City of Knives

by Siavahda

Summary

“Tantō?”

“Yes.”

“Kris?”

“Yes.”

“Shuriken?”

Simon paused in the act of fastening his Shadowhunter belt. “What in the Time Lords’ names am I going to need throwing stars for?”

Jace gave him a superior look. “It’s always best to be prepared.”

“That’s why I carry condoms, not freaking ninja stars!”

Someone is murdering Downworlder children, the Clave’s Inquisitor wants Jace stripped of his runes, and the Spiral Court of the warlocks is descending on New York. But Simon has
bigger problems. A month ago he opened the Pandora's box in his soul to save Jace's life; now it won't close, and the darkness he set free is starting to take him over. With demons flocking to the city and his mind coming apart at the seams, Simon is going to need his friends more than ever.

Because the descent into Hell is easy. It's getting out alive that's the hard part.

Notes

I swore I would not keep you guys waiting a year for the next installment, so here it is! This is going to be a dark one, people. You have been warned. I will post trigger warnings in the chapter notes where appropriate so please make sure to check them before you read each chapter if you know you have triggers.

**Trigger Warnings for the prologue:** human sacrifice/murder, specifically murder of a young person, mercy-killing, physical abuse.

On a related note, I'm on the market for a beta again! I'm looking for someone in a European timezone with regular internet access and knowledge of canon (you have to have read at least books 1-5 of TMI!), preferably somebody who loves world-building and discussing/building/developing ideas and plots. I need a soundboard for ideas and plotting more than I need someone to check my grammar, but also someone who will tell me when my prose is getting too purple or convoluted!

If you're interested, drop me a message saying why you're interested and why you think you'd be a good beta at my tumblr, siavahdainthemoon, or send a pm to my account (Siavahda) on fanfic dot net. Anon messages on tumblr (but not ff dot net) are fine so long as you provide an email address so I can message you back privately. And don't forget to mention three of your favourite books!

Now, on with the fic! ARE YOU EXCITED? I AM EXCITED.
Prologue: Sacrifice

To any mundanes passing by, the abandoned hospital of the Brooklyn Naval Yard was a miracle of architecture—because it really shouldn’t have been standing. Peeling paint and rotten boards were just barely visible beneath the riotous vines and overgrowth, and if anyone had stopped to peer through the doors just barely clinging to their hinges, they would have glimpsed a kingdom of dust and dirt, scattered with dead leaves and puddles of stagnant water, foul with the scent of animal urine. That it had not yet been demolished was surely some clerical oversight; that it had not collapsed under the weight of its own disrepair was nothing short of a minor miracle.

If they had possessed some glimmer of the Sight, however, they would have seen something very different.

Stripped of the glamour of dust and dirt, the entrance hall gleamed beneath a chandelier of witchlight and crystal, the white marble floor reflecting the light like a mirror. Far from containing the remains of a hospital’s reception, the hall featured a curved double staircase leading to the upper floors, carpeted in white and pale grey, framed by a railing of gracefully wrought silver. A fine table stood between the two staircases, bearing up a flower arrangement of hydrangeas, phalaenopsis orchids, and calla lilies.

A young man stood by the table, staring sightlessly at the flowers. The light of the chandelier pulled a blue gleam from his dark hair, like that of a raven’s wing. In his voyance-Marked hand he twirled a slender stem of forget-me-not, idly, as if he had forgotten it.

A scream tore through the house, a thin, keening wail.

The young man sighed, set the forget-me-nots down on the table, and entered the door beneath the left-hand stair.

Witchlight torches illuminated the spiral staircase down into the darkness beneath the house. Another scream, more piercing than the last, echoed off the stone before he reached the subterranean floor. A mundane would not have been able to hear, beneath the scream, another voice chanting; a mundane would not have recognised, nor understood, the demonic language being spoken.

“Ajarbex naintenor mrzes dorzekst…”

The young man pushed open another door.

The room revealed was stone, but for a wide circle of bare earth in the middle of the floor. The centrepiece was an elaborate edifice of silver and adamas, a low table of woven metal and crystal raised just inches from the ground. At another time, in another place, it would have been a beautiful object—but now it was a thing of horror, awash with the blood of the young warlock bound to it, the source of the screams. The teenaged Downworlder struggled like a moth pinned to a corkboard, his wings—black and ribbed, the wings of a bat—staked down by silver spikes into the dirt, his wrists charred and smoking with the Infernal runes Marked there to bind his magic. His screams dissolved into hoarse, choking sobs as the door opened, as he tried unsuccessfully to curl away from the pain.

Ignoring both his victim and the new arrival, the ‘priest’ of this macabre ritual continued to chant, the long spill of his hair shining the same silver as the sword in his rune-Marked hands. Its blade dripped the warlock’s blood back onto the boy’s ruined chest.

“Ssnakris zesth jedesk naitensk…”
Careful not to disturb the elaborate sigils painted and etched into the floor—a twisted amalgamation of Celestial and Infernal Marks, all of them shimmering in the corner of the eye, seeming to shift and quiver like repelling magnets but chained in place as surely as the warlock—the dark-haired young man crossed the room and took up position in the corner. His face was impassive, remained impassive as blue flames caught where the warlock’s blood met the earth, as the runes around the room began to burn.

“Morozon jhaled, extrinza…”

“Please,” the warlock begged, catching sight of him, seeing him through the glaze of tears and agony, “please help me!”

The young Shadowhunter watched, but said nothing and did not move, even as the boy broke down into helpless, despairing sobbing again. Regardless of their real age few warlocks looked older than twenty-five, but since the ritual called for a child this one must actually be as young as he looked—somewhere between sixteen and eighteen, only a touch younger than his one-man audience. He was almost certainly the newest and best-loved treasure of the Spiral Court, who cherished their children above all things, even more than did the fey. He had probably never felt any serious pain before tonight, and now it was the last thing he would ever know.

There was no help to give. He would not live long enough to see the sky even if the dark-haired Shadowhunter answered the plea in his eyes and rescued him from this. His injuries were too great.

It was almost over.

The chant reached its crescendo, every word ringing with triumph. The young Shadowhunter met the despairing agony in the child’s eyes and did not look away, did not flinch as the room exploded with azure fire, a detonation of searing, electrifying power from the very heart of the world. He bore still, silent witness as Valentine’s long seraph blade directed the flames to coalesce, gathering them together in a summer-sky firestorm; watched without quailing as the sword came down and drove through the boy’s broken torso into the blood-soaked earth beneath the altar, as the whirlwind of fire plunged down after it and the teenager ripped himself to pieces around one final scream, his blood staining the flames first crimson and then darkest black. It went on and on, that scream, on and on until the roar of the fires drowned it out, the sound of a thousand storms tearing the boy’s body apart between them, jet flames spilling out of his mouth and eyes and from beneath his fingernails, ribs cracking and wrists breaking like toys with the violence of his frenzied convulsions, a channel for forces that could not be channelled—

Until the room was drowned in ebony, no blue remaining to mitigate the dark horror of the shadow-lit sacrifice, the un-light shining black nightmares on the spilled blood and the boy’s pain-struck eyes and Valentine’s exultant face—

And abruptly was gone. The seraph blade exploded, shards of splintered adamas flying to all corners as the flames vanished, snuffed out like a capped candle; without warning there was only the light of the witchlight lamps, the hellish scene replaced by bare stone walls and a circle of bloodstained dirt, the runes on the floor reduced to ashy scorch-marks.

The young Shadowhunter was kneeling beside the altar, and the warlock boy was dead.

The sudden silence rang.

“Get up,” Valentine ordered. His voice was cold as Sheol.

Smoothly, the young man rose, leaving his dagger where it lay sheathed in the warlock’s heart. His
face was cool and composed as he stood with his hands clasped behind his back.

The blow Valentine struck him sent him sprawling to the bloody floor, the sound of it lingering like a whipcrack on the still air.

“Every moment of his pain strengthened the spell,” Valentine said. “Your interference cost me that strength. When you have cleaned up this mess, you will pay it back to me, and perhaps next time, you will remember its price.” There was blood on his face, where a piece of his broken blade had flown and cut him; it was almost black against his skin. “The spell was already complete; you only kept it from being as strong as it might have been. What did you hope to gain?”

The young man said nothing. His cheek was already beginning to bruise.

“Bring me the whip,” Valentine said, “when you are done.” He left the room without a backwards glance for either boy, the dead or the silent.

Only when the door was closed did the dark-haired Shadowhunter push himself upright. For a moment he held himself still, listening for the older man’s heartbeat, making sure Valentine was truly gone and not waiting in the corridor outside. When he was certain, he went to stand beside the body of the teenager, dropping to one knee beside it.

Carefully, with the air of someone performing a foreign ritual, he closed the boy’s eyes. “Ave atque vale,” he whispered; hail and farewell, the Shadowhunter valediction to the honoured dead. The ancient Latin words sounded strange from his lips, unfamiliar; a platitude he had never mouthed before.

He paused, letting the words hang like snowflakes in the air; cold, and useless, and all too brief. And then they were gone, and he rose to fetch what cleaning supplies he would need to scrub the blood from the floor, and from his hands.

NOTES

In the language of flowers, forget-me-nots symbolise true love and memories.

Sheol is a Hebrew name for Hell, or possibly one of several Hells.
Hey guys! Hope you're ready to hit the ground running!

Just to let you all know, I have found a wonderful new beta! Her name is Courtland and she is utterly fabulous. She was instrumental in making this chapter work, so send her loads of virtual hugs!

Also, I made a small mistake in the prologue, saying Valentine had the Mortal Sword. That was a terrible typo, and he does not have the Sword.

Now, onwards!

“Stele?”
“Yep.”
“Simiel?”
“When do I not have Simiel?”
“Boot knife?”
“That ballistic dagger thing Izzy gave me.”
“Tantō?”
“Yep.”
“Kris?”
“Yep.”
“Shuriken?”

Simon paused in the act of fastening his Shadowhunter belt. “What in the Time Lords’ names am I going to need throwing stars for?”

Jace gave him a superior look. “It’s always best to be prepared.”

“That’s why I carry condoms, not freaking ninja stars!”

With a smirk, Jace withdrew three razor-edged xs from his own belt, crossed over to Simon, and kissed him. “Maybe if you’re very lucky,” he murmured, slipping the shuriken into one of Simon’s many pockets, “you’ll need both.”

“Not at the same time, I hope.” Simon barely knew what he was saying, the low, hot purr of his boyfriend’s voice echoing down his spine, pooling molten and gold in the pit of his stomach. He caught his hand around the back of Jace’s neck and pulled him in for another, longer kiss, loving the
shiver that ran under his fingers as it raced down Jace’s back. “Only you would look forward to any situation that called for ninja stars,” he said when they parted, trying for dry but unable to keep the fondness from his voice.

Jace just grinned at him. “I hear that mundane high schools are terrifying places,” he said unrepentantly. “Worse than any circle of Hell. Cheerleaders, algebra, Civil War history… Who knows what kind of monsters you’ll face?”

The thin veneer of light-heartedness wasn’t quite enough to hide the glint of real worry at the back of Jace’s eyes. Simon made himself smile, trying to be reassuring. He could guess what it cost Jace to let him go today—to a mundane high school, surrounded by people who couldn’t help fend off a demon attack even if they could see the monsters coming—which they couldn’t.

Jace stepped back, a blasé mask snapping down over his concern. “Maybe you just shouldn’t go,” he said lightly. “It’s not as if any of that stuff matters. You could catch up on your training.”

“All I’ve been doing for two weeks is train,” Simon said—but gently. “You’ve got to let me out of your sight eventually, you know.”

“You’re a decade behind,” Jace said, ignoring that last part. “Two weeks is nothing. It’ll be years before I can trust you out on your own; how could I ever show my face at Taki’s again if you mixed up a barghest and a werewolf? Or—”

“Jace.”

Jace shut up. His knuckles had gone white, Simon noticed, before Jace shoved his hands in his pockets.

“There’s been no demons sighted for two weeks,” Simon said quietly. “That’s what you told me. Right? Not since Abigor.”

“Simon—”

“Nobody is going to try and kill me in Computer Sciences,” Simon continued firmly. “The Downworlders don’t care about me—and they’re all on best behaviour because of the Accords next month anyway—and we scared all the demons away. I’ll be fine.”

“It’s not normal,” Jace said tightly, “for the city to be this quiet. They could be planning something, building up to something—Abigor was after you, Simon, you in particular. Demons don’t do that.”

“Well, if they show up in gym class, my angel will smite them,” Simon pointed out. “And the International Space Station will get a free light show again. They might even send me a thank-you note; I bet it gets really boring, the view from up there—”

Jace didn’t smile. “If you want to go to school so badly, we could send you to the Academy in Idris. They’d welcome you.”

And you’d be safe there. The words hovered between them, heavy and unyielding.

“I really don’t think they would, you know,” Simon said lightly. We’ve been over this, Jace. Over it and over it. Was this how Jace had felt, when Simon had kept trying to convince him not to take his oath to the Clave? “Not once they met me.”

Jace made a dismissive gesture. “You’re a pureblood, Morgenstern and Fairchild—and the son of a runecaster. There’s almost nothing you could do that would make them turn you away. Alec’s
already had four letters from the Headmaster asking why we haven’t enrolled you yet.”

Simon blinked. “You didn’t tell me that.”

Jace raised one golden eyebrow. “Would it have made a difference?”

No, it wouldn’t have. Jace and his siblings had explained the Academy to Simon weeks ago, both in an attempt to whisk Simon out of reach of any more demonic assassination attempts and in the hopes of finding someone on the staff who could better understand Simon’s…unique powers. But it was a military school in the strictest sense; no art or literature classes, no sciences or computer labs—not even any maths. Only martial arts and weaponry, tactics and runes, demonology and Downworlder identification—almost twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Because why would a Shadowhunter need to know how many planets there were in the solar system, or who Shakespeare was?

They did, Jace had stressed, have music classes. Weirdly enough, Simon hadn’t particularly cared.

“No,” Simon said aloud, although the silence had already made his point for him. “It doesn’t. Because I don’t want to grow up to be a Shadowhunter, Jace. And if I want a place in the Light World—” Jace twitched, the way he always did when Simon used the term he’d coined to replace the derogatory implications of mundane world, but Simon told himself it was a smaller twitch than it had been a week ago, “—then I have to go to a Light World school. It’s not complicated.”

“It’s also not safe,” Jace said—but quietly, a low mutter that Simon could pretend not to hear if he chose.

He didn’t choose. “It’s perfectly safe,” he corrected, gently. “And I’ll have Clary with me.”

“She’s not a Shadowhunter.”

“Maybe not, but it wasn’t a Shadowhunter who saved our asses from Abbadon,” Simon reminded him. “And even Izzy is jealous of Buffy.”

“Which is still a ridiculous name for a blade.” But Jace seemed ever so slightly mollified. As a mundane (Light Worlde, Simon reminded his brain firmly) Clary couldn’t drop into Shadowhunter battle-trance or use runes, but that didn’t disqualify her from learning how to handle herself in a fight. If anything, she’d dived into the lessons far more fiercely than Simon, who was still uneasy about the bloodlust that took him over in battle, and the dreams he kept having of blood and slaughter—dreams that ought to have been nightmares, but weren’t.

“It is an awesome name, and your pettiness does not disguise your envy nearly as well as you think it does.” Simon pulled on his school blazer, checking the mirror to be sure none of his weapons showed. St Xavier’s was not the kind of school equipped with metal detectors at every door, but he suspected they would take a very dim view of his personal armoury if they found it. All things considered, he would rather avoid trying to explain that his incestuous lover was worried about him being attacked by demons. ‘He wouldn’t let me out of the house without them, sir…’ ‘Now, are you going to brood, or can I get a kiss goodbye?’”

Jace slipped closer without hesitation, but there was a desperate edge to the kiss, a sharp taste of not-quite-fear on his tongue. He was resigned, not reassured. “Call me between classes,” he murmured. The command was almost a plea. “I’ll pick you up at four.”

Yes, mom. Simon wasn’t cruel enough to say it, especially since he wasn’t nearly as blasé about the risks as he wanted Jace to think. “I’ll be fine,” he promised.
Jace kissed the corner of his lips. “You’d better be.”

—

Clary was waiting on the sidewalk by the time Jace and Simon reached the front door of the Institute. It was only the slight bulge of Buffy at her pocket that kept Jace from insisting on a last-minute escort to their classroom doors—and he was still contemplating tailing them from the rooftops just to keep an eye on them when a pang came from Alec.

Reminding himself for the thousandth time that Simon’s angel would keep him safer than Jace ever could, Jace went to find his parabatai.

At this hour, most Shadowhunters were asleep, recovering from a night of patrolling and hoarding energy for the next. It was only Simon’s influence that Jace and his siblings were as diurnal as they were, but it was still not normal to find Alec in the library with the sun this new in the sky.

Or rather, it was becoming distressingly normal, and it had to stop.

“You should be asleep,” Jace said, finding Alec among the northern-most shelves. His parabatai must have come here right after they got back last night, not even pausing to change clothes before hitting the books; he was still wearing the dragon-hide trousers of his hunting gear, and twin throwing daggers gleamed in his wrist-sheathes. “Even the sun’s complaining about having to get up this early.”

“Doesn’t help.” A wave of resigned exhaustion came through the bond, and Jace tried not to let his worry bleed through. Alec had always been pale, his creamy skin only making his blue eyes and dark hair more strikingly lovely—but lately he’d started to look like something made of paper, fragile and spectral. His eyes were darker than ever, but now the sapphire-blue was offset by the violet circles in the hollows beneath. The śimādi anģelou, the silvery mark Simon’s angel had left on Alec’s right palm, was hidden beneath the fingerless gloves Alec hadn’t taken off for weeks, but Jace glanced towards it anyway, automatically.

It was what had started all this, after all, although Jace couldn’t be sure if it was the cause or just a herald for what was wrong with Alec.

Between the half-dozen books spread out on the table, Alec’s phone lay like a dead thing. Jace picked it up absently. “You’ve still got to try,” he said. “Your body needs to rest.”

“I ’rest’ all Fallen-damned day, and just wake up more tired,” Alec snapped, a rare surge of hot emotion snarling through their link—scorchingly reassuring, compared to the feeling of wet ashes that was nearly all Alec could manage lately.

And then it was gone, as suddenly as it had flared. Jace had to bite his tongue to stop himself from yelling for it to come back.

Alec slumped in the chair. “He’s not answering his phone.”

Jace blinked once. “Magnus?” he guessed.

“He said he had a late—early?—business meeting, and I could call him after six if I was up. But he’s not answering.” Alec’s worry was a thick, slow thing, as if it had to fight its way through quicksand to reach a place where Alec could register it. “He always answers, when he’s said I can call.”

Carefully, Jace put the phone down on one of the demonology texts. It was open to a graphic illustration of a manticore demon feeding on a human woman. “He probably just fell asleep before he
meant to.”

It seemed to take a long time for Alec to nod acknowledgement. “Yeah. It’s nothing.” But his quiet words rang hollow, and a dull, miserable ache lodged in his throat like a stone—Jace felt the ghost of it behind his own Adam’s apple.

He didn’t know what to do.

Before he was forced to decide, a sound like a struck gong reverberated through the bookshelves; not the slightly alarming BOOM that warned of a Downworlder at the door, but a heavy, regal noise announcing the arrival of fellow Shadowhunters. At this hour, the door-spells would not have rung in any bedrooms but that of the Head of the Institute, but every other room in the building would have heard; the kitchen, the training hall, the infirmary and greenhouses…

The library.

As one, Jace and Alec glanced at each other, mirroring identical frowns of wary confusion. The thought flashed between them like a quarrel from a crossbow: the Inquisitor?

Without needing to exchange a word aloud, they both went to see who had come, Alec snatching his phone from the table as he passed.

* 

“Alec! Jace!”

It was not the Inquisitor.

Jace stopped at the head of the stairs. Beside him, Alec lit up, a small burst of surprised delight burning through the fog of his apathy. “Max!” He took the rest of the stairs in a rush and scooped up his little brother, effortlessly lifting and whirling the eight-year-old through the air. “You got so big!”

“Did not! We were only gone a month!”

“One and a half,” his mother corrected, pushing back the hood of her double-breasted coat. The motion let free the long plait of her hair, falling like an ebony rope almost to her waist. Only the gleam of silver razors woven into the braid differentiated it from the black of her coat. “That is not suitable conduct for an Acting Head, Alexander.”

As swiftly as it had come, Alec’s pleasure was snuffed out; Jace saw him stiffen, and lower Max back to the floor. “Yes, mother.”

“He’s not Acting Head,” Jace pointed out, descending the stairs. “You’re back. The paperwork is once again your responsibility.” He paused. “You have my condolences.”

He’d expected her to laugh. Instead she flicked a single glance at him, like a thrown blade of blue ice, and looked away.

“I think Isabelle is asleep,” Alec was telling Robert—his father, their father for the last eight years. Jace clung to the fact, even as he suddenly realised that Alec was of a height with Robert now, was maybe even a fraction taller. When had that happened? “But I can wake her—she’ll be so happy to see you! We didn’t know you were coming back so soon—”

“And we wouldn’t have,” Maryse said sharply, “if the three of you hadn’t—"
She stopped herself, but Jace had recovered from the dagger she’d flung his way. “Hadn’t what, mother?”

She had the same blue eyes as Alec, but Jace had never seen Alec’s eyes so algid. “I am not your mother,” she said. “That has been made very clear to us all.”

Jace stared at her. Alec’s shock was a splash of cold water through the bond, but he said nothing, did nothing. In battle such a blow would have brought his parabatai running with an arrow already nocked, distracting the enemy so Izzy could get to Jace, so Jace could get under cover. But there was no enemy here, no demon, no threat…

“Jace?” Max’s voice was small and fragile. He was clinging to Alec’s hand, his blue eyes gone wide and worried behind his glasses.

Before Jace could figure out how to reassure his little brother, Robert intervened. “We will discuss this later.” He gave Maryse a meaningful look. “Alexander, if you could take Maximillian to his room… Your mother and I need to talk to Janim.”

Alec hesitated, glancing between them. He didn’t move.

“There’s no point trying to keep him out of it,” Jace said. A sick chill was spreading through his veins, a lump of dirty ice growing in the pit of his stomach. “Whatever you say to me, he’ll hear.”

“Are you mad at Jace?” Max asked. “Why are you mad at Jace?”

“Take him up to his room, Alexander,” Maryse ordered.

“I don’t want to go!” Max burst out. “I don’t want you to be mad at Jace!”

“Maximillian,” Robert began, “that is no way to speak to your mother—”

**BOOM!**

Everyone turned to look at the doors. They had already closed behind the Lightwoods; it was protocol to never leave them open—or unlocked. One hundred and eight rune-Marked bolts and locks bound the great doors in silver and steel and electrum, a vertical labyrinth of latches and clasps sealing the Institute against attack. To force them open would require destroying the walls around them, because they would not unbar for any but one of the Nephilim without their Master’s order.

“Well, go on, Alec,” Jace said lightly. “Let’s see who it is.”

Maryse glared at him and opened her mouth to speak—as Jace himself had pointed out, Alec was no longer Head of the Institute now their parents were home—but Alec, confused, raised his gloved hand without thinking, and the soft, clicking song of over a hundred locks sliding open answered him.

The doors swung open.

Jace had not been expecting anyone in particular, but he had definitely not been expecting the sight that greeted them. It was Magnus standing on the entrance stairs, and he had come not with the ducked head and bended knee Downworlders usually afforded Shadowhunter pride, but armoured and armed for war. He burned in the early morning light, limned by the still-rising sun behind him; it caught fire on the dozens of gems on his fingers, the rings of steel and gold at his ears, and the glitter-dusted kohl around his eyes. The long black coat he wore whipped and snarled around his legs, although there was no wind; and there were runes Marked on that coat, runes that did not belong to
the Angel. When Jace caught a glimpse of their black-on-black gleam, they burned his eyes.

“Who’s that?” Max whispered, sounding awed.

No one answered him.

Robert drew himself up. “Magnus Bane.”

“Oh, so you are here,” Magnus said. Jace had never heard a Downworlder speak to a Shadowhunter this way, with such heavy, undisguised sarcasm and a low undercurrent of blackest rage poisoning every word. “And here I was thinking the Nephilim must have abandoned New York outright.”

“Watch your tone, Downworlder.” Maryse stepped up beside her husband. “We abandoned nothing.”

“You left children to guard this city!” Magnus hissed, and Jace realised that Magnus’ eyes were glazed as if with fever, that his skin was paler than it ought to be.

*Is he sick?* he asked Alec.

*He wasn’t when we talked yesterday…* Alec’s heart was a roiling storm of worry and shock, and no wonder; to have his Downworlder boyfriend here, in the same room as his parents…

“Our children are not like yours, warlock,” Maryse said coolly.

“No,” Magnus agreed, and if Maryse’s voice were cold then Magnus’ was colder, cold as ice. “They are never the ones who die.”

Robert placed a hand on his wife’s arm. “How can we help you, Bane?”

Magnus turned to the man, sharp and unforgiving. He seemed to have regained control of himself. “Your help is not requested or required, Nephilim. I am here to pass on a message, not to beg for the protection your Accords are supposed to afford us.”

“The Accords protect your kind from yourselves and the Infernal you call kin,” Maryse said. “You should be grateful.”

Gold was supposed to be a warm colour, but the gaze Magnus turned on Jace’s mother made it cold. “One of my children was murdered last night,” he said, very quietly. “And you tell me I should be grateful?”

Across the room, Alec’s indrawn breath was a hiss; his disbelief tore through Jace like hail.

“Warlocks have no children,” Robert said, frowning.

“Every warlock child,” Magnus said, “is a child of mine. As they are the child of every other adult warlock.”

*I didn’t know that,* Jace said. *Did you know that?*

*No.* Alec did not seem relieved to hear that the dead child was not biologically Magnus’. It clearly didn’t make a difference to the warlock, which meant it made no practical difference at all.

“Last night, someone murdered our son and his guardian.” Magnus’ voice was rough. “Their names were Elias Ruth and Xia Dolor, and they died because you were not here. Because you care so little for your precious Accords, you left your job undone with only children to mind it for you. So here is
your message, Shadowhunters: the Spiral Court will be here by noon, and we will be hunting for justice. We will sign the Accords in the killer’s blood, or we will not sign at all.”

NOTES

A tantō is a Japanese blade that comes in a bunch of variations, usually to do with blade thickness, length and style of point. Simon’s is a modified Yoroi Toshi, which means the point is made for armour piercing, but his is dagger length, in the modern Americanised style. I’ve seen these punch through a car door—just the thing for hunting demons, plenty of which have thick hide or armour plating.

A kris is a wavy-bladed dagger or shortsword from Indonesia. Because of the wavy blade they do a ton of damage on the way in and out, for disabling opponents as quickly as possible. Again, a good characteristic for battling demons, no?

A barghest is a supernatural black dog, generally considered monstrous, sometimes as an omen of death.

108 is an important number in Hinduism (there are 108 Maukhya Shivaganas) Buddhism (a Buddhist mala/rosary has 108 beads) and Judaism (108 is a multiple of 18, and contains the numbers 1 and 8 that compost 18, 18 being connected to the Hebrew word for ‘alive/living/life’).

In canon, Elias, the child warlock Valentine murders, isn’t given a surname. I chose ‘ruth’ for him, which as a noun means ‘compassion for the misery of another’. Xia Dolor is an OC, and her surname means ‘misery’. (I know it doesn’t fit the four-letter-word rule for warlock surnames, but I liked it so much I don’t care!)

A note on the Accords: in canon, the Accords are signed every 15 years and were signed most recently during City of Bones; reference is made to the fact that the Lightwood parents are in Alicante specifically for that signing. In Runed, this is not the case. The Accords are signed every 17 years (to account for everyone’s ages, and the fact that my OCD does not like the number 15), and while they are due to be re-signed this year, that has not yet happened—it’s due to take place in about a month from the start of Knives. Robert and Maryse were in Alicante in preparation for that signing; there’s about three months of last-minute negotiations and celebrations leading up to the actual ceremony, and those two were attending.

A note on Max: yes, Max is eight in Runed, not ten. This is primarily because I have more experience with eight year olds than ten year olds and don’t want to write him badly!
Cast Out Upon the Stones

Chapter Notes

A huge huge thank you to my wonderful beta Courtland, for being extra epic even when she was ill! She helped out ENORMOUSLY with this chapter, and you guys would not have gotten it so soon without her :D

Magnus did not stay to listen to the outraged protests of the Lightwood parents. While they were still demanding explanations and issuing furious censures, he gave them one last, disgusted look, turned on his heel in a flutter of raven-wing coat, and left.

Without once glancing Alec’s way.

“Bane. Bane!” Alec’s father roared. But he did not chase the warlock, and Magnus did not look back.

*You have to give him points for style,* Jace said.

Alec was numb. Magnus has a son. His son is dead. The two statements locked together like the twin heads of an amphisbaena, rolling endlessly around and round his mind. Had the redness of Magnus’ eyes been illness as Jace thought, or had the warlock been crying, mourning…?

Something in Alec gave way at the thought, twisted until it snapped and ripped a searing slash across his cement-heavy heart; wounded and raw and fierce and frantic, he let go of Max and forgot to be afraid as he bolted after his boyfriend. “Magnus! Wait!”

Forgot about his parents, standing right there and already focussed on the issue of the High Warlock; forgot to listen when poor Max called after him, confused and bereft; forgot to be afraid of what this might look like, running after a male Downworlder he wasn’t supposed to know—

Forgot to be afraid of anything except that Magnus was hurting—

*I’ll cover you,* Jace sent, just as if they were hunting, as if Alec were shifting positions to play the checkmate on another demon, another monster, and Alec didn’t think he was enough to slay Magnus’ pain but Raziel curse them all, he had to try—

He hit the sidewalk at a run and raced after the beating wings of Magnus’ black coat. “Magnus!”

His boyfriend stopped, looked back as he had not for Robert and Maryse, for the Shadowhunters who ran this city’s Institute. Unabashed shock whipped across the grief in his face, blanked out the rage, and Alec felt it as a pang in his heart, that Magnus was surprised Alec would follow him.

Of course I came, how could I not, did you really think I wouldn’t care?

“What are you doing?” Magnus asked when Alec was closer. His voice was still thick and awful, but the anger had gone out of it, replaced with a horrible resignation. He was not angry at Alec, apparently. At least.

Alec came to a halt in front of him. The distance between them felt like a river, like the Styx, and
suddenly he realised he had no idea how to cross it, how to reach Magnus on the other side.

“I wanted…” Not to ask if Magnus were okay; he wouldn’t be, couldn’t be. “I wanted to tell you that I’ll wear mourning runes for him. For them both.”

Magnus stared at him. Alec didn’t know what to name the expression on his face. Up close, the warlock really did look ill; wan and sudoric, and his feline eyes were just a little bloodshot...

“If you don’t think it would be inappropriate,” Alec added quickly. “I know you must be angry with us, for… For everything.” Alec felt sick just thinking about it. *He* had been the one in charge last night; Magnus’ son had been murdered on his watch. He’d long since had to accept the fact that he couldn’t save everyone; that for every demon sent back to Hell, another ten were killing mundanes somewhere else. But this was different. This was… “If you don’t want a Shadowhunter mourning with you, I’d—I’ll understand.”

“No,” Magnus said.

Despite what he’d said, Alec hadn’t really believed Magnus would reject him, would forbid him the Marks, and that quick *no* thrust in like a knife and twisted, vicious, unforgiving. Just as quickly, Alec was disgusted with himself; this wasn’t about him, about them, and he had no right to be hurt by it. Magnus had good reasons for not wanting to taint his son’s mourning with Alec’s half-grief—Alec hadn’t even known the boy, or this Xia Dolor; what right did he have to—?

Magnus cleared his throat. “I mean, no, I wouldn’t mind,” he explained. He didn’t smile, but the river between them seemed a little narrower, a little shallower than it had been.

Alec nodded mutely. He had heard that mundanes apologised when they heard of someone’s death; for the first time, he thought he understood the bizarre custom. He was so sorry; sorry that he had let this happen in his canton, sorry that a child was dead, sorry that Magnus was in pain. “Call me,” he said lamely; “If I can do anything. Or if you just want to talk. I’ll answer.”

Magnus’ eyes were golden mirrors, giving nothing away. “Thank you.” He looked as if he might say something more, but he caught himself.

Alec nodded again, feeling stupid and useless, still working on supressing his own shock and confusion. Magnus looked only a year or two older than Alec, but he had a son, had had a son, and hadn’t mentioned it, and were there more children—none of it mattered, he couldn’t believe he was even thinking about these things. Magnus’ son was *dead*. Which reminded him.

“We need to see where they died,” he said quietly. He couldn’t look Magnus in the eye. “To start tracking down the killer. Is there someone who can show us?”

Magnus was very still. When he spoke, his voice was level, almost toneless. “I can arrange for someone to show you where Xia was killed, yes.”

I’m sorry. He braced himself. “And Elias?”

For a moment, he thought Magnus wasn’t going to answer. Then;

“That won’t be possible, I’m afraid.” He said it lightly, glitter over gore, and Alec almost flinched at the razors buried in every word. “We haven’t found his body yet.”

When Magnus left Alec walked slowly back to the Institute, thinking over their conversation, sifting
the short exchange for implications, ramifications. Trying to focus on the practical aspects, instead of tying himself in knots over the emotions involved.

‘Did you mean that about the Court? About not signing?’

‘I meant every word.’

Would the warlocks really refuse to sign the Accords, if they—or the Shadowhunters—couldn’t find the killer? Alec had no real idea of what that would mean. The Accords had been in place for his entire life; even the short-lived Uprising had not managed to break the centuries-long chain of signings, pen put to paper every seventeen years since 1810. He didn’t know what it was like to live without the protection of that all-encompassing peace treaty. What would change? What would be affected?

He was still thinking it through when he found Jace waiting for him in the entrance hall.

“I told them that you’d really taken to the responsibility of being Acting Head,” his parabatai said. He was lying sprawled on one of the couches, his legs draped over the arm. “And that it was thus automatic for you to go and get as much information about the situation as possible.” He sat up, swinging his feet around to lay flat on the floor. “They both agreed that you are a marvellously responsible administrator, and want to see us in the library as soon as possible.”

Alec stared at Jace a moment, trying to make sense of this. Pulling his thoughts away from Magnus left him feeling sluggish and slow to catch up, unable to process what Jace was saying. He understood enough, wordlessly, to know that their parents had not asked for Alec, but that Jace wanted him at that meeting nonetheless. “Why?”

Jace’s face was blank. “I suspect,” he said carefully, “that they want to discuss my father.”

“Now?” Alec bit back a flash of orange anger, saw-toothed and hot and disbeliefing. “Now? What difference does it make who your father is? We should be looking for whoever killed Elias and Xia, not—”

“And maybe that is what they want to talk about. They didn’t say it was about my hitherto-unsuspected parentage.” But beneath the skin Jace’s unease was obvious, and Alec knew Jace didn’t believe it. He didn’t need to catch the glimpses of Jace’s memories—his impressions of their parents’ reactions to him, before Magnus had torn the scene apart—to trust his parabatai’s instincts.

How could their parents possibly care about Jace’s father? And now, of all times?

“Fine. Come on.” Alec strode past the couch and towards the stairs. “But we’re waking Izzy first.”

If there was any chance he was going to have to do battle, he wanted their sister at his side.

★

Despite the chill twisting low in his chest, Jace had to suppress a smile as Maryse gave Izzy an annoyed glance. “You do not need to be here, Isabelle.”

“Why not?” Izzy demanded. “You’re not trying to kick Alec out.”

“Alexander is Janim’s parabatai,” their mother said. She sounded slightly strained. “You—”

Isabelle tossed her hair. “Actually,” she said, “we’re all three of us agelai now. So I have every right to be here too.”
Maryse and Robert goggled at her. Jace had rarely seen either of them truly taken aback by anything, but they couldn’t have been more shocked—and more obviously appalled—if their only daughter had suddenly announced she was pregnant by a werewolf.

That was not a good sign.

Still, *When did that happen?* Jace asked, a little bit amused. *Did we all get very drunk and have the parabatai Mark tattooed in some hideously inappropriate place?* He paused. *Mine’s on the ass, isn’t it? I knew there had to be a reason I was sore.*

*No, that was Simon,* Alec said smoothly, and his face remained perfectly composed as Jace choked.

At least their antics distracted their parents. Robert shot Jace an unimpressed look, and Maryse’s cool disapproval doused any last trace of scandalised humour.

He felt Alec’s wordless apology like a drop of rain.

“When did this take place?” Robert asked. He was a tall man, well-built and strong, with the aristocratic features typical of most pureblood Shadowhunters—the stamp of the Angel—and Jace had always thought of him as self-possessed. His voice was level now, but there was a tightness in it. “Who witnessed it?”

Isabelle did not falter, but then, Jace would have been surprised if she had. “The promise has been made,” she said coolly, with every bit of her mother’s glass-smooth poise. “That it has not yet been Marked is legally irrelevant.”

*Is that true?* Jace asked.

*Yes. The legalities apply the moment you agree to bond; the ceremony just forges the connection and makes it binding.*

Jace considered this. *This wasn’t how I hoped she’d become our parabatai.*

Alec had nothing to say to that, but Jace felt the echo of his sadness. *We won’t hold her to it.*

Of course they wouldn’t. That certainty didn’t need to be verbalised.

Neither Maryse nor Robert looked particularly impressed, but there was no way to disprove Izzy’s claim and they knew it. “I would have preferred to have this conversation in private,” Maryse said, “but if you want an audience, Janim, then have it and welcome.” She was sitting at the desk Jace still thought of as Hodge’s, even though Hodge was gone; her husband stood at her right hand, just a little behind her chair, with his arms crossed over his chest. They were both watching Jace. “How long have you known?”

Jace didn’t pretend not to understand. “About as long as you have.”

“I find that hard to believe,” Robert said. “How could you possibly not know Valentine was your father?”

It struck him like a blow, and he felt it cut into Alec, distantly wondered if Izzy felt the same painful shock—because whatever Jace had expected, going over and over all the possible avenues this conversation might take in the dead of night, he had never thought that his parents might not believe him.
“How could I have known?” he asked, struggling to keep his voice level. He’d asked it of himself again and again since that night, but nothing in his childhood memories gave away the lies, not even in hindsight. “He told me our name was Wayland, and I had no reason to think he was lying. We lived in the Wayland manor.” Behind his back, his hands clenched into fists; a soft ripple of reassurance came from Alec in answer. For once, it didn’t help. “Has Max ever asked you to verify that he’s a Lightwood?”

“Don’t be facetious,” Maryse said.

“It isn’t facetious,” Izzy said suddenly. “It’s almost the same thing.” She tilted her head slightly. “Valentine kept Jace isolated. Before he came to live with us, he’d never met any other Shadowhunters; Valentine had total control over everything Jace knew. Max is in almost the same position; until he went to Alicante with you, the only people he knew were us and Hodge.” Her eyebrows rose in a pointed question. “Would you expect him to disbelieve anything you told us?”

“I would expect Max to know whether or not we were alive,” Maryse said.

Jace went cold.

“Jace watched him die,” Alec said. He was standing on Jace’s right, as Izzy was on his left. Like his siblings, Alec’s hands were clasped at the base of his spine, his stance set; unlike them, he had tied a white ribbon around his upper arm. Jace wasn’t sure where Alec had gotten it; Alec had sent Jace to wake their sister and had been wearing it when the three of them met again outside the library. “I’ve seen his memories, and it never looked staged to me. If Jace should have known, then I should have too.”

“Yes,” Robert said harshly, “you should have.”

Alec flinched. It was a small tremor, barely noticeable from the outside, but to Jace it was loud as a shout, the backwash of black, tarry guilt and self-recrimination enough to drown in.

“He couldn’t have known,” Jace said, dragging their attention back to himself, tearing the spotlight away from his parabatai-brother because that could not be borne, he could not stand here and let them take slices from Alec’s hard-won pride, the confidence that was still small and fragile as a newborn bird. “He was a child when we bonded. We were both children.”

“But you were never stupid,” Maryse said. “Surely when we talked about Michael, you must have known we couldn’t possibly have meant your father. The things we said about him could never have applied to Valentine.”

And Jace thought, lie—suddenly, sharply, the thought blossoming like a flame inside his mind. As soon as he recognised the impulse he crushed it, appalled at himself because Shadowhunters did not lie to their superiors, absolutely did not lie to their parents, their family. It could only be Simon’s influence, his pragmatic mundane outlook that had no time for Nephilim honour, urging choices Jace could not make.

“You said he was a good man,” Jace said. He would not lose his temper, would not lose control. “A brave Shadowhunter, a loving father. I thought that seemed accurate enough.”

“Valentine?” Maryse demanded.

Jace stared at the wall beyond them, trying very hard to keep his expression smooth. Demands of his own clamoured in his mouth, rang like bronze in the belfry of his ribs. He wanted to demand to know why they wouldn’t believe him, why his word wasn’t enough, why they thought he was
someone other than who he’d been since the day he came to them. But he bit them back, because they wouldn’t help.

“If he was such a good father to you,” Robert said coldly, “then why did you stay?”

Jace was startled into meeting Robert’s eyes.

“A good man, you said.” There was nothing soft in Robert’s face. There never had been. Sometimes he had been gentle, when Jace was younger, but it had always been a deliberate gentleness, cool and mechanical, never tender or spontaneous. “A loving father. So why did you stay, when he asked you to come back to Idris with him?”

“Because Valentine’s a lunatic,” Izzy said harshly, “and Jace isn’t stupid enough to forget it!”

“Isabelle, the Law grants that you may be present, but it does not grant that you may speak!” Robert snapped. “Be silent!”

“Why should I be quiet, when you’re asking such ridiculous questions?” Far from quailing, Izzy seemed to grow taller, drawing herself up and blazing until her dark hair seemed a streak of hellfire, throwing sparks. “Making such insane accusations! As if Jace was some sort of spy! He’s our brother, he’s been our brother for years! If you can’t see that—”

“We cannot trust anyone Valentine’s influence has touched,” Maryse said. Her words fell like stones, striking Isabelle silent. They lodged in Jace’s throat, cold and jagged-edged. “It’s too dangerous.”

“His influence touched you,” Jace said, very quietly.

Instantly he wished he hadn’t; Maryse went white, as if Jace had slapped her, and Robert’s dark eyes grew darker still with thunder.

“We repudiated him,” Robert said, and each word was cold and sharp with rime.

“No,” Alec said suddenly, “you didn’t.” His jaw was tight, and he kept his gaze fixed on the polished wood of the desk, but his voice didn’t waver. “Lucian Graymark fought with the Downworlders. Michael Wayland didn’t fight at all. But you both fought with Valentine, not against him. You didn’t turn away from him until you were arrested by the Clave.” He did not say, because he did not have to, that that was more the act of two cowards saving their skins than it was two people repulsed by Valentine’s ideologies.

Everyone stared at him, even Jace, who had never even glimpsed the flicker of such thoughts from Alec before. How deeply had they been buried, and how long had they been simmering, to boil over now?

“Alexander—” Maryse began, clearly still stunned.

Alec cut her off. “None of this actually matters.” His voice was cool and hard and unyielding, and he had never spoken to their parents like this before, maybe never spoken to anyone like this before, and Jace wondered what Magnus had said, when Alec had chased after him, to provoke this, to start this fire. “We’re standing here debating Jace’s loyalties when we should be hunting for whoever killed Elias and Xia. That’s our actual job. You heard what Magnus said; if the warlocks decide not to sign the Accords—”

“Of course they’ll sign,” Robert said dismissively. “Bane is grieving, and it has unhinged him. Temporarily, I’m sure. But the fact remains that he is neither important enough to speak for all his people, nor—”
Jace felt Alec’s flash of protest like a firework, all gunpowder and light; felt him about to speak, then caught a fragment of a memory as it passed through Alec’s thoughts: Magnus’ eyes gone suddenly sharp and intent, his voice saying ‘I wasn’t aware the Nephilim paid such close attention to warlock affairs.’

*I won’t give away his secrets,* Alec said, catching Jace listening in.

*Are Downworlders supposed to have secrets from Shadowhunters?* Jace asked, but it was not censuring. He thought of Simon and understood perfectly.

“The Spiral Court doesn’t even exist,” Robert was saying. They had missed part of his speech, but Jace doubted it mattered. “It’s a myth. The only Downworlders who have their own internal government are the fey.”

“That’s not true,” Alec said, and Jace heard him think *Magnus already mentioned the Court, it’s not a secret, I can say this*. “It does exist, it’s existed for thousands of years. They founded it in 2902 BCE in Memphis, ancient Egypt, when they decided to make a concentrated effort to find and teach and protect warlock children. It used to be called something else, something to do with Sekhmet, because she was the one they called on to protect the children, their goddess of war and magic—”

He stopped, and Jace was there for the sharp click of realisation, of pieces falling into place.

“Do you realise what it will mean,” Alec said slowly, ignoring or maybe not noticing how his parents were staring at him, speechless, taken aback by this defiance from the one child they had never thought to expect it from, “if the Court refuses to sign? You’re acting as though we’re only dealing with one—” His resolve faltered for a moment, flickering like a dying street lamp, but only his parabatai caught it. “—one grieving father. We’re not. If the warlocks don’t sign, the other Downworlders will follow their lead. The Accords will be broken.” Jace saw it just before the words left Alec’s lips, and he mouthed it along with his brother, stunned.

“They just promised us war if this killer isn’t found.”

From the corner of his eye, he saw Izzy’s face and knew she’d understood it too, saw it in the tight press of her lips and her stiffened shoulders. War. Against the Downworlders who outnumbered them hundreds to one. It would leave them no time or resources to fight demons; it would whittle their caste to splinters, if any Shadowhunters survived at all. For all that it was lauded as the worst crime in their history, the Uprising had been a single pitched battle; Jace knew enough to understand that all-out war was a very different beast, one that could not be slayed as easily as Valentine’s little rebellion had been.

It should have made this interrogation feel small and meaningless by comparison. It didn’t.

“Maybe that’s what they want.” Jace hadn’t planned the words before he heard them coming out of his mouth, but they fell from his tongue like shards of a mirror and he took a vicious satisfaction in the dumbstruck expressions on their faces. ‘We cannot trust anyone Valentine’s influence has touched,’ and oh, it was petty, petty and cruel and useless but he would hurt them as they had hurt him. “You said it, Alec; they didn’t renounce Valentine until they were forced to. Who’s to say they forsook him in their hearts? Maybe a war with the Downworld is exactly what they want.”

Maryse slapped him.

He saw it coming and stood still when he could have avoided it, letting her move Shadowhunter-quick (*but not as fast as he could move, never that fast*) to reach him across the desk, and then his
cheek was stinging and he almost smiled, he almost smiled with lead closing fast around his heart because he had won.

And she knew it. He saw it in her face, Alec’s outrage a flare in the background of his mind, Izzy’s hissed inhalation gunshot-loud; he had provoked her and she had lost control, and lost, and lost, and lost.

“I’ve never done anything to make you question me,” Jace said softly. “There is no blood on my hands. But yours are soaked in red. How can you point at me, after what you did? Condemn me for being born, when your crimes are legion?”

“We were exonerated,” Robert said. He held himself very still.

“And I have done nothing that needs exonerating,” Jace snapped, and the unfairness of it, the betrayal, to be turned on like this—they were his parents, they’d been his parents for half his life and how could it mean nothing, how could they do this to him, cast him out of their hearts for nothing more than the blood in his veins, for nothing he could choose—“He wanted the Cup, and I kept it from him. What more do you want from me?”

“I want you to go.”

The world broke like glass.

“Mother!” Isabelle gasped. Robert, though, did not look shocked, and Jace wondered dully if they had planned this, if it had always been going to come to this. “You can’t mean that.”

Maryse’s lips had paled, but her face was set. “I can and I do. Thank the Angel, you never knew Valentine, Isabelle, but we did. He turned everyone he could lay hands on into a weapon for his cause; his friends, his wife. It defies belief that he would not do the same with his own son.”

“You can’t just—just throw Jace out on the street because you believe Valentine is using him!” Izzy burst out. “Where’s your evidence? Why are you doing this?”

“Control yourself, Isabelle,” Robert ordered. “You don’t understand how dangerous the Morgensterns can be, how dangerous they are. Your loyalty to your—” he hesitated, “—almost-brother does you credit, but we are the heads of this family, and we will—”

“Actually,” Alec said, quietly but with steely resolve, “you’re not.”

Robert recoiled as if he’d been struck; Maryse whipped her head to look at her eldest son, her dark eyes gone wide. “What?” she demanded gracelessly.

Oil, and water, and fire licking across the greasy surface of it all; Jace could feel how much Alec wanted to take back the words but he didn’t, ignored Jace’s urging *don’t do this, it’s not worth it, I would never ask this of you* to repeat, louder, and coldly, “You are not the heads of this family.”

“I beg your pardon,” Robert said, “but—”

Alec cut across him. “Did you think I didn’t know, just because you never told me?” he demanded. “The Clave exiled you both. The Lightwood holdings were frozen, but not confiscated, because you had a child who had committed no crime: me. Exiles can’t hold Clave chairs, or own property, or claim blood names. But I turned eighteen months ago.” He was angry now, really angry, and again Jace wondered where Alec had been keeping this fury, wondered how long it had been banked. Alec had never breathed a word of this to his siblings, or to his parabatai. “The Lightwood seat is mine. The name, the monies, the manor—it’s all mine. I let you use it all because you’re my parents
and I love you, I honour you, but you can’t turn out my brother. I won’t let you.”

Jace stopped breathing. He’d stopped even pretending not to stare at Alec; everyone else was too, amazed to see quiet, obedient Alec step out of the background to throw down the gauntlet.

Izzy looked like she wanted to cheer.

Maryse collected herself first. “He is not your brother,” she said, straightening her spine. “And you may be the head of this family in the eyes of the Law, but the Clave did not grant this Institute to the Lightwood paterfamilias. They granted it to your father and I, and we do not want Janim here.”

He had expected it—loved Alec for standing up to them, for letting out his fire at last, but he had not believed it would work—and yet it still felt like watching his father die in front of him when Maryse turned her cold gaze his way.

And wasn’t it the same? This was the death of another family, again, years after he’d stopped being afraid of it.

“You can have an hour to gather your belongings,” Robert said. “But leave Max alone. We’ll explain this to him later.”

Apparently they could hurt his heart still more. Jace had been sure it was as full of pain as a heart could be, but now it spilled over, red and viscous. “I can’t say goodbye?”

His voice did not break. It didn’t.

They didn’t yield. “It would only distress him,” Maryse said.

And what will you tell him? Jace wondered, vicious with hurt, ashes and seawater choking him, drowning him. What will you tell him about why I’m gone?

A touch on his shoulder drew him out of his thoughts. “Come on, Jace,” Izzy said, turning her back on their—on her parents. “Let’s go pack our things.”

It took him a beat to be sure he’d heard her correctly. When her blithe words processed, they almost sent him to his knees, overwhelmed by the earthquake of almost cruel relief, awful wonder, bitter, painful love.

I don’t deserve you. I’ll never deserve you. But Raziel, he would never stop trying to.

“Isabelle?” her father asked. “What are you doing?”

“What does it look like?” Alec asked, on Jace’s other side. He, too, had stepped closer to Jace, as if shielding him. “We’re going with him.”

Izzy glanced at her parents over her shoulder, her eyes wide in faux-amazement. “I’m sorry, father. But we’re agelai. If you cast out one of us, you cast out us all.” She linked arms with Jace, almost playfully. “Come along, Jace. I dread to think which shirts you’ll bring if we let you pack your own bag.”

Dazed, disbelieving, Jace let her lead him. *You don’t have to do this. You shouldn’t do this!*

*Yes, we do, * Alec said. *And yes, we should.*

Maryse was on her feet. Robert came out from behind the desk, clearly hesitating, as unable to believe it as Jace was. “Alexander. Isabelle! Stop this!”

They both ignored him.

*When did the two of you discuss this?* Jace whispered.

In that moment, he couldn’t see Alec’s face, but he felt his brother’s warmth, the unshakable solidity of Alec’s love for him. *What makes you think we needed to?*


St Xavier’s was the sort of school that called itself a ‘preparatory academy’, with a Latin motto no one understood and ivy growing like graffiti on its prestigious walls. In keeping with the décor, its graduates made Ivy League colleges more often than they didn’t, their applications nicely padded with things like applied mechanics and philosophy and film making.

To call it stuck-up was an understatement. But they had state-of-the-art computer labs and a music room with its own high-tech recording studio, so Simon kept his mouth shut and enjoyed the benefits.

St Xavier’s was also far enough from the centre of the city to have its own lawn, a sweep of flat green smooth as the icing on a cake, with a few marzipan trees to break up the skyline. This, too, was an unspeakable luxury in the city, but at a quarter to four Simon had more on his mind than the waste of so much space on purely decorative greenery.

He was hiding. It wasn’t much of a hiding place, given the aforementioned flatness of the turf and the complete lack of anything to hide behind, but no one was going to call him on it. That much had been made very clear.

Who was paying the school fees? he wondered, staring up at the fuzzy September clouds. He had never thought to wonder before—oblivious as only a teenager could be, airily assuming the stocks and shares of his mythical father was covering the cost of his school. Now, he supposed Jocelyn had been selling the jewels of her old life, her Shadowhunter life, to give him this new one—but now that she was in the hospital… Had anyone paid for him to be here this term? Luke, maybe? Did Luke have that kind of money? It couldn’t be Clary’s mom; Elaine worked two jobs to send Clary to St Xavier’s, no way did she have any left over to pay for Simon too…

He was coming to the awful realisation that probably no one had paid for his tuition this term when a shadow passed between his face and the sky.

There was no thought, only an abrupt white-out, the achromic heat of panic-fear searing away everything but the deeply-buried instincts he didn’t want, hadn’t asked for, couldn’t resist; the neurons were still firing in his brain as Simiel flew to his hand and he was pushing himself up, lashing out at an ankle by his shoulder, lunging at the other body. He crashed into the person who’d snuck up on him and they both fell to the ground in a snarling tangle, “Simiel!”

“Simon!”

Simon froze. Clary stared up at him, her green eyes stained jade with shock and fear.

Fear. Simiel glinted in the sunlight, crystalline rainbows skittering along the edge of the blade, dancing over Clary’s throat. Because the knife was so close to her neck.

Because he was holding it there.

She was afraid of him.
Simon jerked away as if electrocuted, scrambling away as if Clary had turned into a monster under him—but she hadn’t, he had, Jesus fucking Christ he’d almost—almost—

He couldn’t even let go of the knife, Simiel was locked against his hand—

“I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m—oh my God, oh my God—”

Why had he—how could he—he’d almost—

“Simon, ssh.” Clary was sitting up, watching him but making no move to approach. Probably for the best, seeing as he’d so nearly— “It’s all right, I’m fine. You didn’t hurt me. We’re okay.”

She was too pale beneath her freckles, but the words did their job; as Clary kept up the steady stream of soothing reassurance, Simiel’s glow slowly dimmed, then faded. When Simon’s heartbeat had almost returned to normal, the blade fell from his hand, the celestial magnetism that held hilt to palm evaporated now that he was calming down.

“It’s okay,” he managed finally, unable to look at her—ashamed, ashamed and so fucking horrified, guilty— “I’m—I’m not going to—”

He stopped, helplessly.

“What happened?” Clary asked quietly.

Simon sat down in the grass, graceless, and retrieved his seraph blade. Instead of lingering with it in his hand, savouring the smooth crystal and perfect heft, he shoved it into his belt. He didn’t want to think about—about what had just happened, but he had to. “I think—I think I got scared,” he said thickly. You scared me, was what he meant; but that sounded accusatory, as if he were blaming Clary for what he’d done, when it wasn’t her fault. Couldn’t be her fault. “I didn’t hear you coming—your face just popped into my view, and for a second I didn’t recognise you. There was just this shadow, this blurry human-shape, not a person I knew, and I—I panicked.”

Panicked, because he knew full well that St Xavier’s was not demon-proof. Panicked because Luke was out there somewhere, and who knew what he was up to, what he might try; because Abigor had been after him specifically, out for Simon’s burning blood and no one else’s; because Simon’s father was still free, and no one believed he was gone for good. And it could have been any of them, a demon/a dad/a father, coming for him where he was unprotected…

“I’m sorry,” he said again, sick to his stomach. “I didn’t know it was you. I’m sorry.”

He buried his face in his hands, trying to breathe.

After a little while, he heard Clary get up and come to sit next to him on the grass. He couldn’t see if she hesitated before placing her hand on his shoulder, and he didn’t want to know.

“It’s not that surprising,” she offered finally. “It would be weirder if you didn’t have some kind of PTSD, after everything.”

That was…actually pretty true. But it didn’t make him feel any less guilty, any less sickened by what could have happened. If she’d been too shocked to call his name, would he have woken up in time? Or would he have come back to himself with his best friend’s blood on his hands?

The problem was not that he couldn’t imagine it. It was that he could imagine it all too easily.

“I could have killed you,” he whispered.
She squeezed his shoulder. “But you didn’t. We’ll talk to Jace about it, okay? This has to be—Shadowhunters must know how to deal with this.” She said it lightly, but the truth of it dropped between them like a stone. “They’re probably all traumatised.”

“Maybe.” Probably.

He could have killed her.

“So how was the rest of your day?” she asked brightly, and he snorted despite himself at her playfully chipper tone. “I didn’t hear any screaming, so I’m guessing no demons descended.”

“No, did you see all this sun? They were all touching up their tans today.” He lowered his hands from his face. “Somebody told them about mom.”

She winced, understanding at once that he wasn’t talking about the demons now. “It might have been my mom,” she said apologetically.

“Or Luke, I guess. It doesn’t make much of a difference.” The thick, clogging pain that had made him ditch his last class and run out here was growing back into his throat as he thought about it. “Every teacher—every teacher, even Mr Shinde—wanted to talk about it. Say how sorry they were, they were here for me, all that—all that crap.” His chest felt too tight, constricted.

“Oh, Simon,” Clary said softly.

“I just wasn’t expecting it, you know?” He plucked a strand of grass and started shredding it between his fingers. “I thought going back to school would be—it would make things normal. Sure, Jace made sure I’m carrying enough metal to outfit an armoury, but no one’s actually expecting a demon attack here, and there’s too many witnesses for Valentine to try something, even if he can make himself invisible to mun—to Light Worlders. So.” He shrugged, blinking hard. “And then everyone wants to talk about mom. Every teacher. So I can’t forget it even for a second, and I spend the whole next class waiting for that teacher to call me up and give me the speech, or worse, come down to my desk to say it quietly, while we’re supposed to be working and everyone else can fucking hear—”

He stopped.

Over in the main building, the end-of-period bell rang, shrill and piercing, signalling the end of the day. It only took a minute before students in St Xavier’s dark blue uniforms were streaming out of the doors, talking and laughing and groaning under the weight of first-day homework. All of them blind, all of them blissfully, innocently oblivious to the underworld that had already left its scars on Simon and Clary.

It was hard not to hate them, a little.

“She’ll wake up,” Clary said.

Simon couldn’t bring himself to answer; couldn’t make himself ask the question that had been choking him all day. But what if she doesn’t?

Clary sighed. “Come on,” she said, standing up and pulling Simon with her. “Jace said he was picking you up, right? Let’s go find him.”

* * *

Jace was waiting at the school gates, standing a little apart from the crowd of waiting parents and au pairs, and either ignoring or oblivious to the side-eying he was receiving from them. He was entirely
out of place in this company, his dragon-leather jacket, black jeans, and snarky t-shirt (*I know right from wrong: wrong is the fun one*) screaming delinquent in a way that drew appreciative attention from the departing female students and scandalised outrage from their parents, and he just as clearly didn’t care.

Simon was so ridiculously happy to see him that it took a beat to notice Alec and Izzy standing alongside him.

When he did, he was a little taken aback. It had been a while since he’d seen Alec, maybe a little over a week; he didn’t remember the eldest Lightwood being so pale, or so tired-looking. Alec was wearing a ragged blue sweater a size or two too big for him with a white ribbon tied around one arm, and plain sneakers beneath threadbare jeans. Next to him Isabelle was her usual flawless self, in black corset leggings and stiletto heels. The ruby pendant Simon rarely saw her without anymore burned like blood above a black tank top, with *mother of dragons* emblazoned in fiery gold across her chest; apparently she had moved on to the *Song of Ice and Fire* after *Harry Potter*. Somehow he wasn’t surprised.

But he *was* surprised to see them here, Alec and Izzy. Jace hadn’t mentioned his siblings would be coming with him.

“Our parents came home today,” Izzy said when he asked about it, after the his and hellos and they’d left St Xavier’s behind them. Clary had moved to walk next to her and now the two girls walked arm-in-arm, red hair paired with black. “We had a disagreement of opinion, and the three of us decided to move out.”

Simon glanced at Jace, startled, looking for his opinion, but Jace had his hands in his pockets and his eyes lowered, and Simon couldn’t catch his gaze. “Out of the Institute?” Simon asked, just to clarify. *What kind of argument—on the day your parents come home—would make you want to move out?*

“We’ve been apartment hunting all day,” Izzy confirmed breezily. “We found the perfect place about an hour ago; now we have to go pay for it.”

Well, that explained why they were all wearing backpacks, at least. Simon looked at his *aikane* again, wondering why Jace hadn’t told him this, any of it, when he’d called between Simon’s classes. Wasn’t this important? Wasn’t it something Simon ought to know?

You didn’t tell him about your teachers, a voice whispered. You didn’t tell him how they talked about Jocelyn, how it hurt, how it turned the breath in your lungs to cement and choked you.

*I didn’t want to bother him*, Simon whispered to himself, defensive.

Maybe he didn’t want to bother you, either.

“How do you pay for things?” Clary was asking. “I’ve been wondering that for a while. Are there Shadowhunter credit cards?”

“You can come and see, if you like,” Izzy said cheerfully.

Alec emerged from his thoughts to frown at his sister. “Izzy…”

“Oh, why not?” Izzy asked. “It’s a bit late to be worried about the fraternization rule now, isn’t it?”

“There’s a fraternization rule?” Simon asked. “Why haven’t I heard about this before?”

For the first time in the conversation, Jace spoke up. “The Nephilim don’t mix with mundanes.”
“Light Worlders,” Simon corrected automatically.

Jace rolled his eyes. “Especially not Shadowhunters,” he continued, as if Simon hadn’t spoken. “Our oaths forbid us from telling them anything about the Shadow World. We can’t be friends with them. We don’t watch their movies or read their books.” He shrugged, his shoulders moving beneath his jacket. “If we do, and the Clave decides it was a large enough infraction…”

“Let me guess,” Simon said. “You can be stripped of your runes.” He spoke lightly, but every word tasted like frostbite. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but I’m sensing a theme here.”

Jace nodded, once.

“Why the hell didn’t you tell me?” Simon demanded angrily. Next to Izzy, Clary had gone white. “I wouldn’t have—Harry Potter, and Lord of the Rings, and Time Lords know what else we showed you—you should have told us!”

“If we told you, you wouldn’t have shown us those things,” Izzy said. Her playfulness was gone, stripped away, and beneath it her eyes burned with intensity, with something fierce and longing. “And we liked them. I loved them.” She shot Alec a defiant look, but Alec didn’t seem to be disagreeing with her. “We spend our whole lives fighting to protect the mund—the Light World. Our grandparents died for it; someday we’ll die for it too. Why shouldn’t we be allowed to see what we’re fighting for? Why shouldn’t we be allowed to enjoy it?” Her voice grew sharper, harsher, and Simon heard rage in it, rage at the unfairness of her life, rage that must have been buried for years. “We paid for it, didn’t we? Every Shadowhunter pays for it in blood. It’s our world too, it’s ours!”

She stopped, suddenly, sharply. No one else said a word.

After a moment, she lifted her chin, daring them to comment. “I recognise that it is a rule,” she said coolly, “but given that it’s a stupid rule, I elected to ignore it.” She paused. “And so did my brothers.”

“I—did you just paraphrase Nick Fury?” Simon asked. “Who showed you the Avengers? That one is not on me!”

Unrepentant, Clary raised her hand. “Guilty.”

Isabelle smirked.

“Why is there never a desk around when you need to head-desk?” Simon asked the sky. But he didn’t mean it, didn’t mean a word of it. And from the smile Izzy tossed him like a coin, he thought she knew it.

Because she was right. She—they—deserved every bit of joy they could reach, for what they did. They’d earned it a hundredfold.

“More importantly,” Izzy said, “why isn’t there a Black Widow movie yet? Natasha is clearly the greatest Avenger.”

“As flattered as I am that you are all risking your livelihoods to be friends with me,” Clary said, “and as much as I agree with you about Natasha, Izzy, do not think that I don’t—you still haven’t answered my question.”

“That’s because I don’t know what a credit card is,” Izzy explained.

“Ah.”
Alec surprised them all by speaking up. “If you give it a minute,” he said, “you’ll see for yourself how our finances work.” He gestured towards the subway station ahead of them. “The bank’s just a few stops away.”

“‘The bank?’” Clary repeated disbelievingly as they trooped underground after Alec. “Shadowhunters have a bank?”

Not just any bank, but Bank of America.

“It’s run by merchant adventurers,” Jace explained, as Simon and Clary looked around at the shining marble and glass of the bank’s interior. “One of the Nephilim castes. They work out in the mundane world—” He saw Simon’s look. “—excuse me, out in the Light World, to make sure that Idris has all it needs from outside its borders. Food, metals… Anything we can’t make ourselves, they buy and ship home.”

“They invest Nephilim gold in mundane industries,” Alec added absently. Unlike his siblings, he didn’t correct his choice of words; Simon would get him later. “To increase our wealth. It’s an important job.”

Simon couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “And no one notices?” he demanded incredulously. “That, what, thousands of dollars worth of, of supplies just vanishes into the ether every year? That there’s money on the market coming out of thin air? Where does the IRS think it’s all coming from?”

Jace gave him an odd look. “Of course they notice. That’s the adventurers’ other task; to interact with Light Worlder governments for us.”

“Interact—the government knows about you?!”

“How could they not?” Izzy asked, clearly surprised. They were waiting in line to talk to one of the bank tellers, and keeping their voices appropriately low, but it was obvious Isabelle was shocked Simon hadn’t worked this out already. “Maybe a hundred years ago we could work in secret, but there’s too many places our worlds touch now. Your BFI—”

“I think you mean the FBI,” Clary said.

Izzy waved her hand. “Whatever, they track disappearances and murders. How could they not find out about demons eventually? Or when Abigor attacked Simon and Jace—hundreds of Light Worlders saw something, even if they couldn’t see Abigor’s true form. We can’t cover that up or explain it away. Merchant adventurers and Light World officials have to work together to do that.”

“A gas leak, a terrorist attack…” Simon murmured.

Isabelle nodded. “Exactly.”

“So they’re not really just merchants,” Clary said. “Not anymore.”

“No,” Alec agreed. “They were, centuries ago, but now they’re more than that. They live as mundanes in positions of power—economic or political—to safeguard the Nephilim. Shadowhunters protect the mundane world, but merchant adventurers shield and succour the Shadowed one.”

Simon and Clary paused to consider this.

“Are all the big banks run by Shadow Worlders?” Clary asked speculatively.
“Of course not,” Izzy said. “I think the only other one is JPMorgan Chase.” She glanced at her brothers. “Vampires, isn’t it?”

Alec nodded absently, and Clary’s eyebrows shot up.

“I think it’s our turn,” Jace said suddenly. Sure enough, one of the tellers was waving them forward. Alec sighed. Without a word, he took point, leading their strange little group over to the counter and the smiling young woman behind the glass.

“Hi there,” she said brightly as they approached. Her uniform was crowned by a neat green hijab, the silky material gracefully framing her face. “How can I help you?”

Still without speaking, Alec pushed up his right sleeve and held out his arm to her, silently showing her the Marks on his skin.

Simon watched with interest as the woman’s eyes went wide; her mouth made a small o. “I see,” she said after a moment. “Please just wait a moment, Mr…?”

“Lightwood,” Alec said tonelessly.

She nodded. “Mr Lightwood. One moment, please.” She rose from her chair and disappeared out of sight.

Alec rolled his sleeve down.

“She saw your runes!” Clary hissed. “How could she see your runes?”

“Well,” Jace said, “either she has a stone like yours, or she’s a merchant adventurer.”

“Or a Sighted mundane,” Alec said. “There are still a few of them around.”

“A what now?” Simon asked.

“A Light Worlder with the Sight,” Izzy said. “There used to be whole families of them, bloodlines that served Institutes out in the Light World, or worked with the merchant adventurers. There aren’t many left now, though.”

“Why not?” Clary asked. She sounded suspicious, and given how messed-up the Shadow World tended to be, Simon thought her wariness was justified. He prayed they weren’t about to hear that all the Sighted Light Worlders had been murdered.

“Most of them drank from the Cup,” Izzy said. “They either died or became Shadowhunters.”

Before Simon and Clary could ask any more questions, they spotted the teller returning, walking up to them from this side of the glass, this time. “Mr Lightwood, if you and your party would come this way, we’ll get you served.”

Alec nodded and followed her. Since Jace and Izzy followed him, Simon and Clary tagged along too.

The Muslim woman led them down an elegantly cool corridor and a series of stairs, descending deep into the earth. It must have been almost fifteen minutes before they came to a door Marked with an enkeli rune, at the end of a dark, metal-lined hallway. Simon shivered as the Mark’s song whispered over his bones, strumming through his veins, but then the bank teller drew an opening Mark on the door with a stele carved with incredible geometric designs, and the music faded away as she gestured
them inside.

Into a large, round room of black marble, lit not by electricity but by witchlight lanterns that began to glow a chill white the moment they stepped through the doorway. Subtle lines of Marks shimmered in the marble, just visible when Simon tilted his head and squinted; he could feel them all humming, vibrating, as if he were standing in the resonating chamber of a guitar. A pair of low black sofas, edged in gold, framed the wide, round pillar in the centre of the room; carved of the same dark stone as the windowless walls, it came up to Simon’s waist. A pair of unobtrusive, slender daggers rested on red velvet on top of it.

“It’s freezing in here,” Clary muttered.

Isabelle dropped down on one of the sofas, patting the cushions for Clary to sit beside her. Not sure what to do with himself, Simon copied them, gingerly taking a seat next to Clary. Jace and Alec remained standing.

The bank teller closed the door behind them and moved to the wall. Simon couldn’t see what she did there, but he heard a sharp, piercing rune-song, and when the woman turned back to them there was a small safe open behind her and an unhewn chunk of crystal in her hands. It was the size of a soccer ball, the largest piece of adamas Simon had yet seen, and as she set it down carefully on the table Simon glimpsed an unfamiliar Mark on the back of her right hand; not a Shadowhunter’s voyance, but something else.

“If you would confirm your identity for me, sir?” she asked, turning to Alec respectfully. She proffered one of the daggers from the table.

“I have my own,” Alec said. He drew a knife from within his left sleeve, and before Simon could cry out he sliced it against his palm, opening a steady stream of red across his hand.

Clary hissed between her teeth.

Alec ignored them, instead closing his bloodied hand around the blade, making sure the metal was wet with red. Only then did he walk up to the table and plunge the knife into the crystal.

The sword in the stone, Simon thought inanely, as a hundred tiny Marks covering every inch of the adamas came alight with fire. The knife had entered some sort of slit in the crystal, and now Alec’s blood threaded through dozens of thread-thin channels in it, winding and weaving into a complex pattern within the gem. In seconds the blood reached the sides of the rock, and when it did the crystal suddenly became opaque, cloudy and milky like crimson-streaked moonstone, with a new symbol forming out of the murk; a stylised flame, etched in gold.

The Lightwood symbol.

The woman smiled. “Thank you, sir.”

Alec nodded and withdrew his blade. The Lightwood crest remained for a moment or two, before it started to fade, the adamas becoming clear and diamond-like once more.

“That rock,” Jace murmured in Simon’s ear, and Simon jumped, his heart suddenly pounding hard against his ribs, “is a small piece of a very big corestone kept in Alicante.” Jace was leaning on the back of the sofa, his upper body bent over it, and his lips were too close to Simon’s jaw. Simon swallowed hard. “Where, not coincidentally, the Lightwood gold is housed. Alec’s just confirmed his right to draw on it.”

“And where does the gold come from?” Simon asked, concentrating on keeping still, calm,
Izzy had risen from her seat to draw an *iratze* for her brother. Alec let her do it, already deep in
discussion with the merchant adventurer.

“Killing,” Jace said softly. “Our weapons are forged with runes; it’s what makes them able to hurt
demons. But they also count our kills, and we earn for each one.”

That… was pretty creepy, actually. “Earn what?” Simon asked. Jace’s breath was warm on his neck.

“Celestes,” Jace said. Simon could hear his smirk. “Actually.”

Clary was right there, and Jace wasn’t saying—or doing—anything inappropriate for a public place,
but… Simon swallowed and moved his head a little, away, silently telling Jace *later, not now.*

“Seraph blades are locked to our accounts when we bond,” Jace said. If he was upset by the small
rejection, there was no sign of it in his voice. “But our other weapons have to taste our blood, either
during forging or when we receive them, so the blades know who we are.”

All of Alec’s weapons must be blooded, then, because he had no bonded seraph swords. “We’ve
never blooded mine,” Simon pointed out.

Jace shrugged. “You have no accounts with the Idrian banks.”

Simon wondered how you went about opening one, and if it was worth the bother for him to try.
“But if Alec’s dagger already knows who he is, why did he have to bleed now?”

“Extra security. It’s hard to steal a Shadowhunter’s weapon, but not impossible. It’s to stop someone
walking in with another’s blade and cleaning out their accounts.”

Nephilim identity theft. In a weird way, it was kind of funny. “Huh.” Izzy and Clary had their heads
bent together, and he wondered if Izzy was explaining all this to Clary as Jace was to him.

Jace fell silent then, and Simon was left to watch Alec and the bank woman—a Nephilim, by that
that rune on her hand; Simon wondered what a merchant adventurer’s runes were for, how they
differed from the ones worn by Shadowhunters—discuss numbers. For all that Alec looked almost
ill, he stood straight as he spoke, calm and confident and determined—he knew what he wanted, and
knew his right to it.

“But where does Alec’s money come from?” Simon wondered suddenly, just remembering to keep
his voice low. “He’s never killed a demon. You told me that, right back in the beginning.” *The
beginning;* as if this was a story, and not his life, all their lives. “But he has enough to buy an
apartment?”

Simon felt the change run through Jace before the words were all the way out of his mouth; a gust of
cold like the wind waltzing through an abandoned house. “It’s the Lightwood family fortune,” Jace
said. “Not a personal account. Only the *paterfamilias,* and those with their permission, can access it.”


“It means ‘head of the family’,” Isabelle said. Simon started; he’d forgotten how good Shadowhunter
hearing was. “In Rome, it was always a man, of course. The Nephilim are more equal-opportunity.”

Clary was frowning. “Then Alec is—? But what about your parents?”
“They’re traitors,” Alec said. Simon and Clary both jumped this time; the eldest Lightwood scion had appeared in front of them almost out of thin air. His eyes were shadowed, and the merchant adventurer was gone. “Vainottu. Outcasten can’t rule a House. That leaves me.”


“Out-caste,” Izzy murmured, low. Jace’s eyes, when Simon glanced at him, were shuttered, the windows in them locked and bolted. “Exiles, cast-out. And vainottu—it means ‘hunted’.”

Simon frowned. “I don’t get it.”

It was Jace who answered. “We’re Shadowhunters,” he said. “The Angel’s warriors. Lights set to burn against the darkness.” Every word was carved out of ice, cold and hard and awful. “Vainottu are pieces of that darkness. They are the things we hunt.”

It came clear in a burst of terrible clarity, blinding like sunlight. “Because they fought in the Uprising?”

“No,” Alec said. “Because they fought on the wrong side.”

Simon looked at Alec’s face and remembered the words he’d spoken at Magnus’ party, the weight of them on his tongue, perfectly balanced like a throwing dagger: ‘You think my mom’s a coward? At least she fought on the right side of the Uprising. What about yours? And your dad.

‘How many Shadowhunters do you think your parents murdered that day?’

He’d meant those words to hurt, to wound. But maybe all he’d done was find an injury already extant.

Alec turned away before any of them could speak. “We’ve got what we came for. Let’s go.”

NOTES

An amphisbaena is a two-headed snake from Greek mythology; it gets around by rolling like a wheel, with one head biting the neck of the other to form a circle.

In the 13th century Middle French, a canton is literally ‘a portion of a country’. The Nephilim use the word to refer to the area which is the responsibility of a particular Institute—so, New York is the canton of the New York Institute.

In Runed, the first Accords were signed in 1810, considerably earlier than in canon (1872). As City of Shadows/Dreams/Knives is set in 2014 (not 2007, as in canon), and the Accords are signed every 17 years, the Accords have been signed 11 times, and are due to be signed for the 12th time a month from the start of Knives.

Sekhmet is an Egyptian goddess of love, war, and protection. Way back in the beginning of what we call ancient Egypt, she was considered rich in magic and was often called on by healers. This was a few centuries before the cult of Isis really got going; later Isis became known as the goddess of magic, and sometimes love too.
*Paterfamilias* is a Roman term for the head of the household, literally the husband/father/eldest male. In Nephilim culture it’s an ungendered term, with the *paterfamilias* as often a woman as a man; sometimes it’s shared between a married couple or siblings, or a pair of *parabatai* or *parastathtenes*. You also don’t become *paterfamilias* just by virtue of being the eldest family member; it’s about capability, not age. Exiles and other criminals are considered incapable. Among the Shadowhunter caste, the *paterfamilias* of each family holds a seat on the Clave; this is the ‘chair’ Alec is referring to, which gives the *paterfamilias* the ability to vote in/on any Clave decision. As war criminals, Maryse and Robert are most certainly forbidden from holding the Lightwood chair.

For those of you who are not Americans—JPMorgan Chase is the largest bank in the USA, meaning that the Downworlder-run bank is quite a bit larger/richer than the Nephilim one! Make of that what you will.

Merchant adventurers are a real thing! Or they were. Um. Not the Nephilim ones, obviously. But way back in the Middle Ages, merchant adventurers were the ones who went abroad to set up branches of already-established trading houses; thus, merchants who went off to have adventures in the wild scary places. It seemed appropriate.

Galleons—largest coins in the *Harry Potter* word.

Poke-dollars are the currency in the English releases of the Pokemon franchise.

Ryō—the currency of Naruto.

*Outcasten* is the Middle English word that eventually turned into ‘outcast’, but I like that it sounds so much like the Indian ‘outcaste’ (literally, cast out of your caste), since the Nephilim society is divided up into castes a little bit like the Indian one. Among the Nephilim, *outcasten* is one of the worst things you can call someone.

*Vainottu*—again, one of the worst insults among the Nephilim, particularly amongst Shadowhunters. Think *Harry Potter’s* ‘blood traitor’ and you’ve got the right feel of it, but there’s an aspect of monstrousness to it too. (It’s originally a Finnish adjective, but I nabbed it because that is a thing I do with languages I don’t speak. You may have noticed.)
“Okay,” Clary said. “Let’s go over it one more time. Just so I can be sure I understand what you’re telling me here.”

Simon grinned, leaning back into the sinfully lush sofa to watch the show. Next to him, her eyes fixed on her brother and Clary, Izzy held out her hand, and he passed her the bowl of popcorn.

Even Jace, over in the corner with at least two dozen sharp, pointy things spread around him for sharpening, looked like he might be hiding a smile.

“Oh...” Alec looked wary. Smart man.

Clary held up a single finger. “Item one: given that land tends to retain or increase its value over the long-term, there are a lot of Downworlders in real estate.”

“Only the immortal ones, really,” Jace commented idly. “Werewolves don’t usually have the resources to buy up land.”

Clary pointed at him. “You, shut up. I am talking to Alec. I can only handle one of you lunatics at a time right now, and you are not that one. Yes? Yes? Awesome. Shut it.”

Izzy laughed.

“Item two! Older vampires, the smart ones, tend to be rich.”

“That is a gross oversimplification—” Alec began.

“Older vampires, the smart ones, tend to be rich,” Clary repeated loudly. “Yes or no?”

“Just say yes,” Simon advised, with mock-sympathy. “Or it’ll only get worse.”
“…Yes.”

“Wonderful. Item three: given items one and two, vampire-designed real estate is usually ridiculously, stupidly luxurious.”

“They cater to the wealthy,” Alec agreed, carefully. He might have been squinting suspiciously at her a little.

“Item four,” Clary continued, “given the rarity of wealthy werewolves—”

“Alliteration points!” Simon called. He tossed an Oreo at her.

Clary snatched it neatly out of the air, took a bite, and shook its remains at him. “No interruptions!”

“Not even for cookies?” Simon asked, puppy-plaintive.

“…Maybe. No!” she said as Simon and Izzy laughed. “Shut up! I’m trying to make sense of this!” She was grinning too, and trying to put her serious face back on. “Shut it! Given the rarity of wealthy werewolves, and since faeries don’t give a fuck about living outside their knowes—because IRON, hah, I know a thing, nerf herders!—vampires mostly sell-and-or-rent to super-rich Light Worlders, other vampires, warlocks,” she was counting on her fingers, “aaaaand, travelling Shadowhunters.”

“Nephilim who want a residence outside Idris, yes,” Alec said. “But not just Shadowhunters. Merchant adventurers, for one, often—”

“In conclusion,” Clary said loudly, drowning him out as Izzy doubled over, tears of laughter in her eyes, “You bought a Hekate-damned vampire apartment.”

“Evidence!” Simon yelled. He threw a piece of popcorn at her. “Citations! CITE YOUR SOURCES!”

“Evidence?! You want evidence, you warthog-faced buffoon?” Clary spun in a circle with her arms out, gesturing to encompass the entirety of their surroundings. “If Fort Knox and the Ritz had a baby, it would be this building! And we are in the penthouse! It has three floors! Did you know multi-storied apartments existed, Simon? Because you should have told me, that is important info that I needed to know for my life goals, what kind of friend are you?” She stopped spinning. “There is a pool, you guys. There is a pool. In the apartment. What.”

“Swimming is excellent exercise!” Alec protested, clearly confused. Maybe he’d never seen a sugar-high before; he seemed a bit alarmed by Clary’s bright-eyed mania. “A Shadowhunter’s home has to have some kind of exercise facilities; it’s not as though we could train at a mundie gym—ow!”

“LIGHT WORLDER,” Simon yelled, brandishing another Oreo threateningly as Izzy rolled off the sofa, hysterical. “Don’t say ‘mundie’, it’s Light Worder, you peasant, you uncultured swine—”

“Uncultured? Hey!” This time Alec ducked, with the smoothly blurring motion of a trained Shadowhunter. “Raziel give me strength, why are you throwing cookies at me?”

“Because ‘mundane’ is patronising as fuck!” Clary yelled at him. “I am not mundane, I am not boring, I am a QUEEN.”

“An empress!” Simon bit into a cookie, trying not to choke on crumbs and laughter.

Clary pointed at him. “Yes!” She turned back to Alec. “You see? I am awesome, I am a Sailor Soldier of the gods-damned Morning Star—”
Simon frowned as something occurred to him. “I’m pretty sure the morning star is Venus,” he objected. “That would make you Minako, wouldn’t it?”

“Or Lucifer,” Jace said, not quite under his breath.

Clary waved a hand to shush him. “I may be too awesome for your puny mortal mind to handle,” she was telling Alec, “but that does not make me a mundane anything!”

Jace laughed. Probably none of the others heard him under the racket, but Simon heard, felt it catch like a hook of velvet in his heart and turned to see Jace gilded, every golden line of him lit up by the light coming through the windows, as if the sun wanted to touch him as badly as Simon did. It hurt to look at him, a sweet pain like the first breath after a too-deep dive; to see, just for a moment, Jace without the weight he always carried, without the mask he always wore, with nothing to dilute or shadow the pure auric light of him that was usually kept hidden—to see him smiling and mean it, a shining shard of real, unabashed happiness glistering in those eyes after all these weeks of worry—

Ol boaluasha gi, he thought, his blood singing like wine-kissed crystal; I love you, the Enochian words blossoming like the midnight medianox flower in the Institute greenhouse in his mind, on his tongue—all shimmering white-gold, unfolding into iridescence. I love you, I love you, all the thousand reasons why joined like voices in a choir, loud enough to blow the world to dust—

And it was so immense, this feeling, so wonderful and terrible all at once, as if with every breath he risked his heart bursting open in a shower of diamonds from the pressure—it was so much that Simon longed for Jace to be closer, here, within reach, so he could ground it in Jace’s skin like lightning in the earth.

He felt that want echoed suddenly, like a song in a dark place, like a lover’s pulse; him and not-him, a shiver like a lullaby whispering down a harp-string, and when Jace swept his knives aside nothing could have been more natural, made more sense. Jace flowed smoothly to his feet and of course he felt it too; how could he not, this twinned heartbeat resounding in their chests, this gold ribbon binding them? Simon pulled on that cord without thinking and Jace’s pupils swallowed the light as he crossed the room, dark eclipses fixed on Simon and there was nothing else, no one else—only Jace slipping into Simon’s lap like a spill of light-kissed water, settling over his hips and folding into him with a sigh, eyes falling closed, tipping his brow against Simon’s as Simon reached up to cradle his jaw—

And the music was so loud—the bones in Simon’s hands and face were humming with it, reverberating with it, the melody rising from Jace’s skin to surround him, the orchestra of his runes roaring in Simon’s ears—

Somebody coughed.

The boys froze. The music splintered into silence, drowned out by reality, and Simon’s brain flat-lined.

No, I didn’t—we didn’t just—Clary!

Jace’s face shut down, all trace of the soft joy that had suffused it a moment before utterly gone. His eyes, when they snapped open, were blank as razors, and Simon was torn between trying to soothe him, reassure him, and finding a way to pretend this wasn’t what it looked like—

Except that of course it was, and he would never, ever do that to Jace. But Jesus in the Tardis, this was not how he’d wanted Clary to find out.
Sick to his stomach, and ashamed of it, he turned to see how Clary was taking this.

He wasn’t the only one. Alec was bright red, but he and Izzy were both trying to hide that they were also watching Clary—and doing a pretty bad job of it.

“What?” Clary asked. She glanced between the three of them. Jace was not looking at her; he was staring at nothing. “I had popcorn stuck in my throat! I’m not freaking out! Why is everyone looking at me? You guys are the ones who—”

She paused and squinted at Alec suspiciously.

“We’re what?” Alec asked defensively.

“The ones with the Puritanical sexual scruples,” Clary said absently. She was still staring at him, and suddenly her eyes widened. “Oh my gods, you already knew! Didn’t you?” she demanded, whirling from Alec to his sister.

“Um…” Izzy shot a questioning look at Simon.

That was enough confirmation for Clary. Her face thunderous, she made straight for Simon. “You unutterable—”

Simon snarled, low and savage and terrible, and he caught a peripheral glimpse of shock breaking through Jace’s mask before he had an arm around Jace’s waist, pull-swinging him out of Simon’s lap and onto the sofa behind him, where Simon was between him and the thing that could hurt him—

And the music was so loud, so many points of sound screaming in the room for him to call on, like fires, like stars—

And Clary snatched up a pillow and smacked him in the face with it.

“Best friends—come—before—in-laws!” she chanted, beating him over the head to emphasise her words—gently, but at the first touch he was back, back from wherever he’d gone, that dark, animal place inside—

“I didn’t tell them!” he protested, shaken, his mouth running on auto-pilot, struggling to keep up. “Clary! Stop!”

“And no snarling when someone calls you on it!” she added, clearly completely unafraid (as she should be, he’d never hurt her—he wouldn’t have, at school, he wouldn’t have). But she had pity on him, drawing back with the pillow still clutched in her hands. “Did you really not tell them?”

“Of course not.” Simon felt—almost dizzy, dizzy and sick and confused, with the beginnings of relief building. She wasn’t—mad, disgusted, afraid (even if maybe, maybe she should be…) “Why on earth would I do that?”

“I was wondering.” She sat back on the couch, eying him. “You could have told me, you know.”

Simon jumped a little at the light touch on his hand; Jace’s, reaching out to tangle their fingers together without a word. Instantly Simon felt closer to solid ground—embarrassed, a little, or something like it, but reassured. He squeezed gratefully. “I didn’t know how,” he admitted.

“Miss Manners doesn’t cover it,” Clary allowed, smiling, and Christ, the relief of it—she knew, she
knew and she wasn’t leaving, didn’t hate him, despise him— “But I did already know, you great big idiot. I was just waiting for you to say something.”

“You—” Simon swallowed, definitely dizzy now. “You knew? Already? This whole time?”

Clary raised one eyebrow. “Woah. Simon, I love you, but you are not nearly as subtle as you think you are. Seriously.” She looked pointedly at Jace’s hand clutching his.

Simon flushed. “Um.” What were you supposed to say to that?

The doorbell rang suddenly, startling them all; Clary jumped a little, and the Shadowhunters all swung their heads towards the sound like hunting hounds.

“That must be the instruments,” Izzy said after a beat. “Come on, Alec, let’s let them in.” She was on her feet before she’d finished speaking, but despite her light tone Simon noticed the silver snake-bracelet on her wrist—her whip, in its ‘sheathed’ form—stirring restlessly, apparently of its own accord.

Alec was still flushed, but the red was fading rapidly from his cheeks. Without a word, he followed Izzy from the room.

“Did I miss something?” Clary asked, confused.

Jace’s hand slipped from Simon’s. “They’re worried it’s our parents.”

“What happens if it is?” Simon asked him, staring at the doorway Alec and Isabelle had vanished through.

He felt Jace shrug behind him. “It could get…unpleasant.”

“Why?” It had been Clary’s idea to throw a bit of a house-warming, to stop by a grocery store and pick up snacks so the Shadowhunters could experience some uncomplicated Light Worlder-type fun—but Simon was sure that she was just as aware as he was that no one had yet explained what had happened with the Lightwood parents. He turned around on the sofa to face his aikane. “What’s going on, Jace?”

Jace avoided his eyes. “I don’t want to talk about it right now.”

Simon blinked. “Fair enough.” He tilted his head. “I don’t hear any sounds of bloodshed, though. Shall we see what’s going on?”

That was apparently acceptable, and the three of them left the candy-strewn sitting room to follow Alec and Izzy into the entrance hall.

It was, probably fortunately, not the Lightwood parents. Simon stopped in the doorway, bemused by the strange sight of Isabelle directing a group of moving men along the hallway, as imperious and commanding as Cleopatra. Logic insisted that the movers couldn’t be Light Worlders—not if they’d transported the large, unfamiliar musical instruments they were carrying from the Institute to here—but Simon was more interested in the instruments themselves than the men carrying them. He recognised the outline of a piano beneath the taped-down wrapping of one of the objects, carefully directed over the carpets on what looked like a giant skateboard, but he had no idea what the other two instruments were. One looked just like a traditional guitar, but with two necks and way too many strings; the other kind of reminded him of a lute, but again, two necks, and one of them curved strangely.
“They let you take the piano?” he asked Jace.

“It wasn’t theirs,” Jace said simply. “It came with me, when—”

He stopped, and Simon realised he meant when my father died, or something like it. Only Valentine hadn’t died.

It would have been so much easier if he had.

The three of them watched the instruments vanish down the corridor, each of them lost in their own thoughts. Finally, when the last of the movers disappeared into what had been dubbed the music room (an apartment with a music room) Clary gave herself a little shake.

“I think I should get going. I’ve still got homework to do.”

Simon shot her a scandalised expression. “Who dared give you homework on the first day back?”

They locked eyes, grinned, and chimed in unison, “Mr. Deane.”

“He’s the best teacher I’ve ever met,” Clary explained to Jace’s raised eyebrow. “But he demands the best of you, too.”

“Sounds reasonable.” Jace brushed his fingers over Simon’s shoulder—“I’m going to help the others,”—and headed in the direction of the music room without a backwards glance.

Simon watched him go, frowning and worried. It was clear Jace wasn’t all right, but Simon wasn’t sure how much to push, whether it might be better to let Jace open up in his own time…

Clary nudged him. “Go on, I know you’re dying to go after him. I’ll be fine.”

Simon glanced at her, and didn’t deny it. “And us?” he asked. His mouth was still a little dry. “Are we fine? Really?”

“Really really,” Clary said firmly. “It would be very hypocritical of me to be grossed out, after all that Sam/Dean fic in 10th grade.”

“And you’re never hypocritical,” Simon teased.

“I am a paragon of awesome, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I bet you don’t.” His grin softened into a smile. “I don’t deserve you.”

“No,” Clary agreed cheerfully, “but just try getting rid of me.” She hugged him. “Are you coming home tonight?”

“Clary!” Simon resisted the urge to flail, but he could feel himself flushing scarlet. Knowing that she knew put a whole new spin on that question, and from her wicked grin, she knew it full well.

“You helped me write those fics, Simon, don’t tell me you’re embarrassed now—”

“I’m allowed be embarrassed when you start asking about my sex life!”

“It’s a perfectly innocent question!” she protested, clearly trying not to laugh. “I’ve got to tell mom if you’re not coming back, don’t I?”

He pretended to glare at her, not at all convinced. “I don’t know, anyway. I’ll call you if I end up
“That’ll do, pig,” she agreed mildly, “that’ll do.” She blew him a kiss as she headed for the door. “And don’t let blondie keep you up all night, you’ve got a gig tomorrow.”

“Clary Esther Lewis!”

She laughed, and left him.

And took his smile with her; it fled his face like a passing shadow as the door closed behind her with a final-sounding *snick*. The sound reminded him of knives, and instantly he felt sick, hating that his first thought these days was always martial, violent, bloodstained.

Or maybe that was just him feeling guilty, bitter and sour, for feeling relieved to have Clary gone.

He went to sit on the stairs rather than follow Jace to the music room, and pulled out his phone just to have something to do with his hands. He flicked through Stumbleupon out of habit, but he had his own thoughts to think, fears banked by Clary’s teasing flaring to life like fires, caged in a tangle of razor wire and cursed briars.

Twice today he’d attacked Clary, or been ready to. He’d held Simiel to her throat, bared his teeth and been ready to—to what? To do something awful, something unspeakable, because for an instant she’d been a threat—no, he’d *seen* her as a threat, which was a very different thing. Clary could never be a threat to him because Clary would never deliberately hurt him.

But it was starting to look like he was a threat to *her*, to her safety. What if she hadn’t called his name in time, earlier? What if the monster in his head hadn’t been banished when she’d hit him with the pillow, but had interpreted it as an attack? What might he have done? Jace and Alec and Izzy—could they have stopped him? Could they have stopped him *in time*? Was he willing to bet Clary’s life on it?

It occurred to him, horribly, that maybe Clary had been as eager to leave as he had been to see her go. Maybe her light-hearted posturing had been only that, posturing and fakery until she could get safely away from him.

He clenched his eyes shut, dragging air into lungs that were suddenly stone. *God, don’t let that be true. Don’t let her be afraid of me.*

Don’t let that fear be deserved.

He would have to talk to her, properly; not about him and Jace—although thank the Doctor that was finally out in the open—but about him, and the risk—the threat—he represented now. And he had to talk to Jace, too, because whatever Clary said, Simon didn’t believe this was something as simple as PTSD. Or, could it have been two different things, two different triggers? The first time, he’d been terrified; the second…

He thought back to it; the ice-cold flash of thought, faster and purer than mere words; the awareness of how vulnerable Jace felt, the understanding that Clary was its cause… Only it had been a Clary stripped of all association, in his mind; Clary as a meaningless stranger who was making Jace unhappy, making him *hurt*—

 Darkness detonated in his chest with a silent roar; Simon hissed, the phone slipping from suddenly nerveless fingers as his vision was washed in shining ebony—not blind but shadow-sighted, lines and angles transcribed in obsidian and silver and bloody crimson, the perception of a creature born to darkness. His ears were full of the crash of surf and he knew it for black water, without thinking;
black waves on red sand, and he was so full of rage, pure unholy wrath that Jace should be hurt, hurting. He felt himself stand and his shoulders were weighted down, the room was strobing around him, black-white-black-white-black-white-black—

No, no, Jace is safe! a distant voice cried. There is no threat—

Black and white paused, snarled, crashed together in a blinding tangle of lightning and burning oil. Salt and frost on his tongue, their tongue, xyr tongue, anthrax pulsing in xyr arteries and razors pushing from xyr fingertips like claws, in xyr gums like fangs, ready to hunt down the thing that had hurt xyr aikane—

NO!

A scream to drown out the sound of the waves; xe spun, disorientated, colour leeching back into xyr vision and xyr wings dissolving into ashes—

And Simon’s body tripped on the stair and crashed down, and there, he was here, every sharp spike of pain anchoring him in his skin, carving him real for fragments of seconds—but only for seconds; he was blinking in and out like a flickering bulb, Simon and the Other, black and white and blue and gold as he—xe—they crumpled at the foot of the stairs, clutching their head as it tried to split open, a sun come alight in their skull and it was too big, too much, searing him-xem-them and he-xe was screaming, the unbearable fucking agony of being at war with himself—xyrself—themselves—

If he lost if he lost if he lost this thing was going to go after Clary—

“Simon!”

He couldn’t see, his body was shaking, convulsing, trying to rip itself apart and blood in his mouth and wings beating under his skin, wings with feathers of fire, feathers of swords and ice and bone—there were hands on his skin, turning him over, trying to make him be still calling his name but he couldn’t help them, head hands wrists arms hips thighs shins feet all jerking-spasming, and there were hands on xem, restraining holding back and agé, no! Xe flung them off with a snarl, blood dripping from xyr lips, and saw—

—a citadel of crystal-diamond-glass like a lotus blossom, floating in the sky atop an island of white marble while a flock of figures, some winged and some not, swoop and dive around it like a shoal of rainbows—

—a wave of demons kneeling to xem, legion upon legion of them, and they name xem Adokaz-Aoi, Nazksad-Enaikat-dë—prince of stars, sword of the King, and xe sings the truth of it back to them—

—worlds shattered and burned, crushed between armies of fire and ice, mortals drowning in the ichor that comes storming down out of the skies above them—

—sunshine in a lavender sky, wings feathered in black and white streaking past xem with a whoop of joy, the long fan-tipped tail almost slapping xyr face. “Catch me if you can, Toltorg!” ae calls, taunting playfully. Black scales like dark diamonds flash from beneath leg coverings of violet silk, and ae dives, fearless as any immortal. Xe twists mid-air and plunges after, and their third vertex is laughing at them both, amethyst sun calling sapphire fire from vir blue hide, vir hawk’s-eye dappled wings—

—A warscape, a dying sun choked out by twisted songs and the earth churned to bloody mud beneath the talons of countless inferni, and xe screams down starfire from beyond this world but it is not enough, not enough to save what must be saved, who must be saved—
They are all going to die here—

A sharp stinging sensation burst somewhere close by—no, not just close but against his skin, on his face—he had a face, skin, a body, the pain drew boundaries around his self and Simon blinked, back and human and aware of himself again—his surroundings—

His surroundings—

He was sitting at the base of the staircase, his arms outflung towards—towards Alec and Isabelle, and both of them stood still as stone, as if they had met Medusa’s glance mid-stride; Alec with a seraph blade alight in his hand, Izzy’s whip half-uncoiled from around her wrist, hanging limply at her side. Only their faces were animated, caught somewhere between fear, real fear, and shock, and awe, and disbelief—

“No, Simon, look, look at me,” and Simon saw him, belatedly; Jace was kneeling beside him, cradling Simon’s face and he must have been the one to slap Simon back to his senses because his voice was shaking, and his face, his eyes—“Are you all right? Can you hear me now?”

‘Now; could I not hear you before—what’s happening—what happened—

Simon searched for his mouth. It took him a while to find it; when he did, it tasted like blood. “I… I can hear you.”

Jace smiled a little, but his gaze was still afraid, worried. “Good, that’s good.” He swallowed; when he spoke, he sounded out each word carefully. “Do you think you can let Alec and Izzy go?”

Simon stared at him, confused. “What…?”

“You’re holding them, aikane,” Jace said, low. “Like you held me before, do you remember? Through their runes.”

It felt like a long time before Simon could ascertain the truth of that; it felt so natural, so easy, that he couldn’t feel the effort of it. But Jace was right; once Simon looked for it, listened for it, he eventually found his hold on Jace’s siblings. It was like and unlike holding Jace; they sounded different, each of them, the same instruments—the same Marks—sounding together in different ways, making separate choirs. Here and there was a note or chorus added or absent, where someone had a rune the others didn’t, or lacked one the other two must have had. It was hypnotising, now that he could hear it, was listening to it; Jace, and Alec, and Isabelle, the three of them like living songs…

With effort, Simon…loosened his grip, like relaxing a fist, and Alec and Izzy both made quickly stifled sounds; a gasp of relief, a soft hiss. Simon’s hands fell to his lap, and his head bowed, abruptly exhausted. He fell forward against Jace’s shoulder and felt Jace catch him, those familiar arms (humming with desviar and voyance and enkeli) coming up around him to hold him tight, and safe…

Distantly, he could hear voices, Alec’s and Isabelle’s and others he didn’t know. But before he could lift his head again, he was gone.

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“How long,” Alec asked, “has he been able to do that?”

Izzy rubbed her arms, suppressing a shudder. Jace, who was gently wiping the blood from Simon’s lips and chin with a damp cloth, said nothing. He had not let either of them help him carry Simon here, to his, Simon’s, new room, and Izzy was silently grateful. She was not sure she could have brought herself to touch Simon, just now, not even for Jace.
Simon struggling on the floor, screaming through the blood bubbling from between his teeth. One of the werewolf movers bending over him, trying to hold him down; Jace kneeling on Simon’s other side, calling his name, frantic, stele out to heal whatever-this-is. Simon bucks, writhes; without warning he throws off the werewolf, hurls him across the hall like a doll and Izzy is running, Alec beside her, the stele flies from Jace’s fingers to embed quivering in a wall and Simon sits up like a switchblade flicking free. He flings up his hands and she feels it in every Mark, every rune locking in place, locking her in place and Simon’s eyes are black and blind, blood smeared around his snarling mouth…

“Jace,” Alec snapped. “I felt it; you were only surprised for a second. You’ve seen this before. When?”

Jace dipped the cloth into the bowl of warm water Izzy had brought him when he’d asked. “He’s never moved a stele before,” he said finally. He cleaned a thread of blood from Simon’s jaw.

“But the runes? He held us, Jace! I couldn’t move!”

“I couldn’t either,” Isabelle said quietly. “Only my face, and my left hand.” She swallowed sourness. She had never thought of her Marks as a weakness before, a vulnerability. The idea of it turned her stomach, spun her world upside-down. She glanced down at the voyance on her right hand. They’re supposed to be our strength.

And in that moment, she knew why Jace hadn’t told anyone.

“Because those are the only parks of you unMarked,” Jace said softly. Resignedly. He dropped the cloth in the bowl and turned on the bed to face them. “Renwicks. The first time… I think the first time was at Renwicks.”

“Renwicks?” Alec demanded, incredulous. “You’ve known since Renwicks, and you didn’t tell us?”

“Because of the Clave,” Izzy said, looking up from her hand to meet Jace’s eyes. He looked so tired. “That’s why, isn’t it?”

He nodded.

“What in the Angel’s name does the Clave have to do with it?” Alec looked from Jace to Izzy and back again. “Well?” His tone warned that Jace had better have a damn good explanation.

Izzy didn’t blame him, but she’d seen the scope of it now. “Alec, think. What would the Clave do if they learned there was someone who could control them through their runes?”

“Train him,” Alec said without missing a beat.

Jace actually laughed, brokenly; Izzy just snorted. “Let me rephrase that: what would the Clave do if they learned there was someone who could control them through their runes, and who would not take the Oath? This is Simon we’re talking about,” she added when he opened his mouth to answer. “We all know he’s never going to be Dedicated.”

Alec hesitated.

“They’d kill him,” Jace whispered. “Alec, they’d execute him in a heartbeat.”

Alec didn’t deny it. He could see it as clearly as Isabelle could: their greatest strength, become a terrible, irrevocable vulnerability, a weakness. If Simon could hold them frozen, could he move them,
like dolls, like puppets? Could he walk a Shadowhunter off a cliff, or into a pool? Could he force them to raise a blade to their throats and cut? Izzy had no runes on her fingers, but the *voyance* on her right hand crossed the tendons for her digits; she would not want to bet that Simon couldn’t manipulate them if he chose to, make her hold a weapon.

“That’s why you kept it a secret?” Alec asked finally. “Because you thought we’d tell the Clave?”

“I wanted to spare you the choice between loyalties,” Jace said quietly.

“I’m your *parabatai*,” Alec said. “What you endure, I endure. You’re not supposed to spare me. You’re supposed to trust me.”

“I do trust you!” Jace was suddenly on his feet, and Izzy had never seen their brother cry but Jace looked anguished, grieved that Alec could think such a thing. “I know what you would have chosen, of course I know—just like I know it would have hurt you to keep this from the Clave. You honour them, as you *should*—”

“My first loyalty is to you,” Alec said. “As it should be, as it’s always been. You say you wanted to spare us the choice, but it wouldn’t have been a choice—Fallen damn you, Jace, a choice between you and the world is no choice at all!”

Jace stared at him, and Izzy wondered what was being said between the words, through the bond her brothers shared. She was tired of having to wonder, she realised, watching their expressions shift and change like a lake beneath a storm; and yet, she wasn’t sure if she really wanted to step into that silence with them. The only way to break a *parabatai* bond, once forged, was to cut it out of your own skin, slice so deep no trace of the Mark remained. And even that almost never worked. No one else could do it for you, even if you agreed to let them try; you had to will the bond gone, and wield the blade yourself, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred you would still feel your *parabatai*’s soul merged with yours, as impossible to separate as two flames that had become one.

Her declaration this morning—*we’re all three of us agelai now*—had been a gauntlet thrown down, a ploy to stay by Jace’s side while their parents decided his fate. If she made it true—what if she hated it, once it was done? To never have privacy again…

It would mean never being alone, either.

“If you’re done angsting over how devoted but misunderstood you both are,” she said tartly, “can we get back to the part where Simon has superpowers? What can he *do*, Jace?”

Jace sat back down, glancing at Simon to check that he was still sleeping. “His *iratze* held when mine didn’t,” he said, and none of them needed that spelled out; they all remembered the battle with Abbadon, and how close Alec had come to dying in it. The Greater Demon’s poison had negated the healing runes Jace had tried to draw, but Simon’s… Simon’s had kept Alec alive long enough for Magnus to heal him. “At Renwicks, he… He broke the Portal there.”

Isabelle stared at him. “*Simon* broke it?” Jace had told them—told everyone—that it had been Valentine, destroying his escape route before anyone could follow him through it.

“How?” Alec asked.

Jace shrugged helplessly. “He screamed.”

“He screamed?” Izzy repeated incredulously. “He destroyed a Portal—by *screaming*?”

“He has an angel in him,” Alec said slowly. Clearly struggling to accept what he was hearing, but no
doubt he had the added evidence of Jace’s memories to convince him. “There’s no real telling what he can do.” He glanced at Jace. “Would the Clave really execute an angel?” he asked suddenly.

The sheer horror of the idea silenced them all for a moment.

“They couldn’t,” Alec said finally. “They couldn’t. It would be—I can’t imagine a greater blasphemy.”

“They couldn’t do it knowingly,” Jace corrected. “Or openly, if they knew. But if they said that Simon was possessed by a demon instead of an angel? Who would protest?”

“Would Raziel let them?” They both turned to look at her, but Izzy didn’t retract the question, even if she felt naïve for asking it. “No, really. If they tried—if they tried to kill an angel—wouldn’t Raziel stop them?”

“Maybe.” Jace sounded doubtful.

“He might not have to,” Alec said grimly. “You saw what happened downstairs. Imagine if we’d been trying to hurt him.” He looked at Jace. “He threw that werewolf across the hall, and he didn’t have any Marks.”

Izzy rubbed her chest. It had been like—she didn’t know what it had been like; like a wave crashing against her, or being caught in the blast zone of a bomb, all of her Marks throbbing and vibrating like glass about to shatter. Jace had bolted out of the room; Izzy and Alec had taken one look at each other and followed him, drawing weapons as they went, and one of the werewolves positioning Jace’s piano had run with them.

It had been…interesting, trying to convince the wolves not to talk about what they’d seen and heard, after. She hoped they would keep their mouths shut, but she had a sick feeling that even the threat of Shadowhunter fury wasn’t going to keep this story from being all over the city by the weekend. It might even help it spread.

“I don’t want to bet on it,” Jace said. “On divine intervention, or that Simon’s angel could protect him. Today was the first time I’ve seen him hold two people at once, and the Clave can call on a lot more than two warriors.”

“We’re not going to tell anyone, Jace,” Izzy said, rolling her eyes. “I thought we’d already agreed on that.”

Alec nodded agreement. “Is that all?” he asked. “Everything you’ve seen Simon do?”

Jace cocked his head, considering. “He can move Simiel, sometimes,” he said after a moment.

Alec made a dismissive gesture, but Jace said “No, not like that,” before he could speak, and Alec’s eyes went wide.

To Izzy, who couldn’t see whatever he’d shown Alec, Jace said, “I don’t mean it nudges into his grasp when he needs it, like any bonded blade. I’ve seen it fly up from the floor into his hand, from three, maybe four feet away.”

“Can he do it on command?” Izzy asked. It seemed the next logical question. “Have you two been practising all this in private?”

Jace shook his head.
“Well, why not?” Izzy demanded, exasperated. “For Raziel’s sake, Jace!”

“I thought it might be smarter to make sure he could handle a sword before we started in on the celestial powers!” Jace said. “Walk before you can run, Izzy!”

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard that sentiment from you before,” Alec commented.

“Alec, shut up if you’re not going to help,” Izzy snapped. She turned back to Jace. “The angel’s possessing him for a reason, isn’t it? I doubt it just wants to be ignored. If it’s given Simon these powers, then he’s probably meant to be using them.”

“Let’s take this somewhere else,” Jace said. He looked down at Simon, who was fast asleep but wouldn’t remain so if the discussion grew any more heated, and no one argued.

Izzy’s room was closest, so they went there, Jace shutting his bedroom door quietly behind them.

“Do we know that it has given Simon its powers?” Alec asked. He found a space to lean against the wall, nearest the door; Izzy settled on her new bed, her back pressed to the headboard; and Jace hovered near the window, drawn tight and restless. “Maybe what you saw wasn’t Simon using those powers, but the angel taking him over for a moment or two. We’re only guessing that it’s made its abilities available for Simon to use; it could be the angel, not Simon, doing those things you’ve seen.”

“It could be,” Jace admitted after a pause. “I don’t think so, but I can’t prove you wrong.”

“Why don’t we just ask it?” Izzy refused to quail from their shocked looks. “What? Why not? Has anyone tried talking to it at all? Magnus?” she asked Alec.

Who shook his head. “Not as far as I know…”

“Then why don’t we ask it what it wants?” It was so obvious; why hadn’t they considered this before? “If it’ll talk to us, we can get proof it’s an angel. The Clave won’t be able to hurt Simon then, even if they find out. And…” And, it’s an angel. The thought of actually talking to one, communicating with it… They’d been working so hard the last few weeks trying to get everything ready for the Inquisitor that Isabelle had not had time to consider what it really meant, that Simon had an angel inside him. It had touched Alec, even if Alec didn’t remember it; the black gloves on Alec’s hands hid the sijmádi angélou that proved it, the celestial signature of an opalescent six-pointed star, emblazoned on his palm like a jewel. It was here, on earth with them.

An angel. An angel like Raziel. For all they knew, it might even be Raziel—she doubted it, but they couldn’t be completely sure, could they?

But Alec was shaking his head. “I thought the same thing,” he said. “But, Izzy—Jonathan Shadowhunter is the only Nephilim who’s ever managed to talk to an angel. Everyone else who has tried—the angel always destroys them. They don’t want to talk to us.”

“They don’t want to be summoned,” Izzy argued. “And bound in a summoning circle. Would you want to be? But this one’s already here.”

“Could it hurt to try?” Jace asked softly.

Alec stared at him. “Yes! Yes, it could hurt! Did you not hear me just say that everyone who’s tried has been destroyed? Smited, Jace! People who try to talk to angels get smited!”

“I think the past tense of ‘smite’ is ‘smote’,” Izzy said archly.
“Now who’s not helping?” Alec asked.

Ignoring him, Izzy looked at Jace. He was rubbing his thumb over the windowsill, lost in his own thoughts. “I understand why you kept it secret,” she told him. “But Jace—the Inquisitor could arrive any minute now. And you know there’s no way we can keep her away from Simon—it’s going to be hard enough making sure she doesn’t find out about Clary. What if—” She hesitated, not knowing what to call it. “—what happened downstairs happens again? In front of mother and father, or the Inquisitor?”

“What do you suggest?” Jace’s voice emerged harsh and rough from his throat, almost angry, and although she knew the anger wasn’t directed at her, Isabelle still felt it like a lash. “Asking the angel to pretty please behave itself for a week or two? If it doesn’t kill us all outright for daring to talk to it?”

“If you don’t want to risk that, then train him!” Izzy snapped. “Find some way for him to control his—or the angel’s—powers, and do it fast! Don’t take it out on me just because you were busy sticking your head in the sand, hoping this would go away! If you’d told us before, we could have done something about it earlier!”

“I was trying to keep us all safe!” Jace shouted, whirling on her, and even Alec started at the anguished rage spilling out of him in waves. “If I was the only one who knew, then I was the only one who could be punished! And now look—” He made an angry, aborted gesture, “—now it’s a conspiracy, a nest of anarchist Shadowhunters keeping vital information from the Clave—they’ll exile you and Alec and with my father, I’ll be lucky if they kill me before I have to watch him die—”

His voice broke. Izzy stared, speechless, as Alec was suddenly across the room, enfolding Jace into his arms as Jace’s shoulders shook and shook. Izzy could hear him gasping against Alec’s chest, horrible, sandpapered breaths that sounded like they hurt, sounded like razor wire being dragged from her brother’s lungs—

Alec met her eyes. In that moment, they didn’t need a parabatai bond; they both knew that last him had not been Valentine.

Alec pressed his lips to Jace’s hair, his eyes closing, and Izzy imagined the wave of warmth and love and reassurance he had to be wrapping around Jace like a blanket, like a wardspell, the wordless promises he must be making—we won’t let that happen, you’re not alone with this now, we’ll help and it will not happen—

Damn privacy, Izzy thought. She would take the parabatai oath, and this was why; so she could give Jace the same reassurance that Alec could give him, soul-deep and all-encompassing. Because to apologise unbonded was to be hampered by clumsy, useless words that could not touch her brother’s hurt, could not hope to convey how truly sorry she was, and that was no longer good enough. She wanted, needed, to write her apology in pure emotion, so Jace could know without doubt, could feel how much she hadn’t meant to hurt him, how much she regretted that she had.

She would never have to depend on words again—with the bond, she could battle their sorrows and fears the way she battled monsters, hunting them past the depths mere words could go. She could keep them from ever hurting again.

But that was just selfishness on her own part; there was more to it than that, more important reasons for turning three into one. Their trio had balanced just fine back when things were simple, but the life they shared had grown so much darker since then, so much more complicated; the still summer lake they used to sail on had become a river too deep and dangerous to be forded, strewn with submerged rocks and white-water rapids. She watched Jace struggle to compose himself and knew his fears
were not misplaced; any misstep now could see them all drowned, with Simon and maybe even Clary with them. They needed the added advantage of a true agela, of being a true agela, to navigate this, to minimise the risks and threats they faced.

This entire discussion could have taken place in mere seconds mind-to-mind, if they’d been agelai. That instantaneous understanding would serve them like a seraph blade in whatever trials lay ahead; it was a weapon they couldn’t afford to pass over, but Alec and Jace would never insist she take it from its sheath. Not even to save them.

She had to be the one to choose.

“Simon’s not going to die,” she said, knowing she was echoing Alec’s silent assurances, hating the need to speak aloud. She swung her legs over the edge of the bed and stood up. “And we’re not going to fail. We’re going to become an agela.”

That got their attention. Jace whirled on her, and no, his eyes were dry but they were wild, with glimpses of forest-fires in the gold. “Did you listen to a word I just said? Alec’s already bound too close to me; becoming an agela would just drag you deeper into punishment with us!”

“I’m already in,” she said sharply, “and I’m not going anywhere. You think I’d cut myself away from you to save myself? Do you really think so little of me?”

Alec put a hand on Jace’s shoulder, silencing whatever he might have said. “Of course he doesn’t, Izzy. That’s not what he meant.”

She let it go. “Either way, he’s wrong. Becoming an agela won’t drag me down; it’ll pull you up. It doesn’t matter if you murder the Inquisitor in front of half the Clave; they’ll bend over backwards to preserve a real agela.” She pointed a crimson-nailed finger at her boys. “That means no imprisoning any of us, and definitely no executions. Nothing that would impact our effectiveness as hunters.”

After a beat, Alec quoted softly, “The Shadowhunter is trained in the art of attacking multiple foes, but multiple Shadowhunters cannot attack the same foe without great difficulty. The solution to this are the parabatai and parastathentes bonds, by which two Shadowhunters may fight together as one.

“The sum of these bonds is the agela, which is a greater force against the darkness than any of its parts alone…””

“Yes, we’ve all read the Codex, Alec, thank you,” Jace interrupted.

“Then you should realise that Izzy’s right,” Alec said, unperturbed. “Agelae are too rare to deliberately destroy. Parabatai are already prized, but an agela…”

He didn’t need to finish the thought. For years they’d all endured Hodge and their parents pressuring Izzy to complete the triangle, to turn a precious parabatai bond into a priceless agela. Every Nephilim knew it: if Shadowhunters were flames in the darkness, and parabatai shining stars, then an agela was a sun, a light no demon could stand against and survive. They were the greatest weapon in the Nephilim arsenal—and the rarest.

No one would touch them, no one could touch them, if they completed the bond. They would be too valuable, too highly prized. Agelae sent Greater Demons to the True Death, and held besieged passes against ravening armies, and had their names writ into legend; they were not imprisoned, or exiled, or hung as traitors. They couldn’t be.

No one spoke for minutes, and Isabelle tried not to wonder if Alec and Jace were conversing on their own, discussing the pros and cons without her. They wouldn’t do that.
“You shouldn’t have to do this,” Jace said at last. “Becoming our parabatai for politics—” His voice was rough, and disgusted. “I won’t let you be compelled into this.”

“Oh, shut up and stop being a drama queen!” Izzy said exasperatedly. “Do you think I’d offer if I wasn’t willing? If I didn’t want it?” She frowned at him, half-playful. “Protest much more, and I’ll think you don’t want to be agelai with me.”

“We’ve wanted nothing more for years,” Alec said simply.

Jace looked at her, and his eyes were searching. Soon, if she had her way, he wouldn’t need to look; he would simply know anything and everything that she felt. “Are you sure?” he asked quietly.

“Yes.”

And despite everything they grinned at each other, all three of them, so bright and warm that Izzy felt it as if the Mark were already emblazoned on her chest.

“It won’t help Simon,” she pointed out, because it needed to be said. Because they’d not come in here to discuss agelae, but what to do about Jace’s erastes, and for that they’d come up with no solutions yet.

There should have been a party, a celebration of their decision to form an agela, but if they had it at all it would have to wait.

“I can ask Magnus what he thinks about talking to Simon’s angel,” Alec said doubtfully, hesitantly. Writ across his face was his unwillingness to do just that, to interrupt the warlock’s grieving for someone else’s problems. “And look for hints in the Institute library.” He paused. “If they’ll let me in.”

No one asked who ‘they’ were. “They have to,” Izzy said. “It’s the Law—an Institute’s resources belong to all Shadowhunters.”

Jace brushed a hand through his hair, restlessly. “In the meantime, we’ll try and train him,” he said. “If it’s not the angel working through him—if he just needs to learn control—then practice should help.”

If it wasn’t the angel. If Simon only needed to learn control. If there was time for enough practice to make a difference, before the Inquisitor arrived, before Simon did something they couldn’t hide or explain away.

Izzy took a deep breath. There was nothing she, or they, could do to eradicate those ifs. They would just have to pray, and focus on what they could do. Speaking of which… “Let’s do it tonight,” she said. She let herself think about the enormity of what she—they—were doing; faced it in her mind without flinching, without regret. “Once Simon wakes up. He can witness for us.”

They were smart, her boys. They didn’t gainsay her. They knew better.

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There is a room like a cavern, lit with glowing runes, curlicues of gold and crystal set lovingly into the smooth stone. Their light falls upon the countless shelves, upon the books and scrolls archived here, the discs and tablets and chips, the memory-gems and data-banks. The librarians—for this is a library, albeit the like of which has never been seen on Terran earth—are black chrome and gilt, bipedal golems with serene faces and delicate, many-fingered hands on their four arms. They use their wings to dust the precious volumes in their care.
They bow their heads politely as xe passes them by.

Beside xe is one who is kin and progenitor. She wears matter easily, wields flesh and breath and biology like one born to it—which she was. Xe is less comfortable, feels almost claustrophobic in this suit of meat; the body’s pulse is so loud, the bones heavy, clumsy anchors weighing xe down. It is comforting to glance over at her and see her true form doubled over and under her current aspect: a boundless, calligraphic, helixing spiral of mana, energy etched onto the fabric of unspace in colours-sounds-extants no mortal can ever dream of. The perception of it is a reassurance that xe, too, is still xyrsel.

She—she has taken on gender, comfortable enough to do so; xe has foregone the added complication of such a thing—leads xe between two towers of shelves to a graceful open space, a glade in this forest of knowledge. Two mortals await them, debating over holograms of sigils and runic alphabets that dance back and forth between them; as xe and xyr kin approach, one tosses a glowing image at the other, who pulls its edges to enlarge it and make a correction.

Xyr progenitor makes a sound in her throat—a cough, Simon recognises—and smiles as the mortals recognise their presence. She introduces xe in the language of this world, which is looping and soft-edged; the word she uses means ‘life come from my life’, which can mean so many things. “And these,” she says, gesturing to the strangely tangible mortals, “are the greatest of my students; Iridainurma-só-tehirte, of the planet Azrath in the G-rsam system, and Esirath na Fejtaran-no, of Sylvistrae.”

“Call me Nurma,” the larger one says, turning the complex rolling trills of its name into something xe can hope to get xyr new mouth around. Nurma is eight or nine feet tall, as Simon would measure, with large wings feathered in black and white; it has hair, which not all these flesh-and-blood creatures do, a silver cascade of it falling almost to the silk wrap that hides its legs. Its head and torso are—human, Simon thinks—but its arms are covered in black scales, and its long tail ends in a fan of glimmering scale-feathers. “Only kin attempt the whole mouthful.”

“Nurma,” xe tries, rolling the sound of it around the fleshy tongue, the stony teeth.

Nurma pokes out its tongue and bites the tip gently; its teeth are white and gleaming. It holds the pose for a moment, then releases its tongue to speak. “You’ll get it.”

“My usename is Sirath,” the other mortal says. It is smaller than Nurma by a foot or two, and is clearly of another kind; its hide is dark blue and scaled, with a mane of quills around its head and draconic wings that shimmer all shades of black and blue and green. More quills and spines edge its shoulders, run down its back to the end of its dagger-tipped tail, and where the taller creature—Nurma—wears a skirt of purple and gold, Sirath has only a belt of azure discs around its narrow hips. “I am intrigued to meet another of the Iyrin. Will you be working with us on our project?”

*Perhaps.* Xe sends the emotion-thought directly to the minds of the mortals, already tired with clumsy speech, the impreciseness of verbal language. *I have other responsibilities, but this is a task whose objective means much to me. I wish to give what help I can.*

They start slightly when xyr mind brushes theirs, but both recover quickly. They have been working with xyr progenitor, after all. “We will be glad to have you,” Sirath says, touching triple-knuckled fingers to its lips, conveying some nuance xe does not understand. Perhaps it is a gesture specific to Sirath’s culture, like Nurma’s tongue-biting? “But what are we to call you?”

This, at least, is a simple thing, simple enough to be said aloud. “I am—”

Simon jerked awake as if he’d been dropped from a height. He lay still, staring up at the unfamiliar
ceiling without seeing it, trying to get over the vertigo lingering in his lizard-brain. His heart was pounding.

He could hardly breathe for the crippling, sourceless anguish threatening to sweep him under.

Mindlessly, he rolled onto his side under the sheets, drawing his knees up to his chest and tucking his head in, squeezing his eyes shut like a child. In seconds his throat was burned raw with suppressed sobs, and tears smeared across his cheeks like acid. There was no reason for it, he had no idea why he hurt so much and that confusion kept him silent, but it felt like—if his mom had died, it might have hurt this much; if he’d lost Clary or Jace to death, he would have felt this urge to hide away under blankets and cry until his shattered heart drowned in salt. His chest felt too tight, his lungs encircled by crushing iron bands so that he couldn’t get a breath, hitching and choking and the ache in him, the sheer fucking grief keening through his soul like a banshee’s wail—

*I watched them die, I couldn’t stop it—*

With effort, he dragged his mind back towards reality. No one was dead. Jace had been saved from Valentine, Alec from Abbadon’s poison, Jocelyn from her chains; Clary had escaped Renwicks with only bruises and Izzy had sailed through it all without a scratch. Simon’s mom was in hospital, but she was stable—if she wasn’t improving, at least she’d shown no signs of getting worse. Everyone was fine.

It felt like hours before that certainty—*everyone’s fine, everyone’s okay*—worked its way into his heart. Bit by bit, as if suspicious of the reassurances, his body relaxed, the constriction on his lungs easing in tiny increments. Gradually he stopped shaking, the tension bleeding out of him, and he slumped into the mattress, against the pillow, drained and exhausted.

His throat still ached when he finally became aware of his surroundings. He sat up slowly, blinking at his fuzzy vision; some of it was lingering tears, but the rest could be blamed on his missing glasses. He fumbled for the blurry nightstand, and found the familiar frames beneath his fingers.

When he could see again, he found himself looking around a beautiful bedroom like none he’d ever seen before. The walls and floor were all the exact same shade of dark, forest-shadow green, almost black in the dim light, except for the wall to Simon’s right, which was solid glass. Twilight spilled through the wall-length window, dusky shadows entwined with urban neon pooling on the bare floor, on the low padded window-seat running the length of the glass and the silky sheets tangled around Simon’s legs. The bed was set low, too, and had no frame—it was just a thick mattress a few inches smaller than the platform it rested on, the whole leaving Simon less than a foot off the floor. The only furniture was the short nightstand beside the bed and a bookcase that looked as though it had been made of driftwood, smoothed by waves and pleasingly asymmetrical, but when he got up to explore he found an almost-camouflaged door that led to a connected bathroom, and another that opened on a walk-in wardrobe empty of anything but hangers.

No, wait. Frowning, he searched for a light-switch, and when he found it the light revealed a familiar coat of black silk at the back of the wardrobe; his cóada, the Shadowhunter formalwear he’d worn to Jace’s Dedication ceremony.

He stood staring at the glittering adamas buttons for a long, numb moment.

He closed the door on it with a sharp, convulsive motion, breathing hard and not sure why, not sure how to name the emotion seeing the cóada elicited in him.

He’d seen enough. He left the room, fingertips automatically searching out his weapons as he closed the door behind him. Sure enough, whoever had laid him in bed had left his knives untouched; only
the boot knife was missing, gone with the converse sneakers that had been modified to hold and hide the sheath. He smiled a little; only a Shadowhunter would think it better to wake up armed than sleep comfortably unencumbered by your armoury.

The apartment was dark. Simon stopped and opened doors, but didn’t find anyone. There was a bedroom done up in black and crimson, with ebony-framed mirrors on the walls and a four-poster bed buried in thick cushions; the next was blue and white with bookshelves built into the walls and a beautiful wooden desk beneath the window; the third had been decorated in shades of black and grey and silver, and already had two knives embedded in the target hung on the wall. They all smelled of fresh paint, and they were all empty.

He made his way down the stairs, wondering how Alec and the others had managed to get their rooms decorated so quickly—or were there vampire decorators? It was late evening now, dark enough, he supposed, that vampires could have come to paint everything super-quickly. Maybe. It was a hilarious mental image, either way, and it had him almost grinning by the time he registered the strains of piano music coming from an unexplored corridor.

The lower floor wasn’t so dark; warm light came from the doorway leading into the sitting room, and the electric lights in the entrance hall were turned low but bright enough for Simon to spot his phone at the base of the stairs, where he’d dropped it during his… His fit. Or whatever that had been.

A fragment of his dream flashed through his mind as he stooped to pick up the phone; an alien’s magpie wings, lazuli fingers with too many joints pressed to sapphire lips. A pang echoed through his breast in the wake of the images; it tightened his throat for an instant, for a breath.

And then it was gone, and he shook his head clear and turned away from the sitting room, from the quiet hum of conversation there. He followed the music into the dark, instead, down the unlit corridor to the music room like a reverse Eurydice, following Orpheus into the Underworld instead of out of it. But Simon was already in the Shadow World, had been caught in it from the moment he pushed open the door to another music room, half a city away and more than a month gone, and he didn’t hesitate to open this one now.

For an instant, it was as if he’d travelled back in time; there was Jace at the piano, the very same instrument he’d been playing when Simon woke from a Ravenor’s venom, and here was Simon, standing in the doorway and taken aback by Jace’s gilded beauty, by the magic unspooling from beneath his fingers on the black and white keys…

His aikane’s graceful hands paused, and the music fell silent. He didn’t turn around, but Simon could hear his smile as Jace asked, “Alec? Is that you?”

“Wrong again,” Simon said softly. When Jace turned on the piano stool, he found Simon smiling back at him.

But the warmth in Jace’s face faded all too quickly, replaced by the concern and exhaustion that was becoming far too familiar these days. He started to speak, but Simon got there first. “Is everyone all right?”

“Did I hurt anyone? His memory of what had happened before he passed out was patchy, interspersed with strange, fantastical visions like a montage of fantasy films; a nightmarish battlefield, a dream of flight, a building like a crystal church or palace, but hovering in the sky… He had no idea how to tell apart the hallucinations from what had actually happened.

“Everyone’s fine. One of the werewolves was thrown, but he was only bruised.” Jace turned back to the piano. One-handedly, absentely, he started to pick out a new tune.
“Werewolves?” What werewolves, Simon wanted to ask, but before he could the song snagged him, lassoed his heart with a silver chain and pulled. It ached, not with the anguish of his after-dream, but with something far softer—déjà vu, wistful and sweet and sore, like a healing bruise.

“What song is that?” he asked. His voice emerged a whisper.

“The Colours,” Jace said. “It’s one of the teaching songs for little children—sometimes it gets used as a lullaby.”

Simon walked over and sat down next to him on the stool, careful not to touch the keys. He could play a little—well enough to pick out a nursery rhyme or two—but he didn’t want to accidentally interrupt Jace’s playing. “A Nephilim song, you mean?” He nudged Jace’s knee with his. “Sing it for me?”

Softly, Jace murmured the words, not so much singing as reciting, giving it the cadence of a nursery rhyme or skipping song;

“Black for hunting through the night,
For death and mourning the colour’s white,
Gold for a bride in her wedding gown,
And red to call enchantment down.

“White silk when our bodies burn,
Blue banners when the lost return.
Flame for the birth of a Nephilim,
And to wash away our sins.

“Gray for knowledge best untold,
Bone for those who don’t grow old.
Saffron lights the victory march,
Green will mend our broken hearts.

“Silver for the demon towers,
And bronze to summon wicked powers.”

Simon closed his eyes as Jace’s voice wrapped around him, but he didn’t see the colours from the song, or the pictures the verses evoked. Instead every word increased the wistful almost-sadness
gathered behind his ribcage, bittersweet like dark chocolate, and as the simple tune drifted like mist through the room he almost thought he could hear another voice echoed in Jace’s, older and deeper. The sense of it was so fragile that Simon tried hard not to focus on it, lest it burst like a soap bubble, but instead let it whisper in the back of his mind, half-real and maybe-imagined.

When it was over, they sat in silence for a minute.

“It’s like I’ve heard it before,” Simon said finally. He looked at Jace, hesitating to acknowledge whose voice he’d heard behind Jace’s. “Did Valentine ever sing to you?”

Jace’s expression was unreadable. “Sometimes,” he said. “When I was very young.” His mouth twisted into a bitter smile. “It’s not unusual for Shadowhunters to retain memories from their first year. Maybe you remember him singing it to you.”

“It might have been you,” Simon said. “Luke told me you used to sing to me all the time.”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he realised they’d been the wrong thing to say, horrifically wrong. It was one thing to know, in the same vague way that he knew the Himalayas were cold, that he and Jace were brothers; it was a fact, but distant and unimportant, the truth of it too abstract to matter to their lives. It was something else entirely to think about toddler Jace singing to baby Simon. That was real, it made it real, and for a second Simon was almost dizzy with it, split between two overlapping realities; the one in which Jace was his lover, and the one where they were brothers…

“Werewolves?” he asked again, viciously shoving away thoughts of brothers, siblings, big brothers singing lullabies for their newborn baby brothers.

Jace blinked once, but caught up deftly. “We couldn’t ask munda—Light Worlder movers to bring our things from the Institute, could we?”

“There are werewolf movers?” Actually, that made a lot of sense; werewolves were much stronger than Light Worlder humans, so they’d be great at lugging heavy furniture around. “Wait, does that mean there really are vampire decorators? Did they paint all the rooms upstairs?”

“Just the bedrooms,” Jace said, his lips quirking at Simon’s delight. “It’s all the same company, I think.” He looked down at the piano, and his smile faded. “They brought us our instruments.”

“I remember.” Simon looked around, searching for the strange instruments he’d seen the movers—werewolf movers!—carrying in earlier. They weren’t hard to find, both of them set carefully down on the thick carpet; with Jace’s piano, the three formed the points of a triangle. “I’ve never seen anything like them. What are they?”

Jace nodded at the closer instrument, the double-necked lute-thing. “That’s Alec’s dital harp. The other is Isabelle’s harp guitar.”

“I’ve never even heard of those.” Simon got up from the stool to have a better look, all the important things they had to talk about forgotten in the wake of his curiosity. The dital harp—he could see it now; the strange curves of the second neck made sense once you knew it was meant to be part-harp—was beautiful, something that belonged in a prince’s court. The body of the instrument was engraved with gold, an incredibly detailed pattern of four-winged angels, music notes, flowers and birds running around the rim bright as flames, extending up onto the harp-neck. All of it shone with polish, and knowing Alec, Simon had no doubt that every string was in perfect tune.

Jace shrugged as Simon turned his attention to the harp guitar. “They’re popular among the
Nephilim. I couldn’t say what Light Worlders prefer to play.”

“Don’t sneer, it’s unbecoming,” Simon said mildly. The harp guitar was a lot more familiar, given that it looked like an acoustic guitar with an extra neck and more strings. Like the dital harp, it was exquisitely decorated, but with its own design of running horses and what looked like ocean waves. “These are lovely.”

“Every Shadowhunter has to learn an instrument,” Jace said. “It teaches us patience, and precision. Playing well honours your family, as does the beauty of the instruments.” He stroked a flash of song over the keys of the piano. “If we’d been raised in Idris, we’d each play two or three, but it’s hard to find good tutors so far from home.”

“So between my guitar and my voice, I bring more glory to our House than you do? Sweet.”

Jace laughed, and it was a flare cast into a dark sky, a sudden burst of light. But like a flare, it faded all too quickly, and he stared down at the instrument under his hands. “Alec and Izzy’s instruments were made for them,” he said. “But this probably belonged to the Waylands.” His eyes had that mirrored sheen again, giving nothing away. “Somehow I never thought of that before.”

Simon didn’t know what to say.

Jace closed his eyes. When they opened again, the moment was gone, the dark thoughts clearly filed away. “They know about your powers now,” he said. “Alec and Izzy.”

Simon nodded slowly. There were no other seats in the music room but the piano stool, but the carpet looked soft and he sat down on it, cross-legged. They would probably have to take the carpet out, he thought randomly. It would mess with the acoustics. “What do they think?”

“They were upset I hadn’t told them earlier. But they won’t tell the Clave.” Jace turned around on the stool to face him, and paused, frowning. “What are you doing on the floor?”

“It’s perfectly comfortable,” Simon informed him archly.

Jace rolled his eyes and continued without more protest; he was getting used to Simon’s antics. “They think you should try and train your powers. If you learned to use them deliberately, maybe they wouldn’t get out of control. I think it’s worth a try.” He paused. “Isabelle also thinks we should try talking to the angel.”

Simon blinked. “Is that possible?” he blurted.

“Alec’s trying to find out.” Jace glanced at the window, and the darkening night outside. “It’s late to start training tonight. We can start tomorrow morning, before you leave for school.”

“I don’t get a say in this, do I?” Simon asked wryly. “I guess I’d better sleep over then. I hope you guys have a spare toothbrush for me.”

“There should be one in your room.” Jace hesitated. “Did you like it?” He didn’t sound anxious—Jace never sounded anxious—but Simon could hear how much the answer would mean, nonetheless. “It was that colour when Alec bought the apartment—you can change it if you want, decorate it. We can get some of the posters from your old room, maybe.”

Simon smiled at him. “I like it,” he assured Jace. “I’m not sure why I have my own room here, but it’s great. I like the bed.” He realised that sounded like a come-on and added quickly, “And the bookcase. Did you choose that?”
Jace nodded, and Simon’s smile grew bigger, unsurprised but touched all the same. “Well, thank you. It’s awesome.”

“I am glad you approve,” Jace said formally, the corners of his lips turned up, and Simon grinned. “You missed some things while you were sleeping,” Jace went on, “and today, while you were at school—” He paused a moment.

“Is this about...?” Simon waved his hand to take in the room, encompassing the whole apartment in his gesture. “Why you’re here and not at home?”

“No,” Jace said. “That isn’t so complicated.” The small curve of his smile was gone as if it had never been. “Robert and Maryse threw me out, and Alec and Isabelle decided to come with me. Which I don’t deserve, but which I’ll never stop thanking them for.”

“They threw you out?” These were Jace’s foster-parents, weren’t they? He’d been living with them since he was ten, since Valentine faked his death; how could you be so cold to the child you’d raised for eight years? “Why? What the hell were they thinking?”

Jace looked at him, and Simon thought he looked a little confused. “You’re not going to ask what I did?”

“Nothing you could have done would justify getting kicked out of your home,” Simon snapped, and it physically hurt to see the flash of surprise in Jace’s eyes. None of these Shadowhunters had any belief in their own worth, it seemed.

“They seem to think I’m in league with Valentine,” Jace said lightly, but that statement could never be careless or trite, Simon could barely imagine how much it must hurt. “But that’s not important. Magnus came by just after you left this morning...”

“...It has to be Valentine,” Simon said promptly when Jace had finished explaining. “Who else would want to start a war between Shadowhunters and Downworlders?”

Jace dipped his head, acknowledging the point. “It could be, although I don’t know if anyone could have predicted the Spiral Court’s ultimatum. Then again, I didn’t know the Court existed until today; maybe someone with a better grounding in Downworlder politics would have seen it coming.”

“How could you not know about the Court?” Simon asked. “Isn’t that stuff your job, more or less?”

Jace spread his hands. “I don’t know. Alec knew, but I would swear on the Angel that Hodge never mentioned it in class. Maybe he didn’t think it was important.”

“It’s the governing body for one of the peoples Shadowhunters are supposed to police. It’s important.” But Simon wasn’t as surprised as he wanted to be. This was far from the first time the Nephilim had made their lack of regard for Downworlders obvious. “Poor Magnus,” he murmured, sick sympathy pooling in his stomach. Losing a son—had that been the pain he’d felt, had he dreamed Magnus’ grief somehow? But no, Magnus hadn’t watched Elias die... “What was the other thing, the stuff I missed being unconscious?”

“That.” Jace smiled like striking a match, a quick snap of light and warmth. “Isabelle wants to be our parabatai.”

It took Simon a beat to realise Jace meant himself and Alec, not himself and Simon. “That’s—awesome?” He thought it was awesome. The Codex went on and on and on about how important
parabatai bonds were—remembering bits and pieces of those passages, it suddenly clicked. “You’re going to be an agela!”

“Yes.” Jace was grinning outright now. “The first in our generation.”

