**Bitter Sweet Symphony**

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**Bitter Sweet Symphony**

by [DownworldShadow](http://archiveofourown.org/users/DownworldShadow)

**Summary**

When young, up-and-coming cellist Alexander Lightwood heads to Aspen, Colorado to attend the prestigious Aspen Music Festival he has no idea what destiny awaits him there. This is an alternate universe Malec love story full of twists and turns, triumphs and tragedies. Asking one of life's most difficult questions... does true love really conquer all?
The Overture

Chapter Summary

Thank you to Mundane Lion for creating the amazing fanart featured in chapters 1, 6 and 21! :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your Captain speaking. We are beginning our initial descent into the Denver International Airport. Local time is 10:15 AM and the temperature on the ground is reading a cool 71 degrees. Winds are out of the north-northwest at 15 miles per hour and the dew point is holding steady. Please make sure your seatbacks and tray tables are in their full, upright and locked positions. We should have you at the gate in just about 15 minutes. If you have a connection to make here in Denver please be sure to check the monitors inside the terminal. On behalf of the entire flight crew I’d like to take this time to thank you for choosing United Airlines. We hope your stay here in Denver, rather it’s for business or pleasure, is a nice one. If you’ve enjoyed your flight with us today we invite you to choose United for all your future travel needs. As always, it’s been my pleasure
serving as your Captain.”

Alec reached down and fumbled for the button to bring his seatback forward. He’d lost track of time while reading and completely forgotten to look out the window to see the Rocky Mountains. The lady seated next to him must have had the same idea because her body was turned at an awkward angle hogging the entire view. Alec guessed that was the price he’d have to pay for choosing an aisle seat. Being 6’ 4” wasn’t easy when it came to flying coach. His leg room was always the top priority. After drink service had finished he’d spent the remainder of the flight lounged back with his legs extended well into the aisle; only moving them when another passenger headed to the lavatory. It might have been a bit rude, but he was willing to sacrifice kindness for comfort.

As they prepared for landing Alec folded his legs back in front of him, his knees scraping against the hinge of the tray table. He stifled a yelp.

A dull throbbing pain ensued as the plane continued its steady decline. Alec tried to readjust his body, but no comfortable position could be found. He glanced down at his watch, *ten more minutes of this torture*, and he felt the annoying butterflies return to his stomach once again. He was nervous. And not just your run of the mill everyday sort of nervous, but actually terrified. Alec didn’t know why this overwhelming feeling of dread had plaguing him, he’d participated in these types of programs for years. But there was definitely something he just couldn’t quite put his finger on.

Alec slid the book he’d been reading back into his backpack and shoved it under the seat in front of him. He reinserted his earbuds, tightened his seatbelt, and clicked play on his iPhone. *The Swan* by Camille Saint-Saëns was next up on his appropriately named “Colorado” playlist.

*Perfect.*

Alec sat back and closed his eyes allowing the tempo to regulate his breathing, even and slow. He imagined the butterflies taking flight from his abdomen, drifting out of the plane and into the sky. Bringing him back to a quiet and peaceful relaxation. The imagery and the melody worked better to relieve his stress than any drug on the market ever could. His irrational fears subsided as he lost himself in the music.

Once on the ground Alec could only think of one thing; get to baggage claim as quickly as possible and retrieve his baby. Anytime he traveled with *her* there was always this moment of crippling panic before they were reunited. His wild imagination giving him glimpses of all manner of tragedies. From cracked plastic and shattered wood, to twisted metal or even worse... lost luggage. He navigated his way through the terminal and followed the signs marked “Large and Oversized Items,” holding his breath the entire time. The feel inside the airport was like being in some sort of futuristic circus tent. The ceiling appeared to be made of sharply pitched bright white fabric that had been hoisted on poles. All they needed now was a procession of elephants to complete the theme. Very different from the cramped and dirty LaGuardia airport he’d left from.

Once he arrived at the large item claim it was a total madhouse. Dozens of 20-somethings crowded around the conveyor sporting all manner of braggadocious outerwear. Names like Tanglewood, Oberlin, Steppenwolf, Brevard, Ravinia, Interlochen, and of course Julliard. Alec chuckled to himself as he looked down at his own sweatshirt which was solid gray, stained with coffee, and riddled with a series of tiny holes along the bottom hem. It represented what he was truly most proud of, being the only person present who wasn’t thoroughly shoved up their own ass.

After waiting a few moments the alarm sounded and the belt chugged to a squeaky start. The parade of instrument cases emerged: French horns, bassoons, double base, and trombones were all quickly
being snatched up by their awaiting owners. Most cases were black and many were covered in assorted stickers representing the same impressive list of locations as their corresponding outerwear. You could almost match the case to the person without even knowing them.

So typical.

When Alec finally saw her come into view she was like a shining white stallion blazing through a field of dull black cows. Every eye in the crowd immediately went to the belt with an audible gasp. She was breathtaking perfection really, worth every penny of her $2,800 price tag. Alec took a deep and grateful exhale when he saw she was unblemished and unmarred.

“Pardon me,” Alec called out from behind. The group of kids surrounding him turned to look then quickly parted like the Red Sea. It only took a fraction of a second for most of them to know exactly who he was. Their eyeballs practically popping from their sockets, their mouths hanging open in awe. Alec wound his way through the widening path to retrieve his case from the conveyor unobstructed. There were whispers from all sides…

“That’s him!”

“Yes… I know!”

“Oh my God, I can’t breathe!”

“Fuck, I didn’t know he would be here. There goes first chair!”

“He’s so hot… is he straight?”

“I saw him at Tanglewood last summer, fucking brilliant!”

“Jesus he’s so tall!”

“What a prick!”

“Did you see that case? Friggin’ Accord Flight!”

“Aren’t those like 3 grand?”

“It’s Kevlar for God’s sake!”

“I heard they made the white one just for him… exclusively!”

“What a lucky bastard.”

Alec didn’t acknowledge anything that was said or even let on he could hear their comments. He was an expert at playing the stoic loner. But of course he did hear them, he always heard every word. No matter how many places he went it was always the same thing. Everyone wanted to either punch him, fuck him, or get his autograph. Infamous already at the age of 22.

Alec carefully hoisted his cello case onto his back and headed off from his gawking peers. He could feel their eyes boring into his back as he walked away.

“Stella baby,” Alec spoke lovingly to his cello, only feeling he was a complete human being when her weight was added to his own. An unapologetic smile sprang to his lips as he made his way to the escalator. “I’m so glad you’re OK.”

World renowned instrument maker Peter Moes and his wife Wendela had built this cello for Alec a
year ago and he’d been in love with her ever since. The magic they made together was undeniable
and he’d named her Stella after his favorite movie, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He hated the thought
of her bouncing around in the belly of the plane and he’d actually contemplated driving from New
York just so they wouldn’t have to be separated. But the new case had given him some peace of
mind, and Peter had already promised him he would be at his “beck and call” should she ever need a
repair.

Alec desperately longed to blend in and disappear during these painfully long summer music
festivals. He’d been attending them since he was a child and each summer his name had only grown
more and more well known. He often daydreamed about arriving to find nobody had heard of him
and he could anonymously stroll around town like a regular person. But those daydreams would only
ever be dreams when it came to the ever shrinking music world he lived in. Everyone knows
everyone and nobody ever forgets your triumphs or your failures. Most would think this type of
community would embrace one another in the bonds of musical brotherhood, but so far he’d only
encountered jealousy, greed, and manipulation. It was a lonely life.

As Alec headed back up to the main concourse he was met by a wall of huge floor to ceiling
windows that revealed a stunning view of the Rocky Mountains. He stopped to stare for a moment,
even taking out his phone to snap a few pictures, as most people bustled right past without a glance.
The mountains were surreal in their grace and grandeur, almost like a postcard had been blown up
and taped to the glass. Their snowy peaks painted with an artist’s brushstrokes, so majestic and awe
inspiring. How could this beauty possibly exist in such a mundane world?

“Twelve weeks Stells… I think we can handle this,” Alec spoke aloud to his cello again. A habit that
had only intensified since graduating from the Manhattan School of Music three weeks ago. Life
after college was proving to be a whole new level of loneliness, and Stella was his only companion.
He’d always been a quiet and reserved type of guy, and he wondered how crazy he really looked
talking to himself in public. He’d even joked he might buy a Bluetooth just to look less odd.

After ogling the view for a little while longer Alec managed to pull himself away from the windows
and continue down the walkway. Once near the exit he encountered a large group of men, all
dressed in black suits, holding up various signs and iPads with people’s names scrawled across them.
He scanned the crowd until he saw a small clipboard with a bright white page that read “Alexander
Lightwood.” He walked over and nodded to let the driver know he was the one he was looking for.

The very friendly and smiling man stepped forward eagerly.

“Mr. Lightwood, I presume?”

“Uhh, yeah, that’s me,” Alec responded timidly.

“Fabulous! Welcome to Colorado Mr. Lightwood, may I take your case for you?”

Alec cocked his head and squinted his eyes at the man like he might have just said, *May I slice off
your arms and legs for you*, and quickly replied. “Err, no thanks, I’ve got it.”

The man smiled and headed off towards the exit doors while reciting a very well-practiced speech.

“Mr. Lightwood sir, my name is Hodge, and I’m pleased to welcome you to the Mile High City!
Here where the mountains are high and the beer is always cold! We are home to some of the nation’s
best sports teams. The Broncos, the Nuggets, the Avalanche, and of course my personal favorite, the
Colorado Rockies! Are you a sports fan Mr. Lightwood?”

“Ah, not really.” Alec hadn’t followed sports, much to his father’s chagrin.
“Well I guess that makes sense. You musical types never do seem too interested in my sports talk. I’ve been driving kids up into the mountains the past ten summers in a row. Its easy money and I enjoy the drive. Of course Glenwood Canyon is a breeze this time of year. Don’t need chains on my tires!”

Alec quietly followed behind several paces, he really didn’t like making small talk. He decided that as soon as he got to the car he would put in his earbuds and fake like he couldn’t hear. He’d go back to his playlist and focus on his repertoire. A much better use of his time over the 3 and ½ hour drive than a forced and awkward conversation. With that thought the butterflies kicked up in his stomach again. The nagging sense of dread he’d been feeling for days just wouldn’t let him be.

The car was a sleek and shiny black Lincoln town car. Alec felt right at home. He refused the driver’s offer of help again with loading Stella into the trunk. He felt much more comfortable doing it himself. He carefully guided her under the hood and gently laid her down like a sleeping princess. The driver eyed him suspiciously before slamming down the hatch.

“Climb on in sir, can I get you a cold bottle of Fiji water or Pellegrino?”

“Uh sure, Fiji is cool,” Alec replied, fishing for his earbuds.

The man happily supplied Alec with the bottled water then noticed the earbuds and took the hint that his time for talking was over.

Alec eased into the back seat and closed his eyes. He’d been up since 4:00 AM, his mother insisting he head to the airport much too early, and he craved sleep. He started up his playlist again, Elgar’s Cello Concerto… good Alec thought, nice and long.

Once the car made its way out of the city and passed Mile High Stadium the landscape began to change. The boring concrete and office buildings were being replaced by rolling foothills covered in bright green grass. Alec couldn’t help but open his eyes as the mountains came closer to view. He felt mesmerized by their enormity. It was almost a feeling of vertigo looking up at them. It definitely created a feeling of unease in the pit of his stomach. Alec had spent the majority of his life along the east coast, New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut especially. The mountains he was used to weren’t nearly as grand. About halfway up he noticed the trees stopped growing, not enough oxygen up there for them he guessed, which of course must be how they got their name.

The highway cut a path into the mountains and sheer rocky cliffs rose on either side of the car. They passed exits for all types of ski resorts and lodges: Breckenridge, Vail, Copper Mountain, and Beaver Creek. All places his friends and relatives had traveled to on ski trips, although Alec had never gone with them. He also saw yellow caution signs advising drivers to pullover and equip their cars with chains for the snow. Alec suddenly felt very glad it was the beginning of summer instead of winter. Ice and snow covered roads thousands of feet from the ground wouldn’t have helped his nerves.

About halfway through their journey they passed a sign announcing the entrance into Glenwood Canyon. Alec slid to the driver’s side of the car to look down at a thin ribbon of river crested with choppy white rapids. He’d never been whitewater rafting before but he thought it sounded fun. Alec loved the outdoors, mostly because his New York City upbringing hadn’t offered anything more than Saturday’s spent in Central Park. Which at the time seemed like a treat but after seeing what the rest of the world had to offer paled in comparison.

“Just a warning sir, we’re approaching a very long tunnel, so you won’t have any cell phone service for a bit,” the driver told him.

Alec leaned forward to peer out the windshield as the mouth of the tunnel loomed. His stomach did a
“Sir... Sir... I’m sorry to wake you,” Hodge called out, rousing Alec from a deep and dreamless sleep.

Alec stirred awake, blinking against the sudden very bright and blinding light. His eyes adjusted slowly revealing a large Tudor style home right at the base of a very large and assuming mountain.

“Wow, is this it?” Alec asked in amazement.

“Hendel House, yes Sir, this is the place,” the driver said with a smile.

Alec climbed out of the back of the car and lifted his hand to his forehead to block the sun. So this is home, he said to himself admiring the somewhat out of place European looking structure. Alec saw a handful of people milling just inside the front door, some were looking at the car and talking amongst themselves.

“Thank you… uhhh… I’m sorry I’ve forgotten your name?”

“Hodge, Sir,” the driver replied.

“Yes, Hodge, right, so sorry. Thank you Hodge,” Alec responded, slipping a crisp one hundred dollar bill into his palm.

“Thank you so much, let me get your case,” Hodge said, rushing towards the trunk.

“If you can just pop the trunk I’ll take it from here, thanks.” Alec didn’t want him laying one finger on Stella.

As the driver pulled away Alec turned and looked down the road towards town. It was really a very quaint looking place. He could see from one end to the other from his slightly raised vantage point and it was almost like being inside the mouth of a volcano. Mountains rising on all sides with the low lying buildings clustered in the center. Not really what one would expect a wealthy man’s playground to look like, and yet it somehow made sense. Alec very much looked forward to exploring later but for now he had to find his room.

With Stella snug to his back Alec made his way inside Hendel House. A young woman with a bright beaming smile welcomed him at the door.

“Hello there, welcome to Hendel House and welcome to the Aspen Music Festival! My name is Maureen and I’m your festival liaison. What is your name please?”

“Uhhh… I’m Alec… Alexander I mean… Lightwood,” Alec responded, not use to people asking...
who he was.

“Maureen! Are you kidding me! Do you live on Mars!” someone burst out behind her. “I swear singers are the worst! I am so, so sorry Mr. Lightwood, it is an honor and a privilege to meet you. My name is Simon Lewis and I’m a big, big fan of yours,” said a slightly nerdy looking guy with glasses that were way too big for his face. “I’m a sophomore at BU and I saw your concert at Tanglewood last summer, and oh my God it was incredible! I mean really, really amazing! My sister went with me and she cried openly… like full on boo-hoo’ing like a baby! We had to ask people for tissues, it was so embarrassing. But man you were just so fucking great, oops, I mean just really, really freaking great. I’m super stoked to meet you right now!”

Alec stood silent for a moment, feeling his insides liquefy, then let his inner New Yorker flow. “Wow buddy, I think you just said all of that in one breath, way to go,” he replied with a cocky smile.

Maureen burst out laughing, practically doubling over with amusement, while Simon was frozen in place and slightly mortified.

“Ha, yeah, sorry about that. I tend to talk too much when I get excited. But seeing you here is literally like the icing on the cake of my day! I didn’t even think I’d be accepted to the program and now I’m here talking to a living legend!!” Simon’s voice kept raising louder and louder, as other people gathered around to see what all the fuss was about.

Alec felt his cheeks begin to flush crimson, he hated that about himself. He could never hide his embarrassment, and being overly complimented was always the worst. As soon as it hit the blood rushed instantly to his face. He always felt much more comfortable with haters ripping him apart than having to accept any praise. His face was burning as he clamped his hands around the straps of Stella’s case praying he could somehow escape the scene.

“Yeah… thanks for that. Uh, so, I’d love to get to my room if that’s OK. I’m super tired from the long trip,” Alec suggested, anxious to steer the subject away from his music.

“Of course, yeah, so sorry man. We’ve got a welcome packet for you here. It’s got your room assignment and all your orientation stuff. There’s maps in there and guides to the festival. Pretty much everything you’ll need. Looks like you’re on the 3rd floor, room 311. That’s a nice one, it’s at the end of the hall with a private bath. You’re lucky!”

Alec took the packet and shoved it under his armpit. “Thanks Samuel.”

“Uh, it’s Simon actually, Simon Lewis. But hey, you can call me Samuel if you want. I’ll just tell everyone it’s your nickname for me!” Simon said with a sappy puppy-dog smile.

Alec felt his cheeks blaze again, this guy was too much. “Sorry, Simon,” Alec sputtered as he slowly backed away towards the stairs.

“See ya around Mr. Lightwood!” Simon called out to him, waving his arm frantically. “Let us know if you need anything at all!”

Alec turned to flee, feeling flustered and rattled.
Finally at the top of the stairs Alec had a chance to breathe again, free at last from the annoying Simon Lewis. He took a moment to observe the décor and soak in all the ambiance. The house was very whimsical, yet slightly peculiar. Lace curtains, cuckoo clocks, and dark wood paneling covered the walls. It was a traditional ski chalet which obviously would be booming with vacationers during the winter months. But in the summertime it was used as housing for the invited guests of the festival. Guests were a step above the regular students but not quite at the level of the *artists in residence*. Alec was lucky he had his own room and a private bath. That was a luxury for sure.

“Hey,” a voice called out behind him. Alec cringed, hoping it wasn’t about to be another Simon type encounter. But he was immediately relieved of that notion when he saw a stunning blonde with a killer smile coming up the stairs behind him.

*Shit,* Alec thought to himself, just my type.

“Hey… I’m Jace, you up here on 3 as well?” he asked, revealing a gleaming set of perfectly white teeth.

“Hey, I’m Alec. Uh yeah, room 311 according to this,” Alec replied, his cheeks once again betraying him.

“Cool, I’m 309, right next door.”

“Cool,” Alec imitated, wondering if he could immediately put in for a housing change. This guy looked like trouble with a capitol T. And his eyes were so blue Alec thought he might start drooling on his welcome packet.

“Nice case, my roommate back at IU was a cellist. He would have killed for that. I’m viola by the way,” Jace asserted as Alec tried to advert his eyes from his glorious looking face and focus on the room numbers.

“311, here it is,” Alec mumbled as he fished the key from his packet and unlocked the door. He could have guessed Jace was either violin or viola by the dark red patch of dead skin calloused under his jawline. A badge of honor signifying years of hard work and sacrifice.

Jace reached out and slapped Alec hard on the back. “I’ll let you get settled then, but come find me later. I’m dying to get over to the lodge and inspect the fresh meat. The ladies are crazy horny at this altitude and I wouldn’t want to deny them all of this,” he said with a wink. Pointing both thumbs at his chest.

*Straight, of course,* Alec thought to himself as he gave Jace a halfhearted fist bump then waved goodbye.

“Well Stella, I guess that’s one less thing we have to worry about,” Alec said as he removed his cello case from his aching back, feeling glad but also a bit disappointed. He really didn’t want the distraction of a summer fling anyway, although it would have been the perfect place for one. The majestic mountains and stunning views seemed like the ideal setting for a short-lived, yet passionate affair. Alec placed his case on the bed and gently unlatched the locks.

“Here we are baby, home sweet home,” Alec said lovingly as he lifted Stella from her safe cocoon. “Take a deep breath of this thin mountain air, we might as well both be lightheaded together.”
Alec spent the rest of the day getting settled in his new home. Five large boxes he’d shipped ahead had arrived with all of his clothes, books, sheet music, portable stands, extra strings, etc. Everything he would need for the summer as well as his tux and 3 new suits. He’d also managed to find the practice facilities, which ironically looked like something out of the movie Friday the 13th. They were small wooden cabins in the middle of the woods that backed up to a bubbling creek. Inside each one there was a piano with a bench, and a chair and stand. Pretty basic. But the views out the back were really lovely. The winding creek that gurgled past was picture perfect. Alec would spend most of his daytime hours practicing so it was nice to have something pretty to look at instead of four white walls.

