comfortably be outside longer, Alec decided to modify his normal route— crossing into Manhattan and stopping by Luke’s precinct to grab a coffee. Instead of heading south toward Prospect Park, he went west and crossed the Williamsburg bridge. It paled in comparison to the Brooklyn or Manhattan bridges— the pedestrian walkway was caged in by red steel beams, Saturday morning traffic inching forward below. Exhaust fumes polluted the air. Every few minutes, a train would race by. It was either the J train or M train, Alec recalled, and couldn’t help but think he was missing one. Without speed runes, taking the train or bus was the easiest way to get around— until he saved up for a decent bike at least— so he was trying to memorize the convoluted routes of Brooklyn-bound trains. In the mornings, they were packed full of commuters heading toward Manhattan. Commuters— rush hour— the Z train! Alec smiled to himself as he remembered. The Z train ran across the Williamsburg bridge during rush hour.

The formidable weight of the trains rattled the suspension bridge’s structure in a way that Alec once found unsettling, but now felt oddly familiar. The first time he felt it, his chest tightened— it felt like the struts were about to collapse, sending the bridge, its pedestrians, the cars, and the train spiraling downward into the East River. Looking back on that anxiety, it felt ridiculous. He still wasn’t used to the fact that something so mundane as a bridge would make him anxious, but without his runes, falling from this height into the water could shatter his bones. He wasn’t the best swimmer— in fact, he couldn’t remember the last time he swam. As a child, he would sometimes swim in the lakes in Idris— not Lake Lynn of course— but since then water sports had never been a priority.

In the past, a simple ‘breathing underwater’ rune would calm any of his fears of drowning, but now his only defense against the brownish-green polluted East river was his ability to swim. He took a mental note to find a public pool somewhere and test his skill, just to see if he could avoid sinking. He also took a mental note to buy headphones to wear while running to maybe calm his meandering thoughts that always looped back to the weaknesses of his new, mundane life. That’s why he did things like run five miles, take fight classes, even climb fire escapes. He did it just to prove he still could. To prove he didn’t need runes to be strong. If anything he was stronger now than he ever was as a Shadowhunter, but it still didn’t feel like enough. Although it was getting easier to shoot the thought down, he still sometimes felt like he would never be enough.

Once his feet hit the ground in Manhattan, Alec looped around into East River Park— a thin line between the East River and the outskirts of the Lower East Side and Alphabet City. Unzipping the pocket of his jacket, he pulled out his phone— a crappy, prepaid one he’d bought from a bodega— and checked the time. He had an hour or so to kill before meeting up with Luke, so he took
advantage of the park’s track — doing a few laps running backwards, side-shuffling, and sprinting. The red pavement afforded his worn-out sneakers some welcome traction, absorbing a bit of shock and taking pressure off his knees. Though it was nestled between a wide highway and a dirty river, the tree-surrounded track felt like a hidden luxury, separate from the rest of the city. Without pedestrians to dodge or cars to avoid, he could let loose and lose himself in running just for the sake of it. After a few circles, he continued his journey, running the park nearly its entire length to East 10th street, following it west deeper into Alphabet City and toward the East Village.

Without much else on his agenda today, Alec took some time to pick a spot to grab breakfast, and the Village had some of his favorite spots. Nothing touristy, less pretentious than SoHo or even his home near Williamsburg, and certainly less ostentatious than the place he’d just snagged a job at in Dumbo. He’d grab something for Luke, then stop by the precinct. They would probably eat in Tompkins Square Park. The further inland he got, the more shops and restaurants he passed—Kung Fu Tea, bagel shops, even a rogue pseudo-French Bakery. He didn’t think it really counted as French, since it was a Korean chain focused more on ambiance than french pastry. He ended up choosing a Kosher deli that did great turkey sausage breakfast burritos, grabbing one for himself and a tall-stacked breakfast sandwich for Luke. Two large coffees richer and ten dollars poorer, he walked quickly toward the precinct.

“Hey, Alec.” The desk guard smiled, pressing the security-door button and waving Alec back to the bullpen. It was against protocol, but she didn’t seem to care— just like she didn’t bother to hide the way she checked out Alec’s backside as he walked away. Instead of focusing on how uncomfortable that was, Alec took the privilege anyway, choosing to ignore her stare.

“Lightwood!” The captain called out to Alec, patting him on the back as he walked by. Ever since Luke introduced him, the captain had been vying to recruit Alec to the force. Alec regretted ever mentioning that his previous career was in ‘martial arts training’, and since came up with a better back story. “Always a pleasure to have you— maybe this time you’ll stay a while.” He winked, his pink blood-vessel burst skin wrinkling around his eyes.

“Ah, not today Captain Lawrence— just stopping by with some breakfast.” Alec held up the bag, the white paper turning translucent at the bottom from grease.

“Detective Garroway is lucky to have a stepson like you—” Luke had been referring to Alec as his stepson ever since he was kicked out by the Clave. Alec never asked Luke why, but since everyone knew about Clary, they didn’t question Alec’s sudden presence or mention much. If nothing else, it made Alec feel like he was a part of something, even if it was a patchwork family of his Mom and her boyfriend. It was still weird to think of anyone as his mom’s boyfriend. “You got one of those bagels for me?” He peeked inside the bag. Alec could smell his cheap aftershave and the smell of stale coffee on his breath. He wondered what the captain’s life was like outside of the force—middle aged and slightly overweight, he reminded Alec of the older Clave officials he’d met, mostly sequestered to desk duty.

“Sorry— next time I’ll have to bring you one.” Alec smiled awkwardly, looking around the room for Luke. The large, cluttered space was an ant farm of detectives and officers milling about, heads either down in paperwork or glued to a phone headset. Although it served a similar purpose to the Institute’s Ops Center, it was still foreign to him. The computers were at least five years old, every piece of technology out of date. Dirty coffee mugs and plates sat on top of desks covered in crumpled file folders. The drop-tile ceiling was coated in every manner of stains. Over half the officers were out of shape— they likely couldn’t hold their own in a fight against an untrained opponent. Mundane government clearly wasn’t nearly as well funded as the Clave.

“Hey!” Luke strode into the room from a side hallway, his eyes immediately drawing to Alec. It
was times like this when Alec was thankful for his height advantage— he always stood out in a crowd. “Mmm— that smells amazing. Come on, let’s bust this popsicle stand.” He clapped Alec on the back as they walked out. He grabbed his thick canvas jacket from the hook, shrugging it over his toned shoulders. Perhaps it wasn’t fair to compare him to the other officers— his werewolf blood gave him an unfair advantage in the muscle-tone department. Once they were outside, Alec’s shoulders lowered, tension leaving his body. “Did you run all the way here?” Luke took a look at Alec’s sweat-soaked jacket and his rumpled black training pants.

“Oh… yeah.” Alec shrugged. “I had the time, so I figured, ‘why not?’”

“You really need to get some hobbies, you know.” Luke peeled back the foil on his sandwich with one hand as they walked— too eager to wait the two-block journey to start eating.

“I just opened a tattoo shop and I got a second job at that roastery place. Plus—I have those stupid GED classes. What time do I have for hobbies?” Alec sipped at his coffee. It was still a touch too hot, burning the tip of his tongue. The GED classes were the worst. It wasn’t necessarily the other students— they were mostly people like him, who for some reason or another didn’t have the opportunity to finish high school, and were trying to make something of themselves. No— what made them the worst were the things he had to learn. Everyone told him the classes would be easy— the internet told him it was even easier than mundane high school classes— but things like geometry hadn’t taken priority in his Shadowhunter studies. He was fine at reading and writing, but his math skills were embarrassingly lacking, so he had to actually take the homework seriously unless he wanted to retake the test over and over.

They settled into a bench beneath a few venerable elm trees, some almost older than the park itself. It was their normal spot— facing the dog park, giving them a perfect view of all the pure-bred dogs owned by the newer generation of East Villagers and mostly walked by dog-walkers. Growing up, Alec and Luke both were never exposed to domestic animals, and despite the fact that he was kind of a canine himself, Luke seemed to enjoy looking at the pets. Sometimes, Alec would look up the names of the dog types later, just so he had better ways to describe them. Alec unwrapped his burrito, and spread his tired legs wide. His eyes scanned the grass to see what visitors there were today— a mangy Schnauzer, an older Dachshund, and a perfectly groomed Standard Poodle. There was something different on the edge of the dog park, too— cages were lined up on top of tables, a few young people with clipboards milling about. In a fenced in area, a few dogs ran in circles.


“Huh— looks like some adoption thing maybe?” Luke didn’t seem particularly interested, eyes instead following a golden retriever that recently joined the other dogs.

“Like animals you can just… take?” Alec found it odd. He wasn’t exactly sure how people obtained pets, but he assumed it was similar to how people purchased horses in Idris. The few cats he’d interacted with— primarily Church, who’d lived in the Institute when he was little— kind of just showed up one day on their own volition.

“Homeless ones, yes.” Luke loudly sipped his coffee, his eyes drifting closed at the taste of the hazelnut roast.

“From the street?” Alec noticed there were some stray cats in New York that roamed the alleys, but he never put much thought into whether or not they were supposed to be there.

“Or whose owners can’t have them anymore,” Luke said, his voice a little sad.

“So they were orphaned?” He didn’t like to think of the circumstances that would have led these
cats into cages. Suddenly, every potential danger faced by a city cat flooded his mind at once—
frostbite, cars, rain, contaminated food. Worse were the ones who were abandoned by owners—
whose people didn’t want them anymore, or couldn’t have them anymore. Either way, there was
heartbreak on at least one end, especially for the poor animal who couldn’t understand what was
going on. He related to those cats— nowhere to go, no way to contact their old families, completely
out of control of their lives.

“I guess you could say that.” He turned to Alec, pausing for a moment. “You want to go look,
don’t you?”

“I just want to see what’s in there— it doesn’t look like dogs in the cages.” He squinted, but it was
a bit too far away to tell.


“Wait, can’t you smell them from here?” Alec wasn’t exactly sure the particulars of werewolf
senses.

“Crazy world. Lots of smells.” Luke shrugged, stuffing his mouth with one of the last bites of the
sandwich, immediately washing it down with black coffee. Alec actually understood that reference
— it was from The Office, one of the first things Luke and Simon insisted he watched once he
dove into the abyss of Netflix. It was a peaceful mundane show, and Alec found the dry humor
entertaining. He didn’t like superhero shows, or series about anything supernatural— he preferred
his entertainment as mundane as possible. Not only was it more relaxing, but it helped him become
more familiar with mundane culture in a safe way.

“I’ll just go take a look.” Alec set his coffee on the bench, slipped the remainder of his burrito in
the bag, and stood up, brushing rice and tortilla crumbs off his pants.


Alec crossed the footpath and hopped the fence into the dog park area, not bothering to walk over
to the gate. As soon as he approached, the volunteers perked up, eager to show off all the animals
they’d brought from the humane society for the adoption event. Apparently, the animals were
often stuck in the shelter for long amounts of time, and bringing them outside drummed up interest
about them, making it easier to put them into homes. A bright and chipper girl— Samantha—
pointed out the different dogs, showing off how they could follow voice commands and how they
responded to their new names. She assured him they were smart enough to learn new names
though— she was quick to brush off anything that could be a deterrent.

Alec didn’t know much about dogs, but he knew they were quite a bit of effort. With his work
schedule, he wouldn’t have time to take a dog outside. He politely listened to her speech though,
scratching behind the ears of a few happy dogs, getting a few eager licks to his face, worried his
stubble might irritate their soft, wet tongues.

When she got over to the line of cages, Alec perked up— a cat was something he might be able to
handle. Cats were independent. He’d had a cat briefly as a child— Church. But still, it was a
responsibility.

“I know cats aren’t as exciting to most people…” Samantha trailed. “And sometimes they’re
viewed as less friendly, but they can be fantastic company. They have such big personalities, and
it’s a lot closer to having a person around compared to a dog. You never know what a cat is going
to do, you know?” She pressed her hand to the side of a cage, a grey and white piebald cat bunting
up against her hand. “Keeps life interesting.”
“I work a lot though, I’m not sure I could handle a pet at all…” Alec scanned the cages himself, reading the cute, silly biographies for each animal— it was a successful way to dress them up, give them even more personality. He knew most of it was made up, but it still made him smile to read ‘

Pickles likes to fit in tight places, sitting in boxes that are too small, snaking into jars like an octopus. All he needs is someone with an active Amazon subscription who is willing to not throw out the boxes!’ or ‘Carmine is a woman of exquisite taste, enjoying long walks along the window sill and fresh, high-quality tuna from the people section of the bodega.’

“Well, I’m sure you know cats are relatively independent. You can even go away for a few days and they’ll be fine. It depends on the cat too— some require more stimulation and company than others. This guy—” She walked over to a cage, pulling a blanket off the top. “— he’s more independent than most adults I know. There’s nothing wrong with him, I just covered him up so he could get a cozy nap…” She kept talking, but Alec stopped listening.

This was the biggest cat he’d ever seen in his life. It’s possible it wasn’t a domestic cat at all— maybe it was a wildcat. Tufts of fur jutted left, right, above and below his distinguished face, a compass offering meager assistance in navigating the expansive territory of his body. Its paws were nearly as wide as a soda can— yet they were still too big for its body. This was still a kitten— he had some growing left to do. Blinking away the heavy-lidded sleepiness of his nap, the cat finally paid Alec some attention. Stretching his toes out wide, one knuckle at a time, he stepped up to the edge of the crate, quietly sliding his gaze up to Alec’s face. It always seemed to florid to refer to eyes as ‘orbs’, but as the feline slowly blinked those dreamy, cloud-blue irises, Alec realized he understood how that could be an accurate description. The small lion stretched his neck long, elongating his bearded ruff and putting his length on full display, making it all the more obvious he had some growing left to do. Like Alec, his journey was just starting, he just needed a little help getting up on his feet— well, paws.

“I see you two are getting along,” Sam hummed. “He usually doesn’t take this much interest in people.”

“What’s his name?” Alec didn’t take his eyes away from the cat. Its fur looked too soft not to touch, nearly forcing Alec to stick his finger in the cage to scratch behind the cat’s ear.

“His name is Clyde—” Sam flipped through the pages attached to the cat’s cage. “He had a sister named Bonnie, but she was adopted last week.”

“How old is he?” Alec’s finger was met with a hard headbutt— the kind where the cat scraped its teeth across his skin to mark Alec with its scent.

“He’s about ten months, so he still has some time to grow into those paws. It might be why he was passed up over his sister. She was about half his size.” Samantha held out a piece of paper to Alec, a blurry picture of two kittens printed out in smudgy, budget ink. It was obvious which one was Clyde— he was at least twice as large as his sister, maybe three times. “Here— I’ll open this up so you can actually pet him better. Spend some time getting more acquainted. Would you like that Clyde?” she said in a sing-song voice.

Alec half expected the cat to bolt the second the cage door opened. But instead, he only inched forward enough to meet Alec’s cautious hand. It was a gesture of trust— that the cat wouldn’t bite or scratch Alec, that Alec wouldn’t hurt the cat. When the cat pushed its head up into Alec’s palm, bunting harder than before, with enthusiastic fervor, something clicked. He felt less alone, a little more understood— he couldn’t describe it if he tried. Maybe it was just love at first pet, but in a life where everything was new, confusing and stressful, Alec wasn’t going to turn down any safe source of comfort. Especially not one this cute.
“I’ll take him.” Alec took the leap, wanting to make the decision before he could take it back. He didn’t want to admit that he was having such a strong emotional connection with an animal— after all, he was raised under the motto of ‘emotions cloud judgement’— but he couldn’t deny how peaceful he felt stroking its soft fur, feeling his rumbling purrs against his palm.

“I’m so excited to hear that!” Samantha nearly jumped with joy. “Okay, I’ll go grab the paperwork to fill out. Will you be paying the adoption fee by cash, check or card? If you’re going to pay by card I have to go make sure our weird iPad thing is working…”

“Adoption fee?” Alec pulled his hand out of the carrier, letting Sam close it again— separating him from the cat.

“Oh, yes— I forgot to mention. Since it’s a pop-up adoption event, we’re waiving part of the fees. That makes it $120 instead of $175!” She sounded absolutely chipper, but Alec’s heart sank. He’d had an abstract idea that a cat would cost money, but he’d been thinking about it more in terms of small purchases here and there. Confronted with an up-front fee, his mind was reeling— he wasn’t sure he could produce over a hundred dollars on the spot right now. His debit card was fickle— mostly because it was usually empty. He never carried cash, not wanting to lose any of his hard earned money if he was mugged. Credit cards weren’t easy to come by when you’d only existed in the financial world for one year.

Just like that, all his dreams of snuggling in bed with a cat, having a no-judgments friend to talk to about all of his problems, went down the drain.

“Perfect—” Alec heard footsteps approach him— only a few feet away. It was Luke. “I’ve got some cash burning a hole in my wallet that I’ve been meaning to get rid of.”


“I said you needed a hobby,” Luke shrugged. “A cat is a hobby. Plus— he’ll help with the mice in the apartment.”

“What mice in the apartment?” Alec frowned.

“Fine, they’re not mice, they’re rats. I was just saying mice to make it seem cuter.” He clapped Alec on the shoulders, following Samantha over to a folding table, flopping himself down on a metal chair like he’d adopted thousands of cats before. Alec couldn’t believe Luke was doing this for him, but Alec couldn’t stop smiling. Two hours, a ventilated cardboard box, and a trip to the pet store later, Alec was home, helping his new friend settle in. Two weeks later, after the cat shredded through Maryse’s lace curtains— a thrift store find, but still upsetting when they were destroyed— they discovered the cat’s penchant for mischief and destruction, earning him his new name: The Clave.

Chapter End Notes

Next time:

Alec temporarily moves in with Magnus,
Maryse Temporarily moves in with Luke,
Clary remembers stuff,
Jace is confused as hell
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

With their apartment being fumigated, Alec and Maryse have to make other living arrangements. When routines are disturbed, emotions take advantage of the vulnerability and bubble to the surface, raising tensions all around.

Chapter Notes

I apologize in advance for my poorly worded philosophy joke.

This chapter is setting up some plot for later, so I hope you all don't find it boring!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Are you sure about this?” Alec re-adjusted his duffel bag on his shoulder, shifting awkwardly in the doorway to the loft. His posture was stiff and uncomfortable— he looked like he wasn’t sure if he was going to come inside or bolt back down the hall. By his feet, the Clave bunted against the wire-cage door of his travel carrier, itching to escape the confines of the uncomfortably tiny space.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Alexander,” Magnus scoffed dismissively. He lifted the Clave’s carrier, depositing it by the couch. *Damn, this cat really is heavy,* Magnus thought to himself. Cats adjusted better if they could smell their new environment before being let completely loose, and there were more fabric surfaces in the living room for him to sniff. “You stay here all the time anyway, the only difference now is that you have some of your things with you.”

“But this is like—” Alec stammered. “I don’t want to impose— and I really don’t want you to feel obligated to take care of me— or my cat— just because the apartment is being fumigated. You already have enough—” He was taking tiny steps backwards. He was running, Magnus noticed. The warlock was not going to tolerate this. If he had his way, Alec would never leave, but it was looking like Alec wasn’t even willing to move in when there was an emergency. Magnus diverted himself from that line of thought, focusing instead on the more likely possibility that Alec meant his words— that he really just felt like he was imposing on Magnus’ life.

“What I’ve had *enough* of is you rejecting my hospitality.” Magnus narrowed his eyes. Pulling Alec by the strap of his bag, Magnus yanked him all the way into the apartment, slamming the door closed behind him. “You’re my boyfriend— I can sacrifice a dresser drawer or two for you. I was already preparing for that hardship anyway— it was inevitable.” Truthfully, he already had plans to expand his bedroom— add another walk-in closet, make the bed larger, maybe add a secluded terrace— but he couldn’t let Alec know that yet. It would seem too presumptuous.

“That’s what I’m saying,” Alec let out an exasperated breath, Magnus feeling the rise and fall of Alec’s ribs against his own chest. “I don’t want to inconvenience you.”

“Alec!” Aya ran up, smashing against Alec’s legs, breaking him apart from Magnus. She wrapped her arms tightly around Alec’s knees in a particularly uncomfortable hug, threatening to throw him
off balance. “I’m so excited! Papa said you’re sleeping over for a whole week! We can do so much in a week!” She released him, spinning in circles. “And you brought your kitty?! This is too good to be true.” Aerulei skipped eagerly over to the Clave’s carrier, sticking her face nearly flush to the cage door.

“Aerulei, get your face away from the door. You don’t want to crowd the poor animal.” Reluctantly heeding her father’s words, she backed away, laying on the rug a few feet away, still keeping her eyes locked on the enormous, orange-cream animal. “That’s much better. He’s not a mean kitty, but even nice kitties can get a bit scratch-happy when they’re scared and in a new place.”

“I know…” She huffed, resting her head in her hands, staring longingly into the cage. “But it’s okay! He’ll be here so long that I’m sure he’ll be my friend soon enough!”

“Still think you’re unwelcome?” Magnus turned to Alec and raised an eyebrow, his eyes darting back to Aya. “Aya, sayang — tell Alexander how excited you were that you can have his famous pancakes every morning.” It was a strategy— appeal to Alec’s strengths, appeal to his emotions, do whatever he could to make Alec feel wanted, loved, and at home.

“So much!” She jumped up, her focus shifting from the cat to breakfast food in the blink of an eye. Children’s attention spans were remarkable. They were almost as short as Magnus’ own attention span. “Very excited!” She bounced and bounced, hopping like a bunny back over to Alec. “I wish I didn’t just eat breakfast because I’d want pancakes now!”

“What did you have for breakfast Aya?” Alec put his hand on her head, holding her to the ground and slowing her jumping. It was only a partial success— her sugar high was hard to contain.

“Cereal! But not the yucky cereal Papa gets!” She crinkled her nose in disgust. “His cereal has oats. My cereal has crunch berries!”

“Ah yes— today I learned that Aya can conjure boxes of Captain Crunch from the bodega on the corner. She can’t conjure them back though, so I had to send over money because otherwise…” He drew out his words, waiting for her to finish the statement.

“It’s stealing.” She rolled her eyes. Magnus crossed his arms— she knew that answer wasn’t satisfactory. “And I won’t do it again. Without asking first.” She stuck out her tongue at Magnus — he stuck his out back. “Wait— does Alec get his own room or does he have to keep sharing yours? Won’t he want his own room with his own stuff?”

“I don’t know—” Magnus teased. “Do you want your own room Alexander? That could be easily arranged.”

“Aya— boyfriends and girlfriends usually share bedrooms,” Alec clarified.

“Is it for cuddles?” Aya put her hand on her hip, looking coy — as if she were privy to things she knew she was too young to know. There was a glint in her eye, a smirk on her lips.

“No, Aya,” Magnus said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. “It’s so that it’s easier to share all our secrets we don’t want you to know.” He took Alec’s bag from him, tired of seeing Alec shift it back and forth on his shoulders. “Of course it’s for cuddles.”

“Then can I sleep in bed with you for cuddles too?” Aya was negotiating, and in her mind, she had a solid argument.

“Aya, you’re a big girl— you sleep in your own room now.” Magnus stood his ground— they’d
had this argument before. They’d been having this argument since before she could argue back. Before, when she would kick and scream the second he left baby Aya alone in her crib. Before, when as a toddler, she’d make a death defying leap from her crib to crawl across the loft to Magnus’ room. “You have plenty of stuffed animals to snuggle with. They might get lonely if you aren’t there to kiss them goodnight. After all, their entire purpose in life is to snuggle— one must imagine stuffed animals snuggled, or else they cease to have a purpose.”

“Quoting Camus, really?” Alec mouthed silently to Magnus, slightly seething. His eyes narrowed at the corners, his head cocked to the side— he was reaching his limit of Magnus’ nonsense. It was nonsense— quoting an absurdist philosopher, and doing a terrible hack job of it, in the middle of Aerulei’s tantrum. Whereas Alec’s goal with the children was always to diffuse the situation as quickly as possible, Magnus had a tendency to turn up the drama— to poke the issue with a stick until it erupted into flame. He didn’t know why he did it, he didn’t know why it was fun. He rationalized it by saying it gave Aya sass and wit— two things he’d be ashamed of his children growing up without.

“No I want cuddles with Alec,” Aya relented, her fingertips itching with ultraviolet— almost nearly blue— magic. It was a warning— she was standing her ground. She was bristling with power, reminding everyone in the room what lay just below the surface. Telling everyone with just a flash of her magic and flex of her snake eyes that she’d move Idris and Edom just to snuggle Alec Lightwood. If ever there was a moment Magnus was aware just how much Aerulei was his mini-me— in looks as well as motivations— this was it. “His cuddles are BEST!” Her melodious voice boomed on the last word, her pupils contracting and expanding.

“Aerulei, this tantrum is completely uncalled for. You’ve literally only cuddled Alexander like,” Magnus bit his lip, fighting to recall specific moments. His daughter was smart, and one of the only ways to get her to back down was with facts. Only two scenarios clearly came to mind— first, when Alexander was babysitting and he’d found both of them on the couch. Second, when they’d all been sleeping together in bed, caught up with the warlock flu. Although he wasn’t completely confident in his answer, Magnus delivered the number with the utmost certainty. “Twice!”

“Aya,” Alec interjected, his voice soft as suede. The purple-blue flames at her fingers simmered down to a dim glow as Alec walked over to her. She was still keyed up, still a wound up ball of untamed energy and emotion, but she was listening to him. “I’m sure your papa’s cuddles are better than mine.” He was using logic too, at least an attempt at it. Too bad for Alec, Aya preferred an appeal to the quantitative over a musing of the qualitative.

“No!” Aya was adamant in her position on the matter of who gave the best snuggles. Alec worried the inside of his cheek— Magnus could tell by the way the sharp curve of his jaw became more hollow and his cheekbones more pronounced. He smoothed down her hair with his hand. That was a bold move— her magic could obliterate him in seconds, yet he was stepping right into the danger zone of a magical child’s temper tantrum. But she didn’t back away from the gesture, instead turning her gaze to stare at Alec’s towering frame.

“Don’t you think it might hurt his feelings if you say you like my cuddles better?” Alec knelt down, his voice barely a whisper. True to temper tantrum form, her anger almost immediately melted into tears. They weren’t normal tears though, salt mixed haphazardly with water. No— these were warlock tears— purple, glistening, dropping to the floor in tiny, quiet screams. It was as if each drop contained a fragment of her emotion, while her face stayed nearly frozen save for her quivering bottom lip. There was a reflection of her face encapsulated in the tears, her skin red and blotchy, her face twisted and pinched in various stages of sobbing. Alec blinked hard, his eyes rolling back in his head to reset his vision before opening them again— he wasn’t processing what he was seeing. Sensing that Alec needed a moment, Magnus redirected Aya’s attention.
“Aerulei— why don’t you go check on Keris. He should be waking up from his mid-morning nap any minute now…”

“I don’t want to,” she sniffled.

“You know how fussy Keris can be when he wakes up alone,” Magnus warned. “Plus— I fetched up some perfect dragon fruit for us all to eat as a snack. If you’re good, I’ll let you pick which one you want.”

“Fine,” Aerulei huffed. “But only if they’re the red dragonfruits.” She slinked down the hall, shuffle-stomping her feet. In actuality, he’d conjured white-fleshed dragonfruit from a market in Caracas, but if it would calm her nerves, he’d thankfully swap them out for red ones. Finally alone, Magnus allowed Alec to process the aftershocks of Aya’s tantrum, unaccustomed to the rollercoaster of emotions.

“Tantrum tears—” Magnus answered the question Alec wasn’t asking. “After one too many tantrums during her terrible twos— and terrible threes— Aya took my rebukes to quiet down and stop screaming quite literally. She channels it all into her tears instead. It’s convenient when she doesn’t get what she wants at Target, inconvenient when something is genuinely wrong.”

“I guess this is the first tantrum I’ve been here for then…” Alec looked around the loft, combing his fingers through his hair nervously.

“It means she’s more comfortable around you— she’s not treating you like a guest, pretending to be on her best behavior.” Magnus smiled, trying to calm Alec down. “I think it’s a good thing. I’ve never seen her warm up to someone so much before.”

“You think it’s a good thing?” Alec seemed uncomfortable, almost like he felt out of place. He followed a calculated path back and forth in the room, his relentless pacing making Magnus nervous.

“What’s wrong, Alexander?” Magnus walked over to his boyfriend, wrapping his arms around the taller man’s neck, stopping his pacing.

“There’s just so much I don’t know, so much of the dynamic of all of this I haven’t seen.” He took a deep breath, his ribs shaking. “I’m not as much a part of this as I let myself think sometimes. I get carried away with it.”

“Then let me show you,” Magnus kissed Alec on the cheek. “No, let us show you. You’re here for at least a week, right?”

“Yes, we already talked about that. It’s not a problem is it?” Sometimes Alec was so dense, taking Magnus’ words so literally.

“Shush— I’m making a grand statement here, let me use my words.” Magnus smiled, kissing Alec again, this time on the nose. “While you’re here, promise me you’ll consider something— consider an offer. Move in with me.”

“Magnus I—” Alec started. His eyes were distant and hard to read. Magnus feared that he’d shoot him down right away, and he didn’t want to give Alec the chance.

“I don’t need an answer yet. In fact, I don’t want an answer yet.” Magnus paused, taking a deep, steadying breath. He wanted to give Alec time to process his words. “I want you to mull it over, to see how it feels. I know it’s not an easy decision, but just promise me you’ll think about it?”
“I promise.” Alec nodded resolutely. Before Magnus could even process what had just happened, the words that came out of his own mouth, Alec’s hands were cupping both sides of the warlock’s face, and he was being kissed with a near unprecedented fervor. “I promise,” Alec punctuated the statement with another kiss. “I promise,” Alec kissed him again, this time a bit longer. “I promise.”

“Alexander, that was a storybook promise—” Magnus gasped, half joking, half serious. “If you say ‘I promise’ three times—”

“It’s one of the most binding promises in the world.” Alec’s lips quirked up to one side. “You’re not the only one who knows about magic, even if it is just fairytale magic.”

“Well, as your people love to say—all the stories are true, no?” Magnus leaned in, kissing Alec again, closing that inches-close distance between their mouths, fitting their bodies together. They were completely lost in the moment, everything falling away around them. Magnus couldn’t have said where his hands were if he tried—they wandered across the panes of Alec’s toned body completely on their own volition—grabbing, squeezing, scraping. Magnus wouldn’t have been able to tell because Alec’s hands were doing the same, stimulating his every nerve to the brink. As Alec nipped at Magnus’ throat, the warlock’s ruby-painted toes curled, digging into the pile of the Persian rug, his bare feet swaying on the carpeted ground as his knees grew weak with desire. It was almost too much, but neither one of them wanted to break apart. They wanted to stand in the living room making out for hours—days—until they absolutely had to stop. True to form, however, life decided it was time to stop.

“Papa!” Aerulei yelled, her feet thudding as she ran back into the living room. “K-K is being gross!”

Magnus and Alec jumped apart, startled by Aya’s intrusion.

“Yes, he is a baby. They are gross.” Magnus stated plainly. “What did he do?”

“Well he tried to climb out of his crib—he’s standing up…” She panted, still out of breath from running. “And it’s everywhere.” She held her arms wide.

“It?” Magnus raised an eyebrow. He knew what she was referring to—he just didn’t want it to be true.

“And he’s bouncing up and down and it’s just….” She paled. “Blegh, Blegh, so gross!” She fake-vomited. “And he’s singing and it’s awful he doesn’t know the words!”

“This is exactly what Max used to do when he was a baby.” Alec ran into the kitchen, preemptively grabbing cleaner and paper towels. When he returned to Magnus’ side, like a soldier ready for battle, he turned and smiled. They were about to be facing fecal disaster, and yet Alec was smiling. Magnus looked at him in confusion. “Sorry, I’m just remembering something.” Alec laughed. “I used to call it the doodie dance.”

“The…” Magnus paused, before spitting out the words with laughter. “... doodie dance?”

“What? I was a preteen taking care of a baby,” Alec defended. “In the Institute! I was bored, I thought it was hilarious.”

“I’m sorry I don’t find amusement in the fact that I’m essentially the caretaker for a small magical monkey throwing his own dung.”

"He's not a monkey," Alec smiled reassuringly. "He's a pumpkin."
Clary paced the floor in her room, tying her hair up into a high ponytail. It felt frizzy, bumpy, and unmanageable. Unsatisfied with how it turned out, she wrapped the elastic around it again and again—taking it out seconds after her hair was secure. When she was nervous, her hair felt foreign on her body—never quite right, always a bit itchy, incredibly uncomfortable. She knew from her Psych 100 class that it was a form of sensory overload, but she couldn’t understand why she was feeling that way in the current moment.

Maryse had moved in. It was temporary, just while their house was being fumigated, but it still felt like an intrusion. She knew her mom wasn’t being replaced, it had been years since she lived in the apartment with them, but it was still the first time someone would be actually living there with her and Luke—not visiting, not spending the night—no, Maryse was there for at least a week. And something inside of Clary told her there was a strong possibility Maryse would never leave.

She’d seen the ring hidden in Luke’s sock drawer when she was putting away their laundry. She knew he was going to propose soon, and when he did, Maryse would be there all the time. A few weeks ago, this wouldn’t have nearly bothered Clary half as much, but as her memories returned, so did recollections of a much different Maryse Lightwood. She remembered meeting her for the first time—the harsh, cold, woman who wouldn’t even hug her daughter Isabelle. The woman who regarded Clary with objective scrutiny, who told her son he had to get married to a woman just to keep up the family reputation. More than anyone else, she was regaining memories of Maryse, just because of their proximity. She realized that the more time she spent with someone, the more her memories returned. She didn’t want to remember anything else about Maryse—in the past few years, the woman had become her friend—her family—one of her favorite people.

“Clary!” Maryse called out cheerfully from the kitchen. “Dinner’s almost ready, I’m taking the casserole out of the oven now!”

“Coming!” Clary shouted back. She had no choice now but to calm her nerves—she couldn’t hide in her room forever. Maryse had already asked her if something was wrong, worried about her spending so much time alone the past few days. It made everything so much worse to see how much Maryse cared about her—loved her. Clary’s entire life was falling apart, and yet there Maryse was, still making dinners and acting like nothing had changed. The dissonance was near impossible to bear.

Maybe it was time for Clary to move out. She had been talking about it with Alec for a while—getting their own place in a more hip part of the neighborhood, striking out on their own, but that dream was unrealistic now too. Alec was going to move in with Magnus, even if he didn’t know it yet. It was inevitable. Even though nobody abandoned her, even though there was no conflict between them, even though they were all still firmly planted in her life, Clary felt incredibly alone. For so long, she’d commiserated with Alec—they were two lone wolves, trying to figure out their lives together, adult children of newly single parents, each carrying their own unique baggage. Little had she known, she and Alec shared even more complex baggage than she’d ever understood. She didn’t know how Alec had managed so well. Considering the harsh society he’d grown up in, the sacrifices he’d had to make, he fell into mundane life so well. She hated that word, mundane. It felt derogatory in a way she couldn’t place, yet it was still so attractive. She didn’t want her memories back. She hadn’t asked for this. More than anything, she wanted to go back to when Alec was her best friend—no, her brother. When Maryse was just a loving stepmom, before she remembered the trials and tribulations she’d endured during her encounters with
Valentine and the Mortal Instruments.

What had triggered her memories? She wracked her brain again and again, each time coming up with only one possibility— Jace. It made her resentful of him, even though she felt uncontrollably drawn to him as well. As if his intrusion in her life wasn’t confusing enough, he hardly ever showed up, making her memories of him slow to return. She had vague recollections of angel blood— of conflicting emotions— but from what she understood, that was pretty standard Shadowhunter drama. They were all part angel blooded, and their strict rules made every personal decision an existential dilemma. She had no idea how Alec had survived over twenty years with them— they weren’t exactly LGBT-friendly.

“Clary,” Luke knocked on her door, his rough fingers rapping against the hollow wood. “Food’s on the table. Just letting you know.” She could hear his smile through the door, all fondness and paternal affection.

“Be there in a sec,” Clary offered. She didn’t want to eat right now— she wasn’t interested in anything other than sorting out her emotions. She wanted to paint.

Taking a middle path, she snatched up a small sketchbook and slid a drawing pencil behind her ear, intent on sketching during the meal. Sure, it wasn’t the most polite thing to do, but it was a compromise. When she saw the table set up, a whole meal laid out for just the three of them, Clary felt a pang of guilt. She hadn’t even wanted to come out of her room, but Luke and Maryse were so happy just to have her join them around the table.

“I hope you’re okay with the biscuits from the can,” Maryse laughed. “I tried to use the bread maker again today and it didn’t turn out very well.”

“A disaster is more like it,” Luke snorted. He picked up a large wooden serving spoon, dishing out a large serving of hearty beef stroganoff casserole. “I don’t know what happened, but all she ended up with was warm flour soup.”

“The one time I made an attempt to conquer it, the same thing happened.” Clary smiled, trying to quickly push aside her introspective gloom and believably engage in small talk. “The result was something that looked like clay slip from pottery class. I didn’t even manage to get it to be hot though— so you’re better than I am!”

“So,” Maryse spoke between bites, covering her mouth with her napkin. Tiny details like this were sticking out to Clary more. Maryse wasn’t well mannered by choice— it wasn’t a personality trait — it was from years of restrictive, traditional life as a Shadowhunter woman. From what she knew of Alec, the men apparently weren’t as well mannered. “Your semester is starting next week, right? Have you decided on what classes you’re taking?”

“Um, I still have some prereqs to get out of the way, so I was going to take those.” Clary pushed at the creamy mass of food on her plate, separating the noodles, beef, and vegetables into three distinct piles. “I kinda want to take it easy for a bit.”

“That makes sense.” Maryse nodded solemnly. “You have a lot going on in your head right now, it’s a good thing to take time for yourself.”

“As long as you spend that extra time wisely, young lady.” Luke pointed at Clary with his fork, a stray noodle rolling to the floor. “More time working on your right hook and less time memorizing the names of each bottle of liquor behind the bar.”

“I didn’t know you were interested in bar-tending,” Maryse remarked genuinely.
“Mare,” Luke sighed. “I was just implying she might party a bit too much.”

“I party less than Alec does!” Clary defended. It was true—he went out to bars without her sometimes, and he was always drinking when he was over Magnus’ place. If having kids around made Magnus and Alec need to drink that much, Clary wasn’t sure she ever wanted children of her own.

“Alec is not a great example of self-care, Clary,” Luke rolled his eyes. Maryse threw him a warning look but he backed up his claim. “Ask him yourself! The boy runs himself ragged. Rushing between two jobs on a rickety bike, sparring at the gym at least four times a week, and now he’s practically a second parent to Magnus’ magical brood,” Luke whistled. “I don’t know how he does it.”

“If there is one good thing that came out of a Shadowhunter upbringing, it’s Alec’s work ethic.” Maryse shook her head, sipping at her small glass of red wine.

“And here I thought he just grew up with really strict parents.” Clary sipped her water, hoping she didn’t insult Maryse, at least not too much. She knew that Maryse had just been doing the best with the situation she was in. Even if she’d been problematic, the woman had grown so much since then, and Clary always loved a solid redemption story.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, we go back in time to where Clary 'meets' Alec for the first time after losing her memories.
Also, Alec takes care of the kids more, and certain people notice.
Jace re-enters the game in a big way.
Dorian and Max might make an appearance <3

Drop me a line on my tumblr! Link: fanfic-fugue

Again, comment with any and all ideas, suggestions, fan theories about where the plot is going, saying hi, aything!
Thanks again to my amazing beta DianaCloudburst who just posted her second installation of her series, the sequel to Send/Delete... Speak/Hush.

Link: Speak/Hush

And follow her tumblr too while you're at it!!!
Link: cloudburst-ink

Whew, okay that's the end of my plugs! Anyway, oh one more note...

There will be an Aya interlude soon based on a song/mood, and I'm really really excited for it!
See you all next week!

-LcW
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

First impressions hardly ever go as planned, and when weapons are involved the stakes are much higher. Complicating matters further, what happens when it's not really their first time meeting at all? A flashback to when Clary 'meets' Alec for the first time after losing her memories.

Chapter Notes

Although I've been to Chelsea Piers many times, I took some creative liberties with this. Enjoy!
Also, mild TW: very brief mention of psychiatric medication and anxiety reducing behaviors. Nothing negative, just a brief mention!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two Years Ago

This was going to be a disaster— Clary was almost certain of it. Meeting Luke’s girlfriend’s son? Throwing axes? Worse yet, throwing axes while drinking? There were a thousand ways this could go wrong. During the whole stop-and-go ride from Brooklyn to Chelsea Piers— all the way across the island of Manhattan— she couldn’t stop her leg from bouncing on the rusted out floor of the truck. When they stopped at a red light, the cabin shook from the force of aggressive fidgeting, the pine tree air freshener swaying back and forth— her strength weirdly surprising. She’d never noticed it before, but there was something empowering about knowing she could rattle a whole vehicle with such little force. It did little to make her feel better.

“There’s no need to be so nervous, Clare-bear.” Luke tried to comfort her. He whipped the steering wheel around, pulling into the overpriced parking garage at the piers. Shifting the car into park, he dug around in his wallet to prepay. Clary missed coming to this place— as a kid, she and her mom would come here to ice skate, and she was longing for the comfort of the rink. Maryse and her son must not have been ice skaters, because Luke had shot down the idea of skating instead of axe throwing. The piers had a ton of different activities, mostly physical— it was a quintessential first date spot for hordes of New Yorkers. Driving ranges, ice rinks, even ziplining— yet Luke had insisted on axe throwing. Social axe throwing, he kept pointing out, although Clary wasn’t sure how much talking they would be doing while hurling sharp objects at a target. The whole thing was barbaric— she hated any kind of violence or weapons, even if it was apparently good for stress relief. The yellow bar of the garage gate opened to allow them in, and as it closed behind them Clary suddenly felt very trapped. They were here— this was happening.

Maybe she just wasn’t used to meeting new people— she’d spent most of her childhood glued to Simon Lewis’ hip, or nipping at her mother’s ankles. But in just a few weeks, she’d be starting
school at the Brooklyn Academy of Art, so if ‘new people’ was intimidating, she’d have to get used to it relatively quickly. With social media the main platform for sharing their work, there was no place in this day and age for a recluse artist.

“Hello, anyone in there?” Luke stood outside the passenger door, tapping on the glass. His smile was gentle and comforting, but it still did little to nudge clary out of the truck. Her converse hitting the concrete would move her one step closer to facing the situation—to facing that Luke’s life—and her life, too—was moving past Jocelyn. Clary’s therapist Catarina said this was normal for families who lost loved ones to cancer—that since they had a long time to say goodbye, they began to grieve before their loved one passed. She’d even mentioned that the ability to grieve together was more valuable still, mitigating that feeling of ‘unfinished business’. Clary didn’t buy most of that, though—‘unfinished business’ just reminded her of ghosts.

Either way, there was still a missing element for Clary—something she couldn’t place—something she hadn’t moved past yet, while Luke seemed to just soldier on with a new girlfriend and even some kid he almost treated like a son.

“You gonna hide out in there all day?” Luke cocked his dark eyebrow. “Am I going to have to carry you in like I used to do when you went to the doctor’s?” He opened the rattly car door, reaching in and poking at Clary’s side—it never failed to make her giggle like a toddler. She was ticklish, and right now, that was betraying her.

“I’m just taking a breather first—collecting my thoughts.” Clary pursed her lips defiantly. “Doctor Cat says it’s important to ‘reduce my vulnerability’ before entering new situations. It sets me up to have less anxiety.”

“Do you need any of those pills from—” He started.

“No! I’m good!” She hopped out of the car quickly. She hated the pills—weird, oblong fuchsia things Dr. Loss gave her. A special formula created by the psychiatrist herself in her compounding pharmacy. They made her mind foggy, so she reserved them for panic attacks only, for those moments where she felt separated from reality. “I have some in my bag though, don’t worry.” She bent down into the car, dragging out her worn green canvas backpack. It needed more pins—cool art school kids had pins on their backpacks, right? Clutching the strap of her bag like she was clinging to it to keep afloat, they walked side by side through the garage, looping through the corridor of stairs until they were back at ground level.

It was more like sea level though—and it smelled like it. The Waterside and Pier 63 parks were well maintained and relatively beautiful for modern metropolitan design, but they weren’t immune to the mildew-salt smell of the Hudson River. Some New Yorkers claimed they couldn’t smell it, and some tourists were nose-blind, too mesmerized by the city to see admit its flaws. Sure, the summer brought bright green grass, full-bodied trees, even some well-appointed flowers, but the heat did little to aid the odors of the city. The sun was still high in the sky, despite it being nearly 6:00pm, the long July day giving the children more time to jump through the spouting water, giving puppies longer to play at the park. For July, it was an oddly temperate day—only in the low 80’s—making the four block walk to the right pier manageable. Colorful flags whipped in the light breeze, labeling the different piers, advertising their unique activities. It was like a year-round carnival—a bit too busy for Clary’s taste—but it was one of the most lively and positive areas in the city.

When they finally made their way to the right building, dipping into the air conditioning, Clary’s bare skin erupted in goosebumps. She was thankful for the flannel stashed in her backpack—she’d mostly brought it for the lumber-jill aesthetic, but now it felt more practical. Luke’s eyes scanned
the lobby, and when he finally spotted the two Lightwoods, he eagerly pulled Clary forward, not giving her time to process anything else about the room, their location, or how she was feeling.

“Lucian!” Maryse pulled Luke into a strong hug, her well-muscled arms flexing around his neck. She was strong—physically and mentally, based on what Luke told Clary about her past—her ex-husband’s affair, her estranged children, the way her conservative family business disowned Alec for his sexuality. Clary liked Maryse as much as anyone could expect a daughter to like a step-mom. “And Clary, look at those freckles! The summer sun does you well!” She gave Clary a warm smile and gently patted her on the shoulder—Maryse was incredibly respectful of boundaries, and instinctively knew not to push Clary’s.

“Clary—” In a comforting gesture, Luke wrapped his arm around Clary, wrapping his strong fingers around her bony shoulder and gripping her tightly. With his free hand, he gestured over to a tall, pale, young man with a crop of neatly chopped wavy black hair. He was rigid, awkward, and looked a bit uncomfortable despite the earnest attempt at a smile stretching across his stubble-dusted cheeks. “This is Alec, Maryse’s son.” Clary took some more time to size the guy up before solidifying her first impression. He looked a bit less ethnic than Maryse—his father must not have been Spanish. His features were less pinched, his hazel eyes—colored like a dried pine-needle covered forest floor—were more open and bright. Clary knew that was a bit of a problematic assessment, referring to someone as ethnic, but she couldn’t always help the way her mind made distinctions. He shifted awkwardly on his stiff, long legs, his face an obvious mask of politeness. It was clear Alec hadn’t inherited his mother’s easygoing social demeanor.

“Nice to finally meet you, Clary. My mom told me so much about you.” To her surprise, Alec pulled her into a hug. From everything Luke had told her about him, he hadn’t seemed like a hugger. Especially after Luke’s warnings of ‘He’s not very warm and fuzzy’ and ‘He has trademark resting bitch face,’ she hadn’t expected someone who greeted on their first meeting with a hug. He smelled like spiced men’s deodorant—cedar, juniper, musk—and his threadbare waffle-knit henley shirt tickled her skin. She noticed his clothes were all relatively worn—his jeans might have once been dark indigo, but now were nearly stone washed, his muddled grey shirt was likely once black. It made sense—he was opening a tattoo shop, and Maryse owned a bookstore. Neither of them were raking in the cash.

“Likewise,” She spoke through pained ribs, straining against the crushing force of his hug. He was very strong. She could feel the sharply defined muscles rippling beneath his shirt. As if he were sensing her discomfort, he let her go.