For a moment Simon was taken aback. They’re that rare? But it jived with what the Codex had said about them. Agelae were a big deal, a huge deal. It was one thing to form that deep a connection with one person—then you had a parabatai or parastathentes bond, and those were rare enough. But to make an agela, you had to have that deep an accord with multiple people, and everyone already bonded had to agree to the new addition or additions. “Congratulations. Seriously, that’s so great! Have you guys picked a name yet?”

“Alec and Isabelle are discussing possibilities as we speak.”

Shouldn’t you be a part of that conversation? But Simon didn’t say it. Jace had plenty of reasons to have wanted a little alone time with his piano—not least among them worry for and about Simon. It killed him a little, that he was always adding to Jace’s problems. All he wanted to do was take them all away, leave Jace nothing to be sad or worried or angry about.

I just want him to be happy.

But he couldn’t put off saying this, no matter how much he’d rather hide his problems from Jace and give the blond less to worry about. “I attacked Clary today,” he blurted.

He should have known better than to expect Jace to react badly; his aikane didn’t move, and if the happiness retreated from his face, it left only a smooth calm behind it, not horror. “Tell me what happened.”

Simon did, staring at his hands in his lap as he spoke. He left nothing out, describing both the incident at school and the one in the sitting room—which Jace had been present for, but he couldn’t read minds and couldn’t know what had been going through Simon’s head in that moment.

“I could have killed her,” Simon said when he was done, his gut twisting with self-loathing, with horror at how close he’d come to doing something irrevocable. “Either time. I would have, if—” If something hadn’t woken me up both times.

But that was just luck, purest luck. What if the next time they weren’t lucky?

Jace didn’t say anything for a minute; when Simon glanced up at his face, he saw the thoughtful expression on the blond’s face.

“The second time, you thought I was in a kind of danger,” he said finally. “But I don’t think you would have hurt Clary. If you’d been right on the edge, I doubt you would have snapped out of it when she hit you—you would have seen that as an attack, and responded accordingly. Some part of you must have realised she was playing, and that everything was safe.”

Simon looked back down at his hands, saying nothing.

“And the first time…” Jace frowned. “Hodge told us about something like this. It happens to mundane soldiers sometimes, and Ascended Shadowhunters, Shadowhunters who weren’t trained properly when they were children. Their instincts to respond to danger become overly sensitive. But it’s usually manageable—we just avoid the things that make you feel you’re in danger. You said you didn’t hear her coming, and it scared you—so now we know to always let you know when we’re approaching you.” He smiled, gently. “And if other triggers come up, we’ll learn them and avoid them too.”
“What if we don’t learn them in time, and I hurt someone?” Simon’s throat was tight. How many triggers could there be? And what if some of them weren’t as easy to avoid as being snuck up on?

“You won’t,” Jace said calmly. “You realised what was happening when Clary said your name, didn’t you? You woke up. As long as everyone knows to call your name if you get scared like that, we’ll be fine.”

Simon lifted his head, stared at him. “You couldn’t wake me up,” he whispered. At the base of the stairs, with blood in his mouth and alien worlds behind his eyes. “You called my name, but I couldn’t hear you.”

Jace stilled. “That was different,” he said firmly. “That was—something to do with your angel. And that will settle down once we start training your powers.”

There are so many things wrong with me. Simon didn’t say it. Jace didn’t need to hear that, to be reminded of that, to have Simon’s misery rubbed in his face.

“Aikane,” Jace said softly, and Simon came back to him, dragged himself away from wallowing in his fears and melancholies. “It’s going to be all right.”

“I hope you’re right,” Simon whispered. I really, really do.

* *

Alec and Isabelle had four books spread out between them on the glass table when Jace and Simon found them in the dining room. There was a wooden crate of books at the end of the sofa, but these were evidently not needed at the moment.

“You guys brought the library with you too?” Simon asked, nodding at the box as he nabbed a cushion from the sofa. He dropped it on the floor and sat down there, next to the low table, where he could watch the going’s on without being in the way.

Alec shook his head without looking up. “No, those are mine. I wish we had a proper library here, but it will take years to build a good one of our own.” There was a notebook and pen beside his hand, and peering at a page in one of the books he scribbled something down.

“Have you found us a name yet?” Jace asked.

Izzy pointed at the notebook. “We’re down to five,” she said. “Remiel, Abadiel, Zachariel, Sariel, and Iophiel.”

When she said Sariel, the world stopped, turned white and gold. The sound of it thrummed through Simon, something in him vibrating like a struck bell, ringing and ringing.

“How do you choose?” he asked to cover the moment, thrusting the weirdness away, not wanting to think about it, examine it. “I know agelae are named for angels, it’s in the Codex, but how do you pick which one to name yourself after?”

“You go by the angel’s associations, mostly,” Alec said. He didn’t meet Simon’s eyes, but otherwise he didn’t seem to be unnerved now that he knew Simon could freeze him in place with a thought. But maybe he was just pretending at indifference he didn’t feel. How could you tell? “Different angels mean different things, because of what they’ve done or what their tasks are.”
“Their tasks?”

It was Isabelle who answered. “There are thousands of angels recorded, but we don’t really know much about them. Ancient texts—religious books, old grimoires, that kind of thing—say that some angels have particular purposes. This one looks after children; that one governs storms. That kind of thing. So we think some of them have set tasks, set jobs to do.”

“Who sets the tasks?” Simon asked. “God?”

“We don’t know any more about God than Light Worlders do,” Jace said. “We don’t know if there is a God.”

“There are Nephilim who don’t even believe in angels,” Isabelle added, with a pointed look at Jace.

“I have been convinced otherwise,” Jace said dryly. Even here in the privacy of his very own home, Alec was still wearing his fingerless gloves.

“Well,” Simon said, “my angel thinks you should go with Sariel.”

The Shadowhunters all whipped their heads to stare at him, each face its own study in shock.

“Did it speak to you?” Isabelle asked softly.

Simon shook his head. “Not in words,” he clarified, awkward under the scrutiny. It was too easy to forget, sometimes, that this was their religion; that he was, in some sense, the avatar for a force the Nephilim honoured like a god. He could see some of that in their eyes as they watched him. “I think it just approves of the name choice.”

The Lightwood siblings exchanged a three-way glance, and Simon was still not sure how the hell they managed that. “Could Sariel be its own name?” Alec asked, low.

This time, the name drew no reaction from whatever lived in the shadows behind Simon’s heart; he shrugged helplessly, unable to answer.

“Which one is Sariel?” Jace asked.

Alec looked at his notes. “One of the archangels listed in the War Scroll. He fought for good in the War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, and the human soldiers fighting under him had his name on their shields.”

“Then maybe mine just thinks it’s an appropriate choice,” Simon said, when there was still no response to the name, or the bio. “What’s the War Scroll?”

“One of the Qumran texts,” Alec said absently.

“The Dead Sea Scrolls,” Izzy explained.

Simon raised his eyebrows. “Weren’t they only discovered a few years ago?”


Decades didn’t seem very long for the information in them to have become part of the Nephilim canon, Simon thought, glancing at the books on the table. But then, it was no surprise that the Nephilim took their angelic lore seriously.

“I think we should follow the suggestion,” Izzy said. “An angel’s advice isn’t something to ignore.”
Jace leaned back into the sofa. “Seconded.”

Alec flipped his pen between his fingers. “It’s a good name,” he said quietly. “All right. Sariel it is.”

As the Shadowhunters began discussing arrangements for the ceremony that would make them an agela, Simon turned his attention inward, searching for the evanescent sense of the Other inside him. Are you Sariel?

But there was no answer.

*@

“Of course I’ll witness for you,” Simon said when they asked him. “You want to do it—now?”

“Not just yet.” Jace and Izzy both looked at Alec, clearly surprised, maybe wondering if he wanted to call it off. But Alec shook his head at them both. “I’m not delaying. There’s other Marks I need first.”

Understanding washed across his siblings’ faces, but Simon was still confused. “What Marks?”

“Mourning,” Isabelle said softly.

Alec didn’t correct her. “Will you help me?” he asked Jace.

“You don’t need to ask.”

Simon assumed that the two boys would leave the room, but instead Alec stood up and started pulling off his shirt, right then and there. Simon scooted up and dropped into one of the armchairs, out of the way, trying not to stare. Isabelle went to dim the lights, but not before Simon caught a better look than he’d wanted of the ragged scars slashed across Alec’s chest from shoulder to opposite hip, souvenirs of the battle with Abaddon. They bisected four runes, which had faded to ghostly white under the onslaught and been redrawn elsewhere; mnemosyne, dexterias, suplete, indarra.

Without a flicker of self-consciousness, Alec moved past the table and knelt on the carpet, liquid and graceful, head bowed and arms outstretched. In the shadowy light, it had the air of ritual, something ceremonial and sacred, dissolving Simon’s awkwardness before it had a chance to form.

Jace drew his stele. Simon and Isabelle watched in matching silences as he bent to Mark his parabatai.

But Simon had to swallow a gasp of surprise, because the lines that unfolded from the stele were not the familiar black: they were red, as red as roses or blood, and wisps of thin smoke rose from Alec’s skin at the drawing of them. All runes hurt, but Simon had never seen them burn like that—and he’d never heard anyone cry out at the pain as Alec did now, unabashed by his audience or pride; low, hoarse cries that came from deep in his chest. It felt intensely, awfully private, more than holy, and Simon knew he was being unaccountably privileged to be allowed to see this moment, to bear witness to it.

He refused to close his eyes or turn away from the tableau.

Jace drew one Mark on the back of Alec’s neck—a whorling v embraced by a horizontal crescent; in Simon’s head he heard a desolate wail, a wordless lament echoing through cold, indifferent stones. Sorrowful violins joined it, as more runes graced the base of Alec’s spine and the back of his chest, right over the back of his heart; and the soft, hesitant sadness of a piano rippling through the not-
song. Then one each on the inside of his elbows, the faint smell of charred flesh underscoring the
terrible sense of loss beating an awful sympathy in Simon’s chest.

It was done. Jace put the stele away and helped Alec to his feet; after all that, Simon was unsurprised
to see tears like gemstones in Alec’s cheek, catching the faint light.

Jace kissed Alec’s cheek, and Simon held himself still, understanding that this was part of the ritual.
Isabelle copied Jace, crossing the room to touch her lips to Alec’s other cheek. Simon didn’t get up:
he’d been allowed to watch, but he had no part of Alec’s grief, didn’t have the right to give him this
small closure, if closure it was.

No one asked him to. No one turned the lights back up again, either, and as Alec bent down to the
floor with his own stele Simon realised that they were going to do the agela ceremony right now,
right here. Jace and Isabelle began stripping off their shirts as Alec traced a circle on the carpet; fire
followed his stele, flames that crackled and spat but burned nothing and stayed on the line Alec drew
for them. Shirtless now, Izzy and Jace drew circles of their own, arranging them like the points of a
triangle with Alec’s, and where Alec’s burned blue Jace’s was gold, and Isabelle’s cast a light the
same colour as the ruby hanging from her throat. But Isabelle drew a second, larger circle at the
centre of the triangle, between the other three, and this one burned white, like milk and salt and
snow.

Simon wanted to ask what the colours meant, if they meant anything at all, but the silence draped the
room like an altar cloth and held him back.

Without a word spoken or exchanged, the Shadowhunters holstered their steles and stepped into the
outer circles; Alec into the blue, Jace the gold, Isabelle the red. The flames cast eldritch shadows over
the scene, and unlike the ceremony of the mourning runes here the empty space felt wrong, the
privacy not just unnecessary but unwanted. There should have been more witnesses here, family and
friends; silk banners on the walls and representatives from the Silent Brothers and the Clave. There
should have been music as the Lightwoods clasped hands through their circles, forging an unbroken
chain.

Instead, there was only Isabelle’s voice, her words smooth and confident as she held her brothers’
hands;

“Entreat me not to leave ye,
Or return from following after ye—
For whither ye goest, I will go,
And where ye lodgest, I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

Where ye diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.

The Angel do so to me, and more also,
If aught but death part ye and me!”
With every word the flames burned brighter, leapt higher, but though they licked at the Shadowhunters’ wrists there was no smell of burning, and none of them flinched.

“Entreat us not to leave thee,” Jace and Alec said in unison,

“Or return from following after thee—

For whither thou goest, we will go,

And where thou lodgest, we will lodge.

Thy people shall be our people, and your God our God.

Where thou diest, will we die, and there will we be buried.

The Angel do so to us, and more also,

If aught but death part thee and we!”

Ruby and sapphire and gold danced across the walls, the ceiling, the carpet, and the flames were roaring by the time Alec and Jace finished speaking, almost loud enough to drown out the end of the oath. But not quite, not quite that loud, and the light on their skin was stained glass and jewels as all three of them walked through the fire and into the central circle, into that blaze of whiteness as pure and bright as seraphfire.

It washed them into something more than human.

Now all three of them drew their steles once more; Izzy’s plain wand of crystal, Alec’s engraved with tribal-esque swirls and dots, and Jace’s new one, given to him the day of his Dedication, decorated with abstract lightning bolts and fire. Simon didn’t know if they had pre-arranged the order they would go in, but Jace reached out first, touching the tip of his stele to Isabelle’s heart. The black strokes swept over her collarbone and the upper curve of her breast, unbroken and perfect, shining ebony beside the caged fire of her ruby pendant. Then Jace gave way for Alec, and Isabelle held out her left arm for him, stood straight and tall and proud as the seal took shape on her upper arm, a flawless brand on the taut skin.

Simon found himself holding his breath as the Marks took shape, the beginnings of an irrevocable bond. The tension in the room grew thicker and thicker, heavier and heavier; the arms on his hairs were standing straight up, and as Isabelle brought her stele to Jace’s arm her hair, too, began to lift, the strands not caught in her braid waving as if she were underwater. Static electricity caught on Simon’s fingers; sparks of light, blue-gold-red-white, wove around the Shadowhunters in the circle like tiny serpents, winding about legs and wrists like unearthly jewellery. Isabelle’s stele caught the light of the white fire as she scribed the rune on Jace’s bicep; by the time she turned to Alec it was glowing like a star in her hand.

She traced the parabatai Mark over Alec’s heart—

And vanished. All three of them disappeared from view as the white flames leapt up to the ceiling with a thundering roar, and the light of them was so bright Simon flung up an arm to cover his face and protect his eyes.
The world disappeared, and the universe opened up. Isabelle’s skin turned to glass and then to water, and for a fraction of a heart-beat she saw Alec and Jace transmuted the same way, saw them and saw into them, thoughts and wishes and memories and dreams and hopes and fears—

And then like three rivers falling from the same cliff, they plunged together and became one.

It didn’t hurt. It didn’t hurt and it didn’t feel like drowning; it was ecstasy, her body dissolving into purest bliss, into light, her skin opening up and out like a blossoming passion flower, letting her out, setting her free, and oh, this was why they named agelae for angels, because this must be what it felt like to be one of the celestials, to feel your heart and mind and soul unfolding outwards to encompass galaxies, stretching limitless wings to the edges of creation—

But she was not alone there; melting into her like fire meeting fire were two other souls and she welcomed them in, felt them join with her and become her and they were so beautiful, so perfectly imperfect, miracles of life and chance that shone like diamonds to her new senses, these senses that had no flesh to bind them—they were brilliant things, so incredible she would have cried if she’d still had a body, and they were her, part of her as she was part of them, three rivers become one endless ocean of ever-shifting light and then there was no Isabelle at all, only we-I-us, a triple-faceted star blazing brighter than bright could be—

*joy awe amazement exhilarated-YES welcoming open-armed gladness, delight celebration laughter, the wait was too long, finally-complete, blood singing with elation exult exult exult in being alive-whole-here-one-one-one oh-the-bliss oh-the-love we are I, we are us, WE ARE SARIEL!*

For aeons we-I-us danced between bodies, flowing from one to the other like water spilling into new vessels, delighting in the play of memories and the exchange of sensations—a falcon on Jace’s wrist/Izzy’s first glimpse of a newborn Max/feel of an arrow flying from Alec’s fingers. They saw-felt sex from different perspectives and the differences were only more joys, more amusements, no more important or strange than the weight of longer hair or the feel of paper beneath callused fingertips; they explored the differences in their bodies, the differing shapes and strengths and centres of gravity, marvelling in them, delighted with them. Experiences flashed by like a kaleidoscope’s many colours, shifting from one to another without pause or prediction; riding bareback on the plains outside Alicante, the hot splash of ichor on a cheek, the burn in the calves as one ran across a rooftop. Joys fell like raindrops in a storm, first kisses and favourite books and the thrill of accomplishing a difficult martial move or mastering a new weapon, and we-I-us celebrated each one as if the taste of hot chocolate or the sight of the sunset over the bay were masterpieces to rival the Wonders of the World. There were pains and sorrows, too, heart-hurts and soul-scars, and these were touched and soothed, salved with bone-deep understanding and a wordless, boundless love, because how could they not be, there were no scars too ugly for their bond, no secrets too terrible, nothing that could not be accepted and cherished and lit with their light…

Gradually, as slowly as the movements of glaciers, the we-I-us that called itself Sariel began to separate into I, and I, and I, a single river dividing into three tributaries. Isabelle’s skin re-formed, closing around her like a familiar shell; the water of her crystallised, became diamond that spun itself into flesh, into blood and bone and breath. But her shell was gauze, translucent and permeable, only pretending to keep her separate. She could feel Alec and Jace on the other side of it, and inside it, inside her skin with her, just as parts of her were in theirs.

No, that was simplifying it. There was no her and them. What she felt were the parts of we-I-us that called itself Jace and Alec, and the awareness that the mind that called itself Isabelle was just another part of that greater One.
Fear reached up to engulf her, a petty, too-late panic that she didn’t exist anymore, that she wasn’t real, only a figment of her own imagination—

And instantly they were there, both of them, reassurance wrapping around her like an angel’s wings as they showed her where the lines were, tracing them like gold around the edges of her self—they’d had years to learn this, years to get used to this incredible but terrifying blending. In an instant the knowledge of how to draw a veil over thoughts and memories passed from their minds to hers, as if she’d always known it, and the relief spilled over from her to them and back again; so there was to be some privacy after all, some space to be just herself.

Abruptly she realised her eyes were closed, and opened them.

At some point the three of them had clasped hands again. She didn’t remember that, but she could see and feel it. The fires had gone out, and for an instant she saw out of Jace’s eyes, breathed air through Alec’s lungs.

*We are Sariel!*

It would take them a little while to be solidly themselves again.

“Now that that’s over,” Simon said brightly, and she blinked, having almost forgotten he was there, “who wants take-out?”

***

Jace picked at the chicken tikka masala, half-listening to Simon on the phone with Clary. He was telling her he would be staying the night, but Jace was too distracted to be excited by what that meant; he could feel Isabelle’s fork between her fingers, taste the cardamom on Alec’s tongue. The bond was new and loud, and even with Jace and Alec helping to hold the boundaries, the walls were permeable as netting. Almost every time he blinked he found himself glimpsing the word through another pair of eyes for a second, steel-grey or ocean-blue.

He felt so guilty it was making him sick, and there was no hiding it from his *agelai*. None of them spoke aloud—they didn’t want to alert Simon to their private not-conversation—but Alec and Izzy were fierce in their wordless denials, refusing to let him blame himself for the turn of events.

On the one hand, he was so incredibly happy; the sense of *completion* was unreal, the primal joy of being three-in-one instead of two- almost overwhelming, every pleasure he remembered from becoming Alec’s *parabatai* multiplied threefold. It was not that, as *parabatai*, he and Alec had been missing anything—never that; they’d been whole and perfect, flawless. But now… Now it felt better than perfect, *more* than whole. It was supernaturally, divinely good, and even the overwhelming intensity of it—which would fade with the days—couldn’t make him regret it for an instant.

But on the other… Izzy and Alec deserved so much better than Indian take-away in a dark, empty apartment. For the first *agela* in a generation the Clave would have swept them to Alicante, would have hung the banners of their Houses from the walls of the Gard. The Angel’s city would have come alight to celebrate their bonding; there would have been dancing in the streets, public feasts, an almost religious holiday. The leaders of every caste would have been there to hear them step from the circle and announce their new name: *Sariel*. But because of Jace, they had none of that.

*But this is what we wanted,* Isabelle told him firmly, and the bond meant he couldn’t doubt her for an instant; he could feel the truth in the thought. *We didn’t WANT a party.*

Alec’s agreement came through loud and clear; he, in fact, was relieved to escape the bedlam of an
There was no regret in his agelai, no mourning for the lost acclaim. It would come anyway; the Nephilim would discover their newest agela soon enough, and they would be famous, whether they willed it or no.

*All we dodged was having to forge the bond in public,* Alec thought. *They’ll still throw a festival when they find out, if we’re not careful.*

Jace loved them both so much it hurt.

“If you guys don’t mind,” Simon said, “I have an early start tomorrow.” He tipped his head wryly at Jace. How long had it been since he’d been talking to Clary? Jace kept losing minutes of time, distracted by the sensation of Izzy’s hair against the back of her neck, the paper plate in Alec’s hand pressing into the base of his thumb as he held it…

And he’d done it again. Simon was standing, smiling, and Jace hadn’t even registered him getting to his feet. “Congratulations again,” Simon said warmly. “I’ll see you guys in the morning. ’night.”

He left, taking the empty take-out container with him. Jace wondered what he meant to do with it; were there trash bags in the kitchen yet? None of them had thought to buy anything so…mundane, while they were shopping today. They’d picked out furniture, and later Clary had urged junk food on them, insisting a new house deserved a party. But trash bags? Milk, bread, toothpaste? Had anyone thought to buy things like that?

He wondered if they’d have time to go grocery shopping tomorrow. And if Simon or Clary would be able to go with them, because buying the candy today had been the Shadowhunters’ first time in a mundane store.

With Simon gone up to bed, the agelai sat in companionable silence while they ate. There was no need for words, no need to talk when every thought that crossed one mind flashed across the others’ like the tail of a comet. Physical sensations were the loudest part of it, strange but absorbing; the sated fullness of Alec’s stomach as he cleared his place, Izzy’s bolt of pain when she accidentally bit her cheek. It was so easy to get lost in them, so easy to forget whose body was whose. Skin felt more like a guideline than a law; it didn’t, couldn’t keep them out, keep them apart. They sieved from one to the other and back again, fascinated by their differences, their similarities, anchoring within their own bodies only with effort.

When Jace returned to his body after mesmerisededly exploring the passing of air in and out of Isabelle’s lungs for an endless stretch of time, the food had grown cold, and the night outside was black as pitch. It struck him with a pang, briefly; they should have been out on patrol by now, on a normal night. The guilt echoed in Alec and Izzy, none of them proud to have, however temporarily, set aside the search for Elias and Xia’s murderer.

But tonight was not a normal night, and although they ought to be more settled in the bond by tomorrow, right now trying to fight demons would only result in disaster. Knowing when to fight was just as important as knowing how to; Hodge had been very clear on that, for as long as Jace had known him.

By silent, wordless accord, the three agelai agreed: it was time to go to their new beds. Tomorrow would be soon enough to test—and reveal, to themselves and the world—the extent of their new powers.

***
Simon woke to the door opening, sleepily blinking away hazy impressions of draconic wings wrapped around him, silver hair falling like a curtain around his face. He knew who was there before he looked, something in him recognising Jace’s presence even in his sleep, knowing him by his breathing and scent and stance…

“Simon?” Jace called softly. He had not moved from the doorway, and Simon remembered that everyone was supposed to let him know if they were going to approach him. “Are you awake? Can I come in?”

“’Course.” Simon rolled over in the bed so he was facing the door. Jace was a blurred figure backlit by a smear of light from the corridor. “’M naked though.” He would have to borrow underwear in the morning; all he had with him was his school uniform.

“That’s really not a problem,” Jace said wryly, and Simon snorted, trying not to laugh. Were the others asleep? He didn’t want to wake them if they were…

Jace came in, closing the door behind him. He didn’t turn on the lights, but Simon could just pick him out of the darkness; the wall-length window opposite burnished him with the nocturnal lights of the city. Simon would have to find curtains from somewhere, eventually...

He closed his eyes, half-listening to Jace’s footsteps pad softly across the floor. Then the mattress was giving under his weight, the sheets rustling as he slipped beneath them, and his arm slid around Simon’s waist, drawing him closer, pulling him against Jace’s steady, familiar warmth. He was wearing boxers but nothing else, and Simon sighed with heavy, languid pleasure to have all that best-loved skin pressed against his.

He felt Jace’s smile when he kissed Simon’s hair. “Go back to sleep,” he murmured. “I’m right here.”

‘You’re okay. You’re okay, I’m right here. Ssh, don’t cry, God.’

Abruptly Simon was wide-awake and frozen sick.

“Simon?” No matter how tired he was, Jace could never miss Simon’s sudden tension. He was a Shadowhunter; probably he couldn’t ignore that kind of thing even if he’d wanted to. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Simon whispered. He didn’t want to remember now, here in bed with Jace, in Jace’s arms. He’d managed not to think of it for weeks, and now was not the time to confess to his aikane—it was late, they had an early morning waiting for them tomorrow, and Jace had already had enough to deal with today. Forget everything else, he’d been kicked out of his home—

*It can wait,* he told himself guiltily, trying to bury the memory again, forcing his body to relax so Jace wouldn’t worry. *It will wait.*

“Then by the Angel, can we sleep now?” Jace asked, amusement threaded through his voice. “Are we done?”

“I think so,” Simon said gravely. His heart was pounding, and he wondered if Jace could hear it. “Wait, no, one more thing.”

“Simon, it is time to *sleep*—” Jace began, but whatever he’d been going to say next went unspoken as Simon bridged the distance between them and kissed him, threading his fingers in Jace’s silky hair.
“I love you,” Simon breathed. Guilt pooled in his stomach like mercury, but the very air in his lungs sparkled like champagne and diamond-dust because he meant it, by all the gods real and imagined he meant it. “I love you so much, Jace Lightwood.”

“Ol boaluahe gi,” Jace murmured, brushing the words over Simon’s lips as the kiss ended.

Simon laughed. “Your pronunciation’s getting much better,” he teased.

Rolling his eyes—Simon couldn’t see it in the dark, but he knew—Jace swatted his ass through the blanket, smirking and nipping Simon’s jaw as he yelped. “Go to sleep,” Jace ordered, his voice indulgent.

“I’m going, I’m going.” Simon squirmed down into the blankets, smiling so hard it hurt. When Jace settled again, once more looping his arm around Simon’s waist and tugging him closer possessively, Simon tucked his head under Jace’s chin, his lips against Jace’s throat.

The steady beat of his pulse was all the lullaby Simon needed.

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NOTES

Agelae is the plural of agela.

‘Nerf herder’ is an insult used by Princess Leia in Empire Strikes Back. I freely admit I have no idea what a nerf is.

Did you catch the Princess Bride reference?

For those who’ve forgotten, medianox is the midnight flower Jace shows Clary in the greenhouse scene of City of Bones.

The ‘that’ll do, pig, that’ll do’ line is from The Sheep Pig, by Dick King-Smith. It was made into a lovely movie called Babe in 1995.

Clary’s middle name, ‘Esther’, means ‘hidden’ in Hebrew and ‘star’ in Persian. Queen Esther saved the Jews from Haman, and has her own book in the Tanakh.

Toltorg means ‘of the earth’ in Enochian.

Xe, ae and ve/vir are all separate pronouns and refer to different individuals in Simon’s visions/dreams.

Erastes, as you might remember from CoS, means ‘lover in ancient Greek, and was/is used to refer to the dominant partner in a male homosexual relationship.

A banshee is a Scottish spirit that takes the form of a ghostly woman. The myths differ; either their wails cause the death of those who hear them, or their wails simply herald or mark the death.
The colours song is, of course, by Cassandra Clare and appears in *City of Heavenly Fire*.

Abadiel is one of the Seraphim, who defeated Ariel, Arioc, Ramiel and even Satan in the war against Lucifer.

Iophiel is one of Metatron’s companions, prince of the Divine Presence and the Divine Law. In some traditions he is one of the seven archangels.

Remiel is another angel sometimes counted as an archangel, responsible for destroying the armies of Sennacherib. He is the angel of hope.

Zachariel is another archangel! Supposedly the youngest archangel. His name means ‘God’s command’.

On the *parabatai/agela* ritual: ye is the archaic plural for ‘you’, which is why I’ve replaced ‘thou’ and ‘thee’ from the *parabatai* oath (meant to address one person) with ye, since Isabelle is being bound to multiple people here. (Technically *thou* should be replaced with ye and *thee* with *you*, but I messed with the grammar because ‘you’ sounded too modern. Whatcha gonna do?) As for the flame colours; the colour is individual to the Shadowhunter who draws it, and not representational.

*Ol boaluhe gi*—I love you (Enochian).
Interlude: Starfire

Chapter Notes

I should really have made you guys wait a little longer for this, but screw it: I had so much fun with it that I really wanted to share it!

In other news: City of Shadows is a finalist for the All Time Favorite Mortal Instruments Fanfic over on Fanatic Fanfics!!! How ridiculously awesome is that? I didn't even know CoS had been nominated; I actually started crying when I found out. YOU GUYS. I DON'T EVEN KNOW. It's been a few days since I found out and I'm still freaking speechless about the whole thing.

If you want to vote, head over here to the Fantic Fanfics page. Voting closes on June 22nd, so hurry!

And a huge, enormous thank you to everyone who's ever enjoyed this series. I just don't have the words. <3

Nandira’s hooves were loud as thunder as she and her rider cantered alongside the pre-dawn traffic, but the mortals in their tin cans were deaf and blind to the unicorn’s passing, even as her moon-milk tail streamed behind her like that of a shooting star. Occasionally it brushed like silk against the face of a pedestrian, and then for a fraction of an instant there might be a glimpse of awareness in the mortal’s face.

But it was gone as swiftly as was the unicorn.

On Nandira’s back, Olianthe bore her favourite spear, long and pale as a moonbeam and sharp as sunlight. The humans’ street lamps set rainbow fire to her armour as she passed beneath them, amber and blunt white light trailing desperate kisses over the intricately hinged diamond bodysuit that covered her from throat to fingertips to the soles of her feet. Its lining of four-leaf clovers protected her from the poison of the city’s iron, but nothing could hide the stench of steel and tar and entropy.

Through the slit of her helm, Olianthe caught glimpses of the rest of the ryhmä to either side; the squad on the roster for patrol duty this night, four tähtisuar and their knights, who with Olianthe brought the number of patrollers to the sacred number five, one for each pillar of the world. Like her, they were armoured in diamond and armed with obsidian-headed spears, ready to send their Dark Cousins back to Hell should it prove needful.

And Olianthe could sense them, the Cousins; gathered in the shadows, pressed tight together in the unclaimed spaces. They had flooded into the city over the previous weeks, so that every dawn the night’s ugala reported greater numbers of them than the dawn before. Olianthe had seen demons before, she had warred demons before, but never in her long life had she known them to gather in such numbers. Not since the time of the Queen’s dam had such a gathering been seen—and that had been the invasion of this world.

This was not quite so large as that—surely, if it had been, even the serkut äpärä, the Bastard Cousins who called themselves the Nephilim without understanding what that word meant, would have noticed—but neither was this gathering…violent. Olianthe felt them watching, but they only
watched: her knights had not found or heard of a single attack by the Cousins in a fortnight. It was unheard of. She had thought that the knights must be missing something, but Magnus-ashipu-rei had said that no, the serkut äpärä had found no demonic activity either, and if an ashipu-rei told you that the Cousins had done no harm in his territory, then the Cousins had done no harm in his territory.

No doubt the serkut äpärä would have slain the demons Olianthe and the ryhmä sensed, if they could, but the People had their own ways of dealing with the infernal. The Cousins were kin, after all, and closer kin at that than the Bastards. If they did no harm, then the People would not harm them either.

It was not to hunt demons that the patrol went now.

Without needing the slightest direction from her knight, Nandira turned neatly on mother-of-pearl heels, bunched powerful muscles, and leapt, clearing four lanes of traffic as lightly as hopping over a puddle. Olianthe was ready for it, having long ago learnt Nandira’s language; her jewelled fingers were tangled in the tähtisua’s short mane as Nandira went aloft, balancing her weight and that of the spear with the ease of long practice. The unicorn landed like a snowflake and sprang forward like a hunting cat; in moments they were flying through the fifth avenue entrance to Central Park, with the other knights bare seconds behind them.

Even at this hour the Park was not deserted, but neither the unicorns nor the knights paid any attention to the mortals straggling home after a night of poor decisions or settling in for the night on the park benches. One of the latter raised a hand in salute as the ryhmä tore past; perhaps drugs or alcohol had given him the Sight for a night, or perhaps a Sighted life had driven him to homelessness. It was often so among the elf-touched the People did not choose to bring home, and now that the Accords had forbidden the practice all the Sighted were left to the untender mercies of the mundane world, where they rarely flourished. If they were lucky the cairde would find them, the Friends, but many were not lucky.

The ryhmä carved a crescent between the obelisk and Belvedere Lake and onto what the mortals called the Great Lawn, tracing a curving path around the northern side of the lake. Here there were no humans in sight, only another member of the Queen’s Court waiting for them, distinct in the Seelie’s diamond armour.

Olianthe swung down from Nandira’s white back before the mare had stopped moving, using the butt of her spear to aid her landing. The rest of the ryhmä pulled up behind her.

“This is where they came through,” Luiganaine said as Olianthe approached, and Olianthe dropped lightly to one knee at the space indicated. Her armour melted back up her hand like mercury to bare her fingers, allowing her to touch the grass with naked skin. Luiganaine had spoken in a tongue no mortal would have recognised, not even the elf-touched; few had heard it outside the knowes these past thousand years. None would overhear and understand this conversation, neither mortal nor anyone not of the Queen’s Court.

Olianthe’s eyes flicked back and forth, reading the signs; she tasted the air and thought she knew the answer even before she asked, in the same language, “How many?”


“All armed, I assume.”

“Most heavily, lugal-nin.”

Olianthe traced the outlines of a footprint with her fingertips, tasting the magic of the one who had
made it. “The Queen-my-dam has had no word of their coming. Permission was not requested, nor
granted.” And that worried her. She had never known the cairde’s hunters to be anything but
unfailingly courteous, far more so than the Bastards. It went against thousands of years of fruitful
dealings for them to enter Seelie territory without paying their respects.

“Perhaps they attempt to hunt in secret,” one of the other knights, Siroreth, suggested.

Olianthe withdrew her hand, allowing her armour to fold around her palm and fingers once more,
sheathing her in crystal. “Not so. The cairde may be mortal, but they are of a different kind to the
serkat äpäриä, Siro. The Bastards might believe they could trick us, but these ones… They knew we
would find signs of their passing. By rowan and oak I would swear it.”

Siroreth did not frown, but she slid into the formal pose of polite confusion, her fingers curled just so,
her chin lifted to a precise angle, requesting clarification without the need for speech.

Olianthe shifted her body into the pose of instruction. “I have fought alongside the cairde many
times. And I tell you that they would not attempt to deceive the Queen-my-dam. For one, they know
it cannot be done; for another, they have honour.”

On Siroreth’s other side, Kisavirel gestured disbelief. “Mortals with honour?”

“I tell you that it is so.” Olianthe pulled back her shoulders and conveyed, by the angle of her spine,
that she was insulted, and more than prepared to defend herself. “Do you name me Fallen?”

The other knight held up her hands, crossing them at the wrists with the palms facing outwards.
“Never, lugal-nin!”

“It is good for you that you do not,” Olianthe told her coldly. Turning back to Luiganaine, she said,
“Destroy all traces of the cairde’s passing. None of you will speak of what was found here!” This
was addressed equally to Luiganaine and to the knights who had accompanied Olianthe here, and
was not so much a command as a statement. The People did not lie, and Olianthe shaped the
universe to her will by her words; the gathered knights made the signs of obedience to Truth.
“I will convey all to the Queen-my-dam, and by her word only will you speak on this matter. Näin-ääninen,
näin marthain!”

“Näin-ääninen, näin marthain,” the knights echoed, and Nandira stamped a hoof as if placing her
seal on her rider’s words.

Olianthe grabbed a fistful of the unicorn’s mane, braced her spear against the ground, and swung
herself up onto Nandira’s back. “Mount quickly,” she ordered as the other knights made their way to
the tähtisuar who had chosen them—one the colour called dawn over flames, one sand of Avalon,
and two of the shade known to the People as river mist. Only Nandira was that colour sacred to Dôn,
the purest white called starfire. “I would have the Queen-my-dam know of this ere the dawn
breaks!”

Had anyone been watching the paths of the park mere moments later, they might have seen—if they
had swallowed the right poisons that night, or if the moonlight had slanted just so through the trees—
the Seelie ryhmä streaking past like a meteor shower, all gem-light and myth-magic, children of
powers older than the world they rode through. And at their head, the Seelie Queen’s youngest
daughter, a spear in her hand and her golden hair streaming like a banner behind her, her diamond
helm bright as any crown.

Or they might have seen nothing at all.
NOTES

*Ryhmä*—squad.

*Tähtisuar*—the fey word for unicorns. The singular is *tähtisua*.

*Ugala*—Sumerian word meaning squad leader.

Dam is an archaic word for mother. In modern parlance it’s mostly just used amongst animal breeders to refer to an animal’s mother. The male equivalent would be sire.

*Serkut äparä*—‘bastard cousins’, the fey term for the Nephilim.

*Ashipu* is the correct title for a warlock, and comes from Sumerian again. *Rei* means king or prince; together, *ashipu-rei* specifies a High Warlock rather than a normal warlock.

The People is the fey’s name for themselves.

*Cairde* is literally ‘friends’ in Irish.


*Näin-ääninen, näin marthain*—translates as something like ‘so spoken, so it be’, or ‘so spoken, so extant’.

*Dôn* is the mother goddess of the Welsh pantheon, often considered to be the same figure the Irish Celtic goddess Danu, who is the mother goddess of the Tuatha Dé Danann. The Tuatha Dé Danann, of course, are the faerie/god figures of Irish Celtic mythology.
'So you never wanted me at all, then?'

'No!' The disappointment and hurt on his face is awful, and Simon should have known this would never end well, could never end well for any of them. 'Don’t think that. It’s—you’re everything I ever wanted.'

It’s just that Jace is everything he never knew to want...

“Time to wake up, aikane.”

Simon woke like a plate breaking, guilt racing through his veins. When he blinked up at Jace, the fading shreds of his dream clung to his eyelashes, sticky as silt.

“’Morning,” he managed thickly. His mouth tasted awful, and Jace’s face was a blurry smear of gold. “Can’t see you.”

Jace handed him his glasses, and when Simon put them on his heart stuttered as Jace’s smile came into focus, soft and fond and so sweet it hurt.

The guilt was thick and sour in Simon’s gut.

“Good morning.” Jace kissed his cheek, politely dodging any morning breath, and was out of the bed before Simon could catch a breath. “Now come on. Get up, get dressed, get going!”

“Nmrrgh.” Simon rolled over, pulling the blanket over his head. He’d gotten a glimpse of the watery daylight through the window and was feeling betrayed. “This is not morning. You’re a lying liar who lies.”

He heard Jace laugh, a low, amused sound that warmed Simon’s sleepy blood and banished the last shadows of his dream. “Most Shadowhunters are only going to bed now, you know.”
“That’s because most Shadowhunters are certifiable,” Simon grumbled into his pillow.

The bed dipped slightly; Jace’s hand stroked down Simon’s spine, warm even through the duvet. “I don’t know what that means,” Jace said lightly. “But I can think of a dozen things more fun to do than sleep.”

Simon poked his head out of the blankets, suspicious. “Your innuendos will not work on me,” he warned. “I know you’re talking about training, not sex.”

“True,” Jace said brightly—and Simon yelped as the blankets were unceremoniously ripped away, dousing his body in the frigid air. “Now get up! If you’re not in the training room in ten minutes, I’m sending Izzy to come get you.”

Simon nearly fell off the bed in his hurry to scramble upright.

“Let’s start with something simple,” Jace said. “Call Simiel to your hand.”

Simon suppressed a sigh and stared at his seraph blade. It had taken him closer to fifteen minutes, not ten, to shower, get dressed (he’d found the spare clothes he’d long since stashed in the Institute on a shelf in the back of his wardrobe) and make his way down to the apartment’s third and lowest floor, and while he’d usually be excited to be experimenting with telekinesis, he really, really wanted some coffee first.

But breakfast came after the crack-of-dawn training, apparently, so he focused on the adamas blade and tried to will it to move.

Even if he’d had coffee, it would have been hard to concentrate; Simon’s curiosity had him itching to examine every inch of the floor Jace called the palaestra. There was indeed a pool, which had flabbergasted Clary so much yesterday; not Olympic-sized, but nothing to sneer at, either. He’d gotten a quick glimpse of a workout room that wouldn’t have been out of place in a high-end gym, with punching bags and weights and other body-building equipment, and of course there was the chamber they were in now, a smaller replica of the training room at the Institute, with the same polished wood floors and high ceiling. But where the hooks and shelves and racks lining the walls of the Institute’s training room were weighted down with weaponry, here almost all of them were empty, holding the armoury of only three Shadowhunters, instead of an Institute’s worth. Given that there were five bedrooms upstairs and the room had probably been built for an armoury of corresponding size, Simon was forced to assume that Shadowhunters gained even more sharp pointy things as they grew older, because Alec, Jace and Isabelle’s collection didn’t come close to filling 3/5s of the space.

Unless they’d stashed most of their weapons in their bedrooms?

“Simon,” Jace said patiently, “concentrate.”

Simon squinted at the blade. Despite how everything had gone to Hell since he’d discovered the Shadow World, Simiel was still his only bonded blade. You had to kill with a seraph blade to bind it to you, as Simon had killed the Forsaken—a Light Worlder driven mad and turned into a monster when Valentine poisoned him with runes—and Simon was kind of grateful he hadn’t yet had to kill anyone or anything else. Simiel had been special even before that, though, because it was an armaskö sword, a blade given to and named after a loved one—given to and named after Simon, by Jace. It meant that Jace could touch Simiel without being burned, as bonded blades burned almost everyone but the Shadowhunters who owned them, and it meant that Jace’s love for him was in the
blade, a power like no other. Simon had lost count of the times that love had saved him, blazing out of Simiel like the light of a sun—it had driven back the vampires at the Dumort, and the Silent Brothers in the Bone City, and two weeks ago it had even seared the Greater Demon Abigor until It screamed…

But right now Simiel was lying on a long table meant for the dissembling of weapons, not doing anything at all. Not even twitching, for all Simon’s focus.

Simon threw up his hands “I don’t know how to do this!”

“So think about it.” Jace raised an eyebrow. “How did you do it before?”

“Without thinking about it.” Simon snarked.

Jace’s other eyebrow went up.

“I mean it. I never thought about it, it just—happened. Whenever I needed a weapon right now— there it was, in my hand.” When he’d been caught in Abbadon’s grip, lifted upside-down off the floor; when he’d been held against Valentine’s chest, cradled as if the man cared about his son as more than a weapon…

Simon shook the memory away, trying to ignore the strange, uneasy feeling it evoked in him. “I—”

“Iaoth!”

Light scattered away from Jace’s seraph blade as it swung towards Simon’s face, streaking like a star—

And slowed. Even as Simon registered the movement the motion of Jace’s arm decelerated rapidly, becoming slower and slower as if the air around the sword had become thick and viscous, resisting the swing. Faster than thought the speed of Jace’s attack had become glacial, the gleaming edge of his blade crossing millimetres in what felt like hours. It was as if someone had hit the slow-motion button on reality.

Simon tilted his head, inhumanly indifferent to the proceedings. Jace’s lips were still parted, still shaping the name of the angel he’d invoked into his blade, but Simon’s attention was elsewhere; he could hear the song in Jace’s sword, the runes that made it more than a chunk of crystal, made it magic. They blazed in his mind’s eye: enkeli, which he knew—the Mark of angelic power, of course it would be in a seraph blade—but more, so many more runes that he’d had no names for a breath ago but that now rang in his skull like golden bells, deafening, resonant; kutilu and illido, nuire and liosul, canza and aiwotan, vas and isekheth, xahutzen, nisindra, sixoshe, anō—Marks for harm and holiness, for injury and incurability, Marks to change the shape of the blade according to its wielder’s will and Marks to give the weapon a tiny spark of consciousness, Marks to make the adamans a vessel for some small part of an angel’s power and the Mark that meant Iaoth, the particular angel this blade called on—so many Marks.

For some endless stretch of time, Simon stood still and listened to the choir that was the culmination of all those songs. It sang of honour and war, of blood and ichor, of demons slain and glory gained, and it was a radiant thing, a hymn to indifferent angels and a dream of a future where the shadows had no teeth. It was a song of defence and a song of death, as double-edged as the blade that housed it, terribly beautiful and beautifully terrible—

And it did not reach him.

Time started again and Simon turned Iaoth aside as glass turned water, needing no gesture, barely
needing to will it. The seraph blade ripped out of Jace’s fingers and shot away like a bullet, burying itself, vibrating, in the far wall; caught by surprise, Jace almost stumbled, but before he could do even that Simon slid his power into the songs adorning his aikane’s body like fingers into a glove and Jace froze like Niobe, froze as if turned to golden marble. In less time than it would take to say his name, he was utterly still.

Utterly stilled.

Simon’s mouth was suddenly very, very dry.

For a long, breathless moment Simon thought that maybe time had stopped again, because he wasn’t sure that Jace was even breathing. But finally his aikane gave a shuddery sigh, and licked his lips. Simon found himself watching the gesture a little too intently. “All things considered,” Jace said hoarsely, “I probably should have seen that coming.”

Simon didn’t answer, couldn’t answer; he was so far beyond Jace he could hardly hear him, lost in the roaring rush of sound that wasn’t sound, the orphic realisations that were coming harder and faster the longer he kept hold of Jace’s Marks, realisations that were beyond words or metaphor. For the first time he almost understood what he was doing and how he was doing it, almost understood what the Marks were and how they did what they did, and it was entrancing, hypnotising, numinous. Simon had been hearing the Angel’s runes as music for a while now but it wasn’t that simple or that complicated; they were a language, a cross between music notes and hieroglyphs and kanji, each Mark not a letter but a concept, a sound-symbol that meant agility or deflect or heal—and all of Jace’s runes together made a new song that was purely Jace, a kind of discarnate signature, like instruments coming together in a cantata—

He could hear them all when he focussed, pick out the individual instruments, santalana azo desviar enia tharros, dozens of them, each one meant to hone Jace into a better weapon, a better killer, singing strength and speed into his blood and bone, better aim and soundless steps and courage in battle and more, so much more—

(He remembers once asking Jace if the Nephilim were human, and now he has his answer: no, no they’re not, not once they play the Marks over their skin and take that music into themselves, not once they let it shape them change them rewrite their DNA into celestial symphonies—

Well, and so? Simon’s not feeling very human either, just now—)

He dove into the music, skimming songs, focussing on a single Mark for a moment before moving on to the next, examining absorbing reaffirming his dominion over each and leaping to the next. They were aurals, arias and chorales that only he could hear, scribed all over Jace’s body in a runic ricercar; libratum silencieux celeritas suplete fasthet, all of them beautiful, all of them Jace’s. All of them Simon’s, because this, what he was doing—it wiped all meaning from Jace’s Marks, stripped them clean and wrote it new, so that every rune meant Simon, every Mark resonated with him, with his willwantdesire; they hummed like tuning forks and the note they hummed was him, the song they sang was his, they were an orchestra but he was their conductor and they were—

You are—

Mine.

It hit Simon like a bullet, like a lightning bolt; a rush of power, an awareness of power that took his breath away. He willed it with a thought and Jace’s arm lifted from his side, so easy, as easy as anything; voyance enia accuratio pari answering Simon’s desire and raising Jace’s forearm-elbow-upper arm to shoulder-height and Simon was nearly overcome by a thick, heady heat, an almost
dizzying rush—

*I can do anything to you.*

The thought should have horrified him. It didn’t.

Jace was breathing hard, and Simon could feel him shuddering, the tiny, almost invisible trembling pulling ever so slightly at Simon’s hold. His eyes were all pupil, bright gold almost wholly eclipsed by black, and Simon wanted to bite him.

“Simon—”

Simon cocked his head, amusement flowing through him like dark wine. “Yes?” he purred, and it was intoxicating, the thought-realisation-understanding that he could play Jace like a marionette, like an avatar in a game—he wondered how hard it would be to edit Jace so that Simon could control his voice, too, which runes he would have to Mark on Jace’s lips and tongue and throat—

“I—” Jace closed his eyes, and Simon felt a flicker of annoyance; he wanted to see Jace’s eyes, wanted to see and drink in his every reaction. Coolly, he made a note to scribe stitch-tiny runes over Jace’s eyelids too; maybe a row of *voyances*, for irony’s sake. “I—”

“Stuttering, Jace?” Simon purred. “That’s not like you.”

Jace whimpered. The sound plunged into Simon’s gut like a dagger still hot from the forge and he laughed, delighted; with a twitch of a finger he lowered Jace’s arm again—then made a fist and pulled, jerking Jace forward by the *tharros* Mark on his chest, letting loose the blond’s arms and legs so Jace could scramble to stay upright. His body pressed against Simon’s and Simon locked his limbs in place again, held him tight, held him easily as Jace’s breath came in quick, shuddery gasps, panting against Simon’s mouth.

His eyes were still closed.

“You know, you never did tell me what *harpagmos* meant,” Simon murmured. “I had to find out from Luke, of all people.” The knife of hunger had melted in his belly, become a pool of molten steel that was bleeding through his body, hot and liquid. “But I know what it means now.” He raised his hand and stroked Jace’s cheek, felt him tremble beneath the touch and revelled in it.

He brushed his lips open-mouthed over his *aikane’s* jaw. “You steal your lover away and make them yours,” he breathed. “Two months in the wilderness and a *parastathentes* Mark to bind you. That’s right, isn’t it?”

Jace was beyond speech. Simon laughed softly and nipped him, hard enough to make the blond gasp. “Imagine how easy it would be,” Simon whispered, and Jace was shaking, shivering, “for me to steal you away. Right now.” He smirked. “I could walk you out the door like a doll.”

Jace whimpered again, a sound that could have been pleasure or pain, and Simon heard an answering sound—lower, deeper, more bestial—come from his own throat in answer. Suddenly he badly wanted to look into Jace’s eyes, to see and name the emotion there, and he slid his hand into Jace’s hair, tangling his fingers in it.

“Look at me, Jace,” he murmured, steel sheathed in velvet. He pulled Jace’s head back by his hair until the honey-gold of his throat grew taut, bared and silken and just begging for Simon’s teeth to mark it. “*Look at me!*”

And he did, opened his eyes as though no part of him, even those unMarked, could resist Simon’s
will. His irises were a mere rim of gilt around dilated pupils, and when he looked at Simon the expression on his face might have been fear or desire, aphrodisia or terror, and Simon found he didn’t care which because it looked so fucking beautiful on him—

The moment he thought that his mind split in two, one glorying and one horrified, and in an instant horror overcame delight. It was like waking up from a nightmare, a nightmare that felt like a dream until the sunlight touched it, burnished it, set it alight; Simon let go of Jace instantly, hair and runes, almost flung the awareness-hold-power away from himself. The music of Jace’s Marks snapped into silence and Simon jerked back, away from Jace, away with gorge rising in his throat and so fucking horrified—

Horrified by how much he’d loved it—

Jace looked at him, and his expression changed. “No,” he said, striding forward, following Simon back, “no, don’t you dare,” and Simon’s back hit the wall and Jace pressed flushed against him and caught his wrists and—

And kissed him—

Simon snarled, instinctive, unthinking, and Jace broke the kiss to snarl back at him, his beautiful face twisted into something animal, something without fear, something glorious. “No,” Jace snarled, “you can’t have him, he’s ours,” and before Simon could respond Jace took his mouth again, hot and hard and Simon’s blood ignited, came afire under Jace’s lips. He fought Jace’s grip and it only tightened, Jace’s nails digging into the skin of his wrists and casting stars behind Simon’s eyes, but he couldn’t make himself stop. He struggled harder and thrilled at Jace’s strength, felt it burn through him like absinthe and molten sugar, thick and sweet and poisonous. He bit Jace, fighting him, tasting blood and swallowing it down and oh God it was good, so good, he heard himself laughing like a maddened thing and Jace drank it out of his mouth, held Simon pinned and the fire of him, the fierceness holding him down and claiming him seared brands under Simon’s skin, forged the shape of him anew so he couldn’t be lost, couldn’t lose himself in the dark and the horror.

This is your body and this is your blood and all of you is ours—he heard it as clearly as if Jace had said it aloud and he moaned, the tension sweeping out of him, draining away—he stopped fighting, relaxed into his body, yes—

Yes this here I am, this is me and I am yours—

The nail-marks on his wrists throbbed in time with his heart, stigmata anchoring him in reality, in sanity, in his skin, pain melting into the slide of Jace’s tongue and lips, the pressure of Jace’s body against his, and Simon felt his eyes roll back with blade-sharp bliss, heard himself moan—

And Jace let him go, released his wrists to cradle his face. The kiss softened, then came apart like dripping honey.

“He’s ours,” Jace whispered. His lips brushed Simon’s with each word, pollen-soft. “You can’t have him.”

And Simon—panting, shaking, wholly himself again—didn’t have to ask who Jace was talking to.

***

“That,” Izzy said shakily, “really should not have been hot.”

On the other side of the kitchen, Alec was bent over the countertop, his hand clutching the marble with a white-knuckled grip. The coffee mug he’d been about to fill when everything went to Hell
downstairs was in shards at his feet, broken when it had slipped from his nerveless fingers. He was panting and flushed and humiliatingly aware that his sister knew exactly why he didn’t want to turn around and face her.

“No,” he managed, speaking aloud because it helped focus his thoughts, helped him limit what of him darted through the agela bond. “It shouldn’t have.” But Seraphs and Fallen, it had been. It had been Jace’s shocked fear that had pulled Alec and Isabelle from their awareness of themselves, but it was his terrible, searing desire that had swept them under.

They’d all been there. Inside Jace. They’d all felt the horror of being caged in a body that wouldn’t answer, felt the nauseating disorientation of being moved, played with like a toy. The sickening helplessness of it, the knowledge that there was no defence against it, no way to prevent or stop it—the violation—

It defied description.

And then—then, when Alec and Izzy had been struggling to disentangle themselves from the fear, trying to get back to their bodies so they could get downstairs and stop this—then some twisted alchemy had turned the fear to gold. Not all of it, but enough of it. Too much; it had drowned them, blurred the boundaries to non-existence. They’d all felt the hunger, the sheer need, sick and impossible and unbearable, insatiable; every one of them had looked at Simon and wanted too much for words.

*You can’t have him, he’s ours*—

They’d all kissed him. Three as one, every one, all three together. Because they’d wanted to. Because they had to. Because he was theirs, not some Fallen-damned angel’s—

Alec took a deep breath, trying to remember how to be himself again.

Isabelle’s cheeks were hot too; she was just as achingly aroused as he was. The awkward embarrassment of knowing that should have cooled his own ardour, but that wasn’t how the parabatai bond worked, and the agelai connection was stronger still than a single parabatai bond had been; instead her desire magnified his, the hunger bouncing back and forth between them like light between a mirror, an image made infinite—

By the Angel, he couldn’t get the taste of Simon out of his mouth. Out of his head.

Simon’s mouth under theirs—

He felt Izzy shiver. “Stop it,” she said roughly. “That’s not helping.”

He let her feel his apology. With effort, he let go of the counter and started cleaning up the broken mug, trying to focus on coffee grounds and pottery shards. When that didn’t work, he started reciting all the alphabets he knew backwards, in order of age of invention.

Behind him, Izzy sighed. *This is normalexpected,* he thought with her, not resigned or amused but something of both. She felt his determination to resist and questioned it; he recoiled, outraged, and her silent laughter flickered through them like silver glimpsed through water. Memories flashed, memories that had not belonged to them yesterday but had been gifted them by the bond; Simon’s head thrown back in laughter/thrown back in bliss/his fingers curled tight in sheets as he moaned Jace’s name—

Again Alec recoiled, shoving the memories away, and again he felt-heard his sister’s amusement, knew her query like a question mark engraved on his mind. His answer was wordless but vehement,
and she held up her hands in surrender.

“T’m just saying,” she said aloud.

“Well, don’t,” he snapped. “T’m not interested.”

Her eyebrows rose, two calligraphic sweeps of disbelieving ink.

Alec rolled his own eyes and, lacking trash bags for the bin, left the mess of the broken mug in the sink. “He did it again.”

She sobered instantly, her teasing chased away by a revulsion Alec could feel burning his own throat. Her uncertainty was his, their confusion mirrored twins; neither of them knew what to think when it came to Simon’s new power. Isabelle believed Simon wouldn’t intentionally hurt them, but they both recognised that Simon didn’t seem to be in control of it. They feared, worried, but their fears only looped and tied in knots; neither they nor Jace had answers or even suggestions. There was nothing to say: they would just have to hope that Simon could learn control, and learn it fast.

*And never use it against us.* It was hard to deny Jace’s unshakable certainty, now that they felt it as if it were their own, but Alec had practise at cordoning off his self from Jace’s, and he could not help being wary.

‘I could walk you out the door like a doll.’

Alec swallowed hard and started making toast. The toaster they’d bought yesterday, but Alec had picked up the bread and some other basics on his morning run from a little 24-hour store a few blocks away. He concentrated on the sensation of the knife in his hand as he sliced bread, on its smell and the tiny, cheerful *ting!* the toaster made as he pushed the button down. They helped anchor him, reminded him that he was not the one sitting at the kitchen island and longing for coffee, or the one making his way up from the *palaestra*—even though he could feel the island’s smooth counter under his hands, feel his legs bending as he walked up the stairs…

It would be a while before their connection settled. It had been a lot like this in the days after he and Jace had become *parabatai*—not quite as intense, not quite so immersive, but fundamentally the same. It would get easier.

Izzy got up when the toast popped. “Go sit down,” she ordered. “You’re thinking so loudly I can’t hear my own thoughts. Literally.”

“Very funny,” Alec said wryly. He sat down, but watched her carefully; it was always dangerous to let her near the food.

“I can hear you, you know!” Izzy said without turning around. But her amusement underscored the words like a flash of warm fire, and Alec felt her grin on his own face.

The toast wasn’t bad, but nothing like the bread their mother baked. Izzy pushed away thoughts of their parents the moment they sparked to life in Alec’s head, with an inelegant mental *shove* that was nonetheless more than Alec had been able to manage this soon after bonding with Jace. She felt his surprise and he felt her smugness, braiding and blurring together like smearing paint, and they might have gotten lost in it if Jace hadn’t been coming closer, the proximity strengthening the third side of the triangle and distracting them.

Alec looked up. Jace was a star in his mind, a bright and blazing anchor point of Alec’s solar system; there was no way to forget or lose track of him, especially not now. But it was to Simon Alec looked, unable not to, gaze and attention dragged to where Jace’s lover stood in the kitchen
doorway, and all Alec could think was

_He’s ours._

He dropped his gaze hurriedly, his cheeks burning and his mouth dry. _He’s ours._ Strong emotions strengthened the bond, and Jace’s fear and desire downstairs had made them one—one mind-heart-body-soul that had pinned Simon in place, held him and kissed him and dragged him back from the angel’s grasp. It had been all of them, three-in-one, who’d snarled those words and dared Simon’s angel to challenge them.

_You can’t have him, he’s ours!_

“Alec bought bread and cereal,” Izzy said cheerfully, when no one spoke. Jace was a question, reassuring and trying to soothe and nervous beneath it all; where Simon couldn’t see the agelai traded thoughts and emotions like fish darting and glittering in dark water. There was no longer need to converse aloud. “You can help yourself, Simon.”

“Thanks.”

Izzy drew Simon into a bright chatter about Light Worlde food and where to get it and what kind of things they would need to buy now there was no brownie housekeeping service to look after them. Alec tuned them out and focussed on Jace, catching him in a net of hooked-together question marks and crossed exclamation points.

*_He’s not we-I-mine, we-us-I didn’t mean it, don’t want him—*_

Jace was still shaken—they were all still shaken—but not about this, apparently; he dismissed Alec’s assurances with a bubble of silent laughter. He was happy, Alec realised then, almost overjoyed, and after a beat Alec understood why: Jace’s _parabatai_ had stood up to an angel for Jace’s lover. They’d called Simon theirs and dragged him back from the angel’s hold. How could Jace be anything but happy about that?

 *_He didn’t hurt us,* _Jace said, in response to Alec’s thought-memory of being frozen, held, caught by their Marks. *He broke free of it rather than hurt us.*

Jace’s relief and hope warmed Alec’s cold fears—because it was true, wasn’t it? Simon _hadn’t_ hurt them. Not exactly. Not quite.

Not physically, anyway.

Alec pondered this while the others ate breakfast, aware through Izzy and Jace of Simon’s raw nervousness, his reluctance to speak or make eye contact. Simon felt guilty, clearly, as he _should_—but it was true that he’d woken up from whatever had taken him over. Alec couldn’t shrug off what had happened, couldn’t pretend that it hadn’t—but it had to be a good sign, didn’t it, that Simon had not done anything irreversible? That he _could_ wake up, instead of losing himself completely? He’d sent Ioath into the wall, not into Jace, as he could have—

All three _agelai_ froze as Alec’s realization streaked through them: Simon had sent Ioath into the wall. _He’d sent Ioath into the wall._

“What?” Simon asked, alarmed. “What’s wrong?”

It took them a moment to disentangle themselves enough for Jace to speak. “I didn’t think of it at the time,” he said. “But you—downstairs, you moved Ioath.”
“Your seraph blade?” Simon asked. “Um…” He glanced between the Shadowhunters. “Is that really a big deal? Comparatively? To all the other…?” He waved his hand vaguely.

“Maybe not comparatively,” Alec said. “But in and of itself?”

“Moving your own bonded blade is one thing,” Izzy agreed. “All Shadowhunters can do that—”

“—just not to the degree you can,” Jace continued.

“But someone else’s—” Alec.

“—blade?” Jace.

“A bonded blade?” Izzy added. “You shouldn’t be able to—”

“—even touch it.” Alec again.

They all paused. Simon’s eyes were very wide. “Is this an agela thing?” he asked tentatively.

“The—”

“—finishing each other’s—”

“—sentences? Oh—”

“—sure. It’s because—”

“—it’s so new. It’s a little—”

“—hard to think apart—”

“—just now.” Because strong emotions blurred the lines between minds, and between all the shock and excitement and concern pinging back and forth, there might as well be no lines at all.

Clumsily, we-I-us tried to fumble themselves apart, but instead braided tighter together. “See if he can touch it,” came out of all three throats in unison, driven by one awareness.

“Okay, I’m getting seriously freaked out now,” Simon said. “Can you guys quit that? Please? I’ve had enough X-Files for one morning without adding any more.”

“I’m trying,” we-I-us said, one voice from three throats.

“I?” Simon echoed, suddenly pale. “Did you—did you guys just refer to yourselves as I?”

It was quite possibly too late to worry about freaking him out.

We-I-us remembered suddenly how making the toast—touching, hearing, doing something his agelai were not—had anchored Alec. They tried it—slapped Izzy’s hand on the counter, bit Jace’s tongue, ran the tap and held Alec’s wrist under the water—and it worked, the separate sensations felt by all but redefining the boundaries of their bodies so that they snapped neatly apart like a clockwork toy. Alec turned off the water without thinking about it, almost dizzy with being one-in-three again instead of three-in-one.

This was going to take some getting used to.

Simon was frowning at them. He peered at Jace. “Are you you again?”
Jace smiled at him, and Alec felt his fondness for Simon echo in his own chest. “I’m always me. Even like that.”

Simon groaned and laid his head on the counter. “It’s too early to think about how that works, okay, I can’t handle thinking about your freaky Vulcan mind meld right now.” He turned his head and pleaded with his eyes. “Coffee?”

Jace rolled his eyes. “You have legs,” he said dryly. “Go use them.”

Simon pouted playfully but got up. Alec shifted out of his way to let him at the coffee pot.

“But to get back to the point,” Izzy said. From the bracelet-sheath half-hidden beneath her sleeve she drew a seraph blade. “Simon, think fast!”

Simon whirled, his arm snapping up reflexively. He caught the crystal dowel and stood there, blinking. “Um. Nice throw?”

The Shadowhunters stared at him, all but open-mouthed.

“What?”

Alec glanced at Izzy. “‘Think fast’?”

“It’s a Light Worlder thing,” Jace answered for her.

Izzy was still staring at Simon. “Your hand’s not burning.”

“Should it be…? Wait.” Comprehension dawned, and his gaze snapped to his own hand. “Wait, you told me about that—no one else can touch a bonded blade, right? That’s why you’re all—oh my God.”

He dropped it then, maybe panicking; swore and tried to catch it.

He missed—and it halted in mid-air a foot from the floor.

Simon froze. They all did.

“Well,” Izzy said after a long pause. “I’m going to want that back eventually, you know.”

“Um,” Simon said. “Right.” He bit his lip, staring at the hovering seraph blade.

After another minute or so, he tentatively raised his hand—and the sword rose in sync with it. Like a puppet on a string, the agelai thought with a flicker of unease; but then the blade leapt to Simon’s palm and the moment was gone.

Simon tossed it back to Isabelle as though he couldn’t wait to be rid of it; she plucked it neatly from the air and vanished it back into its sheath.

“How did you do that?” Alec asked finally.

Simon flinched. “I—I have to get ready for school.” He looked at the floor. “I’m sorry. For—before.”

“Simon—” Jace started to rise from his seat, but Simon was gone like a ghost, Shadowhunter-fast, and even Alec knew, because Jace knew, that the line of his back meant he wanted no one to follow.
*He’s developing quickly,* they thought together. *Less than two months and he can call on the speed in his blood at will. It’s impressive…*

Alec pushed away from the counter. In the half-second it took to do that he and his *agelai* agreed on a plan for the day; to call Magnus, to see Xia’s body and the place where she’d died, and start looking for her killer. The Shadow World slowed down during the day, but it never truly stopped; the wolves would be out in their human shapes, and in the knowes and clanhomes, hidden from the light, at least some of the faeries and vampires would be awake. There would be people for the Shadowhunters to talk to.

His *agelai* felt his nervousness at the thought of calling Magnus, but didn’t comment, only offering wordless support that he drank in gratefully. Magnus… Magnus.

**Raziel, Magnus.**

It was actually easier, if not much less terrifying, to think about Simon. To remember Ioath sent flying from Jace’s hand, Isabelle’s seraph blade hanging in the air.

He could control the blades in their hands, the very Marks on their bodies. When Simon came into his full power—what Shadowhunter would be able to stand against him?

**Raziel, Alec prayed, let it be that no Shadowhunter ever needs to.**

Simon had left for school by the time Alec got up the nerve to call Magnus. The phone was lead in his head, and his grief for Magnus’ loss was an iron ball in his throat, silencing all words. Not that Alec had any idea what he was going to say, any idea of how to ask Magnus to please show them his friend’s—sister’s? Had Xia been more like a sister, if she’d been raising a child Magnus considered his?—body.

It physically hurt to be this helpless. Alec wanted so badly to help somehow, to do something to ease the terrible rawness he’d glimpsed in Magnus’ eyes yesterday—but all he could offer was some hope of vengeance, if they were able to find the murderer. All he knew how to do was kill, in the end; he had no idea how to heal something that could not be Marked away.

He hated himself for that, so much he thought he might choke on it.

In his ear the ringing tone fell silent as someone picked up. “Hello?”

Alec started. “Catarina? *Ashigu,*” he added belatedly, remembering what she’d told him about warlock courtesy. “Where’s—is Magnus all right?”

“Alexander.” It was not a question; he thought for a moment that she sounded surprised. When she spoke again, her voice was gentle. “No, Alec. I’m afraid he’s not very well right now. Can I give him a message?”

Instantly, desperately, Alec hoped Catarina was lying to him. He would rather Magnus didn’t want to talk to him—would rather Magnus blame him as he deserved for the death of his kin—than think that Magnus was so destroyed by loss he couldn’t even answer the phone. He’d rather Magnus *hated* him than that.

He should, anyway, Alec thought, his knuckles going white on the phone. Self-loathing was bitter as sulphur on his tongue, sour and sick in his stomach; the heat of it charred his bones until they threatened to splinter apart. *I’m responsible. I was the patrol leader, I was the one they left in charge.*
It happened on my watch.

I’m the one who didn’t stop it.

“I…” Alec had to swallow twice before he could go on, scrabbling for words like mis-matched jigsaw pieces and shoving them together into some semblance of a comprehensible query. “Could you—maybe you could help? I—we—need to see Xia’s body. And where she died. So we can start looking for whoever killed her.”

Catarina’s breathing hitched, and the small sound was a knife to the gut; too late, Alec realised that Xia was obviously Catarina’s kin as well, that of course such blunt phrasing would hurt her.

“I’m sorry,” he blurted, closing his eyes and hating, hating himself. “I didn’t mean—”

“No,” Catarina said, composed once more. “It’s all right, Alexander. I understand.” She was quiet for a moment, and Alec felt the silence taut as a garrotte against his throat, twisting tighter and tighter.

Just before he started to bleed, Catarina said, “I think Magnus told you that the Spiral Court is arriving today.”

Alec nodded, belatedly remembering that she couldn’t see him. “He did, yes.”

“Then if you could wait until this afternoon, one of the Court representatives will be able to show you…everything,” Catarina said carefully. “Would that be acceptable?”

“Yes,” Alec said quietly. “That would be fine. Thank you.”

“If that’s all?” She did not say that he was welcome, and he couldn’t blame her.

“Yes. Wait,” Alec said quickly before she could hang up, “wait. Could you…Could you tell Magnus that I…” That he what? What did people say at a time like this? The Nephilim had the mourning runes, and ritualised responses that differed depending on how well you’d known the deceased and how they had died—but none of those seemed appropriate. None of those seemed like enough.

I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I’d do anything to stop you hurting; I’d drag time from its moorings with my fingernails and hurl it back if I could, make this all undone…

“I’ll tell him you asked after him,” Catarina said gently, when Alec had nothing to give. Just like always. “Thank you, Alexander.”

She hung up before he could tell her she owed him curses, not thanks.

He let the phone fall to his side and pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to ease the headache building behind his eyes. He couldn’t believe he’d asked if Magnus was all right.

Of course he’s not okay why do you keep asking that by the Angel you’re so stupid—

Izzy pounced on the thought and shredded it like Church with an abandoned sock; Jace snatched away Alec’s despairing self-loathing and set it on fire.

*Not true nottrue lie lie lie don’t you dare think that feel that FALSE!* 

Alec didn’t fight them. He didn’t know how. He took in their light like a broken prism, scattering it in a monotone rainbow, seven shades of black and grey to choke on, drowned in, as suffocating as an ash cloud and a hundred times as incendiary. They loved him and it burned, volcanic, acidic, so he
bent away from their love as if from a blow, because it might as well have been. They didn’t understand, and he couldn’t explain.

He had been empty long before Simon’s angel tore him open.

Now he let them think they had won, descending deep within himself, where his agelai did not go, and locked the truth behind seven gates. When he ascended from that place, like Inanna from Irkalla, he was able to pretend, for a little while, that they were right. That everything was fine, and all they had to worry about was what to do with the free hours suddenly fallen into their hands like foreign coinage.

Because free time was inimical to being a Shadowhunter, but the agela had no duties during the day; patrols weren’t necessary when demons couldn’t manifest and most Downworlders hid inside their homes. The agela couldn’t spar, because not even Jace thought handling deadly weapons was a good idea when they kept losing track of whose arm was whose, and they couldn’t sleep without confusing their internal clocks even more than they were already, but it was simply inconceivable that they just sit around and do nothing.

It was Izzy who thought it first, with a grin like the flare of a light-house: bright, dazzling, and warning of hidden perils. “Let’s go shopping!”

“By the Angel, woman, didn’t we do enough of that yesterday?” Jace mock-swooned backwards onto the sofa. “I feel weak just contemplating it.”

“She’s right, though,” Alec admitted reluctantly. “There’s all kinds of things we still need.”

Jace sighed, greatly put-upon, but the burst of firework-excitement through the agela bond gave him away. “I guess it’s off to the Goblin Market we go, then.”

The general consensus of the Nephilim was that the Goblin Market didn’t exist—but if by some Fallen-worked chance it did, then it was certainly not a place where good young purebloods were supposed to go. The Goblin Market, they said, was a modern-day den of iniquity, a place where the most monstrous denizens of the knowes sold the disobedient young Nephilim children they’d kidnapped from their beds to vampires looking for blood-slaves, a place that traded in mundane souls and demonic drugs and the tears of the dying. It was where warlocks went to buy the blood of virgins and werewolves bought children’s hearts by the pound for the pack barbeque, and if a young Shadowhunter were foolish enough to set foot there, they would be summarily dissected for potion ingredients.

Jace had found the New York Gate by the end of his first month in the city.

It was true, Alec thought as they walked through the Gate, that the Market had its dark side. There really were mundanes being bought and sold as pommès de sang on an auction block, and vampires eying them like cakes in a display—but the mundies weren’t the victims of some slave ring, they were selling themselves all willing. The butcher stalls didn’t sell the meat of anything that could talk, and Alec had never even glimpsed anyone who traded in souls, however morbidly fascinating that would have been.

But for all that, the Goblin Market was a wonder. Like the Silent City, faerie knowes, and Atlantis, the Market wasn’t so much a physical place as it was a pocket dimension with multiple entrances. The Gates were scattered across the world, and they were never locked because the Market never closed. At any time of the day or night you could step through a Gate and find the Market awake and
bustling with people of all descriptions, buying and selling wonders—singing mice in belled cages, telescopes that looked into other worlds, necklaces of snowflakes and fireflies. Every stall was draped in colour, ribbons and braids of feathers and strings of coins, and everywhere were Shadow Worlders haggling, laughing, duelling with song, dancing for runestones, blowing glass into iridescent balloon animals for slack-jawed children. Here were sorcerers from Pankhaia selling books of their island’s magic, there a pair of selkies making sushi for hungry customers, and there a stall selling baby rainbows in quartz jars. A trio of vampire girls danced with streamers of red and white silk for the crowd, safely unburnt despite the bright light. No one knew who had created the Market, but there was always room for new vendors and vampires and fae alike walked with impunity beneath its never-setting false sun. And as it belonged to no one, no one policed the Market—but then, no one needed to. Those who cheated or stole from the Market, those who started fights or wrought violence here, never went home. When they walked through the Gates to leave, they vanished, never emerging on the other side.

Only newcomers were foolish enough to flout the Market’s laws.

Alec and his agelai knew the rules, but even Jace was on his best behaviour here. The Goblin Market was a fluid, ever-shifting place, and there were parts of it where Shadowhunters were not welcome—areas that would disappear if they tried to enter. If a Shadowhunter tried to walk down an aisle that led somewhere she was not wanted, she would find herself walking instead towards a stall selling glass flowers, or hyperactive puppies built of paper, or flying carpets. When the ground shivered under their feet, the agela knew to turn around and go another way, just as they knew to accept no gifts, to pay for everything and never say ‘thank you’.

There were rules to these things.

But if you followed the rules all was well, and Alec tried to make himself relax as they made their way through the crowd. There were so many things the three of them needed to set up their own household—all those things that had been taken for granted at the Institute were now under their own purview, and it was a dizzying list.

They bought weapons first, because that was the most immediate need; they no longer had access to the Institute armoury, after all. There was something thrillingly illicit about stringing an elfin bow and testing the draw; the Institute kept no Downworlder-made weapons, but now—now Alec could buy whatever he wanted, bring home whatever he wanted. He could stock their apartment’s armoury with nothing but Downworlder-made weapons if he wanted to.

*You could,* Jace agreed, feeling the balance of a silver-streaked dagger as Izzy laughed at the thought. *But if you start favouring a faerie’s glass needles over a good honest seraph blade, I’m staging an intervention.*

*You don’t even know what that is!* Isabelle said, although instantly both boys did, knowing it as she thought of it.

*I know Simon’s always threatening me with one,* Jace mused, and that set Izzy off again, giggling over the display of clip-on claws.

It felt so fragile, this tentative playfulness. Jace mocked and spun jokes out of the air, Isabelle laughed and tossed her hair, Alec smiled and bantered with the vendors, but it was all as brittle and sharp as a Seelie’s obsidian blade. Between them they traded fears and anxieties like shuttlecocks and throwing knives; what would the Inquisitor think of their parents’ decision to disown Jace? Would she agree with them? Would the agela bond be enough to protect Alec and Isabelle from the fallout, if it came? What if it wasn’t? What would she do to them?
Marks flayed from the skin, white-hot pokers singeing fragile eyelashes—

Isabelle glimpsed huge, beribboned moths for sale in tiny bamboo cages and thought of Simon, wondered if the Clave might just lock him up instead of executing him, and the pain and horror scoured them like a desert wind. No, no, they can’t—

And for Clary, a different kind of cage, one of steel words and cruel will; the Clave would take her the way they took the orphaned children of Shadowhunters who had turned their backs on the Nephilim, force her to drink from the Cup or bear a Shadowhunter child to take her place in their ranks. *If they don’t just kill her outright.* She knew too much; if the agela gave away just how much…

*Olianthe wouldn’t let them take her,* Isabelle thought-said. *The Seelie Court would go to war with the Clave if they tried to interfere with a princess’ olor.*

Except the Clave didn’t seem to care about a budding war with the warlocks, so why would they care about one with the Seelie Court?

They looked at the Market and tried to imagine it ravaged by war, smashed by Valentine’s hatred. Because Valentine was a shard of ice stabbed deep in their thoughts, one that refused to melt. What if Xia’s death did belong in Valentine’s ledger; what if he was the one trying to divide his allied enemies from each other?

What if that madman was not fled—a problem for other, more experienced Shadowhunters in some other part of the world—but still bedded down in agela Sariel’s city like a malignant tumour, their responsibility to find and cut out and bring to justice?

*Because that went so well last time,* Jace said, bitter as rue.

It was Isabelle who fought to bring some of the light and colour of the Market into their sharp-toothed fog of worry. She took the sights—a huge tank with a pod of merai wave-dancing for the Market’s visitors in silver arcs and gem-scaled shimmers; a rare faerie child with a dragonet riding like a green raven on his shoulder; a stall built entirely of rose-entwined trellises—and wove them into the blades of a fan, blowing away the thick smog in their heads, netting their fears and locking them in an iron-bound chest.

*Look see see it all so beautiful so pretty so many people happy, happy and safe because of what we do, what we’ve done, pride and joy cutting through the dark like a phoenix. Let it go for now, set it all aside, try and smile. Just try.*

They tried. They went to the apothecaries, where Alec bargained with an Anjana for all the potions and tisanes any sensible Shadowhunter household kept in good supply while his agelai amused themselves buying witch-candy for Simon and Clary. The Anjana was a skilled haggler, her pupils glowing bright blue as she argued, her shimmering wings beating hard with agitation. She was only half a foot tall, and had to hover above the counter to deal with Alec, but she was fierce and clearly used to getting her own way. But eventually they agreed on a price both could live with, and Alec carefully gave her his finger to shake on it.

The Merchant Adventurer at Bank of America had set Alec up with a Light Worlder debit card—he’d understood about half of her explanation about credit cards, and that had been enough to convince him he didn’t want one—but the Market was no place for Light World money. He, Jace and Isabelle were all carrying hidden purses of celestes and runestones. The former were the most widely accepted coinage in the Shadow World, and the latter were small pebbles and crystals Marked for various properties, good for trade wherever coins were unwanted. Their supplies of both
were much smaller by the time they’d finished being fitted for new gear by a Xana seamstress (whose waterfall of fair hair was a real waterfall, the cascading curls pinned in place with a shining silver comb), but Alec was feeling tentatively pleased with himself. They’d gotten so much done, and with their purchases all set to be delivered they didn’t even have to carry heavy packages around with them.

Without exchanging a word aloud, Izzy went to arrange for a brownie housekeeping service for the apartment while Alec and Jace headed to the booksellers. Alec hadn’t been lying when he’d told Simon it would take them years to build up their own library, but getting a head-start on it couldn’t hurt, could it? They had a little while yet before they needed to get going; what better way to spend it than looking at books from all over the world?

Jace ate Every Flavour Beans—Alec finally understood the lightning bolts and snowy owls decorating that particular candy stall—and looked over his parabatai’s shoulder as Alec reverentially looked through hand-written tomes older than the Institute, soapstone tablets that were modern copies of ones far older, ring-binders of sorcery and Downworlder history. For the first time that day, his mood transmuted into something on the same spectrum as visible light. He never got over the exhilaration of seeing all these books, the impossibly huge variety of them. They were like letters from all over the world addressed to his heart, a cornucopia of friendly voices as eager to teach as he was to learn. All the things there were to read! He could spend his entire life studying and only read a drop of all that was known, and here at the Market were books no Nephilim bookshop would stock, books no pious Nephilim would dream of reading—deckle-edged books documenting the rise of the Nephilim from the point of view of a vampire clan leader in Eastern Europe; leather-bound books of angelology unsanctioned by the Clave; works by Light Worlder philosophers so new the bindings still smelled of glue. Alec was not nearly as pious a Shadowhunter as everyone thought him, because he ached to read them all, to drown in their words and have them drown out the world, to replace everything that confused him with knowledge pure and clear as snowmelt.

And fiction, so much fiction; the Harry Potter books Izzy was obsessed with were here, in a variety of languages and with different covers; and Lord of the Rings—how could a story be a series of films and books? Mundanes had such weird names, too—what kind of a name was Terry Pratchett? Or Diana Wynne Jones? Were the wizards in the Diane Duane books like Gandalf, or more like Magnus?

Magnus… Some of Alec’s simple happiness drained away, thinking of his boyfriend. How could he stand here coveting books like a dragon looking to add to its hoard when Magnus was grieving? When Xia was dead, and probably Elias with her, too?

Two people were dead because Alec had failed, and he was composing poetry to his love of books.

I was the Institute Head that night. I chose where to patrol, I missed the signs; Xia and Elias’ deaths are my responsibility. And Magnus must know that. He has to live with their loss, and with knowing I could have prevented it.

By the Angel, what must that feel like?

Jace hit Alec’s shoulder with his. “Stop that,” he said, in an even tone completely belied by the terrible, bitter anger simmering behind his eyes. Every word was a needle of yew in his mouth. “Magnus doesn’t blame you, because it wasn’t your fault.”

Alec’s guilt tore like splinters through his tongue, made it hard to speak. “I should have—”

A blast of negation from his agelai stopped up the words in his mouth, a fierce, uncompromising NO, Thor’s hammer as gavel.
Alec looked back at the books. His enjoyment of them had soured, but maybe there was something here Magnus would like? Something that might make him smile, or at least give him something else to think about for a moment or two, something besides the death of his son…

*There’s plenty that I want,* Izzy interjected primly, cutting off that train of thought before it could get on the tracks. She mentally pointed to book after book, Light Worlder books Clary had recommended or that looked interesting enough to try on their own merits, and Alec let himself be distracted.

“Do you have any books a warlock might be interested in?” he asked the Yōsei woman manning the stall in careful Japanese. She smiled at him, the epicanthic folds at the corners of her eyes crinkling.

“I think I have a few,” she said warmly in the same language. “Shall we have a look?”

Jace’s attention wandered as Alec examined the books; Alec caught glimpses of their surroundings out of Jace’s eyes every now and then. One person in particular appeared in Alec’s mind’s eye over and over, as if Jace’s attention kept coming back to her; a middle-aged woman whose long cornrow braids brushed the Egyptian fan-axe holstered at her back. It was a particularly fine one, decorated with gold and lapis lazuli like something out of a hieroglyph, its shaft almost as long as Clary was tall, and Alec could hear Jace wondering where she’d gotten it; even the Institute didn’t have one. Jace wouldn’t have even known what it was if Alec hadn’t seen an illustration in a book once. Each time its wielder appeared in Alec’s mind from Jace’s eyes, she was talking to a different person.

Finally Alec looked up from an illumination of Solomon’s Greater Key to poke Jace in the side. “What?”

*I keep seeing her,* Jace said mind-to-mind. It was never safe to assume any conversation went unheard, in the Market, but no one could eavesdrop on a telepathic communication between parabatai. The bond forged by the Angel’s Marks could not be broken into by outsiders. *All morning. I’d swear by Raziel she hasn’t bought a thing; she’s only talking to everyone interesting.*

And she pinged the Shadowhunter’s sixth sense for Shadow Worlders—that claircognizance bred into them to spot and identify non-humans, the skiá-aird—oddly. Alec frowned, glancing after her from the corner of his eye to double-check. There was something about her that said she belonged here in the Shadows, a flicker that refused to be pigeon-holed…

*Warlock?* Izzy suggested, heading back their way. All werewolves skiárd the same—registered the same way to the skiá-aird—as did all vampires and all fae. But warlocks weren’t uniform enough to have one all-encompassing ‘signature’, and they all skiárd a little differently.

The boys sent Izzy their agreement. *Maybe she’s part of the Spiral Court, out looking for the killer,* Alec thought heavily.

“Speaking of,” Jace said, “we should get going.” He nodded at the open book. “Are you buying that?”

He was, and did, asking for it to be delivered to the apartment with all the rest. Any flicker of joy in their little holiday from the real world was gone, wrung like a nightingale’s neck. It was time to go back to their responsibilities.

They dropped by the apartment quickly to change into gear—you didn’t wear Shadowhunter gear to the Market if you wanted anyone to talk to you—and headed out of Manhattan and into Brooklyn.
Simple glamours circumvented the need for subway passes, and there was no need to worry about anyone trying to sit down in apparently unoccupied seats; Light Worlders couldn’t see a glamoured Shadowhunter, but they could sense him, somehow. Hodge had said that mundanes subconsciously recognised the power in the Angel’s Marks and avoided them; Jace had wondered aloud why they couldn’t avoid demons the same way and save the Nephilim a lot of trouble. But it meant never having to shove through a crowd of Light Worlders because mundanes instinctively got out of the way when they sensed a Shadowhunter nearby, and that had been useful more times than Alec could count.

He was trying to distract himself from the sick nerves—like a stomach-full of ice chips—by thinking about inanities. It wasn’t working. His agelai’s attempts to do the same were like the flutterings of birds; far away and meaningless. Every rattle of the train’s wheels sounded like manacles, locking him into a dark spiral of guilt; every inch they travelled brought him closer to facing the reality of his mistake, his failure. At least one person had died because he had failed in the one thing that gave his life meaning, the one thing he’d been conceived and born for; hunting demons and keeping the rest of the world safe.

The mourning runes on his arms and back ached like brands, declarations of guilt writ in crimson.

Alec clutched the jade beads around his wrist and choked on brimstone.

When they reached Magnus’ building, there was a woman waiting for them on the doorstep. Izzy, whose skiá-aird was the strongest, skiárd her first, although they didn’t really need the confirmation: warlock. She was a short, compact woman whose ochre skin was interrupted by a rainbow of serpentine scales, carving a bald arc over the left side of her skull and snaking down her face and neck to disappear under her shirt. She examined the three Shadowhunters with eyes that had no whites, only a hollow ring of fire against solid black—the eyes of the coastal taipan snake.

“I am Arika Kijarr,” she said when she was finished with her inspection. Her voice had the ghost of an Australian accent hidden in it, but other than that it was inscrutable; none of them could guess whether she was pleased or not with what she saw. “I will be assisting you today.”

After Jace’s Dedication, Alec has asked Magnus to teach him the basics of warlock etiquette, and now all three agelai folded their arms behind their backs and bowed. When they straightened, Alec made a fist with his left hand, covered it with his right, and placed both over his heart. “Viisaille viisauden, Arika ashipu.”

Arika’s eyebrows rose, but she touched her index and middle fingertips to her brow and then gestured an arc before her—from left to right, palm up as if indicating a crowd or her surroundings—in the ritual response. “Viisailta maailmalle, Alexander Lightwood.”

Jace and Isabelle unfolded their arms as Alec smiled thinly. “It’s Alexander Sariel, actually, ashipu.”

The warlock’s eyebrows rose higher. “Is it now?” She glanced at his siblings. “And these are your agelai?”

“Alice Sariel, madam ashipu,” Jace said smoothly.

“We’re very sorry for your loss, Arika ashipu.”

Arika’s unnerving eyes flicked to the crimson mourning runes on Alec’s elbows. “Shadowhunters who proffer mundane apologies and mourn warlocks,” she murmured. “How very nonpareil.” She turned on her heel. “Come. Xia’s body is within.”
She led them into the ground-floor apartment of the building; the agelai weren’t sure whether Magnus owned it or whether the warlocks had ejected the previous occupants, and they didn’t ask. Either way, it was vastly altered from the days when Light Worlders might have lived in it; mirrors of all shapes and sizes had been hung on the walls, fitted together to create a continuous wall of glass in every direction. Even the ceiling had been so covered, so that everywhere the agelai looked hundreds of reflections looked back at them. It would have been dizzying at the best of times, but with the agela bond so new they all had to struggle for a moment to remember who and where they were, to not get lost in the mirrors or each other. Strands of pearls and moonstones had been wound around the frames of the mirrors, and the apartment’s windows had been blacked out, creating an unbroken twilight. The only illumination came from the occasional white candles, affixed in conch shells the size of footballs: these floated like bubbles in water a little above Alec’s head, bright as jewels in the dark. If there had once been carpets, these had been removed; the agelai walked behind Arika on floors made soft with glittering black sand.

They bypassed the largest room—Alec caught a glimpse through Izzy’s eyes of another two warlocks moving candles around with magic, checking the mirrors and draping more of the jewelled strands in place—and entered what might have been a small bedroom in another life. Now it was mirrored like the rest of the apartment, and Xia’s body lay naked on a rowan wood table, hands folded over her stomach. Thirteen floating conches bore their candles in a circle around her, the only source of light, but more than enough to see the twisted rictus of horror that was Xia’s face. Her blank eyes stared up at the ceiling as if looking into a maelstrom, with an awful, whitened terror that struck them all like a mace.

“She has not been washed,” Arika said, breaking the thick, heavy silence. “Her clothes are also available for inspection, should you wish it.” She paused. “The Court would be grateful for your haste, Shadowhunters. Our people mourn their sister.”

“We will work as quickly as possible, Arika ashipu,” Alec assured her. “Might I see her clothes?” He didn’t think he could bear to touch Xia’s poor body.

Isabelle and Jace approached the corpse while Arika brought Alec to another room, where the clothes Xia had died in were laid out on another table. Alec pulled a handful of witchlights from his bag and set them up around the clothes, giving himself enough light to work with, steadying himself with the clinical preparation.

Then he started to work.

Maybe another person could have handled Xia’s clothes dispassionately, with as much emotion as folding laundry. Alec was not that person. While his agelai were gently lifting Xia’s epicanthic eyelids to check the clouding of her eyes and tracing runes of reveal over her body, Alec found his throat growing tight as he carefully examined every inch of Xia’s clothing, as if each piece—shirt, bra, jeans, underwear, socks, the bracelet woven of coloured threads—were a link removed from a choke collar, pulling it tighter and tighter around his neck. These weren’t like the standard-issue clothes and gear every Shadowhunter could claim from the Institutes; they were worn, imbued with personality. A real person had worn them. It was a proof of Xia’s life that Alec could touch, and it drove her death home to him in a way her body had not.

Even though there was no signs of trauma on the clothes. If he hadn’t seen the body, Alec would have assumed that the person who owned these clothes was still alive; none of the fabrics were torn or sliced, as by blades or claws or teeth, and there were no bloodstains anywhere. The nocht Mark revealed no shards of demon scale snagged in the wool of her sweater, no broken claws or bits of fur, no saliva-spatter or drops of venom. There was no singeing, as there would be if a demon with corrosive breath had killed her that way.
From her clothes, it looked as though some demon sorcerer had just willed her to die, but that was impossible; the energy of things, mana, resisted intrusion. That was why healing spells were so difficult, because the patient’s body resisted the foreign magic. A demon couldn’t just spell someone to die; it had to summon fire and burn them to death, or make a blade of air and cut them to pieces. A demon could kill you with magic, but not by magic. If that wasn’t the case, the Nephilim would have become extinct centuries ago.

But that meant there were no clues here. Alec’s heart sank like an anchor, kicking up a cloud of silt. He didn’t have to reach through the bond to know that Jace and Izzy had found nothing either; there were no injuries on the body, not even a paper cut, and the nocht rune showed no signs of poison or internal damage. Every test pointed to her being in perfect health.

*So why is she dead?* the agela thought as one.

*And what are we supposed to do now?* Alec whispered helplessly.

The others had no answers for him.

With exacting care and trembling hands, he folded Xia’s clothes and reclaimed his witchlights and stele. It was a few minutes before he could steel himself to return to the other room, back to Jace and Izzy and the body that lay heavy on his conscience.

Even in death and naked on a table, Xia cut a formidable figure. Her warlock mark had been the silver shadowing of fur all over her sleekly muscled body, white and grey and dappled in black rosettes; a snow leopard’s fur. The claws adorning her fingers like pearl jewellery were vicious; Jace had picked up her hand to extend those claws, checking to see whether she’d gotten a swipe at her murderer, and almost cut himself. Even without magic tossed into the mix, Alec wouldn’t have wanted to go up against her unarmed.

But someone had killed her. Killed her without leaving the smallest mark.

They had nothing to offer Arika, when she returned to check on them. The admission dragged out of Alec’s throat like a fish hook, clawing, bleeding; he kept his gaze on the floor.

The Australian warlock didn’t blink. “We found nothing either,” she said. It was her only response.

“She was afraid,” Isabelle said quietly, looking at Xia’s horrified face. “Whatever she saw, she was afraid.”

“The Court came to the same conclusion.” After a pause, Arika added, “Although that would not be like her. Xia was a very great warrior, an onna-bugeisha in her first life, and one of our strongest mages. That was why she was named prime-guardian of Elias.”

The Shadowhunters nodded. Jace asked, “Her first life?”


“Xia isn’t a Japanese name,” Alec said quietly.

“No,” Arika said. “But it is the one she chose.”

Xia’s body had been found in the New York Botanical Gardens; Arika explained that Elias was a
budding healer and had been the driving force behind the visit. She escorted them from Magnus’ building to the Gardens, which were up in the Bronx. But they learned nothing from the trip; Alec, Jace and Isabelle didn’t know the _telesme_ a team of inquisitors would use to pull the events of the murder out of the ground and replay it as a ghostly mirage, and there were no physical clues to find.

Arika thanked them for their effort in a cool voice, giving no hint as to whether she was disappointed or validated by their failure. It didn’t matter; she didn’t need to say a word. Alec knew them all, felt them like glass shards under his skin, slicing him to pieces: _useless. Worthless. Failure_. The frustration, the unbelievable _helplessness_—he could do nothing, _they_ could do nothing, there was no way to alleviate their failure, no way to pay back a tiny fraction of what they owed for letting this happen in the first place. The hatred, the self-loathing—it lashed like Izzy’s whip, bit deep as poison, ratcheting from one to the other of them; Jace and Isabelle tried to contain it, to catch it and smother it, but Alec couldn’t stop. It was like a grenade in his chest exploding over and over, shrapnel flying, tearing; _what use are you, what good are you, the one thing you’re meant for and you can’t even do that!_

No wonder Magnus wouldn’t show his face—why would he, why _should_ he, he deserved so much better than this—

And the very worst part—it burned like ice-white fire in Alec’s chest, curled up inside his throat like a razor-edged scream he could only barely swallow—the very worst part was, it didn’t have to be this way. If his parents had taken Magnus’ warning seriously and called in real inquisitors, they could find out what had happened to Xia in minutes. They would know who or what had taken Elias, would have a real shot at finding his body for his family. By the Angel, Elias might not even be dead yet—the warlocks all seemed to think so, but no one had found a body yet.

He _could_ be alive—and Alec and his _agelai_ couldn’t do a Fallen-damned thing about it, because they weren’t good enough.

*We are good,* Izzy protested, her own frustration and anger a shoal of piranhas in her mind. *But we’re Shadowhunters, not inquisitors. Of course we don’t know the crime scene telesme, because we never need them!* If Shadowhunters were dealing with a body, it was dead just minutes past and they were already on the trail of the monster that had left it. They might take a few seconds to identify what exactly had killed a person, so they could be prepared to go up against it—but that was all.

*Then what use are Shadowhunters!* Alec shouted. *Shadowhunters couldn’t keep Xia from being killed, and Shadowhunters can’t find Elias, so what fucking use are we?*

His _agelai_’s shockburst like rotten fruit—Alec using Light Worlder curses?—but Alec couldn’t make himself care. “Arika _ashipu,_” he said as the warlock turned away from them. “Could you please—could you please tell Magnus that I’d like to attend the funeral? If there is one. If it’s allowed.”

Arika looked back at him. Even after an afternoon together, Alec was no closer to deciphering the thoughts behind those eyes, but he wondered suddenly if she saw his. “I will tell him,” she said. Just that. And turned, and walked away.

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“Poor Magnus,” Clary said, when Simon told her what Jace had said on his last check-in call: that the Shadowhunters had found nothing, no clues to follow, no hint as to what had killed Xia.

“Poor Elias, more like.” Simon swiped his travel pass on the turnstile and descended into the subway. The school day had seemed to drag on forever, but the last bell had set them free a few
minutes ago and Simon was eager to get to Eric’s. Millennium Lint had one last run-through before
the show tonight, and he was itching to get a mic in his hand. He wanted to drown out the last few
days with music, scream the verses until he couldn’t hear his own thoughts. “Jace said—he said the
inquisitors, they use special telesme to replay the crime, right? They pull the memory of the murder
or theft or whatever out of the ground or walls, and it plays like a hologram. But the memory of
Xia’s death—they degrade really quickly, so even if they sent a team of inquisitors from Alicante
tomorrow, they probably won’t be able to see what happened. Which means no one knows where
Elias is.”

Clary frowned. “I thought he was dead too?”

Simon spread his hands helplessly. His stomach twisted just thinking about some poor warlock kid in
Valentine’s claws. Maybe he’s not. Maybe he ran from whatever killed Xia and kept running.

Or maybe he’s dead, and we just haven’t found a body yet. That might be better than being a
Downworlder in Valentine’s grasp. “His body hasn’t turned up. Jace said Alec’s still hoping he’ll be
okay.”

Jace had been calling to apologise—instead of picking Simon and Clary up from school, the new-
formed agela were hunting for any trace of Elias or whoever might have taken him. Considering that
Simon was perfectly capable of getting himself to and from St Xavier’s, he was hardly upset to have
lost his escort.

The only thing he needed to be afraid of was in his own head. And that was something Jace couldn’t
protect him from.

Which reminded him. “I’m going to ask Alec if I can stay at his place,” he told Clary as they
squeezed into a subway car with a pack of other students.

Clary’s gaze was a double-edged sword. “Why?”

“Because it makes sense.” Simon avoided her eyes. “If I go darkside again——

“Panic attack,” Clary said sharply. “Kore’s sake, Si, you didn’t go darkside, you had a panic
attack.”

Yesterday, maybe. What about all the other times? “It doesn’t matter what you call it,” Simon said
tiredly. “Either way, I’m not safe to be around when it happens. Jace and the others—they’re more
likely to be able to handle me.” Unless he took hold of their runes and did something terrible…

He shivered at the thought—and not with horror. It would be so easy… To do—what?

Anything he wanted.

As quickly as it had come, the speculative interest drained away, and Simon had to swallow hard to
keep from being sick all over someone’s pretentious shoes.

Get it out of me, get this fucking thing OUT OF ME——

“Really?” Clary asked. “Because it sounds to me like they don’t understand PTSD at all.” She fixed
him with a glare, which he barely noticed; he was too busy fighting to appear normal, sane.
Unpossessed. “What did you tell me Jace said? It’s something that happens to Shadowhunters who
‘weren’t trained properly’? I don’t even know where to begin with how fucked up that is. Like it’s
your fault for being traumatised!”
Simon had wondered about that too. It was even creepier when you remembered that Shadowhunter training started in childhood. What was the ‘proper’ way to prepare little kids to face off against demons, and how badly did it violate the UDHR? “I’m not trying to argue that they’re not all brainwashed by their totalitarian government, okay? I’m just saying that if I have another episode—” Clary raised her eyebrows, but didn’t interrupt. “—then Jace and the others are less likely to get hurt.”

You knew there was something wrong with your life when that was actually a reassuring statement.

“I’d think their Marks make them a lot more vulnerable than I am,” Clary argued, because of course he’d told her what had happened this morning, he tried to tell her everything.

“I haven’t tried to kill them,” Simon hissed under his breath. They were both speaking quietly, because they were surrounded by other subway riders and any conversation involving the Nephilim tended to get weird quickly (whereas two teenagers talking about, oh, werewolves and faeries were just debating the merits of the newest Stephenie Meyer knock-off).

“No, you just went all Kankurō on your boyfriend,” Clary said tartly. “They can’t ‘handle’ you, Si, they can’t even move if you don’t feel like letting them!”

Don’t remind me. “I’ll learn to control it,” Simon said, feeling sick. His powers, the twisted hungers that came with them—they felt like a noose around his neck. Like something that might destroy him—his self as he knew it, as he wanted it. “And then I won’t do it anymore.”

I hope.

Clary was silent for a minute. “It’s an awful power,” she said finally. “But don’t be a martyr about it, okay? I agree with you, it’s—seriously, seriously screwed up, and you should try not to use it. But I don’t trust Shadowhunters as far as I can throw them.” She cut him off before he could interrupt.

“Yeah, fine, Jace and the others are great. I trust them. But Valentine? Or Alec and Izzy’s parents? The thousands of other Nephilim we don’t know? If any of them try to hurt you, I expect you to use everything you have to keep yourself safe, and no idiotic ‘death is better than saving myself through evil means!’ crap. Okay?”

Simon stared at her. “Are you that worried about the Inquisitor?” he asked, deliberately side-stepping any more talk of his powers. “Jace said—”

“I know what Jace said—hey, this is us.”

Outside, away from the crush of people, Clary repeated, “I know what Jace said. That the Inquisitor wants to know what happened with Valentine, and that’s it. But they’re scared of this Inquisitor person, Simon. And I don’t think the Nephilim are very good at adapting to new things. You’ve a new thing, you’re completely brand new, and your mom—you don’t have your mom to look out for you. I’m worried about what the Inquisitor will think of you. What if she wants to send you to this Academy Jace keeps mentioning?”

Then I’ll walk her under a train.

Simon stumbled, swearing, his blood gone to ice at the cool, perfectly logical sounding thought. What the fuck was wrong with him?

“I just won’t go,” Simon said, shaken. I won’t kill her. I’m not going to kill anybody! “They wouldn’t want me anyway.” He forced himself to smile at Clary. “Can you imagine me at some Shadowhunter military academy? I’d be their worst nightmare! Always asking questions, no respect
for the Law…”

“Seducing all the repressed pretty boys in the showers…”

Simon smirked at her. “Well. I’d have to ask Jace for an open relationship first. I’m not into—”

_Cheating._

His playfulness fled, and guilty nausea settled in the pit of his stomach.

_It really wasn’t cheating, _he told himself weakly. _We weren’t together then, it doesn’t count…_

He had to tell Jace. _Tonight._ He’d tell him tonight, after the show. And Jace wouldn’t care, because it didn’t count, but Simon could stop feeling like a criminal whenever Jace touched him…

Jesus, his life was fucked up. How had this _happened_? A few months ago his biggest worry had been his secret crush on Clary. Now he was rationally considering _killing people_ and keeping secrets from his incestuous boyfriend.

_And the worst part is, you can’t figure out which is worse, can you?_

Simon resisted the urge to slap himself.

“Not into what?”

“Nothing.” Simon lifted his bag higher up on his shoulder. _God, I wish it was nothing._ “Let’s just get home.”

Mrs Lewis wasn’t yet home from her day job, so they had the house to themselves. Simon changed out of his uniform and sliced peppers for a snack while Clary found normal clothes of her own. The conversation was unresolved but over; Clary muttered under her breath as Simon packed up most of his things, but didn’t protest again.

It was for the best. As fucking terrifying as his new powers were, Simon had a lot more faith in the Shadowhunters’ ability to defend themselves than he had in Clary. If push came to shove, Alec or Isabelle, at least, wouldn’t hesitate to put him down—but nothing on Earth would convince Clary to pull the trigger in the same situation. So until Simon trusted himself around her again, he wasn’t going to stay here.

“Why are you using a butter knife to cut peppers?” Clary asked, raising her eyebrows as she came back to the kitchen.

_Because I don’t want to hold something sharp in my hand while I’m thinking about murdering the Inquisitor._ “Couldn’t find the other knives. You want some?”

They took the pepper slices to go and decamped to Eric’s, where he and Kirk were already waiting to go over that night’s set list.

“No, no freaking way, I am singing _First Time_ tonight if it fucking kills me,” Simon said, scribbling over the scrawl that was Kirk’s last-minute edits to the list. “You’ve been talking me out of it for _weeks_, I am _not_ letting you do it again!”

“Clary, Clarissa, darling, talk some sense into him, would you?” Eric begged. “It’s sappy, bubbly _pop_, for crying out loud—I can taste bubble-gum when we play the damn thing!”

“I’m staying out of it,” Clary said, her hands up in surrender.
“And you see this face? This is a face that does not care,” Simon said cheerfully, ignoring the way Kirk’s gaze flicked to the scar on Simon’s cheek. He hid the scars on his wrists under unadorned leather cuffs whenever he wore a short-sleeved tee, but short of make-up there wasn’t much he could do about the one on his face. He’d let his friends draw their own conclusions about his injuries and the sudden radio silence from Luke; whenever he started to feel guilty about it, he remembered Luke driving him to the gay conversion centre, and didn’t feel bad about slinging mud at the guy.

Eric opened his mouth to continue arguing, but Kirk cut him off. “Don’t bother, man. He only grins like that when the boyfriend’s coming to the show; you’ll never convince him to cut the love song.”

Simon flushed, and Clary cackled where she was bent over her homework.

“Oh my God, does everybody know?” Simon demanded of the ceiling.

“If you wanted to keep it a secret, you shouldn’t sneak out of practice to make-out with your boy-toy,” Kirk said wryly, and Clary laughed so hard she nearly fell off her chair. “What, you thought we wouldn’t notice? We’re not blind.”

“We were just waiting for you to say something.” Eric shrugged. “Figured, you know, not our business. Unlike this set list!”

And just like that, they were back to bickering about the songs.

* 

Tonight Millennium Lint was headed back to Pandemonium, and Simon couldn’t deny a frisson of excited nervousness at going back to where this had all started. But the coveted 10 o’clock Friday-night spot was quite a few hours away, and they had a lot to do before set-up time.

Clary and Matt did their geometry homework together while Simon and Eric argued companionably about the set list and Kirk ostensibly moderated. In the end, Simon did get his First Time song, but only in exchange for swapping out Don’t Dance for the still-new Shatter Me.

“Are you sure we’re ready to play that for an audience?” Matt asked from the table.

“I think we can pull it off,” Kirk said thoughtfully. “It’s not really a club song, though.”

“They’ll love it,” Eric grinned. “You know they will. So what if it’s not expected—since when did we want to put ourselves in a box, anyway? No boxes for Lint!”

“That could have been phrased better,” Kirk said to no one in particular, and wandered away to make sure the violin settings on his custom-built keyboard were calibrated properly. He had a patent pending for that thing, which he’d built himself when he was twelve and frustrated with the time it took to learn to play multiple instruments. Now when he flicked a switch, he could hit the keys of an electric piano and make the sound of any one of a dozen other instruments—violin, flute, harp, trumpet, and a bunch of others. Simon loved it almost as much as Kirk did; it meant he could write music for more than his and Matt’s guitars and Eric’s drums. But he thought Kirk probably wasn’t in for the long haul when it came to Lint; head-hunters from MIT had been sniffing around Kirk since he was eight and rebuilt his school’s computer network for fun.

Clary insisted they all do their homework, which helped settle the pre-performance nerves to acceptable levels. Simon kept checking his phone for messages from Jace until Kirk confiscated it, but anyway there were none. Jace had warned him that he might not make the show, what with looking for Elias, and Simon felt guilty selfishness claw in his chest for wanting Jace to be there instead of on patrol. First Time was their song, written just for Jace, and he couldn’t help it; he
wanted Jace to be at Pandemonium to hear it instead of out looking for corpses.

Not enough to insist, though. Not enough to play the aggrieved boyfriend card and plead for Jace to come. That would be a seriously dick move, the kind of manipulative Simon had once accused Jace of being, and with a kid missing Simon was two kinds of asshole for even thinking about it.

The song ought to make Jace laugh, though, and Jace hadn’t been laughing much recently.

When the last equation had been written out and checked over by Clary, they ran through the songs—not all of them, but the newer ones they were still a touch unsure about, including a *Shatter Me* that skipped the final high notes, to save Simon’s voice for later. It really was a good song, one of the best Simon had ever written, but when he’d shown it to the others he hadn’t been expecting to play it at a club. He’d written it imagining the day Lint was hired not to get people dancing and buying drinks, but just to *play*, just because their music was awesome and the world knew it. It was a stupid fantasy—they were so many miles away from being a household name they weren’t even in the same galaxy, and who said any of them would still even *want* that in a year? Two? Three?

But at the same time—at the same time, it was hard not to fantasise. Simon knew he wasn’t the only one thinking it, the only one wondering if maybe they were really on their way to going somewhere. Pandemonium had *asked* them to come back—asked for them, instead of them having to go begging for places to play. People were starting to pay attention to the weird little high school band with the strange name. Clary had even set up a Facebook page for the band, where she posted stupid videos of them practising and snippets of their new songs. The last time Simon had checked it, they’d even had a few fans.

They were good. They knew they were good. At this point, it was mostly down to luck and stubbornness. Performing over the summer had been easy, but it would get harder now they had school to juggle. And did they have what it took to still be here in a year, or two, or three?

Only time would tell. In the meantime, they practised their music.

The rest of the night was a blur. They loaded the instruments into the van, played video games, ordered the traditional pre-show pizza, and let Clary doll them up. Simon was getting used to the kohl around his eyes and the hug of his Shadowhunter jacket, the tight shirt that Clary insisted on—this one emblazoned with *God bless this hot mess*, in hot pink on black.

He was *not* prepared for the hair chalk.

“Are you planning on playing hopscotch on my head?” Simon asked warily as Clary approached him with what looked like a box of chalk. “What’re those for?”

“They’re for you, you moron. Here, *sit.*” She pushed him onto a stool in front of the bathroom mirror. “Don’t you trust me?”


She grinned at him in the mirror. “These are hair chalks. See? You use them to streak colour in your hair. I thought it would help, you know.” She made jazz hands. “Give you some *oomph.*”

“What,” Simon said flatly. “What are you even, I have plenty of oomph. I am the oomphiest son of a mother you know. Also, you are not dying my hair. That is a thing which is not going to happen.”

Clary rolled her eyes. “It’s not dye, Simon. This stuff is really temporary; you’ll be back to normal by Monday, I swear.”
Ignoring any further protests, she proceeded to streak a bright, hot pink through his hair, making a Rogue-like stripe. At first, it was barely noticeable, but after a few passes the colour began to stick. In just a few minutes, it was highlighter-bright.

“Now we brush it, to get any loose pigment out,” Clary announced. She did just that, pulling a soft, small hairbrush from her make-up bag and gently tugging it through his hair. “What do you think?”

Simon frowned at his reflection, wincing occasionally when Clary’s brush found a tangle. But the stripe looked good, he decided finally. He probably wouldn’t have dared choose pink for himself, but it worked. With the make-up Clary had already applied, it made him look wild and fey, like something wicked and playful. Even his glasses couldn’t ruin the effect.

He looked like Jace, Simon realised with a jolt. Like a bad-boy, a punk Peter Pan, sexy and a little scary. Between the bright pink in his hair, the dark eyeliner, and whatever Clary had done to his cheekbones, he was giving the finger to America’s cookie-cutter gender roles—he almost looked androgynous.

Something in him shivered, electric and awake. For an instant, his eyes sheened ink-black, deepest blue studded with tiny stars—

And then he blinked, and was himself again.

“I love it,” he said softly. He cleared his throat, tried again. “Good call.”

Clary was smug. “All my calls are good calls, you should know this by now.”

“I am but a poor male, and must humbly apologise for my ignorance,” Simon replied. “But at least I’m smart enough to keep you around to remind me.”

He ducked her playful swipe.

*\

Jace texted as they were leaving for Pandemonium: found nothing, see you at Pand. Love you.

That literally never got old. Simon was still resisting the urge to squee like a fangirl whose OTP had just become canon when they pulled up behind the club.

Inside, Pandemonium was—well, pandemonium. Young adults of all descriptions were out to party their Friday night away, awash in a dark sea of pink-blue-green lights. Simon saw mohawks and mullets, tattoos and Jimmy Choos, piercings and princess crowns, and felt the sparkling atmosphere sink into his blood, paint a bright grin across his face. It was almost like slipping into battle-trance, but louder, more exhilarating; he felt like laughing, like plunging into the crowd just to drink them all in, the energy pulsing out of the dancers in waves of brilliant, scintillating light. The music caught his heart in a net of bass and he felt awash with flames, flickering and flaring, pure energy; ready to dissolve into golden brightness at any moment.

Nervous? Why in the Time Lords’ names would he be nervous? This was so good, so real, sweat and sex and love-of-life carving a new animal out of the night; and he was a part of it. Why would he be nervous? How could he be, readying himself for the sacrament the crowd had come to partake of? There was a contract here, wordless and binding, a promise; his music for their love, his soul offered up for their delight.

Simple. Easy.
Simon had no instruments to set up, so while the others got their gear ready he and Clary went to look for Jace. Simon didn’t really expect to find him in this crush, but damn it he wanted so badly to move. He wished suddenly, abruptly, that there was another band playing tonight, that he and Jace could just dance together. Simon was a terrible dancer, shy and awkward on the dance floor, but Jace—Simon was sure Jace would be an incredible dancer. The way he moved… That body would slide as easily into dance as into killing, Simon was certain.

There were plenty of pretty blonds out tonight, but none pretty enough to be his aikane. Making a note to repeat that line to Jace, he waited while Clary grabbed a coke.

“He’ll show,” Clary shouted over the music, and Simon nodded, serene. His fingers tapped along to the beat on the bar, feeling it hum around his bones. On his other side a girl stretched out her hand to get the bar-tender’s attention, a skein of what looked like friendship bracelets woven around her wrists, all crimson and blue and gold.

Not long now.

And then it was time, now, countdown counted down and his name in calligraphic blood on the contract with a slash and a swirl and a hot-eyed purr into the mic—

“\textit{I have a heart that gets on everybody’s nerves,}

\textit{They don’t want the truth, they just want the wo~rds,}

\textit{Blah blah blah blah, and I can sing until I’m dead,}

\textit{And none of you’ll remember a single thing I said!”}

They wove fire. They were sorcerers, charming hearts like sirens and calling down lightning in blue and pink and green to dazzle and blind, leading the crowd through a labyrinth of their own design from which there was no escaping—and they didn’t want to escape, this audience, Simon could feel it humming through the room and he drank it in and sang it back to them, taking-transmuting-howling it back to them: their excitement, their thrill, their sheer want bonefire-bright in his head his mouth on his lips like a kiss.

\textit{Worship me, worship us and we will give you Elysium—}

His vision flickered black as he bent over the mic, snarling through a mouthful of night—

\textit{“Took our dreams and got in line!}

\textit{Held our breath and hoped to die—}

\textit{Fade on~}

\textit{And all along, we got it wrong!}

\textit{Live a slow and painful life,}

\textit{Put our heart on hold inside—}
Black waves lapping against crimson sands, the sound of surf breaking beneath the words and Simon was howling, a storm of crystalline winds giving breath to his song, songs, he hardly needed the mic at all to pour his voice into every crevasse of every heart, snare them all, and it was so easy, so right it was almost painful in its perfection.

When they wrapped up the song, he could almost hear the rustle of wings beneath the applause.

“Don’t clap us off just yet, kith and kindred—we’re not done with you yet!” he grinned, loving it, half-drunk on it. At Matt’s signal they launched into Earthquake, always a crowd-pleaser, and Simon revelled in the chance to stalk across the stage, owning it, feline and dangerous. He channelled every bit of this wild energy into the song, every word streaking starfire through the dark club, dancing like meteors before his eyes, inside his skull. Fierce and fiery, exulting in the power, the delight, the priceless joy of singing his heart out and feeling a crowd of strangers love him for it, demand more in an insatiable-unbreakable circle of give-and-take, their euphoria feeding on him and his music growing incandescent on their approval, their adoration.

For the length of a song, he was a king, a god, a seraphim singing heaven down—

When he dropped to his knees for the final howl, the crowd’s screams almost drowned out his own, and he was laughing, drugged on it, when he finally saw Jace in the crowd.

With an idiotic grin, he raised his hand and waved as he got back to his feet. “Someone very special just arrived, my dears,” he told the audience, panting a little, laughing a little. “If I can catch my breath, I’ve a special song just for them. But the rest of you,” he added mock-grandly, “can listen too.”

Still grinning, he touched his fingers to his lips and held them out to Jace, stepping back with the mic—

And saw, standing just beyond his lover, a face familiar as a first kiss—

Simon froze. It was only an instant, a second painted azure-blue in the sweep of the strobe lights, but he knew that face, even here, even washed in blue light—the black hair he’d tangled his fingers in so desperately, the sweet-sharp lips the first he’d ever kissed, the cheekbones sharp enough to cut your wrists on—and though he couldn’t see them from here, the eyes so dark a green they were almost black—
Simon blinked. He blinked, the lights flashed, Jace was shaking his head with a fond smile and that other boy was gone like smoke, gone like a song...

Of course he’s gone, because he was never there, Simon thought, shaken. Pull it together. He said he lived in Europe; what would Sebastian be doing in a Brooklyn club? Never mind that this wasn’t the first time Simon had thought he’d seen him since those nights at Comic Con...

Yeah, well, if hallucinations are all you have to deal with you can count yourself lucky, Simon told himself, and shook it off. He had a song to sing.

He caught Kirk’s signal, nodded, and let the music sweep him under.

“I’ve got these mem-or-ies, they’re all of you-and-me,” he sang, the moment of weirdness rapidly fading under the thrill of the so-familiar lyrics,

“I’ve been recording them ever, since I was seventeen,

Push play-back then re-wind—

I see us meeting for the very first time...

A mental note of you, you sang my melody,

First bar in a life-long sym-pho-ny,

The prelude to a kiss...

My heart’s pounding when I reminisce,”

Chirpy, sweet, electronica bubbles shimmering sweet rainbows, and Simon was grinning, laughing at himself, pride discarded on the floor in favour of singing to Jace.

“The first time that I saw your face—

The first time that you spoke my name...

The first time that I heard you say

‘There’s a first time with me every day.’ ”

Do you remember, aikane? Do you? The Institute’s music room, how close we came to never being close at all—the kisses, the touching, the sounds I made, the promise you made me?

‘There’s a first time with me every day’—

He did. Simon could see it, saw it, a bright speechlessness writ raw on Jace’s face, and Simon was grinning so hard it hurt, the mic cupped in his hands like a gem and his pink-streaked hair brushing
his eyes, and so what, so what if he was a sap, what did it matter when he meant it, meant every
burnished word—

“*No matter what I do,*” he swore, meaning it, meaning it all,

“I won’t fast forward anything with you.

*I know you feel it too—

*The first time I saw love I was with you.*”

There were a lot of ways for a love song to go wrong, and Simon knew this wasn’t an especially
good one. It was nothing special, except that it was, and maybe that was what carried it through,
what made the crowd cheer and put their hands in the air—the truth of it shining out of Simon’s face,
dripping dazzlingly from his tongue, lips, cheerful bubbles blown by lyrical breath. Maybe if he
hadn’t meant it they wouldn’t have let him sing it, but he did and they did and Eric and Matt and
Kirk played it with him, this simple little song that he meant so much.

That meant so much, from the look on Jace’s face.

And that made it all worth it.

*#

There were more songs, almost a dozen of them. Simon took some of them a little easier than he
maybe should have done, but they’d played *Earthquake* too early and he had to save his voice for
*Shatter Me*.

The last song of the night.

When it finally came, Simon was soaked in sweat, his shirt plastered to his chest, but he didn’t feel
tired. Nitro-glycerine rushed through his veins, alight and burning, drumming his heart like Eric’s
bass and gods, it was good. It was so, so good, the rush, the dizzying, electrifying power of it all, and
*Shatter Me*—Simon knew it was the best song he’d ever written. Knew it, and felt it trembling within
him, a phoenix new-born in his rib-cage and eager to spread its wings.

Eric and Matt faded out as the magic unspooled from Kirk’s fingers, from the keys under them, and
Simon waited, breathed—

And let the phoenix-song out.

“I pirouette in the dark…

*I see the stars through a mirror…

Tired mechanical heart,

*Beats ’til the song disappears.*”
The heavenly strains of a violin spun out from Kirk’s keyboard, sweeter and richer than guitar or drum; they caressed over Simon’s skin, rose up into the sky with his golden birdsong—

“Somebody shine a light,
I’m frozen by the fear in me,
Somebody make me feel alive
And shatter me!

So cut me from the line,
Dizzy, spinning endlessly—
Somebody make me feel alive
And shatter me!”

Kirk hammered down and Simon was there to meet him, greet him, weave his voice in amongst the notes and oh, this one meant something too, dark and real and raw; the dreams, the darkness, the visions and the runesongs, the fierce roaring in his head and the black wings behind his eyes—it was so much power, this thing inside him, a sun inside his skin and sometimes, sometimes he just wanted to break—break open, break wide, let all the fire come spilling out to scorch the earth. He sang that desire out into the dark, the glass-struck longing, the impossibility, the need, the defiance, rejection and acceptance and contradiction. Kirk’s violin soared and dived, spiralling around Simon as Simon spiralled, singing a song that was a scream into the abyss.

“If I break the glass then I’ll have to fly—
There’s no one to catch me if I take a dive,
I’m scared of change and the days stay the same,
The world is spinning but only in gray—

“If I break the glass then I’ll have to fly—
There’s no one to catch me if I take a dive,
I’m scared of change and the days stay the same,
The world is spinning but only in gray!”

He heard the black waves lapping against a red shore, saw the world stutter and strobe around him,
black-white-black kissed by blue-green-pink, and at his back, on his shoulders a weight of feathers that were also swords, butterflies, dragon-scale—

“Dizzy, spinning endlessly—

Somebody make me feel alive

And shatter me!”

The note—he held it and held it, carrying it up and out, a phoenix bursting into conflagration, a star going supernova, on and on and on until the air shook with it, burned with it, until the room was full of stars and—

And everything was crashing—surf, breaking surf, yes, surf and glass as throughout Pandemonium the lights and windows exploded, raining a rainbow of glass that would fall upon the crowd in another moment; the speakers were mute and people were screaming, Simon could see the shards falling, falling in that last flare of light—

Saw them stop, arrested in mid-air, swallows paused mid-flight, meteors mid-streak, raindrops turned to ice and frozen—

Motion drew his eyes; as the glass froze a girl’s hand was flung up in the middle of the crowd, up towards the ceiling; he saw sand-gold skin and glimpsed the bracelets on her wrist, gold and garnet and cobalt—

And then she was gone, lost in the panicked crush and the dark, but when Simon heard the crystalline smash of glass against the floor, it came much later than it should have done.

A hand grabbed his sleeve; he heard Matt’s voice calling him, pulling him away from the front of the stage. Glass crunched beneath his feet like sugar, and Simon’s mind was spinning, spinning.

*Did I do this? Was this me?*

“For fuck’s sake, Si, come on!”

***

Clary was not one of the ones who screamed when the lights overhead burst like fireworks, but only because the sound of shattering glass ripped the breath from her lungs. She ducked down instinctively, panting desperately for air, and then without the lights to hold it back darkness swept over her like an ocean, swept over them all—

The werewolves, the werewolves were coming in through the windows—

She couldn’t hear herself think; people were screaming, shrieking, trying to run—pressing in on her, hands and shoulders hammering against her, oh Hekate she was only a *mouse* they would crush her to *pulp*—

She panted, the taste of Raphael’s blood thick and overwhelming in her mouth, not coppery like human blood but sweet like apples with the tang of silver—it was choking her, flooding her throat, pouring into her lungs—
There were too many people, the crowd was too panicked and Clary couldn’t make herself move, a human flinch waiting for a horse-sized wolf to claw her down, a vampire to tear her throat out; someone’s shoulder slammed into her chest and she fell, unable to make herself cry out, unable to catch a breath—

She was going to be trampled under the crowd’s feet—

An arm caught hers before she hit the ground. She shrieked reflexively at the sudden contact, blind and terrified, but whoever it was righted her on her feet; their hand slid down to clasp hers, and she latched onto it instinctively, squeezing tight. It was calloused and warm, strong; in the middle of this nightmare, it felt like a safe harbour.

Then it pulled, firmly. Her head ringing, Clary let herself be led, stumbling along in the dark, clinging to the stranger’s hand. It was a lighthouse, showing her the safe path through the rocks, the waves; Clary could feel the memories of the Dumort slowly fading away, the screaming in her head growing quiet and still.

She did not fall again.

Outside, the streetlamps closest to the club had gone dark, but those across the street cast light like amber honey over the sidewalk and the confused, clumsy crowd. Clary blinked rapidly as her eyes adjusted, but glittering after-images were still dancing across her vision when she felt the hand in hers slip away.

She turned after it. “Hey, wait!” she blurted, startled, wanting to say thank you, wanting to know who had helped her. She caught a glimpse of a young man’s black hair, and sharp, diamond-edged cheekbones, but she was already frozen, her breath turned to frost in her lungs again.

Because the hand that clasped hers in the dark had been Marked with a *voyance* rune.

***

“Clary!” Simon shouted, finally spotting her. “Jace, guys, she’s over here!”

She turned around to face him, looking dazed, and he swept her into a hug. “Oh my God, I’m so glad you’re okay!” He pulled away suddenly to look her over. “You are okay, right?”

“Yeah… Yes, I’m fine.” He saw her swallow. “Somebody—somebody helped me get out.” She looked beyond him at their approaching friends. “Simon, I think he was a Shadowhunter.”

“What?” He opened his mouth to bombard her with questions, but then Eric, Matt and Kirk were there, all exclaiming to find Clary alive and unharmed, and these didn’t seem like the best circumstances to introduce them to the Shadow World. He stepped away to give his friends room, his mind awhirl.

A golden ghost, Jace appeared beside him silently. “Is she all right?” He had made it backstage even before Lint had, fire-eyed and frantic to make sure Simon was unharmed; Simon had no idea how he’d made it through the crowd so quickly. Maybe that was something they taught you, in Shadowhunter training; Simon wouldn’t know yet.

“Yes, she’s not hurt or anything. Just freaked out, I think.” He scanned the crowd, but anyone who wanted to disappear would have an easy time of it in this chaos. “She—Jace, she said that a Shadowhunter got her out of there.”

“It wasn’t me,” Jace said. He sounded…guilty. “If I’d thought, I would have gone to help her. But
“But you were worried about me,” Simon finished, not sure how to feel about that. Clary had been the one in more danger, and he wished Jace had gone to take care of her instead. But he couldn’t think of a good way to say that, couldn’t figure out how to phrase it so that it wouldn’t sound cruel and criticising. “And the others definitely didn’t come?”

Jace shook his head. “They’re on patrol.” He looked out over the crowd. “As I should be.”

Simon nodded, understanding. He was fine, Clary was fine, there was no good reason for Jace to stay. Jace, Alec and Izzy, and maybe their parents, were the only Shadowhunters available to patrol the entire city; that had to come first.

Except they’re not the only ones… “What about this new Shadowhunter?” he asked.

Jace frowned. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “It could be someone from the Inquisitor’s team, come to read the earth before she gets here… That would be my best guess.”

“’Read the earth’?”

Jace gestured with his hand, searching for an explanation. “Like tracking. Feeling out the woods before the hunters go in.”

“Because that’s not ominous at all.” Simon sighed. “Okay, fine. Worst case scenario, it’s still not a bad thing to have an extra Shadowhunter around, probably.” Whoever it was had helped Clary, so they couldn’t be that bad. One of Valentine’s goons wouldn’t have helped some nobody mundane. “Wait, before you—there was a girl in there. When the glass was falling, she—she stopped it. I think she made it fall more slowly.”

Jace was nodding before he’d finished speaking. “I saw that, but not who had done it.” He touched Simon’s shoulder. “Try not to worry, aikane. Pandemonium’s always been a Shadow World hotspot—what did you think I was doing there, the night we met?” He smiled, briefly. “It was probably a faerie or warlock, looking to limit the night’s injuries. We should count ourselves lucky she intervened.”

They had been lucky. Cop cars and ambulances were pulling up now, their sirens burning the night blue and white, but looking around Simon didn’t see many people bleeding or otherwise obviously injured. People could have died under that hail of glass; whoever that girl was had probably saved a lot of lives.

She fixed my mistake, Simon thought. Or at least mitigated it. Neither he nor Jace had brought it up, but they both knew it had to have been Simon who blew the lights and windows. He’d done it before, hadn’t he, at Magnus’ place? Even if he didn’t remember it.

Simon sighed. “Go on, get going.” He kissed Jace quickly, softly. “Go kick some demon ass.”

Jace’s eyes sparkled. “I always do. Tell Clary I’m glad she’s okay,” he added.

Simon nodded. “I’ll see you when you get in.”

“I’ll be looking forward to it,” Jace said softly—and was gone.

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Outside the club, the night was alight with the harsh blue and white lights of emergency services,
police officers and ambulances side-by-side in the neon-lit dark. A crowd had gathered, as crowds always did, exchanging and embroidering the stories being spun out of the last few minutes. There would be a whole slew of tales come dawn, each taller than the next.

Across the street and five stories up, a woman crouched on a rooftop. Her dark skin and darker clothes blended into the night; only the gold of the Egyptian axe on her back might have given away her position, if any had looked for it. She was tall and strong, a warrior in her prime, perhaps thirty-five years old.

Beside her was a young man almost two decades her junior, his Portuguese face lit by the slowly revolving object hovering above his cupped hands. Thirteen interlocked bands of gold, silver, and crystal were each turning and rotating around a glowing central point, a small diamond marble the size of a robin’s egg. Steel rings adorned the first and middle fingers of the boy’s hands; they sparked and shimmered in the light of his charm.

“It’s here,” he said softly. “It’s absolutely, definitely down there.”

His captain nodded. “Did you get that, Ana?”

“Aaffirmative.” The young woman’s Haitian voice came through their earpieces as clearly as if she’d been kneeling beside them. “But I can do you one better; it’s the singer. Those werewolves we talked to were telling the truth: Symeon Morgenstern is the anunnaku.”

A rushing, fluttering sound, like a flock of birds ascending into the sky, sounded overhead; the charm-bearer looked up with warmth in his eyes as a blue-green-black whirlwind of feathers resolved into a young Native American man, stepping lightly down out of the air onto the rooftop, his long black hair falling behind him like a stripe of the dark sky.

“You heard?” the captain asked him.

He nodded.

“You should be able to see it,” Ana continued. “White male, brown hair with a pink streak. Black jacket. It’s standing near the entrance.”

“We see it,” the captain said. “It’s beguiled itself the beginnings of a nice little cult, hasn’t it? Civilians and Shadowhunters both.” Her gaze remained fixed on the monster down below. “All right, Ana, good work. Lucio, Chi, I want you two to track it. Don’t let it out of your sight, but do not engage. Understood?”

The young Native man—Lucio—nodded again. Over the comms, an Asian woman said, “Copy that. Going under now.”

The charm-bearer made a sharp gesture, and the light in the diamond bead snuffed out, the spinning rings collapsing neatly into a circular pendant and falling as gravity reclaimed it. He caught it deftly before it hit the ground and looped its chain over his neck, springing to his feet like a puppy and bounding over to Lucio before he could leave.

“Waaaaait wait wait wait.” He held out his little finger and a bright smile. “Good luck.”

A softly fond smile flickered, there and gone, across the other boy’s face, but he reached out and hooked the proffered pinkie with his. “Thank you, Cas.”

Unhooking their fingers, he turned and ran for the edge of the roof. With a snap as of unfolding wings, he spread his arms and a blur of blue and green and black enfolded him, reshaping him;
human boots leapt off the edge and avian wings beat down in the next instant, huge, powerful wings of lapis and jade and jagged onyx.

The remaining two watched him disappear into the dark sky.

“Ana, head back to base,” the woman said finally. “I’ll want your report.”

“Affirmative. Heading back now.”

“The Shadowhunters are going to make this complicated, aren’t they?” Cas asked quietly, when his captain still had not moved.

She sighed. “I’m sure they’ll try, but in the end it makes no difference.” Finally ending her surveillance of the street below, she rose to her feet. “If Symeon Morgenstern is the anunnaku, then Symeon Morgenstern is the one we kill.”

NOTES

Palaestrae were wrestling schools in ancient Greece, usually attached to gymnasiums.

Iaoth is an angel who thwarts demons. (As do most of the other angels, one assumes?)

All the runes listed in the seraph blade are ones I’ve made up, except enkeli, which is a canon Mark. They’re all runes used specifically in crafting anti-demon weapons.

Niobe is a figure in Greek mythology; for the crime of hubris (translated as arrogance, but really it means believing yourself to be the equal of the gods) her children were killed by Artemis and Apollo, and she was turned into stone.

A cantata is a piece of music written for both chorus and orchestra; it is usually religious or spiritual in nature.

A ricercar is a complex polyphonic composition from the Baroque and Renaissance periods.

As I’ve mentioned before, I went through the list and gave ‘proper’ names to many of the runes mentioned but not named in canon. So santalana is the equilibrium rune, azo is for stamina, desviar is the block/deflect rune, enia is the insight rune, tharros is courage-in-combat, libratum is the sure-footed rune, silencieux is for soundless steps, celeritas is heightened speed, suplete is the flexibility rune, and fasthet is my name for the fortitude Mark. Pari is the true name of the parabatai Mark.

Harpagmos is an ancient Greek rite or ceremony (I believe Cretan, but I might be misremembering) where an older man ritualistically kidnapped a younger man with whom he wanted to become lovers. The two would spend two months in the wilderness and at the end of it, the younger man would accept or reject the elder as a lover. Among the Nephilim, the harpagmos is part of the preparation before forming a parastathentes bond, which is like the parabatai bond but for lovers instead of friends.

Pommes de sang is French for ‘apples of blood’. In the Anita Blake universe the term refers to people who willingly provide blood for a vampire; in Runed, a pomme de sang is a lot more like property.
Pankhaia is an island in Greek mythology, supposedly in the Indian sea. According to legend, it is populated by a ‘lost’ Greek tribe, led there from Crete by Zeus—god knows when. It’s considered an Eastern Atlantis. In Runed, it’s one of the ‘hidden lands’, like Idris—places mundanes can’t see or enter.

Selkies are a kind of fae shapeshifter, human-looking creatures who can become seals by wearing a sealskin. They don’t skin real seals; the skins are their own, a part of them.

Anjanas are really lovely Spanish faeries. They’re the good faeries of Cantabrian mythology, who look after people and especially children; every four years the Anjanas bring children presents on the night of January 5th. They can talk to water, help people lost in their forests, and leave gifts on the doorsteps of good people. I love them to pieces!

Xanas are faeries or spirits from Asturian mythology, usually associated with water and always female.

The Yōsei is a Japanese faerie that sometimes appears as a bird.

A fan axe is an object from ancient Egypt, literally a polearm weapon with a fan-shaped head. Modern scholars aren’t sure it ever existed, since no archaeologist has ever found one, and if it did exist it probably wasn’t actually used as a weapon.

*Skíá-aird* is a term of my own invention, and means shadow-knowing or shadow-cognizance. It’s the name of the sixth sensor Shadowhunters have for recognizing and identifying Downworlders. Present tense verb is *skiáir*, past tense is *skiárd*. ‘I see you’, ‘I saw you’; ‘I *skiáir* you’, ‘I *skiárd* you.’

Inanna is the Queen of Heaven in Sumerian mythology. In one of the myths, she descends to Irkalla, the Underworld, through seven gates, where she dies and is resurrected (with the help of some friends) before coming back through the gates again.

Arika’s name apparently means ‘blue water lily’ in one of the Aboriginal Australian dialects. Since water lilies are supposed to be a gift from the Rainbow Serpent, and Arika is marked with rainbow scales, it made sense to be that her human mother might have called her a gift from the Rainbow Serpent.

Her surname, Kijarr, means ‘pain’ in the Iwaidja language.

*Viisaille viisauden* is Finnish for ‘to the wise, wisdom’. *Viisailta maailmalle* means ‘from the wise, to the world’.

The *nocht* Mark is my own invention; it reveals things which are hidden. Only physical things like secret doors and hidden safes, mind, or hairs on a shirt; not philosophical secrets or lies.

An onna-bugeisha was a kind of female warrior in feudal Japan, a member of the nobility. They get called female samurai a lot, which isn’t true—samurai were strictly male-only—although they often fought *alongside* samurai to defend their homes or answer the call to war. They’re absolutely fascinating and I urge anyone interested to go look them up!

UDHR is the acronym for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Kankurō is a character from *Naruto* who, among other things, uses magic to control human-sized—and-up puppets.

Olor is Latin for swan.
The songs in this chapter are; Nerves – Icon for Hire; First Time – Family Force Five; and Shatter Me – Lindsay Stirling & Lzzy Hale.
Woo, new chapter! Far shorter than the previous one, but I promise the next will be much, much longer.

I was determined to get you guys a new chapter this weekend, because tomorrow I'm going into surgery - I have an ovarian cyst that may, possibly, be cancerous. We'll know one way or the other after the surgery. I'll be recovering for a while, so there's likely to be a bit of a wait for the next chapter. Sorry! But I promise it'll be a good one.

I also want to say thank you to everyone who's been leaving reviews - I've been even worse than usual at replying, because this cyst has left me really, really sick. But I read and appreciate every one of them. Thank you so much for enjoying my stories, you guys - I love all of you so much <3

This chapter is mostly sexing and relationship talk, with a nice dose of angst in the middle. However, please bear in mind that my faeries are not human, and do not have human biology. Olianthe does not have the genitalia of a human cis-woman; please bear that in mind, and feel free to skip over the sex scene if it might bother you.

Hope you enjoy!

The crash of crystal on steel rang like the bells of Hell through the Seelie Court’s training hall, loud and arrhythmic. Some of the Court had gathered to watch, spider-silk dresses whispering to themselves as their wearers murmured to each other behind fans of glass and gold. The bells on their fingers chimed as they stroked exotic animals on velvet leashes—funnel-web spiders the size of kittens, fennec foxes in amber-studded collars, hummingbirds with gilded beaks, and other impossible pets.

Clary hit the ground and rolled as some of their audience laughed. The sound of it was like ringing glass and Clary ignored it, ignored the bruises, swept up to her feet with her sword a streak of silver in her hand and fell into a ready stance, braced for the next blow.

Olianthe smirked. “Good. Again!”

She lunged for Clary, and—

Clary dived aside at the last possible moment, heart in her throat, and didn’t grab Olianthe’s braid as it whipped past—she’d learnt the hard way that Seelie braided razors into their hair when they readied for battle. Instead she drove Buffy under Olianthe’s arm, aiming for her side, ducking away as Olianthe’s twin obsidian blades caught and deflected the blow with inhuman ease—darted back in and kicked out at Olianthe’s ankle—

Olianthe leapt over the kick, hart-like, her elbow cracking into Clary’s breastbone as she came back down and Clary let herself fall, defusing the force of the hit into a roll, and Olianthe was fast, so fast, a shooting star in her diamond armour—but Buffy was faster still. The fae-forged blade melted and re-formed in four nanoseconds and the unicorn crossguard became the butt of a gun, its sweeping
wings the trigger guard and hammer, the trigger curling around Clary’s finger like a wedding ring and Clary was up on her knees as Olianthe came in swinging and Clary—

Fired, and—

The *crunch* of the bullets French-kissing Olianthe’s armour ripped through the room like an earthquake.

Silence broke like a mirror. For a beat of a mortal heart, their audience seemed not to breathe.

Then Olianthe laughed. The razors in her hair glinted like silver fish in sun-struck water as she tossed her braid back, sheathing her swords in one elegant motion. Her armour was already pushing out the mangled bullets to drop *tink-tink* on the floor as she bent to give Clary a hand up.