The festival ran shuttles to and from Hendel House that went on a loop from the main lodge up to the school campus, then over to the festival center and down to the main performance tent. Which really wasn’t a tent but more like a gorgeous outdoor amphitheater. Most everyone who was taking part in the summer program was housed at the lodge, cramped four to a room. Their shuttle stop had a swarm of bodies pushing and shoveling, vying to get in. There were young people of all ages laden with cumbersome instrument cases. They gossiped loudly and bummed cigarettes off one another. Often times Alec felt like he was the only musician who didn’t smoke. The smell really bothered him, so as the kids squeezed in Alec shifted as close to the window as possible. He pulled down the brim of his Yankees cap hoping not to be recognized.

Note to self, rent a car as soon as possible.

After a long ride cramped inside a tight shuttle Alec was glad to finally be back to Hendel House. He purposely fell back from the others so he wouldn’t have to walk in with anyone. The Simon incident had traumatized him thoroughly.

Once everyone was gone Alec climbed the stairs up to the 3rd floor and headed for his room. He was almost to the door when he was suddenly lay waited by an overly excited Jace.

“Alec! Where the hell have you been brother! Come on, you’re coming with me. I desperately need a wing man and every guy in this house is either locked in a practice room or gay.”

Alec winced, realizing he was exactly both of those things and absolutely hated fitting into this stereotype.

“Come on, this is our only night before the festival starts tomorrow. Then we’re gonna be so damn busy we’ll never have a chance to hang.” Jace hooked one arm under Alec’s and began pulling him back down the hall.

Alec allowed himself to be dragged along, feeling this was probably going to be a very bad idea. Clearly Jace would have refused to take no for an answer, so really what choice did he have.

Alec and Jace took a short but steeply sloped walk from Hendel House into the heart of downtown Aspen. The sun had set and the streets were full of people. It was an odd mix of musicians, tourists, locals, and celebrities. Alec had already seen plenty of famous faces earlier that day. Oprah had ridden past him on her bike, and Jason Bateman had accidentally bumped into him while crossing the street. But nobody around seemed to care or even notice. It was indeed a strange fairytale-esque world.
The streets were paved with red bricks and the buildings were all low-rise, no more than 2 or 3 stories each. As they walked along none of the businesses seemed to have signs, just small square wooden placards letting customers know what retailer was inside. Alec thought this must be some kind of town ordinance. Apparently they didn’t like the looks of brightly lit signs interfering with their collective awesomeness.

*Man they must hate New York.*

As they walked along the sidewalk there were tons of gourmet restaurants and classy little bistros ready to cater to the world’s elite. The local shops featured all the designer name you’d expect. It was *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* mixed with a dash of western flare. The most popular décor being chandeliers made out of antlers and coffee tables made from old wagon wheels, both of which cost more than most people’s rent.

Jace was slightly ahead, striding confidently with both hands shoved into his pockets, a dazzling smile plastered across his face. “I found this amazing Mexican place last summer, killer margaritas,” he bragged, not really asking Alec what he wanted to do, or if he even liked Mexican food. Alec imagined Jace was used to being in control so he shrugged *Okay* and let him lead the way.

The Mexican spot turned out to be pretty fantastic. They sat outside on a large verandah underneath dangling fairy lights and brightly colored rows of flags as an amazing guitarist played a selection of Villa-Lobos preludes. Alec had always loved classical guitar, he’d picked it up pretty easily, as most string players do. He decided he’d call his mom tomorrow and have her send it out. Just to play for fun during downtime. He imagined himself strolling up the mountainside with his guitar strumming it like Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*.

*I’ve officially lost my mind.*

After some appetizers and margaritas Jace said they should move on to another little hole in the wall spot he promised would also be great.

*Jace sure knows his way around.*

When they arrived Alec could tell by the crowd inside it must be a popular place. All of the tables were draped with red and white checkered tablecloths and the walls were covered in dark wood paneling. Apparently wood paneling might also be a town ordinance Alec thought, laughing to himself. They bellied up to the bar and ordered a pitcher of beer. Jace shook hands with the bartender and spoke to him like an old friend.

*This guy knows everyone.*

As the night went on Jace hadn’t really mentioned music, which Alec found to be odd. Normally when in the company of a fellow musician it would be the only topic of conversation. Where did you study, who was your professor… scholarships, fellowships, blah, blah, blah. As well as a rundown of your greatest achievements, awards, and performances. But Jace was more interested in talking about his travel adventures and latest female conquests. While Alec simply nodded and faked interest. After Jace had told him for about the hundredth time to “check out that hot girl over there” Alec finally decided to break it to him.

“Yeah, so Jace, I didn’t mention this earlier, but I’m actually gay,” Alec told him plainly.

Jace’s eyes widened, “Really? Wow! I have to say I’m pretty shocked. Normally my gay-dar is deadly accurate. But it’s cool, we can check out some dudes if you want. I don’t mind helping you out. I’m sure you’ll make somebody a lucky man one day,” Jace taunted with a flirty wink. Alec
laughed raucously and immediately realized he was most definitely drunk. Really, really drunk in fact. He wasn’t accustomed to heavy drinking, or really any type of drinking. It was very unlike him. But the alcohol had lowered his inhibitions to the point where he couldn’t contain his boisterous laughter. Soon Jace caught the bug and they were both completely pissed and snickering like teenagers.

“You want me to send a round of drinks to that table of guys over there? Just point to the ones you like and I’ll handle the rest,” Jace needled him. But he said it in a way where Alec knew he would really do it if he wanted him to, which Alec found to be quite endearing.

“No man, it’s OK, I’m good,” Alec replied, his cheeks igniting with their telltale blush again.

“Are you seriously blushing right now? Oh my God!” Jace boomed out way too loud, pointing at his face. “You are blushing!”

“It’s the booze, that’s all,” Alec lied, which only made his cheeks doubly red.

“Seriously you are adorable! Isn’t he adorable?” Jace said to a group of girls sitting to his left. They all leaned forward and looked down the bar at Alec, waving and winking at him.

“I’m going to kill you,” Alec mumbled, shrinking down in his barstool.

“I can’t believe I embarrassed you so easily! Holy shit… are you a virgin?” Jace blurted out.

Alec was mortified.

“Shit man, I am so sorry. I didn’t mean for that to come out so loud. It’s totally cool though, I was a virgin once too. Granted it was about 8 years ago, but still. I can remember it… sort of,” Jace said with wink, elbowing Alec in the ribs.

Alec shook his head, wishing he could disappear from this insanely awkward conversation with a guy he’d only known one day.

“I haven’t dated a lot because I’ve been dedicated to my music, and my career. It was a choice… a sacrifice really… so that I could be successful. And for the record, I don’t regret it one bit.” Alec wasn’t sure why he felt the need to defend himself. He wasn’t ashamed at all of who he was. He was just a very private person who was proud of all he’d accomplished… even if Jace thought it was a joke.

“Hey, don’t listen to my bullshit. I’m always a prick when I drink too much. Let’s get out of here and go find some fun!” Jace grabbed onto the bar and spun his barstool as hard as he could, sending himself whirling around and around in circles. “The night is dark and full of terrors!” Jace called out lifting one arm to a salute and practically falling off his stool.

Alec smiled and helped Jace get his balance. It was true, he was a bit of a prick, but there was something about his arrogance that almost seemed justified. Plus Alec appreciated his brutal honesty. On a daily basis he was surrounded by people who were constantly blowing smoke up his ass, and he found Jace to be refreshing and genuine.

“Yeah, let’s get out of here.”
Alec felt dazed and numb as they stumbled back out to the street in search of their next destination. It was getting late and the night air was freezing cold, Alec could see his breath. Jace suggested they go check out a dance club just a few blocks up, inside the Ritz. He insisted all the hottest people would be there and since they were two devilishly handsome men they’d have their pick of anyone they wanted. Alec didn’t really feel like going, he wasn’t much of a dancer, but at this point he was too drunk to remember where Hendel House was, so he agreed to tag along.

The Ritz Carlton was built right into the base of Aspen Mountain in the style of a medieval, gothic castle. Tall spires stretched above their heads as they passed through curving stone archways. Smartly dressed valets scurried towards shiny red and black Aston Martins as Alec reminded himself to call about a rental car tomorrow. Upon entering the grand lobby Alec could see straight through to the back wall of the hotel where an impressive monstrosity of glass windows revealed a state of the art gondola system. Used for transporting skiers, it stretched up and up into the heavens. The mountain top wasn’t even visible from the ground below. Alec lost his breath.

Wow.

Momentarily losing track of Jace, Alec spied him walking towards the back and hurried to catch up. The club was located just behind the hotel along a cobblestone walkway that stretched uphill alongside the entrance to the gondola. The large wooden doors were standing open under a giant moose’s head. Of course, Alec thought, these people and their fascination with heads and horns was already starting to annoy him.

The base was thumping and Alec’s heart fluttered in time with the deafening music. Glittering lights and flickering lasers flashed wildly ahead, illuminating their way into the club. Two bouncers immediately recognized Jace and unclipped the velvet rope allowing them entrance. Alec felt guilty as he looked to his left and saw a long line of scantily clad girls shivering and bouncing in the cold. He guessed Jace must have been a regular to get this kind of VIP treatment.

“Follow me!” Jace screamed over the music as he pushed his way through the crowd and headed toward the dance floor. He paused briefly to grab two glasses off a passing tray and shoved one into Alec’s hands.

“What is it?” Alec yelled.

“Who cares!!” Jace bellowed back, throwing the contents down in one gulp then dropping the glass on a stranger’s table.

Alec followed suit slamming back the drink, then continued with Jace onto the packed dancefloor. The strobe lights were spinning in time to the music and people were jumping with their arms overhead. Alec’s drunkenness made him feel like he couldn’t stand on two feet, so he shifted his weight back and forth swaying to the beat as his body rebounded off strangers. Luckily they were packed like sardines otherwise he probably would have fallen over.

Sweat began to form on Alec’s forehead, adhering his bangs to his skin. He reached up to run his fingers through the wet strands and realized Jace was no longer next to him. Alec spun around to search the crowd which only made him dizzier. Taking advantage of his height he stood on his tiptoes and scanned the bobbing heads for Jace’s golden blonde hair.

Where the hell did he go?

Further away, around the perimeter of the club, there were curved banquette seats against the walls. Each one had a small table in the center with a flickering candle. Alec was just about to give up on Jace when the flash of something caught his eye. He maneuvered himself to the edge of the
dancefloor, straining his neck to glimpse the mysterious light again. Suddenly a noisy cluster of girls stopped right in front of him, blocking his line of sight.

“Excuse me,” Alec said, gently pushing them aside with his arm, clearing a path towards the back of the club. The girls smiled and batted their eyes, one even grabbed Alec around the waist, but he of course wasn’t interested. His body was being pulled by an invisible force, like a fishhook through his sternum being reeled in click by click. He was no longer in control of his body.

Once the obstruction was clear Alec finally saw what had drawn his eye. The flash of cameras were all around him, girls leaning in to take selfies, their phones illuminating the darkness flash after flash. Alec couldn’t believe it.

No way... no possible way... no.

This cannot be happening.

But it was happening. Seated in the center of a crowded booth, men and women flanking his sides, rows of sweating champagne buckets covering the table, was him.

“ALEC!” Jace howled, unexpectedly coming up from behind him, grabbing his shoulders.

“Jesus Jace! You scared the shit out of me!”

“Sorry man,” Jace said with a laugh, “I’ve been looking for you! What’s going on? You look like you’ve seen a ghost!”

Alec turned back to the man he’d been eyeing and Jace followed his gaze.

“I can’t believe he’s here,” Alec said breathlessly, his mouth gaping open.

Jace smiled and smacked Alec on the back, “Ah yeah, Magnus Bane. I saw him listed in the directory. A last minute change. Apparently Kronos is here as an ensemble in residence for the whole goddamned summer. Fucking mind blowing, huh? Look at him over there! He looks like Bowie for fuck’s sake! I bet he gets all the ass a guy could ever dream of!”

Alec couldn’t speak. Magnus Bane was the most famous violinist in the world. A child prodigy, born in London, he’d moved to Philadelphia at age seven to study violin performance at the Curtis Institute. He signed a multimillion dollar recording contract at age 15, then became the youngest concertmaster in CSO history at age 22. Famous for his high temper he left Chicago mid-season after throwing his music stand during a concert. He moved to San Francisco to join the Kronos Quartet and vowed he’d never perform in a symphony orchestra again. Alec had followed his career like a religion. He was his idol.

“Hey Alec, you OK buddy?” Jace asked.

“I can’t breathe,” Alec replied in a low breathless voice.

Then in that same moment the unthinkable happened. Magnus Bane’s face shifted to where Alec and Jace were standing and he saw them. Alec was frozen in place unable to close his mouth or look away. Magnus’ eyes locked with his and the world stopped spinning. He was looking right at him. All concept of time and space disappeared in that moment. Alec felt his body tumbling towards a black-hole, like being sucked into an alternate dimension that lied deep within the golden shimmering eyes of this unbelievably beautiful man.

“Should we go over and say hi?” Jace suggested noticing Alec seemed to be having some sort of
near death experience.

Alec blinked and broke the connection. “I have to get out of here, I need air.”

Stumbling backwards Alec turned and headed quickly for the exit. He couldn’t meet Magnus Bane for the first time while drunk off his ass, he had to run away. He shoved through a horde of sweaty bodies and back to the velvet rope. The bouncer unclipped the latch and Alec made his getaway, not daring to look back behind him.

The frosty night air hit his sweat coated skin like a thousand icy pin pricks. He shivered and shook as he ran from the club with his arms wrapped tightly around himself. When he finally felt he’d run far enough he collapsed on the curb, his head dropping between his knees. His labored, panting breath had him close to hyperventilation. The excessive amounts of alcohol threatening to eject from his heaving stomach.

Alec hadn’t been prepared to encounter his hero tonight… and he definitely hadn’t been prepared to fall instantly in love with him.

Chapter End Notes

The Aspen Musical Festival events and venues have been tweaked and changed to suit my plot but are mostly based in truth. Sometimes I abbreviate musical jargon or locations just to make it less wordy. Here are a few off the top of my head: BU is Boston University, CSO is the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Kronos refers to the Kronos Quartet, IU is Indiana University, if you see others I forgot to mention feel free to ask in the comments.

I'm not sure how many chapters this will be. But the festival lasts for 12 weeks so the story will end when it ends. :)

I highly recommend going to YouTube and playing the various pieces I've mentioned in this chapter if you want some insight into Alec's character and mood. Alec's "Colorado" playlist as well as the Villa-Lobos preludes are really great. The title of this fic is taken from the song by the same name. A long time favorite of mine by a band called The Verve. Also recommended!

Thanks so much for reading. I really appreciate comments and kudos. This is only my second fanfiction so I'm still learning as I go. I dedicate this story to my previous life. It sometimes feels like it belonged to someone else, but writing about it now I remember it like yesterday.
Alec woke to the painful jab of his earbud wedged too deep against his eardrum. Fumbling for the cord he yanked it out with a painful pop. Morning sunlight was streaming into his room thanks to the curtains that hadn’t been closed the night before. It took Alec a few seconds to remember where he was, disoriented by the unfamiliar surroundings. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and saw Stella in the corner of the room sitting proudly on her stand.

“Don’t judge me,” he mumbled grumpily to his cello, then rolled over onto his left side to face the bedroom door. His head felt like a bowling ball, heavy and dense, and his throat was parched. He desperately needed water but he hadn’t been to a grocery store yet and the distance to the bathroom seemed insurmountable.

Alec looked down at the floor next to his bed. It was littered with the clothes he’d worn the previous
night. Jacket, shirt, pants (inside out), socks, and even… his boxers? Alec shifted his lower body against the sheets and realized he was naked. That definitely wasn’t his normal way of sleeping.

*Damn I must have been really drunk last night.*

He flipped over onto his back and gingerly raised himself up onto his elbows, squinting against the bright morning light. Glancing down, he noticed the top of his comforter was scattered with a dozen or so crumpled tissues.

*Uh oh.*

Alec’s memories of the previous night were triggered and the images started downloading to his brain one by one. He remembered going out with Jace, the excessive drinking they’d done which had led to stumbling through the streets from bar to bar. He remembered going to the club. That’s where he’d seen Magnus Bane in the flesh. Where he’d stared into his bewitching eyes and been transported to a state of pure bliss. Only to have it quickly replaced with gut wrenching fear.

Alec’s heart began thumping against his ribcage as he remembered running back to Hendel House in the cold. His body had been shivering in the sweaty, damp clothes. He’d tumbled through the door, stripped down naked and climbed into bed with his phone.

*Where the hell is my phone anyway?*

Alec searched through the covers until he found the cord he’d plucked from his ear a moment ago. He gently pulled the line to fish his phone out of the crack between the wall and his bed. He clicked the home button and the screen illuminated. It was YouTube… *Magnus Bane performs Sibelius’ violin concerto in D minor with the Oslo Philharmonic.*

“Well this is just a whole new level of pathetic,” Alec mumbled, pitching his phone to the foot of the bed and falling back down on his pillows. He folded his arms tightly over his eyes trying to squeeze the embarrassment out of his brain.

*What kind of freak jerks off to post-romantic Finnish composers?*

Of course it wasn’t the music Alec was interested in, it was *who* was playing it. Magnus Bane’s Oslo performance was one of his favorites. He had slayed the audience, finishing the concert drenched in sweat. His bow had been shredded, the horsehairs hanging like Christmas tinsel. He’d taken five curtain calls, which was almost unheard of. Alec had watched it hundreds of times. In fact he had a whole collection of favorite Magnus videos filling his iPhone’s memory. As well as hundreds, if not thousands of photos. He’d always rationalized to himself it was related to his music career. But truthfully a cellist had no real cause to intensely study the performances of a violinist. It was apples to oranges. Knowing it would be impossible to fool anyone, he’d kept his obsession a closely guarded secret.

*BOOM BOOM BOOM* “Alec?”

*Oh no.*

*BOOM BOOM BOOM* “ALEC! You in there?”

*Shit! Not now!*

It was Jace, and he was banging on the door like he wanted to break it down. Alec sprang from the bed almost hitting his head on the low sloped ceiling. He grabbed handfuls of the incriminating tissues and started shoving them under the sheets.
“Just a minute!” Alec called towards the door, panic rising in his voice. He smashed his comforter down in a desperate attempt to smooth out the lumps.

“What are you doing in there?” Jace taunted him.

“Be right there!” Alec said frantically as he kicked his dirty clothes under the bed, his boxers momentarily tangling between his toes.

“I’m WAAAAAITING!” Jace badgered him.

Alec dislodged the boxers and pushed them as far under the bed as he could. Still naked, he ran across the room to his chest of drawers in search of a clean pair of sweats.

“Come on!” Jace boomed.

Nothing in his drawers had been organized. He’d just dumped everything out and planned to worry about it later. Dizzy, hungover, and his head pounding, he finally located a pair of navy blue Nike sweatpants.

“Will you stop masturbating and open the damn door already!” Jace bellowed, his voice echoing through the hallway for everyone to hear.

Alec jumped into the sweats with both feet and ran to open the door before Jace could say anything else embarrassing.

“Jesus it took you long enough!” Jace complained. “Why are you out of breath? Oh my God were you really masturbating?” he teased punching Alec in the shoulder and walking right into his room.

“I could have come back when you were done.”

Alec huffed angrily as he quickly shut the door. “Are you trying to make me hate you? Because it’s working.”

“Relax man, I’m just messin’ with you. I’m here to make sure you’re alive after last night. Why did you take off like that?” Jace asked as he plopped down on Alec’s bed.

Alec’s heart flew into his throat as he said a quick prayer that Jace wouldn’t find any evidence of exactly what he’d been doing last night.

“Uhhh, I felt sick, and thought I might throw up. So I wanted to get outside as fast as I could. Then I got tired and just came back here. No big deal,” Alec said unconvincingly.

Jace rolled his eyes, “Mmm hmm, sure.”

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Jace rolled his eyes, “Mmm hmm, sure.”

“It was late, I was tired,” Alec mumbled. Continuing to lie, but not very well. His eyes were darting all around the room to avoid Jace’s skeptical analysis.

“It’s too bad… you left right as things got interesting,” Jace replied, leaning back against the headboard, folding his arms behind his head.

“Let me guess, you found a girl drunk enough to get with you?” Alec said sarcastically. Feeling proud for a moment he might have actually one-upped the king of put-downs.