Alec hugged Clary tight—tighter than probably appropriate for a first-meeting—but it was so good to finally see her again, even if it was for a reason so tragic as losing her memories. He didn’t care that her overly-fruity hair tickled at his nose, or that he had to bend down uncomfortably to stoop to her height.

Before he was stripped of his marks, he never thought he’d be so happy to see Clary Fairchild. But now he was thankful for any familiar faces from his past, especially ones that he might have been too hard on. Especially ones that had meant so much to his parabatai. It was strange, though. While he’d braced himself for the initial, visceral irritation he was used to feel upon seeing the red head—an uncontrollable and relatively unfounded knee-jerk reaction—he found he didn’t need to shove down those negative preconceptions. His mind was relatively neutral, empty, clear—a blank slate.
He wondered if some of his previous bristling feelings toward her had been from feeling Jace’s secondhand attraction—an attraction that Alec couldn’t relate to and found honestly repulsive. After lonely days with little to do but work and reflect, Alec realized that much of his irritable disposition had been from being soul-bound to someone as brazenly heterosexual as Jace. His constant flirting, gallivanting, urges—Alec felt them all, he just hadn’t been registering them.

“So, who’s ready to go throw some tomahawks!” Luke cheered, eagerly looping hands with Maryse and leading Clary and Alec into the axe throwing parlour.

“Welcome to The Lumber Yard, I’m Kara, do you have a reservation?” The woman behind the counter was chipper, her eyes framed by hip tortoiseshell glasses, her dirty blonde hair pulled back in a tight ponytail. She wasn’t the rough-and-tumble type Alec expected of the establishment, but taking another good look around the large space, it appeared he might have overestimated the rugged authenticity of the operation.

“Yes ma’am,” Luke chimed. Alec could read the excitement plain on his face. Luke was happy to bring the two arms of his life together, eager to get them to shake hands and become inseparable. Judging by how on-edge Clary was, it looked like it might take more than one ‘family’ outing to get her on board with Luke’s relationship to Maryse, let alone welcoming Alec into her life too. How much of her memory remained was unclear. The explanations provided by Luke, Maryse, and Izzy aligned on Clary losing all memories from the time she first set foot in the Institute until the moment her marks disappeared, but there was some disagreement on how her brain filled in the lost time.

Simon had done wonders with his meticulous *encanto* work—the power of his skills finally realized. To fill in the holes in the timeline since Clary’s 18th birthday, Luke and Simon—the two people who knew her best during her time as a mundane—pieced together a narrative explaining away her mother’s death, covering up what happened to her family friend Dot Rollins, rationalizing why Clary hadn’t started school yet, why her acceptance was rescinded rather than deferred—all of those mundane details Alec wasn’t well acquainted enough with to understand the significance of. The fire in the Fray’s apartment was the only thing they hadn’t needed to lie about—a fire was a fire, whether set by a Shadowhunter or not. Simon’s work had been so thorough that Luke allowed the Praetor Lupus to take record of it—something Luke wouldn’t take lightly, since he didn’t like involving outsiders in his personal affairs.

The one thing Simon didn’t touch with his *encanto* was Luke’s relationship with Maryse. It was too new to create a backstory for, and they had decided instead to start from the beginning, make it seem organic. It took the better part of Spring before Luke introduced Maryse to Clary—Alec’s mother coming home nearly in tears after that family dinner. It wasn’t that their first meeting hadn’t gone well, more that seeing Clary—someone Maryse hadn’t treated very kindly as a Shadowhunter—dug up thoughts and emotions Maryse hadn’t intended on ever addressing again. Worse still, seeing the bright innocence of a mundane Clary broke her heart—she was just a normal 18 year old artist who recently lost her mother. It drove home how easily the Clave could corrupt a pure soul—the anger, frustration and defensiveness that Maryse had seen in Clary Morgenstern was completely absent in Clary Fray.

Alec saw it too—the nervous, fidgety girl half-hiding behind Luke as he signed waivers and paid for their session was nothing like the headstrong girl who’d barged into the Institute months before. This wasn’t how Simon had described her before, though, either. During their countless trial-and-error tattoo sessions, Simon rambled on and on about how fiery Clary used to be. He rambled about a lot of other things too, but Alec hardly paid attention—half because he was focused on honing his new craft, half because he didn’t care for mundane nerd culture or vampire politics. More likely than not, losing her memory again broke a part of Clary’s soul that would
never completely rebuild. She would grow, change, but never be the same— something Alec was familiar with all too well. They had both lost their identities as Shadowhunters— only Alec remembered his, and Clary’s left a hole in her memory. He wasn’t sure which fate was worse.

Caught up in his own thoughts, Alec barely registered being shuffled over to a high-top table and handed a sticky laminated beer menu. There were so many options. Alec was already so overwhelmed by the emotional situation of being confronted with Clary Fray that when prompted for his order, he blurted out the first thing he saw: a Mango Session IPA. He didn’t even think he liked mango all that much— he and Jace hadn’t even eaten one until they were in their late teens, and even then they had no idea how to tell when it was ripe or not. It wasn’t as if the Institute cafeteria was flush with tropical fruits— they focused on utilitarian foods high in essential nutrients needed for optimal demon hunting and fueling centuries-ingrained bigotry.

“A fruity beer, huh?” Clary leaned forward, resting her hands on her chin. The valley between her heart-shaped cleft and lower lip deepened, scrunching up her face and accentuating how round it already was. “Bold choice.”

“Is it?” Alec let out a single, gruff laugh.

“At least, I think it is.” She furrowed her brow, her face scrunching up further like a pale, freckled pug. “It sounds exotic at least. I don’t know much about beer though. I’m technically not allowed drink.” She mock whispered.

“Ah, yes— because you’re a child.” The second Alec said the words, the server sat down their drinks— including a foamy golden beer for Clary. He tilted his head to the side, confused. Luke was a cop, and Clary was currently breaking the law. It blew his mind how little respect mundanes had for their own laws, but this was a different level of absurd. Now that Alec was thinking about it though, the server hadn’t asked for his ID— she likely hadn’t asked for Clary’s either. Adding underage drinking into the mix at this axe-throwing parlor made it feel even less safe than it already was.

“Please,” Maryse chimed in, incredibly smug. “You’re both still children. You live with your parents and you devote your lives to some kind of art like rag-tag bohemians.” Alec saw that Clary shared his reaction— self consciously shifting in her seat, averting her gaze. Alec did the same. Maryse meant it as a joke, of course, but it still didn’t feel good to be reminded how Clary and Alec weren’t fully independent yet. Blissfully unaware of how potentially inflammatory her interjection had been, Maryse resumed ignoring them to stare at Luke. She tried to hide it, but Alec could tell she was checking him out— good for her, he supposed. It was good that she was finally finding happiness.

About three yards ahead of them, Luke had already made his way to their throwing lane, weighing various axes in his hand and taking exploratory swings. Without warning, he lifted one behind his head one-handed, flinging it at the target. It hit a few rings outside the bullseye.

“I’m a bit rusty,” Luke yelled as he walked to retrieve the axe, his voice billowing through the alley-like space. In every way, he was an alpha— commanding whatever situation he was in, but leading with glib charm that wasn’t overbearing.

“Maybe it’s just the axe that’s rusty,” Maryse said, her voice light. There was something in her eyes though— a fire that signaled she’d entered competitive mode. Alec irrefutably inherited his competitive spirit from his mother. “Here, let me give it a try.” Maryse strode confidently toward Luke, plucking the axe from his hands. She didn’t bother to hide how comfortable she was with a weapon, and she made no effort to disguise her skill level either. With one calculated movement, she raised the axe up above her hands, flinging it toward the target. Bullseye— of course. Alec
would expect nothing less of Maryse Lightwood. Even though her last few years serving The Clave had been spent running The Institute, rarely seeing any combat, sending out patrols rather than going on missions herself, her skills were still sharply honed. Alec was attacking this scenario from a different angle though. If both he and his mom were fantastic at lobbing sharp objects through the air, it might look suspicious.

His goal was to hit on the edges of the target—a simple task for an archer with perfect aim. When his mother was finished, he grabbed the axe from her, stepping forward and mimicking her movement once as a dry-run to get a feel for the axe. It would only take one step forward, one swing of the axe above his head. Lining the axe up with his non-perfect target he pulled back and stepped forward, letting the oil-worn handle slide from his fingers. This was his favorite part of ranged combat—as the weapon soared through the air, the world appeared to move in slow motion. He followed the twirling axe with his eye, holding his breath as it neared the target—and then lodged itself deep into the bottom of the plywood wall. He’d missed his mark by over three feet. How could that happen? Noticing that other people were throwing a few axes at the wall before collecting them, Alec picked up another. And another—all misses.

“Here, you’ll look like a pro compared to me—” Clary helped Alec pull the axes from the wall. “I can’t even shoot a basketball. If I’m lucky, the axe will at least go forward instead of flying back and hitting someone in the face.”

“Eh, I’ve been hit in the face with worse,” Alec laughed—just a breath out of his nose really—and shrugged. He had been—once he even had an arrow lodged in his cheek. Another time, Jace clubbed him with a mace. Every injury was easily healed by an iratze, except the dagger through the eyebrow. That blade had been soaked in demon ichor, a nasty varietal so rare that the infirmary didn’t have an antidote. The wound had resisted iratzes and had to heal the mundane way—with stitches. Every moment of it was agony compared to the relatively small nature of the cut.

“Really?” Clary raised an orange-red eyebrow. “I’d think you were exaggerating, but you look oddly serious. Luke said you don’t make a lot of jokes so…” she trailed. “What could you have possibly been doing that was more dangerous than this?”

“Uh…” Alec stalled, trying to remember a poorly constructed cover story he was struggling to remember. “Before I opened the shop—I was in the service.”

“Oh, which branch?” Clary flexed her arms, looking proud she could easily carry an axe in each hand. Izzy said once Clary got her angelic rune, her weapon of choice had been dual kinjdals—based on what he saw of her dual-wielding muscle memory, he could see why. “My dad was in the service, but he died before I could ever meet him.” The words were detached, rehearsed, devoid of much emotion at all, if perhaps a bit wistful.

“Army—I did recon work, night missions, that sort of thing. I can’t talk about it much, though. It’s classified.”

“You could tell me, but then you’d have to kill me?” Clary imitated in a strange voice and laughed. After a few awkward seconds it was evident she’d made some pop-culture reference Alec didn’t understand. “Top gun? You know, bomber jackets, aviator glasses?”

“The line sounds familiar, but I definitely don’t know it from that.” Alec pursed his lips.

“I think it actually came from Sherlock Holmes.” Luke piped in. “Hounds of Baskervilles if I’m not mistaken.” Of course Luke would know about dog-related mystery stories. At least, that’s what Alec assumed it was about based on the title. One of his goals was to dabble more into mundane literature, but he hadn’t found the time for it yet.
“Some people think it came from *Picture of Dorian Gray,*” Clary mused. “If you’re not a huge book person, Alec,” she said, somehow without sounding condescending. “It’s by Oscar Wilde, one of the pioneers of LGBT literature. It’s a pretty good book.”

“We actually have a copy of it in the bookstore, Alec.” Maryse sipped delicately at her beer. “I added a small queer literature section.” She sat an inch prouder, giving herself credit for coming up with such a unique way to support her son—to show him that no matter how much the Clave hated homosexuality, she didn’t harbor the same prejudices toward Alec, and loved him just as fiercely, if not now more protectively.

“Mare—whoa,” Luke held up both of his hands in warning as he grimaced and glanced around. “That word’s a little outdated.”

“Queer?” Maryse cocked an eyebrow. Alec could tell she was already on the offensive. Maryse had put gruesome hours of research into every section of her bookstore, cramming in as broad and deep a wealth of knowledge as she could—even if it was mostly to cover the fact that the store was largely a front for selling obscure downworlder literature, reference materials, and spell books.

“Yeah— isn’t that, you know, a slur?” Luke was hushed, hesitant and well-intentioned, but unlike his relative accuracy with the axe, he missed his mark on this one.

“It’s been reclaimed,” Alec casually corrected. He found that out quickly in the gay bar scene, where people used all types of words to label themselves—most of which Alec had never heard of. Demi, Pan, Queer, Aromantic—but queer and gay reigned supreme in being the two big umbrellas. He was still learning the ropes of gay culture, but slowly and surely he was gaining confidence and putting himself out there. Tinder and Grindr helped out a bit too—more than he cared to admit. Being a late-blooming gay in New York had actually been easier than he expected. Most people, just like Alec, had some falling out with their family. He could talk freely about his life, in more generalized terms of course, and feel understood. Talking to Clary was the opposite—it was a minefield of dodging any mentions of the past and avoiding any topics that might confuse her.

One safe topic, though, was how good she was at axe throwing. She hit near-bullseyes every time—so much that the bar gave them all a round of shots on the house. They were all getting tipsier, but Clary’s skill, to everyone’s surprise, didn’t falter.

“She’s a natural, isn’t she?” Luke guffawed. “We’ll have to get her out there on the farm this fall, have her chop up some firewood for us.”

“Not sure if this talent directly transfers,” Alec mocked, watching Clary chuck another axe at the wall.

“Maybe it will,” Luke said distractedly. He was looking at his phone intently—and smiling. It was very unlike Luke, and Alec couldn’t help but give in to his curiosity and lean over to peek. Filling Luke’s cracked cell phone screen was a close-up picture of a chubby, beautiful south-Asian baby—with brilliant blue snake eyes. A warlock.

“Cute baby.” Alec leaned in closer. “Whose is it?” Before Luke could answer, Clary was back, leaning over the table and sipping at her beer.

“Oh hey, cute baby!” Clary stood on her toes to get a better look, but Luke quickly locked his screen and pocketed his phone. “Yeah, whose is it?” She mimicked Alec. Luke looked flustered—he was scrambling for an answer. Whoever’s baby it was, likely a downworlder’s, he wanted to hide their identity from Clary.
“It’s just one of the women from the precinct. She’s on maternity leave, keeps sending us pictures,” Luke said dismissively. “Looks like I’m up to throw some ‘hawks!” He shuffled away, dragging a giggling Maryse with him, leaving Clary and Alec alone.

“No, he couldn’t— not with forged government documents and a fake identity. But Clary didn’t know that. It didn’t matter anyway— no matter how much he liked kids, having a family outside of his mom and siblings was an idea he gave up a long time ago, accepting it was something he could ever have. “Who knows, maybe one day,” he said, trying to appease her and change the subject.

“I feel the same way,” Clary confessed. “I don’t know what I’m doing tomorrow, let alone a year from now— or worse, five years.” The words hit Alec close to home. As if she could read his thoughts, Clary smiled bright and cheerful, her cheeks rosy and flush. “Hey— to us!” She raised her beer glass. Alec did the same. “To having absolutely no idea what we’re doing!”

“Me too!” Alec mock-exclaimed. “So… why did you chug it?”

“I wanted to live up to the badassness of my new axe throwing skills?”

“Wine— lots and lots of wine.”

After that it was easy, warm— something small snapped the tension between them. The conversation began to flow, and Alec stopped thinking about Clary in the past-tense. This was Clary Fray, the art student— and Alec’s new friend.

Chapter End Notes

Coming up next:
Magnus thinks about what it's like to have Alec staying with them
A flashback to baby Aya
Parabrotai brawl? Perhaps.
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

Magnus comes home to an adorable sight that has him thinking back on the past. Dorian and Max are called to babysit, and Max doesn't quite understand the whole picture.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It had been a long day— longer than he was used to since he went on fatherly sabbatical. Repairing the New York Institute's wards was never a pleasant experience, but the pay was incomparable— which was why he made sure nobody else could ever repair the wards. His signature was emblazoned into the very fabric of the magic, blocking out any warlock who might try to compromise— or repair— the protections on the sacred Shadowhunter stronghold. It was hard work though, and as he returned bone-weary to the loft, his mind was set on going straight to bed.

The door slid open quietly with a flick of his wrist— he didn't want to risk waking up the kids. A waft of buttery, slightly-burnt microwave popcorn smell tickled Magnus' nose, threatening to make him sneeze. The events of the afternoon and evening became more apparent as he glanced around the loft. The TV had been left on, and was stuck on the menu screen for one of Aerulei’s favorite movies— Atlantis. They’d had a movie night, and Magnus was sad he’d missed it. But none of that was important compared to the scene laid out on Magnus’ couch.

There he was— Magnus’ ex-Shadowhunter, his boyfriend, blissfully asleep, flanked by his two little warlocks. Aya was snuggled at his side, curled up like a puppy, while Keris laid spread out face-down on Alec’s chest like a starfish, his little mouth a never ending waterfall of drool pooling on Alec’s shirt. Out of the three of them, not a single hair was in place— they looked thoroughly rumpled and disheveled. It looked like Alec had made an honest attempt to put them in pajamas, although Aya had clearly convinced him her princess Tiana dress was a nightgown.

It made Magnus' heart swell, nearly to the point of bursting. It wasn’t just that Alec was there, it was also marveling at how his two babies looked so happy, how they felt so safe. Even though Keris had a terrible case of sleepy spit-faucet mouth, Magnus still found himself falling further further in love with his son, savoring these precious baby moments before he grew up. There was something especially magical about baby drool— the way it smelled, the way it meant they were completely relaxed and safe in your arms. There was nothing like it.

He wondered how he would feel when he no longer had a baby. He’d nearly had a baby or small toddler in the house nonstop for four years— in less than two years, he’d have two children who would be up and walking— they wouldn’t need him as much anymore. Just thinking about it made a strange wave of melancholy sweep him away. For all the stress and trouble babies were, their unique brand of unconditional love was beyond compare. Soon, Keris would be like Aya— having his own opinions, tantrums. Aya was still small and adorable, of course— she even still drooled— but nothing quite so uncontrollably anymore. Eventually they would start to gravitate more toward specific people, and there was always the possibility gnawing at Magnus that his children might grow to love him less. They were strong warlocks— eventually, they wouldn’t need anyone. The
Seelie Queen’s words began to echo in his head, and the maelstrom of emotion was nearly too much to bear— until Keris stirred.

He rolled onto his side and grabbed a handful of Alec’s shirt, shoving it into his mouth. He gnashed away, the well-worn fabric somehow soothing his gums. Alec started awake at the tug on his clothing, but noticing it was only Keris, he immediately relaxed.

“Hey Mags,” he whispered across the room, sitting up on his elbows and carefully readjusting Keris. Aya curled up tighter at his side, mumbling in her sleep.

“Hey,” Magnus whispered back, walking over to Alec and lightly kissing his lips, careful not to make too much sound. He lightly pressed a kiss to Aya’s head and stroked Keris’ hair. “He didn’t give you much trouble teething, I hope.”

“Not at all, I barely noticed.” Alec rested his hand on top of Magnus’, their fingers briefly intertwining.

That was a peculiar difference between Keris and Aya— Keris was a relatively manageable teether. He shoveled anything and everything into his mouth, and while that was sometimes problematic, it meant he was easily soothed. Baby Aerulei on the other hand was a tough customer, wailing for hours on end and finding little to no relief as her new teeth pressed at her gums. The long sleepless nights had left him exhausted, occasionally wondering if it wasn’t his daughter’s gums that were the problem, but perhaps him instead. He had no confidence in his parenting skills, and spent countless hours on the phone with Catarina as she talked him down off the edge of despair.

Three years ago

“Catarina—” Magnus let out an exasperated sigh. “I googled it. She’s too old to be teething.” Magnus patted his daughter’s back as he balanced the phone between his ear and shoulder. She wailed— horrible sounds that threatened to curdle the blood coursing through his veins— but he’d cast a silence blocker spell so that Cat could still hear him on the other end of the line.

“Oh, you asked the internet?” She deadpanned. “Before you asked your friend, a medical professional?” He could hear her eye roll through the phone. “I’ve told you— that first year at Iris’ operation, she probably didn’t receive the best care. I doubt she was breastfed, and it seems like she might not have eaten enough in general. That can delay development. Plus, each child is different. She seems perfectly fine— her teeth are just coming in a bit late.”

“But she’s in so much pain, Cat.” Aerulei slammed her fist against Magnus’ cheek, demanding that he turn and face her. She found what she was looking for— her father’s finger, and sucked it into her mouth, gnawing with her nearly ruptured canines. For someone so small, her jaws were capable of much more force than he would have ever expected. He continued to pace circles around her nursery, the pale lavender room feeling like an oddly relaxing prison.

“Have you tried the ice pops? You can make them with different things, like that special milk I gave you. If you make them with juice, water it down— too much sugar can make her cranky too.”

“The only one’s she’ll even give a second glance are the grape juice ones.” With such an affinity toward grapes, his daughter would make quite the wino one day.
“Magnus Bane!” Catarina scolded. “Concord grape juice has more sugar than soda!” On the other end of the line, Magnus heard rattling and crashing sounds— Cat was violently multitasking, her favorite pastime while on the phone with Magnus. Apparently she required some form of stress relief whenever he needed to talk. From the background noise, it sounded like she was in the hospital, but Magnus wasn’t sure what excuse she’d have to make that much noise there.

“How can I deny her?” Magnus was nearing the edge of admitting defeat. Within his arms was his entire world— his favorite person he’d ever met— his daughter. She was hurting, and it made him hurt. He felt like there was nothing he could do. Despite being one of the most powerful warlocks in North America, maybe even the world, he was powerless against a writhing, kicking, screaming, beautiful infant.

“You have to, or she’ll be spoiled to hell.” Cat warned, but Magnus wasn’t listening. Aya’s crying had calmed into whimpers, and her biting became more gentle and playful. His fingers were slobbery. She exploratorily rubbed her tongue around the cushion-cut topaz on his ring. She looked at him with her Tiffany-blue saucer eyes— getting more vibrant and saturated by the day— and every shred of irritation left Magnus’ brain, any negativity melted, all he could think about was love.

“She deserves to be spoiled,” Magnus said softly, almost forgetting there was someone on the phone with him. He nuzzled into her head, taking a deep breath of her powdery-gentle baby smell. “And more importantly, she deserves to be not in pain. Can’t I just numb her gums with magic?”

“Using so much magic on a baby is ill-advised. Especially magic as powerful as yours.” Magnus grumpily accepted the compliment, but Cat still wasn’t offering a real solution to his problem. “It’s only for emergencies. Plus, your magic can interfere with hers, slowing its development. You want her to grow up strong and powerful, right?” She was hitting all the right buttons— and Magnus was reluctantly listening.

“So… what can I do?” His mind was tired and spent, but the gears were still grinding along as best as they could. Would he need to mix up a potion or poultice? Would he need to cleanse a crystal for her to chew on? Where would he get such a big crystal that she couldn’t choke on it? His brain was quickly digressing down unnecessary paths.

“Baby aspirin or Tylenol.” She said plainly, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“Mundane medicine?” Magnus clarified. If it really worked, it would be as simple as conjuring a few bottles from the neighborhood Duane Reade, depositing some money back in the register, and reading the instructions on the label. He was fairly confident even his frazzled mind could manage that.

“Your hesitancy toward modern medicine sounds suspiciously like the ideals of the Shadowhunters,” Catarina said condescendingly. She always championed the virtues of mundane medicine— she only used magic to treat patients when it was absolutely necessary to intervene, and very few patients were lucky enough to receive that luxury. It was one thing to prefer magic over medicine, but the opposite extreme Shadowhunters went to was another story entirely. They ignored most standard diagnoses— anything that wasn’t fixable with a rune was traditionally handed over to a Silent Brother for some mysterious healing process. Although some modern institutes were growing with the times, it was a slow-going process. Even the New York Institute’s infirmary was small, from what Magnus had seen. A few digital monitoring machines, some IV bags— nothing particularly impressive.

“They’d rather let themselves bleed out than use a band-aid.” Magnus scoffed. “The Angel doesn’t permit modern adhesives.”
“There are a lot of things the Angel doesn’t permit.” Cat laughed.

“Mostly the fun things,” Magnus smiled. The majority of his life could be filed under the label of ‘things The Clave frowns upon’. He’d never glanced at his official Clave file, but he was certain it must make him out to be some debauched big-bad-wolf evil wizard type. He passingly hoped the pictures they kept on him were from his best angles.

“Alright Magnus, my shift at the hospital is about to end. I have to get home to my own brood.”

“Wouldn’t want to keep you from Flora and Madzie.” Magnus tried to sound light, but he would miss Cat’s voice the second she hung up the phone. Being a single parent was lonelier than he’d ever imagined. Something else poked at him the wrong way— at the mention of Cat’s two children, a strange voice piped up deep in Magnus’ soul. The only thing it said was ‘more’. It was ridiculous— he couldn’t handle the one child he had right now, let alone another, but seeing the way Cat’s two girls interacted was precious.

“And I don’t want to keep you from Aya. Give her three kisses from Auntie Cat okay?”

“And one from Madzie and one from Flora, yes, I know the drill.”

“Alright Magnus, Goodbye.”

“Bye Cat—” The line went dead. Magnus and Aya were alone, and as he peeled back the layers of the silence spell, her cries flooded the apartment. There was only one thing left to do: listen to Cat and get some Tylenol.

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**Present Day**

“Wait, so why are we doing this again?” Max shuffled through the hallway of the dusty Brooklyn Loft building. He didn’t know why Magnus lived here— it didn’t seem like a place to raise children, but then again, neither did the Institute, and he grew up there fine. Technically he grew up in a bunch of different institutes, but on the inside they were all the same— lots of stone, angelic symbols, grumpy looking people wearing all black and carrying weapons.

On second thought, this seemed like a much more pleasant place to raise kids. At least here he’d seen a cute old lady in the halls. Shadowhunters never lived to be as old as she looked.

“Because Magnus is out with some kind of client and Aya has to go to fight practice.” Dorian had so much knowledge about these two children. Max couldn’t understand why Dorian was so happy to do it, why he didn’t give Ragnar a hard time about it. After all, it wasn’t Dorian’s job. Max didn’t complain about going on patrols because that was his duty as a Shadowhunter. Warlocks had no inborn duty— they were loners by default. But Dorian seemed more than happy to spend his days teaching spell work, tending to potion gardens, even wrangling babies.

“Oh,” Max paused, considering for the first time how extensive their responsibilities might be. “Are we taking her there?”

“Are you mad?” Dorian scoffed, shaking his head and sending his dark curls bouncing. “Magnus wouldn’t let us leave the house with his children.”
“He lets Alec walk around with the baby. I’ve seen him do it.” Max thought back to the fair—how he ran into his brother unexpectedly, how he had no idea what to say. Maybe that was just part of growing up though. When he was younger—when Alec lived at the Institute—they didn’t have to try very hard to make conversation. Talking to kids—especially Shadowhunter kids—was easy. The topics were predictable. ‘How are your rune studies?’ ‘Show me what you learned in sparring class.’ ‘Stop lighting things on fire.’ But now, even if Alec still lived with him, maybe they just didn’t have much in common.

“Well, that’s Alec. Anyway, Alec is the one taking Aya to practice, so we’re stuck with Keris for a few hours. It’ll be fun.”

“Why doesn’t Alec just take Keris with him?”

“Because Alec has to go to class too.” Max hadn’t considered that Alec would go to fighting classes. Alec was a fantastic fighter—one of the best in his generation—but he was skilled in ranged combat with his bow. Why would Alec take hand-to-hand combat classes?

“Does Magnus always give you this much information before you babysit?” Max scuffed his boot along the hallway carpet, mindlessly kicking a stone that didn’t exist. “I mean, you seem to have a lot of detail.”

“Sometimes yes, sometimes no—we text.” Dorian shrugged, adjusting his messenger bag.

“You text? Should I be worried or…” Max teased.

“Ew, no! He’s old enough to be my great great great great—”

“You can stop there. I was just joking.” He playfully bumped his shoulder against Dorian, but misjudging his own strength, sent him stumbling into the wall. It didn’t faze the young warlock though, used to dealing with people who weren’t aware of the depth of their abilities—although most of his experience was with baby warlocks.

“He is very beautiful though.” Dorian smirked, and Max swore he could see a hint of a petal-pink blush through his sage skin, mixing to form a ruddy brown.

“If you think glittery equates to beautiful.”

“And what if I think it does?” Dorian taunted.

“Then I don’t know why you talk to me so much.”

Dorian only shrugged in reply. He dug a set of keys out from his pocket, only to stop just before opening the door. “I probably shouldn’t just barge in. The keys are mostly for emergencies.” He knocked five times, in a peculiar meter that sounded like music—like a dance. Max couldn’t think of any dances that were in 5th time—he’d studied some music growing up, but 5/7 was an odd signature. Perhaps a tarantella?

“Coming!” A flustered voice billowed from the other side of the door. Max could hear loud footsteps trudging through the apartment. When the door finally swung open, he was surprised to see that it was Alec who answered. He wasn’t sure why he was surprised. Alec had been dating Magnus for a while now—it was essentially downworld common knowledge at this point. The Institute had even had it as a blurb during one of their current events briefings, as if it were something the Shadowhunters had to ‘look out for’, even though that didn’t make any sense to Max. He suspected they were just rubbing more salt in the nearly closed wounds. People didn’t talk about Alec much anymore.
Even their dad tried to mention him as little as possible, usually referring only to his ‘two children’ or his ‘son and daughter’. Jace fell out of favor with Robert as well. It was common knowledge that Jace had encouraged the unsanctioned missions that Alec took the fall for, and since Alec was no longer Jace’s *parabatai*, Robert felt little obligation left to claim the ‘Lost Herondale.’ Of course Jace never received his share of the blame once they found out he was the Inquisitor’s grandson. The whole subject of Clave politics felt ridiculously bureaucratic and self-serving to Max, and he prayed he’d never have to get too tangled up in them.

Of course, the official reason was because Alec was stripped of his marks— for all intents and purposes, he didn’t exist within the Shadowhunter community. The real reason, Max suspected, was that his father thought Alec was some kind of disappointment. The difference between him and Alec though was that Max wasn’t ashamed of himself— he wasn’t going to live in the closet. He didn’t plan on breaking at least 18 Clave rules in one night either— not even if it was for his *parabatai*. It was for that reason actually that he didn’t want a *parabatai* at all. Max loved Jace, but he’d caused Alec too many problems. Perhaps if Alec hadn’t broken so many rules, they wouldn’t have even been bothered by his suspected sexuality.

Either way, Max was still going to keep things on the down low for as long as possible— his personal life wasn’t anyone’s business. He kept his head down and followed the rules. What he did with the little free time he had didn’t matter. Did he sometimes stretch the rules to see Dorian more? Take on more collaborative missions with the warlocks? Maybe. But he was a 14 year old boy with hormones. They were lucky he controlled himself at all.

“Hey Dorian, uh— Max?” Alec added with surprise. “Come in. Aerulei and I are just about to leave. I promised her we could grab a snack on the way.”

“He promised me ice cream!” Aya ran like a bolt through the entryway, freezing in her tracks when she spotted Max. She eyed him with caution— he was a stranger. He remembered seeing her once or twice as a baby, when Magnus Bane was still the High Warlock of Brooklyn, but he’d never given much thought to her growing up. She didn’t seem pleased to see him, and strangely enough, it struck fear in Max. She couldn’t be more than five, but she was still fearsome. He swore he saw ghosts of purple magic swirl at her glitter-painted fingertips.

“Aerulei, this is my brother Max.” Alec scooted her in front of him. “He’s a Shadowhunter. You love Shadowhunters, right Aya?” She didn’t respond, only narrowing her eyes. In an instant, her pupils turned to slits— she dropped her glamour. Alec was trying so hard to get her to lower her guard, but it wasn’t working. “The first time we met was when she wanted to get a rune tattoo actually, so she could be a Shadowhunter like Izzy. Izzy’s Max’s sister too.”

“None of you look alike,” was all she mumbled, but Max accepted it as some kind of small victory. Isabelle was always the universal unifier— if she was a mutual friend or acquaintance, it could easily build a bridge over any valley. Max and Alec shared the same bristly unlikability that was more characteristic of the Lightwoods.

“Well, Aya— you don’t look like your brother either.” Dorian pointed out as if he were being helpful.

“That’s silly— warlock siblings never look alike.” She laughed, thinking she’d outsmarted him. In a way, she had. Warlocks rarely *had* siblings, so it was entirely possible she was right.

“Check-mate.” Dorian acquiesced. Max couldn’t believe how he addressed the little girl like an adult. He knew Dorian was kind of their tutor— he helped out Ragnor Fell— but seeing him with the kids made him seem more mature, nearly twice his age. “Alec— where’s Keris?”
“Pumpkin’s all settled up for his nap—I gave you a head start there. Really, he shouldn’t wake up until we’re almost back, but you never know. You both have my cell. I’ll keep the ringer on full volume so I can hear if you call during class.” Alec pulled on a jacket and scooped up two duffel bags— one worn and red, one sparkly and purple. “Okay, we really have to go, otherwise—”

“No time for ice cream!” Aya jumped up and down.

“I’ll see you guys in a few hours, then.” Alec stopped. “It’s really nice to see you Max—” Alec wrapped Max into a big, awkward hug, the duffel bags swinging into his side. It was weird— last time Alec hugged him, Max must have been shorter, because it felt like he was being crushed against different parts of his infamously bony brother. “You two should stick around for dinner later okay? My treat?”

“I wish I could, but I have evening patrol,” Max chewed the inside of his cheek nervously. He had a weird feeling in the pit of his stomach that even if that wasn’t true— which it was— he might still have made an excuse as to why he couldn’t go. “Next time though, for sure,” he tacked on for good measure, earning a smile from his big brother.

“Okay, say bye to Dorian and Max,” Alec chimed encouragingly to Aya. It reminded him of how Alec was with him as a kid— trying to enforce manners despite the fact that Max had never been anything other than mischievous and wild. Alec was good at this, the whole kid thing suited him nearly as well as being a Shadowhunter had.

“Bye Dorian, bye Max,” she muttered only out of obligation, clearly eager to get the formalities out of the way. “Now it’s time for ice cream!” The declaration was heard loud and clear, Alec readily accepting her hand as she held it up for him to hold. He let himself get dragged down the hall by the tiny girl. Max never thought he’d see his brother do something so… soft. As soon as the pair were in the elevator and the door was shut securely behind them, Max asked the main question itching at his brain.

“Pumpkin?” Max laughed. “Where the hell did that come from?”

“I think it has something to do with the Halloween fair, but I’m too afraid to ask.”

“It’s probably better that way.” Max shifted a bit, looking around the loft. It felt very empty with just the two of them— until the baby started to wail. “Okay then— show me what we need to do.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter! Jace concocts a plan to get closer with Alec, Alec goes 'full dad mode', and even more fun stuff happens!

I love all your comments, questions, suggestions and reactions! Every comment makes me want to write more and more! Love you all!
Jace is on a mission to wiggle himself back in to Alec's life — if Alec will let him. He tries to get through to his former parabatai in the only way he knows how: sparring.

Chapter Notes

Prepare for parabrotai feels!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jace looked over his set of notes from last night’s mission, making sure his reports were in order before he left. The ops center was abuzz this time of day — it was the overlap time where both night shift and day shift were awake, one just starting their work, the other finishing up. Every light in the room was on full brightness, every screen was displaying mugshots, maps, video calls, surveillance videos, and mission schedules. Gathered tightly around worktables, different teams synced up and checked in with each other, and at small desks, other lone Shadowhunters like Jace were hunched over piles of paperwork.

Paperwork was the worst part of being a Shadowhunter, but if he didn’t keep up on it, Izzy would beat his ass. She never picked up the slack for him like Alec used to. Jace never realized how much he took advantage of Alec like that until he was gone. It was just another reason why what he was doing today was so important. His impatient eyes scanned over the information line by line, cursing his scratchy handwriting — while Jace’s cursive was gorgeous, block-letter print was required on all records, and his was terrible.

“Uncle Jace…” a small voice piped up as Jace felt a timid tug on the corner of his pant leg. It was unusual for Rafael to be so bold — he was a timid kid. Lately though, he was warming up to Jace. Izzy encouraged him to train with Jace, mostly with hopes that Jace could be a decent male role model for the boy. Her son didn’t have many other examples of honorable, honest men in the Institute — Robert most definitely was not an option, no matter how proud he was of his Shadowhunter grandson — and Max was just a bit too young. Robert never thought Izzy would have a pure-blooded nephilim child based on her history of dalliances with downworlders, so when she came back from a mission abroad with a quiet Argentinian orphan in tow, he was much more receptive than anyone thought.

“Hey bud, what’s up?” Jace knelt down to Rafe’s level.

“Can I come to the…” he mumbled, not finishing the sentence. Jace wasn’t sure if it wasn’t because of his shyness or because he couldn’t think of the word in English. Unfortunately, Jace’s Spanish was virtually non existent beyond ‘Hola mamacita’ and ‘Una cerveza mas, por favor’, plus a few curse words he learned from a stint working alongside Raphael Santiago and the New York vampire clan.

“Ah, you want to come with me to the fighting gym to see Alec?” Jace asked softly. Rafael nodded
eagerly in response, his dark waves bouncing across his forehead. The kid could stand to get a haircut, but Izzy was so in love with his curls that she couldn’t bear to cut them. Robert snapped at her at least ten times about it, stating he didn’t want his grandson to look like a little girl, which only strengthened Izzy’s resolve more. She had become an expert at standing up to Robert, using her original position as the beloved daddy’s girl to her advantage, and nudging him toward more passive stances, softening his sharp and antiquated edges. There wasn’t much about him she could change, but she could hold her ground against him better than anyone else—it’s why they allowed her to co-run the Institute with Robert. Jace thought it was still bullshit that she needed a man to run it with her, but part of the frustration was that he wasn’t the one they’d chosen to give half-authority to.

“Please?” Rafael chewed at the inside of his cheek—an anxious habit that used to grind him down to the point of a very sore mouth when he wasn’t faring so well, but now that his life was less chaotic was just a harmless tic.

“No,” Jace sighed, shaking his head. “Well—I think he still is, but he doesn’t—It’s…complicated.” He was butchering the explanation, fumbling over his words, but what other option did he have? There was no way to explain this to a child—especially not as Jace was running out the door to go somewhere—but somehow he’d dug himself into this hole and he had to do his best to step around the broken glass, wrap it up in a nice bow, and change the subject.

“They’re forever. They were the second half of each other’s souls—their hearts beat as one in battle. Everything I was saying countered the very definition of parabatai, and it wasn’t registering in his six-year-old brain.

“No,” Jace sighed, shaking his head. “Well—I think he still is, but he doesn’t—It’s…complicated.” He was butchering the explanation, fumbling over his words, but what other option did he have? There was no way to explain this to a child—especially not as Jace was running out the door to go somewhere—but somehow he’d dug himself into this hole and he had to do his best to step around the broken glass, wrap it up in a nice bow, and change the subject.

“Oh,” Rafael said, looking dejected as his gaze fell to the floor. He shuffled his dusty black sneaker on the floor—dirty from playing outside all morning with Octavian—Tavvy—Blackthorn, whose family was visiting the Institute for a few weeks.

“But you can stay here and hang out with Tavvy! He’s really excited you’re here, otherwise he’d be stuck with boring adults.” Jace clapped him on the shoulder, resisting the urge to ruffle the little boy’s hair. If he did, Izzy would scold him for it later, something about making the curls look frizzy, making her chase Rafe down later with a tub of coconut oil. “You like Tavvy, right?”

“Yes,” Rafael mumbled.

“Tavvy really likes you—plus, the cook in the cafeteria is making some special food for you guys since there are more kids here right now. I heard there’s going to be macaroni and cheese.”

“Like the kind Uncle Alec made?” The little boy’s caterpillar brows shot up, two dark lines on his caramel-skinned forehead. A twinkle glittered in his eye every time he said Alec’s name. It made Jace wish he’d been there at Thanksgiving, that he’d been included as a part of the family, but Izzy made him stay behind. She said it would upset Alec too much, and would make Maryse too sad. All it did for Jace was make him feel like he was too much of everything—that he would overflow the cracks he used to fill in the Lightwood family and cause some kind of mess nobody wanted to clean up.

“Last time I checked, Uncle Alec’s not the best cook, so I think this macaroni might be even better…” Jace poked Rafael in the stomach. “And you need to eat a bunch if you want to grow big and strong.” Rafael was still very small for his age, all bones, a bit of an ashy cast to his skin. He
was leaps and bounds ahead of where he was when Izzy adopted him, but he still had a long way to
go to catch up with the other kids— especially if they ever wanted to send him to the
Shadowhunter Academy. Jace would never let Izzy send him if there was any risk Rafael
Lightwood would be relegated to the dregs. He shivered at the thought as he took in the boy’s
slight frame, how his shoulder was so frail beneath his well worn hands, knuckles wide from hand-
to-hand combat, layers of calluses from climbing ropes and playing piano. “Have I convinced
you?” Rafael didn’t look convinced. “I’ll scout it out— if there’s a class that’s not too easy for you,
I’ll take you next time. You’re much stronger than the mundane kids.” That finally got a small
smile from Rafe.

“You’ll be back for macaroni, right?” Rafe’s eyes followed Jace as he stood— if he didn’t leave
soon, he’d be late for the advanced level martial arts class Clary told him Alec went to without her
twice a week.

“I’ll try my best— but if I’m not, I’ll smuggle in cookies, deal?”

“Deal!” Rafe ran back off— probably to tell Tavvy about the cookies. Amongst the distracting
energy of talking to his nephew, Jace had almost forgotten how nervous he was to see Alec— his
normal cocky confidence wavering in the face of seeing his parabatai. He steeled himself and
tried to regain that impenetrable facade. He was Jace Herondale— he could do this.

“Alec,” Aya huffed and stomped a few feet ahead of Alec, dragging him behind her, their hands
still locked tight. “When are we getting ice cream?”

“Alec tried. They were running a bit late after talking to Dorian and Max— there
wasn’t time to stop anywhere. Plus, every time he looked at the little girl, it made him curse his
own offer in the first place. If he gave her ice cream before her fighting class, there was a solid
chance she would end up throwing up all over the mats, sprinkles flying. It was stupid— Magnus
would have known better than to say they could get ice cream before class. Alec added it to the
mental list he was keeping, reasons why moving in with Magnus was a terrible idea. How many
more dumb mistakes would he make given the nonstop opportunity? He’d only been staying at the
loft for a few days, and it already felt like he was barely avoiding catastrophes, trying to hold things
together with chewing gum and paperclips whenever Magnus wasn’t around.

“But you said before!” She whined.

“Aya I can’t—” Alec’s cell phone rang, cutting him off. It was a number Alec didn’t recognize—
at least he didn’t have it saved in his contacts.

“Hello?” Alec said cautiously.

“Mr. Lightwood,” the gruff voice on the other end of the call said his name like he was reading it
off of some paperwork. “I’m with Percy’s Pest Control. Just letting you know that we’re done
doing all the inspection work—” Alec rolled his eyes. Of course they hadn’t even really started yet.
He wasn’t sure why he’d expected it to go faster. The estimate had been two weeks. “Well we’ve
determined that your shop downstairs is fine. Even when we bomb the upstairs, you should be able
to keep your business running. The book shop— not so much. Bugs love books. So we’re sticking
with two weeks on the upstairs and store— setting up traps, filling in mouse holes, stuff like that—
it’ll all be on the bill— but your shop is good to go.”
“Oh— thanks!” Alec stopped, Aya begrudgingly pausing.

“We’re going to be late!” She whined. Alec held up a finger to shush her.

“We’ll be out of your hair downstairs within the hour. Anyway, if you have any questions, give us a call.” The line went dead.

“Aerulei— how do you feel about stopping by the tattoo studio later today?” Alec slid his phone back into his pocket, picking up the pace of their walking to make up for lost time.

“Only if we can get ice cream.” Aya held firm.

“Then we have a deal.”

Being in the mundane world always made Jace… jumpy. He couldn’t quite place his finger on why, but he’d given up figuring out a reason a long time ago. The “real” world was somewhere he went for missions— the few places he ventured to were all downworlder-owned establishments— usually bars— and even then, it was a rare occurrence. He’d never even considered he would step foot in a place like this— a mundane fighting gym. If anything, he assumed one day he’d find himself in some cool downworlder fight club, facing off with werewolves or something edgy like that. This was just sad— a bunch of sweaty mundanes in weird clothes rolling around on soft mats, wearing protective gloves and mouth guards. The amount of water they drank was ridiculous. In the few minutes since he arrived Jace had already watched someone drink two bottles of water. Sure, it was hot and musty in the gym, but not enough to be sweating as much as these people were. Maybe they were sweating because they were worried about their finances. Before he was even allowed to walk in the place, the woman at the front desk had made Jace pay 25 dollars for a ‘three class starter pass’. For once, he actually had mundane cash in his wallet, leftover from a night at Hunter’s Moon. Otherwise, he might have been screwed. She was cheerful and convincing enough, but he couldn’t wrap his head around why he had to pay to fight. Thankfully, he’d been able to convince her to let him drop in on the advanced class, lying about some certification he needed to have— saying he left his paperwork at home. He wished he could have just invited Alec to the Institute to spar, but that wasn’t possible. This was better anyway— meeting Alec on his own turf, somewhere where he felt like he had the upper hand. Apparently that was important in rebuilding broken relationships— at least that’s what the stupid self-help book Izzy threw at him had said. That’s why he’d decided to come to fight during these classes. To make an effort to be a part of Alec’s new life instead of clinging onto the old one.

The clock was ticking closer and closer to the class’ start time though, and Alec was still nowhere to be seen. It would just be Jace’s luck to go through all this effort to come to a shitty building in Brooklyn only for Alec not to show up. Other students were stretching, putting on their shoes— the beginner class was just ending and they were lining up and bowing chanting in some weird language. Hopefully, the ‘fake it til you make it’ approach would work with all the formalities. Five minutes before the hour though, Alec finally made an appearance— just not in a way Jace had expected.

“Are you sure it’s okay?” Jace’s parabatai visibly huffed, leading a little girl into the fighting gym by her hand. He held his phone to his ear with his shoulder, his other hand occupied with two gym bags— one worn and red, the other sparkling purple. “I just feel weird leaving her in class alone
while I go to my class— shouldn’t I watch her?” Unsure of what he was observing, Jace covertly activated his hearing rune, listening in on the phone call. He still couldn’t hear the voice on the other side. Who was it? The other parent of the child?

“Yes, they overlap completely— mine actually finishes earlier than hers.” Alec put down both bags by the cubby, unzipping the purple one with one hand as he helped the little girl out of her jacket with the other. As if it were the most natural thing in the world, he scooped up the little girl and placed her on the bench. Jace felt weird for eavesdropping, but he couldn’t help himself.

“I know that Esmerelda is a great instructor— No, there’s nobody subbing for her today.” He deftly untied the complicated bows on her boots, carefully sliding them off her feet. Digging in her bag, he grabbed a pair of tiny pink mat shoes— slip-ons— and then produced two matching pink gel hand wraps. He supported her ankles as he wiggled on the shoe, double tying the laces for security— the same way Jace had watched him lace Max and Izzy’s shoes for years. She held out her hands for him, fingernails painted a glittering blue, letting Alec slide the wraps over her fingers one by one, velcroing them around her wrists, covering two plain gold-chain bracelets. “Fine,” Alec continued on the phone. “I’ll try not to worry. I have to go. Love you too.” Alec put his phone into his gym bag, grabbing the little girl’s hand again as he walked her toward the door to class. The familiarity, comfort, and love in every gesture was unmistakable— Alec thought of this child as his own.

Suddenly, something struck Jace as very sad— this could be Alec’s daughter. It had been so long since they’d talked, since he really knew his parabatai, that he could have a daughter by now, maybe even one this age. Jace was a terrible judge for how old children were. It was unlikely she was his biological child— they looked nothing alike save for the fact that they both had dark hair— but how could he be sure? He knew Alec liked men, but did he like women too? It never seemed like he had? It was most likely she was adopted.