“An excellent bout,” she said, lifting Clary to her feet. If she was put out to have lost, she gave no sign of it, and the gathered courtiers resumed their low-voiced chatter as she beamed down at Clary. “And an excellent trick! Had you used steel bullets, you might have killed me.”

She sounded unaccountably cheerful about this, but Clary was starting to get used to her princess’ odd ways. Namely, how much it delighted her when Clary proved herself capable, fierce, strong. Someone who didn’t need protecting.

“And that would be why I didn’t!” Clary said. “Killing you would really put a crimp in date night.”

“This is true,” Olianthe agreed solemnly, but her peacock-sheened eyes glittered with laughter. “I would not be able to escort you to *Guardian of the Moon* from beyond the grave.”

“And that would be sad.” Clary willed Buffy back into its default form—from handgun back to shortsword—and sheathed it inside its magnifying glass disguise. “I still can’t believe you’ve never eaten popcorn. What’s the good of immortality without popcorn?”

“We could ask a philosopher,” Olianthe suggested as the two of them walked from the sparring hall towards Olianthe’s apartments. “But I think them all entranced by some star shower this night.”

“It can probably wait,” Clary said, the easy, lazy banter doing as much as the practice session to smooth the knotted tension from her shoulders. “I don’t think it’s all that urgent, honestly.”

“Perhaps not.” The door to Olianthe’s rooms—white, rippling stone like a waterfall of milk made solid, decorated with an intricate design of stars and bluebells in a spray of pearl and sapphire—opened at the princess’ touch, and as always Olianthe stepped aside and gestured for Clary to enter first.

This was far from the first time Clary had seen Olianthe’s home—not the knowe, which was what Olianthe called her mother’s underground palace (and which was not, Clary understood vaguely, really underground at all, but a small world connected to but separate from the world Clary knew) but the suite of rooms that were all Olianthe’s own—and yet it never stopped taking her breath away. Once upon a time Olianthe’s *galon*—a word that meant something like ‘heart’ and something like ‘sacred space’—might have been a large cave, carved out of the same milk-white stone as her door, but now it was several rooms, and while the outer walls were still stone the dividing walls were of roses—roses red as blood and white as snow, pink as dawn and blue as a sigh, their stems woven into elegant arches that joined room to room. There were no real windows, but picture windows of stained glass shone like jewels in the stone walls, backlit by caged fireflies, forming murals like gems: a herd of unicorns galloping beneath a sky of midnight blue, three gold-and-crimson dragons flying in a circle on a green ground, a white sword half-emerged from a silver cauldron. Thick,
velvet-soft moss carpeted the stone floor, and the furniture seemed to grow out of it, trees guided by magic into the shapes of chairs and tables, a desk, a wardrobe, all graceful curving lines like splashing water, or the beating of wings. In a corner, a tiny dragon the size of a Chihuahua lay curled in a nest of brass necklaces and silver bracelets.

“Hey, Étaín!” Clary bent to tickle the dragonet’s head, smiling as the little creature purred and pushed into her fingers, wisps of smoke coming from its nostrils. “Lovely little dragon. Did you miss me, sweetie? I missed you. But look what I’ve got for you!”

From the pocket of her jacket, she proferred a single earring, a small golden hoop with a tiny heart charm dangling from it. Étaín chirruped her interest, her slender neck straightening to inspect the treasure, amber eyes widening. She was all over a creamy orange, dappled with white stripes and dots, and from her back spread a pair of wings like a monarch butterfly’s, not scaled and leathery but like toughened silk, shimmering all the colours of the rainbow and edged with more white spots. The frills tracing down her spine from head to tail were just as brightly coloured, the twin antennae sprouting from her delicate, finely-formed head iridescent. Her eyes were a little too big for her face, making her the absolute epitome of cute.

Now her wings fluttered with excitement, and she chirruped again, a questioning little trill that made Clary grin.

“Yep, all for you!”

Étaín’s wings stilled, and the little dragon tentatively wiggled closer. Then, when the human didn’t object, she carefully, delicately took the earring from between Clary’s fingers and retreated with it, purring like a kitten as she curled up around her new treasure, her small hoard shifting and clinking as she settled with it.

“You spoil her,” Olianthe said, but Clary could hear her smile.

“She deserves spoiling.” Clary straightened up and stretched. “Anyway, it’s not a big deal. I found it down the back of the sofa. No clue where its pair is. I think they were a gift from one of my mom’s friends; I definitely never wore ’em.”

Olianthe nodded. She was unbraiding her hair, setting each of the small, deadly razors knotted in it in a silver bowl as she found them. Clary had seen her do this a dozen times, and never once did the faerie cut herself. “Will you bathe before you go?”

“If you don’t mind,” Clary said. “But there’s no rush tonight.” She couldn’t keep the bitterness from her voice as she added, “There’s no Simon to wake, now.”

“That will make your lessons easier,” Olianthe said lightly. *Clink. Clink.* Two more razors in the bowl. “But you are not happy about this.”

Clary shook her head. “He’s gone to stay with the Shadowhunters. He thinks it’s too dangerous for him to live with me right now.”

“Is he wrong?” *Clink.*

“I don’t know,” Clary admitted. “He keeps having flashbacks, losing control of his powers, but I don’t think he’s any less likely to hurt Jace than he is me.”

“Perhaps he doubts your ability to defend yourself,” Olianthe said. “Why not tell him about our lessons?”
There was a question. Why not tell Simon that she’d been training with Olianthe almost as long as he had with Jace? That every night, when she ostensibly went to the bathroom, she was really having her faerie girlfriend teleport her across the city for magical self-defence classes? That for every minute she was in the bathroom, two or three hours passed in the knowe, plenty of time for Olianthe to teach her how to use the sword she’d given Clary?

_Because this is mine_, Clary thought. _Because this little bit of magic is something I don’t want to share. Not yet_. It was a difficult, unnerving realisation to face; not the least bit logical. But there it was. These nightly trips to faerieland were _hers_, something beautiful and magical that she didn’t have to share with anyone. Sparring with Olianthe, learning how powerful her body really was, glimpsing the princess’ Seelie secrets—these things were thrills, wonders, things to treasure.

Was it so wrong that she didn’t feel ready to tell other people about them yet?

“I’m training with him and Jace too,” Clary said finally. “If it was really about my being able to defend myself, that would be enough. But it isn’t. And… I like that this is just ours. It’s this beautiful secret I can carry around with me all day.” She looked at Olianthe. “I don’t want to lose that feeling yet.”

Olianthe dipped her head, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

_and he should trust me without knowing about these sessions_, Clary thought. _He should trust himself_. It was a stupid, immature thing to be upset about, him moving out, but wishing never unbruised a heart. “I’m going to wash up,” she said, annoyed with Simon, annoyed with herself.

Before she reached the doorway, Olianthe was abruptly behind her. Clary felt and heard the soft displacement of the air, but the princess didn’t touch her to get her attention. She never did, never laid a finger on Clary without permission, and Clary didn’t know if it was a faerie thing or an Olianthe thing, but she liked it.

Now, without touching her, Olianthe said, “You are not helpless, Clary.”

The simple statement cut through the messy tangle of emotion like a sword through a Gordian Knot, catching in Clary’s throat as it struck truth like a blade meeting stone. Because there, of course, it was, the real reason for the unsettled, deformed misery she’d been so eager to sweat out on the sparring floor; her own helplessness in Pandemonium tonight, her pathetic _weakness_. Her enraged frustration with the flashbacks and nightmares that only Olianthe knew about, because Simon had enough crap to deal with without shovelling Clary’s on top of it. He would blame himself and let the guilt crush him if he knew, so he didn’t know—but goddesses, she was so sick of feeling this fear, of being afraid.

And then, to hear—’You are not helpless, Clary.’

Faeries couldn’t lie.

“I need a bath,” Clary said shakily. “I’m gross.”

This time, Olianthe let her go, saying nothing as Clary ducked through the princess’ bedroom—past a bed that hung suspended from the ceiling by ropes of white roses, curtained by wisteria—and into the bathing chamber.

Unlike the rest of Olianthe’s apartment, the bathing chamber was undecorated, austere in its simple grace. The white stone ceiling was lower here than in the other rooms, the walls unpolished, mimicking a natural cave. Bioluminescent mosses and blossoms cast their blue-green light on the
deep spring-fed pool that was Olianthe’s bath, meeting that of the glowing crystals scattered along its bottom. The toilet—fully functional, if a bit archaic in appearance—was in another, smaller adjoining chamber, but Clary didn’t need that now.

She stripped without fanfare, leaving her clothes in a heap outside the cavern. The air was warm on her skin as she climbed down the steps into the water, sighing a little as the bliss of the warm water kissed her bruises. Whatever was in it, she never ached from her training sessions after bathing here, her bruises always gone by the time she reached for a towel. Whether that was because of magic or minerals, it slid silk-like up her thighs and hips and waist until she was immersed up to her chest in water clear as glass.

And then, taking a breath, she dived.

*Being stolen out of Simon’s rucksack, cold fingers closing around her fragile mouse-body—*

*Raphael’s blood in her mouth—*

*The werewolves crashing through the windows, a dark tide of fur and fang—*

*Hodge standing over a prone Simon with a chakram in his hand—*

*The burst of red and grey and white as she pulls the trigger, blows a man’s face away—*

*Valentine’s face when he looks at her, indifferent, unimpressed, cold as ice—*

*Wash it all away.*

Clary burst out of the water with a gasp, hair plastered to her skin. She imagined every nightmarish memory trapped in one of the beads of water dripping like diamonds from her arms, falling away from her and into the pool. She imagined the magic in the water dissolving them, unmaking them, and willed it true.

She ducked her head under the water again. When she came up for air this time, she took some of the powder from the scallop-shell bowl at the pool’s edge, worked it up into a lather, and started washing her hair.

She wasn’t helpless. Intellectually, she knew that. She’d saved Simon from Hodge, saved all the Shadowhunters from Abbadon—Kore, even as a mouse she’d been the one to find their escape route out of the Dumort! She was freaking amazing, was what she was.

But all the evidence in the world, all the logical thinking, couldn’t undo the memory of the fear. Fear of the vampires. Fear of Abbadon. Fear of Hodge, of Valentine. Fear for Simon.

That was why she trained with Olianthe: so that when she was afraid, she could do something about it. So that she could stand back-to-back with Simon the next time some big bad crawled out of the woodwork. So that she wouldn’t be left behind as a useless mundane.

So that the next time she saw Valentine, she wouldn’t miss.

She rinsed her hair. The water remained perfectly clear, and would no matter how much soap she used.

When she rose her head out of the water, Olianthe was standing in the doorway. Her eyes were closed, her fingers resting on the arch, anchoring her without sight. The dark green body-suit that went under her armour revealed every lean, lithe inch of her, more surely than if she’d worn nothing
at all, and Clary felt her mouth go dry.

“May I join you?” Olianthe asked—calmly, evenly, and Clary blinked, remembering where they were. Remembering, suddenly, that she was naked.

She paused, considered.

“Yes,” she said slowly. “I think you may.”

Olianthe opened her eyes. And stared.

Clary lifted her chin slightly, doing nothing to cover herself. She’d expected to feel nervous, but now that the moment was here there were no nerves to feel. Only a rich, simmering pleasure breaking through her like a dawn at the look on Olianthe’s face.

Everywhere her eyes touched, Clary turned to gold.

Without a word, without looking away, Olianthe slipped free of her clothes, the green silk peeling away like a second skin to lie discarded on the floor, and in the charged air it felt like an offering, like something given up to a goddess. Clary’s stomach tightened even as the rest of her grew soft and warm, taking in the sight Olianthe made without shame. This was the first time she had seen it.

Beneath her clothes, Olianthe was hard and lean, arms and legs sculpted as if stone, the colour of honey and milk. What curves she had were curves of muscle; her breasts were small, the line from waist to hips almost straight, ethereally androgynous in a way that caught Clary’s breath. Faint scars, like silver shadows, dappled the moonstone-lustre of her skin, the marks of claws and teeth and ancient blades, and they only highlighted the fey beauty of her, emphasised the strength and grace inherent in Clary’s warrior princess.

Her hair, unbound, fell around her like mist, like sunlight.

There was nothing Clary could say that would not break this moment, nothing that would not sound trite or cliché in the face of Olianthe’s unselfconscious glory. So instead of speaking, Clary held out her hands, drops of water sparkling on her skin like gems in the dim, unearthly light of the cave.

And Olianthe—hunting cat, warrior, princess of the Seelie—joined her. She walked to the edge of the pool as if approaching something holy, descended the steps with her impossible eyes fixed on Clary. The ripples as she entered the water brushed Clary’s body like the caress of lips, her hair pooling around her like molten topaz. Clary did not flinch, or quail, or shiver as Olianthe took her hands, strong fingers curling securely around Clary’s wrists, calluses brushing Clary’s damp skin.

“Dall ǧe Dôn,” Olianthe said finally, hoarsely, “le haghaidh mé ar d’iníon.” Her pupils were narrow slashes of black as she gazed at Clary, sharp ebony points against shimmering sapphire, emerald, yellow diamond. The eyes of a creature older than any human, and she stared at Clary as if, as if…

“And what does that mean?” Clary asked softly.

Olianthe brought Clary’s hands to her lips, turning them over to kiss Clary’s knuckles. Slow, and light, and Clary felt each touch reverberate in her bones. “ ‘Blind me, Goddess,’” the princess murmured, “ ‘for I look upon your daughter.’”

Oh. Oh.

“Sweet-talker,” Clary whispered. Her pulse beat hard beneath Olianthe’s lips. Gently, she pulled her
hands from Olianthe’s and raised them to the faerie’s face, pausing before she touched skin. “May I?”

In answer, Olianthe pushed her cheek against Clary’s fingertips. And when Clary curled her hands around her head and pulled her down, Olianthe came willing.

It was a kiss, not a spell. There was no fire, no fireworks; the earth did not shake. But the sound Olianthe made against her mouth seared emerald fire down Clary’s spine, and the faerie’s lips were soft, so soft, calla lilies stroking her, winding her tight. Heat ached between her thighs, gold wire and gold sparks knotting around each other in time with her heartbeat and Clary tangled her fingers in that river of hair demandingly, pulling Olianthe closer, shiver-hungry for more. The water rippled and shifted around them, waves born from their desire dancing out to the edges of the pool as Olianthe stepped closer, curving into her, their bodies meeting skin-to-skin for the first time, careful and electric; Olianthe’s body smooth and hard against hers, hairless where Clary had curls, her hand falling to Clary’s waist and the other to her back, stroking up her spine, stroking her closer—and Clary went, lips parting, stroking her tongue into Olianthe’s mouth and tasting honey and cinnamon, the warmth of the water and Olianthe’s body melting into her skin, catching in her breasts, her stomach, her hands, the sweet, aching pressure between her legs…

Olianthe was still stroking her, faerie fingers tracing the curve of her spine over and over, learning the arc of her waist, her hip, her outer thigh, and Clary broke away from Olianthe’s lips to kiss her jaw instead, tracing it up to the princess’ pointed ear. She wanted to touch, and did, let her hands explore the sweep of Olianthe’s collarbone, the swells of her breasts; Olianthe made a sound like a growl when her thumb brushed a nipple, and without thinking Clary did it again, pinching it gently, nuzzling Olianthe’s throat and dragging her teeth across silky-smooth skin—

With a low hoarse sound, Olianthe scooped her up, lifting Clary from the back of her thighs and carrying them both into deeper water, the warm buoyancy lifting her as surely as Olianthe’s hands and Clary gasped, wrapping her legs around Olianthe’s waist and wanting, sharply, terribly; she caught Olianthe’s mouth and kissed her hard, pressing forward with her hips, clutching at Olianthe’s shoulder and back and aching so badly, so sweetly, to be touched all over, for hands on her breasts, to have something inside her—

“Clary—” Olianthe gasped between kisses, rough and hungry and wonder-struck, and no one who could make a faerie princess sound that way was helpless, Clary was so full of power she might spontaneously combust, pool of water or no pool of water, “álainn, réalta croí, anwylaf—”

This was as far as they’d ever come before—even though the first time without their clothes—but this time Clary didn’t want to stop, mesmerised by the water-aided slide of skin on skin, lost in the lush taste of Olianthe’s mouth. The jut of her shoulder blades under Clary’s hands, the way her calluses dragged over Clary’s skin—she wanted to feel them inside her, stroking against her softness, filling her up and up, gods it would feel so fucking good—

She bit her lip—bit Olianthe’s lip—licked the sting and rocked her hips hard, wanting pressure, wanting something pushed against and into the ache driving her crazy—

Fuck it.

“I want—” Damn it, how did you say this, how did these words leave your lips, she could fucking taste them but they felt so weird to say—and that was ridiculous, why should it be embarrassing, she, just, “‘Lianthe, I want…”

Olianthe licked her lower lip, and Clary shivered, praying that she wasn’t blushing. “Tell me,” Olianthe murmured, the words kissed into Clary’s mouth. Honey-sweet, they burned like smoke.
“I want you to make me come,” Clary said, rejecting her own shyness, the part of her that balked at making the unladylike demand. *Whatever a lady does is ladylike and damn it, this lady wants to fuck her datemate!* “I want you to get me off. I want your fingers inside me, ‘Lianthe, can that possibly be arranged?”

The faerie girl hissed, snake-like, and her pupils were obsidian needles as she looked at Clary with such a surge of helpless-hungry-fervent-want.

“My lady’s wish,” she said hoarsely, “is mine own.”

They kissed again—Clary kissed her faerie princess because the look on her face was too much, too intense, too terribly beautiful to accept—and Clary felt herself moved through the water, felt Olianthe carrying her back into the shallows. She never set a foot wrong, never slipped or stumbled, and Clary knew a deep, visceral thrill at Olianthe’s strength, her grace, the sensation of muscles pulling taut against Clary’s body in interesting ways—

Olianthe carried her out of the pool, the water streaming off them, wet hair sticking to skin in an unattractive mess but who cared, and the kiss came apart like two halves of a locket as Olianthe went to her knees to lay Clary down on a pile of thick, soft towels that definitely hadn’t been there a minute ago, and Clary didn’t care about that either. She just pulled Olianthe down for another kiss and ran her hands all over the faerie’s incredible, beautiful body, raking with her nails, biting, sucking, thumbing Olianthe’s nipples until she moaned into Clary’s mouth.

And Olianthe—Clary had her legs wrapped around Olianthe’s hips, insistent, impatient, and Olianthe’s caresses were only making it worse, making it better, stroking down her sides and thighs again and again, touching her like she was a treasure, something sacred. She left Clary’s lips and kissed her way down Clary’s chest, gently unlocking Clary’s legs from around her; her mouth closed around Clary’s nipple and Clary nearly choked, gasping, her hands flying to Olianthe’s hair to hold her there, because oh gods that should be weird but it wasn’t, it was so good, a white-hot line directly to her clit and Olianthe’s fingers were right there, sword-calluses stroking feather-light over Clary’s thigh, brushing the curls of her mons and that was shivery too, shivery-good, so gentle—

“For ’raidia’s sake, go on!" Clary ordered, a little more desperate than she’d meant to be but gods damn it if Olianthe didn’t hurry up—

But Olianthe laughed, low and soft. “I do not know how,” she said without shame, and oh, of course she didn’t—she’d never had a human lover before, she’d told Clary that the night she gave her the magnifying glass. Clary had to show her, and something like embarrassment threatened but Clary refused it; there was no reason to be embarrassed, to be shy. Olianthe was not lessened by her ignorance, and Clary wanted that same bravery for herself, that alien innocence that made her think of Lilith in the Garden—not naïveté but animalism, pure and prideless as fire, glorying and unashamed. So she took it, grasped it, embraced it; she breathed a laugh of her own and curled her hand around ’Lianthe’s, “Like this,” drawing her fingers to Clary’s clit, guiding them into stroking her. “Gently at first. Don’t break me.”

Olianthe dropped her mouth to Clary’s ear. “I will not,” she breathed, and Clary felt it shiver through her like stardust on her skin.

*Faeries can’t lie.*

And, oh, it was better and worse than doing it herself, stranger and more searing, so that Clary felt every caress echoed deep inside her. Olianthe didn’t know Clary’s body but she learned quickly, her thumb and fingers exploring as if she could taste Clary through her fingertips, those fingertips with their satiny calluses working Clary in firm, silken circles just the way she liked. Clary bit her lip until
Olianthe’s tongue flicked over her teeth, and then she moaned, taking herself aback with the sound but unable to take it back, the soft little noise just spilling out of her and 'Lianthe purred in answer, purred like a cat, a deep rumble in her throat that made Clary squirm in a good way, the best way. She could feel herself, wet and growing wetter, aching to be breached and thrust into and filled, the steady-slow-thorough motion of Olianthe’s fingers spiralling pleasure tighter and tighter, screwing the ache deeper between her legs.

She still had her hand on 'Lianthe’s and she traced her fingers over 'Lianthe’s, pushing the faerie’s middle finger down towards her vaia. Olianthe bestowed kisses like jewels on Clary’s cheeks and jaw and lips, and went willingly, eagerly even; Clary felt the faerie’s whole body shudder when she found Clary slick and soft, heard 'Lianthe make a hoarse, surprised sound.


It made Clary throb beneath her fingers.

Olianthe drew back to look at her, and Clary forgot to be uncomfortable, forgot to be awkward with Olianthe’s peacock gaze stroking over her body like hands, like silken feathers. Keeping her thumb on Clary’s clit, the princess gently nudged Clary’s thigh, a request without words, and Clary spread her legs wider without thinking about it, without needing to, letting Olianthe look at her.

“So different,” Olianthe murmured. She stroked a fingertip between Clary’s labia, exploring, flicking her attention from Clary’s sex to her face and back again, watching her reactions. “How am I to please you best?”

“Here.” Clary raised her hips a little, drew Olianthe’s hand to her vaia again. “Just one finger at first. Gently—”

She drew Olianthe in, and felt her pleasure twist and flare as 'Lianthe groaned, shocked and amazed by the wet velvet heat of Clary’s body. That made it Clary’s turn to purr, pleased and almost smug, and her free hand slid into 'Lianthe’s hair, pulled her half on top of Clary again, gold hair spilling around them like a curtain and the narrow slashes of those elven pupils almost invisible, almost gone as Olianthe slid deeper into her, fell into Clary as though she were drowning. They kissed, clumsy with it, and Clary moaned a little against her mouth, amazed by how good it felt, 'Lianthe’s calluses skimming against her inner walls like satin against silk, thrilling and unfamiliar and stunning, searing. It was hot and close and intimate, not her own hand or a toy but another person entirely, this beautiful faerie princess clasped inside her and hanging on her every word, “good, now move, just in and out, yes, like that—” And oh gods, the look in those eyes, Clary had to clench hers shut and breathe as Olianthe thrust in and out of her so sweetly, gradually going faster as Clary urged her to, Clary doing nothing so elegant and controlled as rocking her hips but squirming against her, restless, breathless, stunned by the raw real immediacy of it, this princess who thought Clary was strong, was brave, touching her, inside her—

She raised her hips, panting and cursing and not caring, not caring because Olianthe gave her what she wanted, pushed a second finger into her alongside the first and yes, fuck yes, Clary’s toes curled at the long, sweet thrusts, the ache of want, the stretch of it—not much, her toy at home was bigger, thicker, but when she peeked through her eyelashes Olianthe was still watching her, dropped down to kiss her when she saw Clary looking, her tongue stroking into Clary’s mouth like her fingers into Clary’s sex and Clary trembled, dug her nails into Olianthe’s back and rocked into her, chasing it, the ache the stretch the friction, feeling herself fraying apart on Olianthe’s fingers and loving it, amazed by it, hungry for it—she could feel her orgasm building, her inner sky lightening with the prelude of the sun’s dawning, and when Olianthe curled her fingers Clary nearly shouted, made some other nameless sound instead, almost keening. Their kisses became clumsier, just brushes of lips on lips...
and panting breath and finally Clary pushed Olianthe’s thumb away, got her own fingers on her clit and did it right, hard, frantic, Olianthe’s fingers strong and sure and long inside her, in and out of her, and her face, her eyes—

Clary shattered, a hundred thousand pieces exploding away from each other. She came silently, only gasping a little, feeling Olianthe’s fingers suddenly thicker and harder as she tightened down on them, the fullness heightening every drop of bliss, pushing it further, making it sharper. Supernovas, and her body shuddering, her insides contracting over and over around Olianthe, sweetly, terribly.

When she came back to reality, Olianthe was whispering what sounded like poetry in her ear, in a language the stars might have spoken before humans learned to make fire, and Clary kissed her and kissed her and kissed her.

“Show me how to do that to you,” she ordered, when she could breathe, and Olianthe grinned at her as they swapped positions.

Clary had known since that first moment of seeing Olianthe naked that the faerie princess had different parts between her legs; that was fine, that didn’t matter. It only meant that Olianthe had to show her, guide her, a little more than if they had had the same plumbing—and even then Clary wouldn’t have known how she liked to be touched, how hard, how fast. This wasn’t so different. Olianthe’s biology was alien, but not unbeautiful; Clary caught her breath a little as the silken seam between ‘Lianthe’s thighs opened under her fingers, all soft petals and fronds pale and lustrous as pearls. It was more like watching a kudupul blossom than anything mammalian, starry and so soft around its inner whorls, an artist’s rendition of what genitalia should be. It made Clary shy of her own, glad her orgasm had come first; in the back of her mind she wondered if Olianthe had arranged that deliberately, if she had known or guessed that beside faerie perfection humanity could only be imperfect.

Olianthe’s eyes, multi-hued fire watching her, did not seem to consider Clary imperfect.

The flames there warmed Clary, heated her blood to simmering, brushed aside her petty insecurities as meaningless, worthless. She turned her finger gently, like a key in a lock, coaxing the pale silky petals of her datemate’s body open for her, stroking the star-burst calyxes with another fingertip. When it made Olianthe shudder she did it again, watching ‘Lianthe’s gaze glaze, fascination and a sense of heady power setting sparks to tinder; Clary laid her whole hand gently against ‘Lianthe’s splayed sex, fingers outspread—and knew she’d guessed right when the slender fronds wrapped instantly and firmly around her fingers and hand, when Olianthe made a sound that was almost a cry and fell back against the towels, eyes closed and lips parted, stunned.

“You’re made to fit together, aren’t you?” Clary asked, her voice gone low and rich. Another faerie’s parts would lock together with Olianthe’s, lace like clasped hands, but evidently an actual hand worked near as well; she hardly needed Olianthe’s shaky nod to tell her so. “You’re beautiful,” Clary said, meaning it. Meaning it so much.

Olianthe’s parts throbbed against her hand, the little bead-like nodes at their tips velvety where they wrapped around her. They flexed, tightening and loosening, tightening and loosening again, and Clary thought of her own body clasping her toy at home as she came.

She bent her head and teased her tongue between her fingers, and grinned against Olianthe when she made that sound again, that delirious-desperate noise that made Clary’s insides clench tight and warm. It was even better when ‘Lianthe reached tentatively for her, and Clary moved her head into the faerie’s hand, let herself be held. ‘Lianthe’s fingers twisted in her hair, never tightly enough to hurt but tigh enough; it was thrillingly delicious to be clutched tight or pulled closer when a curl of her tongue shook her faerie princess to her core. When she squeezed with her hand—gently,
carefully—Olianthe squeezed back, and moaned, and slick gathered under the heel of Clary’s palm. Sucking the little tendrils—the thickest were maybe half the width of her little finger—into her mouth didn’t do much, but nipping lightly at them did, made Olianthe convulse and keen and open, another, inner seam unlocking under Clary’s hand.

“Is this okay?” Clary murmured, gently touching a fingertip to the newly-revealed hole. “Should I leave this alone? What do you want me to do, 'Lianthe?”

“It is okay.” Olianthe’s voice was nearly a whisper, hoarse and hungry. “It is very okay. Clary…”

Olianthe showed her what she wanted, and Clary was only too happy to oblige, turning her hand so her fingers were still laced with the tendrils but her thumb was down, could push into 'Lianthe slow and sweet and careful and make the princess moan. Clary was hard-pressed not to copy her, biting her lip to be quiet: 'Lianthe was soft inside, not like a human vaia but lined with what felt like hundreds of silky filaments, wet and warm and stroking Clary back. If someone had described it to her beforehand it would have sounded creepy, but it wasn’t, it wasn’t at all; strange, yes, but it was Olianthe, which made it strangely hot instead of not.

Clary moved her thumb in a slow circle, marveling at the way it made Olianthe shudder and clench tight. Exploring carefully, she found a hard little bud nestled among the silkiness like a pearl buried in an anemone’s velvet-soft fronds; brushing it made Olianthe arch and her outer tendrils lock around Clary’s hands almost painfully, both of them gasping.

“What’s this?” Clary asked, grinning once she had her breath back, and touched it again, lightly, so lightly: it still tore a keen from between Olianthe’s teeth, made her pupils narrow to hair-thinness, barely visible at all.

“Cholpan,” 'Lianthe said. “So it is called.” She grinned up at Clary, a fierce, delighted thing. “I have several.”

Clary raised her eyebrows, feeling her grin widen. “Is that so?” She crooked her thumb, and the faerie’s fey expression broke apart into something wild. “Shall we see if I can find them all?”

She did. With a little help. With her thumb, and fingers, and tongue, Clary learned Olianthe’s body and took her apart, piece by piece, tracing the constellation of little gems inside 'Lianthe with her fingertips, lapping at the whorls of her, teasing out her secrets. The nodes were cholpanei, the warm passage baltu, the fronds lining it irniri; the outer tendrils were pirae, and the second, hidden opening that didn’t open but quivered under Clary’s tongue was 'Lianthe’s sikkuru, where her arnara was hidden away, an organ that didn’t interest them today.

But there would be other times. Plenty of them.

That was as far as the two of them got with the language lesson, because Clary was kissing and licking 'Lianthe’s sikkuru and sliding another finger inside her, and another, swapping out her thumb for a third, nudging and teasing those sweet little bumps, touching three of them at once, working them like Clary would her own clit and Olianthe’s thighs were locked around Clary’s head, the muscles in her legs jumping, trembling, the pool-room filled with the satin-ribbon sound of her cursing-begging in some foreign tongue, her hips rocking against Clary’s face, her hand, her whole body curved like an elven bow as she arched—

She made Clary’s name into an invocation as she came, turned it into something holy, something powerful and blinding and Clary’s other hand was between her own legs, barely needing to touch herself before she followed Olianthe down, two comets streaking from the sky and crashing in fire and gold to earth.
Later, when Clary had washed again and the two of them were curled together in Olianthe’s hanging bed, Êtaín coiled in a knot by their feet, Clary asked something that had been in the back of her mind since her datemate had stripped naked for her.

“Is it all right to call you a girl?” She was braiding 'Lianthe’s hair for her as it dried; nothing as fancy as the faerie styles she’d seen in the knowe, just a simple plait. “I assumed, and then Izzy called you a princess… But the rest of the People don’t call you that, do they? And I don’t actually know anything about how the Seelie see gender. I’ve just been assuming you’re like humans, but even we aren’t actually binary, so… Are you going to answer me, or are you enjoying seeing how deep a hole I can dig for myself?”

Olianthe laughed, and bent to kiss her, lightly, sweetly. “But you dig so prettily.” She grinned when Clary pretended to swat her. “You must help me, dear one. How is one determined a girl, among humans?”

Without letting go of the plait, Clary shrugged a little helplessly. “You’re a girl if you decide you’re one. Same if you’re a boy, or both, or neither. Some people switch back and forth. But you’re the one who has to decide. Nobody ‘determines’ you except you.”

“Then I will be a girl, for that is what you are, and I would ever be as near to you as I can be.” And she kissed Clary again, softly, and fervently, and this time Clary let the plait slip through her fingers, forgotten.

Simon had to admit to feeling distinctly out of place as he approached the building that was the Sariel agela’s new home. Most of those out at this time of night were too distracted to pay the genderbending quasi-punk much attention, but between the faded jeans and the pink in his hair, Simon didn’t exactly blend in. This was a neighbourhood for the rich and famous, for pop stars and movie producers and cars worth more than Clary’s house, and he couldn’t lose the feeling that everyone was watching him, judging him. He was very aware that he didn’t even have a key to Alec’s apartment as he pushed through the glass doors into the marble-floored lobby.

Jace had assured him via text that an opening rune would do the trick—the ward builders are coming tomorrow, apparently—but Simon was still feeling nervous enough to jump when the concierge waved him over.

Vampire, Simon realised as he walked to the desk, and wondered how he knew. The woman was impeccably dressed in a dark uniform, her blonde hair put up in a perfect chignon, and although her skin had something of the sheen of the marble floor, it wasn’t obvious until you came close. But Simon had known before he’d seen that.

Shadowhunter. The thought of that—of being bred to spot non-human beings, bred to kill them—sickened him. They were just like dogs, in the end—hunting dogs, and the Clave held the leash. And puts them down when they’re no longer useful, Simon thought darkly, thinking, briefly, of the punishment Jace faced for being with him.

“Mr Fray?” the concierge asked.

Simon blinked, and shoved all thoughts of the Clave away. “Yes?” His nerves made it a question. It had been a while since anyone but Clary called him Fray.
But the vampire only smiled, and proffered a key. “Mr Lightwood said you were to have this.”

Oh. “Thanks,” Simon said, relieved. Thank the Time Lords for Alec, the only one of them with any sense. Simon took the key, and made sure not to flinch at the concierge’s cold hand. He smiled at her instead. “Have a good night,” he offered.

“You too, sir.” Her fangs, when she smiled, were even whiter than her skin.

Sir. That was a new one.

Less than five minutes later he walked into the apartment, pocketing the key carefully—the last thing he wanted to do was lose it. The brownie housekeeping service must have been by, because there was real food in the kitchen, and Simon made himself a sandwich, trying to ignore the heavy weight of the silent, empty rooms. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been alone like this. Couldn’t decide if he liked it or not.

He cleaned up—brownies or no brownies, his mom had raised him to tidy his own messes—and headed upstairs for a quick shower before bed.

It happened when he saw his reflection.

He’d only meant to glance at the mirror in passing, not especially interested in seeing Clary’s makeup wizardry again—but the newly sharp angles in his face caught him, made him pause, and look again without meaning to. The makeup had held up well under Pandemonium’s lights and the sweat, and Simon had the disorientating, vertiginous feeling that the reflection looking back at him wasn’t his own—that the feral androgyny belonged to someone else—someone who wore his, Simon’s, face as a pale mask. And the mask was coming apart.

Simon didn’t remember putting his hands on the sink, but the cold porcelain half-burned his palms; he didn’t remember leaning into the mirror, but his lips were only a breath away from the glass. He didn’t remember the world dropping away, but now he couldn’t find it, couldn’t see anything beyond the eyes looking back at him—the pupils swelling, growing, breaking like a sea to swallow everything and everyone and stars spilled through the blackness, a thousand thousand stars, suns and moons and planets dancing in rings of light and dust and gravity—

“Dsirgil ita oi maninriiax?” the face in the mirror whispered, and Simon was falling, falling into the stars—

—What dream is this?

—and the stars showed him—

—magpie-winged Nurma asleep in a hammock, aers wings hanging down to either side, that milk-silver hair spread over aers bare chest, the navel-less belly—

—singing with every spark of being, twining around other singers like strands of DNA and the Song is everything, the Song is light and life and love—

—a war between stars, between suns, the very matter of reality forged into weapons as the Song becomes a Scream of hate and rage and seraphfire sears whole worlds to ash—

—“We’ve seen you watching, Watcher,” Sirath says, vir draconic wings tilted open trustingly, vir tail flicking lightly, playfully against xyr leg—

—voices screaming, halls of glass and moonstone full of smoke and blood and corpses and they’re
Reality hit like a truck; Simon staggered against the sink, clutching it as tightly as he could though his bones felt like snow inside him, cold and melting away. He was shaking badly, gagging on copper; dark blood dripped from his nose onto the white porcelain, came from his mouth when he spat to clear it. He coughed and coughed and the blood just kept coming up, searing his throat like acid, and Jesus Christ where was it coming from, what inside him was bleeding, breaking? He stared through watering eyes at the sink and the blood splatter was a Rorschach test, twisting and writhing against the white ceramic, demons screaming in a haze of crimson wings and fire, screaming at him—

—**ADOKAZ-AOI, NAZKSAD-ENAIKAT-DË**—

It ripped through him like a bomb going off, a nuclear warhead detonating inside his skull; Simon dropped, clutching his head as he hit the floor, every cell of his body on fire and shrieking at him, breaking open and white light spilling from the fractures, burning sun-bright against the walls, the whole world shaking as a creature older than universes roared from a throat that had swallowed nebulas:

—**DSIRGIL ITA OI MANINRIIAX?**—

Simon shattered, screaming, and everything went blissfully, finally black.

* *

When he came to, it was sluggishly, glacially, and he was still on the bathroom floor.

For a while, Simon just lay still, unable to face the thought of moving. His body felt wrung out, hollow and fragile, spun glass spiderwebbed with cracks. If he moved, he would break again, he just knew it.

God. God. Was this going to keep happening? This was the second episode in 48 hours, and this time he was alone, with no one else to help him. There was no one to pick him off the floor and carry him to bed this time, to make sure he wasn’t concussed, hadn’t choked on his own blood. The near miss of it—the realisation of how close he’d come to hitting his head just wrong, of drowning in his own blood—chilled him. There’d been nothing but luck to ensure he woke up again.

And twice in two days… Twice in two days meant it wasn’t a one-off. Meant it would probably happen again. That voice, those bear-trap visions, the agony that defied all description—he started to shake, thinking about going through that again, a frantic, maddened dread clawing at his throat like a live thing so that he had to clench his teeth to hold in the scream of denial-no-please-please-please, I can’t do that again, I can’t, I can’t, please!

*Is this going to kill me?* His throat burned, and he closed his eyes to hold the tears in, his chest locking up, tightening. *Is that it? Am I going to keep having these fucking visions until they kill me?* He saw himself burning up like paper around the angel at his heart, turned to ashes by that seraphfire, and fought back a sob.

It made sense though, didn’t it? How could something mortal contain something that wasn’t? The pain, the blood, the visions that shredded through his mind—how arrogant, to expect that he could survive this, sustain this for any length of time. Wasn’t he already fraying, fragmenting under the pressure? Twisting into something dark, something *wrong*, something that laughed at murder and grew hungry at the sight of fear—and what had he expected? That a fragile, breakable mortal could hold the soulsearing star of an angel and not break apart around it? What a joke. What a sad, pathetic joke.
He cried, for a little while. Exhausted, burnt inside his mind, his mouth coated in copper; he couldn’t help it. The thought of it just never fucking ending, weeks or months or years of waiting for this to happen again—not able to stop it or control it, able to do nothing but scream as the angel tore him apart over and over, piece by piece—until it did end, finally, when there was nothing left of him to break—it was too much.

And there was no fucking reason for it. Why? Why was it happening, why was the angel doing this, why wouldn’t it stop—

What do you want from me? He thought at it, at the angel; angrily, desperately. Screaming at it. What do you fucking want?

The silence was deafening.

Eventually, he had to get up. There was no other option; he couldn’t lie on the floor forever, or until Jace came home and found him there. Jace had enough shit to deal with without this too. And what could Jace do, if Simon called him now? Rush home and worry? He couldn’t help, and that, that helplessness, would hurt him so much. No, better for Simon to keep his mouth shut. To wash the blood away himself, and rinse the sink out with soap so Jace wouldn’t smell the copper later. Better to shower, clothes abandoned in a corner and the hot water pummelling down, and remind himself that someone would have told him if those possessed by angels died of it. Jace could not have hidden it from him, could not have kept that knowledge out of his eyes and his touch and his kisses, but Simon had tasted no desperate poison in him these last weeks. Because it wasn’t there.

But Jace might not know, a cruel voice whispered. And the one who would—Magnus—remember how he looked at you after Abigor, when you came out of the bedroom—the look on his face—

Simon leaned his forehead against the shower wall, too tired to cry again, and wished the water would drown him.

He woke for the second time that night when the front door opened downstairs. Again, it was a slow waking, but this time it was soft and comfortable, drifting towards wakefulness in bits and pieces like scraps of silk and velvet. It took him a long, dreamy moment to remember his episode in the bathroom, and when he did he remembered it like a bad dream, the kind that faded to nothing but a sour taste when you woke up. It was impossible to feel shaken, to remember the fear of it, when he could hear Jace and his agela coming in from a long night on patrol, real and alive and eminently reassuring.

He was almost asleep again by the time he recognised the footsteps in the corridor, and smiled to himself.

His door whispered as it opened, spilling light from the hallway across the floor. His back to the door, Simon didn’t move, didn’t speak, knowing that Jace could hear from his breathing that he was awake.

Sure enough, he heard Jace come in, closing the door behind him and coming over, climbing onto the bed. Simon held his eyes closed as Jace’s lips brushed his cheek. “You need a shower,” he murmured.

Jace snorted. “Good morning to you too,” he whispered back, and Simon could hear his grin.

“We really need to have a talk about your flawed definition of ‘morning’.” Simon rolled over to face
his lover, trying and failing to put a serious face on. “It’s starting to worry me, this insistence that midnight equals morning.”

“It’s not midnight.” Jace lay propped on his elbow, and even in the dark Simon could glean the fondness in his face. “It’s four a.m. Morning.”


“Your own fault,” Jace replied without missing a beat. “You’re contagious.”

“I’m taking that as a compliment,” Simon declared, and Jace laughed, and leaned in to kiss him.

“I’ll go shower,” Jace murmured, brushing his thumb over Simon’s cheek as he pulled away.

“I will be here,” Simon told him solemnly, and Jace laughed again, low and warm, as he left the bed.

A minute later Simon heard the shower running, and he closed his eyes. A tension he hadn’t been aware of melted away with the familiar, domestic sounds coming from the bathroom; Jace was home again, safe and sound. He wouldn’t have been so at ease if Alec or Izzy were hurt, so they must be fine too. Clary had texted hours ago when she made it home. Everyone was fine.

Could this ever be his life? He wondered suddenly. A boyfriend in the shower, a bed they shared, their own apartment… Was that ever going to be in the cards for him and Jace? The question soured the simple contentment of just a moment before. It was something he actively avoided thinking about, but the terrible understanding that had hit in the wake of his vision earlier dragged its razor claws gently through his thoughts—where was this going? Where could it go? They were brothers—there was nowhere in the world that would accept what they were to each other. There was no rainbow flag for incest.

What would they tell Jocelyn, when she eventually woke up? How could they tell her? If she looked at Simon the way Luke had… If she was disgusted by him, if she thought he was sick… He didn’t know if he could bear it.

They would always have to lie. Always.

And even if they did—even if they managed to keep it a secret—what then? Jace was sworn to the Shadowhunter cause, and Simon didn’t know what he wanted to do with his life—becoming a Grammy-winning musician was a cherished fantasy, but not exactly a realistic life goal—but becoming a Shadowhunter was not even on the table. This was his last year of high school—what were they going to do when Simon left for college? Or what if the Clave assigned the first agela in a generation to some other Institute? What then?

That isn’t what you’re afraid of though, is it? His guilt whispered. There’s a more immediate reason he might leave, isn’t there? And of his own free will, not on the orders of the Clave.

Simon squeezed his eyes shut as guilt squeezed his lungs. It’s late, he told himself, he’s tired. He’s been patrolling all night. It’s not fair to tell him now. There’ll be a better time.

You’ve been saying that for weeks. You swore you’d tell him after the performance. You owe him the truth.

He won’t care. It doesn’t count.

Then you have no reason not to tell him, do you?
The water stopped running. Dread was a stone in his mouth; he swallowed, and felt it as a weight in
his stomach, cold, bitter, terrifying. *Am I really going to tell him? Now?*

*It’s never going to be a good time. He needs to know. And you need to tell him.*

But what if this was the thing that broke them? What if he was the one that broke it? How was he
supposed to live with that, with knowing that they’d come apart because of him?

*You might be dying. Then you won’t have to live with it.*

The thought actually startled a broken laugh from him. Trust his stupid brain to find the dark humour
even in this.

He really did have to say it. He had to.

*Fuck.*

He opened his eyes as Jace came out of the bathroom, but was quiet. Said nothing as Jace
perfunctorily dried himself and found a pair of pyjama bottoms in Simon’s wardrobe—and when had
he stashed some of his clothes in Simon’s wardrobe, Simon wanted to know?

And then he left the towel in the bathroom and came to bed, and Simon felt like he was choking on
his own heart as Jace climbed beneath the covers, his pulse a beat of ash across his tongue as Jace
kissed him softly, lightly. Simon was wooden, was stone, too tense with shame to kiss back properly,
to touch Jace the way he wanted to. He wanted Simiel so badly his hand twitched for it, because
he’d never felt this afraid without a Greater Demon breathing down his neck before.

“Are you all right?” Jace whispered.

“Just tired,” Simon whispered back. He really wanted Simiel. Surely the cool *adamas* would keep
him from feeling so sick. So fucking *terrified*.

“If you’re sure.” Jace sounded doubtful, but he settled into the mattress. Was he hesitant? Yes.
Probably. He wasn’t an idiot, he knew there was something wrong.

There was something wrong.

“I have to tell you something,” Simon said.

Fabric rustled as Jace turned his head on the pillow to face him. In the dark, Simon could hardly see
him; he was only a shadow, dark silk on darker velvet. “I’m listening.”

Simon closed his eyes. “I slept with someone else.”

Silence fell like a hammer; heavy, bruising. Crushing, crushing the air out of the room, and Simon
desperately wanted to see Jace’s face but didn’t dare look, because even in the dark Jace’s heartbreak
would break him— “Jace, I’m so sorry—”

“Was it Alec or Izzy?”

Pure shock snapped Simon’s eyes open. “What?”

The blanket shifted, and Simon realised that Jace had shrugged. *Shrugged.* “I expected this
eventually. And now that we’re *agelai*… It’s not exactly a surprise.” His voice turned wry.

“Granted, I didn’t think it would happen so soon, and I’m not sure how they kept it from me, but—
it’s okay, Simon. This is normal.”
“Normal?” Simon echoed. Despite lying down, he felt dizzy, as if the earth and sky had suddenly exchanged places. “You expected me to sleep with Izzy? With Alec?”

Jace propped himself up on his arm. “We’re all one person,” he said. “Simon, you know this. We talked about it before, remember? At my Dedication.”

“No, you said you and Alec were legally one person. No one said anything about my having to sleep with him!”

“You don’t have to, by the Angel! It’s not like that. It’s just—it’s normal, that’s all.” Jace was silent a moment. “Strong emotions strengthen the bonds we have,” he said finally. “They blur the lines of… of who we are. Alec and Izzy, they can feel how much I care about you. It can be difficult for them to remember that they don’t feel that for you too.” He shrugged again. “Everyone knows that if you marry someone with a parabatai, you’re really marrying the parabatai too. How could you not be? It’s the same with an agela. It’s worse with an agela, because the bonds are even stronger.”

Simon’s mind, wide awake now, was racing. “Is this why Alec hated me so much before?” he blurted, appalled.

He thought Jace might have grinned. “Maybe a little. He knew that if I loved you, he’d end up loving you too. Sooner or later.”

“Holy Batman, Robin.” Simon fell back against his pillow, his hands over his eyes. And to think of all the times he’d joked about polyamorous Shadowhunters, back before he and Jace were together… “This is the kind of thing you people need to tell me!”

Jace peered over at him. “So it was Izzy, then?” he asked casually.

It was like being dunked in ice-cold water, held under as he fought for breath. “No,” Simon whispered.

Jace said nothing.

Simon took a deep breath, lowering his hands and looking over at his aikane. “It was after Renwicks,” he said quietly. Wishing, now, that he could see Jace’s face after all. “Before I sang for you. Before us. I was so—I was trying not to want you, I thought I wasn’t supposed to. Luke—” His voice cracked, and he had to swallow, hard, before he could go on. “Luke said I was sick, he tried to put me in a—” Did Shadowhunters have words for conversion centres? “—a hospital, and I just wanted to not be, not be—”

“Simon, ssh, ssh.” Jace leaned forward, and his hand was against Simon’s cheek, soothing and warm and—was he smiling? “Is that all? You scared me, aikane, I thought you meant something much worse than that.”

“I’m sorry,” Simon whispered.

He felt Jace shrug. “I did the same.”

Simon stared at his indistinct face, hardly daring to believe what he was hearing. “You—what?”

Jace’s thumb stroked back and forth over Simon’s cheekbone, so, so gently. “Not a guy,” he clarified. “I thought maybe you were—a mistake, a crazy accident. That I could remember how to want girls, want someone who wasn’t you, if I tried hard enough. Be a proper Shadowhunter again.” He shrugged again. “It wasn’t right. But I thought it didn’t count—we weren’t together then, were we?”
“No,” Simon agreed, a little stunned. “No, we weren’t.” It wasn’t right—no, it hadn’t been. He remembered sitting in the bathroom of a stranger’s apartment afterwards, trying to be quiet as he cried, missing Jace, longing for him. He’d never felt as alone as he had in that moment.

He’d texted Jace the next morning, done with pretending he could live without him. He’d barely managed a week.

“So it’s fine.” The blanket shifted as Jace leaned forward and kissed him, softly, on the mouth. “I don’t care, Simon.”

Beginning to believe it, Simon felt himself smile at the words, their words. “I don’t care either.” Not about the girl, whoever she’d been, and not about his own experience—not if Jace didn’t, not if Jace said it didn’t matter. A sick, heavy knot in his stomach came undone with the relief of it; finally, now, he could let go of it, could forget about it. Could stop feeling so fucking guilty, knowing that he hadn’t hurt his aikane. “Ol boaluahe gi, Jace.”

Jace kissed the words back into his mouth, soft as summer sunlight. “Ol boaluahe gi, Simon. Always.”

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The third waking was a lot more dramatic than the previous two had been.

One moment, Simon was deeply asleep, Jace’s arm wrapped around his waist. In the next, the bedroom door—and Simon’s eyes—slammed open, and Simiel was across the room and hovering at Alec’s throat before any of them could blink.

“Oh for Raziel’s sake,” Isabelle said from the hallway. “Enough with the flying seraph blades already!”

“Simon!” Jace, sitting up, shook Simon’s shoulder. “Don’t—”

But Simiel had already fallen to the carpet, and Simon was shaking, retreating into Jace’s embrace. “Alec—God, I’m sorry! I didn’t mean—”

“It’s not your fault.” Jace glared at his parabatai. “They know they’re not supposed to surprise you like that. Did you think I wouldn’t hear you?” he snapped, apparently in response to some silent communication.

“Apparently not clearly enough,” Alec said, more calmly than should have been humanly possible. “She wants to see him too.”

“ ‘She’?” Simon echoed. “She who?” He looked at Jace. “Who wants to see me?”

Jace had been looking past him, at his agelai; at Simon’s question, he focussed on him instead—but not quickly enough to hide the flash of real, desperate fear that had burned in his face for a breath.

“Jace?” Simon asked, nervous now. At Alec’s feet, Simiel glittered, fire in ice. “What? What is it?”

Alec answered for him. “The Inquisitor,” he said. “She’s here, and she wants to see us.”

NOTES
The movie Olianthe and Clary discuss, *Guardian of the Moon*, is the French animated film directed by Alexandre Heboyan and Benoît Philippon.

Álainn, réalta croí, anwylaf—‘beautiful, star heart, dearest’.

Dsirgil ita oi maninriiax?—What is this dream? (Enochian).

Adokaz-Aoi, Nazksad-Enaikat-dë—prince of stars, sword of the King (demonic Enochian).

*O* *l* *boaluhe* *gi*—I love you (Enochian).
Alec swept into the Institute with his head held high, his agelai flanking him as if into battle, Simon held protectively in the centre of the arrowhead they made. *Protection for who?* Izzy thought, and Jace might have smirked if they weren’t all carved so fine, because Simon’s every gesture left an echo of light behind it, and in his black-and-silver Morgenstern cóada, he burned.

But so did Sariel. The cóadas commissioned just for this occasion and delivered before dawn this morning were of the colour the Nephilim called febrile, flame; not the Lightwood red and aurelian but the blazing shimmer of true fire, amber and xanthous and pearl-white, roaring blue and sunspot gold and heartsblood crimson. It was a colour only the fae could conjure from cloth, and it made the agelai look like fire elementals, like dragons in human skin as they walked as one beneath the arched ceiling of the Institute’s entrance hall, and up the stairs towards the figure waiting for them there.

Robert Lightwood had two spots of colour on his cheeks as the agela and its charge ascended the steps. His knuckles were white as bone where they clutched the railing. “Pater,” he said evenly, acknowledging Alec as his paterfamilias. Alec did not flinch at it. “Janim. Isabelle. And this must be Symeon.”

“I don’t use that name,” Simon said coolly.

“We’re here to see the Inquisitor,” Alec said before his father could respond. “If you would show us to her.” He made his voice hard and courteous, the cut-diamond voice of a paterfamilias, and ignored how it hurt to speak to his father this way. This was necessary.

Besides—he, and Alec’s mother, had tried to throw Jace away like trash. He no longer deserved Alec’s respect.

Robert dipped his head shallowly, keeping his thoughts to himself. “Of course.”

The Institute’s Great Council Chamber was meant as a place for the adult Shadowhunters who answered to that Institute to gather and discuss the canton’s health. The heavy oak doors were carved with the Clave’s sigil, four intertwined Cs set with gold, warding and protecting the room against spying or intrusion.

When Robert pushed open the doors, Simon gasped as if he’d been struck, and through Jace’s worried glance Alec saw Simon rock back, clutching his chest with an expression that was all shock and pain and longing.

At the sound, the six golems of the Inquisitor rose from their seats. Seven feet tall, each golem was an enormous edifice of silver and stone and steel, shaped to look passingly like a Nephilim woman—but they were hairless, their faces elegant but uniform silver masks. Two centuries ago their ancestors had nearly destroyed the Nephilim at the behest of a madman, but the Shadowhunters had triumphed,
and taken the technology as spoils. Nephilim alchemists had perfected it, and the result had lifted the burden on the lower Nephilim castes—now golems performed most manual labour, and the bulk of the inquisition force was made up of weaponised golems like these, dressed in dragonhide gear with the Mark of the Clave stamped into their brows.

All three agelai braced as the golems moved, the edges of their minds blurring like chalk in the rain as fear-wariness invited them to skindance—they had no weapons, could not approach the High Inquisitor armed, should they submit or fight or run if they were to be taken now? The golems walked around the table, three on either side, and the agelai’s heartbeats melted into one—

And in a flutter of dark gear, all six golems dropped to one knee, curling their articulated right hands into fists and thumping them against their left shoulders. “Hail,” they intoned, six identical voices issuing from lips that did not move. “Hail the light in the darkness, the sun in the night. Hail, Sariel Firstborn.”

For a small eternity, nobody moved, all eyes on the golems kneeling in obeisance. Alec wasn’t sure he even breathed.

What— What—

Jace’s ears heard Simon whisper something, a single word—but so low, so quiet, maybe it was only a breath—

And the tableau broke, ripped apart like embroidered cloth. The golems jerked to their feet, hands falling to their sides, and the Inquisitor rose from her chair an icon of fury. “Explain yourselves,” she snarled, and the shock sluiced away from the agelai like water from stone as they rallied, hardened, fell together like three rivers into one.

And as one, they examined her, three sets of eyes absorbing information processed by the power of three minds in a flash. The Inquisitor was younger than they had expected—perhaps the same age as their parents, or only a little older. Her pale blonde hair was tied in a queue, and she wore not a cóada but a formal déploi, a floor-length palla coat-robe worn open over an equally long vestis robe belted at the waist; the palla was a deep, terrible red velvet like a spill of blood, the vestis black as a dark moon, with the sign of the Clave hanging from a chain around her neck. Her eyes were the same bronzed-brown as her necklace, and they were burning with disbelieving rage. To either side of her, her Shadowhunter guards—a blond Asian man and a white, dark-haired woman, probably parabatai—were as still as the golems, their eyes fixed unblinking on the agelai.

“Inquisitor,” Robert began, recovering himself, “surely you’re not suggesting that they suborned your golems?”

“I’m suggesting no such thing,” the Inquisitor snapped. “I did not command them to sing praises to this—this Sariel, whomever that might be—”

“It’s me,” the agela said together. “I’m Sariel.”

Behind them, at their heart, Simon laughed softly.

Alec dug his nails into his palm, and the one diverged into three again. “We are,” he repeated. “Agela Sariel.” He glanced at the golems. “The first of our generation.”

Sariel Firstborn. He’d never heard of golems kowtowing to agelai before—and neither had Jace or Izzy—but they always genuflected to members of the Clave, so maybe…?

Well, what else could they have meant? Probably it was just a piece of their geas that had been
forgotten, given the dearth of agelae…

The Inquisitor frowned, and Alec could see her mind racing, coming to the same conclusion. She glanced at the agelai’s cóadas, and he saw, too, the moment she understood the significance of the colour, the uniform of their clothing; febrile, for new beginnings rising phoenix-like from the flames. Her cheeks went white.

*Don’t you dare smirk,* Izzy warned Jace, but it was Isabelle that tasted sweet and sharp and smug, lemon sorbet and ginger; Isabelle who exuded satisfaction at seeing the Inquisitor choke on what they’d done.

“You—” They had all forgotten their mother. Maryse was, if anything, paler than the Inquisitor, her finely-drawn features contorted between disbelief and betrayal. “Alexander—Isabelle—You did not.”

*Don’t say it,* Alec thought at his sister, feeling the words rise to the tip of her tongue, the we most certainly did.

Izzy sent a mental grin his way.

“Enough,” Robert said from behind them. Alec did not turn away from the Inquisitor’s coolly considering expression. “We let you have your joke yesterday, Isabelle, but this is no time for games.”

There were different kinds of cóada, meant for different occasions. A wedding cóada’s left sleeve was attached by buttons, easy to remove so that your spouse could draw the marriage Mark upon your arm. Cóadas meant for balls were cut differently than those worn to Clave meetings or the temples.

Those worn to Reveals had no uniform design, because the parabatai and parastathentes runes could be placed anywhere on the body. But Sariel all wore theirs in the same place, and so they pulled aside the collars of their coats and tugged down, drawing free the flap of fabric that bared the agela bond writ over their hearts.

“It’s not a game,” Alec said evenly. “We are Sariel. Bound and witnessed.”

“By who?” Maryse demanded, but Alec paid her no attention, focussed only on the Inquisitor. Her gaze had become coldly speculative as she looked over the three of them more closely, and it made him uneasy.

“I have no doubt the forms were followed,” the Inquisitor said dryly, to Alec’s surprise. She, then, did not underestimate them so much as to think they had faked the runes somehow; fully believed Alec and Izzy capable of taking this plunge to rescue their brother. It was an eerie sensation, to be respected by this woman he could not help thinking of as an enemy. “You should be celebrating, Maryse, Robert. Think of the honour this will bring to your fallen House.” She did not quite sound sarcastic.

Every word she spoke only made Sariel grow warier. This woman was not what they had expected.

“Close the door,” the Inquisitor ordered. As Robert did so, she continued, “Dark hair, Lightwood eyes—you two must be Alexander and Isabelle.” Her eyes flicked to Jace like knife-points. “Janim,” she said, as if his name was bitter in her mouth. Then she looked past them to the one who stood at the centre of their triangle. “Which means the coal at the heart of this fire must be Symeon.”

“The name my mother gave me,” Simon said coolly, “is Simon.”
The wind breathed outside, and Alec heard it, so total was the silence that fell over the room. The dramatic way in which Sariel had chosen to reveal themselves was one thing—that was bold, it spoke of strategizing and internal loyalty without ever quite crossing the line into defiance or disrespect, all points in a warrior’s favour.

Directly contradicting the High Inquisitor of the Clave was another thing entirely.

“I couldn’t care less what your vainottu mother decided to call you when she fled her responsibilities,” the Inquisitor said, and Maryse inhaled sharply as her husband hissed. Even the Inquisitor’s Shadowhunter escorts looked shocked. Only Alec’s iron will kept his agelai from visibly reacting, kept Jace from lunging across the room and spitting in her face at the enormous, terrible insult: monster, world-poison, that which we hunt. He held his agelai back with reins of steel and prayed for Simon’s celestial fracture lines to hold, to not shatter apart into black and blood. “You were Acknowledged as Symeon Vangelis Morgenstern, and that is what I will call you.”

Izzy glanced at Simon from the corner of her eye, and all Sariel saw him tilt his head to one side with a smile sweet as a fresh-forged blade. “Well, I acknowledge that you’re a vainottu yourself, but I wasn’t planning on calling you one. Still, if that’s how this works.”

The funny thing was that Alec still hoped. Why did he bother even hoping for the best anymore?

“I beg your pardon?” the Inquisitor asked softly.

“You should,” Simon told her, still smiling that smile, “but it won’t be necessary. Thank you,” he added.

They were all going to die.

“I don’t think you understand who you’re talking to,” the Inquisitor said.

“Of course I do,” Simon said. “You’re the person who just called the greatest woman I’ve ever known—the woman who is directly responsible for the failure of Valentine’s Uprising—a monster. The woman who gave up her entire life to keep the Mortal Cup out of Valentine’s hands. She gave up magic, her heritage, her name, to protect something your people let Valentine steal away in the first place.” He shrugged one shoulder, his hands in his pockets. “If you consider someone like that a monster, then you must have crawled from a place so deep in the Pit they didn’t even have legends of light.”

“Simon, shut up,” Jace hissed desperately. Alec knew his panic, felt it like a knife embedded in his heart, cold and final.

The Inquisitor stared at Simon for a long, noose-tight moment. “I see that I was mistaken,” she said finally. “I believed, when I was sent here, that it was your brother I would see stripped and blinded for his part in Valentine’s machinations.” The agela stiffened. “But clearly your father’s blood runs true in you both.” Her voice iced over. “Because you are a minor, and raised outside the embrace of Raziel’s wings, I will ignore your words this once. Do not look for a second chance. Now sit, all of you.”

“Oh what?” Simon asked, for all the world as if he were only curious.

“Oh I will have you thrown in a cell, minor or no. Sit!”

They sat. Alec’s heart was in his throat; Izzy was frigidly unsurprised, in dark, lashing agreement with Simon. Alec sat between his brother and sister, Simon next to Jace. Robert crossed the room to sit next to his wife.
There were seven adult Shadowhunters in the room, and Isabelle with them. Simon couldn’t kill the Inquisitor.

*But what if he tries?* Alec worried as the Inquisitor took her seat again, the golems arrayed behind her against the wall like an honour guard. *What will we do then?*

Neither Jace nor Isabelle had an answer for him. Nor for the other horror, heavy as an anchor hung from their ribs: the Inquisitor had come to strip Jace of his runes. That, at least, was averted now—she couldn’t possibly destroy an *agela* without conclusive evidence. The Clave would have her Marks if she tried.

“I was sent here,” the Inquisitor said as they all settled, “with a threefold mission: to ascertain the truth of the events surrounding the Cup’s reappearance, to pass judgement on the Shadowhunter Janim Morgenstern, and to formalise the Clave’s legal custody of Symeon Morgenstern.” She shot Simon a sharp glance. “Which is clearly all too needed.”

*NO!* The fierce, desperate denial screamed through Alec’s skull from Jace’s mind, searing away boundaries and definitions in a blaze of silver-white terror-rage; a solar flare inside their heads and hearts, sweeping away any shadows of personality, any concept of the individual, reforging all it contained into a brilliant diamond, multi-faceted and spinning like a star.

“What is the Clave seeking custody of Symeon?” the *agela* asked through Alec’s body. It was the eldest body, with the most Law-abiding reputation attached to it; it made the best mouthpiece for dealing with authority figures. The Inquisitor, the Lightwood parents; they all knew intellectually that they were dealing with three-as-one, but the *agela* was willing to bet that it was something people forgot in practise.

Beneath the table, they reached for Simon’s hand. He let them take it, but didn’t squeeze back when their fingers entwined with his. He didn’t move at all.

“The Clave *seeks* nothing,” the Inquisitor corrected sharply. “As an orphaned minor, Symeon is a ward of the Clave. When I return to Idris, he will be coming with me. There will be no negotiating on this point. The Law is clear.”

‘Your father’s banished and your mother broke her oath to the Clave; they’re both dead to the Nephilim,’ Alec had told Simon once, and he must have remembered it because he sat still and silent. That silence, so markedly different to the defiance of just a few minutes before, pricked Sariel like needles sliding through skin.

“There is a scion of his House of age,” the *agela* said, and if fire licked the edges of their words then passing through Alec’s throat cooled them to courtesy. Just. “There is no need for him to be removed from his family.”

“There is every need,” the Inquisitor said, “given who his family is. The scion you mention,” she nodded her head mockingly at Jace’s body, “is a penniless criminal only barely Dedicated. How does he plan to support his brother?”

“You have yet to present any evidence that Janim was involved in his father’s crimes,” Sariel said coolly. “As for the other—the Morgenstern and Fairchild assets were taken by the Clave when it was thought there were no living heirs of either House. We will be petitioning for them to be returned, since of course the Law does not lay the actions of the parents at the feet of babes.” And Jace was hardly penniless even without his family’s fortunes, after all the hundreds of demons he’d killed over the years. Thousands, maybe.
The Inquisitor’s eyes narrowed. “Of course,” she echoed. “And you are free to challenge the Clave’s guardianship—in the proper time and place. But I must say, I find it hard to believe that an eighteen year old boy raised by Valentine will be deemed a suitable guardian—for anyone. Despite its recent shortcomings, the Morgenstern House is a great one, and the Clave are anxious to see its most recent issue raised under Raziel’s aegis.”

Through Jace’s fingers, they felt Simon’s hand curl hard, his nails scoring his leg. He was vibrating like a thrown dagger come to a sudden stop. “Except that I have no interest in becoming a Shadowhunter,” he said, and though his tone was even Sariel heard the whisper of a snarl behind it, like a monster caught in briars. “I don’t want any part of your world. Ma’am. I have a life here, and I like it just fine.”

The Inquisitor’s lip curled. “What you like is irrelevant,” she said. “You are a child. Decisions as to your welfare are to be made by your legal guardians, and in this case, that is the Clave.”

Simon stared at her. “Are you serious? You people send seventeen year olds to die every night on patrol, but you don’t let them decide where they want to live? You can’t have it both ways!”

“You are not a normal seventeen year old Shadowhunter,” the Inquisitor said flatly. “You are untrained and undisciplined, raised to think of yourself as a mundane. I would no more trust a mundane teenager to behave as befits a proper Shadowhunter than I would trust him against an Eidolon.” She held up an imperious hand before Simon could do more than open his mouth in furious protest. “Enough! I did not summon you here to listen to the whinging of children!”

Power lapped against Sariel’s Marks, a whisper like the surf drawing back from the shore before the tsunami; on the other side of the table Robert twitched, and the Inquisitor’s female bodyguard rubbed her arm, but they didn’t understand what they were feeling, didn’t recognise it as the agela did. Simon’s hand was a vise on Jace’s, and through Jace’s ears they could hear the soft, almost inaudible groaning of the arm of Simon’s chair, the wood slowly giving way beneath his fingers. In another moment it would be loud enough for the rest of the table to hear.

Sariel pulled Jace’s hand free and locked it around Simon’s wrist, driving nails into scarred skin. The sense of impending pressure vanished. Simon sucked in a hard breath and leaned back in his chair, his face very pale. And didn’t pull his arm away.

The Inquisitor held out a hand, and one of the golems took an object from the satchel at its hip and placed it in her palm. “The purpose of this meeting,” she said, setting the fist-sized crystal before her on the table, “is to establish the events of Valentine’s re-emergence in August.” Drawing a stele from within her sleeve, she casually Marked a circle of runes around the stone, a telesma Sariel didn’t recognise but could guess the purpose of. Sure enough, the crystal began to glow as the telesma became active. “You will answer my questions quickly and succinctly to the best of your ability.” Her voice was hard, warning that their best had better match up to what she thought it should be.

“Now.” She leaned back, the telesma waiting to record their answers. “Explain to me how you found the Mortal Cup.”

Something in this room was singing.

He had heard it the moment the doors opened, a song of silver fire and holy war, and it had drowned him out. The world had gone dark in a flare, and Simon had gone with it, vanished into something like sleep, something like death, with that song howling through his soul like a solar storm.
When he came back, it had been to the six golems rising to their feet from the floor.

The pain in Simon’s wrist shivered and writhed through him, kissing his every nerve with sharp teeth and a razored tongue, etching him, anchoring him. His head was full of beating wings and lapping waves and that song, the song which had not stopped singing but the bite of Jace’s nails kept him from drowning, from getting lost, from breaking open and unleashing—

*She wants to take me away. She wants to take me away. She wants to—*

Who was it holding his hand? Jace? Alec or Isabelle, reaching through Jace’s body? Or something stranger still, that hive mind personality they’d named Sariel, that was all of them and none?

Did it love him like Jace did? What would that be like, being loved by that? By something so far outside Simon’s understanding? He knew he didn’t really, couldn’t really comprehend the bond Jace had with his brother and sister, couldn’t grasp the enormous intimacy of it, the surrender, the holy ascension of giving up your sense of self to become part of a greater whole. It wasn’t something Simon thought he could ever do. It was kind of terrifying to contemplate.

Nearly as terrifying as the thought that *Agela* Sariel saw him falling into bed with all of them as a foregone conclusion. With Isabelle, who was as painfully beautiful and untouchable as a seraphim; with GQ-model Alec, who hated what he’d done to Jace, who had a boyfriend of his own and had known from the start that his heart would end up in Simon’s hand—

Simon pulled his wrist against Jace’s nails, his heart pounding. “Harder,” he whispered, barely breathing, and to his surprise Jace’s fingers flexed without hesitation. Simon hissed softly, his spine going lax as his skin tore thickly beneath Jace’s nails, the hot brightness whiplashing through Simon’s body, up and around his throat, into his brain.

Tiny drops of blood trickled down his wrist, pomegranate seeds sweeter than Persephone’s ever could have been.

Simon closed his eyes briefly. *She wants to take me away!* But he had pomegranate seeds now, anchoring him to earth as Persephone’s had tied her to Hades, and the thought didn’t send fissures tearing through his control, his sanity, cracks for an angel to break out through. He could breathe. He could focus.

They had practised the story they would tell the Inquisitor over and over. They’d had no choice. Outside of particular government branches, Light Worlders were utterly forbidden from learning of the Shadow World, and the penalties for Shadowhunters breaking that interdiction were beyond severe—almost as bad as the punishments handed down for fraternisation. They couldn’t let anyone find about Clary, find out how much she knew and had been involved in. And Jace was adamant that they give away as few of Simon’s unbelievable abilities as possible.

But where Simon would have simply lied his ass off, the Shadowhunters had insisted on sticking as closely to the truth as possible. ‘*She can compel the truth from us if she asks,*’ Izzy had said briefly, but all three Shadowhunters had been more focussed on concocting a believable story than explaining what the hell that was supposed to mean.

‘*It means you need to think like a faerie. If she asks a question, answer exactly what she asked, not what she meant. Don’t lie outright, but twist the truth as much as you need to. Look, like this…’*

And Simon was at the heart of nearly every lie.

Simon had been the one to shoot out the skylight and destroy Abbadon’s manifestation, not Clary.
Alec hadn’t been as grievously injured as he’d seemed; he certainly hadn’t needed Simon’s impossible Marks to keep him alive. Simon had hidden behind a bookcase for Hodge’s betrayal, not been locked into a cage of runes he couldn’t possibly break out of; and it was then that he’d overheard the location of Valentine’s base at Renwicks. He’d gone to the werewolves because he’d been raised in the Light World and didn’t know how to contact the Clave for help. He and Luke had come up with the idea of switching the Mortal Cup card for a fake that Simon had drawn, mimicking his mother’s style as best he could. At Renwicks, he’d found his mom and Jace. Valentine had made his little revelations, Luke had interrupted, they’d switched the cards and Valentine escaped through the Portal, destroying it behind him.

Okay, so it wasn’t all that close to the truth. But it wasn’t all that far off it, either, and whatever method the Inquisitor had of discovering their lies, she couldn’t use it on Simon or Izzy because they were both minors. So it was Simon who lied, calmly, evenly, blood dripping lazily down his wrist as the pain soothed sweet as morphine. Jace’s lips moved occasionally, describing waking up in Renwicks, discovering that his father wasn’t dead, wasn’t a Wayland; but the main body of the story was Simon’s, and they let him tell it.

Well. The abridged version, anyway.

The Inquisitor took no notes and interrupted only rarely to ask her sharp-edged, frosted questions, asking for more detail, for elaboration on a point. With Jace’s nails in his skin, Simon didn’t falter once, barely cognizant that he should have been afraid of stumbling. Even through his haze, it didn’t seem like the Inquisitor was paying him a whole lot of attention. Her questions weren’t intended to poke holes in his story, and she didn’t try to trip him up or confuse him, the way detectives on the cop shows always did with their suspects. But then, maybe she didn’t think of him as a suspect. In the end, he and Jace hadn’t left with Valentine, and they had retrieved the Cup—even if they claimed that Simon had found the telesma needed to get it out of the card in a note Jocelyn had hidden under Simon’s bed. Those weren’t the actions of criminals. If they kept the incest out of it, if they toned down just how devastating Valentine’s revelation had been—they still told her everything that could possibly prove helpful in tracking the bastard down.

It was themselves they wanted to protect, not their sire.

Finally the spool of story ran empty, and Simon fell silent. Belatedly, he noticed that his throat was sore, hoarse and dry. His wrist throbbed, but the bleeding had stopped some time ago, leaving only darkening red threads criss-crossing over his skin.

The Inquisitor stirred. “Thank you, Symeon.” Her hands were clasped before her on the table. “I believe I now have a sufficient understanding of the events in question.”

Uncertain of what else to do, Simon nodded acknowledgement. He wasn’t sure his voice was up to telling her she was welcome.

Especially when she most certainly wasn’t.

The Inquisitor—what was her name? Did she have one, or did you give it up when you took the title?—used her stele to unmake the telesma around the crystal, and its light went dim. One of the golems stepped up to the table, retrieved the stone, and vanished it beneath its clothes. Simon found himself wondering what it looked like under there—was it a solid statue, or only a framework skeleton? Were there panels in its chest, places to store evidence more secure than pockets and bags?
“Now,” the Inquisitor continued, and for a moment Simon glimpsed a terrible anticipation in her eyes, “Janim. If you would?”

Simon swallowed a hiss as Jace’s nails slid free of his wrist; the pain did not disappear, but it weakened, and Simon tried not to think of a floodwall beginning to crumble as his aikane rose from his chair.

“Where do you want me?” he asked, and the Inquisitor gestured to the space at the right of the room, between the round table and the wall.

And from beneath the table, the Inquisitor drew a sword.

The song that the pain had kept at bay—had reduced to a low, terrifying lullaby echoing in the back of Simon’s skull—roared aloud, and the arms of his chair gave way under Simon’s panicked grip, wood crumbling and splintering beneath his fingers. The sword, the sword was singing, with its hilt a sweep of silver wings and a blade that was metal one second and a bar of shimmering interwoven Marks the next and Simon could not feel his own heartbeat with that sound filling the world—

“Symeon?” The Inquisitor was staring at him, and, oh, they must have heard the chair breaking—

“Are you well?”

Desperate, Simon drove his own nails into the marks Jace had left on his wrist, nearly gasping as air suddenly flooded into his lungs, as the volume dial on the sword-song twisted viciously downwards. Pain blanketed him, a crystal shield muffling the song— “Y-yes,” he managed, trying not to pant. “Sorry. I’m fine.”

Sielu. The sword’s name was Sielu. The word burnt like snowglare in his head.

The Inquisitor’s gaze was hard, almost suspicious as she examined him. Simon forced himself to smile. “Just a headache,” he explained, just managing to keep the hysteria of the thought out of his voice.

“Hm.” But it must have satisfied her, because she took up Sielu without another word to him, pushing back her chair and following Jace to the designated space.

‘The Angel gave three items to the first Shadowhunters. A cup, a sword, and a mirror. The Silent Brothers have the Sword, and the Cup and the Mirror were in Idris, at least until Valentine came along.’

Simon had come face to face with the Mortal Sword before. When he and Jace had gone to the Silent City looking for answers, Sielu had hung on the wall behind the council of Silent Brothers—even if, then, he could not hear its name. Then, it had been enormous, too large for any human to lift, never mind wield as a weapon. It was smaller now, the straight, fine blade shorter than it had been then, but Simon didn’t doubt for an instant that it was the same sword. Even without the distinctive spread-wings hilt, the song it sang was… He did not doubt that this sword could change its shape as easily as any seraph blade.

He pressed his nails harder into his wrist.

The Inquisitor held Sielu two-handed, one hand wrapped around the hilt and the other resting under the blade, as if she meant to present it to him. Jace stood with his back to the wall, an angel clothed in fire. If he was afraid, then Simon couldn’t see it in his straight spine and his still-pool face.

“Janim Christopher Morgenstern,” the Inquisitor said, her voice ringing out like a proclamation in the quiet room, “you are sworn to the Angel’s justice. Will you submit to it now?”
“I will.” Jace held out his hands, palm up, and received the Sword.

Instantly he staggered, and Alec and Izzy flinched beside Simon. Simon whipped his head to glance at them. The shock in their eyes, the blurry confusion, said it all; they had been mind-merged, but the touch of Sielu must have cut them apart, and when he looked back at Jace the blond was paler than he had been, the bones of his face stark and white, jaw locked, eyes wide.

In pain. The Sword was hurting him.

A dizzying wave of fury crashed against the floodgates, and Simon dug his nails harder into his wrist. Fresh blood graced his nails, wet his skin, a fragile chain of ruby links to keep him contained. It was already fracturing. He was fracturing, and why not, even diamonds would shatter under enough pressure, splinter apart like glass and explode into a blizzard of star-struck shards, and Simon was no diamond—he was only obsidian, dark and sharp and brittle as bone, brittle as a heart—

“Is Valentine Morgenstern your father?” the Inquisitor asked sharply, and Simon was dragged back to the real world, to Jace’s tightened shoulders and drawn throat, his hands closed rictus-like around Sielu’s blade.

“I believe so,” Jace answered, and his voice was rough, not with lust but pain and ebony wings spread wide in Simon’s head, feathered with razors, with knives, with glittering obsidian— “He raised me. The Morgenstern ring accepts me. As far as I can tell, he’s my father.”

“Did you know you were a Morgenstern before the incident at Renwicks?”

“No. I thought I was a Wayland. I thought we were both Waylands.”

The Inquisitor had let Simon’s tale pass almost unremarked, but now the questions came like bullets, like hail; had Jace really grown up in the Wayland manor, isolated, alone? Hadn’t he ever met other Shadowhunters? Hadn’t there ever been a point where he should have realised the truth of his heritage?

Yes. No. No.

Had he really believed his father was dead? Hadn’t he and Valentine planned to plant Jace among the Lightwoods, like a cuckoo chick, like a time-bomb? Had, perhaps, the Lightwoods been in on the plan?

Yes. No. No.

Even with her back to him, Simon could read—feel—hear the Inquisitor’s growing frustration. Her voice grew sharper as she rephrased her questions, asking the same thing a dozen different ways, clawing at Jace with her words as if she could tear him open and find the truth she wanted buried inside his skin. Jace’s hands curled tighter and tighter around the Mortal Sword, until blood began to trickle from his palms, from between his fingers, but his voice remained level, his answers clear: no, he had not known that Valentine wanted the Mortal Cup. No, he had not arranged for Valentine to get the Cup. He had not even known where the Cup was.

No, he had not let Valentine escape. No, he had not arranged for Valentine to escape. He had done everything he could to hinder Valentine’s escape. No, he did not know where Valentine had gone—although the Portal had been open to the Wayland manor. He might have gone there first. But no, he did not know where Valentine might have gone after that, or where he was now.

No, he was not in communication with Valentine. No, he had no way to communicate with Valentine, even if he wanted to. Which he did not.
Yes, of course he wanted Valentine brought to justice for his crimes.

It went on for a glacier’s age. Alec’s knuckles threatened to break through the skin of his hand as he clutched the table, and Jace’s blood kept dripping, dripping, Chinese water torture on Simon’s brain, acid eating away at his control. Only the vague, slippery memory that this woman could have Jace stripped of his Marks if not outright executed kept Simon in his seat, kept his teeth shut tight on the snarl of rage building in his chest.

It was so hard. The wind of beating wings buffeted his walls, eroding them, tearing them down. Jace was no traitor, Jace was stupidly, infuriatingly loyal to a people that didn’t deserve it, and she was hurting him, he was bleeding, his Jace was bleeding—

It was so fucking wrong, he could destroy a Greater Demon for doing so much less to his aikane but this woman, this he had to endure, had to let happen—

The fingers of his bleeding wrist twitched. It would be so easy to make her take Sielu from Jace’s hands and fall upon it, drive it into her own chest—

“Do you have any alliance with Valentine?” the Inquisitor demanded finally, almost angrily.

“No.” The Sword tore the word from Jace’s lips, lips gone pale with pain and effort. “I’m not helping him. I never did, and I never will. My loyalty is to the Clave.”

The Inquisitor paused, wearing her frustration like a cloak.

“No,” Jace admitted. “To my agela and my brother too.”

The Inquisitor made a noise that was almost a snarl. “What are you not telling me?”

“I’m getting hungry,” Jace said instantly, Slytherin-like, dodging away from what she meant and answering only what she’d said—and this time the Inquisitor did snarl, and her hand rose up—

“Imogen!” Maryse cried, appalled, and the Inquisitor—Imogen—lowered her arm.

“What are you not telling me,” she hissed, “that I would want to know? What Law have you broken, Morgenstern? Tell me how the taint of your father has manifested in you, because I know that it has! Silvered tongue or no, your blood is poison, and your lies cannot save you. So tell me, Janim Christopher Morgenstern, Lucifer’s child—tell me the great wrong you have wrought!”

Jace cried out as his hands clamped tight around the Sword, and the blood, the blood coming from his hands, the terrible convulsions shuddering through his body, shaking the Sword—

“Enough,” Simon snarled, shoving to his feet, and his chair went flying, tumbling onto the floor, the splinters of its arms scattering like ashes, “enough, you teloaḥ, leave him alone—”

“Simon!” Izzy cried, and Alec was reaching for him, and the Inquisitor half-turned with ire in her eyes and the golems all stepped forward as one, their hands becoming long, shining blades and the black ocean in Simon’s head was rolling into a tsunami, the surf leaving the crimson sand bare and empty as an angel howled over the waves—

And Jace sobbed aloud, all the air leaving him in a rush. “I’m sleeping with my brother,” he gasped, and fell to his knees like a stone, his blood pooling on the floor like a dark shadow and the Mortal Sword shining, shining like a star, like a beacon, like the end of a world.
NOTES

In Nephilim culture, febrile is the colour referred to as ‘flame’ in the Colours Song (‘black for hunting through the night’, etc). It’s the colour worn to births, for ‘the washing away of sins’, and new beginnings. It’s also now the sort-of-family colour for the Sariel agela.

Geas is a word that means binding; in fantasy terms it’s sometimes used to mean the restrictions/compulsions placed on a magical object like a golem (think Asimov’s Laws of Robotics). Here it basically means that the golems have certain set responses/compulsions programmed into them for specific scenarios or contexts.

_Teloah_ means ‘of death’ in Enochian, and can be used as a noun or an adjective. Simon’s using it as a noun when he calls the Inquisitor it.
The Creatures in Cold Mirrors

Chapter Notes

At last, it's done! I really didn't mean for this one to take so long, lovelies, I'm sorry about that. But it's RIDICULOUSLY LONG, so at least it won't be over in a flash like the last few chapters were! And I've dropped lots and lots of clues for you. Let me know if any of you start to put the pieces together...

Trigger warnings for dubious consent, bondage and orgasm denial. Also a warning for claustrophobia near the end of the chapter.

Years later, they would all remember this as the moment it all came apart. This delicately balanced, fragile edifice of spun-glass and wilful ignorance they’d all agreed to believe in, forged with hope and desperation, bloodstained and trembling, that had ever been a whisper and a wish from destruction—this was when it shattered. This moment was the Sword thrust straight through its heart.

Its death cries held them all frozen for a disbelieving heartbeat.

The Inquisitor recovered first. “You—” Her back was to Simon, but her head was canted down, she was staring at Jace on his knees, at the blood on his hands like a divine marker of guilt, and her voice was its own blade. “You—”

Imagine a dam breaking. Imagine the weight of a lake, a river, an ocean come crashing past a crumbling wall. Imagine an ocean come to end the world in salt and tears and blood. Its depth, its power, the incomprehensible size of so much water; do you see it? Do you hear it, the rush, the roar, coming for you, coming for the realm? Do you feel the ice-cold spray on your cheek, glittering frost-like on your eyelashes, like diamonds burning, a breath before it sweeps away all you’ve ever imagined?

Now drown.

Simon drowned. He was an ocean in a bottle and he shattered like glass and the waves, the black water howled forth, a tsunami breaking on crimson sands as the sky above screamed a song of war of apocalypse, world-murder and rage beyond words, beyond mortals. The windows blew in a storm of glass and power sheared through the table the floor the walls as Shadowhunters scrambled aside and he saw none of it, none of it, novae in his eyes bright as suns and the air around him desert-burned, burning, on fire with invisible flames that shimmered like silk and sun-struck water—

The world spun into place around his will, moved around him and abruptly he was standing between Jace and the Inquisitor and she was falling back, stumbling back from the shadows spreading behind him on the wall, a blizzard of wings curving like scimitars over the plaster, black as ink and fluid as fire. Simon, the thing wearing his skin, held out his—xyr—hand and Sielu leapt to it, and at xyr touch it shone, metal become solid starlight, burning off the stain of Jace’s blood in a blinding sear as xe swung it up and around to point at the Inquisitor’s throat.

:YOU WILL NOT TOUCH HIM.: Every word is a mountain, printed upon reality in gravity and magnetism, writ in holy stone, and xe sees the mortals quail and bleed from their ears at the brush of
xyr voice and does not care, cannot comprehend caring. :YOU WILL NOT HARM HIM. IT WILL NOT BE DONE.: 

And she falls to her knees with horror and wonder in her gaze, blood at her ears and eyes like a Madonna, whispering “Seraphim” like a prayer, and xyr face is pure and empty and implacable as death as the shadows on the wall, the shadows of wings, come slicing down like guillotines—dozens of them, hundreds of them—aiming for the Inquisitor kneeling at xyr feet.

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“Code red, I repeat, code red!” the captain barked over the headsets, as beside her Cas stared with blind eyes at the charm-pendant hovering between his hands, its golden rings spinning in a solid gold blur, the diamond at their centre burning white dwarf-bright. “It’s going nova, people, right fucking now, so prepare for Isis-damned lift-off and activate that circle!”

At her words, her operatives sprang into action, each of them exactly where they needed to be, knowing their places their words their parts down to the bone, synchronised as a dance troupe, moving like agelai—

From a nearby rooftop a figure shot into the sky, twisting in a writhing blur of lapis-emerald, growing wings that cut across the autumn blue like lightning. Clouds gathered in its wake, thick grey cotton spun from its talons and the beats of those wings clapped thunder, so that the pedestrians below looked up incredulously at the sudden storm, the darkness curtaining the sun—and as rain began to hammer quicksilver upon them they scattered, clearing the streets—

A burnished fox dashed through the rain, the chalk line drawn by the stick in its mouth remaining stark and bright despite the falling water soaking the fox’s fur, tracing a boundary across the Institute steps—

Behind the Institute a young woman with coloured braids around her wrist spread her hands as she chanted quickly, an unnatural wind whipping her coat and damp-dark hair as she stood at the edge of a chalk line—

On the north curve of the Institute-spanning circle a man matched her stance, the rain repelled from his spelled glasses and the bow slung over his shoulder as he echoed the same words, the same ritual, standing at the edge of the same white line—

And the runes on Cas’ arms seared molten silver as he and the captain shouted with them, all of them crying a single word, the burning diamond in Cas’ hands a gold-caught star—

“Allar!”

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The wings dissolved. Before their shard-sharp edges could touch the Inquisitor they vanished like shadows caught in sunlight, and the terrible, appalling light blazing beneath Simon’s skin went dark, a candle blown out by some unseen breath.

His brown-again eyes rolled up to the whites as the Mortal Sword fell from his fingers, and he crumpled like a shed skin.

The agela lunged to catch him, ignoring the incandescent pain in their closest pair of hands, the honey-blaze of the star marked on Alec’s right palm—there was only Simon’s boneless weight, the vulnerable, terrifying way his body lolled in their arms, the dark blood coming from his nose, the corners of his eyes. They smeared more blood over his throat as they sought a pulse, a heartbeat,
some sign that he was not—

Was not—

No—

No no no no no no!

They couldn’t find it, couldn’t, it wasn’t there and they shouldered the Inquisitor out of the way without thinking, hurling Izzy and Alec’s bodies across the room to drop down next to Jace’s, a hand on a stele and another pair ripping Simon’s cóada open and they had an ocean of their own to call on, three souls made one surging through the slender crystal wand, wave after wave of cascading soulfire burning black against Simon’s skin, the whorls and knots of healing Marks scrolling like ashes across his chest and his eyes were blank and blind, only the whites visible as they stared unseeing at the ceiling—

*Nonononono, don’t do this, don’t leave me like this, not like this, not now not yet, don’t, don’t, Raziel please Raziel please please don’t do this don’t do this I’ll do anything give anything just don’t take him let him live please please God please DON’T DO THIS!*

The star on Alec’s palm was honey-fire beneath his glove, blazing-bliss all up his arm and Sariel kept flickering, Alec shuttering in and out, himself and them and back again, his blood turned to gold in his veins, frantic grief-terror-nonono shredding Sariel apart and Simon’s chest was so still, so deathly still and the angel’s mark beating like a heart, like Simon’s heart cupped in Alec’s hand—

He ripped off his glove with his teeth and slammed his star-lit palm against Simon’s chest, hoping-wishing-praying-willing—breathe—!

And Simon gasped, arching like a bow; his eyes flashed to brown and he was convulsing, gulping air and coughing, choking, crimson flecking his lips and the corners of his mouth. In an instant Sariel turned him over and he was heaving, half on all fours and vomiting blood onto the floor, awful raw gushes of it, again and again until it looked as if someone had cut his throat, the pool of it was so wide and dark and the smears of scarlet on his neck where Sariel had sought a pulse—Simon was shaking like a leaf, half-crying, beads of blood caught on his eyelashes like garnets, gasping like he couldn’t get a breath and what was this, how did they fix this—

They didn’t have to; the blood stopped coming up, and for a few seconds Simon held his weight on trembling arms and panted, horrible, sobbing breaths—

And collapsed again. In Sariel’s tripled vision it was through Isabelle’s eyes that they saw Simon’s fall closed, saw his face go slack and his arms give way under him. Faster than any one alone they caught him before he could hit the bloodied floor, using Jace’s arms to bear him up and cradle him close, terrified, aghast, the stench of copper a miasma in the air and he was breathing, his heart was beating and yet—

“Take your hands off him!” The Inquisitor’s voice a cat o’ nine tails, and they’d forgotten her, they honestly had, turning to her with Simon’s blood soaking their knees, Simon’s blood and Jace’s married on the floor and the Mortal Sword cutting through it a silver brand, and if they’d been armed—

Thank the Angel they weren’t armed. The Inquisitor’s guards were hauling them up, hauling Alec and Izzy’s bodies to their feet and a pair of golems closed hard hands on Jace’s shoulders and their diamond mind was burning with terror for Simon, wild with it; the Inquisitor pulled Simon from Jace’s arms (carefully, almost tenderly) and Sariel cried aloud as if she’d cut them down, unable to
bear the loss; in that instant they would have cut down anyone between them and their *aikane* if they’d only had their blades to hand—

The Inquisitor laid Simon gently on the broken table. His beautiful *cóada* was ruined, black silk stained darker by blood, and his more-beautiful face was a horror, a nightmare of gore. But he was breathing now, they could see the rise and fall of his bared chest, and even as they watched the Inquisitor began drawing blood-replenishing runes with a quick, deft hand.

He was—not all right, but alive. Alive. And likely to remain so. This was no battlefield; they stood on hallowed ground, there were experienced adult Shadowhunters to take care of him. They weren’t going to lose him.

The relief was like the sky falling.

“*You have no healer here with Starkweather gone, correct?”* the Inquisitor demanded. Before anyone could answer—before Sariel could disentangle enough to speak, before their white-struck parents could gather themselves enough to respond—she stepped back and gestured towards the Shadowhunter restraining Isabelle. “*Bellesword, quickly.*”

The woman released her hold on Isabelle’s body—a golem immediately took her place—and strode over, drawing a quill-length stele from her belt. She bent over Simon as the Inquisitor beckoned the Lightwood parents. “*Show Syr Bellesword to the Infirmary,* and make sure she has access to any supplies she requests,” she ordered.

“Yes, Inquisitor.” Maryse bowed her head, her dark hair briefly obscuring cheeks gone seashell-pale. If she looked at Sariel, at Jace, then they didn’t see it and didn’t care.

“Inquisitor—” Sariel said, ready to beg if it would let them stay by Simon—*don’t take him away, he almost, I need to be near—*

“Be silent!” she snapped. She gestured sharply, and another of the golems bent to pick up the bloodied Mortal Sword. It pressed the cold hilt to Sariel’s forehead, and—

They jolted apart, scythed by ice. Alec sagged in the hold of the second guard, momentarily dizzy at being dropped back into his body, feeling his sense of self close up around him, severing what was one into three again.

His angel-marked palm was cool again, only skin. He closed his fingers over it, trembling.

“Go,” the Inquisitor was saying, and Syr Bellesword lifted Simon quickly but carefully, cradling him like a child in her arms, and swept from the room with Alec’s mother leading the way, holding the doors open for her—

And they were gone, with that last glimpse of Simon’s bloodied face catching in Alec’s throat like a stone as the Inquisitor turned blazing bronze eyes on them and snarled, “*You will explain.*”

“He’s possessed by an angel,” Isabelle said. There could be no hiding it now, not after that—the light that had near-blinded them all, the voice that had bled their ears and raked glass and fire through their brains. The shadow of those wings. There was no lie that could hold that truth and disguise it; the truth would burn any lie to ashes around it.

“We think,” Alec said, drawing the Inquisitor’s attention to himself, away from his sister. “We weren’t sure. But most of the pieces fit.” He held out his marked hand, as much as he was able with a golem holding his arms.
Her eyes widened at the gleam of crystalline silver. “Simádi angélou,” she breathed.

Alec swallowed. It had not occurred to him that she would recognise it—the last simádi angélou had been bestowed on William Herondale two hundred years ago. Supposedly his descendants bore a matt, unsilvered version of the same mark, but it still wasn’t something most people were familiar with. “Whatever’s inside Simon gave it to me.” And took something nameless in exchange…

The Inquisitor said nothing for a long, fraught moment. Alec could not begin to read the expression on her face, the kaleidoscope of disbelief and awe like something fragile, something new and precious.

Then it hardened. “And you kept this from me deliberately!” she hissed, a snowdrop swallowed up by ice, sheathed in razor edges. “An angel come to earth, and you hid it from the Clave! I should have you all buried, agelae be damned!”

“It wasn’t our choice to make,” Jace said, and everything in Alec flinched as the Inquisitor’s gaze whipped to his agelai-brother. “Simon didn’t want you to know—”

He did not fall, when the Inquisitor’s blow landed, but only because the golem grasping his arms was an immovable object; his head snapped aside under the force of it and Alec felt the granite-pain blossom in his own cheek, a blow of stone with all an adult Shadowhunter’s strength behind it—

And for an instant the pain was fire, reducing the swords of their souls to molten metal that surged into one blazing pool—

But the golem holding the Mortal Sword pressed its hilt against Alec’s forehead again and they exploded apart anew, and Izzy was thrashing in her captor’s hold, yelling, “It told you not to hurt him, you athumos!” as Jace’s jaw rang like struck bronze, by some miracle unbroken, “You heard it, saw it, leave him alone—!” and all Alec could see was the ring on the Inquisitor’s hand as she withdrew her arm, a pair of herons framing an elegant H, a blaze of silver—

No wonder she recognised the angel mark—she’s a Herondale herself—

The golem restraining Izzy shifted one of its hands to cover her mouth, reducing her fury to unintelligible mumbling, and her eyes spat sparks.

The Inquisitor had not glanced at her, and did not now. She had eyes only for Jace, and there was nothing conflicted or complicated about the revulsion with which she looked at him.

“You will not speak of protecting him,” she said softly, and even when Simon spoke of his father Alec had not heard such hatred from a human being before, from the mouth of anything but a demon. Her voice shook with it. “You Morgensterns—lilim, every one of you! You disgust me—even I would not have dreamed that Valentine’s sons would sink so low as this, rutting like Lilith in the dirt—and to have somehow dragged an angel into your filth with you—I cannot imagine a greater blasphemy!”

Her loathing was a physical thing, a poison, a pressure, a punch—and Jace took it, swallowed it down acid-toxic so that Alec could feel it burning in his own throat, the absinthal tang of something desperate and terrified. It spread like venom, like a virus, fuelling some terrible transformation that Alec could see as well as feel, crystallising softness into bitter salt in a flash, hardening Jace’s stance, his eyes, the smile he unsheathed cyanide-edged and gleaming.

“Oh, please,” he said, and Alec stared, stared and did not understand because he had not seen this mask of Jace’s since Simon tore through their lives, this drawling, mocking, smirking creature, cruel
and beautiful as golden Lucifer and every bit as dangerous. “Simon’s no Morgenstern. He may have the blood, but the heart?” He made a sound of disgust, mouth twisting into a sneer. “He’s so strait-laced I had to break him open. No fun at all.”

And Alec was still reeling from the abrupt transition from one to three, couldn’t understand, couldn’t make sense of the new shape to Jace’s mind. “What are you—”

“I forced him,” Jace said nonchalantly, ignoring Alec, ignoring Isabelle, half-lidded gaze fixed on the Inquisitor. “It was pathetically easy. He’s nothing like a real Shadowhunter, you know, he has no training, no sense of self-preservation. He had no idea he was in trouble until he couldn’t get out of it.” He smirked. “After the first few times, I even had him convinced he loved me. It’s been decidedly entertaining.”

“You…” The Inquisitor was speechless.

Alec was not. “Jace!” he cried, horrified. “That isn’t—”

“Don’t bother defending me, Alec,” Jace said lazily. “I know you’ve always tried so hard to see the good in me, but I’m tired of pretending to be a good boy.” He blinked cat-like at the Inquisitor. “They didn’t know, obviously,” he added, gesturing to his agelai with his restrained hands.

The Inquisitor frowned. Suspicion glinted in her eyes, but Alec barely noticed, couldn’t care, was staring at Jace and gaping, disbeliefing, *that’s not true it’s not true why would you say that Jace—other-myself tell her it’s not true!* “How is that possible?”

Jace smiled again, and his mind was—not a blank slate, but slippery, oiled glass and Alec couldn’t get a grip on him, only heard-felt whispers and fragments, a desperation like a drowning man clinging to a rope—“I haven’t fucked him since we bonded,” he said, razor blades in cotton candy and even Izzy was stunned silent, her mind a raw white shock against Alec’s. “We only became agelai two days ago. Not quite long enough for them to learn all my dirty secrets.”

It flashed between them like a mirror signal, bright-white-final, Izzy and Alec both understanding in the same moment: Jace was trying to protect them. Them and Simon, taking all the blame for his own so Simon would be unstained when they dragged him to Alicante, so that as bad as it got it would not be worse. If they thought Simon was a victim, confused, abused, then—

But if they thought Jace was a—if they thought Jace had raped—

*Don’t you dare say a word,* Jace sent, and his thoughts were steel, hard and sharp, a sword held to his own throat. *Better one of us than all of us. If they lock us all up we’re done, but if you two are free…* *

*They’ll take you to the Silent City!* Izzy’s fear was as dark as the cells her protest conjured; Hodge had taken them to see the gaol reserved for Nephilim criminals, buried deep below the City of Bones, four years ago, and now memories of cold steel bars sprung up like forests, oubliettes reserved for Shadowhunters who broke their oaths, who turned their backs on Raziel. *We can’t get you out of there!* 

And even if they could, where could they go? You couldn’t hide from the Clave. There was nowhere to run to, even if they could somehow get Jace out of the Silent City…

*I’m a pureblood Shadowhunter, part of the first agela in a generation. And Simon will never testify. They won’t execute or exile me.* But Jace’s certainty was mist and sea-foam, dissolving into nothing when Alec tried to grasp it.
“You, his brother, the one who should have protected him above all else—” The Inquisitor said, and Alec had thought her repulsed before, had thought she hated Jace before, but now—he wanted to scream at her that it was a lie, of course it was a lie, his agelai would die before hurting Simon, die before doing something like that to anyone— “How could you?”

Jace didn’t flinch. “As I said,” he said softly, “it was easy.”

It was as if he’d struck her, returned her blow with interest; a shock like pain breaking across her face, hatred tempered by horror, and Jace was feeding her exactly what she’d wanted so badly—the unrepentantly evil Morgenstern heir, Valentine’s protégé—but Alec knew in that moment that she had not comprehended what that would really mean.

She didn’t know evil like Jace did.

But she recovered quickly, a portcullis of hard, revolted anger slamming down. “I will see you in Caïna for this,” she said, arctic, glacial. “I will see you spill the full treasury of your veins upon the ground for blood-price, Morgenstern.” She spat the name like a slur, like poison, and gestured at the golem holding him.

When it started to drag him away—not even trying to let him keep his feet—Alec couldn’t hold back a protest. “His hands—Inquisitor, he needs an iratze at least!”

She turned those ice-eyes on him. “The Silent Brothers will tend his injuries, which is more than he deserves.”

*Don’t defend me,* Jace ordered, grim and hard and the edges of him ragged and sharp as he was taken away. *Don’t let her suspect anything. Be horrified, be disgusted, try and hate me—and keep Simon safe.*

Everything was falling apart faster than Alec could hold it—gold turning to dust in his hands and blowing away, scattering beyond any hope of recovery. The golems were taking Jace away, the Mortal Sword held to his throat and ripping him out of Sariel like a heart from a chest and Alec and Isabelle screamed where no one else could hear, torn open and hollow, their shared soul shredded, in pieces—

And Alec didn’t know what to do, he always knew what to do but this time, this time—

*I’m supposed to protect you but how do I protect you from this, no no don’t take him don’t do this to us Jace! JACE!*

The doors closed behind his agelai-brother, and Alec leaned heavily against the Shadowhunter man holding him in place, all the strength gone out of him, water poured uselessly into indifferent sand. His eyes burned, his throat stinging with arsenic-salt, with sulphur. As if he’d swallowed broken glass.

He couldn’t feel Jace at all. Even when Jace had held the Sword in his hands Alec and Izzy had been able to feel him, but now—

*Raziel, hear your children,* Izzy whispered, and numbly Alec let himself be coaxed into echoing her. *Shelter your son in your wings, Sator—protect and guard him from the forces ‘rayed against him…*

A hand came down on Alec’s shoulder, and when he looked up he found the Inquisitor’s face
looking back at him, her expression ever so slightly softened.

“I know this must be hard for you,” she said—if not kindly, then at least with a clear, astonishing note of sympathy. “No one wants to believe their parabatai—never mind their agelai—could be a —” She hesitated. “Could do such things,” she said finally. Evidently she could no more formulate the thought than Alec could, if for entirely different reasons.

“But this is much larger than your grief,” she continued. She looked to Isabelle, and the golem restraining her lowered its metal hand from her mouth. If she’d expected a response from Izzy, a word of thanks, she didn’t get it; Izzy only stared at her, her expression unreadable. “The truth must be freed, but I cannot do it alone. I need your help now. Symeon needs your help. Will you give it?”

Silently, not knowing what else to do, they nodded, and Alec could not tell if either of them meant it.

***

He is floating among the stars like a ghost, and the world is so beautiful.

Simon stares at it, entranced. He has seen this image a thousand times—the blue, the green and gold and dusky brown, the rippled edges of continents, the serene silk of oceans—but he has never understood how BIG it all is. It is huge, enormous, bigger than ANYTHING—a perfectly imperfect sphere dancing for joy through the endless diamond-studded darkness, holding hands with its brothers and sisters as they fly through space together, skipping through stars, wearing moons and rings like jewellery.

It is so beautiful it hurts, a happiness so sweet it is unbearable. Two tears fall from his eyes and tumble into the darkness, crystallising into constellations somewhere far below.

(Below? Above? There is no up-and-down here.)

Suddenly something—everything—lurches. Reality folds—space compresses, crumpling up like fabric, a Big Bang in reverse. Behind it is empty whiteness like a sheet of paper, as if the universe is only wallpaper and this the plaster underneath, and Simon is too shocked to cry out as the bundle of gem-studded blackness shrinks faster and faster, crushes in on itself in a blur of light and silence and everything is whiteness as it—the universe, reality, everything—falls into his hands like a jewel.

But it is not a jewel. It’s a key.

Simon looks up and the white room is not empty after all—he looks up and sees himself looking back, his reflection framed in the mirror from Renwicks, the mirror that once held Valentine’s Portal.

But then his reflection blinks and his eyes open black as night above a grin like a scythe, and Simon’s hands are empty as Symeon lifts the key to his mouth and swallows it back like a shot of vodka and Simon shouts, “No!”, lunges for the mirror as if there’s any way to get it back—

At his touch the glass explodes, a hundred thousand bolts of silvery lightning bursting from the mirror with a roar, throwing Simon back through empty white space. The shards fly around him like snow and where they land walls spring up, walls upon walls of rippled glass in every direction, closing around him, closing him in, and when he picks himself up off the floor he is surrounded by a thousand thousand reflections, and none of them are him.

None of them are even human.

They have claws and scales and fur, wings and tails and horns, stand on two legs or four or none,
their skins are lavender azure ebony opalescent, they are aquatic draconic sylphic subterranean and everything in between, male and female and genders he has no words for, shapeshifters and creatures that are living gas and consciousnesses with three four five bodies apiece, they wear cloth or light or interlocking pieces of metal, they have flower blossoms growing from their bodies and tattoos on their lips, piercings of bone or ice or amber, their scales are engraved with pictograms and set with silver or their tails are braided with silk and feathers or their hides are marked with thin, delicate scars like art, carving the shapes of people, trees, constellations into their skins, and there are so many, countless, beautiful-impossible-terrifying, and they are all looking at him, seeing him, the weight of so much attention a crushing pressure—

“WHO ARE YOU?” he screams, and they scream with him—with mouths and hand-signs and trilling song, with slashing tail-gestures and searing colours flushing skins, with smoke signals hissed through three-rowed teeth and Morse code flashed from glowing eyes, with vibrations rung from harp-like growths and telepathy tearing out of the mirrors to slam into his mind in waves of pure, wordless emotion; he raises a warding hand and they move too, raising limbs or wings or fins as appropriate, curling into shells or spraying clouds of mist to hide their faces, the same meaning in a thousand thousand different gestures—

Mirroring him—

They are his reflections—

They are him—

It is too much, too impossible, no way to comprehend it make it make sense; he breaks and runs, runs but there is only the glass, the mirrors, a labyrinth of reflections, and the masses of creatures run with him, run or fly or swim or slither, riding beams of light or twisting their bodies into wheels or outright teleporting but there, always there no matter how fast he runs.

You cannot outrun yourself, after all.

Your selves.

***

As the golems escorted Jace out of the Silent Brothers’ carriage, the Mortal Sword still ice-cold against his neck, he felt someone watching him.

Not the golems that walked beside him, cutting him off from his agelai and watchful for any escape attempts. Not the pair of Silent Brothers waiting at the angel statue that was the gate to their city. Someone—or something—else, other, a lick of flame between his shoulder blades.

He turned his head, trusting instincts bred into his caste for a thousand years—but saw no one. Nothing.

He stopped walking. The golems, not expecting his sudden stop, continued on for a pace, and for a brief second the Mortal Sword left his skin and Alec and Isabelle surged to meet him, a brief whirlwind of relief-relief-fear-grief, knowledge and understanding exchanged faster than light, as fast as a thought—

*Keep him-ours secret keep him safe, hide obscure disguise all you-me-we can, make her-our-enemy believe you-we-us are on her side—*

And they were gone, snapped apart like a bone as the Sword came to rest against his throat once more.
“Continue onwards,” the golem not holding the Sword instructed, and Jace walked towards the Silent Brothers waiting to receive him without looking back.

The space where Alec and Izzy should have been inside him echoed, ached like a wound. He could not remember ever being so alone.

The earth shifted, opened, dropping away to reveal the stairs to the Silent City. He walked down them with the Sword at his neck and golems at his side, and let the darkness swallow him whole.

***

Isabelle held a mask of silk and porcelain before her face to hide her soul, and watched every move the Inquisitor made, committed her every word to memory. She was aware that she was studying the older woman like an enemy, like something to be hunted, and she didn’t care.

She had taken Jace away. She had locked him up. And the Angel only knew what Simon was going through right now—if he was even alive—

No. Of course he was alive. Why would an angel bother possessing someone if doing so killed their host? Whatever their objective was, presumably they couldn’t accomplish it if their vessel died, or they would just possess the dead—it seemed like that would be easier. Less complicated.

She saw it each time she closed her eyes, the memory a piece of new amber embedded in her heart, wet and fragile and golden: the unearthly, celestial light streaming from Simon’s eyes, like staring into the sun. The wings on the wall, wings upon wings—swan wings and dragon wings and wings sharp and curved as sabres. The fire that had blazed beneath his skin, terrible, holy, recasting the shape of his face; incinerating every trace of humanity in the form it wore so that it was as if Simon had never existed at all, as if there had only ever been the celestial androgyne with a voice that shook the world….

Even with the disaster that had presaged it, even with the blood that had come after, there was a part of Izzy that was still blinded by the impossible glory of what she’d seen. Her Marks were still humming with it, like wind chimes still shivering-singing from the solar storm that had been unleashed upon them, that had caught them up; they felt pleasantly warm on her skin, as if they had absorbed some spark of holy fire like black paint absorbing sunlight.

But the awe did not make her stupid. If anything, she felt more protective of Simon’s secrets than she ever had before; when the Inquisitor asked her questions, she pared her answers down to slivers of truth, offering splinters shaved from the puzzle pieces and pretending they were the puzzle entire.

An angel. A real angel. And it had come to Simon, for whatever inscrutable, unknowable reason Celestials did anything. That meant something. It had not chosen to manifest itself in the centre of the Gard, the Nephilim house of parliament, and address the Clave directly; it had not lit one of the temples with heavenly fire to speak to the congregations; it had not even chosen for a vessel one of those Shadowhunters who lived entirely within the Law, who clung unhesitatingly to tradition. No, it had chosen Simon, who was not obedient or traditional or religious, who despised the Clave and would never be Dedicated.

There had to be a reason for that. There had to be a reason it had hidden itself for so long, why it had chosen the one Nephilim as far from Alicante as you could get for its vessel. A reason that, when it had finally shown itself to a representative of the Clave, it had been to lay an injunction, not a benediction, upon her.

So Isabelle—and Alec—told the Inquisitor what they had to, and no more; about Abigor, and the
seraphfire, and the síndi angélou. But no more than that. Not that Simon could move seraph blades, his own and others’; not that he could move Shadowhunters, too, through their Marks. They didn’t
tell how Abigor had knelt to him, or that the touch of demons made Simon weep blood, or that he
had a darkness in him, an other-self cast in negative where white was black and black was white.

The angel had not told her. They would not tell her either, and not only to protect Simon.

It was funny, Izzy thought, watching the Inquisitor write her report. Before all of this, she would
have said that nothing could make Alec and Jace lie to their superiors. Jace hadn’t even lied about his
feelings for Valentine, when their parents asked, and that would have been a marvellous time to bend
the truth in half. But now?

We’re answering to a higher authority now, she thought coldly, and the thought was treason, and she
did not care. Another power had entered the playing field, one as high above the Clave as a
cherubim above the earth; she—they—told their lies by Heaven’s will, and that superseded the
Clave’s in a blaze of seraphfire and holy law.

But she considered herself acting under another authority, too, one she held deep and close, hidden
even from herself; a sea serpent that showed itself in a flash of wave-jewelled scales for half an
instant, before submerging with a flick of a powerful tail. A quiet but powerful thing, growing like a
pearl in an oyster from a grain of sand, the speck of an idea, a whisper of thought.

A whisper that said: there are forces greater even than Heaven, more worthy than angels of your
loyalty, your honour. What Law is greater than that of friendship and family?

A whisper that said: the Clave’s Law would tear your family apart.

A whisper that said: what gives them the right?

It was a terrible thought, terrible and terrifying, an infernal blade thrust through the foundations of her
world. So disturbing, so heinous, that she could not even look at the thought directly, could not
acknowledge it.

But she was no longer alone in her mind, and Alec—heart-bruised, exhausted Alec, his angel-torn
soul struggling to bear up against this new wound of losing Jace—caught a brief glimpse of the
serpent as it vanished beneath the waves.

*That’s blasphemy,* he whispered. *Blasphemy and treason both.*

Izzy said nothing. She didn’t have to; he could feel her uncertainty, her confusion, her rage and hate
and fear, as clearly as his own. And she could feel his, too, and guilt took the edge from her
righteous anger because there was no rage in him, nothing hard or burning; if Izzy was frostfire then
her brother was an ocean fog, salt and cold and thick, crushing exhaustion. She tried to help, to lift
some of the plate armour weighing him down, but she wasn’t enough on her own.

For two nights Alec had been able to sleep—really sleep, as he hadn’t since the angel marked his
hand and took the price of it out of his soul. For two days, he’d been almost himself—stressed almost
beyond bearing, but himself, because together, Izzy and Jace could patch the wound the angel had
wrought, stitch it closed, however clumsily, however much it strained against their hold. Alec’s soul
was ripped wide but between them Jace and Izzy had more than enough to share with him. In the
two days since they’d bonded some of the pale fragility had already faded from Alec’s face, the dark
circles under his eyes reduced to the faintest of shadows.

But now the stitches were fraying, popping, no matter how Izzy scrambled for them, clinging the
edges shut with mental fingernails, and the Inquisitor was still asking them questions, sympathy laid over sharpness like gilt on steel.

*I’m fine,* Alec said softly, and Izzy felt him retreat from her, drawing a translucent curtain over his pain, his heavy, bone-deep weariness that was more in his mind than his body, a layering of lead around every thought—

*Lie reject-your-falsehood concern stubborn-male love-love-love,* she answered, discarding words in favour of weaving her heart around his, bolstering it, bracing it with a sister’s stubborn love—

It creaked, trembled, but by the Angel she would hold it—

The Inquisitor and Isabelle both looked up at the sound of footsteps in the corridor; Alec couldn’t find the energy to lift his head. A half-beat later there was a knock at the door.

“Enter,” the Inquisitor said crisply. They had adjourned to the Head’s study, the Inquisitor in the seat that just a few days previous had been Alec’s. Izzy was still trying not to resent the usurpation when the door opened.

“Inquisitor.” It was Maryse; she glanced briefly at her children, and then away. Contempt twisted in Izzy’s gut like a knife, shockingly sharp. “There’s a warlock downstairs. She says she needs to speak with you urgently.”

The Inquisitor frowned. “Of course. One moment.” She added a few more words to the report she was writing, produced her stele, and quickly sketched the fire-message *telesma*, the one every Nephilim knew; *saethu* Mark and the runic name of the message’s addressee, interlocked like a solar eclipse. The paper dissolved in a quick flash of greenish flame as she pushed back from the desk and rose to her feet; Izzy wondered where the message would reappear, if she would recognise the addressee’s name if she knew it. “Lead the way.”

Izzy straightened in her chair. “Inquisitor, should we…?”

She did not quail as the Inquisitor flung a quick, piercing glance in her direction. “Please follow,” the Inquisitor said, after only a brief pause. “You two are more familiar with this canton than I, after all. I would welcome your assistance.”

There she went asking for their help again…

She wanted to squeeze Alec’s hand as they all made their way downstairs, but she didn’t quite dare, and had to settle for hugging him mind-to-mind instead. He’d said nothing, but she’d felt his spark of disappointment when their mother said ‘she’—when it was clear that this time, their warlock visitor wasn’t Magnus.

But it was someone they knew. As they followed the Inquisitor into the formal Receiving Room—escorted by one of the Inquisitor’s guards, the blond Asian man—even Alec felt a muted surprise when they found Arika *ashipu* standing by the window.

“Warlock,” the Inquisitor said, stepping forward. “I am in charge here. You said you needed to speak with me?”

Arika ignored her entirely. Instead, fixing her serpentine eyes on Alec and Isabelle, she folded her arms behind her back and bowed. “*Viisaille viisauden,* Alexander Sariel, Isabelle Sariel,” she said as she rose, making a fist, right hand over left, and placing it over her heart.

Too surprised to hesitate, they made the answering courtesies; touching their first and middle fingers
to their brows, then gesturing a curve from left to right in front of them with an open hand, palm-up. “Viisailta maailmalle, Arika ashipu,” they chorused.

The other Shadowhunters—their mother, the Inquisitor, her guard—stared at them, all of them confused, all of them surprised.

“What is this?” the Inquisitor asked.

“This is how the wise greet each other, Shadowhunter.” The scales covering half of Arika’s skull and face were like jewels in a sword-hilt; beautiful, but beneath the ornamentation was something as deadly as it was lovely. “I come as the Voice of the Spiral Court to tell you this: a werewolf child has been murdered.”

*No,* Alec whispered. *No, no. Not again!*

This time Izzy reached for his hand and squeezed, heedless of how it might look.

Besides, the others were all focussed on Arika. “When did this happen?” the Inquisitor demanded. “Where was the body found? Which pack did the child belong to?”

“The child died just after two this morning,” Arika said. “But I have no other answers for you.”

“What do you mean, you don’t have answers?” Maryse asked. “Where is the body? Where are the parents?”

Arika spread her hands. “The Court does not yet know.”

“Forgive me, Arika ashipu,” Izzy said, choosing her words and tone carefully, “but if you don’t know where the body is, how do you know anyone died?”

For a moment, she thought she glimpsed an almost approving glint in Arika’s black-and-fire eyes—but it was gone before she could be sure. “That I will not tell you, Isabelle Sariel.”

“‘Will not?’” the Inquisitor echoed sharply. “You are bound by the Accords to aid Raziel’s agents in the pursuit of his justice, warlock. Refusing to give information we need—”

“If the Court deems that you need it, the Court will provide it,” Arika said, cutting her off. “Until then, trust our word. A werewolf child has been murdered. Do your jobs, Shadowhunters.”

She said this last with something of a sneer, and before anyone could react she swept out of the room, brushing past the Inquisitor as if the Clave’s strong left hand were of no consequence.

“I’ll see her out,” Alec said hurriedly, and ran after her, giving Izzy’s fingers a final squeeze before slipping away.

Give credit where credit was due; the Inquisitor did not hesitate long. “Syr Park, please gather the golems and meet us in the entrance hall in ten minutes. Leave one golem to assist Syr Bellesword and watch over Symeon.” The man dipped a shallow bow and left to fulfil her orders as the Inquisitor turned to Maryse. “I want to see all of this canton’s packhouses before nightfall.”

“I—I’m afraid I don’t know where they all are,” Maryse said, taken aback.

The Inquisitor’s eyebrows rose. “Excuse me?”

“Alec knows,” Izzy said, surprising herself. It was true, but that was not why she’d said it. “He can show you.”
“Good.” The Inquisitor gave Maryse a cool look. “At least someone in this canton is paying attention to it.”

Maryse flushed, but said nothing.

“Syr Sariel,” it took Izzy a beat to realise the Inquisitor meant her, “I would appreciate it if you would remain here.”

Izzy opened her mouth to protest—then thought of Simon upstairs. “Can I stay with Symeon?”

“I think that would be acceptable, yes. Only ask Syr Bellesword to alert me when he wakes.”

“I can do that,” Izzy said.

“Thank you.” Izzy started, but the Inquisitor was already moving towards the door. “Maryse, I expect you and your husband to be at the front door in six minutes. Do not make me wait.”

And she was gone, maybe to send another message to the Clave. Izzy started after her, wondering if Max was awake yet, if he’d want to sit with her at Simon’s bedside. Wondering if anyone had told him about Jace yet.

“Isabelle,” her mother said. “Thank you.”

Izzy paused with her hand on the door. “Mother,” she said after a beat, her heart thudding with something too cold and bitter to be anger, “I don’t want to hear it.”

She walked out without a backwards glance, and took the stairs two at a time as she made for Max’s room.

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“How is Magnus?” Alec blurted the moment they were out of Shadowhunter earshot.

“He is not well,” Arika said. She looked sideways at him, her long legs devouring the distance to the front door as if she couldn’t wait to be out of the Institute. “He is very ill, Alexander Sariel. And likely to grow worse.”

“What?” Alec froze for a beat, aghast, but she didn’t stop walking and he had to break into a run to catch up with her. “What do you mean, he’s sick? I thought he was—he was grieving. Is grieving. Isn’t he?”

“Of course he is. All the Spiral grieves, but that is a wound time will mend, insofar as it is able.”

Alec had to fight past the thick heaviness in his head to process what he was hearing, had to claw for it. His bones had become lead again with Jace gone, and even thinking was such effort, an immense, almost painful struggle—Sisyphus rolling his stone up a hellish hill, only to be forced to start over when it slipped through his fingers, again and again and again. “Are you saying time won’t mend this? He’s not going to get better?”

Arika walked in silence, her scale-adorned face unreadable for a handful of heartbeats. When she spoke again, he could hear how carefully she chose each word. “Death is the poison that sickens him, and only death can cure him.”

“What does that mean?” Alec demanded, and the fog in him muffled everything, dulled everything, but even a dull blade can be pushed through a heart and the blunt, ungentle point went right through
Alec’s chest. His sister felt it, he heard-felt her questions, her concern, but he could hear nothing but Arika’s words, ‘only death can cure him’—“Is he—are you saying—”

They had reached the front door. At a glance from Arika, Alec numbly waved his hand, and the door swung open in a chorus of unlocking locks.

“There are secrets here I cannot share,” Arika said. “But I can tell you this: Magnus’ fate is tied to these murders. Find the murderer, avert his working, and Magnus may yet survive.”

“May isn’t good enough,” Alec said quietly. The mourning runes on his arms and back throbbed like burns.

He tried to imagine having to draw the crimson Marks for Magnus, and couldn’t do it.

Arika stepped out onto the front steps. “Two children have been murdered. If two more are killed, the only cure for your lover will be a pure death. That is all I can tell you, Alexander Sariel.”

A pure death. Some spark of recognition caught in his mind, smouldering on damp wood. He’d heard that phrase somewhere before…

He nodded shortly, his heart racing. “I understand.”

Arika nods back, and it looked like respect, but her fiery eyes were so hard to read. “Good.” She turned away from him and started down the stairs. Paused. “One more thing.” She pointed at something with the toe of her boot. “Someone is trying to bind you and yours.”

“What?” He came out on to the steps, and saw what she saw. The stairs were damp, as if it had been raining not long ago, but a crisp chalk line bisected the steps, clear and perfect. It was hard to see against the white stone of the stairs, but when he knelt to look closer… “A binding circle?”

“So it appears.” Arika stepped over the line and continued on. “Until we meet again, Alexander Sariel.”

“Yeah,” Alec muttered. He felt sick, and weary beyond words. Watching Arika walk away, he found himself wishing he could go up to his room and hide there, fall asleep and never wake up. He couldn’t begin to imagine what to do next; could hardly find the energy, or the will, to climb back to his feet. And now… Now, on top of everything else, Magnus’ life was on the line too.

He sat down heavily on the steps and put his head in his hands, trying to remind himself that this wasn’t real—this feeling of mental and emotional exhaustion, the sensation of being slowly, unstoppably calcified. The hatred he felt for this weakness was as irrational as despising himself for a broken arm—it was an injury, that was all. Angel-given, but it wasn’t him; this was not the truth of himself. And if it made the mere thought of the future an awful load to bear, he had to remember that this was not permanent. Trying to believe it, he told himself that he hadn’t always felt this way, no matter how hard it was to remember feeling normal. And—and it wouldn’t last forever. Catarina had said so. It was impossible to imagine, but logic and reason insisted that he would not always feel like this.

No, his weariness whispered. It has always been this way. It will never end. The weight in your bones, the broken gears in your mind; they have always been here, and what could ever remove them? You are a small boat lost in the fog, and there is no point in even trying to row free, because there is nothing beyond the brume.

His sister was halfway across the Institute, but sitting on the wet stair Alec felt her presence as if she’d wrapped her arms around him.
A lump swelling in his throat, he reached back for her, clinging hard. *I don’t know how to do this,* he confessed, too drained by bearing this wound on his soul to even cry. *How am I supposed to do this? I can’t do this.*

Magnus. Magnus could die. Could die. He was supposed to outlive Alec by centuries, by millennia, not die of an illness before Alec could truly know him—

It didn’t feel real. It didn’t make sense. Silver burned werewolves and vampires; faeries never walked under the sun; and warlocks didn’t get sick, no more than Shadowhunters did. That was what made their immortality so sad, because the only end for them was a violent death, injury or accident or murder…

*Magnus isn’t going to die,* Izzy said firmly. *Jace is not going to be banished. Simon…* He felt her flicker of dark amusement. *I have no idea what constitutes his happy ending, but he’s going to get it.*

*I’m not strong enough,* Alec whispered.

*Not alone, you’re not,* she agreed, pragmatic. *But you’re not alone, are you?*

Even the thick despair that had edged his heart since Simon’s angel tore him open could not deny that. Not when he could feel Izzy’s breath in his own lungs, the weight of her braid at his back, her pulse in sync with his own. Not with her strength there at their core, a reservoir of clear water under starlight.

*And you’re not alone with this, either,* she continued. *It’s just like a hunt: we have to work together to get it done. So you? Are going to go with the Inquisitor, and show her the packhouses, and find out whose child is missing. And I’m going to trace the binding circle, make a sketch for you, and start researching what a ‘pure death’ might be.* She paused. *We will get through this, you know. Look how far we’ve come, how much we’ve already survived.* Memories unfolded between them; the Cup, Abbadon, Hodge’s betrayal, Jace’s rescue, the mark on Alec’s hand. The glory of the angel standing over Jace, ready to defend him with the Mortal Sword, wings outspread. *We’re the first agela in a generation, Alec! We can do this.*

And like magic, as if her words were a spell, the burned synapses in their shared soul suddenly came alight like an unexpected dawn breaking out of darkness, rays of warm gold piercing and scattering the heavy fog in Alec’s mind; he gasped, drawing his first full breath in what felt like years as the blade came away from Jace’s throat down in the dark and gave him back to them, their third, the completing piece of the tertian that was their soul-song—

*Our-us-by-another-name joy life you return JACE!*

He surged to meet them, awash with the same exhilarating relief, the same bliss at being complete—a pleasure that was so intense-immense it superseded the physical, a sacred joy. Heart-to-heart they embraced, tumbling in and through each other, sharing memories of the past hour in stop-motion flashes. Alec and Izzy saw the steel and adamas bars of Jace’s cell, the Marks etched into the walls—

But they were blurred, indistinct, the images smearing like wet paint the more Izzy and Alec reached for them.

*Did they medicate you?* Izzy asked, worried, and Alec echoed her concern, confused by the staticky quality to Jace’s thoughts. Even distance didn’t do this to a parabatai bond, and every source agreed that a closed agela bond was immeasurably stronger than that—
Jace’s frustration scorched, but it was tempered by a resignation his **agelai** didn’t understand until the fourth or fifth time he sent a hazy snapshot of the runes Marking his cell.

*It’s the cell,* * Alec realised, embarrassed it had taken him so long to understand. *The runes—they’re blocking part of the bond. So he can’t talk to us.*

Izzy’s amazement was frost blossoming on water; she hadn’t known that was possible. Alec hadn’t either, but it made sense. Of course they wouldn’t want Jace to talk to them—and of course they couldn’t hold the Mortal Sword to his skin every moment until his trial. The Sword was too precious for that. No doubt it was even now being returned to its place amongst the Silent Brothers.

Footsteps sounded behind Alec, and he looked around, reminded of his body, his physical location.

“Syr Sariel?” the Inquisitor said. She had changed into gear. She dressed **ilma**-style, like Jace, prioritising speed and smarts over strength, only lightly armoured so as not to weigh herself down. Loose combat trousers tucked into dragon-hide boots, and above them her form-fitting jacket—also dragon leather—was zipped up to the throat, so its high collar would protect her neck. Her braid had been tucked into her coat. Across her back she carried a modified **naginata**—a kind of Japanese polearm; instead of one blade hers had two, one at each end of the spear-like staff—and around her waist a **sephali lehare**, a descendant of the Indian **urumi** midwifed by the Iron Sisters in their citadel, gleamed like a belt of silver. Her bronze pendant, the sign of the Clave, rested on her chest. Against all the black, it shone like a new-minted coin. “Did your sister tell you?”

Alec rose to his feet, sending one last flare of reassurance to Jace. “She did. I’m sorry, I’ll go get changed.”

He hurried past her, his thoughts a flock of new-hatched butterflies, the heavy cocoon-casings discarded, burnt to ash by his **agelai**’s warmth, the charred remains pushed aside to make room for maps and schematics, an objective, a **plan**. They couldn’t talk, but it almost didn’t matter; Jace was here, with them, and between his light and Izzy’s fire… It was like walking all night through a dark forest, the sky storming come down and the wet, icy chill wrapped around his bones—only to stumble upon sanctuary, some place warm and dry, with friends waiting at the hearth.

It was like being able to breathe.

*Start with the Sepher Ha-Razim,* * he told Izzy as he raced to the weapons room. There was no time to go home for his own gears and weapons, but there were spares he could use. *It’s shelved with the grimoires on the second floor.*

He would take the Inquisitor to the packhouses. They would find out all they needed about the missing—murdered—child. And if Izzy couldn’t find a reference to ‘a pure death’, then they would search together when he got back, and when Simon woke up they would make a plan to help Jace, and Magnus **would not die.**

Izzy was right; he was **agelai**, and **agelai** never surrendered, not to despair or exhaustion or unjust Laws. They could do this. They **would** do this.

*(They had to.)*

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Izzy waited until the others were gone, then hurried outside to copy the circle Arika had found.
The sketchpad she carried wasn’t hers; Clary had left it in Isabelle’s old room almost a week ago, and Izzy kept forgetting to return it. Holding it under her arm reminded her that Clary didn’t know what was going on, what had happened to Simon, and to Jace. Had anyone even thought to warn her that the Inquisitor was finally here?

She made a note to call her red-headed friend as soon as she could, put pencil to paper, and started walking the circle.

It extended around the entire building. The single line that crossed the Institute steps connected seven smaller circles, elegant knots of geometric shapes and sigils that meant nothing to Izzy, no matter how she wracked her brain. Each of these circles were banded with a seemingly random collection of numbers and letters, and everywhere she saw the equal-armed cross—it was repeated over and over, far more often than any other symbol, and that confused her, because she knew that was not one of the signs they’d covered in class. It wasn’t used for summoning or binding demons—but then, presumably whoever had drawn this circle hadn’t been intending to trap a demon. How could there be demons in the Institute?

Which left only one possible conclusion. It’s meant for Simon, she thought, chilled. It must be. Had one of the Inquisitor’s guards been sent to draw it, after Simon’s angel had nearly struck down the Inquisitor? Arika had called it a binding circle. Why would Shadowhunters want to bind an angel? How could they dare?

Because he’s dangerous. Or it is. She remembered the angel’s wings, the sharp edges of them as they swung down for the Inquisitor. It would have cut her to pieces, if Simon’s body hadn’t suddenly given out.

Either the Inquisitor’s people drew this, or someone else did. Who else could it have been? Who else knew about Simon? Who could guess?

There were the werewolves, Izzy thought uneasily. The werewolf movers, who had seen Simon convulsing and weeping blood—seen him throw an adult werewolf into the wall. Izzy had warned them to keep quiet, but they might have told others. In which case, there’s no telling who might have put the pieces together. She didn’t know enough about angelic possession to tell if what the werewolves had seen were surefire signs of it; maybe someone who knew all about it would recognise it instantly from the descriptions of Simon’s fit.

And then the mysterious They tracked him to the Institute and drew a binding circle here? It seemed unlikely, illogical. And again, why would you want to bind an angel like that?

To control it. To compel it. To make it do what you want.

Grimly, Izzy scuffed the chalk with her boot, deliberately smearing the circle she’d just finished copying. Dangerous it might be, but Simon’s angel had trusted her—and Jace, and Alec—with the secret of its presence, its very existence. She’d damn herself to Hell before betraying that trust.

Inquisitor or mysterious Other, no one was going to be binding Simon and his angel on her watch.

* *

On her way up to the library, she detoured to stop by Max’s room. It was getting close to noon at this point, and her younger brother was probably still on Idrian time. He ought to be awake by now.

And sure enough, his cool voice answered when she knocked. “Come in.”

Izzy pushed open the door.
When Max was four, the Silent Brothers had conditionally confirmed him as  äräydän. It was not quite a record—äräydinae had been known to start presenting at 18 months—but it was impressive.

Isabelle had never got around to asking Clary if Light Worlders had  äräydinae too; she guessed that they probably didn’t. It was the blood of Raziel, Hodge had claimed, that created  äräydinae; when the celestial blood was stronger than usual in a child, that child was  äräydän, with an angel’s ice and an angel’s fire inside them. Trained correctly, they became legendary Shadowhunters and great leaders, without exception; they could attend the Academy early, take their Marks at a younger age than others could bear, and once graduated they could choose their own assignments, pick their own cantons as they pleased. At 18 they were granted a seat on the Clave, if they wanted it, regardless of where they stood in their House’s line of inheritance; and  äräydinae were the first ones offered the places when Institutes became available. If they were more common than parabatai, they were very nearly as highly prized: Max’s confirmation had come with a lavish party, and it had not just been for the Lightwood family. Officials from Alicante had come to the New York Institute, and the heads of important Houses, and for a little while the coldly barren place that had been Izzy’s home since birth had been warm and bright; for a day, it had been possible to forget that Izzy’s parents were outcasten, that the Lightwood name was a pale ghost of what it had once been, with Makepeaces and Blackthorns congratulating Maryse and Robert on their son, and pressing gilt-wrapped gifts into Max’s four-year-old hands. Cousins Izzy had never met, and had not met since, had appeared out of the ether to claim a little reflected credit for the siring of a  äräydän of their bloodlines. Even Consul Dieudonne had come, the head of the entire Clave, to give little Max the traditional gift given to all  äräydinae: a key to the great doors of the Gard, the heart of Alicante where the Clave met to work the Law.

‘For the day when you will join our ranks,’ he said, smiling at the small boy.

Max had accepted it—all of it—as his due. Jace and Izzy had found his autocratic attitude towards the fuss being made of him hilarious.

But they’d had to have lessons then, the Lightwoods, even Maryse and Robert; lessons in how to handle a  äräydän. Because of course Max’s confirmation was only conditional; it happened, sometimes, that those born  äräydinae were  äräydän no longer by the time they reached adulthood.  äräydinae children who were exposed too much to Ascended Shadowhunters or Nephilim of other castes, or who became parabatai before the end of puberty, sometimes lost the Angel’s fire; they required special treatment, special training. You couldn’t treat them like other people, or expect them to act like other Shadowhunters. They were special. They were  äräydinae.

Which was why Izzy’s parents had allowed Max free rein to stock his room as his own personal armoury. Despite being only eight, Max had more weapons arranged on the walls and shelves than Jace had ever had—more sharp, deadly objects than any non-äräydän eight-year-old would be allowed to even touch, never mind keep within easy reach. In the small spaces between swords forged for a child’s arm, there were books; codices and manuals and tracts, split near-evenly between the subjects of demonology and Shadow World politics. In the corner of the room stood a much-maimed practice dummy, and it was this that Max was focussed on as Izzy came in. He had a pair of kunai throwing knives in his hands, and two more were already embedded in the dummy’s eyes.

“What do you want?” he asked without turning around. He threw the third dagger in a perfect snap; the blade didn’t spin, just flew like a bolt of black lightning into the red circle that marked a heart-shot. “I’m practising.”

“I can see that,” Izzy said, with only a touch of sarcasm. “I was wondering if you’d had breakfast yet. Everyone else is out or busy, so if you want anything cooked, you’re stuck with me.”
“I already ate.” The last knife sheared through the air into the dummy’s groin.

“Are you saying that because it’s true, or because it’s me?” Izzy asked, folding her arms over her chest, the drawing pad clutched in her fingers.

A flicker of amusement brushed Max’s mouth. “I had breakfast with the Inquisitor. She wanted to meet the Lightwood jääydin. We had an interesting discussion.” He walked over to the dummy to retrieve his blades.

Izzy leaned against the doorframe. “What did you think of her?” she asked, curious.

“She’s an idealist,” Max answered promptly. For a brief instant she glimpsed his contempt at the very idea, and then it was gone like a ghost. “Utterly irrational on the subject of Valentine or his sons, but otherwise of above-average intelligence. Probably a very good High Inquisitor; not someone to invite to a tea party.”

A bubble of laughter caught in Izzy’s throat, but after the events of the last hours, it refused to come out. “She arrested Jace. He’s been taken to the Silent City.”

For the first time, Max turned to face her, a rare bout of honest surprise on his young face. The key to the Gard hung from a gold chain around his neck, as it always did. “On what charges?”

She hesitated only a moment in telling him; it was hardly a secret anymore. “He and Simon have been sleeping together.”

Max paused. After only a brief second, his expression became sardonic. “This is a lämieli thing,” he said, using the word that meant non- jääydinae. It was not a question.

“Which part?” Izzy asked, slightly warily, because that kind of statement usually required exacting clarification when you were talking to a jääydin.

“Caring whom Jace has sex with. As if that has any relevance to anything of import.” Max shook his head before Izzy could respond. “I’m sorry. Please continue.”

“The Mortal Sword confirmed that he has no allegiance with his father,” Izzy said, “But after the Sword, Jace claimed that the incest was non-consensual. That he’d forced Simon.”

Now Max frowned. “I take it by your mentioning that this claim was not Sword-sworn I am meant to infer that it is not in fact true. But why in Raziel’s name would he lie?” he asked, with honest puzzlement.

“To keep Simon from getting in trouble,” Izzy explained patiently. Self-sacrifice was not a concept most jääydinae understood. “And us.” Shifting to hold the sketchpad under her arm, she reached up and drew down the flap of her cóada, baring her new parabatai Mark. “Jace, Alec and I—we’re agelai now. Agela Sariel.”

Max brightened. “Excellent! It’s about time. I—” About to say more, he suddenly paused, and frowned. “Although the reputational benefit of your bonding is somewhat undermined by the damage all this will do to Jace’s reputation…” He sighed. “This is ridiculous. The moment Jace is brought to trial he will be made to testify under the Sword, and the charges will fall apart.”

“Not quite,” Izzy said. “They’ll know he lied about the rape, but the incest is still real.”

“So what? There is nothing they can realistically do to a pureblooded Shadowhunter of his calibre—particularly now you are all three agelai. The cost of punishing him is entirely outweighed by the
benefits of keeping this very quiet.”

At another time, Izzy might have smiled. “I don’t think the Clave are going to see it that way.”

Max made a sound of disgust. “Lämieli,” he said, with real revulsion. Izzy knew better than to take it personally.

Her brother crossed the room and put his knives away. “I suppose it’s out of the question that they just become parastathentes? But of course there’s no time for the harpagmos,” he answered himself, before Izzy could. “Parabatai, then. They can always change the Mark later.”

The Silent Brothers had coached Alec, Izzy and Jace on what to expect from jääydnæ, on how to react to their alien modes of thought and logic. It was important never to react with disgust, to remain calm and rational even when they said or did something completely outrageous. But Izzy had never felt the difference between herself and her youngest brother so strongly as she did in that moment.

“Max, I know this makes no sense to you, but trust me, no lämiel would ever agree to become parabatai in these circumstances, for these reasons.”

He turned to stare at her. “It’s the most cost-effective solution,” he said, bewildered. “The Eros Statute is suspended within Marked bonds. There will still be some damage to Sariel’s reputation, of course, but if you continue to kill demons within your projected parameters, and if Jace and Simon become parastathentes as soon as possible, that can be overcome—”

“This is another lämieli thing, Max,” she said gently. “It’s a great idea. And—and I think we should at least suggest it to Jace and Simon, just in case. Maybe I’m wrong.” She knew Jace’s love for Simon was beyond anything she could have imagined, before the parabatai bond had allowed her to feel it for herself; she knew that Jace probably would consent to bond with Simon. He probably wouldn’t even hesitate.