“No, no, better than that! Your boy… Bane! He motioned me over to his table after you ran out,” Jace purred, raising his eyebrows up and down seductively. “Wanted to know alllllll about you.”

“Shut the fuck up!” Alec swore, feeling like he’d just been punched in the stomach.
“Oh he was full of questions. Wanted to know your name, where you’re from, if you were coming back. I’m telling you, the guy was curious.”

Alec felt his body kick into overdrive. He lifted one hand up into his hair, grabbing it firmly by the roots, and fought back the urge to scream. There was no possible way this had happened.

“You’re lying,” he accused Jace, his mind unable to accept this insane scenario.

“Jace Wayland never lies,” Jace declared, raising his right hand and placing it over his heart. “I may stretch the truth a bit, and I may even cover things up when I have to… but I don’t tell lies.”

Alec began pacing in a tight circle, waving his arms wildly like he was signaling planes on the runway. “I can’t believe it! What did you say? What did he say? What did you tell him? I need to know exactly what you said!”

“Ok, ok, don’t get your knickers in a twist. I basically just told him your name is Alec, you’re from New York, you play the cello, and you’re my best friend here,” Jace smiled, giving Alec a wink.

“And what did he say back?” Alec asked, still pacing.


“Jace, you are my only friend here,” Alec responded, rolling his eyes. “Now what did he say?”

“Ah HA! So we are best friends!” Jace affirmed with a look of pride as he crossed his legs at the ankle and grinned.

“Yes, yes, fine, best friends. Now tell me what the hell he said?” Alec was losing his cool as he continued pressing Jace for more information.

“He said we should come to the opening welcome for strings students today at 1:00, over on campus. He said we might find it interesting.”

Alec grabbed his phone off the foot of the bed. “It’s almost noon!” he shouted, flinging it back down with a look of terror spreading across his face. “That’s not enough time to get ready! There’s no way we can make it!”

“Dude, seriously, chill. We’ll be fine. Take a shower, and put on something pretty,” Jace said with a smirk, “I’ll get you to the ball on time.”

Alec stood frozen in place although inside he was completely freaking out. Magnus Bane had asked about him. He’d wanted to know his name and where he was from. Why? Alec thought. His mind wanted to find a reasonable explanation but his heart was already soaring. Could it be possible he’d felt the same connection? Was it crazy to even have hope?

Jace rose from Alec’s bed and headed towards the door, spinning back around just before grabbing the knob. “I’ll be back in 20… and you might try to get that blushing thing under control. It’s a dead giveaway.”

Jace drove his shiny black Dodge Charger like a bat out of hell. Alec’s hands gripped the bottom of his seat, holding on for dear life as they whipped up and around the twisting curves leading to the
AMF campus. It was a gorgeous 38 acres just outside of town, perched high on a mountainside. The buildings surrounded by serene ponds and beautiful aspen groves overlooked the town of Aspen below.

“We’re so late,” Alec grumbled.

“Nah, we’re OK,” Jace reassured him.

“Not OK… not OK at all,” Alec argued bitterly.

“Fashionably late. Bane won’t care.”

Alec gave a sharp exhale, “Will you stop calling him Bane! It’s weird!”


“You’re not funny.”

“Oh come on, that was a little bit funny,” Jace chided him. But Alec wasn’t having it. He already felt Jace knew too much, he had read the signs so easily, Alec felt exposed.

Jace rounded the last turn on two wheels, the sound of squealing rubber filled the empty parking lot. Alec felt his insides lurch with nervous anticipation.

“Well at least it’s easy to park, none of these kids have cars.” Jace pointed out optimistically.

They took the parking spot closest to the door and jumped out to collect their instrument cases from the trunk. Alec had decided to wear a pair of charcoal gray chino shorts with a bright white short-sleeved knit polo shirt. He’d shaved, even trimmed his eyebrows, and put product in his hair. He felt ridiculous fussing so much with his appearance, but he wanted to make a better impression than his drunken state the night before.

Running as quickly as they could Jace and Alec sprinted inside the main performing arts center. The halls were quiet and deserted as they made their way towards the main hall.

“Maybe nobody showed up?” Jace suggested just as they turned the last corner and headed for the door.

Alec excitedly pulled the handle with too much force and the hall door swung wide open then smacked back against the outside wall making a loud thwack! Jace and Alec froze. At least 200 sets of eyes turned around to see their noisy and very belated entrance. The room was packed with students as well as teachers, and up on stage, clearly interrupted mid-speech, was Magnus Bane himself glaring down at them.

“Just follow me and act casual,” Jace whispered as he glided over to the back row and sat down. Alec hurried along, so flustered he ended up whacking a girl in the row in front of him with his cello as he stumbled down the aisle.

“Sorry,” Alec whispered to a petite redhead with a violin case across her lap.

Jace leaned forward to chime in. “Yes he’s very sorry, I swear I can’t take him anywhere,” he said, flashing his most winning smile. The girl seemed unaffected by his charm, she simply rolled her eyes and turned back around. Her fiery hair whipping back in a cascade of flaming curls.

Alec sat down too quickly which caused his chair bottom to pop loudly. It echoed through the hall
causing his face to immediately burn red hot. He scrunched down in the chair as low as he could, trying to disappear. The surrounding onlookers had already begun staring at him, pointing, and whispering to themselves. Of course some of them knew exactly who he was and they were passing the news around like a game of telephone.

Great, as if things couldn’t get any worse.

Clearing his voice Magnus Bane turned away from the disruption and continued speaking to the students. “As I was saying, my colleagues and I are honored to be here at the Aspen Music Festival this summer. Although we’ve had the pleasure of performing for you before, this is our first time as an ensemble in residence. This affords us the opportunity to work with students one on one to provide guidance, knowledge, and insight to their budding music careers. Also I look forward to educating you on several contemporary composers and artists you might not yet be familiar with. After all, there’s more to life than Haydn and Mozart.”

The audience tittered with light laughter as Alec was instantly captivated my Magnus Bane’s incredible presence on the stage. His swagger was so confident, so at ease. Clearly someone as talented as he was would never get nervous speaking in front of a crowd. His hands moved fluidly as he spoke and his eyes sparkled like diamonds. Alec had to keep reminding himself to close his mouth, but it was so difficult to be this close to him and not lose his breath.

“My colleagues and I will also serve as judges for the concerto competition. Which I’m happy to say this year will be broken down into two categories. We will have one student winner as well as one winner selected from our invited guest performers. These winners will have the privilege of working with me personally to polish and perfect their selected music before performing at the Fourth of July Gala.”

Alec’s spine straightened. Jace leaned over close to his ear and whispered, “Fuck that, I’m not even close to being competition ready, are you?”

Alec shook his head side to side silently. That was one of the benefits to being an invited guest, no mandatory classes or competitions, only prearranged performance obligations. Also they didn’t have to pay tuition, although they would be pimped out to some local millionaires’ dinner parties in hopes of raising funds for the program. But apparently things would be done differently under Magnus Bane’s authority.

The welcoming speeches continued from various faculty and visiting artists. Alec’s mind drifted as he became lost in his own thoughts. Magnus Bane had told Jace they should come today clearly to hear the news of the concerto competition. That much was now obvious. He was probably just trying to be helpful and Jace had blown the entire conversation out of proportion just to get Alec worked up. He’d seen his reaction last night at the club and knew he could have fun toying with him. And boy was he right, Alec had fallen for it hook, line and sinker.

What a fool I am.

Magnus Bane wasn’t interested in talking to him or probably even meeting him at all. Alec knew it was time to come back down out of the clouds and push this ridiculous fantasy out of his mind. He needed to focus on why he was here. He had dozens of performances to prepare for as well as a competition he hadn’t known about ten minutes ago. Always a fierce competitor, Alec definitely wanted to win. He’d won the concerto competition at school last fall with Dvořák, he could get it ready if he really put his mind to it. As soon as this welcome was over he would immediately head off to lock himself in a practice room for the rest of the day. Enough time had already been wasted on nonsense.
The sound of applause pulled Alec from his stupor. All around him people were standing up and walking down the aisles towards the exit. He turned to Jace who was busy pecking the red-haired girl on the shoulder trying to get her attention.

*Now’s my chance.* Alec thought to himself as he headed the opposite way down the aisle leaving Jace behind. He hated to ditch him, but he knew if he didn’t Jace would probably find something else to distract him for the day.

Walking across campus in the beautiful sunshine with Stella hoisted on his back, wearing a vintage pair of Ray-Ban Aviator’s he’d splurged on for the trip, Alec felt he was walking away from all the tension and anxiety that had plagued him. Each step further from the hall his stress and unease lessened. He could feel the knots loosening in his shoulders, and the dreaded butterflies in his stomach finally quieting. The surroundings were so peaceful and serene, the wind quaking in the aspen trees carried a faint sound of music that seemed to play like a soundtrack in the background.

*What the hell was I thinking? Magnus Bane was going to personally greet me? Get a grip Lightwood!*

It had all been so silly. Alec was actually ashamed of himself for letting his wild imagination get the best of him. A good dose of reality was what he needed now. He needed to forget about Bane.

*The guy is probably a jerk anyway.*

The first few practice rooms Alec checked were already taken. But he soon found one about halfway down the row that was vacant. Upon entering, Alec closed the door behind him and locked it. Then he took a sheet of blank staff paper from his cello case and with a bit of sticky tack covered the small square window in the middle of the door so no one could look inside. An old trick he’d been doing at school for years to help ensure his privacy and to also keep from getting distracted by anyone who might look in.

Stella was a sight for sore eyes. Alec hadn’t practiced in 3 days, and as he lifted his bow to place it on the strings for the first gentle pull he felt pure joy return to his heart. It was always like coming home. His right arm glided with the bow as the long graceful fingers of his left hand danced up and down the fingerboard. First a few simple scales, then more intricate warmups. It didn’t take long to fall right back into his normal routine. The acoustics in the room weren’t as bad as he’d anticipated. The wood gave a nice reverb. Alec’s breath was even and slow. The body of the cello placed between his long, lanky legs gave a warm, sensual tone. His eyes were closed as he recalled the opening Allegro of Dvořák’s cello concerto in B minor. He began to play.

Alec liked to imagine he was on a grand stage, the orchestra behind him, and the conductor just over his left arm. His cello professor had always told him that it was best to practice just as you would perform in front of a live audience. That way there was no difference in your mind once you took the stage. *"All performances are equal when you play what’s inside your soul”* was what his professor had drilled into him throughout his four years of study. Alec worshipped and adored him. He was more like a father than a teacher really, and Alec lived to make him proud.

*Tap, tap*

Alec’s concentration was broken by a gentle tapping against the door of his practice room. He
glanced over to see his sheet of paper was still blocking the window.

_Apparently this idiot doesn’t know that means the room is taken._

He stood up and carefully leaned the neck of his cello against the chair. “Someone’s in here,” Alec called out but the person only tapped lightly again.

*Tap, tap*

“Ugh, coming!” Alec crossed to the door, feeling annoyed, and flung it open aggressively. Then he died a thousand deaths in one life altering moment.

“So sorry to bother you, but you’re Alexander Lightwood, correct?”

It couldn’t be possible, but it was. Magnus Bane stood in all his breathtaking glory right on the little wooden porch of Alec’s practice cabin. He was wearing white linen pants and a baby blue silk shirt looking like he’d just walked off a movie set. He was absolutely stunning.

“Uh huh,” was all that Alec could manage to squeak out. His entire body clenched in a fit of shock and awe.

“Wonderful! I’m Magnus, Magnus Bane. I’d hoped to speak with you back at the hall after the student welcome was finished, but you left so quickly I had to come out here in the wilderness to hunt you down!”

Alec was dead. He knew he had to be. There was no way this was happening in real life. His hand slipped off the doorknob and he staggered back a step, frantically trying to regain his senses. Magnus caught the door with his right arm, holding it open.

“Would you mind if I came in?” Magnus asked as he removed his sunglasses with his free hand revealing his shimmering black eyes.

“Yes… I mean NO! No I don’t mind,” Alec stammered, unable to speak with any resemblance of sanity. He walked backwards from the door, tripping over his own tangled feet, clearing a path for Magnus to come inside.

“Fabulous! Well, these practice rooms aren’t as horrible as I imagined them to be. Quite nice actually, and even a view,” Magnus declared as he glanced out the back window which overlooked a gurgling mountain stream. “Such beauty to behold.”

Alec watched him as he flowed through the room in the same graceful way he had walked across the stage. His feet setting down toe to heel like a dancer, his hand lightly following along the curved edge of the piano. He was soundless, like a cat on the prowl. Alec wondered if he might be the mouse.

Walking away from the window, Magnus eyed Stella leaning against the chair. “May I?”

“Of course,” Alec replied feeling star struck as Magnus picked up Stella and studied her appraisingly.

“Peter and Wendela are dear friends of mine. They’ve done beautiful work for me as well. This is lovely,” Magnus said as he handed the cello to Alec. “I look forward to hearing you play.”

“Thank you, ah, Mr. Bane,” Alec tested, unsure of how to address him.
“Please, call me Magnus,” he corrected him.

Alec felt an overwhelming sense of pride in his instrument. He reached to take Stella from Magnus’ outstretched hands and their fingers delicately brushed against one another for just a fraction of a second. Alec’s cheeks betrayed him instantly.

Magnus gave a knowing smile then spun on his heel and walked back to the window again. His hands clasped behind his back.

“So… I had quite the interesting conversation with your friend last night. The Wayland boy. I don’t think I’ve ever encountered a musician who was so blatantly arrogant yet spoke so vehemently about someone else’s attributes. He’s a very effective hype man.”

Alec felt immediately mortified but at the same time forever indebted to Jace for having the balls to speak to Magnus on his behalf.

“Well there really isn’t much to say… about me I mean,” Alec stuttered, wishing he’d stayed at the club instead of running away like a coward. There was no telling what line of BS Jace had laid down. Alec would just have to go with it.

“You studied at Manhattan, with Victor I presume?” Magnus stated more as a fact than a question.

“Yeah, uh yes,” Alec replied, trying to keep a level of professionalism.

“And you’re here as an invited guest? That’s quite an honor,” Magnus praised.

“Yes, well, I assume Professor Aldertree pulled some strings. Since he’s on the board here. I was just lucky.” Alec didn’t want to seem too self-deprecating, but it came naturally.

“I see. Well I doubt Victor would risk his professional integrity if he didn’t think you were up to snuff. He’s always been quite diplomatic.”

Alec moved to his case and placed Stella inside. He had a feeling his practice time was over.

“So, what are your plans now that you’ve graduated?” Magnus continued to question him unabashedly.

“Well, I uh, think I’ll just do some gigs for now, see what happens. I haven’t really decided for sure.” Alec was struggling to respond, he felt unprepared to explain his future goals… or lack thereof.

“No plans for graduate study?” Magnus pried.

“I don’t know, I mostly just want to perform. I was never really good at being a student,” Alec admitted, feeling the questions were beginning to be a bit intrusive.

“I see. Well of course it’s your choice to make,” Magnus said as he craned his neck to see a small deer that had come to drink from the stream. “I’m sure you’re quite capable of determining your own path.”

Alec felt taken aback by the man’s cryptic comment. What the hell does he know about my path? The intimidation he felt for his idol momentarily took a backseat to his curiosity for what was really going on here.

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to be rude, but why exactly have you come here?” Alec challenged him.

Magnus’ face broke into a cunning smile as he turned back around to face Alec. “I wanted to see you
Alec’s jaw fell loose from its hinge. He would have made an audible gasp but his lungs seized as if he’d tried to open his mouth to breathe underwater. He was completely dumbfounded.

Magnus took slow, deliberate steps toward Alec. The cat-like prowl he’d noticed earlier had transformed into a lion stalking its prey. “Last night at the club, when our eyes met, I felt I knew you from somewhere. But when I couldn’t place you I decided the feeling must have been that I wanted to.”

“Wanted to what?” Alec said on a sharp inhale. His lips remaining parted as he waited for the response.

Magnus took one more step forward. He was just inches from Alec now. So close he could almost feel his breath. He ran his eyes up and down Alec’s body salaciously then ended with a penetrating look straight into the windows of his soul. “That I wanted to know you,” he replied, without a blink of hesitation.

Alec’s heart leap into his throat. He swallowed against the pressure as a tingling sensation traveled across his skin. Magnus Bane wanted to know him. He’d come all the way out here to find him so they could talk. It was so much more than Alec could have ever dreamed possible.

“Oh,” Alec replied. It was all he could muster.

Magnus reached into his back pocket and pulled out a thin silver case. He flipped it open and removed a small white card, then handed the card to Alec.

“This is my personal cell number, I’d like you to call me. I think we should get to know each other better, don’t you?” Magnus’ glittering eyes and expressive brows relayed his intentions quite clearly.

Alec reached out and took the card. He looked at the front and saw Magnus’ professional details then flipped it over and found a phone number written on the back in pen.

“Mr. Bane, I…”

“Please, call me Magnus.”

Alec couldn’t manage it. His lips wouldn’t form the word. “I’m sorry I don’t know what to…”

“Alexander, you are not a student here, and I am not your teacher. I would like for you to address me by my first name, as many of my friends and colleagues do, and I will do the same for you if that’s alright. Agreed?”

Alec was gone at Alexander. Nobody ever called him by his full name. He’d always been Alec to his family and his friends. But the way his name had rolled off Magnus Bane’s tongue as it stroked the roof of his mouth just behind his front teeth caused Alec’s groin to twitch. He felt an uncontrollable urge to move closer, like he was being drawn in by an invisible force. He wanted to close the small remaining distance between their bodies and feel that tongue with his own. He was breathlessly consumed by an intense longing.

Alright… Magnus,” Alec acquiesced.

“See, that wasn’t so hard,” Magnus said with a flirtatious wink. Then he turned away. “I have to run now, I’m late for a meeting with the CEO and Dean of Students. I’ll have to tell them I took a wrong
turn at the pond!” Magnus quipped as he took his leave. “Don’t forget, you have my number. I look forward to hearing from you soon, yes?”

Alec nodded in agreement while looking down at Magnus’ card just to make sure it was really true.

“Fantastic, Schüß!” Magnus called out as the door swung closed.

Alec stood still for a moment, making sure he was really alone. Then he went to the door, turned the lock, and sunk to the floor completely obliterated. “What the actual fuck just happened?” he uttered aloud to himself. But there was no way to explain it. He’d felt the same feeling last night. The closest comparison he could put into words was a profound and lingering sense of déjà vu. Just as Magnus had said, it was like they already knew each other from somewhere.

Alec let his forehead rest on top of his knees, he couldn’t unravel the mysteries of the universe today.

After daydreaming for an unknown number of minutes Alec reached into his pocket and dug out his phone. He’d switched it off earlier so he could practice without interruption. He held in the side button until he saw the Apple symbol appear. Within ten seconds the text messages began to chime, one right after another. It was Jace.

2:05 PM - Jace: Where are u?
2:06 PM - Jace: Did u ditch me?
2:11 PM - Jace: OMG u fucking ditched me!
2:17 PM - Jace: Holy shit! Bane just came to the back row looking for u! Where the fuck r u?
2:25 PM - Jace: Dude, this is so not cool
2:42 PM - Jace: I’m sitting in my car waiting for your stupid ass

Message after message flashed on the screen. Alec felt terrible. He hadn’t even thought to text Jace and tell him he was going to practice and he should just go on without him. He held down on the last message to bring up Jace’s number, then pressed call.

“Jesus Christ you better be tied up somewhere!” Jace bellowed into the phone.

“Sorry, sorry, I didn’t think,” Alec replied shamefully.

“Are you coming? I’m still in the fucking parking lot waiting,” Jace informed him angrily.

“Yes, sorry, something happened, I’m coming there now,” Alec responded, grabbing his things together and leaving the practice room as fast as he could.

“Was it Bane? Did he find you?” Jace asked.

“Yeah, he found me,” Alec admitted shyly.

“Well what did he say?” Jace demanded.
Alec paused for a moment, trying to decide if he really trusted Jace enough to tell him the truth. But then he remembered Jace was the one who'd made it happen in the first place, and he desperately needed to talk to someone about it before he exploded.

“He said he wants to get to know me. He even gave me his cell number,” Alec confessed, praying Jace wasn’t about to laugh his ass off.

“Damn, looks like I was wrong before. Apparently you’re the man crush in this relationship. Are you freaking out?” Jace slyly assumed.