Weirdly, this child looked a lot like Magnus Bane— but that was ridiculous, as warlocks couldn’t reproduce. Jace looked over, shamelessly watching as Alec tied her hair into a high ponytail, pulling it in both directions to tighten the hold. He braided her long, silky, dark hair into a rope, tying another hair elastic at the end. It reminded Jace of Izzy’s whip— that hair could be a weapon in its own right, whether the little girl was trained in combat or not.

“Aya, be good for miss Esme, okay?” He kissed the top of her head. “If you need anything, I’m just next door in the main studio.”

Aya… the name was familiar. Rafe had returned from Thanksgiving at Luke Garroway’s farm talking about a girl named Aya he’d made friends with— which was odd because Rafe neither talked often nor made many friends. Not to mention, his English had improved by leaps and bounds over the course of just a weekend. That still didn’t answer his question though— whose daughter was she? He wasn’t sure who else had been at Thanksgiving, and Izzy hadn’t offered many details. She always was keeping things from him, saying it wasn’t his place to get involved anymore. Like Alec, she didn’t agree with how Jace had handled things when Alec was deruned. She couldn’t understand though— she didn’t have a parabatai. She would never understand what it was like to lose the person who was a part of his own soul— to reach a point where he didn’t even know Alec at all anymore, to not even know things as important as him becoming a father.

“Don’t worry, that’s silly!” She giggled and rolled her deep blue eyes. “You’re going to make me late to class!” She wiggled away from his hug, opening the glass door and bounding into the studio. Alec let out a breath he’d been holding, his shoulders only relaxing a smidge. He walked back over to the main studio, throwing down his body on the benches and preparing himself for class. Worn black mat shoes, carefully tied tape wraps instead of gel gloves. A stretch, slip-on
brace around his left knee. That was something a Shadowhunter would never need. It pained Jace to think that Alec might have suffered years of injuries with no iratze to help him. What scars did he carry? Jace was only certain of one—the same scar he had—the one that no iratze could fade: his old parabatai rune. Students were filing into the fighting area, trodding onto the mats. Suited up in his gear, Alec followed, beginning to swing his arms and legs as he walked around, loosening his joints. His eyes scanned the room—likely to look for a partner—until he finally caught sight of Jace.

“Jace—” Alec was clearly taken aback with shock, his shoulders tensing, his posture growing defensive. “What are you doing here?”

“I thought we could fight—for old times sake,” he offered, trying to make his voice sound as light and cheerful as possible. “Think you can keep up?”

“How did you know I’d be here?” Alec eyed him with skepticism. Traditional Alec—ignoring his question, brushing off any nonsense, sticking to the real story behind things.

“Clary told me.” Jace had told her everything about the plan. Apparently, in this fucked-up alternate universe, Clary and Alec were nearly best friends. Never in a million years did he think that would be the case. The Alec he’d known hated Clary from the moment he saw her. Now, according to Clary, he trusted her more than anyone. Like Izzy, Clary thought this would be a wonderful way to get the ball rolling with Alec. If he had a source from Alec’s old and new lives to back it up, it had to be a good choice. It was far more support than Jace was used to seeking out before he made a decision, that was for sure.

“You didn’t think to ask me first if this was okay?” Alec swallowed roughly, his jaw tensing and flexing.

“Since when did I need to ask my parabatai to spar?” Class was about to start, and Jace had Alec right where he wanted him. Alec couldn’t cause a scene and kick him out in front of the gym full of people. “Plus—it’s a public class. If you don’t want to fight with me, Tara at the front desk assured me I could choose anyone as my partner.” Alec rolled his eyes—it always bothered him how easily Jace schmoozed people, how he remembered names, charmed them.

“Fine— well, let’s see how you do without any weapons,” Alec huffed as he tugged on his hand wraps. “This has to be a fair fight—traditional fighting skills only. I hope you had the decency not to activate any runes either.”

“Cheating isn’t my style,” Jace let out a victorious chuckle as he realized he was actually about to get what he wanted. He could barely contain his hopeful energy. If he was going to get through to Alec, fighting was the way to do it. It was an equalizer, a constant, something that would hopefully feel just as natural as it always had been. Maybe Alec would be reminded of how good of a team they were—maybe Alec would let him be a part of that team again.

Fighting Jace without weapons was something that historically made Alec very nervous. His strength was in ranged combat—in addition to his signature bow and quiver, he was decent with throwing knives, and although it wasn’t particularly useful, his aim with blow darts was impeccable. Seraph blades and daggers were where Jace shined, but he was without a doubt the best hand-to-hand fighter in the Institute. They circled each other on the mats—a bit dramatic for a
structured fighting class, but it was an old habit. It was a practiced dance of sizing each other up, looking for any trace of weakness. While Alec’s body had changed and shifted in the last few years, Jace’s looked exactly the same. Alec’s eyes traced over those familiar bulging muscles he used to fantasize about, yet no longer appealed to him. Jace’s beauty was low-hanging fruit, something Alec had appreciated more because it’s what was there in front of him every day. Better, it was forbidden for so many reasons that Alec could never act on it— Jace was straight, he was a pseudo-adopted brother, and then there was the matter of the parabatai curse looming over their heads. Without all of that backstory, Alec barely found himself attracted at all.

“Are you going to stare at me all day, or are you going to make a move?” Jace taunted. It was all the invitation Alec needed. He had to get out of his head, to stop thinking so hard, and there was no better medicine for overthinking than a good spar. He raised his fists, guarding his face, and took the first shot—a low, mid-thigh kick. A wicked grin spread across Jace’s face. “Now we’re cooking with gas.”

Jace pointed his fingers, jabbing at Alec’s stomach. He flexed, he guarded his body— tense muscles were the perfect defense. Pride bloomed in Alec— he was better at this than the last time they fought. Sure, the knowing hum of their bond was gone, but there was a newfound confidence in his own abilities. It was his training— without being overshadowed by Jace, Alec could develop his own hand-to-hand skills without feeling inadequate. Alec threw a counter blow, using the reflexive curl of his back to lean into Jace, jabbing an elbow just below his jaw.

“That could have broken your jaw,” Alec huffed. “But we try not to break bones in class.” Jace looked confused. Shadowhunters, especially parabatai, rarely held back while training. A quick iratze could mend bones, close up cuts. It was better to train full force, to practice exactly how they would fight in the field. Alec hoped Jace would honor the standard of the mundane class. His skin couldn’t bear marks anymore, and while an iratze could heal Jace, Alec would be left needing to go to a real doctor that he could barely afford. Or there was Magnus—he had Magnus now— but it didn’t feel right to think of Magnus as someone who could perform a service for him. Alec wanted to lighten his load— not add to it with unnecessary injuries.

“Well if I’m not using all my energy to fight, I’ll use the rest to catch up with you.” Jace delivered a push-kick to Alec’s gut— again with the gut, an easy target. Alec let out a huff, wiping a bead of sweat off his brow.

“Class— five laps!” The instructor bellowed. “Gotta keep your pulse pounding, keep that adrenaline fresh!” The boys fell in line side by side, lightly jogging around the open room.

“So who was the kid you dropped off?” Jace asked unceremoniously. “She yours?” Alec rolled his eyes— Jace was so dense. He was certain Izzy had to have mentioned Aya at some point. Now that he was thinking about it, Aya knew Izzy— she’d asked for a rune tattoo so she could be like ‘Miss Izzy’. Either Jace was unobservant, dumb, or spit-balling random questions.

“She’s Magnus’ daughter.” Alec rounded the corner.

“So… you just take her to her after school activities or something?” Jace looked genuinely confused— Alec had to believe he was playing dumb because the alternative was tragic.

“First off, she’s too young to be in school, she’s not five yet. Second, Magnus is working, so I took her to class. Third, I’ve been staying with Magnus for a bit.”

“You two move in together already?” Jace quirked a blonde eyebrow presumptuously.

“You knew we were dating?” At least it seemed like Jace knew something. He doubted Izzy told
him much— it must have been Clary.

“No, but now I do.” Jace’s knowing grin had Alec bristling— Jace was insufferable. Alec hated small talk. They still had three more laps until they could keep sparring. It was much harder to talk while being punched and kicked.

“Backwards!” the instructor ordered. Jace spun around with ease— he was better at this than Alec.

“So anyway, you live there now? I thought you still lived with Mom.” It was weird to hear him still refer to Maryse as ‘Mom’. It was easy to forget these things, or how natural they used to be.

“No— our apartment is just getting fumigated.” He hated baring all of this stuff to Jace. If this was going to work, he had to take it slow, it had to be on Alec’s terms. After years of having their minds and souls knit together, Jace had to know that. Their laps were over— it was back to fighting.

“Hands only!” the instructor yelled.

Alec didn’t waste any time— he landed a sideways, closed fist blow to Jace’s ear. It wasn’t the fairest move, but Jace could take it. Alec was trying to rile him up and get his focus off of Alec’s life and back onto fighting.

“I know what you’re doing Alec.” Despite the fact that they were fighting, Jace still said Alec’s name with such fondness. “You’re trying to avoid telling me about your life.”

“You’re not offering much about yours,” Alec replied, but realized it was a moot statement— Jace’s life was probably exactly the same.

“It’s more of the same— missions, reports, training. I’m still just a grunt, a soldier. No promotions for me.” Jace struck his palm against Alec’s collarbone. The bruise would be inconvenient— Alec was going to start tracing out a temporary tattoo there to see how he liked it. But he thought about how Magnus would stroke the bruise, kiss it gingerly, maybe even soothe with a touch of magic. The thought distracted him, and Jace landed a jab just above Alec’s groin, right in the center of his still healing quill and inkwell tattoo. The skin stung from the contact— Alec regretted not bandaging with some Saniderm for class. It was a waste of the expensive material, sure, but it kept the area clean while he fought.

“Where’d your brain go, brother?” Jace laughed. No— that was too much for Alec. Enough to get him to deliver the cheapest shot— an underhand, scooped finger blow directly to the groin. Jace doubled over, his eyes watering reflexively. Alec had a captive audience now— it was time to drive his point home.

“Do you want this to work, Jace?” Alec breathed, his chest heaving from exertion and nerves. “Do you want back in my life?” He swallowed hard, his mouth feeling sticky and dry from breathing through it. “Well my life is messy. It’s complicated. It’s mundane. I’m not clinging to the past— I’m done mourning what was lost.” This was more than Alec was used to talking. It felt weird letting so many words leave his mouth at once, but he’d been mulling over what he’d say to Jace for a while. “I’m happy, and I don’t want you dredging up the past. You’re on my turf, and you need to respect that it’s going to take time. Whether you like it or not, we’re starting over— not picking up where we left off.”

“That’s what I’m trying to do, can’t you see that?” A few people in class were staring at them, so Jace threw a passive blow that Alec easily blocked with his forearm. “I’m asking you questions, trying to get to know you.”
“That’s not how I work. If you want to get to know me, you’re going to have to spend time with me.” Alec swung a 360 swoop, Jace raising his hand and leaning into the motion to block.

“Chokeholds!” the instructor belted.

“Then you’re going to have to let me.” Jace let Alec put him in a sideways hold— the same basic choke they’d do as kids when they wrestled. They stopped talking, focusing only on fighting. They were still compatible as sparring partners, and once they focused, it looked like a perfectly choreographed dance. When Jace choked Alec from behind, bearing down with all his weight, Alec flipped Jace with ease, landing him flat on his back. When Alec roundhouse kicked, Jace grabbed his ankle and twisted him into a bind. A few people stopped to watch, but most didn’t care — there were plenty of good fighters there. The last few minutes of class flew by, and when the instructor told them to line up, it was a surprise. They lined up and bowed, quiet as they left the mats. Alec dabbed his sweat off, shot water from his bottle into his mouth, and prayed that the way he looked at Jace accurately conveyed his emotion.

“This—” Alec paused, waiting for Jace to understand. “This is good. Keep fighting with me. I— I think I can do that.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter:
Aya goes along to the studio with Alec to see him at work!
Clary talks to Alec about Jace!
Magnus has some 'mommy' time alone.
Alec comes home to see Magnus in a deliciously compromising position.
Chapter 44

Chapter Summary

After fighting at the gym with Jace, Alec’s day only continues to get more stressful. For Magnus, on the other hand, his day only gets more relaxing. Emotions bubble, simmer, and eventually pop. Clary complicates things by sticking her nose in places it doesn’t belong.

Chapter Notes

Hey! I know I promised smut, and THERE IS SMUT. You just have to make it through a long and awkward Clary scene first!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clary was bored. After calling her into the shop over an hour ago, Alec was still nowhere to be found. No calls were coming in, not a single random passerby had walked in—yet she still couldn’t bring herself to pull out her portfolio and get to work. Maybe taking some time off had made her lazy, but the more likely culprit to her lack of engagement was her racing mind. Jace planned on meeting Alec at fighting class today, at least that was the plan they’d come up with together. The class was long over, but she hadn’t heard from Jace yet. She didn’t know if she should text him first, give him some space to digest, or if maybe he’d need a bit of encouragement to open up. It really was like meeting him all over again, falling for him all over again— and even though she had memories of what he liked, how Jace operated, it didn’t feel like enough.

Worse, she remembered now how Alec reacted to drama with Jace, which meant Alec’s reaction to the whole event might be incredibly negative. When she saw Alec and Aya walk by the front window smiling and swinging their hands, she couldn’t help but think it’d gone better than expected. Alec looked ecstatic, at ease, happy.

“Are you excited, Aya?” Alec lifted Aya off the ground in a flurry of giggles, tossing her upwards just enough so her head sent the front door bells jingling loudly. This warranted more giggles from the girl— they were making quite a grand entrance.

“I’m going to help Miss Clary!” Alec lowered her back to the ground. She obediently held out her arms wide so he could easily take off her jacket. He slid off both arms of the purple puffy down marshmallow coat. It looked out of place on the rack in the tattoo shop, but something about it fit. It was Aerulei’s— it belonged to Magnus’ daughter, and that somehow made it just as much Alec’s. It was strange seeing how they orbited so close to being a family, yet at the same time, Clary could sense a cautious distance between them. She suspected Alec was the one hesitating, but that was just her best guess.

“I know— she’s happy to be back at work, aren’t you?” Alec slid two duffel bags off his shoulder, walking behind the counter and stashing them near the floor. Gym bags, Clary noticed— Alec must have taken Aya to her fighting classes. The boundaries were growing more and more misty
and cloudy, to the point where an outsider would assume Aya was Alec’s own child. It just made Clary more and more uncertain—she could only imagine how confusing it was for the kids and the couple themselves.

“What’s this I hear about helping Miss Clary?” Clary chimed. She knelt, her hair swinging down to Aya’s face.

“Alec said I’m going to help you with your coloring while he does tattoos.” Aya looked around the shop, eyes wide. “It looks different here!” She bolted over to the shelves Alec installed recently, reaching up to touch all the neatly folded t-shirts.

“I do have quite a bit of coloring to do for my homework.” Clary looked up to Alec with a knowing smile. Either Aya wanted to tag along with him, or Alec had no other choice but to bring her along, and it only made sense to get her involved—after all, it wasn’t as if Clary had too many responsibilities at the shop.

“My homework isn’t as cool as that—” Aya whipped around, her braided ponytail smacking herself in the face. “I have to read books.”

“Don’t pretend you don’t like the books Ragnor and Dorian give you Aya, I see how much you read.” Alec grabbed his appointment book from behind the counter, reading through it as he paced back toward the door. Clary didn’t know what he was looking at—his only booking was Rafael at 8:00. “Clary goes to art school.” Alec said plainly. He held his appointment book in his teeth as he slid off his coat and hung it on the rack.

“Do you work here so you make money for art instead of just doing it at school?” Aya was stepping on the black and white tiles as if it were a hopscotch game, hopping between only the black tiles. For a kid who just came from a fight class, she seemed to still have boundless energy. Clary was a bit nervous with the task of keeping Aerulei occupied while Alec worked.

“Er,” Clary grimaced. “Kinda?” Clary didn’t feel comfortable explaining economics to a four year old. Aya paused her jumping, landing with a hard stomp on a black tile.

“Is it to help Alec?” Aya raised one eyebrow— they were getting bushier, darker, growing a bit ahead of time compared to the rest of her face. In honesty, it made her look more like Alec, which was ridiculous all things considered.

“Sorta… Yeah, I guess that’s why.” Alec trailed, scratching behind his head. Both adults were dancing around the topic, passing the hot potato of being the one she asks more money questions to. Neither of them knew what to say—Clary wasn’t even sure how much a four—no, almost five, she remembered—year old would understand about jobs, money, being a student, struggling. Especially a child as wealthy as Aerulei Bane was, even if she didn’t know it. “I don’t have time to do everything around here so yes. Clary helps me.”

“None of those are good answers. You two are being weird.” Aerulei rolled her eyes, spinning around the front of the shop and landing in Alec’s favorite reading chair. She had to hoist herself up a bit to make it onto the seat, but once she was on it, the seat consumed her. “How many tattoos are you doing today?” She kicked her legs against the seat.

“Well I have Raphael,” Alec started.

“Raphael Santiago?” Aya perked up, sitting up straight in her seat.

“Yes, Raphael Santiago,” Clary was confused. How did this little girl know Raphael?
“Um, he’s my….” Aya searched for words. “Friend?” She didn’t sound convinced.

“You can tell her, Aya.” Alec assured the little girl. “She’s allowed to know now.”

“Tell me what?” Ever since she began to get her memories back, it was having the opposite effect she’d hoped— she felt out of the loop more than ever, like she was always missing a beat.

“I know Raphael because my papa adopted him a long long time ago.” She crossed her legs.”But he doesn’t look old at all, because he’s a vamp—”

Through the door, three girls barged in arm in arm. Aya noticed what they were— mundanes— and mimed zipperping her lip shut, locking it, and throwing away the key.

“Oh my god is that your daughter? She’s so CUTE.” A girl with brightly highlighted hair squealed.

“Jessica,” the auburn haired one chided. “We’re here for tattoos, not adopting cute kids. Leave the poor girl alone.” She turned to the front desk. “Hi, yes— I know we probably should have called ahead but it’s like, super last minute. We’re going to an event tonight and we just really want matching wrist tattoos for the picture. We saw your shop on google and it just looked so…” Her eyes combed up and down Alec’s frame— she clearly liked what she saw, it wasn’t very subtle flirting. “... authentic. Is there any way you could squeeze us in?” She batted her eyelashes heavily, unaware that it would have no effect on Alec.

“Uh, sure— what are you looking to get? Three pieces might take a little time, but I have a few hours to kill.”

“We want infinity signs, but like, with our zodiac sign constellations inside the funny eight shape.”

“I uh, think I can work with that.” Alec nodded firmly. “I just have some forms for the three of you to sign, and then we can get started sketching.”

“Sketching,” the honey blonde girl squealed. “Alisse, he’s going to draw for us…” Clary could tell Alec was trying his best to not roll his eyes, tossing him a sympathetic look. He led the girls away as if they were a disease he didn’t want Aerulei to catch, setting them up in the middle work space.

“So, Aya,” Clary gathered up her sketchbook and some pencils in her arm, grabbing a smaller notebook when she realized it might be easier for Aya to hold. “What do you want to work on?”

“You don’t have any coloring books?” Aya chewed at her bottom lip, a bit chapped from the cold winter air.

“No but,” Clary stopped— that was actually a brilliant idea. “I do have some things you can color in!” She flipped through her sketchbook to a set of plain, fine-line tattoo ideas— all in black and white. She was hesitant to let Aya draw right over them, but it also felt like too much effort to go make copies and waste ink, so Clary quickly snapped pictures of them with her phone and handed over the notebook to Aya.

“Whoa— these are so pretty.” Aya’s small fingers traced over each black line, following the swirls and spirals. She was mesmerized.

“Yeah, they’re some ideas I’ve been trying.” Trying, and failing, Clary wanted to add, but she didn’t want to seem defeatist. Every attempt she’d made to tattoo a mandala on pigskin ended in one blobby failure. The lines were too fine— Alec told her over and over she needed to space it out, there was too much risk for blowout for these painfully thin lines Clary was so keen on.
“You’re really good at drawing.” Aya declared. “You should be teaching at the school. Not going to the school.”

“Actually, they’re tattoo designs.” Clary reached over and flipped the thick-stock page, revealing— to Aeruei’s glee— another set of botany-inspired mandalas, each substituting standard lotus and rose themes for more obscure flora. Aya’s eyes went wide as she pointed out all the plants she recognized, muttering on about how much someone named Dorian taught her about plants.

“If you do tattoos,” Aya said, finally breaking from her herbology peacock reverie, “Does that mean…” She whispered, leaning in close enough that Clary could smell her breath— it smelled like mint chocolate chip ice cream. “You could give me one?” Aya bit her lip again, showing off her uneven front teeth.

“I could, but I’d have to ask Alec—” Clary stopped, realizing she’d misstepped. Technically, it wasn’t Alec’s decision at all. “Or your papa first.”

“ Asking Dad would be fine,” Aya nodded. “I’m sure he’ll say yes.”

“Exactly. See, I know Magnus, your dad, actually. It’s a funny story.” Clary prepared to tell the story of how Magnus helped her and her mother, how much Magnus had done to help fight against evil, but Aya wasn’t at all interested— she had a one track mind, and it was focused on tattoos.

“No,” Aya shook her head. “My papa is Magnus. Dad is Alec.”

Clary opened and closed her mouth, at a loss for words. It felt like every thought had checked out and vacated her brain, leaving behind only a sense of confused shock. She took a deep breath, centering herself, convincing her heart to be as pragmatic as her brain wanted to be. Clearing her throat, she ended the pause in the conversation that had been making Aya clearly a bit anxious.

“When did your papa tell you to call Alec dad?” Clary’s brow furrowed so deeply she could feel the tension stretch across her forehead and behind her ears. Her jaw clenched, her eye twitched.

“He didn’t,” She shrugged. It wasn’t necessarily Clary’s place to be having this conversation, but maybe it was easier this way— for an impartial party to do the awkward explaining. Aya needed it— she wasn’t grasping the gravity of her words. Of course she’s not, Clary, she’s four and a half; she scolded herself.

“Did… Alec?” It didn’t seem like something Alec would do, but if he did, it was a complete overstep. Everything was up and down, side to side, inside out for Clary right now— she wouldn’t put a surprise like this by him. “Did Alec tell you it was okay to call him that, or did he ask you?”

“No,” Aya shook her head again, sending wispy strands of black hair aflutter, dancing in front of her crystal blue glamoured eyes. Clary noticed up close how unnatural they looked, even when concealed by magic.

“So… you decided?” Clary pursed her lips. “It was your choice to call him Dad?”

“Yeah! He lives at our house, he takes me places, and I love him like I love papa.”

“Well, that’s a very good calculation, but it’s a bit more complicated than that.” It felt like a hand was yanking at Clary’s heart. What had she gotten herself into? She already felt out of her depth in this conversation, and it could only get worse from here.

“Why?” Aya asked the infamous why so typical of young children, but right now, it was more impossible to answer than normal. Clary would have rather had Aya ask her why grass grows
upward or why penguins choose to live in the cold when they could easily swim elsewhere.

“Well, okay. When I was your age,” Clary started.

“Can I color while you talk?” Aya asked, looking a bit impatient as she fiddled with the embossed seams of the chair.

“Sure,” Clary blinked. “Here you go.” She handed over a mandala design and a few colored pencils.

“I don’t like these colors.” Aya looked side to side not-so-subtly before closing her eyes really hard and waving her hands in a very precise circle. A small folio of fancy colored pencils appeared in her hands. “This is better.”

“I think I’m supposed to tell you not to do that with mundanes around?” Clary pursed her lips, not sure if she should be authoritative or encouraging. Aya, on the other hand, just shrugged. “Did you… steal them?”

“No— that’s silly. These are from home.” Aya stuck out her tongue as she assessed her color options, starting with— predictably—a light purple. “Keep going with your story.”

“Okay,” Clary settled into her chair. “When I was your age, my mom had a boyfriend named Luke. She’d been dating Luke since I was very little—a bit younger than you actually. I almost don’t remember not having Luke.”

“Is this the same Luke from Thanksgiving and Alec’s mom?”

“Yes.” Clary reflected back on her memories of Thanksgiving, how she’d been so utterly oblivious to so much, how so many of her memories were still obscured.

“So Luke used to be boyfriends with your mom? Now…. Alec’s mom?” Aya was having a hard time understanding. Little kids assumed love was forever, and this wasn’t meshing well with that type of fairy-tale romance told over and over again in children’s books.

“Okay, we’re getting a bit off topic,” Clary sighed, feeling that much closer to defeat.

“I like this topic.” Aya gave Clary a wide, cheeky grin.

“Well, yes— but my mom passed away a few years ago.” Clary paused, giving Aya time to process what she’d just said.

“Oh,” Aya looked down at her colors. Clary could tell she didn’t quite understand, but she still felt sad. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay— I still have Luke. But see, I never called him Dad.”

“Why?” Aya asked again, and Clary started to realize just how difficult it was to rationalize with a little kid.

“Well, first off, my mom and Luke never got married.” Clary wondered if they ever would have, given the chance. The past few years before Jocelyn passed, the couple had been closer than ever. It was a moot point to dwell on it though—it could never happen. Plus, Luke was so happy with Maryse. In a way, their relationship seemed even better than what Luke had with Jocelyn—there was more passion, more complex love, more understanding. Maybe they would get married one day—Clary had a good feeling about it.
“Well boys can’t always get married.” Aya had the conviction of someone who had studied politics for years and was intimately familiar with the gay marriage laws in other states and countries. Clary knew it was just rote memorization—mimicry of some adult in her life—but it was still very cute and rather impressive.


“It doesn’t matter anyway,” Aya didn’t look up, tilting her head to the side as she observed her work. She was remarkably good at staying in the lines—far better than Clary had been at her age.

“Why not?” Clary watched as Aya focused on the drawing, sticking her tongue out between sentences, fully rapt in concentration.

“Because,” she said like it was the most obvious thing in the world, “Papa and Alec are totally getting married.”

“Oh really, how do you know?” Clary leaned in, plucking the yellow pencil from the pouch. She began to lightly color in a different design than the one Aya was working on—she didn’t want to step on the girl’s toes—focusing first on the petals of a daffodil.

“It’s so obvious. They kiss all the time. It’s pretty gross.” Aya scrunched up her nose, scribbling aggressively with her pink pencil at a diamond shape in the design.

“Plenty of people kiss and don’t get married,” Clary tried to reason.

“He lives at our house now,” Aya rationalized.

“You know that’s temporary right?” Clary frowned. “It’s just because there are mice and bugs in his apartment.”

“That seems silly to me. He’s already there all the time, now he is there all the time. It would be easier for him to stay.”

“I think maybe you just want them to get married so you can wear a pretty dress.” Clary smirked, trying to lighten the mood in an effort to drift the conversation away from the strong severity it had fallen into.

“Well, I’d look much better in one than Keris,” Aya snickered.

“That’s for sure,” Alec chuckled, leaning against the door-frame between the front of the shop and the backroom. His laugh didn’t reach his eyes though—they were locked on Clary’s. Clary realized he’d heard more of the conversation than just Aya’s cute remark—he’d heard enough to make him incredibly unhappy with Clary. “I just came back here to grab one of my sketchbooks.” He reached below the front desk, plucking up a tiny black book. As he slowly drifted over to Clary and Aya, he pointed to the mandala Aya had been coloring. “You’re doing such a good job, sweetie,” Alec smiled.

“She is.” Clary pursed her lips.

“That’s for sure,” Alec chuckled, leaning against the door-frame between the front of the shop and the backroom. His laugh didn’t reach his eyes though—they were locked on Clary’s. Clary realized he’d heard more of the conversation than just Aya’s cute remark—he’d heard enough to make him incredibly unhappy with Clary. “I just came back here to grab one of my sketchbooks.” He reached below the front desk, plucking up a tiny black book. As he slowly drifted over to Clary and Aya, he pointed to the mandala Aya had been coloring. “You’re doing such a good job, sweetie,” Alec smiled.

“She is.” Clary pursed her lips.

“Yeah, I think you should try to teach her to do some sketching—it looks like she’s more than ready for it.” His eyes bore holes into Clary’s heart. Behind his words, there was a different message. Teaching her to draw would give you something better to talk about than meddling with Magnus and I.
“That’s such a good idea, Alec,” Clary’s bottom lip trembled as she stifled a frown, “I’m sorry I didn’t think about it before.” She hoped he picked up the message, but as he walked away without looking at her again, she didn’t feel particularly redeemed.

When Magnus walked through the portal into his home, he was met with a scene of rowdy chaos.

“Keris get down from there!” Dorian yelled in his trademark lilt. Magnus wasn’t even sure the boy had heard him enter the apartment over the ruckus, even though Magnus had gone through the effort to make the portal static extra loud to give the teenage boy a respectful amount of warning. Dorian startled rather easily.

“I don’t see what’s so wrong with it,” a slightly unfamiliar voice added. It was one Magnus had heard before—but he couldn’t place where.

“Dorian?” Magnus questioned, inching into the living room. There was more ruckus, two pairs of feet shuffling around.

“Magnus! You’re home early!” Dorian froze, his Adam's apple bobbing as he stared at the older warlock. He looked panicked, nervous, as if he’d committed some egregious error. Magnus looked around to see what was so sinfully out of order, yet the only thing unexpected and mildly out of place was Maxwell Lightwood. He didn’t look anywhere near as uncomfortable as his companion, instead steeling his features in a familiar way Magnus had seen Alec do thousands of times.

“Oh, hello Maxwell,” Magnus smiled. “Dorian didn’t tell me you’d be joining him.” Magnus leaned casually against the back of the green velvet armchair. “If he’d told me, I would have left out some snacks!”

“I—I’m sorry!” Dorian stammered. “I should’ve asked—” Magnus held up his hand to cut Dorian off. Magnus shook his head mildly—the fear in this boy was remarkable, making him wonder just how strict a parent Ragnor must be.

“Never apologize for giving my son an additional bodyguard. I’m sure your companion is armed to the teeth.” Magnus’ eyes scanned the young Shadowhunter, who’d grown at least an inch since he’d last seen him, perhaps even two.

“Are you?” Dorian quirked his head to the side. “I certainly wouldn’t know if you had concealed weapons or anything like that,” he added, but stumbled over the words. Magnus could very obviously tell what Dorian was trying to cover up, and he was now incredibly certain that Dorian knew the exact location of each of Maxwell Lightwood’s weapons, and was rather familiar with them.

“Not too much—” Max lifted his leg, planting his foot on the ottoman and rolling up the hem of his dark pants. “just an ankle dagger, a small seraph blade in my belt, throwing stars.” His eyes darted to Magnus, and he quickly rolled down the leg of his pants. “All secured of course! I work with kids at the Institute a lot.” He raised the hem of his shirt to showcase just how well secured the weapons were in his belt, and Magnus caught Dorian glance over, immediately blushing.

“Oh! You work with young nephilim children! You’re even more qualified than I thought!” Magnus smiled. “So I take it you’re familiar with Rafael Lightwood?” Magnus paused. “Oh gods that was a stupid question. You’re his uncle. Sorry, it’s just been a long day.”
“Well this one seems to have worn himself out.” Dorian pointed to Keris, who was still doing whatever it was that had caused a ruckus— which was lounging on top of The Clave’s back. He clutched the cat’s fur in his chubby hands, fists full of orange-cream fluff. It was quite a sight— the proportions were similar to an adult riding a horse.

“Keris, bunso, what are you doing?” Magnus knelt down to reach out for them, but with a wiggle of Keris’ butt, the cat was off again, sliding out of arm’s length. Magnus stood back up, his eyes following Keris and The Clave as they meandered around the room—a baby cowboy and his feline steed.

The baby smiled, showing off his gummy, half-tooth filled smile. It felt like every day he was gaining more and more teeth, losing more and more of his baby fat— growing up so fast. The cat was looping around toward Magnus again, his destination: bunting against Magnus’ leg for pets. Magnus gladly obliged.

“You think you’re so funny, don’t you?” Magnus reached down to grab Keris, but with a kick of his legs, the cat was off, prancing quick circles around the living room tea table.

“Is this something I should be worried about?” Magnus chuckled, looked back to Dorian. “I mean, I should clarify— this is absolutely new behavior.”

“Nah, he’s been doing that all afternoon. We actually don’t know how he got there. One second he was asleep in his crib, next he was riding into the living room atop the cat.”

“Stranger things have happened,” Magnus mused. He was used to Keris— and Aya— getting into mysterious situations that he couldn’t explain. There was, of course, the time Aya showed up unannounced in Tessa’s home in Devon— right in her bed, catching her in a very compromising position with poor Jem. Then there was the time Keris turned himself purple— but the aubergine hue was contagious, tinting everyone he touched. There were the more mundane ones, of course— climbing out of cribs, finding their way into locked rooms, managing to get food that was definitely not for babies — specifically Magnus’ brie imported from France— not only into their mouths but also smeared all over their faces. Riding cats, however, was new. Perhaps it was The Clave’s idea— after all, Keris— to Magnus’ knowledge, at least— had never done this with Chairman Meow.

“At least the two of them seem like good friends now. Where’s Chairman Meow?”

“Not quite fond of The Clave yet, I suppose— haven’t seen the Chairman all day, actually.” Dorian’s green face scrunched up in curiosity. It was rather strange for Chairman Meow to not make an appearance for Dorian, they were incredibly fond of each other, but it was most likely just that the Chairman still hadn’t adjusted to sharing his feline territory. It had been similar when Magnus first brought home Aya, then with Keris, but now it was just another fur-baby.

“Magnus— your cats are very oddly named.” Max furrowed his brow, watching as The Clave rubbed against the sliding glass door, Keris’ hair clinging to the glass with static.

“Only one is mine. The Clave—” Magnus started.

“Is Alec’s,” Dorian pointed out.

“Oh,” Max snickered. Magnus wasn’t sure what the teenage boy thought was so funny. Was it the name of the cat? Was it that Alec was living here? It was hard to tell with kids that age. Maybe there was something to their constant insistence that ‘nobody understands them’. Magnus already dreaded what it would be like having two teenagers at once. He anticipated that it would be the hardest experience of his life, more daunting than any of the wars he’d been in.
“Well, you two can go now. Here’s your money.” Magnus conjured a stack of bills from his safe into his hands, double the normal amount.

“Wait, what—” Max started. “I didn’t really do much, I mean it was Dorian who—”

“Shh, young shadowhunter. Just take it.” Magnus looked the boy up and down. Max was wearing the standard Shadowhunter uniform—a black, long-sleeved shirt, dark, slightly worn utility pants and black leather combat boots. “Buy yourself something nice—they outfit you lot so poorly over there.” Dorian’s eyes darted to Max apologetically.

“I don’t see anything wrong with it,” Dorian quipped. Max blushed. It was bolder than Magnus had ever seen Dorian. Something had shifted between the boys, it was obvious from all the small hints and glances, and Magnus found it incredibly endearing.

“I agree, Dorian. Alexander did look fetching in his gear, but—I assume you two would want to go on regular dates?” Magnus internally scoffed at the thought of taking Alec out to dinner in full Shadowhunter gear, how he would look seated in a white-tablecloth restaurant, his bow slung across his back. It was comical. “Am I wrong? Am I picking up the wrong idea here?” Magnus paused, looking between the two boys. “Would you want to wear your gear to the movies, or to dinner?”

“Uh, no— thank you, Mister Bane.” Max fumbles over his words. “I mean—that would be very nice—kind, thank you.” He was a bit flustered, but he was still far more confident about himself than Alec had likely been at that age—he was actually more comfortable with his sexuality than Alec had been when Magnus first met him, when Alec was in his early twenties, not early teens.

“Please, it’s Magnus, Mister Bane is reserved for my clients. If anything, I’m your client right now, Mister Lightwood,” He clapped Max on the shoulder. “You should really come over for dinner sometime when Alexander is home— both of you. Your brother would really like it,” Magnus paused, pursing his lips. “You have my number, right?”

“Yeah, I do.” Max dug the heel of his boot into the floor nervously, shifting his ankle back and forth. He nervously scratched at the back of his neck—a habit that was so Alec, someone would have to be blind not to notice.

“Do you need me to open you a portal to the Institute? I’m the only one who can portal past the wards directly inside.” Magnus thought about giving Dorian the same access, to make the little Shadowhunter’s life easier, but it would violate his contract with the New York Institute. Keris and The Clave passed by again, and this time Magnus was able to scoop them both up, holding one in each arm. The cat struggled against being handled, so Magnus let him go. If The Clave wanted to run through a portal into limbo, that was his prerogative, but he certainly wouldn’t do it with Magnus’ son on his back.

“That would be a lifesaver, actually.” Max gave Magnus a thankful, slightly crooked grin.

“Well, here you are.” Magnus revealed the glimmering portal. Max stepped through without much ceremony. A few seconds later, Dorian opened his own portal back to Devon, slipping out after a quick goodbye to Magnus and Keris.

With the boys gone, it was just Keris and Magnus, at least until Alec got home. No, not his home Magnus reminded himself. Not yet at least.

Alec texted that the tattoo shop would be open tonight, and asked if Aya could come along. He assured her Clary would be there keeping Aya company the whole time, and that Aya was very
excited by the idea of ‘working at the shop’ for the evening. Of course Magnus said yes, but only if he could get some pictures of Aya. He could only imagine the foolishness she’d get into in the shop with Clary while Alec worked. A few hours later, as Magnus sat on the couch with Keris sharing a bowl of buttered noodles and attempting to make the baby eat broccoli, his phone pinged with a picture of Aya coloring in some mandala designs— and she was using her colored pencils from home. Magnus was impressed and proud of her conjuring skills and how far they’d come in the past few months. She was more adept than most warlocks three times her age.

After a bit of Catarina’s enriched formula to supplement the meal, Keris was sleepy and ready for bed early. Max and Dorian had clearly worn him out with playtime, and with a full belly, Keris was fading fast. Magnus gave him a quick bath, massaged a bit of comforting oil onto his scales, and changed him into soft organic cotton pajamas— his favorite blue ones with little yellow stars. The second his silver hair hit the crib mattress, he was asleep. It was the easiest bedtime procedure Magnus had gone through in months, and he was incredibly grateful for it.

He checked the clock— it was only 7:00. Alec said he and Aya wouldn’t be home until 10:00, which was far past Aya’s normal bedtime, but Alec assured him that Aya was a ball of energy and promised to close up shop and take her home if she got too tired. Magnus knew there was plenty of space for Aya to crash too if she got too sleepy— Alec’s back room had a cozy couch, and the front room had big armchairs. It was strange how he had grown to trust Alec so much in what, compared to the span of Magnus’ life, was an incredibly short amount of time— especially allowing him to take care of his daughter in such a nontraditional, chaotic environment. Life was funny that way. There were few people he trusted with Aya and Keris, yet he now trusted Alec unconditionally, equally as much as Ragnor and Catarina. It had been true for some time, yet every once in a while, it struck Magnus anew.

With at least two hours to himself, Magnus was at a loss for what he should do. When he was busy, his mind was always focused on how he would spend his alone time, but now that he actually had some, he was coming up blank with ideas. He lit a fire in the hearth, his agenda at least in agreement on wanting to be warm and cozy. Pacing around the living room with a glass of Riesling, he scanned the overstacked bookshelves for inspiration. He wasn’t just considering reading a book, but he was hoping that maybe one of the titles of a volume would pique his interest and give him a more creative idea. Inspiration ended up coming from the most mundane places— the sliding glass door to the balcony.

It was nearly useless in the winter. Sure, he could cast a barrier spell, add a heater, and make it an artificial warmth bubble, but there was something inauthentic about that. Looking at one of the desiccated potted plants suffering in the corner of the deck, he finally found inspiration. His mind drifted to the Carstairs-Gray home in Devon— more specifically, to their lovely greenhouse. Magnus decided almost immediately— he was going to craft a glass sun room, and it was going to be his private oasis.

Less than thirty minutes later, his magic had helped him architect a glass ceiling and walls around the deck, adding in beds of tropical plants, hanging vines from the ceiling to create a magical, Seelie glade-esque look. In the corner there was a small gurgling fountain, with hanging lanterns to burn incense. He’d had to expand the balcony a bit to make everything fit, but ended up working. Of course, there were still a few finishing touches— he could still hear the bustling sounds of Brooklyn outside, which cut deeply into his desired zen. But he realized he didn’t have to stop there. Glancing at his two stone bracelets, he remembered he would immediately know if the children stirred, if they needed him, so as he soundproofed his greenhouse oasis, he sheltered it from all sounds, both inside and outside the loft.

With all the heavy lifting done, he could relax into it, enjoy the fruits of his labor. A wave of the
wrist spread out a yoga mat across the stone floor, a snap of his fingers produced a steaming cast-iron pot of kava tea. Jasmine and ylang-ylang incense filled the space with their soothing, sensual aromas, begging Magnus to relax. He more than happily obliged.

After overhearing Clary’s conversation, Alec had found it hard to calm himself down. Dealing with Jace at fighting class had been stressful enough, tattooing three chatty sorority girls who wouldn’t stop flirting with him had almost been worse, but Clary digging her nose in where it didn’t belong was the cherry on top of Alec’s emotionally exhausting day. Alec was reminded of why he didn’t like Clary when they’d first met—she rammed head first into situations where she didn’t belong, ignoring all social mores, codes of decency, and even hard and fast laws, choosing instead to prioritize her own goals and frivolous fancies.

It was infuriating, and Alec was disappointed— in the years he’d known Clary, it seemed like she had matured beyond this, but clearly, he was wrong. Regardless of why she felt like it was her place to talk to Aya about their private home life, it infuriated Alec. He’d held it together for Aya, of course, making sure his negativity didn’t rub off onto her. Instead of asking Magnus for a portal, Alec opted to take the bus, getting off a few stops early so that he could walk to clear his head. Aya was tired, so he’d ended up carrying her most of the way, but at least she’d enjoyed riding on the bus— an experience that she’d treated as strangely exotic.

When they finally returned to the loft, he was surprised to find the living room and kitchen completely dark. What he didn’t expect, though, was the warm candle-lit glow coming from the balcony where Magnus appeared to be doing yoga. At least Alec assumed the position Magnus was in— his leg held high above his head, his hands grabbing the heel from behind— constituted as yoga. Alec didn’t know much about the semi-spiritual fitness practice, but he knew it involved stretching—and Magnus looked thoroughly stretched. Alec’s face flushed. He couldn’t see much from this angle, but it was enough—expanses of caramel honey skin, the curves of his boyfriend’s body contorted in sinful shapes. He’d nearly forgotten he was still holding hands with Aerulei, until she tugged at his arm.

“I want to see papa!” Aya whined loudly, but Alec shushed her.

“Aerulei,” Alec whispered to her. “I think papa is trying to relax. Why don’t I put you to bed so we don’t disturb him. That way, he’ll be even happier to see you in the morning.”

“Fine,” She huffed, stomping down the hall toward her room. He followed her into her princess’ lair, a paradise of pale purple hues and soft white fabrics. Every time Alec came into the room, it looked just a little different. It was always evolving, slightly shifting—much like the loft itself. Although he assumed Magnus was the one changing the loft, there was something about this space that had a slightly more youthful touch, hinting that perhaps Aya was her own architect. It wasn’t necessarily more whimsical than Magnus’ style—if anything it was a bit more orderly. Aya was a bit more practical and pragmatic than her father, after all, but it still looked like something out of a fairy-tale.

Puffy white clouds hung from the ceiling, illuminated from within by a shifting, magical glow. The windows were altogether too large, draped in intricate, delicate lace, showing off a view of the city not exactly true to reality, and contrary to the current weather outside. Large fluffy flakes of snow drifted downwards, not landing on any surface, just drifting away into the night air. The
window was glamoured to show a peaceful, wintertime snow— an odd touch. As Alec continued to take in the room, it struck him how little time he’d actually spent there. Keris’ room was much more familiar— he’d spent enough time at the changing table in there to memorize the pattern on the wallpaper— but Aya’s was a room reserved for quick tuck ins, the lights already mostly dimmed and dark.

“I redecorated,” Aya flopped down on her four poster bed. “My old room looked like it was for babies.”

“It’s very pretty, but we need to get you to bed.” He realized he didn’t know where her pajamas were, and started pulling out random drawers on the dresser. “Where are your pajamas?”

“I will do it myself.” She huffed, rolling over to her back and clapping her hands. In a flash of lilac-hued sparkling magic, she was suddenly in her pajamas. The use of her power drained her further, and her eyes struggled to stay open. Alec lifted her up, tucking her in under the covers. He probably should have gone through all the steps— brushing her teeth, taking a bath to wash off the stink of fight class— but she did it all on her own before he could protest. She looked so happy and dreamy that all of Alec’s insecurities melted away.

“Goodnight then, Aya,” Alec whispered as he quietly walked toward the door.

“Mmm g’night,” Aya mumbled into her pillow.

Alec shut the door quietly behind him, his mind quickly snapping back to what was going on out on the balcony. His heart sprinted, making up for the time lost pausing to take care of Aya. They were alone now. Both kids were asleep. The glances Alec had stolen through the glass doors were enticing enough to make Alec want more, to make him crave the candid appreciation of his beautiful boyfriend. Careful to step as silently as possible, Alec crept across the living room, pausing at the glass doors to peer outside. The space had completely changed— the penchant for decorating clearly ran in the family— transforming into an otherworldly oasis. It was beautiful, with abundantly lush foliage, inspired details— even a fountain— but that wasn’t what sparked Alec’s wonder.

The most breathtaking thing in the entire space was Magnus. Low-waisted harem pants hung just below his hip bones, their silky burgundy fabric slit down the side to reveal every muscle of the warlock’s impeccably toned legs. Gathered at the ankle, the pants gave away so much, yet left many of the more alluring details to the imagination. They were begging to be ripped off, discarded shreds tossed without a care into the garden. Through a feat of acrobatics, Magnus rolled from a downward-dog position into a wheel pose, his chest and abs stretching, his pelvis reaching toward the sky. His pelvis… and other things. Alec saw the tattoo on Magnus’ chest, the snakes hardly sinister, but rather beautiful, protective.

He didn’t even realize he’d slipped through the glass doors until he was enveloped in the humid warmth of the greenhouse. Magnus’ breath shifted with each movement, deep inhales, long hissing exhales, each heave of his chest showcasing more of his rippling back muscles. Alec’s tongue darted out to lick his lips— they felt too dry, screaming to be kissed, screaming to kiss Magnus— his Magnus. The warlock shifted again into a downward dog, his ass to the sky. He could clearly tell Alec was there— it was an invitation.

“Right here,” Alec murmured, reaching out to graze the skin just below Magnus’ shoulder blade. He dragged his fingers with a sincere calculation, knowing exactly what the touch would do to the warlock.

“Hmm?” Magnus pushed back his hips, leaning into the contact, his ass meeting Alec’s groin.
“Right here is where I’d love to mark you— something beautiful,” Alec reached out with both hands, digging his nails deep into the skin on either side of Magnus’ spine, pulling him in closer. “Something to show off how gorgeous you are.” Alec draped his body over Magnus’, nipping at the skin stretched over Magnus’ back, just hard enough to make the warlock squirm.

“Darling, I barely held myself together when you were tattooing my chest,” Magnus exhaled languidly. “I can’t imagine how I’d survive you working your magic on me in this position.” Alec stood back up, sliding his hands up to Magnus’ neck, tracing little shapes across his shoulders.

“And here—” Alec stopped his finger at the space right below the nape of Magnus’ neck. “If I marked you here, I’d almost always be able to see it over the neckline of your shirts. It would be visible all the time— everyone would be able to see how I marked you.” From this angle, Alec couldn’t easily bend down to kiss Magnus’ neck like he wanted to, so he opted instead for roughly scratching from his hairline down to the place where his shoulder blades met.