But he should hesitate. He shouldn’t enter into a bond with Simon at all. Not yet. Not so soon, if ever. And Simon—Simon couldn’t possibly understand what he was agreeing to, if he did agree.

“If the Clave are actually stupid enough to try executing Jace,” Max began—

“Then a bond is the best idea,” Izzy agreed. “But it’s a trump card idea. We shouldn’t play it unless we have no other choice. Do you understand?”

“No,” Max said wryly. “But I defer to your judgement where lämieli are concerned.” He tilted his head, considering. “I do wish Jace could have been more circumspect,” he said, annoyed. “It was always going to be hard enough to repair the Lightwood name as it was, without this on top of it.”

“ Wouldn’t want it to be too easy, would you?” Izzy asked. “Where’s the fun in that?”

He gave her a look, and this time she did laugh a little, unable to help herself.

“It really isn’t amusing,” he said, and Izzy grinned at him.

“It’s a little funny.”

He rolled his eyes. “So we have a deus ex machina, should we need one. What are we going to do for Jace now?”

That sobered her, because she didn’t have an answer, did she? For all that she’d tried to reassure Alec, Izzy wasn’t sure what they could do for Jace right now. When Simon woke up they could
coordinate with him, but until the Inquisitor formally brought charges against Jace…

And even when she did, what then? The incest was true, the Mortal Sword would confirm it—

“Max…” Izzy said softly, but he was talking over her, thinking aloud in what was the greatest sign of trust a jääydin could give—

“It has to stay quiet—which means it must be done with quickly, all of it—the longer it goes on the more chance the damage to Jace’s reputation will be irreparable—and yours and Alec’s with it, there’s no way to distance ourselves from Jace now you’re agelai, and even if we could he’s too valuable to discard if there’s any chance of fixing this—hmm—but your value as agelai ought to counteract the associations of Jace’s parentage—and agelai are expected to have complicated love lives anyway, are they not? Perhaps the agela exception to the Eros Statute would be enough to sway the Clave’s vote, even if it doesn’t strictly apply here—”

“Max!”

He stopped and looked at her. “What?”

“We don’t have any way to influence how the Clave will vote for Jace. We don’t even know if there really will be a trial yet!”

“That’s true,” he said, his eyes coming alight. “Even if they’re too stupid to realise how unimportant this is, it would be in their best interests to settle it privately somehow, out of court. There’s always a chance the public would side with Sariel, if the case went before the Clave.”

Privately, Izzy thought this was another case of her jääydin brother forgetting how irrational lämieli could be, but she didn’t correct him. “Well, until we know the Inquisitor’s next move, I’m on assignment from Alec. If you don’t need breakfast, then I’m off to the library.” She glanced at his bookshelves. “Unless you have a copy of the Sepher Ha-Razim up here?”

Max’s eyebrows rose. “Raziel’s book of spells? No. What do you want that for?”

“Alec wanted me to look something up. Have you ever heard of a ‘pure death’?”

“Not that I can remember…” Max tilted his head. “How in the Angel’s name does an obscure magical term fit into all this?”

Izzy sighed. “You know what? Why don’t you come with me, and I’ll tell you everything while we look through the books?”

“Done,” Max said instantly. He moved across the room towards the door, pulling his stele from a pocket. “I bet this is going to be a good one.”

In the hallway, as Max drew a locking rune on his door, Izzy rallied her memories of the last month into some kind of order. “The first thing you need to know,” she said as they started towards the library, “is that Simon is possessed by an angel…”

***

Simon ran.

And ran.

And kept on running.
He ran until he was sick, until he was dizzy, until his vision blurred and the mirrors spun around him like carousels and comets. He ran until he could not distinguish up from down, left from right; ran until he could not tell the difference between his every step, every breath, and the echoes in the glass. He ran until the maze of mirrors ran too, ran like water or mercury around him, ran like the blood of some impossible, angel-strange creature, wounded, bleeding—

He is bleeding.

Veins opening like flowers in his arms, spilling gold that streaks behind him like wings as he runs, as he flies, as the ground/ceiling falls away and he is tumbling falling soaring into a whirlwind of reflections, millions of dazzling shards twisted into a star-storm around him, not faces now but vistas caught in the mirrors like worlds trapped in argent amber, mountains plains oceans cities, cities in the sky in treetops buried underworld like Moria, cities of shell and stone and silk and selenite, cities that sing and cities that bleed and cities that are living beings in their own right, crystalline admanatine, silver and steel, towers of ice and towers of bone, turrets, spirals, domes, skyscrapers, minarets—they are snowflakes dancing in a blizzard of glass around him and every world he sees is dying, burning or drowning or dissolving into chalky dust in atomic winds. Castles in the sky plummet like falling stars and mountain cities crack asunder and those beneath the waves boil as lava comes gushing out from the sea-quakes knife into their bedrock jagged as lightning in an endless montage of apocalypses, Ragnaröks flashing past sharp as memory sharp as grief sharp as guilt, round and round and round again and he can hear them, they are screaming, every one of them is screaming as darkness spills across their reflections like blood like ink as they are swallowed up, torn apart, devoured by the demons he glimpses in every glass, swarms of them, plagues of them, as many as the grains of sand on all the beaches in every universe he does not know—

The fragments of mirrors stop their spinning, hang suspended like stars in their orbits, and for an instant there is a figure burning gold in the death throes of every landscape, bright as a spark in the devouring dark—here weeping, here laughing, here bent over the corpse cradled in its arms and here shrieking at the sky, licking blood from its lips or clasping forelimbs with two companions, here with a blade and here with a wand and here with blood-soaked hands spread open in welcome to Hell—

And then there are only the faces again, the reflections that are him and not-him, millions of them, and they all scream one word so loud he forgets his own name—

REMEMBER

—only to coalesce, every glint of silver flying together to form one mass as Simon falls from where he hangs, falls down through the white nothingness with the echo a mace in his skull and his wings of blood trailing behind him like comet-ribbons—

He smashes into the net of glass waiting somewhere between entropy and eternity, and it slices him to pieces.

But he comes back together. And when he does, he’s inside a mirror—the mirror—and standing on the other side of the glass, his smirk sharp and his eyes black, is Symeon.

***

Alec had been right: they found the explanation for Arika’s oblique riddle in the Sepher Ha-Razîm.

It took Izzy and Max almost an hour to even find the book, it was so deeply hidden in the shelves of esoteric texts. Simon had mentioned once that Light Worlders used something called the Lewey Secimal System to organise their libraries, but Izzy knew nothing about that. The Silent Brothers, it
was said, had their own baroquely intricate methods for organising the records of the Nephilim, but no one she’d ever heard of organised their library by anything but personal whim. A smart Shadowhunter had particular shelves for particular subjects, so that you didn’t have to tear through cookbooks and family histories when you needed a demonology scroll in a hurry, but beyond that… What was the point?

Although she had a better idea of the answer to that question after hunting down this book of Raziel’s magic. It’s all well and good to say ‘these are the shelves for spellbooks’, but when you have 14 bookcases of them and no idea what’s on what shelf…

She made a note to talk to Simon about that Light Worlder system. If Light Worlders could write such good books, maybe they could organise them well, too.

The Sepher Ha-Razim was in Hebrew, of course, and Izzy sat down to read through it while Max made a stack of other likely texts. The book Raziel had given to Noah was less than a hundred pages long, full of spells and rituals to guard against demons in the days before Shadowhunters. Hodge had taught the Lightwood children that Noah was the name ancient Hebrews had given to a warlock of the time, one whose true identity had been lost; which explained both why he would have a book of magic and his 950 year lifespan. But as she turned the pages, Izzy found herself puzzling over that. Everyone knew that warlocks hoarded their knowledge like dragons hoarding jewels, ensuring that most true spellbooks were never glimpsed by the Children of Raziel; but the Sepher Ha-Razim was not the only ancient book of magic to come down to the Nephilim. The Institute’s library had 14 bookcases full of spellbooks no warlock had ever claimed; the Ghâyat al-Hakîm fi'l-sihr, the Liber Juratus, the Heptameron. All predated Jonathan Shadowhunter, and none of them belonged to the warlocks—so who, she wondered for the first time, had they been written for? The fae?

Maybe Alec knows… She thought about asking him, but he was busy; she could feel his focus, banded with iron and skeletoned with steel. She didn’t disturb him.

She turned a page, and there it was, in a list of ritual phrases explained: a pure death.

‘As the ending of any self-aware creature is a stain on the face of the LORD—for even the gentlest of deaths leaves sorrow behind it—so there is the pure death, which honours the LORD: the striking down of the unrepentant murderer, and also the death of he who goes willingly into the arms of the LORD—for the one is justice unto the LORD, and the other is welcomed to the very foot of the Heavenly Throne…’

“Why do you need this again?” Max asked when she read it aloud to herself, frowning over it.

“It’s something to do with the murders,” she said absently, thinking hard. She would not tell him about Alec and Magnus; that was not her secret to share. “Arika said that if the murderer kills two more children, the only way to undo what was being done would be a pure death.”

“Then you have to kill the murderer,” Max said, and Izzy made an impatient gesture.

“Yes, thank you, I’m not a complete idiot.”

He grinned at her. “You’re lämieli. Same difference.”

He ducked the pencil she threw at him.

“Do you have anything usefule to say?” she demanded.

He paused to consider this. “Not at this time.”
“Jackalope.”

“Hydra.”

“Pixie.”

“Chimera.”

“What’s with the multiple-head theme there, Jackie?”

“Don’t call me that.” He looked down at the book in front of him. Even when she peeked, she couldn’t figure out what language she was looking at. “Lämieli—talking to you is like trying to kill a hydra,” he said after a long moment. “There are so many heads, and if you cut one off another just grows back. It’s exhausting.”

Isabelle said nothing as she parsed this. “Max,” she said slowly, “did you kill anyone in Alicante?”

He gave her an annoyed look. “Of course I didn’t!”

“Not even the most annoying lämieli?”

“No.” He turned back to his book. “Mother and Father are the worst,” he said after a beat. “They’re so irrational. You, Alec, Jace—I can talk to you like reasonable people. But them—!” He pushed his hands into his hair. “I can’t wait until I can go to the Academy next year. I can’t wait to leave.”

Izzy didn’t know what to say. Of course Max was looking forward to the Academy, where he would be free to be himself and his jääydinae traits would be, not a source of interpersonal friction, but weapons in an arsenal that would catapult him to the top of his classes. But she would still be sad to see him go.

“We’ll miss you when you’re gone,” she said, fixing her gaze on the book in front of her. “Just so you know.”

“I know,” he said quickly. But he didn’t say it back, and she knew better than to expect it.

“Well, that’s one quest-object down,” she said briskly. She drew out Clary’s sketchpad and flipped to the drawing of the circle. “Let’s find this one next.”

“What on earth,” Max began, coming over to look at it, but Izzy never heard the rest because very suddenly, two terrifying things happened at once:

Fear bloomed black and toxic petals in Jace’s heart—

And upstairs, Simon woke up.

***

“Do you know who you are yet?” Symeon asks.

Simon stares at him. “I know I’m not you,” he says, with more confidence than he feels. It would be more accurate to say, he doesn’t want to be the boy on the other side of the mirror. He refuses to be his reflection.

“Then you know nothing.” Symeon’s smile twists, a broken helix, corrupted DNA, and corrupted is just the word for him, this anti-Simon with his obsidian eyes and the plethora of Marks writhing over his skin like demonic script, for all that the runes are supposed to belong to the side of the angels.
They share a face and scars, but they are not the same, no matter the implications of Symeon’s contempt. Simon has to believe that. “Mirrors don’t lie, little singer. There you are, and here I am. Two sides of the same coin.”

He puts his hands together. When he parts them, there’s a coin resting on his palm. He flips it up into the air, and it turns over and over, one side bright gold, the other flashing cool silver. He catches it, turns it over, slaps it down on the back of his hand and glances at Simon with a grin. “Heads or tails?”

Simon shakes his head. “I’m not going to play with you.”

“How dull.” The coin is gone, and so is Symeon’s smile, but his eyes glitter like blue goldstone. “You’re trying so hard to be good, aren’t you? Don’t think about it. Don’t feel it. Don’t want it.” He smirks, and it’s honey dripping from a razor, a sweetness that cuts. “How’s that working for you?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Simon whispers, cold, and his twin’s smirk grows wider, sharper.

“No? Then let me show you.”

The world inside the mirror melts, blurs, dissolves like candy floss in the rain. Beneath it is something else, another picture, a different scene, one that slides into Simon’s gut like a knife of molten metal and his breath is gone like a thing that never was, because—

Because. Because Jace.

He is naked, and he is kneeling on the floor, in a room that curves around him like the setting about a gem. And he is a jewel, Jace, a work of art, an artist could spend a lifetime striving to capture some fragment of his beauty and never do him justice—he is gold, a golden blade with an edge like steel, like adamas, and every line of him is so perfect it hurts to look at. His shoulders almost beg for wings to complete his glory; his hand wants a sword of fire.

But now he is kneeling at Simon’s feet, a Celestial humbled, brought low, and when Simon slides his hand into Jace’s hair—unthinking, unresisting, unable to even think of resisting this treasure laid before him—Jace shudders full-bodied, pressing into his touch like a lotus twisting into the sun. Simon tightens his grip and Jace moans, velvet and smoke, and when Simon tips his head back he looks up at Simon as if into the face of God.

And. He.

He is covered in Marks. It is a fist around Simon’s neck, a burst of magma in the pit of his stomach, the surfeit of runes scattered over Jace’s face, his neck, tumbling like black jewels down his arms and chest. They are tiny beads of jet blinking on his eyelids, droplets of ink on his lips, ebony curlicues gracing his cheekbones and jaw; they spill in graceful profusion along the lines of his bones, his joints, a waterfall of onyx and black pearl that grace his hands like rings, kiss his hips, his thighs, his knees. A collar of calligraphic sigils encircles his throat, and when he parts his Mark-kissed lips to pant Simon catches a glimpse of a curl of ebony on his tongue and goes up in flames—

Because he knows, doesn’t he, knows exactly what each Mark means, what they mean in this quantity, this oh-so-deliberate placement—mine, they mean mine, his name his claim tattooed over and over on Jace, branded to the bone for all to see, and it should be horrifying, terrifying but instead there’s only the rich satisfaction of sated possessiveness, dark and pleased, the rise of ignited desire, hunger, Jace is so fucking pretty on his knees—
Simon pushes Jace’s legs apart by the Marks on his thighs and Jace whimpers, shivering, his eyes bronze-dark as they stare up at Simon, and even his cock is jewelled with small, delicate runes, runes of arousal and denial and without thinking Simon strokes his power through them, watches Jace’s lips part around a moan, feels him shudder in his exoskeleton of Marks; Simon’s puppet, Simon’s toy and they both know it. Simon pulls on the collar and Jace sways forward, his face desperate, pleading for—something, more or none, possession or freedom, his wrists locked behind his back and Simon opens Jace’s lips, gently but irresistibly, pulls him in and Jace groans, pants hotly against Simon’s crotch, shivering, trembling, and the sheer rush of just holding him, holding every inch of Jace’s body in the palm of his hand, the grip of his power, the certainty that he can make Jace do anything—

His clothes fade away like afterthoughts and Jace’s eyes flutter closed as the head of Simon’s cock slips into his mouth, just a little, and Jace’s groan almost sounds like pain, like bliss as Simon pulls his whole body closer, makes him—makes him—take Simon deeper, take him in, his mouth like blood-warm silk and Simon fists both hands in Jace’s hair, flicks Jace’s eyelids open because Simon wants to see him, take him, give him nowhere to hide. Jace looks drugged and Simon pushes his leg between Jace’s thighs, pulls at the Marks on his hips and makes Jace thrust, makes him rut up against Simon’s leg and the sound he makes is muffled by Simon’s cock and that, that—

Simon wants to tear him apart—

Instead he strokes heat through Jace’s runes and thrusts hard when he moans, drags him closer by runes and hair until he’s sliding into Jace’s throat, and Jace is letting him, can’t stop him, grinding his cock against Simon’s calf with frantic whimpers, pupils blown wide open and spit gleaming on his Marked-up lips—

Until Simon pushes him off, a flicker of will knocking Jace back with a wet sound as he comes off Simon’s cock, and space spins, he falls back not onto the floor but a bed and Simon follows him down, mouths crashing together like swords—Jace surges up into him, hands freed and come up to touch him, grab him, calluses catching on Simon’s skin and that Marked tongue touching his with a shock like lightning searing down his spine; he catches that feeling and shoves it outward, slams Jace down and purrs into Jace’s shocked gasp, pinning Jace’s wrists above his head, wrists elbows shoulders, torso hips thighs knees ankles pinned right where he wants them and Jace’s mouth opens for him as he licks into it, as he rolls his hips and their cocks slide together, Simon spit-slick and Jace wet as a girl, furnace-hot against him, Simon can feel him throbbing through the Marks there, can taste the sounds he’s making, soft fractured noises, fracturing—

He doesn’t need his hands, just spreads his knees to cage Jace’s hips and bows his spine, pulls Jace’s hips up like pulling on puppet-strings, holds his cock right where Simon wants it as he laps at the corner of Jace’s mouth, smug and pleased, Jace panting so hard and his breath just breaks as Simon slides down on him, a cracked wail clawing out of his throat as Simon takes him in like a toy and holds Jace there, hips locked, body locked and trembling, shaking, unable to twitch or blink without permission that Simon doesn’t give, oh no, not now, rolling his hips to drink Jace down and savouring the desperation in eyes he doesn’t let close, in knuckles that can’t curl into fists. He chokes Jace’s cry in his throat before it’s born and holds him statue-still, forcing him to just take it and feel as Simon takes all of him, inch by inch, sliding full in a spiced-honey burn, a languid, rich bliss. Only Simon knows how much Jace fights it, fights him; only he can feel it, the fierce, frantic struggling of a mouse caught by a serpent, so easily, deliciously subdued, a pleasure a thousand times greater than anything physical. There is a scream building in Jace’s eyes, sweet as sugar, sweet as sin; his body is a cage and Simon is the one who’s caged him, collared him, claimed him; Simon is the one who rears back and rides him, fucks himself on Jace’s cock as if his lover, his pet is just a living dildo, just a toy, his very body Marked for Simon’s pleasure, and Jace would be crying out if Simon let him, would be crying, every inch of him taut with need made sweetest agony, need
made unbearable but Simon makes him bear it, makes him and makes him—

His orgasm sweeps him under in a rush, so blinding-burning-terrible-good he sees stars, a hail of dazzling mirror-shards reflecting icy light. But it’s almost an afterthought, almost unimportant; it’s when he climbs off Jace to kiss the sweat from his throat that he feels satisfied—when he lets go of (almost) every runic chain and Jace curls into him, shaking, still delirious with desire—when he whispers a denial to Jace’s pleas for relief and licks the subsequent tears from his lover’s lashes, holding him as he sobs—

‘How’s that working for you?’

—that’s when he feels sated, complete. Whole, with Jace broken in his arms.

He purrs, and drapes a dark wing over his pet like a blanket, holding him like an ember in ebony, holding him like a breath…

It’s so good. It lasts so long, endlessly; he drifts on bliss, glutting with pleasure, for what seems like eons. And maybe it is—but. But, but. After an endless while the sweetness of Jace’s tears begins to leave a bitter aftertaste on Simon’s lips, like poisoned sugar. It turns to asphodel and wormwood on his tongue, and before he can understand it Jace melts away, turns to smoke in Simon’s embrace.

His enraged roar shakes this mirror-world to its foundations; he whips up and around, night-sky wings flaring wide, bristling with bladed primaries. “Where is he?” he snarls, and Symeon is pale as milk in the mirror, his black eyes gone wide; in the glass his wings are gold, sunbeams woven into feathers and set alight.

“Something’s wrong—in the caos—”

It’s a word that means tangibility, the realm which is physical and touchable; flesh and blood, stone and sea, not this place of dreams and visions but reality as mortals know it, and when Simon puts his hand on the glass Symeon mirrors him like a good little reflection (for once, for maybe the only time). Light bursts from the touch of their palms, silver moon’s light and blazing solar gold and Symeon’s coin is spinning heavenward, turning over and over, heads over gleaming tails as it flips and falls—

And he opened his eyes.

***

It was like being in an oubliette.

Not that it was an oubliette. It wasn’t. But they had marched Jace past the oubliettes on the way to his cell, the impossibly deep pits reserved for Shadowhunters who betrayed the Angel, and the thought of them was firmly embedded in Jace’s mind. No one had ever bothered to place bars at the mouth of each shaft, because no one, not even a pureblooded Shadowhunter, could climb their way up the adamas-lined walls, as smooth and slick as oiled glass. If you were swallowed by an oubliette of the Silent City, you were never coming out again.

He wondered if anyone ever accidentally fell into one. It was hard to imagine a Silent Brother tripping, but they did wear those ridiculous robes, and if you weren’t going to place manhole covers over pits like that you really only had yourself to blame if you fell in.

They had not put him in an oubliette. But the cell was so completely, unrelentingly dark that they might as well have done. The torches carried by the Silent Brothers had illuminated a stone box of a room, with unfamiliar Marks carved into every surface; when they healed his hands and locked him
in, the light had licked over a wall of bars each as thick as Jace’s wrist. But now those things were just a memory, because even Shadowhunter eyes were struck blind by this darkness.

There was a manacle around his right wrist, chaining him to the wall. He could feel the weight of it, still; could touch it, run his fingers over the steel and be certain it was not just a memory.

Or thought he could be certain. Maybe he couldn’t be. Maybe the Silent Brothers had done something to his mind, and none of this was real. Maybe they had put him in an oubliette to rot, and the manacle was only a fantasy, something his mind had conjured up because the reality was too terrifying to face: that he had been abandoned here, out of reach of his agela and Simon, to rot, to go mad and die in the dark without ever seeing any of them again—

He tangled his fingers in the chain of his manacle. Stop. This was ridiculous. He was not going to die. The Inquisitor couldn’t just—leave him here, without any kind of trial—

Why not? They all heard you say it with the Sword in your hands. ‘I’m sleeping with my brother.’ Not exactly open to interpretation, is it? And it’s clear she hates you. Probably someone she loved died in the Uprising—maybe someone Father killed himself, that would explain a lot—

And if that’s the case, she’s probably happy to leave you down here, trial or no trial.

You’re going to die here.

Die in the dark, alone, unable even to truly reach his agelai—by the Angel, his death would destroy them, a third of their soul torn away, he should never have agreed to bond with either of them—and Simon, oh, Raziel, who would tell him?

What does it matter? A voice whispered. You saw how he bled, how he fell after the angel was done with him. No one’s going to be telling him anything. He went too far this time, he’ll never wake up—he’s probably already dead, and Alec and Izzy can’t tell you because the cell is censoring your bond…

Oh, so I’m in a cell now? Jace thought at himself. He wanted to be annoyed with the thick, cloying fear tangled around his throat, knotting razor-wire around his heart. This wasn’t like him, he knew it wasn’t—these fears were illogical: Simon’s angel needed a vessel or it wouldn’t have taken one, it would not kill Simon at least until its goal, whatever it was, had been met. And the Inquisitor would not break the Law to leave him here. Too many people knew where he was for her to get away with it even if she had wanted to.

But none of that seemed to matter. In the quiet his breathing was loud, his breaths coming quick and harsh as he wrestled with outright panic. Logic warred with irrational certainty and was losing, hard and fast. The darkness of the cell was smothering, lethal and he found himself on his feet with no memory of getting up. He had to get out, he had to get out of here, but he couldn’t see and what if the floor was gone, what if when he took a step he fell forever into the dark—

Then you’ll hang from the wall, because you’re still chained to it!

Before he could make himself move, a cry cut through the darkness like a sword, shearing through his heart like a vampire’s kiss. Jace froze, forgetting how to breathe as the sound continued, on and on and on, spilling into echoes that beat against the walls like fists, beat against Jace’s skull like blows from a mace: a high, wretched wail, stretching higher and higher until his every cell was drawn taut with waiting for it to break, waiting for it to shatter apart—

It’s not real it’s not real you’re hearing things, your mind is playing tricks on you—
His whole body jerked as the wailing was cut off, as suddenly as the fall of a guillotine—but before the echoes had died away another scream rose up out of the dark, and another, and another, a cacophony of inhuman terror that sent Jace staggering back against the far wall, as far from the bars as he could get; the sounds pierced his head like nails hammered through the bone and turned his blood to ice, to mercury. He couldn’t count the voices now, couldn’t tell how many were real and how many reflections cast by the Silent City’s tunnels and caverns—but it was so many, too many, this was what Hell must sound like, thousands upon thousands of souls screaming—

Like the word of God, light. Jace blinked, his eyes dazzled by the sudden onslaught of sight; it took him a moment to process the dance of firelight on the walls of the corridor outside his cell, the burning torch clasped tight in a Silent Brother’s hand. But almost instantly Jace wished for blindness again, because this was no serene bastion of unimpeachable power; the Brother staggered as he walked, his hood torn away to bare a rictus of horror, the face of a man terrified beyond mortal understanding. His lips bled, the stitches that had once sewn shut his mouth torn free, and even as Jace saw the blood he understood who it was that was screaming: the Silent Brothers, driven by a fear stronger than the Rune of Silence that bound them, tearing themselves apart to make such noise —

What fear could pierce their silence—?

The Silent Brother, shaking, stumbling, tripped on his robes, just as Jace had been imagining earlier. He fell forward onto the stone floor and did not get up again.

Jace did not, could not make a sound.

The torch rolled away from the Brother’s outflung hand, still burning, its light casting dancing shadows over the walls, and Jace knew he should reach for it but he could not. He knew he should call for help, but he could not, could not even open his mouth as the Silent City rang with the screams of men who had not spoken, not laughed, not even whispered for centuries.

No one would hear him anyway—even Alec and Isabelle could not hear him now—

Simon, I’m sorry, sorry for everything…

Gradually, the cries died away—literally died away, Jace thought, unable to conceive of what could be killing the Silent Brothers in their own stronghold but unable to deny it, either. Silence fell, and that was worse, it pressed down on him until he was sure he would go mad from the pressure of it, from the certainty that whatever monster had gotten into the City was still here—he almost thought he could hear it, a heavy, dragging slither against the stones, like the movement of an enormous serpent writhing its way through the tunnels. His mind flashed to the basilisk in the second *Harry Potter* film and hysteria clawed at his throat, at the space behind his eyes and he could tell himself he was imagining it all he wanted but down deep he knew otherwise, knew it with the same sense that recognised demons and Downworlders and danger. He pressed shaking hands over his mouth to keep in the scream building behind his teeth and tried to believe that he heard no whispering, no sick, voiceless murmuring like a stranger scratching at the door, a sound somehow worse than the quiet, worse than anything, it beat like a second heart in his chest, a cold, tarnished heart—

At the edge of the torch’s flickering light, something moved. The shadows rippled, shifted like water, and Jace quailed back into the corner without thinking, beyond thinking, his mind seared blind by fear like an eye staring into the sun—

He glimpsed, so quickly he might only have imagined it, a pair of eyes like icy jewels—

A door a little way down the corridor opened, and swift as a magic trick the fear was gone, the
weight lifted so suddenly from Jace’s chest that he gasped as much in shock as relief—warmth flooded back into his frozen veins, air flowed into his fossilised lungs, and not even the appearance of his father in the doorway could undo the sense of reprieve, of execution stayed—

“Janim?” Valentine’s face was writ clear with surprise. The witchlight in his hand shone like a star as he entered the corridor, walking towards Jace’s cell without heed for the Silent Brother’s corpse on the floor. “What are you doing here? Are you hurt?”

“What are you doing here?” Jace parried. He straightened up as the witchlight’s illumination fell on him. His pulse was still racing. “What was that thing?”

Valentine considered him. He was, Jace realised belatedly, in full battle dress. There was no uniform for Shadowhunters; they tailored their gear to their own martial styles, which was why Alec wore more armour than Jace did—he was stronger, where Jace depended on his speed, on being lighter and quicker than anything he fought. Valentine—Jace’s father was clothed head to toe in supple black dragon-leather, armour which would turn most demonic claws and venom while allowing a gymnast’s range of movement. The hilt of a sword protruded over his shoulder, strapped to his back, and bracers of Marked electrum bound his forearms and calves. “The Silent Brothers had something I needed.”

Something of his earlier chill came back to Jace then; frost’s fangs, the sharp points lying gentle against his skin. “You did this. You killed them.”

Valentine inclined his head, not so much agreement as acknowledgement.

“Why?” Jace did not expect an honest answer, but he needed one. He pushed himself to stand, needing to face his father on his feet.

“They had something I needed,” Valentine repeated.

“A sense of decency? But no, you’ve never needed one of those—”

A flicker of annoyance crossed Valentine’s features. “This.” In a single, beautifully fluid motion he drew the sword from over his shoulder—no, the Sword, Jace recognised it in a single appalled instant even before his father named it, “Sielu. The Soul Sword.”

“Someone likes their alliteration, don’t they?” The taunt came from his mouth fully-formed, without thought; all of Jace’s attention was locked on the sight of the Mortal Sword in his father’s hand. There was no sign now that his blood had ever marked the blade, but he could not fail to recognise the shape of the hilt, the pair of sweeping wings.

“Who put you here, Jace?” Valentine asked again.

Jace made himself meet his father’s eyes. “Why? Are you going to kill them, too?”

Valentine’s gaze was cold, and for an instant Jace was reminded of those other eyes he’d seen, eyes like burning ice. “Do you think you deserve this, then? Were they right to punish you?”

Jace’s answer caught in his throat.

“There is a sickness at the heart of our people, Janim,” Valentine said. “Deep down, I think you know this. You should not be here, locked in a cell like a criminal. It is a symptom of a greater ill.”

“How do you know I don’t deserve it?” Jace challenged him. His voice was raw. “You’ve been away for a while, father. There’s no telling what I’ve been up to.”
Valentine just looked at him. “I know,” he said, “because you are my son.”

The ground dropped out of the world.

“I am proud of you, Janim,” he continued, seemingly unaware of how he’d stolen Jace’s voice with a word. “Seeing you here, how they’ve treated you, and yet your loyalty to them is unflinching—it may be misguided loyalty, but that is my fault, not yours, for leaving you with them in the first place. I should never have done that. I should have kept you with me. If I had, you would understand…”

Jace shook his head, snatched back his power of reason even past the words looped like a ring around his heart; I am proud of you. I am proud. “There’s nothing to understand. You killed my grandparents, you kept my mother a prisoner… My twin is dead because of what you did! You slew other Shadowhunters to further your own ends—you, who taught me that it was the worst of crimes. You did that!”

“I did. But Janim, that is only half the story. When you were a child you were too young to understand, and now that you are old enough for the truth…”

Jace’s mouth was dry. His father looked almost sorrowful, as if he genuinely regretted the decisions that had brought them here, brought them to this, father and son on opposing sides of the line. He wanted so badly to ask for the truth—wanted so badly for there to be a truth, some mystery that would cast light on all of his confusion, make sense of the father he’d thought he’d known and the murderer, the war-criminal, the impossibility that they could be the same man.

Simon would know better than to ask, a voice in him whispered.

He dropped his gaze. “You can’t take the Sword,” he said instead, quietly.

Was there a flicker of disappointment in Valentine’s eyes? “It belongs to me as much as any other,” he said, sliding the Sword back into its sheath. “It was given to all Nephilim, not just the Silent Brothers. Do you know its history? ‘And he placed at the east of the garden of Eden a cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way.’ Sielu is that blade, the sword with which the Angel drove Adam and Eve from the garden.”

“Thanks for the refresher,” Jace said, “but you still can’t take it. I’m going to face trial. Without the Sword, they’ll leave me down here.”

“And what charge have they invented to cage you, my son?” Valentine asked, softly, and again Jace could not make himself answer.

Valentine shook his head; his silver-white hair fell like snow about his shoulders. “Come with me,” he said. “I made a mistake at Renwicks,” Valentine said, as Jace tried not to gape at him. “I treated you like the child I remembered you to be, not as the man you are now. I was wrong. You are a man grown, Janim, courageous and loyal, a prodigy of a Shadowhunter. You are everything I ever hoped you would become, a gem in the Clave’s crown, and I would be honoured to have you at my side.” He held out his hand. “Let me free you, not only from their cell but from their lies, Janim. I promise I will explain everything.”

Jace froze. He stared at his father’s outstretched hand, knowing he could reach it if he only stepped forward, if only he tried, just a little—
A roar split the world, a roar that shook the earth out from under them. Valentine staggered back and nearly fell and the sound of a star screaming drowned out the clank of Jace’s chain as he stumbled; no fear-wail this, no dirge for the dead but a howl of war, a cry not for the dying but the ones about to die, a promise and an oath sworn in rage fit to tear suns asunder. It rang like thunder echoed on bronze, shaking the very air Jace breathed, and his Marks burned on his skin in answer, igniting like signal fires beneath his clothes—

He turned to Valentine, about to ask what is that, but Valentine’s expression stopped him. For the first time in his life he saw his father truly afraid, unabashed fear plain as a wound on his face, in his ever-controlled eyes. The witchlight had fallen from his hand, and he seemed to have forgotten Jace; he was turned away, looking-listening up the corridor, to where the stairs led to the upper levels and the source of that sound—

It came again, that shattering, explosive scream of fury, and Jace watched with disbelief as Valentine flinched as if from a blow. He had snatched up the witchlight again before Jace understood that his father meant to leave him here after all—

“No! Wait!” He rushed to the bars, but Valentine paid him no attention at all. “What’s coming? What is it? Don’t leave me chained to face it!”

Valentine spared him a cool look. “Don’t worry,” he said, almost bitterly. “It will not hurt you apurpose. But me—I must go.” He swept for the door by which he’d appeared, pausing only a moment with his hand on the frame. “We will talk of this again, Janim. We are not done, you and I.”

“No!” Jace shouted as Valentine pulled the door closed behind him, disappearing without another backwards glance. “Father, please! Please!”

But the door clicked as the lock caught, and he was alone again, caged and helpless while somewhere in the dark, a monster’s howl threatened to break the world.

NOTES

Chapter title comes from a quote by Alejandra Pizarnik; “Because no one has more thirst for earth, for blood, and for ferocious sexuality than the creatures who inhabit cold mirrors”.

Allar means bind or bind up in Enochian.

Syr is a gender-neutral term of address used for all Shadowhunters, the same way Light Worlders would use Mr/Mrs/Miss etc.

The lithu or lilim are the children of Lilith and Samael in the Zohah Kabbalah; so, a particular kind of demon. Among the Nephilim they are viewed as special abominations because Lilith was supposed to be the mother of humanity, and turned aside from that destiny. For Shadowhunters there can be nothing worse than turning your back on humanity to embrace the Infernal, which is what Lilith did in the myths, more or less.

Caïna is part of the Ninth Circle of Hell in Dante’s Inferno—the Circle/Level of Traitors. Caïna is reserved for those who are traitors to their family.

Sator is Latin for Creator/begetter/founder, and is a title/name Nephilim sometimes give to Raziel in
their prayers. Prayers to Jonathan Shadowhunter address him as Genitor, for those who are interested; its meaning is creator/father/ancestor.

A tertian is a piece of music composed of thirds.

The *Sepher Ha-Razim* is a book of spells given by the angel Raziel to Noah.

Because it’s been a while since it was mentioned; *harpagmos* is the name for the two-month isolation entered by couples wanting to become *parastathentes* before they actually bond.

*Jackie* is a Nephilim pet-name, short for jackalope—a mythological creature that looks like a rabbit with antlers.
Waves of invisible fire crashed through the Institute, breaking like burning surf against her Marks, and Isabelle was out of her seat and running before her conscious mind could put it together, a lifetime’s well-honed instincts remembering-understanding-acting without the need for deliberation. Max shouted something behind her but she didn’t stop to listen, her runes singing like struck glass through her skin as she sprinted through corridors and up flights of stairs, doorways and paintings turned to smears of colour by the speed of her steps, her hair a black whip behind her—

Another wave of searing gold, invisible but not intangible, swept through the building like a tsunami; her every Mark rang with it like a struck gong and she knew what it was, knew what it meant, found herself standing in the doorway of the Infirmary and was not surprised to see Simon sitting upright on a cot, his eyes and skin full of a light that cast strange shadows on the wall behind him, his hand upraised and held against Syr Bellesword and Isabelle’s father.

She was not surprised to see that it was not Simon at all.

She felt the moment the angel recognised her presence like a flaming brand held to her breastbone, a golden agony as if the full might of the sun’s fire had turned its attention on her alone. Her Marks sang beneath it and her body trembled, struck by the immensity of that regard, terror and awe a carcanet about her heart—

“Quiida i tox?” it snarled through Simon’s voice, a demand so clear the glass in the windows shivered and Syr Bellesword and Izzy’s father both flinched as if whipped, Simon’s human voice too thin a protection against the lightning-strike that burned behind it—

But Izzy didn’t flinch. The thunder in the angel’s words echoed in her chest, and her ears rang with it, every bone in her humming like windchimes in the wake of that voice, and she stood her ground without quailing.

“I’m sorry,” she said softly. “I don’t understand you.”

It stared at her without blinking, Simon’s eyes turned to stars by the power looking through them. “Nurma!” it said sharply. “Quiida i Nurma?”

She shook her head, spreading her hands to illustrate her helplessness. “I don’t understand,” she repeated.

And abruptly he, it, stood inches from her, ablaze with gold like a figure of living light, and Izzy’s breath dissolved into smoke as it took her face in Simon’s hands, so gently, and his hands were Midas’ hands, turning her to gold with the angel’s touch—
“Where,” it asked through Simon, through lips gilded with Heaven’s might, “is he?”

“Jace?” she whispered, because who else could the angel be looking for, this angel who had stood over her brother and held the Mortal Sword between him and the Inquisitor?

“Jace,” it echoed, and nothing more.

“In the Silent City,” Izzy said. There were planets revolving in the angel’s gaze, comets and moons dancing there as if all the universe were held enclosed in its mind like an orrery…

“City of bones,” the angel said, sing-song and eerie, “city of the dead, city of the dark.” It held her face in its hands, and her runes burned. “Can you hunt him through the shadows, Shadowhunter? Can you find him?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Then show me.”

And the world turned to fire.

Distantly she heard her father’s cry and Syr Bellesword’s sudden curse; distantly she was aware of a curtain of flames enfolding her, embracing her, flames that arced and beat like wings. But those eyes held hers, held her as if she were a star it would add to the constellations she could see revolving in its gaze, and the rest of the world became a faint and far-off dream, nothing like as real as the music searing through her soul; the song of spheres, a wild and rhapsodic chorale that encompassed all the world in its singing, every world, every living thing, and for the briefest of instants she heard the song of her own body, her every cell a vital note in the Song of Songs—

Silence fell like a guillotine, and the loss of the music was so ruthlessly sudden, so terribly total that she cried out before she could stop herself. The flames parted, and she stumbled as Simon’s hands fell from her, stumbled as if wounded; she pressed a hand to her heart and felt the anguish there, even as her Marks still hummed with the faintest echoes of that heavenly song.

Swallowing the sudden lump in her throat, she looked around—and ice spun like silk down her spine.

She was not standing in the Institute—was nowhere near the Institute. Instead in an instant of fire they had crossed half the city, so that now angel and Shadowhunter stood encircled by the names of the dead, inside the square that housed the New York entrance of the Silent City. The names of fallen Shadowhunters were engraved on the walls, macabre flower petals clasped around the statue of Raziel at their centre, Raziel with the Mortal Cup at his feet. Even as Izzy found her balance she saw Simon’s body approach the statue, and was struck by the strangeness of it, the image of these two angels facing each other, one clothed in mortal flesh and one in stone.

If Simon’s angel recognised the tableau it made it gave no sign. It stared at its marble cousin, and a wash of something terrible broke over Simon’s face like a shadow across the sun; enraged, frenzied, chillingly alien. Simon’s lip curled back in a snarl and his hands wrenched at the air, a cutting, a tearing—

“Oh—” he hissed—

And the gate opened. With a groan like pain, the earth fell away beneath the statue, revealing the stairs that led down into the dark, down into the necropolis of the Silent Brothers, and the darkness seemed almost to reach out of it, to flow like poison from that yawning mouth—
The angel was staring at her again, a stare like a burning sword. “Find him,” it said, commanded, Simon’s voice wavering like heat-struck air, a mirage that would dissolve into fire at the least provocation, shred into that earth-shaking voice from the Council Chamber, the one that had made them all bleed from their ears and broken the blood vessels in their eyes—but beyond the glory Izzy could hear the terror in it, the frenetic energy that whipped and howled like scouring storm winds.

So she ran. Down the steps, into the dark; darkness that gave way like cringing demons before the angel’s fire, golden light that stretched ahead of them into the shadows. Izzy led the way down and her feet had wings, she was moving faster than she ever had, her Marks blazing with power as if new-drawn and fuelling a speed she’d never known before, so that together she and the angel seemed to fly down the stairs like twinned comets. In mere seconds they reached the first level of the Silent City, the staircase dissolving beneath their feet into an enormous space that Izzy could sense more than see, the open air of the long hall and high ceiling a tangible presence on her skin.

They did not stop, but crossed the floor in a streak of light, the angel ever a half-step behind-beside her, a living sun in the tomb-like dark. The City smelled of stone and dust and unloved space, and beyond their footsteps there was no sound at all.

No Silent Brothers appeared to bar their way, or demand an explanation for their presence. Had they fled from the angel’s light; did they hide from it even now, in the shadows where Izzy couldn’t see?

When they reached the stairs that led to the lower levels, she had her answer. Beside her, the angel snarled, shaking the ground beneath her feet, but the world did not change in the face of its fury. The stench of blood still rose up from the stairs, a thick miasma of coppery death that squeezed a fist around her heart.

“Jace,” she whispered. Jace was down there somewhere, and suddenly she understood why the angel was so desperate to find her brother. Something had gone very, very wrong in the Silent City.

As if Jace’s name was a charm against the dark, the angel’s light grew brighter. Lines of fire arched from Simon’s spine, twining and spiralling upwards and outwards through the darkness like vines of light, budding stars like fruit or blossoms. Izzy’s breath caught in her throat at the impossible glory of it, the wings of sunlight that lit up the topmost floor of the Silent City bright as day, washing colour across the vast plain of stone. For the first time Izzy saw the patterns decorating the floor, the night sky replicated in shades of marble, every star lovingly set down beneath her feet; while above the ceiling was a flurry of frescoes, seraphim and cherubim and dominions locked in an intricate dance, their wings interlaced in golden braids. In the paintings the angels had the feathered wings of birds, nothing like the sheets of dazzling fire that framed Simon now like the nimbus of a saint, shifting and undulating like the Aurora Borealis in every shade of gold, flames that wirthed like water, changing shape from moment to moment; sharp edges melting into wave-like curves, spirals gaining razored points, tendrils and tongues stretching outwards in skeins of glowing gilt only to collapse into ripples of white wine and honey.

She was still staring at them, her eyes watering at their brightness, when the angel spoke. “Come,” it said, “we must go faster,” a command her body obeyed before her mind registered the imperative in it; it held out Simon’s hand and she took it, refused to cringe as it pulled her close and effortlessly lifted her up, as if she weighed nothing at all. Instinctively she looped her arms around Simon’s neck as the angel cradled her against Simon’s chest.

Her eyes wanted to close against the stunning brightness of him. She didn’t let them.

Without warning the angel plunged down into the dark, and Izzy’s gasp was lost to the light-drowned shadows. The stairwell was tight and close and they rushed down it like a rip tide of fire, shearing the air before them; there was not enough space and yet they never touched the stone, never
crashed even though Izzy was sure they must, stairs flashing past in their hundreds and floor after floor opening up and gone behind them and it was like being caught up in a burning whirlwind, flames and feathers of light whipping and lashing and flooding the staircase and she could not make herself look up at Simon’s face, could not catch her breath as they plummeted down and down and down—

Until with a rolling twist they soared through an archway and into-onto one of the lower floors, and Izzy felt it even as the angel let her go and she landed in a graceful crouch on the floor, knew it before the angel’s scream of fury broke the world apart like a hammer kissing a mirror; the wrongness, the wound in the fabric of the real—

There was a demon in the Silent City.

*And she was unarmed.*

***

A roar of challenge burst from his-their-xyr throat like a sword from its sheath, gilded in fire and rage as Simon dropped to the ground in front of his-their-xyr Shadowhunter, countless wings flaring wide in a threat display older than this world’s sky; and the demon crouched over the bodies littering the floor quailed away from the radiance of heavenly fire. Its presence burned like poison in Simon’s throat, a sick cold around his heart, washing the world in a crimson hatred that spilled across the stone, dripped from the roof of the hall like brackish water; a hate that demanded, **compelled** the Infernal’s utter destruction, an imperative like breath with all the force of a raging wildfire behind it, in it. The demon’s mephitis clawed at his light, an icy pressure against his flames, darkness of the abyss beating like waves against his light and xe-they-he snarled—

“Adokaz-Aoi!” the demon hissed, grovelling, **prince of stars** and xe hesitated, struck by the shock in its un-voice, by the weight of its words. “Do you not remember me, Adokaz-prince? I am one of your own—forgive me, my prince, I did not believe the rumours of your return—we thought you dead!”

Simon-and-not stared at it, uncertain, confused. Flickers of memories danced around the edges of the fire, shadows on the wall like dreams; a thousand demons kneeling to him, xem, calling xem just that, **prince of stars**, **Sword of the King**, and xyr own voice singing it back, echoing the truth of it… For a millisecond that stretched aeons, Simon’s vision seemed to waver, doubling the bloodied corpses on the floor, the pillars holding up the roof, and for the merest moment the demon itself, the demon whose twin was not a black and noxious thing but a crouched figure of gleaming silver, ephemeral wings like moonlight on water curved about and behind it, mirrors to Simon’s own—

And in that instant it lunged, snarling, those silver wings become sheets of steel and then they were gone, there was only the umbra-wreathed monster with sun-on-ice eyes and a mouth full of stalactites, stalagmites and xe snapped into motion, whirling in place like a top with xyr wings spinning around xem like rotor blades, a whirlwind of light and fire and the demon screamed as its leap collided with that oscillating wall of burning edges—

Simon whipped his wings apart and caught the demon on the backstroke, smashing it back across the space. It crashed into stone and xe flew after it, the pillars shaking with the force of his roar, xyr scream of wrath, wings extended like claws, swinging like living swords for that manifest shadow. He plunged down on it like an axe like lightning and the demon twisted away, striking out, forming black limbs of its own shadow-stuff to meet xem with, a stinging scorpion’s tail and a porcupine’s thousand quills stinking with venom, acid and Simon’s wings were both armour and armoury, pairs of them folded around xyr fragile mortal core while others cut and slashed, blades of crystallised heat and frozen light, scything atoms in half and catching-shaping-hurling the resulting fireworks, the
nuclear explosions like dying stars, at xyr enemy with wings that became limbs with all the fluidity of flame, morphing as needed, a meteor shower of light and heat flash-flash-flashing and the demon’s claws were jagged ice, splintered crystal lash-lash-lashing and raking xyr wings, sparks flying like blood from his wounds and stinking ichor splash-splash-splashing from the demon’s, spilling across the floor like oil. Fire and cold, stagnant water locked in opposition, trading wound for wound and not-blood for ichor, elemental titans casting terrifying lightshows and grappling, snarling, bleeding smoke and sparks as each fought to tear the other apart—

And in its protective cage of glass-clasped wings xyr human sleeve, the mortal heart of this countless-winged light-born creature, bled red wept red screamed red, a haemophilic Snow White in his golden coffin, convulsing every time the demon’s claws found their way through that forest of wings to brush the pair wrapped around him—

And those wings flickered like candles in the wind, weakening—

But the demon was tiring too, slowing faster, and xe shrieked like an eagle, like a glacier with vicious triumph, and dived upon it.

***

When the angel engaged the demon Izzy found herself surrounded by the leavings of a massacre—the light of the angel’s wings lit a field of corpses, dozens of Silent Brothers cast down bloody on the ground. The air stank of blood and death, the foulness mortals made in their final moments, and probably Izzy could have stopped to give the fallen their last rites, but instead she plunged among the bodies for a weapon, any weapon, because there was a darkness here that the angel’s wings did not, could not banish, a shadow that writhed and twisted, a demon who should not have been able to enter the city at all—

But of course there was no need, really, to find a weapon—it was not as if the angel was going to need the help of a seventeen year old Shadowhunter, not even Dedicated, to defeat a single demon.

She paused, then, kneeling next to the body of a Silent Brother, in the coagulating blood that had come from his mouth when he fell. (Never mind, her cóada was already ruined, already stained with Simon’s blood from this morning...) She longed for her glorious electrum whip, but it was true, wasn’t it? What angel would need her help? She would only get in the way—and so she watched, unaware that she was trembling, unable to say, if she had been asked, whether she shook with awe or terror. The battle was as far from the fights she knew as the sun to a tea-light, a wholly different thing. The angel fought with its wings, huge scythes of golden light that took new shapes between Isabelle’s blinks, wreathing it in what were simultaneously weapons and unhuman limbs that it controlled effortlessly, moving through the air like a bullet; the demon was smoke and sickness, forming and re-forming as the angel’s wings cut its creations apart, lashing with terrible claws, teeth, pincers and tails. It was like watching a thunderstorm, the flash of lightning in a dark sky; tangled together, crashing together, angel and demon alike both seemed monstrous, like nothing Izzy’s world could ever have birthed. Light and lightnessness, fire and living night both wreathed in ozone and the splash of sparks, and those who thought only the dark was terrible had never understood the power that made the deserts—never seen that hurricane of cutting wings, that storm of burning swords, never heard a demon scream as if for mercy as it cringed away from a blow, gushing ichor upon the stone floor—

It was terrible—and it was glorious. Izzy was afraid and elated, terrified and overjoyed with visceral wonder, for here, here was proof that the Shadowhunters had behind them a force to rival the full might of Hell, to rival and devastate it utterly—here was Raziel’s kin come to fight for Raziel’s children and prove that there was hope, there was purpose, there was a reason for the tithe of pain
and deaths laid upon Izzy’s people and it was a price well-paid—it was well-paid and well-done and the Nephilim’s Celestial family were proud of them, recognised their sacrifices—

Would fight with them—

And when the angel cried aloud with what could only be triumph, plunging down like a hawk for the kill, Izzy shouted with it, ablaze with that same savage exultation, rising to her feet with the force of the cheer that ripped out from between her bared teeth—

It did not occur to her that an angel, even one currently incarnate, would have any trouble with a demon. It had not occurred to her to worry. But suddenly the fearful, abject, wounded demon lunged upwards with a mouth that gaped open like an earthquake, full of teeth longer than Izzy’s arms and clearly not so wounded it had appeared to be—and those teeth, those black-ivory teeth like splinters of the abyss caught and sheared through a whole cluster of wings that exploded into dying sparks—

And the angel screamed.

Not in rage or anticipated celebration but in pain, in agony that clapped Izzy’s hands over her ears in a useless, shameful attempt to shield herself from it. It rang from the stone walls and bled across the floor in a gush of sound, and even as Izzy’s hands fell incredulous so did the angel, crashing to the ground like a star cut from its moorings in the sky—

And—

No—

The demon laughed, an awful, thunderous sound as it twisted and pounced on the angel’s glowing form, a demonic cat leaping for an injured mouse—

No—

The world didn’t work that way—

The angel screamed again, not a mouse but a trapped butterfly, auroric wings struggling beneath stabbing claws, flickering like dying witchlights—

Dying—

No—

The world does not work this way—

Her hands were empty. Her hands were empty and Simon was in there, Simon, Jace’s heart and Izzy’s friend—but more than that, larger than that, loomed the death of how she understood the universe to be, the fall of light before the dark, the undoing of all she and all her ancestors before her had fought for bled for died for, over and over they had died and that was what they did, it was the price they paid it was why they were made, but they did it hoping believing knowing that there was something bigger, something greater, some light that could not go out no matter their individual failures, and if that was not so—

It could not be not-so—

The sun rose in the east and nausea was bad and two plus two was four, Shadowhunters died and warlocks lived forever and Light Worlders shaped the world and beyond it all, above it all, the light, the light of Heaven was greater than the shadow of Hell, that was how the universe worked—
The angel screamed and—

No—

No, THE UNIVERSE DOES NOT WORK THIS WAY

—and Izzy screamed with it.

Screamed, as white light to rival the sun burst from her hands like a nursery of stars being born. Screamed as, without conscious deliberation, her palms came up to halt the desecration before her. Screamed as, the light, her light seared across the space between like Artemis’ silver arrow and struck the demon that had profaned this place and blasphemed against the world. Like a tide of glittering diamonds it smashed into the monster, carried it back and back and back and Izzy was screaming, defiance and denial, rejection and revolt as the white light of stars streamed through her and out of her with the roar of all the oceans of the world, the howl of every wind that blew above every field, the rumble of the earth beneath her feet and above it all she screamed and screamed and screamed—

NO!

THE UNIVERSE DOES NOT WORK THIS WAY!

Somewhere very distant, she was aware of the demon screeching fit to wake the dead, saw the smoke of it boiling as it writhed. She knew the light could kill it, not merely send it back to the realm it came from but destroy it utterly, and she sensed the moment the demon knew it too, the terror in it, its horror of her.

She felt it when the demon fled from her, her and her light, and vanished into the tunnels of the Silent City like a rat into a sewer, bleeding great gouts of foul smoke and ichor. She felt it like a wrongness gone, a weight lifted, a false thing made true again.

And the river of starlight faded from her hands like a witchlight no longer needed.

As she was, now, no longer needed.

The thought barely had time to flit through her mind before Isabelle Lightwood—who had never swooned in her life and had never expected that to change—fell to the ground in a dead faint, and lay quiet and still amidst the corpses, and thought no more.

***

Simon came back to the world with the thick taste of copper in his mouth and nought but blackness above him.

The angel—the creature—had retreated, and without its wings Simon could see nothing, had to lift shaking fingers to his eyes to be sure they were even open. The darkness was total, impenetrable. But then, they had to be hundreds of feet underground at least…

Or maybe I’ve gone blind, he thought, panicked, and his body was awash with pain, every inch of him aching as if he’d been pummelled by a football team. His fingers found his cheeks wet, and with resigned familiarity he recognised the scent of his own blood, found it smeared beneath his eyes and around his mouth, at his ears and below his nose.

At least I’m not choking on it this time…
He took a deep breath and sat up, the sheer totality of the dark making him feel dizzy, as if he might tumble away into it if he moved wrong. He set his palms down on the cool stone floor to reassure himself that he was not, in fact, hovering in some terrible void.

He smelled blood and ozone, the too-sweet scent of demonic ichor and a horrible smell like the worst kind of public toilets—ammonia and faeces, thick and awful. It took his sluggish mind too long to remember the bodies he had glimpsed through the angel’s attention, dozens of Silent Brothers scattered like broken dolls on the floor; took him longer to remember that those bodies would have voided their contents when they died. That was the source of the smell.

He swallowed. His throat burned, horrifically raw. *I need light*, he thought, knowing that, for once, he had no seraph blade to light his way. You couldn’t bring weapons to a meeting with the Inquisitor, Jace had said, and so Simiel was waiting on Simon’s pillow at Alec’s apartment. And Simon had no witchlight stone, didn’t even have a stele. *Without light I’ll never find my way out of here.*

Izzy. He had to find Izzy. She had done something…saved him, and the angel with him. There had been a white light…

Simon curled his hands into fists and reached for the angel buried inside him like shrapnel, pleading, hoping. *Light.* He needed light. He needed light, because Izzy hadn’t made a sound and that meant she needed help; because Jace was in a cell somewhere down here and that demon was not, he thought, dead; because without light all three of them were trapped down here, in the endless dark—

**LIGHT!**

A wave of exhaustion not his own broke briefly over him—and a softly gleaming light shimmered hesitantly into existence, a slender bracelet around his right wrist growing brighter by the moment; his *enkeli* rune, glowing beneath his sleeve. When he rolled up the bloodied silk the light of the Mark was like a bizarre lantern set into his skin, a strong, clear gold, and Simon didn’t even have the strength to be amazed, only grateful that it had worked.

He held up his arm. Like the beam of a lighthouse, the light cut like a knife through the dark, illuminating drying pools of blood, stones cracked and charred by the fighting of angel and demon—but no bodies, and no Isabelle.

They’d been fighting at the far end of the hall, Simon told himself. The angel had left Izzy at the other end, further than the light could reach. He just had to go find her.

He had to crawl. His legs refused to bear his weight, his entire body seemingly folded out of paper—ripped paper, stained and waterlogged, and that made no sense but Simon couldn’t make himself care, didn’t have the energy to straighten out his metaphors. Achingly, awkwardly, he inched himself along the stone floor, struggling to light his way with the rune Marked on the inside of his right arm. There followed a horrible, endless stretch of time that would haunt him till the day he died; the stench; the chill, all-encompassing darkness; the bruised throbbing of his bones; the heavy awareness of the dead built into the walls, and those more recently fallen laid in their own blood on the ground. The *silence*, a cage of lead simultaneously constricting and too large, choking him and leaving him certain that there was something out there in the dark with him.

There wasn’t. There *wasn’t*. But it was impossible to be sure, to quiet that primal animal terror, and he dragged it behind him like a corpse as he crawled.

Maybe he went in circles for a while; there was no telling. It felt like years later that his beam of light found an outlying body at last, a Silent Brother whose pale umber robe was stained dark with his
own blood, his sewn-sealed mouth ripped open in a silenced cry. The horror of it, coming unexpectedly out of the dark, nearly stopped Simon’s heart; he bit down on an unfeigned scream and the light snapped out without warning, leaving him alone with that image seared into his brain, those empty eye-sockets and the gaping, bloodied mouth—

It took too long for him to bring the light back.

When he managed to once more make his enkeli Mark play nightlight, Simon continued on, stopping every few minutes to sweep his light around and look for Izzy. Soon he was crawling through tacky, drying blood, sickeningly sticky beneath his hands and knees, and trying not to wonder if he could have prevented this massacre. He—they, him and the angel—they had come for Jace, had known something was wrong; the need to get to him had been overwhelming, as irresistible as a heart’s need to beat. It was gone now—presumably, hopefully the demon had run far beyond where it was a threat to his aikane—but if they had been faster…

_They’re not dead because of me_, Simon told himself, even as another, colder voice whispered;

_But you could have saved them._

They’d had stories of their own, these men; stories that had nothing to do with him, of which he was no part, but no less real than his, no less important. The Silent Brothers were a strange sect, but they were still human, still Nephilim; they’d had desires and dreams, grudges and nightmares. They’d been children once.

_And now they’re meat_, another part of him said dismissively, and Simon grit his teeth.

Isabelle was near the stairs. She was lying on her side as if she’d fallen, and Simon went to his knees beside her, wishing sharply for a stele; if she’d hit her head she would need an iratze at least, but he had nothing to draw it with...

When a solution occurred to him, he almost smacked himself, it was so obvious: he was surrounded by Nephilim! Of course one of the Silent Brothers would have a stele. Grimly, he searched the bodies around him, trying not to gag, his flesh crawling. It was a difficult, undignified, fumbling search, trying and often failing to keep the light on what he was doing; by the time his fingers closed on the slim, cool rod of a stele in a dead man’s pocket Simon hardly glanced at it, exhausted past bearing. He shuffled back to Izzy and pushed up her sleeve, awkwardly holding the now blood-smeared stele in his left hand so that his right could shine light on the network of Marks already gracing Izzy’s arm.

Carefully, he drew a small iratze—since size had no bearing on a rune’s power—between a sabedoria and a tharros, and felt the familiar drain as it took. For a minute his vision swam, and the light on his arm blinked like a firefly; the stele slipped from between his fingers to clatter on the ground—

And Izzy groaned, raising her hand to her head. “Simon…? Simon!”

She bolted upright, so quickly that she almost smacked their heads together; Simon only just got out of the way in time. “Careful!”

“Sorry.” When he angled his arm—sending the light, not in her face to blind her, but to the side so they could both see a little—she looked sickly pale. “Are you okay? What happened?”

She stared at him—and then down at her hands.

“Izzy?” he asked hesitantly.
“Light,” she said. “Light came out of my hands.” She was still staring at them.

“…Okay,” …That sounds fake, but okay, his mind added hysterically. “I take it this is not a normal Shadowhunter thing?”

She shook her head.

“Have you ever done it before?”

“No.”

“…Okay.” What the fuck. “Well, thanks. Pretty sure you saved my life.” It came out far more lightly than he’d meant—and that was a terrible pun—fuck it, he was too tired for this.

“Your Mark’s glowing,” Izzy said with surprise.

Simon resisted the urge to go what?! By Jove you’re right! “Yes,” he said instead. I levelled up and unlocked a new skill. “But I don’t know how long I can keep it up. We need to—” He stopped as he suddenly realised that he had no idea what came next.

Isabelle, on the other hand, didn’t seem the least bit confused. “We need to get Jace,” she finished for him, calmly.

Simon bit his lip. The thought of leaving Jace alone in this City-turned-tomb cut at him, but… “Maybe it’s smarter to go get help first,” he started—

Only to double over as a wave of heat and gold like liquid sunlight crashed over and through him, flooding him to the brim with energy too hot to hold, to contain, and Simon swallowed his words in a choke of copper—

A certainty to warp his bones and burst his heart and put him back together kintsugi-style, brimming-burning with desperation-denial; no, he could not, could not leave Jace here in the dark with the dead, behind bars he should never have been thrown behind—

FIND HIM.

The compulsion was stigmata tearing him open, a need stronger than breath; Simon was on his feet before he knew it, fuelled by that energy, that urgency to have Jace near him and all right, in his arms and well, unharmed, warm and alive.

“The angel wanted to find Jace,” Isabelle said, still in that eerily calm voice. “So we need to find him.”

“Yes,” Simon agreed, no longer at odds with her. He offered her his light-gilded hand to help her up.

Electricity sparked between their palms when they touched, jolting lightning-like up Simon’s arm and down his spine. The light of his Mark bleached white in an instant, gold gone pearlescent and shining like a star, and as Simon automatically pulled her to her feet he drew a sharp breath at the saccharine shock of it.

“Naleli cayaare,” he whispered—something else whispered through him, words of pearl and platinum like sorbet on his tongue, sweet and cold and sharp, and he saw the glow of his eyes reflected in Izzy’s—

And blinked, and it was gone, the only light the steady gold of his enkeli rune and his mouth gone
dry, and only Izzy’s wide eyes to say it had happened at all.

“Star dancer,” he said before she could ask. He let go of her hand. “It means—star dancer.”

She nodded slowly. “I’ll ask Alec,” she said simply.

And started walking. “Come on,” she tossed over her shoulder. “The cells are down this way.”

_Naleli cayaare._ The whisper echoed in his head.

_Star dancer._

Simon followed her.

***

_Naleli cayaare._

_Star dancer._

Izzy replayed the words over and over in her mind as she led Simon—and the golden fire that kept sparking in his eyes—down through the Silent City. They found more bodies, more dead Silent Brothers, and neither glimpsed nor heard anyone alive. Distantly, she worried; was it really possible that the demon, whatever it was, had cut down the entire brotherhood? And how had it managed to get into the Silent City at all? Had someone accidentally broken the protections on this place, or had it been deliberate, a calculated attack? Her thoughts leapt to Valentine, of course, but why in Raziel’s name would he want to murder the Silent Brothers? Where was the gain for him?

Or was this something to do with the murdered warlock child—could this be the Spiral Court’s revenge for the loss, their strike against the Nephilim—? No, it couldn’t be—surely the Court would give them more than three days to find the killer they hunted—

And endlessly, dizzyingly, her mind circled the starlight.

_Star dancer._

It was gone, now. She couldn’t feel it inside herself, didn’t feel powerful or gifted in any way that she hadn’t been before. There was no sense that she could summon it again—no sense that she’d been the one to summon it at all. Maybe she _hadn’t_ been, maybe she’d only been a channel for someone else, something else—the angel that walked in Simon, or even Raziel, intervening to save his Celestial sibling’s life. If Simon’s angel could manipulate Shadowhunters by their Marks, who was to say Raziel, whose blood was in their very veins, couldn’t move his power through one of his children at need?

But Simon’s angel hadn’t thanked Raziel through her. It had named her instead: _naleli cayaare._

_Star dancer._

Well, maybe that was what angels called mortals who acted as mediums for angels; what did she know about it?

Alec might know. Alec was frantic, a mirror to her heart flashing her name in Morse code, and Izzy was grateful that the _agela_-bond was beyond words because she had no words to give. Only the memories: the angel’s awful glory, burning her eyes like the sun; the demon’s black monstrosity, smoke and poison; the light filling her up like starlight in water, breaking out of her like a
Alec felt very far away, when she thought about that light. And Izzy—Izzy felt tired. No, that was the wrong word—drained. She felt drained. Weightless. Strangely buoyant, as if, if she didn’t focus on walking on the ground, she might float away…

Simon too seemed lost in thought, so that he and Izzy walked in silence except for those times when she had to direct him. Her night-vision was good, much better than a Light Worlder’s, but even a Shadowhunter couldn’t see in pitch blackness. The only light was the glow of Simon’s rune, which he held up like a lantern uncomplainingly, even though after a while his arm must have been aching. But finally they came to a door that didn’t swing open when Izzy pushed at the handle.

“The cells should be through here,” she said, frustrated. If Simon’s angel wanted Jace out of the Silent City, then she would do her utmost to get Jace out—but even with her stele, she would never be able to get through a lock crafted by the Silent Brothers. “But I don’t know how we can—”

“Odo.”

Inside the door, Izzy heard the tumblers of the lock shift and click. When she touched the handle again, the door gave way, swinging wide open.

She turned to look at Simon, and saw the flicker of fire in his eyes, under his skin.

The corridor beyond the door smelled of blood and the dead, but Izzy hardly needed Simon’s light; at this distance even the runed block on Jace’s cell couldn’t hide him from her agela sense. She saw through Jace’s eyes the moment the light reached him; with a flare of disorientation that almost made her stumble, she saw the hallway both from her angle and through the bars of his cell, the two images overlaying and blurring into each other—

“Jace!”

—and then Simon was there ahead of her, ignoring or possibly not even noticing the dead Silent Brother on the ground. He wrapped one hand around the electrum bars and lifted the other high, and Izzy saw her brother then, his gold skin pale and his wrist chained to the far wall, unwell but unharmed.

The relief was staggering.

But Jace clearly didn’t feel the same way. “What happened?” he demanded, and Izzy belatedly remembered that they were both covered in blood—Izzy in the Silent Brothers’, and Simon in his own, the repercussion of angelic possession. “There was something—I heard—are you all right?”

“We’re fine,” Simon said, which was maybe stretching it a little but Izzy didn’t see the need to argue the point.

“There was a demon,” she told Jace. “It killed the Silent Brothers—we haven’t seen anyone still alive down here. Simon’s angel and I drove it off.”

Jace’s face twisted. “Valentine brought it here,” he said wearily.

Simon stiffened. “He was here?” His voice had a snarl in it.

Jace nodded. “He’s stolen the Mortal Sword. I don’t know what for. He was…”

Izzy could feel his helplessness even through the block. “It’s okay,” she said, even though it clearly
wasn’t. “We’re getting you out of here. Everything else we can figure out in the sunlight.”

She turned to Simon, raising her eyebrows. “Can you open it up?” she asked, meaning like the other door, like the City’s entrance. If he couldn’t, she would check to see if the dead Silent Brother had been carrying keys—

Simon didn’t even look at her; the anger in his face turned to fire, and he closed both hands around the bars of the cell’s door. Light shot down his arms like lightning, gilding every vein—

And he ripped the door out of the wall.

***

The hinges gave with a screech of metal like a demon’s howl and Simon tossed the door aside like it was cardboard, bronze and gold beating in his head like drums, like wings. He strode into the cell with light moving under his skin like water and all he could think was Jace, all he knew was the need-want-craving to gather his aikane close and be sure of him, know down to his marrow that Jace was all right, okay, in one piece and well.

Jace was staring at him as if hypnotised, and Simon caught his face between his hands and kissed him, frantic, needing, there was blood on his cheeks and chin but Jace kissed him back like it didn’t matter, pressed into him and Jace’s mouth was warm and alive and Simon couldn’t get enough of it. The chain on Jace’s wrist rattled and Simon didn’t hesitate a second, dug his fingers under the manacle and tore it like paper and heard it clatter to the ground without even glancing at it, kissing Jace over and over, tasting him, the life in him, the unhurt-ness of him, Jace’s hands twisting just as desperately in his hair and Simon’s skimming over Jace’s body, relearning reassuring himself of the unbroken lines, the solid reality of his lover. You were gone they took you away from me, locked you in the dark with the dead and the blur the sear of something fiery and vicious rushing through Simon a tidal wave of gold, sheets of light like silk folding around Jace like protective arms, like walls of adamantium and Jace was shaking, trying to speak and Simon swallowed his words down, licked them off his lips like sugar, lost, you could have been lost, if the demon had gotten down here and it was an unbearable thought, a burning blade of terror-rage-desperation no less sharp for being parried, blocked, averted, you’re okay you’re okay as he kissed Jace over and over, “I thought you were dead,” Jace’s whisper like a secret and Simon crooning in his throat, honey behind his teeth and “Not this time,” nuzzling him, biting him so gently and Jace was trembling against him, shaking harder, his callused hands sliding down Simon’s skull, his neck, to his shoulders—

And shoving him away.

It was a Shadowhunter’s push and Simon almost fell, caught his balance only at the last instant, the wings that had embraced Jace shredding into sparks as they broke around him and Simon didn’t understand, his lips were still aching, bruised and “Jace?”

“No,” Jace said, and his voice had a patina like bronze, dull and rough. “We’re not doing this.”

“Doing what?” Simon’s mind was a whirlpool, spiralling and confused and full of a roaring that drowned out his pulse. They—they had to get out of here, had to find their way back to the surface, tell someone that the Silent Brothers were dead, and Jace...

Jace stepped back, away from him and it made no sense, did not compute, Simon was staring at him as Jace said, “This. Us. We can’t do this anymore.”

“What?” Slowly, slowly, it was coming together, and Jace’s expression wasn’t breaking into a grin, wasn’t revealing the joke, was instead resolute and unyielding and everything of fire in Simon was
icing over, going cold. “That’s not funny, dearling.”

“It’s not supposed to be,” Jace said with lips still red from their kisses. “I mean it. We can’t be together anymore, Simon.”

Individually, the words all made sense, but together the pattern they formed was incomprehensible, a Rorschach test with nothing in it, no shape to it and Simon was failing it, failing the test, he knew it and couldn’t help himself, couldn’t see what could not be there. “I don’t understand,” he said desperately, helplessly, and felt it like a wound when Jace looked away.

*No no no, don’t, look at me, LOOK AT ME—*

“It’s not that complicated,” Jace said. “This—us—it was never going to last. You had to know that.”

“No,” Simon whispered, and maybe it was a lie, he wasn’t sure, but there was nothing else he could humanly say in answer. “I didn’t know. Why would I?”

“Because there was never anywhere for it to go but to an end,” Jace said. “There’s no life for us, Simon. There never was.”

“Not if we don’t try,” Simon said frantically, “not if you won’t even try—if you just give up—why are you giving up?”

*Because there’s nothing to believe in!* Jace snapped, driving Simiel right through Simon’s heart and Simon couldn’t breathe, couldn’t see, the ground giving way underneath him and his eyes on fire with stupid, *stupid* tears. “It’s a fantasy, it was always a fantasy, lovely while it lasted but it was never going to last forever, Simon! And now it’s time to wake up and grow up. Or did you think there was a white picket fence in our future?”

That was cruel, needlessly cruel, Jace hadn’t even known that phrase until Dean had mentioned it on *Supernatural* and Simon had explained it, they’d laughed and Jace had teased him and hearing it now was a twist of the knife. Simon wanted to cry why are you doing this but he knew, part of him knew and that was the worst part, the worst thing. “No,” he managed, his breath hitching, “no, I didn’t, but there could be something, we could make something if we tried, if you wanted it, there’s nothing saying that we can’t—”

“There are two worlds that say we can’t!” and Jace was almost yelling now, almost shouting, voice raised and toxic and terrible, *don’t do this, please don’t do this.* “Where are we supposed to go, Simon? Where’s this dreamland where we can be together? Because it’s not your world, and it’s not mine!”

“Fine, we can’t get married,” Simon shouted, “so what? I never asked you for that, I never needed to go public, it can stay a secret—”

*It isn’t a secret anymore!* They know! And even if they didn’t—even if it was a secret, what then? What was your plan? Were you going to be Dedicated, were you going to smile at my wedding, were you not going to mind when I had children with someone else, a life with somebody else that you can’t share and you can’t have? Or was I supposed to give up being a Shadowhunter for you? Was that it? Go to college with you, get a degree in media studies? Would that be sufficiently mundane for you? Was that what you wanted?”

“I wanted you!” Simon cried. “I want you, I don’t care, Jace, tell me what you want and I’ll do it! Tell me—” Crying, he was crying, tears falling from his eyes like rain and he couldn’t remember how to be ashamed, couldn’t figure out how to care about something so unimportant. “Tell me you
want me and I’ll take your oaths, okay, I’ll be a fucking Shadowhunter, I’ll never say a word against
the Clave again, I swear, I promise—I’ll be their perfect pureblood, everything they want, everything
you want—”

Jace was watching him with what could only be pity. “You can’t,” he said softly.

“I can, I can, I will, I’d bleed out every drop of Morgenstern blood if that was what you wanted—”

“You can’t do that either.” Jace’s voice had hardened, crystallised. “And even if you could, you’d
still be a man, Simon. You’d still be male. You’d still be a singer, an anarchist, a Light Worlder. You
would still be you, and my world has no place for you in it.”

“Then leave it!” Simon shouted, and it was like a bandage being ripped off, long-swallowed words
come spilling out like rotten blood from a hidden wound, one that had been buried and suppressed
for weeks that weighed like years; Jace recoiled, physically flinched back as if he couldn’t believe
and Simon tasted the words like razors, knew they were too sharp too much too far as Jace’s eyes
went wide and shocked, raw and unfeigned but Simon couldn’t take it back, couldn’t stop the words
from shooting out of his mouth like bullets, like head-shots, heart-shots— “For once in your fucking
life, choose yourself over your precious mandate! You want to talk about fantasy versus reality, fine,
let’s, here we go! You think your people are chosen, you think you’re special, but the reality is that
you’re going to die young and in agony because you’re too fucking stupid to walk away!
Shadowhunters aren’t warriors of God, Jace, they’re brainwashed idiots playing soldiers who abuse
their kids ‘cause that’s what mommy and daddy did to them! And you know what, no one fucking
cares! There’s no such thing as a glorious death, there’s no such thing as heroes, and maybe they’ll
remember your name but it won’t matter, because you’ll be dead and the dead can’t hear the fucking
stories we tell about them!” He was screaming now, crying now and couldn’t stop, it wasn’t fair of
him and he didn’t care, he’d been wanting—waiting to say this for what felt like years and and and
Jace’s face growing more and more still, more and more closed, final. “So leave! Leave with me,
because they don’t deserve you and maybe no one will remember your name when you’re gone, but
you’ll be happy, you can have an entire lifetime of being happy and being human, instead of some
toy soldier dying in the dark before you’re thirty—”

And for a second, for a second—gods and Time Lords, for a second he thought he saw something
like indecision in Jace’s face, something like longing, a crack ajar in the closed door of his eyes and
please—

Please, please, please—

They could have a life, if Jace turned his back on his people. Their mom would understand when she
woke up, Clary didn’t care, and no one else had to know that Jace and Simon shared blood. Jace
could go to school, make friends he’d never have to watch die, become a martial arts teacher or a
doctor or work in a music store. He could see movies in the cinema and visit the aquarium, the zoo,
learn to skateboard or code or play football, he could collect stamps and be happy, be human,
simply, complicatedly human, and Simon would love him till the day he died—on a deck chair in the
sunshine, at eighty, or ninety, or a hundred and two—

If Jace could turn his back on his people. Such an enormous thing to ask of someone.

Such a small one, against the future it could buy.


Agony flashed across Jace’s face like the strike of a sword—but he was a Shadowhunter to the core,
wasn’t he, he knew how to stand beneath pain and Simon’s heart snapped like a bone as Jace shook
his head, and it was a death-knell tolling, deep in the dark—

_No_

_No_

_No_

“You can’t seriously think I would do that,” Jace said, and it was nearly a sneer, a whiplash snapping across Simon’s throat; the contempt in it, the ice. “We’re at war, Simon, and you want me to turn tail and run away—abandon my friends, my family, just so I can read Harry Potter and eat candy-floss—”

“You’re not going to win!” Simon yelled. “You told me that, you told me that, it’s a war you will never win, so why not leave, haven’t you paid enough blood to it yet—”

“And what then?” Jace shouted, so suddenly Simon that Simon jumped. “Should we all just give up, all of us Shadowhunters? What makes me so special, surely every other ‘hunter is worth just as much, surely they all deserve to grow old and die in their beds, but then what, Simon? Who fights then? Who protects your Fallen-damned Light World then? Should we all just watch New York become another Atlantis because none of us deserve to fall in battle? Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Trenton, Dover—how many cities would you let fall before you agreed I should defend them? Delphi? Shanghai? Cairo? London? How many people would you let die—a million? Ten million? A hundred million? How many is enough, Simon? How much blood do you think my life should cost?” He was shaking again, but not from kisses this time, not with anything like desire, and Simon had never seen him like this before, had never considered that maybe Jace had words like mines hidden in him too—“Maybe we’ll fall eventually, but every year we buy is a victory, every day we give the mundanes is another day for them to find a better solution—maybe their scientists will find a way to seal the world-wards and keep the demons out forever, or maybe they’ll figure out how to give themselves the Sight and learn to fight the monsters themselves, but they’ll do it because we gave them time, because we bought them the world!” Rage. Rage, and contempt, and maybe even—“You selfish athumos, how can you even think I’d walk away—the Nephilim are all that stand between you and the apocalypse, and you want me to leave even one inch of the wall unmanned? How dare you even ask?”

“Then let me fight with you.” Simon stood still, didn’t flinch under Jace’s bemused, angry glare, was too fucking desperate and afraid and broken to bend. “Right? If it’s so important, if the Nephilim are stretched so thin, then I’ll join you. I’ll be Dedicated and take the oaths in a year. I’m sure the Clave will be happy to get another pureblooded Shadowhunter in their ranks, won’t they? They might even like me more than you, with the angel riding shotgun.”

Jace said nothing.

“No?” Simon asked, and his voice shook, now, fractured, now, because he was so angry he thought he’d die with it, genuinely wondered if he might spontaneously combust into his own funeral pyre with a scream to wreck the world. “One life for billions, right? I’m a Shadowhunter, I can be as strong and fast as the rest of you, I can use the runes. I even have a whole pokédex of extra superpowers that you don’t have, so actually, it’s my duty to fight, isn’t it? With great power comes great responsibility, so the great web-slinger tells us.”

“Simon…”

“I think I’ll do that,” Simon said. He wiped at his eyes, his cheeks with his sleeve. “I’ll tell the Inquisitor today. They can send me to the Academy. Maybe if I work hard, they’ll station me with
“Simon!”

“I’ll braid your hair and you can polish my sword. Or is that too gay for your beloved Clave?”

“You can’t be a Shadowhunter!” Jace shouted.

“Oh fine, you can braid my hair and I’ll polish your sword.”

“This is not a joke!”

“Of course it fucking is!” Simon exploded, and light roared out of him, blazed like a bonfire and Jace threw his arm in front of his face, covering his eyes. “Because the only reason, the only reason you have for not wanting me to fight is because you don’t want to see me hurt, you don’t want me to die, so how fucking dare you ask me how dare I, when you’d do the exact same thing, when you’re doing it now!”

“Simon—”

“Fuck you, Jace!” Simon snarled, and the light in him snapped and lashed, flames dancing, whipping, storming, sending the shadows running and leaping on the walls. “This is what love is, it’s realising someone else is worth more than you are, but it’s a false epiphany because we can only ever be worth as much as each other, I’m worth just as much and just as little as you, if you can demand it of yourself you can demand it of me, if you can choose then I can choose, and if you can fight then so can I!” There was a ringing in his ears, a heat in his hands, wrapped around his spine as if his wings, the angel’s wings were braced to break through his skin and blaze. “I can be sacrificed or you can be saved, but you have to pick one or the other—”

“I don’t love you.”

The cell plunged into darkness.

* *

“I don’t want you to become a Shadowhunter,” Jace said, when it became apparent that the light was not coming back, “because you think that if you do, we can be together in secret. We can’t. I don’t want to.” His voice froze, clotted like blood. “So there’s no need to play the martyr.”

* *

“Unless you really do want to fight, for its own sake,” Jace continued, blithe, airy. “In which case, go right ahead. I won’t stop you.”

* *

It felt like a long, long time before Simon realised that the dark was real, was not just internal but external too. With slow, clumsy effort, he willed the enkeli Mark on his arm to glow, and the light it cast was dimmer than before.

When he looked up from the rune he found Jace watching him, his expression anxious. But it was gone as soon as he saw Simon looking, and the light was bad, and if Jace was worried about the angel freaking out…

It was quiet, the angel, buried deep. Simon reached for it and couldn’t find it and didn’t care.
The simple thought—I don't care, their words, and oh gods the fucking irony was a knife to the gut—made his throat close up, and Simon ducked his head away from the light, held his arm out to keep Jace from seeing how his face was marked with the stunning, agonising pain. As if his every nerve were screaming, but worse, deeper, twisting in him like razor wire and briar roses, and why did they call it heartbreak when every inch of you hurt?

He took a deep breath, and it scoured him like acid, and only then did he realise he had no idea what to say.

Part of him wanted to ask: did you ever?

The rest of him did not, because Jace might tell him.

No, that was stupid. Jace had not… No one was that good an actor. And Jace would not have risked what he had risked for anything less than an overwhelming love, a love like hemlock and cyanide. Deadly and total.

I woke in your arms this morning. I woke to your heartbeat this morning. You loved me this morning.

Didn’t he? Hadn’t he?

Maybe Jace was more upset that Simon had slept with someone else than he’d seemed. Or maybe it was the Inquisitor; maybe, now that he was faced with the consequences, he’d decided that Simon wasn’t worth it. That even made sense. No one rational would stay in a relationship that cost so much.

So why do I feel like I’m dying?

“Are you sure?” he asked finally. Softly.

Why do I feel like I’d rather be dead?

He heard Jace sigh. “Enough,” he said, and he sounded tired. “It’s over, Simon. We’re done.”

Enough.

It’s over.

We’re done.

Simon stared at him, felt the silence fill him up. Looking into Jace’s eyes was like meeting Medusa’s; Simon couldn’t figure out how to turn away, how to move, how to breathe.

Enough.

It’s over.

We’re done.

Enough.

It’s over.

We’re done.
Jace looked away first.

But I still love you. Doesn’t that mean anything?

Why doesn’t that mean anything?

“Right,” Simon said, and his voice was a little stronger but just as raw. “Well. There’s nothing I can say to that, is there?”

“I’m—” Jace started but Simon made a sharp gesture.

“If you say you’re sorry,” he said pleasantly, with a smile full of shark teeth, “I will fucking lose it. Don’t.”

His hand had flashed, as he gestured. Simon stared at his fingers and he wasn’t crying, not really. His heart was bleeding brine through his eyes, that was all.

‘Your blood is my blood; your war is my war—’

And then his breath hitched and he choked and he sobbed, he was crying, was crying outright, awful and ugly and shameful because he couldn’t bear it, he couldn’t fucking bear it, ‘together we are stronger, together we are whole’ but Jace was tearing them in two and Simon couldn’t even blame him, understood perfectly, all the logic was on Jace’s side and that only made it worse, made it crueller, no one had ever told him that star-crossed love was cocaine for the heart. And Simon threw away the needle before he could take another hit, ripped the gleam of silver from his finger, the Morgenstern ring Jace had put there like a wedding band, and hurled it with all his strength, with the bastard child of rage and hate and despair like vodka in his veins—

Why does it hurt so much why why would you do this to me why would you hurt me like this how could you say—

The silver hit the stone like a bullet, and the chime was a keen of mourning.

“Go and die then,” Simon managed, his breath catching on every word and tears streaming down his face and he couldn’t even be embarrassed, fuck the patriarchy’s insistence that men weren’t supposed to feel—all Simon could do was feel, all he was was feeling, an exposed nerve burnt and livid with ashes pouring through his ribs where his heart used to be, ashes and dust. “I hope it’s quick.”

***

Izzy pressed herself against the wall as Simon ran past her down the corridor, wrapped in the scent of salt like a cloak. She held herself still, her eyes squeezed shut as his footsteps slapped the stone and Jace’s pulse pounded in her throat, but even through her eyelids some light remained. She didn’t look, but she listened, and heard Simon stop not far off, remembering, perhaps, that she and Jace would need the light…

She heard him cry, wet, wounded sounds muffled against something—his sleeve?—and her own eyes stung with tears.

*Why did you do that?* she asked Jace, the thought a gossamer whisper brushing the winter of his mind, his ice-locked heart. She reached for him and the cold burned her, turned her aside like a parried blade. *How could you do that to him?*
She opened her eyes and walked the short distance to the cell. There was just barely enough light for a Shadowhunter to make out shapes in the gloom as Izzy tentatively paused in the doorway, unsure, despite the renewed agela bond, what she would find.

Jace was kneeling on the ground, staring at something in his hand, and his thoughts were bound in diamond, cool and unbreakable, unfathomable.

“We need to follow him,” Izzy whispered. Simon had the light.

If she raised her voice, she would break.

She felt Jace’s fingers close around the metal ring, and knew what it was without words.

They said nothing. But in the last flickers of the light, Jace got to his feet, and the two of them followed Simon’s footsteps, and pretended not to hear him crying.

NOTES

*Odo*—open (Enochian).

*Sabedoria* and *tharros* are the Runed names for the mental excellence and courage-in-combat Marks, respectively.

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery (and sometimes other items) with gold/gold-dusted lacquer.

*Naleli cayaare* is pronounced nall-ell-ee kai-are-ey.

If you’ve forgotten, the ‘your blood is my blood; your war is my war’ comes from the Runed!Shadowhunter engagement oath. Jace and Simon said it together back in *City of Shadows*. The ‘together we are stronger; together we are whole’ is also a quote from that oath.
A Mother's Word

Chapter Notes

IT LIVES!

No but seriously, you guys—I don’t know what happened. I can’t believe it’s taken me so long to get the next chapter to you. My brain got weird again and school suddenly exploded, and honestly I just lost my mojo for a while there :/ Not cool. Not fun. But this fic was never abandoned—I will never abandon Runed!—and I’m sorry for making you wait, but I promise, you will never wait in vain.

There have been so, so many amazing people loving this series. I have not often replied to your beautiful comments, because my hands are (still, perhaps forever) just not up to that much clicking and typing. But I have read and saved and cherished every single one. You guys have made me feel so loved, and so honoured, and I don’t know what I did to deserve any of you. You’re fabulous, and this chapter is dedicated to every last one of you. Thank you so much for loving my little story. Thank you for the kind words and the squeeing and the flailing, the encouragement and the caps-lock. I hope this chapter can be even a little bit worthy of you all.

And now, ONWARDS AT LAST!

Trigger Warning: This chapter contains the death of two minor characters.

The journey to the surface passed in a dark haze, a fog of grief and bewilderment and aching, awful humiliation. The last thing Simon wanted was to be forced to walk at Jace’s side through the pitch blackness of the dead city, already so exhausted, so drained that the flights and flights of stairs drew tears from his eyes that had nothing to do with—

With—

But no, there was nowhere to hide, no privacy where he could work through his tattered emotions in some semblance of peace. Jace’s presence was the crater of a volcano, ablaze with molten rock and liquid fire, and walking beside him in heavy silence was like trying to walk the mountain’s rim while pretending not to see the plunge. It could not be ignored.

Except, of course, that it had to be. The fight was done, the dye cast, leaving nothing left to say

(leaving a whole tome of unspoken words, and pride a chain binding it shut)

and his chest full of shrapnel from his grenade-heart. There was nothing to do but pretend, as hard as he could, that Jace wasn’t here, that Izzy wasn’t there with them, that all three weren’t tied together with knots of painfully awkward tension, with utterly pathetic social embarrassment—

He was so, so tired. Every step seemed to drag a world with it, and Simon lost count of how many times he stumbled, grew used to the sense of sickening vertigo that accompanied their ascent—how could the world be spinning when he could barely see it? What was there to spin? His Mark’s light grew fainter and fainter until they couldn’t see much more than a foot or two ahead, and twice it
flickered and died, leaving Jace and Izzy to wait uselessly while Simon scraped up the tattered shreds of his power to get it lit again. The effort left him a creature of paper and glass, light and hollow and echoing with it, and only Izzy’s tentative grasp of his wrist kept Simon from lying down on the stone floor and never getting up again.

Time stretched in the dark like a rubber band, until Simon swore he heard it snap and give up; no matter how he told himself they could not possibly have been down here for decades, it certainly felt like it. But eventually he realised that the staircase they were trudging up was the last one; eventually the dim glow of his Mark brushed weak fingers against a ceiling of earth that pulled aside like a curtain at Simon’s approach. The relief of seeing the sky at last nearly made Simon collapse, even as the daylight seared his eyes like fire; he crawled out of the Bone City and laid down on the grass, indifferent to the blurry haze of figures around him, the cluttering bite of voices. His bones throbbed as he curled in on himself, his cheek pressed against dirt and leaves; he saw, as if from worlds away, Alec wrapping his arms tightly around his sister, and then Simon’s eyes were closing without his permission, helpless against the tide of exhaustion gnawing at his insides, at his brain.

“What’s wrong with him?”

“Is he well?”

“What happened?”

Someone knelt beside him, touched his face, the pulse at his neck. The voices broke and crashed like surf, and when gentle fingers pried open his eye, he recognised the female Shadowhunter who had come with the Inquisitor.

“Valentine,” Jace said, heavily. “It was Valentine.”

“Can you hear me, Symeon?” the woman asked softly. “Give me a sign if you understand.”

He was too exhausted to breathe, and they wanted him to speak? Simon almost started crying again. He nodded instead, once, his skull gone so thick and unwieldy he could hardly move it.

“There may yet be survivors,” the Inquisitor was saying, somewhere close by. She barked names, orders, and Simon heard what must be feet descending into the Bone City, moving quickly down those dark stairs. They had better be carrying witchlights…

The woman rolled up Simon’s left sleeve. By the time it occurred to him that he really shouldn’t be letting any of these people Mark him, the rune was almost complete, an electric warmth that pulsed gently on his forearm. Lying down, he couldn’t see it, but it sang a soft question into his body, like a dolphin’s echolocation, seeking, searching; chittering dolphin-song and sweet flutes, silvery chimes…

Fumana. A diagnostic rune.

Whatever it told her must have been alarming, because she hissed under her breath and quickly traced another Mark just below it; this a bright, soaring soprano that cut through Simon’s exhaustion like sunlight through shadows. The iron bands around his chest loosened, and he almost gasped as he took his first full breath in what felt like days.

“Don’t move,” the woman told him. “And in Raziel’s name, don’t touch a stele!” She looked up, gesturing to someone outside Simon’s sight. “Jin! Watch him.”

The second of the Inquisitor’s bodyguards, the blond Asian man, took her place, and the woman disappeared. Tired still, but no longer feeling like a dandelion about to burst apart into silver fluff,
Simon managed to sit up.

“Careful there,” the man said—the first time Simon had heard him speak. The Nephilim had their own accent, something Simon could only identify as somewhat European, but this man’s English bore the ghosts of a south-Asian accent instead, not the burnished Idrian lilt Simon knew from Jace and the others. An Ascended Shadowhunter, rather than a born one? Or just raised outside of Idris? “The *sila* rune isn’t a cure, just a stop-gap. You’re not well yet.”

*Sila*. Simon flexed his fingers and said nothing, looking around. The square garden at the heart of the cemetery was not quite full of Shadowhunters—not counting however many had gone down into the City, there were ten or fifteen men and women in full Shadowhunter gear, their black armour not uniform but tailored to their body types and, presumably, their favoured weapons and fighting styles. Where had they all come from? Simon had been under the impression that the Lightwoods were the only Shadowhunters in the state…

He was not the only one wondering; a fox had gotten caught in a corner of the garden, presumably surprised by the unexpected influx of humans before it could flee to safety. It was watching the commotion with the mien of a cat curious about the ridiculous two-legged creatures stomping about in its territory.

And it was a commotion, Simon realised belatedly, his mind suddenly understanding what he was looking at, staring at. Izzy was shouting, “That’s not what happened, are you all *idiots*, it was a *demon*, how can you seriously think—” while her father gripped her arms and Alec was arguing, the words running together in Simon’s ears because Jace—cruel, razor-tongued Jace was standing pale and still before the Inquisitor, holding out his hands while her stele traced flames over his wrists—

‘*Binding cuffs,* ’ Luke’s voice said in his memory, and the scars on Simon’s wrists burned with the remembering, with remembered agony and hate and violation—

The loss was still so raw, still bleeding, Jace’s viciousness still ringing in his ears, *he is not yours anymore* but nothing had ever been more irrelevant, nothing had ever mattered less, no words could cut love neatly out of your heart no matter how surgical-sharp and even if it was true, even if Jace no longer loved him it *did not matter*, it was *extraneous*, he saw harm about to fall on the man he loved and the paper and glass of him became adamant and diamond in a sweeping instant, the hollow space where his power had run empty exploding into a hurricane and

*(Vas & cesuine & navitas, an exquisitely elegant network of telesme twining like DNA inside the stele as he reaches for it, the runes not singing but shrieking as he takes them in his mind and rends them, tears them into pieces bleeding broken notes)*

the stele in the Inquisitor’s hand *shattered*.

Jace recoiled as the crystal fragments flurried like snow, his half-Marked hands flying to protect his face but Simon turned the shards from him so that not a single sharp edge kissed his skin because *no*, he would never, no move of his would be paid in Jace’s blood. But the Inquisitor—she lunged back too but not quite fast enough and Simon did nothing to shield her, a hundred crystalline splinters lacerating hands and neck and face, she cried out more in shock than pain as the incomplete runes faded from Jace’s wrists without leaving scars—

Oh, the black savagery of satisfaction, the heroin-high of vicious triumph—

But someone, some stranger, grabbed at Jace’s arm as if he might have been the cause and Simon *snarled*, shoved off the ground and lunged to his feet without thought, barely aware of his guard’s sharp protests. A hand grabbed his own arm and Simon flung it off, grabbed the body through the
hooks of its Marks and tossed it heedlessly away; there were voices then, alarm and anger and confusion and Simon wrenched at the hand grasping Jace, pulled on its runes so viciously he heard the crack of broken finger-bones from across the clearing, heard the shocked scream and cared only because he felt and saw that hand retreat as if burned—

The Inquisitor was bleeding but her angle was wrong, she had not seen Simon throw Jin away without a touch and did not turn to look after the shouts of her people (*swords, so many seraph blades coming alight in Simon’s mind as they draw on him, Gamaliel Af Lahabiel Barrattiel Karael like a cloud of fireflies and as dangerous to him, how can they not understand, how do they not see*). Closer to Simon the woman from earlier was talking, trying to tell him something, but he had eyes only for the Inquisitor: she spoke and *adamas* flashed, Jace’s hands up in surrender as strangers grabbed him and forced him down, pushed him to his knees and the hurricane *howled*, Kansas split asunder and

*(we have been here before, haven’t we, we’ve played this over and over and you never win, you are incapable of winning because you still think this is a game, IT IS NOT A GAME THIS IS WAR)*

thunder burst from Simon’s upflung hands in a shock wave, fire and lightning striking invisibly in all directions like a hail of crossbolts, laser-locked on hearts and throats; with a hundred hands he grasped the Shadowhunters all around and *hurled* them, threw them, sent them flying, crushing seraph blades to sparkling dust and snapping steles like bones, screaming “*Leave him alone!*” because how dare they, enough, *enough*, Jace chose the Nephilim over Simon and this was how they repaid him, they weren’t worthy, they didn’t deserve him, how fucking *dare* they—

“No!” Izzy and Alec were both still standing, his storm had passed over their familiar rune-songs, but it was the Inquisitor’s female guard pushing herself up off the ground, and the horror-fear in her face made no sense, fear not *of* him but *for* him— “Symeon, stop this, your mana—!”

He snarled at both of her, and tasted blood—

How—

The hurricane of power faltered, stuttered—

How dare they—

“Simon!” Izzy cried. She was running between her downed brethren, running towards him—

But not fast enough. The storm inside went out like a light, and his eyes rolled up, and he fell into the dark silence.

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Isabelle pushed for a desperate burst of extra speed and caught Simon just before he hit the ground—and her whole body revolted at the sickening bonelessness of him, the limp wrongness that made her throat close with instinctive nausea. Knowledge older than her bones told her a human body should not feel like this.

He was bleeding, bleeding everywhere.

And then Syr Bellesword was there, taking him from her, lowering him to the grass as most of the other Shadowhunters were still getting to their feet, and Simon was so pale, so still, dark, almost black blood streaking his already bloodied face from every orifice as Bellesword grasped the *fumana* Mark on his arm—she must have been the one to draw it; Izzy had seen Hodge do the same thing, clutch a *fumana* rune to strengthen the bond between Marker and Mark, its secrets spilling directly
into his mind, a palimpsest of ills and imperfections—

“Stay where you are, Morgenstern!” the Inquisitor commanded somewhere behind them, but Izzy could feel Jace pushing through the gathered Nephilim, shoving them aside with his heart in his throat, snatching frantic glimpses through Izzy’s eyes of the blood, the white stillness, Bellesword’s face as it dawned on her—

*No no no no no no no no no he isn’t he can’t be, those were not our last words, I gave him up, Raziel I gave him up!* Jace’s cry cut through their shared soul and Izzy almost gasped at the anguish in it, a wolf’s howl of grief and terror spiralling up and up and up— *Don’t do this you can’t do this you have no right I gave him up!*

You can’t pay for lives that way, Izzy thought, remembering all too well the helplessness of watching Alec dying of Abbadon’s poison, the promises she’d made, and the look Jace gave her cut her to the heart—

“He’s dying,” Bellesword said, deaf to the byplay around her; she swept Simon up into her arms and almost lunged to her feet. “He needs a—”

She made it two steps. Izzy saw it—the way the woman’s face abruptly stiffened, her gaze suddenly blind, turned inward, her lips opening to scream at whatever she saw there—

And collapsed as if struck down, crumpling gracelessly, horrifyingly to the ground as if her spine had broken; Izzy lunged to catch her without thinking but Jace caught her arm—no, Alec, it was Alec looking out at her from Jace’s eyes, Alec’s voice that burst from his throat, “Don’t touch her!”

*What-why—* But then she knew, knew as the knowledge streaked from Alec’s mind to hers and Jace was dragging her back, away, and Alec was there, physically pushing people towards the walls and fumbling with his phone and Simon had fallen with one arm outflung and grey was spinning from his fingers, spreading like rot through the grass—

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“You can’t, you have to leave her,” Jace was saying, but he was the wrong person to be handing out reassurance, his own terror for Simon blinding-bright in his eyes and “She’s my parabatai!” the man snapped, trying to thrust Jace aside and Isabelle blocked him, understanding his need because what if it had been Alec, what if it had been Jace? But she still couldn’t let him do it, “If you touch her you’ll die,” she said urgenty, and he stopped and stared at her, uncomprehending—

“What is going on?” the Inquisitor demanded, pushing through the bodies. Her face was dotted with red where the pieces of her exploding stele had cut her. “Someone explain to me—”

She froze, and Isabelle knew that she’d seen the circle of death and rot around Simon, expanding second by second towards the feet of the gathered Shadowhunters. Some, sensible enough to heed Jace and Izzy’s warnings, were stepping back, away, nervous and wary, but not enough.

“It’s the angel,” Izzy said desperately. “It’s pulling the mana out of Simon’s surroundings, you have to get everyone back!”

The Inquisitor did not stop to argue; nodding brusquely, she shouted for everyone to move as far back as possible. “How do we stop it?” she asked then, cool and brisk as a battlefield commander.

“Imogen,” her male guard pleaded, “Catherine—I can feel it, what he’s doing to her, I have to help her—!”
“Stand down, Syr Park,” the Inquisitor said sharply. “No one will approach Symeon or Syr Bellesword until I am assured it is safe to do so.” She returned her well-honed gaze to Isabelle. “Well?”

Izzy opened her mouth to answer, to explain that last time Magnus had been able to contain it, that Alec was calling him now, that surely he or one of the other warlocks would be here soon—

But even as she drew breath Alec’s disbelief swept her aside, wrenched her in, she and her agelai-brothers spun together like disparate currents forged into a single whirlpool and Arika’s voice was in their ear, loud and clear, and she said “No.”

For a moment, even their tri-faceted mind could not comprehend it.

“You don’t understand,” Sariel said urgently into the phone, after that pause, a beat, a stutter of blue screen. But they kept their voice low, unthinkingly; low enough to keep this conversation private. “There’s a Shadowhunter already caught in Simon’s pull, if you don’t come she’s going to—”

“—die, yes,” Arika said evenly. “I am sorry. But we cannot help you.”

A pounding in their heads, knuckles gone white as snow, as bone. Far off, the Inquisitor’s voice scraping at Isabelle’s ears, muffled, distant.

“Magnus contained Simon last time!” Hearts beating, racing, pounding bass underscoring every desperate word— “You can do it, I’ve seen it—please, Arika ashipu, is this because of the murders? We’re trying, we’re looking, no one is ignoring that your child died—”

At the other end of the line, Arika hissed as if struck, and Sariel’s mouth snapped shut, understanding at once that they’d overstepped.

“This is not revenge,” Arika said, after a tension-tight pause. “It is truth. Magnus is the only one who can cast the spell you ask for. And to do so now would kill him.” Her voice hardened. “I know how most of the Nephilim would balance this accounting. I know how many of your people would still ask despite the cost, and count it well-spent. Are you one of them, Alexander Sariel? Will you have me tell Magnus of your need, and spend his life like copper, and count it cheap?”

The perfect circle of dead and dying grass around Simon had not stopped, was still growing, gulping down life like a dark, devouring mouth. It was almost four metres wide now, extending smoothly in all directions from Simon’s body; and even as Sariel watched blades of grass were shrivelling to nothing at the edges of the circle as the pull caught and drained them, turned the dirt that held their roots from healthy loam into bleached, cracked dust. If the angel’s hunger went down, instead of across, would it find a subway line? A train full of mundanes? The powerlines that fed the city? And if it continued as it was doing—sending its hunger along the surface of the earth, instead of beneath it—how far could it stretch? To the edge of the garden? To the road? Further? More? How much more?

Arika was wrong. It wasn’t just one life for one. Simon—the angel in him—could take so much more than just one life if Magnus didn’t come. All the Shadowhunters here. Every one of them. Syr Bellesword would be just the first pebble in an avalanche of deaths.

Three lifetimes of training-experience-upbringing weighed on Sariel’s tongue like the bit of a bridle, the hands of a millennium’s worth of Nephilim on the reins. There was only one answer to Arika’s question, and it was not the one she wanted to hear.

“Isabelle?” the Inquisitor demanded. Then, perhaps realising who she was actually talking to;
“Sariel?”

They ignored her.

Syr Bellesword was vampire-pale beside Simon. Were her cheeks sunken? Had those dark circles been under her eyes a few minutes ago?

The circle of death reached the base of the angel statue, the sentinel that stood guard over the Bone City’s entrance. Hairline fractures spread like lace over its plinth, spiderwebbing wider and wider.

The mourning runes on Alec’s body burned like brands.

Elias and Xia had died for Sariel’s incompetence. That was no agreed-upon price, no willing trade: that was a theft, two lives cut down and stolen. What right did Sariel, did anyone have to demand more of the Downworld, of the Spiral Court, of Magnus? The Nephilim were already in breach of contract, the protection promised by the Accords undelivered, broken. Magnus owed them nothing.

Shadowhunters might die. But Shadowhunters were the true coins, cast and minted in steel and adamas, born to be spent buying safety from the darkness. Downworlders were not.

Magnus was not. Magnus had no part in this life of death and dying—Magnus was supposed to be immortal, was meant to live forever, and Sariel was born to die, Shadowhunters promised their deaths to the cause long before they were ever Dedicated—but the thought of Magnus dying was like some priceless treasure desecrated and destroyed and lost to the world: the Taj Mahal reduced to rubble, Michelangelo’s David broken and shattered, Lascaux’s cave paintings graffiti’d over with slurs and gang marks. It was blasphemy to even consider it.

Magnus might be only a single coin—but that coin was a californium medallion, and no matter how Sariel set the scales in their mind, no matter how the facets of their soul spun and re-evaluated the numbers and their results, that one coin outweighed and outworthed any amount of Shadowhunter steel placed against it.

It could not be otherwise.

“Nothing about Magnus,” Sariel whispered, “is copper. And he is not mine to spend.”

Silence from the phone.

“I would not have done it anyway,” Arika said at last. “But I am glad you will not ask me to.”

She hung up, then, without another word, and Sariel lowered their phone into Alec’s pocket, dazed and heartsick. Wondering if they had done the right thing, made the right decision.

If Sariel had asked—if Alec had asked—Magnus would have come. Nothing in the agela-mind doubted that. They could call again, hope for Catarina to answer the phone this time, or Magnus himself. And Magnus would come.

And die.

Every Shadowhunter here would say they had made the wrong choice. But how could they have made another?

“Agela Sariel, attend me!” the Inquisitor ordered, and finally, at last, they turned their attention to her.
“Simon’s angel is drawing on the aetheric energy of everything around him,” they said through
Izzy’s mouth. “Consuming it. The edge of the circle is the extent of his reach. Step into it, or let it
reach you, and he’ll start draining you too.”

“What about Catherine?” Syr Park demanded; his eyes were wild.

“How do we stop it?” the Inquisitor asked at the same time.

“It can’t be stopped,” Sariel lied. “Everything touching Simon will be drained until the angel is
satisfied—and if that’s not enough, everything in contact with anything touching him becomes
vulnerable, on and on like links in a chain. Reach for Syr Bellesword, and you become one of those
links.”

Comprehension flashed across the Inquisitor’s face like a drawn sword catching the light. “There’s
no way to break the chain safely?”

There was no use pretending they had not seen this before. “Last time, Jace and Alec were caught in
the drain. Isabelle caught Alec with her whip and dragged them free. But that won’t work now.”
Sariel gestured towards the prone figures of Simon and Syr Bellesword. “She’s lying down. There’s
no way to flick the whip so it can grab hold of her.” The ground itself would block the coils of the
whip from wrapping around the Shadowhunter woman. It couldn’t be done. “Theoretically, the
chain can be broken by someone fast enough to get one of the links out of reach…”

 “…But that would mean entering the circle, here,” the Inquisitor finished.

Sariel nodded.

The cracks had spread to the feet of the angel statue. Magnus had said before that it was impossible
to take mana from non-living things, but beneath the hem of its robe the bare toes of the stone angel
began to crumble like a pillar of salt, like Lot’s wife staring into an unseeable truth, and Sariel felt the
tableau of it shudder through them, a touch of ozone and ice to their threefold heart.

Raziel, fractured and breaking. Raziel, devoured and consumed. The Sator of the Nephilim race,
creator and begetter, dissolving into dust and shards as Simon—the creature in Simon—drank him
down like wine, and for a moment Sariel forgot all else, had eyes only for the heavy portent of it.
They stared as if hypnotised and felt each fracture like a line of frost running through their own soul;
there was something—some whisper of wordless dread elicited by the picture made, unintelligible
but growing louder, and louder, a whisper that became a shout, and then a roar, and then a piercing
howl, rising not from nothing but from some depth within them, from one part of their whole—from
Jace. As if a hammer-blows had fallen upon Jace’s facet of their bond fissures of dark horror seared
like jagged lightning bolts from it, bursting black and rotten through the gemstone the agelai made
together, a tide of darkness sweeping through their jewel-bright light—

*Augury harbinger omen, see the Sator fall like Lucifer, break like the wife of Lot; the ending of an
age heralded. It comes like a winter storm on black wings, with rabid wolves in its train and a smile
on its lips; it calls the names of the Nephilim and its words are chains about their throats, dragging
them from their thrones into a vortex of tearing teeth; it walks on blood as the Christ-son walked
upon the water and all the world is become its red red road—*

And then it was gone, the sense of impending doom withdrawn like a shadow crossing the sun. In its
wake Sariel came apart into three again and the Inquisitor was still talking, Syr Bellesword was still
dying, and Isabelle was shaking so hard that for a moment, for the first time in her life, she thought
she might be sick.
“No,” the Inquisitor was saying, to Agela Sariel and to the Shadowhunters gathered around her to hear her verdict, “I will not order anyone into the circle. This is not a demon that needs slaying. Raziel’s mandate does not give me the authority to command any of you against angels.” She sounded very tired. “If anything, it bids us not interfere.”

*Maybe we should be offering ourselves up,* Izzy thought, a little hysterically. The echoes of what Sariel had felt—the weight and pressure of some great nameless and unnameable terror, wordless, formless, framed by the dissolving wings of the angel statue—still beat against her mind like waves against a shore. Battering her into sand. *Volunteering to feed it. Or would that be a kind of cannibalism?* It seemed like something Simon might have wondered.

“NO!” Syr Park shouted, and for a second Izzy thought he was answering her question, but— “You can’t leave her, she’s dying, Imogen, he’s killing her! I can feel it, she’s slipping away from me, please, please—Catherine! Catherine!”

*Dying. She’s dying.* This slow, almost gentle death—Izzy glanced over at Syr Bellesword almost without meaning to. It did not feel real. There was no immediacy to the picture the woman made, laid out on the grass. This was not how Shadowhunters died, they died quickly, in blood and darkness—not slowly and softly, sleeping in the sunshine—

But Syr Park’s frantic cries scored the *agelai* like a sword. *If it was one of us...* All three of them felt it like a fist around their hearts, squeezing, crushing. *Thank Raziel it isn’t one of us,* Izzy thought guiltily.

“Let me, I’ll do it, let me go!” Syr Park struggled against Jace’s hold, and Jace was still ringing with the not-sound of whatever it was they hadn’t heard— “Please, Imogen *please,* make them, let me, she’s dying!”

His voice broke like a blade snapping, metal giving way beneath unbearable pressure, and the Inquisitor’s eyes were fathomless with unfeigned grief. “This isn’t a battlefield, Sung-jin!” she said sharply. “An angel is nothing you can fight! You can only die with her!”

“Then let me!” Syr Park—Sung-jin—screamed, and his eyes were manic, rabid. “Let me, *parabatai,* she’s my, she’s, let me go!”

“Restrain him,” the Inquisitor ordered heavily, gesturing for a couple of Shadowhunters to relieve Jace. “Death is the one place the *parabatai* oath bids you not follow her,” she told Sung-jin as he shrieked like an animal, heedless, deaf to her logic—as Isabelle would have been, as Alec and Jace would have been— “Catherine would never forgive me if I let you—”

He was not listening. And as Jace relinquished his hold on the man to two older Shadowhunters, Syr Park broke free.

“Chamuel!”

Only the *agela* bond gave Jace the processing speed to sway away from the diamond-flash of the man’s seraph blade in time; blood arced crimson before other Shadowhunters could react, Sung-jin whipping and snarling like a crystalline whirlwind, scattering Shadowhunters like black leaves. Hands flew to blades but everyone hesitated—Shadowhunter did not raise hand against Shadowhunter, it was bred into their bones—

In that moment of hesitation, Syr Park bolted through the crowd—towards his *parabatai* and the circle that caged her.
“Stop him!” the Inquisitor shouted—but it was already too late, the man had already set foot on the withered grass, crossed into death without a second’s hesitation, and Izzy held her breath, hoping—hoping—

Momentum carried Syr Park forward two steps—

Three—

Four—

But it did not, could not carry him far enough.

He fell like a tree cut down, toppling to earth between one step and the next—and the angel swallowed him whole. It sucked the lustre from his hair and the colour from his skin all in an instant, turned the former brittle and grey and the latter a shade of white that belonged on nothing human; the celestial light in his seraph blade went out like a candleflame even as the sword fell from his fingers. He hit the ground knees-first with the dark leather of his gear rotting around him, cracking apart into nothingness; as his face met the dirt his clothes puffed into dust like the spores of a disturbed fungus. Izzy had a fraction of a second to glimpse the man’s naked back, his corpse-pale skin laced with shadowed veins, the rich ebony fading from his Marks like dye in bleach—and then he collapsed inward, imploded, skin and flesh and bone crumbling away like an ancient parchment handled without care. A few seconds, and there was nothing left but a heap of greasy dust, a chaotic swirl of grey and brown and rust-red.

In the silence that followed, Isabelle heard a thick, struggling breath exhaled from the centre of the circle—and no inhale to follow it.

Syr Bellesword had followed her parabatai into the dark, one last time.

***

Simon did not wake, but the drain stopped. No more grass died; the circle of the angel’s hunger was halted. The Inquisitor herself tested it, gingerly laying a single hand within the dark border to make sure it was done, before ordering the Shadowhunters to decamp.

They did so swiftly. An urn was found from the bloodstained Silent City for Syr Park’s remains; Robert Lightwood grimly lifted Syr Bellesword’s body into his arms. His children were the only ones willing to approach Simon’s still, pale form; Jace made to pick him up, but aborted the motion at some silent communication from his agelai, backed away to let Isabelle take Simon instead. If any of the other Shadowhunters wanted to protest the gentle protectiveness with which she cradled him, they kept it to themselves.

Within minutes, the Nephilim were gone.

All but one. In the commotion of the Inquisitor’s summons no one had noticed another Shadowhunter answering the call, even one a good decade younger than the rest; their eyes had passed over his gear and Marks and accepted his presence without thought. But without friends or partners to notice his absence from the group, there was no one to miss him as he hung back in the shadows, watching one particular corner of the garden as the rest of the Nephilim left the graveyard.

When all was silent, he stepped into the sunlight; it pulled streaks of blue from his pure black hair, glinted on the hilts of his blades. He stared at the fox that had watched the events of the last few minutes as he had watched them, and gone nearly as unnoticed. “We need to talk.”

The fox spun on its paws and made to bolt, but the Shadowhunter made a sharp gesture and mid-leap
copper-coloured fur burst apart into skin and fabric. A crimson whirlwind of claws and tail coalesced into a young Korean woman left gasping for breath on her hands and knees in the grass.

“Shadowhunter,” she said through gritted teeth. Her eyes burned as she got to her feet, brushing off the knees of her jeans. “How did you do that?”

He smiled coldly. “Your people aren’t the only ones with secrets, Lightbringer.” The smile vanished. “What are the Messengers of Inari doing in New York? This isn’t your territory.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” the woman said.

“And I don’t have time for games, so I’ll make this simple for you: stay away from Symeon Morgenstern.” His eyes were black ice on a midnight road. “He’s not your concern.”

The woman’s eyes narrowed. “If you know about the Lightbringers, then you know Symeon is our concern,” she said, changing tack on a dime. “Or do you not know what it is?”

“I know exactly what he is,” the man said. Better than you was unspoken, but rang clear as crystal.

The fox-woman eyed him coolly, speculatively. “Do you?” she asked after a considering pause. “I doubt it. If you did, you would not have left it breathing. You have your duties to the world, too, don’t you? That creature is a living violation of your mandate. It will bring a second Flood if it’s not put down. I can promise it.”

“Better get your swimsuit ready, then,” the Shadowhunter commented idly. He was inspecting his nails, a satire of boredom.

The woman’s eyes narrowed. “It’s not a levelled-up Nephilim, Shadowhunter. Whatever that creature may look like to you, it isn’t a holy son of Raziel. It’s a monster worse than anything you’ve ever faced!”

“I’ll thank you not to assume you know what I’ve faced.” He looked up from his fingers. “Are you done? Then I have a promise to exchange for yours, little kitsune: touch him, and die. It’s that simple. I don’t care about your reasoning; I don’t even care about the world. Hurt him, and I’ll kill you. Try to hurt him, and I’ll kill you. Every last one of you, if I have to.”

She raised her eyebrows with contempt. “Do you think that scares me?”

The Shadowhunter smiled, the curve of his lips a reaper’s scythe. “It should.”

“Why?”

She was fishing for information, and he tossed her a bite. “Because I’m not a levelled-up Nephilim either.” And he made a fist.

Like a doll of wet clay, she was suddenly compressed inwards and down; pain sheared across her face, but even as she opened her mouth to scream she was silenced, lips elongating into a coppery muzzle, russet fur bursting from her skin and clothes, ears moving up her skull and sharpening to arrowhead points. She fell to the ground and landed a fox, weak-legged and trembling, her human scream become a vulpine whine of distress.

The Shadowhunter loosened his hand. “Tell your commander to leave Symeon alone. There is no ‘or else.’”

He didn’t wait to see the fox’s fur stand all on end, or hear its low growl of acknowledgement. He
simply turned on his heel and left, as swiftly and silently as he had come.

Moments later, a small red fox disappeared in the other direction.

***

Hunger.

HungerhungerhungerHUNGER.

Starving. Famished. VOID.

He is a black hole thinly sheathed in skin and he is gulping down stars, clawing them from the firmament and into his mouth, shoving them in in desperate, ravenous handfuls. They go down easy as pomegranate seeds and they taste so good, so perfect, like fresh-baked brownies just out of the oven and crisp apples and Mrs Lewis’ roast salmon and nothing like any of those, more and better and beyond similes—but he hardly tastes them at all, he doesn’t have time to taste and savour them, the hunger is SCREAMING and it feels like bleeding as he weeps from the pain, from the need, stuffing himself full and smearing electromagnetic radiation all over his chin, astronomical light dripping from his lips and hands as he reaches for more, and more, and MORE—

He swallows over and over and they plunge down into the dark inside him, constellations of them, asterisms of stars, and the space around him dims as the emptiness within him brightens, lightens, fills bit by bit. The howling agony of starvation’s sharp edges grow dull, soothed and smoothed out; gradually his core turns from black hole to stellar nursery, the brilliance of a thousand stars driving away the famished shadows. One last lozenge of silvery fire flares suddenly within his reach and he snatches at it, drags it hungrily to his mouth and bites—swallows—

It tastes like cedar smoke and honey and pineapple—and then the hunger is gone. The pain stops.

He can breathe.

He licks the starlight from his fingers, trembling with satiation, with relief and rich, heady pleasure. The shining smears explode on his tongue, champagne and sugar.

When the last of it is gone he stands still, panting a little after gorging himself so full. He’s just straightened up to take a look around—only just beginning to realise that this is nowhere he should be, nowhere in the world he knows—when a pulse of golden light flashes away from him.

It bursts out of his chest and flies away into the darkness, and he feels it go, a faint throb of sensation, painless but indescribably strange—and then there’s another. And another, and another, regular as a heartbeat, each one tracing the same path from his solar plexus away into the pitch-blackness, each one briefly illuminating Simon and the blankness of his surroundings before darting away.

What the—?

With each successive throb of light the path leading out of him becomes clearer, becomes a little more defined. At first it only glitters on the edge of invisibility; then it gleams, like a mirror in mist suddenly reflecting fire. And then it’s as solid as light can be, clear as a laser, a shining rope anchored in Simon’s chest and tied to—to something else, something Simon can’t see or sense out in the darkness. He almost can’t be afraid; it’s so beautiful, a radiant cord of sunlight and starlight, topaz and diamond, citrine and opal, blazing like flames but smooth-edged as silk, pulled so taut it ought to hurt—but it doesn’t. There’s no pain, just a distinct palpitation when each flare of light goes out of him, a kind of pull, a tug, as whatever the light is is drawn from his body.
But he is afraid, still, despite how pretty it is, despite the lack of pain. What in Kal-el’s name is it?

Gingerly, he reaches for the point where it vanishes into his chest—it does not give beneath his fingers, and his hand doesn’t pass through it like a hologram. It’s solid, with a texture like velvet-sheathed wire, softness over an unbreakable core. He can just about wrap his hand around it; it’s as warm as something full of blood, something living.

Wondering-hoping he can just rip it out like a weed, he yanks.

It’s like wrenching on his soul: he feels it in everything he is, every cell of him screaming a frantic protest and he reverberates like a gong struck by Mjölnir as the rope of light hums, quivering like a plucked harp-string and singing a crystalline note that resounds in the dark, a sound as full of and as rich with meaning as rune-song—

*It means life—*

It means life, and the reverberations fill him up, fills everything to bursting-shattering; it’s like an earthquake in his mind, everything shaking and shaking and all his trains of thought thrown from their rails by the convulsions. His bones are wind-chimes caught in a storm, pealing and pealing, that sound flooding everything, every space he has, sweeping everything else away like the wave that drowned Atlantis. All he knows is the song, all he can feel is its music playing over his ribs and drumming in his skull, the pulsing tug of light flowing away from him into the golden-opal rope like blood through an umbilical cord—

***

In a flowershop in downtown Manhattan, a young man in the midst of arranging lavender, sunflowers and Asiatic lilies into a bouquet for a customer suddenly froze mid-word.

“Are you all right?” the woman asked after a beat, alarmed by his very strange expression—but even as she spoke his eyes rolled back in his head and he crumpled, falling bonelessly and suddenly to the floor.

The lily in his hand fell with him like an offering into a grave.

***

It does not, cannot echo in this place without walls. Gradually the sound dies away, and the terrible convulsions of his soul-Self-mind ease, stilling slowly. Bit by bit he stops feeling like a manic toddler’s xylophone. It could be seconds or hours before silence reigns again, before the after-effects of that wrenching pull fades; the cord gives light, but there is no way to tell time or its passing, no way to know how long this feeling lasts.

Finally, though, his mind stops vibrating. Finally he’s able to think again, and remember his name, remember to be afraid. He lets go of the light-rope at once, thinking umbilical cord, thinking it’s feeding on me, whatever’s at the other end is feeding on me like a leech—

The bond vibrates again—and not because he touched it.

Because someone else did.

Terror rams like an icicle through his heart; with nothing pulling on the cord he doesn’t drown in the music this time—but there’s something there, there’s something out there in the dark tied to him in gold and silver and he doesn’t know what it is, doesn’t know what he’s tied to, but nothing in the last few weeks suggests it’s going to be good.
Monster, nightmare, no no go RUN!

Except there’s nowhere to go, and no way to hide with this rope of light blazing a path directly to his heart for anyone and anything to follow, and the pulses of light-life-energy are leaving him faster, faster and faster, why are they doing that, what does it mean, what is he supposed to DO—

He thinks it’s a trick of his eyes at first, the distant glow. But it comes closer—swiftly, like a streaking star—and no. No, it’s no illusion, it’s not his imagination.

It’s—

It’s a—

It’s the other end of the bond.

The cord is strobing now with the quick beats of light flashing down its length, leaving Simon, and he thinks of a wound, thinks of bleeding light into the dark as the creature on the other end comes close enough to see, comes close enough to be painted by the glow of the rope joining it to Simon but even before that he is jerking away, jerking back. Because the instinct of that Other inside him says demon even before he can make out the feathers, the skull, the claw-jewelled fingers and Simon’s fear catches and comes alight, white and gold fire leaping to his hands and wreathing his wrists in burning bracelets—

But then it stops him. That inner instinct, that wordless voice, the thing inside him that has always reacted to demonkind with white-out revulsion-rage stops him in his tracks, catches him like a moth in amber.

Because there is no blinding fury as the demon comes into the light of the fire. Only a near-painful bolt of joy.

Simon can’t move, he wants to run but that inner It won’t let him, has him locked in place like a lodestone. The demon is, it looks—it looks almost human, like the Greater Demons did, but where they were giants this one is Simon-sized, a biped without tentacles or spines or a scorpion tail to make his gorge rise. But its face is a skull’s, an avian skull, gleaming like mother-of-pearl where the firelight kisses it and too large to belong to any bird Simon knows, surrounded by a dark mane thick as smoke. Abbadon wore nothing and Abigor wore armour, but this one wears a cloak of feathers that spills around it like a storm, and the rope of light that binds the creature to Simon catches gleams of green and blue in them.

Every throb of the bond sends a pulse of soul-stuff from Simon into this thing. It’s feeding on him. There’s—it’s—the demon is feeding on him, sucking the light from him, and Simon has to struggle not to be happy about it, the Other inside him is so damned happy about it, what—

The demon moves, and Simon flinches—but the hand adorned with delicate-deadly claws reaches not for him, but for the edge of its own forehead. It pulls, and skull and mane both slide away, come free in its hand and Simon understands what he’s looking at even as the demon’s true face is revealed—the terrible visage was only a headdress, and beneath it is a face as human-seeming as his own, all dark ebon-gold skin stretched over bones like spun steel, fine and sharp and strong. Its hair tumbles down around it like a winter wind, like a fog of silk, longer than another cloak; white as milk and snow and the glare of sunlight on clear water, and as if in contrast its eyes are dark, slitted black pupils against white irises against black sclerae.

And none of it is as terrifying as the wary wonder in its face as it stares at Simon.
“Adokaz-Aoi,” it breathes, and even the harsh snarl of the twisted Enochian demons speak can’t disguise the prayerful tone, the relief and longing and delight that touches ice to the back of Simon’s teeth, runs heat down his spine that has nothing to do with the fire in his hands.

He starts when the demon suddenly folds, dropping down to its knees like a sword into its sheath; its wings fold and flatten like Abigor’s did all those weeks ago, a gesture whose poignancy catches in Simon’s throat: submission, respect, an honouring. (Do demons have honour?) The mask is let go, and it falls away into the darkness as if into water, but the demon lays its hands down flat as if there is solid ground beneath its palms. Its head bows low.

“You called,” it says, its face hidden in the silver spill of its hair. “And I came.”

Except that’s not quite it, the word the demon uses is anjedshhazekt and its meaning tumbles through Simon like an avalanche in all its layers of intimacy/loyalty/service, its tangles of past- and present-tense: more I come than I came, I heard and I hear both, with the implications therein. It is a word that means I rise, both to your call and to your hand, like a vassal, like a sword; it means I am reborn/renewed by your will, reborn into your will, and that is…

From a demon? That is unbelievably disturbing, even nauseating, and the horrific implications rend like shrapnel through Simon’s stunned thoughts.

Especially because the Other inside him seems anything but disturbed.

“I didn’t,” he answers in the same language, more harshly than he meant to—more harshly than is probably wise. He takes a step back, raising his flame-cuffed hands in a warding gesture. With effort, he forces the words out in English, and not the splintered, bastardised Fallen Enochian that sits on his tongue like hot lead, eager as blood to be spilled. “I didn’t call you!”

The demon looks up at him, and its face is human but inhuman, unhuman, and Simon cannot read it at all. “You called me through the lilnilipah,” it contradicts him, and its voice is a parrying sword, catching Simon’s certainty-wish-will and knocking it back. Simon almost stumbles: the word means blood and branch and living breath, and he understands instantly that this is the name for the cord of light that binds this demon to him. “Do you not know me, Adokaz?”

Prince. It names him prince, like the demons in his vision did, like the voice in his head, like the monster he found in the Silent City.

Prince.

“No,” Simon says, before he can think better of it, before he can realise all the ways in which it might be better, safer, to play along. And there are many, so many: if this creature has mistaken him for someone (something) else, what might it do if Simon denies it, unveils himself as not the one he’s thought to be?

(Or, worse—

—what if he is exactly who ((what)) the demon thinks he is?)

But he thinks of all the reasons to lie too late. “I don’t know you,” he insists, and readies himself, as best he can, for anger, for confusion, for attack. “How could I—why should I?”

The demon smiles, suddenly, and it is not an attack but it tears at Simon like one, not least because it is a smile too full of teeth, shard-sharp and glittering like splinters of opal. A mouth full of jewels.

(Not least because, for a moment, Simon could swear the strangeness of the demon’s face makes
sense to him, and that in it he reads sadness, sadness and resignation and a breath-taking, heart-stopping tenderness—)

And then it all flies right out of Simon’s mind as the demon says, “Your mother sent me.”

***

When the message came from the Silent City, the Inquisitor had commandeered a car from the werewolf pack she, Alec, and Syr Park had been interviewing—only the first of the four packs in this canton, but the moment Alec had walked into their packhouse he’d known they’d found the family of the missing child. The grief and barely-suppressed hatred they’d turned on the Shadowhunters had been raw as burns; the guilt Alec chased it down with seared like salt.

Our fault. My fault. I should have stopped this.

Syr Park had driven them to the graveyard that was the Silent City’s entrance while his commander messaged Alicante for support. An emergency Portal had met them by the statue of Raziel and deposited twenty-one Shadowhunters at the Inquisitor’s feet, ready for orders.

There was no way to get them all back to the Institute in the werewolves’ car. The seriously injured—of which there were only two—crammed in alongside Agela Sariel in the back of the car while the rest walked.

It was a car meant for ferrying a family around; there was room. But Sariel noticed nothing, not the foreign Shadowhunters, or the Inquisitor, or the sudden, awful lack of Syrs Bellesword and Park. They only watched Simon’s face, and his breathing, and his slow, steady pulse.

There didn’t seem to be anything else in the world.

But at some point, the Inquisitor must have sent a message ahead somehow, because when they reached the Institute it was swarming with unfamiliar Nephilim.

Sariel stopped just inside the door, momentarily bewildered by the crush of people. They had never seen so many Nephilim in their home before, not even for Max’s jääydin-confirmation; there were Shadowhunters assembled in black and gleaming gear, runecasters in garnet and vellum, alchemists in armour-tight ruby and ebony lugging their signature carrying cases—even members of the scholar-caste, with the pins of their knowledge shining steel or pearl or jade at the throats of dove-grey robes shot with silver.

Scholae wore different emblems to denote their areas of scholarship, the subject of their knowledge and expertise. Those who worked with the Merchant-Adventurers wore bronze globes with the mundane lands gilded, for their knowledge of the Light World; historians had the triple-knot, the triquetra, to denote the interwoven fluidity of history; and scholae who had studied the cultures of the Downworlder peoples wore the warlocks’ star, the luna moth of the fae, the werewolves’ crescent, or the vampires’ ankh pinned to their collars—sometimes all four. But all the scholae Sariel could see—all of whom immediately tried to swarm the Inquisitor—were wearing the same sign, one the agela had only ever seen in the Codex; a golden key, winged with the six pennons of a seraph, each one carved from flawless adamas. The crest of the Secretseekers, the secretari—the angelologists.

For a single second, caught clear in time as snow and glass, Sariel thought we should run. Simon was in their arms, and they were barely inside the door; they could turn now and be gone in a beat of their synced hearts—

And go where? With what resources? The Inquisitor would have the Lightwood accounts frozen the
moment she realised they were gone. The only place they could go that they might actually reach was Magnus’ home, and they had no right to bring the wrath of the Clave down on him. Especially when he was sick, and maybe dying…

It only took a moment to consider, hardly a breath, and then there were authoritative figures gathered around, reaching for Simon as though they had the right, and Sariel reacted faster than thought, stepped the Izzy-body back and the Alec- and Jace-bodies forward, reversing the arrowhead formation, putting the bulk of their muscle between these strangers and their parastathentes—

One of the men slapped Alec on the shoulder.

Or tried; he probably meant only to break their skindancing, to make them startle apart into three minds again, but Sariel caught the man’s wrist and twisted, shoved, bared their teeth in protectiveness cubed by itself, a triple-spiral grown thorns and claws, *Secretseekers Secretseekers Secretseekers here for him here for Simon they mustn’t they can’t he is ours YOU CAN’T HAVE HIM—*

“Agela Sariel, stand down!” the Inquisitor commanded, sweeping into view. There were still specks of blood on her face and hands. “There is no time for this; Symeon must be examined, and now. Now.”

It was true. Simon still hadn’t woken up, and there was no Magnus this time to cast healing spells. Sariel couldn’t help him, wasn’t helping him by keeping him out of the healers’ hands…

“Get Catarina ashipu,” they said with Izzy’s voice. It emerged rough from her throat. “She’s a magical healer. She can examine him.”

The Inquisitor gave them an incredulous look that quickly shaded into anger. “Allow a Downworlder to lay hands on an angel’s vessel? No. One more word,” she said icily as Sariel opened Alec’s mouth to speak, “and I will have you all stripped.”

Did she mean it? Would she do it? Break an agela?

To protect an angel’s vessel? Yes.

Which meant they had no choice, because unMarked and cast out they would be no help to anyone. Certainly not Simon.

And yet giving up Simon’s weight was like carving out their lungs; his head lolled as they handed him over, and despite having just seen him wreak destruction like an avenging angel less than twenty minutes ago—the Inquisitor’s stele turning to shrapnel in her hand, dozens of seraph blades exploding like crystal grenades, Shadowhunters flying through the air like flung dolls—he looked fragile and defenceless in the arms of the woman who took him from them.

She handled him like a holy relic, careful and reverent. It did not make Sariel feel better.

They watched him be whisked away by physicians with adamas torques around their necks and adamas rings shining on their fingers. Like Shadowhunters, the caste of healers wore hunting black—but where Shadowhunters hunted to kill, physicians hunted through harm and illness to bring their patients back to health. These were the true medics of the Nephilim, far greater in their skill than Hodge had ever been with his simples and tonics, and it was good that they were here. If anyone could care for Simon now, they could.

But the Secretseekers followed them up the stairs, and Sariel had known, of course on some level they had known the secretari were here for Simon, that nothing but the golden glory of an angel could tear the hunters of secrets from their ziggurat—but still the agela had to root themselves to the
ground like stone so as not to chase after them and steal Simon from beneath their sight—

“Agela Sariel,” the Inquisitor snapped, drawing them back to their own predicament, to her hard, speculative eyes. Hers was the expression of an experienced Shadowhunter weighing up an unfamiliar weapon, cold and judging and wary. “You will come with me. I will have your report on the events in the Silent City now, and then Janim Sariel will be confined until the Silent Brothers are able to accommodate him again. Any knowledge you have of Symeon’s…situation—”

One of the Secretseekers appeared suddenly at her side, the diamond-bright pin at her throat ablaze against her Mediterranean skin. “Inquisitor,” she said, and it was like facing an unknown demon for the first time, seeing one of the scholae interrupt the High Inquisitor without hesitation, with assured impunity, “Secretar Miracle requests your presence in the Infirmary.”

‘Request’ my blessed ass, Clary would have said, Sariel thought, watching the incredulity-edged frustration flash across the Inquisitor’s face.

It was quickly suppressed. “Of course,” the Inquisitor said. She shot Sariel a look that might have come from a crossbow, but when she spoke it was to the Shadowhunters around them, the ones more unequivocally under her command. “Confin[e Agela Sariel in whichever room they wish. I want them under guard until I can interview them myself. Give them whatever they ask for, but they are not to speak to their parents.”

She turned on her heel to follow the scholar—then paused. “And take their steles,” she added briskly.

Sariel drew breath sharply in shock; they were not the only ones. Several of the surrounding Shadowhunters hissed or outright gasped, if softly. To take a Nephilim’s stele was to leave them defenceless, unable to draw the Marks that were their birthright, the runes that could save them should the darkness reach for their life. It was tantamount to stripping their Marks outright, albeit usually more temporary, and very nearly taboo.

It was not murder to kill someone for trying to steal your stele.

“How are you?” someone asked tentatively.

“Do not make me repeat myself,” the Inquisitor said coldly, and her voice was such a bitter winter wind that several people flinched.

The Secretseeker coughed delicately into her fist, and Sariel marvelled at her daring even as apprehension weighed like lead in their bellies—for the Inquisitor turned away to follow the other woman without any more hesitation, not waiting to see her orders carried out.

When the secretari called, even the High Inquisitor came running. That was worse than Sariel had feared.

But without the pressure of the Inquisitor’s presence, the agela’s synergy dissolved like sugar in water and they stood dazed for a too-long instant, dizzy and disorientated to be three minds again.

As if to take advantage of that momentary vulnerability, a dark-haired Shadowhunter stepped forward with a slightly apologetic air but a firm expression. “I will take your steles, please, Agela Sariel. Where would you prefer to be confined?”

***

“My mother?”
For a single, amber-enclosed instant, hope as wild and desperate as Pandora’s floods Simon like helium and fire, a white roar so glorious he hardly feels its burn. The flames in his hands are snuffed out like an afterthought as his heart leaps, his mind going instantly to a bare white hospital room, his mom silent and still and surrounded by machines arrayed like a queen’s handmaidens. For a millisecond, his breath is broken by questions: is she awake, is she okay, is she, is she, is she—?

And then reality comes rushing back, sure as the tide.

_He thinks:_ demons lie. _He thinks:_ she would never traffic with demons.

_He thinks:_ that’s not what **Exestanser-a-jeqaaonzx** means.

And it’s not. Not quite. It’s a term with interlocking meanings, something like Empress or maybe Creatrix, a title like a crown, a goddess’ epithet. It means Mother of All but it’s possessive too, that – jeqaaonzx ending forges a relationship between the Mother and Simon. Makes it your Mother.

Your mother.

Your Queen, your goddess, the-one-who-birthed-you—if Enochian had concepts like ‘birthed’, or any understanding of binary genders, for that matter. ‘Mother’ is just as close as English can come. ‘Father’ would work as well…and be just as incorrect.

The-one-from-whom-you-came-forth, maybe. Who-created-you, for a given definition of ‘create’— organic, spiritual, divine, with-love. As far from the sterility of test-tubes and laboratories as one can get.


Enochian, even the demonic form, is extremely concise.

Whatever it is, it’s not a term that could possibly refer to Jocelyn Fairchild, and the disappointment of that is—equal and opposite to that flare of hope. Sick, crushing misery, and it’s only by the skin of his teeth that Simon keeps himself from collapsing into exhausted, hurt-child tears.

This, here, is not a safe time to break down and cry. His mom would not want him to mourn her now. She’d want him to stay alive, and that means not letting himself be distracted from the fact that there’s a frickin’ demon in front of him, addressing him, wanting something of him.

“Exestanser-a-darzga--lok-drilpaxk, (First-and-Greatest of the Four) Mother of All, yes, Adokaz-Aoi,” the demon says, as if Simon’s question was a real one, and not an exclamation of disbelief.

It’s taken so long for Simon to struggle through a translation of the term—title—that it’s actual meaning only hits him belatedly, only hits him now: this is some kind of demon queen they’re talking about, a demon deity, the kind of monster that makes Simon sick to imagine. He can’t imagine it, it’s incomprehensible, Abigor was bad enough and it was only a prince; the Exestanser-a-darzga--lok-drilpaxk is an Infernal god(dess), and Simon wants to stop and think about the theological implications but he’s too fucking terrified because whatever it is wants him, has sent a, a—

What?

“Why?” Simon snarls, terror transmuted to some semblance of fury by a trickster’s alchemy, and it’s fool’s gold but it glitters when flames lick around his wrists again, fill his hands like coins to buy an illusion of safety, of mastery, of defensibility. “Why did par—”

He stops, appalled, because the word came easy as breath and he understands what he should have
long ago but never stopped to consider: demons aren’t it. Par is—it’s like ‘they’, kind of, it’s the pronoun you use when you don’t know someone’s—a demon’s—gender, and Simon feels sick with it, this bombshell of a revelation forcing him to acknowledge that demons are people.

Because of course they are.

They have language, they have hierarchy, they have craft (he thinks of Abigor’s Infernal blade, parz armour, of demon smiths forging both), they have fucking pronouns—

The Nephilim call them ‘it’ and Simon adopted that without thinking, because why wouldn’t the world mimic the black and white morality of his RPGs and fantasy novels, because demons just are evil, monsters, of course they are, they kill people—

But has anybody ever asked them why?

(You can’t have it both ways, either demons are beasts, are ‘it’, or they’re evil—it can’t be both, the tiger that kills a human isn’t evil, only people can be evil, evil is something you have to choose—)


The demon’s pupils dilate into huge, deep circles, then contract to goat-sharp slits again. “Nii sent me because I am the Sword’s Shield,” par says, and there is again that moment of comprehension, an instant where parz body language and tone and facial expression combine into sense, into something Simon can see and understand; hunger, and yearning, and something bittersweet as honeyed wormwood. “But a seeker was needed because you were lost, Adokaz-Aoi, Prince of Stars. Because Jocelyn Fairchild broke her promise to the Enaikat—the King of Kings, the Lord of All Legions, the Venom of the Void. She broke her oath to Samael, and so I am come, to guard and to guide and to serve.”