“Freaking out doesn’t even begin to cover it,” Alec answered him in a low voice as he weaved his way through a crowd of students.

“Well I just got turned down by a very hot girl who apparently needs to find a new eye doctor or something, so I say we go drowned our emotions in beer.”

“Yeah, for once I actually agree with you on that, I might need 2… or 10,” Alec said sarcastically.

“Now that’s my boy! Don’t worry, we’ll hash out this Bane business. As an aggressively horny male myself I think I can help advise you on what to do next.”

Alec rolled his eyes at the thought. “Advice from you sounds dangerous Jace.”

“Ha! Don’t worry bro, you’ve just become my personal project for the summer! I declare this mission, Alec Gets His Cherry Popped 2k16!”

“I’m hanging up now,” Alec grumbled and he clicked his phone off and slid it into his pocket. Of course he’d never admit it to him, but Jace’s help was exactly what he needed. He’d completely choked back in the practice room, barely even talking. And when he did talk it was a stuttering mess. He needed to pull his shit together and not blow this chance. Magnus was too important to him. He could already feel a strong connection, like their souls were tethered. They’d only been apart for a few minutes and Alec missed him.

God I am so screwed.

Chapter End Notes

The playlist is growing! Here's a link if you'd like to track the music as I continue to add more: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7
You'll have to cut and paste that into your browser because ao3 doesn't allow me to link it.

I hope you are enjoying the story so far. Only day two and Alec's already got it bad! ;) I'd love to have your comments and kudos, it keeps me going when I feel I'm slipping into writer's block. LOL :D
When Jace and Alec arrived at the Aspen Lodge it was bustling with young people. Normally functioning as a hotel nine months out of the year, it was now in full swing as a student dorm. The ages ranged from late teens to early twenties, with a smattering of mid-twenties mixed in. The grand lobby was cavernous with exposed wood beams and more of Alec’s favorite antler themed lighting. Along the back wall there was a huge stone fireplace with windows on either side looking out towards the mountains. Alec still hadn’t gotten use to these insanely gorgeous views. Every window was postcard perfect. Jace didn’t seem to even pay attention, Alec guessed this was all old news to him. He proceeded through the lobby and rounded a staircase that headed downward. Alec hustled to catch up.

Why am I always trying to keep up with him everywhere we go?

The stairs led down to a large gaming room. There were a dozen or so pool tables, illuminated by Tiffany style stained-glass lighting, as well as video games and darts. The area was packed with students. Jace walked over to a pool table where two younger boys were playing.

“Hey, you guys almost done here?” Jace asked them in a way that sounded more like he was telling them they were done.

“Uh… yeah, sure, we’re done,” a scrawny nervous boy answered, dropping his pool cue and motioning for his friend.

Alec gave Jace an incredulous look.

“What? They were done!” Jace defended himself as he patted one of the boys firmly on the shoulder. “Thanks guys!”

“You’re such a jerk,” Alec said as he walked over to the table and picked up the cue stick.

“Maybe so, but I got us a table didn’t I?” Jace bragged with a devilish sparkle in his eye. He grabbed the ball rack and shoved it into Alec’s chest. “You rack ‘em, I’ll break.”

Along the wall were high-top bar tables with stools. Alec sat down and watched Jace line up the cue ball. A waitress soon came over, looking frazzled and stressed.


“You boys want anything to eat? Pretzels? Nuts?” she asked Alec. “Miller Lite’s on special for $2 and we got buckets of Heineken for $10.”

“Definitely the Heiny,” Jace called out. He’d already cleared half the table and Alec hadn’t even had a turn yet.

Is there anything this guy isn’t good at?


“Alec here would love some nuts,” Jace chimed in with a sarcastic, mocking tone. Alec felt his notorious blush creeping up as the waitress rolled her eyes and walked away.
“Seriously?” Alec asked. “Was that necessary?”

“Loosen up dude, I might actually let you take a turn once I finish letting my aggression out on this 6 ball,” Jace taunted him with a sly eyebrow raise.

Alec sat back down and pulled out his phone. On the car ride back from campus he had entered Magnus’ cell number into his contacts. Now he just stared at it, fretting over when to call, or if he should call. The thought of even attempting to form words into coherent sentences over the phone to Magnus Bane made his tongue swell up.

*What the hell would I even say?*

His heart was beating fast and his palms were starting to sweat as he looked down at the 10 digit number imagining what it would be like to click it. Just one touch of his finger and Magnus would be on the other end. It was too good to be true while at the same time absolutely terrifying.

Suddenly Alec’s phone was snatched out of his hands.

“Hey!” Alec exclaimed.

“Dude, I’m talking to you! Why are you ignoring me?” Jace grumbled as he nosily looked down at Alec’s phone. “Oh of course, I should have known.”

Alec reached to take his phone back but Jace spun around quickly and darted to the other side of the pool table. “Magnus Bane’s phone number, oh what a lucky boy you are.”

“Stop it Jace, I’m not kidding,” Alec threatened as he rounded the corner of the table following after him. “Give it back… now!”

“You know, rule #1 when someone gives you their number, you always wait at least 3 or 4 days before calling. That’s just standard protocol,” Jace informed him. “If you call him now he’s gonna think you’re a total creep.”

Alec felt increasingly embarrassed as the people around them started to watch curiously as he chased Jace in circles around the pool table.

“Just give it back, I’m not gonna call him OK. Just let me have my phone,” Alec begged.

Jace became more and more interested in Alec’s phone the harder he tried to get it back from him. “What’s the matter Alec? You got some nasty gay porn on here or something?”

Alec sped up in response.

“Oh my God you do! Damn you are so easy to read! I bet this baby is loaded with goodies!” Jace tormented him as Alec finally got close enough to grab the back of his shirt.

“All right fine, here you go, calm down. Don’t rip my shirt,” Jace chided him. “Your secrets are safe with me bro.”

Alec hastily took his phone and put it back in his pants pocket.

*Shit, that was close.*

“Here ya go boys, that’ll be $16.39,” the waitress said as she set the bucket of beers and bowl of nuts down on their table.
“Just start us a tab,” Jace replied as he grabbed a beer and immediately began chugging it down.

“Nope, no tabs in the summer. Too many kids walk out and stiff us,” the waitress complained with her hand extended.

“I got it,” Alec responded, handing her a twenty. “Keep the change.”

Jace climbed into the barstool across the small table from Alec and dug his hand deep into the bowl of nuts. “Ok, fun time’s over,” he declared as he chomped down on huge handful then finished off his first beer in one long gulp. “Tell me your game plan, and let’s break it down play by play.”

Alec let out a long exhale then looked at Jace miserably. “There is no game plan.”

“Yeah, I figured that,” Jace replied, vigorously chewing nuts with his mouth open. “Ok, so the important question here. Are you looking for a one night stand? Or do you really like this guy?” he asked Alec bluntly as he grabbed a second beer.

Alec picked at his beer bottle’s label, avoiding eye contact. “I don’t do one night stands. Obviously.”

Jace chuckled. “Yeah, sorry. Of course you don’t. But with a guy like this… he’s older, more experienced, not to mention famous and insanely rich, hell he’s probably just looking for some fun. You gotta play it cool and don’t get all clingy and attached. Chances are he won’t even remember your name by the end of the summer anyway.”

Alec took a long drag from his beer. This is exactly what he didn’t want to hear. He could have played it cool with literally any other human being on the planet. He was never the type to get emotionally invested in anyone, or swept up in an infatuation. But Magnus was different. Thoughts of him consumed his mind long before he came to Aspen. Magnus had been his safe obsession, an unobtainable fantasy. Now that he’d met him, would he be satisfied to have a meaningless hook-up? To be just another notch on Magnus’ bedpost? As much as the idea tempted him, Alec knew he wasn’t that type of guy.

“Yeah, you’re right. Maybe I’ll just text him and say I’m really busy practicing for the competition and leave it at that. Like you said, he’s probably got plenty of people to keep him occupied.” Alec said gloomily.

Jace nodded and drained his bottle. “Hey, at least you got his number, that red-headed little minx totally shut me down. I tried all my usual tactics and got absolutely nowhere. I even offered her my number! Christ I never do that!”

Welcome to the real world…

Alec and Jace continued commiserating with each other through two more buckets of beer and several games of pool. All of which Jace won of course. As the night went on they were both able to cheer each other up a bit. At least enough to take their minds off their love lives.

“We both just need to focus on why we’re here, get back on the path, and stop getting distracted by all these… these… distractions!” Alec announced. The mixture of beer and exhaustion making him tense and cranky.

“Yeah, good point, good point. I’m gonna find the hottest chick here and totally make Clary jealous,” Jace proposed tossing his cue stick down on the table with resolve.

“Clary? Is that the redhead? Because that’s not really what I had in mind when I said focus,” Alec
scolded him as he tossed his half empty beer back in the bucket. “But sure, you do you.”

“Want to go back to the club again tonight?” Jace asked excitedly.

“No, not tonight. I’m tired, I gotta crash,” Alec told him as he threw a few extras dollars on the table and checked his phone.

“Suit yourself, but remember what I said. Don’t call him! Especially late at night. That’s a total booty call,” Jace insisted. “Once you go down that road, there’ll be no turning back.”

Alec retrieved Stella from the trunk of Jace’s car and took the short walk from the lodge back to Hendel House. He enjoyed the cool night air and the beautiful star lit sky overhead. It was remarkably luminous, very different than how it appeared over Manhattan. The stars seemed closer, more brilliant. Alec swore he could actually see them twinkling; like a million diamonds sprinkled across a field of deep blue satin. It went on and on in every direction as far as the eye could see. The bright and glorious light of the moon was so captivating Alec hung his foot in the cracks of the sidewalk pavement almost falling over several times. He wished he had his telescope from home. Which reminded him he still wanted his guitar.

Mom’s going to think I’m never coming back.

Once Alec finally reached his room he propped his cello case in the corner and collapsed onto the bed gratefully. He’d been in Aspen less than 48 hours and he’d already been drunk twice. Not to even mention the jet lag mixed with the high altitude had him completely out of whack. His brain felt like it was two sizes too big for his skull. He dug his phone out of his back pocket and went straight to his contacts list. Scrolling down to the M’s, right between Maddy and Max was Magnus’ number. It was glaring back at him as enticing as a siren’s call from the deep. His thumb clicked his name then hovered over the tiny blue phone icon, the temptation was physically painful. He’d never wanted something so badly that scared him this much.

I can’t call him, this is crazy!

He looked at the time, only 8:00 PM.

Not late enough to be a booty call, right?

Alec’s earlier resolve was wavering as he fantasized about Magnus’ voice picking up on the other end. His way of speaking, the inflection he placed on certain words, was so seductive. He remembered staring at his lips earlier that afternoon in the practice room. How badly he wanted to go to him, the magnetism he’d felt. He was desperate to see him again. There was no denying it.

Then just call him you idiot, who cares what Jace thinks!

Alec pressed down to make the call, then lifted the phone to his ear. His heart beating wildly as the line began to ring.

One ring…

Two…
Three rings…

Voicemail.

“Fuck!” Alec yelled, disconnecting the call and throwing his phone down on the bed. “That was so stupid! Shit, shit, shit, why did I do that!” He moaned, grabbing fistfuls of his hair and scrunching his eyes tight. “Maybe he won’t notice the missed call. I’m sure he knows lots of people who live in New York, right? He’ll probably just ignore it.” Alec tried to reassure himself.

“That’s it, I’m deleting his number, this is insane. I can’t go on feeling like this for the rest of the summer. I’m gonna lose my mind!” Alec spoke aloud to the empty room as he attempted to scrape together enough courage to remove Magnus’ name from his contacts.

Just then, his phone rang. Alec quickly grabbed it back up from the bed and looked at the screen: Magnus

Oh my God

Alec’s chest seized as he briefly contemplated throwing his phone out the window. Then he bravely swiped right to take the call... “Hello?”

“Alexander, I was wondering when I’d be hearing from you. Sorry I missed your call, I was indisposed at the moment.”

Alec’s heart fluttered like the wings of a bird trapped within his ribcage. It was the voice he’d fantasized about all day, more pleasing to hear than even his memory of it. The alluring sound flowed through the phone and into his grateful ear like golden honey warming his entire body.

“Oh… h-how did you know it was me?” Alec asked, feeling pleasantly stunned into numbness.

“Why you’re the only person who has this number,” Magnus suavely informed him with a sultry lilt to his tone.

“Oh… I uh, was just calling to say, I’d uh, probably be really busy, you know, getting ready uh, for the competition. And uh, might not have time to really go out, or anything.” Alec managed to stumble through his pathetic excuse as his face burned red hot from humiliation.

I am pathetic…

“Are you trying to give me the brush off? Or are you just playing hard to get?” Magnus cooed flirtatiously.

“What? Uh, neither, I just wanted to let you know, I uh,” Alec was floundering, he didn’t know what to say. He’d totally botched his justification for the call and was now coming off like a complete lunatic.

“Good, then I think we should have dinner tomorrow night,” Magnus stated confidently.

“Dinner tomorrow?” Alec was flabbergasted.

“Yes, here at my house. As I’m sure you noticed at the club the other night I can’t really find much privacy in public. We wouldn’t really be able to talk or get to know one another with all the interruptions,” Magnus said with the slightest underlying meaning Alec didn’t quite pick up on.

“Oh, uh, yeah, that makes sense,” Alec acknowledged, not having a valid argument to propose.
“I’ll send a car to fetch you from Hendel House at 8:00, will that work?”


“Of course I know where you live silly, being on the board has its privileges,” Magnus taunted. “Just wear something comfortable and come hungry … oh, do you have any food allergies?

“What? Uh, no,” Alec responded, wondering how he would manage to eat anything in the presence of this insanely intimidating man.

“Perfect that means the menu is wide open to any and all exotic tastes,” Magnus replied sinfully.

Alec gasped a sharp intake of breath and he was sure Magnus heard it.

“Until then, Salut!” Magnus chimed, abruptly hanging up.

Alec dropped his phone onto his chest and felt paralyzing fear wash through his body. He laid there, mouth agape, staring at the ceiling, trying to understand how he’d gotten himself into this situation. He wasn’t supposed to call Magnus, Jace had told him to wait. But he couldn’t stop himself. Now they were going to have dinner! Alone! At Magnus’ house!

Alec’s mind was racing through all the possible scenarios, each one more unnerving than the last. He hadn’t thought this through. He’d only wanted to call Magnus so he could hear his intoxicating voice again. It was a moment of weakness, letting desire take the lead over common sense. But now he had a date, and it was tomorrow night. He wasn’t ready, he didn’t know how to ever be ready. His hands felt cold and clammy, his skin hot and flushed. The last words Jace had spoken to him at the lodge rang through his mind only increasing the debilitating cowardice that gripped him...

“There’ll be no turning back”

Alec knew he was right. The wheels were in motion, the course was set, and he’d passed the point of no return. Tomorrow would undoubtedly change his life forever.

Careening up the side of a mountain with Jace behind the wheel hadn’t become any less frightening the next day. Alec was convinced that the harder he clutched his seat bottom the faster Jace went.

“You know we really don’t have to hurry, there’s plenty of time,” Alec pointed out as the car took another whipping turn to the right.

“Yeah, I know. But it’s more fun this way,” Jace teased with a wicked grin.

“Fun for who?” Alec bellowed as the car inched dangerously close to the embankment.

The wind blew Jace’s hair in every direction, sunlight glinting off his natural blonde highlights. Alec felt it was reminiscent of a Ralph Lauren ad he’d seen before. Not surprising since Jace was the quintessential blonde haired, blue eyed, American boy. But as perfect as he seemed to be, Alec didn’t feel jealous. They were complete polar opposites in almost every way, but somehow their friendship had fallen right into step. It was hard to believe they’d only known each other for 3 days. Alec wasn’t usually the type to trust someone until they earned it. But Jace had this way of making
you feel lucky to be in his presence. His personality was infectious and his sense of humor kept Alec’s nerves at ease.

*The yin to my yang…*

Jace screeched into the school parking lot, took the first open spot, and slammed on the brakes. “Door to door service sir,” he replied with a sassy smirk.

Alec was relieved to get out of the car still in one piece and reminded himself again to call about a rental.

*I don’t want to spend my summer dead!*

With their instruments in hand Jace and Alec headed off to find rehearsal hall 12. There they were to be assigned into ensemble groups. Alec had absolutely no idea who would be in his group or where their first performance would be. He felt anxious and dreaded having to go through awkward introductions with strangers. At school he’d participated in several ensembles, but he’d had the luxury of picking and choosing which ones suited him. This would be totally out of his hands as the decisions were being made by the faculty based on their resumes and sample recordings. Alec’s professor had taken care of submitting his. He’d chosen Alec’s senior recital and assured him he’d be a shoe-in for the top group. Although he trusted his teacher he still felt nervous. Being in an ensemble was the closest of working conditions you could imagine. Hours of practice time spent together as well as getting to know each other personally so you could learn to interpret each other’s playing style. It was essential to mold together as one cohesive unit. It wasn’t the time to be a soloist, this required precision and skillful blending.

“I think this is it,” Jace called out from ahead. “Rehearsal 12!”

Alec sped up to join him and together they entered the hall. The first face to greet them just inside the door was a familiar one.

“Victor!” Alec exclaimed as he rushed toward his professor and clamped him in a tight hug.

“Alec, my man, you’re a sight for sore eyes! Great to see you,” Victor replied, giving Alec a few hard smacks on the back. “You’re looking well, this mountain air must suit you.”

“Ha, I must be doing a great job covering up how miserable I feel,” Alec groaned. “I haven’t been able to take a deep breath since I got here.”

“Be glad you’re not a singer,” Victor said with a wink.

Alec was going to introduce Jace to his teacher but when he turned to find him he was gone. He gave the room a quick scan and saw him lingering in the back of the hall with none other than the infamous redhead, Clary.

“So tell me, how are you settling in? Is your room nice?” Victor asked.

“Oh yeah, it’s fine. I’m in this little ski chalet at the base of the mountain. It’s kitschy, but pretty cool,” Alec reported, wondering if Victor was living anywhere near him.

“Good, that sounds great, I think you’re really going to like this experience Alec. I’ll never forget my first summer here. This place is truly something special. I guess that’s why I keep coming back every year,” Victor surmised, giving Alec a light punch to the arm.

Alec felt a lump form in his throat as he immediately thought of Magnus. Victor had no idea how
truly special this place had already proven to be. Alec had barely been able to control himself on the
car ride up with Jace. He was so tempted to tell him about his date, but he knew Jace would flip if he
found out he’d called Magnus last night. Alec had broken rule #1, as Jace had called it, and if by
chance things went badly he didn’t want to hear the “I told you so.”

“We’ll continue to catch up later Alec, I have to join the other faculty members up front for the group
announcements. I think you’re going to be happy,” Victor hinted with a glimmer in his eye.

Alec felt the lump in his throat grow twice the size. Being in the top group would be a tremendous
honor of course, but it also meant more work, and bigger egos to deal with.

“Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take a seat and we’ll get started,” a woman called out from a
small wooden podium. The other faculty flanking her sides.

Alec walked over to where Jace was currently badgering Clary and hooked him under the elbow.

“Come on Romeo, time to go,” Alec said sarcastically, pulling Jace away.

“Call me,” Jace said back to Clary over his shoulder with a pensive look.

“Jesus man, pull yourself together,” Alec whispered as he shoved Jace into a chair up front then
hastily sat down beside him.

“Fuck, sorry, she’s just under my skin,” Jace muttered woefully, craning his neck to watch where
Clary would sit.

“Thank you everyone. My name is Professor Jia Penhallow. My colleagues and I are honored to
have such a diverse and talented group of performers joining us this summer as our special invited
guests. Not only do we appreciate your musical abilities but we hope you’ll provide our students
with shining examples of what their futures can hold. As role models you inspire them to practice
harder and become even more dedicated. So your purpose here is really two fold. Now before I
make the group announcements I’d like to assure you we’ve taken this responsibility very seriously.
With careful consideration of your strengths as well as your individual styles, we’ve formed these
groups to place you in the best possible scenario for a successful summer. Many of the events and
gatherings where you will perform offer the chance to showcase your talent to highly influential
figures in the music world. I suggest you take this seriously and do your very best to represent the
school and the festival in the most positive light. Aspen is home to highest concentration of wealth on
the planet. At least 50 of the 1500 billionaires currently in existence live here within a stone’s throw
of this campus. Company founders like Google, Amazon, Dell, Walmart, Disney and Starbucks, not
to mention investors in oil, gas, and commodities. Our donors are the lifeblood of this school and
without their contributions none of us would be in this room.”