“You’re right, maybe that would be distracting.” Alec switched to massaging Magnus’ back now, admiring the dark red scratches already blooming across the places he’d touched— places he wanted to mark. There were so many other places he wanted to mark— Magnus’ lower back, his inner thighs, his ankle— the right design could make any part of Magnus even more beautiful— but while Alec would have loved to tease the warlock by tracing over each spot, their bodies both had other ideas, emphasized by Alec’s dick straining against the confining fabric of his jeans. “But there’s other magic I can leverage from this position.”

Alec looped his fingers into the waistband of Magnus’ pants, yanking them down to expose his tight, needy ass. He wiggled coquettishly, earning a hard slap on his ass that would certainly leave a hand-print shaped bruise.

“Not that I’m complaining,” Magnus turned his neck around in the slightly uncomfortable position, yet maintained the alluring stretch of his body. “but what has you so aggressive tonig—”

“Shush,” Alec chided. “I’ll tell you later. Not now.” Alec breathed heavily, removing his hands from Magnus to work at his own belt and jeans. “Right now, I’m busy. And you’re about to be, too.”

Alec fell to his knees, spreading Magnus’ cheeks wide and burying his face in them. His tongue hungrily worked around the warlock’s hole, swirling and savoring his taste. He moaned against the flesh, nearly in-time with Magnus’ own whimpers. When he thrust his tongue past the rim, he stretched it out wider, eager to open up his warlock. Magnus was slick— he’d managed to lube himself without Alec noticing.

“Unh,” Alec grunted. “I love it when you do that,” he breathed, Magnus’ hole clenching at the soft, cool, exhale of breath. Alec leaned back to create just enough distance to slide his fingers into the warlock, pumping a few times, testing and teasing.

“I did this before you even came home,” Magnus purred.

“So you knew what seeing you like this would do to me?” Alec came up for air. “You’re a minx.” Alec grabbed Magnus’ ass tighter. He closed his eyes, luxuriating in how plump the flesh was in his fists, but it wasn’t enough. He needed all of Magnus. Snaking his arm beneath Magnus’ chest he deftly flipped him, careful to support his weight so he didn’t hit the ground.

When their mouths finally crashed together, it was like they were two men starved in the desert for a thousand years. Their hips bucked together, creating delicious friction that was just a tease for what was to come. Alec had shed the rest of his clothes— he wasn’t sure when that had happened,
but he was thankful. He reached down, grabbing his dick in his hand, smiling when Magnus eagerly bucked up his hips to provide him a better angle. Each thrust was met with an equally impassioned kiss, or a hungry, playful bite, a pinch of the nipple or a yank of hair.

“Alexander!” Magnus screamed his name, his eyes slamming shut with pleasure.

“Shh, Magnus— we’re on the porch, the kids— ”

“Soundproofing wards. Impenetrable.” Magnus’ Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed roughly, trying to parch his dry throat. “Convenient for penetrating.” Magnus breathed, sweat glistening on his brow. He reached out and looped his arm beneath Alec’s digging his nails deep into his back, pulling him closer. Alec could tell he wanted more— and Alec was more than happy to give it to him. Guiding Magnus’ hands to loop around his neck, Alec adjusted his grip on Magnus’ hips, raising his legs higher to create a heavenly angle, allowing him to go deeper, fully to the hilt.

“Then scream for me, Magnus.” Alec thrusted in harder, knowing he was hitting every nerve to drive Magnus wild. He wrapped his hand around Magnus’ cock, adding another layer of overwhelming pleasure that he knew would drive the warlock over the edge. “Scream for me, come with me,” he whispered into Magnus’ ear, nipping on the lobe beneath, tasting the metal of his earring and swirling the rounded stud against his tongue. Those words were all it took for both of them to completely crumble into absolute bliss.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter (although this list is subject to change):
Izzy talks to Jace.
Alec talks to Magnus.
Simon talks to as many people as possible.
Keris holds court with the two cats.
Aya doesn't like being told what to do, formulates a new plan.
Maybe there are donuts involved.

I hope you enjoyed! Comment, hit me up on tumblr, hit that subscribe button— I love any and all interaction with all of you.

Also, I'm going through ALL MY COMMENTS over the next few days. There's a lot to sort through, but I'm trying to respond to as many as I can! I love each and every comment!

Until next week!
Chapter 45

Chapter Summary

Alec finally opens up about what happened with Jace and Clary, and Magnus is not pleased.

Chapter Notes

I know I promised a lot of things in the end notes last time, but very little of that happened. This chapter kind of got away with me, and I chose to use it as a way to kind of catch up, remind all of us of some details, and have a bit of atmospheric fun.

I promise there will be baby fluff next time. I want it as much as you do.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Magnus reclined back on a pile of summoned silk cushions, his body sated, relaxed, and still more than a bit sweaty. The greenhouse was relatively humid and warm—a choice made partially for the well being of the lush ferns Magnus had conjured from a greenhouse in Florida, and partially for the benefit of his yoga practice. In retrospect, he should have anticipated the other activities that would end up happening in the secluded, sound proofed, 'Papa only' relaxation zone.

A bit too warm from the pleasant overexertion from the fantastic sex they’d just had, Alec lay a few feet away from him, their legs playfully entangling, their toes brushing together. Between them, a pitcher of lavender lemonade dripped with condensation, already half emptied. Their shared breaths, the mumbling gurgle of the fountain, and a strange breeze—which could only have a supernatural source—rustling the sword-tipped and teardrop-pointed leaves were the only peaceful sounds. None of the ambient industrial grinding of New York in the nighttime penetrated the glass of the sun room. It was like a pocket dimension where it was only Magnus, his love, meticulously eastern-inspired styling and a literal metric ton of plants—it was a very large terrace to begin with, and in his spurt of redecorating, he’d manipulated the building’s architecture, expanding it further.

"So, my darling Alexander," Magnus drawled, rolling into the side and propping his head into his hand. "Are you ready to talk about what had you so… worked up?" Rolling his wrist lazily in the air, a crisp slice of cucumber appeared in Magnus' fingers. He happily munched on it, the refreshing crunch waking up his dreamy senses enough to keep the temptation of sleep at bay long enough to let Alec talk through the problems of his day.

"What if I'm not?" Alec breathed, mirroring Magnus' position, a smirk stretching across his five o’clock shadow dusted face. "What if I have some more steam to blow off?" He scooted a bit closer to Magnus, awkwardly dragging a few pillows with him with his legs. He reached his free arm over, grabbing Magnus' hand and sliding their fingers together.

"As lovely as that sounds," Magnus said, his eyes fluttering closed at the still viscerally fresh memories. He cleared his throat, pushing himself up to gulp down some much needed hydration.
"I'm not sure I could leverage enough magic right now to convince my body to make it through another round. You wear me out, pup. In the best way possible, of course."

"Please," Alec groaned. "Don't try to make pup a thing. We've been through this."

"Fine. My 'over two hundred years junior' it is, then."

"No, absolutely not." Alec's voice was firm, no-nonsense—a clear invitation for Magnus to tease him harder. "Under no circumstance will you call me junior." He spat out the word like it was a piece of rotten apple he'd bitten and desperately wanted to spit out.

"Youngin?" Magnus tried. Alec flinched, but Magnus smiled.

"Magnus, please." Alec buried his head into the crook of the elbow holding him up, one too-long wave of hair brushing against the stone floor.

"My beautiful youth?" Magnus jokingly purred.

"Stop…" Alec whined.

"Fine, I'll drop it, but only if you tell me why you came home so riled up." Magnus had moved his metaphorical bishop in line with Alec's king, implying the impending checkmate.

"So many reasons. I'm just… too tired to go through all of it." Alec's body relaxed, his face turning back toward Magnus. It was remarkable how much Magnus missed that face, even though it had only been hidden for a minute at most. A slowly fading blush tinted Alec's cheeks, mingling and mixing with their shared, post-sex glow. It was heavenly—cherubic, even.

"That can actually be beneficial sometimes, though. You don't have time to ruminate or get too worked up about the details. When you're too tired to elaborate on the details and nuances, you stick to the facts."

"You never seem to be at a loss for words," Alec cheekily goaded—gentle, yet throwing back the same eye-twinkling taunts Magnus had been dishing.

"I've had hundreds more years of experience with the English language. Decades more still with other tongues…" Magnus caught his own innuendo. "Lots of other tongues," He and Alec grimaced simultaneously at the terrible joke—he'd known it was horrendous but he still couldn't have resisted if he tried. He was a dad—he was allowed to make the occasional dad joke. "And also…" He weighed his words, carefully plucking a narrative from the coffers of his mind that would be both entertaining and validating. "I have had my moments. Even the occasional bout of silence. The first five years of the 1790's I was relatively mute. It was also the decade where I decided I do not like opium. Or being a mime. I'm not sure which I hate more."

"Mimes existed back then?" Alec's brows knit together into one single, bushy line spanning his furrowed forehead.

"Of course. The term comes from the Greek actor Pantomimus. It was… not the same art-form as it is today, but from the Roman Mimius, to silent films like 'A Trip to the Moon', all the way up until Marcel Marceau himself, people have been acting things out without words for centuries." It was a pretentious amount of knowledge to unload all at once—Magnus was well aware—but every once in a while he wanted to peacock his brain in front of his boyfriend, flaunt something other than his body. He was also simply a sucker for fun-facts—more so than he'd ever want to admit—and his mind was a never ending trove of random information.
"So the people demanding money in Times Square painted silver and dressed like the Statue of Liberty are... artists?" Alec scoffed, looking skeptical.

"Hey," Magnus shrugged. "Everyone is just trying to make a living." *Goddess knows I've done much worse for much less money,* Magnus reminded himself. Piracy was the first thing that came to mind.

"But couldn't they do it without trying to force me to give them money?" Alec furrowed his brow. It was almost cute to imagine a grumpy Alec, being accosted by street performers in the hazy, stench-filled media barrage that is Times Square— even after its revitalization in the 80’s, it remained the armpit of New York, desperately in need of deodorant.

"If you choose to walk through Times Square, you are agreeing to bear that cross," Magnus tutted. "It comes with the territory. I avoid the whole area like the plague, myself."

"But Clary always gets me to go to these incredibly stressful, last-minute Broadway shows! Sometimes she even makes me sit down and hold her place in a fuckin’ lottery line while she goes and gets coffee. I have never been given the option of avoiding it." Magnus never took Alec for the Broadway type— did he enjoy the shows? Magnus went through theatre phases throughout the years— operas in Paris, West End productions in London, and of course, the incomparable, star studded beauty of Broadway. Dressing up, reveling in the sparkle of it all— it screamed Magnus Bane. That being said, Alec still didn’t seem like the theatre-going type.

"No, you’re getting off topic— although we definitely need to revisit the Broadway conversation later," Magnus rattled off quickly. "Now, spill the beans on your day."

"Jace showed up to my fighting class." Alec squeezed his eyes shut, exhaling sharply through his nose. It was clear that the sting of seeing Jace was weighing heavily on him— like the day’s experience was a fresh bruise he wasn’t sure if he wanted to show off, or if he’d rather hide by himself nursing the wound.

"That’s..." Magnus paused. He wasn't certain how Alec would respond to seeing Jace without warning right now. Was it intense? Was it casual? Unwelcome? Welcome? The relationship between the ex-parabatai was changing, but Magnus didn't understand all of the nephilim nuance. It struck Magnus as odd— Alec had never explained everything to him fully, never expressed just how many logs were stacked onto the funeral pyre of their relationship. It was Alec’s choice to share, though, and Magnus couldn’t push it, no matter how hard he wanted to.

"It was okay, actually," Alec murmured, trying and failing to hide his own surprise in the lowered volume of his voice. "He listened."

"For once," they said in unison, falling closer to each other in a flurry of giggles a stranger would never assume two grown men were capable of. Alec was so beautiful when he laughed. The way his eyes squinted closed, the way he bit his lip as if he was always holding back the force of his laughter just a little. Magnus would happily watch it all day. The mounting tension in the conversation quickly melted away, reminding both of them that the relationship stress being discussed wasn’t theirs. They were okay, they were happy, they were rolling around on the floor like two idiots in love.

"But," Alec paused. "That’s really all that happened. We sparred." Alec flexed and unflexed one of his ankles, his body remembering some pain he must have felt during class.

"Did you have fun?" Magnus chewed his bottom lip. Alec was a fighter, but Magnus still wasn’t quite sure what he got out of it. Whether it was leisure, therapy, exercise, or entertainment— he
couldn’t say. For Magnus, when he studied physical combat, it was always about the artistry. He highly doubted it was the same for Alec. There was still so much he had to learn about his love, and it unleashed a cageful of butterflies in his chest when he thought about the fact that he had the privilege to learn.

“Fun?” Alec scoffed. “No, but, it was good. Different than… before. But good.” Alec stared up at the ceiling. “I actually got a few hits in on him. I couldn’t feel him though, and that was— ” Alec cut off, his eyes fluttering closed.

“You don’t need to tell me if you don’t want to,” Magnus reassured him, refilling Alec’s glass of lemonade.

“No, I do— I just mean,” Alec sat up fully on both arms, hanging his head in sudden frustration. “It’s just that the whole Jace thing— that’s not what I’m most upset about.” It was like saying those words was painful to him— whatever this was, it was what Alec had been burying deep. Magnus couldn’t fathom what could be more emotionally taxing than spontaneously attempting to reconnect with Jace Herondale.

“What happened, Alexander?” Magnus whispered, scooting over and joining Alec at his side, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and clutching him tightly.

“Clary,” was all Alec offered.

“But Clary is such a good friend, she’s almost family to you—” Magnus stopped. “Oh… I’m so dense sometimes.”

“Exactly. I’m not used to really being mad at her anymore. But it’s like now that she’s getting her memories back, it’s like she’s turning into that same annoying girl I met years ago when Jace dragged her into the Institute. She’s sticking her nose in places where it doesn’t belong and—” Alec pressed his eyes shut. He was fighting his natural urge to bottle things up— he was doing this because of Magnus’ encouragement, and it filled Magnus with a pride he’d remind himself to revel in later. Now was just for listening.

“So I assume it was Clary who told Jace to show up at the gym unannounced?”

“Yes, but that wasn’t it.” Alec shook his head. He readjusted his position, leaning into Magnus’ arms and wrapping his own arm around Magnus’ waist. Despite all the cushions surrounding them, they were sitting on the bare floor, Magnus’ hip bones grinding uncomfortably against the hard stone surface. He cursed himself, vowing to do more squats to build up a stronger layer of muscle tone.

“What could possibly be more invasive than that?” Magnus started to roll through what he knew of the day’s events in his head. Beyond Jace’s sudden appearance, the only thing Alec had done was go into the shop. Magnus felt a sudden flare of anger at the idea of Clary introducing negativity into Alec’s studio, his quiet workplace he’d worked so hard to build up.

“It was about Aya,” Alec started, and Magnus’ anger boiled stronger. He’d been prepared to tamper the anger down, assuming it was unwarranted, but now that it involved his daughter, no holds were barred. “I asked Clary to watch her while I did some stupid cliche tattoos on some sorority girls.”

“That is a lot of judgement of culturally stereotypical femininity, women are allowed to enjoy whatever they like, Alexander.” Not the time and place, Magnus, he scolded himself. He was scolding himself a lot in this conversation. Alec didn’t seem to be upset about it though, only
quirking his head to the side in confusion—he wasn’t following Magnus’ non sequitur logic.
“Sorry— I know I shouldn’t interrupt, but I couldn’t help it. Feminism has always been one of my
long-term fights.” Magnus tacked on at the end, trying to make his defense stronger, but with each
word he added, Alec grew more skeptical. After a few seconds of silence, Magnus realized that
Alec had lost his place in the conversation, and as he stared blankly into the distance, at nothing in
particular, he was trying to figure out where he’d left off.

“Anyway, as I was saying,” Alec continued. “I asked Clary to watch her, you know— just color
and stuff. I left them in the lobby, but I had to come back to grab something from the front desk.
When I went into the room, I overheard a conversation. She didn’t know I was there, so I stayed
longer than I probably should have, just listening.” Alec was focusing on the objective details of
the situation— documenting it verbally like he would in a formal report. It was a defense
mechanism. Whatever he’d heard, it made Alec feel nervous, afraid even, based on his body
language. “She was talking to Aya about us. Comparing us to Jocelyn and Luke, telling Aya how
she should feel, how she should address us. I didn’t hear everything, but I think—” Alec tried to
pull away from Magnus, but the warlock held him tighter. He wasn’t letting Alec give in to his
natural instinct to flee.

“What was she implying?” Magnus kissed Alec’s hair gingerly, an attempt to calm him down. The
soft sigh buzzing from Alec’s lips showed it was working, even if only a little.

“I think she was—” Alec shook his head. “It’s just— uncomfortable and I don’t know how to say
it. I don’t want you to think it was my idea or anything— it’s not even something that happened, I
mean it did once when she was sick, but—”

“Alexander— spit it out,” Magnus said, more curtly than he’d wanted to. He let Alec pull away
this time. He couldn’t help but be defensive— it was his daughter they were discussing. Whatever
had Alec so worked up sounded serious, and for Alec to openly admit that it happened— especially
when Aya was sick and vulnerable— Magnus didn’t know what to think. He had to be
overreacting. Above almost anyone else, he trusted Alec. Magnus closed his eyes, took a deep
steadying breath, let the aroma of the incense calm him, and calmed his energy. “Sorry, I was just
—”

“No need to apologize. When I tell you this— you have every right to be mad at me. Aya— I think
she called me ‘dad’ to Clary. What I walked in on was Clary explaining how she never called Luke
dad, and that since Luke and Jocelyn weren’t married, that was the correct thing to do. I even heard
her ask ‘Did Alec tell you to call him that’ as if somehow she didn’t trust me to have good
judgement.’”

Magnus tried to calm his mind, to wade through all the details of Alec’s conversation with Clary
and think rationally. None of this was Alec’s fault— the fact that Alec even thought Magnus would
be mad at him made everything all that worse. Clary had, whether she intended to or not— which
Magnus reminded himself was likely the case— made Alec out to be parentally presumptuous,
making him seem like he was crossing the line into Magnus’ family. It was Clary though, crossing
lines and sticking her nose in places where she didn’t belong. Alec never pushed Magnus—
especially not when it came to the children.

If anything, Magnus wanted Alec to play an even bigger role in their lives than he currently was.
But what Clary said could push Alec away, scare him off from the thought of being more involved.
Alec was skittish to begin with, and a lack of support— or rather, a field planted with seeds of
doubt—from someone he loved and trusted like Clary, it could have him running for the hills. But
he wasn’t running, Magnus assured himself. He was right there, in the sun room with him—
confiding in him.
“Alexander,” Magnus said his name for emphasis, closing the distance he’d let grow between them, cupping Alec’s cheek in his hand. “You have no control over what a four year old says. You have been so respectful of our boundaries, especially the children’s. While I don’t think she should be calling you her dad, it’s more because... well, it puts too much pressure on you. I hope you understand. I invited you to live here, I already consider you a constant in their lives. Do I think that one day she might start calling you that, that it could be a natural progression of things? I definitely believe that to be in the realm of possibility. But it was not Clary’s place to give her two cents— especially not to an impressionable child.”

“I just don’t know why she didn’t just bring it up with me later.” Alec nuzzled into Magnus’ palm.

“Neither do I, darling. But now she gets to deal with me instead. I don’t think she’ll like this alternative. I think it’s time Clarissa Fairchild learned some boundaries, don’t you agree?”

“Oh shit—” Alec jolted upward out of bed, the silk sheet pooling around his waist. “I overslept.” He knew before he even checked the clock. Too much sun was drifting through the frost-clouded windows, too much street noise was bustling outside. He’d wanted to wake up early and take a shower— something he’d been too tired to do last night— but there was no way that was in the cards for this morning.

“Overslept?” Magnus mumbled. “What do you mean? The shop doesn’t open until the afternoon. Go back to sleep.” Magnus’ voice was sleepy, a bit whiny even.

“No—” Alec jumped out of bed, quickly finding his jeans on the floor and hopping into them. “I have a shift at the cafe this morning. In five minutes. At least you live across the street from the roastery— if I was at my place, I’d be thoroughly screwed right now.” He leaned down to peck Magnus on the cheek before rushing into the bathroom to brush his teeth.

“Oh, you’ve already been thoroughly screwed, or did you already forget. Do you need a reminder of last night?”

“Magnus, I—”

“Although, technically I was the one who was screwed. You did the screwing. Maybe it is your turn then.”

“Stop—” Alec yelled from the bathroom, his voice garbling through a mouth full of toothpaste and toothbrush. “I really don’t have the time.” He swished the minty foam in his mouth for a few seconds, spitting it into one of the porcelain sinks. It was strange— Alec swore there only used to be one— but maybe his tired, frazzled brain was playing tricks on him. No— this definitely was different from before. All of Alec’s toiletries were organized around the left sink, and Magnus’ plethora took over the right. It was thoughtful, but it was also a promise of so much more that made Alec’s nerves stand on edge.

“You know, mon ange allechant, while I’m pleased with any excuse you have to convince you to move in with me, living here would subsequently mean you wouldn’t have to keep working as a barista. It would be a bit of a shame really. I mean you do look strangely sexy in an apron, but—”

“Magnus, don’t be ridiculous. I can’t afford to quit this job. The tips alone pay my phone bill and electricity.” Alec scrubbed a damp washcloth across his face— he had way too much stubble for
his liking, but he didn’t have time to shave.

“But darling,” Magnus whined, burying his head deeper into the pillow, peering at Alec with one unglamoured, early-sun golden eye. It was enticing— of course Alec wanted to crawl back in bed — but that wasn’t an option.

“But nothing. This isn’t negotiable. No matter what, I have a job. I want to feel independent, contribute. Shit.” Alec saw the time as he slid his phone into his pocket. “Look, I’m sorry if I’m coming off as an asshole right now but I really have to go unless I want to get fired.” He rattled off a quick text to his coworker Drew asking if she could sneakily punch him in on time. Shrugging on his jacket, he took the stairs, confident he could make it down them faster than if he waited for the elevator. His years of Shadowhunter training came in handy as he sprinted across the cobblestone street. Thank the Angel, he thought to himself, half-sarcastically. Even with the rush, he ended up being one minute late to shift.

“Don’t worry, I covered for you.” Drew winked, sliding a tiny espresso cup under the spout of the machine. “We got a whole single order of a double-shot of espresso in the one minute I was working by myself.”

“I’ll make it up to you,” Alec deadpanned. “Cross my heart.” He slipped his apron over his head, reaching his arm around to tie it in the back. The first time he’d done that, he helplessly fumbled, spinning in circles. Now— he was a pro.

“And hope to die?” Drew grinned, her cheeks rosy, her hair a bit bouncy.

“You’re in an oddly good mood, what’s up with you?” Alec was curious. Usually, Drew was bogged down with every type of stress possible— work, school, money, health, family— but this morning, with the windchill pushing the temperature into the single digits, she was all smiles.

“Rude, but accurate.” In a practiced rhythm, she took a customer’s order, passed the cup to Alec to start preparing, and then picked back up their conversation. “That double shot you missed— you should see the tip they left.”

“That can’t be all though,” Alec teased. “There’s something else.”

“No, really. That tip will pay for my food for a couple weeks. Maybe a month, even.” While she sounded thrilled, the idea of a single tip covering her groceries for the month made Alec cringe. Images of depressing ramen with frozen corn, peanut butter sandwiches on stale bread, and cereal with almost-expired soy milk had him shivering. It reminded him of those first days on his own, how he’d eaten buttered noodles and discount granola for a week. Those were dark times, which is why Alec was determined to keep working no matter what— to budget well and eventually save up enough so that he and his mom would always be taken care of. On a barista and tattoo artist salary, building up a nest egg wasn’t feasible, but he could work toward it anyway— one grocery-budget level tip at a time. Not this tip though— this one belonged to Drew.

“And since I wasn’t here, it’s all yours.” Alec dumped ground, house-blend coffee into one of the large, serve-yourself containers, flipping the switches to start the brewing.

“Are you sure? I’d take a look at it first if I were you.” She gestured with a nod to the tip jar— there were two, scarlet fifty Pound Sterling notes from Britain, folded neatly in half. The only person Alec knew who tipped that outlandishly was Magnus— usually when he conjured something away from a business— but firstly, Magnus was at home in bed, and secondly, he’d never seen Magnus use British money before.
“Good morrow, Alexander!” Ragnor Fell yelled from across the cafe. “Come join me!” Of course it was Ragnor— British currency, up at an unholy hour.

“Morning Ragnor,” Alec sighed. “I can’t, I’m working.”

“You don’t look very busy.” Ragnor crossed his legs, ankle over the knee, showing the scratched and worn leather sole of his burnished walnut-brown wingtips. His wool pants were well tailored, but subdued, his jacket something a professor at a university in Edwardian England would wear. A newsboy cap sat crooked on his head, covering his likely unglamoured horns while still looking believable with the rest of his outfit. He exuded eloquence— even in his style.

“I could be busy at any second.” Alec turned away, trying to make himself look busy by checking the nitro cold brew taps, shuffling around cups, pacing to and fro. This appeased Ragnor for a minute or so, but eventually he caught on to the act.

“If I order another espresso,” He mused, his voice playful. “will you bring it to my table? Perhaps talk to me for a second out of polite obligation? I mean, that’s just good customer service, isn’t it?”

“I’m not a barista prostitute—” Alec jeered. He wasn’t sure why he was being so salty. Sure, Ragnor was being a bit annoying, but not to the degree Alec was responding to. Something about the morning’s brief conversation with Magnus must have affected him more than he wanted to admit. Alec flexed his jaw, letting out a tense breath he’d been holding. The least he could do was make Ragnor a cup of coffee. It was too late though— someone else had already jumped in.

“Yes!” Drew exclaimed. “I’ll get it started right away!” Alec shook his head. She didn’t even make him pay first. He’d probably pay in a big bill, make them break the change so that the right amount went into the register. It would be such a pain. “But, uh— I’ll let Alec take it over?”

“That would be glorious Drusilla.” Ragnor smiled.

“Oh, it’s just Drew,” she corrected, getting to work on his espresso immediately. “Drusilla is a pretty name though, I’ve never met anyone named that.”

“A friend of my family is named Drusilla actually,” Alec leaned against the counter as he watched Drew work.

“Ah, the Blackthorn Brood. Far too many of them running around if you ask me,” Ragnar continued on to tell some story about how one of the younger Blackthorn children had gotten stuck in the window of the newly opened Shadowhunter Academy— which he’d aptly renamed Idris Academy for the sake of the mundane in the otherwise empty coffee shop— while they waited. When the tiny cup of frothy, bitter coffee was done, Alec walked it over, sliding into the armchair across from Ragnor’s.

“Oh, my, Alexander. Your manners are preposterous. No wonder Magnus is so infatuated,” He sipped at his beverage. “You’re two birds of a feather.”

“Are you teaching the kids today?” Alec half smiled, trying to seem polite. Talking about the kids’ tutoring was good small talk, right? “Where’s Dorian?”
“Dorian is still staying in Devon with Tessa and Jem. The baby could come at any minute now. While I’m certain Tessa would fare fine on her own, Jem needs all the help he can get. It is his first child, after all.”

“She’s gonna be a really cute kid.” Alec popped a piece of gum in his mouth, returning the box to his front apron pocket.

“They all look like wrinkly purple monkeys at first, I’m afraid.” Ragnor furrowed his brows, looking mildly disgusted. When another sip of espresso touched his tongue, the expression faded back to his standard grimace. “I’m not particularly fond of babies, which is why Dorian normally works more closely with Magnus’ dear knife-child while I work with Aya.”

“Funny, Aya doesn’t talk about you much, though.” Alec sucks in a breath, popping his gum. “And okay— I’ve wrangled Keris during his diaper changes enough to know that his skin— I mean, skin condition,” Alec looked over to Drew to make sure she wasn’t listening. She wasn’t, her head buried in her phone, probably indulging in some of the weird fan-fiction Alec sometimes caught her reading. Their conversation was more than safe from her ears. “The scales aren’t that sharp. You probably shouldn’t be comparing him to weaponry. He probably doesn’t appreciate it.”

“Then you would abhor my nickname for the other one then,” Ragnor sighed. “I’ll keep it to myself. Back to the matters at hand, no— I’m not here for any academic purposes. I’m here because I have some information regarding your little brother that might be of interest to you.”

“What? Are you going to tell me how he and Dorian are dating?” Alec rolled his eyes. “Because I’m already well-aware. I think anyone who’s seen them within ten feet of each other knows.”

“Alexander, you’re missing the point. While I don’t care who Dorian chooses to spend his time with— no matter how poor of a choice— it’s not him that I’m worried about. You know what the Clave does to little boys like him. They’ll chew him up and spit him out, stomp out that kind spirit that I hate to admit he has.” Alec shot him a warning glare. “Fine, but you know how I feel about Lightwoods in general.”

“That’s fair, I’ll give you that.” Alec shrugged.

“Mundane life suits you— you now see sense!” Ragnar raised a hand to the sky, dramatically thanking some supernatural deity for Alec’s newfound clarity.

“Thanks for the concern, Ragnor, but my brother is going to be fine.” Alec pushed up from the table, standing up. “I mean it— I really am thankful. But he really is going to be fine.”

“I’ve read the transcripts on your trial— you were deruned because you were homosexual.” Ragnar said the last word in a quirky way, leaning into each syllable, as if he were using to describe a literary character or a celebrity from the Victorian era. “I don’t want him to go through the pain you had to endure, even though he’d have you here to catch him when he fell.”

“It wasn’t that simple. There were a lot of reasons that I was deruned— why they chose to strip me of my marks instead of exiling me— but Max will be fine. He follows the rules, keeps his head down. He doesn’t have the desire to run an institute, he just wants to be a quiet soldier. The Clave got out all their anger they harbored for the Lightwoods by deruning my mom and me. Plus, he doesn’t have a cocky parabatai getting in his way.”

“Just, keep an eye out for him, then? I’m trying to get Dorian to encourage him to talk to you.” Ragnar’s eyes were sad, genuine. In that moment a greater glamour faltered— his green skin flashing for a moment as his emotion took over. It wasn’t like Ragnar to be so emotional, but Alec
remembered— Dorian was Ragnor’s son, even if he was hesitant to admit it. He cared about him, wanted to protect him from the heartbreak he’d suffer if something happened to Max.

“That would be great. I’ve been catching up more with Izzy and her son too,” Alec had always been in contact with Izzy since his deruning, mostly because she was already notorious for fraternizing with mundanes and downworlders, but now it felt safe to reach out more. Tensions were lower, people were starting to forget what had happened to the gay rule breaker Alec Lightwood. He was still a bit hesitant to get too close to Max, though. It was the last thing his reputation needed. But Max was growing up, and he was more than capable of managing himself. Which was good, because Alec wanted to connect more, to get to know his brother better.

“And you’ve also been in cahoots with Jace Herondale, so I’ve heard,” Ragnor smiled, but Alec was off put— how did Ragnor know already? “Word gets around. Eyes and ears everywhere.”

“That’s, uh— more complicated.” Alec pursed his lips. Thankfully the front door to the coffee shop swung open, a tunnel of frigid air rustling the flyers on the community board and sending napkins flying from the coffee bar. Five or six customers shuffled in, bundled in too many scarves and hats— tourists, likely, based on their general sense of wonder. “Sorry, I really have to go. It was great catching up with you, Ragnor.”

“Likewise, Lightwood.” He smiled, sipping the last dregs of his espresso. Alec blinked, and the chair in front of him was empty, four more fifty pound notes folded beneath the saucer. Drew would be eating well tonight.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter I promise there will be baby fluff.

I really really promise.
Chapter 46

Chapter Summary

Spring is on its way, but that doesn't mean the hard times of winter are behind them. A playdate leads into a date, Keris holds an important business meeting, and Magnus tries to relax. Of course, very little of that goes as expected.

Chapter Notes

I'm back!

So here's chapter 46. In a few moments, I'll post an interlude that I think you all will...... LOVE

NOTE: There are mentions in this chapter to a COVID-19 type virus. The reactions of the characters may seem as if they are downplaying it. This is because they are of the opinion that it doesn't affect them, so their perspective is skewed. I wanted to express that side of what is going on in the world right now. Please remember that COVID-19 is very serious. While the nephilim downplay it, we should not.

This is the only chapter that will mention it, so if you are uncomfortable reading, it is skippable. There is a scene in the middle with Keris that is virus-free, and a scene with Malec that is also safe.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So let me get this straight—” Jace peeled the banana, using his seraph dagger to cut off a thick slice. “You’re just skipping school for the next three weeks?” He took the piece of fruit and tossed in the air, barely catching it with his mouth. “Didn’t you like… pay for it? Won’t you fail?”

“I’m not playing hooky— the school is enforcing quarantine.” Clary shook out her hair and tossed her head back. A soothing breeze rippled through her waves, the wisps of flyaway hair around her ears tickled her cheeks. The sun was oddly warm for the beginning of March. It felt like late spring, and even some of the plants were starting to come to life. Buds poked out of the tree branches, bushes looked a bit greener. It wasn’t going to last, though— New York weather was picky, and this time next week, it would be back in the freezing winter temperatures.

“Not quarantine,” Simon clarified. “They’re enacting a containment policy— which we are brazenly ignoring, I might add— for self-isolation and social distancing. That’s super different from quarantine.” The daylighter pulled a flask from the pocket of his NASA sweatshirt and took a quick swig of what Clary now realized was blood. In the past few years, she just assumed that Simon had started an early-twenties college student drinking habit— she’d actually been keeping tabs on it, considering his family history of alcoholism— but now she knew it wasn’t a habit— it was a means of survival.

“Well I think it’s pretty fuckin’ dumb,” Jace mumbled through his mouth full of banana. “Clary
can’t get sick— she’s a nephilim. Why should her classes be cancelled when she’s fine?”

“Nephilim can still carry diseases, Jace.” Isabelle grunted, plopping down on the bench beside them. A few meters away, clearly in their line of sight, Rafael hung upside down from the money bars with another boy his age— Tavvy Blackthorn, they’d told Clary. Isabelle had brought both of them to the waterfront playground, getting them out of the musty confines of the institute. With the virus that was going around, the park was nearly empty, thwarting any attempt to get the boys to socialize with mundane children, but it was still a welcome change of pace. “Since we can carry diseases, we are actually the perfect vector for mundane viruses. Our stronger immune systems might even make the virus mutate and become more deadly. And don’t even get me started on how multiplying in nephilim cells could alter the RNA structure of—”

“Alright, Isabelle, we get it,” Jace scoffed. “You’re the best biochemist in the New York Institute —”

“Hah!” Isabelle snorted, “In the Institute? More like in—”

“The whole Clave?” Simon bumped against Isabelle’s shoulder affectionately. “Trust me— nobody is doubting that one bit.” He wrapped his arms affectionately around Izzy’s shoulders. Their relationship made so much more sense now that Clary was getting her memories back. Before, it had kind of seemed out of the blue. Simon never gave a particularly believable story for how they met, and Isabelle was so ridiculously out of his league that Clary was sure there was something else going on under the surface. Now, she knew it was just a product of the crazy ways people come together on the brink of disaster.

“Ugh— you two are being gross,” Jace jeered, rolling his eyes. He stretched his legs out, taking advantage of the prime real-estate they’d taken up on the better bench. Izzy and Simon had the bench without a back next to a trash can, while Clary and Jace had the one a few feet away, with a perfect view of the water. “That’s my sister, you know. In case you forgot, mundie.”

“Us?” Simon retorted. “You literally have your head in Clary’s lap right now. That’s gross.” He had a point— Jace’s head was sitting in Clary’s lap, but she liked it this way. She could stroke his blonde hair— way softer than the hair of any man who didn’t know what conditioner was had the right to be. The way his short-trimmed sides tickled her fingers made her skin feel alive, like creativity and safety and realism all wrapped into one. It was ridiculous— she was just touching his hair, but somehow it felt like her whole world. Everything with Jace was like that— a magnetic attraction she couldn’t resist if she tried, not that she’d ever really tried all that hard. Simon had been rambling about something, but Clary was beyond paying attention. She only caught the last few words. “... and can you drop the mundie thing Jace? It’s been almost five years. Actually… over five years. I’ve been a vampire a fifth of my life at this point.”

“Once a mundie, always a mundie.” Jace deadpanned. “Maybe I’ll stop calling you one when you stop acting like one… and dressing like one.”

“Clary look!” Rafe yelled. He motioned over to her with his arms, still dangling as he hung upside down.

“Yeah!” Tavvy screeched. His blue-green eyes were blazing with boundless childhood energy, the color offset by the rosy flush of his cheeks. “Rafe wants to show you something super cool!”

“He’s going to show you his ‘backflip’,” Izzy whispered. “He just showed me already, literally five minutes ago…”

“And me five minutes before that…” Simon laughed.
“And me five minutes before *that* five minutes,” Jace added.

“Look—” Izzy let out a sharp exhale. “Let’s just be glad he’s coming out of his shell, okay?”

“Clary!” Rafe raised his voice louder. “Now!”

“You’re going to miss it!” Tavvy exclaimed. He hopped up and down, a dusty cloud of mulch flinging around his feet. “It’s really cool and you haven’t seen it yet and—”

“I’m coming, I’m coming, hold your horses.” Clary pressed a kiss to Jace’s forehead as he sat up, freeing up her legs so she could stand.

“Eww she’s going to come here with *cooties*!” Tavvy whined. He pulled himself up to sit on top of the monkey bars, looking down at Raphael.

“What are *coodies*?” Rafe struggled over the word, swinging back and forth. His black curls swayed a few beats behind the rest of his body, floating in the air, weightless.

“Oh, Clary hopped beside Rafe at the monkey bars. “Show me.”

“Are you ready?” Rafe turned his head to the side to look at her.

“Ready Freddy.” Clary nodded.

“That’s not Freddy, that’s Rafe!” Tavvy narrowed his eyes. “It’s not nice to forget someone’s name.”

“It’s just a saying, like a joke. I know that this is Rafael Lightwood, and he’s about to show me a really cool trick, right Rafe?”

“Yeah! Count to three!” Rafe demanded.

“One…” Clary counted off. “Two… Three!” Rafe swung upward sharply, grabbing the next rung of the monkey bar with his hands and sliding out his legs from where he’d been perched. He looked like a practiced trapeze artist. He swung once on his hands before flinging himself forward, spinning once in the air, and landing on his feet. Clary was incredibly impressed. At best, Clary had been expecting a ‘skin the cat’ scenario, but not an actual flip. Sure, it wasn’t a back flip, but it was still a feat of agility. Shadowhunters must have a very high bar for what they consider impressive.

“Rafe! That was so cool!” Clary cheered.

“Want me to teach you?” He pushed off of his crouched position on the cold mulch ground.

“Er… I think I’m too old to learn that. My body is a little too big to flip in between the monkey bars like that.”

“You’re much smaller than mom…” Rafe started.

“And you’re way smaller than Dru or Emma or Diana or Helen…” Tavvy continued to list off female names Clary didn’t recognize. More Shadowhunters she guessed. Apparently Tavvy was the youngest child in a long line of Blackthorn children— an incredibly large nephilim family from Los Angeles that was orphaned during the Uprising. A war Clary was told she took part in— she was the hero of the story— but didn’t remember.

“Okay, *mi diablito,*” Isabelle’s curvy shadow blocked out the sun behind Clary. “On that note, it’s
time to get you two minions home. Dinner will be served in the cafeteria soon, and it’s lasagna day.” At the mention of food, Tavy stood up, balancing on the metal of the monkey bars, and fell to the ground in a graceful motion, rolling into a standing position. Shadowhunter agility—even for kids without runes—was remarkable. “Give Miss Clary a hug.” To Clary’s surprise, both boys ran over, smashing into her legs and squeezing her tight. Then she realized—this hug was a condition for pasta. She’d hug pretty hard for pasta too if she was a hungry little boy.

A few minutes and a thousand hugs later, it was just Jace and Clary, alone at the playground. It wasn’t even five yet—apparently the Institute had an early dinner schedule.

“So, I actually planned a date for us,” Jace said sheepishly, pulling Clary up from the bench. “It’s still pretty early, and the sun won’t set for a while, plus you have a big strong man to protect you from the dark…”

“Okay, back up on the misogyny—it’s not necessary for a date proposal.” Clary was only half-serious in her rebuke.

“I mean this isn’t a proposal… unless you want it to be.” Jace wiggled his eyebrows cheekily.

“No,” Clary sighed. “So where are you taking me?”

“You’ll see…” Jace tapped a few buttons on his phone, looking at a map. “I called an Uber. That way you can’t guess where we’re going based on the train routes.”

“Was that really necessary? If it’s too far to walk to before sundown, an Uber is going to be super expensive…”

“It doesn’t matter, I have some Herondale trust that an accountant in Alicante said could sustain my family for at least seven generations.”

“Yeah, well,” Clary swallowed awkwardly, her stomach turning sour at the thoughts of the storied families of Idris. The manor houses and town homes, family relics and hunt spoils. It was dirty money, and she didn’t really want any part of it. “I doubt I’ll be raking in the Morgenstern money any time soon. Or the Fairchild money…” She trailed off. “So until then, it’s part time jobs for me.”

“Actually—that’s a good point. The Clave probably seized all the Morgenstern assets after the whole…thing… but the Fairchilds’? Well that’s an interesting concept there. Your mom was the last one, but you have some distant cousins and stuff. I wonder where the money actually went. I could ask Lydi—”

“Jace, I don’t want to talk about it.” She was curt, but she was truthful. It was the last thing she wanted to talk about if they were going to go on a date. This was about them—Jace and Clary, two young people on a date—not Jace and Clary, Valentine Morgenstern’s experiments, the famous shadowhunters who were ill fated lovers, two nephilim from incredibly famous and infamous families. She didn’t want politics or history souring things. She was trying to move on.

“Oh…” His phone pinged, a welcome distraction. “Uber’s here. Your carriage awaits, my princess.” It was an UberBlack—a far cry from the UberPools Clary was used to. The driver even had water bottles in the cupholders. Mineral water—not the little bottles of off-brand water. She settled in, her hand in Jace’s, and let herself enjoy the ride. She mindlessly traced shapes on his palm, let herself be passive in the moment, and tried not to think too hard about their destination.
“Clayb— Chair—” Keris chirped with authority. Aya watched him through the crack in his door, careful not to give away her location to her brother or the cats. It was weird to hear him talk when there was nobody around. He hardly ever said anything around people— even when Papa asked him to. Cats were sort of like people, but still, it didn’t make sense. For a moment, Aya considered that maybe Keris liked cats better, or that he thought they were more like him. That would make sense— cats had sharp claws, Keris had sharp scales. Even his name was sharp— Uncle Ragnor had told her a keris was a special type of knife from the place where Papa grew up. Papa had never told her that though, and Uncle Ragnor told her to not bother Papa about it. But with his name, his scales, his metal colored hair— everything about Keris was sharp. Aerulei didn’t have anything sharp— not even an atheme of her own. Technically she did have one to use for spells, but Papa kept it up very high on a shelf in a special box she couldn’t open up or float down with magic. ‘You’re not old enough to play with sharp things’ he’d said. But then he always told her to play with Keris. It didn’t make much sense.

“Sit,” Keris whispered to the two kitties, patting his hands on the ground. Golden-copper sparks swirled across the carpet, circling around Clave and Chairman’s paws. They both slowly layed down on the fluffy light green rug, looking at Keris like they were completely listening. It was funny— it almost looked like they were outside in the grass, if the grass was a bit less green and a lot more white. It was weird for kitties to listen. That was the second thing Aya learned after learning that the Chairman was soft— that kitties always did whatever they wanted. But right now with Keris, they were doing what he wanted. Maybe it was dark magic.

“Mrow?” The Chairman chimed in, his head tilted to the side. He clearly didn’t know what the meeting was about.

“Hmph,” The Clave huffed— he didn’t care what the meeting was about. His tail smacked the floor hard with each flap.

Keris had been sitting up criss-cross style, but he was getting a bit wobbly— it was still hard for him to sit up for a super long time— so he joined the cats and flopped down onto his stomach.

“So!” His silver eyebrows lifted like bent spoons. “Bizness…” He sank his head down as low as he could, leaning in so his face was only a few inches away from the cats. Their whiskers were probably tickling his face. He was mumbling and babbling words that Aya couldn’t understand. They probably weren’t words at all. The kitties were not convinced of whatever he was saying— or they didn’t understand him, either— and it made K-K frustrated. His face scrunched up and he looked like he was about to cry or throw a tantrum, but instead he took a deep breath in— his whole back lifting up as his tummy and chest filled with air— and let it out slowly. His fingers dug into the carpet, clawing forward until his fingers touched one paw of each cat. His eyes fluttered closed. Aya could see the veins in his eyelids, which she always thought was creepy, but Papa said he’d grow out of it since it wasn’t so long ago that he was born.

Keris was doing what he did best— showing instead of telling. All he had to do was touch and tell them what he meant.

Aya learned a sneaky trick a while ago. While Keris was doing this, he never paid attention to what was going on around him, and neither did the person— or cat— he was doing it to. Taking her chance, she bolted over, putting her hand on the skin on the back of Keris’ neck. If she touched him skin to skin, she could see whatever he was showing the cats— another secret she’d learned. His message to them didn’t make much sense, but Aya got the big picture.

Keris wanted the cats to love each other’s owners— The Clave to love Papa, The Chairman to like
Alec. Keris could tell that Alec was going to go home soon, and he didn’t want that. He wanted to use the kitties to get him to stay.

For a baby, it was a pretty good plan, but Aya wasn’t sure if it was going to be good enough to get Alec— and the Clave— to stay forever. She didn’t know what would be good enough— at least not for this time— but there was one thing she was sure of: Alec would live at home with Papa and Keris and her eventually, so she wasn’t too worried about this time.

It was just about an hour until midnight, and in the Bane household, all was quiet— at least for now. Keris had taken a while to go down, screaming every time Magnus tried to walk away from the crib, standing up and shaking the bars until it sounded like the whole piece of furniture threatened to break. As long as Keris was unsettled, Aya was as well, claiming she could still hear the noise through her room’s soundproof wards. She demanded that at least three stories were read to her before bed in reparation for her suffering. To tackle the issue, Magnus and Alec split up, Alec taking over with Aya while Magnus went into battle dealing with his disgruntled infant. After about two hours of struggling, both children were finally asleep, completely exhausted from all the commotion they’d created. The whole ordeal had the opposite effect on the adults, shaking off any notions of going to bed and making it hard to wind back down. With everything finally at peace, Alec realized that moments like this were more rare than he’d anticipated, so he was determined to do whatever he could to make Magnus’ life easier, to help him relax— which is why Magnus was stretched out on the couch, on the opposite side as Alec, letting Alec gingerly massage his feet.

“You know, I’m really the one who should be doing this for you,” Magnus hummed. “You’re the one on your feet all day at the cafe, then all day at the shop. You hardly ever sit down.”

“Nonsense— especially since there’s that virus going around, things have been slow at both of my jobs. I even got to sit down some at the cafe this morning. It sucks, because I don’t get tips if people don’t come in, but at least I’ve been able to read through all of the e-books on my phone before the loan expires from the library.”

“You know you can just pirate e-books… right?” Magnus raised his eyebrow skeptically.

“Nah, not my style. I wouldn’t want someone to steal my tattoo designs, so I don’t want to steal anyone else’s work either.” Magnus was having a hard time shutting down his brain, and it was showing. “Stop worrying about me, this is your relaxation time, remember?” Everything about the environment in the room was relaxing. The doors to the greenhouse terrace were open, the silencing spell removed so that they could hear the soothing sound of the rain tapping on the glass roof. Fragrant yuzu incense floated through into the living room from the greenhouse burners, carrying with it the verdant and vegetal scent of the lush foliage. The couch was cushy and soft, the lights were dimmed, Magnus was in his favorite silk kimono and covered in a thick arm-woven blanket. Everything was perfect for relaxation, but Magnus was still fighting it.