***

Clary was still kicking herself for oversleeping when she realised that there was no way Simon and the Lightwoods would be holding Saturday-morning training in the Institute now. They had their very own training room in their very own apartment, and why would they bother coming all the way across town and risk running into their horrible parents, when they could just go downstairs?

Unfortunately, that little gem only occurred to her as she was leaving the subway station. The sunlight slapped her in the face, and the temporal illumination came with a side-dish of the mental kind.

Goddess damn it.

She sighed and glanced at her phone. She’d called Simon twice to apologise for being late, but he hadn’t picked up, and while it was always hit and miss whether you could find signal in the subway, now that she was out of it her phone was listing no missed calls. Which probably meant they were already sparring, because you didn’t take your phone into the training room unless you wanted to risk it getting smashed when somebody kicked your hip right over your pocket.

She put the phone away—and froze.

The Institute was a very short walk from this entrance to the subway, so short that Clary privately suspected Nephilim influence in arranging it—why wouldn’t the Shadowhunters have leaned on the human government to make sure they had a subway station close by their home base, when it was, to be fair, way more important that they be able to get around the city quickly than pretty much anyone else who would be using it? But what that meant right now was that Clary had no trouble at all
seeing from here that the street outside the Institute was full of Shadowhunters.

Full. Of Shadowhunters.

Most of them looked quite weary; more than half of them had drying blood on their black leathers. One was clutching some kind of pot or urn to her chest as the whole bedraggled-looking group trekked up towards the Institute from the other direction, some speaking to their neighbours in low voices and some not speaking at all. There were more people, presumably also Nephilim, waiting for them; a flurry of men and women whose black clothes were flowing tunics and trousers instead of hunting armour and who wasted no time beginning to check pulses and eyes, brandishing their steles like magic wands. One of them whisked the urn away, and the Shadowhunters were swiftly ushered into the Institute.

Clary turned and vanished back into the subway station, her mind whirling. Her thoughts flew to the unknown Shadowhunter at the club last night; was he a part of this, whatever this was? And if so, did he know who she was—in which case, Simon and his friends were even more royally screwed than they might already be—or had he just been trying to help a mundane girl who meant nothing to him?

Given what she knew of the Nephilim, she thought that unlikely.

And what was ‘this’? Why were there Shadowhunters here? Had the Lightwood parents called them in? For what? Kore, that had been blood on their gear—red, mortal blood, she was sure of it, nothing like the gunk Abbadon had bled—and sunlight killed demons, what could Shadowhunters be hunting in the middle of the day?

In the middle of the day, and with a small army. She’d seen Jace practising—Izzy—even Alec, once or twice. She couldn’t imagine anything bad enough that it would need that many fully-trained, adult Shadowhunters to take it out—

Oh Kore, why hadn’t Simon answered her calls?

Scrambling onto the subway platform, Clary threw herself on the first train to arrive—and despite the no signal icon in the corner of her phone’s screen, she couldn’t stop herself from dialling Simon’s number.

Again.

And again.

And again.

***

Demons lie.

Demons LIE.

Simon all but screams that truism to himself, but it is still drowned out by the cataclysm of horror that answers the Sword’s Shield—Kashtokaz, is the word, a title and a name in one and Simon doesn’t CARE because his mom—

His mom—

Oh God what if it was never Valentine, what if it was HER, what if whatever’s wrong with me is
something SHE DID—

No, it can’t be, that’s crazy, she wouldn’t, she’d never, she didn’t she didn’t she didn’t—

*Not his mom, not Jocelyn, bravest strongest smartest BEST person he’s ever met, ever known, ever dreamed of—*

*Demons lie demons lie demons LIE!*

She was so determined to keep you from the Shadow World she cut your Sight out of you, *a voice whispers beneath the screaming.* She told you nothing, prepared you not at all, when you came to her with visions in your eyes she was going to run out of the city with you rather than let you face them.

What if she was not afraid of what the Shadow World might do to you, but of what you might do to the world?

*But no, Valentine admitted it was him—‘Because of what you did to me!’ Simon had shouted at him, all those months ago in Renwicks. ‘Because you did something to me, to make me like this, didn’t you?’*

*And Valentine said, he said—‘Ol gi eol drlpá.’*

*I, not she, it was Valentine, it WAS—*

That doesn’t mean she didn’t know. It doesn’t mean she made no promise.

Simon struggles against too much, so much, trying desperately to make sense of it, to weigh the possibilities, the worth of a demon’s word against a lifetime of love and trust. Samael, who—what is that—he thinks of the Destroyer of Hope from the Wheel of Time books, the Desolate One from Hellboy; it’s a name that means monster, the embodiment of evil, isn’t he the one people mix up with Satan, isn’t he—?

*Simon thinks of Neil Gaiman, of Sandman, of Lucifer’s name before the Fall.*

*…Isn’t he the Devil?*

*The idea of his mom making a deal with the Devil should be laughable, but Simon isn’t laughing. He can’t remember what the urge to laugh even feels like.*

*He can’t remember how to breathe.*

*There are so many questions dive-bombing through his head like magpies in swooping season, sharp tearing screeching questions, he can’t catch any to ask them, can’t choose, can’t—*

*“If you will have me,” the demon continues, and the longing in *parz* voice strums some chord in Simon’s chest, some taut wire drawn between his ribs.*

*The music it makes sets a snare around his throat, like a choke-collar, like a noose of velvet. Yearning swells like a waxing moon behind his collarbone, unexpected and inexplicable and distantly horrifying; he sways with it, breathless, caught, hooked. Balancing on a razor’s edge.*

*Until the Other in him throws him off the ledge.*
He crumbles like a pillar of sand before a wave, dissolving, will and fear and horror all dispersing as his knees hit the not-ground (which is soft as silicone, which yields like padded velvet under him), and his hand is reaching out without his will (with all of it), he watches it happen like something in a dream (like one he’s dreamed a thousand times). The flames bracelet his wrist flicker out like eyelashes falling shut as they draw close, but not before Simon sees—

Sees the demon’s face change where the light of Simon’s fire falls on it, like dirt wiped away from the surface of a mirror. Sees parz jaw and cheek and eye rewrought in gleaming, fluid silver, rippling like water, like light; beautiful and exquisite, terrible and alien. Nothing like parz human-esque face at all, more like—

More like—

(He can’t remember, it’s on the tip of his tongue, something he dreamed once, something he almost knows—)

And then the flames are gone, as though the Other that lives behind his heart can’t bear to burn parn, and the scintillating silver strangeness is gone with them as Kashtokaz turns into his palm, pressing into his hand with a look of relief, of pain, of the same bruise-sweet yearning Simon can feel reverberating through himself like a star bleeding its cold and perfect light through darkness.

The lilnilipah throbs like a heart, and Simon almost thinks he can feel whatever’s being taken—whatever he is giving—as it enters the demon’s chest, like sharing breath, like another heart echoing his.

(Do demons have hearts?)

Simon looks at himself and wonders where the horror is, can’t understand what he’s doing but can’t pull his hand away. Is it only that this demon looks so human, is Simon’s brain tricking him into empathising with something that cannot be empathised with—?

Or is it—?

Is it more (worse) than that?

What is this bond between them, what does a demon goddess WANT with him, what did Jocelyn promise, what—?

Why—

(It is like glass vibrating before it breaks.)

“My Kashtokaz,” Simon murmurs, and it is his voice but not, someone else’s words shaping his lips, longing-loving-ardent—

(Oh, God, he almost remembers—)

And Simon realises that the touch of this demon is not burning him.

He whips his hand away as if it is burnt, the words like embers on his lips, searing, terrible, horrifying. This is not—he is not—he doesn’t understand, he can’t make sense of it, what is this, what is he, what is going on—

It is too much, and he reacts as Jace has been so careful to train him to; Simon lunges backwards and up and bolts, turns on his heel and in a centisecond he is running, he is—
(Is there even anywhere to run in this dark place, is there anywhere he can go that the *lilnilipah* will not immediately reveal, where is he, how does he WAKE UP—)

*He is surrounded.*

Demons fill the darkness like salt fills the sea, countless, limitless, closed in a circle like a noose around him. Simon spins in place and his hands fill again with fire, the light showing him scales and carapaces and dark fur, toxic spines and lashing tails and dripping slime, a wall of the Infernal in every direction—there are so many, so many, not tens of them but hundreds, thousands, a slithering-writhing-hissing ocean of horror in the dark—

*He waits for the atom-bomb fury to erupt in his mind-heart-blood, the sun-death hatred that will demand he annihilates them all, the instinct-compulsion deeper than thought or words or bone that drove him like a tsunami against Abbadon, Abigor, the demon in the Bone City—*

*But it doesn’t come.*

It doesn’t come and without it there is only oh-so-human fear thick as slurry, without it he is helpless, the flames glittering on his hands won’t go far and he doesn’t even have a seraph blade, Simiel is so far away, he is going to die here—

(Mom Clary Jace I’m sorry—)

A clawed hand touches his shoulder and he whirls, his burning hands coming up in a defensive gesture and the terror honed into a snarl, because he may go down but he will go down fighting, he will take as many of them as he can with him—but the demon, the one who knelt, who put parz cheek into his hand, is not attacking.

“Don’t fear us,” par says, a plea, a prayer. “Adokaz-Aoi, you never need to fear us.”

And Simon should be silent. He should not believe.

*But this demon’s touch does not burn.*

“Why?” His spine is cold granite, stiff and unmalleable. He cannot be unaware of the countless eyes on him but the Other in him is silent, quiescent. It is not demanding their deaths and he doesn’t know why, doesn’t know if he can trust it—if it really is a demon (it’s bonded to one, it calls their goddess its queen, it leads a legion of them, they call it prince) then shouldn’t he do the opposite of what it wants? And yet. But. “Tell me who you are,” he says. There is a fire in his throat: it makes his words into a command. “Tell me who you are to me.”

The demon’s eyes open, black and white, ichor and milk. “We are yours, Adokaz,” par says, and parz voice rings pure, rings true, strikes a song of certainty that echoes and echoes and echoes. The pride in it is unmistakable. “Your Tabaord, your governed-ones, the ones-you-rule. We are your Abavonin, your dragons. We are the Dragons of the Sword.”

Tabaord. Abavonin. The words strike like flint, like cross-bolts through bone.

Tabaord is what humans mean when they say ‘host’, as in ‘a host of angels’. It is the group, the pack, the legion, the choir. The voices that sing together and the warriors who fight together, limbs of the same body, notes in the same song. It is not a word for demons; that would be, that should be, tolhamach, with all its animalistic connotations, its ragged-edged savagery. But these demons have taken an angel’s word for their own.

*Does that make them good? Does it make them trustworthy?*
And Abavonin. Dragons, in Enochian, with a lilt that makes it a nickname, a pet name, something fond and proud. The shape of it falls into Simon like a coin into a wishing well, shining, turning over and over.

“And you are the Sword’s Shield,” Simon says slowly, putting it together. Piece by piece. He shapes the word with care, its import dawning like a sunrise behind his breastbone. “Kashtokaz.”

Not a title—not only a title—a name. He has it, now; it flows from his tongue like honey, slides from his lips like silk, and the one whose name it is makes a sound as if Simon has wounded Parz razored pupils dilate, par looks hurt and hungry and disbelieving, ecstatic and heartbroken and heart-healed. All at once, all together.

Par looks at him as if at a god, and Simon is dizzy with it.

“What is the Sword?” he asks softly. He thinks he knows the answer.

Kashtokaz does not disappoint him. “You,” par tells him, its voice gone raw and bruised. “You are the Sword, Adokaz-Aoi. It has always been you.”

***

*If he dies if he dies—*

*He’s not going to die—*

*But if he does—*

*The healers won’t let him—*

*The angel won’t let him—*

*But the secretari—*

*If they decide he’s a demon—*

*What do they know?*

*Which secrets are out?*

*He killed two people—*

*No—*

*That wasn’t Simon—*

*That was the angel—*

*Does that make it better?*

*Will the Clave care, will they make the distinction?*

*They must—*

*They have to—*

*He threw how many Shadowhunters around in the courtyard?*
*By their runes—*

*They might think it was only telekinesis.*

*But if the Secretseekers figure it out—*

*—the Clave will order him killed.*

*They can’t kill an angel’s vessel—*

*—the blasphemy—*

*But he’s not a vessel—not really—*

*—Simon’s the one who’s ascendant—*

*—most of the time—*

*Memory: the shadows of a thousand wings against the walls of the Great Council Chamber, the Sword a streak of white fire in Simon’s hands, the voice that shook the world and shattered it, YOU WILL NOT TOUCH HIM.*

*Why would an angel care about Jace—?*

*Maybe it cares about justice—*

*—fairness—*

*IT KILLED TWO PEOPLE.*

*But it knows Jace shouldn’t be punished—*

*Irrelevant, doesn’t matter, Simon Simon Simon!* 

*If they think he’s corrupted the angel—*

*—contaminated it with impure desires—*

*Is that even possible?*

*Who knows?*

*The secretari would know.*

*They’ll kill him or they’ll lock him up—*

*—take him to the Hermetic Ziggurat—*

*—for study and experiment—*

*—cut him open and release the angel—*

*If he goes into the Ziggurat he’ll never come out—*

*If they take him to Idris he’ll never get out—*

*They won’t let him go—*
They had chosen to be imprisoned—‘confined’—in Alec’s old room, not for any particular reason but because it was the first place that had occurred to them, because it didn’t matter, because Simon was out of their reach and protection and even now the Secretseekers could be discovering something too terrible to save him from—

*At best they’ll force him to fight—*

*Would that be so bad?*

*Would that be so wrong?*

*Doesn’t he have a responsibility to use his powers for good?*

*It would kill him—*

*—if he starts hunting them every demon in the world will be out for his blood—*

*They’ve left him alone so far—*

*Because he hasn’t gone after them—*

*If he did—*

*If he does—*

*—they’ll have to destroy him or be destroyed by heavenly fire.*

*Memory: a whirlwind of white flames and light, Simiel a beacon in Simon’s hand in the eye of the storm and the hellfire outside it breaking like waves against a white wall—Abigor kneeling—*

*It knelt to him—*

*To the angel inside him—*

*What if it isn’t an angel?*

*If it isn’t—*

*—and the secretari find out—*

*It looked like an angel.*

*What does an angel look like?*

*It left an angel mark on Alec’s hand—*

*But the Greater Demons used to be angels too—*

*—maybe a Fallen angel would still leave a mark—*

*Would one of the Fallen burn gold?*

*Abbadon was hideous—*
*—but Abigor wasn’t.*

*It attacked the demon in the Silent City—* *

*Would a Greater Demon do that?*

*Maybe—*

*Maybe not—*

Round and round, a useless sieving of the evidence that bore no fruit they could recognise but that they couldn’t stop, desperate for some solution that didn’t end with Simon in the Clave’s gilded cage or the secretari’s inescapable laboratories—

*Or with his neck on the guillotine on Gard Hill—*

*The angel would never allow it—*

*So it would kill more people! Great!*

*There are ways to bind an angel—*

*—or a demon—*

*—aren’t there?*

*It might not be able to save itself—*

*—or Simon—*

*Not if the Clave was prepared—*

*Like the binding circle Arika found—*

And woven in and under and around Simon’s see-sawing fate like currents in dark water were a host of other questions, terrors, mysteries sprouting thorns and opalescent teeth; the starlight blazing from Izzy’s hands, Magnus’ illness, the slaughtered Silent Brothers, Jace’s vision, the meaning of a pure death like a noose of lead, the murdered children—and the binding circle.

*Who drew it—*

*Who knows—*

*No Nephilim could have—*

*—no one but us knew—*

*But if the werewolves talked—*

*Who could they have talked to?*

*Anyone—*

*Everyone—*

*Arika wouldn’t have told us if it had been a warlock—*
The fae would only be too happy to let him wreak chaos—*

Vampires and werewolves don’t work magic—*

So who—?*

WHO—*

Maybe the Spiral Court has factions. Maybe Arika is part of one—*

—and whoever drew the circle part of another?*

But still—*

—how did they know about Simon?*

We could ask Magnus—*

—if he wasn’t ill.*

It hit them all in the same moment, an open door where before there had been only adamant bars.

Ill—*

Sick—*

Catarina—*

Alec had his phone out before the next thought.

“Catarina ashipu, it’s Alec. Alec Sariel,” he added belatedly. Did she know? Had anybody told her? Did it matter in the slightest, with the pressure of Simon in the hands of the secretari threatening to crush the air from his lungs? “I’m sorry, I know you must be busy, but—but could you please come to the Institute?” He could hear the splintered edge of his own voice through Izzy’s ears, through Jace’s, a horrible kind of echo more honest than he heard himself. “Simon was—he fell unconscious, and now he’s with the secretari and I’m—we’re afraid of what they might find—what they might do to him—”

“And what do you think I can do?” Simple, clear, direct. It was like a brace of cool water.

“You’re a magical healer. If you could examine him instead…”

This time, Alec’s words were met with silence.

“Catarina ashipu?” The pause was strangling, choking. Every second might be one too many, might be the moment the Secretseekers discovered a secret they would never let go.

“You want me to lie to the Clave,” Catarina said finally. “Heal whatever’s wrong with your friend—presupposing he needs healing—and cover up any...unusual findings. Have I got that right?”

“I know it’s a lot to ask—”

“No,” she snapped, “you don’t. You have no idea what you’re asking, Shadowhunter.”

His caste was almost a curse in her mouth.

Alec closed his eyes. “Please,” he said. “I will—anything I have to give is yours. Please.”
Her silence was a rope around his neck. A vise squeezing Jace’s heart. Liquid fire in Izzy’s gut.

“They probably won’t let me anywhere near him,” Catarina said. She sounded tired; so tired, and resigned. “But I’ll try, Alec Sariel.”

The relief took his legs from under him; the backs of Alec’s knees hit the bed, and he sat down heavily. “Thank you,” he whispered.

“Don’t thank me yet.” And she hung up before he could say another word.

Jace put his face in his hands. *If he dies—*

Alec and Izzy embraced him soul to soul, twining the three of them together as tightly as ribbons in a braid. His pain was theirs; their terror his own, coloured cordials pouring and splashing from glass to glass, into a single bowl that contained them all. Everything was coming apart so quickly, an avalanche of disaster, the halcyon dream they’d shared with Simon and Clary these last weeks turning to blood and ashes faster than they could draw the *iratzes*, faster than they could staunch the wounds. Magnus’ son, his illness, Bellesword and Park swallowed into the maw of something unknowable, the light from Izzy’s hands, Simon—Simon displaying his powers in front of the High Inquisitor herself; they saw, they all saw him tossing Shadowhunters around like I Ching sticks and the hexagram they spelled might well be Simon’s execution—

The trill of Isabelle’s phone cut the silence like paper just as someone knocked.

“Agela Sariel?” one of their guards said through the door.

Izzy snatched up her phone. “It’s Clary.”

“Visitor for you.”

And the door opened.

***

The Sword.

You.

Always.

The Sword.

You.

Always.

The Sword.

You.

Always—

*It almost makes sense. He almost understands.*

The Sword, the Sword, the Sword—
Kashtokaz doesn’t mean Simon. Wasn’t talking about Simon, wasn’t even talking to Simon.

(The demon’s words are a blade forged of memory and it is plunging down through the dark pit-trench-chasm in Simon’s soul like a streaking comet and he can feel it falling, feel it coming, enlightenment like a lightning bolt streaking through the sky for his tiny human heart and oh it burns and oh it blazes, so bright, so white, a sweetness to shatter stars and a terror-pain to sear the soul, to break it open like glass exploding in the heat—)

But something in him hears.

(There is a crystal coffin buried in the deepest depths of him and—)

Something in him answers.

(—the sword shatters it into sidereal shards.)

It uncoils from the depths and rises, a leviathan, a titan, impossibly huge and impossibly terrible and impossibly other, great and ancient and the shadow of its ascent is enough to eclipse a sun and it is coming, it is here, not leviathan but Leviathan and as it breaches the surface of the waves that are his conscious mind Simon screams—

Screams and screams and screams—

(A thousand faces in a thousand mirrors roaring REMEMBER—)

Alarm races through the gathered demons like the beacons of Gondor coming alight in a chain of flame but Simon doesn’t see it, can’t see it, stumbling away from Kashtokaz’s claw-gemmed hand and there is an asteroid shower tearing flares of fire through his head his heart his soul, hammering crashing burning and the agony is beyond words beyond thought he is screaming xe is screaming the storm of stars is—

Is—

(remember)

)Beings like living suns singing Singing changing shapes like water but always shapeless, beyond-shape beyond-form there is only the music the Music the Song, sound whose vibrations spin into matter and anti-matter and everything in-between, a thousand thousand worlds coalescing out of the chorale—(

)Constellation-convocation, a gathering of Singers and xe hurls xyr desperation and star-shattering rage at them, pleading-demanding for understanding and agreement. *They are kin, born of us!* Conversing as no human can, in a way no mortal could understand, not with words or signs but pure thought and concept exchanged between minds faster than neurons can spark, faster by far than mere light. *Annihilation cannot be the only answer. We Oecrimi/Sing, we do not Narmaz/Silence!* *The Mal-Teloch are not part of the Lviahe/Song,* another speaker parries, Arctic ice and unyielding gravity. *They are already Silent, and their Silence spreads. They will destroy the Song if they are not first destroyed.*

*A song is not only sound,* xe argues, *it contains pause and rest. It holds silence within it. So can the Song find a place for the Mal-Teloch.*

*The Firstborn’s anglard rings true,* many Singers hum, but others remain unconvinced, stone and glass turning aside xyr arguments.
The Firstborn is biased,* they resonate, accusations like solar winds shrieking. *Xe is not impartial on this matter—*

They tear xem from the in-between into the physical world and matter closes around xem, spinning into a body xyr captors do their best to bind. The chains might as well be sugar-spun for all they can hold xem, but xe is so tired, too tired to fight any longer, to Silence any more lives. Not even for xyr freedom can xe do it, and as they drag xyr temporal form forward and throw xem to this body’s knees on the ichor-stained ground, xe fully expects to die.

Xe looks up into the eyes of a Mal-Teloch warlord, eyes with white irises and black whites—*

Sirath delicately bites the back of xyr neck, and xe shudders, stunned by the sensitivity of a nervous system, the sensations lighting up this body. Nurma’s tail is lashing, electric. “Flesh isn’t so bad, Toltorg,” ae purrs. “Let us show you—”

They fall together onto the nest-bed, a tangle of tails and wings and other limbs, and xe does not know this, does not know how bodies can join and become one for a time. But they show xem, and xe shifts, spins xyr form into something that can accommodate them both, and cries aloud against their skin as together they turn into stars—*

It is scales falling from his eyes and the earth dropping away, it is the graze of a sea-serpent’s fangs against his ankles as the waves pull him under, it is a beach of red sand and an ocean that only looks black, it is his skull unfolding like a puzzle-box to let the light out (in) and a cyanide straitjacket falling away in shreds of ash and Simon is screaming, cannot stop screaming. His skin is dissolving into fire and flame, the edges of his Self shredding tearing expanding outwards like a nuclear blast and it is chrysopoeia, he is become gold, he is become light, gilding-combusting-detonating apart into a thousand wing-limbs like the rays of a sun—

Firstborn, Only-born, child of Night and Poison, do you remember, do you remember who you are—

Do you remember what you’ve done—

The killing/the slaughter/the genocide, whole worlds tithed to the Silence/entire planets crushed like pearls underfoot, oceans of blood and choirs of screams and over it all the laughter, xe is laughing, the world-wards shards of tattered silk in xyr hands as the darkness comes rushing in to feast and oh, the marrow-mana of broken bones/broken souls is so, so sweet—*

NO!

Xe screams, and burns at the pyre of xyr remembering, and in the light of the bonfire-bonefire flames every demon gleams moon-forged silver.

***

Izzy hit the reject call button and shoved the phone under the pillow with Shadowhunter speed, but one glance at the man who opened the door and they all knew he had heard it ringing. He couldn’t possibly have not heard it, with a Shadowhunter’s hearing, and sure enough his gaze darted at once to the bed, where the sound had originated, and then to the guilty pillow when he saw that Izzy’s hands were empty.

But instead of demanding that she hand it over, he only dipped his head slightly and stepped aside to let their visitor through.
It was Max, carrying a bundle of papers and books and somehow managing to look both blithely unconcerned and supremely annoyed as he strode into the room. “Thank you, that will be all,” he said, cool and sharp as an _adamas_ blade. Like most _jääydinæ_ , he wasn’t fond of strangers—he must hate, Izzy realised, having the Institute packed full of them without warning—and with a slightly wry expression the guard took the hint and retreated, with only a murmured “Agela Sariel, _Jääydin Lightwood,_” as he saw himself out and closed the door behind him.

The agelai exchanged a mental look, a kind of shared flash of sharp-edged question marks as Max set his burdens on the desk.

“I have decided there’s no use being annoyed with you,” Max announced, his voice only slightly warmer now that he was addressing his siblings. “Clearly this is my own fault for not having my _lämielë_ properly trained…”

*He didn’t take the phone. Why didn’t he take the phone?* Izzy asked, turning the device in question to silent. She felt guilty for it, but there was no way she could take the time to call Clary back now.

*He wasn’t ordered to.*

*It’s Light Worlder tech, the older generations don’t use them much—*

*—maybe he didn’t think it was important—*

*—maybe he’s Ascended, and his ears weren’t sharp enough to hear it—*

*Or maybe he disapproves of what the Inquisitor is doing,* Izzy thought, and felt the supposition rock Alec back a mental pace.

“…but I want you to know I strongly resent the three of you causing this much chaos in a _single day._” Max glanced between them. “Are you even listening?”

“No,” Izzy said flatly, because you weren’t supposed to give a _jääydin_ excuses or explanations when they asked a closed question. “Was it important?”

Max pinched the bridge of his nose, the gesture made surreal by his youth. “Not as important as the question of how many people saw you looking like _that?_”

He waved a pained hand in the direction of Izzy and Jace. Blinking, Izzy looked down at herself, and suppressed a wince: her beautiful _cóada_ was absolutely filthy with blood and muck, the flame-coloured silk marred with countless stains. And no wonder, after the day the poor thing had been through…but still, she had to swallow a pang of regret, rubbing the cuff of her sleeve between her fingers. It had been one of the most glorious things she’d ever owned, and she had been so proud to be fitted for it, to stride into the Institute this morning with it blazing like a banner around her... But she seriously doubted whether even the brownies who took care of her family’s dry-cleaning could possibly salvage it.

Jace, not having fainted amidst the corpses of the Silent Brothers, was a little better off. But not by much.

“By the _Angel,_ am I the only one who gives a damn about this family’s reputation?” Max bit out. He set his papers down on Alec’s desk and stormed back to the door, which he opened smartly. “You! Whatever-your-name-is! Have someone bring my brother and sister clean clothes, _please._”

“Of course, _Jääydin Lightwood,_” the guard said respectfully.
“Thank you.” Somewhat mollified, Max shut the door and turned back to his siblings. “If you allow
them to treat you like nothing, they will believe you are nothing,” he said, sternly. “You have to
insist on the treatment you deserve. Demand it, if you have to. For our House’s reputation, if nothing
else.”

“Yes, Max,” Alec said patiently. They had all heard this kind of thing before. “Did you have a
chance to study the circle?”

“I did.” Returning to the desk, Max spread out his papers: the sketch Izzy had made of the binding
circle was now covered in Max’s own annotations. “And—”

“How’s Simon?” Jace interrupted. “Have you heard anything? Is he awake yet, is he—”

He stopped, because even now that they were three-as-one none of them could find the words to
finish that question.

“I have not been told anything about Simon,” Max said. “I know he is in the Infirmary, because I
overheard some people talking about it, but that is all. What happened to him?”

“We don’t know,” Izzy admitted. “He used his powers, and…and he collapsed.”

They gave him the full story, telling it as quickly as they could: Izzy describing how the angel had
scooped her up from the Institute and taken her to the Bone City, and what they’d found there; all
three of them relating the events in Raziel’s Courtyard—Simon’s attack, his collapse, the deaths of
Syrs Bellesword and Park. Max listened to it all without commentary, his expression indifferent but
his eyes intensely thoughtful.

“This might be even more relevant than I thought,” Max said finally when they were done, gesturing
again to the drawing. “It might explain…something.”

It was so unusual for Max to hesitate about anything that all three of the older Lightwoods pricked up
their metaphorical ears, and came closer to examine the papers for themselves.

“Arika called it a binding circle,” Alec said.

“If it is, it is a strange one,” Max said. He pointed at one of the dozens of equal-armed crosses
incorporated in the design. “This symbol is supposed to represent the unification of the ethereal and
the material.” He frowned. “Isabelle, what is that on your arm?”

Taken aback by the non-sequitur, Izzy followed his glance. “I think it’s ink.” It was a dark blue blur,
as if someone had drawn on her with a pen and the doodle had smeared. She couldn’t imagine how it
had gotten there, among all the other stains. “Sorry.” She licked her fingers and rubbed at it; now it
had caught Max’ attention, he was unlikely to go on until she dealt with it.

Jace looked drawn and tired—and no wonder—but he managed to keep his temper. “So?”

Max gave him a faintly contemptuous look, which under the circumstances Izzy thought was more
than a little unfair. She shifted to wrap her arm around Jace’s shoulders, and took his weight when he
leaned into her. “So,” Max said, “this circle is designed to bind something that is both temporal and
incorporeal at once. Which makes no sense; everything alive is either one or the other. Demons take
on physical form when they enter our world, but it is only a seeming; they are not creatures of matter.
But this circle couldn’t hold something like a vampire or werewolf either, because werewolves are
creatures of matter.”

The answer seemed obvious to Izzy. “What about a possessed person?” Who else would anyone
want to bind but Simon, and the angel in him? What else could possibly fit the strange requirements of the circle?

But, “No,” Max said, and the word was a stone dropping into dark water, the shriek of winter wind through mountain peaks and a sudden drop when you thought the ground was solid beneath you. The focus of all three agelai snapped to their younger brother like seraph swords unsheathing, icy shock sweeping through the bond. “To hold a possessed creature, you use the symbols for the ethereal and for the material—to bind both the possessor and the possessed. This is something else, meant for something else.”

They were a tri-faceted soul in three bodies; the processing power of three minds parsed the revelation in a sliver of a second and the conclusion raked through them like Abbadon’s claws, pierced them through as the Greater Demon’s talons had driven into Alec. And with it—with it the sensation all Shadowhunters knew from their nightmares: the moment of reaching for a blade or an arrow and finding nothing but empty air, the monster coming for you and your weapons spent—and it was only a nightmare, only ever a nightmare, because no Shadowhunter would or could lose track of how many arrows they had in their quiver, how many knives at their belt… But now they were awake, and it was that same feeling, the reaching for something depended upon—and the lurch to find it missing.

“Are you saying Simon’s not possessed?” Alec asked quietly. So quietly.

“At the very least, whoever drew this did not think so,” Max said. “Presuming that they meant to bind Simon with it, and not someone or something else.”

“Who else could they have wanted bound?” Jace asked harshly. “Who else, what else, was there to bind?”

“Assuming Simon was the intended target is just that—an assumption,” Max insisted. “The reference to something simultaneously corporeal and incorporeal could even refer to us, to Nephilim—as the descendants of humans and angels, material and immaterial respectively, we might even fulfil the requirements ourselves.”

“But no one else fainted,” Izzy said. “Simon was the only one the circle affected.”

“He fainted in Raziel’s Courtyard, too, and there was no circle then,” Max pointed out. “Maybe his body shut down because it could only channel so much power without being permanently damaged. You said he bled both times, and no one could wake him—if we accept the premise that it harms him in some way to use or conduct the powers he has so far displayed, then it is possible the appearance of the circle and his first collapse are unconnected, only coincidentally timed.” He shrugged. “Personally I think it is too much for coincidence, but it is possible that the circle was not responsible—just as it is possible that it was in fact intended for any Nephilim within its bounds rather than Simon in particular, and had no effect because it was incorrectly drawn, or was not a working spell-circle at all. Or it did something none of us have detected yet.”

“But you don’t think it’s likely.” Alec.

Max glanced at him. “No,” he admitted. “I think it was meant for Simon, and I think it accomplished the task it was meant to. I think someone who knows exactly what he is has been watching him, and was watching then, and drew that circle to bind and contain him. And I think they did that because they were afraid of what he might do if he was free.”

The shockwave that tore through the Institute at just that moment rather proved the point.
Fumana—a Runed!rune, i.e., one of my own inventions. It diagnoses any physical health issues (including things like energy levels and the strength of someone’s mana), transferring that information from the body of the one Marked to the mind/knowledge of the person who drew it. This can be the same person.

Sila—a Runed!rune. A rune for a temporary energy boost. Too many used within too short a time can lead to a comatose state.

Vas—as already mentioned in an earlier chapter, vas is a Runed!rune, which lets the stele or seraph blade become a vessel for a greater power (for seraph blades, this is the angel they’re named for; for a stele, it’s the mana of the wielder).

Cesuine—Runed!rune, allows the stele to channel the mana of its wielder into drawing Marks (the reason you can’t just draw a rune with a pencil and have it work).

Navitas—Runed’s name for the canon power rune.

Gamaliel—an/the angel who takes the elect into Heaven.

Af—an angel of light.

Lahabiel—an angel who protects against evil spirits.

Barrattiel—an angel ‘of support’, however you want to interpret that.

Karael—an angel who has the power to thwart demons (although one assumes that they all do?)

Sator is Latin for Creator/begetter/founder, and is a title/name Nephilim sometimes give to Raziel in their prayers. Prayers to Jonathan Shadowhunter address him as Genitor, for those who are interested; its meaning is creator/father/ancestor. (This was explained in the notes for the last chapter, but since it’s been over HALF A YEAR since the last chapter, you can have a reminder.)

Californium—specifically californium 252—is the most expensive substance in the world after anti-matter (which, how on Earth do you buy that?) A gram of californium 252 costs $27 million. It’s also the densest/heaviest naturally-occurring substance on Earth.

Chamuel—an archangel whose name means ‘he who seeks God’.

Lilnilipah—the bond of light between Simon and the demon. From the Enochian words for ‘living breath’ ‘blood’ and ‘branch’.

On the werewolf symbol: I chose to use a crescent moon instead of a full moon as the symbol of the werewolves because traditionally, the full moon is when werewolves transform and, in most myths, become monstrous creatures with no self-control who are very likely to rend and kill whomever they come into contact with. The crescent moon, then, is the symbol of self-control, representing werewolves as creatures of mindful strength and not as monsters.

On the secretari; in the 14th century ‘secretary’ meant ‘someone entrusted with secrets’, which is the sense in which the secretari get their name. They don’t take notes and organise day planners for important people; they are the important people.
A ziggurat is a type of building from ancient Mesopotamia, and looked kind of like raised platforms crossed with step pyramids. There’s a wiki page on them with pictures if you want a look!

Miracle is a real, albeit dying, Welsh surname.

_Mal-Teloch_—Enochian, literally ‘those of death who live’.

_Anglard_ is Enochian for ‘thought’; here it means a combination of ‘thought’, ‘concept’ and ‘words’, given the strange way in which the Singers communicate.

Hermetic Ziggurat—the home/base of the Secretseekers/secretari. Hermetic means ‘sealed/air-tight’ as well as ‘of or relating to an ancient occult tradition encompassing alchemy, astrology, and theosophy’, so it seemed very appropriate for these mysterious scholars.

The I Ching is a form of divination where one can use sticks, among other things, to gain insight into the universe. You toss the sticks or stalks and the patterns they make are ‘hexagrams’, which have different meanings. It’s really a lot more complicated than that, but that’s the very basics.
An Announcement and Acknowledgement: I was going to mention this in the notes for the last chapter, but I didn’t want to spoil you guys before you’d even read it. So I shall say it here instead: Kashtokaz is not my character. He is an OC created by my darling internet wife Erin. You can check out her hilariously awesome blog at dracavy.tumblr.com, which also happens to contain concept art for Kash. All credit for him is therefore obviously hers and not mine!

Also, ALL CREDIT AND GRATITUDE TO Quidnuncian for fact-checking my Jewish info. Thank you so much again, lovely!

Now, some changes: chapter three (Angels and Agela), chapter five (The Truths That Burn) and chapter ten (previously Dragons of the Sword, now A Mother’s Word) have all been edited to varying degrees. (This is what I’ve been doing over the last YEAR, omfg).

In Angels and Agela and subsequent chapters, the pronouns for one of the aliens glimpsed in Simon’s visions, Nurma, has been changed from ze to ae; the full pronoun set is now ae/aer/aers/aerself.

In The Truths That Burn, Clary and Olianthe’s sex scene has been expanded as well as edited, and a new mini-scene has been appended to the end. Please read the updated author’s note for that chapter, as there is now a warning for non-human biology, which may squick or trigger some readers. All you really need to know is that Olianthe does not have the genitalia/biology of a human cis-woman, but identifies herself as a girl as humans understand it.

The greatest changes have been done to the previous chapter, now titled A Mother’s Word for reasons that will become obvious if you reread it. The scene/s of Simon in the ‘dark place’ with the demon/s have been heavily changed, and I urge everyone to reread them, since their continuation in this chapter won’t make sense otherwise. The scene that was originally going to be the beginning of this chapter has become the closing scene of the last chapter, too.

I continue to love, adore, and be unspeakably grateful to everyone who reads and comments on this fic. Thank you all so much; you're all amazing. We wouldn't be here without you <3

LASTLY, THIS CHAPTER IS DEDICATED TO MY INTERNET WIFE KIBU. HAPPY BIRTHDAY KIBS <3

Catarina held the phone tightly between her fingers for a long, long moment after hanging up.

Alec had no idea what he was asking for. But if he also had no idea of the debt she owed him, she knew, and knew how deep was the account he had to draw on.
It was certainly enough to cover this.

She sighed, sent a text to ask Arika to come watch Magnus while she was gone, and gathered her things.

Magnus’ kitchen counters were almost hidden beneath an organised chaos of herb bundles and sachets, coloured vials of glass and crystal, jars of pickled mandrake or ground alicorn (certified found or gifted, never hunted for), an assortment of wand-like wooden spoons engraved or embossed with a variety of sigils, five separate mortar-and-pestle sets (three stone, one rowanwood, and one dragon-bone), a scattering of different gemstones, and small pots of live plants, few of which a mundane would have recognised. Neat cauldrons and kettles hovered about the room, most with well-behaved burning pocket-watches underneath: the red and white flames did no damage to the clocks, and would go out upon the correct conjunction of hour and minute hands. All of it was Catarina’s responsibility, and despite Alec’s pleas to hurry, and the debt she owed him, some things could not be rushed. It took nearly twenty minutes before she was satisfied that her potions and spellwork could be left unattended, and it took her another quarter-hour to deftly whip up a witch ball to tide Magnus over while she was gone. She had dozens of the hollow glass balls waiting, but the whorled sticks of cinnamon taken from a cinnamalogus’ nest had to be ground by hand, the lavender lightly seared in pine oil, the wormwood leaves chopped fine with a silver knife. She dropped nine rosehips into the glass with the rest, sprinkled a dusting of saffron on top, and sealed it with wax from the bees of a priestess of Austėja.

Slipping the witch ball onto a red ribbon, a gesture sending her bag to wait for her beside the door, she made her way to Magnus’ room. Lines of electrum wire had been set into his door, glowing like banked embers; they flared when she set her hand in the circle at chest-height. Fire tasted her, checked her against the list of those allowed to pass, and subsided; the door opened beneath her fingertips without a sound.

Trying to be quiet, she crept across the room to hang the witch ball at the window, where the sunlight would help spread its healing influence. But she must not have been quiet enough, because as she moved to leave, a groggy voice emerged from the mare’s nest of the bed.

“Cat?”

“Yes?” Centuries of experience at the bedsides of the ill kept her voice and mien calm as she turned to her oldest friend. “It’s all right, Magnus. I’m going out for a little while, but Arika will be here. Do you want something to help you sleep?” Despite the exhausting drain of his sickness, he had not been sleeping well.

“Please,” Magnus sighed.

Catarina fetched a sleeping draught, and sat on the edge of his bed to help him sit up to drink it, noting as she did that his skin was noticeably paler than it had been even a few hours ago. He was cool to her touch, and clammy, his eyes glazed and struggling to focus; his hands struggled to hold the cup. She had to guide him back against the pillows when he was done.

It horrified her to see him reduced to this. And enraged her. And terrified her.

“Where are you going?” he asked as she tucked the blankets in around his body.

“The Institute, if they’ll let me in,” Catarina said tartly. “Something’s happened with the Fairchild boy. Your Alexander wants me to look him over.”

His eyes had already closed: now they snapped open. “What?”
“Are you having trouble focussing?” That shouldn’t be happening yet. There had only been two deaths. They would know if there had been a third; Magnus would know. “I said—”

“No, I’m sorry, it’s not that. I’m fine.” Not true, so far from true, but she knew what he meant. “You can’t.”

“I can’t—?”

“You can’t examine Simon.”

She looked at him. “You’re not talking about the vanishingly small chance the Nephilim will let me anywhere near him, are you,” she said slowly.

“No.” The potion had to be making his eyelids heavy by now, but when he met her gaze his eyes were clear and hard as citrines. “I’m telling you, as En of this territory, that you can’t.”

He had the right. As En—what the Nephilim, in their childish simplifications, called a High Warlock—he had the right to compel or forbid her, who lived in his uru-zag, his territory. But there was something obscene about his using the power that was now killing him to command.

It honed her voice sharp. “For Ma’at’s sake, why?”

Magnus closed his eyes and turned his face away. “Because it would do more harm than help,” he said quietly. Tiredly. “I’ve never commanded you before, Cat. Trust that I wouldn’t do it now if it didn’t matter.”

She knew he wouldn’t. But it left her nothing to say as he drifted into much-needed sleep, confusion and fear hooked together in the pit of her stomach.

There were only so many reasons he would forbid her from examining Simon. And she didn’t like any of them.

***

When Izzy didn’t answer either, Clary called her girlfriend.

This did not involve a cell phone.

Buried in Clary’s backpack was a necklace she was always careful not to let Jace or the other Shadowhunters see, in case they recognised its unhuman origins; despite her friendship with Izzy, and Alec’s delicately growing relationship with Magnus, Olianthe was not a topic Clary wanted to discuss with the Downworlder-prejudiced Nephilim. The faerie-forged pendant was an acorn of gold and bronze, with a little cap of green enamel whose stem formed the loop for the chain, and Clary had taken it off for training but now that it was clear Izzy wasn’t going to pick up, she sat down at a bus stop and rummaged through her work-out clothes until her fingers closed around its familiar coolness.

She wasn’t alone at the bus stop, but right now she simply could not care less if it earned her weird looks when she unscrewed the acorn’s cap, tipped the firefly inside onto her palm, and whispered the charm Olianthe had taught her just for moments like this one:

“As acorns grow and stars align,
By glass and bone and dragon’s fire,

I call the heart that calls to mine,

And swear to her my need is dire.”

The firefly—glowing like an enchanted jewel, even though she’d checked online and they weren’t supposed to do that during the day—blinking its light at her as if in acknowledgement, then rose smoothly from her palm and flew up into the sky.

“The fuck?” someone said. Clary ignored them. Probably the exclamation wasn’t even intended for her magic bug anyway.

Carefully, her fingers gone shaky and clumsy, she screwed the acorn shut again and fastened the chain around her neck, let it drop down under her shirt, between her breasts.

‘Do all your spells rhyme?’ Clary had asked, when Olianthe had given her the quatrain.

‘Most of our magics require no words at all,’ the princess-knight had answered. ‘But I was told that mortals find rhymes easier to remember, and I would not have you forget how to call me if ever you need me.’

She had placed the firefly in Clary’s hair the very first night they’d met, at Magnus’ apartment. ‘Tell that one when you wish to see me, and I will come,’ she’d promised—but it was difficult to carry a glowbug around unobtrusively, and the acorn had appeared beneath Clary’s pillow not long after the magnifying glass had.

Clary rubbed the chain between her fingers restlessly, her stomach a sick knot of nerves. She didn’t really need the necklace, just like she didn’t really need the firefly—any insect would carry a message to Olianthe if Clary just told it the faerie girl’s name; it even worked with the pigeons that came when Clary stuck her head out the window and yelled ‘I would like to call my girlfriend now, please,’—which she got away with because her mother wasn’t home and the neighbours had long since stopped raising their eyebrows at the Jewish woman’s neopagan daughter. But a note slipped to a sparrow or a non-rhyming memo dictated to a housefly could take hours or even days to reach the Seelie princess, and Clary couldn’t wait that long.

Simon might not be able to wait that long.

The thought she’d been trying not to think since she saw the bloodied Shadowhunters outside the Institute rose up her throat like poison: what if the thing they’d been fighting was Simon? The monster that could come out in the middle of the day, the creature it would take a dozen Shadowhunters to bring down; what if it was Simon?

She remembered the other afternoon, when he and Jace had kissed in front of her, forgetting that it was a secret. The snarl on Simon’s lips when for the briefest instant he’d thought she was a threat to Jace; the way he’d thrown Jace behind him as if he had forgotten who Clary was, forgotten that she would never. The alien rage that had twisted the face she knew and loved into something utterly wrong.

She’d told him it was fine. She’d told him that he wasn’t any kind of monster. And she believed that. But if someone had triggered his PTSD, he might have looked enough like one for the Nephilim to cut him down.
What if that red, definitely-not-ichor-blood had been his?

Clary had never used the emergency-rhyme before, and she had assumed that if she ever did
Olianthe would come quickly, instantly, teleporting to her side in a gleam of peacock-colours, the
way Clary knew she could. But buses came and went from the stop, swallowing new passengers and
disgorging old ones, and no beautiful princess-knight appeared with her hair like a river of Celtic
gold, and the toxin of fear and dread worked closer to Clary’s heart with every beat. She had one
hand on her necklace, and the other on her phone, and the fingers of both hands ached with how
tightly she held them.

It seemed like a long time before the acorn-pendant flared warm against her skin, but when it did she
reacted instantly, without pausing for surprise; she had it open again in a breath, and there inside was
a tiny letter, the same as the ones Clary had found in her cereal and behind her toothbrush in the
weeks after she and Olianthe had first met. It was rolled up tight to fit in the small space, and Clary
had to peel it open with her fingernails and squint to read it, unwilling to wait the seconds it would
take to get out her faerie-made magnifying glass—

*Find a green place.*

There was nothing else but the impossible intricacy of Olianthe’s signature, which was not her name
or even a decorated O but an elegant knot of curlicues and dots and calligraphic sweeps, evoking
leaping unicorns and flowers and swords without being directly like any of those things. On another
day Clary would happily scrutinise it with her magnifying glass to study how the effect was
managed, in the same way she spent hours poring over the paintings of Julie Dillon and Stephanie
Pui-Mun Law—but this wasn’t another day, it was today, and today Clary’s friends weren’t
answering their phones and New York had been flooded with Shadowhunters and ‘find a green
place’ wasn’t a straight answer damn it—

Clary forced herself to take a deep breath. Let it out again. Curled up the message and pushed it into
her pocket; fixed her necklace; swung her bag up, and ran back to the subway.

A green place only meant one thing when one of Olianthe’s people said it: not green but greenery,
grass and trees and a fragment of wildness, a place where the earth could breathe instead of being
suffocated by tarmac and concrete. Properly it meant something like a forest, something far less
tamed than even the untidiest corners of Central Park, some place where humans did not go—but of
course there was nowhere like that in New York city, not this side of a knowe. So a garden would
do, if Clary could break into somebody’s garden, if anyone in New York actually had the kind of
gardens that would qualify, which they didn’t. The Kew Gardens in Queens were too far away, and
so was the Brooklyn Botanical Garden—and the Bronx had a surprising number of parks tucked
away, but few of them were what Clary could honestly call green: plastic-smooth rolls of grass and
bruise-proof playgrounds, baseball courts and basketball courts and even an outdoor pool, in the
Crotona Park. The only trees pruned within an inch of their lives. Clary could have gone to any one
of them, but what if they weren’t green enough? What if she wasted precious time going to a park
that wasn’t any good for whatever Olianthe wanted?

Which only left one choice.

At the very end of the 5 train was Seton Falls, 30 acres of lush semi-wildness held cupped in the
borough’s palms like an unexpected emerald. There were open spaces for picnics and games, and a
children’s playground, but huge stretches of it were what the city called ‘preserved natural land’—a
sanctuary for the thirty species of birds that lived in it. Clary doubted the authenticity of the park’s classification, given that the beautiful waterfalls were manmade and how likely was it, really, that anywhere on the island counted as ‘natural land’ anymore? But it was the wildest green place Clary knew, without question, and she told herself that over and over as she watched the subway stations flick by, her gut twisting with anxiety and impatience.

What the hell was Olianthe playing at, anyway? Why couldn’t she just come to Clary directly, the way she always had before? All right, maybe appearing in a flash of peacock-shimmering light on a busy street in the middle of the day wasn’t the best way to keep the Shadow World hidden… But she could have teleported behind a dumpster, or in an alleyway, or something. Not sent Clary running across the borough after she hit the figurative panic button!

*She must have a reason,* Clary told herself as she left the subway and entered the park. *A good reason. You know she must. She’s so protective, she would never leave you hanging without a good reason…*

But even if it was the very best of reasons, time was running through Clary’s fingers like water, and Simon still wasn’t picking up, and she was afraid.

A different kind of pang cut through her as she stepped away from the manicured areas of the park and into the trees, off the path. She hadn’t come here for three years, before today. Not since her dad grew too ill for their Sunday morning bird-watching sessions; not since he died. Once upon a time every Sunday’s dawn found them here, her dad with his binoculars, Clary with the book to mark down the birds they spotted. When she was thirteen she’d started bringing a small sketchpad with her, packing it in the bag with the thermos and sandwiches, to draw the sunlight filtered green by the canopy as if spilling through a stained-glass window. She’d drawn the birds too, of course, but they were harder to see, harder to get a good look at. Sketching birds had taught her how to get an image down quickly, before her model flit away…

Saturday for the Shabbat, for *zakhor* and *shamor*—remembering and observing, the Jewish day of rest that was like a little festival every week. Clary had always thought of it as her mother’s day, with the forbidding of melach making everything into a kind of elaborate game, the comfortable warmth of the morning service at the synagogue, and the Havdalah ritual to perform when the stars signalled the proper time… All bound up with the taste of challah bread and cholent. And then Sunday for the park and the birds and her dad’s quiet smile; the city streets as empty as they ever got in the city, and the sunlight spreading slow as honey across the sky, dripping through the trees, a golden conductor bidding her choir of birds to sing… Sunday had been her father’s day. Her day to be with her father, quietly, as sweet and necessary a staple of her life as a challah braid.

But then it was gone, and with it her taste for challah. For Yahweh. She hadn’t been to the synagogue since her dad died, hadn’t been able to extricate the two halves of her life from each other, and so in losing one had lost both. Now she called on Kore in her prayers, and Hecate, and Aradia, as facet-avatars of a truth her mother’s religion no longer felt big enough to hold.

And she came to this bastion of memory for a faerie girl, not her father.

Clary’s fingers were tight on the strap of her bag as she dug into the undergrowth. “I’m here,” she announced to the air, and if her voice was a little thick, it could have been for a hundred reasons. “Olianthe? Is this green enough? Can anyone hear me? ’Lianthe?”

“Clary!”

And there she was, as if she had been there all along and Clary had only, somehow, not noticed her before; Olianthe, with her hair like the tail of a comet and her face a star, beautiful and alien as a
diamond. She wore a dress that might have been cut from the fabric of a tropical ocean, the green-blue of warm waves fitted to her upper body and dissolving into a fall of velvet below her waist: a dress for running through the woods in like the elven creature she was, a fey thing, bare feet as fleet as a deer or a unicorn as she ran—Clary could see the image so clearly she could have painted it.

She looked like a painted thing, Olianthe, so perfect that it hurt a little. Except that no human artist could ever have captured her in canvas, ever have hemmed in her unearthly beauty inside a picture-frame.

Looking at her was like looking at a dawn.

“What has happened?” dawn asked, and she was not human but not so inhuman that Clary couldn’t recognise the worry in her voice, her face. At least in this moment, with her peacock-coloured eyes filled with dread like dark wine. “Are you hurt?” She held out her arms, imploring, afraid; they were bare, but for vambraces the same colour as her dress. “Come to me, I will take you to the knowe, my mother’s healers will—”

“I’m not hurt.” But something bothered her about this tableau, and it only took her a moment to realise what.

‘Lianthe said, come to me, but she hadn’t move towards Clary, not one single step. The realisation struck cold and chiming in Clary’s chest, a bell of ice with a silver clapper. She had fully expected her girlfriend to sweep her up like a tigress with her cub, and if Olianthe had thought Clary might be hurt—

“Why didn’t you come?” The words were out of her mouth before she realised she had to ask, before she could suppress the bolt of selfish hurt and focus on what actually mattered, which was were Simon and the others all right—

But Olianthe, who did not know that, answered. “When we must reach a far-off place in an instant, my kind travels through the memory of the earth,” she said. “You have experienced this.”

Clary blinked. “That’s what that is?” She had passed through what Olianthe called the in-between while sheltered in the princess’ arms, on their way from one side of the city to the other in less time than it took to take a breath; a place of ancient trees and laughing shadows and a scent even city-girl Clary recognised in her bones as wildwood. The first time had been the night of Jace’s Ascension party, but it had been far from the last. Every night when she went to train in the knowe, Olianthe brought her to the Seelie court through the ghosts of those trees.

“Yes.” Olianthe lowered her arms to her sides. “At night, the world remembers more clearly what it used to be, and I can go almost anywhere. But it is not night, and in the day the memory of the true earth lingers only in places like this.” She gestured to the trees around them, illustratively.

But Clary had read too many faerie stories, and spent too long as a Seelie princess’ datemate, not to notice that that wasn’t actually an answer. It sounded like one, but nothing Olianthe had said actually definitively tied itself to Clary’s question. She frowned, unhappy. “And is that why you didn’t come? You couldn’t reach me without a green place?”

Olianthe’s face became an exquisite waxwork.

“You promised not to hurt me,” Clary said. “Lying to me, even by omission, is hurting me.”

Olianthe curled her hand into a fist, then opened it. The gesture spoke of helplessness, a poignant pain. “Then I cannot lie to you,” she said, and Clary was reminded again that a faerie’s word was
more than honour, was a compulsion stronger than chains;

‘If you give your word, can you break it?’

‘No.’

“Nor would I protect you from the truth, as if you were a child blind to the dangers of salt and steel,”
Olianthe continued, watching Clary all the while with expressions that shifted like water over coral
bones, wonderful but wild, containing riptides and sharp reefs: yearning and desperation, hunger and
resignation, fear and fervour. “I know you are no Beannon Bride, to come apart at the first breath of
wind. You do not need me to shelter you from the storm. So, then: yes, I could have come to you. It
would have cost me dear, but I could have paid the price.”

“But why didn’t you?” Clary asked sharply. She could feel her pulse in her wrists, beating hard and
fast. “It was the emergency code. I could have been hurt. I could have been dying.”

“No,” Olianthe said swiftly, and her voice was a whip of frost, sharp and glittering. “The breath of
your message bore no imprint of blood or pain. For that, I would have run barefoot over iron to come
to you. I feared you hurt, but knew you were uninjured.”

Some sore, thorny hurt in Clary’s chest loosened to hear it. But still: she firmed her resolve, and
insisted. “Tell me why you didn’t come.”

“Because I was afraid,” Olianthe said simply, unashamed to admit her fear as no human ever could
be. “I knew you stood in sunlight. And I feared that if I came to you there, you would repudiate me.”

Clary stared at her. And realised, as Olianthe met her gaze without flinching, that she had never seen
the faerie girl during the day before. And that even now, Olianthe stood in a patch of perfect shadow,
untouched by the glints of sunlight falling through the branches.

This was why she had not run forward to Clary when she appeared: because the ground was littered
with splashes of sunlight like autumn leaves, and to move forward was to step into one.

Months of Olianthe’s fierce tenderness were not enough to keep Clary from remembering, with a
sick, sudden jolt, that demons could not bear sunlight.

But no—no; demons died in sunlight, and Olianthe had said she could have come to Clary; she could
not have, if it would have killed her. That was not what could have meant. Clary took a deep breath,
and refused to reach for the magnifying glass in her pocket.

“Why would I do that?”

“Because I do not always look like this,” Olianthe whispered. “And I could not bear for you to fear
me, réalta croí.”

She had called Clary that last night, in the pool. Clary still didn’t know what it meant—and yet did, if
not the dictionary translation than the heart of it, the core of it, writ clear in the way it left Olianthe’s
lips. Dear one, precious one.

(Beloved one?)

“I don’t think I could fear you,” Clary said carefully. “Not for looking different. I could be afraid of
you if you did something, if you hurt people. Do you hurt people? Like demons do,” she added
quickly, remembering from before that ‘hurt’ had too many potential meanings to hold any meaning
with a faerie. Specificity was required, among a people that couldn’t lie.
“I do not consume the aetheric energy of any thing living or dead,” Olianthe said solemnly. “I do not hunt or torture mortal or immortal things, though I have done both in the past. I have killed, but only when no other course but death was open to me.”

“Just to be clear, I am not happy to hear that you used to torture people,” Clary said. “But I did kind of take it as read, considering all the stories about your people.” She sighed. “Like I said, ‘Lianthe, I won’t fear you because of how you look. I can’t promise I won’t think your other form isn’t ugly—’” She thought of Abbadon, twisting poor Dorothea’s body into a nauseating monstrosity. “—but it won’t make me fear you. Only what you do can do that, not how you look.”

Olianthe said nothing, only stared at her. Though her face was entirely expressionless, her whole body sang a chorale of emotion, confusion and near-disbelief and uncertain joy.

Clary sighed again, this time with a little more frustration. “I’m not—you don’t have to show me, okay? I get that it’s—private, and scary to share. But next time, if it’s an emergency—please come. I promise I won’t call if it’s not important. If it doesn’t really, really matter that you come.”

“If there is a next time, I will come,” Olianthe promised huskily.

“I appreciate that.” She made a note—not for the first time—to find a less awkwardly formal way to say ‘thank you’ to someone who under no circumstances could be thanked with those words. And, more than a little ashamed to have let herself get so selfishly side-tracked, brought them back to something that mattered more than a little relationship drama. “But, you know, this time—I called because…”

She described what she’d seen outside the Institute, told Olianthe about the unanswered calls. “Do you know what’s going on?” she asked, trying and failing to keep her renewed anxiety out of her voice. “What were they hunting? Why are they here?”

“I do not know.” Olianthe’s smooth mask of impassivity broke apart into a frown. “But the Queen—my-dam should be told of it, if she does not know already. And if she does, it is possible she will have the answers you seek.” Once more, she held out her hands. “Will you come with me to the court, and speak with her?”

Somewhere in the back of Clary’s mind, an utterly irrational voice shrieked You want me to meet your mother?! at a glass-shattering pitch. Now?! In workout clothes? Bearing bad news about the Nephilim? Why??? Would you??? Do this??? To me?????

Oh Kore, and you said human/faerie relationships were ‘discouraged’, and you still WANT ME TO MEET YOUR MOTHER—

“Oh, of course,” she said calmly. Thinking, grimly: the things I do for you, Simon. She just hoped that he was okay, that he would be able to laugh about this with her very soon. “If you think it will help.”

“I do.”

Clary suppressed a sigh—there went any hope of getting out of it—and crossed over to the faerie princess. For Simon—and with Olianthe’s binding promise to protect her from other fae—she could do this. She could meet with the Queen.

Every rosette of sunlight she passed through had an almost tangible weight.

And then her datemate’s hands clasped hers, strong and gentle and cool as milk, tugging her carefully against the princess’ chest as the memory of the earth reached up and embraced them like wings, blue and green and gold.
In the darkness, there is light.

Xe burns. Xe blazes like a phoenix reborn wrong, the shape that means Simon dissolved into flame-music-memory-screaming, and the light fills the dark place like a sun being born or dying. It is a tsunami of golden fire sweeping away the shadows and the ugliness, washing the assembled demons clean; it is an atom bomb of light dissolving all it touches to ash, burning away their blackness to reveal the silver beneath.

Because it is so: scales and horns and twisted wings vanish like tarnish beneath a restorer’s hand and underneath them there is treasure, there are treasures, lustrous and shining and incomparable, unimaginable: xe burns gold and xyr Dragons flare antiphonal argent; like starlight cutting through smoke to find moonstones through the haze xyr flames reveal them and they incandesce in answer, incandescent. Harsh jagged lines are softened and smoothed by the blaze of astrogenous fire, gnarled limbs deliquescing into whirling streams of silver light arcing above and around like wings, like sterling rainbows; they are undone, remade, revealed, rank upon rank of them numberless as waves beneath the moon, the horde of monsters become a constellation of stars when seen in this other light.

And Kashtokaz, whose wings are myriad now and fluid as water, gleaming, mångata: Kasthokaz, who alone is silver with a golden heart, a scintillating core where the lilnilipah anchors in parz essence. Kashtokaz, who, as Simon-but-not falls in on xemself and screams and screams and screams at the assault of autognosis, plerosis, self-schema shattering into self-schism—Kashtokaz leaps forward and catches xem, nebula-cloud wings enfolding the sun of xyr blinding radiance like hands cupping a nonpareil, starbeam-limbs clasping xyr flame-self to parz chest as closely, tightly, soothfastly as Janet ever held Tam Lin.

“Aoveons no, hush, fesharszi, I’m sorry…”

Parz wings cradle and cut off the shining light like a veil drawn o’er the sun, so that only the underside of those wings are left gilded silver—the outer side ribbed and draconic once more, and like a curtain drawn over a hoard the echelons of demons beyond dim and darken, silver splendour smeared over with heart-flinching horror, a thousand points of niveous fire snuffed out by a winter wind.

Not soon enough.

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“There’s a fuck-ton of them now,” Cas muttered, peering through the binoculars at the building opposite. Where passers-by on the street below saw a run-down church, he saw something else entirely. The amulet at his throat glittered, thirteen rings of gold and a diamond nested at the centre. When he spoke, his words were gilded by a Brazilian accent. “It’s like a beehive in there. We’ll never get a chance at another binding circle with this many of the fascistas paying attention.”

“Language,” the woman next to him said mildly. She might have been a statue of Isis; tall and proud and in her early forties, she looked a decade younger and bore the golden Egyptian axe on her back as though it were weightless. A sociolinguist, allowed the prize of dissecting her speech, would have declared it a mix of Cairene Arabic and Mexican Spanish; it flavoured her English heavily. Despite her tone, she watched the Institute as a lioness watches gazelle.

“Sorry, Captain,” Cas said, contrite.
She made a dismissive gesture. “We knew we weren’t likely to get a chance at a second circle. I’m more concerned that they found the last one.”

“It was the ashipu who pointed it out to them.” The young Native man in the corner of the room sat cross-legged, a portable writing desk on his lap. Reports written by hand could not be hacked into by government bodies who didn’t know what was good for them.

“Lucio’s right, María,” Ana said. She caught and corrected herself at the older woman’s raised eyebrow. “Captain. It was the ashipu who pointed it out to them. The Shadowhunters are so oblivious, they could have tripped over it and not noticed.” Her Haitian accent was thick and sweet; she sounded her every word carefully to be sure the others could understand her.

“It does not occur to them that their bastions could be vulnerable,” Lucio said from his corner. His was the only accent native to these shores; someone who knew the voices of the tribes would recognize his as Zuni.

“It’s not like they have a great track record for noticing stuff anyway,” Cas said, without looking away from the binoculars. “The Nephilim couldn’t spot a werekodiak if it bit them on the—”

“Casimiro.”

“Sorry, Captain.”

Bent over his report, Lucio smiled.

María turned to the young woman beside her. “What do you think our main concerns should be at this point, Ana?”

Ana counted on her fingers. “Why the ashipu betrayed a sign of our presence to the Nephilim; whether she did it on purpose; and will the angelologists try to take the anunnaku from New York.”

“They would have to be pretty stupid to try and move it now it’s started feeding,” Cas said. “I felt it swallowing from here. They try and take it through a Portal and it’s going to eat it faster than Luc with my dad’s brigadeiros.” Under his breath, he added, “Om nom nom, Portal. Part of any anunnaku’s five a day…”

Lucio looked up from his report. “I’ve never had your father’s brigadeiros.”

“Well, you should, they are ungodly.”

“Let’s not underestimate the stupidity of the Nephilim,” María said dryly, ignoring Cas’ antics. “If they try and the anunnaku devours the Portal, wonderful: they won’t reach their destination, and the creature will be destroyed by its own greed. But anunnaki are cunning. It might know better than to devour a Portal while journeying through it. In which case, it’ll find sanctuary in Idris, where we can’t reach it.”

This silenced them all for a moment.

“The Nephilim don’t make Portals,” Ana said. “They hire ashipu-ene to do it for them. If the locals refused to work for them, the Nephilim would be stranded.” She shrugged. “And we have to talk to the ashipu-ene anyway.”

“Exacerbating tensions between the Nephilim and the Spiral Court is not ideal,” María said. “But it may be our only option.” She nodded slowly. “Good. Casimiro, Lucio, as soon as Chiyŏng and Samuel return I want the two of you to take the measure of this city’s Nasaru-ene. I want to know
what’s going on here. But don’t give yourselves away. We need to face the possibility that the Spiral Court may be protecting this anunnaku for some reason.”

“Is that likely?” Ana asked.

“No. But unlikely does not mean impossible.”

The Captain might have said more, but a short, high sound warned that someone was approaching the door of the apartment. Lucio deftly set his lap desk to one side and flowed to his feet, reclaiming his wakizashi sword from where it had leant against the wall; Ana cross-drew a pair of knives from her belt, a khukuri in her right hand and a serpentine kris in her left; Cas unhooked the binoculars from around his neck and set them carefully on the windowsill, the tattoos visible on his neck and arms throwing black light as he reached for his own sai daggers. María reached behind her, unhooked her axe’s harness, and swung it like a scythe of gold and lapis to her side; by the time she had it in her grip Ana and Lucio were positioned on either side of the door, Cas at 8 o’clock to their 6 in the nearer corner. It left the Captain to stand before the door, a target for whatever sought to come inside.

They stood in perfect silence for elastic moments.

Until a fist hammering at the door broke the taut stillness. “It’s us, it’s only us,” Sam said through the wood. He sounded exhausted —and afraid. “Chi’s hurt. Perkele, just let us in!”

Ana glanced through the door’s peephole, and nodded towards her Captain. Sheathing her kris, she laid her hand on the door, spread-fingered, and when the wards lit up in spiralling circles turned her palm a sharp 90 degrees. The lock popped, and the door swung open as she stepped back to let their teammates inside.

The man in his late twenties was white, with neatly-clipped dishwater hair and Nordic-blue eyes behind his glasses. Leaning heavily on his shoulder was the kitsune of their team, her eyes closed with pain and her skin clammy.

Swinging her axe back into its harness, María came forward and helped Sam get Chiyŏng to the couch. Lucio slipped into the corridor to make sure they hadn’t been followed; Cas and Ana were already running for the first aid kit.

“What happened?” María demanded.

“One of the Shadowhunters was a sorcerer,” Sam—Samuel—said. He unslung the long, slender rifle from over his shoulder and set it down on the table, almost falling into a chair once it was out of his hands. “He spotted her, forced her to change and then to change back. He wasn’t gentle about it the second time.”

Cas, returning with the kit, swore viciously in Portuguese.

María looked grim. “Did you get his picture?”

Sam pulled his phone from his pocket, found the image, and slid the phone across the table. María caught it and scrutinised the face it showed.

“He’s young,” Ana said in surprise, looking over her shoulder.

“About your age, I’d guess,” María murmured. The young man in the photo was perhaps somewhere between Ana’s nineteen and Cas’ seventeen years; twenty at the very most. He was white, with dark hair and a lean frame; his face was a hard, sharp, sculpted thing. In his black Shadowhunter armour
he looked like a knife in its sheath. “Anything distinctive about his gear?”

“Chi might have seen his family ring,” Samuel said. “I don’t know. I wasn’t close enough, I was playing sniper from across the street.” He nodded to the phone. “I took that with my scope. Give me a minute and some coffee, and I’ll start pulling CCTV footage.”

Ana went to start the coffee as Lucio returned as quietly as he’d left, nodding the all-clear to María.

“I need to speak with the Shemayet,” María addressed the room. “She needs to know about this sorcerer.” She shook her head, correcting herself. “We all need to contact our Orders. If the Nephilim have begun studying magic, every sect needs to know it. Everybody take ten and phone home.”

“Um. That might have to wait,” Cas said, backing away from Chi on the sofa. When María and Lucio turned to look at him, they saw his amulet lifting away from his shirt, the diamond at its centre glowing a bright and dazzling white as the golden rings around it began to spin, fast and then faster. “We have a bigger problem.”

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Clary had always known that the Seelie knowe was much larger than the parts she’d seen: the training halls where members of the court practised weapons she knew from fantasy stories if she knew them at all, Olianthe’s galon apartments, and the corridors that connected the two (exactly which corridors depended on the time of day one had been born at, the movements of stars not visible from the world Clary knew, and whether the knowe thought you a good singer or not. Since Clary had sung a zemer for it, a style of song it had apparently never come across before, it always gave her the shortest and most beautiful route to her destination). So she was not too surprised, when the memory of the earth faded, to find herself in a part of it she’d never seen before.

She knew she was in the knowe, because there was no mistaking it as anything other than a faerie place. It was a chamber of living glass, all light and crystal, and standing inside it was like being within the embrace of a weeping willow; glittering tendrils dripped from the ceiling, sprouting delicate bells where natural branches would have leaves. More bells grew like fruit from the woven boughs of the walls, silver and sweet, and all of them softly chiming, their symphony one of sugar and starlight. There was no obvious source of light, but everything was bathed in a soft illumination that was music to Clary’s eyes.

“Beautiful,” Clary whispered.

A crystalline frond stroked her cheek, its bells cool kisses on her face.

Olianthe smiled. “You will charm the knowe into keeping you for its own, one of these days.” She tugged gently at Clary’s hand. “Come. I would not keep the Queen-my-dam waiting.”

“Yeah, about that,” Clary said, allowing herself to be led. “Is there any chance we could stop to change? So I could change my clothes, I mean?”

“There is no need to stop.” The tilt of Olianthe’s eyes was amused. “I have told you before: the knowes are not truly part of your world. They belong to Annwn. Merely wish, and the knowe will answer. Certainly one it favours as it does you.”

“You mean, I can wish myself new clothes?” Isabelle was going to love that, if she didn’t know it already.

Olianthe gave one of her elegant, rippling shrugs. “At least the seeming of them.”
Brushing bell-hung branches out of way—though most of them swayed away from her of their own accord—Clary gave it a try, briefly closing her eyes and wishing for an outfit that would render her presentable for meeting the Seelie Queen of the People of Peace.

*If you’re listening,* she thought at the knowe, *I trust your judgement. Make me presentable, please?*

There was no spiralling cloud of glitter magicking her workout clothes into a frothy ballgown, no shining lights, no *bibbidi bobbidi boo!* But between one step and the next, the *weight* on her body changed, and Clary knew it had worked even before she opened her eyes.

The knowe had gowned her in the night. Her slacks and tank top had become a single-shoulder dress of deep sapphire blue, scattered with countless glittering points that moved of their own accord—stars, planets, moons, all dancing with regal slowness over her body. A kind of corset-belt of soft brown felt wrapped her waist comfortably, beaded in spirals, fringed in soft blue; the same fringing decorated her shoulder. Clipped to the belt was a chatelaine the shape of a fairytale castle, her magnifying glass hanging from it by a slender chain just the right length for her to reach comfortably. A gossamer wrap all the colours of twilight was pinned around her waist and draped behind her, whispering against her dress. And it wasn’t just her clothes; she didn’t realise her ponytail was gone until wisps of her hair fell into her eyes as she walked. When she raised her hand to it she found her hair loose about her shoulders, with some kind of diadem woven through it like a crown. Without a mirror she couldn’t be sure, but she couldn’t *feel* any jewels on it, thank Kore. That would have been…

Wait, thought too soon. More charms like the ones hanging from her belt were threaded on ribbons from the diadem, at the back. They chimed when she moved.

*They’re so jewels,* aren’t they. At least she only had her own familiar acorn pendant at her throat, rescued from the change to her clothes like her magnifying glass.

But her mother raised her to be polite; jewels or no jewels, she did her best to beam gratitude at the knowe. *I really appreciate the help!*

It was harder to avoid thinking ‘thank you’ than saying it. No surprise there.

Olianthe’s fingers tightened around Clary’s hand. “It has garbed you in Annwn’s stars,” she said hoarsely.

Clary ran her free hand over the skirt of her dress, marvelling at the thought of another world’s constellations gracing her skin—and then she was marvelling at the softness, because *wow.* The fabric looked like silk, but it felt softer than anything she’d ever felt.

They had stopped; Clary looked up, and found Olianthe standing close, and staring, her pupils narrowed to sharp slits.

“’Lianthe?’”

“The knowe has garbed you in Annwn’s stars,” Olianthe repeated, and her voice was satin against Clary’s skin, soft and rough at the same time. “And even they barely do you justice.”

Clary’s throat tightened with the immediate urge to dismiss the compliment, to laugh it off, deflect it. But you couldn’t pretend it was not sincerely meant, even to yourself, with a faerie. They couldn’t lie. “You look beautiful too,” she said, wishing, not for the first time, that she had Olianthe’s gift for perfect words and easy, heartfelt poetry. *Beautiful* did not do sufficient justice to the Seelie Queen’s daughter; she would stop hearts and breaths in rags, and she was not in rags now. If Clary was the
night, then Olianthe was the sun, her sea-blue dress replaced with a wash of gold while Clary had her eyes closed. Over a tunic of amber velvet was fastened a plate of solid gold covering her collarbone and breasts, engraved with a herd of galloping unicorns, their horns picked out in gems; diamonds, mother-of-pearl, opals. Flowing leggings were bound with gold laces from the calf down, and the belt at her waist was more artwork than accessory, a winged dragon encircling her hips, biting its own tail to lock closed. Her vambraces had vanished, but at her side a dagger whose whorled hilt was an alicorn. There were gems and bells knotted in the fall of her hair.

Olianthe smiled. “You do me so much honour, Clary.” She made a twisting gesture with her hand, and when she proffered it to Clary, there was a firefly in it—the one Clary had sent with her message, presumably. “May I?”

Clary nodded, and Olianthe carefully tucked the little insect, not back in the acorn pendant, but inside Clary’s ear. “Thus may I guide you, when you meet my kin,” ’Lianthe said. “Now we must hurry on. ’Tis the knowe’s own fault for garbing you thus and stealing my breath, but the Queen-my-dam awaits us.”

Olianthe tracked a course for them—or perhaps the knowe did—that passed through only a handful of impossible rooms: a grotto lit with smokeless fire where the cave-paintings on the walls were not of people or bison, but dragons; a room without gravity where Clary and Olianthe had to kick off from one wall to reach the next, half-swimming, half-flying; another where everything, including the two girls, was upside down. They passed other faeries on the way; a person with long green nails reading from a book of crystal pages, elegantly poised on a velvet chair in the no-gravity room, and in a room with its own sky a person whose braid burned like fire was carefully painting a flock of white ravens black with a paintbrush. A cluster of people had gathered to listen to a pair of ephemeral twins playing instruments of silver and bone in a chamber filled with ball-joined, jewelled dolls; Olianthe had Clary cover her ears as they passed, but even so the strains of the melody seemed to twine around her heart and make it ache.

And they were all just dubbed people in her mind, because after last night Clary was working hard not to assign genders to the inhabitants of the court. Olianthe had declared herself a girl, but her easy indifference to the issue made Clary suspect that, whatever the People of Peace thought about gender, it wasn’t anything like the attitudes Clary knew. She had been assuming faeries were either male or female, which was stupid, that wasn’t even true for humans so why would it be true for a people that weren’t human at all? And besides—none of the markers she knew for gender applied here. Again, long hair didn’t automatically denote a woman even for humans, but here everyone’s hair was long and flowing in impossible colours, knotted and braided and decorated with beads and charms of bronze and glass and gold. All the Seelie had sharp, elegant faces like the facets of jewels, and they were all slender and straight as silver birches. There was nothing in their hips or how they walked to give her a hint; they all moved like deer, like dancers, divine in their grace. Those she saw in dresses one night wore pallazzo-style trousers the next and shimmering bodysuits of interlocked pieces of metal and stone the night after that. However the fae marked gender—if they did at all—it was by no system Clary could discern.

And then she had no more time to ponder it, because they had arrived.

Clary had visited Olianthe’s court—her mother’s court—every night for weeks now, but no matter how many times she saw it she never grew inured to its terrible, glorious, wholly unhuman beauty.

The moment she saw the throne room of the Seelie Court, she knew that she never would.

It was a like walking into a cathedral, a huge and sweeping space that reached hundreds of feet up, all pearlescent white stone and ivory and shining gold. Where Clary might have expected tapestries
she saw carvings, every inch of every wall covered in incredible scrollwork, Celtic-looking knots and spirals and stylised people and animals, dragons the size of buses breathing scintillating fire that curled into flowers and birds, which became shooting stars which morphed into leaping fish which burst into butterflies, on and on and on in a never-ending monument to wonder. The air itself seemed to sparkle and flash; the entire chamber was filled with thousands upon thousands of hovering, slowly-revolving diamonds, the light coming from the walls themselves scintillating through the gems into clouds of rainbows, whose shifting, as the jewels moved, made the carvings seem to shift and stretch.

Or—

No.

They were moving. Clary’s breath stuttered in her chest as the dragon stretched its wings and leapt aloft, scattering a flock of swans as it flew up the wall; the branches of a carved tree rustled as if in a wind, pomegranates falling from its canopy and tumbling into the midst of a pack of wolves. It was like the paintings of Hogwarts, but a thousand times as grand, as magical, as beautiful.

And high above their heads, on a mother-of-pearl platform floating at the precise centre of the room, the Seelie Queen.

Clary swallowed hard, feeling smaller than Thumbelina.

She and Olianthe ascended a wide stair of nacre steps, each hovering without apparent support a little above the last. There were other platforms suspended about the room, some higher than the Queen’s, some lower, but none as large. Most of them were empty, but a cluster of those above and behind the Queen’s central stage were populated by a series of tall, alien figures.

“Who are they?” Clary whispered. Grateful for all her nightly work-outs, that meant she could speak without gasping.

Olianthe looked pleased. “My sisters.”

Of course they were.

A little below the Queen’s dais, one of the steps widened into its own platform, and here Olianthe knelt, dropping gracefully to one knee and crossing her arms in an x across her chest, her palms on the wings of her collarbone. ‘Bow,’ Clary heard, Olianthe’s voice whispering through the firefly, and Clary obeyed, bowing at the waist.

Someone spoke then, a brief ribbon of musical, lilting, entirely unintelligible words, and Olianthe rose to her feet, gesturing for Clary to straighten as well.

Even if the throne’s floor had been packed with people, Clary would have known the Queen instantly. The monarch of the Seelie Court—who, the gendered implication of ‘Queen’ aside, Clary mentally dubbed ‘ze’ in an effort not to assume anything—was as beautiful as the room which housed zir throne, and as incredibly unhuman; seeing zir standing at the very heart of the knowe with an artist’s eye, Clary was struck by the realisation that the entire chamber had been built around zir like a house of worship around a deity, the carvings on the wall framing zir like the settings of a jewel, the nebula of suspended diamonds all around revolving around zir like countless glittering planets around a sun. The entire room was zir adornment, and even amidst all this splendour, ze outshone it all: tall and slender as the point of a crown, ze blazed like dawn upon the peak of Everest, with the cool, ageless grace of that empress among mountains embodied in every line of zir profile. Zir presence filled the hall like light, so bright and brilliant Clary’s eyes actually hurt to look at zir
directly, as if she were standing before a star come to earth. A star clad in a deceptively simple gown of gleaming white, touched here and there with spirals of silver embroidery and subtle moonstones, accentuating that luminous poise rather than distracting from it. Against zir dress and the backdrop of the pale walls the floor-length fall of the Queen’s hair burned like a river of lava, the deep, primal red of fire and blood, so far beyond the mortal shade of Clary’s that it was hard to believe the two colours shared a name. Upon zir head was a headdress like a star-burst or many-petalled flower of silver and platinum, with multiple rows of sequentially-larger rays; a faceted crystal sphere the size of Clary’s fist was clasped at the nadir where the crown—for it could be nothing else—met the Queen’s brow.

Clary could not see zir face. A veil of glittering beads hung from the brim of the crown, shielding onlookers from the terrible glory of zir gaze, and Clary was grateful for it. She could feel the Queen’s regard like a heavy weight, and didn’t want to think about how much worse it would be if she could see those eyes looking at her.

She wrapped her fingers tightly around the handle of her magnifying glass.

Two other figures stood on the Queen’s platform. On zir left was a pale figure swathed in flowing grey silks, whose—hair? hat? headdress?—was shaped like a great storm cloud, dripping long strands of crystalline raindrops that echoed the Queen’s veil. But Clary found the faerie on the Queen’s right far more interesting: a vivacious personage whose mass of styled and bedecked white hair would have been at home at Marie Antoinette’s court and whose lower body, beneath a bodice of deep blue velvet, was that of a mechanical equine, a strange and beautiful thing of gold and silver and crystal, trailing a mass of sapphire velvet more like a cloak than a tail.

‘Virdiridon and Iphivania, the Queen-my-dam’s advisors,’ Olianthe whispered.

Clary wanted to ask why Iphivania had an equine prosthetic, but there was no firefly in Olianthe’s ear to convey her questions.

“Silariel-eresh, I present to you one who holds my heart knotted in her hair,” Olianthe said then. Her words had the weight of ritual, and Clary guessed she was missing some of the nuances. It seemed a very formal way of saying this is my datemate, anyway. “She comes bearing news of the Nephilim that I judged it needful for you to hear.”

“She comes dressed in our stars,” one of Lianthe’s sisters said. There were six of them, arrayed behind the Queen as if ze were a prism, and they the colours ze had made of a beam of light—though they were not a rainbow. The one who had spoken stood at the Queen’s immediate right, and wore white like zir mother, but trousers and a sleeveless tunic instead of a dress. Hundreds of pearls and opals made constellations in zir ebony hair, and alone of the sisters, zir face was hidden like the Queen’s; two feathery coils of zir hair had been fixed in complex spirals before zir eyes, strung with tiny seed pearls. “How are we to read this omen, Olianthe-ahatki?”

‘Siarien,’ the firefly whispered to Clary. ‘The Queen-my-dam’s heir.’

“‘Twas the knowe that garbed her, Siarien,” Olianthe said aloud. “I would take that as a good omen, myself.”

There was a stir among the gathered faeries, silenced instantly when the Queen raised zir hand. “One the knowe has welcomed is not to be turned away,” ze said. If the flutes Clary had passed on the way here had hurt her heart, the Queen’s voice threatened to break it in two, it was so painfully beautiful; Clary had to grit her teeth so as not to gasp. “Little as it pleases me to see one of my jewels about the neck of a black swan.”
Before Clary could work out if she’d just been insulted, she saw the beads of the Queen’s veil tremble as ze turned in Clary’s direction. “Speak, mortal, and I will hear.”

Taking a deep breath to steady herself, Clary repeated what she had told Olianthe. The cool metal of her magnifying glass anchored her, made it easier to bear the focussed attention of the Seelie royal family, the strange, heart-rending beauty of the living walls and the gem in the Queen’s crown, like the heart of a star caught in crystal. Too, Olianthe’s presence at her side was a bulwark, a breakwater shielding Clary’s earthy self from the ocean of the fae; Clary imagined ‘Lianthe’s golden heart braided into her hair, and stood straighter.

It did not take long to tell, and when she was done Clary fell silent, refusing to lower her eyes. She was not one of the Queen’s subjects; she had bowed to be polite, but she was not going to cower.

She couldn’t tell if the Queen was impressed or offended by this, or if ze cared at all.

“The Nephilim are not the only ones disturbed,” another of ‘Lianthe’s siblings said. ‘Irlaridi,’ murmured the firefly. Ze had graceful antlers of bone and mother-of-pearl sweeping back from zir pale blue hair, hung with bells and twined about with apple blossoms; Clary had no idea if the horns were decoration or if they were a part of zir. Ze was robed in blue, a bodice of sapphire velvet dissolving into swirling gossamer skirts of a dozen paler shades. “The Cousins are awake and restless, for all that they should slumber while the sun crowns the sky. The shadows writhe with them. Might not the same event have agitated Raziel’s children and Samael’s?”

Perhaps the Nephilim have discovered what has called so many of our Cousins to this city,” said a faerie in black and green, gleaming gold tattoos winding like woad up zir arms and throat and face, bursting into confections of gold wire and amber in zir emerald hair. ‘Nelesediar.’ “The mortal saw them returning from battle, after all.”

“Had they destroyed whatever the Cousins value so dearly, the shadows would not writhe, but kill all who came near,” another contradicted, making a dismissive gesture with a hand that ended in crystal claws. ‘Hirsulerune.’ Tiny mirrors were woven into zir silvery hair, and zir tunic was pale lavender and mist-grey, a waist-cloak of amethyst trailing behind zir. “And this city would not survive the night.”

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“Would it be such a loss?” Irlaridi asked coolly, without any emotion Clary could discern. “I for one would not weep to see the humans pruned like the strangling vines they are.”

“At least have the courtesy,” Siarien said, far more coldly yet, “to not speak so before one whose city it is.”

Ze meant her, Clary realised. And wondered, sickly, if that meant Siarien disagreed with Irlaridi’s apparent disdain for humans.

“Humanity aside,” Hirsulerune added, “you presume much, Irlaridi dear, if you think we could weather such a storm as that unscathed. Whatever it is the Cousins treasure so, I do not think their wrath at its destruction would pass us by so neatly as you hope.”

“Might the cairde be at the root of this?” suggested someone the firefly identified as Fionrawen. Zir gown was made of actual water; Clary could see koi swimming around in it, and a beta fish. For all that, the body beneath it was indistinguishable. “They have not yet presented themselves to the
Court. Perhaps the excuse for their rudeness is that they have finally drawn the attention of the Nephilim.”

“That would certainly put the Shadowhunters in a dither,” drawled the only one of them with red hair, darker than that of their Queen—Kheylandrnil, came the whisper, with hair like a gout of blood spilling from a cut throat, and a mouth like the inside of a pomegranate. Zir body was sheathed in silver like a knife, rubies and garnets like flames or blood tracing galaxies across the fabric.

The others laughed, but Clary noticed that neither the Queen nor zir advisors had said a word, any of them. And though she had no idea who or what the cairde were, Samael’s children could only mean demons. In Hebrew school, they’d taught her that Samael rejoiced at Moses’ death, that he was Michael’s eternal opposition, the chief of Satans; when she’d looked him up on her own in the wake of discovering the real-life Nephilim, she found that her teachers had undersold it. Samael was the ultimate evil, who joined with Lilith—and, depending on the source, his three other wives—to beget the entire race of demons.

“They are not yet as rude as the Nephilim,” Nelesdiar said. “Myself, I hope Dôn turns unkind eyes from their shadows. Make mock as best please you, but should the Nephilim wipe the cairde from the memory of the earth, we will be wholly dependent on the Nephilim alone.”

“A terrifying prospect indeed,” Kheylandrnil said dryly—and yet, faeries couldn’t lie. Did that mean ze really did think it terrifying? Or was sarcasm a loophole in the truth rule? “Truly, one we should pray Dôn averts.”

Faerie sarcasm didn’t matter. These royals were saying—what? That Samael’s Children were their cousins? Clary flashed back to Olianthe’s unwillingness to step into direct sunlight, and only with effort pushed the thought away. If the fae were half-angel, half-demon like the Nephilim said, then obviously that made demonkind their cousins, of a kind. It didn’t mean Olianthe was one herself.

They were saying—that there were more demons in the city than usual. That they were awake during the day, when they shouldn’t be. That they were restless.

“The Shadowhunters don’t know this.” Only when the princes/ses all turned to look at her did Clary realise she’d spoken aloud, but she refused to quail. There was something cold and awful building behind her breastbone, and it pushed the words up and out of her throat. “They think there are less demons, they think the demons are gone. There’s been no attacks for weeks—”

Was this what she’d seen? Had the Shadowhunters outside the Institute been fighting demons, despite the daylight? Had they been caught somewhere dark and dim enough for Infernal claws to find them?

Did they know?

One did not make demands of Queens. Particularly not fae ones. Clary knew her mythology, and so she did her best to choose her words carefully. “Please, will you tell them? They don’t know, they’re not prepared. If the—” She almost said demons, then wondered if that was rude here. “—Cousins are massing, a lot of people could die.”

“And what makes you think the Nephilim will listen to such as us, mortal girl?” Virdiridon asked. Zir voice was as cold and biting as winter rain. “They have had centuries to make clear how little they value our opinions.”

It was a fair point. But Clary wasn’t backing down. “Simon will listen,” she promised wildly. Knowing it was true. She wasn’t so sure the assembled Nephilim would listen to Simon, but given
how little the Shadowhunters cared for Downworlders, he probably had a better chance than any
faerie. “Simon Morgenstern. He’ll care about what you say.”

The beads of the Queen’s veil shivered, and even through it Clary felt the moment the Queen’s
attention focussed solely on her. “We do not interfere with the one known as Simon Morgenstern.”

It had the weight of law, that pronouncement, and Clary blinked, confused and uncertain. “Why?”

“We do not interfere with the one known as Simon Morgenstern,” the Queen repeated.

That…wasn’t weird at all, but Clary put it aside. She would ask ’Lianthe about it later. “Will you
help me find him?” she asked, greatly daring. But that was why she had called Olianthe in the first
place, after all. “I can tell him what you said. I’ll make sure he hears it. But I can’t get hold of him
right now.”

“She was questing for him when I diverted her here,” Olianthe said suddenly. “She came only to
bring us this news, at a cost to her search and perhaps her friend.”

“There is obligation.” Siarien, on zir platform. “So I judge.”

“I agree,” the centaur-faerie said. Iphivania. Zir voice was unexpectedly rich and sensual, for all that
zir expression was a solemn one. “The girl is not your subject, Radiance. She was not bound by duty
nor acted from vassalage. A debt is owed, lest the scales remain unbalanced.”

“Have the Court beholden to a mortal?” Fionrawen exclaimed. “That is one which will weigh like
steel. Give her what she wants, that we may be free of it.”

Virdiridon looked to zir Queen. Whatever ze saw beneath the veil, it must have been enough, for the
rain-gemmed faerie brought zir attention to bear on Clary. “The one known as Simon Morgenstern is
within the New York Institute. He was taken there by his own kind, and so far as we know they
have done him no harm.”

The careful phrasing hooked at her. “Did someone else hurt him?”

“He was bloodied when he emerged from the Silent City,” Siarien told her, before Virdiridon could
—or perhaps because Virdiridon would not. Clary had no way to tell. “And he was unconscious
when the doors of the Institute closed behind him. More than that is beyond the ken of the Court.”

The cold, horrible shock neatly saved Clary from her automatic thank you: it stopped her breath
dead. Bloodied—the City of Bones, that grim Shadowhunter necropolis—unconscious—what had
happened?

“I appreciate your sharing your knowledge with me;” she choked out after a pause. Headless of how
it looked, or if she was being rude, she looked up at Olianthe. “I need to go and find him. Please.”

“You will not be allowed into the Institute,” Olianthe said, low. “They will hurt you if they learn you
know their secrets. The Nephilim are not kind to those they are meant to protect.”

Clary remembered the Lightwoods telling her and Simon about the fraternization rule, that Izzy could
be stripped of her runes just for reading Harry Potter, just for being friends with Clary. And she
knew Olianthe was right.

“Either way, I can’t stay here,” Clary managed. She didn’t want to, and she didn’t think Olianthe’s
family wanted her to either. “Please take me back.”
“If you wish it, then it will be so.” Olianthe turned to her mother, and knelt again. “If I have permission to leave.”

“Go,” the Queen said. “Take your black swan from my Court, Olianthe.”

Olianthe bowed her head in acquiescence. When she rose, she nodded at Siarien.

Clary didn’t miss Siarien’s subtle nod in return. But she had other things to think about.

***

Isabelle’s body remembered the sensation before her mind did, the explosion of invisible fire breaking against her runed skin like a wave of molten gold, searing and glorious and too strange to be either pain or pleasure. The somatic memory drew the whole agela towards the door before they remembered that they could not leave, and the realisation was a seraph blade twisting as it pierced.

Their runes sang like church bells, reverberating on their skin, ringing and ringing and ringing.

Because Isabelle remembered it her agelai knew what was happening, knew where the sweet agony of the call would pull them if they followed it—if they could; the door, the guard, there was no way they could go to it, to the angel screaming—they could hear it, hear it screaming with Simon’s voice, a high inhuman sound cry that went on and on and on, cutting through the Institute like a sword and roping Izzy-Alec-Jace like lassos of barbed wire and honey, pulling, dragging, spiralling higher and higher on wings of steel and gold, beating in their heads like a terrible thunder-woven heart—

The surge came again, and again, a pummelling tide like the crashing waves of a storm, and Max was trying to ask them something, Alec’s phone was ringing and they could hear neither, register neither over the shrieking need to go, to answer, to fly to Simon’s side and hold him through the flames of heavenly fire, to staunch and soothe whatever agony made the creature in him cry aloud like the world’s ending as best as any human could—

The agelai were dragged under by the current, swept together by the backstroke of the wings in their skulls; a dizzying psychic tornado that blew their still-fragile boundaries of self apart like gossamer. It was as Sariel that they flung themselves at the door, unable to remember unable to care that escape would damn them in the eyes of the Inquisitor, the Clave. There was only the screaming, only the need-dread-terror of knowing Simon was in pain, a thin mortal shell that had to be breaking apart around that solar-storm light, that celestial anguish; honour and religion and love all knotted to choking around their throats, their Self, and they nearly tore the handle from the door with rattling it, clawing at it, if they’d had even a single stele they would have blasted it down without hesitation, without being able to hesitate—

And on their palm the angel’s mark echoed every shockwave, blazing beneath their glove like a burning brand, afire with a pain that was not pain.

Sariel glanced down at it, seeing the glowing mark in their mind and remembering—like light, like lightning, searing through memories and maybe faster than any single human ever could—Alec’s raised hand before the Institute doors, the hundred and eight locks springing open at his gesture, his will—

*Even once their parents had returned—*

Before the thought had finished forming they lifted that hand before the door and willed, wanted, commanded as Alec had commanded the Institute all the time that Hodge was gone—

And felt as much as heard the lock give.
But before they could touch the handle it moved, pressed downwards from the other side. The door swung open, and from three sets of eyes Sariel saw their father’s shocked face, the keys in his other hand, the prone figure of their guard on the floor, a bundle of clothes under his arm.

Robert stepped aside before they could speak. “Go,” he said, and they did not pause to ask him why, only flew past him, ran as if they had wings on their heels, the path they needed spelled out in gold in their heads and under their feet, singing in their Marks.

Screaming.

Corridors, stairs, doors, the blurred impressions of other people bent double and clutching their heads under the onslaught—

And then they had reached the Infirmary.

There were guards at the door, but they were on their knees, blood trickling between the fingers that covered their ears. There were golems, but they stepped aside for Sariel, dipped their heads; Sariel had no eyes for them.

They remembered what Izzy had seen, called here this morning by the same entity: Simon’s body lit from within, the angel’s hand raised against Robert and Syr Bellesword. It had been awake, and angry, and terrifying in its glory.

This was nothing like that. This was like stepping into Hell, all fire and chaos, rabid and blinding and thick with the stink of hot iron and storms and blood, and drawing it all together to a soul-piercing point the screaming, the unhuman screaming that hadn’t stopped, that went on and on and without pause, without breath. It was a maelstrom of light and darkness, fiery light searing like the heart of a sun breaking across Sariel’s faces like the blow of an axe, light with weight and heft and heat, and cutting through the light a storm of whirlwind-wings, shadows curved like scythes and scimitars beating-snapping-writhing, not mere shapes on a wall but tangible whips of black oil and gold fire alike that lashed and cut and burned: scorch marks marred the ceiling and walls, beds were overturned, figures in the robes of angelologists scattered like dolls on the floor, some broken, some bleeding.

And at the heart of it—in the centre of that vortex of light and dark, where the light was bright enough to burn Sariel’s eyes and the shadows dark enough to drown in—at the heart of it was Simon, a creature of tissue paper and silk caught in the gale of power. He thrashed like a child trapped in a nightmare on a gore-streaked cot, his mouth a raw red hole and his face streaked with blood from his eyes, his nose, his ears; his skin might have been glass for all it hindered the radiation streaming from his core, that terrible incandescent fire and decalescent blackness pouring out of him as if he had a portal to Heaven and Hell both in his bones. Someone had tried to tie him down; three or four wide straps hung limply from the bedframe, but only one had been secured around his waist, not enough to still him, not enough to protect him from whatever storm raged inside his skin.

He still hadn’t stopped screaming to breathe—

That decided it, if decision needed to be made. Off to one side, the Inquisitor belatedly spotted them; she shouted something, but the angel’s awful wail drowned her out and Sariel ignored her. They dove into the storm and they were the only one who could possibly have done it, six eyes to watch the strobing cyclone of shadows and fire and the power of three minds to plot and trace their burning arcs, to duck and weave and twist between them as in a hail of arrows, dancing as if between lightning bolts, tasting ozone when one sheared too close, smelling smoke when a sheet of flame came near enough to kiss their cheek; and all the while their Marks crying out on their skins, the simádi angélou a molten gem on their hand—
There was no room for three nearer Simon’s body, where the spaces between those strange unearthly bolts was so much narrower, and there had never been any question of which body to send forward. It was their Jace-self that reached the side of the bed while the others watched its back, and their Jace-hand that reached out, carefully-quickly, to touch Simon’s face, heedless of how his cheek burned like hot glass. There was only the gaping wound of Simon’s mouth, the agony writ in blood on his face, the driving compulsion to make it stop, make it all stop, to let Simon breathe—

The moment they touched him one became two: the power reverberating in their runes surged to unbearable, soul-shaking heights like an electrical current being made whole and Jace was torn free of his agelai like a ribbon being ripped from a braid, ungentle and yet silken. The shock of it sent him gasping to his knees, dizzy and aching and alight with something unnameable, flooded with the unspeakable. In an instant of rapture he glimpsed the workings of the world, light and light and light going on forever, an eternity of gemstones weaving together in endless patterns to create the world, every world, a universe of stardust and every shining mote was singing, Singing, oh Angel—

And in the Song he heard the silence, and realised the screaming had stopped.

It would have been so easy to never come back, to fall into the celestial music and wholly become it, dissolve into it. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to simply let go, and cease to be, and become everything, instead.

But the parabatai Marks he bore anchored him, and that silence drew him back, and the real world was real again as Simon drew a deep, ragged breath like a man saved from drowning, and nirvana could never matter more than this.

The screaming had stopped. The angel’s writhing wings (if such they were) still flashed and snarled above and around him, but Simon was no longer screaming, was panting deep, sobbing breaths and it was better, it was enough. Jace’s hand was still on Simon’s face; his graceless fall had turned Simon’s head to the side, towards him, and the sight of it—

Jace would remember the sight of it until the day he died.

Simon’s gaze was bright and blind, his eye sockets full of spiralling light and dark, black and gold like oil and water; his lashes were red with blood, his cheeks wet and writ with it, and Jace forgot to fear those wings, forgot what he had said in the Silent City and why, forgot the angel itself as he leaned close and prayed for Simon to hear him, buried somewhere in the fire and the dark and the blood—

“I’m here, aikane, I’m here.” His voice shook, every dark space in his head echoing with the memory of those screams, with the sound of such unimaginable agony, but he only pressed himself closer, drew Simon a little bit nearer, touched his free hand to Simon’s dark hair—the only part of him unaltered by whatever the angel was doing, neither afire nor shadowed, just simple and soft and human. It made Jace’s heart ache. “I’ve got you, I have you, do you hear me? I’m here, you’re safe, you’re not alone, it’s all right—it’s all right, aikane, love, I’m here, I’m here and I’m not letting you go—”

His fingers burned, his eyes burned, his throat burned, but Jace could no more have stopped than he could have caught the moon in his hands.

“Don’t let go, Simon,” he whispered. “Don’t let go, stay with me, I don’t know where you are but you have to hold on. You have to come back to me, aikane, dearling, dearest; you have to come back to me from where you are—”

It was like bleeding, this flow of words; they spilled out of him in a torrent of copper and pain, soft
and desperate, tender and pleading; pleading for Simon to hear him, to keep breathing, to claw his way back to Jace as he had every time before, and the fear that this time, this time Simon wouldn’t—

Couldn’t—

It broke his heart, that terror, the dread, the hoarse struggle of Simon’s every breath and the feverish writhing of his fragile, beloved body, the blindness of his eyes and the pain in his face—it was grinding Jace’s heart to dust and the shards of it caught in his throat, ripped him to pieces and he bled more, bled everything, promised anything to any god who would listen, if only Simon would

Come

Back

“Come back to me, aikane, come back, come back, come back to me—”

***

The darkness is not empty, and the aurulent light Kashtokaz fights to conceal is a beacon: beyond the ranks of the Dragons, deep in the black, leviathans stir, alerted by the screams that cut through this realm like a sword, like lightning. The darkness shudders and roils with their movements, like water echoing with the gestures of kraken; it crashes like waves against the gathered demons, a heavy, crushing pressure.

But their prince does not, cannot feel it, cannot comprehend anything beyond the nightmare-memories, the fever-dream truths. They burst through xem like machine-gun fire, and silvered darkness spirals through xyr fire-form in their wake, blossoming like orchids, silver and black spreading through gold like blood in water. Sunlight and moonlight and midnight twisting together like a Celtic knot, sick and bright and terrible, and Kashtokaz struggles to contain xem as xyr form roils like a storming ocean, still wailing, still screaming—

“Nanaeel, aoiveons, hush, I have you, you do not need to wake yet, you do not need to remember this.” Parz cupped wings fold tighter around xem, clasping xem close, like a child, like a lover. “Let it go, let it be, it was not your fault, it was never once your fault…”

Xe shakes, and shakes apart: xe is lashed by memories that blur into phantasms and back again, ephialtes of the soul, and

Xe is on a cot in the Institute looking at a stranger’s face, and

Xe is walking on an endless shore of crimson sand, and

Xe is in a thousand-thousand cities and they are all burning, they are all falling, xe is flying and xe is plummeting down, xe is revelling in the bloodshed and xe is drowning in it, xe is the hand on the hilt and the hand catching the blade to halt its scythe-swing and xe is the sword itself, the Sword xe itself —too many pieces and too many parts, disparate and discordant, the Song turned to Silence in xyr bulmoni-mouth, choking, suffocating, the guilt—the blood—the laughter the remembering, xe remembers it all—

Remembers, and can do naught but scream beneath the onslaught, naught but scream for the horror and abomination of it, can do naught but scream—

Scream and scream—

Until two lodestars ignite amidst the blitzkrieg, radiant, resplendent, thus;
In one place, in one shard of self: a hand on a cheek, callused fingers and a rune-song familiar as a lullaby, foreign as a prayer, cutting like water through fire to anchor xyr against the storm, anchor xyr in xemself—

In one place, in one shard of self: a wealth of silver upaahni-wings lacing, tangling with xyr own, intertwining like fingers, like hearts. Drawing xyr back to the now, the here, to xyr Shield’s embrace, and xe falls shudderingly silent, falls into Kashtokaz’s hold like a star collapsing in on itself.

Xemself.

“Oia i vaan?” xe whispers. “Brsgdauran zirdo?” Is this real? Am I dreaming? Xe doesn’t know how to tell anymore, has lost count of how many times figures from the past—the present—the future have manifested in xyr dreams. That is all the dreams are, reflections of what is and could be—

And what was. Over and over again, what was, what has been, what xe has done—

“No, aoiveons, no,” Kashtokaz croons. “You’re not dreaming. But we don’t have long.” As if to underscore parz words, another dark wave breaks against them all, Dragons and Shield and Sword—and this time their prince seems to recognise it for what it is; the light of xyr flames turns colder, harder, the curls and whorls of tri-coloured fire sharpening slowly into a host of glittering razors.

“Adokaz.” Kashtokaz calls xyr attention back, coaxing as one might a wild beast; easy, crooning, tender. “Where are you? You need to tell me where you are, star-heart, so I can find you.”

Fire has no eyes, but if xe did they would be blank and glazed, gilded and uncomprehending. “Kures. Zirdo kures.”Here. I’m here.

“No, Adokaz, not here.” Gently, so gently, Kashtokaz combs silver tendrils through xyr flames; fingers stroking through curls. “In the waking, in the caos. Where is your body?”

“Gnay ipé ol…” I don’t… Xe tries, struggling, adrift. There are just too many possibilities, too many memories and maybes, a trillion places and faces that could be, that were, that will be. Which one, which one is right and how can xe tell? “Ol gnay ipé orn, ipamis ol, ipamis ol—” I don’t know, I can’t, I can’t—

“Hush, sssh.” Kashtokaz hisses—not the savage sound of rage or battle, but soft, silken, soothing. Demonsong, an Infernal’s lullaby. “Sssh, it’s all right, it’s all right. What about your eyes? Can you show me what you see?”

This is easier; a hand on a cheek like a path through a maze, like a signal fire in the dark. Xe shares the seeing, seeming, images and impressions travelling through xyr wing-limbs to Kashtokaz’s like electricity through synapses where they are twined together: gold eyes in a gold face, angelic runes, a white ceiling streaked with scorch marks.

But it is the face that makes the Shield hiss again, this time with surprise. “And here I thought you lost,” par murmurs. “But you found one of them yourself, didn’t you? Your Mother will be glad. Good.” Without letting xem go, par breaks their connection, gently disentangling the nerve-like sparks of light and self. “That’s enough, star-heart. You did so well, but you can rest now. I’ll find you, and keep you safe, and this time it will work. I promise.”

If xe had the strength, xe would sob. If there were words, xe would call xyr Shield a liar, but there is no room in xem for words; they are crushed to coal beneath the weight of dead worlds, and the thought of going on is unbearable. It has to stop, it has to end, all xe wants is for it to end for good, make it stop, make it STOP, xe can’t do this anymore, xe hasn’t been able to do it for eons, and yet it
goes ever on and on, on and on and make it stop, make it stop, Song and Stars just let it end...

Please, please just let it end.

“I promise,” Kashtokaz whispers, “I promise you this is the last time, the very last. You need only hold on a little longer and it will end, it will, I swear it will, I will make it end. We are so close now, aoiveons, it is so nearly over. Only hold on a little longer for me, please, for me, Adokaz, just a little longer…”

“Agé,” xe says.

No.

“Ipamis ol,” xe says. “I can’t, I can’t, Kashtokaz please, please, I can’t do it again. I’m not strong enough, I never was, I can’t be this anymore!”

The storm in the dark is building with every moment, waves of pressure-presence coming faster and faster as the Sword’s left-hand kin gather and close in. The storm will break, soon, and when it does the darkness will split asunder in black fire and ichor; the Dragons are many, but too few for what will come. They cannot linger, and yet none of them flee.

No Shadowhunter would believe it, but they will not leave their prince in this state.

Kashtokaz knows it, and parz wings twine tighter about parz prince’s, an alchemical marriage of Infernal and Not.

“You can,” par says fiercely. “You are the Sword of the King, the Prince of Stars, Hope of the Misbegotten. You found us a home, you brokered the Peace. You can do this and you will, because if you fall Silent I will fall with you, if you go into the teloah-oblivion I will be at your side, if the Sword is broken then xyr Shield shatters with xem. And because without you your people are damned.”

Fire has no eyes, but if xe did xe would close them now, unable to bear this truth atop all the others.

“Cruel Shield,” xe whispers.

“Even from yourself I will guard you, Adokaz.” Fire has no brow, but par leans forward and moonlight mingles with xyr gold-silver-blackness. “Do it for me,” par says again, softly. “Do it for us, Nanaeel. Please. We need you still.”

“Cruel,” xe whispers again. And—shudders, firelight flickering as if in a winter wind. “Yes,” xe says, helplessly. “I will try. I should not love you so much, this much. I should not be—willing to risk this risk, for your sakes. But the Silence will have to damn you itself, because I cannot.

“Only make me a promise for a promise, Shield. Guard this world from me. Don’t let me— Don’t let me become— Not again. Never again. Please. Promise me.”

“I am the Sword’s Shield, not the world’s,” par says. “I will never strike you down, even if I could.”

“Kashtokaz—”

“Shh,” par croons, “it’s all right, star-heart, it’s all right. I’ll find you in the waking, and keep you safe, and it will be all right.”

“Kashtokaz!”

But par is singing softly, a melody sweet as a lullaby and fierce as the thunder—an ariette that
makes the darkness around them reverberate like struck metal and catches up the prince’s fire like a crystal lantern closing around a flame. It is a spellsong woven by one even a Prince of Stars must bow before, spun and given to the Sword’s Shield by The Fire That Lights Herself, and xe is helpless before it.

There is only—

A small, hard charm Kashto presses into xyr grip, folds xyr ‘fingers’ around, and

A beloved stranger’s voice, saying ‘come back to me, come back—’, and

For a single instant the weight, the weight of being forced to live, so heavy xe cannot be beneath it—

And then xe is gone, and Kashtokaz with xem, and the Dragons with them both.

When the night-storm breaks, and Princes of Hell descend upon the place where their prey had been, they find nothing at all.

***

Inconsequential, meaningless snapshots came to Jace through his agelai’s eyes, pieces like shards of broken pottery in a Roman ruin; hands lowering from ears, figures picking themselves up off the floor, the Inquisitor striding forward with her eyes flashing like seraph blades. “How did you—get them out of here! Get him away from Symeon!”

He saw-felt Alec and Izzy bar her way, unarmed but unmoving; felt Izzy’s words almost as his own as she said, “Inquisitor, it’s working.”

She was not wrong. Jace let it all slip away from him, the rest of the world fading like a half-remembered dream, but somewhere far away was the knowledge that what Izzy said was true: slow as continental drift, something was changing. He held Simon as if he could reach through the fire beneath his skin and draw him home, clasp his wrist and guide him through the labyrinth of light and dark back to the world, and his words wove their own spell; he had not yet been struck by the angel’s wings because the whip-cracks of fire and darkness had slowed, eased. They drifted in place now like underwater vines, occasionally twitching or clenching into spirals, but no longer thrashing. Simon’s body still bled, but it did not convulse quite so badly as it had done before, and Jace stroked Simon’s hair and crooned to him, murmured whatever soothing thing he could think of.

Called and called and called for him to come back.

A woman with the winged key of the Secretseekers and a leg of steel and adamas put her hand on the High Inquisitor’s arm, holding her back. She shook her head at the Inquisitor’s sharp glance, and the Inquisitor subsided. But the Secretseeker’s gaze was fixed on Jace, unblinking.

His agelai’s unease couldn’t touch him.

There was only the alchemy of dread slowly transmuting into hope, lead into soft, fragile gold, as Simon’s breaths came steadier, and more easily. As the wings curled in on themselves, retracting, curlicues of gilt and ebony. As the wracking convulsions came further and further apart, until it seemed safe to hope they would not come again. As the bleeding from Simon’s eyes slowed to a trickle, and then stopped entirely.

There was only Simon’s sharp gasp, and his spine curving like a whip, and the light in him snuffing out like a sun dying, taking the strange pleasure-pain-pressure in their runes with it.
There was only relief like rain and love like an ocean as Simon saw him, and knew him, and said his name.

***

“Wait wait wait,” Cas said sharply. “Something’s—it’s calming down. Wait.”

“Annunaki don’t just calm down,” Samuel protested. “Nothing stops them going nova but a binding!”

“Well, nobody explain that to this one, because there’s too many witnesses to draw another binding circle!” Ana said, glancing out the window.

“Guys, shut up,” Cas snapped. His eyes were black as ink, watching the spinning rings of his amulet with unblinking focus, reading in them the impossible. “It’s real. It’s easing down.”

He blew out a breath of relief. “Guess New York gets to stand another day.”

***

**BOOM.**

It came crashing like thunder, like storming surf, resounding in near every room of the Institute. Not in the Infirmary, no, for in places as busy as Institutes were apt to be the rooms of healing were soundproofed, to guard their patients’ rest; and not in most of the bedrooms, either, for the sun was still high in the sky and in the normal course of things all Shadowhunters beneath the Institute’s roof would be sleeping, gathering strength for the night to come. But the sound of someone at the doors swept into every other corner in a flood, from the greenhouse on the roof to the cellars that had once been prison cells under the ground, and in the wake of the angel’s screams there were many who had to clutch at still-pained and fragile ears and guard them against it.

**BOOM.**

Maryse’s ears were still ringing slightly, but she swept through the entrance hall like an empress, and if the knots of Shadowhunters and scholars drew away from her like lords from leprosy rather than as subjects from their queen, still she held her head high. She had taken the time to clean the blood from her ears, if she had bled at all; she stood cool and composed as a marble statue as the 108 locks of the great doors came undone at her imperious gesture, and waited to greet whoever had come.

“Lucian?!”

Lucian Graymark gave a wolf’s grin that was no grin at all. “Maryse. Where,” he snarled, “is my son?”

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**NOTES**

A witch ball is usually a hollow sphere of coloured glass that is hung in windows as a charm against witches or witchcraft. Within modern witchcraft, witch balls are sometimes filled with herbs and other ingredients to bring blessings on the household, or as active spells. That’s the way in which Catarina is using it.
A cinnamalogus is a mythological creature colloquially known as the cinnamon bird, who, predictably, builds its nest out of cinnamon. The story goes that when spice hunters/sellers wanted cinnamon, they would knock a cinnamalogus’ nest out of its tree with lead weights to sell the sticks.

Austėja is a Lithuanian goddess of bees, flowers and honey, friendship, the family unit, and the sun. A lot of her rituals revolve around friendship and marriage; she’s a really wonderful goddess.

Ma’at is the Egyptian goddess of truth and justice. As if that wasn’t badass enough, she was also the one who set order from chaos at the beginning of time, and regulated/controlled the seasons, the movements of the stars, and the actions of gods and mortals alike.

You can read the whole story of Clary and Olianthe’s first meeting in *City of Mirrors*, ‘The White Knight is a Princess’.

If you missed the fact that Runed!Clary is neopagan, I’m afraid you have not been paying attention, my friends.

Bearnon Bride is a Scottish Gaelic name for a dandelion.

*Mångata* is a Swedish word for the road-like shape of moonlight on water one sees while facing the horizon.

Autognosis is defined by thefreedictionary dot com as ‘knowledge or understanding of one’s own nature, abilities, and limitations; insight into oneself’.

Plerosis is a theological term, meaning the act or process of being made full or complete.

Self-schema are the beliefs and ideas one has about oneself. Self-schism is a term I made up, with the kind of obvious meaning of a schism with or within oneself.

A nonpareil is a peerless object or person; something/someone who/which is priceless and best.

For those who are not mad myth-geeks like myself, Tam Lin is a character in a Scottish ballad; a faerie man who in most versions was once human, but taken captive by the faerie queen. Janet is a human woman who rescues him, more or less, by winning the challenge the queen sets her: Janet has to hold fast to Tam Lin while the queen turns Tam Lin into various shapes, like a snake, a black dog, and ‘a flash of fire’.

*Aoiveons* is an Enochian hypocorism, a term of endearment; literally, star-heart.

*Fesharszi* is *peace* in demonic Enochian.

*Brigadeiros* are a super-yummy Brazilian dessert/treat made of cocoa powder, condensed milk, and butter, rolled in chocolate sprinkles. I heartily recommend them.

*Ashipu-ene* is the plural of *ashipu*, which is what everyone but the Nephilim call warlocks.

*Perkele* is a Finnish swearword, analogous to shit/fuck. Literally it means ‘devil’.

*Shemayet* is a modern rendering of the ancient Egyptian word *s_m’yt*, which is translated as ‘chantress’ and was the title of an extremely important priestess of each religious order.

*A zemer* is a religious Jewish song, typically sung in Aramaic or Hebrew, analogous to a hymn.

Annwn is one of the names for the Otherworld in Celtic mythology; specifically the Welsh name for it.
Bibbidi bobbidi boo is from Disney’s Cinderella (1950). It’s the song/incantation sung by the fairy godmother when she’s making Cinderella’s ballgown.

Eresh is the Sumerian word for Queen.

Ahatki is the Sumerian word for sister.

Nirvana is literally the state of becoming one with the universe, or Brahman, in Hindu philosophy, and is the sense in which the term is used here.

Nanaeel—my power, Enochian. Used here as a term of respect or endearment.

Caos—literally ‘tangibility’ in Enochian; used as a catch-all term for the material realm of existence (as opposed to the dark place where Kashtokaz and not-Simon have been hanging out, or the realm of dreams.)
And the Blood Will Run Cold

Chapter Notes

HEY GUYS, GUESS WHAT? I’M NOT DEAD!

No, but seriously, I am so ridiculously sorry this chapter has been so long in coming! I don’t even know. I quit my degree without graduating, my social anxiety went haywire to the point I couldn’t open up social media or any of my fics, or leave the damn house without risking a panic attack. (I’m still struggling to answer emails and be any kind of active on tumblr. I’m sorry to everyone who’s tried to talk to me and been left hanging <3) I had a depression spiral, got better, moved house, started a new job—I say ‘new’, it was my first one ever!—part-time, and then early this year I went full-time JUST as we got a new CEO, who proceeded to fuck-up EVERYTHING, to the point that I was literally ordered to go to our work therapist, because I just completely lost it. Burn-out and depression and exhaustion, but also, volcanic levels of rage because Stress. (I would argue, because of fucking idiots being in charge, but whatever). At one point, I threatened to quit and go to the press if the new CEO did not contact the police herself over A Thing. Let’s just not even, okay?

But we just got a new CEO, and the change has been nothing short of magical, I am happy to be at work again, my meds have been adjusted, life is pretty freaking awesome right now. So I’m okay. I am SO okay, in fact, that the next chapter is already written, and just needs some polishing before I can give it to you!

I need to say an ENORMOUS freaking thank you to Starrie_Wolf, who continues to be unreasonably epic and the best beta imaginable, despite having so much on their own plate. And I also want to say thank you to everybody who left comments, both before and after I went MIA. You guys made me cry happy tears, and like magic, some of the most wonderful comments showed up just when I really needed some love. I’m still utterly useless at ANSWERING, but I read every one and I treasure them. I love you guys so much <3

Now, I can only hope that the next two chapters have been worth the wait :) PREPARE YOURSELF FOR SOME REVELATIONS!

Also: I won’t be going back and editing past chapters (at least not yet), but as of now, fantasy terms will only be italicised the first time they show up in the fic. That doesn’t apply to things like Enochian, or words like parabatai, but things like ashipu-rei won’t be in italics anymore, since they were introduced in earlier chapters. Since it’s been a while, I do recommend at least rereading the last chapter, but as usual, all the weird new words will be explained in the Notes.

NOW LET’S DO THIS THING!

“Jace,” Simon whispered, and the recognition in his eyes was a lighthouse in a midnight storm: sanctuary, sacrament, salvation.
Jace knelt at his side as at an altar, and his answer was a hosanna. “Yes.” He swept his hand over Simon’s hair and down to his cheek, needing to touch him, hardly able to breathe through the collar of ardent gratitude wrapped tight around his throat. “I’m here, aikane.”

Simon sighed, the highwire-tension melting out of him with that long, steady breath, and closed his eyes.

And did not open them again.

For an instant cold and sharp as a dagger to the heart, Jace thought Simon had died. But no; no, he was breathing, his chest rising and falling, and Jace pressed his face to the edge of the bed and whispered a prayer of thanks every bit as fervent as when he’d woken after Hodge’s betrayal and felt the echo of Alec’s heart still beating with his own.

*Thank you, thank you, thank you.*

“Arrest him.” The Inquisitor’s voice trembled, whether with rage or fear or some other emotion Jace couldn’t guess, but the command in them lashed like a manticore’s tail across Jace’s back and he raised his head even as he looked out of Alec’s eyes. “Arrest *all* of them—how did you even get *out*—”

“Oh, enough, Imogen.” The Secretseeker who’d held her back before made a dismissive gesture, without looking at her. No, her eyes were locked on Jace, and the speculative, hungry look in them made wariness bloom like blood in water through the *agela* bond.

“‘Enough’?” The Inquisitor whirled on her, furious. “It is the outside of enough! Janim Christopher is a self-confessed *rapist*, and that boy you let him *fondle* is his victim! What—”

“If that’s your idea of ‘fondling’, no wonder you never remarried,” the woman said dryly. Izzy nearly choked. Alec stared. The Inquisitor flushed, a ruddy and unbecoming backdrop for the sheer disbelief that met the Secretseeker’s pronouncement. “Heulwen, you can’t seriously—”

But the woman stopped her with an imperious hand. “*Enough*, I said,” and her voice this time was a warning, the ozone-crackle of the air before the thunder. “Events have moved beyond your purview, Inquisitor.” Though it was slight, no one could miss the faint stress placed on the title, any more than they could miss her clear transition from a woman speaking with a personal acquaintance, to the head of one of the most powerful—and feared—Nephilim castes addressing a subordinate. “*Agela* Sariel and their brother are no longer your concern.”

“I understand that you want to allow a rapist to escape justice,” the Inquisitor snapped. “I understand that you would spit in the face of the Law and leave Valentine laughing!”

The Secretseeker’s mien chilled again. “You have your mandate and I have mine, Inquisitor. The situation has now moved beyond the jurisdiction of yours. And frankly, I don’t care if he screws *incubi* in his spare time; Janim and his kin *are no longer your concern*.”

Through Izzy and Alec’s eyes, Sariel saw the Inquisitor’s hands curl briefly into fists at her sides.
Through their hearts, they felt the crash of relief and fear like the breaking of a wave, the cool water and bitter brine together. It was a stay of execution; it was a trap snapping closed.

And yet because they were agelai, they saw through Jace’s eyes too, were inside his skin as he knelt by Simon’s bed, and even as they watched the Inquisitor bend her head as if for a guillotine they saw Simon’s hand.

Curled white-knuckle tight around a secret.

Instantly Izzy’s memory of a dark room and Magnus and Alec’s hand opening like a blossom of light flared in Sariel’s shared mind; but this couldn’t be the same. No angel had touched Simon, one had only…

‘Only.’ As if possession could ever be only.

Carefully, they gently pried Simon’s fingers apart.

“Yes, Secretar,” the Inquisitor said stiffly. “I understand.” The glance she swept over the agela was like the swing of an axe, contemptuous and cold. “I will, however, still need to interview Janim and Isabelle about what occurred in the Silent City.”

“That seems reasonable,” the other woman said. “You may conduct your interview once they’ve had a chance to refresh and gather themselves. I’ll escort them to you myself.”

Sariel was no longer listening; Sariel could not hear. The sight of what Simon held struck like a hammer to a gong, making the whole world reverberate and blowing the meius apart like shattering glass, an explosion like the touch of the Soul Sword; Izzy staggered and Alec fell to his knees and abruptly Jace was alone in his body, alone with his bones singing-ringing like crystal bells and the world gone silver and strange around him, fluid and unreal, with only Simon blazing gold in the blurred bed and the object in his hand—

—the tiny object in his hand shining like a star—

—And then it fell into Jace’s palm and they were whole again, one again as Jace folded his fingers around it and a healer was bending to check on Alec and the Inquisitor swept from the room in disgust, at the spectacle or the usurpation of the Law, who could tell? Her people followed her out with steel spines or hesitant miens, carrying those wounded who needed the help.

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” Alec insisted, and Izzy added through his lips, “It just overwhelmed me for a moment. The relief...”

*Thanks,* Alec said dryly as the healer insisted on drawing a diagnostic rune on his arm. *A reputation as a fainting flower. Just what I always wanted.*

*Would you rather tell them what really happened?*

*I’d like it if someone told me what just happened!*

But none of them knew, and there was no more to say when they could feel each other’s ignorance. Not here, not now, and Jace slipped the bibelot into a pocket, trembling.

Simon slumbered on, a mortal youth in an infirmary bed. Not gold, not afire. Bloodied, yes, and even as Jace thought it a number of the angelologists and healers brushed past him, the former in their pale grey robes, the latter with their torques of adamas around their throats. “Syr Morgenstern,” they murmured, avoiding his eyes; Jace rose shakily to his feet, getting out of their way as one of the
black-clad healers began gently wiping away the blood from Simon’s face with damp cloths.

Another was buckling closed the restraints they had not managed to fasten before Simon’s angel made the attempt impossible, and Jace felt sick, watching the leather straps bind Simon down. As if he were not already helpless enough, defenceless enough…

He felt his agelai draw his attention even as the Head Secretar called, “Syr Morgenstern.”

With effort, Jace turned his back on his brother and walked across the room to his agelai and the woman who had banished the shadow of the headman’s axe from his neck. He still felt almost dizzy and strange, but the bonds to his agelai were like safety-ropes in the dark, stepping stones over rapids. “Secretar,” Alec said through him, and Izzy knelt in his skin, drawing his hand to his heart. “Thank you.”

The Secretar looked down at him for a long moment, her expression masked, her thoughts hidden. “It wasn’t rape, was it?” she asked finally.

In battle-trance, no surprise could jolt an experienced Shadowhunter; if they had been wired like Light Worlders to freeze or jerk or bolt when faced with the unanticipated, they would have died out long ago. Instead, in trance, their minds ran faster, processed new information impossibly quickly, assimilating and analysing and acting, instead of reacting, in response to the unexpected.

But he wasn’t in trance now, and Jace’s head jerked up with white-hot shock that seared through all of Sariel.

*How did she—?*

“I saw how you went to him,” the Secretseeker said. “How you touched him. And I did not see Valentine’s hand-reared monster fondling his toy.” Her expression was still unreadable. “I do not think the man Imogen believes you to be would have braved an angel’s storming wings as I saw you do today. I do not think anyone would do that for anything but what they found most precious in all the world.” She smiled thinly. “And I cannot imagine how you could have survived raping an angel’s host in any case. So you see, Janim Sariel, I think our High Inquisitor is wrong about you. I can’t imagine how it could be otherwise.”

Jace said nothing, only bowing his head once more. Sariel said nothing. Their protestations would only confirm that the woman was right—and Alec and Isabelle were less than dedicated to the lie to begin with.

*If it protects Simon—*

*If it gets you thrown back in the Silent City—!*

The Secretseeker laid her hand on Jace’s head, as if in benediction. Jace’s skin crawled, but Izzy firmly kept his head down. “You need not fear the Inquisitor any more,” the woman said, and again Sariel glimpsed a covetousness in her, a tender kind of greed. “You are far too precious to be wasted in a cell. Angel-whisperer… Do you know, you are the first of our people since Jonathan Shadowhunter to come so near to an angel and survive?”

Sariel wasn’t sure how to answer that. “The angel manifested before the Inquisitor, Secretar,” they said after a beat, through Jace’s lips.

“To defend you.” The Secretar’s hand moved to Jace’s chin, and she tilted his head up to look him in the face again. The glitter of the angelologist’s key at her throat dazzled his eyes. “What makes you so special, I wonder?”
“I have no idea,” Jace answered honestly.

She examined him for a moment more with eyes like shards of blue ice—then released him and stepped back, gesturing for him to stand. “Well, we shall endeavour to discover it,” she said as he rose. “For the moment, you can consider yourself in my service and under my command.”

Getting to his feet again, Jace got his first good look at the angelologist, his impressions twining with those of his agelai. In her forties or fifties, she was older than most Shadowhunters ever lived to be, her dark hair silvered at the temples and her white skin weathered. She was dressed in the soft grey tunic-robe of the scholar caste; not loose and billowing like those of the wizards in the *Harry Potter* films but fitted to her form, with skin-tight sleeves extending to fingerless gloves at her hands. The belt of pale leather at her waist bore a buckle that matched the brooch fastening her high, stiff collar—the seraph-winged key of the secretari—and there were rings on her fingers, moonstones and emeralds and a *memento mori* ring of white gold set with a single pearl—which meant someone close to her had died, long enough ago for the mourning runes to fade, but not long enough to lift the weight of that past grief from her heart, her hand. Her robe ended below her knee, but not so low that they couldn’t see that her right leg had been replaced by a prosthetic of articulated steel and *adamas*, a clearly alchemical thing.

Between that injury and her weathered skin it was likely that she had been a Shadowhunter once, but obviously was no longer; more, she lacked the sharp, deadly beauty that was the signature of pureblooded Shadowhunters, her features rounder and softer, Raziel’s blood more diluted in her than in Jace or the Lightwoods. There had been no Light Worlders raised to the ranks of the Nephilim in generations, so either she had been born outside the Shadowhunter caste but earned her place in it through the Academy, or her Shadowhunter family was a relatively young one.

All this Sariel noted and processed in an instant, from three perspectives, drawing on the knowledge and memories of three minds as they said, through Alec’s body, “What does that entail?”

The Secretar—the High Secretar; with the authority to overrule the High Inquisitor, she could be no one else—turned to their Alec-body. “It means that for the moment, Janim’s duties as a Shadowhunter are suspended. In fact, all of you are forbidden to patrol. You are not to risk yourselves.” She swept a sharp look over them. “As agelai, harm to any one of you is harm to all, and that can no longer be borne. Janim’s bond with this angel is a priceless prize, and *nothing* comes before protecting it. Am I understood?”

Forbidden to patrol? But that was what they were for; they were Shadowhunters, as pureblooded as they came. To stand aside—to give up their mandate—to let the Infernal go unchecked…

*There’s been no demon attacks for weeks,* Izzy pointed out reasonably.

*No, but there’s a Downworlder war building!* Jace answered, and Alec’s guilt over the dead warlock and werewolf children underscored his thought.

*The Inquisitor brought dozens more Shadowhunters into the canton,* Izzy reminded them. *Let them take care of it!*

*And if the Inquisitor leaves now she’s got no one to string up? If she takes those Shadowhunters with her?*

“You’re asking us to break our oaths,” Alec said thickly.

“No,” the Secretseeker said, “I am ordering you to fulfil them in another way. A Shadowhunter’s life is never their own, but at this time, you can better serve the human race by preserving yourselves
than by slaying demons.”

*We can accede gracefully, and retain some control of the situation, or we can be compelled,* Izzy said bluntly. *We didn’t want the secretari involved. We didn’t want anyone to know about Simon.* Knowledge, wordless, flashed between and through them; that the angel had not appeared before the Clave but chosen Simon for its vessel, a Shadowhunter who refused the Oath and renounced, denounced tradition and duty both; the understanding-belief that the angel’s choice meant something, and whatever that meaning might be, it was not support for the status quo or those in power among the Nephilim. *Fine. But it’s too late for that. Now we have to mitigate what we can, and that will be much easier if she thinks we’re good little puppies who’ll come running when she snaps her fingers.*

*The closer we are to any research, the more we can learn,* Alec agreed.

*The more we can dissemble,* Jace whispered.

*The more we can help Simon,* they all thought.

The three of them bowed. “Yes, Secretar-Emeritus,” Jace said, giving her the suffix that denoted a retired Shadowhunter. “We understand.”

She raised her eyebrows; the agela couldn’t tell if she was pleased or surprised that they had deduced her past. “Secretar-Kleidoukhos Miracle will do, thank you. As I hope you too will find, my service as a scholar has far surpassed my contributions as a Shadowhunter.”

The casual dismissal of their caste stung like acidic ichor, but it fell on numbed flesh, because Alec’s memory had already offered up recognition of the epithet and the realisation bloomed like frost on a window, chilling and cold; Kleidoukhos, Keeper of the Keys. The head of the secretari order. They had already deduced who she must be—no mere scholar, or even a scholar-adept, could have pulled rank on the High Inquisitor of the Clave; not even one of the secretari, the angelologists around whom even Shadowhunters stepped softly. So of course this woman was the Kleidoukhos. There was no one else she could have been.

And yet, with Simon’s life fragile as a frangipani blossom in their cupped hands, the cold confirmation felt like something dangerous.

The Secretar-Kleidoukhos beckoned to one of the other secretari, and Izzy recognised the young woman who had been sent to summon the High Inquisitor before. “Elidi will see you freshly dressed and fed. I realise you should all be asleep by now, so please feel free to rest until the Inquisitor’s interview. I will want to interview you myself at some point, but I expect to be busy for several hours.” She was already looking past them to Simon, lying so still on his bed. “Elidi, if you would __—”

There was a commotion at the door, and when the agela turned, it was to see a young girl in the tunic of the scholae caste but without the badge of any order at her throat—an apprentice—looking apologetically to her mistress. “I’m sorry, Kleidoukhos, but the High Inquisitor requests your presence downstairs. There’s a werewolf claiming to be Symeon’s guardian...”

“A werewolf?” Miracle echoed, momentarily taken aback. But she glanced towards Simon, and her gaze was possessive, not that of a woman who meant to give up her prize. She turned to Jace. “Do you know who she means?”

It could only be Luke. But by the Fallen, what was the man doing here? “My mother’s...consort,” Jace said, every word a razor that would cut if not spoken with care. *Mother. My mother.* The
woman who was defined by her absence, by the empty space carved into Jace’s life; the body in the hospital bed (like Simon’s now) that meant nothing to him no matter how long he stared at it.

(Unlike Simon’s.)

(Unlike Simon’s.)

(Unlike—)

“We didn’t call him,” Izzy said, because Jace couldn’t. “We don’t know why he’s here.”

“Very well. He’ll be dealt with.” The Kleidoukhos gestured again. “Elidi, please take Agela Sariel wherever they want to go—find them clean clothes and something to eat, let them rest before we all face the Inquisition. You,” she beckoned the apprentice, “lead me to this werewolf who thinks he can steal an angel from the Nephilim.”

Alec raised his head. “May I join you?” When Miracle hesitated, he added, neatly turning her own logic back on her, “When one agelai rests, we all do. And it’s my agelai who’ve been having adventures. I’m well enough to bear witness.” And not nearly as much of a mess, he added silently. Izzy and Jace were still in their bloodstained cóadas, but Alec was in the pristine Shadowhunter gear he’d donned to interview the werewolf packs, and perfectly presentable by any Nephilim standard.

The Kleidoukhos scrutinised him a moment, but then nodded abruptly. “I suppose you’ve a right, at that. Come, then.”

The apprentice, looking anxious and harried, led them away. But just as Jace and Izzy could feel his every step in their own bones, so could Alec hear Elidi’s voice, solicitous as velvet, in his own ear as she asked, “And where can I escort the two of you, Syrs?”

And they all, every one of them, felt the pang in their shared heart as they left Simon to the clinical zeal of those who looked at him and saw only the angel, and not the boy.

***

Alec had never met Luke Garroway—Lucian Graymark—but even without Jace’s memories to draw on, even without his own inner senses immediately identifying the werewolf in the room, he would have known the man at once, just from the way he stood at the centre of the maelstrom he’d gathered around him.

“By Raziel’s lost bloody mirror, what have you dragged my son into?” Lucian demanded, seeing the Kleidoukhos enter. “The angelologists? Really?”

The food his agelai were devouring at that very moment was a warm weight in Alec’s belly, but something else came through their bond to him as Lucian spoke; another jolt of recognition, a memory that was not Jace’s but Izzy’s snapping to the fore like an arrow drawn lightning-fast from a quiver and nocked: Magnus’ apartment, her sleeping brothers, a stranger at the door and a conversation overheard. Graymark had reported to Magnus, the night Simon had summoned heavenly fire and a Greater Demon had knelt at his feet.

‘If you see Loss, tell her she has my thanks.’ Magnus had said that, to Graymark.

Loss. Catarina, who had diagnosed the damage the angel had done to Alec. Catarina, who had promised to come and look after Simon, but who had not arrived yet.

Was she still coming?
The memory of Alec’s phone ringing while the angel screamed shot through the agela bond like a crossbolt, a runed arrowhead to the gut, and now they surreptitiously drew the mobile from his pocket, checked the missed call as subtly as they could.

Catarina.

Why would she call, except to change her mind, to tell them she wasn’t going to come? And that seemed fair enough—standing opposed to the Clave was no safe place to be for a warlock—but there was Izzy’s memory, Magnus and Catarina both involved in some tangle with Graymark, a Nephilim werewolf set to some task for the High Warlock of Brooklyn the very night Simon lit up the sky with heavenly fire...

The arrowhead twisted sharply, barbs tearing as the realisation came, bloody and bright: *There is a conspiracy here.*

*Magnus and Catarina know more than they’ve told us.*

“I will thank you not to blaspheme in my presence,” the Kleidoukhos said, seating herself gracefully at the table. Alec remained standing, quickly taking in the other faces around the room as he hid his phone away again; the Inquisitor, a handful of golems against the walls, Shadowhunters and inquisitors and secretari Sariel didn’t know. And Graymark, who took a seat with empty chairs to either side of him.

Alec and the Kleidoukhos, it seemed, were not the last to arrive. The High Secretar had hardly sat down before the room’s doors opened again, and Alec’s mother walked in, pale with restrained anger, two spots of furious colour stark on her cheekbones. “High Inquisitor, Kleidoukhos,” she said stiffly, making her bow. “My apologies, but I can’t seem to locate my husband.”

“He has been arrested for subverting my orders,” the High Inquisitor said coolly, and Maryse wasn’t quite quick enough to suppress her flinch of shock. “If you want to represent this Institute, sit down. We have more pressing business.”

*For helping us,* Alec thought numbly, watching his mother take her seat.

*It was the right thing to do,* Izzy answered. And, with her own flash of bitter anger, *The first thing he’s done right for a while.*

“You can thank me for whatever you like,” Graymark said after a pause, returning his attention to the Kleidoukhos and High Inquisitor, “by giving me my son and ending this farce.”

“Your son?” Alec’s mother echoed incredulously.

The Kleidoukhos held up her hand for silence, then turned to the Inquisitor, leaning forward in her chair. “Who is this man?”

“My name,” the werewolf answered before anyone else could, in a low, cool voice, “is Lucian Graymark renas Michael.”

“Ah,” the Kleidoukhos said. She leant back in her chair. “Valentine’s parabatai. Of course you are. I should have guessed. Only someone arrogant enough to take the name of the leader of Heaven’s armies could stride in here and demand that to which you have no right.”

Michael, she meant; not one of the seven names forbidden to use for a seraph blade, but one rarely invoked nonetheless. Alec—and Jace, and Izzy—tried to imagine how anyone could claim that name for themselves, the audacity and hubris of naming your reforged soul after the greatest warrior of
Heaven. No mortal could live up to that, could be worthy of that.

But Graymark was a name with history too. The Nephilim didn’t have saints, but they had heroes, Shadowhunters who were remembered not by their birthnames but by the epithets that they earned, like Jonathan Shadowhunter. Yllona Graymark was one such, an Asended Shadowhunter in the 13th century whose skin could hardly bear Raziel’s Marks and whose runes, when she drew them, were pale grey instead of strong black. But she had led the campaign, and then the final charge, that wiped out the infamous Pricolici werewolf pack which had terrorised a huge swathe of Eastern Europe from their home territory in Moldavia. Her battle with Andrei Drăgoi, the pack Alpha, was a thing of legend, immortalised in epic poetry and a dozen tragic plays—because although Drăgoi had fallen beneath her sword, he had died after setting his teeth to her bare skin.

When it had become clear she was infected, she had taken her own life rather than become one of the monsters she had dedicated her life to destroying.

Jace had thought of that story when Simon first told him about Luke’s past. The painfully perfect irony of it, that Lucian had been turned just like his namesake...but had, unlike Yllona, refused suicide, even at his parabatai’s urging...there was a bitter and beautiful symmetry to it.

Sariel wondered what Lucian himself thought of it.

“Valentine chose our name,” Graymark said. “I followed where he led, Secretar—until I didn’t. You might recall that. It’s why we won the Uprising.”

Alec’s mother went, if possible, even whiter, and her jaw clenched.

Are you ashamed of your sins, mother? It didn’t look like shame.

Or are you bitter that Graymark betrayed you, when you betrayed all our people first?