“Fuckin’ A, talk about pressure,” Jace whispered to Alec, although a bit too loudly considering
several sets of eyes darted to his direction.

“Shhhut up,” Alec muttered under his breath, feeling mortified by Jace’s crude comment.

“We will start with the most prestigious and honored positions. Our top group, The Aspen Quartet.
Every year this group spearheads our fundraising campaign with a $2500 a plate dinner at the home
of the Koch brothers, who need no introduction I’m sure. We feel this could very well be the best
ensemble we’ve put together in years.”

“I’m gonna shit my pants,” Jace whispered to Alec.

“Christ Jace!” Alec growled low, digging his nails into Jace’s upper arm.
“When I call your name please come and join us up at the front.”

Alec tried to empty his mind and have no expectations, but he still couldn’t breathe. As humble as he tried to be, deep down he was fiercely competitive. He wanted to be the best. He looked to Jace and they acknowledged each other’s current state of panic wordlessly.

“Our first selected musician, coming to us from the Manhattan School of Music, is celebrated cellist Mr. Alexander Lightwood.”

_Oh my God…_

Applause broke out across the room as Alec sat dazed for a moment until Jace firmly shoved him up and out of his seat. “Go, you idiot,” he muttered abrasively.

Alec obeyed the command, feeling the room tilt slightly as he walked to the front of the hall.

_Don’t trip… don’t look surprised… don’t smile too much…_

“Welcome Mr. Lightwood, we are thrilled to have someone of your caliber and expertise here with us this summer,” Professor Penhallow said, shaking his hand.

The applause continued as Alec gave a slight nod to the other faculty, then stepped aside to await the next ensemble member who would join him. He kept a calm, aloof outward appearance as his insides did somersaults.

“Our next musician, coming to us from the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, is the always impressive violist Mr. Jonathan Wayland.”

Jace popped up out of his seat with an emboldened shout of ‘Woohoo!’ then turned and waved to the applauding crowd. This display of pride and enthusiasm made Alec’s stoic face break into a smile. Jace looked like a political candidate rising to give his acceptance speech. Alec could only marvel at his unabashed confidence.

“Ha! Guess you’re really gonna be sick of me now,” Jace teased, giving Alec a fist bump. “I figured you were probably good, but damn you must really shred on that thing!” Jace said as he pointed to Stella. “I predict we will blow the panties off those rich old ladies! Hell they’ll be throwing their money at us!” he said under his breath as he made the hand motions for _makin’ it rain_.

Alec tried to control a laugh but couldn’t. Jace once again had shattered his weak attempts at remaining sophisticated and civil with his indecent yet charming wit. They were both giggling now like a couple of ten year olds as Jace continued to slide his right hand over his open left palm flinging invisible money over the both of them.

“Welcome Mr. Wayland, it’s nice to have you with us again,” the professor commented dryly without looking up from her notes.

Jace bounced up on his tiptoes in an attempt to make eye contact with Clary who had taken a seat towards the back. But she was obviously avoiding him, looking down at her feet. Alec shook his head.

_And he worries I’ll look like a creep…_

“Next we have a very talented young musician from the Julliard School, Miss Clarissa Fray.” More applause again, but only halfhearted now that most of the others knew their chance of being selected was gone.
“Fuck, I should have known, no wonder she won’t give me the time of day,” Jace grumbled as he made puppy dog eyes towards Clary’s approach. “Congratulations,” Jace praised her as she took her place next to him leaving more than an arm’s length distance between them.

“And finally we have our first violin, who we have also chosen to serve as concertmaster for the summer symphony. Coming to us from the Colburn School in Los Angeles. His musical genius and impressive accolades will no doubt raise the bar… Mr. Sebastian Morgenstern.”

The entire group turned in unison toward the scrape of metal chair legs behind them. He was sitting alone along the back wall, half obscured in darkness. Alec hadn’t even noticed him there, and as he rose from his seat there was an immediate feeling all of the air had just been sucked from the room. Sebastian strutted down the center aisle, tall and lean, his muscular build showcased in a fitted YSL t-shirt and skinny jeans. With platinum blonde hair and bright green eyes he looked like he’d just stepped off a Paris runway. High cheekbones and an angular jawline gave him an almost inhumanly perfect face. No surprise he was from LA, Alec mused, he looked every bit the stereotype. Alec wondered if he’d undergone plastic surgery to look that flawless. Every eye in the hall was his, and he definitely knew it.

Sebastian shook hands with Professor Penhallow then glided towards Alec. He paused briefly to scan him up and down, then looked to Jace and did the same. It was as if he were perusing a particularly interesting bookshelf but decided there was nothing he wanted. With no offer of a handshake or greeting he turned his attention to Clary next and immediately extended his hand to her.

“A pleasure to meet you Clarissa, I am Sebastian Morgenstern,” he purred, taking Clary’s hand and bending down to kiss the top.

Jace was absolutely enraged, both hands clinched in tight fists at his sides. Alec could have sworn he saw literal steam pouring from his ears as Clary blushed and smiled up at him.

“Nice to meet you,” she responded demurely.

Alec couldn’t place Sebastian’s accent, he spoke with an affected tone that almost sounded British but not quite. Concerned for his friend he reached to place his palm on Jace’s back in hopes he could calm him. His body was trembling under Alec’s touch and for the first time he realized just how much Jace was invested in this girl.

The other musicians gave one last round of applause as Professor Aldertree escorted Alec, Jace, Clary, and Sebastian out of the hall.

“Congratulations to everyone, such a great honor. I know you’ll do a brilliant job,” Victor said with a warm smile, patting Alec on the back. “Here is the key to your practice room, it’s in the pond building just behind us. It offers a lot more space than the standard student practice rooms and is exclusively reserved for your use.” He handed the key to Alec. “And this is your performance schedule along with event locations and preapproved repertoire. Guard it with your life.”

Clary reached to take the paperwork while Jace, still fuming, stood glaring at Sebastian.

“If you have any problems please contact me, my number is on there,” Victor said as he headed back inside the hall to continue with the group assignments.

The newly appointed members of the Aspen Quartet stood in the corridor amidst awkward silence. The tension was palpable as Jace continued to give Sebastian threatening looks.
“Shall we take a peek at that list?” Sebastian asked Clary, sliding his hand under her forearm.

Jace exhaled sharply and rolled his eyes at Alec. Alec looked back at him and shrugged.

**What does he think I can do about it?**

“Looks to be pretty standard. Brahms, Beethoven, Mozart, most of these I’m sure we could play in our sleep,” Clary commented as she read through the list.

Sebastian leaned in so that his face was just inches from hers. “The fundraiser dinner is next Friday, that gives us ten days. We should probably get started right away. Perhaps this evening, let’s say 7:00?”

Alec’s heart dropped. He couldn’t practice tonight, he had his dinner with Magnus. But what excuse could he give that wouldn’t tip Jace off instantly. He would know in a second what was really going on.

“Sorry guys, I can’t tonight, there’s something I have to take care of,” Alec mumbled.

“Alec!” Jace burst out, his eyes blown wide. “What could you possibly have to do that’s more important than this?”

Alec clenched his jaw and gave Jace an irritated look. “Just some personal matters that can’t be avoided.”

Jace eyed him suspiciously. “Is that so?”

Alec ignored him and turned to Sebastian and Clary. “But tomorrow I’m free all day. Name a time and I’ll be there,” he offered.

Sebastian cocked his head to the side and looked from Jace to Alec and back to Jace again like he was trying to decide what manner of species they were. Alec thought he was a very odd sort of person, quietly critiquing them in what appeared to be a very judgmental way. It made a shiver run up his spine.

“Very well, tomorrow morning at 9:00 then. We’ll plan to work through the day,” Sebastian decided, clearly taking on the role as their leader.

“Works for me,” said Clary.

“I’ll be there,” Alec responded.

“Fine,” Jace scowled, and they all turned to walk away in different directions.

Alec was jogging briskly down the path that led from the rehearsal building to the parking lot, feeling Jace hot on his tail.

“Alec?” Jace called out.

Alec kept going.
“Alec!” Jace yelled louder.

Alec didn’t flinch.

“Christ Alec, wait up!” Jace screamed, and Alec stopped abruptly but didn’t turn around.

“You did it didn’t you? You fucking called him after I specifically told you not to!” Jace accused as he grabbed Alec’s shoulder and roughly spun him around.

“Don’t start with me Jace, after that ridiculous display you just put on back there, don’t you dare judge me!” Alec defended himself, jerking away from Jace’s grasp.

“What? You mean that Euro-trash wannabe supermodel asshole who thinks he’s going to steal my girl!” Jace blared out at him viciously.

“Your girl? Are you insane? She doesn’t want to have anything to do with you!” Alec said, unleashing the cold, harsh truth as he saw it. Jace’s face immediately fell in response.

“Wow… Ok… you need to check yourself, because you don’t know anything about Clary and me. And just because some rich playboy wants to fuck you doesn’t mean you’re all the sudden an expert on relationships!” Jace replied bitterly.

“You know what? Just mind your own business,” Alec huffed as he turned and stormed off angrily.

Jace stood there stunned, watching Alec leave. He instantly regretted what he’d said, but the damage was done. Cupping both hands to either side of his mouth Jace bellowed toward him as he walked away. “Was this our first fight!??” His voice echoing across campus, loud enough for everyone to hear. “I think it went well don’t you?”

Alec held his middle finger up over his head and kept marching on. He’d had enough.

Twilight settled across Alec’s small room, the faint glow of a purple and orange sunset bleeding through the lace curtains. He kept looking at the time every five minutes. It was now 7:30. He’d been ready an hour ago and every minute since had felt like an eternity. After his argument with Jace he’d taken the miserably crowded shuttle bus back to Hendel House from campus. The trip took twice as long and at least half a dozen people aboard spent the entire ride congratulating him incessantly on making the top ensemble. This forced Alec to interact with them when all he really wanted to do was to be left alone. When he’d finally gotten back to his room he’d busied himself digging through the remainder of his unpacked luggage. He’d found a decent pair of pants and a lightweight button-up shirt in white that didn’t look too dreadful after he’d managed to iron out most of the wrinkles. Despite the fact that Magnus had told him to be comfortable he felt compelled to dress to impress. If it’s even possible to impress him...

In an attempt to stop watching the clock Alec paced back and forth until he was almost dizzy. His stomach churning with nerves he grabbed his D’addario varigrip and began fingering the 4th movement of the first Shostakovich cello concerto. It matched the pulse of his accelerated heart-rate and his current frantic state of mind. The dramatic melody filled the air around him as he concentrated through each pressured touch. The well developed callouses on his fingertips immune to his aggressive form of tension relief.
“Please don’t let me say anything stupid,” he moaned aloud to his cello case, wishing he could take Stella with him. He had always felt his confidence was only unlocked when she was in his hands. Like an important piece of his identity he couldn’t replicate in her absence. It was a cliché he knew, but she was an extension of his body, heart, and mind. His tool for communicating his innermost thoughts and feelings to others. Whether it was pain, joy, sadness, or love, every emotion was produced from the touch of his bow against her strings. Tonight he would be vulnerable and incomplete.

Alec’s concentration on the music was disrupted by two short beeps from a horn outside. He threw down the varigrip and rushed to the window to see a long, shiny black limousine parked conspicuously in front of Hendel House.

A fucking limo! Holy shit!

Alec grabbed his phone off the dresser, along with his single key that hung from a cheap metal ring, and dashed towards the door. After locking his room he turned to run down the stairs and bumped immediately into Jace coming up. Their eyes met and Alec could see Jace was full of remorse over what had happened earlier. His blue eyes swimming with a conciliatory offering.

“Hey, have fun tonight,” Jace said with genuine honesty.

“Thanks,” Alec responded, feeling he’d already forgiven him.

“And if you need me, I mean, if you need to get out of there… you know… if something doesn’t feel right. Or you feel pressured, or whatever. Just call me and I’ll come get you,” Jace offered sincerely.

Alec felt overwhelmed by this gesture of concern. He’d never had anyone in his life say something this heartfelt to him before and really mean it. As unexpected and unexplainable as it was, Jace wanted to protect him.

“Jace, I…” Alec started.

“Don’t, it’s OK. We were both idiots before, myself the more colossal idiot as usual. We can debate the finer points later, but for now your carriage awaits!” Jace declared with a dramatic hand flourish towards the steps.

Alec smiled an adorable crooked grin then proceeded down the stairs playfully punching Jace’s shoulder as he passed by him.

“Have fun, remember to be cool, drink plenty of water, and don’t do anything I would do!” Jace added sarcastically as Alec waved back, turned the corner, and disappeared from sight.

Jace lingered on the steps for a moment then pulled out his phone to fire off a quick text. Once finished he fished his car keys out of his pocket and headed back down the stairs. "Don't blow it kid."
Sorry for the delay. I went to the fan screening of Shadowhunters season 2 and lost several days of writing time. Boy was it ironic to be back in Colorado while in the midst of telling this story. Almost eerily so! Especially as I walked through the Denver airport. I kept thinking maybe I'd see Alec and Stella. :)

Luckily I don't have any trips planned over the holidays, so chapters should come quickly now. I've actually written most of the next already. I was too excited for the big date night!

Speaking of chapters, has anyone noticed the chapter titles? They aren't just by accident. ;)

Thank you for your comments and kudos. I appreciate them so much! Also a huge thanks to ladyklaus92 for making an aesthetic on tumblr for this story. Nobody has ever done that for one of my fics before and it was so amazing to see! Here is a link: http://ladyklaus92.tumblr.com/post/153718765343/aesthetic-inspired-by-bitter-sweet-symphony-by

I've added more music to the playlist on YouTube if anyone is listening as they read: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YPEXgr7 I think it helps set the tone. Especially the Shostakovich!

Thanks again for reading! Up next... Magnus is having Alec for dinner. *wink wink*
Alec emerged from the front entrance of Hendel House and walked tentatively toward the limousine as an older man with a jovial expression opened the driver’s side door to greet him.

“Good evening, Mr. Lightwood I presume?”

Alec nodded his head in agreement.

“Wonderful, my name is Mr. Fell and it will be my pleasure to drive you up Red Mountain tonight.” The man spoke politely, opening the rear passenger door.

“Red Mountain?” Alec asked with a puzzled look. “Aren’t most of the teachers and visitors housed in town?”

“Mr. Bane maintains a permanent residence here, well one of many that is, he likes to dabble in real estate.”

Alec stood dumbstruck. *One of many???

“Kindly watch your head please,” Mr. Fell suggested and Alec ducked down to guide himself into the backseat. The door hastily closing behind him.

*No turning back now…*

The interior of the limo gave Alec a momentary feeling of being closed in his own coffin. The creamy leather was tucked and rolled along all four sides, the windows heavily tinted, and the apparent sound proofing of the cabin was pressing against his eardrums uncomfortably.

*Nobody would even hear me scream…*

The partition separating Alec from the front seat slowly hummed downward revealing Mr. Fell behind the wheel.

“Please help yourself to anything from the bar, the drive should only take about twenty minutes,” he informed Alec with a smile. Then with a light buzzing sound he raised the partition, sealing him back inside his tomb.

Alec fidgeted with the mini-bar. There was a small fridge stocked with Pellegrino, Perrier, and Evian, as well as a built-in shelf which housed at least a dozen types of liquor. He contemplated taking a shot to see if it would calm his nerves, but Jace’s advice about drinking water led him to grab the Evian instead.

As the limo made its way out of town the quaint brick buildings were replaced with aspen groves and rolling hills. Peering out the tinted window Alec could see a small farm with horses and livestock, not what he would expect in the land of billionaires. The road began to pitch sharply upward as they took a sudden left turn onto an unmarked road. Alec stooped his head to look up the mountainside and he could just make out the pitched rooftlines of spectacular homes nestled into the cliff face. There were private lanes, most of them gated, splitting off to the right and disappearing into thick landscaping.
Sliding to the driver’s side window Alec looked down to see the town shrinking below him as he rose higher and higher towards his unknown destination. Night had fallen and the city lights were casting a yellowish glow. In the distance he could just barely make out the orange tiled roof of Hendel House.

*Even if I wanted Jace to come get me I have no freaking idea where I’m going!*

Alec finished off the rest of his water then wiped his sweaty palms down the length of his pants. His heart was racing as the limo braked and slowed to a near stop. They turned into a narrow driveway blocked by a large wrought iron gate. Alec nervously fidgeted with his hair and collar.

*I should have got a haircut, and a new shirt... fuck!*

The gate unlatched electronically and the two doors slowly parted giving the limo entrance to a private lane. They wound their way along the steep incline until it finally leveled off and the house was in view.

*Holy sh*t!*

Alec hadn’t been prepared for what he saw, the home was breathtaking. It rose from the ground like the bow of a ship protruding from the rocky terrain. Angled sharply into a point of rough cut timber and glass, it was the perfect balance of rustic charm and ultra-modern design. Alec’s jaw was slack as his eyes ogled the sheer magnificence of the structure.

*This is insane…*

The limo swung around to the front and aligned Alec’s door with a path of slate stepping stones. He felt the driver’s door open and he roughly shook his head, trying to gain some semblance of calm.

*Ok… you can do this!*

Alec’s door popped open and Mr. Fell extended his arm in welcome. “This way sir, watch your step,” he instructed as Alec grabbed the door frame to hoist himself up and out.

Alec was led along the stone path to the entrance of the home where the door stood slightly ajar. “Your presence, Mr. Lightwood, has been highly anticipated to say the least,” Mr. Fell told him wryly with a twinkle in his eye.

Alec felt his cheeks begin to brighten as a lopsided grin escaped. He looked down at his feet in the hopes he could chase away his embarrassed yet pleased expression.

If it were even possible to imagine, the foyer was actually more impressive than the exterior. Towering at least 20 feet high the theme of timber and glass continued, but on an even more elaborate scale. Massive beams of what appeared to be cedar wood crisscrossed overhead. Alec took a deep breath and confirmed his suspicions, the smell of cedar was definitely present, mixed with another even more sumptuous aroma that must be his dinner. It made his stomach growl.

Mr. Fell looked to him and smiled. “I do hope you’ve come hungry, dinner has been underway nearly since dawn. Your host has truly outdone himself.”

Alec tried to reign in his excitement but his grin had bloomed into a full blown smile. *He cooked… for me?*

The home was palatial and full of beautiful music, so crystal clear it was like stepping into a concert
hall. No doubt a state-of-the-art home entertainment system was responsible for spreading the sweet sound of Mendelssohn all around them. Alec felt more at ease as the familiar tune calmed his nerves.

Everywhere Alec looked there were the most fascinating musical artifacts. Most interestingly to his left there was a large framed piece of parchment, which appeared to be hand written music of some sort. Alec was drawn closer by his curiosity and quickly decoded the scrawled handwriting across the top of the composition, König Stephan.

“Oh my God is this Beethoven?” Alec blurted out, unable to control his complete shock.

“Ah yes, good eye, Opus 117 in all its glory! Marvelous isn’t it?” Mr. Fell praised.

Alec couldn’t believe what he was seeing. Leaning in to take a closer look he almost knocked over a large vase that sat on the table below. He hastily grabbed the sides to steady its rocking.

“Careful Alexander that vase contains the sacred remains of the Zhengtong Emperor himself,” Magnus cooed, sneaking up behind Alec unaware.

“Jesus!” Alec swore, jumping back at the sound of Magnus’ voice.

Mr. Fell let out a loud guffaw clapping his hands together in amusement. “Oh dear, the poor lad’s only been here 2 minutes and you’ve already managed to scare him half to death,” he teased, smacking Magnus on the back.

“My apologies, where are my manners. Welcome to la Maison de Bane, I see you’ve discovered one of my prized possessions,” Magnus said warmly, gesturing to the framed music. “The maestro was still pumping out the hits in 1811, before the worst of his illness set in of course. I like to imagine this was on his piano alongside No. 7’s 2nd movement, which has always been my favorite,” Magnus beamed with pride.

“It’s… amazing,” Alec managed to speak, his heartrate finally falling back into a normal rhythm.

“I have many more treasures I can show you, but first let me get you a drink,” Magnus said as he flashed a knowing look to Mr. Fell.