“What’s bothering you?” Alec asked, his voice warm and soothing. He scooped a bit more lotion into his hand, using his palm to massage it into the heel of Magnus’ foot.

“Ugh,” Magnus groaned. “Clary.”

“I can definitely relate to that.” Alec focused on Magnus’ arch, rubbing firm circles with his thumb. Magnus arched his back at the touch, his body easing into the welcome relief of such an
important pressure point. “Is it about her talk with Aya at the shop?”

“Yes,” Magnus sighed as Alec used his knuckles to rub the length of his instep. “I have no idea how to confront her.”

“Well, if you wait too long, she might forget the whole thing happened. You should probably mention it to her while it’s fresh.”

“I know, but it’s just—” Magnus let his eyes flutter closed. “She was my first baby, you know? I mean— the first baby I really interacted with, got attached to. She’s like family to me. It’s hard to be angry with her when in my mind, I still see her as a chubby toddler wobbling around, yanking at my cat’s tail.”

“She sounds like a pretty dumb toddler,” Alec laughed. He imagined a fat, wavy-haired, redheaded child, toddling around the loft and causing all forms of chaos. Even if she wasn’t a warlock as a baby, he imagined she was probably more of a handful than Keris. And less cute— but Alec was biased.

“Eh, she turned out alright, all things considered.” Magnus shrugged. The movement must have irritated something in his neck— he twisted it side to side, his spine cracking in relief. Maybe he was finally starting to relax.

“I guess I see your predicament.” Alec switched to Magnus’ other foot. “I think it might be hard for her too— I mean, is she really going to take your anger seriously? She sees you as family too, and she might just assume the whole thing will blow over.”

“Exactly— but this isn’t something I can let slide, you know? She needs to know that I won’t tolerate it, not even from her. I think I’m going to have to pull out my battle warlock look for this. Go in magic blazing and all that.” Magnus took in a deep breath, held it for a few seconds, exhaling slowly through his mouth— it was a lion breath from yoga, something Magnus had taught Alec a few days ago when they tried to do yoga together in the greenhouse. Sweaty, stretched out, and wearing very little clothing, their exercise session ended up being a bit more… strenuous… than yoga, leaving them in a panting, blissed-out, dehydrated pile of limbs, sprawled across their yoga mats. It had been a different type of stress relief than they’d been anticipating.

“I love your battle warlock look,” Alec purred, lowering Magnus foot to drag his blunt nails down the warlock’s leg. Magnus shivered at the touch before jumping away when it tickled. Alec watched how each muscle rippled, exposed by the open kimono. He looked devastatingly gorgeous like this. It was hard to resist yanking down Magnus’ underwear and taking his half-hard cock in his mouth— but now was not the time. Magnus was probably only half-hard from the massage anyway, not from actually being aroused. Alec would fix that later, but for now it was time to listen.

“Hush, I know you do. But I thought we were having a serious conversation!” He giggled, slapping Alec’s hand away. Alec obediently returned to massaging Magnus’ feet. “So anyway, where was I — my senile immortal brain is drawing a blank— oh! Yes! So I’m going to have to really go in there and shake her up a bit, remind her that while I’m her friend, I’m still a dangerous warlock father who takes no shit. Especially when she’s coming at my boyfriend, who I love very, very dearly.” Magnus winked.

“If she were to do something like this again, what would you do then?” Alec was curious about how Magnus would answer this question. From everything he’d seen, Magnus was relatively forgiving, but considering this was about the kids— and about their relationship— Alec wasn’t sure how he’d respond.
“Well, I’d have to really consider if I’d want to continue our friendship.” Alec couldn’t imagine Magnus actually doing that— Clary had been a feature in the warlock’s life for so long— but Magnus’ cool tone and confident exterior added a very serious gravity to his words.

“I think you’d have every right to feel that way.” Alec nodded, busying his hands with the task of working out a small knot in the muscle of Magnus’ ankle. “But remember, it is still Clary— the first kid you saw grow up.” Alec struggled not to roll his eyes at the affectionate term.

“It’s fine, I have a few punishments in mind for her already— she needs to learn that her actions have consequences.” Magnus didn’t elaborate on the punishments, or offer any more information. Alec picked up the subtle cue not to pry further into it.

“That’s definitely a weak spot for her.” Alec chuckled dryly. “She rams through every situation head-on— she never considers the collateral damage. I mean, her intentions are usually good but, you know… ‘path to hell’ and all that.” Alec mumbled, trailing off. They passed a few more moments in comfortable silence, and Alec was secretly hoping this conversation would end there. There was no way Magnus— or himself for that matter— could relax while talking about this drama with Clary.

“What about you, my love?” Magnus wiggled his hips, settling more deeply into the cushions. “How are you going to deal with her?”

“I’m not going to do anything. She knows I’m mad, and now that she has her memories almost all back, I’m sure she remembers what I’m like when I get mad— especially when I’m mad at her.” He shrugged. When they’d first met, Alec hated Clary— and now she had all the b-roll in her head to prove it, to remember. With this misstep, it actually made things more even between them. After all the awful things he’d said to her when he was a Shadowhunter, if anything, this leveled the playing field.

“Are you sure that’s enough?” Magnus looked at Alec skeptically, his unglamoured eyes full of concern, glowing a fierce gold in the dim light.

“Eh, you can never be sure of these kinds of things. But what I’m definitely sure we’ve had enough of is talk about Clary. Let’s make the rest of the night just about us.”

“I have to admit, I like the sound of that.” Magnus bit his lip, a blush painting his cheeks. Alec would never get used to the fact that he could make Magnus Bane blush.

“Wine?” Alec slid Magnus’ feet off his lap, standing up and stretching high to the ceiling. He walked into the open kitchen, taking stock of the well-appointed wine rack. He didn’t have to turn around to notice that Magnus was eagerly following at his heels.

“Yes. Absolutely. Gallons of it.”

Jace Herondale had made a grave mistake.

Going to Coney Island in early March was probably a bad enough decision— but during whatever plague was currently sending the mundane world into chaos? That was an even worse oversight.

During their lengthy Uber ride, the driver refused to talk to them, made them wear surgical masks,
and scowled at Jace every time he had to clear his throat— which was often, because it was his
default habit in uncomfortable situations. The whole vehicle smelled like alcohol and chemical
cleaners, and the guy wouldn’t let them put down the windows because he was afraid of ‘airborne
particulates’. He wasn’t sure how this virus could be worse than normal pollution, but he didn’t
really have any option other than comply.

When they finally got to their destination, Jace thought they’d be in the clear. He had figured the
boardwalk would be less crowded than in the summer, but what he hadn’t anticipated was that
everything would be closed. The whole part of the boardwalk with rides was shuttered for the
season, and the few restaurants that would usually be open had signs up saying they were closed
because of the virus. Jace wanted to find this virus and kick its ass—it was ruining his date.

He could tell Clary was trying to make the best of it. She made casual small talk, swung their
hands adorably as they walked down the deserted boardwalk— but he could tell she was a bit
disappointed. He should have done some research ahead of time. He’d envisioned riding the ferris
wheel and eating cotton candy, winning her a stuffed animal as he flaunted his dart throwing skills.
But instead, it looked like they were venturing out during an apocalypse. He expected the zombies
to crawl up from beneath the boards or pop out from behind an abandoned building at any second.
Thankfully, so far, it was zombie free.

To his immediate relief, it turned out that one place wouldn’t shut its doors no matter what: an old-
school diner. God bless Americana.

“You hungry?” He tugged at his hand, pulling her closer to him.

“Starving,” Clary sighed emphatically.

“And cold, look—you’re shivering.” Jace noted with mild alarm. Since they’d arrived, the
weather had taken a turn for the worse, the sun dipping behind the clouds and a chilly wind
whipping sand from the beach onto the boardwalk. Neither of them were dressed for this weather,
but all Jace had to do was activate a heat rune and he’d be fine. He wasn’t sure if Clary could bear
runes though, so he abstained in solidarity. “Come on, let’s get you inside.”

A few minutes later, they were huddled into a tiny vinyl booth, the only people in the entire
restaurant. On an old fuzzy TV hanging in the corner, the mundane news was on, all red banners
and paranoia. Thankfully, the volume was turned down so he didn’t have to be bothered by
something that didn’t affect him.

“Alright,” an exhausted server popped over. “What can I get youse two?” The waitress had a
strange accent that Jace couldn’t place.

“Uh…” Jace looked at the menu quickly. It was enormous—there was no way a place this small
could make so many different things. The only similar place he’d been to was Taki’s, where he
knew the menu by heart.

“It’s okay, I’ll give you a second. But what do ya want for drinks?” The waitress snapped her gum.

“Coffee for me, thanks.” Clary smiled. Every time she smiled, it felt like Jace’s heart was knitting
itself back together again. He couldn’t get enough of her smiles— the polite ones she gave to
service people, the big ones when she laughed at something so hard she doubled over, and the
sheepish ones when someone complimented her.

“Uh—same.” Jace agreed. He wasn’t the biggest coffee drinker, but it would do.
“Comin’ right up.” In what felt like less than a minute, the waitress was back with two steaming mugs of strong-smelling black coffee. He warmed his fingers against the ceramic— Clary did the same. Clary ordered pancakes, Jace ordered a burger, and they settled into a somewhat heavy silence. Before she’d even taken a sip of her coffee, Clary upended a few containers of creamer and more than one pack of sugar into the cup. By the time she was done, the tan liquid barely resembled coffee anymore.

“I can feel the judgement coming from that glare,” Clary giggled.

“No it’s just— I didn’t know you took your coffee that way.” He felt like it was something he should know— that he should remember— but it felt entirely new.

“Barista you did.” She half smiled. “Food-truck Barista you was pretty hot actually… You can surprisingly pull off an apron very well.” She blushed, taking a sip of her sugary, milky, coffee.

“What?” Jace sat back abruptly. He was offended and confused at the same time. But then he remembered— in the other dimension they’d travelled to, she’d said he was a barista. “Well I’m sorry that in this dimension I’m just an unsexy Shadowhunter.”

“I never said that,” Clary smirked. “The whole ‘looking better in black than the widows of our enemies’ thing really works for you.” Normally Jace would take the compliment with pride— he knew he was cocky— but he still couldn’t shake off his nerves. He still felt like this date was a failure, that he was letting Clary down. When the waitress returned and sat down two plates of food— warm, and good enough smelling, but nothing special, nothing date worthy— Jace finally snapped.

“Look—” Jace started the moment the waitress was out of earshot. “You don’t have to pretend you’re having a good time. I know this date sucks.” He threw an over-salted french fry in his mouth, chewing aggressively.

“Jace, why would you say something like that?” Clary dropped her fork, abandoning her carefully cut slice of pancake. She was looking at him incredulously, like he was talking nonsense.

“You can’t possibly tell me you’re having fun right now,” he huffed.

“What do you mean?” She frowned, searching his face for an explanation to his question. He cursed himself for being so direct. Looking him up and down, she paused for a moment, considering her words. “Wait— you think that just because stuff is closed that this date is a failure?”

“Stuff is closed, the weather sucks, it’s creepily empty, our Uber driver was weird—”

“Stop.” Reclaiming her fork, she held it up to his mouth, silencing him. There was still pancake on the end, so he reached out and stole it off. The sweet pancake, doused in sticky maple syrup, actually did wonders in making him less grumpy. Clary’s eyes lit up, and she looked at him like he was some adorable puppy— he didn’t know if anyone had ever looked at him like that before. With a blush on her cheeks, she bit her lip, trying to regain her composure before continuing. “Now listen to me. Is this different than all the other times I’ve been to Coney Island? Sure. But that’s what makes it an adventure. I’m having fun because I’m here with you. Spending time with you.”

“You mean that?” He still had a hard time believing her, worrying she was just saying all this to placate his concern.
“Of course I do.” She reached across the table, grabbing his hand. “We never thought we’d have this again— but here we are. It’s not always going to be perfect but… I’m just happy we are here, no matter where here is.” The look on her face was so genuine, her green eyes were sparkling— sparkling because she was looking at him. It made his heart feel things he hadn’t felt in years; he felt like he was flying.

She gripped his hand tighter, but it did little to tether him to reality. The sharp contrast of going from feeling like he’d ruined the day to hearing her say these words threw him for a loop. All he wanted to do was stand up, march over to her side of the booth, slide in, and kiss her until she could never lose her memories of him again. He wanted to kiss her until her lips were puffy, kiss her cheeks until they hurt from smiling too much. He wanted to ravish her, cherish her— he wanted everything.

But they were in a diner. On a date. And he was on his best behavior. So what he did instead was lean across the booth, cupped her cheek in his hand, and pressed one chaste kiss to her lips.

He swore he could feel her body buzz beneath his touch.

Chapter End Notes

Whew, and there we have it! Time for me to post the interlude, see you in a few minutes!
Interlude: Fly Me to the Moon

Chapter Summary

Aya wakes up in the middle of the night and gets a peek of something special.

Chapter Notes

Play this while you read :) It's what inspired this whole interlude, and is very 'mood'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paOTzftyOuE

ALSO: If you're coming here from the email update, I posted this at the same time as the previous chapter, so make sure you read chapter 46 first. Sorry for any confusion!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aya stirred in her bed. She pulled her favorite fuzzy blanket up around her neck and squeezed her eyes closed tightly— she didn’t want to be awake, she wanted to be back asleep. No matter what she did, though, sleep wouldn’t come. She didn’t get it. How could she be asleep for a while, and then her body just decides it’s time to wake up when it’s not supposed to? Counting sheep did nothing— it made her too excitable actually to think about sheep, and made her more awake. As she tossed and turned, her legs got tangled in the covers, making her feel trapped. It was still dark outside, and the rain clouds blocked out the moon, so the sky was spooky and empty.

Thankfully her night lights were on, or else she wouldn't have been able to see when she finally got out of bed. There was only one thing that would make her sleepy again— a cup of warm milk. She knew Papa might not like getting woken up in the middle of the night, but she decided it was better to do that than to try to make it herself. Last time she tried to pour a drink by herself, she accidentally dropped the whole bottle on the floor. The Chairman was happy, since he got a good snack that day, but Papa was not happy. She tiptoed out of her room, careful to shut the door quietly enough not to wake Keris. She wasn’t sure if Papa had the soundproof wards up on his room like he did on hers. Normally he did, but she didn’t want to chance making the baby cry.

As she inched her way down the hall, the sounds of rain got stronger and stronger, bouncing off the roof of the greenhouse— Papa always left the doors to it open when it rained so they could listen to the storm sounds. But she also heard… music. Why would there be music playing so late? More curious than she was before, she tried to be even quieter, since it seemed like someone was awake. On the one hand, that was good— she wouldn’t have to wake someone up to help her— but on the other hand, she wanted to know what they were doing.

In the living room, she found the source of the music. The old horn-shaped record player was on, the disk spinning slowly. Aya was afraid if she stared too long, it might hypnotize her. The music was old and strange— it sounded like the man who sang the ‘New York, New York’ song.
Aerulei thought the words were pretty cute. But she couldn’t waste time listening to the music, she had to solve the mystery. She looked around the living room, but nobody was there and the lights were off. She furrowed her brows in confusion, shuffling forward quietly. Now that she was closer, she could hear footsteps, muffled voices. She could see that the hanging lights were on in the kitchen — it was half open to the living room, so she had a pretty good view. Not wanting to be seen yet, she hid behind a pillar, poking her head around the side just enough so she could see.

It was Papa and Alec… and they were dancing.

She watched them sway back and forth a bit, listened as Papa sang along with some of the words to the song. He wasn’t a very good singer. Alec didn’t even try singing, so she assumed he must be even worse.

“I knew Sinatra, you know.” Papa looked up at Alec, his eyes glowing bright yellow.

“Of course you did.” Alec rolled his eyes, sliding his hand lower down Papa’s back and rocking them side to side. “And you probably slept with him too,” Alec teased.

“Hey now, not fair—” Papa laughed. “Actually, I deserve that. Normally the answer to that is more likely yes than no.” Papa rested his head against Alec’s chest as they kept dancing, Papa occasionally whisper-singing some of the words. Aerulei could still hear the tip-tap sounds of rain coming from the greenhouse, making the music sound a bit muffled and far away, even though it was just in the other room, half open to the kitchen.

“I’m not stepping on your feet, am I?” Alec whispered, tightening his hand around Papa’s waist. Aya wasn’t sure how he could possibly be stepping on his feet — they were barely moving, just swaying back and forth. One hand wrapped around, the other holding hands— just like princesses in the movies, but in the movies they did a lot more prancing around.

“How could you be,” Papa whispered back, smiling. They were whispering much louder than they probably thought they were. “It’s like I’m walking on air.” Alec guided them, spinning Papa with one hand a bit clumsily. Papa’s pretty kimono twirled with him, showing he was only wearing his undies. It was pretty embarrassing.

“I think that’s just the wine talking, Magnus,” Alec laughed, pulling Papa back closer against his chest. “You’re more than a bit tipsy.” Aya looked at the kitchen island, where a big, green-glass bottle sat empty, with two wine glasses next to it. She wasn’t sure how much wine was a lot, but it did look like they might have drunk a lot.

“What, you mean you haven’t been dipping me between every step? You’re telling me the wine is doing that?” Papa giggled.

“I don’t think I’m a good enough dancer to dip you…” Alec pressed a kiss to the top of Papa’s head, and she swore she heard Papa purr like a cat.

“Maybe not now, but I’ll make a dancer of you yet, Alexander.” Papa stopped dancing and stood up on his tip-toes, kissing Alec on the mouth.

“Well you’re going to have to teach me,” Alec pulled away, breathing hard. “And it’s going to take
a lot of effort.”

“Relationships take effort darling. Dancing? That takes even more.” When Papa said that, Alec picked him up high enough to sit him on the counter. The wine bottle tumbled to the ground when Papa sat back, shattering to a million pieces on the floor. She barely saw Papa use magic to clean it up, but in the blink of an eye, it was gone. She wanted to be that good at magic one day.

“In other words,” Alec sang. He wasn’t as bad at it as Aerulei had thought. “Hold my hand,” He slid his fingers between Papa’s, raising his hand up to his mouth and kissing it. “In other words, darling, kiss me.” He leaned in and started kissing Papa in a way that Aerulei didn’t think she should be watching.

Realizing now probably wasn’t the best time to ask for a glass of milk, she shuffled back to her room, letting the warm-fuzzy feeling of seeing Papa and Alec so happy lull her off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Anyway, I'm not crying, definitely not.

Next week:
Magnus confronts Clary
Alec does some thinking
TATOOS

Note: I posted this interlude at the same time as chapter 46, so if you're coming here from the email update, make sure you didn't miss chapter 46!
Chapter 48

Chapter Summary

Alec takes care of the kids while Magnus takes care of business. Some of that business is sleeping in, and the rest of it is Clary Fray.

Chapter Notes

Here’s a long one you guys! I thought about breaking it up, but it was too fluffy not to share! I kind of rushed to get it done so it might be a bit messier than usual!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey, Mags,” Alec whispered, his warm breath kissing Magnus’ forehead before his lips made contact. “I have the early morning shift this morning. Just wanted to remind you so you don’t wonder where I went.” Alec’s long fingers threaded through Magnus’ hair, twisting an angle-cut lock into a spiral before smoothing it back out in a slow, gentle touch.

“You go make that coffee, sexy barista boy,” Magnus mumbled into the pillow. “Kick the coffee’s ass.”

“You’re delusional, because it’s way before your normal wake up time. Go back to sleep, kitten.” Alec dipped down, nuzzling his face into the pillow to meet Magnus’ lips with his own. He was nudging him like a cat. Acquiescing to the gesture, Magnus turned his face, allowing the kiss to deepen further. Alec tasted like the strange orange-mint toothpaste he preferred, his skin was prickled with stubble, but smelled like rosewater witch hazel. Ever since Magnus had introduced him to the wondrous toner, Alec sheepishly splashed some on his face whenever he was in the bathroom.

When Alec pulled away, Magnus whined at the lack of contact. He hated that Alec had to go. He wanted to conjure a thousand one-hundred dollar bills and have them rain from the bedroom ceiling to convince Alec not to go— to just stay home with him and avoid the rainy morning— but he knew the effort would be futile. They’d had that argument— Magnus had lost that battle— and no matter how much he hated it, he had to respect Alec’s decision to keep working both of his jobs for now.

Magnus did lull back to sleep for a while, his slumber dreamless and calm and light— so when a pair of cautious footsteps shuffled into his bedroom, he stirred awake easily. He played the part though, pretending not to be awake. He could tell Aya was trying to be sneaky and crawl in bed without him noticing, so he figured he’d let her win.

“Come on Clave,” Aerulei said, her voice hushed. She crawled onto the bed and patted the covers with her hands, probably to get the cat to follow her. In some act of what had to be witchcraft, the cat listened, and Magnus felt the mattress dip as Alec’s enormous cat hopped up. “Okay, now we can’t wake Papa, he needs his beauty sleeps,” she said seriously, crawling higher up the bed until she reached Magnus’ side. She curled up next to his side. He was a stomach sleeper, which usually
led to him waking up with Aya on his back, but this time, she nuzzled close, tucking her head into his shoulder and hugging his arm tight. It was incredibly uncomfortable, but while Magnus couldn’t see it, he was sure it was cute.

“Sayang,” Magnus whispered a quiet sing-song. “This is not very cozy for Papa. I’ll move very slowly so we don’t wake up too much, but I need to shift, darling.”


Magnus slowly rolled from his stomach to his back, sliding closer to the middle of the mattress. Reaching his arms down, he scooped up Aya, who took the lead and snuggled right up under his arm. It was much more comfortable, and Magnus was already starting to drift off.

“Is Keris awake?” Magnus mumbled before he let himself succumb to sleep.

“No, it’s too early.” Aya yawned in Magnus’ face.

“He’ll let us know when he’s up,” Magnus fell victim to the contagious yawn. “Until then, it’s Papa Aya snuggle time.”

“Papa, Aya,” she yawned again, wiggling closer and squeezing Magnus tight. “Snuggle time.”

Sometimes, Alec was thankful that he had worked in the cafe for so long. Most people didn’t stay in the same service job very long, always needing to learn a new routine, but for Alec, he could get through an entire shift on autopilot. He’d even learned how to put on fake charm with minimal effort, just to get his tips higher. His shift had gone by in the blink of an eye— he could have been convinced he just showed up and turned around. Plus, he’d ended up being the only one behind the bar, so the whole tip jar went to him. Even though it had been slow, it was still worth getting out of bed at 4:30.

It was only 10:00 am when Alec got back, and the loft was silent. Magnus and the kids often slept in at least until that time, sometimes until noon, so Alec tried his best not to be too noisy. He slid off his coat, only to realize he’d forgotten to take off his apron at work. It was covered in ground coffee, so he shook it off before hanging it on a hook next to Magnus’ designer coats and the kids colorful jackets. It didn’t look quite as out of place as he’d thought.

Tiptoeing down the hall, he slid open the door to the bedroom, thankful he’d fixed it the other day and lubricated the sliding hinges. Magnus was never great at handiwork— even with his magic, he still had to know how to fix it to leverage that power. Summoning something new was easier for Magnus, but Alec didn’t want to always jump right to that— he liked to fix things, the simplicity and routine of it. It was quiet and calming— and an incredibly easy way to impress his boyfriend.

But in that moment, Alec was the one speechless. He’d expected Magnus to still be asleep, or maybe lounging sleepily as he scrolled through his phone. What he saw instead made his heart skip a beat. Magnus and Aerulei were snuggled up like puppies in the middle of the bed, buried in a mound of covers. There wasn’t a single sign of them stirring yet, not a hint that they were close to waking up. Alec couldn’t disturb them yet— and there wasn’t really any reason to— so he backed out of the room just as silently as he entered, sliding the door shut.

Although Magnus and Aya would happily sleep past noon, there was one member of the Bane
family who had a stricter schedule— Keris. Babies could only stay asleep for so long before their needs had to be met, and while Keris was an amazing sleeper for his age, he was still a baby. If Alec didn’t act soon, Keris would let everyone in the house know that he needed help. It was alright— Alec was looking forward to spending some one-on-one time with the baby.

Keris wasn’t quite as asleep as his papa and sister were. His eyes were still closed, but he was squirming in his crib, his feet lightly kicking. Beneath his eyelids, his eyes darted around— he was dreaming. Alec didn’t want to wake him up either, but he knew doing that now was better than waiting until he started crying. It didn’t look like he wasn’t having the happiest dream either, at least that’s what Alec told himself to rationalize waking him up.

Leaning over the railing of the crib, Alec lightly tickled Keris’ cheek, hoping the gentle touch would nudge him awake. Keris’ silver-tipped eyelashes fluttered, but he squinted his eyes tighter closed.

“Pumpkin, wake up,” Alec cooed, stroking the baby’s cheek. Hearing Alec’s voice, Keris finally opened his eyes, staring up at Alec with a still-sleepy curiosity. “There you are… hello.” Alec reached in and picked him up, bouncing him against his chest as he pressed a flurry of kisses to his forehead.

“How,” Keris smiled, his eyes scrunching up.

“I think you know what we’ve gotta deal with first, don’t you?” Alec held out Keris at arm’s length, making a jokingly disgusted face. “You’re a stinky boy.”

“Stinky!” Keris cheered, kicking his legs eagerly in the air.

“Okay, hold your horses,” Alec warned, walking over to the changing table and putting the baby down. “We don’t want you kicking yourself off the table and bopping your head.” Alec held down Keris with one hand while he opened the top drawer of the table, grabbing a fresh diaper. The baby clothes Magnus bought for Keris were much fancier than the ones Max had worn as a baby, so at first it had taken Alec some practice to unfasten what felt like hundreds of tiny snaps and buttons, but now he could do it almost like a pro. The actual process of changing a baby though was something Alec could do in his sleep— especially since, unlike Shadowhunters, Magnus used disposable diapers. Keris was starting to get picky about the patterns though— they were printed with different animals, and he was incredibly partial to the ones with lions. Thankfully the room was dark enough and Alec was quick enough that Keris didn’t have a chance to notice. Less than two minutes later, Alec was standing with a clean, half-naked baby in front of an overstuffed closet of baby clothes.

“What do you want to wear today, K-K?” Alec asked, filing through some of the hangers. “It’s still raining a bit so I think we’re going to stay inside— so you can pick whatever you want.”

Keris pushed his hand to Alec’s forehead, the now familiar feeling of magic pulsing through his body strangely comforting. As easy— and helpful— as it was for them to communicate that way, Alec knew that Keris needed to start talking more regularly, especially if they wanted him to mingle with the mundanes.

“Use your words,” Alec chided, gently removing the baby’s clammy hand from his face. “Let’s look at what we’ve got.” Alec paused generously between each option, letting Keris touch each one and grab at the fabrics. It took way longer than it would have if they’d used magic, but eventually something caught the baby’s eye— a pirate-themed jumpsuit.

“This!” Keris declared.
It might have actually been a dress-up costume—Alec had accidentally let Aya wear dress up clothes as pajamas before—but it was what the baby picked out, so he was going to at least let him wear it during breakfast.

“I think that’s a good choice. Now, let’s get you dressed.”

Now that Keris was ready to face the day, Alec took on the daunting task of making breakfast. He strapped Keris into his high chair and started heating up a bag of his warlock formula. He filled a sectioned bowl with some of Keris’ favorite puffed rice cereal, and halved grapes. Keris ravenously started shoveling the food in his mouth, grabbing messy handfuls and sending at least a quarter of the cereal onto the floor.

“Slow down pumpkin, you’re going to make yourself sick.” Alec warned, scooting the bowl away from him.

“No!” Keris yelled, chucking a piece of grape at Alec. Alec plucked it out of the air at nephilim speed, tossing it in his own mouth. Keris was so impressed by the display that he heeded Alec’s words, slowly eating one piece of food at a time.

“Now, are you going to be good while I make some coffee for papa?” He sat down the bottle of formula, encouraging Keris to drink that instead of loading up on just cereal.

“Yesh,” Keris mumbled through a mouthful of food, grabbing his bottle with both hands and guzzling it down.

Unlike when he made coffee at the cafe, making coffee for Magnus always made him acutely aware of every step. Avoiding waking everyone up with the coffee grinder, he used some beans he’d snagged at the Roastery that morning, since they ground up fresh ones each hour. An extra scoop added to the french press made the coffee extra rich—a secret he’d never tell Magnus, adding more mystique to his barista image. He picked up the kettle from the stove just before it started to whistle, pouring it into the press and quickly stirring in the grounds with a bamboo chopstick. While the brew steeped, Alec fed Keris the remaining pieces of cereal and grapes one at a time, his fingers getting sticky with fruit juice and baby spit. When the coffee was ready, he scooped up the pieces of cereal from the floor and tossed them in the trash—he didn’t want Magnus to wake up to a mess in the kitchen. The plunger of the french press pushed down slowly, revealing a rich dark brew from what had before been a cloud of grounds. Normally, he’d give Magnus the whole press, but for now, he just poured a small mug—one of Magnus’ favorites, a Garfield mug that said ‘Ten more minutes’.

“You want to come with me to wake up papa?” Alec asked Keris, ruffling his silver hair. It wasn’t actually a question. He wasn’t going to leave Keris in the high chair unsupervised, where he could knock it over onto the floor. “Come on, up we go.” Alec picked up Keris and rested him on his hip. With his free hand he picked up the cup of coffee, balancing it precariously. It was another time where his barista experience kicked in—he was pretty confident he wouldn’t spill it all over the floor before they made it to the bedroom. At least 80% confident. At work, normally the situation would be a hot coffee in each hand, or a bag of beans and a full pot of French Roast—not a squirmy baby. But with a full tummy, Keris was more than compliant.

As he slid open the door with his foot, he saw that Aya and Magnus still hadn’t moved—but this time, Alec noticed there was another visitor in the room—the Clave was sprawled out at the foot of the bed, nearly as long as the bed was wide. Alec shuffled over to Magnus’ side, putting down the coffee on the side table. He stroked Magnus’ messy, unstyled hair, a frazzled mop of silky black that matched his daughter’s, trying to rouse the warlock.
“How is your papa so sleepy?” Alec laughed quietly.

“Aya!” Keris chirped, pointing at his sister.

“You want to try to wake her up?” Alec reached over Magnus, putting Keris down next to Aya. As Keris busied himself by poking at his sister, Magnus’ eyes finally started to reluctantly flutter open.

“I smell coffee,” Magnus rolled over, his nose following the scent until he found the mug on the side table.

“Good morning to you too,” Alec sat down on the edge of the bed. “There’s more where that came from in the kitchen. Dating a sexy barista boy has its benefits.” Alec teased.

“As many as having a warlock boyfriend?” Magnus leaned up, his lips pursed for a kiss.

“Not even close,” Alec leaned in, giving Magnus a quick peck. “Keris already had breakfast, but I’ll make something for you and Aya.”

“What time is it?” Magnus rubbed his eyes, smearing a tiny bit of leftover mascara from the previous day. Alec licked his thumb and reached out, swiping it away. Magnus scrunched up his nose grumpily, rubbing harder under his eye.

“It’s like… eleven-ish?” Alec sat up, cracking his neck. “Why, do you have a client today?”

“You could say that… I have a certain redhead I have to take care of.” Magnus pouted.

“Oh, is today finally the day?” Alec looked over to the kids. Keris was yanking at Aya’s hair as she tried her hardest to pretend she was still asleep.

“Unfortunately, I think it has to be.” Magnus sighed, reaching out and picking up Keris. “You know, before I forget what I was angry about in the first place.” He hugged Keris tighter against his chest, nuzzling into his hair. Alec could tell what he was doing— taking a steadying breath of baby smell. Nobody who knew the infamous Magnus Bane would ever imagine him this way— in slouchy pajamas, in bed with his children, calming himself down with baby smell— but Alec wouldn’t have him any other way.

“Well, I was already going to take care of the kids for the rest of the day, give you a break.”

“Why would I need a break?” Magnus looked up, confused.

“You always need a break— you have two kids.” Alec smoothed down Magnus’ hair, following suit with Keris’, which was standing up completely straight.

“Two!” Keris yelled, holding up two fingers proudly.

“Look at you go—” Alec cheered. “Using your words like we talked about this morning!” He held out his hand for a high-five, and after a few seconds regarding Alec’s hand with a look of confusion, Keris finally understood and slapped his hand against Alec’s.

“If anything, you’re the one who needs a break— you’re over here being superdaddy.” Magnus purred, oddly suggestively. “Two jobs, two kids… and you look fine as hell doing it.”

“Where is this coming from?” Alec felt his cheeks flush.

“Wait, pick up the baby, I want to see you hold him.” Magnus passed over the baby to Alec.
“Wait why—” Alec stammered, grabbing Keris.

“Mmm, that’s what I’m talking about, sexy. I should make you an Instagram for stuff like this. You’d have all the Upper East Side mommies drooling.” Magnus made a picture frame with his hands, looking at it through one eye. “You look downright yummy.”

“Eww, Papa you’re being gross!” Aya finally sat up, smacking Magnus with a pillow.

“How is it gross to tell Alec he looks pretty?” Magnus scoffed, insulted.

“The way you’re saying it is gross!” She smacked him again with the pillow, a few feathers escaping it and flying into the air. “Gross words!”

“Alright, I’m taking that as my cue to get more coffee.” Magnus picked up the mug, downing it in one gulp. “See, it’s empty, I need more now.”

“Come on Aya, I’ll make you waffles.” Alec reached out and grabbed Aya’s hand, pulling her out of bed.

“Fine— but there better be strawberries for me to be up at this hour.”

“Clarissa Morgenstern,” Magnus’ voice bellowed as he stepped through the portal directly into Clary’s studio.

“Magnus!” Clary startled, dropping her palette of paint, red, purple and blue exploding more on her clothes and hair rather than on the floor. Her canvas was jostled, unceremoniously flopping to the ground as well. Magnus felt a bit guilty— he hoped that wasn’t an important school assignment. He’d meant to make an entrance— a formidable one at that— and he’d even meant to catch her by surprise, but he didn’t want to jeopardize her college career. He waved his hands casually, a simple object reversal spell sliding everything back into place. Turning back the time on a person was dark, evil magic, but changing an object back to a previous state was remarkably easy. It had come in handy more times than he could count now that he had two rambunctious children.

“I know it’s a low blow to use your paternal name, biscuit, but it’s hard to not see the similarities when you behave the way you’ve been lately. Morgensterns love to stick their upturned noses in places where they don’t belong.”

Clary paled, her fingers gripping her paintbrush tightly. Magnus could see that she was trembling. He knew how terrifying he could be when he tried— and it was hard to maintain this facade in front of Clary, the darling redhead he’d known since she was a toddler, but for this— he had to get his point across.

“Speechless, are you? No haughty diatribes or pseudo-idealistic proclamations about how the state of the world— and particularly family values— have succumbed to the ill influence of society?”

She swallowed. “Mag— Magnus?” Her breath quickened as Magnus slowly paced forward. He’d dressed for the occasion— long black velvet frock coat, blood red silk shirt that dipped deeply enough to show his muscled chest, menacingly tight jeans, and dangerously pointy boots. His orange-red magic— usually reserved for conflicts much more dire than this— constantly floated from his fingertips, like a spark threatening to send the whole room ablaze.
“Hmm, your father was quite charismatic with those types of speeches. I figured that if you were passionate enough about the subject to have a clandestine talk with my daughter, then you’d have something even more…” Magnus picked the next word carefully. “… pointed… to say to me directly. After all, I’m the one making the reckless decisions, am I not? I’m the one in charge of my children’s lives? Or would you rather have Alexander march in here, so that you may berate him again in the same way you did in his own place of business.”

“I didn’t mean for him to hear that,” Clary whispered, her voice meek.

“That’s what makes this matter even more unfortunate for you.” Magnus was directly in front of her. He could smell her pear-scented cheap shampoo, he could see tears welling in her eyes. Maybe he was being too hard on her, but it was hard to not see red considering the way she’d overstepped in his relationship with Alec, the way she’d tried to plant doubt in his daughter’s mind. “Not to mention— sending Jace to Alec’s fighting gym unannounced? Sending a nephilim prone to fly off the handle into a place where my daughter practices? Encouraging them to fight out their conflict there?” Magnus asked. “The cards are stacked against you here, biscuit.” He traced his finger under her chin, making her look him in the eye. He dramatically dropped his eye glamour, his golden irises flaring.

“What are you going to do to me?” Clary’s chest puffed out— her fight or flight response had kicked in, and in true Clary Fairchild fashion, it told her to fight. She backed away from Magnus, her posture tensed, knees soft, ready for battle. He was surprised she didn’t pull a knife out of her converse high tops and point it at him. Could he blame her? He was being rather threatening, but that was the point. Her actions had consequences, and that was something Clary had never really been able to get through her head.

“Now I’m insulted— I could never hurt you, darling. Who do you take me for? I thought you knew me better than that…” Magnus paced around her art studio, admiring the paintings passively. His sudden indifference and flippant tone was bound to make her nervous, and that’s the reaction he was going for. “But I have cancelled your gym membership for the time being. Alec takes her to class often, and I don’t want you having opportunities to influence her when Alec and I aren’t around. On that note, you can’t babysit anymore, which is a shame because you know I pay handsomely, and you could really use the money for some new shoes. Those ratty high-tops are terrible. If it was up to me? I wouldn’t want you working at Alec’s shop anymore. You clearly don’t trust him or respect him. But that’s his decision, not mine. And— you’re not invited to Aya’s birthday party. You understand, right?”

“I do. But please let me apologize, I didn’t mean to make any of you upset, I was just concerned and—”

“I’m sure you are. But I’m also sure that you really thought you were doing the right thing, and that’s what irks me the most. You interfered with my household. And I do not take that lightly. If it was anyone but you, the consequences would be much more severe.”

“I understand Magnus.” She lowered her head and relaxed her stance in defeat, visibly deflating.

“One more thing. You’re Jace’s girlfriend now, and despite everything they’ve been through, Alec and Jace are going to try to rebuild their relationship. I don’t want you getting in the way of that either. Not everything is about your opinions.” Magnus paused. “So, have I made myself clear?”

She nodded meekly.

“Good.” Magnus waved his hand, opening a portal behind him. “Then this is settled. I’m done with this… for now.” Before she had a chance to say anything else, Magnus stepped through the portal,
walking into the alley behind his favorite spot for a matcha latte, which he desperately needed right now to calm down. He hated having to act that way, but he was afraid that if he hadn’t come on so strong, Clary wouldn’t have taken him seriously. She was like family to him, and the last thing he wanted was to have to push her away. But there were a few things in his life now that were non-negotiable—a few lines he wouldn’t let anyone cross. Not even Clary Fray.

“Alright it has been a Day.” Magnus sighed dramatically, flicking his wrist to close and lock the loft doors behind him. “I hope you’re ready for cocktails Alexander, because I’ve been thinking about them all day.”

“Arr!” Magnus heard Aya yell. “Ahoy! Avast! Other A-words!” Magnus followed her voice into the living room, where he found his daughter perched on top of the couch, holding a makeshift sword made of paper towel rolls.

“Arrrgg!” Keris yelled from the floor, spread out on a blue blanket, looking like a piece of flotsam adrift on the sea. All the furniture was pushed away to clear out the area in front of the TV, and an array of toys were spread out. Any toy that was remotely nautical was fair game—mermaids, ships, plush stuffed animals of fish.

“Magnus, you’re home!” Alec dusted off his hands, something white staining his sweatpants. “Sorry I was finishing up the sugar cookies the kids made today.”

“I cookie!” Keris rolled over, looking immensely proud. Magnus could see a smudge of flour just above Keris’ eyebrow. Looking closer, some was in his hair too, making his silvery strands look more like a fancy powdered wig. He’d need a bath later—or at least a magical cleaning.

“They’re shaped like skulls and boats. I had to bend the cookie cutters, but we made it work.” Alec walked over to Magnus, looking so casual and content. Nobody who spent the whole day with two young children should look so relaxed—it should be illegal. Even in his disheveled state, in flour-dusted sweatpants, he looked like something fashioned out of marble. He was so gorgeous, and Magnus was sure he didn’t know it, which made him so much hotter.

“We had pirate-day Papa! Are you going to join pirate day?” Aya jumped down off the couch, pointing the ‘sword’ at his stomach.

“What she’s asking is, do you want to watch more pirate movies?” Alec walked over, kissing Magnus lightly. He smelled like vanilla extract and flour—dusty, but sweet. “Tell Papa what we watched today.”

“Treasure island!” She spun around, smacking Alec with her sword next. “Peter Pan!” It was clear they’d been doing some type of dress-up all day. Keris was in his pirate onesie, and Aya had a bandanna wrapped around her hips, one of Magnus’ antique tri-cornered hats on her head, and a makeshift patch on her eye.

“The classics, fantastic choices.” Magnus reached down and hoisted her up. She was getting so big, but he was going to hold her until she was so big it broke his back to try. “Although, if we are talking Disney Pirate movies, there is one true winner.”

“How is Peter Pan not the winner Magnus?” Alec asked skeptically. “I mean, I’m no expert in mundane movies, but still—”
“Have you not seen Pirates of the Caribbean?” Magnus was so taken aback that he actually backed away from Alec. That was a rare feat— usually, when they were in the same room, it was nearly impossible not to be pulled together via some magical gravitational pull.

“Magnus, that’s PG-13, I wasn’t going to watch that with the kids.” Alec looked horrified, but Magnus didn’t have the heart to tell him that in the Bane household, ratings didn’t mean too much. Aya saw her first werewolf transformation— that Magnus was aware of, at least— when she was two. She saw fledgling vampires, actual demons— it was just part of being the child of a warlock who was in high-demand. There was very little on television that was off limits, other than of course things that were too sexual or unnecessarily violent. Magnus tried to avoid things with swearing but again, with him as their father, his kids had already been exposed to every swear word in the English language, and then at least half of them in other languages.

“Well I’m parental, and I’m going to provide guidance. So that’s what we are watching tonight!” Magnus declared, tossing his overcoat over the back of a kitchen chair. Alec stared at him, mouth agape. “What? Is there a problem?”

“Aren’t there… zombies, in that movie?”

“Alexander,” Magnus used his name for emphasis. “My children are warlocks. They are far more fearsome than any animated corpse.”

“If you say so…” Alec scratched the back of his neck awkwardly. “Anyway, I was going to order food from the Caribbean place down the street… but I wasn’t sure what you wanted.”

“Very on theme, I approve.” Magnus pulled out his phone, scrolling through the menu on his delivery app. “Wait— you know I can just conjure any of this, right?”

“Well… that’s the other reason I didn’t order already,” Alec confessed. A light blush graced his cheeks as he shifted on his feet. He was downright bashful.

“I see how it is,” Magnus teased. “Getting more comfortable with exploiting my skills now, are you?”

“You take coffee from the Roastery almost every day, and I see how your ‘payment’ works, so,” Alec shrugged. “Yeah— It’s less weird for me now.”

“Alright well then… you tell me what you want to order, and I’ll have it here faster than you can say Isla Tortuga.”

He didn’t just conjure their food— he also conjured enormous tropical frozen cocktails, each its own unique rainbow of color. Going the extra mile, he changed into a billowing linen shirt and brown leggings that he could write off as looking like pirate trousers. He even added his chain of skull beans carved out of real bone by a voodoo priestess, and an actual piece of cursed gold he’d stolen from a prince of Venice after he stood Magnus up for a date. If nothing else, Magnus was thorough when it came to a theme.

“Don’t worry if the drinks don’t seem potent enough,” Magnus reassured Alec. He snapped his fingers, a thick layer of clear alcohol floating on the top. “I planned on adding an extra floater of rum anyway.” He winked. “We can’t have the rum being gone too quickly, am I right?” The joke was lost on Alec. It sunk in for Magnus that the ex-Shadowhunter had never seen Pirates of the Caribbean. He pushed back the outrage and settled down for the movie.

As they all snuggled up in front of the TV— the kids on the blanket, picnic style, the boys on the
couch with their food on their laps—the cats started to circle the living room like vultures, waiting for that split-second window where a plate was unattended, eager to swoop in and steal some jerk-rubbed chicken. A heaping plate of warm, surprisingly edible sugar cookies sat in the middle on the coffee table, filling the room with a pleasant vanilla aroma. As the sweeping overture filled the loft with thematically pirate-like sounds, Magnus reveled in how different this evening was compared to his actual evenings spent as a so-called pirate. It certainly smelled better, and there were quantifiably more children—two things which, in the past, he would have thought at odds with one another.

Neither of the children were scared by the movie at all, to Alec’s surprise. Aya laughed at every joke, and Keris clapped loudly every time the monkey was on screen—even as a zombie. Each cat successfully stole a piece of chicken, and fell asleep somewhere secret in the loft. By the end of the movie, despite the loud canon booms and exciting sword fighting, both kids were sleepy and eager to go to bed.

“You know,” Magnus started as he closed the door to Keris’ room. “Pirates of the Caribbean is kind of a bisexual icon when it comes to movies.” Magnus wiggled his eyebrows at Alec.

“Why? Because Orlando Bloom is in it?” Alec followed Magnus back into the living room.

“I’m surprised you even know who that is,” Magnus joked. “I mean, that’s part of the reason, yes—but it’s also because Kiera Knightly is in it. Both of the strong-spirited, wholesome love interests are incredibly attractive. Plus, Elizabeth is incredibly empowered, Will is emotionally available. Honestly it’s just,” Magnus gave a chef’s kiss into the air. “I mean honestly, it would be a wake up call to anyone who is even fleetingly interested in both genders. You’re given two of the best options delivered to you on a cinematic plate.”

“I mean, my other idea was because of Jack Sparrow—because you and him are a lot alike.” Alec fell onto Magnus, pushing them both onto the couch.

“We are not!” Magnus defended, pulling Alec more comfortably on top of him.

“You both drink a lot of rum, you know a lot of things, you have sordid reputations—”

“Alright, I see how it is—we’re breaking out the SAT words,” Magnus growled, fisting the front of Alec’s t-shirt and pulling him in closer. He knew they were both more than tipsy—Magnus had refilled the frozen drinks each time they emptied—each of the five times. But it didn’t matter how inebriated they were. They were home, they were safe, they were together.

“I thought you liked it when people used fancy words on you. I’m trying to get better with them,” Alec giggled, biting his lower lip and batting his eyelashes. He had to be making a farce of this—there’s no way he could look that adorable without calculated effort. “I thought you’d like it.”

“Alexander, I love any words you use. You know why?” Magnus lifted himself up, kissing Alec sloppily. “Because they come from your mouth,” he breathed against Alec’s lips. “And I love your mouth.” He captured Alec’s lips again, this time his tongue demanding entrance, sucking Alec in with everything he had, finishing it off with a nip at his tongue.

“More than you love me?” Alec chuckled, kissing Magnus back. Alec’s hand traced up Magnus’ chest, toying with the tangle of necklaces, sliding his fingers through the beads. Magnus’ eyes drifted down, and he was mesmerized by the movement of those deft fingers—all he could think of were all the places he’d rather have them than on his necklaces.

“It’s a close tie,” Magnus sighed. He did something he very rarely did—opened a portal directly
beneath himself that opened right above his bed. He grabbed onto Alec tightly— he’d feel awful if he lost Alec to limbo just because he was too thirsty— and they toppled onto the bed together in a mass of limbs.

“By the Angel, I love it when you do things like that,” Alec said as if it were a curse. He was making quick business of Magnus’ clothes, peeling the shirt over his head and shimmying down the waistband of his leggings. Right before he got them past Magnus’ hip bones, he paused. “Do you even know how good you look in these?” Alec palmed Magnus’ cock through the fabric, making it eagerly twitch beneath his hand. Magnus bucked his hips into the touch, wanting so much more than that meager amount of friction was providing.