“Be that as it may,” the Kleidoukhos said, “I was told that Symeon is the acknowledged son of Valentine Morgenstern. Have I been misled?”

“You have not.” Whatever their disagreements over Jace’s fate, it was clear the Inquisitor and Secretar-Kleidoukhos meant to present a united front before the Downworlder; the High Inquisitor showed no sign of her earlier frustration as she watched Graymark with a gaze like a bear-trap. “Both Valentine himself and the Morgenstern family rings acknowledged the boy.”

“I was Valentine’s parabatai,” Graymark said. “His children are mine under the Law.”

“The operative word being, was,” the Kleidoukhos said. “You are no longer.”

“More pertinently, you are not even Nephilim,” the Inquisitor interjected. “No Downworlder can claim guardianship of a Shadowhunter child.”

“And the Clave can’t just kidnap the children of ex-Shadowhunters!” Graymark snapped, a snarl curling through too many teeth. “Yet that’s what I see happening here. You have three chances to ask Shadowhunter children raised outside Raziel’s aegis if they’ll take up his mandate, and then their lives are their own. That is the Law. Have you asked Simon? Because I’ll tell you right now, he’ll spit it back in your face.”

“Jocelyn Fairchild is not an ex-anything,” the Inquisitor said coldly. “She is a fugitive who illegally abandoned her post and her duty. She was never stripped of her runes, and so was never legally made noncaste. Which makes her progeny, as the children of two criminals, wards of the Clave.”
“Janim is of age,” Graymark pointed out, “and the legal paterfamilias of House Morgenstern.” He hesitated, and Sariel wondered how hard it was for him to say, “By the Law, if Simon is anyone’s ward, he’s Janim’s, not the Clave’s.”

He had been disgusted when he discovered how true to their name Morgenstern’s two last scions were, how they had fallen like Lucifer for sin, for each other, twin stars in free-fall. In all the months since Renwicks he had never once reached out to Jace, never sought to meet him, to face him, this man who knew Jace’s family as no one else ever could—Valentine’s parabatai, Jocelyn’s agelai, who had fought in the Uprising and stood as father to Simon for nearly all his life. He held the answers to all the questions Jace could never ask, and Alec felt the weight of them in his own throat, the longing and the anger like the blooms and thorns of brier-roses, silk-soft and shrapnel-sharp, tangled and strangling and edging too close to something like hate.

It was a hate that spread like flames, licking from agelai to agelai like a wildfire between drought-dry trees, growing brighter, hotter, fiercer with every branch consumed. Izzy had eventually coaxed out of Clary the reason Simon would not stay with or speak of the man who’d helped to raise him, why he would get up and leave his mother’s hospital room rather than breathe the same air as Lucian Graymark. This was the man who had taken Simon away—wounded, exhausted, trusting—to be cured of loving boys, and Alec had spent too long despising himself for the same thing, as Izzy had spent too long fighting to protect him from their world’s unforgiving prejudices, for them not to feel as Jace felt: all wormwood and sulphur and the ache of a palm for the hilt of a knife.

This was the man who had betrayed Simon at every turn, and nothing in Sariel could forgive him for it.

He is OURS.

They did not believe for one second that Graymark wanted Simon as Jace’s ward. It might be that he trusted Jace not to force Simon into anything he did not want to be… But they doubted it.

It was only a feint, the flashy sword-work that distracted from the dagger sliding up and under your ribs.

“Janim Christopher—” the Inquisitor began hotly.

The Kleidoukhos cut her off. “—is unable to claim the mantle of paterfamilias at this time,” she said smoothly. “And is unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future.”

Graymark closed his eyes behind the thin gold frames of his glasses. “Fine.” He bent down, reaching into a bag Alec couldn’t see from where he stood, and withdrew a sheaf of papers.

“And what are these?” the Inquisitor asked, as Graymark slid the unremarkable beige folder across the table to the two women.

“Witnessed and binding documentation declaring me Simon’s legal guardian in the case of his mother’s incapacitation,” Graymark said.

The Kleidoukhos looked sharply at him, but the Inquisitor was already paging through the papers.

“These are mundane documents,” she said, with contemptuous disbelief. She closed the file, and handed it across to the Kleidoukhos when the other woman held her hand out for it. “They are not admissible in a Nephilim court, and certainly don’t bind the Clave.”

“As far as the mundane world is concerned,” Graymark said, “Simon is a mundane. He has a mundane birth certificate, school transcripts, a driving licence, a Facebook account. He has an
Angel-damned library card. He has friends, teachers, even fans of his band who will raise Hell if he disappears.”

“So?” the Inquisitor asked. “Mundanes go missing all the time. And the fact remains, Symeon is not a mundane. Our merchant adventurers will explain the situation to the police commissioner, the mayor—the mundane president himself, if necessary. Do you think they will risk their territories going unpatrolled by the Nephilim over one boy who is not even one of their own?”

“I think you underestimate mundane politicians if you think they can’t hear a threat as weak as that one,” Graymark said. “The Clave would never order any canton left deliberately undefended, and if they did, they’d have another Uprising on their hands—from their own Shadowhunters.”

No one corrected him, because everyone present knew he was absolutely correct.

“That still does not explain,” the Kleidoukhos said, putting down the file, “why, by the Angel, you think any mundane politician would put themselves at odds with the Clave for one boy.”

“Because you’ve broken the rules,” the werewolf snapped, and several people jumped. “The Shadow World and the mundane one are not meant to mix—and when they do it’s to be only briefly, quietly, according to strict protocols. You only get to spirit away mundane citizens who want to be Shadowhunters, who consent. And given that you didn’t lead with that, I feel damn confident that Simon’s done nothing of the kind.”

He smiled, cold and wry. “I’ve lived in the mundane world for a very long time, Inquisitor, Secretar. So believe me when I say that mundane politicians despise depending on anyone—and they are only too eager to pounce on the smallest of infractions, to punish anyone who sets a mere toe out of line. For a chance to put the arrogant, all-powerful Nephilim in their place after all these centuries? Yes, they would fight you for Simon. They’ll be salivating before I even finish explaining how you’ve kidnapped my white, straight-As son while his mother lies comatose in a hospital bed.”

Sariel knew basically nothing about Light Worlder politics; from the expressions of the other Nephilim in the room, Alec guessed that most of them were equally ignorant. America had a king who wasn’t a king, sort of like the Consul, didn’t they? And a council something like the Clave? Sariel had some vague idea from overhearing a few of Clary’s more passionate rants that the Light Worlder Clave had more men serving on it than women, which was ridiculous—everyone knew that women were better in positions of power than men, more rational and ruthless than any man could be—but that was all they could dredge up from their shared memories.

If the Light Worlder Clave was anything like the Nephilim one, though, Graymark might be right about their willingness to clash with Idris. Certainly Sariel couldn’t imagine the Nephilim Clave doing anything but going for the throat of anyone who crossed them, anyone who stepped out of line…

The Kleidoukhos must have been thinking along similar lines—but reached a very different conclusion, because she smiled, coldly. “I think you greatly overestimate the willingness of the mundanes to threaten their only protection from the Infernal threat they cannot even see,” she said. “And I think you greatly underestimate just how far the Clave will go to keep this boy.” She tilted her head, mocking contempt in her mien. “You don’t even know why, do you?”

Lucian looked wary. “Know what?”

The Kleidoukhos’s smile widened. “Some father,” she said softly, “to be so very ignorant about his supposed son.” She rose from her chair. “I would have thought your time as a Shadowhunter would have taught you the worthlessness of bluff’s you can’t make good on, Lucian Graymark. But I
suppose you’ve been running with beasts too long to remember how to think like a Nephilim.” She
turned to the High Inquisitor. “Send this fool away. If he wants to involve the mundane authorities,
let him try. I have more important things to attend to than animal control.”

She pushed back her chair, as if to sweep from the room—but her dramatic moment was abruptly
ruined as the doors of the chamber suddenly opened, revealing a Shadowhunter woman whose black
braids flowed into the black of her gear and whose skin was as smooth and dark as the wood of the
meeting table.

“Kleidoukhos,” she murmured, sketching a quick, distracted bow, “all. My apologies for
interrupting; please excuse me.” Without waiting to see her apologies accepted she crossed the room
in swift strides and bent to whisper something hurriedly into the Inquisitor’s ear.

Shadowhunter hearing was good, especially that of purebloods like Alec. But the woman knew how
softly to pitch her voice to prevent eavesdropping, and Alec had no idea what she said until the
Inquisitor’s face turned, if possible, even grimmer.

“Thank you, Syr Otieno,” she said. “I’ll join you in a moment.”

“Yes, Inquisitor.” Otieno dipped her head again, and left the room as swiftly as she’d entered it,
closing the doors carefully behind her.

The Kleidoukhos, still standing, regarded the Inquisitor with eyebrows raised. “Well?”

“Graymark must remain a little longer, I fear.” The High Inquisitor faced the room, and particularly
Luke, with an expression of hardened regret as the Kleidoukhos slowly took her seat again. “This is
not information I would usually divulge to a Downworlder at this stage of the investigation, but as
one of the local alphas, I think you have the right to know the threat potentially posed to your own
pack.”

“I would appreciate that,” Luke said warily.

Sariel thought of Simon and Clary’s disgust at Luke’s cavalier attitude to using his pack as cannon
fodder, and doubted the man was motivated by any kind of protective instinct, any sense of a leader’s
responsibility to the ones he led. But they held their tongue.

The Inquisitor did not close her eyes as a Light Worlder might have done, but the lines of her face
might have been etched of steel. “It seems the body of the werewolf child Arika Kijarr warned us to
expect has been found.”

“Luna,” Alec said without thinking—without thinking of propriety, etiquette, the respect for his
elders and superiors that should have prevented his interrupting; unable to think of anything but the
grieving wolves he’d met earlier that day, the men and women and teenagers who’d already known
that one of their own was dead. Because the Spiral Court had been to visit them too—hours before
the Nephilim, who should have prevented the death entirely, had come to darken their door. “Her
name was Luna.”

One of the Shadowhunter men standing at the wall snorted. “ ‘Luna’?” he echoed, giving the name a
creamy French lilt. “Really? Was Selene already taken?”

“She was thirteen,” Alec snapped, forgetting himself entirely in the wash of bright, clear rage that
struck like lightning at the man’s callous insensitivity. “She was mauled by some rabid vainottu and
survived to be turned into something out of her worst nightmares. She ran away from home when
she realised she was a danger to the people she loved, and made it to New York and a pack who
could teach her how not to be a monster. Could you have done as much at thirteen? Untrained, with no knowledge of the Shadow World?"

The man’s eyes, at first bright with surprised outrage at being called out, fell beneath Alec’s glare. “No,” he admitted, resentment and shame and guilt twisting through the single syllable, defining the hunch of his shoulders. “That’s…impressive.”

“Yes, it is.” Alec had to work not to curl his hands into fists. All he could see was the photo the werewolves had shown him, the picture of a shyly smiling Latina girl on someone’s phone. A girl he’d known was dead even as he held her picture in his hand. “I think she earned the right to call herself whatever she Angel-damned wanted, personally.”

“Syr Sariel is absolutely correct,” the Inquisitor said sharply. “A young girl is dead, Syr Durand. If you don’t find that cause for gravitas, then I will be happy to strike you from my team and send you back to Idris.”

The man’s eyes widened. “No, Inquisitor. My apologies. I spoke out of turn.”

“Yes, you did.” Her voice was adamas. “So far two children have been murdered, and there is no guarantee that the killer will stop here. If you find that grounds for amusement, you don’t belong in gear, never mind active service.”

Durand’s gaze fell to the floor. “Yes, Inquisitor.”

Sternly satisfied, the Inquisitor returned her attention to Luke. “I know Luna was not a member of your pack. But it may be that other werewolf children are in danger from the same killer. Look to your own, Graymark.”

*That’s what he was trying to do,* Izzy said wryly.

Except that wasn’t true, because Simon wasn’t Luke’s at all. Still. It was a piece of irony that Luke had come to claim Simon, but was instead only recognised as the guardian of minors he had no real relationship to at all.

Looking at Luke’s face, Sariel thought that the man knew it.

“Thank you for your information,” Luke said stiffly. He glanced around the room, at the Shadowhunters ranged along the walls. “I take it my audience is at an end?”

“It is,” the Inquisitor said. She nodded at two of her Shadowhunters. “Syrs Castan and Muri, please show our guest out.”

Evidently knowing when he was beaten—or perhaps, having once been a Shadowhunter, knowing when to retreat—Luke slowly rose from his chair and allowed himself to be escorted from the room.

“I’m afraid there’s more,” the Inquisitor said to them all, once the doors had closed behind the werewolf and his escort. This time, she briefly closed her eyes before continuing; her words were precise as scalpels, but there was real pain in her face. “Elias Ruth’s body was recovered alongside Luna’s. Preliminary examinations suggest that they were both killed by a sword-thrust through the chest—and that both were tortured before they died.”

The entire room fell so silent, a falling leaf would have echoed as it struck the carpet.

Demons didn’t use weapons. Abigor had wielded an infernal blade, the demonic equivalent of a seraph sword—but the black crystal blades were so rarely glimpsed that before that attack, most
Shadowhunters had believed them only legends. A vampire or werewolf would have no need for weaponry either, nor a warlock, who had all the offensive capabilities of their magic to call on at need.

Which left the fae…or one of the Nephilim.

*Valentine,* Jace whispered, and his agelai agreed. Who else stood to benefit from a war between Downworlders and Nephilim? Because that was what was coming, building. The Spiral Court had already declared they would not sign the Accords until Elias’ murderer was found; the other Downworlder peoples had been likely to follow their example even before their children, too, started dying.

And if the Accords went unsigned…

But Alec could hardly think of that. Could only see Luna’s photograph, as if seared onto the backs of his eyelids; could only hear Magnus’ quiet, cold voice saying ‘One of my children was murdered last night.’

‘Tortured before they died.’

*She was going home,* Alec thought, struck numb. *She was going to learn to control her wolf, and then she was going home. As soon as she knew she’d never hurt anyone, she was going home to her family.* That was what her packmates had told him, when he’d asked about her, when he’d proven he cared.

*She was supposed to go home.*

Did anyone know who they were, Luna’s family? Her parents—was there anyone who could tell them that their little girl was never coming home again, or would they hold that heartbreaking hope forever? Would anyone ever tell her brothers and sisters that she’d loved them so much, she’d run away rather than risk hurting them? Would her family ever know that they hadn’t failed her, hadn’t driven her away, but had instead raised a heroine braver than Alec could ever imagine being?

Did anyone even know what name to put on her gravestone?

And Elias—Magnus’ son—

Maybe Alec didn’t really have the right to bear the sureva mourning Marks for Elias’ death; alar was the mourning rune for a stranger, a sign of respect for the passing of someone you didn’t know personally. If he drew mourning Marks for a Downworlder at all—something he’d never heard of another Nephilim doing—tradition dictated that they be alar. He hadn’t even known the boy existed before the young warlock was murdered.

But every sureva Mark on him ached now, hot and sore as eyes trying not to weep.

“As horrifying as that is,” the Kleidoukhos said, “I think this is a business best left to the experts, and in this case I am not one of them.” She rose again and stepped away from the table. “May Raziel watch over you all, and guide you swiftly to justice’s execution.”

Many of the Shadowhunters bowed their heads in acknowledgement of the angelologists’s blessing, murmuring thanks or ritual responses of their own as she beckoned to Alec. He felt like an empty space still ringing with the striking of a gong, but he followed her out of the room without protest. He was a Shadowhunter too, but the Secretar-Kleidoukhos had already made it clear Sariel were to lay down their weapons for the foreseeable future. He would have no part in the hunt for the killer…
He stopped mid-stride.

The Secretar walked on a few paces further down the corridor before realising he was no longer following; she turned swiftly around to look back on him, as lithe on her leg of steel and crystal as Alec was on his two of flesh and bone. “Syr Sariel? Is there some problem?”

As if from very far away, Alec heard himself say, “Secretar-Kleidoukhos Miracle, I request permission to inform the High Warlock that the victims’ bodies have been recovered.”

“I was under the impression that the Spiral Court is well aware of these deaths,” the woman said. “Weren’t they the ones to tell us, both times, that a murder had occurred at all? I think it likely that they are already well aware of this development.”

Not so long ago, Alec would have yielded to the implicit pressure, to the implied command of a superior. But his sureva Marks throbbed like burns, and the one at the base of his spine refused to let him bow. “Even if that’s the case,” he said firmly, “the Spiral Court is very angry with the Nephilim right now. Doing them the courtesy of telling them their son’s body has been found could go a long way to smoothing things over.”

The Kleidoukhos eyed him thoughtfully. “You’re not wrong,” she admitted after a moment. “And I suppose it would be a safe enough errand, wouldn’t it? I don’t think the Court is angry enough to kill a Shadowhunter out of hand just yet.” She nodded once. “Very well. You may go as soon as the Inquisitor is done with your agelai; I think that is an interview we should both be present for.” Her eyes were sharp. “Will that suffice?”

Alec dipped his head. “Yes, Secretar-Kleidoukhos. Thank you.”

“Be brief as well as respectful when you do go, Syr Sariel. Shadowhunters are nocturnal creatures; you should be fast asleep by this time of day. I need your agela in prime condition, and that means all of you getting enough rest.”

“Yes, Secretar-Kleidoukhos,” he repeated. “I understand.”

“Excellent. Then let’s get this next bit of business over with, shall we?”

*

Sure enough, it wasn’t long before the Inquisitor came looking for those two facets of Sariel that were the only witnesses to whatever had happened in the Bone City—the only ones awake and talking, at least; no word came that Simon had woken again yet.

The agela wondered if the Kleidoukhos would be more obviously concerned about that if she had heard Max’s theories about the binding circle Arika had found outside the Institute.

‘Are you saying Simon’s not possessed?’

‘At the very least, whoever drew this did not think so.’

What did it mean?

What could it mean? If Simon wasn’t possessed, what was he?

And by the Fallen, who had drawn the circle?

Even with the speed and processing power of three minds, Sariel couldn’t come up with likely
answers before the Inquisitor was seated across the table from them, two golems arrayed against the wall and a recording telesma glowing bright around the chunk of crystal that would absorb and store their every word until kingdom come.

“Tell me everything,” she ordered.

They were *agelai*; even the few minutes they’d had for Jace and Izzy to wash and eat and dress, for Alec to oversee the utter dismissal of Graymark’s claim, had been time enough. Time enough for Jace to fasten the mysterious necklace that had appeared in Simon’s sleeping hand around his own throat, the chain hidden beneath the collar of his shirt and the golden pendant falling over his heart; and time enough for Sariel to take a scalpel to the truth and excise what they would not, could not tell the Inquisitor.

They were *agelai*; they were Sariel. They were faster than light itself, now, when they needed to be.

But even without the Mortal Sword, they knew better than to lie outright, and so they told the truth. Most of it—almost all of it—but only about the Silent City, and what had happened there. Not about before; not about Simon. With the Kleidoukhos sitting at the same table the Inquisitor steered reluctantly, resentfully clear of any questions about Jace and Simon’s relationship, but that still left plenty to tell; the shockwave of invisible fire that had torn through the Institute, that every Nephilim in the building had felt; the being of fire and light that had pulled Izzy in like gravity, like a planet to a sun, and commanded her to lead it to her brother-*agelai*.

“Syr Bellesword reported as much,” the Inquisitor said, tonelessly, and Sariel remembered that yes, Bellesword had been there, in the room with their father and Simon when the angel inside the latter had taken Izzy away. Of course she had gone straight to her commander with the news. Of course.

But she couldn’t have told the Inquisitor how the entrance of the Silent City had parted like a lover’s mouth at one hissed word from Simon’s lips. Only Isabelle had been witness to that.

She couldn’t have told the Inquisitor about the screams Jace had heard from his cell, or about the Silent Brother he had seen die in the light of a fallen torch. Only Jace had been witness to that.

And she couldn’t have told them about the slaughter Izzy and the angel had found in the necropolis, the bodies and the demon that had been down there in the dark.

“The Silent Brothers were already dead?” the Inquisitor asked sharply.

“Yes,” Izzy answered, surprised by the question. “All of them—all of them I could find. I don’t know if any of them might have escaped deeper into the City. But when we arrived, all we found were corpses.”

Alec, sitting next to the Kleidoukhos in his capacity as *agelai* to those being questioned and the *paterfamilias* of at least one of them (though it would be both, always both, in his own, their own hearts, no matter what the Law said or whose blood ran in Jace’s veins) understood what the Inquisitor was asking like a shock of cold water. “You thought the angel killed the Silent Brothers?”

“I thought it might have been Janim.” The Inquisitor spoke without wryness, unapologetic, and Sariel remembered the acidic burn of *alligatura* runes being traced around Jace’s wrists, before the Inquisitor’s stele had exploded in her hand. Remembered how the star-splinter shards had flown in every direction but Jace’s, leaving the incomplete Marks to fade away and scoring the Inquisitor’s face instead. “But that it could have been the angel’s work crossed my mind.”

There was no condemnation in her voice; it was clear that if the angel *had* done it, she wouldn’t have
sought to have it punished. How could she? And in fairness, Syrs Bellesword and Park were dead at
the hand of Simon’s angel.

(Or at Simon’s own hand, Sariel whispered, so low and soft it was barely a thought at all.)

“No Nephilim has survived encountering an angel for a thousand years,” the Kleidoukhos said. “Not
since Jonathan Shadowhunter himself appealed to Raziel has any angel consented to be summoned
and speak to us. All others, when summoned, have without fail destroyed their summoners instantly
and departed before the ashes settled.” She tipped her head towards Jace. “Making Syr Morgenstern’s situation unique, as the only Nephilim an angel has been willing to interact with since our Genitor.”

Not quite true, Sariel thought. Simon’s angel had interacted with Alec and Izzy, too; marked Alec’s
palm with an opalescent star and carried Isabelle in Simon’s arms and its own flaming wings. But it
didn’t seem wise to point this out, when it was Jace’s connection to Simon’s angel that was
protecting him from the Inquisitor’s wrath.

“I had not forgotten,” the Inquisitor said coolly, her tone proving Sariel’s caution well-warranted.

“What about Tessa Gray?” Izzy asked, to pull them all away from that potential minefield. “She had
an angel trapped in a pendant, didn’t she?” Alec had mentioned it, the morning after Simon—or the
creature inside him—had marked him. They had looked into it since, in what little time they’d all had
between preparing for the Inquisitor’s arrival.

“An abomination created by the warlock John Shade,” the Kleidoukhos said sharply, “and
perpetuated by his adopted son, Axel Mortmain, using foul magics no Nephilim would touch.” She
paused, and quite visibly reined herself in. “You must understand,” she continued more calmly, “that
the summoning ritual used by Jonathan Shadowhunter is the only form of angelic summoning
sanctioned by the Clave. And that is because it contains no binding element. The angel called upon is
free to answer and appear or not, and if it chooses to do so, it is not, cannot be compelled by any part
of the summoning circle. The ritual John Shade found or created dragged the angel Ithuriel from
Heaven all unwilling, caged and bound him and forced him to obey strictures placed upon him like
chains. That binding is what prevented Shade’s annihilation, and even so, in the end his blasphemy
destroyed his son. The Nephilim decided to cease all attempts at summoning rather than attempt such
a binding ourselves. Even if it would allow Nephilim summoners to survive, it would be anathema.”

Sariel didn’t need to be told that. They only had to remember the way Simon had burned with the
Mortal Sword in his hand, the galaxies Izzy had seen in the angel’s eyes, the heart-stopping glory of
the angel’s firestorm-wings as it fought the demon in the Silent City. The thought of chaining such a
creature, caging it… Even if they hadn’t had Raziel’s own blood in them, even if they hadn’t been
raised to revere the idea of such creatures—even Jace, who had not believed, had always known
what the idea of the Angel, of all angels, meant to his people—the mere thought of it would have
been wrong. Obscene. Profane.

*But that’s what someone tried to do, with the binding circle.* *Comprehension like a lightning
strike. *Lock the angel down, cage it in. Clip its wings.*

*But what if it’s not an angel? If Max is right, and Simon isn’t possessed?*

Ice like the hilt of a seraph blade fitting into a hand, cool and sharp and sanctified: *If they’re not
coming for an angel, then they’re coming after Simon.*

They all recognised the truth, a certainty as instinctive and inarguable as skiá-aird, as something bred
into their blood and bones: that was worse. It might be blasphemy, it might be twisted, it might be
that their agela was just too new and raw for Jace’s climactic, cataclysmic love for Simon not to infect Alec and Izzy like a virus, like a plague—it didn’t matter. It was still the truth.

It was worse, so much worse, if their nameless, faceless enemies were hunting not angels, but Simon—their Simon—

They’d snarled it as one to the thing inside him, once, at the power burning beneath his skin that made demons kneel and Raziel’s Marks sing; and they snarled it again now, inside, together, a pact sealed in the red-blue-gold flames that had made them agelai, in the white starfire that had fused them into meius, into Sariel—

You can’t have him, he’s ours!

It was considered and decided and done, in the space between one heartbeat and the next.

“‘The Law lays down a particular punishment for it,’” the Inquisitor said, oblivious to the riptide undercurrents that had passed, were passing beneath the surface of the agela. “‘For binding, or even attempting to bind, an angel to mortal will, a Nephilim is stripped of their Marks, having lost all right to bear them.’” Her gaze rested on Jace as a headman’s axe on the back of the condemned’s neck, readying for the strike. “‘And then they are cut, seven hundred and seventy-seven times, and hung upside-down above cursed earth to bleed out the blood of the angels they have sinned against.’”

Sariel looked back at her, unblinking. “Sounds unpleasant,” they said mildly, through Jace’s mouth.

“It is. It takes several hours to place every cut, of course—and they are shallow. The blasphemer does not bleed out quickly.” She turned momentarily contemplative. “‘I have been told that a mundane would be dead within hours simply from being upside-down for so long, which seems ridiculous to me.’” Her eyes cleared, and she returned her attention to Sariel, to I-in-we, to Jace. “‘But we Children of Raziel are stronger than that. It can take one of the Nephilim days to make their penance and die.’”

“Only appropriate,” Sariel agreed.

“Or so our records tell us,” the Inquisitor continued, as if they had not spoken. “‘In a thousand years, it has only been done twice, and the last was centuries ago.’” Her mouth twisted, into something that might almost have been called a smile. “‘But it is always possible that I might see it meted out during my lifetime.’”

“Enough, Imogen,” the Kleidoukhos said, and her voice was a warning as Izzy’s hand found Jace’s beneath the table and squeezed it tight, Alec feeling both his sister’s nails and Jace’s calluses as if he was both held and holding—felt them, and a rage that made him all too burningly aware of every blade tucked into and holstered in his gear, of how easy it would be to put a knife through the High Inquisitor’s eye, this woman who spoke of bleeding Jace to death as if she could imagine nothing sweeter than the red rain of his blood on blasted ground—“You’ve made your point. Perhaps we could return to the original one?”

“But of course.” The Inquisitor slid her gaze from Jace to Isabelle. “Syr Lightwood, you had just reached the Silent City?”

Without releasing Jace’s hand, Izzy told them about the demon, and how the angel had screamed, lunged after it (and in that moment, her memories and Jace’s clicked together like pieces of the same puzzle, the terrible roaring Jace had heard from his cell explained and comprehended in a silent flash) and fought it; the heavenly fire that had flooded the cavern from the angel’s burning wings, and Simon’s fragile human body at the centre of the firestorm, bleeding and breaking under the
power being channelled through him, beneath the demon’s blows.

She did not tell them, these two women hanging on her every word, how the angel had very nearly lost, how it might even have died—certainly Simon would have died, whether he was the warrior of light and flame or only its avatar—if not for the light that had come bursting from her, Isabelle’s, hands. She did not tell them how the world had seemed to break open inside her, how it had felt like touching the universe and her own soul both at once and discovering that they were the same thing, that she could grasp that selcouth force and let it spill through her and out of her like a scream, like tears, like a roar of defiance and refusal to let the world be what it was.

She did not tell them—Sariel did not tell them—that the angel, or maybe Simon, had called her naleli cayaare.

Star dancer.

Because maybe, maybe the angelologists would have wanted to take her away too, study her as well. Maybe it would have meant being taken to wherever Simon would be taken; maybe they would both vanish into the secretari’s ziggurat, and she would be close to him, close enough to help him somehow. But what would that mean, when Simon couldn’t control his powers, and Izzy didn’t even know if what had happened was her at all? Maybe what she’d felt had been Raziel, maybe she had only been the Angel’s instrument for a moment, maybe the power she’d felt moving through her had been his, and nothing she could call on or command. It would mean being trapped in the secretari’s stronghold with no way out, and simply keeping Simon company in captivity—if the secretari would even allow them that much, which was doubtful—wasn’t worth the price. 

Naleli cayaare.

She didn’t tell them.

But she told them how Simon’s enkeli Mark had glowed gold, how the locked doors had opened at his word and he had torn the door of Jace’s cell from the wall. Because they knew, the secretari and by now probably even the Clave knew that Simon was special, that he had something inside him that no one else did, and there was no point in trying to hide it anymore.

So long as they didn’t realise he could control the Marks on their bodies—and it was agony, wondering if the Inquisitor and her team had worked it out, if they had seen or understood what they’d seen when Simon flung the bodies of Shadowhunters aside without touching them, outside the entrance to the Silent City—they wouldn’t want to kill him. Right now they knew he was stronger than a normal Shadowhunter, they knew his runes could glow like witchlights and that there was unhUMAN fire and storming wings inside him—strange things, but holy. Right now they revered him, and as long as they did not start to fear him…then he should be safe, for now. As safe as Sariel could make him.

They did not tell the Inquisitor about the break-up, either. Instead, in a low, quiet voice, Jace took over the tale, starting from the screams he’d heard in the dark, the Silent Brother he’d seen die.

And Valentine. He told them about Valentine.

“Was he looking for you?” the Inquisitor asked sharply, and Jace shook his head.

“I don’t think so. He seemed surprised to see me.” A deep breath. “I asked him—accused him—of killing the Silent Brothers. He admitted to it. When I asked him why, he said they’d had something he needed.”
Beside Alec, the Kleidoukhos went still. Sitting across from Izzy and Jace, the Inquisitor paled, as if all the blood in her body had rushed out of seven hundred and seventy-seven cuts. “What was it?” she asked, and her voice—it was not the elegant, deadly snap of an electrum whip in a Shadowhunter’s hand, but the desperate and wild slash of a mundane trying to fight off a ravener with a steak knife; a sharp gleaming slice, but nescient and clumsy and afraid. “What did he say he wanted?”

It had not occurred to Sariel that a woman like the High Inquisitor could fear anything but a seraphim with Sielu shining in its hand.

“The Sword,” Jace said, baffled by the sudden drawn-bow tension in the air, between the two adult women. “He took the Mortal Sword. He already had it—he showed it to me—I don’t know what he wanted it for…”

Even Alec’s vast store of knowledge had nothing in it to explain why the Inquisitor swore, every word keen-edged and brittle as obsidian as she tore her stele through the recording telesma, breaking it and snatching up the crystal at its centre and all but hurling herself out of her chair, her golems half a step behind her as she very nearly ran from the room. The agela heard her snarling orders at someone in the hallway, and then the door closed behind her and she was gone, so abruptly Sariel reeled.

“What…” Sariel asked, through Isabelle’s lips. “What just…?”

“You have just become the lowest of Imogen’s priorities,” the Kleidoukhos said grimly. “Take what comfort from that you can.”

“Not that I’m complaining,” Jace said—and he wasn’t, he wasn’t because now he did not have to strip his heart bare and tell them how his father had said I am proud of you and what it had meant, how it had cut deeper than any wound ever dealt him, how something in him was still bleeding because of it, couldn’t breathe around it—“but why?”

“Obviously we have to get the Sword back,” Izzy said quickly, “it’s one of the Mortal Instruments. It was a gift from Raziel.” She said this with the quiet respect of any devout Nephilim.

“But it’s not like Valentine can do anything with it,” Alec said. “Can he? The Sword—it just makes you tell the truth.” He froze. “But if he captured one of our people, he could use it to interrogate them —”

“No,” the Kleidoukhos said. “Or rather, yes, he could do that, but he is unlikely to be able to abduct anyone whose secrets would be of value to him—the Inquisitor’s team are all well able to defend themselves and travel in groups in any case, and my secretari will not be leaving the Institute during our stay here. That is not what he wants the Sword for, much as I wish it were.”

“Then why?” Alec asked, because dread was tightening like a choke-collar around Jace’s throat and they were all still wound tight from the Inquisitor’s not-so-subtle threats and there was guilt (my father, our father) and a growing fear (even Abbadon and Abigor manifesting in this city did not bring the Inquisitor running as this did, does, what threat could be greater than a Greater Demon?) “I think—Kleidoukhos, I think we have a right to know—”

She looked sharply at him, at his turning her own words from before back on her like a chakram caught and sent flying back at the one who’d thrown it—but Alec didn’t take back what he’d said, and didn’t bow, and the pendant under Jace’s shirt weighed a world—

*Our responsibility our city we-I-us should have killed him, found him, he wanted the Cup for an
army but he didn’t get it, he wants meius-Jace, he wants Simon, what kind of horror could he wreak with Truth—*

What a stupid question from three-in-one who had been lying and lying and lying since Simon entered their lives, desperately trying to hide all the truths that could have ended them, that still could —

“You have guarded an angel and its vessel for months,” the Kleidoukhos said slowly, considering the three of them (the one of them). “From Valentine. From Greater Demons—even from the Clave. And much as our High Inquisitor would beg to differ, that your first loyalty was to this angel…is as it should be. What kind of Nephilim would you be, if you had placed the authority of a mortal assembly above that of Heaven?”

More softly: “It came to you, and not to the Clave.” She glanced at Alec’s gloved hand. “It has marked you—” Her eyes turned to Isabelle. “—borne you up in its arms—” To Jace. “—drawn Sielu itself to defend you. It chose you, and none others, above all others. I may not know why, but my first loyalty, too, is to Raziel and his kin. And Heaven’s will is clear in this.”

She drew a breath. “But not here.” She rose from her chair. “Come. I will tell you, but—not here.”

What could they do but follow her?

***

They waited over an hour—making use of the time to call their respective sects and update them on the situation—before they were sure that, against all expectations and millennia of lore, the anunnaku really had stopped mid-flare, and was not about to light up again. Twice in one day was already unprecedented; surely no anunnaku, especially one as young as this one was, could manage three flares in one day?

But the rules had already been broken too many times for the Captain to take the chance. Though the plan had been for Cas and Lucio to go and play scout, Cas was the one bonded to the team’s aurinko amulet and the only one who could interpret its signals: he had to stay with the majority of the team and continue to watch the Shadowhunter hive, just in case.

He hooked his little finger with Lucio’s, a weak smile on his lips. “Be safe, okay?”

“Always,” Lucio promised, but he didn’t even attempt to smile. They all knew the price that would need paying if a third flare did come: Cas, and the others staying, would be in far more danger then. Because there would be almost no chance of drawing another binding circle without the Nephilim catching them in the act, and then all Hell really would break loose.

The best that could be hoped for was that the Lightbringers were all able to swallow their cyanide pills before the Shadowhunters could stop them.

That knowledge was a shadow in Cas’ eyes as he looked to Ana—who, with Samuel hard at work hacking into the city’s CCTV network and Chi too weakened from her clash with the Shadowhunter sorcerer to go anywhere, was the only one who could be spared to accompany Lucio. “And you—play nice with my lovebirb or I’ll hex your hair moisturiser.”

Lucio rolled his eyes in fond exasperation at the ridiculous endearment; Ana tossed her long, beautiful braids in a deliberate parody of an American Mean Girl. “Please. As if my wards would even notice your little charms.”

“Ah, but that just makes them more deadly. My hexes are ninjas.” Cas grinned, something closer to a
real one this time. “You’ll never see them coming until—bam! Every hair-care bottle is now full of hydrogen peroxide, and you’re blonde.”

“You say that as if I would not be just as fabulous blonde,” Ana sniffed. “But fear not; I promise to behave myself.”

“That’s all I ask for.”

“And I.” María said from her position near the window. “I understand that adrenaline makes you babble, Cas, but Ana and Lucio must go.” Her voice held a note of gentleness in it, but it was still firm as stone.

“Yes, right, letting you guys go now;” Cas said, his smile waverling again as he let Lucio’s finger slip from his. “Good luck, you two.”

Abruptly Lucio’s freed hand curled around the back of Cas’ neck, and Cas froze, stilled like a held breath as Lucio tipped his forehead against Cas’, so close their lashes brushed as he closed his eyes.

“I will come back,” he murmured, for their ears alone. “But I will never forgive you if you are not here to come back to. Be safe, isingane.”

“Always,” Cas whispered. He did not reach out to touch Lucio, or tilt his head to bring their lips together. He held perfectly still, his eyes closed, treasuring the rare closeness, the warmth of Lucio’s hand on his nape.

Ana cleared her throat, and Lucio pulled away. Without another word, the two of them retrieved their weaponry and left, and no one who saw them do so could ever have questioned why they had been tapped to lead their own teams someday. The answer was writ in the pair’s every sleek, powerful line.

His hand going to the amulet of silver and gold and crystal hanging from his throat, Cas comforted himself with that reminder, and went to see if Chi needed anything.

* 

“Most of the Nasaru-ene will be asleep at this hour,” Ana said. They had not gone down to the street, but up to the roof of the building. “Or at least hidden away from the daylight. And we can’t go knocking on the knowes when the Courts don’t know we’re here.”

“The Captain already found this city’s entrance to the Goblin Market,” Lucio said. “Any of the ekimmu-ene who are awake will be there, and there’ll be kaisu-ene and dalenul-ene. More than we’d find in any other one place.” He eyed the gap between this roof and the next. “Can you make that jump?”

“Of course I can make the jump,” she said impatiently. “What do you think the Leiomano trains us for, accounting? I won’t even need a charm for it.”

“Sorry. Cas is the only human I’ve worked with long-term, and he has his runes. I’m never sure what the rest of you can and can’t do.” He glanced at her. “Never assume, right?”

“Never assume,” Ana agreed, with the air of one repeating a holy law. “But don’t worry, wakinyan. This human can keep up with you just fine.” She gave him a Look. “You know there’ll probably be ubärum-ene at the Market too.”

He made a small grimace of distaste. “I’ll survive.”
“You’d better. Cas will roast me like a chicken if I don’t bring you back safe and sound.” She moved away from the roof’s edge, readying for her jump. “I still can’t believe you’re fine with the dalenul-ene, but the ubārum-ene spoil your blood.”

“They upset me,” said Lucio, who’d had a while to get used to Ana’s Haitian idioms, “because they’re invaders.”

“Refugees,” Ana corrected.

“Invaders.”

“Well, if they are, they’ve been far politer about it than the caucazoids,” Ana said sarcastically, using the word Sam used whenever he saw his fellow white people fucking up on the news. She liked it better than the Haitian blan. The z gave it bite. “And there won’t be any of the local Court at the Market anyway, because the Courts never come out of their knowes in daylight. So suck it up, lightning bug.”

“Lightning bug?”

Ana flashed him a grin and sprinted for the edge of the roof—and leapt, even turning a playfully taunting somersault in the empty space between the buildings, before coming down in a neat roll, smooth as any Olympic gymnast, unfolding back to her feet as quick and lithe as a cat.

She looked back at Lucio and raised an eyebrow in teasing challenge.

His answer was instantaneous and unhuman, perfect stillness bursting into light-smearing speed without transition—and when he pushed off from the lip of the roof he shimmered as he soared, something blue and green and great unfolding from within him and blurring over his human outline for the long endless moment he hung poised in the empty air—something that folded away like wings as he touched down on the other side, as lightly as a bird.

“Cas,” he growled, “is the only one who gets to call me stupid names.”

Remembering the intimate goodbye she’d witnessed between the two boys, and what Cas risked by staying behind, Ana sobered. But she still sighed “Fine,” as dramatically as any white girl in a trashy sitcom, because a heavy heart made for a heavy hand on the blade, and heavy, slow hands got you killed. Better to joke and put aside worries they could do nothing about, and focus on their own mission. “I suppose I did promise to behave.”

The look he gave her said what he thought of that, but she knew that, like her dramatics, it was only an act. “If you get stolen by the ubārum-ene, I’m not buying you back.”

“Just so long as you understand that if they turn you into a frog for being rude to them, I’m not turning you back.”

They grinned at each other, understanding what lay beneath the words, and took off for the Market.

***

Institutes were great, sprawling things, larger inside than the buildings that housed them appeared to be. They twisted space in the same way that Idris, the Nephilim homeland, did; but where Idris had belonged to the fae before Jonathan Shadowhunter won it from them, it was the secretari and runecasters who recreated the effect for the Institutes, working Marks and telesme unknown to normal Shadowhunters into the foundations of the Nephilim sanctuaries. It was what allowed a building that physically took up no more space than an abandoned Light Worlerd church to contain
many more hundreds of rooms than it should have been able to.

It was also a fact of life that Sariel had never had cause to think about or question, which had only made Simon’s flailing reaction to it all the funnier.

‘It breaks the laws of physics!’ he’d wailed, and Jace had just grinned at him.

‘What are those?’

Simon’s spluttering had made him laugh so hard his ribs had ached.

As if Simon didn’t break those same laws every time he moved Shadowhunter-quick or felt Simiel lock against his palm, bonded and sure. As if every rune—every demon and every faerie, every Nephilim, didn’t smash the rules of Lightworlder scientists into grit and dust simply by existing.

The quick smile the memory brought faded as it was replaced by Jace’s memory of the seraphfire that had saved them from Abigor, Izzy’s of Simon’s body wreathed in heavenly flame and burning wings, Alec’s of star-dusted black eyes and a kiss that spilled a song down his throat like a comet’s diamondfire tail. The memory, seen through three pairs of eyes, of the black and gold storm that had torn apart the Infirmary, anchored in Simon’s scream.

He didn’t want to be a Shadowhunter. Didn’t want to be Nephilim. But how could he ever go back to the Light World now?

It was towards the Infirmary that the Kleidoukhos led them. The corridors around it were full of secretari and scholae apprentices, scribing runes and teleseme on walls and doors, carrying books and esoteric equipment the agelai couldn’t begin to guess the use of back and forth, barking orders and requests so thick with arcane jargon they might as well have been in another language entirely; a flurry of activity that could only be related to the angel in their midst. The room the Kleidoukhos brought them to had almost certainly been originally intended as a suite for visiting Shadowhunters, but now the furniture had been removed; in its place stood a table with a top of black marble, the stone inset with complicated designs in shining gold, designs reminiscent of the binding circle Arika had pointed out to Alec, the demon-summoning circles Sariel had studied so carefully under Hodge so they would always be able to identify—so they would always know how to kill—what some idiot Light Worlder or Accord-breaking warlock had let into the world. Circles and symbols meant for magic, neatly bracketed by steles and books and instruments of adamas not even Alec could guess the purpose of. Two young secretari stood on ladders, carefully scribing runes that hurt Sariel’s eyes onto the ceiling; unfamiliar Marks already covered nearly every inch of the walls and floor.

The Kleidoukhos swept a glance over the intricate maze of runes, then gestured at the two secretari. “Out,” she ordered, and they hastily climbed down from their ladders and fled the steel in their leader’s voice.

When the door had closed behind them, the Kleidoukhos said, “This room has been warded for my order’s work, but it will protect against eavesdroppers just as well.” She pointed to the ebony stools tucked under the table. “Please have a seat.”

What, Sariel thought as they obeyed, the razor-wire of dread crushing them into three-in-one, could possibly be so dangerous that it makes THIS level of precaution necessary?

The Kleidoukhos remained standing. She clasped her hands behind her back, her expression solemn, determined. Struggling, perhaps, now the moment had come to tell them what had set the Inquisitor running.
What horror Valentine wanted to wreak on the world now.

“My order,” she said finally. “You call us Secretseekers. But some secrets are too dangerous to be sought, and must be hidden instead. Scrubbed from our histories, expunged from every written record—known and held by only the few who can be trusted to guard it.” She paused, and a wry smile flashed across her mouth like a throwing star, there and gone. “Secretkeepers, if you like.”

“Who?” Sariel asked quietly, through Alec’s body.

She glanced at their Alec-body. “Consul, Kleidoukhos, High Inquisitor, Archimandrite—if he still lives—and the Anchorite. Who else?”

Who else indeed? The leaders of the Nephilim’s five most powerful sects and castes—the Consul for the Shadowhunters; the Kleidoukhos for the secretari; the High Inquisitor for the inquisitors; the Archimandrite of the Silent Brothers; and the Anchorite who led the Iron Sisters, the all-female order who forged every weapon of the Shadowhunters, the only ones who knew the secret of shaping adamas.

If there were buried secrets about the Sword, those five were the obvious ones to know them.

“When we ascend to our rank,” the Kleidoukhos said, “our predecessors whisper in our ears as they hand over the reins of power. They tell us what was told to them by the ones who came before, and what was told to them; Consul to Consul, Anchorite to Anchorite, back and back in a chain that has gone unbroken for eight hundred years.”

_Eight hundred years._ Sariel reeled beneath the weight of all that history, understanding at once the heavy responsibility of it, that a secret so closely guarded was being given to them, granted to them. A chain that had gone unbroken for so long, being broken now for their sake.

_No_, they reminded themselves. _For the angel’s sake. For Simon’s._

It was almost impossible to imagine—a conspiracy at the very heart of the Nephilim, stretching back so long. A secret passed on only as a whisper—what if one of them died before their successor was chosen? But of course, Sariel realised instantly, of course those five—Consul, Kleidoukhos, High Inquisitor, Archimandrite, Anchorite: they were roles that rarely took the ones who bore them into battle. The Consul was a Shadowhunter, yes, by blood, by caste—but not an active one, not one who patrolled. Not one likely to fall beneath the claws of some dark thing on some dark night. And if one did die before telling their heir—if the Anchorite died before her successor could be told the secret, then the Kleidoukhos or Archimandrite would do the telling, wouldn’t they?

What, Sariel wondered, the wondering a chain eight centuries long being wrapped around their necks, could be terrible enough, dangerous enough, to necessitate such incredible efforts to keep it hidden?

_Something terrible enough Valentine would massacre the entire Silent Brotherhood to take it._

She must have seen the question in their eyes. “Here it is, then, _Agela_ Sariel: the Mortal Sword does not only compel the truth. Perhaps you have heard the whispers that the demons a Shadowhunter kills each night do not truly die, are only banished from this world for a time and return again when they gather the strength for it?”

“Hodge told us that only an _agela_ could send a Greater Demon to the True Death,” Sariel said, through Alec’s numbed lips. “Because of how powerful it makes our Marks, our seraph blades. That the Greater Demons don’t really die otherwise, they only go back to the void… But… _all_ demons do
“So we think,” the Kleidoukhos said, and her voice was gentle. “If it makes you feel any better, parabatai and parastathentes can deal the True Death to any lesser demon. It is one reason the bonds are so prized.”

So every demon Jace and Alec had killed since they said their Oaths was killed for good. But not the ones before that, and none of Isabelle’s, ever. Her electrum whip might as well have been a child’s toy, for all the good it had done.

No, Sariel thought fiercely, no, no. It takes them time to come back. Sending them back to the void even for a little while is something, is everything. It still saves lives.

And from now on, from now on everything meius kills will stay dead, will stay dead forever —

But by the Angel, no wonder Shadowhunters were losing this war. For a moment the sheer hopelessness of it all overwhelmed them—nearly every demon struck down survived, but Shadowhunters who fell didn’t come back. And it took so much time and effort to create a Shadowhunter—nine months during which a Shadowhunter mother couldn’t patrol, years of raising and training, hundreds of thousands of celestes and hours poured into feeding them, arming them. Hadn’t Hodge said, once, that it took eighteen Nephilim to place a single Shadowhunter in the field? Two parents to breed them, four Iron Sisters to make their weapons and gear and steles, a tutor to teach them how to identify a monster and an instructor to train them in how to kill it, four merchant adventurers to maintain the pacts between Clave and Light World and make the money to pay for it all, and six wyrtweardu, the earth-guardian caste that was the bedrock and backbone of the Nephilim entire, to feed and clothe them…

The agela had no idea how demons reproduced or how fast they grew. But they would bet the entire Lightwood fortune—and the Morgenstern and Fairchild ones too—that it was faster and easier than growing and honing Shadowhunters.

“You’re not going to win!” Simon shouted in their memory. ‘It’s a war you will never win—’

And it was true, or it might be true, but Sariel thought now what Jace had thought then: That still doesn’t make it not worth fighting.

“The Mortal Sword kills them,” they said aloud. “Doesn’t it? It kills them all, for good, even if the person who uses it doesn’t have agelai.” And they had been raised not to question, to bow their heads and obey, but it caught like fire on oil inside them and the explosion of it, the raw red rage—it came spilling out like flames, like blood. “Then why don’t we use it?” they demanded, disbelief and accusation hurled like a Molotov cocktail, all searing heat and shattering glass. “You send us out to die, every Shadowhunter on Earth goes out every night to try and hold back the dark a little longer and we die for it and all along, all along you’ve had something that could kill them for good hanging on the wall of the Silent City? Why don’t we use it?”

“Because,” the Kleidoukhos said tiredly, “the power to deal the True Death is not all it grants. Whomsoever wields the Mortal Sword can use it to compel and command the legions of Hell. And that is certainly what Valentine will want it for.”

***

The Goblin Market was as busy and bright and beautiful as ever, and stepping through its gate was a lot like coming home.
Not completely, of course. The Leiomano order worked out of Cuba to patrol the entire Caribbean, and Lucio’s clan were home-grown Americans in a way no white would ever be; neither of their home grounds looked quite like this. But it was the epitome of what the Lightbringer sects all worked for, fought for, bled and died for; places like this, where magic was a thing of wonder instead of something to fear, and people of every kind could come together freely, in safety, needing to hide nothing of their natures.

Not like the Nephilim, with their merciless Law and tyrannical arrogance, holding themselves above and apart from those they professed to protect. So proud of the unhuman blood in their veins, and so blind to what it made them kin to.

In a perfect world, Shadowhunters and Lightbringers would have been two sides of the same coin. Their titles would have been two ways to name the same thing: people who protected the world, and humanity, from the monsters who wanted to destroy both. But they weren’t.

Maybe if they’d shared the same definitions of protect, and humanity, and monsters, they could have been. But they didn’t.

They never would.

*How*, Ana thought, as she and Lucio moved away from the Market’s entrance, *can they call this a ‘Downworld’?* As if it was something beneath them, the dark rotting underbelly of the ‘real’ world, instead of a world in its own right. Instead of something wondrous, magical, beautiful in its intricate, infinite complexity.

It wasn’t the Downworld. It was the Numinous.

It was far from Ana or Lucio’s first visit to the Goblin Market, and usually they would have been introducing themselves to the Nasaru-ene here, talking to the stallholders and buskers and shoppers openly, asking after families and troubles, keeping a finger on the Numinous’ pulse. The Market had gates all over the world; more than once a friendly smile and an easy chat with a nasaru had alerted some Lightbringer to a danger on the other side of the planet, information that could be passed directly to whichever sect dealt with the area in question. *Open hearts and open hands* had saved as many lives as *never assume anything*.

But today they wanted no one thinking about the Lightbringers and what they might be up to—not yet, not for now—and that meant going incognito, pretending not to be what they were. It meant avoiding those areas of the Market where Ana and Lucio were likely to be recognised, the charmsetters and secretsellers who knew them personally; and it meant not asking directly about what was going on in New York, lest anyone put two and two together and get four. It meant Lucio folding his true self down deep, so deep the shape and colour of it blurred into illegibility, because there were no wakinyan who were not also Lightbringers and anyone who recognised him for what he was would realise what the two of them had to logically be. Anyone with the senses for it would still know him for a nasaru, but the denizens and visitors of the Market who weren’t were… Well, they were very much in the minority. *Holhokit*, those humans untouched by the Numinous—*mundanes*, the Nephilim named them, blithely blind to their own contempt for those they were meant to protect—rarely knew about places like this, and visited them more rarely still.

There were some, though, especially gathered around the ekimmu-ene quarters of the Market. All kinds of people were drawn to the ones Hollywood called vampires: those who feared death, or craved it; those who hungered for the beauty and youth that being turned conferred. People who had needs the mortal BDSM scene couldn’t sate came to sell themselves as blood-slave *suburušim* for a night or a month or a year; some of them even became *bijoux de sang* in time, cherished and treasured blood-jewels. It was a trade the Lightbringers kept a close eye on, but for the most part the
ekimmu-ene policed themselves well enough.

And there were those who, by chance or fate, had stumbled through one of the Market’s many entrances unknowing, and, entranced, would belong to the Numinous forevermore.

But mostly the Market’s proprietors and customers and visitors were Nasaru-ene—denizens of the Numinous, those with the magic and power to be the Guardians the old Sumerian term named them. There were kiasu-ene, shapeshifters like Lucio and Chi whose type and kind had been born of this world and belonged to it; and there were dalenul-ene, shapeshifters who belonged here now but whose powers came not from the Earth, but from demonic viruses weaponised and released among humanity millennia ago. The urbar-ene, that the ignorant called werewolves, were one of these, but there were others who had remained better hidden from the Nephilim; weretigers and -elephants and -bears and a Noah’s Ark of others, all of them represented here. The úbārum-ene who raised Lucio’s hackles so were present—but only a few, and all of them fae of the Tribes and not the Courts, as Ana had predicted. They were all so radically different from each other, the úbārum-ene, that it was a mystery how even the chronically idiotic Shadowhunters had never realised that asparas and kelpies and cait sidhe weren’t separate races, but separate species.

Fae, from fatum, ‘ordained’, from bhā, the Proto-Indo-European root for ‘speak’. Because the thing that made them all fae was the promise they’d made, the oath sworn, a binding so much older and stronger than the Nephilim’s precious Accords that it had outlived entire civilisations. One none of them could break, whether they would or not.

One created by ancient kashshaptu-ene—human magic users like Ana, and Cas, and the thousands of witches and isangomas, machis and brujas, druids and kāhuna all over the world. Their existence was perhaps the most viciously-guarded secret of the Numinous; so many magical lines had been wiped out by the Nephilim in the centuries after Jonathan Shadowhunter, so much knowledge had been lost because early Shadowhunters had slaughtered or conscripted or enslaved anyone with the Sight, anyone they found using magic. The only source of magic was demons, the Nephilim said; warlock bastards and the Fair Folk, both—they claimed—products of Infernal rape, the one of human women, the other of angels and thus thrice times abominable. A human working magic could only mean a human consorting with the demonic, and the sentence for that was death—the death of the body, or the death of one’s humanity: a sword-thrust or the coin flip of the Mortal Cup, which might burn you to ash or might make you a gilded monster, left to do a lifetime’s penance as a Shadowhunter—with all the children they bred of you born into the same sick slavery, forever and ever.

When she was younger, Ana had sometimes had nightmares of the hard metal lip of the Cup being forced against her mouth, the taste of an angel’s blood choking her, searing her inside like acid. She could never decide whether the nightmares where it killed her were better or worse than the ones where it changed her.

But she wasn’t a little girl anymore; she was nineteen, one of the most powerful witches the Leiomano had seen in years and a blizzard with her blades, in training to become a patrol captain someday. Any Shadowhunter who tried to lay down the Law on her wouldn’t live to regret it.

And still, she’d felt a moment’s stomach-clenching nausea when she’d heard the Nephilim had recovered their lost Cup two months ago.

But they weren’t listening for news of the Cup now. With Lucio’s sword left behind and his true self obscured, there was nothing to give the two of them away as anything but what they appeared to be: two young Nasaru-ene out for a little shopping in a place where they didn’t need to hide what they were. No one hesitated to speak where they could hear, or fell over themselves to be helpful in ways
that only hindered, or took any notice of them at all. And if Cas would have been better at coaxing stories and secrets from people—he had a smile that could charm people like a puppy—well, the runes on his arms might also have gotten him mistaken for a Shadowhunter, which never ended well. And even without him, Ana and Lucio heard enough.

An ashipu child was dead, and his guardian with him; the Spiral Court had gone to New York to investigate, and demand justice from the Nephilim. Over mugs of spiced blood, pale ekimmu girls debated how likely they were to get it; the consensus seemed to be, not very. Kashshaptu-ene of all disciplines from all over the world murmured of fluctuations in power over the last few days, sharing concern and speculations over the trading of amulets for paket kongos, rubies for dragon scales, Nephilim runestones for potions. Eerily beautiful ubārum-ene of the Tribes whispered to each other of friends or acquaintances catching glimpses of the Court of Silver Stars, the first time the most reclusive of the fae courts had let itself be seen by outsiders in centuries. Boudas cackled like the hyenas they were beneath the skin that the Seelie Queen’s youngest child had fallen in love with a holhokki, a human girl with hair like fire and a heart to match, who would burn out quick as a candle, see if she didn’t.

“It’s like Romeo and Juliet,” sighed an encantado happily, momentarily dislodging the hat that hid the blowhole in his forehead.

“Doomed to end in tragedy?” Ana said under her breath, and Lucio laughed quietly.

And everywhere, everywhere there was talk of New York. The drop in demon activity, even as the stink of sulphur grew in the city’s shadows. The Spiral Court’s righteous rage, the ashipu-ene’s declaration that they would not sign the Accords before the one who had murdered their son and sister was found. The Market was a champagne fountain spiked with cyanide, bubbling and golden and laced with something bitter and awful; if the Spiral Court abandoned the Accords, would the dalenul-ene? The ekimmu-ene, the ubārum-ene? Was this a chance to break free of the Nephilim’s tyranny, or the seeds of war being sown? Everyone had a different opinion, and the two Lightbringers memorised all they overheard, but in the back of their minds it beat like a dying heart: why hadn’t the Spiral Court warned them of what they meant to do? Why was this the first they were hearing about the ashipu-ene’s holding the Accords hostage?

More demons, but no deaths, no attacks. A murdered child, an enraged Spiral Court; the Lightbringers cut out of the loop. The spells of kashshaptu-ene behaving erratically; the Court of Silver Stars circling like white wolves in mist, watchful—watching what?

An anunnaku, born somehow into one of the oldest Shadowhunter families, sheltered now in the Nephilim’s embrace. Gathering a coterie, coming into its powers, defying ancient lore with its strength. Watched over by a Shadowhunter sorcerer.

How did it all fit together?

“The ashipu-rei must have his hands full,” Lucio said casually, running his fingertips over a collection of dagger-wands without quite touching any of them. Bronze, ivory, slender rods of quartz that spiralled like unicorn horns… Cas didn’t use a wand, but would he like one he could stab people with? “With so much going on in his uru-zag.”

“All the stress has made him ill,” the stall’s owner said in sympathetic agreement, and she was a kashshaptu, a human who’d found her way into the Numinous but was no Lightbringer; she had no idea of the significance of her words, no idea how hard it was for Lucio and Ana not to outwardly react to the grenade she’d just thrown down at their feet.

“The poor man!” Ana said without missing a beat, though her fingers trembled minutely as she set
down the pendant she’d been pretending to consider, a peryton-antler amulet set with small chips of amber. “I don’t blame him. Is he very sick?”

“He must be,” the witch said, a middle-aged Jordan woman who’d lived in the Bronx for over a decade. “I heard he’s cancelled all his appointments and suspended all his usual services, and he’s never done anything like that before. He’s usually so good about keeping to his commitments.”

Ana and Lucio didn’t exchange glances, because that would have been obvious. Instead they made sympathetic noises and Ana asked where the woman got the antlers for her amulets and the conversation moved on without a ripple. Only when they were sure she wouldn’t connect their leaving to her news of Magnus Bane did they leave; without a gift for Cas—it would have been forever tainted by the shock of horrified realisation—but with Ana’s purse lighter the cost of one protection-spelled candle and their hearts heavier than lead.

They didn’t run. It would have called too much attention. But they hurried, quickly, back to the Market’s New York gate, back to where their communications devices worked and they could call the captain, right now.

They knew she wouldn’t begrudge the cost of the candle. The information gathered had been worth the price.

An ashipu child dead, and the ashipu-rei of the territory sick. Ancestors and loas help them, it was too much to be coincidence. It could only mean one thing.

No, the Captain wouldn’t be upset about the candle. Even its small magic would be welcome now. They were going to need all the help they could get.

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For a moment that felt like a lifetime, even the agela’s three-fold mind couldn’t process what they’d just been told.

“Valentine’s gathering a demon army?” they cried, sharp as claws on a blackboard from three throats full of horror thick as sulphur.

“At the very least, he must want to,” the Kleidoukhos said. “I think that’s a safe assumption to make, at this point.” She smiled grimly. “You see why the Inquisitor took her leave so hurriedly.”

Yes, they did! Of course they did, by the Angel—the thought of it—no, they could not even think it, couldn’t imagine it, Valentine with all the legions of Hell at his beck and call—

“I should have let him take the Cup,” they said, the realisation bitter as nightshade. “If I—if we—if he’d had that instead—”

“—then he could only have had a Shadowhunter army, yes,” the Kleidoukhos agreed, clinically. “Mortal, and every one who survived the change in need of training, and—unless he managed to get compulsion runes on them all the instant they Ascended—much more likely to refuse orders or turn on him. No demon will be able to do so much, if he holds the Mortal Sword in his hand.”

Sariel flinched, guilt sick and sour and dizzying in its depth, hammering their trifold soul like hail. A Shadowhunter army—an army of Ascended mundanes, not purebloods, slower and weaker and with less power to pour into their Marks and yes, one that would have needed so much training to be able to face true Nephilim—Valentine’s plans with the Cup would have taken him years, years during which the Clave could have sought him out and hunted him down. So many people would have died, Valentine wouldn’t have wasted time preparing the Light Worlders he chose for their
transformation, so many would have been burned alive by Raziel’s blood—but less, still so many less than would die now, if Valentine—

If he—

(A shard of a dream, a flash like crimson moonlight on black water; the towers of Alicante cracking in the heat of hellfire, falling like stars ripped from their moorings, the river through the city running red and a glimpse of eyes that burn like suns, twin suns flecked with jet—)

It was like the vision that had struck Jace outside the Silent City, but not, and Sariel felt it like an icy fingertip trailing down their spines. And yet it made them realise something else.

“But where will he get them?” Sariel asked, slowly, slowly even as their mind raced, snatching at pieces of knowledge and memory and inferences drawn from both and fitting them together, assembling them into a four-dimensional puzzle faster than light could fly. “He’d have to summon them one by one—there are holes in the world-wards but none of them are that big, none of them could let in an army—” And thank the Angel for it, because if they could Earth would have fallen long ago, drowned by the dark long before Jonathan Shadowhunter had a chance to light the fire of the Nephilim against it. “There’s time. We have time to find him, stop him—”

“You will do nothing,” the Kleidoukhos said sharply, and it was like slamming into a wall, the reminder that they were something to be protected now, and not the protectors. Their link to Simon turning them from sharp steel into soft gold, a maddening alchemy. “But yes, you are correct. Thank Raziel, Valentine will not be able to summon or deploy any kind of army immediately.”

That was something. It was more than something; it was hope, a chance.

“He’s probably in New York,” Sariel said. “Isn’t he?” Like the Goblin Market, the Silent City had entrances all over the world, any one of which could have been Valentine’s way in. But the murders, Elias and Xia and Luna… It had to be him.

“I would think so,” the Kleidoukhos said.

And Sariel was three-in-one, Alec’s self-mastery could only temper so much, couldn’t stop the parts of them that were all Jace and Izzy from crashing together like flint and steel and throwing fire. “How could he get his hands on it?” they demanded, because there was guilt but oh, no, they weren’t that stupid, this wasn’t even close to all their fault, no one had ever even hinted that letting Valentine keep the Cup was the safest option, would keep him from reaching for something worse— “Why was it there for him to take? It should have been being used! It can send demons to the True Death, it can command them—we could have been making them kill each other all this time!” It struck like a blow. “This could all have been over centuries ago,” they whispered, disbelieving. “It could have been over—”

The very thought was as if the planet had suddenly started spinning the other way, knocking every fixed star from its place and leaving nothing to navigate by; as if gravity had come unhooked and undone.

It could have been over.

‘You’re not going to win!’ Simon shouted again in their memory, but this time the words struck like shuriken, this time the armour of honour and duty and pride that had protected them before crumbled like blades too rusted to parry the blows of a truth that was no truth at all. ‘You told me that, you told me that, it’s a war you will never win—’
Because they could. They could win, they could have already won, they could have won it long ago, it could have been over—

_Dancing with Magnus where anyone-everyone can see_, Sariel whispered silently, with a pang. _Not having to hide the Light Worlde books that open their pages like doors to whole new worlds_—that was what over would mean. _Freedom. Fandom. Love._

_White picket fences._

No. Not that. Even a world without demons wouldn’t allow them _that._

“And who would you have trusted to wield it, Agela Sariel?” the Kleidoukhos asked, and her voice was a werewolf’s jaws snapping shut, poisoned teeth crushing down, but Sariel were almost grateful to be torn from their thoughts. “We are only the children of angels, not angels ourselves. Valentine is far from the only one who has tried to misuse the Soul Sword. Did you know Jonathan Shadowhunter was on his way to a mundane war when he appealed to Raziel? The Crusades, they called them. Pointless, bloody massacres that made the land they fought over run red and ruined. They lasted almost two hundred years.” Her smile was devoid of joy. “You might think they were none of our affair, and you would be right. But back then more Shadowhunters were Ascended than born, and the Cup did not burn the prides and prejudices of their mundane lives from them when they drank. They wanted to fight in mundane wars. They wanted to take the Sword and use it to direct demons against mundanes. Yes,” she said when Sariel recoiled, “for the sake of wars that no longer concerned them, they would have forsaken their oaths to Raziel. They would have gone so far. They nearly did. Jonathan Shadowhunter forbid it, but in time he died, and afterwards there were no voices as wise as his. The Nephilim chose Kings to rule us and we gave the Sword to them, and the monarchs used it themselves or gave it to their chosen champions and it was so easy. Set the demons against each other; set them on the werewolves and the vampires, on the fae and the warlocks. Cleanse the earth of them; kill them all. Why not? They were all demon-tainted, and it was centuries before the Accords. We would make this world pure again.”

The picture of Luna lit behind Sariel’s eyelids again; they saw Magnus’ grief at his murdered son. They saw _Magnus_, not just sick with some nameless ailment but ripped apart by monsters, monsters directed by a silver sword with a Shadowhunter’s Marked hand on the hilt—It pierced them like satanic stigmata, like the Sword run through their own chests.

_No._

“How did it stop?” Sariel whispered.

“There were accidents,” the Kleidoukhos said. “And accidents that were not accidents.” She shrugged under their look. “The Sword has its limits. Its wielder must remain perfectly focussed—if they are distracted, their hold on the demons they command is lost. And we could never send them back to destroy wherever it is they come from—once they pass beyond the world-wards, the Sword’s hold on them is broken. No one could compel all the demons in the world at once—some could command more, some fewer, but everyone had a limit. And as I said, they had to concentrate perfectly, especially to direct demons some distance away.” She made an elegant twisting gesture with one wrist. “And of course, the Downworlders fought back. Any Shadowhunter they found, they slaughtered. They united against us, burned a swathe through Idris and drove us back behind the protections of the Glass Towers. The Wild Hunt, the Court of Chaos, the Unseelie. The Spiral Court. The _úlfheðnar_ and the _obyri_—werewolf and vampire berserkers, like nothing that exist today. It didn’t matter that we had the Sword; no one could control enough demons to make a difference against that horde.”

Sariel stared at her. This—there was not a whisper of this in the history books. Hodge had never
even hinted at the existence of the kind of war this must have been. Even Alec’s ancient copy of the Codex—gifted now to Simon—had made no mention of it.

“And the holes in the world wards were only growing,” the Kleidoukhos continued. “More and more demons were coming through, more than we could ever hope to control, and no one was hunting them while the Downworlders hunted us. The mandate Raziel had given us was going unfulfilled. There was nothing King Nesrin could do but surrender, and try to bargain for her people’s lives. She promised that the Mortal Sword would never be used against Downworlders again, that for a hundred years no Shadowhunter would raise hand against any Downworlder, not even in self-defence. Most of the Nephilim’s wealth was given up, all monies and property held in the mundane world, and the fae demanded a Shadowhunter child in reparation for each faerie child struck down. Thank the Angel, the fae have children so seldom, there were few of those.”

Which would have made them all the more precious, Sariel thought, sickened. By the Angel. Who had chosen the Nephilim children to be given up? What had the fae done with them? To them? Had they been cherished in memory of those they had replaced? Or tortured in vengeance for those losses?

“And the King?” they asked, mouths dry.

“Was executed, along with her champion and consort. They gave themselves up to spare their people. But not before the King ordered the Sword buried in the Silent City, and all records of its powers burned.” The corner of the Kleidoukhos’ mouth was sharp as broken glass. “And in all these centuries, no one has ever wondered why the Mortal Sword was kept by the Silent Brothers, when the Mortal Cup was housed in the Gard, protected, but there for all to see.”

“It doesn’t seem to have made any difference,” Sariel said. “Since Valentine managed to steal both.”

The Kleidoukhos tipped her head, acknowledging the point. “And how he accomplished that is a matter for the inquisitors. But that is why no Shadowhunter has been permitted to wield the Sword, no matter how much easier it might make your mission. It makes it too easy. Power corrupts, and the Sword is one of the most powerful artifacts in the world. Who could resist the temptation to meddle in the affairs of mundanes, to direct demons into battles we have no part in? Or to use them against personal enemies? Whole lineages were wiped out that way, because some son or daughter of the bloodline angered Sielu’s Champion—and of course it was always an accident, personal anger corrupting the focus required to use the Sword, never intentional—and yet.” She spread her hands, an economic but eloquent gesture.

And yet. No, they couldn’t blame the ancient King for ordering the Sword hidden away. Was there anyone Sariel would trust with that much power? Anyone in whose hands they would place the Sword, if the choice was theirs? Not Simon, with his uncompromising loves and hatreds. Not the High Inquisitor, with her bitterness and blindness. Not the Kleidoukhos, who called interacting with Downworlders ‘animal control’. Not Max, with his icy, dispassionate jääydin heart. Maryse, Robert—never.

But an answer did present itself, and meius was split apart by it, three facets of one gem become three stars in one constellation so that Jace and Izzy could say *You.*

*We would trust you with it, Alec.*

There was no denial possible, no way to question or mock their faith in him—he could feel it, unconditional and absolute, certain as a coronet about his brow, crowning him with a halo in their eyes. It was humbling and terrifying and repulsive, all at once, and he recoiled, turning his heart from it.
“No. I am not that. I could never be that!”

“And now Valentine has it,” he said aloud, before his agelai could argue with him. He felt their
indignant disagreement and quashed it firmly. “But he can’t get himself an army quickly, and even
when he does, he’ll only be able to control so many. Right?”

The Kleidoukhos…hesitated.

“What?” Izzy demanded. “What else is there?”

What else could there be?

“Jonathan Shadowhunter was the Sword’s greatest wielder,” the Kleidoukhos said. “He could
control more demons at once than any Shadowhunter after him. And it may be that part of that was
his drinking Raziel’s blood hot from the vein. But a large part of it was his agela.”

Almost before Jace could frown, the understanding was already sweeping through the agela;
certainly before the Kleidoukhos explained, “The Mortal Sword requires immense focus to wield
effectively. Parabatai, agelai—the bonds increase a Shadowhunter’s ability to use the Sword
tenfold. The larger the agela, the more demons a Champion can command. Valentine no longer has
an agela, but as the Inquisitor pointed out to us all, Jocelyn Fairchild was never stripped of her
runes.”

“She’s still his parastathentes,” Izzy breathed, horror turning every word to sarin. “Oh, Raziel.”

“Will he come for my mother?” Jace asked sharply. “Will he try and take her again?”

“I don’t know,” the Kleidoukhos said gently. “It may depend on whether he needs her awake or not
to take advantage of their bond. And that, no one can know but him. There is no precedent for this
question.”

“But he might.” The shudder of it crawled cold and sharp through the agela’s veins. Jocelyn
Fairchild—there was an empty space in Jace’s heart where his love for his long-lost parent should be;
he didn’t know her, had never known her. She was an unmoving figure in a hospital bed, a blank
doll he could only clumsily and unconvincingly dress in the concept of mother. But that didn’t mean
he would see her back in Valentine’s hands; it didn’t mean he was numb to what losing her again
would do to Simon, who did love her, who had given up his humanity and walked into the dark to
find her and bring her home.

“Yes,” the Kleidoukhos said, quietly. “He might.”

***

“It’s the kilušargad,” Ana said desperately into her com. “Someone’s trying to perform the ritual!
Somebody’s started!”

“Explain,” María’s voice said crisply, after a pause that contained all the horror in the world.

They did, quickly laying out the evidence for their captain; the magical surges, the dead ashipu child,
the ashipu-rei suddenly struck down with sickness—even the glimpses of the Court of Silver Stars
made sense, because of course they would have sensed it, would be coming closer to the mortal
plane to investigate it themselves—

“Go to the ashipu-rei,” the Captain ordered, brittle as ice breaking. “Now. Get as close as you can,
reveal yourselves if you have to, but find out how sick he is. Find out everything you can as quickly
as you can.”

“Do you think the anunnaku’s a part of this?” Lucio asked, and Ana automatically reached for his hand at what she heard in his voice.

She stopped herself, remembering in time that he didn’t like to be touched—but he surprised her by taking it, and squeezing tight.

“I don’t know,” María said. “Isis hear me, I hope—I don’t know what to hope. Just go. *Quickly.*”

Without another word, Ana recast their glamours, and they ran.

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**NOTES**

Heulwen is a Welsh name meaning ‘sunshine’. It’s pronounced Hile-wen.

In our world, ‘Emeritus’ is a title given to retired professors. However, the original Latin means ‘retired soldier’, which is the sense in which the Nephilim use it.

Kleidoukhos is one of the epithets of the Greek goddess Hekate, who among other things was the goddess of witchcraft/magic.

Elidi means ‘gift of the sun’ in Greek; for obvious reasons many Nephilim have solar names.

Yes, Simon’s Light Worlder birth certificate is a forgery. Of course it is; he was born in Idris! But it’s a very good forgery and would definitely fool a Light Worlder court.

*Renás*, from the Latin word for ‘reborn’, is used a little like the French ‘née’ by Shadowhunters; although most *agélai* go by the name of their *agela*, a Shadowhunter can use *renás* to refer to their *agela* name and *nat* (from the Latin for ‘born’) for their family name. So Alec, for example, can go by Alexander Sariel, Alexander *renás* Sariel (if he’s being super formal), Alexander Sariel *nat* Lightwood, or Alexander Lightwood *renás* Sariel—although this last form is pretty uncommon; your family would have to be very stuck-up indeed to consider your House name more important than the name of your *agela*. The only time it’s considered normal to put your House name first is when you are no longer part of your *agela*: although obviously, this is not a situation that arises very often.

Technically, Shadowhunters who become Downworlders are no longer members of their birth House, and no longer have the right to their House name (their family rings will also no longer recognise them). Luke is in a special category of his own because he is the first and only member of House Graymark*; as someone born outside of the Shadowhunter caste, he was allowed to take a Shadowhunter name when graduating from the Academy, which effectively founded a new
Shadowhunter House. Because he was his own *paterfamilias*, there was no one to kick him out of his House when he became a werewolf, though officially in the Clave’s records, House Graymark is listed as extinct and its properties and monies were given to House Morgenstern, as Valentine and Jocelyn were Luke’s *agelai*.

(In all fairness, Luke *could* have retained his money and property; there are stipulations in the Accords for what happens to a Nephilim who has become a Downworlder. Downworlders cannot own property in Idris, but if Luke had stuck around instead of running away, the Clave would have remunerated him for his house and his finances would have been converted to the mundane currency of his choice and transferred into one of the merchant adventurer-run banks; the merchant adventurers would also have helped him set up a mundane identity, if he wanted that**. But he ran away after being turned, so in the absence of any heirs everything he had went to his ex-*agelai*.)

*Luke chose the name Graymark because it was the name of one of his heroes; however, in that case ‘Graymark’ was used as an epithet, in much the same way that Jonathan Shadowhunter was not the founder of the Nephilim’s actual name.*

**Treaties between world governments and the Clave mean that basically every Light World government is compelled to grant citizenship to any Nephilim or ex-Nephilim for whom the Clave asks it. Generally this is only used for those merchant adventurers born in Idris (most merchant adventurers, being born and raised in the Light World, don’t need anyone to create identities for them, since they have organically grown ones of their own) and the occasional Shadowhunter-turned-Downworlder or scholar. The vast majority of Shadowhunters are not legal citizens of the countries in which they patrol.

Pricolici are monsters from Romanian folklore, undead spirits that rise again as demonic wolves (as opposed to vampires, who retain the appearance of their human selves before death). Some myths say that pricolici are werewolves while alive, and become vampires when they die. In the case of the pack referenced in this chapter, there were some really nasty werewolves who took the name of these monsters for themselves and their pack; they weren’t literally demons as defined in this verse.

Naming conventions: some of you will no doubt have noticed that Jace, Alec and Izzy are variously addressed as Syr Morgenstern/Lightwood and Syr Sariel at different times by different people. Both are valid, but the general rule of thumb is that, if more than one *agelai* is present, you use their birthname to distinguish which individual you are actually addressing, if you are in fact addressing one person in particular and not all of them. Thus, the High Secretar calls Jace *Syr Morgenstern* when Alec and Izzy are also in the room, but calls Alec *Syr Sariel* when he’s the only one of the *agela* present.

*Vainottu* is a Nephilim insult/slur that came up back in chapter three, but just to remind you, it means ‘hunted’, aka, the evil that Shadowhunters stand against. To call someone *vainottu* is to say they have sunk to the level of demons themselves, and is thus obviously a *huge* insult.
Genitor means creator/father/ancestor in Latin, and is used by the Nephilim to refer to Jonathan Shadowhunter, especially in prayers.

*Skiá-aird,* as some of you might remember, is the name of the Shadowhunter sense that allows them to detect non-humans. It was first mentioned in chapter *Stillborn Truths,* but since it’s been a while since then I thought you all deserved the reminder!

*Isingane,* as best I could determine (and please, PLEASE correct me if I’m wrong!) means *darling* or *love* in Zuni. As you may remember, Lucio is a Zuni Native American.

*Wakinyan* is a Lakota word which…if you don’t know what it means I’m not going to tell you, because it will be revealed later. But after lots of intense internet research I am still unsure whether *wakinyan* is the singular or plural form, or if it works as both—I’ve seen it used to refer to a single individual and to a group, so that’s how I’m using it. If anyone knows better, again, please correct me!

*Wyrtweard* is literally ‘plant-guard’ in Old English, and the *wyrtweardu* are the foundational caste of the Nephilim (NOT the lowest—it’s very rude to phrase it that way. The wyrtweardu are the *foundation* of the Nephilim, the ones on whom all others depend, and are very respected.) You could call them farmers—they’re responsible for food production in Idris—but they do a lot more than ‘just’ growing grain; they raise animals for meat/eggs/milk/wool, hunt and fish, keep bee hives and orchards, raise silkworms, make alcohol… They’re also responsible for the runes and rituals that keep the earth and waters of Idris fertile and healthy, and interact with the various spirits/magical beasties that live in Idris alongside the Nephilim.

*Holhokit* is Finnish for ‘wards’, as in, the people one has guardianship of. The singular form is *holhokki*.

*Suburušim* is a word I mashed together from Sumerian that translates literally as ‘blood slave’.

Isangomas are South African healers who diagnose ailments with the help of spirits.

Machis are Mapuche healers, oracles and advisors; they commune with spirits, interpret dreams, and identify and stop evil witches.

Brujas are female practitioners of Brujería, or Mexican/Spanish-influenced witchcraft/folk magic. Common culture depicts them as evil, but anthropological research argues that they were demonised
by Colonial attitudes towards indigenous female healers and magic-workers.

Druids, in the modern day, are those who practice neo-Druidism or Druidry, which can be considered a practice or a religion. It’s a non-organised system, like Wicca, which means there’s no one set of rules or beliefs, though generally there’s the veneration of nature involved. The movement started in the 1960s when the historical druids weren’t much understood, so it’s not really accurate to claim that neo-Druidism mimics perfectly the practices of the ancient Celtic druids, any more than Wiccans can be said to actually be practising a tradition thousands of years old.

Kāhuna are Hawaiian experts of any skill or profession, but is used here to refer to sorcerers and healers of the Hawaiian tradition.

*Paket kongos* are sacred objects created by vodou priests and priestesses, meant to encourage or create a connection to a particular loa/lwa. The ones I’ve seen have all been very beautiful. They are not at all to be confused with mojo bags and no one but a priest or priestess of vodou should attempt to make one. If you come across one, don’t touch without permission!

Boudas are hyena shapeshifters, categorised as kiasu-ene (so, shapeshifters native to Earth) in this verse.

An entantado is a Brazilian dolphin shapeshifter, categorised as fae in this verse.

Just to remind everyone, *uru-zag* is the proper name for a High Warlock/ashipu-rei/En’s territory.

A peryton is a magical/mythical creature that is basically a deer with wings. Except very scary.

Nesrin is a Turkish name meaning ‘wild rose’. The wild rose has often been assigned anti-evil properties in various folklores—especially anti-vampire.

(Also yes, the Nephilim title of King is/was unisex and there were plenty of female ones.)
No Sickness Worse

Chapter Notes

This one goes out to everyone who commented on the previous chapter. I can’t tell you how much it means to me that so many of you have stuck around—and still care about this story—after all the delays. Guys, you brought me to tears. I can’t thank you enough ♥

This chapter is pretty obviously the second half of the last one; I still think they ought to have been one part…But that’s why I have the best beta ever, who is vastly smarter than me! Thank you too, Starrie, for sticking around so long, and still caring ♥

Now, trigger warnings: this chapter contains the mention and some discussion of gay conversion therapy and -centres. There is also a brief mention of lobotomy, used as a metaphor. The latter especially is one of my triggers, so I don’t want anyone who needed the warning not to get one.

‘Even the Sword can’t command demons into sunlight,’ the Kleidoukhos said when Alec reiterated his desire to go. ‘Not and let them survive it. You’ll be safe enough. Only remember what I said, Syr Sariel.’

He remembered. He couldn’t get any of the sick revelations she’d poured into their hands like poison-coated coins out of his head.

It was customary to wear short sleeves when in mourning. Between the long silken sleeves of Alec’s cóada and the armoured jacket of the gear he’d worn to interview the city’s werewolf packs, and the high collars of both, Alec’s mourning runes had been hidden—and he felt guilty for that; horribly, cowardly guilty. But he remembered how the Kleidoukhos had said ‘animal control’ and Durand had mocked little Luna’s very name, and knew it would have meant another mark against Agela Sariel, at a time when any blow might be the one that shattered their worn, brittle seraph-sword.

He had shown them to the werewolves, when the Inquisitor was occupied speaking with the pack alpha; briefly removed his jacket and let them see the crimson Marks on his inner elbows, stark and unmistakable as brands.

‘And who are you grieving for, Shadowhunter?’ one of the young men had asked, bitter and accusing.

‘Elias Ruth,’ Alec had answered quietly, and it was terrible, somehow, how much that had shocked them. How deeply it had struck them. Because of course, Nephilim never put themselves through the agony of mourning Marks for mere Downworlders.

He was pretty sure it was why they’d shown him Luna’s picture. Why they’d told him about her plans to go home, as soon as she was sure she could control her transformations and inner beast. Because, alone of all his kin, he was a Shadowhunter who grieved for the death of a Downworlder child.

He wore a plain black jacket as he left the Institute, but the moment he was out of sight he took it off
and tied it around his waist instead. His white t-shirt wasn’t proper mourning wear—it had no open or gauze panels to showcase the red Marks at the base of his spine and over the back of his heart, and it lacked the high stiff collar that opened at the back to frame the one at the nape of his neck—but it left the runes on his arms visible, stark and bright as blood against the white shirt and his pale skin. He had no white trousers, but he had found the most washed-out pair of jeans he owned, and the faded blue was the closest thing he had to mourning-white.

They hadn’t asked him if he was sure he wanted to do this, Izzy and Jace. There was no more need to ask, now that their three hearts beat in sync. Just as he hadn’t had to ask if they were all right; he knew they weren’t. None of them were. He could feel them both, now, curled up in Alec’s room—his old room—trying to sleep, the way they knew they had to.

Could feel them both lying awake, Izzy’s thoughts full of demonic armies and blinding white light spilling from her hands, Jace’s a sick maelstrom of guilt and worry, toying with the small golden thing they had found clenched in Simon’s hand.

A gold sphere the size of a nickel, hanging from a chain that spilled smooth as water through Jace’s fingers, thin and shining. A mysterious, impossible little bauble that he couldn’t seem to let go of, that felt magnetised to the bones of his palm.

Alec desperately wanted to ask Magnus how such a thing could appear in Simon’s hand from nowhere, what it might be and what it could mean. But he knew he couldn’t do it. Not now. Not with the message he had to deliver waiting heavy and toxic as a lump of orpiment in his throat. ‘Tortured before they died.’ Yet again, Alec felt the uselessness of his caste like a vice around his heart, because none of his training had ever taught him how to deliver a message like this. Shadowhunters didn’t comfort the living; they defended them from the Infernal, and when they failed at that they avenged the fallen. Should he tell Magnus this at all, or only that Elias’ body had been found? At least the Spiral Court already knew Elias was dead… Alec didn’t have to deliver that news.

It was not very much consolation.

***

The two Lightbringers made their way across the city faster than any holhokki could have; Lucio took his true form the moment there was space for it and carried Ana on his back, her body bent low against the wind and her arms wrapped tight around his feathered neck, his wings bearing them aloft and her magic hiding them from those above and below. They had memorised maps of the city in preparation for this mission, marked with the locations of things like the local Institute and the canton’s packhomes; it wasn’t so hard to find the ashipu-rei’s residence, even from above.

They alighted on a rooftop nearby, and Ana was scouting a path to the ground when she saw him. “Tonnè kraze’m!” she swore. “It’s a Shadowhunter. The same one Arika Kijarr was talking to!” She twisted the dial on her binoculars, but there was no mistaking that face, stamped with all the signs of pureblood Shadowhunter ancestry. “If he’s here to talk to the ashipu-ene about a Portal—!”

Lucio was already talking into the wristband that was his and Chi’s equivalent to the earpieces the rest of the team wore: the earbuds would have been lost every time the kitsune or wakinyan changed shape, so instead, the stretchy bracelets adjusted to go around their legs when they shifted. But if he couldn’t wear an earpiece like Ana, his eyes, far sharper than any human’s, needed no binoculars to see what she had seen.
She set the binoculars down and scrambled upright, snatching up her satchel and withdrawing what looked like a perfectly ordinary American penny, but was anything but. “I’m going to bug him.” She touched the silver pendant at her throat, a valentine’s heart with a dagger slid through it; a small red gem winked at the heart’s centre, a blue one on the dagger’s hilt. Erzulie Dantor, mama, guide my feet and hands, she prayed, and took off at a run for the roof’s edge, and the fire-escape that led down to the street.

***

The subway journey to Magnus’ took forever, and not nearly long enough. Walking down Magnus’ street, he hardly noticed bumping into a young woman, so consumed with sick dread for the coming conversation, desperately trying to figure out what he should say and how to say it. A muttered apology, automatic and thoughtless, and he was walking towards Magnus’ building as if to his execution, his steps as slow and heavy as if anchors hung from his ankles. The witch’s ladder Magnus had given him after Abbadon felt like a noose around his throat; the book in the satchel over his shoulder might have been made of lead.

When he could bring himself to ring the bell, the door was opened by a warlock he hadn’t met before, a short woman with skin like mother-of-pearl and epicanthic eyes that shimmered like opals, without pupils or irises. An oil-spill of black hair was pulled back into a careless pony-tail, its end brushing the small of her back. A triple strand of pearls and moonstones, like the ones the agela had seen being hung around a thousand mirrors after Xia’s death, shone on her right wrist.

“So it’s true,” she said before he could speak. With her eyes all a single colour, he couldn’t tell what she was looking at, but he realised quickly enough when she went on, “There is a Shadowhunter who wears mourning Marks for a Downworlder’s death. I wasn’t sure I believed it.” She cocked her head. “You must be the Alexander I’ve heard so much about.”

Not sure how to respond to the implication that the Spiral Court had been discussing him, Alec made his obeisance instead, placing his hands over his heart, right over left. “Viisaille viisauden, ashipu. I am Alexander Sariel nat Lightwood, yes.”

Her eyebrows rose at his greeting, but like Arika before her she responded without hesitation, touching her brow with two fingers tipped in diamond claws and then making a sweeping gesture, left to right and palm-up. “Viisailta maailmalle, Alexander Sariel. You may call me Khutulun.” She spoke with only the faintest trace of an accent he couldn’t place, something that made him think of Central Asia but that didn’t quite match any particular place. Which meant her birth-tongue probably no longer existed, or at least had changed so much since she first learned it that no one else in the world spoke it as she once had. Which in turn meant she was probably centuries old, at the least. “Why are you here?”

The question jolted him out of his automatic analysis of her voice (trained into him because any clue about a warlock’s age was a clue about their experience and experience meant power and if you have to kill a warlock, Hodge had said, you had better know if it’s a neonate or an adept) and wasn’t sure which hurt him more: remembering the message he’d come to deliver, or realising that he’d just evaluated how hard this woman might be to kill, automatically, without even thinking about it.

The two facts twisted like Abbadon’s claws inside him.

“I have news for the Spiral Court,” he said quietly. “About Elias.”

Khutulun stilled, and Alec remembered that Elias was not just Magnus’ son, but the child of every adult warlock. Which made this woman a grieving parent too, a mourning mother.
It only made him feel even more sickened by his own instincts, the reflexes shaped and honed by growing up what he was. What kind of ugliness looked at a mother who’d lost her child, and saw her first as a potential threat to be put down?

_No wonder the Downworlders hate us. All we bring is death._ At the edge of the blade…or the tip of a tongue.

“Then I suppose you had best come in,” Khutulun said after a long moment. She stepped back, allowing Alec room to enter.

***

“Well?” Ana asked, climbing back up over the edge of the roof. She brushed off the flakes of rust that lingered on her palms from the fire-escape ladder as she took up position again next to Lucio.  
“What did they say?” No need to ask if the tracker-and-transmitter was working—Sam had made it, and Lightbringers all over the globe knew that if Samuel Tukiainen built you a gadget, it would not only do its job perfectly, but survive everything up to an atomic bomb—or its magical equivalent.

“It’s Alexander Lightwood,” Lucio said, and Ana swore. The pillar of seraphfire released from Coney Island last month had called the Lightbringers to the city, but it was talk originating from a group of werewolves who’d helped three Shadowhunters move house that had led them to Symeon Morgenstern. They knew who Alexander Lightwood was—a Shadowhunter stupid enough to get close to an anunnaku, to let it into his new home.

“Maybe he’s not beguiled,” Ana said without much hope. “They said it froze him and his sister, didn’t they? Maybe it scared him into sense. He might be coming to the ashipu-ene for advice on how to deal with it, not on its behalf.”

“I know it sounds crazy, but you might actually be right,” Lucio said, and Ana’s head whipped around to face him, shocked.

“What, really?”

Lucio spread his hands. “I told her, and the Captain said it could be possible. Did you see the red runes on his arms?”

“Yes.” She hadn’t been looking very hard—pretending to bump into someone on the street meant pretending you didn’t see where you were going, and that meant not staring at your target—but they had been bright and loud, a flash of crimson in the corner of her eye. “They’re the—what’s the word, _chagren, dèy_—” Unable to find the word she wanted amidst the flurry of new questions and issues raised by the Shadowhunter boy’s identity, she made a frustrated dismissive gesture and went on without it. “—the red Marks they wear when someone dies, aren’t they?” Something occurred to her.  
“Is that it? Did the anunnaku kill someone he knew?” Surely that would be enough to wake even an idiot Nephilim to the danger they might otherwise revere…

“No—well, possibly, if it did they didn’t mention it, but Khutulun—she’s here, by the way—said they were mourning _Marks for a Downworlder child._” Ana gaped. “And then he gave her the greeting of the wise.”

“His parents run the local Institute,” Ana said slowly, almost dazed. “They neglect their duties, they _hate_ the Nasaru-ene, they took Valentine’s side in that little skirmish they called a war—” Her tone momentarily turning contemptuous; the Leiomano was based out of Cuba, but Ana herself was Haitian, and Papa Legba as her witness, Haiti could tell Idris a few things about what a _real_ war looked like. “He can’t have learnt the courtesies from _them._”
“He called himself Alexander Sariel *nat* Lightwood,” Lucio said, considering. “I’ve never heard of a Nephilim taking an angel’s name for anything but their swords. Have you?”

Ana shook her head. “But it must be important. *He* must be important. With the way they venerate angels, they wouldn’t let him bear the name otherwise.” It made her uneasy, though, to find a Shadowhunter so close to an anunnaku claiming an angel’s name. They all learned early in this life never to assume anything was coincidence, and this was a big one.

“Khutulun hinted at that,” Lucio confirmed. “The ashipu-ene know him, or of him, at least. She said, and I quote, *You must be the Alexander I’ve heard so much about.*”

“Important enough for the Isu-Immaru to take an interest in him,” Ana murmured. “The whole Seba, maybe? You know they must all be in town, with an ashipu child murdered.” Following that trail of thought… “If there is a conspiracy in the Court to hide this anunnaku from us, and the Seba are so interested in a Shadowhunter with close ties to it… The Seba themselves might be involved.”

It didn’t bear thinking about, and yet it had to be considered. No one *ruled* the Spiral Court, but the Seba council certainly guided it; five Immaru-ene to stand for the cosmic elements—Khutulun, as the Isu-Immaru, was the representative of the element of earth—and the Ninmulmulla, literally *lady of stars*, to stand at the centre and balance the rest. No one outside the Court knew quite how the members of the Seba were chosen, but the qualifying criteria and subsequent selection process must be exacting, because the six sitting members were without question not just the most influential, but also the most powerful ashipu-ene in the world.

In other words, some of the worst enemies to have this side of the world-wards.

“Hope for the best and prepare for the worst,” Lucio said tiredly, quoting a common Lightbringer maxim. The Seba in particular and the Spiral Court as a whole were, historically, the Lightbringers’ greatest allies, but blind faith bought only death—another lesson hammered into Lightbringer trainees early and hard by their teachers.

And no one could deny the fact that the Spiral Court hadn’t called a single Lightbringer order last month, even after such a blatant sign of an anunnaku’s presence. Even though one of the Immaru-ene lived in this very city, and could not possibly have missed it.

And then, blessedly, they had to stop, because voices were coming over the transmitter now, and they had set the machine to record but that didn’t mean they didn’t need to listen. The whole team would need to know immediately if the ashipu-ene *were* commissioned to make a Portal…and if they accepted that commission.

***

When Sariel had visited here last, the warlocks had turned the downstairs apartment into a mirrored cavern, hanging glass and gems on the walls and covering the floor in soft sand. When Alec stepped inside now, he saw that the effect had spread to the entire building; every wall and all of the ceilings were covered in hundreds of disparate mirrors fitted together like mosaics, each one wrapped in strands of pearls and moonstones like the ones on Khutulun’s wrist. The black sand underfoot glittered a little in the light from dozens of candles cradled in floating seashells; they were the only source of illumination, but Alec would no more have reached for his stele and drawn a night-vision rune, or pulled out a witchlight, than he would have started dancing or singing. Besides, the candleflames were reflected from a thousand panes of mirrored glass, and if it wasn’t enough to make the space bright, it was more than enough to see by. Silence swathed the building like thick velvet, but what should have felt oppressive instead seemed perfectly natural and correct.
Even if Alec was sick with nerves and dread.

Without a word spoken, Khutulun ascended the staircase, which was also carpeted in the dark sand. It made soft whispers under Alec’s feet as she led him up to Magnus’ apartment, the door of which, too, was nearly hidden between neatly fit-together mirrors of all shapes and sizes. It didn’t seem to be locked, or maybe Khutulun worked a spell, because the handle gave under her fingers and the door swung inwards.

***

Catarina turned at the sound of the door opening, startled; there was no one who did not know that Magnus was ill, or why; no one who would have risked disturbing his precious rest—

She had been spellcrafting; her senses and Sight were open wide for it. When she saw who followed Khutulun through the door without the veil of physicality to cloak him, she dropped her cauldrons. All five of them.

Khutulun’s magic whipped out and caught them before they could hit the ground, and automatically Catarina took them back from her, her own power slipping under Khutulun’s to reclaim the weight. The pots wobbled a moment, but they held.

“Alexander,” Catarina said, shaping his name with numbed lips.

He bowed to her. “Catarina ashipu. Are you—is everything all right?”

It was a struggle to drag her attention away from the scintillating wonder of his soul—the soul that, the last time she’d seen it, had been a shredded, gouged-out thing, cauterised but seeping, weeping. She could still see the wound, but over it, almost filling it, was, was—what in Hekate’s name were those? “No,” she managed, despite her wonder. “Magnus is resting. This isn’t a good time for visitors.” Gathering herself, she demanded of Khutulun, in a language that had been dead outside of the Spiral Court for thousands of years, “~What were you thinking, bringing him here? Now?~”

“~That it would raise his suspicions to be turned away, and that I could bring him to you or let him glimpse the workings of the Court.~” Khutulun raised her eyebrows pointedly. “~Fire said this one is smart. Would you let him in downstairs, and risk what he might learn?~”

“~I wouldn’t have let him in at all,~” Catarina snapped, but done was done, and Khutulun did have a point. The Spiral Court had survived so long by guarding their secrets more jealously than dragons did their gold. She didn’t know Alec well herself, but if he was half as intelligent as Magnus claimed, then she didn’t want him near the gathered Court either, most of whom were in the ground-floor apartment downstairs.

“~He said he has news of Elias,~” Khutulun added quietly, and it took Catarina like an arrow to the throat.

Alec was looking between the two women uncertainly. If he’d understood nothing else, he must have recognised Elias’ name. “I’m sorry,” he said hesitantly. “If this is a bad time, I can—” She saw him realise he still had some message to deliver, and swallow. “I can just give my news and go.”

“That might be best,” Catarina said, trying to be gentle and knowing she hadn’t quite managed it.

“No,” Magnus said, stepping into the living room/kitchen. Catarina whirled, but at least this time she didn’t drop anything. “Let him stay. I want to hear what he has to say.”
“You should be resting!” Catarina protested.

He smiled at her, and the dulled edges of it hurt her heart. “Then you’ll have to brew me another sleeping draught, Cat. I promise to drink it if you do.” He tipped his head at Alexander. “Al—?”

But he stopped before he could even say the boy’s name, and Catarina took a worried step towards him, fearing an imminent collapse. But Magnus didn’t fall: his eyes widened, fixed not on the Shadowhunter’s face but on his bared arms. “Those are sureva Marks,” he said roughly, his voice hoarse with disuse and disbelief and something too raw to name.

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Magnus did not look well; he did look as though he should have been sleeping, and guilt and worry corkscrewed into Alec’s gut, hard and sharp, awareness of his own selfishness in coming here momentarily clogging his throat. In the few days since Alec had last seen him, Magnus’ beautiful gold skin had grown paler; he seemed thinner, the bones of his face sharp and his eyes unnaturally lustrous as if with fever, and Arika’s words came back to Alec like bullets of ice—

‘Death is the poison that sickens him, and only death can cure him.’

He was looking at an immortal being eaten alive by cancerous mortality.

No. We’ll stop it. Whatever this is, we’ll stop it, Alec promised himself, more than a little desperately. Magnus’ illness was tied to the murders, Arika had said: stop the murders, or kill the murderer, and Magnus would get better. Would be fine.

Alec would have given his all to stop more children from dying anyway, but with Magnus’ life on the line too, he would give more than his all. He would make more all to give. He would have done everything he could; now he would do anything. It was as simple and certain as an arrow in his hand, nocking it to his bow, sighting his target and letting it fly. He knew it like he knew how to send the arrow where it had to be. Arrow and hand and target and eye, and the synergy of them all writ in his breath and bone, skill and instinct and muscle-memory and rightness.

It did not feel right, it felt like being stripped naked, the shock in Magnus’ eyes, the hoarse rasp of his voice like sandpaper against Alec’s heart. Alec instinctively moved to cross his arms and hide the runes at his elbows, but stopped himself.

“Yes,” he made himself say, and it was only by Raziel’s grace that his voice didn’t break on the word. “I’m sorry, I know I don’t have the right. I only—” He stopped, because there was nothing he could say.

Khutulun and Catarina were looking back and forth between them. “He wears Marks of mourning,” Khutulun said, and somehow it was a question. “And sureva?” she asked Magnus.

“What is it, that it has struck you like lightning from a blue sky?”

“It’s the Mark for a family member,” Magnus said, husky with emotion Alec didn’t dare try and
name. “For mourning a family member.”

“Oh.” Catarina gasped softly. Abruptly, she pressed her hand to her mouth and turned her back on them all, and Alec was deathly afraid that she might be crying, or trying not to.

“I’m sorry,” he said helplessly. What had he been thinking. Marking himself with sureva? And once it was too late to take back—to come here dressed as he had, shoving the red glare of the runes into the faces of Elias’ actual family—he should have worn long sleeves and hidden them, should never have pretended he had any kind of right— “I didn’t mean to—to insult, or belittle your loss, to—to presume—”

“Alexander, no,” Magnus began, but Khutulun cut across him.

“I have heard that your mourning Marks hurt you more than Raziel’s other runes. Is it so?”

Alec blinked, uncertain. “Yes.”

Khutulun stared at him. Stared into him. “You branded yourself for grief at our son’s loss. Named him family, for all to see.”

Alec swallowed hard. He opened his mouth to deny it—almost no one had seen the Marks, not his parents, not the Inquisitor or the High Secretar or any of the people they had brought with them to the Institute—but then he stopped, and thought about who did know. Jace, and Izzy. Simon. The werewolves of Luna’s pack. And now the Spiral Court. All the ones who mattered.

“Yes,” he whispered.

Khutulun blinked, once. Then she turned to Magnus. “You have found an argamag amongst the herd,” she said simply, and incomprehensibly. “Bridle him in silk and starlight.”

“I mean to,” Magnus said hoarsely.

She nodded. “Catarina?” She walked across the room to the other woman, and murmured to her in that strange language she’d spoken in before. After a moment, Catarina nodded, and Khutulun gestured at the various potions simmering and bubbling around the kitchen; shields of what looked like glass sprung up around them. “We will leave you to converse in private,” she said. “Call if you have need.”

She took Catarina’s blue hand in hers, and led the healer past Magnus and further into the apartment. Alec didn’t see where they went, but he heard a door being softly closed behind them, and then he and Magnus were alone.

“I’m sorry,” Alec said softly, helpless. “Magnus, I’m so sorry.”

He saw the moment Magnus understood what he was apologising for—not the runes, not the red on his arms but the red spilled between them (tortured before they died, tortured before they died), a line Alec didn’t know how to cross because there it was—Magnus didn’t have to ask because he already knew what Alec meant, he’d thought it too, and the stricken pain in his face—

Alec had been so sure that he knew what pain was—a parabatai he could never touch, Simiel in Simon’s hand, the poison on Abbadon’s claws trying to drag him to Hell after the Greater Demon who’d left it in his blood.

Nothing, none of it, came close to this.
So quickly Alec could almost have pretended he hadn’t seen it at all, the raw agony vanished from Magnus’ face, folded up and tucked away and closed over. “It wasn’t your fault,” he said quietly, his expression terrifyingly blank.

“I was the acting Head of the Institute.” The weight of that, and the guilt of his failure, clamped like a vise around his throat. “I should have—”

“You should never have been put in that position!” Magnus shouted, the blank mask shattering like hammered glass, more fragile than Alec could ever have guessed, and Alec flinched back but not even a lifetime’s trained reflexes and a millennia’s worth of instincts were enough to make him reach for a weapon, not now, not with Magnus— “You’re eighteen, Alec, you’re a child, and they left you to guard an entire state with just two other teenagers to help you! Of course you failed, of course people died, Ammit take every last stone-cold Nephilim heart—!”

Every word struck Alec like a stone, and Alec stood still and let them, something deep inside him bleeding even as Magnus whirled away like a broken thing, turned his back on Alec and raised his hands to his face, to his hair, clenching tight as if he wanted to rend something.

‘Of course you failed…!’

“I’m sorry,” Alec whispered again, and meant it, and knew it wasn’t enough. Lightworlders apologised for things that weren’t their fault, but this—this was on Alec, was his fault; his hands were red because they weren’t black with ichor; he bore the responsibility of the killing blow because his swords had been sheathed; because he hadn’t been there to defend and protect, to stop whatever monster had struck down Magnus’ sister without leaving a mark—

‘Of course people died…!’

—and tortured his son to death.

‘You should never have been put in that position!’

You should never have
Should never have
Never
Have—

“Sorry. You’re sorry.” Magnus’ voice was a snarl, and Alec flinched, couldn’t look Magnus in the eye when the man turned to face him again, too sick with shame and guilt to meet that green-gold jaguar-blaze gaze. “What in Sekhmet’s name are you sorry for, Alexander? WHY ARE YOU SORRY?” he roared, and Alec remembered that Magnus’s birthplace was an island inside what the Lightworlders called the Ring of Fire, a place where the earth could tear open like a wound and spill molten fire like blood, where the rage of the world itself exploded in searing eruptions and sky-swallowing tsunamis, and Magnus looked pale and exhausted and ill, but in that moment he wore that ring of fire like a crown and blazed with it, as beautiful and terrible as any seraphim.

And from being unable to look Magnus in the eye, Alec suddenly couldn’t look away, or breathe, or do anything but let those flames sear him to ash and bone.

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Ana hissed, rocking back on her heels at the surge of power that spiked from the other side of the
“What?” Lucio demanded in a low whisper.


Lucio swore, and Ana nodded grimly. Whatever her suspicions about the Seba, she didn’t want to even *imagine* what tapping his magic right now was doing to the ashipu-rei.

“Only his own power,” she told her partner. Which was why she was so sure it was him—that surge had felt like it all came from one person, and she knew Khutulun’s signature. It hadn’t been her, which left only one other ashipu in that apartment who could be strong enough to have caused that psychic solar-flare. “He just—let it loose. But he didn’t tap the nexus.”

“I know. That, I would have felt.”

Ana filed that tidbit away—Lucio might not have worked much with humans, but Ana had never worked with a wakinyan before, and knowing that Lucio—or another of his people—could sense the ley lines was the kind of thing that might save lives someday.

“How sick must he be,” Lucio said, low, “to lose control like that?”


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“Magnus?” Catarina called softly. She stood in the doorway, clearly concerned. She must have heard the shouting—by the Angel, the whole building had probably heard it. “You need to calm down. You can’t exert yourself like this.”

“No,” Magnus snapped, without looking at her. Without looking away from Alec. “I want to hear him say it.” Power snapped and lashed around him like a corona of ozone, an aura of shimmering, searing heat that sent static electricity skittering over Alec’s skin, raising the hair on the back of his neck. “Tell me what you’re sorry for, Alexander Lightwood. *Tell me what you have to apologise for!***

Alec swallowed hard. His mouth was dry as salt, but he hadn’t run from Abbadon, and he wasn’t going to run now. It wasn’t fear in the pit of his stomach, anyway. Guilt, regret, shame, yes—but not fear. He couldn’t imagine looking at Magnus, no matter how much magic he gathered around him like gunpowder around a spark, and seeing an enemy, a danger, a threat.

It just broke Alec’s heart a little more, that was all. Because he thought only real, deep agony could push Magnus into a rage like this.

“For letting them die,” he said quietly.

“For letting them die,” Magnus echoed. His hands—his beautiful, elegant hands, strangely naked without their ever-present rings—curled into fists at his sides. “Do you hear that, Cat? He thinks it’s his fault. *He thinks this is his fault.*”

“I know,” Catarina said gently. She looked sad.

“They put the safety of the entire state into the hands of three teenagers, and he thinks it’s *his* fault!” Magnus whirled away, clenching a hand near his temple, making a sound Alec had never heard come out of a human throat before. It sounded as though it had been torn from behind his heart,
visceral and vicious, primal and pained. “I’m going to burn it to the fucking ground, Cat,” he choked; choking on tears, choking on a snarl, and he was shaking, and Alec wanted to go to him but he couldn’t move. He wasn’t sure he’d ever heard Magnus curse before, but it wasn’t that. It was the way Magnus moved and spoke like a volcano about to erupt, as if he might shatter apart into living fire at any moment—and destroy not just Brooklyn, or New York, or maybe even the entire east coast, but himself, too. “Their precious Institute, their ivory towers, their glass towers; I’ll burn them all and the Abyss can take their blackened bones, my father can scatter their ashes on the winds of Edom—!”

“You will not!” Catarina swiftly closed the space between them and caught Magnus’ face in her hands. “You’re not allowed spark so much as a candle, never mind light up a blessed and warded Institute. Now let go of your power, before you pass out or I knock you out!”

“This is not you who speaks, Bennu.” Khutulun stood in the space Catarina had vacated, her arms folded across her chest. Her skin shimmered in the dim light of the doorway, and her eyes were as cool and cold as the opals they resembled. “It is the poison that puts its words on your tongue. Spit it out, or you will be the one who burns.”

Poison, Alec thought numbly, watching Magnus caught in some internal struggle, wrestling with some inner demon. Not a toxin like Abbadon’s venom, or anything as simple as a cordial of castor bean or oleander, but death itself somehow distilled from the murders of children and infecting Magnus’ immortality, ravaging it and leaving the High Warlock raving of death and fire.

Was he raving? Alec felt the presence of his agelai, felt them wake like slumbering tigers and stalk with wary care through the dappled shadows at the edges of his self, the place where I blurred into us. Jace and Izzy remembered how the shadows had grown heavy and heated when Jace and Magnus almost went toe-to-toe after Simon’s angel hurt Alec; remembered the High Warlock saying, so very softly, ‘What do you think you can do to me, exactly, little Shadowhunter?’ All three of them had seen how the Downworlders of the city obeyed Magnus’ word instantly, leaving his parties the moment he dismissed them; and they’d seen, too, how many who hated the Nephilim had answered his call when he summoned them to celebrate the Dedication of a Shadowhunter. There was power there, implied and implicit, written in a bold and clear hand between the lines.

Just what and how much would burn, if Magnus did call down a holocaust of fire?

But it seemed that today was not the day they would find out, because after a long, smouldering moment, the strength drained out of Magnus all in a rush, the heavy smog of power dissipating like smoke as he leaned into Catarina. “I hate them, Cat,” he whispered. “I hate them all so much.”

Catarina stroked his hair. “There’s at least one you like,” she said gently.

Magnus hid his face in her shoulder, but Alec’s pureblood-Shadowhunter ears were sharp enough to hear it when he said, “He’s not even angry. Why isn’t he angry?”

Even more softly, desperately, despairingly, Magnus whispered, “Why isn’t he scared of me?”

Because I could never be afraid of you, Alec thought—and only then realised that they were talking about him.

“I’m—” Izzy bit back Alec’s attempt at yet another apology before it could escape, and he was grateful even as he felt sick. He was doing everything wrong, just as he’d been doing everything wrong since the moment his parents left him in charge of the canton. “I’ll go,” he said. “I’m sorry for intruding.” Izzy wasn’t quick enough to stop that one from slipping out. “I didn’t mean to—I’ll leave.” Forget delivering the message that would only be a dagger to these people’s hearts; it would
be easier for everyone if the High Inquisitor informed the Spiral Court by formal fire-message, anyway, so Magnus and the others could react honestly and privately, without any Nephilim to gawk at them or trespass on their mourning. “I’m sorry.”

“No.” Magnus raised his head from Catarina’s shoulder and looked at him. “No, don’t go. Not back to them.” He stepped away from Catarina, and she watched him worriedly but let him slip out of her grasp. “They hurt you,” Magnus said. “They’ve hurt you, they keep on hurting you, and you can’t even see it,” and he sounded so lost and wounded it struck Alec like a blade. “Don’t go. Stay.”

“Okay,” Alec said quietly. Because any other answer was unthinkable. “Okay.”

Magnus opened his arms, imploring and pleading, and Alec let his bag fall to the ground. In four long strides the space between them vanished and he had his arms wrapped around Magnus, holding him tightly, holding him together as he crumpled into Alec’s embrace, collapsing inwards. His tears, as he started to cry, burned Alec’s heart like acid, and his sobs tore at Alec worse than Abbadon’s claws ever had—but he held on, and never even thought about letting Magnus go.

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Clary had long since stopped worrying that Olianthe would judge the little house Clary’s parents had bought together before she was born. It was no glittering and magical knowe, but she and her mom both worked hard to keep it clean and neat and welcoming, and ‘Lianthe had never given the slightest hint that she looked down on her datemate’s humble mortal home. If anything, just the opposite; more than once Clary had caught her with an expression of perplexed delight as she played with the toaster, carefully touching only the plastic buttons and not the steel machine’s steel casing.

Introducing the Seelie princess to pop-tarts had definitely gone down as one of the most hilarious and happiest moments of Clary’s life.

So she didn’t hesitate to ask Olianthe to stay with her while she waited. ‘Lianthe only nodded, and sat patiently on the stairs while Clary paced the narrow entrance hall, playing with the acorn pendant resting on her collarbone.

When the knock on the door came, Clary snapped to attention and went to it at once. She looked through the peephole—her days of thoughtlessly opening her front door to anyone who knocked were long gone—and when she saw who it was, unlocked and opened the door, moving out of her visitor’s way to let him in without a word.

Luke took one wary step through the doorway—and froze when he saw the Seelie princess sitting on the stairs. “What is this?”

“This is my datemate ’Lian,” Clary said with deceptive mildness as she shut the door behind Luke. She was pretty sure that ‘Olianthe’ wasn’t actually Olianthe’s true name, but there was no way she was taking the risk of putting ’Lianthe in Luke’s power, the way the stories said knowing a faerie’s true name could do. Just in case. “She’s here to kick your ass if you don’t behave.”

“Though Clary will need less assistance in such an endeavour than you might think,” Olianthe added.

Luke looked between the two girls as if they were pieces of a puzzle he couldn’t make fit; the faerie princess once more in sea-blue velvet, the human redhead in the jeans and tee that had been waiting beneath the knowe’s illusions when she left its reach. “’Datemate’?” he echoed.

“She is my mate, and we are courting,” Olianthe said, with the approval of one who came from a
culture where verbal accuracy and specificity were not just appreciated, but of vital importance. “I would think the term is self-explanatory.”

A grimace of disgust cut across Luke’s face like the slash of a sword, and Clary set her feet and her shoulders when he turned to look at her. “You’re dating a blendling? A female blendling?”

Clary glanced at Olianthe, and caught herself before she asked do I want to know? Olianthe would take a question like that literally, and say something like I do not know, but I suspect so. Which wouldn’t answer the real question. “What’s a blendling?”

She almost didn’t need to ask at all: the ice she saw in her datemate’s face as Olianthe looked at Luke reminded Clary of the Seelie Queen. She hadn’t seen the Queen’s face, but she’d felt a similar chill come from behind that veil of diamonds.

“It is an old word for a mongrel thing,” Olianthe said. “A bastard.” The shape her mouth made was the sickle crescent of February’s moon, the moon some First Nation tribes called the hunger moon, and others called little famine, for the dark and the cold and the starving predators howling beyond the fire’s reach in that month. “It is what I think you would call ironic, coming from one of the serkut äpärä.”

From the incomprehension in Luke’s eyes, Clary figured that he didn’t know what the term meant either, but she was too angry at Luke to ask Olianthe to explain. “Fabulous; so you’re a homophobe and a racist,” she said, coating her every word in dripping sarcasm to hide their furiously sharp edges.

“Race—?” Luke’s face was a mess of incredulity and disgust. “She’s not Black, Clary, she’s not human!”

“Neither are you!” Clary snapped. “You know, from what I can work out of the timeline, you must have spent at least half of your life as a werewolf by now. You’d think you’d have gotten over the Nephilim’s racist bullshit after seventeen years of being a Downworlder yourself.”

“I’m a Shadowhunter where it counts,” Luke half-snarlled.

Clary thought of how blithely Luke had murdered someone just to get the cannon fodder of a pack; of how casually, carelessly he’d spent the lives of those who’d looked to him for leadership and protection at Renwicks; of what he’d tried to do to Simon. “Yes,” she said coldly. “I think you are.”

He stared at her, clearly not understanding, and Clary forced herself to count to ten. “You got my text?” she asked with effort.

Luke nodded, closing the door behind him. “I did,” he confirmed. “But they wouldn’t let me see Simon.” He shot Olianthe a wary glance, as if unwilling to discuss such things in front of someone who was both a stranger and one of the fae; ‘Lianthe gave him a smile false as fool’s gold in return. “They’re insisting he’s a ward of the Clave now.”

Dread curdled in Clary’s stomach. “What does that mean?”

“It’s like being a ward of the state,” Luke said. “But the Nephilim don’t have social services like mundanes do. If they have their way, the Clave will place Simon under the guardianship of a family they approve of, to be fostered with them, and/or send him to the Shadowhunter training academy.”

“But the academy is in Idris!” Clary protested.

Luke nodded. “And probably any foster-family they choose for him will be, too. I doubt they
approve of how much Simon has been exposed to the mundane world.”

“Can they do that?” Clary asked. “Just—take him?” At least it sounded as though Simon wasn’t dead; that the Shadowhunters hadn’t turned on him. Trying to seize him instead, claim him, even stealing him away, was better than *that*. But Clary had seen Izzy’s scars—some the brand of the Nephilim’s angelic runes, others the marks of tearing teeth and monstrous claws—and seen just how isolated, how *indoctrinated* she and Alec and Jace all were. None of them thought there was anything unusual, never mind wrong, in teenagers being sent out every night to risk their lives against monsters. None of them had ever even hinted that being left alone to guard the whole of New York while their parents were in Idris was too much, too big, too unfair a weight to place on their shoulders.

It sounded like whatever the Shadowhunters she’d seen at the Institute had been fighting, it at least hadn’t been Simon. But if the Nephilim tried to cage him and whip him into the shape they wanted, tried to carve him into a good little soldier?

The seraphfire that had lit up Coney Island a few weeks ago would fall on Idris like a nuclear bomb. And the Simon she’d seen at Renwicks would laugh as they all burned.

Clary didn’t want to believe it—didn’t want to believe her best friend was capable of something like that—but she did. She believed. She *knew*.

“Under Nephilim law,” Luke said, “he’s an orphan.” He looked tired, and worn, and overwhelmed. It wasn’t enough to make Clary feel sorry for him. “Valentine was declared dead, and now that the Clave know he’s alive, he’s noncaste—*outcasten*, cast-out and hunted.” He rubbed a hand over his face. “And because Jocelyn fled him rather than go through the legalities of stepping down as an active Shadowhunter, they’re saying she abandoned her duty, which is justification to strip her of her name, her family’s holdings—and her rights to her Nephilim children. In the eyes of the Clave, she’s as much *outcasten* as Valentine.”

Clary didn’t bother pointing out that it was insane to compare a woman who’d saved the Mortal Cup to a genocidal megalomaniac; she had yet to come across a single Nephilim law that made any sense at all. “And Jace?”

“Isn’t considered a suitable guardian, apparently.” The *I can’t imagine why* went unspoken, but not unheard. “No more so than a werewolf,” he added bitterly.

He took a deep breath, and when he let it out, his eyes were sharp. “They have no interest in letting Simon out of their clutches. I was expecting resistance, but not that much. Simon’s a pureblood Shadowhunter, but he’s been raised in the mundane world and he’ll be eighteen in a year, at which point they’ll have no more right to hold him. He shouldn’t be worth the fight. Instead, I had the damn *secretari* telling me I had no claim to him.”

“The what?” Clary asked. Secretaries?

“The angelologists,” Luke said sharply, and Clary felt sick as comprehension hit like a fist to the gut. “One of the most powerful of the Nephilim orders. They study angels, and they study *us*, the Nephilim.” There it was, that *us* again. He really did think of himself as still a Shadowhunter, despite everything. “And they always get what they want, so if they want Simon, we’ll never get him away from them. But what do they want him for? Why the *hell* are they involved, Clary?”

Clary stared at him, thinking. Then she looked at Oliathe. “Do you know?” she asked.

‘*We do not interfere with the one known as Simon Morgenstern.*’
“Yes,” Olianthe said simply. “But I am forbidden to speak of it.”

“Will you repeat anything I say to Luke about it to anyone?” Clary asked, just to be sure.

“I will not.”

“All right then.” Clary turned back to Luke, whose confusion was honed by a sharpening wariness. “Simon has an angel inside him.”

“He what?!” Shock blew like a desert storm across his face, scouring everything else away to bare the bones beneath: not the Shadowhunter, or even the werewolf, but the man who’d stood as Simon’s father and Clary’s uncle for as long as either of them could remember. The frigid wariness, the disgust and suspicion—in that moment, Clary only saw the fear of a father for his son.

It would be easier for them all, she thought, if Luke didn’t love Simon anymore. It would be so much simpler.

“But they think it’s an angel.”

“No, Jace and the others. Magnus. But I guess the secretari must have found out.” How? What had happened? Why were none of them answering their damn phones?

Luke wiped a hand across his face. “By the Angel,” he whispered. When he uncovered his eyes again, he fixed them on Clary. “What happened? When?”

Clary spread her hands helplessly. “Simon doesn’t know. None of us do. He doesn’t remember being possessed. There’s just—things he can do, that the other Shadowhunters can’t. His runes kept Alec alive when no one else’s were working; he broke out of the Marks Hodge used to cage him… He froze Valentine and broke the Portal at Renwicks, remember?” She hadn’t been there to see Simon seize control of Valentine’s Marks, or shatter the enchanted mirror with a scream of rage, but Luke had.

And from the way his eyes widened, she knew he hadn’t forgotten.

“He fell,” he said softly. “He shouted for Valentine to stop, ordered him to drop his sword…and when he did, Simon fell. He was bleeding from his eyes…” Comprehension dawned. “The Portal. We thought Valentine broke it to stop anyone from following after him—”

“No,” Clary said quietly. “You were the only one who thought that, Luke.”

The rest of us knew. The words hung unspoken between them, silent and yet as loud as the scream that had broken a Portal into as many pieces as a shattered heart.

Luke heard what wasn’t said; his eyes filled with betrayal that struck against Clary’s temper like flint against steel. But he looked away. “That night, I—I should have—shouldn’t have—Jocelyn always…”

“What?” Clary pounced. “Jocelyn what?”

Luke pressed his lips together in a grim line, and looked away. “She was always worried about him,” he said finally. “She was always afraid of what would happen if Simon ever found out what he was. I wanted to train him, at least send him to martial arts classes, for Raziel’s sake, but she refused. Said it was too dangerous. What she hired Bane to do to Simon’s mind, his Sight…” A grimace of disgust
flickered across his expression. “It was sick. But she always insisted it was necessary. That he could
never, ever know what he was.”

“To be fair to her,” Clary said after a pause, “finding out about the Shadow World did kind of blow
up in his face.”

But Luke shook his head. “I don’t think that’s what she meant. She wasn’t afraid of him
discovering…” He waved his hand around the room, the gesture encompassing his werewolf-self,
the faerie princess sitting on the staircase, and the Light Worlder who’d survived vampires and
ridden unicorns and had a magnifying glass in her pocket that turned into a sword or a gun as she
willed. Not that she was about to tell Luke that last part. “All this. If she had been, she wouldn’t have
let him read the books and play the games he does. She never tried to turn him away from fantasy,
from magic. But she was so afraid of what would happen if he got a stele in his hands, or a seraph
blade, that she wouldn’t even keep her own in her apartment, made me hold them for her.”

He met Clary’s eyes. “She’s a Fairchild, a pureblooded Shadowhunter. She grew up sleeping with a
stele under her pillow and a weapon always within reach, but even knowing that Valentine was still
alive—that he might track her down someday—she wouldn’t take the chance that Simon might find
them. She thought it was better to leave him unprepared and defenceless, better to risk her life and
his, than to risk him figuring out his powers.”

“What powers?” Clary asked. Her chest felt suddenly tight.


Clary stared at him. “Do you think she knew? That Simon is possessed?”

“I don’t know.” Luke ran a hand through his hair, restless, frustrated, uncertain. “Valentine was
always obsessed with angels,” he said softly, frowning as he thought, thought back, remembered.
“Raziel’s blood is what makes us Nephilim.” There was that us again, but Clary didn’t call him on it.
“He used to say that a new infusion of angelic blood would make our people strong again.
Sometimes he talked about summoning an angel to create a new Mortal Cup, since the Clave refused
to use the one we had to create new Shadowhunters. He talked to us about a new race of Nephilim,
Shadowhunters with the powers of angels who would scour the world of all Infernal influence for
good…” He shook his head, the curve of his mouth a small, bittersweet thing. “He used to choose
the names for all our seraph blades. He even made us learn Enochian, so we could talk or pass
messages without anyone not of the Circle knowing what we said…”

Enochian—the language of angels; the language Simon had found himself speaking like a native
after Abbadon. After he died.

Died, and came back with a Mark on his arm given him by an angel in a vision.

Clary turned that over in her mind, her stomach twisting into cold knots as she tried to fit the pieces
together. She wasn’t sure she liked the shape they made.

“You speak Enochian?” Olianthe asked. Her gaze narrowed. “Nonci camliax a bialo piripsax?”

“Ol faaip picru orri, crpl ol ipamis zamran,” Luke said, shaping the words slowly and carefully.

Clary glanced at Olianthe and raised her eyebrows in question.

“His accent is atrocious,” ’Lianthe said, “and he is not fluent. But he does not lie.”

Clary considered this for a moment, then dismissed it as not of immediate importance. “Hodge told
Simon he was sorry for what ‘he’ had done to him,” she told Luke. “And you told Simon that Jocelyn thought there was something wrong with Jonathan, right?” Simon’s older brother, Jace’s twin, killed in the fire Valentine had set to cover his escape the night of the Uprising. “That he was a monster?” She chewed her lip. “Maybe he was. Maybe whatever Valentine did to Simon, he did to Jonathan first, and it went wrong. And that’s why Jocelyn was scared of triggering—whatever it was—in Simon. Why she spent so long suppressing his Sight, and everything else.”

And Clary had to admit, remembering the utterly alien, primal fury in Simon’s face when he’d snarled at her in Alec’s apartment—remembering how he’d laughed at Renwicks as the blood splashed over his face—she wasn’t sure she could say that Jocelyn had been wrong to try what she’d tried, do what she’d done.

“Maybe.” Luke sounded doubtful, but Clary’s mind was already skipping ahead, trying to put all the pieces together in a way that fit.

“Can you force angelic possession?” she asked Luke. “Could Valentine have put an angel inside Simon while he was a baby?”

“By the Angel, Clary. Do you have any idea what you’re talking about? Angelic possession.” Luke shook his head. “It can’t be—it has to be something else. Summoning and binding an angel, forcing it into an infant? Even Valentine—Simon couldn’t have survived—Raziel, why didn’t he tell me?”

Oh, no. He had no right to play the martyr. Not after what he’d done.

“Jeez, Luke,” Clary snapped, “I don’t know, maybe it’s because you lied to him his entire life, abandoned him when his mom went missing, and, right, let’s not forget the big one, tried to lock him up in a fucking conversion centre. Why the fuck would any of us trust you?”

“I was trying to help!” Luke shouted.

Olianthe hissed a warning, drawing herself up like a cobra. Clary half-expected her golden hair to flare into a serpent’s hooded crown. “Tread lightly, wolf,” the princess warned, the pupils of her peacock-shimmer eyes narrowing to razor-blade slits.

Luke shot her a furious glance, but he bit back the snarl that started to curl his lips. “I was trying to help,” he repeated.

“No one needs that kind of help,” Clary said. “Not ever. Because being queer isn’t a problem; the problem is people like you.”

“He fell in love with his brother!” Luke yelled.

“They didn’t know!” Clary shouted back. “And so fucking what, anyway? Who cares? Who gets hurt if they make each other happy?”

Luke reared back as if she’d slapped him.

Clary wished she could have. “Besides,” she said, “if you really thought the incest was the issue, you’d have taken him to a therapist. But you didn’t, because if Jace had been a girl you would have accepted that they didn’t know, that it was an accident, that all they had to do was stop seeing each other. Wouldn’t you’ve?”

Luke stared at her, and said nothing.

Which said everything.
“But Simon fell in love with a guy,” Clary said. “And that was more than an accident, wasn’t it? That was a sickness, one you were willing to put him through torture to try and cure—”


“That’s what those places are!” Clary shouted. “That’s what they do, Luke! That’s what people like you do to people like Simon and me! So screw you for thinking we should have trusted you! Trust has to be earned, and you blew your savings when you tried to take Simon to be broken into a shape you’d like better! Fucking Valentine was prepared to take Simon as he is, but not you. You were his dad, and when he was exhausted and hurt and traumatised, when he needed you more than he ever had in his life, you tried to have his soul lobotomised. Why would any of us ever trust you again?”

Behind his glasses, Luke closed his eyes. “You don’t understand,” he said quietly.

“No, I don’t,” Clary snapped. “And I never will.”

Luke said nothing for a long moment. Clary tried to rein in her temper, and uncurled her fingers from the fists they’d made.

She saw Luke swallow. He glanced at Olianthe, then looked away. “Can we talk privately?” he asked, his voice low and scraped rough.

Clary considered him for a long moment. This was the man who had dragged her, kicking and screaming, off the street and into a strange car with an unconscious, bloody Simon; the man who had locked her in an abandoned police cell rather than answer her questions, rather than explaining. The man who had murdered another werewolf to gain cannon fodder for the attack on Renwicks, and tried to take Simon to a place even Valentine would not have sent him to. The man she had shot, with her mother’s gun, when she’d glimpsed a side of him she’d never dreamed was there.

But he was also the man who had taken her and Simon trick-or-treating, and helped teach her how to swim, and brought her books when her dad died.

And ultimately, she had Buffy in her pocket and Olianthe at her back. If Luke tried something, he was going to regret it. He was going to regret ever coming to this continent.

“All right,” she said finally. She looked to her datemate; ’Lianthe’s unearthly gaze met hers without condemnation. “Would you please wait for me upstairs?”

’Lianthe blinked slowly, cat-like. “As you wish.” She glanced at Luke, and her eyes glittered. “But if I taste your pain upon the air, I will be at your side in an instant.”

She rose and swept up the stairs without another word, the long comet’s tail of her golden hair streaming behind her.

“Well, that’s you warned,” Clary commented. She turned and headed into the sitting room, refusing to be afraid of showing Luke her back, and plunked herself down on the sofa. “So. Talk.”

He followed more hesitantly, and for a minute Clary thought he wouldn’t talk; he sat down in one of the armchairs, but wouldn’t meet her eyes. He looked as though he were struggling with something, and Clary watched without sympathy, refusing to feel sympathy.

In a better world, Luke would have been thrown in jail for what he’d tried to do to her best friend.

“I know Simon is confused about Jace,” Luke said at last. Clary sat up, bristling, furious, but he spoke before she could, the words spilling out like blood from a wound. “I know, because I was
confused the same way once.”

Clary stared, forgetting her fury. “You fell in love with a guy?”

“No,” Luke snapped harshly. “It wasn’t love. I thought it was—he said it was—but I—I was wrong, and he was lying. He was just taking what he wanted, because that’s what he does.”

Oh Queen of Hades, no way. “Valentine?”


“Hey, don’t get me wrong, he’s pretty,” Clary said. Genocidal, but good-looking. “And used to be less crazy, I guess. And it’s not like Simon’s mom didn’t fall for him too—” She froze. “Oh my goddess, does she know?”

Luke’s shoulders hunched even lower. “No,” he said quietly, and Clary could see and hear the shame in him, the self-loathing. “I never told her. Valentine said—he said a lot of things.” Clary could see the shadowed scars of those words in the back of his eyes. Maybe he noticed, or realised, because he closed them. “And all of them were lies. None of it was real. I did terrible things because of what I felt for him, Clary, in the name of what I thought we had. It blinded me to what he was, twisted me into something I never wanted to be.” He laughed a little, rough-edged and without humour. “If he hadn’t set me up to be Bitten, I’d have fought beside him at the Uprising, and never questioned whether it was right. Because how could it be wrong to follow the man I loved?”

His voice turned to arsenic on that final word, cruel with self-mockery and self-disgust, but Clary wasn’t having it.

“So let me get this straight,” she said, “pun totally intended: you had a fucked-up relationship with Valentine, so all relationships between guys must be fucked-up?”

“It wasn’t real love,” he said, his eyes opening to meet hers. “It’s not possible for real love to exist between men—not romantic love. That’s why I tried to get Simon help. It took me a long time to realise what Valentine had done to me, to see that the Clave are right, that that kind of love isn’t love at all. I didn’t want Simon to have to go through the struggle I did. The faster he learned it’s nothing but a sickness, the less pain he’d have to go through when—”

“Did you ever think,” Clary cut in, hearing her own voice cut like Izzy’s whip, “that maybe the problem wasn’t that Valentine was a guy, but that he was Valentine?” She shook her head, struggling to contain the fury growing claws in her chest, her frustration at Luke’s narrow-minded, blind idiocy. “Would it all have been okay if he’d been a woman, Luke? Or what about Simon’s mom—was her relationship with Valentine all rainbows and sunshine? Was that love magically, heterosexually perfect because she was a woman and he was a man?”

He was staring at her. “No,” he said quietly.

“No. It wasn’t. Because it has nothing to do with queer and straight, and everything to do with the fact that Valentine is a genocidal, narcissistic egomaniac!” Clary found her hands curled into fists, and didn’t remember when she’d clenched them as tightly as her teeth. “You know what I think, Luke? I think you want Simon to be ‘confused’ because you don’t want to face the fact that maybe you did love Valentine, just like Jocelyn did. But guess what? Your mistakes don’t mean anything except that you made a mistake. They have nothing to do with the rest of us. They don’t mean that anybody else’s love is wrong, or fake, or sick, or whatever else you want to tell yourself so you can keep hiding from the fact that the world’s not as simple as you want it to be!”
And there was something so painfully ironic in needing to say that to a werewolf, to someone who had not only been born into a world full of magic and supernatural creatures, but who was one. Surely anyone who lived in the Shadow World ought to know, better than anyone else, that neither world, no world, was simple, clean-cut, black-and-white. That fae or vampire, warlock or werewolf, Nephilim or mundane, they were all people, and people were complicated. Wonderfully, terribly, awfully, gloriously complicated.

How could she be just seventeen and already know that better than the man sitting across from her?

“I don’t understand you,” she said to Luke. “I don’t get how you can be the way you are, especially after everything you’ve been through. But fine, whatever, you keep trying to make a rhombicosidodecahedron—” she felt a dark, preening pride at getting the word out without stumbling over it, “—peg fit into a square hole—good luck with that. Tell me about Valentine and angels, or get the hell out.”

Luke’s mouth opened, but no sound came out. He looked at her as though she’d transformed into some kind of monster before his eyes, and Clary was okay with that. She wanted to be the kind of person people like Luke were afraid of; she wanted to be their nightmare, wanted claws and wings and a roar loud enough to drown them all out, wanted to breathe fire fierce and bright enough to drive away their blindness. They had their books, their holy texts, their Law; well, she had Catherynne Valente’s Monstrous Manifesto to live by.

_If you are a monster, stand up._

_Come stand by me._


“Angelic possession,” Clary said. “What does it look like? What does it mean?”

“It means you _die,_” Luke said harshly. “Raziel, Clary—in ancient times they used to train for decades just to be able to host an angel for a few _seconds._ No one’s ever managed to act as an angel’s avatar for more than a minute, at most. I don’t know how you could force possession, but if Valentine had done that to Simon, Simon would be _dead._ He would have died as an infant, instantly. No one can channel that kind of power.”

It was as if her heart had run at full-tilt into icy razor-wire; Clary sucked in a breath. For a moment, all she could feel was a wordless, depthless terror for her best friend.

“What do you know this?” a familiar voice asked sharply. Olianthe was at the doorway, her eyes narrowed at Luke as she twirled the stem of a red tulip between her fingers as Jace might have toyed with a knife. Clearly she considered Clary’s fear a pain that gave her permission to return from upstairs—but how had she known that Clary was afraid? “The Nephilim are too young a people to remember those who gave their voices to angels.”

Luke’s lips tightened, as if he didn’t want to answer, didn’t want to speak to this princess of the fae, but the words came before Clary had to tear them out of his throat. “Valentine told us,” he said. “When his father died, he used his inheritance to buy stories about angels from the other Hidden Lands. Books, scrolls, stone tablets—everything he could get his hands on.” He looked away from Clary and ’Lianthe both. “I think now he might have summoned demons for answers, too. You can compel them to tell the truth, with the right binding.”

’Lianthe didn’t look happy, but the crushing tightness in Clary’s chest had already eased. “Simon already did, though,” she said. “Channel an angel’s power. He’s done it before.”
Luke was many things, but Clary truly didn’t believe he would take Simon’s secrets to the Clave. “A few weeks ago, on Coney Island,” Clary said. “A Greater Demon called Abigor attacked Simon and Jace. Simon held it off by—channelling—something they called seraphfire.”

“That was Simon?” Disbelief gave Luke’s words sharp edges, each one punched out of metal. “I—looked into that for a warlock I know. Talked to the mundane police, to Downworlder witnesses. Used some of the telesme Valentine taught us.” Telesme Valentine had learned from his ancient scrolls, Clary wondered, or had Jocelyn created the rune-spells for her fiancé? “It was definitely heavenly fire that burned that night. But Simon? What did he do?”

Clary tried to remember. “He said it wasn’t really him. That the power wasn’t his, just moving through him. That he was only anchoring it, channelling it.” She thought back. “He said it came from, or through, Simiel. He was just—what?”

Because Luke had gone deathly pale, turned white as a vampire. “‘Simiel?’” he echoed, a low whisper.

Crap. Luke definitely didn’t need to know about the whole armaskō thing. “Simon’s seraph blade,” Clary said cautiously. Izzy had said that family members could give armaskō blades to each other, that armaskō swords could be philia, platonic, as well as romantic. And back at Renwicks, Luke had assumed Simon’s blade came from Jocelyn, hadn’t he? Clary saw no need to enlighten him.


Luke opened his mouth to speak, but again, no words escaped him. He stopped. Swallowed hard. Tried again. “There’s—Clary, there are angels no Nephilim, no one at all, is supposed to call on. In ritual or spellcraft or—or to name a seraph blade. The Forbidden Names.” He stopped, as if struggling with some deeply-engrained taboo, and when he did finally speak again, it was slowly and carefully, with reverence and fear in equal measure. “Raziel, Metatron, Azriel, Jehoel, Seraphiel, Lucifer, and Samael.”

Clary blinked at him. “Okaaaay?” she said, drawing the word out like taffy. This is relevant why?

He shook his head, body coiled tight with frustration—and maybe fear. “You don’t understand. When you name a seraph blade, you’re invoking the power of that angel into your sword. All Shadowhunter weapons bear the Angel’s Marks, if they didn’t they couldn’t hurt demons at all, but only a seraph blade can kill one, because they channel that angelic energy straight from the source. But some angels are never supposed to be called on that way. They’re too important, or too powerful, or—”

He stopped, but Clary nodded slowly. “Or they’re like Lucifer. I can see why you might not want his power in your seraph blade. But so? What’s that got to do with Simon?”

It was Olianthe who answered. “Angels have no truenames that any but their own kind can speak,” she said, idly rolling the stem of her flower between her fingers. “So the beings of matter give them many.” She paused, considering. “Or perhaps the angels themselves gave different names for themselves to different mortals. It comes to the same thing.”

“There are seven angels never to call on,” Luke said thickly, “but they each have more than one
name. Simiel—Clary, Simiel is one of the names of Samael.”

Samael. That was the second time that name had come up today. Clary felt a chill coil like Eden’s serpent slither down her spine. “The father of all demons.”