“Gentlemen, this is where I leave you. Mr. Lightwood it was a pleasure. I look forward to seeing you again in the future, which I daresay will be sooner rather than later,” Mr. Fell affirmed as he bowed his head and backed away towards the door.

“Thanks for the ride,” Alec replied, instantly regretting his lame choice of words.

Way to make a great impression, moron.

“Follow me Alexander, this way,” Magnus chimed, turning on his heel and heading off. Alec hustled to catch up.

The foyer led into a large great room with another vaulted ceiling trussed in more cedar beams as well as a jaw dropping wall of floor to ceiling glass that stretched all along the back. There was a wide stone hearth to the left and a gorgeous Steinway grand. Alec stopped in his tracks to just take in the perfection of the scene.

If I had a house this is exactly what it would look like.

Magnus was busying himself at a highly polished Chicago-style bar in the corner, shaking a large stainless steel cocktail shaker between both hands.
“I consider myself quite the skillful mixologist, I think you’re going to like this,” Magnus said convincingly as he popped the top of the shaker and poured its contents between two martini glasses.

Alec cautiously approached the bar, remembering Jace’s advice about drinking water.

_It would be rude not to drink it though._

He took the glass and eyed the contents suspiciously.

“To us,” Magnus declared, clinking their glasses together and taking a sip. Alec lifted the glass to his lips and immediately felt the burn of vodka as the concoction swirled around his tongue coating it in the surprising flavor of lemongrass.

“Mmm,” Alec responded automatically. His palette surprised by the spicy, herbal sweetness.

“See, I knew you’d like it!” Magnus bragged. “And it goes perfectly with our menu tonight.”

Alec took another sip, relishing the incredible flavor.

_These are going to be dangerous!_

“Thank you for coming tonight. I know my invitation probably seemed quite forward, but I admit I was anxious to get to know you better. Without the distraction of strangers gawking,” Magnus confided, eyeing Alec over the rim of his glass.

“I was happy to come,” Alec responded, regret instantly plaguing his mind again.

_Ugh, literally everything that comes out of my mouth is idiotic!_

“Good, I’m glad,” Magnus smiled, and Alec’s heart fluttered from the brilliance of it.

There was an awkward silence for a minute as Alec continued sipping his martini despite the way it was making his head feel.

“So I hear congratulations are in order?” Magnus said, breaking the quiet. “The Aspen Quartet, quite a tremendous honor.”

“Thanks,” Alec mumbled, praying he could keep his cheeks under control.

“The best of the best, not to mention the festival’s secret weapon. I hope they won’t work you too hard on the campaign trail. When do you start rehearsal?”

“Tomorrow morning,” Alec replied. “9:00 AM.”

“Ah, I see, then perhaps no more of these martinis. I wouldn’t want you sporting a hangover on your first big day!” Magnus teased, taking Alec’s glass and setting them both back down on the bar.

“Shall we eat? I know I’m starving.”

“Yes, definitely.” Alec replied, feeling the hollow inside his stomach yearn for food. He followed behind Magnus again as he led him towards the kitchen.

“I wanted to keep things simple and casual, no need for the fuss of the dining room tonight,” Magnus explained revealing an intimate setup for two at the barstools of his kitchen island.

Alec sat down on one of the stools and took in the enormity of what clearly had been modeled after a
traditional French kitchen. Gorgeously rustic, yet refined, with an elegant but very livable feel. The cabinets were a dark knotty wood that looked surprisingly like pieces of actual furniture. The countertops were a light, buttery granite and a large assortment of copper pots and pans dangled from the ceiling above them. Alec had to admit he was impressed to find out Magnus could cook. Not only that he could but that he’d actually made something special just for him. He fought the urge to blush by grabbing his glass of water and chugging it down.

Magnus was pulling large serving bowls out of rectangular warming drawers built right into the wall next to the double ovens. Alec’s eyes widened as a feast for the senses was set in front of him.

“My Mother was half Indonesian, God rest her soul, and suffice it to say I’m a tad obsessed with Southeast Asian cuisine,” Magnus told him as he placed dish after dish on the counter.

Alec had known of course that both of Magnus’ parents had passed away when he was quite young. He’d read every bit of information he could find about his personal life and committed it all to memory. But he didn’t want to bring up the subject so instead he pointed out the obvious.

“Are we expecting more people?” Alec asked sarcastically.

Magnus replied with a loud belly laugh. “Ha ha, not tonight… this is all for us.”

Alec liked hearing the word us. The way Magnus had used it so casually, like it was commonplace to refer to Alec and himself as one entity. He struggled to remain grounded in the truth, that this was only their first date. When really he felt they’d known each other much longer. It was a nagging déjà vu Alec felt tugging at the back of his mind, the same feeling he’d had in the practice room the day before. He found himself lost in his thoughts as he watched Magnus align the dishes meticulously.

“Alright, I think this is everything. May I?” Magnus asked, gesturing to Alec’s plate.

“Sure,” Alec answered in awe as Magnus lifted his plate from in front of him and began building his masterpiece.

“First we begin with nasi, which is the steamed rice, and I’ve also made some nasi gorung, which is fried rice, because it’s so much tastier the way I make it. Then we’ll add the lauk-pauk, those are the fish and meat side dishes. My absolute favorite, ayam goring, which is like fried chicken but much better because of the seasonings. Shallots, garlic, turmeric, lemongrass, then fried in coconut oil. You’re going to love it. I’ve also made rendang, which is a curry but the beef cooks in coconut milk for hours, you won’t believe how tender it is. Then I’ll put some sayur-mayur on here next, those are the vegetables. I’ve used spinach and various leafy greens, cassava, eggplant, papaya, and garlic. I know it sounds like a mess but these flavors complement each other perfectly, trust me.”

Alec was mesmerized. He was trying so hard to listen to the names of the dishes and ingredients but he couldn’t stop staring at Magnus’ hands. The way he gestured to each dish before placing a helping on Alec’s plate, his fingers rolling with a flourish and snap. He truly could have been a conductor if he hadn’t played the violin. He was graceful and captivating. Alec felt riveted to his stool as he watched with breathless anticipation.

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“Sure,” Alec answered in awe as Magnus lifted his plate from in front of him and began building his masterpiece.

“First we begin with nasi, which is the steamed rice, and I’ve also made some nasi gorung, which is fried rice, because it’s so much tastier the way I make it. Then we’ll add the lauk-pauk, those are the fish and meat side dishes. My absolute favorite, ayam goring, which is like fried chicken but much better because of the seasonings. Shallots, garlic, turmeric, lemongrass, then fried in coconut oil. You’re going to love it. I’ve also made rendang, which is a curry but the beef cooks in coconut milk for hours, you won’t believe how tender it is. Then I’ll put some sayur-mayur on here next, those are the vegetables. I’ve used spinach and various leafy greens, cassava, eggplant, papaya, and garlic. I know it sounds like a mess but these flavors complement each other perfectly, trust me.”

Alec was mesmerized. He was trying so hard to listen to the names of the dishes and ingredients but he couldn’t stop staring at Magnus’ hands. The way he gestured to each dish before placing a helping on Alec’s plate, his fingers rolling with a flourish and snap. He truly could have been a conductor if he hadn’t played the violin. He was graceful and captivating. Alec felt riveted to his stool as he watched with breathless anticipation.

“Alright, I think that about does it, your dinner is served Monsieur;” Magnus declared, setting Alec’s plate down in front of him again. “Please dig in, I’m dying for your critique!”

Alec didn’t need to be told twice. He immediately picked up his fork and took a huge bite of the fried rice, the flavors exploding in his mouth. “Mmmm hmmm,” he moaned in approval as his eyes rolled back involuntarily. The aromatic spiciness mixed with the earthy sweetness, combined with the crunch of something crispy, enveloped him. It was the most delicious thing he’d ever tasted. And that
was really saying something considering he’d been born and raised in Manhattan.

“Try the chicken next!” Magnus urged him, clearly enjoying watching Alec discover his hidden talents as a chef.

Alec tried to control his embarrassing Ooo’s and Ahh’s but the food was just too good. He knew he should slow down and remember his manners but nothing was going to keep him from devouring every bite on his plate with gusto.

Magnus finally tore himself away from the joy of watching Alec and joined in. Alec was thankful to feel a little less on display as Magnus reached for a bottle of wine and began filling both their glasses.

“This is tauk, a sugar palm wine. I have friends in Jakarta who keep me well stocked,” Magnus praised as he continued to pour generously.

_Great, more booze. I’m so doomed._

Magnus sat the bottle back down and began eating. Alec’s eyes took the opportunity to wander again. He was drawn hypnotically to Magnus’ magical hands… his nimble fingers, the nails painted black, even the way he held his fork was sublime.

_Doomed!

“So, tell me about your family, any siblings?” Magnus asked innocently, his eyes focused on his food.

“Uh, yeah, two. My sister, Izzy, she’s the smart one. Yale law, pride of the family,” Alec joked but with an edge of sarcasm. “But don’t get me wrong, she’s great though.”

“And the other?” Magnus questioned.

“My little brother, Max. He’s totally crazy, literally never stops talking, but he’s impossible not to love. I miss him a lot,” Alec admitted. “He’s been in boarding school overseas. I need to go see him as soon as the festival’s over.”

“You two are close?” Magnus asked.

“Honestly, he’s the most important person in my life. I admit at first I wasn’t really that excited about having another sibling. I was 9 and moody. I basically sat in my room playing cello day and night, avoiding the world. But when Max came along he changed everything. He looked up to me and made me feel important, and needed. I’d do anything for him,” Alec said, his emotions cutting off the rest of his thought as the inside of his throat tightened. He felt a twinge of sadness thinking about Max and how far away he was.

“That’s really sweet, he sounds extraordinary,” Magnus smiled. “And what about your parents, what do they do?”

“Ah well, my Mom and Dad both work for the government. International affairs for the State Department, sort of a big deal,” Alec told him.

“I see, and are you close with them as well?” Magnus prodded.

“Sometimes. But mostly they just think of me as their poorly misguided gay son the cellist, who went to music school instead of the Ivy League. They really wanted me to go into finance, or law. Or
anything they deemed ‘worthwhile’, as they put it. I’m a disappointment to them I know. It really doesn’t matter how successful I am musically. I’m destined to be the black sheep of the family,” Alec replied.

*Shit, why did I just say all of that? Is this an interview or a date?*

“Clearly they must be delusional if they can’t see how incredibly talented you are. I’ve been in this business a long time and I know greatness when I see it,” Magnus proclaimed.

“You’ve never even heard me play,” Alec responded brusquely.

“Au contraire my dear, I Googled you! Legal name, date of birth, school records, performance history, I went full blown stalker mode. I’ve seen more than enough to back up my claim. You have an amazing gift, I wouldn’t lie about such things, trust me.” Magnus affirmed.

“Oh my God he Googled me?

“Uh… thanks then, I guess,” Alec answered shyly, feeling a bit embarrassed. He hoped he hadn’t seen the really early stuff, it was dreadful.

“You should be proud Alexander, don’t let the stupidity and closed mindedness of others dim the light that shines brightly within you. Believe me, I’ve learned that lesson the hard way,” Magnus confessed as he put down his fork and turned to face him.

“You really are something special,” Magnus told him sweetly.

Alec found himself staring into Magnus’ eyes, momentarily lost in their absolute genuine kindness and honesty. These were traits he rarely found in others, it was overwhelming to him.

*How is he this amazing?*

Their brief but intense eye-lock was broken by Magnus hopping abruptly out of his stool. “Help me clean up, I’ve got something I want to show you!” He said cheerfully as Alec was left behind in a dazed trance.

The two men worked together as a team to wrap up the leftovers and load the dishwasher. Alec felt very domestic, he daydreamed for a moment about what life would be like when he had a house one day. His own place, with his own kitchen. He thought he’d like to learn to cook, he’d always been a foodie. Distracted by thoughts of his unknown future he kept glancing over at Magnus to watch him work. He had a hard time believing this was the same person he’d idolize for so many years. The legendary virtuoso scraping bowls and tearing off pieces of plastic wrap, it made him so human. Like they could almost be considered equals in his mind.

Once they’d finally finished Magnus strolled back to the island to refill their wine then he picked up his glass by the stem and headed for the back patio door.

“This way,” he beckoned and Alec grabbed his glass and followed.

Once outside Alec was surprised to see there was absolutely no view. The house backed right up into the mountain. There couldn’t have been more than 30 feet of backyard. Magnus turned toward a metal staircase and began a steep climb upward.

“I like to call this my Stairway to Heaven,” Magnus said with a smirk turning back to motion him along. Alec grabbed the rail and continued after him.
The stairs stretched all the way up the back of the house making two turns before reaching the roof. Magnus had skipped ahead and beat Alec to the top.

“Here we are, my private oasis!” Magnus announced as Alec took the last two steps in one giant stride bringing himself up to join him.

“Whoa,” Alec uttered on a swift inhalation. His eyes blown wide with amazement.

Magnus beamed with pride seeing the look on Alec’s face.

The roof offered a breathtaking view of Aspen Mountain just across the valley, as well as a panoramic view of the entire mountain range behind. It was truly incredible.

“All of this wasted space was just the roof of the garage, so I had the builder turn it into my makeshift backyard in the sky!” Magnus said proudly with his arms outstretched. “Do you like it?”

Alec took a minute to process what he saw. The awe-inspiring view, the dancing light of a tabletop fire pit, the twinkling stars so close overhead, and the man of his dreams standing in front of him with his arms open wide. Liking it was the understatement of a lifetime. He felt like he’d walked into an alternate reality where he’d suddenly been given everything he’d always wanted.

“It’s the most beautiful sight I’ve ever seen,” Alec professed, looking bravely at Magnus as if he were the only visible thing that mattered.

Magnus’ waiting expression blossomed into a joyous smile, his eyes gleaming brighter than the stars in Alec’s eyes.

“Come over here,” Magnus requested beckoning Alec to the railings at the edge of the roof. “I want to show you something else.”

Alec set his wine glass down next to Magnus’ on a smooth marble table and followed him.

“You see that cluster of lights over there?” Magnus pointed. “Just to the left of the gondola.”

“Yeah,” Alec replied, pressing his waist against the rail and leaning over slightly. He could see it glowing in the distance.

“That’s the club where I first saw you just three days ago. And in that one perfect moment, when the crowd parted and you were standing there under the strobe lights looking at me, I knew without a doubt I wanted you in my life.”

Alec’s grip on the railing came lose and his arms fell limp at his sides.

He felt it too.

“That might sound crazy, and maybe it is, but I believe it was fate that brought us both to that place at this point in our lives. I know we’ve barely had time to learn about each other, and there’s so much I need to tell you. But right now the only thing I want to say is this,” Magnus said as he reached to take hold of Alec’s hand.

“Alexander Gideon Lightwood, would you please allow me to kiss you?”

Alec’s heart stood frozen in his chest, there was no air in his lungs to breathe or thought left it his mind to think. Only one simple answer to Magnus’ question came forth effortlessly and without hesitation... “Yes.”
Magnus eased forward and raised up on the balls of his feet, taking Alec’s face in his hands as gently as if he were made of glass. He set his warm smooth lips upon Alec’s awaiting mouth and pressed in fervently but with careful restraint. The taste of their mingled breath was sweet from the wine. Alec’s lips parted ever so slightly to allow Magnus’ essence to flow unobstructed into his lungs. It felt like the first real breath he’d ever taken in his life. His body tingled.

Magnus pulled his lips away and Alec chased after them. He’d had a taste of their blissful sweetness and he wasn’t about to let him go now. Magnus responded eagerly and with more intensity. Now that the initial ice had been broken he angled his head to come at Alec fully, his mouth open and pliant. Alec could feel the touch of Magnus’ tongue on the seam of his lips and he granted him passage. His breath hitched as Magnus entered into him hungrily, pulling his head in closer to deepen the kiss. It was passionate and all-consuming. Alec felt he was losing control until suddenly Magnus pulled back and broke apart the connection.

“Thank you,” Magnus murmured just an inch from Alec’s panting mouth. “I’ve been wanting to do that all night.”

Alec spontaneously reached for Magnus’ left hand and pulled it away from his face. He grasped it gently, spreading his strong but delicate fingers across his own open palm. Then he carefully touched the polished nails and glided over each of Magnus’ fingertips, feeling their calloused edges. These were the skillful fingers that had brought down Carnegie Hall with flawless Tchaikovsky, earned standing ovations with Beethoven at Royal Albert Hall, and played the soundtrack of his wildest nightly fantasies ever since he was a teen. He lifted his palm up to his lips and kissed each of Magnus’ knuckles one by one, worshipping every ridge and crease. “I’ve been wanting to do this for years,” Alec whispered softly, admitting what he’d been afraid for Magnus to find out. That he’d adored him for so long this moment was a dream come true.

Magnus responded by wrapping his right hand over top of Alec’s, sandwiching it between his. His expressive eyes gazing upward were telling Alec everything he wanted to hear without making a sound.

“What are we going to do now?” Magnus asked with a wide-eyed innocent look. It had replaced his normal air of confidence with a raw vulnerability Alec hadn’t seen before.

“I don’t know,” Alec confessed twining his fingers through Magnus’ and clutching their joined hands to his chest. “But I don’t want to go.”

“Then stay…”

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas!!! : )
I hope you enjoyed seeing Magnus and Alec have their first date. Which isn't quite over yet! But I had to leave a bit of a cliffhanger to keep things interesting. So much more to come! Some shocking revelations I don't think anyone has guessed at yet! :)

Also forgot to mention that the playlist has been updated with the music from this chapter! Mendelssohn's Midsummer Night's Dream is what Alec heard when he arrived at Magnus' house. :) http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqiT2YEPXgr7

Thank you so much for your comments and kudos! I appreciate you taking time to read my story. I hope your holiday season is full of laughter and cheer! :)
Alec felt the weight of Magnus’ words like a blow to the chest. His mind violently jerked from its current blissed out state and catapulted into a terrifying reality.

Stay?

Alec’s entire body went rigid, his throat immediately tightening. “I… I can’t,” he managed to reply as the cold chill of fear traveled through his veins like ice water. He let go of Magnus’ hands and took a step backwards. An intense fight or flight response gripping him.

I’ve gotta get out of here!

“I can’t, I’m sorry,” Alec muttered, looking down at his feet as the levity of the situation paralyzed him.

“Alexander, it’s OK, don’t panic,” Magnus responded raising both palms toward Alec in an attempt to calm him. “There’s no pressure here, I wouldn’t do that.”

Alec reached one hand into his hair grasping it in his fist while squeezing his eyes tight in an attempt to clear a deluge of unnerving thoughts. “I know, it’s not you… it’s me,” he admitted feeling his cowardice grow and stretch to epic proportions.

Jace was right, there’s no going back from this. What am I doing here?

Alec was losing the battle that was raging inside himself. His crippling anxiety over the mere thought of staying with Magnus overnight frightened him to the point where he had to escape. Even though a huge part of him didn’t want to be anywhere else in the world, it was overshadowed by apprehension and self-doubt.

I gotta call Jace.

“Why don’t we just slow things down a bit? Let’s go back downstairs, I made dessert,” Magnus suggested, clearly concerned he’d pushed Alec too far, too soon.

Alec was subconsciously moving backwards step by step, closer and closer to the stairs. He was trying to remove himself from the intimidating situation, unable to find the courage to stay or the words to explain why he couldn’t.

“Magnus I’m sorry, I forgot, I have a big day tomorrow… I really have to go.” Alec lied, and not very convincingly. He risked a glance up from his feet to Magnus’ face and saw the look of disappointment glistening in his eyes. It crushed him.

I am completely fucking this up.

Alec pulled his phone from his back pocket and opened his text to Jace. He typed: “Help me” then hit send. The response was immediate.

11:05 PM - Jace: Be there in 5

Magnus stepped back, giving Alec space to breathe. “Alright, I understand, let me call Ragnor, he
“can take you back,” he offered gently with a soothing air to his voice.

“Actually I have a friend who’s going to come and get me, uh Jace. You met him,” Alec replied.

Magnus was taken aback. His eyes blinking rapidly with confusion.

“We have some stuff we have to handle tonight, before tomorrow… some important stuff for the quartet.” Alec’s pathetic excuse sounded even worse coming out of his mouth than it did in his head. He knew he was blowing it, and every word he spoke only dug himself into a deeper hole.

Magnus lifted one eyebrow and cocked his head to the side, eyeing Alec suspiciously. “I see, well by all means don’t let me keep you from your plans,” he replied with an edge of bitterness.