“It’s just—” Alec didn’t finish, instead dipping down and pressing a wet kiss to Magnus’ groin. Alec’s breath was hot and moist, adding to the nearly unbearable heat that was already pooling there. Magnus felt so warm— so volatile— that his body threatened to explode. Alec moaned against the wet spot he’d created, his eyes rolling back in his head as his hands yanked down the waistband. He looked so beautiful— angelic even— despite the fact that he was being filthy. Magnus was incredibly thankful he’d chosen not to wear underwear, because it would have meant one more second without Alec’s mouth on his cock.

Alec sucked him in, and Magnus could have sworn his tongue was still a bit cold from his last mango margarita. As Alec’s cheeks hollowed and his jaw relaxed, Magnus felt his length bottom out in the back of Alec’s throat. With no sign of hesitation, not even a glimmer of water in his eyes, Alec took Magnus in and over, just as deep every time. His tongue traced the vein leading from Magnus’ scrotum all the way to his head, applying an even pressure that made his entire body curl. In barely a minute, Alec had Magnus on the verge of coming.

“Alexander,” Magnus panted. Alec made no move to stop. “Darling,” Alec kept going, so Magnus grabbed a fistful of Alec’s dark, wavy locks, pulling his head away from his cock. “If you don’t stop right now, this voyage is going to be over before it begins. And once my cannons fire, I’m going to be dead in the water— if you catch my drift.”

“Well then, we better hoist the sails and pick up speed then, captain,” Alec smirked. He let his hands slide down, scratching his nails across Magnus’ sides in a way that sent hot shivers across Magnus’ skin.

“Pirate jokes, Alexander? Really? I mean I know I technically started it, but still—” Magnus was cut off by Alec’s fingers tracing the rim of his ass. He hadn’t even noticed when Alec fully removed his leggings, or stranger, when he’d removed his own sweatpants. They were both in that happy place, tipsy enough where time sort of melted together, but they weren’t going to forget this in the morning. Everything was warm, a bit fuzzy, but it felt so good.

“What was that, Magnus?” Alec huffed valiantly, his lubed finger pushing slowly into Magnus. It made him want to thank Raziel himself for fashioning a nephilim with such perfect, long, fingers. Magnus didn’t even know how Alec got the lube without him noticing— or maybe Magnus had already lubed himself— that was a solid possibility.

“Nothing— I have no complaints in this scenario at all. You could start singing Rick Astley right now and I wouldn’t care.” Magnus gasped as Alec pushed in a second finger. “Fuck, I might need to reiterate—” Alec’s fingers grazed Magnus’ prostate. “— that thing I said about being close…”

“Tell me what you want, Magnus,” Alec leaned down quickly, murmuring in Magnus’ ear. “Tell me…”

“I want you inside of me,” Magnus moaned as Alec circled his fingers inside of him.
“I’m already inside of you,” Alec nipped Magnus’ earlobe. “Be more specific.”

“Fuck me, Alexander.” Magnus nearly cried out.

He heard the pop of a lube-bottle cap, and then in another fast-forward of motion, Alec was inside of him. His whole length, to the hilt, was almost too much to bear— Magnus should have let Alec open him up more— but it was everything he wanted. As Alec started to thrust slowly, Magnus realized that wasn’t what he wanted at all. He tightened his thighs around Alec and flipped them over as gracefully as they could. Alec looked surprised as he slid out of Magnus, his chest heaving from being thrown roughly onto his back.

“You asked me what I wanted,” Magnus breathed, grabbing Alec’s cock in his hand and lining it up properly. “And I want to ride you.” Magnus lowered himself down slowly until he bottomed out, barely letting his body get re-acclimated to the angle before starting to raise and lower himself. He tried to go slow— he genuinely did— but inevitably he found himself nearly bouncing on Alexander’s dick, his strong hands gripping Magnus’ sides as he met Magnus with matching thrusts.

They were messy, they were sloppy— they were nowhere near as elegant and coordinated as Magnus liked to think they normally were. But it was heavenly. He lasted longer than he thought he could, and by some beautiful act of fate, just as he found himself about to come, he felt Alec swell inside of him. The added girth pushed against Magnus’ sweet spot more, pushing him directly off the cliff with no hope of turning back. They came together, riding it out in what felt like an eternity of blinded bliss, but was probably a few seconds of writhing on the sweaty silk sheets.

Magnus couldn’t say when they fell asleep. He’d like to think they didn’t fall asleep on each other immediately after sex, but if he was honest with himself, it was probably what happened. It didn’t matter to him though— they were happy, they were safe, and Magnus wouldn’t have rather had fruity rum-drunk sex with anyone else.

Alec hated drinking. That’s what he decided. It was the first morning in days where he didn’t have to go to the Roastery for work, but he’d decided to still wake up early and take a long run. It should’ve been easy— his body was already on a schedule, he even had a protein shake before he left the loft— but every muscle was fighting him, screaming at him to turn around and go back to the loft— back to bed.

His head pounded, his stomach churned. He had a hangover.

Alec was aware of hangovers— he’d had them in the past— but he simply hadn’t felt drunk enough last night to get one. He’d had plenty of water, he ate while he was drinking, and after some amazing tipsy sex, he and Magnus had fallen asleep relatively early. By every formula he could think of, at least historically for himself, he should not have had a hangover.

But he was getting older, and he was essentially mundane, and objectively, it had been a lot of rum. He pushed through it, vowing to at least do his basic two mile circuit. He rationalized that route over one of the longer ones from his standard gamut since it meant he could swing by Dough on the way back to the loft and bring back donuts.

As he hit the end of mile one, his phone buzzed in the pocket of his windbreaker. It was a call from
a number he hadn’t saved in his phone.

“Hello?” He continued to jog in place, afraid that if he stopped, his body would give up.

“Mr. Lightwood? Sorry to bother you so early, but I just wanted to let you know that your apartment is good to go. It’s safe for you to move back in.”

“That’s—” Alec stopped. Suddenly, his throat felt dry, and the nausea in his stomach threatened action. “That’s great. When can my mom and I move back in?”

“You could move in now if you wanted to, nothing stoppin’ ya. We left the bill for the remaining charges on the counter,” the gruff voice said.

“Thanks, I’ll make sure to send that to you right away.”

“No problem.” The other line went dead, and Alec’s stomach decided it was finished with his protein shake. He doubled over the railing, losing his breakfast to the depths of the East River.

He could move home. He had no reason to keep staying with Magnus. He had to make a decision now, and he had no idea what to do.

Chapter End Notes

See you guys next week with the tattoo scene I’ve been promising, some Maryse + Luke action, and even more introspective Alec!
Chapter 49

Chapter Summary

Alec moved back into his apartment two days ago after the fumigators left, and he’s still having a hard time adjusting. Taking some time to reflect, both alone and with a dear friend, is exactly what he needs.

Chapter Notes

A bit shorter than normal, but enjoy! Times are tough right now and I just wanted to make sure I gave you guys all something to smile about.

The familiar sting of the tattoo needle against his neck was both comforting and exciting. He never used to trust anyone else to do this—but being with Magnus was teaching him a new type of unconditional trust that he hadn’t experienced in a while. He was growing more trusting overall—a quality he never thought he would develop.

But that wasn’t why he was in this chair. That wasn’t why he was having a pair of angel wings tattooed on the back of his neck. No—this was for himself.

It was therapeutic. He assumed this was what it might feel like to have a spa day—the allure of someone else painting your nails instead of doing it yourself. All of the tattoos Alec had so far were in places reachable by his own hand—his left arm, his hip bone, his wrist. He had plans for other reachable ones—inner thigh, ankle, inside his bicep—but of course he had plenty of ideas for places where it would be impossible to ink himself. A neck tattoo wasn’t an impulsive decision for him. It didn’t carry the same taboo for him as it did for some people, getting a tattoo in such a visible place. For years, he’d proudly worn the deflect rune on the side of his neck, stretching from his jaw to his collarbone. He never gave the placement a second thought. It was practical, easily reached with his stele, and—selfishly—he’d liked how it made him look.

By comparison, the small set of angel wings was nothing. If he grew his hair out long enough, in a few months it would barely be visible, since it hugged his hairline. It was an aesthetic placement by any opinion, but it would force him to be more stringent with going to the barber—something else that he hated that he couldn’t do well himself, normally putting it off weeks longer than he should.

“Doing okay, Lightwood?” Mel asked. “You’re giving me a river of blood here, and I know you’re not dumb enough to take aspirin before an appointment so...”

“Sorry—I had a bit too much to drink last night. My boyfriend taught me how to make Negronis.” Since moving back into his own apartment two days ago, Magnus had invited Alec over each night after the shop closed, plying him with enough liquor that it made Alec suspicious of his intentions. As the night drew to a close, he snuggled Alec tight, tempting him with murmurs of ‘Are you sure you don’t just want to stay?’ As enticing as it was, there was so much to be done around the
apartment. The fumigators had left behind quite a mess, and the place smelled awful. Sometimes there were just inconvenient facts that got in the way of desire, and maybe with magic to solve most of his problems, Magnus couldn’t grasp the amount of effort it would take to make a place smell normal again.

“Is your boyfriend a 75 year old Italian man?” She laughed.

“Actually, they’re my favorite cocktail.” Alec scrolled through Instagram. He didn’t follow a ton of people— mostly other tattoo artists and his closest friends and family— but these days his feed was almost completely Magnus. Magnus posted on Instagram at least two or three times a day, and he even made a separate account for each of his kids— managed by him, of course. Today’s pictures so far were a selfie of Magnus’ makeup, a video of Keris sadly eating spinach leaves, and a mirror picture of the three of them in matching sweat-suits captioned “time to teach these hoes how Brooklyn does hip hop.” Alec had no idea where that last picture was taken, but he had a sneaking suspicion that Magnus either added a room to the loft or temporarily converted one into a dance studio. It’s not like it would be much effort for him— he changed the layout of the loft all the time. Something inside Alec ached though, feeling left out because he didn’t know the concrete answer to that question, that the place he’d called home for two weeks was no longer the loft he knew like the back of his hand.

“Psh, I should have expected as much from you,” Mel scoffed. A squeak from her rolling chair meant she was turning to her worktable, probably refreshing the black ink, or switching shading needles. Alec tried his best not to keep track of exactly what she was doing, otherwise he’d obsess over it. He didn’t know why that anxiety wouldn’t go away. When he was just starting out, he’d apprenticed under Mel for a while, using her wealth of experience to learn as much as he could from the highly skilled mundane. She was a great worker, and one of the most objectively cool people Alec had ever met— which meant she teased him incessantly for being so innocent and sheltered.

“Hey, I’m not totally uncool. I’m getting a neck tattoo,” Alec defended.

“You and every twenty-something girl who wants to look cute when she puts her hair up in a messy bun.” Alec couldn’t see her, but he could sense how hard she was rolling her eyes. “And stop laughing, unless you want to end up with a bunch of shaky lines on your neck for the whole world to see.”

They fell back into the unique brand of comfortable silence that made Mel one of Alec’s favorite people. She could keep up a conversation well enough, but she was one of the rare conversationalists that had also mastered the art of silence. For a while, Alec allowed his mind to completely zone out, emptying his head of thoughts as quickly as they came in. He stared at no spot on the floor in particular, his head turned down away from the lights, the half-darkness of the position luring him with the promise of sleep. Sleeping during a tattoo would be a horrible idea, especially since when people doze off unexpectedly, they often wake with a jolt. Alec only had it happen in his chair once or twice, and thankfully it had been with vampire clients whose botched tattoos would disappear in a few weeks. But Alec was mundane— his wouldn’t.

The faint vibration of his phone in his hand— barely palpable in comparison to the buzz of the tattoo needle— shook him back to awareness. It was two texts back to back, from different people. In Mel’s basement shop, his phone sometimes lost service for a minute or two, leading to a flood of messages when it reconnected. The first was from Magnus, a string of emojis that at least to Alec, came off as completely random. He stared at them for a few minutes before giving up and checking the next message— one from Clary.
Hey! I just saw your message, I slept in! Yeah! I’m free tonight! What’s the plan?!

Alec assumed from the five exclamation points that she was excited about his invitation to have a night out. It would be the first time in weeks—or months, now that Alec thought about it—where it would just be the two of them, at least outside of work. He wasn’t sure what inspired him to extend the olive branch. It could have been the loneliness of going from living with Magnus and the kids to living alone again. Maryse had decided to stay with Luke a bit longer, and there was a solid chance that she would never move back in, whether she admitted it or not. Needless to say, Clary needed a break, and Alec needed some company. Trying his best to text with just one hand, he sent a response.

Dinner at Juliette, bar hopping in Williamsburg?

Sounds great! What time?

I put in a res for 6, since last time we waited an hour for brunch. Sleepover after? Bring Pjs?

Sleepover?! Really?! Are you sure?!

If you want, of course.

I’ll come by before then so I can drop off my stuff and we can walk there together.
Perfect, see you then.

He locked his phone— that was the only conversation he really had to focus on right now, and he wanted to go back to zoning out. But an insistent train of buzzes refused to let him relax. It was a flurry of messages, one after the other. Alec just watched them come in, waiting until Magnus was done.

Magnus 12:55
I hope you weren’t too confused.
I’m not the most adept emoji user, but if I were to send you a few…
...
...
...
I was going to be clever and just put the emojis but that might confuse you more.
Let’s just say
It would have the eggplant, and the peach, and…
UGH no it will make much more sense if I just put it

or perhaps
or even more graphically
but I’m more fond of the produce 😊

Alec smirked at his phone, biting back a blush.

Alec 12:56
In that message, am I the peach, or are you?

Magnus 12:57
Darling, you can be whichever you like.
There are few things as awkward as showering after a new tattoo, but Alec had no other option. The adrenaline had a way of making him so much sweeter than normal, and he had too much dignity to go out smelling badly. Working around the gel bandage on his neck made the shower less than enjoyable, and it made his hair look like a mess since he had to awkwardly half-hold his head under the spray. As he followed the beeping sound of the dryer, sauntering through the empty apartment in just a towel, he still didn’t quite feel entirely clean. He sniffed the clothes in the dryer, checking to see if the strange fumigation smell was out of them. Beneath the sage and cedar-wood fragrance of his dryer sheets, he could still catch a faint chemical smell. It was going to have to do — Clary would be there any minute. He grabbed the whole load out of the dryer at once, his arms completely full of dark washed jeans, black boxer-briefs and v-neck shirts.

The second he threw his clothes on the bed— the bed that seemed so cold and unlived in compared to Magnus’ — the Clave appeared out of nowhere, hopping onto the pile of warm clothes, covering them in his orange and cream fur. Alec wanted to be mad, to shoo the cat away, but the Clave looked so happy that he didn’t have the heart to do it. Ever since bringing him back from Magnus’, the Clave had been hiding out in weird places, standoffish from Alec— he missed Chairman Meow. The two dramatically named cats had become far closer than anyone could have imagined.

Still a bit clammy from his shower, Alec pulled on his underwear and let The Clave enjoy his clothes pile while he shaved his face. A knock on the door startled him, nearly making him nick his face. Clary was early. “Coming!” He left his face half covered in shaving cream, dug through his clothes for a pair of distressed skinny jeans, and grabbed a t-shirt. Standing there shirtless, he realized there was no way he could put on a shirt without covering it in shaving cream, so he resigned himself to letting Clary in half-dressed. He ran to the front door, and opened it quickly, angling himself behind it so that the neighbors wouldn’t potentially see him looking ridiculous.

“Alec?” Clary peeked around the door. “Oh there you are!”

“Sorry, I look—”

“Like a half-shaven Santa Claus?” She laughed, closing the door behind her. She followed Alec to his room, and Alec was reminded just how comfortable it was having her around, how used to it he was. He thought about how often they used to do this before she got her memories back. But that wasn’t all, it wasn’t the full reason. Ever since he started dating Magnus, his time with Clary had tapered off as well. He felt guilty, but more than anything he realized he missed her.

“I—” he touched his face, feeling just how thick the cream was.”Yeah, I probably do.” As he walked back into his bathroom, he heard Clary drop her things on the floor and flop onto his bed. “I just have to finish up shaving and then we’re ready to go.”

“Really? Just like that?” Clary laughed. “I had no idea chest hair was the must-wear shirt of the season.”

“Hey— some people like the chest hair.” Alec poked his head out the bathroom to glare at her.

“I’m sure some people named Magnus Bane do, but I’m not sure if the people at the restaurant will. And I’m pretty sure most bars in New York have an unspoken no shoes, no shirt rule.”
“Are there bars that don’t?” Alec spoke carefully as he dragged the razor against his face.

“Have you never been to Florida?” She was acting as if she completely forgot about his Shadowhunter upbringing. He hoped she hadn’t— losing her memories a third time would be incredibly inconvenient.

“No, and I never want to.” He shook out his razor, briefly turning on the water to clean out the blades. “Everything I hear about it sounds terrible.”

“That’s incredibly closed-minded. There are pretty beaches, manatees, Disney World.”

“Okay— that makes me want to go even less,” he scoffed. “Of all the places in the world, any Disney theme park is at the bottom of my list.”

“Sure… so that video of you swinging Keris around to the Pirates of the Caribbean theme song was just a coincidence?”

“What video?” Alec saw himself blush in the bathroom mirror. He knew exactly what she was talking about, he could remember the exact moment, but he hadn’t realized Magnus had been taking a video. Even though he checked Magnus’ feed most days, videos sometimes got buried— especially ones posted at night.

“From Magnus’ Instagram?” she said as if Magnus’ Instagram was public domain knowledge.

“Of course you saw that,” he rolled his eyes. “But my statement stands. Just because I like some Disney movies doesn’t mean I want to go to a place with thousands of people, in the heat, with a ton of screaming kids and their parents.”

“Umm… are you sure that would really bother you?” Clary stood up, walking to the bathroom and leaning on the door frame. Only inches away from him, Alec could smell her vanilla-coconut body spray—a new choice for her. Mixed with the scent of his shaving cream, it tickled his nose and put him on the verge of sneezing. He took in a deep exhale, holding the razor away from his face just in case he did sneeze. When the urge passed, he got back to business, both on his shaving and the conversation.

“All the people? Of course.” He could only imagine the horrors of standing in long, serpentine lines, waiting for hours to get into a little ride that thousands of other people had slid their sweaty bodies into. The sounds, the smells, the overall tension of having that many people in a hot, humid environment all combined into what sounded like one of the circles of Alec’s personal hell.

“The kids part,” She clarified. “I don’t really see how that could bother you.” She scooted him out of the way, checking her makeup in the tiny mirror. Scowling, he bumped her hip with his, reclaiming the mirror to finish off his shave. He had a few patches left to go— her lipstick could wait.

“Oh, I mean, I guess that’s not the worst part, but it’s different than you know, hanging out with Aya and Keris.” Aya and Keris were only two children. Children Alec enjoyed being around. Children that Alec knew, that were mature for their age, that listened to their father most of the time and didn’t throw many public tantrums. They also had a father who could portal them away in a second’s notice if things got out of hand. Mundane families, on the other hand, had this terrible habit of letting their children throw themselves on the ground and scream at the top of their lungs, and thought the solution to it was yelling back at the kids. He had a headache just thinking about it.

“I hear it’s always different when they’re your kids,” she teased. “Oh my god I’m sorry, I didn’t
mean it like I did before in the shop, you know that right—” Her voice picked up, nervous—
covering her tracks. She froze for a second, staring at Alec in the mirror before fleeing to the
bedroom and flopping down on the bed. If they were going to have a good night, Alec had to stop
this guilt spiral immediately before it picked up too much momentum.

“Oh I know you didn’t,” Alec said plainly. “But I’m sure Magnus already gave you enough trouble
about it.” Alec turned the tap on, rinsing off his face. “You don’t need to walk on eggshells around
me. If I was still mad at you, you’d know.” He paused for emphasis. He didn’t want tonight to be
about heavy conversations. He wanted to just hang out, have fun, be like how they used to be.

“Hell hath no fury like Alec Lightwood’s scorn,” Clary recited dramatically. In revenge, Alec
flicked the water off his freshly washed hands onto her.

“I’m not a cat! Water doesn’t scare me!” She reached behind her on the bed, snatching up one of
Alec’s pillows and tossing it across the room. It hit him square in the face.

“That’s right, and you’re not a witch, so you won’t melt.” He groaned. “How else am I going to get
rid of you?” He flopped dramatically onto the bed, landing on his back. Clary mirrored his
position, laying completely down.

“So you did pay attention when we watched Wizard of Oz!” She beamed.

“Of course I did. It came in handy when we saw Wicked, remember?” He turned his head to her,
smiling. “We had to wait in that fucking line for three hours waiting for rush tickets?”

“Hey, just because I keep losing my shadow world memories over and over doesn’t mean I forget
other things!”

“Are you sure? Because you keep forgetting that Aya and Keris are not actually my kids.”

“Oh, as if you don’t forget it too.” She jabbed his side playfully with her pointy elbow.

“Well… maybe I do,” he admitted, sitting up, “Which is why we are having a friends’ night
tonight. No boyfriends, no Simon Lewises, just us.”

“Just us.” Clary smiled. “Wait—” she stopped. “Turn around! Let me see your neck!”

“Oh wait, I didn’t tell you?” He scooted around, showing her the still-wrapped tattoo.

“What is it? Let me see!” her fingers started to poke at the bandage.

“Clary if I take off the saniderm, I can’t put it back on.” He swatted her hand away.

“You have more downstairs in the shop if you really feel like you can’t air dry.” She grumbled.

“Now show me!”

“Fine!” He acquiesced. “But can you peel it off for me? It’s easier if you do.”

“But it’s full of plasma!”

“Tough,” Alec shrugged.

“You wouldn’t go out with it looking like this, would you? It looks like a huge black lava lamp on
your neck.”

“Yes, I would, if I wanted my tattoo to heal properly!” He defended. “Honestly, have you learned
“Anything I taught you?”

“Yeah but like… you can’t see it yourself, it looks so gross.” She slowly started to peel off the saniderm, and Alec winced back at the pain. Just as suddenly as she had her outburst, she fell silent. “Alec…” she said meekly. “Angel wings?”

“Do you not like it?” Alec felt his breath self-consciously hitch.


“Thanks, it’s been something I was thinking about for a while, and I mean— I can’t do it myself. Maybe you can give me my next one?” He walked to his closet and grabbed the shirt he’d washed the day before, shaking out the remaining wrinkles.

“You’d let me do that?” Clary’s face lit up in surprise.


“Thanks, it’s been something I was thinking about for a while, and I mean— I can’t do it myself. Maybe you can give me my next one?” He walked to his closet and grabbed the shirt he’d washed the day before, shaking out the remaining wrinkles.

“You’d let me do that?” Clary’s face lit up in surprise.

“Of course— I was always kind of hoping I could be your first.” Alec laughed dryly. “After Simon, of course, since he can self-heal any mistakes.”

“Oh my god, I am so happy you made a reservation. That line outside was ridiculous!” Clary sipped at her mojito. “Like we are going to be done eating by the time we would’ve made it halfway through the line!”

“I couldn’t have waited that long to eat. I would have ended up running to the bodega and grabbing a snack,” Alec scooped a piece of escargot from the shell with his tiny fork.

“Which would be nowhere near as good as these snails. I can’t believe you got me to eat snails.” Clary painted on a face of concentration, trying hard to maneuver her small fork.

“I mean, Magnus somehow convinced me to try it.” A stray pothos vine from the ceiling fell in front of his face, and he brushed it away, safely looping it around another vine. The whole top of the room was covered in what had to be hundreds of hanging plants, making a canopy of foliage that would make any Seelie feel at home, despite the fact that it was a mundane restaurant. “I mean growing up, I didn’t get a lot of choices in the Institute cafeteria so it’s not like I’m picky, but snails were still a bit off-putting at first.”

“Hey Alec!” A familiar voice called over.

“Bat!” Alec smiled. He quietly slid a few folded bills out of his jeans pocket, cupping them in his hand. “It’s nice to see you.”

“Nice to see you too, bud.” Bat winked, smacking his hand into Alec’s in an informal handshake. When he stepped back, the money was gone. “This can’t be a date, unless the famous Magnus Bane had a lot of work done.”

“Oh this is Clary, she’s like my sister.”

“Clary Fray?” Bat whistled. “Damn. I never really got a chance to meet you but… Damn. I mean you are… high-key famous. I’m Bat… I hang around with the Hunter’s Moon crowd, if you catch
my drift.” Alec watched as he dramatically flashed his green eyes.

“Bat sometimes DJs at Pandemonium too.” Alec added.

“When I’m not involved in my other side-hustles.” He smiled a wicked grin. “Anyway, nice seeing you Alec.” He shook Alec’s hand again, this time passing over a small plastic bag with two vape cartridges. “And you too Clary.” He saluted.

“Wait is he like— even eating here?” Clary scrunched her eyebrows, following Bat out the door with her eyes.

“Probably not.” Alec laughed, discreetly opening his palm to show Clary before stashing it in the pocket of his shirt.

“When did you get so badass?!” Clary gasped, slapping Alec’s arm playfully. He shrugged, saved by having to respond to the compliment by the waiter bringing their dishes.

“So,” Clary continued, popping a piece of roasted cauliflower in her mouth. “Tell me what we’re doing with the rest of the night…”

“Oh I mean, nothing set in stone. Just Ubering to a neighborhood with some bars that we’ve never been to before.”

“Where? I mean… we’ve been around.”

“You’ll see!”

Chapter End Notes

See you next week!

<3

There will be:
The continuation of this storyline
Lightly stoned/crossfaded Alec and Clary being adorable
Installation art (which takes on a new meaning if you're a bit stoned)
More cuteness
Lots of messages sent to Magnus

<3 <3 <3

And a tie-in to two different relationships we haven't seen in a while! We are in the home stretch here, even if it doesn't feel like it-- and there is still so much left to do! Only about 15 chapters left, including flashbacks but not including any interludes that come to mind. Whew!

I am working on another story at the moment and I'm not sure if it's going to get off the ground so I don't want to give too much away, but I promise I'll still keep up with my 1 chapter a week for this because I love this story so much and it makes me so happy to write. Love you guys!
Chapter 50

Chapter Summary

While Clary and Alec are out on their adventure, Magnus has some much needed relaxation time. Once Alec and Clary wrap up their night, still tipsy and a bit faded, it's time for snacks and a good heart-to-heart.

Chapter Notes

Sorry I'm late posting. Life stuff happened and got in the way of fantasy life stuff that makes me happy. But I'm back! With a goofy chapter that is mostly fluff but also some good clarification of everyone's emotions! A lot of this is strangely inspired by what I've been doing at home (read as: watching at home) so I apologize in advance for some odd references!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Holy shit this is so cool!” Clary twirled around slowly, the light reflecting on her white-lace bohemian dress. “The whole walls are screens! With cherry blossoms!”

“I was worried you wouldn’t like it,” Alec yelled over the loud droning ambient mood sounds. “I don’t know a lot about installation art, but Magnus took me here once for a different exhibit.” The exhibit he’d dragged Alec to was a bit less tame than the sakura themed one— it had been an oddly phallic VR experience inspired by some artist named Yayoi Kusama. Apparently she and Magnus had been close friends back in the 1960’s, hanging out in her strange infinity mirror rooms— which were coincidentally, also unnecessarily phallic. They were also polka dotted, which Alec didn’t want to think too much into. Needless to say, this cherry blossom exhibit was much better.

“So,” she drawled as she sat down on one of the minimalist stools, waving down a bartender. “Were you high too when Magnus brought you here, or did you think of that idea yourself?”

“I—” Alec stammered. That had not been his intention, but in retrospect, it would have been a solid decision.

“Because it was an amazing idea,” Clary swooned.

They ordered two drinks, each pale pink and glittery, reminding Alec of the fancy cocktails Magnus often made with magic— firing, smoking, glistening. A pang of melancholy struck him— for the past few weeks, he’d had cocktails with Magnus every night. It was a peaceful, post-kid’s-bedtime ritual, a reward for making it through. That thought spiraled Alec down another train of thought. He hadn’t been there for the kids’ bedtime in three days. He hadn’t changed a diaper in three days. Nobody begged him for a snack— except, of course, The Clave.

“Alec?” Clary clinked her reusable metal straw against her glass, stirring passively. Of course she would fit a reusable straw in her purse before a night out. “Where’d you go? You zoned out on me for a bit.”
“Nothing, it’s just…” he sighed.

“You miss Magnus, don’t you? And the kids?” she asked, quirking her head to the side endearingly. “That’s okay. You essentially lived with them for a few weeks. It’s back to your old routine now.”

“What? Are you going to miss my mom when she moves out of your place?” Alec laughed.

“Not in the same way,” Clary giggled, taking a sip of her drink.

“Ew, thanks for putting that image in my head.” Alec gulped down the rest of his drink, which he now realized had actual cherry blossom petals in it. It was awful, but he choked it back anyway. “You know, I asked her today when she’s coming back, since I finished all the cleaning and stuff. She didn’t really give me a straight answer.”

“Yeah— she seems pretty happy where she is.” Clary raised her eyebrows nearly to her hairline. He could only imagine how it must feel to be Clary, to have another maternal woman in her house after her mom passed. But she didn’t seem annoyed— her dry laugh and feigned skepticism was more… knowing. He had an idea what she was getting at— that Maryse might want to stay with Luke for the long term. They’d been dating for quite a while, it would make sense to move in together— but that wouldn’t make it any less strange for Clary.

“Sorry my mom’s a freeloader,” Alec chuckled.

“She’s not that bad. She just always tries to get me to wear a jacket, and tells me that I listen to too much music and don’t read enough.”

“I think she doesn’t know what to do with a daughter who’s not… Isabelle-ish.”

“I am, unfortunately, nothing like Izzy.”

“Well, Izzy’s not fun to go to bars with, that’s for sure.” Once. Alec had gone to a bar with her once. It was an absolute disaster. She somehow ended up causing three guys to fight over her— despite the fact that she was not single at the time— forcing Alec to intervene. She drank nothing except shots, and had a penchant for screaming random things in Spanish.

“Why?”

“Too much attention from random dudes.” Alec shook his head. “Plus, she’s loud. She likes to dance— like a lot.”

“Well I think that sounds like… a lot.”

“You’re much quieter. It’s preferable.”

“Do you know where the bathroom is in this place? Because from what I see,” Clary sat up straighter, spinning around on her bar stool, scanning the expansive exhibit hall. “It’s just a big cube room, with other cubes to the side, with no bathroom sign.”

“Oh there are bathrooms— and they’re specifically designed for mirror selfies. It even says that in the description for the exhibit. You’ll see.”
Magnus Bane was certainly not brooding. Sure, his gorgeous boyfriend was out on the town without him. Yes, he had baby spit up on his shoulder. Perhaps he was getting drunk by himself on the rooftop patio, but no—he was not brooding.

Throughout his centuries of life, he learned that the best way to get himself out of a funk was to change the scenery, change the ambiance, and change his clothes. That was before his clothes were frequently covered in ambiguous child fluids. Now that this was the case, it was more important than ever. In a Cinderella-esque moment, he waved his hands around him in a cloud of blue sparkling magic, conjuring the vintage kimono from the back corner of his closet that was a bit too fancy to wear around the house normally. With its long flowing sleeves and delicate custom screen printing, he never wanted to risk the Chairman mistaking it for curtains and shredding it. But on his rooftop terrace, completely alone, the garment was safe.

He lit the glass fire pit with glowing green warlock fire—warm and cozy, but posing no risk to the infrastructure of Western Brooklyn. Snacks and beverages were still missing, so with a wave of his hand he covered the table beside his chaise lounger with charcuterie, petits fours, and a bottle of twenty-year aged whiskey. Finally, it was perfect.

With the children in bed, the fire pit burning high, and his favorite music blasting from the speaker system, he was thriving. And beneath his silk kimono, he was naked, nothing between his body and the sky. It was his own house, and he could do what he wanted.

Breaking the perfect peace, his phone pinged. He cursed himself for not silencing it, fumbling in the cushions of the lounger to dig up the wretched device. Once he saw the name in his notification bubble, any irritation he felt melted away. It was from Alexander—and it was a picture.

Not just a picture, but a selfie—in a mirror. In a mirror, wearing the shirt Magnus bought him last week with the roll-up rainbow cuffs, the top four buttons undone, showing off the top of his pecs and his gorgeous chest hair. He looked like a model in the pink glowing lights, his face lightly flushed from alcohol, his pupils wide-eyed and dilated, probably from a bit of weed. It was his boyfriend—young, gorgeous, having fun. Magnus desperately wished he was there with him—he even knew exactly where that bathroom was, he could easily portal there—but this was Alec’s sacred time with Clary. Not to mention he couldn’t leave the two kids alone at home. That was definitely the most important factor. He couldn’t, shouldn’t, wouldn’t interfere with Alec’s night.

He was just grateful for all the cute pictures he got out of the deal.

“You know what I could really go for right now,” Clary sighed, snatching the vape pen from Alec’s hand. He tried to play keep away, holding it too high for her short frame to reach, but she jumped up and somehow grabbed it anyway.

“What?” He exhaled the breath he’d been holding in his lungs, coughing a little. He watched as the light breeze slowly carried away the smoke, admiring how it swirled and hovered in the air. It was a crisp but humid early spring night. The city smog was lifting out of it’s winter freeze, the water was evaporating more—but all that unpleasantness was countered by how nice it was to not need a jacket.

“Ice cream. I know it’s not technically warm enough for it but—”
“Yes!” Alec cheered. “Yes, 100%, ice cream.” Alec’s stomach rumbled just at the prospect of sugar. It had been hours since dinner, and the bar at the gallery hadn’t had any snacks— he was starting to get very hungry.

“Where should we go?” Clary exhaled, waving away the cloud of vapor from her face.

“What’s open right now?” Alec asked, realizing it was a stupid question.

Alec pulled out his cellphone and went to type in a quick search. The only problem was that in his inebriated state, his long fingers were certain to fumble over the keys. He pressed the microphone button and barked out his search.

“Ice cream near me, open now!”

“Does that ever really work for you?” Clary laughed, shaking her head.

“Here are five places within a quarter of a mile from you.” The virtual assistant’s voice responded.


“Okay, this can’t be the name of the place…” Alec tapped on the screen, looking at the information for the first shop on the list. It was ridiculous, there was no way this was a real business.

“What is it?” Clary hovered over his phone, her wavy hair tickling his cheek.

“Big. Gay. Ice. Cream.” He said each word for emphasis.

“It’s decided,” Clary declared. “We’re going.”

“Oh fuck— it looks like it’s on the other side of the bridge actually. You were right, I shouldn’t trust technology.”

“What’s the big deal? We can just walk across the bridge.” She walked on the edge of the sidewalk, one foot in front of the other like a balance beam. “I’ve done it like, a thousand times.”

“Clary, that’s going to take like… thirty minutes to walk.” It wasn’t like Alec hadn’t done it before— it was a part of a few of his standard running routes— but doing it at night, slightly drunk, slightly high, felt like a daunting task.

“I’m cool with that. It’s more fun than taking the subway.” She skipped a few feet ahead of him. “It’s why I never wear heels!”

Another picture popped up on the screen of Magnus’ phone.

It was Clary staring out over the water on the Brooklyn bridge. Immediately, two more came through— one of Alec, with the Manhattan skyline in the background, and then a selfie of both of them, outlined by the arches of the bridge in the distance. He tapped out a quick response, not wanting to spark a conversation that Alec would feel obligated to be invested in, wanting to respect his night out.
Magnus 12:30 PM

Look at the adventure you two are getting into!

He tapped send, realizing another cheeky addition.

Magnus 12:31 PM

I bet I could see you from my house right now, if I tried *really* hard

To Magnus’ surprise, Alec responded immediately.

Alec 12:31 PM

We’re getting ice cream! Aya would be jealous!

Even inebriated, on a night out, Alec was still thinking about Magnus’ children. It hit him that Alec was actually thinking about him a lot in general. Sending pictures, tiny texts— he didn’t have to do that. Magnus didn’t expect that. Alec was doing it because he wanted to, and that made Magnus’ heart sing. He poured himself a glass of sparkling almond wine— he’d moved on from whiskey a while back, feeling like it fit the mood of his playlist more. It felt celebratory— he was basking in the glow of his relationship and indulging in it. Feeling the effects of his own bottle of wine, and in the mood to gloat, he tapped out a text to Ragnor.

Magnus 12:35 PM

Have I ever told you how in love I am with my boyfriend?

There was no response for a while— which wasn’t altogether surprising considering it was many hours ahead in England, making it very early in the morning— but Magnus wasn’t going to let it bother him. He snapped his fingers and opened one of his favorite books— *The Picture of Dorian Gray* — and kicked up his feet, setting in for at least a few more hours of drinking and relaxing. Just when he was fully settled in, a blaze of fire appeared right in front of his book— a fire message.

*To Magnus, the thorn in my side:*
Please do not text me about such redundant things. I hear you sing this man’s praises, the praises spring eternal. I reserve my mundane phone for logistical reasons and business. Please do not clutter it with your lovesick musings.

Ragnor Fell

Sometimes Magnus wondered why he had such bristly friends. He was in the mood to talk, and it didn’t seem wise to talk to himself, so he scrolled through his contacts to see who else might tolerate his ranting about how much he loves his boyfriend. Catarina was out of the question. Either she was asleep or working—and she certainly wouldn’t want to be bothered by this. Raphael wouldn’t tolerate it either, plus this was the busiest time of the night for the Night Children. Isabelle was likely on some kind of night watch, plus she likely didn’t want to hear juicy details about her own brother. Magnus would feel guilty texting Tessa at such an early hour in the UK, but he knew it was likely she was up anyway, plagued by the late stages of her pregnancy.

Fuck it—he wanted to scream Alexander’s name by some proverbial digital rooftop, so he decided to give it a go. But just as he was about to send the text, another picture came through. Alec had an enormous, soft-serve ice cream cone, dipped in cherry sauce, covered in rainbow sprinkles. He was posing in front of a sign that said “Big Gay Ice Cream”, and making an altogether obscene gesture, whether intentional or not, pantomiming fitting his mouth around the monstrous ice cream.

This man was going to be the death of him.

“Shh, we gotta be quiet,” Alec whispered, climbing the last few creaky wooden stairs to his apartment. He slid his keys into the lock with a bit of tipsy difficulty, but nothing too embarrassing. It was always a gamble opening the door in the dark, since the cat had a terrible habit of door-darting, taking advantage of the cover of night to slip out under your feet the second the door was open.

“Why?” Clary giggled, stepping inside.

“The Clave—”

“Where!” she shrieked, hiding behind Alec. “But I don’t have any weapons!”

“No— not the Shadowhunters, I mean my cat,” he said, a bit exasperated. He was genuinely considering renaming the cat. He was tired of it causing panic and confusion—two things that Alec preferred to avoid.

“Ohhhhh, wait—you’re right. I’m just being a little paranoid I guess.”

“This is the last time I give you a sativa, Fray.” He rolled his eyes, flicking on the hallway lights. “I’m just saying, if the cat wakes up, he’s going to demand to be fed again. And I fed him before we left, so—don’t listen to him if he begs.”

“But can’t he have one treat?” Clary bent down, petting the cat, who’d already woken up. His blue
eyes were lidded and sleepy as he purred loudly and smacked his head against Clary’s legs. He stretched against her thigh, digging his claws into the lace. “Clave no! This is a new dress!” she shrieked.

“Pspspspsp,” Alec called the cat. “Come here Clave— I have some tuna treats for you.” The sound of the shaking bag of treats distracted the cat enough for him to let go of Clary’s leg, his claws disengaging safely, not tearing the dress to shreds. Dishing out the normal serving of treats— five for this enormous animal— Alec outstretched his hand. The cat gobbled them up quickly, prancing off contentedly to fall back asleep somewhere.

“This is why I’m more of a dog person,” Clary sighed, dusting off her dress.

“I know,” Alec laughed. “Magnus told me all the ways you tried to torture his cat when you were little.”

“Sometimes I forget how old your boyfriend is.” Clary followed Alec down the hall, kicking off her shoes and shedding her purse along the way without a care.

“I just… try not to think about it, you know?” Alec kicked off his shoes next to his closet, quickly sliding out of his jeans and into his pajama pants. There might have been a time where he was shy changing in front of Clary, but now, he didn’t really care. “If I think about it, it makes me all… confused.” He waved his hands in the air for emphasis.

“Unzip me?” Clary twirled around, craning her neck toward the zipper on the back of her dress.

“Sure,” Alec struggled to find the pull of the zipper— it was the same color as the dress, which in his opinion was a major design flaw. Once she was free of the garment, he turned away to be polite while she got into her pajamas, knowing she’d want to take off her bra. He was cool with getting dressed and undressed, but he still respected her space. He also had no interest in seeing boobs— ever— particularly not Clary’s.

“I’m decent now,” she proclaimed. Her PJs were pale green, printed with a pattern of shamrocks and lightsabers, with a design on the top that said “Yoda lucky one”.

“You realize St. Patrick’s day was weeks ago, right?”

“And you realize I’m a college student who relies on free pajama hand-outs from my family, which unfortunately for me, only gives gifts for holidays?”

“Hey,” Alec mocked offense. “I didn’t get a St. Patrick’s gift this year!”

“This one was from Simon, of course. It’s Star Wars.” Alec ducked into his bathroom, wet a washcloth with a bit of face soap, and handed it to Clary. She always forgot to take off her makeup after a night out. “Even I understand the Star Wars reference.”

“Well, technically it’s from his mom, Simon isn’t one of those wealthy, centuries old vampires.” Clary wiped the cloth lazily over her face in small circles. “Sometimes, that would be really convenient.” Folding the rag in half, she tugged at her eyelashes, removing her mascara.

“Nothing about vampires will ever be convenient.” Alec narrowed his eyes and crossed his arms. “I have to redo their tattoos every three weeks, and most of them complain the whole time. They’re always going to be a big pain in my neck.”
Realizing what he’d just said, they both burst into uncontrollable laughter.

“That was terrible, you should be ashamed, Alec Lightwood!” She threw the wet, makeup covered towel at him.

“Sorry, I learned most of my mundane social skills from this dumb girl named Clary Fray!” She scrunched up her nose at him in response. After a seconds-long standoff, all was quickly forgotten.

“What snacks do you have?” Clary pushed past Alec back into the hall, bee-lining toward the kitchen.

“You’re lucky I picked up some snacks this morning.”

“It’s morning right now,” Clary said cheekily.

“Yesterday morning.” He opened up the pantry cabinet, grabbing a box of girl scout cookies. “If you go in the fridge, there’s a bunch of drinks too, I’ve got grape juice.”

“What adult drinks grape juice?” Clary laughed, poking her head in the fridge.

“All adults do,” Alec grabbed a box of crackers and closed the cabinet with his hip. “Wine is grape juice.”

“Alec, this is concord grape juice. Like what I drank in kindergarten.”

“So maybe I got a taste for it when I was staying with Magnus and the Kids. What are you gonna do about it?”

“Pretend to give you grief, but secretly thank you, because for some reason right now I want grape juice more than I ever have in my entire life.”

“You’re not pregnant, are you?” Alec deadpanned. “Because Jace is not fatherly material yet. He is not ready.”

“No, I’m not pregnant, I’m high. I have the munchies.”

“Oh, right.” Alec grabbed two plastic cups from another cabinet and shuffled back to his room. “What do you want me to put on until we fall asleep?” Alec put the snacks on his side table, grabbing his laptop and opening it up on the bed. He and Clary settled into bed cross-legged, digging into the snacks quickly.

“I don’t know, something relaxing?”

“I’ll put on one of Aya’s favorite shows.”

“As good as I’m sure her taste is, I don’t want to watch a children’s show.”

“It’s not a children’s show, don’t worry. It’s something much worse.” He tapped around on his laptop until he found the show he was looking for.

“No, I refuse to watch this.” Clary crossed her arms dramatically, holding the pose until she realized it heavily limited her grape juice drinking potential.

“What’s wrong with Ancient Aliens? Give it a chance, it’s relaxing.” Alec threw a whole cookie in his mouth, a bit overwhelmed by chewing so much caramel.
“If you’re going to make me watch this, I’m going to ask you annoying questions the whole time.”

“About the show? Go ahead— that’s kind of the point.” He munched on a cracker, washing it down with juice. The familiar opening sequence of the show started, making him somehow feel immediately at home. He felt like he was on the couch with Aya, eating snacks while she was fully engulfed in the goofy show about aliens throughout history. He could almost hear her bizarre commentary, her off-the-wall personal alien theories, and her thousands of questions about why Magnus didn’t know more about aliens.

“No, asking questions about the show would be too easy. I’m going to ask you hard questions.” Clary lowered her voice low. “Personal questions.”

“Fine I’ll turn it off then—” Alec huffed.

“Too late! You dug this hole.” She wiggled a bit, readjusting her position to sit taller, looking proud of herself. “Okay— first question: Are you in love with Magnus?”

“That’s a stupid question,” Alec refused to look at her, to give into her scheme. Instead he stared at his laptop screen, watching some strange image sequence about how Mayan sculptures were depicting men in space suits. “Of course I’m in love with Magnus.”

“When did you say ‘I love you’?” She giggled.

“December, Christmas Eve actually,” Alec started.

“That’s so romantic—” Clary cooed, but Alec cut her off.

“While I was balls-deep inside of him.”

“Eww, that’s too much information.”

“You asked,” Alec shrugged. Normally he wouldn’t offer up so much personal information, but the combination of waning inebriation, exhaustion, and desire to playfully annoy Clary was making him a bit more bold. “Plus, it was in front of the fireplace. I think that counts as romantic, right?” She looked at him with what was still an appropriate amount of disgusted alarm.

“Okay, when are you moving in with him? Like for real this time?”

“I’m not— not yet at least.” Alec felt his jaw tighten on its own volition at the mention of that topic. As if it weren’t on the forefront of his mind anyway, the decision of whether or not to move in with Magnus and the kids worked its way into every conversation. It was excruciating, because while it would be so easy to say yes, he didn’t want to risk taking the plunge too soon. It could hurt more than just him and Magnus— it would hurt Aerulei and Keris— and Alec wasn’t going to risk that just because his emotions were telling him to jump in.

“What, has he not asked you?” she asked incredulously.

“No he did, but I said I’d think about it.” Alec paused, chewing nervously on the inside of his cheek. “And then the apartment was ready after the fumigators left, and I had to come back here to clean so I just… did. I mean he understood. I just… never answered the initial question.”

“Are you insane?” Clary chucked her half-eaten cookie at him. It bounced off his shoulder and landed somewhere under the dresser. Great— he just had the exterminators in the house, and now he was going to have ants. “That probably hurt his feelings so much!”
“Nah it wasn’t like that. It wasn’t an ultimatum, or like… him begging me or anything.” Alec dusted the cookie and cracker crumbs off his shirt, changing his position on the bed so that he was laying on his stomach, propped up on his elbows. From this vantage point, he could still pretend to watch tv if he wanted to— for protection. “Sometimes, Magnus is a bit impulsive. He feels something and just… goes for it.”

“He does tend to lead with his heart…” Clary slowly ate a cookie. In the reflection of the screen, Alec could see that her eyes never left him. She was searching for nonverbal clues, and he wasn’t giving any.

“And I love that about him, but sometimes,” Alec sighed. “I have to remind myself that this is new for him too. Sometimes I default to his judgement because he has so much more life experience, but in this case, we’re on even ground. He’s never had kids before, so he’s never had a significant other around his kids before.”

“So you think he didn’t know what he was asking?” She hugged her knees up to her chest. Her feet brushed Alec’s side— they were freezing.

“There are fuzzy socks in my top drawer— grab two pairs.” Alec leaned away from her cold feet. “What? They’re like two ice cubes. I’m not going to let you suffer under my roof.”

A few minutes later, they’d settled into a comfortable silence, their feet warm and cozy, both on their stomachs, staring at his laptop screen. As the credits came up on what was either their second or third episode, Alec spoke up.