“And the angel of death,” Luke said urgently. “Every time Simon invokes his blade, that’s who he’s calling on. He’s drawing Samael’s attention, using his power. I don’t know if Valentine did anything to Simon, or what it was if he did, but if Simon is something—else, something dangerous—if he really does have powers Jocelyn was afraid of—even if he doesn’t, being noticed by a being like Samael—he has to stop using that sword. He has to get rid of it.” Something like pain creased his face for a moment. “I know he won’t listen to me, but Clary—you have to tell him, convince him—the Nephilim who forge our weapons, the Iron Sisters, they can unmake it for him—”

As if Simon would ever give up Jace’s armaskô blade. They would have to pry it out of his cold, dead fingers first. But Clary needed to direct Luke’s thoughts away from that direction, quickly, because if he stopped to think he might wonder why Jocelyn would give her son a sword named for Samael, and then he might realise that she wouldn’t, that there was only one other person who might have given Simon an armaskô blade, and then he would probably explode and she’d get nothing else useful out of him. And she needed useful answers.

“What might Samael do?”

“And none of it good. If he decides Simon’s invocation is a sign of disrespect, he could kill him.” He put his head in his hands. “Or he might decide all of the Nephilim, even all of humanity, need to be taught proper respect. He could wipe New York off the map like Sodom, smite Alicante like Gomorrah, drown the whole world in another Flood—you know nearly every culture has stories of a Flood? Judaism, Hinduism, Babylon, the Aztecs, the Yoruba, China, Ireland, Hawaii…”

“Sumer,” Olianthe murmured.

Luke continued as if he hadn’t heard. “As far as we know, Samael outranks Raziel—as far as we know, he outranks every other angel, except maybe Michael and Metatron. What could he do? I don’t know, Clary! Anything! Whatever he wants, because what could stop him?”

“God?” Clary suggested, wishing she was only joking. Because she didn’t believe in God, not her mother’s God, but angels…angels belonged to the Torah, the Koran, the Bible. Didn’t they? She and Simon had spent hours wrestling with whether the existence of angels and demons proved those books right or wrong, but didn’t all of them insist that angels answered to something higher, something that had promised never to inflict anything like the Flood on humanity again?

She didn’t believe. But she wanted to believe that there was something, someone, with benevolent feelings towards humanity holding the reins of whatever creatures wielded the sky-searing fire Simon had described to her.

She was terrified that there wasn’t.

“Even if God exists,” Luke said, “and I don’t know if He, or She, or It, does—the stories we have say that Samael doesn’t obey Him. Or doesn’t always obey. He’s the father of demons, and God’s left hand; he founded Hell, and he’s a prince of Heaven. If there’s such a thing as an evil angel, Samael is it, but he’s not one of the Fallen, either. That doesn’t mean I want him near anyone I love.”

God. Heaven. Hell. Demons and angels. If Samael was real, Clary wondered, had he really wrestled with Jacob in Penuel, the night’s battle that had earned Jacob the name Israel? Had Moses really
existed, if Samael had been there to rejoice at his death as the Torah said that he had?

Or was Simon right, and angel was just the word Jonathan Shadowhunter had used for a being he had no other name for? Something far outside the scope of human religion or myth? Something not celestial or divine, just—if anything like this could ever be ‘just’—a creature from one of the countless other worlds and dimensions Jace had told Simon about? Not a guardian of human souls, or a messenger of God, but an alien with its own unfathomable motivations and desires?

She could not believe that when some people died, their souls went to the same place Abbadon had come from.

What difference did it make to Simon now, though?

Possibly a lot, if the Nephilim were working from human legends that had no—or almost no—basis in objective reality. If Luke’s beliefs were based on false truths and misinterpretations, on legends based on events irreparably mangled by millennia of Chinese Whispers—then Samael might be no danger to Simon at all.

Might be the exact opposite. The seraphfire that Simon shouldn’t have been able to channel—the power of what, from Clary’s reading, might be the most terrifying angel of them all—had safeguarded him, not destroyed him. With Abigor’s hellfire raging black and burning for him and Jace, Simon had screamed Samael’s name to the sky—and been answered, protected, by a power fierce and terrible enough to make the bone-armoured knight of Hell kneel and cower.

And there hadn’t been a single demon attack since that night. Not anywhere in the city.

Clary was missing something. Luke was wrong, or at least…not right. There were too many pieces, and she couldn’t make them fit together into one whole. She was missing answers to questions that theologians had been debating for all of human history. And no matter how much she might need them, they weren’t answers she was likely to get.

“I’ll tell Simon,” she said, because she would. He needed to hear all of this, and maybe Izzy and the others would know more. Maybe there was a book somewhere in the Institute’s library that Valentine had never read. “But if he can’t be possessed, then Valentine must have done something to him. Maybe even something that means he can survive being possessed.”

“Maybe,” Luke admitted, clearly doubtful. “But even if he can only channel an angel’s power…” He shook his head, stunned. “‘Only,’” he repeated to himself, because how could something so enormous be an ‘only’? “Even if that—the secretari will never let him go. The Clave will never let him go—a Shadowhunter with that kind of power? The secretari will be desperate to figure out and recreate whatever his father did, and the Clave will salivate at the thought of the warrior they could make out of him.”

“Simon will never be a Shadowhunter,” Clary said fiercely. “Not like that. Not for them. He hates them.”

The look Luke gave her was equal parts resigned, pitying, exhausted…and afraid. “They won’t give him a choice.”

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It was a little like a battle-trance, a little like skindancing; time turned fluid and became meaningless, and Alec didn’t notice when Catarina and Khutulun slipped away. There was only the ichor-burn of Magnus’ tears, and the tearing agony of his grief, and the terrible shaking of his shoulders under
Alec’s hands, all of it together like being surrounded by a pack of demons Alec didn’t know how to fight. But that was what parabatai were for, to stand back-to-back and guide and guard when things were at their bleakest, and Alec’s edges blurred, watercolours spilling together like blood and carmine under his skin, Sariel coalescing like the philosopher’s stone out of the alchemy that was Alec’s agela.

There were no blades here, no gleaming whips or monsters to wield them against, but they moved as if there were, guiding Magnus to one of the apartment’s sofas and easing him down onto it with the same careful precision they would have used putting an arrow through a kuri demon’s eye—and with the same fierce love that blazed so bright when Alec’s bow guarded his brother, his sister, his agelai in the heat of battle.

No bow could save Elias now, though, or Xià. It was too late for a rune-Marked bolt to keep Magnus from being heart-hurt, and the wound in him was nothing an iratz could touch; no bandage could stop him bleeding tears. And that helplessness only made Sariel hold Magnus tighter, the memory of Simon crying in the dark of the Silent City churning inside them like a whirlpool in ink; everything they hadn’t been able to give him they gave to Magnus, pouring it into the embrace, the mourning Marks burning on their skin, the pain a flickering candle flame next to the desert sun searing inside Magnus’ chest. Sariel could almost feel the heat of it, as if Magnus were burning up in their arms, his skin drawn thin and tight over charring bones.

And they remembered, not just Simon, but Magnus, holding Alec just like this after Abbadon, after Renwicks, after being told he deserved love too.

“I’m here, buah hatiku,” Sariel whispered, the words coming to them from Magnus’ lips all those weeks ago, when it had been Alec weeping on this same sofa. “I’m here.”

Not, it’s okay, because it wasn’t. Not, we’ll fix this, because they couldn’t. Only I’m here, because they were, and would be for as long as Magnus wanted them.

There was no clock in sight, and if there had been, Sariel wouldn’t have watched it.

Gradually, the rain of tears slowed, then ceased. Gradually, Sariel dissolved, the tight braid of their three selves loosening until Alec was one-in-three again, his parabatai pulling away as much as they could to give their brother and his lover some privacy.

They couldn’t go far, but they tried. Alec loved them for it fiercely.

“Arika told me you asked about the funeral,” Magnus said. His hand, laid on Alec’s chest, found the gemstones of Alec’s witch’s ladder—the one Magnus had given him to save his life, jade and gold—through the fabric of his shirt, and Magnus reached up slightly to hook his fingertips around it where it looped around the back of Alec’s neck, clutching at it like a lifeline. His cheek was against Alec’s collarbone, the curve of his skull fitted against Alec’s throat like it belonged there, and Alec tightened his arms around his boyfriend at the raw note in his voice. “Xià’s.”

“I did.” Alec tried—tried to put compassion without expectation into those two, too-short words. He didn’t want Magnus to feel any kind of obligation, any kind of pressure, to allow Alec admittance to somewhere he wasn’t truly wanted. “Have you—” decided when to hold it? He swallowed the words, rephrased. “Do you know when it is?”

He heard and felt Magnus inhale. “Tomorrow.” It ached like a bruise. “We wanted to wait until we found Elias, but—”

“We found him,” Alec said quietly, and Magnus’ breath stopped as if the words were a guillotine.
“That’s what I came here to tell you.”

“He’s dead.” It was not a question; it was too bleak and barren of hope for that, but Alec answered it anyway, whispering against Magnus’ hair even as the truth caught in his throat like a stone.

“Yes.”

Magnus said nothing for what felt like a long, long time. Alec had nothing to say that hadn’t already been said, had nowhere to be that mattered more than this. He just held Magnus tightly, and had the sudden, mad wish that Raziel’s Marks could be borne by Downworlders. He wished he could trace the parastathentes rune on Magnus’ skin and have Magnus draw it on him, because he wanted nothing more than he wanted to be able to reach down into Magnus and take all his pain away, enfold his soul in Alec’s embrace the way Alec held his body.

He wanted it so badly.

“Where?” Magnus asked, his voice rough.

Where had they found Elias? “I don’t know,” Alec admitted. “I wasn’t there. I didn’t—I haven’t seen him. I only heard the news, and offered to deliver the message.”

Offered. That was a meek word for how he’d insisted on it, but Alec thought it would sound like a kind of boast, as though he were seeking approval or compliments, if he explained how he’d used the politics of the situation as leverage to gain permission to come here. That wasn’t the point.

“Thank you,” Magnus said quietly. “I’m glad it was you, and not a stranger.”

That the Nephilim had had no intention of informing the Spiral Court at all was something Alec decided to keep to himself. He was—officially—here as a gesture of goodwill, his presence meant to be a step towards smoothing things over between Magnus’ people and Alec’s own. Alec didn’t care very much, right now, about the Spiral Court thinking well of the Clave—but he didn’t want a war.

And he didn’t want Magnus to hurt any more than he was already hurting.

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It might have been that Luke carried hints of Valentine’s goals inside him, all unknowing; maybe if they’d combed through his memories of his time in the Circle, the things Valentine had taught his star struck followers about angels, they could have uncovered or pieced together something important about Simon, and Samael.

But Clary didn’t have the energy for it, and Olianthe was only too happy to escort Luke out.

Clary had her face in her hands, but she heard Olianthe come back into the sitting room. Despite everything, it made her smile, because she knew how silently her datemate moved when left to her own devices. The soft scuff of her shoes against the carpet was deliberate, done for Clary’s sake, so Clary would know ’Lianthe was near.

The tiny thoughtfulness and care in the gesture felt like a warm jewel tipped into the cupped hands of Clary’s heart.

Olianthe sat down on the couch next to her. Gently, she wrapped her arm around Clary’s waist and drew the smaller girl against her side. “He is gone,” she assured Clary. “And will not enter again without your invitation.”
Clary considered asking how Olianthe had arranged that, briefly indulging in a fantasy of Olianthe pinning Luke up against a wall and threatening terrible bodily harm if he distressed Clary in any way. But she decided she preferred the fantasy to whatever ‘Lianthe might tell her.

Besides, there were even odds that the fantasy was the truth.

“I don’t know what to do,” she confessed. She tipped her head sideways to rest it on ‘Lianthe’s shoulder. “I don’t know if I can trust anything Luke said. He’s so blind about so much—what if he’s as wrong about Samael as he is about Simon and Jace? What if he isn’t?”

Olianthe was silent.

Clary sighed. “This is part of the stuff you can’t talk about, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” ’Lianthe said gratefully—and apologetically. “I am sorry, réalta croí.”

“I believe you.” Clary closed her eyes. “What can you tell me?”

She felt the faerie princess stroke her hair. “How to turn lead into gold,” Olianthe said softly. “Why the Great Dragons gather treasure for their nests, and where the unicorns go to birth their foals. Why Stonehenge was built, and what the symbols at Newgrange mean. How Atlantis fell, and how to visit it despite that. The secret names of the stars.”

Clary smiled without opening her eyes. “About this, ’Lianthe. Not anything and everything in the universe.” Although some night, she would definitely ask about all of those things too. The secret names of the stars…

Earth’s stars, or the ones the knowe had dressed her in when she went to meet the Seelie Queen—the stars of Annwn?

“Ah, well. You must be more specific when asking questions of one of the People.” Olianthe slid something behind Clary’s ear; after a moment of confusion at the strange sensation, Clary realised it was the flower ’Lianthe had had earlier, the tulip.

“Okay, then.” She opened her eyes and tipped her head to look up at ’Lianthe. “What can you tell me about the situation Simon’s caught in?”

The princess hummed softly. “I can tell you…that Samael will not be offended to be invoked by Simon,” she said slowly. “The very opposite, in fact.”

“The opposite?” Clary sat up. “He wants Simon to call on him?”

“I would stake my life upon it.”

Okay, then.” She opened her eyes and tipped her head to look up at ’Lianthe. “What can you tell me about the situation Simon’s caught in?”

The princess hummed softly. “I can tell you…that Samael will not be offended to be invoked by Simon,” she said slowly. “The very opposite, in fact.”

“The opposite?” Clary sat up. “He wants Simon to call on him?”

“I would stake my life upon it.”

“Why?”

“I cannot say, dear one,” ’Lianthe said, with what Clary thought was real regret.

Clary swallowed the flood of questions she wanted to ask, a flock of razor-winged butterflies in her throat. Faeries couldn’t lie: if Olianthe said that she could not say, then she really couldn’t. “What can you say about it? About the why?”

Olianthe was quiet for a long, long time. “Love is the most terrible weapon of all,” she said softly. “In its name do sins become miracles, and miracles, sins.”

Something sick and cold pooled in the pit of Clary’s stomach. “That doesn’t help me,” she
whispered.

Olianthe looked sad as she bent down to touch her lips to Clary’s temple. “I know,” she whispered back. It almost sounded like despair.

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There was silence again, only softly disturbed by the sound of their breathing. Even Alec’s Shadowhunter-sharp ears couldn’t hear anything beyond this room; no murmur of voices from Catarina and Arika down the hall, no sounds from the apartments above and below this one, or from the streets outside.

But maybe that was because his every sense was focussed wholly and only on the man in his arms.

Which was perhaps the only reason he caught Magnus’ whisper, so low and quiet he might otherwise have missed it. “It means a lot to me, that you would wear sureva for them.”

Alec swallowed hard. He could feel Jace and Izzy, could feel their heartbeats in his fingertips—but they were withdrawn, within reach but not prying, actively trying to look away. His golden-tongued brother wasn’t going to take his mouth and speak the perfect response for him; his fearless sister wasn’t there to slip into his skin and sketch his lips into the right kind of smile. He was never alone, but he was on his own for this, and he knew exactly how to take apart a thousand different kinds of demon, but he had no idea how to touch what Magnus had just given him.

“He was your son,” he said finally, uselessly. Helplessly. “And you’re my—we’re—” He closed his mouth, and his eyes, just for a moment. “I wish I could have known him,” he said when he could speak again. “But even if I didn’t, he was—he was yours. And I know that doesn’t make him mine, but…”

He trailed off, all words failing him.

“But it made him more than a stranger,” Magnus finished for him, softly.

Alar is what you wear when a Consul dies, Alec thought. It’s for distant and sterile grief, impersonal, the death of someone you never spoke to, and I never spoke to Elias but his death is not nothing to me. It is close and raw and completely personal, because he was yours, because he should have been safe in the city I was set to watch over. I would have stood between him and Xia and whatever killed them if I’d known to, if I’d been smart enough, good enough to know they were in danger. I would have died to protect them, not because they were your son and sister but because that is what is right, and I am sorry, I am so sorry that I failed them. It hurt too much for alar. Nothing but sureva could encompass how much it hurts, how much I’d give to have it undone.

But the words knotted when he tried to bring them to his lips, and he only nodded, pathetic and useless.

Magnus sighed, a small and shaky sound. “Someone from the Court will come for Elias—Elias’ body. At the Institute?”

Alec nodded again, the motion brushing his face against Magnus’ hair. “It’s not—you won’t have to deal with my parents,” he said awkwardly, remembering how awful they had been, how dismissive of Magnus’ raging grief, when he had come to tell them what had happened. That a child was dead, and the blood on their hands. “Do you remember when I told you the High Inquisitor was coming, to talk to us about Valentine? She arrived this morning. She and her people are in charge of the Institute now. They’re the ones who found Elias.”
“I should have guessed,” Magnus murmured. “Maryse and Robert Lightwood would never care enough to look for a dead Downworlder.” His voice was bitter.

Alec didn’t contradict him. He ran his palm up and down Magnus’ back without saying anything, softly stroking the path of Magnus’ spine over and over. Trying not to feel how much thinner his boyfriend had become, thin enough for Alec to feel the edges of his bones through his silk pyjamas. Trying not to think about how Magnus could have lost so much weight in just a few days.

‘Death is the poison that sickens him.’

Magnus sighed. “When will she interview you?”

“She already has,” Alec said. Magnus shifted to look up at him, frowning slightly, and Alec hesitated. Magnus’ face was still wet; unselfconsciously so, but a sharp reminder, if Alec needed one, that Magnus didn’t need all of Alec’s problems spilled into his lap. “A lot has happened,” he admitted, trying to make the words light and careless.

Those beautiful green-gold eyes stayed locked on him, seeing through the weak misdirection like sunlight cutting through fog. “Tell me.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Alec said, more firmly this time. “We have it—" under control.

He couldn’t force the words out. Couldn’t lie, not to Magnus. Some days it felt like what he had with Magnus was the only clean thing in his life, the only thing unstained by blood and ichor, the only thing that had no sharp edges of adamas or steel. The one place he could lay down all his armour, set aside every lie, and be—just be. Not the son of outcasten traitors; not the pureblood scion of an ancient Nephilim House; not an older brother; not a guardian; not a killer without a single death to his name. Just himself, whoever that was.

Death and darkness defined the shape of Alec’s life. Until Arika’s bombshell revelation, he had thought that Magnus was the one thing they could not touch; tall and proud and immortal, powerful enough to drive all the dark away. Now… Now he felt how fragile this was. How fragile Magnus was.

If he’d ever considered lying to Magnus, he couldn’t do so now.

He looked down into Magnus’ face, helplessly, and saw him smile a little. As if he could hear Alec’s every thought; as if those eyes really could see right through him.

“You’re my boyfriend,” Magnus said quietly. “Your problems are my problems.” His smile cracked right through the middle. “And if I may be so selfish, I’d appreciate something else to think about right now.”

His new parabatai rune throbbed on Alec’s upper arm—as if he needed any physical reminder of his agelai when he could feel them both inside him, part of him. It was so—much, so enormously, breathtakingly world-changing, that he desperately wanted to tell Magnus all about it. How could he not?

Except that Magnus wasn’t a Shadowhunter, wasn’t even Nephilim. How could he understand, when no human words, not even Jace’s gilded ones, could possibly explain it? And he’d hated seeing Jace and Alec skindance, weeks ago in the aftermath of Abigor’s attack. What if he hated this, Sariel, which was so much more—and infinitely more permanent—than a skindance? What if he was disgusted, or horrified, by the transcendence of the agelai bond? Simon had been uneasy, when he’d seen how the Angel’s gift transformed their we into I—and he’d barely had the chance to see it in
action before the Inquisitor’s arrival swept everything else away. Magnus wasn’t a Shadowhunter, but he knew them, was far less ignorant about the Nephilim and their culture than Simon, despite the latter’s lineage. Agelae were rare; Alec did not think they were so rare that the High Warlock of Brooklyn would not understand exactly what Alec had done, by giving his oath to Jace and Izzy both.

It was not—quite—as fierce and desperate a fear as Sariel had felt upon entering the Infirmary and seeing Simon being torn apart by fire and darkness. It was not—quite—as soul-freezing as that heart-stopping moment afterwards when they had thought, for a shard of a second, that he was dead.

But the thought of Magnus repudiating him still struck Alec like Abbadon’s claws punching through his chest, the quicksilver-terror cold and terrible as the Infernal venom that had nearly dragged him into the Abyss.

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“Did he just say ‘boyfriend’?” Ana asked in an incredulous whisper. “A pureblooded Shadowhunter is dating a Downworlder?!”

Only half-joking, Lucio tapped gently at the comm with the edge of his nail. “Maybe we should tell Sam his device is broken.”

It wasn’t funny, not with the word Kilulšargad caught like coal in both their throats.

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“Alec?”

And yet—how could Alec not tell him? Even if Alec could somehow hide Sariel’s existence—and he didn’t think for one second that he could, not for long, not with the agela so new and raw and overwhelming; sooner or later, he would slip up, slip through the translucent, transparent, transcorporeal borders between his self and his agelai’s and reveal that his heart now beat in time with two instead of one—even if Alec could somehow manage it, Magnus had a right to know. Had every right to know. Alec had wept here, after Renwicks; had let Magnus see him at his weakest, most vulnerable, most pathetic. And that had been hard and humiliating enough—but if Magnus had shared that memory with someone else? If some stranger had watched Alec break down and cry from behind Magnus’ feline eyes?

He couldn’t have borne it. And this was no different, unless it was worse, because Magnus had far more reason for grief, far more right to his privacy. He had allowed Alec to come into his home, to see him like this—but he hadn’t consented to Jace and Izzy being here as well.

And they were. They didn’t want to be, they couldn’t help it, they were trying as hard as they could to give Alec space to be alone. But there was only so far they could go, when they were all one.

“A lot has happened,” Alec said again, but what he meant was, I’m sorry.

“Tell me,” Magnus said again, softly.

And Alec did.

***

Ana and Lucio listened closely to the Shadowhunter’s story, alternately exchanging baffled and horrified glances. Some of it was incomprehensible, or only potentially useful—Ana didn’t care
about the Lightwoods’ family dramas; this business of their casting out their adopted son, for example—but you never knew what titbit might turn the tide at the right moment. Lucio and Chi had already tracked Symeon Morgenstern to Alexander’s new apartment, so that was redundant information—although she would have bet good money that Lucio was drafting a mental floor plan of the place from Alexander’s descriptions, just as she was. And they had already heard how Symeon had frozen two Shadowhunters in their tracks and flung an *urbara* across the room, in an anunnaku’s fit; the *werewolf*, as Alexander called him, had told Samuel and Chi all about it himself. That story was what had turned the Lightbringers’ attention towards the long-lost Morgenstern.

If only he’d stayed lost.

But this other thing, this Nephilim ritual, these—

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“—*agelai*?” Magnus pulled himself from Alec’s arms, sitting up on the sofa to look Alec directly in the face. “The three of you became *agelai*?”

“Sariel,” Alec said quietly.

“What did you say?”

It was like a thunderstorm breaking out of a clear blue sky; power and presence *exploded* through the room, the air abruptly thick and heavy and fired, full of electric static that shocked the hairs on Alec’s arms and the back of his neck straight up. Had he thought of Magnus as weakened, fragile, vulnerable, just a moment before? Because there was no trace of it now in the man before him, the shadows under those feline eyes eclipsed by the fire within them, thinning flesh cloaked in scorching, maelstroming magic that ignited the air into shimmering whorls snarling and whipping around him, more terrible than Alec had ever known it to be—even wilder than when Magnus had sworn to tear down Alicante’s towers; fiercer than when he and Alec and Isabelle had raced to Coney Island to stand with Jace and Simon against Abigor; more primal and glorious and devastating, even, than when he’d healed Alec of Abbadon’s poison and driven back the legions of the void with an upraised hand. It was power with such weight and heft that Alec could taste it in the back of his throat; Arabian jasmine, sandalwood thick as smoke, amber and pepper that burned even as it lured, that Alec wanted to breathe in deep and fling himself away from at the same time. A lifetime of training said danger, said *Downworlder*, said bow, arrow, shoot-for-the-heart—

But something so much deeper than that whispered *beautiful*.

Alec stared, his mouth gone dry, his *agelai*’s pulses racing in his wrists, because all three of them should have been afraid and none of them were.

“Sariel,” they managed, somehow getting the name past Alec’s lips just as the door opened.

***

“Magnus!” Catarina shouted. She tightened her hold on the door handle as the room blurred before her eyes, the floor tilting beneath her, her every unhuman sense seared blind by the atomic flames of Magnus’ power roaring through the room, the building, the *block*. *Ashipu-ene* on the other side of the *world* would sense this as clearly as the mortals had seen the pillar of heavenly fire on Coney Island weeks ago. “What do you think you’re—?”

“—*Get out,*” Magnus said, without looking away from Alec.

Khutulun came up behind her, and Catarina could feel her, too, gathering her power about her, like
the shudders of the ground beneath one’s feet that presaged an earthquake. The thought of what could happen if quake met sunburst gave Cat the strength to push through the scorching heat of Magnus’ magic and try again, answering him in the same language. “~Magnus, you cannot channel your power in this state!~”

“~I said get out!~” Magnus snapped.

Behind her, Khutulun said, low, “~Fire does not command Earth.~”

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At that, Magnus looked at the two women, and Alec felt the breaking of their gaze like the loss of the sun.

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“~I am ordering you out of the room,~” Magnus said, and Catarina tasted ashes as the fire in his eyes lashed her. “~Do not make me order you out of my territory.~”

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After a long, knife-edge moment, Khutulun gave a stiff nod. Walking forwards past Catarina, she drew a large and slashing circle in the air with her hand—and in the wake of her fingers trailed a thin and perfect line of pearlescent light, like a slice cut into the fabric of the world. In an instant it was done, and the circle, a little larger than the woman herself, flooded edge-to-edge with light that shimmered like water and diamonds.

She stepped through it, and vanished, the Portal—because that was what it was, a Portal, sketched in the air as though it was nothing—snapped closed behind her.

Catarina gave a helpless look at the spot where the Portal had been, and shot another in Magnus’ direction, but neither of them said anything.

After a beat, Catarina shook her head, and went back into the corridor, pulling the door closed behind her without a word.

When Magnus looked at Alec again, it was like a solar eclipse in reverse; wondrous, beautiful, blinding. “Where did you learn that name?”

It took a moment for Sariel to remember what Magnus was talking about; even three-in-one, it was a struggle to shape their thoughts into anything but dread-desire-awe. “The Qumran texts. He’s—”

“I know who xe is,” Magnus said. His eyes burned, and Sariel wanted to fall against his mouth, lace their fingers in his hair. “Why did you choose it?”

“I—we didn’t,” Sariel said. “Simon’s angel did.”

And just like that, it was over: the storm of Magnus’ magic broke apart into soft stillness, the heavy weight of the air abruptly lifted from where it pressed Alec’s breastbone breathless, the aura of power slipping like an emperor’s robe from Magnus’ shoulders—and beneath it he was himself again, beloved and brittle and laughing.

Except—not. Laughing, but not; beloved, always; but himself—

Not.
The High Warlock of Brooklyn was a man brilliant and beautiful, charismatic and clever, debonair and dangerous; one gesture from his jewel-decked hand was enough to send the most recalcitrant Downworlders rushing to do his will—and another sent demons fleeing into the Void to escape his wrath. He glittered and shone and all who came near were drawn to dance around him like orbiting planets, ensnared by this bright star blazing unafraid and glorying in its own glory.

But Sariel looked at him now and saw a star that was burning out, burning up from the inside. Guttering. He looked so small and plain, they thought with an anxious, fearful pang; usually Magnus’ presence filled the room, dazzling and heady and electric, highlighted and honed by the bright jewels on his fingers and the glitter in his styled hair, and it was another kind of magic, the confidence and magic of him somehow erasing, or superseding, Magnus’ youthful face. Magnus looked eighteen, nineteen, twenty at most, but he was unmistakably more. He burned too brightly to be only what he appeared to be; the truth of him blazed through his skin.

Now all of that seemed to be missing; he looked young and exhausted and his laughter was obsidian, dark and sharp and liable to snap under the wrong pressure.

So Sariel didn’t press. They just reached out, opening their arms wordlessly, and Magnus fell back into them, pressing his face into Alec’s shoulder.

For a long, horrible moment, Sariel couldn’t tell if Magnus was shaking with laughter or sobs.

“Of course xe did,” Magnus said breathlessly. “Of course.”

***

Before the flare was even over Lucio was speaking quietly but urgently into his comm, passing on the unhuman name that had made an ashipu-rei draw on a poisoned nexus.

Nothing. Nothing should have been enough to make him do that. Not a direct threat to his own life, not watching his dearest loves bleed out in front of him, not an army of Infernal Knights descending on his territory. Nothing.

Her training kept Ana from throwing up, but it couldn’t stop her from wanting to.

***

“A brilliant woman, your sister,” Magnus said. “I’d hate to play chess against her. She checkmated the Inquisitor nicely with that little suggestion.”

He pulled away a little, to look Alec in the face. “Or should I say ‘you’, not ‘she’? With the bond so new, you must all be struggling to keep yourselves separate.”

The anxiety pounding through Alec’s veins only underlined the point, dragging Izzy and Jace in like a whirlpool. Sariel unfolded into glittering fractals, compressed again, spun into riptides. They couldn’t identify Magnus’ tone.

“I wanted this,” they said—Alec said, himself and then not, one-in-three and three-in-one in a strobing rush, getting his head above the water only to go back under again over and over. Tributaries couldn’t separate from the river again, especially when the confluence made them feel so whole. But the river tried, for Magnus. “Our—my—whole life. The three of me—us—we were meant to be agelai. We were just waiting for me to—for Izzy to be ready.”

And maybe she never would have been, and that would have been okay too. They hadn’t needed the Angel’s bond to be a perfect triquetra of blade and bow and electrum whip. The rings of fire as
they’d spoken the oaths, the final set of parabatai runes—those had only formalised what had been true for years.

We are us.

Magnus’ silence was a garotte around Sariel’s throat, drawing tighter and tighter with each passing moment—but finally it fell away, as Magnus sighed. “I knew what I was getting into, dating someone with a parabatai,” he said, and Sariel’s heart lifted, hardly daring to be hopeful. “‘Marry half and marry two’, as they used to say.”

Sariel could scarcely think over the sudden pounding of their hearts, mouths gone dry and speechless. They’d never put the concepts of Magnus and marriage together, even in their deepest and most private thoughts. Hearing Magnus do it was like the blazing, world-changing fire of your first Mark taking form on your skin. “They still do,” they managed.

“Do they?” Magnus asked, absentely. “I did know you had a parabatai when I told you to call me, you know. I knew the moment I saw you and Jace together.” His lips quirked a little. “You were not subtle.”

He stared into the distance for a moment. “I suppose this won’t be so different, once you’re all used to it,” he said after another pause. “I just—wouldn’t want them to see me like this.”

Sariel—Alec—Sariel whispered helplessly, “It’s because we care about you so much. Strong emotions—”

Magnus smiled at them; tired and sad, but a real smile. “I know.” He reached for Alec’s hand, and Sariel’s fingers slid between his, interlocking perfectly. “Tell me the rest?”

***

Ana was taking careful mental notes as Alexander went on. The next morning, the Institute, the High Inquisitor—it was like a kind of vertigo, listening to the Shadowhunter describe from an insider’s perspective what Ana and the rest of her team had experienced from the outside. They’d followed the anunnaku and its coterie to the Institute, of course, even if they hadn’t known why the creature was going there. Or what exactly had gone on inside its walls to trigger the monster’s rage.

Kilulšargad.

***

“And you lied?” Magnus asked without missing a beat.

Sariel wasn’t sure whether or not to be proud that he took it for granted that they would lie to the High Inquisitor. Not so long ago, it would have been unthinkable.

Now, the only possible answer was, “Yes.”

***

They’d lied to protect a holhokki? Shadowhunters had lied to protect one of the ones they called mundanes? This Clary person—they’d broken their own Laws to keep her out of the Clave’s reach?

And Magnus ashipu-rei had known that they would. Because a Shadowhunter was dating a warlock. The Downworlder race most despised by the Nephilim because they were the children of demons.
Alexander Lightwood—Alexander Sariel nat Lightwood—a pureblooded Shadowhunter—was dating a warlock. Was wearing mourning Marks for an ashipu child. Knew the greeting of the wise.

Ana hoped, fiercely, that he was wise enough to spot the danger of the anunnaku in his midst and repudiate it. Because she realised that she was afraid of what an anunnaku could do with a Shadowhunter as strange as this one in its coterie.

She had to put those thoughts aside as Alexander described the confrontation with the Nephilim High Inquisitor, and the deep, dark secret whose reveal had triggered the explosion of power Ana and the other Lightbringers had raced to contain. “It’s sleeping with its brother?” she hissed, appalled. When she’d been assigned to hunt down a potential anunnaku, she’d braced herself for violence and depravity, but she hadn’t expected incest.

Lucio shrugged. “Technically, only its half-brother. And at least it sounds like it’s consensual.”

“What a very low bar,” Ana muttered.

“It’s one most of those in my people’s records didn’t clear,” he pointed out. “Have the Leiomano encountered more who cared about consent?”

“Are you on that thing’s side?” she asked. The overhanging threat of the Kilušargad honed her words sharper than she’d meant them, even if they were both keeping their voices low so as not to drown out the conversation coming through the transmitter.

Ripples of deep, oil-spill blue rippled through Lucio’s dark hair, the only outward sign of how her question must have insulted him. “Of course not. But given what else it’ll do if we don’t put it down, I just don’t see any reason to care about its sex life if it’s not raping and murdering people.”

Ana thought of Cas offering his smallest finger to hook around Lucio’s; of Lucio pressing their brows together, and how still Cas had held himself while Lucio touched him. “You wouldn’t.”

Lucio huffed a soft breath. “I thank the spirits every day for making me asexual. Sex can’t possibly be worth the knots the rest of you tie yourselves into over it.”

It took Ana a moment to parse that, between focussing on the transmitter and Lucio’s still-unfamiliar accent, and by then Alexander had moved on with his story, and she paused, the brief moment of almost-playfulness over.

Because Symeon’s confrontation with the Inquisitor? Ana remembered the white-hot terror of being on the other side of that, knowing that the anunnaku they’d come to kill might be about to destroy the borough, the city, the continent entire in its atomic-bomb fury; knowing that if she stumbled, stuttered, fucked-up her spellwork by even a microscopic degree she could be dooming five hundred and seventy-nine million people to a searing death.

No pressure, or anything.

It was a kind of morbid vertigo, listening to Alexander relate the same event she’d experienced from an entirely different perspective. But—she met Lucio’s eyes and saw her confusion mirrored in his face, because what Alexander described—the shadow of wings cast against the walls, the voice that was no voice, the heavenly fire that had come streaming out of Symeon’s body like light from a newborn star—

*Anunnaki have no wings*, Lucio mouthed at her, and Ana nodded slowly.

As if she needed the reminder. As if they hadn’t all been grilled in every detail of what anunnaki
were—and were not—day and night for years.

This was wrong. It was all wrong, or right in the wrong ways: an annunaku that hid itself from the Nephilim who would worship it if it revealed itself; one that chose strange Lawbreakers for its coterie instead of those whose power and influence would be assets to it; one that, apparently, cared about a human girl; one that Manifested not with the wild, sadistic savagery of its kind, but in order to protect another living creature, to safeguard its brother—

Even if it was sleeping with that brother.

An annunaku that Manifested wings. One that bled and convulsed after channelling its power, and Ana went over and over it in her mind, but no, they hadn’t made any kind of mistake in the binding ritual, nothing that could have caused the annunaku to bleed and break inside.

Something wasn’t right.

And why was the ashipu-rei being so quiet?

***

Reciting the events of the day calmed Sariel—giving reports was something they were used to, a well-worn and familiar ritual. The only strangeness was in making their report while curled up on their boyfriend’s sofa, telling it all to Magnus instead of Hodge or their parents. But by the time they’d reached Jace being dragged away to the Silent City, Alec and his mother going with the Inquisitor to talk with the werewolves, Izzy in the library with Max—by then Alec was mostly himself again. Only mostly—if his two parabatai were flames then Alec was paper; one brush would set him alight, make them all one blazing fire again. But it was enough that he allowed himself to kiss Magnus’ dark hair.

“Hey,” he said quietly. “I’m me again.”

“For now,” Magnus said. But he pulled back enough that Alec could see his smile. It was small. Rusty. “Welcome back.”

Hesitantly—he still, after so many weeks, struggled to really believe he had permission to touch this incredible man—Alec laid his gloved palm against Magnus’ cheek. His right hand; the opalescent scar Simon’s angel had left on him, the si̱mádi angélou, throbbed as Magnus turned his face into the touch, his hollowed eyes falling closed.

“That feels so good,” he murmured. The edges of his words smeared a little, as if he were close to passing out.

It felt good to Alec, too. But it also hurt him, scared him, because Magnus felt so brittle and fragile against his fingers... As gently as he knew how, he brushed his battle-roughened thumb along Magnus’ cheekbone—and the sharp jut of it, honed by the sickness eating away at Magnus’ flesh, slashed at his heart like knives, and it was like having his throat cut, the words just spilled out of him like blood. “Magnus, what’s wrong with you? How bad is it, really?”

It’s only been a few days and I missed you, do you know, do you have any idea how much I’ll miss you if you actually die —?

Just the thought of it—the unutterable wrongness of it—Magnus was a warlock, he was supposed to live forever, to still be his magical, glittering, glorious self when the pyramids had ground down to dust and the Light Worlders spread from Earth to distant stars, the way Simon and Clary insisted they someday would; when the sun burned out Magnus was supposed to still be blazing on some far-
away planet, in some distant galaxy, still loving and laughing and living long after he’d forgotten ever dating a blue-eyed Shadowhunter who’d let his son and sister die.

Elias and Xia’s deaths had violated the natural order. Magnus’ death would break it completely.

Magnus was silent for so long that Alec thought he wasn’t going to answer. But finally he sighed. “Arika should never have said anything to you,” he said tiredly.

“But she did.” ‘Death is the poison that sickens him.’ He felt like those words had been branded onto his bones, searing deeper than any Mark ever could, and Alec swallowed hard, uncertain of his—his right to say what he was about to. Not really believing that it was allowed. And yet— “Your problems are my problems,” he said quietly.

You’re my boyfriend. It goes both ways. Please, let me help you.

But Magnus shook his head, his cheek whispering against Alec’s glove as he moved. “Not this one.”

It wasn’t that Magnus didn’t have every right to keep his secrets. He did. But if he was dying—if he was dying— Alec had only felt desperation like this twice in his life; once, when Abbadon’s claws had been about to fall on Simon and Alec had felt Jace’s heart scream; twice, when his parabatai had been facing Abigor without him and Alec had needed to get to Jace more than he’d needed air.

Thrice, because if Magnus was dying—

“Please,” Alec—Sariel, Jace and Izzy pulled into Alec’s terror and need as if into a whirlpool—begged, and oh, how their parents would be disgusted to see them, pureblooded Shadowhunters of the oldest Houses, plead with a Downworlder. But Sariel shed the Nephilim pride as swiftly and reflexively as they would have a broken blade. “Magnus, please.”

Magnus’ eyes were still closed, but his expression was an open book of heartache. Heart-break. “I can’t tell you,” he said quietly, and his voice was thick with equal parts exhaustion and regret.

When Sariel’s selves experienced different sensations, it helped them separate, and abruptly Alec was three-in-one and one-in-three simultaneously, because it was like swallowing broken glass and his agelai felt it too but not as much, not as much; the shredding cold, the struggle to make himself accept what he’d heard, take it in. The way it cut him to ribbons inside, slicing through his vocal cords and leaving him bleeding silence.

“It’s not because I don’t trust you,” Magnus said. He laid his hand over Alec’s heart, and in some numb cold place inside Alec thought about that, about his heart bracketed by the Mark of his parabatai bond with Izzy on his chest and the Mark of Elias and Xia’s deaths on his back, a lump of useless meat that beat harder as if trying to touch Magnus’ fingertips through Alec’s skin. “I know you’d keep my secrets—my people’s secrets—if you could. But you’re a Shadowhunter. If they question you under the Mortal Sword, you won’t have a choice about what you tell them.” He leaned his forehead against Alec’s shoulder. “I won’t lie to you. I won’t tell you this is something it’s not. But the thing that’s making me ill—it’s something we’ve kept from the Clave since the beginning. I can’t risk it falling into their hands.”

***

Ana closed her eyes in relief. He’s not going to tell him. For an instant there, she’d wondered. She’d feared.

Even telling a Shadowhunter as much as Magnus had was dangerous. And Arika—by all the loas, what had she been thinking, to tell Alexander so much? The Spiral Court would fall on her like the
wrath of Baron Kriminel if they discovered what she’d said, who she’d said it to.

It made no sense. Arika must not know about the anunnaku—or not know that Alexander was of its coterie—

…Or she must believe that the anunnaku wasn’t connected to the Kilulšargad.

The thought caught on her mind like a small, glowing splinter, and Ana tucked it away to consider later.

***

Oh. Alec took a deep breath, and the oxygen flowed down his throat and into his lungs and where it passed, the raw ruin of the thought that Magnus didn’t trust him was healed. “That—that’s actually not a problem right now,” he said, almost laughing a little, almost hysterical, because, by the Angel, today was, today had been—it just hadn’t stopped and now, this one thing— “We don’t have the Sword anymore. It’s like the Cup all over again—Raziel must be so ashamed of us, his blood in our veins and we can’t even keep a cup and a sword safe—"

Magnus jolted upright, pulling out of Alec’s arms to look him in the face. “What?”

“It’s been a really long day,” Alec said, and the weak joke cracked halfway through and all of a sudden it all seemed to hit him at once, the weight of mountains falling on his shoulders: every revelation and every horror, all the fear and panic and desperation, every moment of spending his mind and strength like arrows in a rapidly-emptying quiver just to keep all their heads above water, to keep his agelai and Simon from drowning. His bones seemed to shudder beneath his skin with exhaustion, soul-deep.

“Alec.” Magnus closed his hand around Alec’s wrist, hot and urgent and his beautiful jaguar eyes gone frantic and afraid. “Tell me.”

His pulse racing against Magnus’ fingers, Alec did, continuing the story they’d paused: Izzy and Max in the Institute’s library, and then—

The angel waking—screaming—Izzy running to answer—

“What did xe say?” Magnus asked sharply.

“Izzy?” Alec asked, thinking he’d misheard ‘she’, but Magnus made a dismissive gesture.

“No, it, the angel, what did it say?”

Alec reached for Izzy’s memories and they came as easily as his own, as clearly as if it had been his body standing in the Infirmary and not his sister’s; Syr Bellesword and Robert Lightwood and the blazing golden boy in the bed, Simon’s skin thin as glass around that burning glory—

Without thinking Alec answered, “It said, ‘Where is he? Nurma! Where is Nurma?’”

And he froze, because that was not what the angel had said at all.

‘Quiída i tox? Nurma! Quiída i Nurma?’

“How do I know that?” Alec whispered. “It was speaking a language I don’t know—I have no idea what language that was, how do I know that?”

“Enochian,” Magnus said, hoarse. He leaned away from Alec, his expression stricken and his eyes
distant, his mind turned inwards to some other secret Alec wasn’t to know. “It would have been speaking Enochian.”

Alec stared at him. “The angelic language?”

Magnus laughed a little. “No. No, one word of that would have destroyed the east coast.” He bent his head, rubbing a hand over his face. “When an angel speaks in their own tongue, they remake reality. Enochian is just what they use to communicate with the rest of us.”

He looked up at Alec, and Alec could read dozens of languages but he couldn’t read what was written there, in Magnus’ face, in his feline-fire eyes. There was a blankness there, as if his boyfriend’s face had become a wax mask, and Alec almost flinched when Magnus reached—slowly, carefully—for Alec’s gloved hand, taking it between both his own.

“My guess is,” Magnus said quietly, “that the angel gave it to you when it marked you.” His fingertips touched, lightly, the soft dark leather beneath which the sjimádi angélou shone like light inset in flesh.

“It gave me a language?”

“Apparently.” Tired. Magnus sounded so tired, and so strained, and there were a thousand questions Alec wanted to ask—needed to ask.

But Magnus was not a Shadowhunter. Shadowhunters watched their friends die in front of them and kept on fighting; they went home and drew their mourning Marks and the next night they got right back up and went out on patrol again, because there was no other option. Shadowhunters were coins for spending in the world’s defence, but Magnus wasn’t. Magnus was wounded and in pain, sick with something terrible, and Alec wanted nothing more than to swallow every thorn-sharp question and give Magnus what peace he could.

Magnus met his eyes again. “What happened next?”

“It wanted Jace,” Alec said. “It asked Izzy to find him. To show it where he was.” Looking into its eyes had been like looking into eternity, and everything had blazed gold, and it had taken her to the Silent City, ordered the entrance open with a word, swept her down into the dark on wings of shining fire.

And below—

“Jace heard the Silent Brothers screaming,” Alec said, almost numbly; his edges were blurring, swirling like paint into his parabatai at the strength of the memories. “He saw one just—fall dead.” He took a deep breath. “Valentine was there. He had the Sword—”

“Valentine has Sielu?”

Sariel snapped together, three-in-one in an instant at the punch of Magnus’ shock-disbelief-terror-rage, the tsunami of blue that crashed down and outward and swept everything away: breath-sight-touch-name-knowing, flames that burned them alive without burning, that turned the witch’s ladder around his neck into a noose of stars blazing like meteors, light-heat-fire-MAGIC racing through every artery and vein and turning Alec’s body into a constellation, lightning-sunlight-ambrosia rushing through them and everything was blue, a thousand shades of blue, sapphire-azure-lapis-cobalt-turquoise-indigo-celeste-cyan-peacock-hyacinth-mazarine-slate-smalt-watchet-teal-perse-lovat-zaffre-bluebell-kyanite-cerulean-larkspur-glaucoius-tanzanite-kingfisher-iris-apatite-swallow-storm-ocean-ice-fire, the burning blue heart of a flame, not fire but Fire, what fool had ever claimed that
flames were only red and gold—?

“Magnus!”

“Alec!”

The voices come at once, together, Catarina bursting into the room and Magnus almost lunging to catch Sariel by the shoulders before they can fall, before they can fall, before they can fall—

And they fracture, warp like a mirror, Sariel and Alec at once and together, because they are full of blue and there is no end to it and it rushes in, it finds the abyss Simon’s angel tore through Alec’s soul and fills it, a roaring waterfall-firefall of blue-light-heat-life—

For a shred of a second, for an instant that is eternal, the hole in him is whole.

***

Pure firepower burst like a bomb from the ashipu-rei’s home and Lucio threw himself at Ana even as she swept her hands up, his blue-green-black wings folding around them both just as her wards crystallised into an outer shield over his shimmering feathers, forming a shelter like a boulder diverting a tide of molten lava to either side and above them, rushing over and around them, earth’s-core-fire hot enough to atomise and in the dark space beneath Lucio’s wings, the jewels in Ana’s heart-and-dagger pendant glowed like burning coals.

If they’d tried to stand against it, they would have burned. But instead they only deflected and redirected the force of it, let it wash over them without resistance, and they lived.

***

And then it’s over, it’s gone, the room is thick with the smell of Magnus’ magic and Catarina is shouting in a language Sariel doesn’t speak (that the angel didn’t give them) and Magnus’ green-gold eyes are shimmering and afraid and light is spilling from the edges of Alec’s leather glove where the mark on their palm feels like a star in their hand.

It dims and disappears even as they get their breath back.

“I’m sorry,” Magnus is saying, over and over, “I’m sorry, are you all right, Alec, Alec—”

“I’m okay.” They couldn’t stop their body (bodies, Izzy and Jace’s are both trembling too, across the city in their room at the Institute) shaking with the aftershocks, but they made themselves reach up and take Magnus’ hands in theirs. “I’m fine, I’m not hurt.”

They’re not lying. But it doesn’t feel like the truth, either, when the wound the angel dealt feels new and raw again. Jace did his best to fill the emptiness before, and becoming an agela had made Alec feel properly alive again, made him feel like he could breathe and sleep and burned away the leaden fog his injury had bled like blood.

But for a moment it had been as though there was no wound at all, and now there was, however well Sariel combined to patch and bandage it.

With effort, they made themselves focus, not on the ache inside but the hands in theirs, Catarina’s sharp voice, the electricity in the air. “What happened?”

“I lost control.” Magnus’ voice was thick with self-recrimination and self-disgust. “I’m so sorry. I haven’t—there’s no excuse. I haven’t done that in centuries.”
Because they were drunk on the fading taste of magic, because their soul ached where it is riven, because everything about this day had been wrong and they were tired of questions they could not ask, Sariel said, “So why did you do it now?” Magnus’ fingers were cold, clasped between Alec’s hands. “Is it because you’re sick?”

“Magnus,” Catarina said sharply.

Without looking away from Sariel, Magnus said, “You didn’t hear, Cat. Valentine has the Mortal Sword.”

“So what? That’s the Nephilim’s prob—”

She broke off mid-word, comprehension dawning across her face like blood spreading through cloth. “Oh, Ma’at,” she whispered. Realisation—and horror.

“He can use it to control demons,” Sariel said, glancing between Magnus and Catarina. They would not realise until later that they had not hesitated even one beat of their hearts to break centuries of silence and give up one of the Nephilim’s greatest secrets to two warlocks. Had not even considered hesitating.

“We know,” Magnus said grimly. “I remember.” At Sariel’s startled glance—despite their curiosity, their boyfriend had never told them his age—Magnus’ smile grew jagged edges. “The Uprising wasn’t the first time I’ve fought Shadowhunters. I doubt it’ll be the last.”

Something uneasy and sharp and sad twisted in the pit of Sariel’s stomachs. Something like guilt, and grief. “I hope it will be,” they said quietly.

Magnus’ smile faded, and he bowed his head to kiss Alec’s fingers where they were closed over his own, so gently that it hurt. “I hope so too.”

But he doesn’t believe it, Sariel realised, he expects to fight again, and it wrapped like a garotte around their throats.

Because the threat of war gleamed like light on blood on the horizon; war between the Downworld and the Nephilim, if the Shadowhunters couldn’t find whoever was murdering Downworlder children (Valentine, it has to be Valentine) and bring them to justice.

If it came to it—if it came to war—would they and Magnus be standing on different sides?

How could we not be? Sariel thought despairingly.

It struck like lightning and cut like claws, a whisper like skin parting to bleed: Simon would fight for the Downworld.

We could too.

It was a thought too big, too blasphemous, too terrible to contemplate; in a near-panic, Sariel blurted, “But he can only control so many.” It came out almost a plea. “And he has to summon them first. Valentine. He can’t just call an army through the world-wards.”

“He can,” Magnus said, “if he brings the wards down first.”
The chapter title comes from a quote by Aeschylus, an ancient Greek writer of tragedies; “There is no sickness worse for me than words that to be kind must lie.”

Sarin is the most deadly nerve gas on the planet.

Orpiment is a crazily toxic crystal/mineral made up of arsenic and sulphur.

Chagren means ‘grief’ in Haitian Creole.

Déy means ‘mourning’ in the same.

Erzulie Dantor is one of the loa or lwa of Haitian Vodou. Loas are spirits/gods who are often associated with Catholic saints as a result of African slaves being forced to convert. Unlike Catholic saints, loas are not just beings to pray to, but require/demand specific services and presents/offerings. Erzulie Dantor is one of the Petro loa (there are several families or mini-pantheons of loas), a protector of women and children and a very badass lady. The dagger-and-heart, or the heart alone, is her veve, or sacred symbol.

Khutulun means ‘shining moon’ or maybe just ‘moonlight’ in ancient Mongolian; it was the name of one of Kublai Khan’s great-great-granddaughters. In this verse, this story’s Khutulun and the historical Khutulun are the same person. To get an idea of her awesomeness, this is the Mongolian princess who insisted any suitor who wanted to marry her had to win a wrestling match against her; if he lost, he had to give her a horse. She ended up with (allegedly) ten thousand horses. She was an incredible warrior and fought alongside her father, as well as being his political right-hand. He even tried to have her named as heir to the Khanate on his death-bed, but her male relatives refused to allow it. Sigh.

Argamag is a Mongolian word, related to the Russian argamak; it means divine or heavenly horse. Nowadays it’s used as a praising adjective for any beautiful horse, but once upon a time it referred to a specific breed of horse, probably the Akhal-Teke, believed to be celestial in origin. Khutulun is basically saying Magnus has found a precious thing where one would not expect it, and to cherish it/him (Alec.)

Ammit is the ancient Egyptian goddess known as the devourer of souls; she was the one who ate your heart if you failed to pass Anubis’ test (wherein your heart was weighed against a feather of Ma’at, goddess of truth and justice). If Ammit got your heart, you were considered to have died twice—possibly annihilated—and would never reach the afterlife.
Bennu is either the ancient Egyptian inspiration for the Greek myth of the phoenix—in other words, a self-created, ever-reborn mythological bird connected to the concepts of life, rebirth, light, fire, and the sun—or an ancient Egyptian deity in its own right, depending on the source. In the latter form, the Bennu or Benu was believed to be the *ba* (one of the souls of a person) of Ra or Re, the sun god. Arika here uses it as a nickname or petname.

The castor bean and oleander plants are two of the most toxic on the planet.

‘Blendling’ is an old Germanic word meaning bastard or mongrel. It’s a Nephilim slur for faeries, particularly Court fae, and is based on the Nephilim belief that faeries are the children of angels and demons (which *obviously* must have involved rape, to Nephilim minds, making the fae’s existence even more blasphemous/foul).

*Serkut āpārā* is a term that first came up way back in *Interlude: Starfire*, but since it’s been so long I think it’s only fair to translate it again; *serkut āpārā* is the fae’s name for the Nephilim, and translates as ‘bastard cousins’.

*Nonci camliax a bialo piripsax?*—You speak with the voice of the heavens/you speak Enochian? (Enochian).

*Ol faaip picru orri, crpl ol ipamis zamran.*—I understand more than the barren stones, but I cannot sing/I understand it better than I speak it. (Enochian).

A rhombicosidodecahedron is a three-dimensional geometric shape; it has 20 triangular faces, 30 square faces, 12 pentagonal faces, 60 vertices, and 120 edges. Clary, unlike Simon, pays attention in geometry class.

If you have not read Catherynne Valente’s *A Monstrous Manifesto*, do so immediately.

A red tulip symbolises perfect love—allegedly because of a Persian legend in which a prince killed himself when his true love died; red tulips supposedly grew from the drops of his blood. (Where other-coloured tulips were supposed to come from, I do not know, but it must have been somewhere else, since tulips of every other colour represent different things entirely.)

A kuri is a canonical demon that appears in *City of Ashes*; they are described as ‘spider demons with eight pincer-tipped arms, large, slinking black bodies, and poison-dripping fangs that extend from
their eye sockets’.

*Buah hatiku* means ‘my heart’ in Indonesian; it can be used in a romantic sense, but also as an endearment of affection for children.

Arabian jasmine, also known as *melati putih* in Indonesia, is one of the three national flowers of Indonesia. It has a very long, revered history in Indonesian culture, particularly with regards weddings; it is representative of life, love, beauty, and the sacred (especially ‘divine hope’), but also spirit and death. Fallen blossoms are often used as metaphors for fallen heroes in patriotic Indonesian poetry. Somewhat ironically in connotation with Magnus, it also represents modesty.

In various parts of the world, sandalwood has been viewed as sacred to the gods, and often used in funeral rites to help guide departed souls onward. It is connected both to the third and root chakras, which in turn gives it an association with self-identity, anchoring the self, and psychic powers.

Baron Kriminel is another of the Haitian lwas or loas. It’s a fairly good rule of thumb to assume everything you’ve heard about Vodou in popular culture is completely wrong, but Baron Kriminel is legitimately terrifying, to the point that I seriously considered not referring to him at all. He’s sometimes referred to as the ‘first murderer’ in Vodou tradition, and is malicious, violent, and sadistic. I want to stress that he is *not* typical of loas; while they should all be treated with respect, Baron Kriminel is the only one I know of who might legitimately belong in a horror movie.
The Spiral Court

Chapter Notes

I LIIIIIIIIIIIIIVE! Did you miss me?

No but seriously: life’s been hectic, yada-yada, but you guys continue to be mind-blowingly amazing. Every comment and review (or message on tumblr) makes me so unbelievably happy. I’m so grateful to everyone who reaches out—and to everyone else still reading, whether you’ve been with us from the beginning or joined more recently. I adore you all <3

THIS CHAPTER HAS BEEN A LONG BLOODY TIME COMING, but I think you’ll agree it was worth the wait. I meant to get it out on the 1st (my birthday! I am now 26!)…and have been writing this series since I was 18. DOESN’T TIME FLY WHEN YOU’RE HAVING FUN?) but didn’t quite manage it. Still, I’m really proud of this one, and I hope you’ll love it as much as I loved writing it.

Dedicated to my fabulous readers, without whom I probably wouldn’t still be here. ♥

Now: Aigiarn has been renamed as Khutulun. I’m sorry for the confusion, but I have my reasons!

Trigger Warnings: There is a brief mention/reference to black market organ theft, and mentions of rape and murder, including the murder of children. None of it’s graphic and both are pretty brief, but they’re there. Also some examination of pretty awful speciesism, re the Nephilim’s attitude towards Downworlders.

Last but not least: my solution to every love triangle is poly. Anyone who objects to A Certain Ship (you’ll know it when you see it)...well, you’re welcome to walk the plank on this one.

And now, ENJOY!

“We’re still waiting to hear back on a few tests…but as far as we can tell, Mrs Bell, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with your son.”

“Daughter,” Rebecca corrected automatically, absently.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” The doctor, puzzled, flipped a page on her chart. “Whoever took your details must have—”

“Sometimes my child is a young man, and sometimes she’s a young woman,” Rebecca interrupted. “That’s really not the issue here, doctor.”

Dani winced, shrinking in on herself as much as possible. As grateful as she was for her mom keeping people from misgendering her when she hadn’t had time to change into more femme
clothing, she also really didn’t want to cause any more trouble than she already had today.

But the doctor surprised her. “No—no, of course, I beg your pardon.” She rallied admirably—someone had been going to their sensitivity training. “But as I said, so far as we can tell, your daughter is perfectly healthy.”

“Can’t you run more tests?” Rebecca asked. “I told the nurse already—Dani’s been having migraines for weeks, sleepwalking…”

Danielle tuned her out as Elliot slung an arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. “Hey—that’s good news, right? No brain tumour to worry about.”

“Elliot!” Maggie snapped. “Jesus, can you not for just five minutes?” She gave Dani a sympathetic look. “How are you feeling?”

“Honestly? Embarrassed.” Dani rubbed her forehead with the heel of her hand. “I never saw myself as a fainting flower.”

“I’m going to restrain myself from making the obvious joke,” Elliot declared. “It’s just too easy.”

Dani elbowed him, but gently. “Shut up.”

He mimed zipping his mouth shut, and Dani managed a weak smile. She still felt weak and weird, as if her skin didn’t fit right—it was too loose, too thin to hold her; she felt as if she might slip out of it at any moment, the way she had at the flower shop.

Or as if it might tear open, ripped to shreds by something inside her. Something buried down deep, clicking its jewel-like claws against her lumbar vertebrae, its whispers getting into her dreams, looking through her eyes every time she blinked. Looking for something in the darkness behind her eyelids.

Dani was used to what her younger self had called her night-friend. As far back as she could remember—all the way back to that day on the side of a dusty road in Florida—it had been there; usually quiet and still, occasionally rough and roaring, but always, always there. Wherever she had come from, it had been her night-friend who got them to that road: she hadn’t existed until the cocoon of its wings had unwrapped from around her consciousness, letting her be born into Lacie’s arms—Lacie, and her wife Rebecca, the drivers of the cherry-red pick-up that had pulled over for a naked, sun-burned five-year-old, and scooped her up into their arms and their hearts.

Sometimes Dani had nightmares about the dark stretch of nothingness that was the time before her moms; nightmares of fire that seared her soul and a heavy, keening grief she didn’t know what to do with. Sometimes she woke up at night in odd places; the greenhouse they’d had in Florida, or the attic, or curled up in the space between Elliot’s bed and the floor. But those seemed like small prices to pay for the dreams of crystal palaces in the sky and a euphoria sharp as a sword; for being fast enough to yank Maggie out of the way of a taxi running a red light; for feeling as much wonder as she did at every plant ordered for the store. For the instinct-intuition that made her skip a bus that later crashed, take the long way home on a day when someone taking her normal route got mugged, avoid the ice-cream truck driver who made the national news a year later when the police found body-parts in his basement.

Her night-friend had never led her wrong—except maybe the one time, with Simon. And really, this was all about Simon, wasn’t it? Everything had been fine until he walked into the store, looking for flowers to bring someone at the nearby hospital. Dani had always sleepwalked, but only once or twice a month; since Simon she hadn’t woken up in her own bed once. Last week she’d woken up
on the subway, wearing her superman pyjamas and Maggie’s sneakers, the latter’s laces tied in an intricate tangle like Gordian knots on LSD.

That had been fun.

Almost as much fun as the headache she was getting thinking about him again.

“It’s likely nothing but low blood-sugar,” the doctor was saying. “If she’s been sleepwalking her whole life, then this most recent rash of incidents is probably just back-to-school stress.” She was writing a note on her chart. “A lot of teenagers go through a phase of fainting spells during puberty. It’s actually very common.”

“What do you mean, a phase of fainting spells? Are you saying this is going to keep happening?”

“It’s a possibility. But there’s nothing wrong with your so—your daughter’s heart. As long as she doesn’t hurt herself falling, she should be perfectly fine. With no underlying cause, she should grow out of it, and there’s plenty you can do to minimise the chance of her passing out…”

The doctor kept speaking, about increasing Dani’s fluid intake and eating more salt, of all things, but Dani was done listening; she closed her eyes and leaned into Maggie, letting the stream of soothing reassurance just flow over her. Reflexively, she raised her hand to her throat, reaching for her necklace—

Which was gone.

She sat bolt upright, panic and disbelief cascading through her like an avalanche. She patted her neck, searching for the gold chain she never took off, but, no—no, no, no!

“My necklace,” Dani said, her lips numb, her heart exploding. It hadn’t fallen down the front of her shirt—it wasn’t snagged in her jacket— “My necklace, Mags, it’s gone!”

She could hear the hysteria in her voice, but her brother and sister didn’t try to downplay it: Elliott even gasped, before jumping up to his feet. “I’ll check the car,” he promised, all seriousness. “Mom, the keys?”

“Of course.” Rebecca handed them over without hesitation, the worry-lines in her face etching themselves even deeper as Elliott raced out. Distantly, Dani felt guilty for that, but she couldn’t make herself calm down; she felt like one of those people who were attacked, knocked out, and woke up to find one of their kidneys stolen for the black market: violated, terrified, in white-out shock. She’d rather have lost a kidney; it was as if someone had gouged out her lungs. She couldn’t breathe.

“I’m sorry, what’s happened?” The doctor was clearly bemused, glancing between Dani and her mother with concern. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Dani’s lost her necklace,” Rebecca said anxiously. “It’s very important to her; she’s never been without it. She’s had it since before my wife and I adopted her.” She took a deep breath. “Would it be possible for you to ask the other doctors to keep an eye out for it? And call us if it turns up?”

“Oh course,” the doctor promised. “I have your number in your daughter’s file…what does this necklace look like?” She smiled at Dani. “I’m sure it’ll turn up in the lost and found, if it hasn’t already.”
“It’s a small gold sphere,” Rebecca said, bringing her thumb and forefinger together to give an idea of its size. “On a gold chain—”

She continued to describe it, but Dani couldn’t hear her. She’d had that necklace before the adoption, yes, before the papers were signed on a desk she’d been too small to see over: she’d been wearing it when she woke up beside that road. When she’d been born out of the dark space in her memory, the necklace had been the only thing she’d had: no name, no clothes, no idea of who or where she was. She hadn’t even been able to speak English or Spanish or any other recognisable language; only a crazed kind of gibberish not even the speech therapists could make sense of. All she’d had was her necklace, as much a part of her as her limbs, her heart.

And now it was gone.

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“He can’t do that.” Sariel looked from Magnus’ marble-cut expression to Catarina’s appalled one. “That’s impossible. No one can do that.”

Magnus and Catarina exchanged an hour’s debate in a single glance.

“Magnus!” Sariel cried. The beads of the rosary around their neck seemed to throb like hearts.

“Downstairs,” Magnus said. “Now.”

“Not in your condition.” Catarina set her jaw.

“The Court—”

“—will wait,” Catarina snapped. She swept over to the counter where she’d been brewing her potions, and quickly scribbled something on a scrap of paper. As she turned back to them, Sariel saw it go up in flames and vanish: a fire-message, the warlock kind that required no runes.

There was a sharp exchange between them, Magnus and Catarina, in that strange language they and Khutulun had spoken together. Sariel couldn’t hear the breaks in the sentences, couldn’t figure out which sounds were individual words and which were only syllables, and their hand fell to Alec’s pocket and the stele there, seeing the shape of the glossalis Mark behind their eyes and wondering if the speak in tongues rune could give them this warlock’s-language as Simon’s angel had given them Enochian. Maybe, maybe: glossalis only worked on human languages, not demonic ones, but warlocks were half-human, their language might fall under glossalis’ scope—and even if it didn’t completely, even if glossalis could only translate the human half of it, understanding some, half, of what was said would be better than this terrifying nothing—

No. Their fingers spasmed, flinching away from Alec’s pocket as their thoughts raced, snapping pieces together swift and deft as assembling a bow. No, no, no. Magnus knew Sariel couldn’t understand, knew it and used this unfamiliar language anyway and that could only be because he didn’t want them to know what was said, and memories whirled, ‘If you see Loss, tell her she has my thanks.’, Alec’s phone ringing beneath the angel’s screaming, Catarina’s missed call, the realisation that she and Magnus knew more than they were saying—

More than they were saying in any language Sariel could understand—

But still, but still—they could not betray Magnus like that. Would not, would not use the Angel’s power, which had been turned on Downworlders far too many times, to eavesdrop and steal secrets that were Magnus’ right to keep, his to give.
But the WORLD-WARDS—

He’ll say. Explain. Tell us what we have to know; he will, he will, he WILL —

They curled Alec’s hand into a fist, nails biting into his glove’s palm so hard they left crescents in the leather, because every drop of Shadowhunter blood in their veins screamed at them that nothing could matter more than this, if the world-wards were in danger the world was in danger and they’d been bred and birthed and they breathed to prevent that, would give their last breaths to defend against that—

We betrayed Simon for less than this, one facet of meius whispered.

We SAVED Simon, another lashed back instantly, slicing through regrets and doubts and fears like a seraph blade cutting through shadows, and Magnus saved us—protected us before, Abbadon’s poison and driving away the demons in the Abyss and guarding us in blue after the angel’s kiss. We trust him, we can trust him, we WILL trust him.

He will tell us what we need to know.

The moments passed like eons, but Sariel had only just balanced their heart and duty in Ma’at’s scales when the air near Catarina parted, cut open as neatly as if by a scalpel. Opalescent fingers found the edges and cast them wider, not tearing, but sweeping the laws of physics aside like gossamer curtains, half-visible silk strewn with thousands of tiny diamonds. Khutulun stepped through, and even with Magnus’ foreboding filling their awareness like a broken bone Sariel still found it in themselves to stare. They could not wrap even their tri-sided mind around the decadent, profligate luxury of using a Portal to move between two floors, instead of two continents. The extravagant use of power, so blithely spent… It seemed almost obscene.

Hodge-trained instincts extrapolated by reflex: *if she can afford to spend so much magic on so small a thing…just how powerful is she?*

Stronger than Magnus?

Magnus gave Khutulun a tired smile as she appeared. “Telling tales on me again, princess?”

“Only the ones that need telling,” she answered. Her opal eyes shimmered and dazzled like twin Portals set into her face, echoing the one still open behind her.

“Well, I have a much more exciting one for them,” Magnus said, the line of his mouth turning grim. He turned to face Sariel and extended his hand. “Alexander?”

“What’s happening?” Sariel asked quietly.

Magnus closed his eyes briefly, seeming to steady himself. Brace himself. But there was still a flicker of something desperate in the back of his gaze when he opened them again. “I need you to come and tell the Court what you told me.”

They did not blurt ‘*the Spiral Court?!’ because they were *agelai* and their threefold-mind raced ahead of that kind of meaningless shocked reflex. Of course the Spiral Court; that was the only one Magnus could mean. They did not ask ‘really?’ because yes, really; and they did not ask if he was sure, because Magnus obviously was. Those questions would only be a waste of time and breath.

But no Nephilim had ever been taken to meet the Spiral Court of the warlocks. Sariel knew their parents weren’t the only Shadowhunters who didn’t believe in the Court at all—or who hadn’t, before the Court’s ultimatum about the murders and the Accords.
“In the Spiral Labyrinth?” Sariel asked, hesitantly, naming the semi-mythical, unmappable place the oldest scrolls claimed was the meeting-place of the Court.

Magnus smiled a little. “Will you come?” he asked, which wasn’t an answer.

Sariel answered it anyway, placing their gloved hand in Magnus’ and clasping it tightly. It was about the world-wards, and Valentine, and Sielu: any Shadowhunter would have no choice but to go to the ends of the earth for those answers, no matter the danger of facing the most deadly of the Downworlder races on their home ground, unarmed and unready.

But Sariel did choose, and they made the choice they did because it was Magnus who asked.

They were starting to realise just how much he weighted those scales inside them—the scales of steel and adamas forged of blood and sweat, quenched in history and ichor, that should not have registered the weight of any single life at all.

But did. Because it was Magnus.

They helped Magnus up when he went to rise—and followed him through the Portal, hand in hand.

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“Lucio? Lucio!”

Cas’ voice coming through both their comms, frantic, his signature playfulness shattered into shrapnel.

“Lucio, I swear to God I will hex you with fucking bird flu if you don’t answer me!”

Ana felt the wings wrapped around her tremble, feathers that shimmered like hawk’s-eye jewellery brushing her skin in a dozen places. She heard the wakinyan take a deep breath, and then carefully, slowly, begin to unfold his wings from around her.

She let her shield fall, and held herself still as Lucio disentangled from her. “We’re okay,” she said clearly, and heard Cas’ sharp inhale of relief as he heard her voice through her comm. Across from her, Lucio blurred back into human form, wings compressing down into copper-skinned arms, blue-green-black feathers melting into a long ebony braid, the beak sharp as the jagged edge of a lightning bolt dissolving into high cheekbones and a smooth mouth; a transformation as seamless and organic as a moonflower curling in on itself at the first touch of dawn.

“All clear,” he confirmed, and at the sound of his voice Cas burst into a stream of machine-gun-fire Portuguese, speaking far too quickly for Ana to understand.

Lucio answered in the same language, slow and soothing as dripping honey, words of reassurance and calm. Ana left him to it; the comm in her ear clicked, cutting her off from Cas and replacing his voice with María’s.

“Report, Ana.”

“The ashipu-rei tapped the nexus,” Ana said bluntly. “I’m not sure it was on purpose; something in his conversation with Lightwood might have triggered him again.”

“Was it ‘Sariel’ again?” María asked sharply. “Samuel’s looking into that now.”

“No, something else.” Ana revisited the moments before the detonation in her mind. “Alexander told
him—” She hadn’t had a chance to register the words before the explosion; now, playing them back, they caught in her throat. “…that Valentine has the Mortal Sword.”

What madman would seek to perform the Kilulšargad? Not one of the Nephilim, at least; that had been the only thing they could be sure of. The Shadowhunters were tyrannical despots, but their loyalty to their mission was unquestionable, unimpeachable. None of them would ever.

But Valentine Morgenstern—if he had the Soul-Sword—

It made sense. Horrifying, terrifying sense.

“And Bane knows what that means,” María said, after the smallest, most terrible of pauses. “Which means the Court will as well, if they don’t already.” Another minute pause. “Enough. Forget the anunnaku; this is—” Ana could almost hear the older woman’s internal struggle to wrap her mind around the very idea, a lifetime’s fuel for disbelief against stark reality. But merciless logic trumped the mortal desire for denial. “—bigger than that now. We need to call in the other orders. Return to base as quickly as you can.”

“But the civilians!” Ana protested, shocked. Members of the Numinous tended to congregate around the residences of ashipu-rei-ene, making their homes close to the seat of a High Warlock’s power—because there was nowhere safer for a nasaru to be than in the shadow of the ashipu-rei pledged to protect them. The immediate area around Bane’s home was almost certainly full of ubārum-ene who belonged to no court, solitary ekimmu-ene, street-gang shapeshifter packs—and kashshaptu-ene of all kinds, human magic-workers who hadn’t had the warning Ana and Lucio did, hadn’t known to get under cover. Who could have been hurt, badly, by the blast of power. “We can’t leave without making sure there are no injured!”

“But the ashipu-rei,” María said sharply. “And a good one, from all accounts. Any kashshaptu-ene living so close to him will be warded by spells he cast on their homes himself.” Ana heard Samuel’s voice in the background, saying something she couldn’t make out. “I want you and Lucio back here in thirty minutes. That’s an order.”

“Yes, Captain.” Ana rose to her feet somewhat shakily as her comm went silent. Lucio was still murmuring to Cas, so Ana gathered their things, running quick fingers over their equipment. Despite having felt the force of the blast herself, she was still surprised to find the connection to the bug she’d placed on Lightwood was dead.

The ashipu-rei’s detonation had been purely psychic; it hadn’t manifested on the physical plane at all. And yet the bug was clearly fried. Samuel Tukiainen’s bug was dead.

Her stomach roiled, imagining what that blast would have done to her and Lucio if they hadn’t gotten shielded in time. Would they both be lying here comatose on this rooftop, brain-dead, their minds burnt to ash by the power Magnus Bane had channelled?

She firmly reminded herself of what the Captain had said about the civilians. There were no Lighbringer chapters in New York to watch over the Numinous—there couldn’t be, it wasn’t safe for them in Shadowhunter cantons—but if there were homeless people driven to the streets by the visions their Sight showed them, or hedge-witches weaving charms out of rusted beer cans and pigeon feathers, they weren’t here, in the shadow of the ashipu-rei’s stronghold. Everyone who could have been hurt couldn’t have been, because they were here, and Magnus Bane protected his own…

Her trained subconscious noticed the silence before her thinking mind did, and she had her kris dagger in her hand before she realised the quiet was a safe one.
Lucio tilted his head to one side as he looked at her, a gracefully avian gesture. He must have smoothed Cas’ ruffled feathers, Ana thought. At least for the moment.

She sheathed the ripple-bladed knife. “Thank you.”

Lucio raised his eyebrows. “For what?”

“For shielding me.” Her magic had covered them both, but his wings had enclosed her in a mica-glittering wall of lapis and obsidian and jade beneath her spell. As they got moving, she remembered his feathers brushing her skin; remembered his finger hooked with Cas’. Those things were easier to think about than—everything else. “I know touching people is difficult for you, and I’m not your friend, your family. I’m nobody to you.” They crossed to another rooftop, darting deftly down fire-escapes and drainpipes. “But you did it twice today—carrying me from the Market, and shielding me. I just wanted to say thank you—mèsi anpil. I don’t know what it cost you, but I’m grateful.”

Shadowhunters lived fast and died young, burnt out by the punishing, barbaric strictures by which they lived. Every Lightbringer order rejected that model utterly. Ana had been trained to be one of humanity’s Guardians, not a sacrifice on its behalf: she had always known that she had as much value as the people she protected and saved; that she was not worth more than them, but not less, either. She and her fellow tyros were not expected to throw their lives away, or blithely accept the inevitability of an early, painful death in the field, and where Shadowhunters needed disturbingly intrusive magical bonds to be able to fight in unison, Lightbringers always worked together, in teams that never left anyone behind.

But still, people died. You could never know when a conversation with someone might be your last, what words, spoken or unspoken, might shape a regret that would last the rest of your life. Open hearts and open hands meant more than treating all the Numinous with respect and compassion; it meant being open with your heart to your fellow Lightbringers, holding in open hands the kind of secrets holhokki kept locked away and hidden. I love you; I forgive you; thank you. Words that should always go to the living, and not be whispered to the dead.

This was more than just an anunnaku (as if an anunnaku could ever be ‘just’ anything!) It was the Kilulšargad. If Ana died over this, she wasn’t going to her ancestors weighted down with things she hadn’t had the chance to say.

Lucio was quiet for a bit, as they moved to another rooftop, one further away from the street and out of sight of the ashipu-rei’s apartment. Then, just before shifting again, he said, “You’re not nobody to me.” His dark eyes met hers briefly. “You’re a fellow Lightbringer, and you’re a part of my team. And that means I’ve got your back, Anacaona Hilas.”

Before she could decide how to respond to that—and to the deliberate way he’d used her full name—he transformed, wings like blue-and-black lightning spreading wide, and once she was on his back again and they were in the air, there was no point in trying to talk past the rush of the wind.

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Neither of them noticed the young Shadowhunter sorcerer who watched them go, because he was not there—even he would not try to stalk two Lightbringers as gifted as those two must be, to be sent hunting anunnaki at their age. No, he watched from afar, through a mirror that had at some point been broken, and carefully but clumsily repaired. Cracks like fault lines ran through the glass, marking where a child’s hands had tried to fit each shard back into the frame, gluing each piece of glass to its neighbour. The frame and handle were exquisite, gleaming black lilithium and shining adamas carved together into a wonder of wings and flames and stars—but the glass was fractured, any reflection bisected a hundred times by the lines of glue and hope holding it together.
It was enough. He saw the thunderbird and the witch fly off in the glass, and tucked the mirror away.

He had a favour to call in.

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On the other side of the Portal was a hallway of jewels and mirrors, a shoal of floating candles scattering a thousand points of light over the gems and glass. It took a moment for Alec’s eyes to pierce the dark dazzle of it all, but once they did Sariel recognised the place instantly: it was the apartment beneath Magnus’, the one Arika had brought them to so they could inspect Xia’s body. When Magnus drew them forward, black sand *shushed* beneath their feet, thick and soft.

They weren’t alone.

The faces of unfamiliar warlocks looked back at Sariel from every mirror, and it was a dizzy instant before they could make sense of it—Alec’s pureblood-strong, finely-tuned skiá-aird, that sense which registered and recognised Downworlders as surely as his skin recognised touch and his ears knew sound, told Sariel there were only a dozen or so warlocks present. But there were far more in the mirrors, reflections not cast by the men and women in the apartment: warlocks whose three eyes glowed like neon, warlocks with ears whorled like seashells, warlocks whose hair parted around curving horns too big for the mirror frames to contain.

Magnus’ hand tugged gently, and Sariel followed without thinking, trying to look everywhere at once, frustration flashing like the gleam of light on glass at the separation between their bodies—with only their Alec-body present they had only two eyes to see with, instead of the six they could have used if they’d brought all their bodies with them.

Not even forty-eight hours since they’d become an *agela*, and already it was reflex to reach for more than one body’s voice, hands, eyes.

Three bodies drew in the same deep breath—and Sariel *twisted* against the grain, like silk being unwound, coming unspun: still one thread, still fundamentally the *same*, but parting into a trio of filaments. Jace and Isabelle pulled back and faded into the shadowed edges, flanking Alec as if this were a hunt, covering his consciousness as they would watch his back in a dark alleyway. But they were all mindful of Magnus’ earlier words—*I just wouldn’t want them to see me like this.*—and Alec’s *agelai* hung back as much as they could, understanding that they were not the ones who had been invited into this.

Whatever this was.

The apartment opened up into a wide central space—not as large as Magnus’ loft, but very respectably sized for New York real estate—still carpeted in sand and walled in mirrors, and here were the warlocks they’d sensed. Khutulun moved to one side, making room; Magnus held Alec’s hand; Catarina followed behind him—and spread across the rest of the room were ten or eleven others. He saw Arika, with her rainbow-scaled face: the rest were strangers to him, men and women and a few who seemed to be both or neither, each figure a strange blend of the otherworldly and the tellurian, simultaneously unearthly and geotic with their human shapes stamped with marks of their demonic parentage. One man seated on the ground met Alec’s gaze with eyes that were a thin rim of blue around inky black, the iridescent feathers growing out of his skull like hair rising up in an unmistakable threat display; a woman whose softly transparent skin revealed the blood and muscles beneath it stiffened at his entrance and pulled on a coat discarded to one side, hiding her unique nakedness from his eyes in its hood. Years of training had him cataloguing their unhuman features automatically: here a mouth framed by elegant tusks, engraved and set with gold; there a pair of hands with too many joints and jewel-shard talons; another whose iridescent cheeks flowed and
“~What is this?~” Kukulkan demanded, rising from where they’d been seated on the sand-carpeted floor as their crest of shimmering feathers rose from their skull. Here, among the safety of their kin, where there was no one to judge, they were bare-chested; feathers of emerald green and shining crimson wound down their copper-skinned arms in spirals, criss-crossed their pectorals. They spoke around the fangs of a Bothrops asper, the deadliest snake in the Western hemisphere. “~You bring one of the Nephilim—a Shadowhunter—here, to our place of mourning?~”

Catarina didn’t have it in her to wince: the seams where all the puzzle pieces had met and fallen into place burned white-hot in her mind, molten glass sealing them all into a terrible whole. She had made the same objection less than an hour ago, but it didn’t matter anymore.

Evidently Magnus thought the same, because he raised a hand that instantly silenced all protests. “~Valentine has stolen the Mortal Sword.~” he said, sharp as the stolen blade; it cut like a comet through the hostile atmosphere. “~Do I need to explain to you what that means?~”

Not to the eldest: it was like watching the rapid spread of a virus through a body, seeing understanding sweep through them; Mòzì with his lion-like red mane and graceful horns, Ekundayo with her blue goldstone skin and metallic-silver hair, Dobromil who had pieces of the shimmering northern lights where his eyes should be and a polar bear’s claws tipping his hands. A few of the younger ashipu-ene looked a little uncertain, but not the elders.

Certainly not those who’d fought against the Sword the last time it was wielded.

“~So.~” Arika hissed softly. “~Not some naive mortal led astray by poisoned dreams, but a fanatic acting with intent.~”

“~That’s so much worse,~” Leialoha whispered. She was young—only a few decades past her Walk, the rite that made an ashipu an adult in the eyes of their people—young enough that her fear made Catarina forget that they were sisters now, made her ache with a mother’s reflexive urge to comfort her. It didn’t help that Leialoha was summer-sky-skinned, blue as Catarina herself, and had therefore always seemed a little more her child than the rest of the Court’s, even if Catarina had never put herself forward as a candidate to be anyone’s prime-guardian.

Evidently she wasn’t the only one who still saw Leialoha more as child than sibling; Śelli moved to hug her tight, murmuring soothing things, and Leialoha closed kaleidoscopic eyes as Śelli stroked her hair with a six-fingered hand.

“~Not worse enough to save him.~” Ekundayo purred. Her hair shimmered as it fell around her, every strand a thread-thin blade. “~Not from us.~”

“~What are the chances, do you think,~” Arika said, sharp and biting. “~that whatever struck down Xia without leaving a mark is unrelated to the Sword being in play?~”

“~Arika is correct,~” Dobromil said, nodding towards her in acknowledgement. “~We cannot make the mistake of dismissing Valentine as easy prey. He has at his command some force or creature that killed one of the greatest warriors among us, apparently without effort. Just because he has yet to complete the ritual does not mean he could not have summoned some leviathan of the Abyss to do his bidding while he works. He dealt with demons before the Uprising; he summoned a Demon Prince to this city not two months gone. We may not have to fear Valentine himself, but something worse than he serves him.~”
“~And Valentine must be put down without freeing it,~” Mòzĭ pointed out in his quiet, lilting voice.
“~A demon that could overcome Xia is nothing we can let loose.~”

“~While Valentine was stealing the Sword,~” Magnus said, “~something massacred the Silent
Brothers, probably as a distraction. Either he has one demon that killed both them and Xia—or he has more than one.~”

There was a brief silence as they all absorbed that, but only a brief one.

“~Anything summoned before he gained the Sword is not controlled by it,~” Khutulun said, reasonably enough. “~Or was not originally. It would be beyond foolish to try to juggle many true terrors without the Sword to compel them.~”

“~He has done foolish things before,~” Dobromil said, “~but I do not like to place my trust in his doing so again.~”

“~So we must be prepared for one monster or many,~” Ekundayo summarised, sarcastic. “~That narrows it down.~”

“~We must be prepared for a sorcerer,~” Magnus snapped. “~Any fool can summon a demon, but how many can control one? How many can control one strong enough to kill Xia, without the Sword? At least one? How many can even attempt the Kilišargad, never mind survive two sacrifices?~” He shook his head. “~We can’t afford to underestimate him. A self-taught sorcerer skilled enough for what he’s done? Before this, I would have said it was impossible.~”

“~So would I,~” Kukulkan said. They crossed their arms over their chest. “~Can we be sure he was self-taught?~”

“~The Nephilim don’t know about the kashshaptu-ene,~” Magnus said, “~and cannot learn the ways of the ubārum-ene.~” His cat-eyes gleamed as they locked with the other ashipu’s. “~And who among our people,~” he asked softly, “~would teach Valentine anything but the taste of Inanna’s Justice?~”

Catarina’s skin crawled at the mention of the curse that predated the Court itself—created and cast by the first warlock, and never cast again since. But that once had been enough to make its mark even in human myth, weaving its way through time like a dark whisper murmuring beneath the passing of Ages.

“~This calls for the Ninmulmulla’s counsel,~” Khutulun said firmly. She stepped forward and swept her gaze over their assembled kin, locking eyes with Kukulkan, Ekundayo, and Magnus each in turn. “~For the full Court. Everyone must be informed—must have their say—and have their chance at Valentine.~”

“~There will be no chance involved,~” Kukulkan said, and a serpent’s fangs dropped from the roof of his mouth even as his feathered crest rose from his skull in bright warning. “~We will find him, and when we do, we will break open his ribs for Ammit to feast upon his heart!~”

Ekundayo bared teeth that glittered the same sparkling black as her skin. “~If even she could stomach such rotten meat.~”

“~Let us hunt him down,~” Kukulkan said, “~and find out!~”

“~Not yet,~” Khutulun said sharply. “~This will take strategy and care, not hot heads and reckless vengeance!~”
“~It will not take a Shadowhunter,~” Ekundayo said, glancing at Alec disdainfully. “~Why is he here, Fire? Is he your pet? Or have you gained the power to bear their Marks yourself, and shared your soul with this one?~”

“~Show some respect!~” Catarina snapped, without realising she was going to. “~Magnus is your elder and your Isatum, and you stand in his territory. He may be sick, but if you held this nexus, you would be in the ground by now.~” She swallowed, realising that everyone was staring at her, shocked by her outburst—even those who were nodding approval. “~Nearly any of us would be. And then there would be no one to contain Valentine’s poison before it could spread and kill every ashipu-rei we have. Before it shattered the ley.~”

Magnus shot her a surprised and grateful look.

“~Magnus is awake and coherent and standing under his own power,~” Catarina continued, fiercely. “~So you can keep your sharp tongue to yourself, or I’ll spell it silent for you!~”

“~Besides,~” Mòži said softly, “~surely you did not mean to imply aspersions upon Water and her Rivers? Or will you belittle their bonds simply because Raziel reinforced them?~”

“~Only while she’s out of earshot and can’t drown you,~” Šelli said under her breath.

Khutulun held up a hand to silence them all. “~I will not listen to bickering while our son and sister are yet unhallowed, and their murderer plans more death.~” She looked to Magnus. “~Bennu, why is Alexander here? Much as I honour his wearing the red, I cannot see what place he has at this table.~”

Magnus’ fingers tightened around Alec’s. “~He is my friend,~” Magnus said. “~And I want the Ninmulmulla to meet him.~”

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Cas was waiting for them on the rooftop. As Ana slid from Lucio’s back and the wakinyan resumed his human form again in a shimmering blur of blue and black, Cas ran towards his boyfriend.

At the last moment he stopped himself from crashing into Lucio and throwing his arms around him, but Ana wondered just what it cost him to hold back.

She averted her eyes from the desperate relief writ all over his face. It felt like too intimate a thing for her to witness; as if she were intruding.

“I thought you were dead.” Cas’ voice was empty of any trace of his usual laughter; scraped hollow and left fragile.

“We’re not,” Lucio said gently. He closed—almost—the distance between them, offering his hand; Cas lunged for it, hooking his little finger around Lucio’s like it was a lifeline. “I’m not.”

Cas closed his eyes and bowed his head over their hands. The intensity of the simple gesture was such that Ana half-expected to feel the shimmer of magic, for Cas to cast some spell, but he didn’t.

“You idiot bird-brain,” Cas whispered. He took one deep breath, then let go of Lucio and stepped back.

“Sam’s on intel, and Chi’s awake,” he said. “And we’ve all got calls to make. We’d better get back downstairs.”
Sariel had no idea what Magnus had said, but instant uproar greeted the words: shouting, sharp gestures and a dozen different inhuman signals, eyes flashing with outrage. One warlock’s shimmering porcupine-quills went from lying sleekly against her skin to standing up like hundreds of rose quartz needles, and Sariel’s hand flew for a blade that wasn’t there as one man’s hair rose up and hissed, what Sariel had taken for dreadlocks revealed instead to be dozens of slender black snakes with emerald eyes—

*The origin of the Medusa myth?* part of Sariel wondered, even as the rest of them raced, cataloguing potential threats, potential weapons, how quickly could Alec’s body reach the athame dagger on the altar against the far wall, if they snatched one of the floating conch-shell candles from out of the air would the wax inside it give it enough heft to be used as a bludgeon—? *Or just sired by the same demon that bred the gorgons?*

There was a sensation like the movement of air, except there was no breeze or draught: it was magic, it was power, and Sariel realised that all the claws and teeth were near-meaningless posturing; *this* was a warlock’s threat-display, this gathering of their magic about them, filling the room with scents that weren’t truly there, aniseed and roses and iron and cherries. Sariel saw a heat-haze shimmer building around some of the men and women; saw it without Alec’s eyes, saw it the way bats saw, something echoing and resounding in the deep emptiness Simon’s angel had carved into Alec and making a shape Sariel understood without understanding. But they were Sariel, they were three-as-one, they were reacting even as they realised that they were somehow sensing *magic*: they pulled sharply on Magnus’ hand and swung him behind them, put Alec’s body between the danger and their boyfriend because Alec was unarmed but Magnus couldn’t use his magic, Khutulun and Catarina had both said so, and Sariel would rather lose a body to the Spiral Court’s vicious hexes than see them fall on Magnus instead—

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Silence fell like a hammer, shattering the building tension into a thousand shards of shock.

Catarina took one of those shards in the base of her throat, stopping her breath dead. The pureblood-Nephilim—aristocratic—planes of Alec’s face carved into such shapes, the hard light in his eyes, the deceptively loose and easy angles of his arms and shoulders… All of it added up to a trained Shadowhunter ready to face the hordes of Hell and sell his life *dearly*; ready to go down fighting, and take as many of the enemy with him as he could.

It should have stirred old hatreds—and old fears—to see a Shadowhunter look like that at her people. But all she could see was a Shadowhunter—a pureblood—a *Lightwood*—putting himself between a Downworlder and danger.

Between a Downworlder and *death*. Because Alec would die, if the Court attacked; the only advantage the Nephilim had ever had over the ashipu-ene was numbers, for they had no defence against an ashipu’s magic; and Alec was alone, and unarmed, his hands empty and his feet planted and the mourning runes standing out stark as blood on his arms, as if he were already broken and bleeding.

Catarina had seen a few—a very small, precious few—Nephilim defend Nasaru-ene before. Not at the Uprising—she hadn’t been there, and Magnus, who had, had made it clear that the majority of the ‘loyal’ Shadowhunters had been fighting *against* Valentine that day, not *for* the Downworlders. But a generation before Valentine’s Circle there had been the Amazons, a group of Shadowhunter women playfully named but fierce as their namesakes, who had sought out Downworlders to teach them what their own people would not—and who had repaid that teaching with a lifetime of
unwavering friendship to all who could not bear Raziel’s Marks. Catarina looked at Alec and remembered Adele Nightshade putting an arrow through another Shadowhunter’s wrist rather than letting him lay that hand on a vampire fledgeling; remembered her standing just like this between a werewolf single-mother and her cubs, and the Nephilim patrol who wanted to put mother and children down like animals…

But Adele had been wielding a longsword made for her hands by friends that time—the blade Nehanu, that some had called Opium for the white poppy marked on its hilt and all those sent to the final dreaming by its razored edge—and Alec had nothing at all. No gear, no weapon, not even a stele in his hand.

Only his own fragile flesh, set as a warlock’s shield.

“Alec…” Magnus said softly. He stared at Alec’s back, his eyes wide and dark with shock and wonder and something like pain, and Catarina thought that he had been knocked as speechless as the rest of them.

“~Do you still think he is just like all the rest?~” Khutulun asked the silence.

“~He’s unarmed,~” Leialoha said with quiet disbelief—and awe. “~Even unarmed, he would…? For one of us?~”

Catarina found her voice at last. “~He stands with us.~” When her assorted siblings focussed—some of—their attention on her, she pointed with two fingers to the red Marks on Alec’s arms. “~Those are the runes Shadowhunters wear for mourning family. Family. And he’s wearing them for Elias and Xia.~” Her voice broke a little. “~He calls our son and sister his family.~”

A murmur ran through the gathered ashipu-ene, shock and incredulity flashing across their faces even as their gazes fell to the stark red Marks branded on Alec’s skin for all to see, immutable and irrefutable. Mòzĭ was one such; he raised his eyes from the runes to Alec’s face, and whatever he saw there must have reassured or convinced him, because he looked past Alec to Magnus behind him. “~This is one the Ninmulmulla should meet,~” he agreed, low.

There were some protests, but they were half-hearted: even Ekundayo nodded in sober accord, stunned far past sarcasm. She watched Alec the way an ashipu child watched their first kelpie: with wary wonder, knowing they were faced with something dangerous, but unable not to marvel at it anyway.

Catarina couldn’t blame her.

Alec was still, but his eyes weren’t; hard and cool as sapphires, they watched everything and everyone, his attention flashing from one ashipu to another like throwing stars. He hadn’t reacted to Magnus’ use of his name, or to the easing of tension in the room. He still looked ready to defend—to defend mercilessly—and maybe that was what caused Dobromil to say, “~He is not an ashipu. He is not one of us.~”

He held a fist to the base of his throat, opened it towards Magnus in a gesture of respectful dissent. “~I understand that he is dear to you, Isatum, but he is not your kiáñrashi. He does not carry the right to enter our sanctum in his blood, nor by your friendship.~” He made the same gesture again when Magnus opened his mouth to speak. “~I do not say, He cannot come,~” the Slavic ashipu said. “~I say only, Let him prove he will guard our secrets as well as he would guard you.~”

Magnus closed his mouth. Catarina saw her friend’s gaze turn careful and thoughtful; considering. “~What do you have in mind?~” he asked finally.
The warlocks continued to talk a while longer. No one looked as if they might attack, now, and the gathering magic Sariel had sensed had dissipated, but the urgency to know—the world-wards, Valentine, Mortal Sword, whathowwhy wemust know!—was drowned out by the whispering hiss of electricity through their nerves. They felt like drawn bowstrings, like nocked arrows: ready, waiting, vibrating with the urge to fly and rend anyone who so much as looked at Magnus the wrong way.

*He’s sick. Poisoned. Dying.*

**WE WILL NOT LET HIM DIE!**

It wasn’t true that they had nothing. Their hands might have been empty, but the rosary around their neck was a weald of oak, a thousand-thousand leaves green as jade interlocked like dragon scales. The necklace felt as though it were made of light and blood; the golden leaf charm, as though at any moment a wind might snatch it up to ride a storm. The power in it hummed and stirred against their skin, hot as sunlight, bright as fire.

They stood in front of Magnus, but Magnus had their back.

So when they felt him move they felt no fear; the air displaced by his body triggered no defensive reflex. Instincts bred into them for a thousand years were at perfect ease with having a Downworlder, this Downworlder, in their blindspot; their skin, Marked with runes that named them the enemy of any demon-blooded thing, did not flinch away when a hand in whose veins that blood ran covered the back of their neck, and the crimson sureva rune there.

His palm on their nape, fitting against the shape of their vertebrae.

“Alec,” he said, and they heard the careful emphasis, understood that he wanted Alec and not Sariel but how could they divide when it would take the full force of three combined to keep him safe? “-There’s someone I want you to meet.-”

He said it not in English, but in Hindi, and whatever Sariel’d expected, it hadn’t been that. “-Who?-” they asked in the same language. They tried to make themselves relax, both because it would help shift from them to him, and because Magnus wouldn’t risk distracting them if there was a danger of attack. Which meant that there wasn’t.

But using Hindi—one of the many languages Magnus knew Alec spoke—suggested that no one else in the room knew it. Because Magnus would only switch out of English to keep this conversation private.

Why did it need to be private?

“-I can’t tell you,-” Magnus said apologetically, and with one last glance around the room Sariel turned to look at him. When his hand fell from their neck, they caught it with their own, tangling their fingers together automatically. “-But you would have to come to the Spiral Court.-”

It was a bizarre twist, sudden and dizzying; the spike of interest and the sharp relaxing of readiness, all at once. If they were considering letting him visit the Court, then no attack was forthcoming, and the humming potential in the witch’s rosary faded and quietened. It was like the loosening of a leash; they started to unravel, slowly and delicately. “-Is this about Valentine?-”

“-Yes.-”

“-Then I’d be happy to — -“
Magnus stopped him. “-If you come, we can’t let you leave with our secrets. A lot of us have seen the Nephilim at their worst. Not everyone trusts you to keep to yourself…all the things we would need you to.-” His expression turned a little wry, a little dangerous. “-And even those of us who trust you don’t trust your people not to try and drag out of you anything that could give them an advantage over us. Even without the Mortal Sword.-”

Sariel met his eyes: only one thing seemed important. “-Do you trust me?-” they asked quietly.

“-Yes,-” Magnus said without hesitation. The swift certainty of his answer eased the gathering weight in the pit of Alec’s stomach. “-But that’s not enough.-” He glanced at their clasped hands. “-I told you before that I wouldn’t tell anyone we’re dating, only Cat. Some of the others have probably guessed—Khutulun, for certain—but it doesn’t matter. Even if we were married, you wouldn’t be allowed into the Court. It’s our sanctuary—our sacred ground. A place just for us, where we can be safe and be ourselves, and outsiders…-” He shook his head. “-It takes a very, very serious bond with a warlock for a mortal to be considered one of us. To gain the right to enter the Court. Only a few have ever done it.-”

What kind of bond was more serious than a marriage? Nothing Sariel was willing to enter into yet, that was for sure—not when Alec’s whole body tightened with fear and dread at the thought of Magnus’ kin knowing that they were dating.

They didn’t let go of Magnus’ hand, though.

“-That’s fair,-” they said, because it was. The warlocks had every right to have a private place of their own—and every reason to not want to let Shadowhunters into it. Switching back to English, they asked, “What do you want me to do?”

“You remember what I did to Simon’s memory?” Magnus asked, shifting languages just as smoothly. When Sariel nodded, Magnus continued. “It would be a little like that. If you come to the Court, when you leave, one of us will cast a memory spell on you. You’ll forget most of what you saw, but you’ll still remember what you felt, your own thoughts and decisions. Just not necessarily why you felt or thought that way.”

Sariel nodded slowly, considering it. “Who would cast it?”

Magnus frowned—with frustration, Sariel thought, at remembering that he couldn’t cast the spell himself—and looked over Alec’s shoulder towards the others in the room. He hesitated.

“Someone skilled enough to do so.” When Sariel turned to see who had spoken, they saw Arika, the rainbow gleam of her scales echoing the light in her eyes. “No harm will come to your mind.”

They had introduced themselves to her as Alexander Sariel, Jace Sariel, Isabel Sariel the first time they’d met, but had she understood what that meant? “Even though I am renas Sariel?” they asked her, this time using the proper form that declared what they were. Agelae were rare, but these were immortals who must at least have known of Agela Michael, the agela Valentine had forged and then broken; and indeed, recognition dawned in more than a few faces. “I—” and Sariel meant I—Alec, even though they were three-in-one, because it was easier, wasn’t it, for outsiders to think of them as three bound together, instead of three facets of one soul? “—have two parabatai. Agelai. What does that mean for your spell?”

“Nothing.” Magnus, now, and Sariel glanced back at him. Their boyfriend’s expression was solemn and intent. “The moment you step into the Court, you’ll be alone. Jace and Isabelle won’t be with you. The spell will only be cast on you, and when you leave the Court and join your agelai again, you won’t have the memories to share with them.”
Words failed them: Sariel recoiled, gorge climbing up their throats at the idea of being cut apart that way. Even if it was impossible, the thought of it—it went past the strictures of mere taboo and into the realm of the unthinkable, of crimes not of law or Law but blasphemies against nature itself: necrophilia, and child-rape, and all the other evils that warped a person’s humanity into something not even Hell could hold…

There were lines even demons did not cross.

“You want to cut our agela bond?”

“No!” Magnus’ appalled expression was immediately, immensely reassuring. “Of course not. It won’t be cut. Just…” He ran his free hand through his hair. “Only those who are invited can enter the Court. And we’re willing to invite you.” His eyes fell to the sureva Marks, and his voice grew hoarse even as the cadence of it became almost formal. “Alexander, kin of our kin, we invite across our threshold.” His eyes flicked up, meeting Sariel’s again. “But not your agelai.”

“We’re one person,” Sariel said.

“You are,” Magnus said. “And you’re not.” He smiled a little. “Or will you tell me that Jace and Izzy Marked themselves for Xia and Elias too?”

After a beat, Sariel looked away. “We all share Alec’s grief,” they said quietly.

“That,” Magnus said gently, “isn’t what I asked.”

No, it wasn’t.

They wanted to say What you want is impossible. ‘What the Angel has joined, let none but the Angel unjoin,’ and wasn’t it true that only the Mortal Sword had been able to cut them apart, like the cold shard of a star slicing quick and deft as a scalpel through their soul? Even the cells of the Silent City had only been able to blur and fog the bond, not silence it.

But bringing down the world-wards was supposed to be impossible, too.

They wanted to ask, Will it hurt?, but it would only be a waste of breath. Whether it did or not, they had a duty to pay whatever it cost to learn about the wards.

Besides, they already knew the answer.

(How could it not?)

“If you take away Alec’s memories—”

“Not take,” Magnus corrected. “They’ll only be—hidden away, inside your mind. Any warlock will be able to give them back to you.” He squeezed Alec’s hand. “It won’t be like what I did to Simon. I promise.”

Sariel nodded once, a little relieved. “When you hide them away,” they said, “will he—we—still know about Valentine? And the world-wards?” They breathed very carefully. “You are going to tell us—we—are’t you? So we can help?”

“Yes,” Magnus said. “You won’t remember what was said, or who said it to you, but you’ll remember what you learn. You’ll know, without remembering how you know.”

“If the Court agrees to trust you,” the warlock with claws on his fingertips and shimmering lights in
his eyes added.

Sariel turned to face him, icefire licking the insides of their chests, anger like frost gilding their voice when they spoke. “The price of your trust will tear my soul in two and cost me the sanctity of my mind,” they said coldly. “The price of mine is the information I need to stop Valentine and save Magnus. Do we have a deal?”

They looked from warlock to warlock, deliberately meeting every pair of eyes—wide and amaranthine; double-lidded like a crocodile’s; perfectly human brown; no matter how strange or strangely mundane, Sariel stared them all down.

And one by one, they all looked away or nodded.

Sariel breathed out slowly, and wondered if Magnus could feel how their pulse raced through their fingertips. “Yes,” they said to him, dread and determination both setting like molten stone in cold water in the pit of their stomachs. “I’ll come. And let you lock my memories away when we’re done.”

They held his hand tightly, squeezing his familiar, elegant fingers so hard they had to hurt, but Magnus didn’t say a word.

“I’ll come.”

***

They had almost reached the team’s apartment when all three of their comms suddenly gave a hissing pop and started leaking smoke.

Cas and Ana clawed theirs out of their ears to get away from the hot plastic and snarling static, and Lucio dragged his off his wrist.

“They’re completely dead.” Cas ran his thumb over the half-melted lump of what had been some of the most advanced tech in the world just seconds ago. “The magic in them too. You feel it?” he asked Ana.

She nodded. There was no point in pointing out that these were Sam’s creations, and Sam’s toys didn’t break: they all knew it, and the comms were indisputably broken anyway. The bug she’d dropped in the Lightwood boy’s pocket being fried by Bane’s blast was one thing, but the comms? There’d been no explosion of poisoned mana this time.

Cas held his pendant out from his neck, but when they all looked at it the diamond looked like a perfectly normal dead gem, the gold rings around it perfectly still. “Not the anunnaku,” he said with some relief.

Lucio dropped his comm in his pocket. “That leaves plenty of other possibilities,” he pointed out grimly. “Come on.”

They turned into the corridor that would take them to the team’s base. Crackling bolts of razor-wire energy wound down Lucio’s arms, white and gold; Cas palmed his daggers as inky darkness slid across his eyes and his runes glowed black; Ana drew her kris and channelled her mana through the blade like a wand, braced to defend or attack. But as they approached their door, they could hear Sam’s voice raised in furious curses, and they relaxed.

To a point. Clearly something had gone wrong, but that was not how the rest of the team would be signalling for the three teens to come and help—or cut and run.
Still treading carefully nonetheless, Cas brushed his fingers against the door. “Wards are fine,” he murmured, and pulled out his key.

Inside, Ana could smell smoke, and more of that horrible melted-plastic stink. As Cas shut and locked the door behind them, Ana went into the main room, still holding her knife at her side. Just in case.

Samuel was sitting at the table, using swearwords Ana had never heard as smoke rose up from his laptop. Before any of the teenagers could ask what was wrong, the Captain appeared with a duffel bag, and upended its contents onto the table.

Burner phones.

“What’s going on?” Ana asked.

“Communications are down,” María said, restrained anger embedded like shrapnel in every syllable. “All of you, check your own devices. Now!”

The teenagers scattered. Ana had her own reserve of burner phones, but both of them refused to turn on, and her personal mobile, which she’d left charging, went dead the moment she touched it. No amount of pressure on the power button made the screen so much as flicker.

“Everything’s dead,” Lucio said bluntly, when the team had gathered in the main room again. Chi held out two halves of a porcelain bowl, decorated with elegant blue and white designs. “My scrying bowl just broke,” she said. “Just cracked in two pieces the second I picked it up. Dodaeche?”

“It’s a curse,” Cas said.

They all turned to look at him. His eyes were still black as obsidian, and his expression was distant, as if he were watching something the rest of them couldn’t see. His fingertips tapped and twitched against his thighs. Ana supposed a normal person would have found him quite eerie, but everyone here had seen things far stranger.

“It’s a curse,” Cas repeated. “A strong one.” He closed his eyes; his lips moved soundlessly for a moment. Ana wasn’t a lip-reader, and she suspected that she wouldn’t have recognised the words even if she were. She waited with the rest of them, trying to be patient.

When Cas opened his eyes again, they were a normal brown. “Someone doesn’t want us talking,” he said bluntly. He walked over to pick up one of the dead burner phones from the table, turning it over in his hands. “I think I can figure out a way to get our internal comms working, if Samuel can rig us up new ones. But there’s no way we can message any other Lightbringers.”

The Captain’s face paled, and Ana felt a yawning horror open up in the pit of her own stomach. If they couldn’t communicate with their orders—if they couldn’t call for back-up—

“You’re absolutely sure,” María said.

Cas put the phone down. “We can try,” he said. “But this…it’s strong. Like an injunction on the universe. If we borrow a stranger’s phone, it’ll lose signal once one of us touches it. If we try to write a letter, the ink will dry in the pen, or the nib will snap. If we try to tell someone about this, we’ll cough and cough until we give up.” He bit his lip. “I think this thing might even kill us if we really push it. Give us a heart attack instead of a coughing fit if we tried to email instead of speak, stuff like that.”
“So we can’t talk to anyone?” Sam demanded.

Cas hesitated.

“What is it?” Lucio asked softly.

Cas gave him a look that had too much in it for Ana to decipher. “I think we can talk,” he said carefully. “This spell…it’s tied up with intent, and content, and identity. We can’t talk to specific people about specific things. We can’t call for help.” His expression turned wry. “I don’t want to find out what would happen if we called 911.”

“We can’t call home, can we?” Ana asked.

Cas held a hand out in front of him, and wobbled it, like a set of scales weighing from one side to the other. “You could call your friends and say hi,” he said. “I think. But if your intent was to ask for help from anyone outside this room, then the curse kicks in.”

“What if we communicated in code?” the Captain asked.

“Doesn’t matter,” Cas said. “It’s not about what you say. It’s about your intent.” He spread both his hands helplessly. “I can’t feel a loophole in this. If I could, I would tell you.”

“Can you tell who cast it?”

Cas shook his head. “I mean, I might recognise them if I met them in person,” he said apologetically. “But it doesn’t have a signature I know. I’m not even sure what kind of training the caster’s had. The shape of this thing is weird.”

“What weird?” Ana asked.

“ Weirdly simple,” Cas said. “It’s huge and incredibly strong, but it’s not trying to hide itself, or hide its purpose. Like whoever cast it wanted us to spot it and figure out its rules.”

“But not break them,” the Captain said.

“But not break them,” Cas agreed. “But like—someone really nasty wouldn’t have made it obvious that this spell would kill us if we pushed it. They would have let us find out for ourselves when we dropped dead.”

Sam stopped scowling at his computer and looked up, his eyes sharp. “You’re saying that this caster doesn’t want to hurt us, but will if they have to.”

“Pretty much,” Cas said.

“Could it be the Court?” Ana asked.

“Yes,” Cas said. “But not the one you’re thinking of.” He closed his eyes again, as though checking his conclusion against some internal measure. “I think this comes from the Seelie Court.”

Lucio swore viciously, and Ana didn’t need to speak Zuni to know he was cursing every ubārum to ever seek sanctuary in this world.

“Are you sure?” the Captain asked sharply.

“Pretty sure,” Cas said, apologetically. “I mean, I haven’t gone up against the Seelie before, but it…” He struggled for the word he wanted, then shrugged. “It feels like them.”
Chi caught the Captain’s eye. “The Queen discovered our trespass,” she said. “This is her punishment.”

“Yes, I know,” the Captain said. She rubbed her forehead. “But that means it has nothing to do with the anunnaku or, Isis forbid, the Kilušargad. If we make recompense and grovel enough, we may be able to get out of this before Valentine has time to complete the next step of the ritual.” She nodded to herself. “Yes.” She pointed at Sam. “I want new comms up and running within the hour. If we can’t communicate with anyone else, we at least need to be able to reach each other.”

“Yes, Captain.”

María turned her attention on Cas. “Casimir, tear this curse apart. If there’s a loophole or a weakness we can slip through, I want to know about it. I’d rather not be dependant on the Queen’s temper for this. Ana, help him.”

“Yes, Captain,” Ana and Cas chorused.

“Chi, Lucio, you and I are going to come up with a way to make the Queen very, very happy with us, so her temper tantrum doesn’t end up ending the world.” She clapped her hands. “Get to it, people!”

***

Khutulun made the Portal.

It was no quick, blasé thing this time, and Sariel stood still as they watched her work. Three-in-one, every shared beat of their hearts seemed to braid them more tightly together; knowing that would make the coming separation hurt more only merged them more completely. As if they could keep from being torn apart if they could only coalesce enough.

Surely their bond was stronger than any warlock’s magic. Surely.

They’d seen Portals before, of course: since Isabelle turned 10 the three older Lightwood siblings had spent part of every summer in Idris, living alone in the family’s townhouse in Alicante or the manor outside the city while their parents remained behind in New York, and the Clave had arranged Portals for them to travel through each time. Those had always appeared like curtains of star-lit diamonds being drawn aside in the air, with Alicante shimmering on the other side like a reflection in sun-struck water; the Portal Jace remembered from Renwicks had been like a clear window set in a mirror’s frame, almost anti-climatic in its simplicity. And before that, there had been Dorothea’s Portal, a spiralling tourbillion of blue and red and onyx lightning, hiding a Greater Demon on the other side...

The Portal Khutulun made was like none of those; not a curtain or window or vortex, but a door. The movements of her hands shaped its outline, and where her fingertips passed a line of every-coloured light followed, something that might almost have been a cord woven of fire and water, of sunset and moonrise, jewelled and gilded. Its handle was in the shape of a golden hand, palm out and fingers spread, and Khutulun reached for it, lacing her fingers into the golden ones and clasping it like she might a lover’s.

Sariel heard a sound, like a single, sweet bell being struck once, just on the edge of their hearing, and the door opened.

There was no seeing what lay on the other side; the doorway was filled with light, softly shifting white and silver shot through with glittering streaks of purple and green. But despite the dazzling
blindness, none of the warlocks hesitated; one by one they all walked through it and disappeared, until there was only Khutulun holding the door, and Sariel, and Magnus holding their hand.

Sariel stared into the light, and remembered a thousand different darknesses: demons of more kinds than even Alec could name; claws and teeth tearing the very Marks from their flesh; rabid werewolves foaming at the mouth and horse-high at the shoulder, so much taller than the young Shadowhunters sent to put them down; demonic venom and the glint of an Infernal blade and Abbadon’s claws come scything down; Simon locked blade-to-blade with Valentine and Izzy turning her back on her dying brother, begging Raziel to make her fast enough to find Magnus in time; blood soaking a ten-year-old’s shoes and that fallen father walking into the room at Renwicks; Simon’s angel falling like a star in the Silent City and learning that Magnus was dying and Alec waking with some deep core gouged out of his soul by a kiss; Jace’s vision in the Angel’s Courtyard and all of eternity in an angel’s eyes as its fire closed around Izzy and rivers of blackness and light searing-screaming out of Simon’s body in the Infirmary—

The truth about the Mortal Sword’s power.

Children’s bodies, ‘tortured before they died’.

The world-wards coming down.

“Alexander renas Sariel,” Khutulun said, and her voice was gentle. “Be well-come to our hearth.”

‘Only those who are invited can enter the Court.’

Sariel’s fingers tightened around Magnus’. “I’m afraid,” they whispered.

‘Alexander, kin of our kin, we invite across our threshold.’

Their parabatai Marks throbbed like wounds, like hearts, on all three of their bodies.

‘But not your agelai.’

“I’m with you,” Magnus said.

Sariel took a deep, steadying breath.

And, together, they walked into the light.

***

Ana followed Cas into the room he was sharing with Lucio; while he dug books out of his bags, she sat down on his bed and crossed her legs.

“Sam’s so mad about his laptop, I wouldn’t be surprised if he tracked the spell back to its source and sent a drone to nuke the entrance to Seelie,” Cas said, sitting down opposite her. He split the pile of books in half, pushed one half to her, and started flicking through the pages of his own stack.

“Is that possible?” Ana asked, obediently opening up books.

Cas shrugged. “You’re the one on the Lightbringer fast track: you tell me.” He said it without any sort of bitterness, which was both a surprise and a relief.

“And you’re the magical prodigy,” she said. “Isn’t that why you’re here?”

Cas thought for a moment. “I’m not sure if that was a compliment or a dig at my age.”
“A ‘dig’?” Ana’s grasp of colloquial English failed her.

Cas waved it off. “I know we’ve got to figure out this curse, but before we get started, can you…tell me about the Kilulšargad?” he asked after a long pause.

Ana managed not to gape at him. She’d been so sure that he must know, but the discomfort in his face made it clear that he wasn’t making some bizarre joke. “Yes, of course,” she said. “I’m sorry; they tell us when we’re eighteen, but I thought, because you’re so gifted, you must know already.”

Cas smiled weakly. “That was definitely a dig at my age.” He paused. “Wait, does that mean the brilliant Anacaona Hilas, warrior-witch extraordinaire, the Leiomano’s golden girl, is going to break a rule and tell a seventeen-year-old classified info?”

She jabbed an elbow at him, which he avoided deftly. “Do you want to know or not?” She pretended to hesitate. “How long is it until your birthday, anyway?”

“Tomorrow,” he said promptly. “It’s absolutely tomorrow. I expect presents and everything.”

Ana smiled, genuinely grateful for the light-hearted banter, for the sort-of-distraction from the terrifying void in the pit of her stomach. “I will need to go shopping,” she said, playing along. “But, all right.” It was easier to think about the Kilulšargad in academic terms anyway: she could feel herself calming bit by bit as she thought about how to explain it, and not about what the reality of it might do if they didn’t find and stop the caster in time. “It’s a very ancient ritual…”

***

There was just enough time, when their Alec-body was half-in, half-out of the Portal, for them to remember the terror-agony of feeling Alec being torn away from them by an angel’s kiss, to remember Jace falling in the subway car and his parabatai rune bleeding under Isabelle’s fingertips—

(‘This will hurt.’ A whisper of a memory, a fragment of a long-forgotten dream. ‘More than anything ever will again.’)

It was not like that this time.

A filter of blazing gold fire, their own steps pouring them through it and it sifted their soul in a dizzying-dazzling rush, letting only what was Alec waterfall through; Jace and Izzy were caught in it like birds in thorns and it didn’t work that way, this way, it could never be so clear and clean to split a soul apart and there were wings like the shadows Simon’s angel had cast upon the wall of the Council Chamber, star-bright, auroric pinions like the ones it had embraced Isabelle in and fought with in the Silent City; wings like those and they came down like velvet guillotines and Alec screamed, heard his brother and sister screaming too even as he was snatched away from them, enclosed in a thousand shades of gold like a shell, a shield, a chrysalis—

A cage and carapace in one—

His fingers were torn from Magnus’ and Alec fell to his hands and knees, heaving, shuddering, desperately reaching for his agelai, searching for them—

Finding nothing but the gold, gently but mercilessly closing him inside itself—

Alone, one alone, even before he’d become Sariel he’d had Jace and now Alec was alone in the echoing emptiness of himself, riven and wrong—
“I’m sorry,” Magnus said, and he sounded so far away, kneeling next to him, brushing the hair back from Alec’s clammy brow, “I’m so sorry Alexander, it’s only for a little while—”

“Give him some space, Isatum,” a new voice said, kindly but firmly. “You can’t help him through this. Let him breathe and adjust.”

Dimly, Alec felt—or saw, or heard, it was all swimming together in his head—Magnus move reluctantly away. The new speaker took his place, kneeling down to rub firm, slow circles over Alec’s back. Alec glimpsed perfectly ordinary blue jeans in the corner of his eye. “It’s all right,” the stranger murmured, his voice heavy with sympathy. “They’re not gone, you haven’t lost them. They’ll be right there waiting when you leave here.” He kept up the soothing circles, anchoring Alec in his body bit by bit. “In a minute you’ll be able to feel that they’re still alive. You can’t right now because you’re still reeling, but I promise you, they’re fine, and you will be too.”

He was right—well, not about the fine part, Alec wasn’t fine and couldn’t imagine how he could be, like this. But as Alec’s breathing steadied and the chaotic maelstrom inside him calmed, he was slowly able to detect the dim and muted energies of his agelai. It was like catching sight of two glowing embers in a dark night: he had to strain for it, and wasn’t completely sure he wasn’t imagining it, but he clung to them anyway. He couldn’t feel them, couldn’t even tell which was Jace and which was Izzy, but the proof that they were still alive eased the primal, mindless terror in his marrow.

“How do you people live like this?” he gasped, when he was able to form words again. The floor beneath him was crystal, and glowed with a light that should have hurt his eyes, but didn’t.

The hand on his back stilled. “Well,” the voice said, a little wryly, “not all of us do.”

Confused, Alec looked up—into the sun-tanned face of a young man who could have been Alec’s older brother, with his sapphire-blue eyes and the ink-black hair almost falling into them. And the mnemosyne rune half-bared by the neck of his t-shirt.

The young man reached up to brush his hair back with a hand emblazoned with the voyance Mark, and smiled at Alec. “William Herondale, at your service,” he said. “You must be Alexander. Welcome to the Spiral Court.”

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“About six, six and a half thousand years ago,” Ana said, “humans were just beginning to really study demons. We knew about them—the first of the ubārum-ene arrived thousands of years before that, looking for sanctuary after their own worlds were destroyed, and they brought stories of demons with them. But no demons had found our world yet, so for a long time humans didn’t worry about them. But more and more ubārum-ene were arriving all the time, and we realised that probably meant that the demons were coming closer to our world.

“The world-wards were whole then: nothing could get through without someone here opening a way for them. So that was what some spellcasters did; with the help of some ubārum-ene, they created summoning rituals to bring demons through, so they could be studied. We made them tell us their weaknesses, and then we cast them out again, closing the way behind them.”

Ana took a deep breath. “But there were accidents. And some accidents that weren’t accidents, but experiments. The first warlock was born when the king of a place called Akkad, King Sargon, ordered a kashshaptu to summon a demon to lie with his queen—Queen Tashlultum. He was hoping for a powerful heir, but his wife gave birth to a daughter, who couldn’t inherit the throne, so he gave
the girl to the priesthood of the moon-god Sin instead.

“But she was powerful, able to work magic like no kashshaptu ever had—so powerful that they said Inanna, their goddess of magic, had taken human form. So others tried the same thing. And like I said, there were accidents. Some demons escaped their summoning circles, and not all the conceptions were consensual ones.” Ana lifted her shoulders, and let them fall. “It was chaotic and awful. People died. And of course, even when the demons were banished again…”

“They knew about our world now,” Cas said.

Ana nodded. “A world rich with life and magic, but with no organised defence, and little knowledge of demons. They were starving, and we were a feast.

“But they couldn’t get through the world-wards. Instead, they had to slither their way into the dream-realm, and whisper to the kashshaptu-ene they thought powerful enough to do what they wanted.”

“Which was…?”

Ana looked Cas in the eye. “Destroy the world-wards.”

***

Alec stared, even as he took the offered hand and let William pull him to his feet. “You’re a Shadowhunter,” he said dumbly.

“By birth and blood,” the older man agreed. It took Alec a second to remember the meaning behind the archaic phrasing; ‘by blood’ was an old-fashioned way of saying, by practice and training. An Ascended Shadowhunter, someone who was born a Lightworder but was remade as one of the Nephilim by the Mortal Cup, was a ‘hunter by blood—the blood they’d shed in training, the blood of Raziel they drank from the Cup, and the blood of the monsters they’d slain in the years since. Alec, who’d been born to the caste, was a Shadowhunter by birth and blood, the same as William. “Not exactly an official patroller these days, but I keep my hand in.”

“How are you here?” Just a few seconds ago, Alec—Sariel—would have demanded an answer, would have underscored the question with the amazed incredulity in their voice. But already Alec could feel the thick, leaden exhaustion rolling over him, the fog that bled from the wound Simon’s angel had left in his soul and numbed everything it touched. Jace had alleviated it; becoming Sariel had left Alec feeling almost himself again. But without his agelai… Without them, caring became so hard, and even his skin felt unbearably heavy.

There was a Shadowhunter. In the Spiral Court. Intellectually, Alec knew he should care, should be shocked, and he struggled to feel it. To at least pretend as if he did.

“It’s a long story,” William said. The amusement in his eyes had gone a little sharp, and Alec was hit by the uncomfortable worry that the older Shadowhunter could tell that something was wrong with him.

“And the short answer is, ‘love’,” a woman’s voice said lightly. When Alec let go of William’s hand and turned to look, he saw, standing beside Catarina, a white woman who looked about William’s age. Alec’s sixth sense for Shadow Worlders sparked weakly, and he blinked, confused; the brown-haired woman smiled at William, and it was like watching a room light up from the other side of a pane of dirty glass, but Alec’s senses insisted that she was a warlock—

—and a Shadowhunter.
But that was impossible. Nephilim couldn’t have children with demons. They couldn’t.

(They had depended on that when they were trying to figure out Simon; no matter what Abigor had said, Simon couldn’t be demon-blooded, because his mother was a Shadowhunter and Nephilim and demons couldn’t have children. That was a fact. It was true."

If it wasn’t…)"

After that disturbing, terrifying thought, it was almost a relief to see that the silver-haired, half-Chinese man holding the woman’s hand was only another Shadowhunter.

“Tessa,” Magnus said, with warmth and relief. He strode past Alec and embraced the woman tightly. “It’s been too long.”

She hugged him back hard. “It has,” she said. “I’m just so sorry our reunion had to be under these circumstances.” She pulled back a little and placed her palm against his cheek, giving him a searching look. “How bad is it?”

“Bad,” Catarina said briefly, before Magnus could answer for himself. “I’m honestly not sure how he’s standing upright right now.”

“She’s exaggerating,” Magnus said.

Catarina raised her eyebrows.

“Slightly,” Magnus amended, with a small wince.

Having stepped discreetly aside to let the warlocks embrace, the silver-haired Shadowhunter approached Alec and William. He, too, wore perfectly ordinary clothing; a sapphire-blue sweater that made his pale hair shine, and jeans gone soft and faded with wear. “Alexander Lightwood,” he said warmly. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. I’m Jem Carstairs.”

“It’s Alexander Sariel,” Alec corrected, automatically. Herondale. Carstairs. Both old and honoured Shadowhunter Houses, ancient lineages that had produced some of Raziel’s finest sons and daughters. What were two of their scions doing here?

He was almost sure that there was no William Herondale—or Jem Carstairs, for that matter. Weren’t the Carstairs family based in Los Angeles now? The Lightwoods were social pariahs, but still, Alec thought he would have heard if little Emma Carstairs had an older brother. And the Inquisitor was a Herondale, but her son had died on patrol, killed by vampires, hadn’t he? Hodge had drilled Alec, Jace and Isabelle on the genealogies of all the High Houses endlessly, and Alec couldn’t remember anything about any other Herondale branches William might belong to.

Then again, he hadn’t known the Inquisitor was a Herondale either, before he saw her ring…

“Well, if we’re being formal,” William drawled. He held out his hand to shake. “William Anael nat Herondale, at your service.”

It seemed an enormous effort, taking William’s hand. Alec’s head felt like it was spinning, and vertigo and exhaustion—however mental instead of physical—did not go well together.

“James Anael nat Carstairs,” Jem said, smiling. “Sariel? They told us you had a parabatai, but I hadn’t heard there’d been a new agela. Congratulations.”

“We only just joined,” Alec said. “It hasn’t been publicly announced yet. Thank you,” he added
belatedly.

Jem frowned, concern and confusion in his eyes. “You formed an agela without telling anyone? That’s…unusual.”

_Not nearly as unusual as an agela that doesn’t exist_, Alec thought. There was no Agela Anael—Sariel was the first agela of their generation, but there were others from his parents’. Agela Michael, Valentine’s _agela_, had broken when Luke became a werewolf, and Usiel had been destroyed in battle against the Greater Demon Glasya-Labolas when Alec was six, but _Agelae_ Maadim, Jesodoth, and Haamiah were all still whole.

And that was it. Those were all the _agelae_ in existence. It was possible that he might have forgotten, or never heard of, two sons of two of the High Houses. But there was no chance at all that even the Lightwoods wouldn’t have heard of an _agela_.

“Just shows that he’s going to fit right in,” William said, clapping a friendly hand on Alec’s shoulder. “You have to be a bit strange for the Court to take you on despite your Nephilim blood,” he told Alec cheerfully. “No respectable servitors of the Clave here, I’m afraid. That sort doesn’t make it past the front door.”

“I prefer _unorthodox_ to strange,” Jem said, but he was smiling fondly at William’s antics. Something about the look on his face hooked Alec even through the leaden fog in his head, like the very tip of an arrow piercing thick, heavy armour just enough to scratch the skin beneath. “Regardless—as Will said, welcome to the Spiral Court.”

He gestured at their surroundings, and for the first time Alec took in where he _was_.

They stood inside an enormous chamber, one that reached so high and swept so wide it would have made even one of the Greater Dragons feel small—but even so any dragon would have coveted it for a nesting place, for every surface was made up of glittering facets as numberless as stars. The walls, the ceiling—it was a _geode_, an impossible, perfect cavern all of amethyst, darkly sparkling as if some angel had taken an amaranthine nebula and shaped it into this sanctum. Arches of jade and opal and turquoise led to other parts of the Court; up above Alec could see multiple levels of elegantly wrought balconies and walkways, carved out of the amethyst walls and lovingly polished. Here and there faces looked down at him, but most were so high up he would have needed a kulvade rune—the vision or farsight Mark—to see them properly; even his pureblooded Shadowhunter eyes couldn’t see so far unaided.

“By the Angel, this is amazing,” he said, doing nothing to hide his awe. “And beautiful.” He looked at the other two Shadowhunters. “But how can it block my bond to my _agelai_?”

Will shrugged, carefully careless. “You’ll have to ask Magnus. He’s the one who set the wards on this place.”

But Alec hardly heard him, because he’d finally glanced down, and what lay beneath his feet took his breath away.

The floor glowed. He’d only vaguely noticed it as he arrived—he’d been too busy reeling at the sudden loss of his _agelai_—but now it dragged his eyes down and didn’t let them go. It lit the entire cavern as bright as day, but was not blinding—Alec felt as though he could have stared at it forever. It wasn’t amethyst, but made of some kind of stunning misty, milky white crystal, smooth as glass and full of whorling coruscations; rich blues and fiery greens, jewelled pinks and gleams of gold, joyful purples and star-kissed silver and a thousand other shades of colour…
Wonder touched him even through his sick, bleak fatigue: moonstone? Opal? Had the Spiral Court somehow acquired adamas, and the skills to shape it? But even adamas had never…

No.

Wait.

The translucent shimmers of colour—they were moving. Alec was standing above a rushing river of light, curling and spiralling and racing through—beneath?—the crystal, a knee-weakening glory that made the Hudson look like the dripping of a bathroom tap. It was huge—it was everywhere—it ran under the whole of the floor, wild and fierce as white-water rapids, if some deity had poured the Milky Way into a riverbed and let it run. Surf like diamond-dust caught and crashed under Alec’s feet; the shining colours coalesced into teasing almost-shapes as he watched, a seraphic calligraphy, and the speed and power and beauty of it all was somehow joyful, as if the river was alive, alive and celebrating its own existence, the existence of every living thing—it was dancing, dancing and laughing and singing, he could swear it, could almost hear it, and he knew if he could just make out the words of the light’s song there would never be anything wrong with the world ever again—

A hand on Alec’s shoulder jolted him out of the glowing eternity before he could lose himself in it, and he stumbled back, his heart racing (beating to the beat of its song). “By the Angel,” he gasped. “What is that?”

“It’s a ley line.” It was Magnus, and Alec looked up to find a small, tired smile on his face. “Do you remember telling me you knew what a High Warlock was?”

The first time he’d visited Magnus’ loft on his own; the first time they’d kissed. “One who controlled a nexus,” Alec said slowly. “And you said a nexus was a place where ley lines crossed each other.” He glanced back down. “But I never knew what that meant.”

Magnus’ hand slid from his shoulder down his arm, and Alec automatically clasped it as it reached his fingers. “Ley lines are like…the veins and arteries of the world,” Magnus said quietly. “They’re the conduits of the earth’s energy, the planet’s lifeblood.” He paused. “And they feed and sustain the world-wards.”

Alec looked up at him sharply, his lungs constricting. “So what Valentine’s doing is affecting the ley lines?”

Magnus squeezed his fingers. “We’ll get to that.” He drew Alec forward before Alec could muster up the energy to make some kind of protest, to demand answers. “I’d like you to meet one of my dearest friends.”

William and Jem had returned to the side of the brown-haired woman, the three of them talking amongst themselves in low voices. Alec just had time to see that William’s jovial cheer had been replaced by something far more solemn—when he noticed Alec and Magnus approaching, the grin came back like a mask being slipped on.

“Tessa,” Magnus said, “allow me to introduce Alexander Lightwood; an extremely anomalous Shadowhunter.”

“It’s Alexander Sariel nat Lightwood, actually,” William corrected primly.

“Really?” Tessa smiled at Alec. She had a lovely face, but it was the genuine warmth in her smile that made Alec relax a little. “Congratulations on your agela, Alexander.”

“Thank you,” Alec managed.
“I’m Theresa Gray,” she said. “But please call me Tessa.”

He couldn’t help but remember the name: Izzy had brought it up with the Inquisitor just that morning. “You’re the one who turned into an angel!” He looked between her and William. “Theresa Herondale!”

“Only briefly,” Tessa said with a laugh, “either of those things.” She gave William a fond look. “Will was being rather stupid on a matter only a wedding would fix. But that was a long time ago, and I use my own name now.” She grinned. “Despite having two husbands.”

Alec blinked. *Husband S?*

“These three have been together since the late 1800s,” Magnus said. “It was something of a scandal, as I recall.”

“Couldn’t be helped,” Will said with a shameless grin. “No one man could be good enough for Tessa. It takes at *least* two to love her as she deserves.”

His tone was light, but the love in his eyes as he looked at his wife was anything but shallow. Alec had no difficulty in believing theirs was a love that had lasted two hundred years; seeing it—in Jem’s tender expression, too, as Tessa briefly rested her head on his shoulder—he realised the only surprise would be if it didn’t last a thousand more.

“My mother was a Shadowhunter,” Tessa explained, straightening. “Although she didn’t know it—she had no Marks, which is why she was able to have me. But her blood means I can bear runes, and when the three of us became *agelai*—”

“Jem and I were *parabatai* then,” Will added. He took Jem’s hand and brought it to his lips, courtly as a prince as he softly kissed Jem’s runed fingers. “We’re not anymore.”

*Parastathentes.* It struck Alec like a burning arrow, watching them; Jem’s loving smile, the deep and unstinting adoration in Will’s eyes, and all the time, all the years Alec had spent dreaming of his own *parabatai* wanting to alter *their* bond…

But that answered his earlier question. A *parastathentes* bond was far more serious than a marriage…

“I was very ill then,” Jem said. “My *parabatai* bond with Will kept me alive much longer than anyone could have predicted, but I was dying. It was Will’s idea to see if becoming *parastathentes* with Tessa would share her immortality with me.”

“And as usual, my brilliance saved the day,” Will declared.

“And my heart,” Tessa said. “It would have crumbled to ashes and dust without the both of you. I wanted no part of immortality if it meant living without you both.”

Jem grinned. “Will was such a self-sacrificing twit, it took Tessa a while to convince him she wanted him as her *parastathentes* too,” he teased. “But he saw sense eventually.”

“The two of them were very thorough in the demonstration of their sincerity,” Will said gravely, his eyes sparkling, and Tessa laughed.

“I swear you weren’t convinced until I had you at the altar, you ridiculous creature!”

There was a pain in Alec’s throat, and he looked away from them, the three of them. He remembered
the night of Jace’s Dedication, how Magnus had asked him to dance and Alec hadn’t dared, not until all the guests had gone home. And here were two men—two Shadowhunter men—completely open with their love, fearless and unashamed. As if it didn’t even occur to them to be…to be…

Magnus deserved a boyfriend like that. Didn’t he?

“So.” Jem cocked his head. “How do you know Magnus, Alexander? I never thought I’d see another Shadowhunter in the Court.”

Magnus opened his mouth to answer, and Alec didn’t know what he meant to say, only that it wouldn’t be the truth, because he would keep Alec’s secret, even if it meant lying to his friends.

“I’m his boyfriend,” Alec blurted.

For an instant, all of them froze; Magnus stared at him with unabashed shock, even if Alec could see it swiftly morphing into happy surprise. But before he could speak, Will whooped.

“Another one!” he crowed, pumping a fist into the air, and he was so ridiculous that even Alec had to laugh, the absurdity of it distracting him from the tight, sick fear in his gut, so that the razor-studded knots around his lungs and stomach relaxed before he could notice. “And a Lightwood, too! Spiral: 3; Clave, 0!” He flashed white teeth. “We’ll have all the High Houses married in before the next millennium, at this rate!”

“Good God,” Magnus said, as Tessa dissolved into giggles. “Is that your plan? Why would anyone want such a thing?” But he was smiling, smiling as Alec had never seen him smile before, and Alec was so startlingly, stunningly happy he could barely breathe.

A pulse of light swept above their heads, accompanied by a soft, ringing sound: insistent without being grating. As Alec looked up, startled, it came again: a rhythmic pulsing of violet light, steadily coming at shorter and shorter intervals.

“That’s the call to council,” Magnus said as Tessa’s expression sobered, and Will and Jem grew serious. Alec had a glimpse of what the two of them must have been like hunting demons together: intent, focused, deadly. “Come on, Alec.”

Together they made their way towards the centre of the space, one of many small groups; knots of warlocks had gathered everywhere, but everyone was migrating towards the source of those pulses of light. Alec saw Catarina and Arika walking together, and spotted a few of the others he recognised from the apartment in Magnus’ building, but the vast majority were warlocks he’d never seen before. He caught snatches of languages he knew and ones he didn’t, saw a few talking to each other with their hands, little sparks of light tracing the paths of their fingers—not the coded signals Shadowhunters used when it was too dangerous to speak aloud (stop; on your left; mundanes present) but something far more complex, what looked like an actual language of hand-signs. They wore jeans, robes, fantastical gowns and tank tops—whatever was going on, there didn’t seem to be any kind of dress code.

Without his agelai, it was hard to feel the urgency Alec knew he should be feeling. He ought to be impatient, should have been going insane with the wait for answers—but he wasn’t. The happiness he’d felt just seconds ago had been like the sun cutting through the thick fog inside him, but he couldn’t hold onto it. Not when his arms felt like swords too heavy to lift; not when every step felt like an effort. It was as if the ley line knew and sympathised; every time he set his foot down on the crystal floor, a kind of pearlescent surf gathered under his feet, a flurry of opal snow rushing up to meet and outline his footsteps.
It was not, he realised slowly, doing so for anyone else.

His heart started to beat faster. If asked, he couldn’t have explained why, only that there was the dizzying sense of—of fingers reaching out to touch his, separated by a pane of glass; of a hand laid flat against a crystalline barrier, someone longing for him to set his palm against theirs. It was the smallest flicker of understanding exactly what ran under his feet; like standing atop the surface of the ocean and suddenly realising that there was only depthless darkness beneath you, a void whose enormity you could never truly grasp, dark and cold and filled with things you could never imagine. Only this void was all light and heat and life, savage and wild and alive; fiercely, gloriously alive, dancing in wild spirals around his feet in kitten-curiosity, hummingbird-brightness, darting dolphin laughter.

And something in the aching hollow of his wounded soul…answered. No: echoed, vibrating with the same light-song, filling up and overflowing with it, sending it back as if to say: I am here, here I am, I am here! The cauterised walls of the gouged-out space in him were turned to crystal, a thousand shards of adamas reflecting back the blaze of light, mirroring it back like a signal flare: I am here, see me, know me, I am HERE!

It was not actually words. It was not intentional, it was nothing he consciously chose to do, thought to do, knew he could do. It was autonomic; he did it like he bled, like he breathed, like he lived.

And it was building and building with every step. The song growing louder as the ley line sang it and it echoed it back; the light growing brighter as it blazed and he shone it back and it leapt up higher, more brilliant, even more beautiful—

Alec wanted to say something—tell Magnus, ask him, what was happening—but if he opened his mouth, if he opened his mouth all the incandescent radiance of that vortex of light would come pouring out…

And the ley was responding to others now: dimly, distantly, Alec saw the river of light-life-magic under the floor swirl around Magnus and Tessa in a blizzard of fractals. They walked towards the centre of this amethyst hall and the ley line swirled up through the ground, ribbons of light spiralling their way up Magnus and Tessa’s bodies. They did not flinch—and neither did Will and Jem—but strode on like a King and Queen, an Emperor and Empress as the living mana of the world garbed and crowned them, transforming their clothes. Step by step, Magnus’ soft, worn jeans and sequin-studded t-shirt—what he’d been wearing while ill and resting—were transformed into a kind of long and sweeping coat of deep midnight-blue, the silk shimmering white and gold and azure as he moved; its skirt flared, while above the waist it sealed itself closed over his chest, melting into a sort of sleeveless shirt; it was all one garment. Gold looped his hips, and wound down his bare arms to form gauntlets of blue and gold wire, set with glittering blue stones; a rainbow of rings curled lovingly around his fingers, even the ones Alec was still holding. Alec felt the gems grow like ripening fruits against his hand, and still the ley line wasn’t done. It painted gold on Magnus’ lips and swept shimmering sapphire around his eyes; it twined through his hair and made it shine, raising it into a crown of lightning-sharp spikes, streaked with electric blue.

He looked like a prince—like a young god, powerful and regal and otherworldly. He was breathtaking.