Alec flinched, if he needed further proof that he’d totally ruined the night his suspicions were confirmed. Magnus was obviously upset and Alec was 100% to blame.

“I’m sorry. Thank you for dinner, and for everything,” Alec sputtered, failing miserably at trying to smooth things over.

Magnus grabbed his wine glass off the table and downed the contents in one gulp. “Sure, my pleasure.”

“What are you doing you idiot, go back over there and stop being such a pussy!”

Magnus leaned back into the overstuffed cushions and crossed his legs defiantly.

Alec swallowed hard, he knew he should say something but no words would come. He just stared at Magnus silently wishing he could be a different kind of person. He wanted to be someone brave, someone who could let good things happen to them… someone who wasn’t so damn afraid.

“Goodbye Alexander,” Magnus declared, his cynical eyes unable to fully mask what was hidden behind them.

Alec’s heart sank with Magnus’ brusque dismissal. His chest ached as he watched his perfect dream come true dissolve right before his eyes into the worst nightmare imaginable. Devastated, he took off down the stairs skipping them two at a time until he reached the back door. Thankfully it was unlocked and he tore off through the house and out the front door.

Following the slate stepping stones that had led him inside just a few hours earlier, Alec ran across the driveway and down the sloping narrow lane. The moon was shrouded behind a thick veil of clouds, barely lighting a path for him to see his way. The only sound he could hear was the soft thud of his shoes on the pavement and his own panting breath. When he finally reached the gate it magically buzzed to open.
He’s watching me.

Weaving between the partially opened doors Alec eyed a shiny black Dodge Charger idling by the side of the road. He ran to the passenger side, ripped open the door and threw himself in.

“Jesus man, what the hell happened back there?” Jace asked, his eyes blown wide with shock.

“Just drive! Just fucking get me out of here!” Alec screamed, losing control of his carefully guarded emotions. He pulled back his right hand making a tight fist and smashed it into Jace’s dash. “FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!” Alec yelled as he punched the dashboard repeatedly. “I fucked up the whole fucking thing! GOD DAMN IT!”

Jace was stunned. He’d never seen Alec lose his cool, he’d never even really heard him swear. Not wanting to make the situation any worse he slammed his foot on the gas and squealed out into the road. Leaving behind no doubt a long trail of burned rubber.

“Did he hurt you? Because I’ll turn this car around and…”

“No, just drive!” Alec interrupted, his voice quivering with anger.

“Ok, Ok, but I don’t care how rich that prick is I’ll go back there and beat his ass…”

“Stop talking!” Alec bellowed.

Jace closed his mouth with a snap and continued driving down the long and winding mountain road silently while Alec fumed in the passenger seat.

Unable to breathe properly Alec dipped his head down between his knees, clutching the backs of his legs tightly.

Jesus, what have I done?

It was unfathomable to believe he’d allowed himself to completely lose his nerve and walk away from Magnus like that. Someone he respected and admired so much. Someone who had gone above and beyond to welcome him into his home, to make him feel totally comfortable, to cook for him and ask him about his family and his life. Alec felt thoroughly ashamed.

Jace quietly drove while monitoring the sounds of Alec’s erratic breathing. He waited until it was under control before daring to speak again.

“Listen man, I don’t know what happened, and you don’t have to tell me. But is there anything I can do? Do you want to go get a drink or something?” Jace asked kindly with genuine care and concern for his friend.

“There’s nothing you can do,” Alec answered with hushed desperation. “What’s done is done.”

As the Charger pulled up in front of Hendel House Alec felt a moment of clarity wash over him.

“Hey, how did you even know where I was?” he asked Jace accusingly.

Jace busied himself fumbling with his car keys, not making eye contact.
“What?” He replied absentmindedly.

“You heard me! How did you know where I was? And how the hell did you get there so fast?” Alec demanded.

Jace shifted nervously in his seat. “Uh, well, I got to thinking you’d been gone a while and, I don’t know, I just wondered where you were. So I called that Maureen chick from registration and sweet talked her into giving me Bane’s address,” he confessed.

“That still doesn’t explain how you got there so fast?” Alec continued questioning him, not buying the story.

“I was just out driving around, happened to be close by. That’s all,” Jace proposed as he gave an innocent shrug of his shoulders.

Alec thought this explanation didn’t seem very likely, but he was tired, pissed off, and just wanted to be alone in his misery.

“Fine Jace, whatever,” he blurted out, exiting the car and slamming the door behind him. “I’m going to bed.”

Jace watched Alec storm off and didn’t try to stop him. Once he was absolutely sure he was completely out of sight he hopped back in his car and drove away.

The next morning Alec awoke startled like he’d heard a gunshot. Panicked, he frantically scrambled around the bed searching for his phone, worried that he’d overslept. He finally found it buried in a clump of blanket near his hip, thankfully there was still some battery left.

7:00 AM… thank God!

Rehearsal wasn’t until 9:00 so he still had plenty of time to get ready. Since he was the one who’d been entrusted with the key to the practice room he thought he should get there early and make a good impression. Reaching his arms overhead to take a long morning stretch the memories of the previous night began replaying. First the pleasant ones, which almost fooled him into thinking the night had been a success. Until the horrific turn of events flooded his mind, reminding him of just how badly things had ended. Anxious to push them aside Alec hopped out of bed and headed for the shower.

“Today is about me and you,” he mumbled to Stella as he crossed the room. “Nobody else.”

The hot water soothed Alec’s stiff and aching muscles. He’d been so upset last night he’d slept in a contorted position curled around his phone. At least a dozen times he’d started to call Magnus and apologize. He wanted to tell him that it was the most amazing night of his life. That he’d been wonderful and the date had been perfect beyond his wildest dreams. He wanted to explain that the only reason he’d freaked out was because he felt embarrassed and pathetic. Alec was used to getting in his own way. He had always been his own worst enemy. It was a coping mechanism after a life full of failed relationships. His parents, his sister, his school friends, his nonexistent sex life, it was all a wasteland of disappointment and heartbreak.

He’s better off without me anyway, I’m too fucked up to even be in a relationship.
Alec looked down at his right hand and noticed his knuckles were scabbed over with dried blood. He made a fist and felt the skin pull painfully across the bone. He remembered punching Jace’s dashboard, thankfully with his bow arm and not the one he used for fingering. He hoped he hadn’t caused any damage to the car, and was honestly shocked he’d had this visceral reaction. He didn’t feel like himself. He wasn’t the type to get angry and he definitely wasn’t a person who ever punched things. His stomach lurched with more embarrassment.

Just about the time Alec finished getting dressed there was a gentle knock on the door.

“Alec?”

It was Jace.

“You up?”

Alec unlatched the door and opened it to reveal Jace in the hallway looking sheepish.

“I thought you’d probably want to get going early. Will you ride up to the school with me?” Jace asked cautiously, unsure of what kind of mood Alec would be in today.

“Yeah sure, thanks,” Alec replied. He felt guilty for leaving things the way he did last night after Jace had been nice enough to come get him.

Jace smiled and gave Alec a light punch in the arm. “This is our day man! Let’s go show those other two lame asses what’s up!”

Alec rolled his eyes, he knew Jace didn’t really mean that. Maybe for Sebastian sure, there was no love lost, but he knew his main objective today would be to impress the redhead, Clary. Alec hoped watching him epically fail might make his own inadequacies with love less depressing.

Careening up the mountain with Jace behind the wheel Alec didn’t feel his normal level of fear and nervousness. He didn’t grip his seat or brace himself against the door. He just relaxed his body and let the sharp curves of the road move him willingly from side to side. He felt a change coming over him, a new sense of freedom somehow creeping into his consciousness. What had been the cause of all this fear in his life? Fear of failure, fear of change, fear of disappointment, fear of driving too fast or loving someone too much. What was it doing to him? How was it shaping his future? He knew the answers without much thought, the fear was holding him back. If he didn’t find a way to fight it he wasn’t ever going to be happy. This realization crashed over him like an ocean wave.

But what if it’s too late?

Jace and Alec arrived at the school about a half hour before their scheduled practice time. It was a gorgeous day, bright sunshine beaming down from a cloudless sky. The mountains framed against a canvas of brilliant blue. Alec still wasn’t use to the majesty of it all. As they entered the pond building and hung a right down the first hall they were surprised to see Clary sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of the practice room door tuning her violin.

“Hey!” Jace called out to her. “You beat us!”

“Hey,” Clary responded. “Yeah, I wanted to get here early since the shuttle sometimes runs late.”
“We could’ve picked you up!” Jace proclaimed excitedly. “Next time we will for sure, won’t we Alec? It will be no problem!”

Clary looked down with a bashful smile. Alec thought she seemed receptive to the idea and he suddenly felt his own heart tug a little bit at the thought of Jace and Clary flirting on their morning car rides up to the school. Not at all helpful to his current distraught state of mind.

“I’m happy to as well Clarissa,” Sebastian chimed in, approaching them stealthy from behind. “I come right through town every morning on my way from lessons.”

Jace spun around quickly to shoot his most threatening look. But Sebastian’s eyes never left Clary as he drank her in lasciviously.

Alec dug the key out from his pocket and opened the practice room door. Hurrying before any blood was shed. When he flipped on the lights he saw the room was already setup in quartet formation, four chairs with four stands. He walked to the fourth chair and found sheet music for the cello was already in place along with a note with his name on it. Alec picked it up and opened the folded card.

*So proud of you,*

*Victor*

Alec felt his heart twinge as a smile instantly came to his lips. His teacher was like a father to him in so many ways. He’d been there the last four years of his life through all the ups and downs like nobody had ever been before. Making him proud meant the world to Alec. He closed the note and tucked it into his back pocket pledging complete dedication to the group without letting any distractions get in the way. He knew if he dug down deep he could pull himself out of the swamp of emotions he’d been suffering through the last ten hours. It was time to put his game face on.

“Let’s get to work,” Alec spoke aloud to the other three. “We’ve got Beethoven here on top of the stack, that’s a good place to start.”

Sebastian narrowed his eyes at Alec, clearly not expecting him to be the one giving directions.

“Good choice Alec,” Jace responded, giving him a pat on the back to show his sign of solidarity. Sebastian’s eyes flickered back and forth between the two of them as if he were trying to decide who to murder first. Jace responded with a cocky grin. Alec and Clary seemed oblivious to the exchange.

“Beethoven it is,” Sebastian sneered, sitting himself down on his chair as if he were taking a throne. He had no intention of letting anyone else call the shots, you could almost see his wheels turning.

Practice was fairly uneventful. A few issues with tempo and dynamics, Clary had dragged on the Allegro twice but she’d quickly adjusted. Alec and Jace were in perfect sync, much to Sebastian’s dismay. After three hours without a break Alec felt they were in good shape considering it was their first meeting. Feeling his confidence was still at a high he spoke up again with a voice of authority.
“I think we should stop for lunch,” Alec stated. “We can pick it back up in a couple of hours.”

Jace immediately turned to Clary and asked her to ride with him into town to get food. Sebastian’s jaw fell loose, although he tried to hide it by keeping his lips together. Alec saw his visible reaction.

“Do you have a problem with that?” Alec snapped, not in the mood to be challenged.

“Not at all, maestro,” Sebastian replied sarcastically with a maniacal sort of grin. He bowed his head dramatically toward Alec then winked.

Alec was thrown. What the fuck is wrong with this dude?

“Hey Alec, you good?” Jace interrupted.


“You said you had some important stuff you had to take care of over the lunch break, right?” Jace replied, enunciating each word with his eyes wide open.

Alec took the hint. “Yeah, right, I gotta go do some stuff.”

“Great, Clary and I are going down to Boogie’s, we’ll be back at 2:00, cool?”

“Yeah, sure,” Alec said, trying not to look disappointed. He had nothing to take care of, and no car to drive, plus Boogie’s diner was supposed to be the best burgers and shakes anywhere, but obviously Jace’s good fortune talking Clary into having lunch with him was going to outweigh Alec’s need for food. At least one good thing had happened, Sebastian had left the room while Jace was talking. The confrontation avoided, at least for now.

Once Jace and Clary were gone Alec sat back down in his chair and pulled out his phone. No messages. His heart sank, hoping maybe he’d heard something from Magnus. Even if it was just him texting to say what an ungrateful jerk he had been, it would be better than no communication at all. He glanced over at Stella who was laying in her case with the top flipped open.

“Ok, I know I said today was just about me and you, but I’m suffering over here.”

Alec clicked on his contacts list and scrolled down to Magnus’ name.

Maybe I can just apologize better, or try to at least leave things on a more positive note. He probably hates me by now.

Just then, the practice room door swung open and a gangly young boy walked in carrying a bassoon.

“Oh I’m sorry, I thought this was Professor Blackthorn’s studio, my bad,” the boy said, backing out of the room and letting the door drift shut.

Alec felt a lightbulb click on inside his mind. “Studio? Of course! He’ll have a studio here on campus somewhere, probably right in this building! He has to meet with students, that’s why he’s here!”

Alec rushed to close Stella’s case, then hurried to exit, locking the practice room door behind him. He walked briskly towards the main reception desk, trying to play it cool even though his heart was racing. He needed a staff directory so he could find Magnus. Then he’d go apologize to him face to face, convince him he didn’t mean to be so rude. That would be the only way to solve this mess.
With directory in hand Alec was fast approaching room 134, Magnus Bane’s personal studio. It wasn’t very far from where he’d been rehearsing all morning, which gave Alec an odd sense of closeness. He thought it funny that even after their uncomfortable parting the night before, Magnus’ presence in the building was so satisfying to him. Maybe if they could find a way to get back on good terms that would be enough for Alec. At least then he could go back to functioning somewhat normally.

With each continuing step forward Alec felt his heart thumping louder and louder against his eardrums.

I can do this, I can do this…

When he reached the door he pressed his ear against it to listen for voices. He waited several seconds but didn’t hear a single sound.

 Maybe he’s not here.

Mustering up his final bit of needed courage, Alec raised his shaking hand to knock.

“Entrez!” called someone from inside.

Shit that’s his voice.

Alec grasped the door handle and let out a deep breath.

Here goes nothing.

He quietly entered the room but didn’t see anyone there. Not until he looked down and discovered Magnus was lying on the floor, knees bent, arms at his sides, with what appeared to be a textbook behind his head.

“How fitting. Alexander Lightwood graces me with his presence just as I’m in the midst of my midday Alexander Technique,” Magnus jeered not bothering to get up. “To what do I owe this great pleasure?”

Alec was caught unprepared for this scenario and nervously shifted his weight from one foot to the other, glancing anywhere around the room but down.

“Uh, I just wanted to come talk to you for a minute,” Alec admitted, feeling the blush rise to his cheeks.

“ Well I’m all ears!” Magnus declared, still staying put on the floor.

“I want to apologize for the way I acted last night. I’m really sorry for leaving like that, it was rude of me” Alec said with humble sincerity.

“And?” Magnus taunted him, clearly enjoying this far too much.

“And I’m sorry for being an ass,” Alec added. “A big one. I feel really bad about it.”
Magnus let out a long sigh. “I have to tell you Alexander, I’ve been around the block a time or two in my life but I’ve never had a dinner date kiss me and then run off with another man immediately after. My ego has plummeted to an all new low!”


“The Wayland boy of course, unless you had multiple engagements last night? I can’t quite keep up with you,” Magnus said with a mocking tone.

“Jace? God no. He’s just a friend! It’s totally not like that at all, I swear. Plus he has this girl, Clary. He’s insanely crazy about her, and has no interest in me I can assure you,” Alec explained, his voice getting higher as he went on.

“Hmmm, so you don’t find him attractive?” Magnus cooed sarcastically.

“What? No! Of course not,” Alec exclaimed, his voice reaching an even higher register.

“Liar,” Magnus accused him as a flicker of a smile danced across his face.

“Now you’re just busting my balls,” Alec moaned, rolling his eyes with exasperation.

“Mmmm, so many ways I could respond to that, but I wouldn’t want to offend your delicate nature,” Magnus slyly replied, continuing to enjoy tormenting him.

Alec stifled a laugh. He might be innocent in some ways, but he could pick up an innuendo as well as any boy from New York could. “Is this how you’re going to get even with me? Because I can just leave right now.”

“Don’t. You. Dare,” Magnus threatened. “Get over here and help me up off this floor!”

Magnus extended both his arms toward Alec, his fingers wiggling to beckon him forward. Feeling a glimmer of hope that he wasn’t about to be thrown out of the room Alec stooped down and took hold of both of Magnus’ hands pulling him up onto his feet. Not knowing his own strength, he accidentally tugged a little too hard, the excess force causing Magnus to fly towards him. Their chests collided and Magnus’ face was thrust within an inch of Alec’s.

“Sorry,” Alec said as their eyes locked intensely. “Didn’t mean to pull so hard.”

“That’s Ok, thank you for the help up,” Magnus murmured, his eyes wandering down to Alec’s mouth.

“You’re welcome. And I really am sorry,” Alec stated with a bashful sweetness. He felt dizzy now that Magnus was so close, he licked his lips with hopeful anticipation.

“You’re forgiven,” Magnus said with a smile, his warm breath tingling against Alec’s moist mouth.

“Maybe we can we just start over?” Alec suggested, his heart soaring.

Magnus’ eyes twinkled with a devilish spark. “Or… how about we pick up where we left off?”

Magnus leaned in and Alec met him halfway, their lips drawn together, sealing like magnets. The euphoric sensation was immediate, their bodies melting into one another. Alec wrapped Magnus tightly in his arms. As inexperienced as he was this reaction came second nature, he was finally letting his heart take the lead. His hands spanned across Magnus’ firmly toned back and he could feel their hearts beating in time. A gentle Adagio, slow and steady, both of them completely at ease. Their
kisses were soft and lingering. Alec experimented, placing feather light touches along Magnus’ top lip, then moving to the bottom lip lightly sucking it into his mouth. He ran his tongue along the smooth edge, tasting him, exploring all of these unknown terrains. Magnus let out a soft moan, overcome by Alec’s curious innocence.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know what I’m doing,” Alec shyly confessed.

“Don’t worry, you’re perfect,” Magnus replied, wrapping his arms around Alec’s strong neck. He pulled him down to his open mouth, taking back the control.

Alec felt like he was participating in a kissing masterclass. Magnus would demonstrate a skill, the roll and swirl of his tongue, the gentle nip of his teeth, and Alec would respond in turn. Magnus encouraged him with sighs and moans as Alec mastered each move. The louder the sound Alec could elicit the more he felt he was doing something right. The passion and intensity continued to grow as the pupil kept surprising his teacher with his own improvisations. Magnus’ hands moved into Alec’s hair, grasping it gently, running the locks through his fingers. His nails lightly scraping against his scalp. Alec was unraveling with each delicious touch.

“Am I keeping you?” Magnus asked between kisses.

Alec squeezed him closer. “No, I still have time,” he responded softly against Magnus’ open mouth, their bottom lips still touching.

“Promise me something,” Magnus whispered.

“Anything,” Alec exhaled breathlessly.

“Don’t walk away from me like that again.”

Alec felt his heart swell, the realization of just how badly he’d hurt Magnus by leaving was proof enough these feelings he was having were not one-sided. He pressed another kiss against Magnus’ lips then pulled back to look deep into his eyes. “I promise.”

Alec sprinted down the hallway towards the practice room, he was ten minutes late. As he rounded the corner he saw his Jace, Clary and Sebastian standing outside the door looking more than annoyed.

“Jesus Alec, where have you been?” Jace shouted. “I called your cell ten times!”

“Sorry, lost track of time, didn’t have my phone on,” Alec responded, out of breath and still floating on air from his encounter with Magnus. His lips felt swollen and his face was still flushed.

“What the hell happened to your hair? You look like you just came out of a god damn wind tunnel!” Jace exclaimed.

“Yeah, I uh, went for a walk, guess its pretty windy outside.”

Jace gave him an incredulous look as he slowly put two and two together. “Yeah, super windy today,” he responded giving Alec a wink. Luckily Clary and Sebastian weren’t paying any attention as they were picking up their violin cases and preparing to go inside.
Alec unlocked the door and held it open for the others, still trying to regain his breath.

Jace let Clary and Sebastian go on ahead so he could catch Alec alone for a moment. “So, I guess you two patched things up, huh?” He said with a teasing grin.

Alec smiled and ducked his head, knowing he’d been caught red handed. “Yeah, I guess you could say that, I’m going to see him again tonight.”