“I want to be with him more than anything— not just Magnus, but the whole family. But I don’t want to do it the wrong way, you know? And if he doesn’t know the right way, and I don’t know the right way, then we should just take things a bit slower, wait until we’re sure.” Alec sat up, sliding under the covers and resting on the pillows against his wall. Clary followed him, and he settled the laptop back on their laps.

“So you’re going to go all ‘traditional guy’ on him and not move in until you’re married?”

“Oh, I’ll push you— literally— ” She bumped against his side. “Just… not for this. I’ll push you for stuff like ice cream, or a night off from my shift at Inkwell, to take cooking duty for Easter dinner, but I won’t push you about Magnus. I’ve… learned my place.”

“There’s no way in hell I’m proposing to Magnus Bane with a twist-tie.” Alec jabbed her with his elbow.

“So you are going to propose to him.”

“Don’t push me, Fray,” he said warmly.

“If I’m not going to propose with a twist-tie, then I’ll propose with a really impressive ring to propose to Magnus Bane. That man is very passionate about finger jewelry,” Clary yawned. She burrowed into the covers, pulling the comforter up high under her chin. “On second thought, the way he loves you— he might say yes to a twist-tie.”

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“Is your place hogging more than half the bed? Which should be impossible, because you’re so small…”
“Yeah Alec,” she smiled, resting her head against his shoulder. “It is.”

Four hours— that’s how long Jace had been on patrol of Hell’s kitchen and Chelsea Piers. There had been a report of a sea-demon sighting the night before, but so far he hadn’t gathered any evidence to support that. His sensor was barely buzzing— it was quiet compared to the baseline New York demon activity standards.

He was jolted from his half-focus by a different buzz— from his cellphone. His heart skipped when he saw the name in the notifications. Alec had sent him a picture— a picture of Clary. She was holding a huge blue ice cream cone, sauce covering her lips, looking up at Alec with a shameless grin. But what really got him was the caption.

Alec 1:10 AM
Cute?

Chapter End Notes

Whew! That was a lot of talking for Alec Lightwood, wasn't it?

Side note, I might switch my publish dates to Sunday, I hope that is okay!

I'm doing some rework on the plotline for this story, so I can't make any promises for next week's chapter.... but I'll make sure to put the babies in it because I miss them as much as you do. When I don't write them, it makes me sad. But when I don't write Clary x Alec friendship, I also get sad! And the whole point of this is to be happy so... sorry, I'm ranting.

See you guys next weekend!
Interlude: Hippity Hoppity

Chapter Summary

A flashback to Aerulei’s first Easter.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! I know this is just a small taste, but it's topical, so, here you go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Three Years Ago

“Aerulei Bane,” Magnus breathlessly exclaimed. “Get that bunny rabbit out of your mouth this instant!”

“Baa—” the baby cooed, wrapping her mouth around the pointy white ear, her tongue the same color as its pink skin. “Baa— nee.”

“Oh my goodness,” Magnus cooed, falling to his knees. “She said bunny! Did you hear that Ragnor?”

“Remind me why I’m here again? Because if it’s to monitor your wildly oscillating attitudes toward this infant, I’d rather be at home.”

“It’s Easter, Ragnor,” Catarina said, popping the cork off a bottle of Prosecco with ease. Magnus was always amazed at how she did it without any pomp and circumstance. With a waiter’s napkin in her hand, she simply pulled off the cork—it barely made a sound. Whenever Magnus opened champagne, the cork went flying in unpredictable directions, denting ceilings, shattering lights, and one time blinding a three-eyed pixie in her mind’s eye. He wouldn’t repeat that four hour healing session for anything—his magic just wasn’t suited for it.

“Exactly, Ragnor—it’s Easter.” Magnus reached out, scooping the bunny and depositing it a few inches away from his curious daughter. “If anyone can appreciate a resurrection, it’s you. How many times have you faked your death, only to magically return? Three, four times?”

“Five if you count the time he stopped his heart just to prove a point.”

“Oh! That was in 1983 when he said that if I got one more piercing, he’d drop dead!”

“Mister Bane, but you only have your ears pierced?” Dorian said as if it were a question, his head finally lifting from his book. He was at that strange age of prepubescent where his hair was growing just as fast as his body—twice as curly, twice as oily—making him look a bit like an untamed shrub. It almost completely hid his horns. If it wasn’t for his green skin, he would almost pass for a mundane.
“They’re the only piercings you can see —” Magnus mumbled to himself.

“Magnus! You need to learn how to filter yourself. I know you’re used to being around a child who can’t understand you, but one day, she will, and she will repeat everything you say.”

“Well that doesn’t sound very original,” Ragnor chided, holding out his glass to Cat for more bubbly. “Dorian Antony, if I catch you repeating anything I say, I’ll slit your tongue like a snake.”

“I wouldn’t mind being a snake,” Dorian shrugged. “Aya has snake eyes, and she’s pretty cool for a baby, aren’t you Aya?”

“Aya!” She yelled, clapping her hands.

“Do you guys want to hear a joke?” Dorian asked, perking up.

“Again with the jokes?” Ragnor sighed.

“You shouldn’t stomp on his passions, Ragnor,” Cat scolded. “Go ahead Dorian, I’d love to hear your joke.”

“If Aya went to Hogwarts what house would she be in?” Dorian smiled.

“Let me guess,” Cat said dryly. “Is it Hufflepuff?”

“No, don’t be ridiculous.” Dorian rolled his eyes. “She’d be a Slytherin, because she has snake eyes.”

“See!” Ragnor defended. “It’s not a joke!”

“I agree, because I’m still not convinced they’re snake eyes,” Magnus mused, half to himself. “I think they might be cat’s eyes. I mean, they’re not super different.” He tickled at his daughter’s chin, watching those very eyes crinkle with her garbled giggles.

“Actually, they are,” Dorian corrected. “Mainly in the membranes, the way they blink…”

“I don’t have extra… membranes.” Magnus blinked slowly, trying to feel if his eyes felt functionally different glamoured as when they weren’t. “Just my pupils are… slit.”

“Well Aya has extra membranes. It’s why sometimes she looks like she doesn’t blink. She flicks the membrane across her eye. Just like snakes do. Therefore, snake eyes.” Dorian buried his face back in his book— on phylogeny.

“Well sue me for wanting my daughter to look like me!” Magnus focused back on the task at hand — posing Aya for her Easter photo with the soft white bunny. “Sayang, now I’m going to give you the bunny again, if you promise not to eat him.”

“Ba-nee. Papa!” She grabbed Magnus’ finger as he tried to pull his hand away.

“Aya, I need to take your picture darling. Now— hold still.”

“She is twenty-three months old. Sitting still is what she’s worst at.” Cat sighed. “Just take the picture, accept it as it is, and come eat some of this coconut cake.”

“If she’s almost two, why are you so impressed by her saying simple words?” Ragnor waved his hand over the cake, stealing half the jelly beans and depositing them in his palm. “My ward knows a ton of words.”
Magnus went quiet. It was a sensitive topic. While on the outside, Aya looked fine, she was behind on almost every milestone for her age. Considering that warlock children matured faster than mundanes, it was even more concerning. When he first got her, she was so small that he’d thought she was only six months old—it turned out she was a year old. In the past year, she’d made strides in catching up, and Magnus celebrated every small victory even if others thought it was ridiculous.

“Aerulei speaks more than Flora, so Magnus has every right to be proud.” Cat shoveled a bite of cake in her mouth. “Speaking of which, where did my daughter go?” Cat peeked up, looking around the room.

“Oh, she wanted to be wet, so I filled up the tub in my master bathroom for her.” Magnus arranged the silk flowers around Aya just so, looking through the lens on his phone to preview the image. “She’s been floating around in there a while.”

“Magnus! What if she drowns!” Catarina threw down her fork. “You can’t leave a child in a bathtub unsupervised!”

“She’s part jellyfish?” Magnus raised an eyebrow. “I wasn’t aware she could drown.”

“Well—I haven’t tested that hypothesis,” Cat huffed. “And I don’t want to find out!” She rushed out of the room at light speed, bounding off to the bedroom.

“That woman found a way to make herself even more tightly wound and overly serious.” Ragnor sat back in his chair, kicking up his feet to occupy the chair Cat had been in.

“Okay, I think I finally have it.” Magnus fluffed out Aya’s pink chiffon skirt, making sure her sparkly shoes were visible. “Look up at Papa, sayang.”

“No,” she whispered. “No pwink.” In a flurry of pale purple sparks, she patted her chubby hands against her skirt, the color flashing from pink to purple, one patch at a time.

“You just wanted to match your magic? Didn’t you?” He leaned forward, pressing a kiss to her cheek. It left a smattering of glitter from his lipgloss on her skin, which looked dashing against her blue eyes. “Now you can’t be uneven can you?” He kissed her other cheek. “Now it’s perfect.”

He clicked the screen once to adjust the lighting, and snapped at least twenty pictures. The bunny hopped into Aya’s lap halfway through, and the ear went right in her mouth again. He took five more pictures anyway.

Chapter End Notes

I'm officially changing my post date to Sunday.

It's been a bit harder lately to get writing in during the week, but I think I'm finally getting my motivation back. Thanks for sticking with me even though these past few weeks haven't been as strong as they normally are. I know it's rough for everyone, but writing this is super important for me because I just want to make as many people smile as possible.

So, hopefully I have more for you next week, some stuff that moves the story along.
<3
Chapter 52

Chapter Summary

It's the morning after Alec's night out, and Magnus can't wait for an excuse to see his boyfriend.

Chapter Notes

Here we go! Back to a normal chapter length!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Magnus knew it was objectively rude to enter Alec’s apartment unannounced, but desperate times called for desperate measures— and this morning's desperate situation was that a certain Keris Bane was being altogether too criminally adorable. If there were such a thing as cuteness police, he’d be in prison for life. Was Magnus biased? Of course. But Alexander was equally— if not more so— biased.

His choices could have been better— portalling to the front door and knocking politely— but judging by how late Alec and Clary were out last night, there was a solid chance Alec would sleep right through the disruption. Magnus could have also been worse— he could have portalled directly into Alexander’s bedroom and woke him up by crawling into his bed. That option could have landed the warlock on the bad side of Alec’s inborn Shadowhunter agility and reflexes, and he wasn’t willing to take that risk for the off chance of the entire thing panning out adorably. So, in a compromise with himself, Magnus chose to portal into the living room. Surrounded by all the trappings of the Lightwood’s modest apartment, his hands suddenly felt very empty.

Should he have brought breakfast? Something greasy to cure a hangover? He hadn’t seen his boyfriend in over twenty four hours— he wondered if that warranted some kind of present. At least a coffee, perhaps? He mused. His heart was aflutter, his palms a bit moist— he was anxious to see Alec. Anxious, as if the boy were a crush, and not the man he’d been dating for half a year. He settled on a coffee, a rich french roast from an obscure cafe in Montreal, and for good measure, he snagged a few warm rosemary sea-salt bagels from the famous St-Viateur bakery. Somehow, despite their acclaim, it didn’t feel like enough for his Alexander, not a grand enough gesture. He put the breakfast food on the quaint kitchen table and shook off the rest of his nerves, spiking up his hair and straightening his posture.

It was utterly ridiculous how nervous he felt, especially for an impulsive jaunt just to grab Alec and show him how cute Keris was. If he luxuriated too long in this puddle of anxiety, by the time he was collected, Keris might not be doing the adorable thing anymore. Not to mention, he probably shouldn’t leave the infant in the care of his daughter for more than five minutes. With newfound resolve at the sake of logic, he strutted down the short and narrow hallway and slipped into Alec’s room.

“Alexander,” he purred, cracking open the door to the dark and quiet bedroom. It was chilly, the
air thick with an odd assortment of smells that didn’t particularly seem familiar to Magnus. His attention wasn’t focused on his sense of smell for long though—what he saw made him instantly pause.

In all his wild and scattered thoughts, he never could have imagined walking in on Alec Lightwood in bed with a woman. Especially not Clary Fairchild. They weren’t in any compromising position, which made it a bit more believable, but the shock still remained. Magnus stared in awe for what felt like hours, his eyes detailing every angle of each limb, noting how they were barely touching yet still so warm and affectionate. Like siblings, like friends.

It finally struck him—they were having a sleepover. He glanced around the room—remnants of snacks, a laptop plugged in and propped up at the perfect viewing angle for Netflix watching, the goofy fuzzy socks both of them were wearing, visible as their feet poked out from under the comforter. They were like two teenagers, passed out on the bed after a fun night. He wondered if they stayed up late gossiping about boys. He secretly hoped so.

*Stick to the program, Bane.* He scolded himself. Clearing his throat, he crossed the room to Alec, trying not to disturb Clary too much.

“Alexander, wake up. I brought you breakfast. I’m sorry to wake you, but you have to see what Keris has gotten himself into. I promise it’s well worth the early wake up call.”

“Ung,” Alec grunted, covering his eyes with his forearm. “I’ll come out to the living room in five minutes, or should I meet you in the nursery?” Alec mumbled into the pillow. “I just need some time to wake up…”

*Come out to the living room. Meet you in the nursery.* Alec thought he was in the loft still. Magnus’ heart soared.

“I have a portal still open in the living room here, darling.” Magnus reached over, pulling down the covers from Alec. “Come on, you don’t want to miss what he’s doing, I promise.”

“Wait, portal—what?” Alec sat up abruptly, jostling Clary. She complained, still asleep, rolling over and drifting back off. “You left him alone? Magnus!”

“He’s fine, if anything were wrong I could hear through the portal. Plus, I’m wearing my monitor bracelet.” He raised his arm, jingling the pair of dark stone bracelets. “Plus, Aya is there. Come on—”

Magnus was cut off by Alec swiftly hopping out of bed, racing toward the living room. He strolled leisurely after him, not particularly worried. Why would he be? The best protector in the world was already heading toward his kids. Stopping in the kitchen, he grabbed the forgotten breakfast food before portalling back to his own home.

“Honestly Alexander, you worry too much,” Magnus scolded. “Now, let’s see if Keris is still on his warpath…” He put the breakfast down on Keris’ dresser and turned back to the crib. “Oh yes, perfect, it’s still happening.”

“*Alwek, Alwek, Alwek,*” Keris chanted, bouncing up and down in his crib. He gripped the rails tight, shaking his butt and head side to side in countermotion.

“What?” Alec joined Magnus at his side. Magnus could feel the warmth radiating from Alec’s body, still toasty from being tucked beneath his covers. It made him want to wrap his boyfriend up in his arms, carry him to the bedroom, and snuggle back in bed. But now wasn’t the time.
“See, he’s been doing this all morning. It’s rather clever— the dark hair, the hazel eyes. I think he missed you.”

“Alwek!” Keris screeched, finally noticing Alec. He reached his arms up high, opening and closing his fists, begging to be picked up.

“He got jealous that I look like you, Papa,” Aerulei chimed in, rocking back and forth in the nursery rocking chair. “And he missed Alec, so he decided that he wanted to look like the other da — ” she paused, her bright blue snake’s eyes darting back and forth between Alec and Magnus.

“The other boyfriend.”

“Pumpkin, that is so silly,” Alec whispered into the baby’s hair. “You’re so handsome the way you are, you don’t need to change just to get me to come back.”

“I don’t think that was totally it,” Aya corrected. “I think K-K just thinks you’re pretty.”

“Well thank you Keris, but I think we would all love it if you changed back, okay?” Alec held Keris out at arms’ length, far enough away to give him a serious, firm-yet-pleading look.

“No, look daddy.” Keris yelled, kicking his legs and scrunching his face.

“Ah, he’s on this again.” Magnus tried to sound cool to save face, to cover his son’s mistake. He couldn’t have Alec knowing that Keris was referring to him as Daddy, that he’d been doing it ever since Alec moved out. Alec was skittish enough— he didn’t need any more reasons to possibly flee. “He’s started to call me daddy recently.” He chuckled awkwardly, hoping Alec wouldn’t notice its lack of sincerity. “I think he wants to call me something different than what Aya does— he’s becoming quite the little contrarian.”

“I wouldn’t expect any less from a Bane,” Alec hugged Keris close to his chest, kissing the top of his head fondly. “C’mere,” Alec looked up to Magnus, and the warlock swore his heart stopped. “There’s another Bane that I need to kiss.” Alec walked over, carrying Magnus’ son in his arms, and leaned in for a kiss. It was beautiful, domestic— Magnus was overcome by how much love he felt in a single moment. He raised up on his toes to meet Alec’s height, leaning carefully over Keris to place a warm, languid kiss to Alec’s lips.

“Good morning, Alexander.”

“Good morning, Magnus.” He grinned his adorable crooked smile. “I smell coffee, I need coffee.”

Magnus darted over to the dresser and grabbed the coffee, now the perfect drinkable temperature.

“I’d say be careful of spilling it on his head— his silver hair has a tendency to stain, but it doesn’t seem to be a problem right now.” Magnus leaned against the wall, watching Alec carefully drink the coffee as he still held Keris.

“Here, take this, I’m going to sit down.” He handed back the drink and somehow managed to gracefully lower himself to the rug without letting the baby go. Magnus never looked that natural holding a child. Alec held out his arm, asking for the coffee back. “I already feel so much better. You’re the best.”

“Oh my god— what if his hair stays like this forever.” Magnus realized. His little boy— his shining silver and bronze boy— could look this mundane forever. In his long sleeved pajamas, Magnus couldn’t tell if he even still had scales. His heart sank at the thought. If it wasn’t for the happy tendrils of copper magic licking off his chubby fingers in excitement, Magnus would almost think his magic had gone and made him mundane. Thankfully, Keris was a ball of untamed magic
whenever he was happy, and seeing Alexander clearly did it for him.

“Can’t you change it back?” Alec leaned back, creating enough distance between himself and Keris to take another long, calculated look. “His eyebrows are so bushy now…” Alec muttered.

“I haven’t tried,” Magnus said quietly. “But it goes against my code to change anything about my children’s appearance.” It was a rabbit hole he would never venture down. His children were powerful warlocks—he wanted them to have complete autonomy over their bodies and their lives. He’d guide them as best as he could, but it was none of his business to change their physical appearance beyond clothes and hairstyles. Even then, he tried his best to help them pick things out for themselves. Keris even picked his own name.

“Even if he changed it himself?” Alec took a very long swig of coffee, his eyes drifting closed in contentment as the caffeine hit him directly in his soul.

“Even if he changed it himself…” Magnus shook his head. “Who am I to say he doesn’t want to look like this forever.”

“I doubt it, I think he’s just joking around, aren’t you K-K?” Alec shifted the baby to his side. “Now, are you going to be good and change back?” Keris shook his head aggressively.

“I already tried,” Aya hopped up from the chair, brazenly stealing the bagels from the dresser. “He won’t do it.”

“I think I can convince him,” Alec said, half to himself. “I’m going to stay right here until you change yourself back, pumpkin.”

“You could be waiting all day…” Magnus warned.

“I’ll stay right here... until five o’clock when I have to open back up my shop,” He placed a loud kiss on Keris’ head. “And until then, don’t worry about it Mags.”

“Mags reminds me of Maggie Moo!” Aya laughed, talking with her mouth full of bagel.

“And you’re always the one complaining about nicknames, Alexander…”

“So tell me Magnus, did you spend the most holy of days worshiping that pagan rabbit again by taking… adorable …” Raphael cringed at the word, clearly attempting to be polite but doing a terrible job of it. “...numerous photos of your children? Did you involve innocent rabbits this year as well?”

“Thankfully, o pious one, both of the little warlocks were too excited about some new video game Simon showed them, they didn’t even notice the holiday came and went. It makes sense, really. I mean, it is a traditionally religious holiday, and we aren’t the church going type, you know— half demon blooded and all, so I doubt they missed it.” Magnus looked down at his cuticles, tracing his nail beds. He was in dire need of a proper manicure—not the simple polish changes he magicked on every morning. His mind drifted to the thought of a good hand scrub, a paraffin mask, a hot oil massage.

“You should never allow Simon Lewis to influence your children.” Raphael pulled a flask from the
inner pocket of his suit jacket. “That’s a mistake you’ll never be able to undo, I’m afraid.”

“The Daylighter seems to do a good enough job with his own child,” Magnus shrugged.

“Come again?” Raphael nearly choked on his blood. “Just because he can go in the sun doesn’t mean he’s mortal— how does he have a kid? Can Daylighters procreate now, too?” Raphael said the word with faint disgust.

“Gods, no. Thank you for putting that image in my head.” Magnus shivered. “I’m talking about Rafael, the little boy Isabelle adopted.”

“Then that is a Lightwood child— a Shadowhunter child. I don’t see what Simon has to do with it at all.”

“I know that romance isn’t on the forefront of your concerns, but you have to know that Simon and Isabelle are dating, right?” Magnus crossed his legs and rolled his neck, getting more comfortable in his seat. “And they have been… for a very long time. Years, I think? Definitely less than a decade. You know how time escapes me…”

“Dating? Yes. But that doesn’t make him the child’s father.” Despite the fact that Raphael was a good head shorter than Magnus, and his armchair was even lower, the vampire seemed to be looking down at him condescendingly through his wispy dark eyelashes.

“What, are you going to say he’s not his father until they’re officially married? Are you so old fashioned?”

“I would never encourage anyone to live in sin, mortal, immortal, or otherwise undead.” The vampire smirked pompously. Sometimes Magnus felt cursed— doomed to be a foster father to what had to be the only aggressively Catholic vampire in existence, to deal with his preaching and disparaging lecturing for eternity.

“Sometimes I wonder how your own blood doesn’t burn you from the inside— your staunch morals must make it damn near holy water.” Magnus snapped his fingers, a calming glass of iced jasmine green tea appearing in his hands. He wanted alcohol, but it wasn’t even noon yet, and he wasn’t in the mood for any additional lecturing from Santiago.

“For a single father with two children, I assumed you’d understand my point.” Raphael articulated each syllable, as if to shame Magnus for not divining what Raphael meant by his words.

“That people shouldn’t have sex before marriage?” Magnus scoffed. “What’s next, a lecture on the dangers of sodomy?”

“You shouldn’t speak of such lewd things with your daughter in the room, Magnus.”

“What are you talking about? She’s downstairs, waiting for her lessons with Dorian.” Magnus sucked in an ice cube, busting his mouth by crunching on it. A bad habit for mortals, a fine habit for warlocks.

“No, she’s sitting on the top step of the staircase.” Raphael leaned forward in his chair, looking at Aya. “¡Buenos días, magdelenita. ¿Cómo estás?”

“¡Bueno!” Aya cheered, rushing over toward Raphael. Magnus still couldn’t believe how tolerant Raphael was of his children, how he even showed such unbridled affection toward them— Aerulei in particular. He didn’t even correct her Spanish, something Raphael normally wouldn’t be able to hold his tongue about.
“Ah ah ah—” Raphael waved an unnaturally pale finger at her. “Not bueno, the right word is bien.” Magnus had spoken— well, thought— too soon.

“¡Bien!” She reached out for a hug. He acquiesced, letting her quickly yank her arms around his neck.

“Do you need something from me, sayang?” Magnus questioned, perhaps a bit impatiently. He valued his conversations with Raphael— for the rarities they were— and he’d been looking forward to some much needed grown-up socialization.

“Nope!” She sat back down on her perch on the top step. If it wasn’t a spiral staircase— and if she wasn’t a warlock— Magnus might have been worried about her tumbling down and hitting her head, but there were too many variables in favor of just letting her do it for him to tell her not to.

“So you’re just hanging out?” Magnus clarified. He struggled not to roll his eyes.

“Yep!” She cheered. “And you hide good books up here.”

“If I give you one book, will you sit quietly and read while Raphael and I chat?”

Aya nodded furiously. Magnus stood from his chair, smoothing out his silk tunic, and walked over to the bookshelves. Tracing his finger along the spines— some worn from hundreds of years of loving use, some sharp edged and new, only a few years old— he selected a volume of poems by an obscure greek oracle. Not one of the ancients, no— but a brilliant young woman Magnus met in 1843, who was outcast for claiming she had visions of the past and future. In the glorious hellenistic period, she would have been revered, prized, worshiped, but in the 19th century, she was viewed as a lunatic, a heretic, and a fraud. For all of her struggle and strife, she was a beautiful poet, and she wove small prophecies into every verse. Every time Magnus read them he found good luck and fortune, so maybe it would do the same for Aya. Either way, the vocabulary was simple— English was Nadya’s fourth language, so her lexicon was limited— and it wouldn’t go too far over Aya’s head.

“Oraculus Miraculus?” She stumbled through the title. She didn’t look very impressed.

“I promise that is the most complicated set of words in the whole thing.”

“So then it’s a book for babies?” She raised a bushy eyebrow.

“No, it’s just not super fancy. It’s about feelings, not academics and learning.” Magnus twisted his wrist, creating a small ball of warm orange light to illuminate the pages in the dark, secret library.

“Okay, I am good now,” Aya scooted onto the Persian rug, slithering like a salamander to get comfortable laying on her stomach. The orb of light followed her, settling closer to the book as she dove into the pages.

“Alright, where were we?” Magnus sighed, flopping into his armchair. “Oh, yes. We were talking about the sanctity of marriage.”

“Ay dios mio, do you have to be such a heathen sometimes.”

“I’m not being a heathen,” Magnus smirked cheekily. He was, if anything, the embodiment of the definition of a heathen.

“Yes you are— the rest of your personality aside, you’re discounting the entire concept of marriage and what it means.” Raphael pursed his lips in frustration.
“I’ve heard it’s a wonderful institution.” Magnus sipped his tea.

“And one which you never wish to lower yourself to I assume?”

“I didn’t say that,” Magnus paused. “I just don’t see why Simon and Isabelle being married would change anything about his relationship with Rafael. He’d love him the same either way.”

“It’s not about loving or caring for someone—it’s about the commitment. The promise that they won’t leave, that they’re there until death do they part.”

“I didn’t realize that extended to families,” Magnus laughed dryly. “So you’re saying that if Isabelle and Simon were to break up, Simon wouldn’t care the same about Rafe anymore?”

“That’s not what I’m saying at all, I’m just saying that fatherhood is a commitment—just like marriage. It’s intentional, it’s forever, it’s a bond not easily broken.”

“50% of marriages end in divorce.” Magnus stuck out his tongue.

“I don’t know why you’re trying so hard to be a skeptic—you’re the most hopeless romantic I’ve ever met.”

“And yet, I’ve never been married.”

“And you’ve never been in love when you have other people’s hearts in mind. Drop the act—this isn’t about Isabelle and Simon, this is about two other people in a relationship.” Raphael was still marking his words carefully since Aya was in the room. But glancing over at his daughter, Magnus was certain she wasn’t listening. Just to be safe, he discreetly waved his hand in her direction, creating a quick muffling spell.

“So what, are you saying that if I want Alec to move in with me, I’d have to get down on one knee? Because I assure you I already do enough of getting down on both knee—”

Raphael cut him off, not wanting to hear any lurid details of Magnus’ sexual life, which was a shame, because the details were glorious.

“Oh, so he won’t move in with you permanently. That’s what has you so riled up.”

“I am not riled,” Magnus huffed.

“Case and point.” Raphael crossed his arms. “Have you ever stopped to consider for once—which I know is hard for you, both the stopping and the thinking—that Alec might be a traditional man? Shadowhunters are brought up to have a very strict code of honor when it comes to families. Children out of wedlock are not common, adoptions are highly official, divorce is very rare.”

“It is said that nephilim love once, and love fiercely. Although I’ve seen plenty of loveless Shadowhunter marriages.”

“If memory serves, Alec values family so highly that he almost was married just for the purpose of creating a solid, noble Shadowhunter family.”

“He… what?” Magnus scoffed. “No—I was certain that was a farce, some kind of power play he was doing to gain influence in the Institute.”

“I’m sure it was, but that doesn’t change things. Isabelle told me all about it herself. It was Alec’s dream to have a family, be a man of honor, provide and care for people. All of those traditional
things you scorn so heavily. Which is ironic, really, because now you’re essentially a stay at home mother with two squirmy infants.”

“When were you having private conversations with Isabelle Lightwood?” Magnus’ mind could only drift to one place when he thought of a man spending time with Isabelle privately.

“That’s beside the point. Perhaps Alec doesn’t want to cohabitate until he’s certain you’re both at the same level of commitment— that this is something solid for the entire family.”

“Then I ask again, do I need to get down on one knee for him to stay?” Magnus couldn’t imagine doing such a thing.

“No— absolutely not. This conversation has me wholeheartedly convinced that your entire view of marriage is skewed.”

“So I shouldn’t get married at all? I never get to live with Alexander?” Magnus knew he was playing at dramatics— damn near histrionics— but he felt like whining. He had been given the chance to whine and complain about not getting what he wanted— for Alexander to move in— and he was going to revel in the opportunity, even if it was at Raphael’s expense.

“See?” He waved his hands to point at Magnus. “You’re proving that you’re willing to jump into it just to follow the immediate impulse of wanting him to live with you.”

“But—” Magnus protested.

“Which is why you should wait for him to do it.” Magnus knew his vampiric friend had a point. He would never want to push Alec into something like that— he would want it to be Alec’s idea. But that scared him. It scared him more than anything to think that there was a chance Alec wouldn’t pick him. Part of his heart told him that was absurd, but another part hid away, afraid of being abandoned.

“And what if he never does?” Magnus uttered quietly, his voice wavering with uncertainty.

“He loves you,” Raphael sighed. “I don’t know why, but he does. If he didn’t agree to move in with you, it’s not for lack of love. Give him time, Magnus. You have a lot of it to give.”

“But he doesn’t—”

“Exactly, and Alexander Lightwood is not one to squander time. Take it from me— he’s spent hours meticulously fixing my art, and he’s never wasted a moment of it.”

“You have tattoos?!” Magnus screeched. “Where? Show me! Take off your clothes now!” Magnus laughed to himself. “That is not a phrase I ever thought I’d say to you of all people.”

“Yes. I’ve told you about my religious iconography tattoos. I’ve told you about them numerous times. You’re getting very senile,” Rafael teased.

“Does everyone have a tattoo done by Alec Lightwood at this point?” His hand traced over the front of his tunic, circling the mark on his chest, the beautiful design Alexander had created to represent Magnus' two children.

“Well, I don’t believe any Shadowhunters do— other than his once betrothed.”

“Lydia Branwell, wasn’t it?” Magnus pretended he didn't remember, but of course he did. He always loved a bit of hot gossip, and at the time, it was some of the hottest.
“I do believe so.” Raphael nodded.

“She seems pretty badass then, albeit in a different way than her great grandfather. Or great-great, I’m not sure. Shadowhunter generations are notoriously short.” Magnus sipped the last bit of his tea, snapping it away. “Speaking of generations, ages, youth—I might as well give you your invitation to Aya’s birthday while you’re here, so that you can politely decline and I can save the hassle of pointlessly sending it to you.”

“I will send a gift for my favorite princesa, of course,” Raphael scoffed. “Who do you take me for?”

“I never said you didn’t care, I just know there is no way in heaven, hell, or purgatory that you would ever go to a child’s birthday. Case in point, her last three birthdays.”

“They’re always outdoors, during the day. What do you expect?”

“This year it’s indoors…” Magnus taunted. “At the New York botanical gardens.”

“Ay dios mio, exactly. I couldn’t go even if I wanted to. Which, you are correct in saying that I don’t.”

“Have you ever considered that I do that on purpose, to save one of my dearest friends the trouble of feeling remorse?”

“If we are dearest friends, you would know that I feel no remorse.” Raphael stood from his chair, dusting off his suit despite the fact that it was still crisp and clean. “Unfortunately, that is all the time I have. There are some matters I must attend to before my 7:00pm appointment today at Inkwell. Mind opening a portal to the DuMort for me, Bane?”

“It would be my pleasure. It’s always wonderful to see you Raphael. Do you want to say bye to Aya?” Magnus moved his arms in a rounded, sweeping motion, opening a glittering blue portal the vampire headquarters.

“I wouldn’t want to disturb her—she seems very busy. Give her my regards.”

“I shall give my four year old your regards, yes.” Magnus rolled his eyes. For any other friend, this was when he would give them a warm, gut-crushing hug, but not with Raphael. Amicable eye contact was all he could hope for— and he cherished every second of it.

“Almost five, Magnus.” Raphael smirked, his dark eyes glistening.

“Shh, don’t remind me that she’s growing up so fast.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll forget soon enough, considering your terrible memory.” With that, Raphael stepped through the portal and Magnus closed it behind him. He lazily twirled his hand to remove the muffling spell from Aya, walking over to snoop on what page of the prophetic poems she was reading.

And in the house of brick and stone

Where flowers, love and children grown

Five to three, two to four
Magnus shook it off— he wouldn’t try to derive any personal meaning from it. Besides, all of the prophecies were unnecessarily vague. Last time he took stock in something so foolish it was a tarot card at Halloween, driving him nearly insane. He wouldn’t look at it again, he’d try to forget the words— it was time to check up on Alec and Keris anyway.

“Vroom … Vroom ….” A small voice rumbled. Snaking across his stomach, over his arms, he felt something rolling, catching his body hair in its wake. He must have been woken up by the pain.

“What—” Alec sits up groggily. His back is stiff, his limbs heavy. “Oh, hello Pumpkin.” He reached out, ruffling the hair on Keris’ head, still stuck in its dark brown state. “I guess we fell asleep here, didn’t we?”

“Yuh,” He smiled, showing off all his nubby teeth. “Vroom!” He announced, returning to the task of driving the tiny toy cars over Alec’s legs— which were thankfully protected by his sweatpants.

Alec reached into his pocket to grab his phone, which Keris took as a challenge to roll the cars as fast as possible toward Alec’s hand. With his hand free from the onslaught of tiny rolling wheels, he tapped his phone screen to check the time— he’d been asleep for two hours. Catching his attention before the screen went black, he noticed he had a new voicemail— from Jace. He unlocked the screen, quickly tapped to his voicemail app and listened.

Hey, Alec— it’s Jace. Um, which you probably knew because this is on your phone. Anyway, I stopped by the shop this morning but it was closed, and I knocked on the door to what I assume is your apartment? But you didn’t answer. Maybe you’re still sleeping off a hangover, sucks you don’t have Iratzes for— shit, sorry. So I’ve got some free time this afternoon— I want all the details from your wild night last night. Based on that picture you sent— thanks for that by the way— it looked wild as fuck. Call me or text me back or whatever. Bye.

Alec’s heart sputtered before it stopped in panic— he didn’t remember sending a picture to Jace. He could feel his face flush, anticipating the embarrassment. Tapping through his texts, he finally came to his message thread with Jace. To his relief, it was just a picture of Clary— not embarrassing at all, although it conveyed a different message than what Alec had been projecting. The caption made it sound like he supported the relationship between Clary and Jace, and perhaps in his inebriated state, he allowed himself to be open to the idea.

Maybe it wasn’t so bad— they’d dated once before and it was relatively successful. His mind still recoiled a bit from the idea, but drunk words reveal sober thoughts— even deeply buried ones. Perhaps it was time to let Jace be happy.

He tapped on the screen, writing out a quick text.
Hey Jace. Sorry I missed your call. I was asleep.
Definitely hungover.

But where r u hungover? Clary said she woke up and you were gone.

Magnus' loft.

Of course.
Wait.
Unless you were kidnapped.
Photographic proof to show you weren’t kidnapped.
Unless your naked, then please don’t.

Alec shifted on the rug, leaning over to scoop up a giggling and squirming Keris.

“Okay, I promise I’ll only take one picture—I won’t take a thousand like Papa does,” Alec assured Keris. He opened the camera app on his phone and double-tapped to flip to the front view. “Now, three, two, one!” Alec smiled, tickling Keris’ belly with his free hand to get him to smile too.” He quickly sent the picture to Jace.

You never told me the second kid looks like you man. Is there something you want to tell me?
Alec 1:50 PM

He’s a warlock, Jace. That’s not how any of this works.

Anyway, I’m free too. Want to grab coffee?

Jace 1:51

Um, if you want, but don’t you get enough of that at the shop?

Your choice I guess.

Where can we go where you can bring the kid?

Alec 1:52

I can leave him here with Magnus

Jace 1:52

Nah, bring him. I like babies.

Alec 1:53

Okay, I gotta check with Magnus first, but then I’ll meet you there in like 30.

I’ll text you the address.

Alec took in a sharp inhale, letting his heart take over the typing, not letting his brain overthink it.

Alec 1:54

See you then, brother.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like we need more smut... do you guys think we need more smut?

Anyway, the plot goes on! This was so plot heavy! See you next week!
Chapter 53

Chapter Summary

It's the afternoon after Alec and Clary's night out. Alec just woke up from his nap with Keris, and now that Raphael left, Magnus and Aya are upstairs reading together. It's as simple as that, right?

Chapter Notes

I know this isn't what I promised, it's not mindless smut, but these scenes ran away with me. I'll explain in the ending notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sound of cautious steps echoed up the spiral staircase into Magnus’ private library. A twin of the staircase to the rooftop terrace, it wasn’t always visible, normally curled away magically into the coffered ceiling— but it wouldn’t be a very cool secret library if it didn’t have an air of mystique. Sometimes, Magnus regretted not going with the same layout as his Paris apartment in the 1700’s— back then his literary panic room of sorts had been hidden behind a bookshelf, only revealed if you picked up a gilded bookend fashioned in the likeness of the Egyptian god Bastet. It hadn’t been the most clever choice for a secret lever— anyone who knew Magnus’ warlock mark might have found it notable enough to jostle— but he was always a sucker for cats.

As Alec poked his head up through the opening, Magnus straightened his posture a bit— trying to appear even more debonair in his private library than he likely already did. He straightened his necklaces, ran his fingers through his hair, and put on his best coy smirk. His book was still in his lap— a volume he’d plucked off the shelf the moment Raphael left. It was a velvet-bound copy of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, one of his favorite collections of slightly risque poetry. It reminded him— again— of Paris. Paris was on his mind a lot today.

“Hey Magnus, is it okay if I take—” Alexander started.

“Yes!” Magnus quipped.

“I didn’t even finish—” Alec shook his head in befuddlement.

“I’m assuming you want to whisk away one of my children— or maybe even both of them— out for some adventure? An adventure outside the stuffy brick walls of this loft?” Magnus shut his book eagerly. “Absolutely! Please. I would— I mean they would love that.” The tension in his muscles already began to relax at the idea of an afternoon to himself. For the past few days, without Alec around, he’d been overwhelmed with responsibility. He was tired, grumpy— he needed a break.

“Uh— I was just going to take Keris.” Alec furrowed his brow, taking a look around the cozy, windowless library. Magnus followed his gaze, taking the room in for himself anew, and suddenly feeling a tad self-conscious. Every shelf was crammed with books to the point that many were
dipping beneath the weight. Some looked like they hadn’t been touched in centuries, while others were shiny and new. Embarrassingly, he noticed his mass-market paperback of one of those Twilight books Clary made him read. Alec didn’t seem to notice that, at least. “Aya has lessons with Dorian soon, remember?”

“Ah,” Magnus hummed. He flicked his wrist, checking his conjured appointment book to confirm. He flicked through the pages, his finger tracing down the line for today’s column. Written in bold, blue ink was the time slot for Aya’s tutoring. Stupid, careless — he cursed himself, squinting his eyes closed and pinching the bridge of his nose. “Yes, you’re right. You’re much better at this planning and scheduling thing that I am. I can barely recall what I’m supposed to be doing— and now these two adorable hellions have their own dance cards filling up. It’s a recipe for disaster.”

“I work shifts— I kind of have to be good at keeping track of time.” It occurred to Magnus that he wasn’t used to any of the mundane responsibility Alec had to learn— for hundreds of years, he’d answered to no one. Warlocks didn’t have a Clave, an alpha, or a clan leader. It was no wonder Magnus couldn’t keep up— his two children made far more demands than all three of those leaders combined. That made him feel a bit better about being so reckless, but Alec continued to flout his talent for all things responsible. “Plus, you forget— I track Clary’s schedule at the shop.” Alec looked back over to Aya, his head tilting in confusion. “I’m surprised Aya isn’t trying to come along with me and Keris.” The warm tone in his voice indicated that the statement was intended for Aya herself.

“Two-way muffling spell.” Magnus said smugly, vaguely gesturing over to his daughter. “I can’t hear her, she can’t hear you.” Alec furrowed his brow, as if he were considering something for a moment. He didn’t look particularly pleased, but Magnus wasn’t sure why. He thought his muffling spells were a clever improvement on parenthood, but Alec seemed like he begged to differ.

“Yes I can,” Aya said, not looking away from her book. Tiny wisps of her dark hair escaped her ponytail, dusting the pages. “But I have lessons. And I like this book.” She kicked her feet behind her, her light-up shoes twinkling as she continued to read.

“It is impolite to listen in on adult conversations, young lady,” Magnus huffed. “The things I was talking about with Raphael were private.” His brain cataloged everything that he and Raphael had discussed, formulating all the wild and absurd conclusions she could have drawn from it. The outlook was not good, and he was praying that the poetry had demanded enough of her attention that she hadn’t picked up on much.

“You weren’t saying anything bad,” Aya shrugged. “Except for Raphael. I wish he would come to my birthday. But it’s not his fault he’s a vampire.” Alec chuckled quietly at her statement.

“But it is his fault he’s an ass—” Magnus started.

“Language...” Alec scolded, pursing his lips. His glare seemed to say ‘Really? You’re a parent. You’re supposed to be the one enforcing these rules on them, not breaking them yourself.’ This was the second scolding he’d gotten from Alec during the course of one conversation— he must have done something wrong. Magnus bit his lip, chewing at it nervously.

Some days, being a parent was easy, almost natural even. But then there were days like this— where it was like he was the old, infamous, flippant Magnus Bane. No sense of propriety, very little desire for structure, avoiding anything adjacent to a bother. It didn’t mean he loved his children any less— it was more of a personality rebellion. It had been different when Alec was here all the time— being around Alec brought out something paternal and honorable in Magnus, making him always want to be better. But now that Alec had left, Magnus found himself thrust
back into the overwhelming realities of single parenthood.

“Aya, why don’t you come downstairs with me?” Alec offered out his hand. She pulled the ribbon from her hair, using it as a bookmark. “We’ll get you settled downstairs at the table, and you can read there until Dorian gets here. Okay?”

“Okay,” She hoisted the heavy book up, meeting Alec on the stairs.

“No— come here, Alexander,” Magnus whined. He shifted sideways in his chair, hanging his legs off one scrolled arm, tossing his head back over the other to get a better vantage point on Alec—and more importantly, Alec’s ass. Situated as he was though, Magnus embodied the stereotype that bisexuals never sat properly in chairs.

“Yes?” Alec turned, his hazel eyes sparkling in the dim light.

“Come here,” Magnus reached out his arms over his head, opening and closing his palms to signal his boyfriend over, his intentions clear.

“I’m right here— this room is barely six feet across.”

“You’re not close enough for what I need you for,” Magnus pouted.

“Fine,” Alec sighed dramatically, trying to conceal his half-smile. Magnus pursed his lips and closed his eyes, lifting his head up just a touch. Alec took the signal, kissing him softly, lingering just an extra synchronized breath.

“I love you,” Magnus murmured wistfully.

“I love you too,” Alec kissed him again, this time with more determination, melting into the contact. Magnus could feel the hint of stubble on Alec’s face, he could taste the rosemary from the bagels on his lips.

“Gross!” Aya huffed. He broke away from Magnus, snickering to himself.

“Now skedaddle you two— you both have far better places to be than in my stuffy lair.” Magnus smacked Alec on the ass as he walked away, loud enough for the slap to make Aya snap her head around again. Alec flushed, but otherwise played it down gracefully.

“I’ll go down the steps ahead of you, alright Aya?” Alec asked. “I trust you could make it down on your own, but it’s that book I’m not so sure of— I think it’s heavier than you are.” Alec was a bit overprotective, but it made up for how blase Magnus could be at times like this. Magnus had to admit— he never would have thought of that. Safety wasn’t always on the forefront of his concerns. The children were both warlocks— easily fixable, less breakable.

“Wait— where are you taking my child— my other one?” Magnus yelled after Alec. He didn’t quite feel like getting up from his cozy chair yet, and he was trying to dig up the tiniest shred of motivation to.

“I’ll text you the address”— Alec yelled back. “I’m meeting Jace at a cafe. He wanted to meet Keris.”
“Jace?” Aya lisped through the ‘c’, making it sound more like Jayth. “I don’t know him.” Aya hopped off the last stair, quickening her pace to walk at Alec’s side instead of behind him.

“Jace is my brother, kind of.” Alec marked his words carefully.

“Like me and K-K?” She questioned. “Adopted is still real brothers,” she tacked on, her tone self-assured if not a bit defiant.

“It’s a bit different. I met Jace when he was 10, not when he was a baby.” Alec pursed his lips, thinking back to that strange moment when the blonde-haired boy had shown up to the institute—scrawny and guarded, yet cocky and golden all at once. He was the light to Alec’s dark—it was inevitable how they became parabatai. “So we only did half of our growing up together.”

“Oh— that sounds good though, babies can be dumb sometimes.” Aya said gruffly. Alec tried to imagine what it would have been like if Jace had come to them as a baby— if he grew up side by side with Max. He resolved that Jace would have been a terrible baby— his need for constant attention would have been unbearable.

“I understand. When Jace moved in with us, my brother Max was still a baby. That wasn’t always fun.”

“It’s funny to think of grown people as babies,” Aya said as if she’d somehow heard Alec’s thoughts.

“I was a baby once, so was your Papa,” Alec said, an image of an adorable baby Magnus with glowing cat eyes flashing in his mind.

“He was a baby so long ago, his old diapers are like dinosaurs in the ground,” Aya snickered before succumbing to a fit of uncontrollable giggles.

“Like landfill fossils?” A cheerful voice with a British lilt chimed. “If you want to discuss paleontology, I’m not sure this is a day we could do it— it won’t fit into the carefully curated lesson plan on demon phylogenies.

“Oh, where are my manners! Pardon the sudden intrusion. I let myself in—” He jingled a set of keys in his hand, two engraved with a curling ‘MB’. “I normally would never, but the senile old woman in the hall was leering at me in a way that made me very uncomfortable. Muttering something about ‘they get younger and younger’.” As soon as Dorian sounded the words, he realized their meaning. “My goodness… how… crude…” He flushed, his cheeks blushing deep brownish-purple.

“You’re going to have some competition today for Aya’s attention,” Alec changed the subject. “She’s been reading this poetry book Magnus gave her all morning.”

“Is it any good?” Dorian raised an eyebrow. His curly bangs were so long and unruly that his eyebrows disappeared beneath them at the slightest raise. Ragnor really needed to take him for a haircut. “Ah, the Oraculus Miraculous. A bit obscure. I recall she was a good friend of Ragnor and your Papa, Aerulei.” He held his hands out for the book— she gave it reluctantly. Dorian flipped through the pages, careful not to disturb her makeshift bookmark. “First edition, in extremely good condition, I wonder if he procured it at Quill and Scroll actually— I believe I saw a copy there once…” Dorian turned back to the title page, most likely looking for some clue of its ownership. “I take that back— this is most definitely the property of Magnus Bane, at least judging by the…” Dorian coughed, flushing again. “…impassioned letter in the beginning.”
Unable to resist his curiosity, Alec snatched the book from Dorian’s hands.

“Alec I don’t think you want to—” Dorian warned, trying to pull the book away, his dirt-stained fingernails digging into the cover. He must have been spending too much time in the greenhouse at Tessa and Jem’s. Alec won out the battle, anxiously reading the letter.”

_Dear Magnus,_

_Dear, dear, very incredibly dear, Magnus._

_I never believed my verses would find themselves between the pages of a properly bound book— I always assumed their most notorious stage would have been between your sheets,_

_Whispered quietly and carefully as you stole my journal, and tried to make me read each word out loud as you—_

Alec slammed the book closed, his cheeks flaring red.