Tessa’s transformation was no less dramatic: the ley had given her a loose, flowing dress of slate-grey silk, a colour that shifted and changed no less than Magnus’ coat robe. From a belt of silver links at her waist hung dozens of silken threads strung with crystal beads, and over it all was draped what might almost have been a poncho—if it hadn’t been light as gossamer, transparent as water, and sewn with countless tiny diamonds. It draped over her from waist to neck, pinned at the shoulders
with intricate brooches of silver and steel and mother-of-pearl. It didn’t quite form a hood; it covered the back of her head, but joined a silver coronet threaded through her hair, becoming instead a kind of backwards veil. Underneath it her hair hung loose and long, tumbling like waves. She wore no make-up; she needed none. Her arms, like Magnus’, had been left sleeveless; silver wire wove down them, forming gauntlets like Magnus’ over her forearms, intricate whorls clasping pearls and pieces of labradorite.

And then they had arrived.

They came to the lip of an amphitheatre that seemed to appear without warning: suddenly there, the crystal floor plunging down in coiling rows down to a circle platform at the bottom. But Alec could only see its outlines, because although a space had been carved out of the ground, no one could redirect the ley line, and it continued to flow uninterrupted, forming a kind of roof or cover over the ‘theatre. Anyone wanting to enter the council-space would have to walk through that whirling lake of pure magic.

And everyone was doing just that; without hesitation, every warlock reached the edge of the ley-pool and lowered themselves into it, walking down the steps cut into the floor of this place. Catarina took the stairs and passed through it without even pausing; Tessa flashed Alec an encouraging smile, then went down, descending with the unhesitating grace of the Empress she resembled, hand in hand with both her husbands.

Will looked back and shot Alec a quick thumb’s up just before he disappeared into the radiant murk of the ley line.

No. Ley lines. The echoing inside Alec felt louder now—was growing louder all the time, but—it wasn’t hearing, not with his ears, but he could hear—more. And when he looked—not with his eyes, but inside, somehow, sort of, almost, the wound in him crying out with something torn between agony and ecstasy—he could see it. The direction he and Magnus had been walking from—they had walked along the path of a single ley line. But there were others—dozens, hundreds, thousands of them, pouring in from every direction and meeting here, in this ocean of power pretending to be a lake.

Magnus was watching him, and smiling, something proud and tender in the curve of his gilded mouth. “Welcome to the heart of the world,” he said softly.

“It’s so beautiful,” Alec whispered, and felt the inadequacy of human language like a physical pain, because to call this beautiful was so pathetic it became an insult. Second by second, he could see—sense—it better, the courses of all these rivers of starlight, how they ran alongside each other, blending and melting at their edges because that was what they did, until they tumbled, laughing-singing, into this shining pool the warlocks—or someone else?—had made for them. They swirled together, not still and placid but a rushing spiral vortex—and instead of being terrifying it was inviting, welcoming, singing the world’s heartbeat for every soul to hear.

He felt it beating in his own chest.

*I’m here! Here I am, I’m here, I am I am I am!*

Magnus squeezed his hand. “It won’t hurt you,” he said gently.

Alec smiled up at him. “I know,” he said, and stepped into the heart of the world.

***
And the world rushed in to embrace him.

***

Catarina felt the ripple of Tessa’s arrival, and looked up to see her and her two kiáñrashi pass through the World’s Heart, the confluence of all the world’s ley lines that served as a final protection for the Spiral Court. James and William immediately let go of their wife’s hands and fell in behind her, not beside her, so that she led them down the spiralling tiers towards the bottom of the amphitheatre. It would send the wrong message for them to walk beside her like equals, just now, with Xia and Elias murdered, and as far as Catarina could tell they didn’t seem to resent it.

Smarter than most Nephilim, those two. Not that that was a particularly high bar…

But Tessa had hardly made it a third of the way down before the Heart—

It—

That was not a ripple—

Later, trying to describe it to those who had been unable to answer the summons and did not see and experience it for themselves, Catarina would say: picture a sink.

*Fill it to the brim with water.*

Now, *pull the plug.*

It was a whirlpool. That was the only word that came close for the sudden whirling rush, the crashing tsunami of mana converging in on one point. The ever-shining light of the Heart blazed incandescent and Catarina heard shouts and cries even as the light seared the sight from her eyes and she could only feel, feel the Heart whipping itself into a wild twister that poured itself—

Somewhere—

Into *something*—

And in an instant it was over. Twenty seconds from start to finish, if that. As suddenly as it had started, all was calm again, and when Catarina lowered her upflung arm and cautiously looked up, at first nothing seemed to have changed. The World’s Heart still shone and swirled above, like a lid over the council’s amphitheatre, a sky of opal clouds above the court. Nothing seemed amiss.

Until she saw Alexander.

She didn’t realise it was him at first. She saw a single shoe coming through the milky confluence of the ley lines; a white boot with the sheen that said *dragon-leather,* and there was no reason to think of Alec. Alec had been wearing perfectly normal sneakers when Catarina saw him only a moment ago.

But this foot wasn’t touching the ground.

Heads began to turn as her kin sensed what she did, saw what she did. Stared at what she did.

Alexander entered the council-space step by step, passing through the ley and becoming visible in stages; feet, calves, thighs, hips, torso, neck—

Head—
“Ma’at,” she heard someone breathe.

It was Alexander, and he was glowing. Drifting ribbons of starlit-ley wound like loving serpents up his legs and down his arms, threaded through his hair as if they’d been braided there. His jeans had been remade into loose silken trousers whiter than snow; his shirt had lost its sleeves and been shocked to the same shade of white, and now hugged his body, emphasising the musculature of an active Shadowhunter. A rope of jade beads looped his throat, and an oak-leaf of gold, like a tiny shard of the sun, hung from it gleaming, resting against Alec’s collarbone. Against the white of his clothes and framed by the light of the ley, the crimson Marks of mourning blazed against his skin like jewels, like the bracelets of red beryl bright as stars around his wrists.

The Heart of the World was in his eyes. No dark pupils or rich blue irises: there was only the opal-fire radiance, shining so brightly that streams of light came from his eyes; so bright that looking at them was like trying to stare into the sun.

And yet Catarina stared, unable to help herself as Alec took his slow, sure steps downward. He walked inches above the ground; at every step, a whorl of ley-light curled into being beneath his feet, supporting him so that he walked on air and light. He was smiling—as if he might break into laughter at any moment, and whatever he saw, it was not what Catarina and the other ashipu-ene could see. He looked up even as his steps led him downwards, and held his arms extended, glimmers and cords of mana darting in-between his fingers like fireflies. Above him the Heart stirred again, flowing faster in its endless spiral, its calm waves rushing, crashing—but what should have been chaos seemed like dancing; what should have been terrifying instead felt playful and excited. The Heart of the World danced itself into a storm and Alec was at its centre, the eye of the whirlwind, whirlpool, huge coils of gold and pink and green circling above him—and around him: when he raised his hands the ley rushed down to meet him, breaking from the Heart in enormous ephemeral-effervescent streams of colour and light and life. The Heart of the World had always been the roof of the Spiral Court, their shelter; now it flooded the amphitheatre in shimmering auroric sheets, as if Alec had summoned down the Aurora Borealis from the sky to gift to them. Catarina’s eyes filled with tears of wonder, and she heard cries of emotion from every side as the ley wove itself among them all, coiling and curling to brush against every ashipu present, briefly embracing every last one of them in love-made-light, kissing softly against their souls.

_MINE_, the Heart whispered to Catarina without words, in a language her atoms spoke as tears streamed down her face. _MY CHILD, MY DAUGHTER. IT HAS NEVER MATTERED WHO SIRED YOU. YOU HAVE ALWAYS BELONGED. YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HOME. YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN LOVED._

_CATARINA LOSS, YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN LOST TO ME._

She pressed her hands to her mouth and sobbed, pain and relief and gratitude and love all bursting free like blood and pus as—neatly as a surgeon’s scalpel, delicate as starlight on skin—the Heart gently drew free a twisted, jagged splinter of self-loathing from where it had been festering inside her since the day she was born: self-loathing, and guilt, and shame, and sin. The living light that had embraced her soul excised it all, and cleaned the wound of poison, and tenderly stitched it closed.

_BE HEALED, HEALER._

And she was.

All around her, her people were having similar experiences: there were no dry eyes in the Court today. Alec had reached the base of the stairs, still looking up with glowing eyes into something no
one else could see; still standing inches above the smooth stone ground; still at the heart of a
whirlpool of light, an almost-storm of a silvered rainbow tracing wild spirals in the air.

Through the silken whirl of colours surrounding him, Catarina thought that Alec might be weeping
too, thought she saw tears like glowing diamonds on his cheeks.

But she blinked, and they were gone—and Alec fell as the twister of light abruptly disappeared,
letting him go. The dazzling lights vanished so suddenly that it was almost like a flash of darkness—
but still, she saw Alec shift mid-fall, saw him go down on one knee as he landed, bracing his weight
on one hand, catching himself in a crouch.

When he looked up, his eyes no longer shone like signal-fires, and the silence was deafening.

At least until a familiar voice came from above.

“Well,” Magnus drawled, and if his voice shook a little as he descended the stairs, Cat for one wasn’t
about to blame him. “I think that answers the question of whether my Shadowhunter’s allowed to be
here.”

He came to stand beside Alec, his hands in his pockets. “Unless anyone feels like arguing with the
Heart of the World?”

***

He was the world, and the world was him.

The world was him, and he was the world.

He felt the ley lines spread across the planet like veins within his body; felt the Heart of the World
beating inside his chest. He breathed and his breaths were all the currents of the air, warm and cool
alike; the sun was his left eye and the moon was his right and all of his fingers were stars. The molten
core of the Earth was in the pit of his stomach and howling lightning bolts leapt between his neurons
and he felt every living thing like a billion billion nerve-endings, grass-pigeons-moles-pangolins-
oaks-geckos-horses-rats-moths-iguanas-magpies-wolves-plankton-vultures-tigers-ticks-lemurs-
hyenas-axolotls-fossas-crabs-owls-orchids-seaweeds-tardigrades-okapis-python-ants-ivy-
tuna-tadpoles-elephants-spiders-sloths-sharks-hoatzins-kakapos-moss-dolphins-platy-podes-
hummingbirds-seagulls-markhors-marmosets-moose-squirrels-camels-hawks-chickens-stingrays-
seals-daisies-chameleons-cornsnakes-kingfishers-fennecs-caracals-nettles-macaws-peacocks-
cheetahs-ferrets-pandas-huskies-tapirs-seahorses-entipides-kinkajous-pelicans-coyotes-lilies-pigs-
lynxes-shrews-bees-giraffes-otters-wombats-rhinos-corgis-capuchins-dandelions-hedgehogs-
panthers-slugs-gorillas-octopodes-gharials-ducks-antelope-ocas-reindeer-swans-scorpions-numbats-
zebras-ravens-snow leopards, all at once and everywhere. His thoughts were whalesongs and
meteors, his bones were coral reefs and his spine a culmination of every mountain range, and he felt
the planets like chakra-points, one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight(-nine). His lungs were geodes,
every breath gem-encrusted; every hair was a forest and every drop of sweat a sea.

Not even the agela bond could have prepared him for this; it was so much more, so much greater, his
awareness spread not through three bodies or even three billion, but the earth and the sky, the water
and the fire at the core of this spinning rock. He was the grains of sand dancing with the Saharan
wind and the dust in the raindrops falling over Amsterdam, he was the cold silent eternity of space
and the pale sharp-toothed things in the deepest oceans. He was things he had no names for and
creatures he’d never imagined and it was so much, so much that he should have broken from trying
to contain it all. No one should be able to hold this, feel this, see and know and be this.
But Alec could, and did, and was. Because the emptiness inside him, the terrible wound Simon’s angle had left him with—the dark pit he’d thought of as a black hole, depthless and devouring, starving to the point of agony but quenchless, insatiable—

The world fell into that terrifying space, and clicked into place, like a jewel into the setting forged for it.

(‘Oh, I see.’ Midnight eyes strewn with stars, staring at him, drowning him. ‘Yes.’ A grin like the flick of a switchblade.

‘You will need this later.’)

He was the world, and the world was him.

And he/it was…sick. Injured. Alec felt-saw-was the world-wards, comprehended them in their entirety: they were the world’s skin, not just planet-Earth but the world, this dimension of reality that humans and birds of paradise and dung beetles and fruit bats and Neisseria gonorrhoeae all called home; every atom of their universe, from one impossibly distant end to the other. And that skin was viciously abraded: Alec felt the pain of it, the road-rash burn all over him/it/them, and everywhere the skin was broken outright. Countless billions of paper-cuts, tiny but stunningly painful, and still enough for some of Hell’s legions to slither through; bigger, vicious scratches and ragged tears, lacerations that were the marks of scrabbling Infernal claws and the gnawing of their bone-splinter teeth; terrible slashes that seeped pain from the touch of lilithium blades, wide and gaping.

This was how demons reached Earth: by ripping and tearing their way through the world’s skin, and then pouring in like a virus…

But oh, there was pain: an immense, sick pain like none of the wounds in the wards! An ill heat, an infection under the skin, pus building as toxins spread—not demons, this; there was no tear, no puncture-wound through which they could have come. No, this came from beneath, from inside, like a cancer but not. Infection in the ley itself: poison and heat and the skin stretching tight and taut above it, swollen by the sickness, the necrosis.

Even Abbadon’s poison had seemed somehow cleaner than this…

Alec could not focus—he was the world—but he knew, because it was him and he was it, that the site of infection was in what his mortal mind knew as New York, at the crossroads where dozens of ley-lines met in a swirling diamond-dust nexus.

He experienced all of it at once: the blight and the beauty, the life and the death, the sickness and the sweet. New York was poisoned, and in the arctic circle the Northern Lights cascaded across the frosted sky; the skin of the world was a torn and ragged thing, and the stars spun a dance too intricate and exquisite for mortals to ever fathom as they raced through space-time. There was no difference, no separation: it was all pieces of the same whole, facets of the same impossible gem, beyond the scope of mortal morals or fears. There was only the fierce wild joy of being, of existing, singing in the pounding hooves of wild brumbies and the pounding of a billion waves against a hundred thousand shores alike; howling through a storm-tossed sky and from a wolf’s moon-kissed throat; caught shining in the spray from a dolphin’s blowhole and within the bubbles of lava crystallising as it cooled—

We exist we inhere we are

We are
Deeper than atoms, below the level of molecules, everything was singing with that song, singing we are we are WE ARE so loud and clear and perfect the notes of it interlocked to form—

—everything that IS!

It took an eternity to remember, and then to care, that he was an individual; that the awareness spread out endlessly across the universe belonged to one and not to all. Drawing himself back to his body—it was a little like spooling thread, if the spool was invisible and intangible and there were millions of threads instead of one; threads that were also invisible, also intangible. But the star an angel had carved into his palm throbbed, a beacon of heavenly fire amidst the All, and Alec followed it home—bit by bit and then all at once, like water trickling and then rushing to fill a grail.

The whiplash of suddenly being only one made him fall, but his body caught him, well-honed reflexes doing their job so that he went down on one knee, landing lightly and gracefully with his star-marked palm against the ground.

He was here. He was him.

And he was whole, because the Heart still burned with incandescent rainbow fire inside him.

A woman’s voice spoke into the silence, using the musical warlock language. Other voices joined or echoed hers, a murmur like the tide sweeping gently through the amphitheatre.

(The Heart in him heard and understood; “~Eris herself could not find a reason to deny him,~ and others in the crowd agreed, and they were talking about Alec, about Alec —)

“Excellent,” Magnus said. He turned and looked down to Alec, offering him a hand up. “Alexander?”

It felt like an impossible thing, taking that hand and standing: but Shadowhunters did impossible things every day. Alec got to his feet without letting Magnus take his weight; Magnus looked well now, imposing and glorious in his strange new clothes, the sick pallor faded from his skin, but Alec had no intention of letting him strain himself.

If Magnus could be cured just by coming to the Spiral Court, he would have done it days ago. Which meant he was still sick, and Alec had to take care of him.

(Which Alec could do, because he could breathe, he could breathe, the Heart’s light drove away all the thick and heavy fog like an angel’s sword casting demons out—)

They were standing at the floor of the amphitheatre, which seemed to be made of the same purple gemstone as the greater extent of the court, as if someone had cut the space out of the crystal floor and lined it with polished amethyst. In the middle of the floor was a round table of blue salt-crystal, a six-pointed star—the Warlock’s Star, not quite the same as the one beneath Alec’s glove, but close enough to make him close his fingers over his palm—inlaid in gold on its surface; a throne-like stone chair was placed at every point. In the light streaming down from the Heart of the World Alec saw that instead of tiers, the amphitheatre’s seats were arranged in a wide, looping spiral, neatly divided by the six sets of stairs that led back up and past the Heart.

And he thought: this is why they want to hide my memories of this.

Because everywhere he looked, there were warlocks. The room where he’d agreed to come had felt crowded, and walking towards the Heart Alec had been struck, distantly, by how many warlocks
there seemed to be. But now he knew: there were hundreds of them, easily four, no, five hundred of them seated on the amethyst spiral. Maybe a little more that.

Over five hundred warlocks. Over five hundred.

Alec would have been amazed to find half that number; he’d expected around a quarter as many. Everything he’d ever been taught, everything he’d ever been told, everything he’d ever read had insisted that warlocks were impossibly, vanishingly rare. Perhaps a hundred warlocks, Hodge had told Alec and his siblings, made up the whole world’s population. By definition they were an endangered breed—effectively extinct, for they couldn’t have children of their own. Living fossils, Alec’s father had called them once. Bodies embalmed by demon blood, still walking and talking because they were too stupid to just lie down and die.

A warlock was a child sired on a human mother by a demon. The mother had to survive the rape; mother and child both had to survive the pregnancy; the infant warlock had to survive their human family when the baby was born and they saw their blue skin, their rainbow scales.

Their green-gold cat eyes.

Less than 0.1% of demon attacks involved a sexual element. Alec knew the numbers, and they only grew smaller and smaller: the number of mothers to survive the experience, the number who didn’t abort when they discovered they were pregnant by a monster, the number who managed to live through the pregnancy…

Even accounting for their immortality, even if none of the warlocks ever born had ever died, either—and he knew some of them had, the Nephilim alone had killed dozens over the centuries—from the start of recorded history to here, now, this moment, there should not have been five hundred of them. It was impossible.

“How are there so many of you?” Alec whispered.

“We have always hidden our true numbers from the Clave.” Alec spun around, and above him (inside him) the Heart sparked and flashed, churned like storm-clouds. The woman who’d spoken didn’t look up at it. Standing near the round table, she had eyes only for Alec. She was short and thickly built, heavy in a way Alec rarely saw. Even without training as hard as they did, Shadowhunter metabolisms made it almost impossible to store fat; everything they ate was converted into muscle mass or energy, and the same heavenly fire that burned in them would burn them alive if it wasn’t fed. Woe betide the Shadowhunter stupid enough to start skipping meals, because their bodies would start to cannibalise themselves almost immediately if not given enough fuel.

(Clary insisted that Lightworlders could go three weeks without food under the right conditions. Alec still wasn’t sure he believed her. A pureblooded Shadowhunter wouldn’t last three days without growing dangerously ill. It was why the nourishment rune was one of the most valued of Raziel’s Marks: one couldn’t live on it, obviously, but it had saved countless Nephilim from the tyranny of their own hungry bodies down the centuries.)

This woman was—clearly—no Shadowhunter. Her weight wasn’t muscle, but thick, soft fat. Her skin was a light brown with gold undertones, and her black hair fell down her back in hundreds of slender braids, each one tied off with a crystal bead the same shape as the star on the table behind her. Her human mother must have been Arabic, Alec thought, possibly Persian; but this woman’s eyes were an intense lapis blue, shining metallic gold where the whites should be. Crystal spires rose from her skull; not a pair of horns, but a ring of nine diamond wands grew from beneath her hair, each one longer than Alec’s hand and tipped with a sharp point. It was impossible not to think of them as a crown, especially with the way she held herself; straight and strong and proud. Like
Magnus and Tessa, her forearms bore gauntlets of shining wire like filigree upon her skin, electrum set with diamonds and lapis lazuli; her dress was a pure and perfect ebony, scattered with twinkling stones so that she looked like a night sky.

“The Nephilim have always feared us,” she continued. Her English had no accent at all. “They tolerate us because we are few. If they knew we were even this many—” She gestured to all the people seated around them, “—they would find some excuse for a purge. It has been tried before.”

“I wish I could be sure you were wrong,” Alec said after a beat. “But that’s not what I thought when I saw you all.” He drew himself up, but he kept his tone respectful even as he met those blue and gold eyes squarely. “I’m not afraid of your numbers, ma’am. I’m afraid of what they mean. There must be more demon attacks than my people—” Because they were his people, both their glories and their sins his inheritance, and he could be proud of his blood and ashamed of it at the same time. “—know about. A lot more, for there to be so many of you. That scares me.”

“There are not enough Shadowhunters,” the woman said simply—bluntly, “to defend the world anymore, Alexander Lightwood. Yours is a dying breed, and Hell’s hordes are limitless. You are right to be afraid. You are losing your war.”

Alec felt it like a garotte. She wasn’t wrong. Jace had told Simon the same thing, the first time they visited the Silent City: there were more and more demons coming through the world-wards, and fewer Shadowhunters coming back each dawn. But it was too big. It was something they didn’t think about, didn’t talk about; something they trusted the Clave to see and fix.

It was hard to hear.

He felt a hand rest on his shoulder: Magnus. “Ninmulmulla,” he said, respectful but firm, “Alexander is here because he is not like the others. He’s not the enemy.”

The woman—Ninmulmulla?—opened her mouth to speak, and paused. “Yes. I cannot think the Heart would have welcomed him so if he were.” She took a breath. “My apologies, Alexander. I am—old. It is hard to forget.”

_The sins of your ancestors_, she meant. Alec knew it without asking. “I don’t blame you,” he said quietly. He thought of how his parents hadn’t even _believed_ in the Spiral Court. “I think the Nephilim have failed you and yours enough to deserve your—enmity. But if you let me, I’d like to try and earn something better.”

He saw surprise in her face, and thought it was sad that something so small could be so surprising, coming from anyone wearing Raziel’s Marks. “Everyone deserves a chance,” the woman murmured, almost to herself.

Then she surprised _Alec_ by making a fist with her left hand, covering it with her right—and placing both over her heart. “Viisaille viisauden, Alexander Sariel.”

_How did she —?_

Magnus squeezed his shoulder gently. “Alec, this is En’hedu’Ana,” he said. “The Ninmulmulla—the Lady of Stars. She leads us, as much as anyone does. And the Court is her home. If it’s said inside these walls, she hears it.”

Alec swallowed hard, and instantly made the answering gestures of the warlock greeting. “Viisailta maailmalle, En’hedu’ Ana ashipu.” Years of studying the names of demons and angels alike kept him from stumbling over her name: it was no worse than Kostchtchie or Yan-gant-y-tan. But he was
very aware of all the eyes on them: on him, a pureblooded Shadowhunter, first son of two of Valentine’s most trusted, meeting with the warlock—Consul?

Queen?

The Heart in him stirred, and it was like seeing through a glamour, a way of focussing the eyes, seeing instead of only looking—Alec looked at En’hedu’Ana and saw her, saw her as the Heart did: a majestic figure made all of light, a celestial queen crowned in crystal, great and glorious enough to light a solar system all her own. The Milky Way was as jewels caught in her hair; Venus and Polaris adorned her ears, and she outshone them both, and Alec understood her title right down to the bone —

_Lady of Stars._

His awe was nearly enough to eclipse his fear, his determination to be worthy of the trust he’d been shown. He was representing the worst of his people; it was so, so important that he showed her the proper respect. That he showed them _all_ that Shadowhunters could be better.

As if she’d heard his thoughts, the Ninmulmulla smiled at him, not unkindly. “Magnus overstates it. Herding warlocks is worse than herding cats: whatever you’re trying to do, it can’t be called _leading._”

Was that true, Alec wondered, or was she spinning armour out of lies to protect her people? Making them seem less organised than they were, less cohesive; more fractious and undisciplined? A misdirection that would reassure the suspicious, trigger-happy Nephilim, who already saw warlocks as the most dangerous of Downworlders. Who would be all too quick to see a threat, a potential army of magic-wielding anarchists, where Alec saw only Magnus’ brothers and sisters.

Because she had every right and reason to be wary, Alec didn’t ask En’hedu’Ana—or Magnus—for a clearer answer.

“But who are _you_, Alexander Sariel?” En’hedu’ana asked. “I have never seen the Heart react to anyone that way before. Nor seen it garb any but one of the Seba.” She gestured up and down his body, and for the first time it hit Alec that he was not wearing the clothes he’d been wearing a few minutes ago.

“I—I don’t know,” Alec stammered. He touched his shirt tentatively, and saw that his gloves had been remade from white dragon-leather, shimmering just a little where the light hit them. He held them out in front of him, staring at his palms, at the bracelets of red crystal around his wrists. “It gave me mourning clothes…” He looked up at Magnus. “I wanted proper mourning-wear so badly,” he said quietly, hearing the ache in his voice. “For Xia and Elias. But I didn’t have any.”

Magnus gave him a small, soft smile. There was grief in his eyes, but something loving, too. “You did the best you could,” he said. “It’s the thought that counts. That you even wanted to means so much to me.”

Alec felt En’hedu’ana’s eyes on the gauze panels of his shirt, studying the crimson Marks they bared. “I’m no one,” he told her, thinking of Jace, who must surely be the greatest Shadowhunter of their generation; of Izzy, and the white light that had burst from her hands to smite a demon down; of Simon, whose shadow sometimes grew wings of heavenly fire; of Magnus, High Warlock of Brooklyn; of Clary, who had saved them all from Abbadon. What was Alec, next to all of them? “Nobody special.”

En’hedu’ana’s eyebrows rose, and she glanced at Magnus.
“It’s a point of contention in our relationship,” Magnus said. “I’m considering talking him into couples therapy.”

Alec had no idea what he was talking about—what in the Angel’s name was couples therapy?—but it seemed to mean something to En’hedu’ana, who laughed quietly.

“The Heart of the World knows and hails you,” she said, and though she spoke no louder than before her voice filled the amethyst amphitheatre, reaching every ear by some impossible feat of magic. “I can do no less. Silimma hemeen, Alexander Sariel. Be well-come to the Spiral Court.”

Alec bowed without hesitation, pressing his fist to his heart. “Thank you,” he said. “I will do my all to be worthy of your welcome.”

En’hedu’ana paused, before giving a regal nod of acknowledgement. Without another word, she turned her back on Alec and Magnus and walked towards the table.

Magnus’ hand found his again. “You did great,” he whispered to Alec, leading him after En’hedu’ana.

“Thanks,” Alec whispered back.

Magnus squeezed his hand reassuringly, steadying some of Alec’s nerves.

There were six chairs at the round table, one at each point of the star set into its surface, and sometime during the last few minutes four people had gathered to each stand behind one of the thrones.

Because that was really the only word for them—thrones: strange, beautiful, otherworldly thrones, each one completely unique and yet complementing the rest. One was—it was a tree, not carved of dead wood but a living thing, trunk and roots and branches somehow coaxed to grow in the shape of a flowering chair, emeralds clasped in the coils of vines and glimpses of tiger’s-eye stones just visible beneath the shifting leaves, set into the wood; it looked like something from Faerie, reminded Alec of the pictures Clary had once shown Izzy of the bridges made of the living roots of fig trees in Meghalaya, in India. Khutulun stood behind it, watching her Ninmulmulla approach; the Heart had dressed her, too, in something that looked like a cross between a long coat and a tunic—a Mongolian deel, if someone had cut off a deel’s sleeves. It was made of rich green cashmere, fastened not down the middle but on the right side of Khutulun’s body, with a scarf of russet silk tied around her waist. On her forearms were vambraces of oxidised copper wire and bright, shining bronze, glinting with malachite and green garnets.

To Khutulun’s left and Alec’s right was a warlock Alec didn’t know, a man whose deep brown skin was almost black where it wasn’t dappled with the pale patches of vitiligo, streaks and curls of creamy, melanin-deficient skin surrounding his mouth and stretching over one eye. His long hair held all the colours of a sunset—ambers and golds and crimsons, dusky blues and violets—in cornrow braids that fell halfway down his back, leading the eye into the rich saffron wrap draped across his chest and shoulders and spilling to the ground behind him, and the pale yellow tunic underneath it; his vambraces were citrines and topazes caught in a net of holmium wire. His throne was majestic, the seat a Throne angel might have claimed: it was its own musical instrument, its back made of two harps pressed column-to-column, grand and gilded things sweeping out to either side like the wings of a song. The strings gleamed gold, shivering slightly (in what draught?) and singing softly with the motion, a sound sweeter than Alec had ever heard from his own dital harp. The whole edifice was painted in gold and amber, carved with swirling shapes that made Alec think of winds and wings.

The next chair was made of what a Light Worlder might mistake for new ivory, but Alec flinched,
repulsed, recognising the terrible, toxic whiteness of demon bone. Objectively, it was a graceful, elegant thing, finely carved in flowing lines, but it felt harsh to his eyes, the visual equivalent of sandpaper rubbing just a little too hard against his skin. Its only adornment was a sword of light-sucking lilithium—the Infernal version of adamas, Hell’s answer to the Shadowhunter seraph blades—set into the back, and Alec wondered if the chair had been made from the bones of whatever knight of Hell had once wielded that sword. The warlock who stood by it, waiting, was another Alec didn’t recognise, an androgynous figure with chalky-white skin nearly the same shade as their throne, wearing an outfit that mirrored and reversed En’hedu’ana’s; all shimmering white silk, scattered with beads of blue goldstone and chips of onyx; their hair was the resplendent blue-green of peacock feathers. Where their eyes should have been there were only smooth hollows, and a row of golden slits, gill-like, ran down each of their cheeks. Thread-thin lines of light, like veins of bioluminescence, spread in a sweeping symmetrical pattern across their face, curling into daedal shapes in their eye-sockets. Intricate, colourful tattoos moved over their arms—actually moving, like one of Simon’s movies on a screen, dragons and moths and otters dancing over bare biceps. Alec saw a swallow fly down the warlock’s forearm and perch on the edge of their vambrace; black wire this time, the strange not-jewellery decorated with jet and polished pieces of more demon bone.

Tessa stood behind another chair; she gave him an encouraging smile and a little wave. Her chair was coral and mother-of-pearl, smoothed and shining, and it had been fashioned into a kind of fountain; water ran through it and from it, flowing through a thousand tiny channels to spill down the back of the chair and from the armrests to the sides, so that when Tessa sat she would be surrounded by a constant waterfall, without ever getting a drop on her beautiful clothes.

And they reached the table, the two warlocks and the Shadowhunter, and En’hedu’ana seated herself in a chair made of the brilliant, shifting light that shone above their heads; the stuff of the Heart, the ley, cradled her body in a never-ending cycle of gossamer colours, somehow become something solid for the Court’s Lady of Stars. Magnus laid a hand on the back of a chair of glittering, sharp-edged obsidian, volcanic glass that remembered its time as molten rock beneath the earth; the fiery light of magma moved within the throne, and when Magnus touched it blue fire raced along its outline, flames that made the air around them shimmer with heat, but that did not burn Magnus’ fingers. They almost seemed to lick his hand, instead, like a loving puppy.

“Our people have called the Seba to council,” En’hedu’ana declared, and again her voice reached the highest levels of the amphitheatre’s spiral. “Who answers?”

Inside Alec, the Heart stirred. En’hedu’ana spoke in a language Alec didn’t know—the same one the other warlocks had used amongst themselves—but it was almost like playing back Isabelle’s memory of the angel speaking; he heard and understood, the Heart whispering the meaning to him, translation and context-knowledge sliding smoothly into place in his mind. The Seba, the council of the wise, the faces of the world, the anchors of fate it murmured, and he knew, and the knowing sent ice and starlight running down his spine. He shivered, mouth dry, knowing, somehow knowing what was coming, who would speak first and what they would say, what they would mean—

“Khutulun of the House of Ögedei answers,” Khutulun said, in a loud, clear voice. Alec looked at her and the Heart saw trees and mountains, the green of growing things; steadfastness and patience, endurance and practicality, roots and bones and honey in the comb. He saw her, knew her for the embodiment of Earth even before she said, “Isu-Immaru of the Seba. Earth hears and answers the call of our people.”


“Nomlanga Sithunzi answers,” said the warlock behind the harp-chair. Alec saw wind and wings in him, tornados and breezes and breaths; light-footed quickness and deep, rich thoughts, playfulness
and peril, and Alec knew that this man, too, somehow stood for an element; knew which one as he knew the colour of the sky. “Tumudal-Immaru of the Seba. Air hears and answers the call of our people.”

“The Ninmulmulla hears you,” En’hedu’ana said. “Be welcome.”

The eyeless warlock spoke next. “Cessair Brón answers,” they said, pronouncing their name Kah-seer. Their voice was melodic, and as androgynous as their appearance, but through Alec’s eyes the Heart saw beneath the surface. There was darkness there: not evil, but elemental, beautiful and terrible and pure, as outside the realms of mortal morals as was the moment of midnight. Neither good nor bad, it simply was. “Kur-Immaru of the Seba. Void hears and answers the call of our people.”

“The Ninmulmulla hears you. Be welcome.”

“Theresa Gray answers,” Tessa said, and Alec heard the roar of oceans echoing behind her words. Emotions and adaptability, the cradle of creation and the flood of destruction all in one. “Asura-Immaru of the Seba. Water hears and answers the call of our people.”

“The Ninmulmulla hears you. Be welcome.”

“Magnus Bane answers,” Magnus said, and in the Heart’s sight he burned like a pillar of living flame, like a sapphire sun that had taken on human form on a whim. He was heat and passion, ruination and salvation, danger and desire, the hearthfire and the pyre and the firestorm. He was beautiful. “Isatum-Immaru of the Seba. Fire hears and answers the call of our people.”

“The Ninmulmulla hears you. Be welcome.”

Magnus let go of Alec’s hand to take his seat. Even without the Heart’s sight, blue flames surrounded him like an aura of power, and Alec marvelled, looking around at all those sitting at the table before returning his attention to Magnus. Magnus, who was the High Warlock of Brooklyn; Magnus, whose raised hand was enough to make demons flee; Magnus, who looked only a little older than Alec but sat at this star-graven table, one of the leaders of his people, the voice of Fire.

Magnus reached for Alec’s hand again, and clasped it tightly.

Magnus, who was his boyfriend.

Alec felt dizzy.

“En’hedu’ana, daughter of Tashlultum, answers,” En’hedu’ana said at last. “Shi-Immaru of the Seba. Life hears and answers the call of the people.”

The Heart roared inside Alec, a roar of celebration and acknowledgement, love and pride, welcome and benediction for its oldest daughter, the crystal-crowned woman who represented it at this table. A flurry of images blew like autumn leaves through Alec’s mind: En’hedu’ana as a small child, finding a crack into a natural tunnel and following it down and down until it opened like a flower into a cavern of amethyst; En’hedu’ana carving the round table with her power; En’hedu’ana leading others here, one by one, guiding them through the earth’s darkness into this ley-lit sanctuary—

“Be welcomed, be wise, be true,” Magnus and the others said in unison, jolting Alec back to the present moment.

Just in time: in English now, En’hedu’ana said, “We are gathered to hear the words of Alexander Sariel, who comes before us as an ally. He has agreed to give up his memories of this meeting when
it is done, a sacrifice for which we thank him.”

She gave a slow, regal nod of acknowledgement to Alec, who nodded back solemnly. Standing beside Magnus’ chair, he held his hands behind his back.

“Listen well,” En’hedu’ana ordered her people, “for we must remember, if he will not.” Then she nodded to Alec again. “Speak, Shadowhunter,” she said. “We will hear you.”

Magnus looked up at him. “Tell them about Valentine,” he said softly.

Alec took a deep breath—and did just that.

“I believe Valentine Morgenstern is the one who killed Elias, Xia, and a young werewolf named Luna, from the Bronx pack.” (*Tortured before they died.*) “I think he’s trying to destabilise the relationship between Nephilim and Downworlders—maybe even start a war.”

There were murmurs at that, among the warlocks on the spiral tiers of the amphitheatre. Alec didn’t try to make out the words, but he did try to move his gaze from En’hedu’ana to Tessa to random people in the crowd, trying to give the impression he was talking to them all.

“Today he stole the Mortal Sword,” he said loudly, and an almost total silence descended. “My agelai saw him do it.”

It was so quiet he could hear Magnus breathing beside him; even the small waterfalls of Tessa’s throne seemed to have lost their voices. All of the Seba, from Khutulun to En’hedu’ana, sat perfectly still, like exquisite statues. It was unnerving: Alec associated that kind of stillness with danger, with demons poised to leap or his now-agelai freezing so some monster didn’t hear them.

Didn’t kill them.

Alec swallowed. “I know he can use the Sword to control demons. And I’m sure he’ll use it as a weapon against your people and mine, if he can.” He glanced down briefly at Magnus, then squared his shoulders.

“But I thought it would take him time to summon enough demons for that kind of attack force. Until Magnus told me that Valentine might bring the world-wards down, and gain his army that way.”

Alec didn’t need to close his eyes to see-feel-know the world-wards, not with the Heart still nestled in his ribcage; he saw again the cuts and bruises of his world’s skin, the terrible tears and gashes. All the holes.

But punctured skin was a far cry from no skin at all.

“How is that possible?” he asked, trying to keep his voice respectful even as the urgency bled through the words. “How can he do that? How do we stop him from doing it? How long do we have?”

(\textit{It did not occur to him to say anything but we. It did not occur to him that this was a problem only for the Shadowhunters, or only for the Spiral Court. It did not occur to him to hand all of this over to the Inquisitor and wash his hands of it, leave it for older, more experienced 'hunters to deal with.}

\textit{Valentine was murdering Magnus by degrees with these deaths. Even if the fate of the world hadn’t been at stake —even if Valentine hadn’t done what he had to Jace, to Simon—for that alone Alec wanted Valentine’s neck under his blade.)}

“He needs to kill three more children,” Magnus said. He was looking at his fellow Seba-members as
he spoke, and his voice was loud and clear. Almost challenging them. *(He could have told the Court all this himself, he didn’t have to bring Alec here, why had he—?)* “A faerie, a vampire, and one of the Nephilim. If he does that, he’ll have completed his ritual. The world-wards will fall. I’ll die.” He paused. “And since the Mortal Sword will be as useful as a knitting needle against the entire population of Hell, the rest of the human race will be right on my heels.”

Alec—

Couldn’t—

He didn’t—

He could have sword the Heart stopped in his chest—

*Breathe*—

Somehow, he did.

“Tell me about this ritual,” he said, and his voice was *adamas*. “Tell me how we stop it.”

Eyeless Cessair turned their head a fraction, so their light-etched face was directed at Alec. “It’s called the Kilulšargad,” they said, and the name alone made the Heart tremble inside Alec.

*The Death of All*, it whispered to him, and if before its not-voice had been that of a giggling child sharing a secret—now it was a child young and bruised and broken, its whisper almost a whimper, terrified of the dark. Not Cessair’s darkness, natural and clean, but the terrible, hungry nothingness that waited beyond the world-wards.

Maybe most people would have quailed before the kind of threat that could terrify a *world*.

Alec set his feet.

“Tell me,” he repeated.

***

“Travelling between worlds is impossible,” Ana said. “At least most of the time. But worlds—they’re alive, in a way. You can feel it whenever you touch a ley-line. Not alive like us, but…”

“Sentient,” Cas nodded. “I know what you mean.”

Ana nodded too. “The death of a world releases a huge amount of energy. The ubārum-ene who reached us when their own worlds were dying—they rode that energy to get here. And our world let them in, because—we think worlds can tell, when another world dies. And they—” She still couldn’t remember the word in English, the word for the red runes the Nephilim wore when someone died. “It makes them sad.”

“They mourn?” Cas suggested.

“Yes. They mourn. So when the children of another world ride that death to another world, the new world almost always lets them in. Like adopting your nieces and nephews.”

“We can throw them out, though,” Cas said thoughtfully. “Otherwise the ubārum-ene wouldn’t need to take the Oath.”

“Well, they’d still have to fight us,” Ana said practically. “If they came here and couldn’t, or
wouldn’t, live peacefully. But, yes: until the ubārum-ene are woven into the life-web of their new world, that world’s children can cast them out.” She shrugged. “In theory. As far as I know, it’s never been done.

“But that’s still the only way to travel between worlds: ride a world’s dying breath and hope you land somewhere that you can live, with people who will let you live there. Steering is almost impossible—you can’t control where you end up—and all of it… It means we can’t travel. You can’t murder your world every time you want to take a trip.”

“Not more than once, anyway,” Cas said. He looked a little shaken, and Ana didn’t blame him. The thought was the kind that kept you up at night.

“The demons said they knew another way,” Ana told him. “In dreams, they taught the kashshaptu-ene who listened about a ritual. They promised it would let humans come and go as they pleased, travel anywhere they liked perfectly safely. We would be able to see all the wonders of the multiverse, go to them, trade with them—probably some were promised that we would be able to conquer those other worlds, with the power the ritual would give us. It would make all of us into a race of warlocks.

“And it would cost us almost nothing…”

***

“The one who performs it commits five ritual murders,” Cessair said. “A warlock, a werewolf, a faerie, a vampire, one of the Nephilim.”

‘Tortured before they died.’

“Children,” Alec said.

“Children,” Cessair confirmed.

Someone in the crowd sobbed, and Alec remembered, again, that everyone here had lost a son and sister to this evil already.

“The deaths are used to poison a nexus,” Tessa said. “A place where several ley-lines cross. If the ritual is completed, the nexus dies, and the ley-lines are broken.”

“And the ley-lines fuel the world-wards,” Alec said.

She gave him a startled look. “Yes.”

Alec looked down at Magnus, and laid his hand over Magnus’ on the arm of his chair. “You control the New York nexus,” he whispered. *The one Valentine’s poisoning.*

Magnus turned his hand over, and their fingers laced together without Alec thinking about it. “It’s more than that,” Magnus said quietly. “A High Warlock is someone who’s *bonded* to a nexus. We can draw power from it, influence it, even direct it, to a point…”

Alec stared, well able to understand why the warlocks didn’t want the Nephilim to know about this. He could feel the Heart inside him, and he couldn’t imagine the power of being able to direct even a tiny part of it. And a nexus was not a tiny part.

The Clave would never allow Downworlders to have that much power. If they learned that Magnus—if every High Warlock—could not just tap a nexus, but *control* it? They would slaughter them all
—and every other warlock as well, to prevent anyone else from forming that bond, claiming that power. They would hunt for infant warlocks as they were born, and kill them in their cribs, all to make sure they never grew into potential threats. Alec wouldn’t be surprised if the Clave decided any victim of demonic rape was to be put down too, just in case they became pregnant, just to make absolutely sure no one, no Downworlder, could ever claim the kind of power Magnus was talking about. The power of something like the Heart…

“But if it’s poisoned, you get sick,” Alec said numbly. 

If it dies, you die.

Magnus looked as though he’d heard the thought. “Yes,” he said softly.

Alec’s free hand longed for a knife, a sword, his bow; he didn’t see red, but his vision sharpened more and more, his Nephilim biology reacting to his need to kill something. “Then break the bond!”

He can’t, the Heart whispered.

“I can’t,” Magnus said. “It’s permanent, Alec.”

No. NO.

“ ‘Death is the poison that sickens him, and only death can cure him,’ ” Alec whispered.

Magnus looked confused—and then his beautiful, wickedly intelligent eyes sharpened. “What?”

Alec didn’t want to sell out Arika, and who had told him what didn’t matter. It wasn’t the important part. “This is why Catarina ashipu said you couldn’t use your magic, isn’t it? Because it’s tied to a poisoned nexus.”

“Yes,” Magnus said. “Its power and mine are interconnected. If I cast, I’ll draw more of the poison into myself, and get sicker. But the poison can’t spread as fast as it would in an unbonded nexus. I act as its shield: it won’t break while I live.” His eyes still searched Alec’s face. “Alec, what did you just say about—”

Alec didn’t let him finish; he looked up at the Seba, resolution solid as a seraph blade inside him. “How do we heal the nexus?”

Khutulun and Tessa exchanged a look he couldn’t read, but it was Nomlanga who answered. “It will heal on its own, if it is allowed to,” he said.

“And if it isn’t?” Alec snarled. He’d never heard himself make that kind of noise before, and he didn’t care.

En’hedu’ana’s jaw tightened, and she glanced at Magnus. Alec saw worry in her eyes. “Every murder will worsen it. After the fourth, it will be—past the point of no return.”

“It won’t be able to heal on its own, but it can be cured,” Tessa cut in, before Alec could find himself snarling again. She turned to Alec. “Killing the one performing the ritual will cleanse the nexus, even after four murders. We didn’t know who was doing this before—we never would have thought a Shadowhunter could be the one, but if Valentine has the Mortal Sword, if he thinks he can control the demons who will come through…”

“The Sword will also help him with the ritual,” Nomlanga said. “There aren’t many objects that can channel the energies he’s working with, and even fewer that a Shadowhunter could get his hands on.
“The Sword would be one of the only ones, I think.”

“Probably,” Tessa said. “But regardless—now we know who to look for, we can find him. We will find him. And his blood will save Magnus and heal the nexus.”

There was another option, a different cure. None of them had mentioned it. *A pure death*, Arika had said; only that could save Magnus if the ritual went too far. But there were two kinds of pure deaths; Valentine’s would be one, if they could find him in time, stop him in time. *The striking down of the unrepentant murderer*, as the Sepher Ha-Razim had put it.

But the other…

*The death of he who goes willingly into the arms of the LORD…welcomed to the very foot of the Heavenly Throne…*

A willing sacrifice. A life deliberately and unstintingly given. That would heal the nexus—cure Magnus—save the world—too.

But they didn’t mention it, and he didn’t either.

Let them think he didn’t know.

“How long do we have?” he asked again.

Nomlanga spread his hands. “As long as it takes Valentine to murder three more children.”

“I sent the word out when I felt—when Elias died,” Magnus said, his voice breaking a little, and Alec understood all at once that Magnus’ wasn’t just the grief of a father. Through his connection to the nexus, he’d felt his son’s death as Valentine used it to poison the ley-lines. Felt it, and been unable to do anything to save him.

No wonder Magnus had looked crazed when he came to the Institute. And no wonder Arika had been able to tell them a werewolf child had died, but not who or where. Magnus would have felt Luna’s death too.

“Downworlder families with children are leaving the city, or taking refuge in the sanctuaries,” Magnus continued. Alec had no idea what sanctuaries he was talking about, but it didn’t seem the moment to ask. “By now everyone should know that Valentine is hunting Downworlder children. He won’t take another without a fight.”

But Xia hadn’t fought. Alec remembered his *agelai* examining her body; remembered the lack of defensive wounds. Somehow Valentine had killed one of the Spiral Court’s fiercest warriors without leaving a single mark.

Would it be different now that everyone was watching for him? Maybe Xia had simply been taken by surprise…

“Let’s not give him the chance to try,” Alec said. “This ritual, what is it? What does Valentine need, where could he go to perform it? What are the signs we need to look for?”

“He can poison the nexus from anywhere within the city limits,” Cessair said.

“But he will need privacy,” Nomlanga said. “A warded place. He’s most likely performing the killings underground, somewhere the deaths can touch bare earth. It would make it easier for him to channel the energies directly into the nexus.”
Alec frowned, thinking quickly. “There’s the subway system.” Which was vast. “And tunnels and crypts all over the city. What else?”

“Silver,” En’hedu’ana said abruptly. “A great deal of silver. And…” She paused, thinking.

“Adamas. There are alternatives, but none one of the Nephilim could make use of.” She nodded, certain of her logic. “He will have had to purchase or steal a notable amount of silver and adamas to construct his…tools.”

“And someone to shape both,” Tessa added. “Valentine might be a sorcerer, but he’s no smith.”

“It is unlikely he let the smith live,” Khutulun pointed out.

“Then we look for smiths who just died,” Alec said. “There can’t be many. Only the Iron Sisters can work adamas—he might have bribed one, or if any were exiled—”

“No,” En’hedu’ana interrupted. “Any smith with Seelie or Unseelie blood can shape adamas. We should look into the Iron Sisters, but I suspect we are looking for a duine death.”

No translation came from the Heart this time—maybe because Alec was reeling a little at the revelation that faeries could work adamas, something which went against everything he’d ever been taught. (But then, what didn’t, lately?) He ducked his head a little. “‘Duine’?” he asked Magnus quietly.

“A Seelie or Unseelie faerie,” Magnus said, just as softly.

“It could have been a changeling,” Nomlanga said, as Alec nodded his thanks and squeezed Magnus’ fingers. “The youngest were born before the Accords; old enough to have mastered such work, if they decided to. Or it might even be someone with no idea that they are a descendant of a duine tryst, and who stumbled upon the trick of shaping adamas by instinct or accident.”

“Artists with duine blood create distinctive work,” Tessa said. “We should be able to find them, even if they don’t know about their ancestry. And of those, we see who, if any, have disappeared.” She rubbed her fingers over the frown between her eyebrows, closing her eyes briefly. “Globally. There’s nothing saying Valentine had to have his tools made in New York, only brought there when they were done.”

“The Seelie and Unseelie Courts will know if any of their own smiths have gone missing,” Magnus said. “Or any of their first-generation descendants.”

“And the tools probably were made in New York,” Alec said. “Or very close by. Valentine probably never left the city after he revealed himself at the end of the summer. Every Shadowhunter and Downworlder in the world knows he’s back: travelling would have been a huge risk for him. If he was spotted…”

“Who says he’d be spotted?” someone called out from their audience. “The Nephilim couldn’t find him for 17 years!”

It struck Alec like the lash of a whip across his back: sudden, shocking, a slash of pain. It felt like an attack, where he’d forgotten to expect one.

Magnus squeezed Alec’s hand, looking up at him with silent support in his eyes. It was steadying, grounding, and Alec was so grateful for it.

“We weren’t looking for him then,” he said after a moment, without turning around. Without trying to see who it was that had shouted. (Without trying to defend himself, or his people.) He kept his eyes
down, but lifted his chin and made his voice loud and clear. “We thought he was dead. Now we
know he’s not, every Shadowhunter in every canton is searching for him. And not just us, but
everyone in the Shadow World.” He leaned forward, letting go of Magnus’ hand to lean his palms on
the stone table. “He can’t show his face in the Goblin Market, which would have been the easiest
way for him to find and get what he wanted. Whatever he did, it will have been complicated and
difficult for him, and that means he’s more likely to have made a mistake.”

“He could have used the Goblin Market to travel,” Khutulun pointed out. “If he entered through the
New York gate, he could pass through one of the other gates to go anywhere he liked. He would
only need to obscure his features, and so many of the Market’s visitors do that for one reason or
another that he could pass through with reasonable ease.”

“But not unnoticed,” Alec said. “Even Valentine’s fingers bear Marks. People at the Market would
notice and remember someone who bought nothing, spoke to no one, and hid every inch of his skin.
He could have done it, but it would have been a risk. One I don’t think he would take unless he had
to.”

“Valentine is not the greatest of strategists,” Nomlanga said, a little wryly. “But Alexander has a
point.”

The acknowledgement and validation sent a flush of warmth through Alec, and he went on before it
could fade. “And then there’s the adamas.” Deliberately, he swept his gaze across the Seba. “I was
taught that the Iron Sisters controlled the supply. Is that true?”

“Yes,” En’hedu’ana confirmed. “The Nephilim have laid claim to all of it. Unless a new lode has
been found—which I would stake my life is not so—your Iron Sisters own every store.”

“Then we follow the adamas,” Alec said. “It’s priceless to us. Someone will have noticed if any has
gone missing.” Stealing adamas couldn’t be easy—Valentine couldn’t have just killed another
Shadowhunter and taken their seraph blades… Unless some of those blades had been unbonded?
“How much will he have needed? Would it have to be unworked adamas?”

“More adamas than you weigh,” Cessair said, though how they could guess how much Alec
weighed without eyes to see him with Alec had no idea. “And yes, it would need to be unworked.
None of your seraph blades, or steles, or any other Nephilim tool would suffice.”

So no unbonded blades would do. Good: if they would have had to check every Shadowhunter
death since Renwicks to discover if their seraph blades had gone missing…well, going through that
many deaths would have taken months, and they didn’t have months. Alec doubted they had weeks.

“You need to bring this to the Inquisitor,” he said. He tried not to make it a command—he had no
right to give orders here—but the memory of how ill Magnus had looked before the Heart
strengthened him pounded at his breastbone like a hammer, frantic with urgency. “She can help. She
doesn’t want any more children to die, and even if she didn’t care—” Because the Spiral Court must,
most of them, be used to Shadowhunters who didn’t care “—she hates Valentine. All Nephilim do.
We want Valentine caught and executed just as—like you do.”

He’d almost said, just as much as you do. But Valentine hadn’t killed his son and sister. He had
murdered Jace’s grandparents and twin brother, but that had been long enough ago—the acts, and
the revelations of them—for the pain to dull somewhat. For Magnus and his kin, the wounds weren’t
just fresh: they were still bleeding.

“The Inquisitor can trace the adamas. But you can find the smiths much faster than Shadowhunters
could. We can find Valentine more quickly, we can stop him more quickly, if we work together.”
The way we’re supposed to, he thought.

A low-grade murmuring had been an almost constant undercurrent throughout this meeting as those in the tiers around and above quietly discussed and reacted to the council’s discussion. But now that background noise cut off as if with a knife, and Alec’s words seemed almost to echo in the sudden silence.

If we work together.

If we work together.

If we work together —

Alec held himself still, held his breath. It felt as though the Heart did too.

‘The Uprising wasn’t the first time I’ve fought Shadowhunters,’ Magnus had said, not even an hour ago. ‘I doubt it’ll be the last.’

How many other warlocks felt that way? En’hedu’ana had declared him an ally, or at least a would-be-, but how many of them saw him as just another Shadowhunter—worse, the son of Maryse and Robert Lightwood, two of Valentine’s inner circle? How many of them saw him as a part of the same system that had ‘punished’ his parents for their part in the Uprising by giving them an Institute, one of the most prestigious positions a Shadowhunter could hold?

I am part of the same system, Alec thought, feeling sick. I have always been part of it. Jace destroyed the motorbikes of the vampires at Magnus’ party unprovoked, and I just laughed; he and Simon broke into the Dumort, and I only cared about the danger, not that they broke the Accords, trespassed in the scathe’s home… No, wait; that wasn’t even the right word, was it? The Nephilim called a group of vampires a scathe, but vampires used another word, and wasn’t the name they chose themselves the only one that should matter? …trespassed in the sublimity’s home. I have watched Jace and Izzy kill Downworlders, I have helped them, and never questioned our right to do so. I have always known that the Clave keeps count of how many demons we kill, but no one cares if we put down a werewolf, if we dust a vampire. We execute Downworlders on the streets without even a hearing, but Nephilim get enquiries and inquisitors and trials, and I’ve never wondered about that before. I’ve never wondered if Downworlders deserve something other than death when they break the Accords, never wondered why we don’t kill Nephilim for anything but treason. I have never wondered why no Downworlders ever came to us for help; even Magnus came to the Institute to throw down the gauntlet, not for help. Not for justice. I’ve never wondered why the Dedication oath binds us to destroy the Infernal wherever we find it, when all Downworlders are the children of demons—of their diseases, or their blood. The books of the Law he’d studied when preparing for his own Dedication had been very clear on their definition of ‘Infernal’, and it very much included Downworlders. Only while they obeyed the strictures of the Accords could they be deemed something like human, for then they were battling their own nature, even as Shadowhunters did battle with the denizens of Hell...

I didn’t fight with Valentine in the Uprising, but I didn’t fight against him, either. I didn’t fight my parents, or Hodge, or Jace and Izzy. I didn’t fight the Kleidoukhos or the Inquisitor. I’ve never fought the Law, or all the things it implied, all the ways it made me think and act…

The mourning Marks burned, a pain like red-hot metal against his skin, and only a lifetime of training injuries and wounds gathered on patrol kept him from crying out.

“Alexander?” Magnus asked, alarmed, seeing some of the pain in his face, maybe; hearing it in the soft hiss that escaped between his teeth. “Are you—?”
Alec nodded tightly, controlling his exhale and closing his eyes as he leaned on the table. “I’m a Shadowhunter,” he whispered. That was supposed to mean that he could take the pain. It was supposed to be something glorious, something important, something to be proud of.

But more and more lately, it only made him feel ashamed.

*They don’t trust me because I’m a Shadowhunter. They won’t do this, they won’t work together with the Inquisitor, because we’re Shadowhunters, and that means —*

**(Taking pain)**

**(Something glorious)**

**(Useless, worthless, failure; what use are you, what good are you, the one thing you’re meant for and you can’t even do that!)**

It was supposed to mean something different.

He wanted it to mean something different.

*So change it, Lightwood.*

The pain of his *sureva* Marks was clean and pure, grounding. Distilling everything down to simplicity itself.

*Change it.*

Jace would charm them with his quick tongue and dazzling grin. Izzy would awe them into doing whatever she wanted. But Alec—Alec only had his heart, too big for him for as long as he could remember.

**(And now the Heart beat behind his, too big for words and yet a perfect fit —)**

“I’m a Shadowhunter,” Alec said again, beneath his breath.

*Change it.*

And felt a tide of clarity swelling up from somewhere deep and raw inside him, cool against the heat of his mourning runes, salt against the wounds of them. And he understood what he had to do.

He opened his eyes and turned away from the table to face the crowd; he caught a glimpse of Magnus’ concerned expression, but his heart (the *Heart*) was pounding like Hephaestus’ hammer at the forge, and he squared his stance. “I know I’m a Shadowhunter,” he said, loud and clear and addressing them all. “But I am not just any Shadowhunter!” he said, loud and clear and addressing them all. “But I am not just any Shadowhunter!” He drew himself up, refusing to quake beneath all the eyes on him. “I am the *paterfamilias* of House Lightwood!” he cried. “Firstborn son of Maryse Lightwood, direct descendant of Hawisa Lightwood, *agelai* of Jonathan Shadowhunter! I am *renas* Sariel, the first *agela* in a generation, able to send even Greater Demons to the final death!”

He pulled off his right glove and thrust his hand up high, letting the six-pointed star on his palm shine as opalescent as the Heart above. “I bear the *şmádi angélou*, mark of Heaven’s favour, the first to do so in hundreds of years!”

There were gasps: not many, but a few, as Alec walked in a slow circle around the platform, a full revolution around the Seba’s table until he stood again at Magnus’ side, letting everyone see the truth of his words. Even the Seba watched wide-eyed, and part of Alec realised that their surprise meant Magnus had never told them, that he’d kept Alec’s secret without ever being asked.
But most of him was burning, most of him was blazing, the Lightwood in him become a roaring beacon, and he had never been this, he had never done this, he had always hidden in the shadow of Jace’s glory, behind the glittering whip-flash of Izzy’s glamour. He had always been silent, he had always bowed his head, he’d turned 18 and his parents didn’t tell him that the money, the manors, the family was his, and he had said nothing.

He refused to say nothing now.

“I’m supposed to be your enemy. But here I am!” He spread his arms wide, showing them his mourning shirt, the red runes visible through the gauze panels in it. “I come to you in white and red,” he said. “Not black. I come unarmed and unMarked for war. I left my agelai to come here, and I’ll leave my memories of this place behind when I leave. Because I refuse to be your enemy.”

Murmurs spread through his audience, and he heard a few of the Seba whispering behind him. Not Magnus, though.

Alec lowered his arms, and waited for quiet to fall over the amphitheatre again. He wanted a bow in his hand and a battle to fight, something he was trained for, something he knew how to do. But this was something he had to do.

“I used to think I knew what Shadowhunter meant,” he said, when they were ready to listen again. “I used to believe it meant something great.” He paused. It was too easy to imagine how horrified his parents would be to hear him speak this, speak this here, to hundreds of Downworlders. They would say he was debasing himself, dishonouring his blood and his name and Raziel’s mandate. If those things were what his parents thought they were, then Alec wanted none of them.

“I don’t believe that anymore,” he said, his voice pitched to carry. He pulled his glove back on, slowly. “I don’t know if this is what we always were, or something we became. But what we are now is—indefensible. Unforgivable. And I am not asking you to forgive us. We don’t deserve it. But I am so, so sorry. For all of it.”

He took a breath. “I am not proud of my House. Of my lineage. I’m ashamed of my name and my blood, and I know nothing I can ever do will make right what my people have done, or repay what my family has done. What I have done.

“But I am the paterfamilias of my House. And that means I get to define it.” He turned in place, a slow 360°, avoiding Magnus’ eyes but trying to meet the gazes of as many other warlocks as he could. “I want to change the meaning of Shadowhunter. And maybe that’s too much for one person to hope for, but whatever happens, I swear by the Angel that House Lightwood will be remade.” He felt it pounding through his veins, a rush of fierce fire, the urge to laugh, almost, when he pictured what Robert and Maryse would look like if they could hear this. When they heard this. “I will turn it into something my parents would be ashamed of,” he said, “but that I can be proud of. I will fight for you, for all Downworlders: in my home, against demons, in the Clave. And I hope that someday, if I’m ever invited here again, you trust me enough to let me leave with my memories. Because I’ll have proven myself worthy of your trust.

“I haven’t yet. I know that. And I understand it. But today I need you—I am begging you to trust me anyway. Trust me when I say that my people can help you find and stop Valentine. That they will help, if you let them.” He swallowed hard; it felt as though he had a piece of jagged flint lodged in his throat. “If you can bring yourselves to trust us one last time—to give us one last chance—then together, we can bridge that which separates us. We can build something stronger than Valentine’s hatred. We can save the lives of the children he wants for his ritual. We can save the world.”
He stopped, poised on the edge of a precipice. Wavering, hesitating, too scared to—no, he had to—
All the years he’d spent terrified of Jace finding out—
The ancient copy of the Codex, and the secrets he’d found in it—
The fizzing fear-delight of Magnus pointing him out the first time they met—
Simon pinned to a wall and saying aloud what Alec had never dared to—
Being too afraid to dance with Magnus at Jace’s Dedication party, until—
‘Dance with me.’
‘What? Right—now? Here?’
‘Yes.’ Magnus’ hand, extended like a lifeline. ‘Right now. Right here.’
Alec closed his eyes, and leapt.

“And if you can’t trust the Nephilim, then trust me,” he said, hoarse. “Not because I’m here with pretty words, not because of promises I haven’t made good on yet. But because I’m selfish.” His throat hurt; he opened his eyes, but could hardly bear the weight of all the eyes on him. He felt them all as if they were stones, crushing him down; and yet he stood straight and tall. “You—you’ve already lost people you love to this, to what Valentine is doing. Now he’s—he’s threatening the life of someone I love too.” He stood by Magnus’ chair but facing away from it, and he swore he could feel his boyfriend’s eyes on his back. “I swear by the Angel, here and now: I will do whatever it takes to stop Valentine, because my world will end with or without the wards if he kills—”

His voice broke.

Thrones didn’t scrape the floor as the one sitting in them rose, but Alec heard one of the Seba stand and knew which one, knew it was Magnus even before he recognised his boyfriend’s footsteps: two quick strides and Alec turned into his embrace as Magnus swept him up, holding him tight and it was Magnus, Magnus who was going to die if Valentine wasn’t stopped—

There were so many people, strangers, all around. Alec didn’t care. He didn’t even remember that he should care, or why. Whose judgement mattered more than that he held Magnus as tightly as he could, for as long as he could? How could he bear to hide what he felt when he might run out of chances to show it within the day, the hour, the next beat of his heart? The next time Valentine lifted up the Sword—

“How speaks the Seba?” En’hedu’ana asked, and her voice rang like bronze. “Trust, and partnership with the Nephilim—or secrecy and solitude?”

The Heart of the World—the whole world—seemed to hold its breath, waiting for the Seba to decide.

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“Five children tied to our world and its magic,” Ana said. “Now, in our time, whoever performs it is probably using ubārum-ene and dalenul-ene and ekimmu-ene. But were and vampires didn’t exist yet, the last time, and the ubārum-ene weren’t bound so tightly to this world. So the caster—he used a witch-child, and a newborn warlock, and three kiasu children.”
She saw Cas glance in Lucio’s direction, something awful in his eyes. Lucio and his clan were kiasu-
ene, shapeshifters native to this world. Lucio was hopefully too old to qualify as a child by the
Kilulšargad’s standards—Ana didn’t know, doubted that anybody did for sure—but six thousand
years ago, it might have been one of his cousins, his siblings, any wakinyan toddler with their hair
half-feathers and lightning dancing in their eyes…

“You said ‘he’,” Cas said suddenly. “Does that mean we know who…?”

“Not really,” Ana said. “The name we have is Tammuz, but whether that was a real person’s name,
or just what made it into the myths that grew around what he did, nobody really knows. But
someone performed the ritual—started, and nearly finished. The first warlock—the priestess-princess
—she stopped him, but too late to keep the world-wards from being damaged. They didn’t come
down, but they were torn, and demons have been coming through them ever since.”

“Damaging them more and more in the process,” Cas said. It wasn’t a question, but Ana nodded
anyway.

“It’s already too late for so many,” she said. “The holhokit are never going to find aliens in space.
There used to be other planets here that had other kinds of people living on them—but they’re gone
now. As far as we know, we’re the last living planet in this world, this dimension. The others were
all overrun by demons. And that’s with the world-wards as they are now! This ritual—someone
wants to bring the wards down completely.” She reached up and played with her pendant, trying to
find comfort in the cool, solid metal. “That’s what the Kilulšargad is for. It means ‘the death of
everything’ in the language they spoke back then. It would leave the world defenceless, and
everything—everyone—would die. All the Lightbringers together wouldn’t be enough to stop it. All
of us, nasaru-ene and holhokit, would be extinct in an hour. If we were lucky.”

The thought of it was like a heavy stone crushing her chest, crushing her into silence. Cas didn’t
seem able to speak either; his bronze skin had gone pale, and she couldn’t blame him.

Maybe she shouldn’t have told him.

It occurred to her, with a sudden flash of horror, that Cas himself probably counted as a ‘witch-
child’, like the poor child that had been murdered for the ritual last time. He was only seventeen. Not
legally an adult yet. Did that matter? How did the Kilulšargad determine whether a sacrifice was a
child or not?

She would have to raise the issue with the Captain. They had to send Cas home, just in case. María
might even decide to send Ana and Lucio home too, just to be safe, but Ana could live with that. She
wanted to be a part of making sure the Kilulšargad didn’t happen, but if she was taken off this
mission it would only be because someone as capable, or more capable, would take her place.

“What happened to Tammuz?” Cas asked after a little while.

“The first warlock punished him,” Ana said. “She cast him out of the world, through one of the holes
his ritual had torn in the wards. She let the Void have him.” She swallowed. “They called it Inanna’s
Justice.”

***

It was like waiting for an axe to fall, like the moment Alec had stared at Simon’s angel in all its glory
before it moved to annihilate the Inquisitor. Like watching the shadows of those wings spread across
the wall.
And Alec had no idea if they were about to come slashing down.

Khutulun breached the silence first. “As Earth,” she declared, clear and cool, “I say partnership.”

“As Air, I say the same,” Nomlanga said. “The enemy of my enemy is my friend. The Nephilim hate Valentine enough to be trustworthy in this.”

“As Void, I say partnership,” Cessair said.

Tessa was a long time considering. “As Water, I say partnership,” she said finally.

“How speaks Fire?” En’hedu’ana asked, when Magnus made no move to answer.

Alec kept his face against Magnus’ shoulder, willing to be blind rather than give up the heat of Magnus’ body.

“Trust,” Magnus said softly, for Alec alone. Then again, louder; “As Fire, I say we trust the Nephilim.”

“As Life, I say we stand alone,” En’hedu’ana said simply. “My people: what say you?”

Without letting go of Magnus, Alec lifted his head, watching over his boyfriend’s shoulder as, like a wave breaking over a shore, one by one every warlock in the amphitheatre raised a hand into the air. Light, a thousand shades of light, rose up from their fingers and into the Heart above, where they swirled like a jewelled kaleidoscope and broke into dizzying fractals. The pieces started to move like gemstones caught in a current—slow at first, but then faster, colours being stretched into ribbons of paint, pulled into a whirlpool of molten rainbows. But instead of muddying into a swampy brown as they moved faster and faster, melting and blurring into one, all the blues and pinks and yellows and greens and purples and whites and oranges began to transition into a great blaze of turquoise.

And then it slowed. It was still the Heart: it did not stop moving altogether. But it shifted and lapped like water above their heads in great ripples of glowing celadon.

Alec stepped back to look up at it, but he didn’t go far: close enough that he could feel the heat streaming from Magnus as if from a fireplace, close enough that their hands could slip together as naturally as magnetised puzzle pieces. “What does that mean?” he whispered.

Magnus’ head had tipped back to watch the colours; now he looked down to meet Alec eye to eye. He was smiling, and there was softness in it, but something grim and hard as a well-worn sword as well. “It means we’ll go to the Inquisitor.” He squeezed Alec’s hand. “You won the Nephilim their chance.”

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“Cas, Ana.” Lucio poked his head around the doorway. “How are you doing?”

Cas smiled. “Cap sent you to help us because you’re useless with ubārum-ene, didn’t she?”

Lucio sighed. “Guilty as charged.”

For just a second, Ana saw light glitter in the diamond caught in the interlocking gold circles of Cas’ necklace; the talisman he’d invented himself for tracking anunnaki. “All right then,” he said, picking up some of his books to make room. “Set your butt down and start reading, goose.”

***
"You should be incredibly proud," Jem said afterwards, as the Court began to disperse, the Seba assigning tasks and duties to those they summoned down to their table. The three Shadowhunters lingered to one side, waiting for their respective loves. "I would never have predicted the day a Shadowhunter stood before the full Court and convinced them to trust the Clave the way you just did." Jem’s smile was as bright as his silvery hair. "I think you’ve made an excellent start to changing the connotation of your House’s name, Alexander Sariel."

"Thank you," Alec managed. He still felt stunned—relieved and grateful, and stunned as if by a blow to the head. He couldn’t believe the Court had really voted to believe him, to trust him and his word. "I really hope so."

"I know so." Jem grinned. "I’m going to enjoy watching your star rise. The Heart, your speech… your agela. You’ve already accomplished so much, when mere entry to the Court is a privilege not many Shadowhunters have managed to earn…"

"In fact, you’re only the third one ever, after us," Will said. He paused. "We should form a club," he said thoughtfully. "With badges. I’ve always liked badges."

Jem laughed, and that was how Magnus and Tessa found them; Alec still reeling but smiling, Will debating the merits of various designs for his budding pin club, and Jem watching his lover (husband?) with fond amusement.

Magnus reached for Alec’s hand, and Alec clasped back instantly. "Are you ready to go?" Magnus asked him. He was still in his full regalia, like a young god just stepped out of a legend, and his soft smile warmed Alec inside.

"Yes." There was nothing more Alec could do here, and everything to do at home. The Inquisitor and her people were already hunting Valentine, but they didn’t know what to look for, not like the Spiral Court did, and Alec had to get that information to them as quickly as possible. "Did they decide who’ll come and speak to the Inquisitor?"

"Nomlanga," Magnus said. "But he’ll go straight there. We’ll head back to my apartment, so you can get your things."

Alec remembered the bag he’d left, and what was inside it, and felt a smile crack across his own face.

"And so that you can rest," Tessa added, giving Magnus a fond but pointed look.

Magnus sighed. "Don’t worry. I’ll be a good boy and stick to bedrest. The rest of you can play heroes for once."

"It’ll make for a nice change," Tessa said tartly.

"Yes, it will," Will said. "Tessa, my fountain of life, will you make badges for us?"

"Will I make you what?"

"Badges! For those Nephilim as wise as Jem and Alexander and myself…"

Alec tuned out Will’s chatter, although the sketches the man made in the air with his hands as he spoke flickered in the corner of his eye. As Magnus led the way up and out of the amphitheatre, and towards one of the cavern’s many archways, Alec fell into step with him, walking close enough that their shoulders brushed.
“I never knew you were so important,” he said quietly. “To your people, I mean.”

Magnus looked at him. “It’s a little like being the firstborn of one of the First Houses, I imagine.”

Alec wasn’t sure he agreed—there were a good two dozen Firsts, and hundreds more High Houses, pureblood families formed after Jonathan Shadowhunter’s time; whereas the Seba only had six thrones—but the last thing he wanted now was an argument. “It’s going to be okay,” he said instead. Promised. To them both. “We’ll stop Valentine. Or whoever’s doing this, if it’s someone else.” His chest felt tight. “I’m not going to let you die.”

They had almost reached the arch. Tessa and her husbands had fallen a little behind them; Will might have arranged that on purpose, Alec realised belatedly, as Magnus drew him to a stop, tugging on Alec’s hand so that they faced each other.

“Lightwood,” Magnus murmured. His eyes smouldered like witchfire, green and gold and entrancing. “Alexander. Every time I think you can’t burn any brighter, you find a new way to blaze.” He raised his free hand and laid his fingertips lightly against Alec’s cheek. “You really will remake your House, won’t you? From a pyre into a beacon. I can’t even imagine it, but I believe it. I believe in you.”

His fingertips were coals against Alec’s skin.

“I think I love you,” Alec whispered.

Magnus smiled, and it was the most beautiful thing Alec had ever seen. “The moment I saw your sureva Marks,” he said quietly, “I knew that I loved you. Now…” He shook his head, disbelief and wonder in his eyes as he looked at Alec. As if he saw something Alec had never seen in the mirror. “Seeing the Heart welcome you like that, watching you stand before the Court and say what you did…you took my breath away.” His smile softened. “You have a habit of doing that.”

The Heart pounded beneath Alec’s skin, against Magnus’ silken fingertips. “I could give it back to you,” he heard himself say.

Magnus’ eyes glittered, a thousand points of flame. “People will see,” he said, low.

“Let them,” Alec said, and he stepped in close and drew their mouths together, his free hand sliding into Magnus’ soft, soft hair, closing his eyes on all the world so that all that existed was this incredible, brilliant, peerless man in his arms. Blue fire raced through Alec’s veins as Magnus made a low, wanting sound in the back of his throat and melted against him, pressing them together from collarbone to thigh, letting go of Alec’s hand to wrap one arm around his shoulders, fisting his other hand in Alec’s white mourning shirt as if there was some way to pull them closer together. Alec felt it too, the hot electric ache of want-crave-needing, tracing the shape of Magnus’ lips with his tongue, wrapping his arm around Magnus’ waist with his palm pressed between Magnus’ shoulder blades. He stroked his hand down Magnus’ spine as his tongue stroked the seam of Magnus’ lips, coaxing, yearning, and his head spun as Magnus moaned softly against his mouth, opening to him, drawing him in, the graze of his teeth shocking as a struck match in the dark.

Isatum-Immaru. Lightwood. Magnus was Fire and Alec was the wood longing to burn, the dark sticky tar of his House’s name igniting at Magnus’ touch, flames catching at the wick of him, racing beneath his skin as if his bones were gunpowder. The silk of Magnus’ hair slipped through Alec’s fingers like sparks, and Alec cradled his skull and drew Magnus tighter against him, some deep and secret reservoir of oil inside him thrilling alight as their bodies fit together like flint and steel. They were incandescent together, and out of that bright and singing heat Alec was a phoenix rising from the ashes of his old fears, sheer, searing love spreading gold and crimson wings inside him, his heart
and soul taking flight and soaring with the joy and wonder of being here, alive, in this moment, with
this man in his arms.

This is the start of something, he told himself as the kiss slowly gentled, dissolving apart painlessly,
naturally. He pressed his brow to Magnus’, his eyes still closed as they both got their breath back. It
is not the end. You will not die. You’ll outlive me by millennia, exactly as you should; you’ll be a
bright, dazzling star long after the memory of me has faded into the dark.

Valentine is a black hole, destroying everything he touches. But he can’t have you.

Not you.

Magnus sighed, and kissed him again, very, very softly. “I love you, Alexander Sariel,” he
whispered. “Don’t forget that.”

Alec thought of the memory spell that would be cast upon him in just a moment. “If I do, you’ll just
have to remind me,” he said. He smiled, and brushed his fingertips over Magnus’ cheekbone. “I love
you too.”

Champagne. Starfire. The bright glow of a seraph blade coming alight in the dark. It was all those
things, and none of them, and more than them.

Magnus stepped away, and Alec missed him instantly. But he let Tessa’s soft cough claim his
attention.

She was smiling too, and Alec knew she’d seen him and Magnus, but the faint flicker of fear that
came with the knowledge was a pale, watery shadow of the terror he would have felt yesterday.

“The spell will be triggered when you pass through the Portal,” Tessa said. She waved her hand, and
the air spiralled into a shining vortex within the archway they’d been standing near. She was one of
the Seba, too. “Your memories won’t be gone, only locked away. You’ll still feel everything you do
now, but you won’t remember why you feel that way. Do you understand and consent?”

Alec looked past her, at Magnus. “I wish I could remember this,” he said, low, “but yes. I
understand, and I consent.”

The Heart ached inside him, elemental regret and sorrow twining through him. Alec’s flesh-and-
blood heart sped up a little as he realised that this, too, he would lose: the sense of wholeness, the
gouged-out space inside him perfectly filled, the fierce and wild joy of being alive. But Jace and Izzy
would be there to fill the emptiness instead, he told himself. He would have his agelai back the
moment he left the Court.

Tessa placed her palms together: when she pulled them apart, strands of softly wavering magic, like
light seen through water, spread between her fingers like cat’s cradle. “Then whenever you’re ready,
Alexander.”

Goodbye, Alec thought at the Heart. “See you on the other side,” he told Magnus, and turned and
walked into the Portal.

Not for always, the Heart sang, and it was sorrow and hope and farewell and anticipation, all
together, curling into a solid weight on his witch’s ladder just as Will darted forward and clapped
something into Alec’s hand.

“Until next time, renas Sariel.”
And before Alec had a chance to see what it was, the Portal whirled him away.

* He slammed into they, Jace and Isabelle instantly snatching him up like ocean currents and the three of them spun into a whirlpool, into one, into we-I-us-Sariel!

Gone-gone-gone-GONE, missing-piece-returned, not-whole unwhole broken but whole again, ONE again, other-I other-us you-I-we missed you needed you NEVER AGAIN!

Souls embracing, braiding and melting into one in an instant. The intensity of it almost sent them to their knees, suddenly having six eyes and twelve limbs and hair both short and long simultaneously. They’d been starving but now they were sated, full, complete, and with it came a wave of exhaustion. They wanted to bring their Alec-body back to the Institute and tuck it into the bed their Jace- and Izzy-shapes were already sharing, wanted to put their bodies neatly and safely away like the weapons they were.

They couldn’t, though. The dissonance—the dizziness—the foggy, blurred hole in Alec’s memories was awful, and Sariel circled it, unhappy but accepting. They remembered agreeing to this, and they—mostly—trusted that Magnus wouldn’t allow anyone to take memories, or thoughts, or ideas, beyond the bounds of that agreement.

“Are you all right?” Magnus asked, appearing behind him. Sariel looked up in time to see the Portal close, silent as a well-oiled door.

“I think so.” They looked down. In their hand was an enamel pin, shaped like a heraldic shield; a Warlock’s Star, the six points white against a rich blue ground—and at the centre of the star, an enkeli Mark shone with bright gilt. “What’s this?” And the hand that held the badge—“What happened to my clothes?”

Magnus leaned in a little to take a look at the badge, and smiled. “A gift from a new friend,” he said. “To mark you as a friend of the Court. As for your clothes—you wanted mourning-wear. It was given to you.” Magnus himself was still in the clothes he’d been wearing when they left, and he looked wan and tired.

After a moment’s thought, Sariel fastened the pin on the right side of their chest—and found the witch’s ladder Magnus had given him.

It was heavier than it had been.

Without taking the necklace off, Sariel lifted the golden oak-leaf charm in one hand. It was no longer the only jewel; an opal spiral now hung in front of it, from the same ring that attached the leaf to the necklace. It was perfectly smooth and maybe a third the size of the gold charm. The bangles of red beryl embracing each of his wrists, however, were as thick as his thumb. “And these?”

Magnus stared at that one for a moment. “Another present,” he said finally, with something Sariel couldn’t identify in his voice. “From another friend.”

Alec let go of the witch’s ladder, but gingerly poked one of the bracelets. They both seemed to be carved all of a single piece; he couldn’t find a clasp. “How do I get these off?”

“I don’t think you’re supposed to.”

Sariel let their hand fall. Gifts of jewellery they didn’t remember getting were strange, but ultimately not that important: they had to go, now, to the Inquisitor. It was an urgent, pounding compulsion, a
need to get back to the Institute and convince everyone, Court and Clave, to work together. Sariel
didn’t remember anything from the moment they’d stepped through the Portal to the moment they’d
come out of it, but they remembered Magnus saying ‘*He can if he brings the wards down first,*’
remembered the threat of Valentine with a demonic army he couldn’t control, not even with the
Mortal Sword he’d stolen. And they didn’t remember, but they *knew,* that the Spiral Court could help
the Nephilim find and stop Valentine. That certainty lay coiled in the centre of the excised space in
Alec’s memory, and badges and pendants weren’t enough to distract from that.

…I could wait a few more minutes. Couldn’t it?

“I have one for you too,” Sariel said. “A present, I mean.” They looked Magnus over again
worriedly. “Should you sit down?”

“Probably,” Magnus agreed, and accepted the help when Sariel came forward to offer them their
arm, Alec’s body solid and sure as they guided Magnus down onto his couch. “It’s all right. Cat will
be back in a few more minutes. She’s been taking excellent care of me.”

“Good,” Sariel said simply. “I’ll wait.” They didn’t want to leave Magnus alone, not when he looked
so poorly. Arika’s warning—‘*death is the poison that sickens him*’—was something they did
remember: something they couldn’t forget.

Magnus smiled a little wanly. “My present?”

He was deflecting again, Sariel thought, but that was okay. It was okay because they were going to
get Valentine, and Magnus was going to get better, and they would never need to talk about how
serious his illness was if he didn’t want to.

The reassurance worked so well that Alec was almost himself alone again when he said, “It’s in my
bag,” and went to fetch the satchel he’d dropped what felt like years ago.

The bookseller at the Market had wrapped it in brown paper and string for him, and for a moment
Alec held it in his hands. It was heavy, but he was abruptly, sharply aware that the weight of it
couldn’t possibly, could never, add up to the weight of what Magnus had lost, and what did Alec
think he was doing, really?

He hadn’t even wrapped Magnus’ present properly. Light Worlders did that, didn’t they? They
wrapped their gifts in pretty paper and ribbons. Magnus liked pretty, sparkly things. Why hadn’t
Alec thought to do even that much? Maybe it would have made Magnus smile. The brown package
in his hands looked so plain.

He came back to the couch and offered it to Magnus anyway. “I found it in the Goblin Market,” he
said awkwardly, sitting down next to his boyfriend. Magnus accepted it slowly and carefully, as if it
were already something precious to him. His neat fingers looked naked without the rings that usually
made his every gesture a shining, hummingbird-bright thing as they picked apart the knots in the
twine.

The paper fell away, and Magnus actually gasped.

There was no name on the book, but that wasn’t unusual among genuine books of magic. Bound in
shining black leather, Latin verse in minute gilt script made a frame on the front cover, interspersed
with the seals of Archangels at the points of the compass: Michael’s, Uriel’s, Gabriel’s, and
Raphael’s, who each guarded one of the four directions. They framed a centrepiece of crimson,
bright as fire against the black; four more gilt seals had been embossed in the corners of the red, those
of the four elements, and at the centre—at the centre blazed the *Sigillum Dei Aemaeth,* symbol of the
living God, said to conceal or reveal His true name, an impossibly intricate series of circles, heptagons, and pentagrams, each surrounded by hundreds of individual esoteric symbols and interspersed with the names of more angels.

It was a sign ancient powers had believed, or at least claimed, could give the righteous initiate command over all creatures but the Archangels themselves.

“Alexander…” Magnus was clearly stunned. He ran his fingertips reverently over the Sigillum Dei, turning the volume to view the spine: it was divided into six squares, each featuring another complex seal in shining gold. “I’ve only ever seen this in the Akashic Records. I know of one physical copy, but I thought it was the last. You found it at the Market?”

“Yes?” Damn it, he’d picked up Simon’s Light Worlder quirk of phrasing statements as questions. When had that happened? “I asked the seller for books a warlock might like, and she showed me this one. Is it—it’s special?”

“‘Special’?” Magnus echoed incredulously. “This is the Arkhangelos Grimoire. People have killed for this. People would kill for it. Your secretari would do anything to get their hands on it, if they knew it still existed. And you just—found it, and brought it to me like a bunch of flowers.” He sounded a little dazed.

Disbelief that something he’d found so easily, and bought so casually, could be something as precious as Magnus seemed to think warred with a quiver of uncertainty at the mention of the secretari. “Will you get in trouble for owning it? Should I take it back?”

“Probably. But I’m not going to let you.” Magnus hugged the book to his chest. “Isis would strike me down for giving this up.” Relief flowed like cool water over a burn, and Alec dared to lean in and kiss Magnus’ cheek. “Then I’m glad it found me.”

Magnus went still against him. “Yes,” he said finally, slowly. “It did find you, didn’t it?” There was something strange in his voice, something Alec didn’t recognise, but he had no idea how to ask about it as Magnus ran his fingertips over the cover again, thoughtfully, almost absently. Alec could have sworn the gilt glowed at Magnus’ touch, just for an instant.

“The seller can’t have known what she had,” Magnus said at last. “But I’m just glad you didn’t have to pay what it was worth. Thank you, Alexander.”

Despite everything, Alec couldn’t help the warm glow that flooded through him at Magnus’ obvious pleasure. He hadn’t screwed anything up, this time. “You’re welcome,” he said, meaning it. Hoping Magnus knew how much he meant it. “I—”

A Portal opened near the kitchen counter, and Catarina came through it. “Is everything all right here?” she asked. The Portal was already closing behind her.

“I think so?” By the Angel, he’d phrased it as a question again. Alec bit his tongue to remind himself to stop that, and turned to Magnus. “I should get going,” he said quietly.

“You should,” Magnus agreed. He was holding the grimoire to his chest with one arm, like a small child might hold a teddy bear, and the sight of it made Alec smile despite himself. He was still smiling when Magnus leaned in to kiss him, softly, his free hand cupping Alec’s cheek.

“Thank you,” Magnus whispered.
Alec swallowed, painfully aware of Catarina’s presence, but finding it hard to care with Magnus’
golden eyes so close, and so full of warmth. “You’re welcome,” he whispered back. Understanding,
deep in his bones, that Magnus was talking about more than just the book.

Alec wondered what he’d done, during that blank space in his memory, to earn Magnus’ thanks like
this.

He got up and gathered his bag, exchanging a polite nod with Catarina as he passed her. He didn’t
know what to say, to Magnus or to her, so he said nothing, and every step away from the couch was
one where he didn’t stop and ask for a change of clothes. Every step was one he took wearing white
from head to foot, wearing unmistakable mourning-wear for a Downworlder; every step took him
further from the shield of plausible deniability he’d had when he first arrived. He’d left the Institute in
faded jeans and a jacket that hid his sureva Marks, and he was going back with neither, in pure white
stark as right from wrong.

The Inquisitor, the Kleidoukhos, his parents—they didn’t matter. Not as much as doing the right
thing, and hiding his grief, mourning Elias and Xia furtively and in secret, as if it was something to
be ashamed of—as if they were something to be ashamed of—was not right.

He’d tell the world that in will-bright white.

He was just opening the front door when Magnus said, “Alec.”

Alec turned back to him, his face a question.

Magnus gave him a small, tired smile. “I’ll text you the details of the funeral tomorrow.”

Alec’s heart constricted in his chest; for a moment there was a hard, hot lump in his throat, and his
eyes stung as if with salt. “I’ll be there,” he promised. It didn’t matter what the details were. He
would be there.

“I know.” Magnus closed his eyes and lay down on the sofa, the book Alec had given him still
hugged to his abdomen. “Stay safe, Shadowhunter.”

“You too,” Alec said softly.

He closed the door as quietly as he could behind him.

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“How are you feeling?” Catarina asked, when Alec had gone.

It was a long moment before Magnus answered her. “Tired,” he said finally. “I need to rest, I know.”

“You do,” Cat said firmly. She came over to him; he was still lying on his back, clutching his new
book of magic to his chest. “Let me help you to bed.”

After a beat, Magnus did just that. Catarina was stronger than she looked, and there was nothing
preventing her from using her magic to help her manage Magnus’ weight. But she hardly needed to:
yet again, it gave her a sick jolt to feel how much lighter Magnus was, lighter than he should be. The
nexus was eating him alive to keep from succumbing to Valentine’s poison.

He curled up on his side on the bed, when she got him to it, immediately wrapping both his arms
around the book. There was a stricken hollowness in his eyes; he shut them quickly, but she caught a
glance before he could hide them from her.
She smoothed back his hair. “It’s going to be all right,” she said quietly.

He didn’t answer her. She kept stroking his hair in silence, combing a gentle calming charm through the rumpled spikes with her fingers.

Eventually the tension in his body seemed to ease, at least a little. It was likely the best she could do.

“I’ll bring you something to help you sleep,” she promised, rising to her feet.

“I’ll be here,” Magnus murmured, without opening his eyes.

She was in the kitchen, preparing hot chocolate with lavender and vanilla, when she heard the crash.

“Magnus!” She ran back to his room, panicking. She hadn’t felt him work any magic, but—

She froze in the doorway.

No, he hadn’t used any magic. It had been perfectly normal, mortal power that got Magnus onto his feet to sweep all the bottles and boxes from his dressing table, scattering glass and jewels everywhere. Gems and beads rolled across the floor; shards lay around his feet like pieces of coloured stars; powders and make-up were spilled and smeared all over the table and mirror and floor. Dozens of scents rose up from broken bottles, and the air almost hummed with the magic stored in the rings and talismans Magnus had hurled away from him, some now in fragments.

He was bent over the dressing table, shoulders heaving. She couldn’t see his face in the mirror from here, so she wasn’t ready for it when he raised his head with tears streaking down his cheeks.

“You saw him.” Magnus’ voice was as wrecked as the room. “You saw him.”

“…Alec?” she guessed, unable to think of another ‘him’. She stepped into the room gingerly, and made her voice soft, soothing. “I did, Magnus, I did see him. He was wonderful today.”

“He was wonderful,” Magnus echoed. He still had the book in one arm; the other was on the dressing table. He was leaning on it. She thought maybe he had to lean against it, that he couldn’t support his own weight. She hoped it was only that he hadn’t adjusted yet from being away from the—unfortunately only temporary—restorative effect of the Heart, and not that he was truly so sick he couldn’t stand. “And he meant it, Cat. The mourning runes, defending me like he did, getting up in front of the Court… He let us take his memories. Robert and Maryse’s son let warlocks into his head.” He bowed his head, hiding his face again, and swore like his heart was broken.

Catarina let her fingers curl and uncurl, helplessly. “Aren’t you proud of him?”

“Of course I’m proud of him!” Magnus shouted, and Catarina saw the Fire in him. It still burned, no matter what Valentine had done. “I’m amazed by him. When he said what he did—he could change the entire Shadow World, Cat. No, the whole world. I look at him and I see hope, for the first time in centuries, that…that…”

The book slipped from his grasp, and Catarina cast without thinking, catching it before it could land in the jumbled mess on the table. She levitated it over to a shelf as she strode into the room, heedless of the crunch of glass and pottery under her shoes, and she set the book down in the same moment she wrapped her arms around her friend.

And Magnus crumpled. He turned his face into her shoulder and sobbed, and she let him, because this was the other part of being a healer, and maybe the most important part of being a friend.
“It’s okay, Magnus, it’s okay,” she said softly, over and over. She held him as tightly as she could. “It’s okay.”

“I love him, Cat,” he whispered, like it was breaking him. Like it was killing him. “I love him, and he’s dying. This was supposed to stop all the death, but he’s still dying. How is any of it worth it if he’s still dying?”

“What are you talking about?” She stroked his hair, trying to soothe, trying to heal the hurt. “Magnus? What was supposed to stop all the death?”

He just shook his head, and didn’t answer her.

She let it go, because she had something that might be a cure for the main injury, even if she couldn’t treat every symptom. “I don’t know if he’s still dying.”

Magnus jerked his head up and stared at her. “What?”

She kept her breathing even with the force of practice. “The hole the angel ripped in his soul. It’s not empty any more.”

“It’s gone?” Magnus looked at her with such naked, desperate, disbelieving hope in his eyes. “It healed?”

“No,” she said slowly. “I don’t think so. The hole’s still there. It’s just that something—two somethings—are filling most of the missing space. Not while he was in the Court, but here—”

Comprehension caught fire in her friend’s face. “His agelai,” he breathed. “Ma’at damn me. Jace and Isabelle—the bond—it was cut off while he was at the Court—”

“But your wards,” Catarina reminded him. She regretted it instantly, but luckily Magnus didn’t seem to hear her. It was only that she’d never known what spell he’d used to shield their Court, or where he’d gotten it.

—and then the Heart—is that how it—?” He waved a hand, indicating the word he couldn’t find.

Catarina couldn’t find it either. What had the Heart done to Alec? Gone into him, connected to him...? Fitting itself somehow into the space the angel had torn in him? “Maybe,” she said. “I don’t know. I wasn’t looking with that kind of sight.”

Magnus’ face was still wet, but he had stopped crying. He actually smiled at her. “It doesn’t matter. He’s not going to die while he has agelai, and nothing can break that bond. He’s not going to die.”

Not of this, Catarina thought worriedly. Alexander was still mortal. He would die eventually, of one thing or another, and Magnus’ heart would be broken, the way it had been so many times before. She had been there to pick up the pieces so many times.

But she didn’t say that, because this was how love worked, for ashipu-ene. Unless you were lucky enough to fall in love with another warlock, or with a vampire or one of the fae, you were doomed to lose your beloveds over and over again. It was one of the many prices of immortality, one they all had to live with, because the alternative—closing off one’s heart entirely—was one no ashipu could survive for very long. You needed passion to survive immortality; passion for other people, or for learning, or travel, or art—anything, something. One of their sisters had been collecting spoons since ancient Egypt, for Sekhmet’s sake. It didn’t matter what form your passion took. But cut yourself off from it—or lose it, as plenty did—and sooner rather than later there would be the kind of accident that wasn’t quite suicide…but that didn’t happen to people who still cared about living.
“I’m sorry for worrying you,” Magnus said. “I’m all right. Really.” And he did seem to have relaxed, as if she’d lifted an enormous burden from his shoulders.

From both their shoulders. The guilt of hiding Alec’s condition from the Shadowhunter himself had been eating at Catarina for weeks. She was a healer; it was her job not to lie when she discovered something like that. But she had lied, out of shock and horror and a misplaced attempt at mercy, and then she hadn’t known how to take the lie back again.

Now, maybe, she wouldn’t have to.

“And you sure?” she asked now. When he nodded, she sighed, mostly with relief. “Then let me help you back to bed, and I’ll bring you your posset. Which you will drink,” she added sternly.

“Yes, Cat.”

He wanted the book, when she had him settled, and she was feeling steady enough now that she rolled her eyes at him. But she did fetch it for him, and the hot chocolate, too.

“Drink,” she reminded him, and he smiled gratefully.

“Thank you,” he said softly.

She touched her fingertips to his brow, gently. “~No thanks necessary, brother-mine,~” she said, in the tongue of their kind. “~Just get some rest.~”

She left him drinking his hot chocolate, with the book safely out of reach of any accidental spill.

***

Magnus went to visit a library that didn’t exist.

He waited a little while, until the sounds of Catarina moving about in the kitchen had gone quiet. The drink she’d made for him helped, relaxing his body and stilting his mind, turning both all soft and warm.

And easy to slip away from.

He left his flesh-and-blood form in Brooklyn, and followed the astral paths through the immaterial planes to a library.

The library. The first, the last, the only. One that could not be touched, or mapped, or ever fully known; one that was both dream and memory, real and unreal.

There was no librarian. There was not even a door; either you knew the way to the Akashic Records, repository of all knowledge and experience, or you did not. But once you did, all of it was open to you.

Entrance was barred to no one. But the natural order that kept worlds separate applied here, too; visitors from different worlds could not see each other, sense each other, detect each other’s presence in any way. Magnus could have been surrounded by a million other knowledge-seekers from a million different worlds, and he would never know it.
Supposedly, the Records appeared differently to every visitor. Magnus saw shelves of gleaming crystal taller than the Empire State Building, filled with books made of smoke and silk and songs. There were tablets of clay, and glass, and ice inset with gold; flash drives of feather and bone; discs of wood and ivory and shining silver. Scrolls made of dragonfly wings with rollers of gleaming alicorns; crystal spheres that played holograms when they were touched; codices whose words wrote themselves on your eyelids instead of their own pages. The carpet was always a thick, soft green; the murals on the distant ceiling (if it was a ceiling, and not a sky) were always changing, melting into new designs the way sunset melted into night.

Many visitors had died here, losing track of time so that the bodies they were tethered to withered and gave out. Sometimes souls grew lost among the shelves; some minds were shattered by knowledge they should have left unread. But Magnus had been coming here a long, long time, and he knew what he was looking for.

On an empty reading table lay a book that didn’t exist, and Magnus opened it, and wrote words that were not there in it.

*Received your gift. Awaiting instructions.*

Visitors from different worlds could not directly interact with each other. But they could all interact with the books.

A hand he couldn’t see began writing on the page in answer to his missive, and Magnus waited for Them to explain why They had pushed the grimoire into Alec’s hands.

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**NOTES**

_Glossalis_ is the name I gave to the speak-in-tongues Mark, which is one of the canon runes but, as far as I know, doesn’t have a proper name in canon (or at least, not one that’s been revealed to us yet!)

_Justice_ is the original personification of Lady Justice, aka the female figure holding a set of scales while blindfolded. She was officially a goddess, but was always viewed more as a poetic personification of a concept rather than as an actual deity (or so I understand).

_A tyro_ is literally an apprentice or initiate; it comes from the Latin ‘tiro’, which translates as young soldier/new recruit/novice.

_Kukulkan_ is one of the names for the feathered serpent god Quetzalcoatl. The use of ‘they’ pronouns is not a mistake; Alec mistook them for a man, but Kukulkan (the warlock, not the god)(as far as I know) is genderqueer. Fun bit of trivia for you: there seems to have been a living human individual also called Kukulkan, possibly some kind of high priest. The lines between the god and the person have gotten a little blurred in the historical record…
Mòzî is/was a Chinese philosopher in the 5th century BC. He believed self-reflection and authenticity > ritual and tradition; he also thought that humans should strive to love everybody equally, rather than loving some people more than others (the way we love our friends more than strangers).

Ekundayo is a Yoruba name meaning ‘sorrow becomes joy’.

Nehanu is a compilation of the words *peace* and *creator/maker* in ancient Sumerian, making the name of Adele’s sword something like Peacemaker.

Kiáñrashi is, like nehanu, a word of my own invention, basically a compound of two other terms, hopefully made grammatically correct, almost certainly something that would make an actual expert in Sumerian wince painfully. I apologise to anyone who actually knows what they’re doing, and ask that you don’t translate it for anybody else. To the rest of you: IT’S A SECRET. DEAL WITH IT.

*Dodaeche* is more or less ‘What the hell?’ or ‘…the hell?’ in Korean.

Anael (also known as Aniyel, Haniel, Hamiel, Aniel, Anafiel, and Ariel) is one of the seven archangels of Creation; Prince of the archangels and Prince Regent of the Principalities (another angelic caste). There’s a lot of other responsibilities and powers under his governance, if you want to read up on him, but as the angel of Venus he governs romantic love and human sexuality; this is the angel who brings soulmates together. Any of you with eidetic memories may remember that Alec had a seraph blade named Anael in City of Shadows; Wikipedia also informs that Will himself had a seraph blade with the same name at one point. So... unquestionably appropriate!

Usiel is an archangel, one of the Malachim, AND one of the Cherubim (please don’t ask me how that works). He is a prince of compassion and/or an angel of mercy; in both capacities he serves Metatron.

Glasya-Labolas is listed as a President of Hell who commands 36 legions of demons. He is the captain of manslaughter and bloodshed, ‘gains the minds and love of friends and foes’, and incites homicides.

Maadim is an angel who ‘stands near the moon in order to warm the world from the cold’. Not sure exactly what that means, but it sounds beautiful, and like an appropriate example for an agela to try and follow.
Jesodoth is the angel who transmits God's wisdom and knowledge to humans.

Haamiah is an angel who is especially protective of those who seek truth.

*Kulvade* is my name for the canon Vision Mark, which, like the speak-in-tongues rune, doesn’t seem to have a canon name yet.

Red beryl, also known as Bixbite after the man who discovered it, is rarer than diamonds (one stat I found claimed that one natural red beryl exists for every 150,000 diamonds). Metaphysically, it’s known as *a/the ‘right time crystal’*, one that helps you know your life’s purpose and when it is the right time to take action (and determine what that action should be). It helps one shed baggage, be brave, and ‘expand the innate qualities of unconditional love and respect for all life’. It specifically attracts and strengthens the relationship with a soulmate, and as a healer, it helps with overcoming grief and loss, and keeping your heart open to love and life. It’s an immensely powerful shield against negativity; stimulates self-esteem, confidence, and creativity; and enhances emotional communication and understanding. Finally, it’s very powerful for ‘releasing karmic conflict and ancient wounds’. Almost spookily appropriate for Alec, especially in this moment!

Eris is the Greek goddess of discord, particularly famous for creating the golden apple that led to the start of the Trojan War.

En’hedu’Ana, also known as Enhuduanna, is history’s first named author—she was a princess of the Akkadian empire, and the high priestess of Sumer’s moon god Nanna, an incredibly important and influential role in ancient Sumer. She was also a clear devotee to the goddess Inanna, since her surviving works are all hymns to that goddess. Although Enhuduanna is Sumerian, she was not Sumerian herself—she was the daughter of the Akkadian Emperor. Historians don’t know what her birth name was; ‘Enheduanna’ is a combination of title and epithet. ‘En’ is a hierarchal title, meaning something like ‘high priestess’, whereas ‘Hedu-ana’ means ‘ornament of Heaven’ and is an epithet she took when she was made En.

Like Khutulun, in Runed the historical Enheduanna and the one in this story are meant to be the same person. Since no one knows what Enheduanna’s actual name was, I decided to name her Ikribi-iš-tár, which means ‘The offering of Ishtar’. Since the Emperor is the one who installed his daughter as a priestess, I figure he might have named her as a religious offering (Ishtar being the Akkadian name for Inanna)—incorporating the names of deities into birth names was apparently really common, and dedicating his daughter to the goddess who was also one of the most important goddesses of the place he had conquered (Sumer)…? Seems like a good political move to me.

Also, while Inanna is awesome enough that Enheduanna didn’t need another reason to adore her, I like imagining the baby princess being interested in the goddess she was named for and becoming very devoted to her.

The description I have for Kostchtchie is simply ‘a Russian goblin of death.’
Yan-gant-y-tan is a demon in the mythology of Brittany, described as ‘wandering in the night holding five candles on his five fingers.’ Doesn’t sound so bad?

*Silimma hemeen* means ‘welcome’ in Sumerian; specifically, ‘welcome to this place’.

Thrones are a kind or caste of angel, also known as Ophanim. These are the ones that are described as burning wheels covered in eyes, so I doubt they could sit in an actual throne, but I couldn’t resist the pun-thing.

The word *duine* is the Old Irish word for ‘person’, as in, an individual. You might remember that waaay back in *Interlude: Starfire* it was mentioned that the fae (or at least the Seelie fae) call themselves The People—in other words, just like the proper term for warlocks is ashipu-ene, the proper name for the Seelie/Unseelie fae (meaning, what they call themselves, rather than what other people call them) is simply *tuath* (‘people/tribe’, in Old Irish). *Tuatha* is the plural form, and the word they would use when referring to, say, both the Seelie and Unseelie Court at once (since the two courts are very much not a single tribe!)

It’s also come up between Olianthe and Clary that ‘faerie’ is not what the fae call themselves, and they don’t like the term—both in Runed, and in Irish/Welsh mythology. (If you go digging, you’ll find a LOT of euphemisms people used when referring to the fae; ‘the good folk’ is a well-known one, although my favourite is the People of Peace.)

(A clue as to WHY the Runed fae don’t like the world ‘faerie’ has already been dropped in the last few chapters.)

Scathe is an old word meaning ‘injury or harm’. I was inspired by looking at some of the really odd group nouns for things. (Did you know it’s a *shadow* of jaguars, or a *deceit* of lapwings???)

Sublimity is the state or quality of being sublime. Again, inspired by the oddness and awesomeness that are group nouns.

Hephaestus is the Greek god of metal-working and smithing, among other things.

Lavender is associated with love, relaxation, and sweet sleep. It’s especially helpful for insomniacs and depression, so a pretty good thing for Catarina to give Magnus just now.

Vanilla is often used in feel-good spells—it’s good for happiness and general healing.
There’s no exact date for the invention of spoons, but apparently they’ve been finding spoons with handles since 1000 BC. Archaeologists think the ones in ancient Egypt might have been used for religious purposes.

The Akashic Records are not my own invention, but a theosophical concept that’s been co-opted for fantasy and sci-fi occasionally, as I have done here.
The finest of the *iatroi*—the Nephilim caste of healers—worked upon the sleeping Vessel throughout the day. With infinite care they cut away his clothes with consecrated blades of gold edged in steel, and when it was bare they Marked his skin with runes of diagnosis and healing, blood-replenishment and energy renewal. They murmured the names of their patron angels, and the torques of *adamas* around their throats glowed softly with celestial light, the same power Shadowhunters channelled through their seraph blades moving through their skilled hands and steles: the power of heaven, shimmering like moonlit diamond. Beneath the watchful eyes of the angelologists the most skilled of the healers’ acolytes reverently washed the blood from his skin with holy water and the softest of cloths. Cradling his neck with silk-gloved hands, they held his head up so they could wash the blood and sweat from his hair in a wide silver bowl, pouring oils of frankincense and vervain into the blessed water. While their teachers mixed healing herbs with unicorn milk and honey from the hives of Idris in the Cup of Raziel—summoned by the Secretar-Kleidoukhos and escorted from Alicante by the Inquisitor’s second-in-command just for this purpose—they combed the tangles from his dark hair and softly dried it with thick towels, retreating only when the head of their order, the Paiôn, brought the Mortal Cup to the Vessel’s lips. She fed the posset to the Vessel drop by drop, gently massaging his throat to make him swallow.

A younger *iatros*, the torque at her throat freshly carved and its weight still unfamiliar around her neck, cleaned and polished the Vessel’s glasses. She left them folded on a velvet cloth close by, within the Vessel’s reach when he woke—assuming someone saw fit to unbind his wrists from the leather cuffs tying him to his bed before then.

The glasses were a puzzle, and as the healers and Secretseekers alike took their notes, someone measured the strength of the lenses.

“Could it be the strain of hosting a Celestial?” the Paiôn murmured to the Kleidoukhos, examining the glasses herself. “He bleeds when it channels its power through him. Perhaps there has been more long-term damage.” Only a few of the very elderly ever required glasses among the Nephilim—or those whose bodies were cursed to fail them, like Hodge Starkweather. In the normal course of things, Raziel’s blood made his children strong and hardy: immune to mundane illnesses, untouched
by cancers or viruses, death in childbirth almost legendary for its rarity. Blindness, deafness—these things were all but unheard of.

“Perhaps,” the Kleidoukhos agreed, non-committal. “Let us continue.”

They clipped the Vessel’s nails, catching the cuttings in a silk cloth and placing them in an electrum casket that already contained the bloody cloths used to wash him. A lock of his hair followed as the secretari used delicate instruments to measure the width of his skull and the distance between his eyes, apprentices taking careful notes as their teachers dictated. The tiniest scraping of tissue was taken from the scar on his cheek; the Kleidoukhos’ eyes hardened as the Païôn estimated the depth of the injury that had left it. Every freckle was catalogued and mapped like stars in a constellation as the examination moved down the Vessel’s body, tracing the ghosts of old runes, looping cords around his upper arms to measure his developing musculature. The angelic power Mark on his lower left forearm drew particular attention; it was the only permanent Mark on the Vessel.

The Païôn looked to the Kleidoukhos for permission; when the latter nodded, she drew an unlocking rune on the cuff binding the Vessel’s wrist.

The terrible scars revealed as the leather came free drew gasps and shocked hisses from everyone present; more than one healer and secretar reached automatically for gold medals emblazoned with the effigy of the Angel, or made the sign of Raziel: thumbs hooked together, fingers spread like wings to ward off the terrible blasphemy before them.

“Alligatura,” the Païôn said softly, identifying the source of the thick, silver scars that ringed the Vessel’s wrist like flames. “Who would dare?”

“Starkweather,” the Kleidoukhos said grimly.

“That vainottu.” The Païôn glanced at her superior with fire in her eyes. “He must pay for this.”

“A hundred times over,” the Kleidoukhos promised.

Only partially satisfied, the healer returned to her work.

The alligatura scars bisected the enkeli Mark on the Vessel’s wrist and lower forearm. This should have broken the enkeli—for all their power, the Angel’s runes were fragile, and damaging a Mark or the skin it was drawn on drained it of strength, reducing it to a pale, silvery ghost of itself.

But not this time. The Vessel’s enkeli rune almost hummed with power, raising the hairs on the back of the Païôn’s neck when she brushed it with gloved fingertips. When one of the secretari came forward and used a pair of jeweller’s tweezers to place a tiny bead of adamas upon the Mark, the crystal exploded with light the moment it touched the Vessel’s runed skin: one of the apprentices cried out, and even the Kleidoukhos flinched back, shielding her eyes as the blaze flung all their shadows against the walls as if to break them.

There was a pause in the examination as the bead was removed and pens moved furiously over a dozen different books and files.

The cuff was carefully locked around the Vessel’s wrist once more.

The rest of the examination was less dramatic. The Païôn pressed gently at the Vessel’s pectorals and abdomen, took his pulse from his throat and listened to his breathing, dictating comments to one of her underlings, who faithfully transcribed every word. Diagnostic runes confirmed that the Vessel had never broken a bone, nor were there any signs he had ever suffered serious illness. Bound to a bed, they could not weigh him, but the Païôn made estimations, measured his height and the
thickness of his thighs and calves, and confirmed that all was well; the Vessel had less muscle mass than a typical Shadowhunter of his age, height, and gender, no doubt due to his being raised a mundane, but a few months’ training was already beginning to correct that. The skin of his left wrist was just a little paler than that of his right, as if he usually wore some kind of bracelet or cuff there; his fingertips and palms did not yet have a Shadowhunter’s calluses, and there was not yet a voyance rune on the back of his dominant hand.

The secretari’s tests found that unbound adamas, placed within eleven centimetres of his right hand—slack and loose with sleep—was drawn as if magnetised toward’s the Vessel’s palm—and any runed weapon at all, of metal or adamas, was repelled as if that magnetism had been reversed. No Marked thing that held an edge could be brought against his skin; if a wielder fought against that resistance, the Marks flashed gold and burned their hands, making them cry out and let fall their weapons.

After seeing that the Kleidoukhos forbade any attempt to take a blood sample, even with their unrune instruments. They would have to satisfy themselves with the bloodstained cloths that had washed him.

One was removed from the casket; when a Ravener scale (taken from a living demon and preserved in salt and cinnamon until this moment, to prevent it from dissolving along with its source when the Ravener had been killed) was placed on the bloodstain, the scale instantly began to smoke and char: in seconds it was only ash, which did not dematerialise as the remains of dead demons always did. The fur of a werewolf, when it came in contact with the same blood, twisted and writhed as if each strand were a living serpent—but instead of burning the hairs grew longer, and thinner, their animal coarseness smoothing into silkiness. After only a few moments, what had been fur had been transformed into what was clearly human hair. A vampire tooth, given the same treatment, had no visible reaction; but when the same tooth was then dropped into a beaker of holy water, the water did not steam and hiss, and the tooth did not dissolve into black fizz as it should have done.

“Is his blood purifying them of the demonic taint?” the Paiôn whispered, awed. She was not the only one with wide eyes. “Is he curing them?”

“It is too soon to speculate,” the Kleidoukhos said firmly. After a pause, she added, her voice slightly shaken, “Though it does appear so.”

Rowan wood did not burn the Vessel, nor that of the elder tree; there was no reaction to cold iron, salt, or sage; nor ruby, labradorite, or turquoise. Sandalwood incense, lit near the Vessel’s head, curled in a spiral as it rose towards the ceiling; the secretari watched its motions closely. A drop of demon blood, let fall on his skin, smoked and steamed into nothing, leaving no burns behind it—but the Vessel’s pulse grew faster, and his eyes moved beneath his eyelids, his breath coming more shallowly, and the secretar bearing the vial of blood hastily withdrew with it.

It did not seem wise to make the Vessel—or the angel within him—feel threatened. If either the boy or the Celestial was given reason to believe actual demons were present…

There were other tests: candles Marked with telesmes known only to the secretari were placed at six points around the Vessel’s bed; when lit, their flames turned from natural, flickering yellow to a radiant white. Bone dust from the Silent City’s tombs, tossed into the air above the sleeping Vessel, formed geometrically perfect shapes, smoky mandalas of impossible intricacy. When a small bowl of the Kleidoukhos’ own blood was placed on the Vessel’s chest, glittering motes of gold became visible in the crimson; when the bowl was taken away, the gold disappeared.

They had almost performed every examination they could make that did not require the Vessel to be conscious, when one of the younger secretari made a small sound of distress and, in his haste to
make the sign of Raziel, dropped the glass he was holding. It shattered upon the floor, holy water splashing the ankles of half a dozen Nephilim, but he seemed not to notice; his fingers, spread in imitation of the Angel’s wings, trembled like a sparrow’s pinions.

“His foot, Kleidoukhos, Paiôn,” he gasped. “Someone—he—”

He doubled over and was sick.

As his peers gathered to help him and clean up the mess, the heads of the two orders looked for what had disturbed him so. The Paiôn, bending down to inspect the Vessel’s feet, saw it first, though it strained her eyes; what appeared to be a tangle of almost invisibly-pale lines on the soles of both his feet. But it was the Kleidoukhos who, upon seeing it, swore such as even the most experienced healers, long-used to the exclamations of those in terrible pain, had never heard before.

“What is it?” the Paiôn demanded, confused and frightened and growing more horrified by the moment; tracing the faint lines with her fingertip, she recognised the clumsy work of a sharp blade. These were not the work of a stele, these—they had been—

“Someone,” the Kleidoukhos said, sickened and low and enraged, “carved a pair of angelic binding circles into his flesh. Likely when he was an infant.” She might not be a healer, but she had been a Shadowhunter once: she knew scars, and could gauge the age of these at a glance. “And when I find out who, they will wish it was Raziel’s wrath they faced, rather than mine.”

She forced herself to take a slow, deep breath and hold it for a count of 44, before turning like a sword moving from parry to strike. “I want the best surgeons of the Nephilim working with my secretari within the hour. We’re going to break both those circles.”

But despite all their combined expertise, all their experience, all their tests—none of them were prepared for what happened when they did.

NOTES

*Iatroi* is an ancient Greek term for healers.

*Paiôn* is an epithet of the Greek god Apollo. It literally means ‘the healing’, and Homer uses it to designate the physician to the Olympians. Paiôn became the epithet of the healer-god Asclepius, but it was also given to Apollo and Thanatos (Death), because, besides Apollo being a healer-god himself, he and Thanatos were both thought of as gods who delivered men ‘from the pains of sorrows of life’—in other words, sometimes death is a mercy, which seemed a very...Shadowhunter mode of thinking. (Also, Paiôn gives the nod to the word *paean*, which is used to describe both hymns and war-songs. I just couldn’t resist, okay?)

*Iatros* is the singular form of iatroi.
Interlude: Globus Cruciger

Chapter Notes

The second of three interludes! There shall be one more before we get back to the main story, my darlings. I hope the wait is not too painful!

I always swear to myself that I’m going to get around to answering comments this time, and I never do. I’m sorry. I have been having a pretty rough time with the fibromyalgia—facing up to the fact that I have a chronic condition, that I’m physically disabled in a way that’s never going away. (Bar some miraculous medical discovery, which I’m praying for.) You’d think I’d have wrapped my head around it by now, but not so much. I’ve been thinking of the fibro as a pain condition, which sucks, but, you know, I can mostly deal. But the latest found of blood tests has confirmed that this permanent exhaustion I’ve been experiencing for over a year now isn’t some weird illness, it’s just the fibro. And coming to terms with that…well, it’s an ongoing process.

My point being: I don’t generally have the ability to answer, but gods, the comments and reviews you guys leave me have been really beautiful bright spots through all the fog. I love and appreciate every one, and I wanted to say, yet again, thank you. Thank you so much.

Now, enjoy!

Maryse only heard about it afterwards, catching snippets like glimpses of the whole by overhearing scholae who underestimated the range of a pureblood’s hearing. She was escorting a mixed group of Idrian Shadowhunters and inquisitors through the city when it happened; it was only later that she assembled the fragments into something like a whole, but even that crude mosaic was enough to send a chill down her spine.

The picture the whispers sketched for her was this: the Institute’s entryway a wheeling flock of synchronised motion, scholae and secretari and healers and inquisitors all moving around each other as deftly as dancers. Runecasters holding open half a dozen Portals through which supplies and volunteers were being moved; grim-faced Shadowhunters bringing survivors of the massacre in the Silent City for healing, while expressionless golems laid out the dead in neat rows. The Coadjutor—the Consul’s deputy, Gwenaelle Whiteshield—had come for answers, her hair like a spill of dark honey, worn ostentatiously long and loose as only Clave officials were permitted to do. In her official regalia—a traditional palla outer-robe of soft yellow velvet, embroidered in black and gold with the sign of the Clave over her right breast and Raziel bearing the Cup and Sword over her heart, the palla left open over a black vestis robe—she would have looked like the queen of the hive of activity awhirl about her.

All this, Maryse could picture well-enough. It was the next part that threatened to blind the eye of her imagination.

The opening of the Institute’s great doors, swinging smoothly and soundlessly on their hinges. So few would have looked up, busy with their tasks; those that did steal a glance… The afternoon sun slanting in, back-lighting a shadow of a figure, outlining him in a saint’s corona for an instant imprinted upon the world. For a moment, he would have struck them blind; for a moment, their
breaths would have caught in their throats.

And then the second must have shattered, and Alexander, her son—if she focusses, she can almost see it: his height and his pureblood beauty coalescing out of the sun’s glare like an angel stepping down from paradise to alight upon the Institute’s hallowed ground. But instead of Raziel’s golden armour—

Who noticed first? Who saw and realised; who gasped; whose shock drew the attention of those who had not yet seen? Did it spread like ripples in a pool, like a diamond fallen into blood and milk, more and more eyes turning his way, widening at the sight of red and white? Did someone touch the Coadjutor’s arm, or did she turn of her own accord, sensitive to the energy of the room?

Because she did turn; turned and asked “Who else has died?” with harsh urgency, even though he would have had no time to go into mourning yet if one of his parents or siblings had been killed since the secretari’s arrival—

Maryse cannot see Alec’s face, cannot picture his expression as he answered. The whisperers used words like magnetic and regal and serene, and these are all the things she has always wanted her firstborn to be, but she’s never seen it in him and can’t see it now. It’s a struggle to hear him say what he said, impossible to reproduce the tone and intonation he must have used when she plays her recreation in her mind—

“Elias Ruth, and Xia Dolor.”

There must have been so many blank stares. How many of those present could possibly have known those names? They’d meant nothing to Maryse when she overheard the scene being dissected later. Whiteshield’s shock can only have been that they were clearly not Lightwood names, and not that she, Coadjutor of the Clave itself, had memorised the names of a warlock and one of their whelps. Why would she have bothered?

“But those are sureva Marks,” one of Whiteshield’s aides blurted, a young woman so unpolished she could only have been born in some backwater village in northern Idris, to speak as she did—

And even so, Alexander—whose name meant saviour of mankind, whose House was among the Highest, whose blood was of the purest, whose lineage stretched all the way back to Hawisa Lightwood herself—allegedly turned to her without judgement or censure, with a peace like adamas in his eyes and a smile soft as silk and steel on his lips.

“I wear sureva,” the gossips would have it that he said, “because I mourn the deaths of two of my family.”

And because he was not satisfied with just cutting the throat of the Lightwood name, he drove his blade into his House’s heart by adding, “I name and claim Elias and Xia as my kin. I grieve for them with the Spiral Court, and I will wear sureva for as long as it takes the loss of a—a little brother, and an older sister, to begin to heal.”

They say his voice broke a little, when he named Elias Ruth his brother, but Maryse refused to believe it. After everything, after it all, he could not have shamed her still further than he already had.

But she had no difficulty at all in imagining the deathly silence that must have fallen over the hall at her son’s—her House’s paterfamilias!—pronouncement.

He must have bowed, acknowledged Whiteshield properly. He must have begged to be excused,
pleaded exhaustion—it was beyond late for a serving Shadowhunter to be awake. He doesn’t seem to have hinted at a need to reconnect with his agela, which is something—Maryse still can’t decide if the glory of being the generation’s first outweighs the stain of Jace’s place in Alec and Isabelle’s agela, and in either case that was not the right moment to announce it to anyone, least of all the Coadjutor.

It was something. It was not much. All the Clave would know of the Lightwood paterfamilias’ perversity by sunset, and from there it would spread like a plague throughout Idris, to the other castes—to the Downworld, too, if the mutts and bats and blendlings didn’t already know what the Fallen-damned Spiral Court had done.

What her son had done.

No, Maryse wasn’t there when it happened. And by the time she returned to the Institute, it was far, far too late to stop it.

NOTES

The globus cruciger is the proper name for the orb carried by a monarch at their coronation—the jewelled sphere with a crucifix on top.

A coadjutor, to quote Wiki, ‘is a title qualifier indicating that the holder shares the office with another person, with powers equal to the other in all but formal order of precedence.’ It’s generally used for various kinds of bishops, though in Latin it literally means ‘co-assister’.

Given the pattern in canon of naming everything to do with the Nephilim government something beginning with C, I couldn’t resist using it here!

For the Nephilim, a Coadjutor is basically their equivalent of a deputy prime minister (if we take the Consul as a prime minister) or vice-president to the Consul’s president, if you prefer.

A palla is a traditional item of Nephilim clothing, first mentioned in chapter Inquisitor. You can see how I envision it by checking out the red-velvet-over-black (aka, the final photograph) here on my tumblr.

Mutts, bats, and blendlings are Nephilim slurs for werewolves, vampires, and faeries (especially Seelie/Unseelie fae) respectively.
Interlude: Invisible Ink

Chapter Notes

I’M GOING TO WORLDCON! Membership bought, accommodations paid for… I’m so excited – this’ll be my first con of any kind, if you can believe it! Will any of the rest of you be going? It’s in Dublin this year!

And now, for the last of the interludes! Enjoy, darlings! And hey, if you have any theories about Dani…drop them in the comments!

Dani didn’t find it until she was going to bed, checking her pockets on numbed auto-pilot before they went in the laundry basket: a scrap of thin, slightly rough paper, a few shades darker than the kind that went in her mom’s printer in the flower shop’s office.

And, penned in a smooth black scrawl, the words, Missing something?

Dani froze, staring at the stark letters. For a second, her head was filled with white noise and her breath wouldn’t come as she struggled to make sense of it.

Her necklace was gone, and some fucker was taunting her about it. Someone who’d gotten close enough to her to reverse-pickpocket a note into her jeans pocket—which meant they’d been close enough to steal her necklace, too.

It wasn’t just gone. Someone had taken it. A customer at the shop pretending to fuss over her after she’d passed out, maybe, or the EMTs in the ambulance. It hardly mattered: if it really had been stolen, there was almost no chance she would ever see it again. There’d been a chance of a good Samaritan handing it in if they found it lost, but if someone had deliberately taken it…

Her skin crawled, thinking of someone lifting the chain from around her neck while she was unconscious, helpless. But worse was the heavy, tar-like misery pooling in the pit of her stomach, feeling her faint hopes of getting her necklace back drown in the pitch-sticky black.

Tears pricking at her eyes, she crushed the note into a ball and hurled it at the wastepaper basket, the urge to cry clawing its way up her ribs. Abandoning the laundry, she dropped down on her bed, curling up on her side and hugging a pillow as she struggled not to cry. The walls of the apartment were too thin; the last thing her mom needed was more worry for her weepy sometimes-daughter—

She grit her teeth, fighting the salt in her eyes and the fiery lump in her throat. It was okay. It was okay. It was just a necklace. It didn’t matter. She’d be fine without it.

It was just a necklace.

When she no longer felt liable to burst into tears, she settled herself more comfortably. As she put the pillow back at the head of the bed, another note fell out of the pillowcase.

It said, Don’t be like that.

No. No way. Nobody would break into her room to tuck a note into her damn pillowcase, and Dani knew right down to her heart that none of her family would ever play this cruel a trick on her. Not
even Elliot would find something like this funny.

Dani snatched up the note and tore it into little shreds, her hands shaking with rage. And then wanted to kick herself, because it was evidence, wasn’t it? Someone—someone must have been here, they’d broken in, and that meant calling the cops, handing over both notes so they could look for fingerprints or whatever.

A trickle of fragile hope made its way through her anger. If the police got involved, maybe there was some chance she’d get her necklace back after all.

She would tell her mom about the notes tomorrow, she decided. It was late. She’d dig the other note out of the trash and they’d call the cops in the morning. It wasn’t like the thief was going to break in when they were all home.

Right?

She was still thinking about that when she went to brush her teeth. But her thoughts kept catching on the second note, the patronising BS of it. “‘Don’t be like that,’” she muttered, reaching for the cupboard above the bathroom sink. “What the fuck do you want me to be like, you fucker? You stole my—”

I didn’t, actually, said the note propped against her toothbrush, and Dani shrieked and slammed the cupboard door shut again.

“Dani?” Maggie knocked on the bathroom door, her voice full of concern. “You okay in there?”

No, I have some kind of freaky note-stalker! Dani wanted to yell. “I’m fine,” she choked out instead. “Totally fine. Everything’s fine. All is absolutely adequate in here!”

Maggie didn’t say anything for a second, which gave Dani plenty of time to slap herself in the head repeatedly. ‘All is absolutely adequate’? Really, brain? REALLY?

“…Okay,” Maggie said doubtfully. “Just call if you need anything.”

Like psychiatric help? “I will totally do that,” Dani lied, trying to sound cheerful and chill and pretty sure she sounded manic instead.

She waited to hear her sister’s footsteps walk away before gingerly opening the cupboard again.

You’re adorable when you’re flustered, said the new note tucked against the toothpaste, which had definitely, 110% for-sure not been there the first time she’d opened the god-damn cupboard, and Dani made a sound like an enraged emu being strangled.

At the last second, she closed the door gently instead of slamming it the way she wanted to—there was no way Maggie wouldn’t insist her way in if Dani kept up the crashes and bangs. She gripped the edges of the sink, bowing her head over it as she hissed through her teeth. “Motherfucker!” Of all the patronising, stalker-y bullshit—“Come out where I can see you and I’ll show you fucking adorable!”

She wasn’t even surprised when she looked up and saw the ragged-edged scrap of paper half-tucked behind the soap dispenser.

There’s no need. I can see how adorable you are just fine from here.

And Dani realised that her night-friend, her deep-down-self, was laughing, had been laughing at the
notes all along, because only now that she thought of being afraid did she realise that she hadn’t been before. It had been a game, for a second there; a tease and a puzzle and a treasure hunt; even the anger had had amusement threaded through it, like trying to hold onto being mad when you were trying not to laugh.

But it wasn’t funny, even if her night-friend thought it was. Dani’s anger drained out of her, pouring away down the drain as she stared at the note. A sick chill crawled over her skin, curling into a cold, heavy weight in the pit of her stomach. How were these things getting here? The first one could have been slipped into her pocket, and maybe someone—for some inexplicable reason—broke in to tuck the second one into her pillowcase. A creep could have predicted her reaction to the first note well enough to write the second, she guessed.

But the others? There had not been two notes in the cupboard when she first opened it; there had not been one by the hand-soap when she walked into the bathroom. So how the hell had they gotten there? Was somebody really watching? Were there cameras? How could there not be, when the notes were responding to what she was saying? Someone had to be, had to be listening in at the very least to write what they had.

But even if someone had left spy-cameras and listening bugs all over the apartment—which, why would anyone bother?—how the fuck were the notes appearing?

Without another word, she straightened up and left the bathroom. Her steps stuttered a little when she caught sight of another piece of paper tucked into the picture frame of a photograph on the hallway wall—Please don’t do this, as if whoever it was was still watching and had guessed what she was going to do—but she didn’t stop. Couldn’t stop.

“Mom?” she asked hesitantly, stopping in the kitchen doorway.

Rebecca looked exhausted, sitting at the kitchen table with a mug of hot chocolate, and Dani felt guilt claw at her guts as her mom looked up. “Everything okay, ghost?”

For a second, Dani’s throat tightened. Ghost. Short for ghost orchid, the rare flower only found in Cuba and Florida—the way Dani had been found in Florida, appearing out of nowhere on the side of the road like a spirit, a faerie changeling—a ghost. Dani’s other mom, green-thumbed Lacie with her glossy books full of exotic flowers, had coined the pet-name when they took Dani home with them. She’d given them all flower-names: Dani was ghost like Maggie was kad and Elliot was parrot; ghost orchid, kadupal, parrot’s beak flower. The almost-mythical kadupal blossom for the first child Rebecca and Lacie had been able to adopt, something they’d been afraid they would never be able to do, and kad for the play on kid; parrot’s beak for Elliot’s bright, cheerful chatter and his ability to make anyone laugh; and ghost orchid, for their precious mystery baby.

Dani had to swallow hard before she could speak around the lump in her throat. “Not really,” she said softly, apologetically. “I—something really weird’s going on, and I need to show you something.”

Rebecca frowned, but stood up at once, leaving her tea on the table; Dani caught the scent of lemon and passionflower from the delicate blue cup, before Rebecca took her hand and Dani led her away.

“I think someone stole my necklace,” Dani said, the words tumbling over themselves in her efforts to get them out. “And then—I know it sounds crazy, I know, but I think whoever took it broke in while we were at the hospital. They left all these—”

The note tucked into the picture-frame was gone.
No. With a sick certainty, barely hearing her mother’s anxious questions about what she was taking about, Dani saw how the next few minutes were going to go, knew even before they reached the bathroom what they were (not) going to find—

Nothing.

There was no note by the hand-soap, but Dani opened the bathroom cupboard anyway, frantic sparks of desperate hope-confusion-dread blooming like claws in her fingertips. And of course the other two pieces of paper were gone, vanished as if they’d never been, even when Dani yanked toothbrushes and bottles of mouthwash and packs of cotton buds from the shelves and tipped them into the sink, just in case the notes were just hiding among them, behind them—

“Dani!” Her mom’s hands closed over her shoulders. “What are you doing? There’s needles and nail-scissors in there, you’re going to hurt yourself!”

She gently pulled Dani away, and Dani, breathing hard, let herself be pulled, and turned around, and drawn into a tight, shaken hug. She hugged back hard, hiding her face against her mom’s shoulder. Her mom rubbed her back. “Talk to me, ghostie,” Rebecca said softly. “It’s all right, whatever it is. We can figure it out, I promise.”

There were probably plenty of teenagers who wouldn’t have believed her—plenty of kids who wouldn’t or couldn’t put that kind of trust in their parents. Dani wasn’t one of them. Her moms had always been magic—Dani more than half believed they’d made her, summoned her out of the dark space that was her memory before the side of that road and made her real. Hell, they’d managed to build a successful small business as an openly gay couple—in Florida. They’d convinced Florida’s social services to let two lesbians adopt not one, but three children—and when one of those kids had admitted to sometimes being Danielle as well as Daniel, they’d sharpened their nails and tongues and knowledge of the law, and gone to war with the school board until s/he could present however s/he damn well pleased.

And when the cancer came for Lacie, Rebecca held them all together, even as her wife was dying. Next to that, water into wine was a parlour trick.

“There were notes,” Dani said quietly. “In my pocket, and in here, in the cupboard. From the person who took my necklace.” I didn’t, actually, the writer had claimed, she remembered belatedly, but seriously, they couldn’t expect her to actually believe them? “But now I can’t find them.”

Rebecca’s hand moved from Dani’s back to her hair, stroking it for a few moments in silence. “Let’s look for them together,” she said finally. “Where did you see them?”

Dani hugged her so tightly her arms ached in protest; her mom hugged her back just as fiercely.

They dismantled the bathroom together: methodically, and quietly, so as not to disturb Mags and Elliot. Dani knew she and her mom weren’t going to find them, but she couldn’t make herself not look. Eventually, though, they had no choice but to admit defeat and put everything back in its place.

“What about the one in your pocket?” Rebecca asked, and Dani loved her so much.

That one was gone too, though. And so were the bits and pieces of the note she’d torn up, because of course they were.

“I saw them,” Dani said miserably, sitting on her bed beside her mom. “I held them, mom. I swear I’m not making this up.”
Oh, ghost, I’d never think you were.” Her mom slung an arm around her shoulders and pulled her close; Dani leaned into her. “But you’ve had a pretty rough day, honeybee. Maybe you fell asleep and dreamed it all. Sleepwalked to the bathroom.” She stroked Dani’s hair again. “It wouldn’t be the weirdest thing you’d done while you were asleep, would it?”

Dani shook her head slowly.

Rebecca kissed her daughter’s hair. “I was with you in the ambulance,” she said, “and afterwards, too. If someone had stolen your necklace, I would have noticed.” Her voice was so soft, and kind, and full of love; Dani closed her eyes. “I think that old chain just finally broke in all the chaos. It was as old as you,” she added, gently teasing.

Her mom had a good point. Several, in fact. And didn’t it just make more sense, than the idea that someone would take a pendant that couldn’t be worth much, and then break in to leave weird notes about it?

“I know how much it meant to you,” her mom said, more seriously. “I don’t think it’s so strange that you might dream about it like that.” She ducked her head to peek at Dani’s face. “But if you’re worried, we can go back to the doctor in the morning.”

“No,” Dani said. “You’re right. It was probably—it was just a dream.” She had to swallow, her throat gone tight again. “I guess my brain was just—making up an explanation. Because if there was a reason my necklace was missing, I might be able to figure it out and get it back.”

Her mom sat in silence with her for a minute. “I can’t promise you we’ll find it,” she said finally. “But I promise we’ll do everything we can. Okay?”

Dani nodded. “Okay.” She sighed. “I think I just want to go to bed.”

“Far be it from me to tell a teenager she has to stay up late.” Rebecca kissed Dani’s cheek and stood up. “I love you, ghost.”

Dani smiled, her gratitude eclipsing, however briefly, the ache of loss. “I love you too, mom.”

Before Rebecca could quite reach the door, Dani said, “Mom?”

Her mom turned back to her. “Yes, ghost?” There was nothing but love and patience in those two words. Rebecca would stay up all night if Dani needed her, and never complain even inside her own head, and both of them knew it.

Dani drummed her fingers nervously on her thigh. “What about before the ambulance?” she asked in a rush.

“Maggie got to you first,” her mom said. “She sent Elliot to get me and call an ambulance.” Rebecca paused. “She did say that someone else caught you when you fell,” she admitted.

Dani’s heart was pounding. “Who?”

“Not one of the regulars,” Rebecca said. “A young man. Mags thought he was about her age.” She smiled a little. “She said it was like he teleported. Came out of nowhere to catch you and make sure you didn’t hit your head. But Maggie was only a second or two behind him. She wouldn’t have let him take your necklace either.”

“No, I know.” Dani couldn’t put a name to what she was feeling; a kind of taut-wire anticipation, an electric restlessness, a swirl of something sharp and confusing. “I wish I could tell him thanks,
though.”

Her mom shrugged. “Maybe he’ll come back. Your knight in shining armour,” she teased with a sudden grin. “They usually come back and check in on their damsels in distress, don’t they?”

“Oh my god, I am not a damsel in distress!”

Rebecca laughed. “He had black hair and tattoos, Mags said. You can keep an eye out for him.”

Her mom retreated down the hallway, still laughing to herself, and Dani went back to the bathroom to brush her teeth. If this was a story, she thought, he would come back to see me. And he’d probably have my necklace, too.

She avoided looking at the mirrored bathroom cupboard when she spit, so she wouldn’t have to see her naked throat.

She was lying in bed a few minutes later, lights off and eyes closed—and her skin too tight. Dani held herself still but inside her her night-friend was restless and snappish; Dani pictured a tiger pacing around and around its cage, striped tail whipping, a growl rumbling in its throat. It was too abrupt an ending, it insisted; too simple, too easy, unfinished. Under the blanket Dani’s fingers twitched, her tendons aching to flex; her hands wanted another note to pick up, her eyes wanted more of those looping letters to read. She felt as though she’d been in the middle of a really great book, and someone had taken it away from her halfway through.

Except this isn’t a story, it’s my life, Dani thought at her night-friend. And what was that earlier, anyway? You’re supposed to protect me, not make friends with my stalker!

Her night-friend didn’t answer in words—it never did—but Dani had the distinct impression it was rolling its metaphorical eyes at her.

Maybe it hadn’t been trying to protect her because the threat hadn’t been real. Maybe it had treated it like a game because it had just been a dream.

The tiger in her imagination growled louder, and she felt her night-friend’s annoyance.

“Well, what then?” Dani hissed out loud. The fuck is going on? If it wasn’t a dream, why did the notes disappear? Why did you act like someone was flirting with me instead of creepily spying on me in a bathroom?

The image changed; Dani saw-sensed a tiger-cub stalking a big, shiny bug, practically hopping with excitement. Crouching in the grass. Springing, with pure glee, on the pretty, skittering bug. Batting it between fluffy paws and play-growling at it.

This is not a game! Dani yelled internally. And if it is a game, then I’m the bug! This is not cool! I don’t want to be the bug!

A pause. Then, with an almost conciliatory air, her night-friend offered her a montage of a pair of cubs playing together, mock-growling and scuffling with each other. Excitement and happiness practically radiated from the mental video clip.

Dani responded by mentally banging her head against a desk.

She tossed and turned, as if settling her body would settle her mind, too. It didn’t work: she closed her eyes, but only saw the last moments before she passed out in the shop play over and over again. She strained for some glimpse of a dark-haired, tattooed guy, but there was nothing.
She must have started to drift off without realising it, though, because she saw dark blue scales, a flick of a blade-tipped tail, wings like a dragon’s shimmering black and blue and green...

It was almost four when she woke up again, needing the bathroom. The apartment was quiet: light showed through the crack at the bottom of Maggie’s door, suggesting their family’s own Hermione Granger was lost in a book, but everyone else seemed to be asleep.

Washing her hands afterwards, Dani glanced automatically, habitually, at the mirror again.

And was suddenly wide awake.

She rubbed her hands perfunctorily on her pyjama pants to dry them, and snatched down the note pinned to the glass, her chest suddenly too small, too tight for her pounding heart.

*You’re not dreaming.*

*But you are asleep.*

*It’s time to wake up.*

Dani’s hands were shaking. She fumbled her grip, and the note slipped through her fingers.

For a second it skimmed a loose, downwards spiral, like a leaf or petal of paper, not so much falling as drifting gently towards the floor. She should have been able to catch it again easily.

But as her fingertips brushed against it, it twisted into a whorl of ink-black fire. Dani whipped her hand back, too shocked to shout, staring in disbelief at the flame that curled in on itself and dissolved into fine, dusty ashes. They fell into the still-damp sink, smearing dark streaks on the porcelain.

Her mind was white noise and electric snow, a long string of exclamation marks. !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The last line of the note. She’d just had time to read it before it burned.

*Find Simon.*

In the mirror, eyes with black whites and white pupils stared back at her from a face that was not hers, but that was *hers.*

*Find Simon.*

Black fire. Impossible notes. An unearthly, uncanny face that managed to embody everything s/he was—Danielle and Daniel, Dani and D and Ghost—all at once and together.

*Find Simon.*

And in the glass, Dani’s night-friend said *yes.*

**NOTES**

The note Dani finds is written on sugarcane paper, not the kind of copy paper most of us are used to!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!