“What does it say!” Aya whined. “I want to seeeeeeeee!”

“You can have the book back after lessons, Aya,” Alec tried to stay composed, stern even, buying himself time until he figured out what to do with it. Using the only advantage he had over everyone in the house— his height— he placed it on top of the living room bookshelf, sliding it back, flush against the wall out of everyone else’s line of sight. A coat of dust was disturbed in the process, billowing into the air and irritating Alec’s eyes. As he squinted them tightly closed, the slight rumbling in his ears did a remarkable job at distracting him from the absurd book-related drama taking place.

“That’s not fair!” Aya crossed her arms, scowling.

“I know what will cheer you right back up,” Dorian said sweetly, scooting up next to Aya. “How about we move all this pesky living room furniture out of the way and get to drawing a summoning circle?”

“Why can’t we just use Papa’s summoning chamber?”

“He has a summoning chamber?” Dorian perked up at the prospect. Sometimes Alec was reminded of just how different warlocks were than other downworlders or mundanes— especially when it came to the things that excited them.

“It’s in his office.” Aya offered.

“Are we allowed in his office?” Dorian questioned. Their voices trailed off into a flurry of hushed conversation as they supposedly plotted their demon summoning.

Alec gave a quick wave, but it went unnoticed. Aya was completely absorbed in her conversation with Dorian. On his way to Keris’ room, he tapped out a quick text to his mother.

Alec 2:15 PM
Hey Mom, do you have a copy of *Oraculus Miraculous* at the shop? Magnus ruined his, and Aya was pretty attached.

Keris was still completely preoccupied in his room with his toy cars— that were all completely different colors and double the size. Much to Alec’s relief, Keris’ hair was back to it’s normal silver, and though he couldn’t see the baby’s eyes from this angle, he was almost certain they were back to a sparkling copper.

“Pumpkin, let’s get you cleaned up and ready to go— you’re going to see my brother Jace!” Alec hoisted the heavy baby up, checking his diaper. His suspicions were correct— Keris would need a change before they headed out.

“Don’t want Trace want Alwek!” Keris banged his fists against Alec with a force that was objectively surprising.

“It won’t just be Jace, ” Alec carefully corrected the baby, even though he knew it was probably no use. “I’ll be there too, don’t worry. I’m not leaving you with somebody you don’t know.” As he had a cute yet stunted conversation with Keris, Alec went through the motions of his changing, barely registering that he was doing it. It was so incredibly easy now.

“You know, now that you’re not staying at *L’hotel Bane*, I might have to consider re-hiring the nanny,” Alec’s favorite voice softly purred behind him. “Although, watching her change diapers was much less… stimulating.”

“Nothing about changing diapers is stimulating, Magnus. You’re being gross. Keris— tell your papa he’s being gross.” Alec said, tickling Keris’ stomach as he pulled up his stretchy jean-like pants.

“Gwoss Papa.” Keris kicked up his feet, grabbing them in his hands, rocking back and forth.

“Oh stop— You both love me.” Magnus huffed.

“Can you hold him for a second while I grab the baby bag?” Alec motioned Magnus over to the changing table, the warlock carefully picking up his son without tangling him within his collection of necklace. “Wait— you had a nanny? When?”

“Since Aya was about two. It was good to have an extra pair of hands when she was that little. I mean now it’s so much easier with Keris. Dorian and Ragnor are here all the time teaching Aya’s lessons, and you’re such a help with Keris— I just found I wasn’t calling the nanny in for shifts enough to keep her on the payroll. I paid her handsomely on her departure, it wasn’t her fault her services were no longer needed.” Magnus shrugged. “Plus— Keris didn’t like her all that much. I mean after all— I picked her because she got along with Aya.”

“That’s just weird that I never met her, is all.” Alec swallowed, his throat feeling crowded and dry.

“I suppose you wouldn’t have,” Magnus hummed. “I think the last time she was here was…” Magnus looked up in the air, trying to remember. “Six, maybe seven months ago?”

“You mean… when we started dating?” Alec froze, his hand halfway inside the bag, putting in one of Keris’ numerous stuffed octopuses just in case.

“Huh, you’re right. I never made that connection.” He chuckled warmly. “You got too good too fast— came in here and stole her job.”
“I think you might have realized it,” Alec said quietly, slowly zipping the bag closed. He watched each tooth of the zipper close together, letting the repetitive image calm the strange edge that had come to the forefront of his mind. “I mean, you just said that since I’m not living at the loft, you’ll need her back.”

“You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone, Alexander.” Magnus danced over, kissing Alec on the temple. Keris wiggled out of Magnus’ arms and back into Alec’s. “There’s a rather popular song about the phrase, but then it rambles on about paradise and parking lots … it gets a little hard to follow.”

“I haven’t gone anywhere,” Alec mumbled. He wanted to lean into Magnus, to let him kiss away the tension bubbling up unbidden. But he also wanted to go— to get some fresh air, to see his brother, to watch Keris smile at every stranger on the street. “Have you seen his glamouring bracelets? Or his dampeners?” Alec checked the mesh pockets on the side of the sporty black baby bag.

“No, I haven’t seen them but…” Magnus clapped his hands, unclasping them to show the two tiny beaded bracelets. “Perks of being a warlock parent, I never lose things.”

“I think that’s a perk of being a warlock in general,” Alec laughed dryly, trying mostly to lighten his own mood. “The stroller is still by the door, right?”

“Now that’s a great question. I portal him almost everywhere— hardly any need for the stroller.”

“I’m not carrying him ten blocks away,” Alec huffed, a bit shortly.

“Won’t you have the strong, golden, angelic-blooded Herondale with you? You two strong, handsome nephilim can take turns.” Magnus raised his eyebrows suggestively, staring hungrily at Alec’s arms, how he was holding the baby. Alec flushed, clutching Keris tighter.

“I’m meeting Jace there— and no, I would not trust him to hold a boiled egg, let alone an infant.” Alec pushed past Magnus, heading toward the front door. He opened the coat closet with one hand— by some grace of the Angel, the stroller was there, neatly folded away. It suddenly occurred to him that it was that way because he’d put it away himself.

“He’s almost a toddler, they’re much more durable, I assure you.” Magnus pitched in, grabbing the stroller and unfolding it for Alec— albeit a bit clumsily.

“You really don’t ever use this thing, do you?” Alec laughed dryly as he helped Magnus lock one of the joints in place. Instead of laughing with him, Magnus bit his lip— a nervous habit that was so unlike his magical, confident warlock boyfriend.

“Aren’t you going to be late?” Magnus watched as Alec strapped Keris in. The baby tried to maneuver around the buckles of the harness, tried to fit both his feet through the same hole of the seat, but after a bit of clever wrangling, Alec got him in.

“You really don’t ever use this thing, do you?” Alec leaned over the pram, giving Magnus a slow, lingering kiss. He wanted to pull him tight, spin him around, and kiss him against the wall. He wanted every kiss he’d missed before falling asleep the past few nights, he wanted every good morning kiss he’d been robbed of.

“I love you, Magnus.” Alec whispered against his warlock’s lips. His voice was so soft, he was worried Magnus hadn’t heard him over the drifting sounds of Aya’s lesson with Dorian floating in from the main room.
“I love you too, Alexander.” Magnus pulled away, smiling.

Alec pressed one last rushed kiss to Magnus’ lips as he dipped out the door, Keris strapped into the stroller and on their way. Magnus stared at the door for a while after it closed behind them, something pulling and clawing at his heart.

“Mister Bane, would you mind terribly if I… borrowed… your summoning chamber for today’s lesson?” Dorian’s voice broke Magnus from his meandering thoughts.

“Summoning? That’s exciting,” Magnus said, but the sentiment didn’t match his tone. “Of course, it’s right off the back of my office. I’d tell you to be careful, but I know you will be.”

“Right, yes, of course! Nothing too powerful, just an exercise in circle creation, resisting temptation — only the basics. Thank you!” The boy rushed off, supposedly taking Aya with him to summon pure evil. Magnus still couldn’t will himself to move.

When?

You mean, when we started dating?

The words started to sink in, stabbing Magnus like a thousand tiny pinpricks. It was as if his vision clouded and he was watching the conversation all over again, this time noticing the subtleties in Alec’s facial expressions. The way his face fell, the twitches in his eyes and brow.

The realization of his mistake was twofold. First, he’d made Alec feel as if Magnus was taking advantage of his kindness and how much he loved Aya and Keris, turning him into a glorified babysitter with benefits. The second part was much more troublesome— Magnus had leaned on Alec far much more than was appropriate. He took Alec for granted, and there was no possible way Magnus could ever give him enough back in return.

The fact that he could ever make the man he loved so much feel like that pained him more than his multiple lifetimes worth of words could express. He had to find a way to fix this— and sooner rather than later.

He summoned his appointment book and looked at his schedule for the next few days— there was so much to do. He’d have to call Clary, have her reschedule any appointments Alec had— bribe them to change the date if necessary of course. Then there were preparations to make at the manor, finding someone to watch the children last minute.

He took a deep breath, commanding his heart to still.

He was Magnus Bane— he could do anything. A last minute trip to Provence was child’s play.
“Hey Jace,” Alec rushed over to the table in the corner where Jace was sitting, staring out the window, nursing a steaming cup of something frothy. “Sorry I’m late, putting a baby in a stroller takes longer than you’d think.”

“So is this the little guy?” Jace peered into the stroller.

“No,” Alec deadpanned. “I left Keris at home and picked up some random baby on the street.”

“He doesn’t look… you know… very warlock-y,” Jace whispered the last word. “Although the amount of jewelry he’s wearing does scream ‘My dad is Magnus Bane.’”

“Glamouring bracelets. It makes us less noticeable when we go out.”

“What are you packing under those, little guy?” Jace cooed, tickling the baby’s wrist. “Wings? A tail? I always thought it was lame how few warlocks had tails.”

“He does not have a tail.” Alec snapped. “Don’t you know it’s rude to ask a warlock about their mark?” As Jace winced, Alec realized how unwarranted his sudden aggression was. He tried to relax his countenance, take a breath, and start over. It was strange how quick he was to jump into that tone, how he felt a slight edge behind every thought. He couldn’t quite place what exactly was making him feel sour, but he tried to shake it off.

“Yeah— but he’s a baby.” Jace kept his attention on Keris, tickling under his chubby chin. Keris wasn’t amused, backing away from the touch and grumbling defensively.

“And he can hear you,” Alec scolded, rolling his eyes. In an act of defiance, Keris ripped off his glamouring bracelet across the cafe floor, the glamour dropping and his natural appearance returning.

“Oh, so he just looks like an old person? That’s it? That’s the secret that you’re hiding behind a glamour?”

“An old person!?” Alec hissed “Fine— whatever. Keris, don’t listen to Jace. He’s being dumb. He doesn’t appreciate how handsome you are.” Alec reached into the stroller, smoothing down Keris’ hair. He leaned in, pressing a kiss to the top of his soft head.

“I pwetty,” Keris babbled, a drooly smile stretching across his face. He wiggled contentedly, his eyes never leaving Alec. His little hands pulled at his grey sweater, jostling the false dicky collar Magnus insisted he wore. Alec reached out and straightened it, Keris taking the opportunity to dive in and kiss Alec’s hand with a loud mwah.

“I never said that!” Jace defended. “I think you’re very pretty too, Keris.” The baby turned to Jace, narrowing his eyes skeptically. When Jace reached out to touch him too, Keris smacked his hand against Jace’s, tiny tendrils of copper magic seeping into his skin.

“Pumpkin, how are you doing that, did you take off your bracelets?” Alec whispered nervously. His suspicions were correct— the magic dampening bracelet was missing too.

“That’s not very nice Ker!” Jace pulled his hand away, insulted. Alec didn’t miss how Jace tried to use a nickname, how hard he was trying to be friendly. There was a desire to be familiar, to make a solid effort. Jace wanted this to work— Alec realized it was likely because Jace really did want to be a part of his old parabatai’s life. Keris, however, was not so fond of the idea— his disappreciation clear on his scrunched-up face.
“What did he say?” Alec dipped below the table and bent down on the floor, reaching around for the discarded bracelets. They’d somehow slid almost six feet away, making Alec crawl around like a baby on the floor.

“Well he didn’t say anything,” Jace huffed. “He just… smacked me with knowledge. Does he do that all the time? It makes me feel… violated.”

“I think it’s helpful— supplements his limited vocabulary. We never have to wonder why he’s crying,” Alec sat back on his seat. “Now, what did he say?” Alec snickered.

“Well, he told me a straight up lie.” Jace crossed his arms and clenched his teeth, staring out the window.

“Come on, it couldn’t have been that bad.” Alec looked longingly at Jace’s largely ignored beverage. He hadn’t had enough caffeine today— the craving was urging him to reach out and steal a sip, but with his luck, Jace had demon pox again. It wasn’t worth the risk.

“He said I’m ugly,” Jace snapped. He leaned forward, whispering quietly so only Alec could hear. “He said my yellow hair looks like pee. Pee Alec. People don’t call me the golden Herondale because my hair looks like…. pee!” Jace shivered at the thought.

“I’m going to grab a coffee— do you think you’re capable of watching him for a minute while I do that? Or should I bring him with me?”

“Bonding time, I can do that! Give the Herondale charm more credit!” Jace sat up a bit straighter. “I welcome this chance to redeem myself and win over this infant.”

“You used to say the same thing about the Wayland charm, and the Lightwood charm— that’s a lot of rebranding. It doesn’t build my confidence in it.” Against his better judgement, Alec turned away and walked over to the counter. His heart stuttered a bit— it shocked him how nervous he was about leaving Keris even for a moment. He shook off the nerves and got in line. He stuck with the classics— a plain cappuccino and an almond biscotti. Then something in the display case caught his eye— a fluffy pain au chocolat. Keris loved chocolate— Alec couldn’t resist. He might even try to steal a bite of it himself.

When he got back to the table, Keris had been freed from the safety of his stroller and was perched on Jace’s knee, much to Keris’ obvious distress.

“I got you a treat, sayang,” Alec cooed. He placed the coffee and treats on the table and rescued the baby from Jace.

“Hey, I was just making some progress!” Jace yelled.

“Sure you were, he looked on the verge of a tantrum,” Alec mumbled and rolled his eyes. He broke off a piece of the chocolate croissant and fed it to a curious Keris, who— upon realizing it was filled with chocolate— squealed in glee. He grabbed another handful of the pastry, sending crumbs flying. “Anyway— this will occupy him for a while,” Alec laughed. “So… what do you want to talk about?”

“Oh… nothing really,” Jace smirked knowingly. “Just wanted the hot gossip on your wild night out.”

“Why?” Alec took a sip of his coffee, relishing in how the hot bitter liquid burned his tongue.

“I have no idea how you and Magnus work, bro.” Jace shook his head. “That man loves gossip.
Thrives on it. You could be on the cover of every trashy magazine and you’d still swear nothing exciting happened.”

“What do you know about magazines or Magnus’ gossip habits?”

“You forget he was at the Institute a lot during the whole Valentine thing. Even after it— until he adopted the first kid. Dude— it’s embarrassing, I forgot he had a kid at first, but then Clary showed me this picture of me holding the girl as a baby— I’m dumb as hell sometimes.”

“At least you’ve grown self-aware.”

“I’m incredibly self aware— I’ve been telling everyone for years how irresistible I am— and I’m right.”

“Anyway— fine, I’ll answer your question.”

“I didn’t ask you any question, just heavily implied I wanted details.”

“Well Clary and I had a bit of an argument recently. I wanted to patch things up, you know? She’s like family to me. I can’t stand being mad at her.”

“How times have changed. You know you once implied it would be better if she got eaten by a demon? Refused to learn her name?”

“Yes— I was terrible. I’m still terrible sometimes, you don’t have to remind me.” Alec raised one eyebrow as he scowled, deftly stabbing his biscotti into his cappuccino.

“Sorry—” Jace took a swig of his drink, foam coating his upper lip endearingly. “Please, continue.”

“I took her to dinner and some weird modern art thing Magnus took me to once. Then we just drifted around the rest of the night.” Oh, and I gave your girlfriend drugs, and we got super high on top of also being drunk, Alec selectively omitted. Jace could be fiercely protective— especially over Clary— and Alec didn’t want to give him any reason to aggressively jump to her defense. Clary was her own person— she was Alec’s friend— they could do whatever they wanted. That said, he still didn’t want to upset Jace, since things were still so rocky between them.

“And then you got ice cream, watched garbage television, and had a little sleepover, I know. Your date game is so much stronger than mine, and you’re gay. That’s so not fair.”

“Gay people go on dates, Jace,” Alec scoffed. He wasn’t surprised. The ‘gay’ subject wasn’t something he’d spoken with Jace about really at all. Jace knew he was dating Magnus, he knew it was serious, but they’d never discussed it outright. Sure, when he was being deruned it was a hot topic in the Institute, but Jace never acknowledged that he knew, never asked. He pretended the rumors— and even Alec’s passive confirmations— didn’t exist.

“Yes— but there’s no way you’re the one planning most of your dates with Magnus,” Jace rationalized. “He seems like the ring leader for most of your adventures.”

“I pan plenty of dates,” Alec defended. “Last month, actually, I took Magnus to an underground fae circus in the Bronx and had one of the performers help him do trapeze tricks after. I convinced her to do it by trading her for a huge magnolia tree tattoo on her back. Magnus hadn’t done circus tricks in years— he loved it.” He was proud of that date. Plus, he got to eat a ton of popcorn while looking at his boyfriend’s ass from very advantageous angles for an extended period of time. It was a perfect date for everyone involved.
“I stand corrected.” Jace blinked his blue and brown eyes, looking impressed.

“So why are you even asking me about the night if clearly Clary filled you in on it?”

“Why would you say that?” Jace said coyly.

“Because you know we had a sleepover and watched goofy TV shows.” Keris shoved a piece of croissant at Alec’s mouth, which he accepted awkwardly— but not before chocolate smeared on his face. He spoke with his mouth full, wiping his face with the sleeve of his worn black sweater. “Thank you, Keris.”

“This is something I never thought I’d see in a million years,” Jace said fondly. “Look at you— mister-mom-ing it up. It’s fuckin’ adorable.” Jace paled. “Shit— language, right. Gotta be a good example.” At least Jace was trying.

“So yeah, what did Clary not tell you that you wanted to know?” Alec adjusted Keris on his lap.

“She actually didn’t tell me much. She’s been napping all day— her hangover is much worse than yours. No— I found out my… information a different way. One of you happened to butt dial me last night.”

Alec blanched— what did Jace overhear? Alec didn’t remember everything he and Clary talked about. His mind was racing, piecing together how bad the damage might be.

“Someone must have sat on Clary’s phone while you two were having your late-night gossip session. It was cute. You were talking about boys.” Jace laughed. “I… um… also overheard something you said.” His voice went soft.

“Jace, I’m sorry if I said something bad.” Alec looked down. “I’m still working through a lot, and I don’t remember all of it… but—” Jace cut him off.

“Nothing like that,” Jace smiled. He dug into the pocket of his leather gear jacket, probably to check his phone. But he didn’t pull out his phone— instead, he set a small black box on the table. “You left something behind at the Institute— something that belongs to you.”

Alec looked at the simple box— it couldn’t be. He took a deep breath. Clutching Keris tightly with one arm for support, he reached out. It was a bit tricky, but he opened it with one hand. It was the Lightwood ring.

“But—” Alec stammered.

“If you’re going to propose to Magnus— be it tomorrow, a month from now, or a hundred years in the future— I want you to be able to do it right.”

He stroked the engraved insignia ring with his thumb— he was holding his birthright in his hands. His birthright that had been stripped from him. But he was still a Lightwood— and Jace hadn’t forgotten. “You have no idea how much this means to me,” Alec struggled to say the words.

“I had a vague idea.” Jace winked. “Oh sh— shoot. I have a meeting to run in fifteen minutes. I have to go.” He stood, clapping Alec on the shoulder warmly. “Bye Keris Bane— I’ll win you over yet.”

Alec sat there in the cafe alone, burying his face in Keris’ head to hide the few tears that escaped his eyes.
“Don’t tell your Papa, Pumpkin. It’ll be our little secret, okay?”

Chapter End Notes

So! Here is what happened...
I was lining up what scenes still have to happen to get this plot moving toward its end, and this chain of events fell together. It wasn't the original plan at ALL, and it bumped the smut scene back by about.... 5k words! I have over half of that sex scene written (it's the next logical scene) but I didn't want to rush that scene out. Nobody likes rushed smut!
This chapter ends so well here too, so, that's what happened!

Next chapter (or coming soon):
The smut scene I am already writing!
Aya has some ideas.
Alec does some snuggling
More. Flashbacks. We need so many more before we have closure! We still don't know all the details of the deruning! It's probably killing you! I'm sorry! There will be closure!

Only ~10 chapters left guys! Maybe more, who knows! The events of this chapter were only supposed to be like 1k words so.... hahah!

Love you all so much, hang in there <3
Chapter 54

Chapter Summary

Magnus can't wait to pamper Alec when he comes over after work.

Chapter Notes

SMUT ahead :)
With some cuteness first just for good measure!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec would be back from his shop any moment now— and Magnus’ nerves were aflutter with anticipation. He was going to spend the night at the loft for the first time in what felt like ages— although in reality it was only a few days. His plan to spoil Alec so far was well executed except for one detail— he’d made the mistake of letting the kids know that Alec would be staying over. Both children refused to go to sleep until Alec returned, and with a tattoo artist’s schedule, that meant working late into the evening.

Keris was fussing in Magnus’ arms as he paced the living room, and Aya was struggling not to drift off on the couch, watching some colorful anime on TV. He wanted to put his foot down so badly, to be firm in his discipline and make them go to sleep— but he was too empathetic toward their desires. He wanted to see Alec just as much as they did. Even Chairman Meow sensed the anticipation in the air, standing at attention on the foyer rug. His perky feline ears alerted Magnus of Alec’s return before Magnus noticed the shift in his wards, before he heard the click of the keys in the door.

Magnus rushed to the front door, meeting Alec as it opened.

“Alexander, you’re back,” Magnus leaned in, squishing Keris between them, kissing Alec fondly.

“I’m glad to be back,” he murmured against Magnus’ lips. He slid off his jacket and hung it up before striding into the living room and flopping onto the couch next to Aya. “But what are the two of you still doing up? It is way past your bedtime.”

“Papa said you were staying over and I wanted you to tuck me in!” Aya sat up, bouncing on the couch. “Keris too!”

The baby squirmed and kicked in Magnus’ arms, reaching his hands out toward Alec. Magnus acquiesced, handing over Keris. “There you go, sayang,” Magnus sighed. “Get your fill quick both of you, you have five minutes before bedtime!”


Magnus didn’t have to be so convincing to them though— once they got what they wanted— to see their favorite person— they were already starting to drift off. Aya leaned groggily against Alec’s
side, her blue snake eyes half-closed, and Keris melted into his arms. If Magnus listened closely, he could hear tiny snores coming from both of them. He swore he saw little dribbles of drool.

“They missed you,” Magnus whispered, sitting down beside Alec. He stroked his hand through Alec’s work-rumpled hair, pushing it away from his face. “I missed you too.”

“I was only gone a couple of hours,” Alec laughed quietly. He rested his head on top of Magnus’. Magnus nuzzled into the contact, fitting his head perfectly in the space in Alec’s shoulder. The unmistakable scent that was every wonderful thing about Alexander rolled up into one overtook Magnus. He breathed it in deeply. Crisp linen of his laundry soap, well-oiled leather from his jacket, a hint of the citrus-pine cleaner from the tattoo shop, a freshly opened antique book, and— Magnus swore, although it seemed unlikely—a hint of hand-mixed black ink.

“You know what I mean,” Magnus felt his voice tremble. He was vulnerable—he was in love—his family was in love. This sleepy scene was the ultimate expression of that.

“Well… I’m here now, and we have all night… Once these two go to sleep of course.” There was a wicked glint in Alec’s hazel eyes. It made Magnus’ heart leap, flipping in dizzying gymnastics.

“I think they’re already asleep—” Magnus smiled. “If we’re very careful, we could probably slide them right into bed without them noticing.”

“Aya maybe, but not Keris. He needs a change. My chunky little pumpkin must have had some late-night snacks.” Alec moved to stand up, presumably to take care of Keris. Always the caretaker, always the provider.

“No—I’ve got it!” Magnus said hurriedly. His tone woke up Aerulei and startled Alec. “I’ll take care of his diaper and put both of them to bed. You just stay here and relax. Get comfortable.” As Magnus lifted the stinky baby from his boyfriend’s arms, Alec looked confused. “Here—have a drink.” Magnus snapped his fingers, producing a glowing martini. “Put your feet up!” The coffee table scooted magically closer to Alec, his feet rising to sit atop it on their own volition. “I’ll be back before you know it.”

“But I wanted Alec to put me to sleep,” Aya whined, rubbing her eyes.

“Give Alec a hug and get in bed, I’ll tuck you in when I’m done with Keris.” Magnus hoped his tone was convincing. He nudged Aya into Alec, and she gave him a squeezing hug that must have taken every ounce of her tiny strength. Craning her neck up, she gave Alec a loud kiss on the cheek.

“Kiss Alwek too!!!” Keris demanded. Magnus gave in to the baby’s pounding fists and kicking legs, leaning over to Alec and holding out Keris. The baby planted a slobbery kiss on Alec’s other cheek, gurgling unintelligible goodnight sentiments into his ear. Or secrets. Or just random sounds. Magnus couldn’t be sure.

“Magnus, I can help, you don’t have to do it on your own.” Alec tried again to stand, but Magnus stopped him with a warning glare. It was so tempting—Magnus loved the domestic bliss in putting the children to bed together. But not tonight. He needed to prove he could still do this on his own, that Alec wasn’t expected to always help. He wanted Alec to feel loved, pampered even—to feel like he was a young, sexy boyfriend, and not a stand in for Magnus’ lack of natural parental skill.

“Nonsense, you spent all evening working, this afternoon you played babysitter to this little troublemaker,” Magnus bounced Keris in his arms. “All that, while nursing a hangover. You deserve to relax.”
He wished he could have taken Alec up on that offer— both kids were cranky now and put up a fuss, demanding Alec. They weren’t saying they didn’t want their father— they kept saying they wanted them both. Both to tuck them in, both to give them kisses, both to sing a lullaby, both to turn out the lights. It felt like it took hours to get them to go down, but when Magnus checked the clock in Aya’s room for the time, it had only been twenty minutes.

“Sorry that took so long Alexander,” Magnus sighed. “But they’re asleep now.”

“You made pretty good time, actually,” Alec looked at him with pride. “Sometimes you don’t give yourself enough credit.” Alec reached out, twisting his fingers into Magnus’ necklaces mindlessly, slowly urging him forward. Magnus’ breath hitched— this was what he’d been thinking about all day. This was what every plan he’d made was leading up to.

“I must admit— I’m a bit impatient tonight. I have...plans I’m rather eager to get started on.” Plans which, of course, he’d immediately roll back if Alec wasn’t in the mood. In the bedroom, the candles would flicker out, the music would silence, the bottle of champagne would disappear, and they would simply go to bed, snuggling up and falling asleep. But every touch, every word, every ounce of Alec that was permeating the loft, screaming ‘I am home’ threatened to make Magnus boil over. He had to act, he had to show Alec how much he meant to him. He was a man possessed— by love, by lust, by an overwhelming need to take care of his boyfriend.

“What kind of plans?” Alec asked with a naughty smirk, the knowing tone in his voice the flint to spark the evening’s fire. With the confirmation he needed, Magnus pounced, answering Alec’s suggestive question with a physical response. In a flash, he was straddling Alec on the couch, capturing his mouth with his lips. Magnus cupped his stubble-coated face in his hands, his thumbs grazing over Alec’s well defined cheekbones. Alec welcomed the kiss, his mouth opening to Magnus’ tongue. Magnus rolled into every point of contact, his body begging for more— begging for every bit of contact his addicted body had missed since Alec moved out. A needy whine escaped his lips and Alec chased the sound, kissing him deeper and stronger. Alec kissed him, and it felt like home.

“I missed you so much,” He said as he broke away, his mouth placing a trail of kisses down Alec’s neck, careful to avoid the area of his new, very sexy angel wings tattoo on the back of his neck. A tattoo that Magnus desperately wanted to see as he fucked Alec from behind— but tonight wasn’t the night for his fantasies. Tonight was for Alec.

“Come with me,” Magnus stood, pulling up Alec by his ratty black sweater.

“What?” Alec protested. He seemed startled by the lack of contact, flustered by the movement. His kiss-swollen lips stood out red against his pale skin, his hair was already starting to look sex-rumpled— and Magnus hadn’t even gotten started yet.

“Bedroom,” Magnus dragged his boyfriend along with him, stopping at frequent intervals to kiss Alec against every vertical surface in their path. On the hallway walls, on the column between the kitchen and living room, against the bedroom door both before and after they opened it.

“Magnus,” Alec gasped once they broke away long enough for him to get a look at the bedroom. “What is all this?” He looked around the room wide-eyed, taking in the romantic scene. Magnus suddenly felt self-conscious— exposed. What if Alec didn’t like it? What if it was too much? Was it cheesy? Was it forced? He was thankful he’d nixed the rose petals— that would have been too embarrassing to recover from if Alec hadn’t liked it. The candles were ostentatious enough.

“Oh it’s nothing—” Magnus prepared to whisk it away. “It’s just one candle for each day since our first date, it’s silly— It’s— ”
“It’s beautiful.” He turned back to Magnus, grabbing him by the shoulders and pulling him close. “You’re beautiful.” Alec’s arms reached down, hooking beneath Magnus’ ass and picking him up like the warlock weighed nothing at all. He spun them around, his mouth never leaving Magnus’, even as he lowered him on his back onto the bed. He was just as starving for Magnus as Magnus was for him. As Alec rushed to strip out of his own clothes, Magnus protested.

“No— this isn’t how it’s supposed to go at all, I’m supposed to slowly undress you, pay attention to every glorious inch of your body—”

Alec cut him off with a searing kiss. “If this is for me, then you don’t get to tell me what to do, right?” Alec’s voice growled. His eyes searched Magnus face, glinting with something that felt dangerous, delicious, possessive— almost unbearably hot.

“Mhmm,” Magnus hummed against Alec’s mouth, their tongues wrapped in another kiss. “Now, warlock boyfriend,” Alec breathed against Magnus’ cheek, chuckling lightly as he threw Magnus’ own words back at him. “Get us out of these clothes.” Alec pushed Magnus back further onto the bed, crawling on top of him. Nuzzling against Magnus’ neck, Alec dragged his tongue sinfully from just below Magnus’ earlobe down to his collarbone. The lights flickered above them, the sensual background music stuttered. Each candle’s flame leaped to twice its height before snapping back to normal—a few sputtering out in the process. “Are you having some trouble focusing?” Alec teased playfully.

Of course I am! Magnus wanted to shout. He could barely contain his magic— could barely keep it from running on a wild rampage when Alec was kissing his neck like that. When he didn’t answer, Alec snickered, sucking at a particularly sensitive spot behind the warlock’s jaw—it would leave a dark mark. Feeling debauched and a bit helpless, Magnus summoned every bit of control he could muster, feeling the familiar crackle of directed magic at his fingertips. With a quick snap of his fingers, the offending clothes were gone. Alec’s bare skin was so warm above him that he barely felt the initial chill of suddenly losing his clothes.

“There you go,” Alec said warmly, “You’re so good for me, Magnus.” He lowered himself so that their bodies were completely flush, their legs slotted together. Magnus couldn’t smell the lush aroma of the jasmine candles anymore—all he could smell was Alec.

“I want to be good for you,” Magnus found himself whimpering. “Let me show you how good I can be, Alexander…” Magnus surprised Alec, bucking his hips up enough to allow him to flip them over. It was a combat move, really, but also incredibly effective in bed. With Alec on his back, Magnus settled between his legs, dragging his fingernails down Alec’s chest as he dipped down to his groin. Alec’s cock jerked with interest, but Magnus held his hips down, preventing him from bucking up. His thumbs rubbed lazy circles along the outline of each one of Alec’s toned abdominal muscles, lingering gingerly over the scar on his lower flank. Alec shivered at the touch, letting out a sharp exhale. If he was already losing himself in the pleasure, Alec was in for almost more than he might be able to handle.

Keeping his eyes locked on his love’s, he took Alec in his hand, holding him steady as he licked experimentally at the tip of his cock. Just that light touch had Alec fisting the blue silk sheets. Magnus looked at how Alec was writhing beneath him and smirked to himself—he was back in control.

Opening wide and relaxing his jaw, he lowered his mouth to take in Alec’s full length, his tongue applying soft pressure to the underside. It was a bit of a challenge considering his partner’s size, but Magnus was able to bottom out, luxuriating in the sensation of the head of Alec’s cock pulsing lightly with interest against the back of his throat. In unison, they moaned— Magnus’ muffled by a
dick, Alec’s muffled by a pillow. That wouldn’t do. Magnus slowly slid up, creating just enough distance to speak. Alec whimpered at the sudden lack of contact.

“I want to hear you,” Magnus demanded. “These wards are strong enough to muffle seven marching bands and a nuclear bomb. That said— I still would love to test their limits.” Before Alec could respond, Magnus bobbed back down, keeping a slow and steady pace, punctuated by swirls of his tongue around the head, all the while keeping a soft, massaging touch to his balls. He wanted each of Alec’s nerve endings to ignite with pleasure. Now that he’d regained more control of his magic, he sent out tendrils snaking across the expanses of Alec’s body, pinching at his nipples, caressing his neck.

With an echoing moan, Magnus felt Alec’s cock grow thicker in his mouth. His balls were twitching, his muscles tensing— if Magnus didn’t stop soon, Alec was going to come. He dragged his lips sloppily along Alec’s length, sucking in his cheeks as he came up until Alec’s cock was released with a soft *pop*. Alec shivered, his cock twitching at the sudden chill. As it jerked on its own volition, a sparkling drop of precome dribbled free. Magnus couldn’t resist— he dipped back down, grabbing Alec in his hand once more and lapping at Alec’s slit. The diluted salty taste on his tongue was intoxicating.

“**Fuck, Magnus—**” Alec breathed. “That was so sexy— you make me feel so good—” Alec cut off as Magnus’ tongue flicked across the head of his dick again. “So good for me.”

“**It’s all for you, Alexander ,**” Magnus whimpered, looking up to Alec with wide doe-eyes, his glamour dropped. Alec was reveling in the pleasure— it was everything Magnus had envisioned for the night.

“You’re so gorgeous,” Alec paused. For a moment, their eyes stayed locked in a heavy, shared gaze. Magnus could almost see the energy between them crackling in the air. Illuminated only by candlelight, Alec’s hazel eyes were a kaleidoscope of earth-tones— green, brown and gold, in a full spectrum of shades and saturations. The shadows on his chiseled face were more pronounced, his jawline sharp, his cheekbones severe; there was a dusting of stubble dappling the sculpture from cheek to neck. Alec swallowed, his lips parting, but not a sound nor sigh escaped. In a startling flurry of motion, he pulled Magnus up, fitting their mouths together in a hot, messy kiss.

“**Always so pretty for me…**” Alec traced his thumb below Magnus’ eye, outlining the glittering plum eyeliner he’d put on for the occasion. “**So pretty even when you’re being filthy…**” He kissed Magnus deeper, bucking up his hips and grinding against the warlock. “**What are you going to use that pretty mouth for next?**” Alec tilted Magnus’ chin up to look him in the eye— he was asking for an answer, but Magnus knew there was only one other option, only one place he hadn’t put his mouth.

“I’m going to eat you out, stretch you out—” Magnus paused, licking his lips. “I’m going to take care of you…”

“You always take such good care of me, kitten.”

“No— I don’t take care of you enough,” Magnus said with veneration. Alexander was his god, and he was making up for every self-perceived sin, every lack of reverence— worshiping his body in every way it deserved. “That’s why tonight is just for you. Tell me how to be good for you.” Alec looked up at him with an expression Magnus couldn’t quite place. His eyes were glassy, his mouth half-smiling. It was how Magnus would imagine someone would look at a single blooming orchid in a barren rocky landscape. *Like something they wanted to protect.*

“I’ll show you, don’t worry,” Alec said soothingly, delicately sliding his fingers down Magnus’
sides. The feather-light touches sent goosebumps rising on Magnus’ skin. “Here,” Alec guided Magnus off of him, sitting him up on the blankets. Alec managed to gracefully get onto all-fours in one rolling motion. With his back slightly arched, he looked back over his shoulder to Magnus.

“I want you to rim me just like this,” Alec said plainly, guiding Magnus along. “I love how wide you spread me this way.” Alec rocked his hips ever-so-slightly, his body ready for Magnus to devour him.

Magnus didn’t have to be asked twice. He got between Alec’s legs, kneeling down and admiring Alec’s ass with something close to reverence. He squeezed each side one at a time, taking firm fistfuls of pert, toned, flesh. Alec moaned, bucking back into the contact. Magnus massaged in further, circling his palms and rubbing out some of Alec’s built up tension.

“Relax for me, Alexander,” Magnus leaned over, hovering his face over Alec’s crack as he continued to massage. “I want to take care of you.”

“I think about the way you say my name,” Alec mumbled against his crossed arms. With his face hidden in the crook of his elbows, he was emboldened— he always said the filthiest things in this position, and it drove Magnus wild. “I think about it when I’m alone, when I touch myself. Just your voice turns me on so much— say my name again.”

“Alexander,” Magnus purred, pushing Alec wide. He breathed against Alec’s rim, watching how the skin puckered and relaxed at the sensation. “Alexander,” Magnus mumbled against the soft, delicate skin. “Alexander,” Magnus nearly growled as he gave in— finally tracing his tongue around Alec’s hole. Alec’s hips immediately pushed back, crushing Magnus’ face between his cheeks. It was a heavenly way to suffocate.

“Please, push into me,” Alec breathed, arching his back further. “It feels so good, you’re so talented— I want you to fuck me with your tongue.”

Normally, Magnus would take his time, kissing, sucking, licking at Alec’s rim languidly, luxuriating in it— but Alec was impatient tonight. How could he resist such a needy demand? How could he resist the dirty words coming from Alec’s gorgeous lips?

“Yes, Alexander,” Magnus whimpered. He pushed his tongue past Alec’s tight rim, his hands holding Alec completely still. He didn’t want Alec to push into it too fast. Even though it was just his tongue, Alec needed to be stretched slowly. With a passive flick of his tongue, his magic soothed through Alec, coating him internally with a warm sheen of lube. With the addition, Magnus slid forward easily as he fucked Alec open with his tongue.

“You’re going to fuck me so good, aren’t you?” Alec asked, lifting his head to look over his shoulder with a wicked grin. Magnus slowly pulled out, replacing his tongue with a single finger. He’d left on his smooth silver monogram rings— the cold metal causing a bit of resistance, catching on Alec’s rim with each pulse. Alec clenched and relaxed with the rhythm, his back arching each time Magnus’ fingertips grazed his prostate. “But I want to see that gorgeous face as you fuck me— ” Alec was cut off by his own moan, his hole tensing around Magnus’ finger at the dragging sensation of his ring. Magnus slipped in a second finger, scissoring his fingers to test how ready Alec was. “You already made me so open, you’re taking such good care of me.”

“Can you roll onto your back for me, Alexander?” Magnus leaned forward with the thrust of his fingers, blanketing his body over Alec’s back. He kissed the skin just below Alec’s shoulder blade, his gaze tracing up Alec’s spine and landing on his new neck tattoo. The bold-lined and heavily detailed angel wings showed a stark contrast against his creamy pale skin. While it was incredibly beautiful, something about it was sinful and naughty— heretical even. It was the ultimate middle
finger to Alec’s nephilim heritage—and it was hot as hell.

“I can’t roll over with you on top of me, Mags,” Alec laughed breathily, pushing his body closer against Magnus. It was adorable, intimate, soft, natural—it was so many things Magnus hadn’t imagined himself having again, and so many things he’d never had before.

“Hmm, that is a problem… isn’t it,” Magnus began to kiss a trail down Alec’s spine—worshiping each of his chakras. “But you’re so beautiful from this angle… forgive me for being distracted……” he trailed off, his lips brushing between Alec’s shoulder blades.

“Anahata,” Magnus whispered. The candles in the room flashed a glimmering springtime green. “Your heart—more full of love than any I’ve known. Love for me, love for my children, love for your family. Your capacity for love always surprises me.”

“Manipura,” Magnus breathed against Alec’s skin, his breath sending wisps of magic through the air, making the candles flash yellow. He pressed a kiss just below Alec’s shoulder blades. “Solar plexus—responsibility, willpower. You’re a provider—you’re an achiever—you wear responsibility gorgeously, better than any designer clothing.”

“Svadhisthana.” The candles shifted a warm orange as Magnus pressed a kiss just between the dimples on Alec’s back, sending the ex-nephilim shivering. He knew he was drawing out the anticipation—perhaps a bit unfairly—but Alec deserved to be worshiped. “Sacrum—the juncture of creativity and sexuality.” Magnus’ hand slid around Alec’s waist, his fingers dusting over the quill and scroll tattoo. “You’re a master of both. Walking in on you tattooing yourself that day—it was one of the most erotic experiences of my life.”

Magnus slowly licked his tongue down the dip in Alec’s spine, drawing a wet, sensitive line all the way to Alec’s hole. There was one left.

“Muladhara.” Magnus kissed Alec’s rim deeply, with the same romantic passion he’d kissed his mouth with the moment they were alone tonight. The room was bathed in a deep scarlet, each candle burning with molten heat. “Your root—your foundation, security, what makes your soul at home.” Magnus kissed the puckering hole deeper, this time swirling his tongue before pulling away. “It doesn’t matter where you live, Alexander. You are the home to my soul. You are my root. You are what tethers my heart. I can only hope I’m the same for you.”

Alec scrambled to a sitting position, allowing Magnus to see his face for the first time since his dramatic venerations. Even in the dim lighting, he could see the flush on Alec’s face. He could hear the quickened pace of his breathing. He could see the tremble in his love’s lips.

“Magnus, of course you are,” Alec said, quieter than a whisper. He scooted closer to Magnus, cupping his face in his rough, calloused palms. His fingertips brushed Magnus’ lower lashes. Magnus leaned into the touch, resting his weight against one of Alec’s hands. “You are my home. I love you more than I ever thought I could love anything. Don’t you ever ever question that.” He kissed each of Magnus’ cheeks before kissing him lightly on the mouth. The light kiss turned into a tangle of limbs, the tense heat returning full force, snapping back from its unwelcome momentary pause.

Alec ended up on his back, Magnus hovering above him.

“I want you inside me,” Alec whined as Magnus dragged his teeth down his neck. “Want to feel you fill me up, stretch me out.” Magnus’ cock twitched at the praise, managing to grow even harder.
“I want that more than anything,” Magnus purred, adjusting their position to slot himself between Alec’s legs. He summoned a wedge pillow, which slid below Alec’s lower back to support him.

“See, you take such good care of me,” Alec adjusted his hips, linking his legs around Magnus’ waist. Magnus’ heart stuttered— Alec thought he was good. Alec felt cared for. The remaining worry scratching at the back of Magnus’ mind fell away, every inch of his brain occupied with one thought, one word— Alexander.

“Only the best for my Alexander,” he said with emphasis, savoring the hungry glimmer in Alec’s eyes each time he uttered his name. He thrust into Alec in one even motion, thankful for the added lube— he didn’t want to waste another second. Neither of their bodies could take it, already glistening with sweat, both of their cocks painfully hard. They’d artfully built up so much tension, so much anticipation— the dam was about to burst. After his first pump in and out of Alec, the first drag of Magnus’ cockhead against his prostate, everything ignited in Magnus’ senses. Judging by how Alec’s eyes rolled back in his head, his boyfriend was right there with him.

There were no more games, no more wordplay— only two men, ridiculously in love, making love. Their bodies took over, conscious decisions impossible in their state. With each thrust in, Alec pulled him tighter, flexing his thighs and using the leverage around Magnus’ waist. Magnus rockered, trying to keep his body as close to Alec’s as possible, wanting as much contact as he could get. Their fingers were laced together, gripping white-knuckled at the overwhelming sensations. Magnus lost track of the time— they might have fucked like that for minutes, they might have fucked like that for hours. Between them, Alec’s cock leaked needily, begging for release.

Magnus used his free hand to rub summoned lube along Alec’s length. His intention had only been to reduce friction, but his hand had other ideas, pumping Alec’s cock in time with Magnus’ thrust. It must have been some divine intervention— it was just in time. In his hand, Magnus felt Alec’s cock harden at the exact pace as his, felt his balls tense and draw up— they were going to come together. Not like this— not with Magnus’ hand taking up valuable space between them. He released his hand, pressing their bodies almost impossibly close together. Never slowing his pace— not that he could have if he tried— Magnus captured Alec in a kiss.

As they came, the room flared to life, blinding white light consuming them. Magnus was afraid he would become unmoored, drift into nothingness, but he was held firmly to the ground by Alec’s hand in his, by the grounding pressure of their fingers squeezing together. He screamed Alec’s name so loudly he felt his own wards waver, riding out the waves of their shared orgasm, chasing every last ounce of the sensation. As they came down from the heavenly high, the candles flickered around them, dissipating into a smoldering ember before snuffing out completely.

Plunged into darkness, they clung close to each other, Alec fitting inside of Magnus’ arms as they spooned.

“Run away with me, Alexander,” He whispered into Alec’s ear.

“There’s a lot here we can’t run from,” Alec sighed longingly, shaking his head. Magnus could hear Alec’s dry swallow. Alec was right of course, and Magnus would never dream of running away from this wonderful life he’d built. All they needed was a breath, a break to be alone.

“I just mean for a few days. I already arranged everything. Clary cleared your schedule, your shifts at the cafe were moved, and there’s someone lined up to watch the children.” Magnus paused, chewing at his lip nervously. He let out a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding, letting the remaining words fall from his mouth before he could lock them back away. “If you’ll have me, I’ve prepared everything for us to go on a trip to a private chateau in Provence, France. I have a little house there where we can be alone.”
“I think that would be good for us,” Alec said quickly. Magnus’ heard sputtered nervously. He couldn’t map the intention between how fast Alec’s response had been. If he wasn’t so tired, he would have worried it would keep him up at night.

“Good, perfect,” Magnus yawned. “We can leave whenever, of course— but I was figuring tomorrow after breakfast.”

“And after a shower?” Alec stretched his limbs long, flexing his ankles and relaxing his muscles.

“You don’t want to shower right now, darling?” Magnus teased dryly. “We could both use it.”

“Too tired,” Alec nuzzled into his pillow, his hair ruffling Magnus’ nose.

“It’s okay, so am I.” In an easy stroke of magic, Magnus had them cleaned, fresh, and had a pitcher of lemon water on the bedside table for when they inevitably woke up with unquenchable thirst in the middle of the night. He scooted closer to Alec, savoring the contact of their clean, naked skin.

“I’m going to just close my eyes for a second, and then get up for some water,” Alec yawned. “I promise I’m not falling asleep immediately after sex. That would be pretty lame, wouldn’t it.”

“Shh, sleep my love,” Magnus whispered against Alec’s hair. “You deserve it.”

“You did such a good job with all this tonight, Magnus,” Alec’s voice trailed off. Beaming with pride, Magnus snuggled his boyfriend tight against his chest, letting the feeling swaddle him in warmth and comfort. He fell asleep moments later, his well-worked body finally succumbing to its exhaustion.

Chapter End Notes

Next week.....
A trip to France, anyone?
Planning a party?
Aya meddling?

EDIT: I lied. I am taking a hiatus this week and will be back next week. This week, a chapter just didn't happen. Other stuff did, and it got in the way. I'm sorry guys :(  

I'm working on chapter 55 right now, don't worry though.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!