“Good I’m glad, cuz guess what? Clary finally caved and we’re going out tonight too!” Jace exploded in a silent shriek of delight.

Alec suppressed his laughter and gave Jace a fist bump. “Congrats man, that’s awesome.”

“Looks like things are finally going right for us, huh?” Jace said cheerfully as he headed into the room.

Alec stood at the door, his smile slowly fading away as a dark thought crept into his mind.

*As long as I don’t fuck it up again.*

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Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! :) Hope you liked this chapter. Alec is struggling with his insecurities but I think he's making good progress. Magnus is going to be instrumental (ha ha) in helping him grow and change throughout the summer. So many amazing things yet to happen!

Jace is just the best, I freaking love his humor and his genuinely loyal nature. In the next chapter we're going to see our beloved Malec take a day trip to one of my favorite places! I'm so excited!!!

There is some trouble brewing on the horizon. I'm scared you are all going to kill me, but the story has already been planned in its entirety so we have to travel the rough road together! ;)

I've updated the playlist with more goodies. I hope you check it out. [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7)

The Alexander Technique is actually a real thing. Practiced by many musicians to provide improved balance, movement, support, and coordination.

As always I am so grateful for your comments and kudos. They mean the world to me! If you like this story please share with a friend and help me get the word out! It's always more fun to write when you're getting feedback along the way. Thanks again, and HAPPY NEW YEAR!!! :)
Alec anxiously walked across campus towards the faculty parking lot where Magnus had told him to wait. Quartet rehearsal had ended a couple of hours ago and he’d used the extra time to finally get in a bit of practice for the upcoming concerto competition. The intense focus had given his mind a short reprieve from its perpetually frantic state. Although his lunchtime interlude with Magnus had been amazing the euphoria had worn off and as usual his mind had shifted back to its pessimistic default mode.

*I just need to see him again and everything will be Ok.*

The butterflies in Alec’s stomach were fluttering away as he stood at the edge of the sidewalk scanning the parked cars. He was reminded of his flight to Denver just four days ago, the unease he’d felt then was a strange sense of déjà vu. It seemed almost like some sort of premonition. Alec didn’t really believe in such things, but he admitted it appeared to be more than a mere coincidence.

Alec felt his phone vibrate in his pocket, he dug it out and saw Victor’s name.

“Hey, Victor, what’s up?”

“Do you have a moment?”

“Yeah, of course, what’s going on?”

“Well Alec, there’s no easy way to say this, so I’ll get right to the point. There’s been a complaint filed against you, to the board.”

“Excuse me, a what?” Alec was sure he’d heard wrong.
“A complaint. It seems your fellow group member, Mr. Morgenstern, feels you aren’t invested in the success of the quartet.”

“What? Are you fucking serious right now?” Alec was livid.

“He claims you have refused suggested rehearsal times, and that you were late today. He also hinted that you’d made inappropriate remarks to a female member of the group. He’s asked for a second key to the practice room as well as a replacement cellist.”

“What the actual fuck!?” Alec yelled. It echoed through the parking lot frightening a group of birds into flight. “This guy is completely insane!”

“Listen Alec, I’m going to speak frankly with you right now. Friend to friend. You do not want to piss off this guy. Do you hear me?”

“Victor I haven’t done anything, I swear!”

“I know, believe me, I stood up for you. I know this isn’t your style. But Alec, this kid has connections. And they run all the way to the top. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

Alec was dumbstruck. He actually couldn’t even believe what he was hearing. “Why is he doing this to me?”

“Whatever you can do to smooth this out, do it now. This kid isn’t messing around, and I’m worried.”

“Yeah… Ok,” Alec said in a defeated voice.

“Listen, you and I know the truth, and that’s all that matters here. Just try to work well with this guy if you can, please? I really don’t want to see your reputation tarnished on this kind of epic scale. And I’m not trying to scare you, but this is serious.”

“I can’t believe this is happening right now,” Alec mumbled into the phone.

“It’ll be Ok, we got to the problem early and I know you’ll do what it takes to work it out. Just let him call the shots if that’s what will keep his mouth shut. We’re used to that in this business, right?”

“Right,” Alec said, knowing Victor was giving him his best advice. Even though morally and ethically it was against every fiber of his being.

“Alright, I have to run. Lydia’s coming into town this weekend and I’ve got to go to Denver and fetch her from the airport. Are you going to be OK?”

“Yeah, I’m Ok,” Alec lied, feeling anything but Ok in this moment.

“Come to dinner Sunday night, I know Lydia would love to see you!”

“Sure, Sunday night,” Alec replied, barely even registering what Victor was saying.

“Be strong, stay tough, and remember, I’m proud of you,” Victor praised, then he hung up.

Alec stood there with the phone to his ear trying to process a million feelings at once. First and foremost he was genuinely shocked, as well as angry, but mostly he just felt confused. Why would Sebastian run to the board and complain about such tiny, insignificant problems? Then Alec remembered how he’d challenged him early that day, when he’d suggested they should break for lunch, and how they’d narrowly avoided a confrontation. Was that what set him off? He couldn’t
understand why this was such a big deal.

*Why is this asshole trying to hurt me?*

“Hey there beautiful,” called a voice from behind him.

Alec whipped around and saw Magnus walking toward him. Designer shades, sly grin, swagger in his step, just swinging his car keys off the tip of his finger like he owned the world. He looked like a million bucks. Alec’s heart leapt into his throat.

*Damn, he’s so fucking perfect.*

“Hey,” Alec replied, trying to contain his overwhelming range of emotions behind a gentle smile.

“You ready to get out of here?” Magnus asked with a playful lilt to his voice.

“Definitely,” Alec said, relieved. He wasn’t going to give Sebastian one more thought. Not now anyway. All he wanted to do was focus on Magnus and forget about everything Victor had just told him over the phone.

“Sorry I’m late, I was running behind with my last student,” Magnus apologized.

“No problem,” Alec responded as he followed Magnus into the parking lot and all the way back to the very last row of cars. As they got closer and closer to what appeared to be Magnus’ Alec felt his jaw drop. He gasped aloud. “Is this your car?” Alec exclaimed, his mouth agape.

“This, Alexander my dear, is not just a car, this is my baby,” Magnus declared as he clicked the remote to unlock it.

Alec stopped dead in his tracks just soaking in the sight. “This is a freaking Maserati!”

“Isn’t she gorgeous? I don’t think your cello is going to fit in the trunk, but you can lay it across the backseat and that should work,” Magnus suggested as he initiated the automatic roof control.

Alec peered into the backseat of the shiny red Granturismo convertible and felt very thankful his case was clean. He carefully laid Stella down on the creamy brown leather interior and she fit like a glove.

“Perfect! Good thing she’s not a two-seater,” Magnus teased as he dropped down into the driver’s seat and revved the engine.

The motor produced a low growling sound that rumbled through Alec’s body, tickling his insides. It was glorious. He opened the passenger door and slid down into the smooth bucket seat. Surprisingly his legs fit perfectly with only a slight adjustment to his seat position. He turned his head and gave Magnus a boyish grin, then he reached to fasten his seatbelt. “Where we going?”

Magnus only smiled wider as he eased the car into reverse. “It’s a surprise!”

The car purred smoothly out of the school parking lot and onto the road. Even though it was after 5:00 pm the summer sun was still shining brightly overhead. Magnus reached to the dash and turned on the stereo. Alec was surprised to hear Boston’s *More Than a Feeling* kick in mid-chorus. He looked at Magnus over the top of his sunglasses.

“What? I told you Alexander, there are so many things you don’t know about me. One of those being my undying love and devotion to 70’s rock.”
Alec threw his head back with laughter. If someone would have told him this he’d never have believed it! But somehow it made perfect sense. He could almost picture Magnus in the 70’s, sporting some gaudy, loud outfit with platform shoes. The thought made him smile even more.

When they reached the roundabout at the end of the road instead of veering right, back towards town, they went left. Alec had never been this way before and he felt his excitement building. The road twisted and cut its way through a deep valley between huge arching mountains that loomed on either side of the car. He could see dozens of ski slopes bleeding down from the mountaintops and meandering their way through the trees like grassy trails. The ski lifts lie dormant for now but he could imagine how thrilling this sight would be in wintertime. They passed multiple signs warning them of possible avalanches as well as snowmobile rentals and guided tours.

“This road closes late November through May because it’s too treacherous to drive,” Magnus told him. “It can only be accessed with snowmobiles or snowshoes. Pretty crazy, huh?”

“Yeah, crazy,” Alec thought, trying to imagine all this beauty covered in deep blankets of snow.

The trip was short, they’d only been traveling for about ten minutes when they reached a gated entrance. Alec couldn’t tell but it looked like some sort of park. A short balding man stepped out of a small wooden booth and waved his arms wildly at their car.

“Mr. Bane! Welcome, welcome! The last bus just pulled out so you’ve got the whole place to yourselves!” The man shouted enthusiastically.

“Thanks Henry, I owe you one!” Magnus replied as they drove under the gate’s rising arm. It immediately lowered after they’d passed.

“Whole place to ourselves hmm?” Alec asked with a controlled giddiness.

“Well it’s usually overrun with tourists this time of year, but the bus tours end at 5:00 so I made a call. Henry’s used to seeing me all the time anyway, this is my favorite place. Plus I threw a ridiculous amount of money at the preservation society last year, so they know who butters their bread,” Magnus quipped as they swung around to park in the empty lot. “It’s just a short walk from here, half a mile or so.”

Alec hopped out of the car and stopped to glance back at Stella.

Magnus caught him eyeing her. “Don’t worry, I’ll put the top up.”

“Thanks,” Alec replied. “Your baby can protect my baby, right?”

“Oooo I like the sound of that,” Magnus said with a wink as he rounded the front of the car and took hold of Alec’s hand. Their eyes met for a moment of brief intensity then Magnus tugged him towards the marked path. “This way!”

Alec felt an overwhelming sense of joy holding Magnus’ hand, his grasp was firm and warm. It seemed such an intimate gesture, this simple act of guiding him along the path. Magnus probably had no idea this was the first time anyone had taken his hand, not since he was a child anyway. It might have been inconsequential to most people, but to Alec it felt life altering.

“You’re quiet, are you Ok?” Magnus asked, giving his hand a squeeze.

“I’m perfect,” Alec sighed, basking in the glow that was emanating from his own heart. He didn’t quite know the words to describe the way he was feeling, but he felt like he’d been claimed somehow. As silly as that sounded in his mind he felt like he was being protected by Magnus, like he
was leading him to some unknown destination and he was no longer alone in the world. And although he feared Magnus didn’t see it in quite the same way, the warmth and happiness he felt now finally outweighed his normal defeatist outlook.

“See the beaver dams?” Magnus chimed, interrupting Alec’s wandering thoughts. “We’re almost there!”

They continued to follow the path that wound its way around the lake until Alec finally saw the full unobstructed view of what Magnus had brought him to see. They stepped out onto the lake’s rocky shore and Alec lost his breath.

“Welcome to the Maroon Bells,” Magnus proclaimed. “Aren’t they magnificent?”

“Whoa!” Alec stood staggering at the awe inspiring view, it was the most wondrous sight he’d ever seen. The mountains were framed like an exquisite painting that seemed much too beautiful to be real. Their jagged faces reflected perfectly in the crystal clear lake water below. “Amazing!” Alec replied, pulling out his phone to begin to take pictures… he knew Max would love to see this.

“Definitely one of the selling points when I first considered buying a home here. I’m a sucker for beautiful things,” Magnus said as he placed his hand on the small of Alec’s back, enjoying his visible excitement.

Alec felt the gentle touch of Magnus on his back and felt compelled to turn and grab him into a bear hug. “Thank you so much for bringing me here,” he said as he squeezed hard enough to lift Magnus off his feet. “This is so amazing, I love it!”

“Well if I’d have known you’d be this happy I would have brought you here yesterday!” Magnus teased as he wrapped his arms around Alec’s torso.

Alec had a sinking feeling as he remembered how badly he’d fucked up their first date. He pulled Magnus a little tighter and wished he could hop in a time machine and go back and fix it all. “I’ll just have to keep finding ways to make it up to you,” Alec murmured against Magnus’ ear, then pulled back to find his lips for a tender kiss.

The two men enjoyed their evening along the water’s edge, barefoot, skipping stones and taking
selfies, just like a couple of kids. Alec loved spending time outdoors soaking in the beautiful nature, realizing how fortunate they were to have this place to themselves. As the sun began to dip behind the mountains they grabbed their muddy shoes, took each other’s hands again, and headed back to the car.

Walking along the path Alec felt totally at peace listening to Magnus talk. He was gushing over various mountain ranges and national parks he’d visited and which ones he’d still like to see. Alec was surprised for a second time today to learn of Magnus’ love for the great outdoors. Just another piece of the intricate puzzle that was slowly beginning to take shape in his mind. This man was so much more than a talented musician, he was a complex and inspiring human being full of passion, intelligence, wit, humor, and most of all kindness. Alec didn’t think he’d ever met a person so genuinely caring and considerate before. The more time they spent together the more enraptured he was with him.

“Well I don’t know about you, but I am starving!” Magnus declared once they’d finally gotten back on the road.

“Me too,” Alec confessed, realizing he hadn’t eaten a bite all day. The awareness suddenly made him feel dizzy and lightheaded.

“We could stop somewhere in town if you’d like, or…” Magnus drifted off as if he was going to say something and then decided against it.

“Or what?” Alec questioned him, wondering what he’d been about to say.

“Well I do have enough leftovers from last night to feed a small army, but I don’t want to push my luck,” Magnus spoke with a hint of sarcasm.

Alec didn’t even have to ponder this for a moment. “Yes! God yes! There’s nothing in this world I’d rather have than your leftovers! Are you kidding me? Your food was freaking amazing!”

Magnus smiled proudly and goosed the accelerator, speeding back through the canyon. “It tastes even better the next day,” he boasted as Alec returned the same beaming smile.

Cruising up the final curve towards Magnus’ house the pair were giggling as they sang full voice as loud as they could along to another one of the endless playlist hits…

“Well Crocodile Rocking is something shocking when your feet just can't keep still”

“I never knew me a better time and I guess I never will”

“Oh Lawdy mama those Friday nights”

“When Suzie wore her dresses tight!”

“And the Crocodile Rocking was out of sight!”

“La la la la la la la la la laaaaaa”

Alec held a pretend microphone under Magnus’ chin as he rang out with the last set of la la laaa’s. Alec couldn’t remember when he’d ever laughed so hard in his entire life. The two of them
practically doubled over in their seats barely able to breathe from the hysterics. When they finally pulled up in front of the house they rolled out of their seats and stumbled towards the front door clutching onto each other for one final chorus of “la la la la laaaaaaaa” before falling through the entrance cackling uncontrollably.

Magnus clicked on the lights and headed towards the kitchen. “I have to hand it to you Alexander, I’m impressed with your knowledge of classic rock, being as young as you are. Knowing your Elton John lyrics might just move you even higher on my list of favorite people!”

“Yeah, well I might be young but I know good music,” Alec replied, following Magnus to the kitchen and immediately heading for the fridge. He felt oddly at home, remembering fondly how they’d carefully packaged up all the leftover food together the night before. Their first little domestic moment. Alec smiled.

“Hungry boy I see!” Magnus teased. “Making yourself right at home?”

Alec peeked out from behind the refrigerator door with a piece of cold fried chicken clinched between his teeth and gave a devilish wink. Magnus laughed so hard at the sight he snorted.

“You are really something else! Stop eating the food directly out of the fridge and grab a plate, you beast!”

Alec grabbed two large bowls out of the fridge, still with the chicken hanging from his mouth and shut the door with his hip. Magnus just watched his adorable display as he grabbed a bottle of wine from the rack below and sat down.

“You seem to have everything under control so I’m just going to sit here and drink,” Magnus taunted him, pouring two glasses of red wine while Alec piled two plates full of all the leftover goodies.

“You drink babe, I got this,” Alec said as he popped two plates into the microwave. Magnus seemed to sit up a little straighter, his lips pursing in a cute little pout, at the mention of Alec calling him *babe*. Alec loved the response and took note that this was going to be a regular nickname from now on.

The two devoured their food like they hadn’t eaten in a week. Alec went back for seconds and thirds while Magnus kept their wine glasses full. The dinner conversation flowed liked they’d known each other forever. Magnus talked about his long months on the road with Kronos, covering the globe nine months out of the year with an endless number of concerts. He talked about his apartment in LA and his townhouse in San Francisco and how he’d never realized he could feel so at home in California. He said he had a good network of friends there, and a few violin students he’d kept through the years just to remain grounded. He enjoyed teaching and finding hidden talents among others. They had become like family to him.

Alec opened up more about his family, mostly stories about his little brother Max and all the trouble they’d gotten into back when Alec was still in high school. Magnus noticed he didn’t speak much about his parents and didn’t press the issue.

When they’d finally stuffed themselves beyond belief Magnus strolled back into the great room and Alec followed him.

“Ugh, I’m so full I can’t move,” Alec moaned as he dropped down onto the couch leaning back into the deep cushions. “That was so good.”

Magnus came around the corner of the coffee table and sat down right next to Alec, leaning against
him. He let his head fall back onto Alec’s chest as he lifted his legs up on the couch to stretch them out. “I’m so full I can’t bend,” he groaned in reply and Alec dropped his arm around Magnus shoulder cuddling him against his chest.

“Mmm, me too,” Alec sighed as Magnus nuzzled against him, turning to kiss Alec’s bicep as it curled around his body.

The two laid there quietly for several minutes just snuggled up peacefully in their mutual food comas. Alec felt so at ease there wasn’t a bit of nervousness or uncomfortable feeling at all. It felt as natural as if they’d done it a thousand times, and he lifted his head slightly to kiss the top of Magnus’ hair.

“You make a very comfy pillow,” Magnus cooed, burrowing deeper against Alec’s body as he grasped his arm to wrap it tighter around himself. Soon they were completely intertwined as Alec’s left leg pulled up onto the couch to slide between Magnus’, locking them into a pretzel shaped hold.

Alec closed his eyes and felt he could easily fall asleep just like this. Their limbs braided together, their breath matched at a slow and even pace. It wasn’t until Alec’s overstuffed feeling began to slowly morph into a very different urge that the mood shifted. Alec felt a yearning to pull Magnus even closer to his body and the thought of this caused his hips to involuntarily buck slightly upward.

Magnus, being an expert on body language, responded by rotating himself around to lift his leg across Alec’s raised one and bring his chest flat against Alec’s chest. He smiled blissfully into his eyes then pushed himself up to meet Alec’s lips. Alec pulled his body closer then slid down deeper into the couch until Magnus’ full weight was on top of him, their mouths hungrily connected.

Magnus’ skilled tongue slid into Alec’s warmth and a moan escaped. His smooth lips devoured each kiss as he pressed deeper inside Alec’s mouth. Soon they were both breathless and gasping as Alec reached to place his hands low on Magnus’ back. He could feel the hem of his shirt just slightly raised above his waistband. It revealed a thin strip of warm skin Alec couldn’t resist. His fingers lifted the fabric slightly allowing his palms access to lay flat against his flesh. Magnus’ body quivered with the touch and Alec’s hips thrust against him wildly.

“Alexander,” Magnus exhaled gently. “Are you sure you’re Ok?”

Alec responded by reaching his hands further up the back of Magnus shirt gently digging his fingertips into the strong muscles of his back and replied with a breathless, “yeah.”

Alec wasn’t thinking about anything in this moment except how amazing Magnus felt in his arms. His body was strong yet gentle and his skin was as smooth as satin. A rising heat was building between their chests and Alec ached inside with an unknown longing. He wanted to feel Magnus against him, skin to skin, and the impulse was intense. Whatever basic human need people were born with to crave this kind of contact had been unlocked inside Alec for the first time in his life. He felt a frenzy threatening to topple over as his hands greedily explored as much of Magnus’ body as he could reach. All the while their tongues invaded every inch of each other’s mouths. It was overwhelming yet perfect in every way.

Desperate for Magnus to reciprocate Alec bravely murmured “please touch me,” between their kisses.

“Are you sure?” Magnus asked him.

“It’s Ok, I swear,” Alec promised, and Magnus finally placed one delicate hand on a patch of exposed skin just above Alec’s left hip. Alec shuttered as Magnus slowly caressed his side then moved up higher to stroke his ribcage lifting Alec’s shirt in the process. Their naked and slightly
sweat covered abdomens were now clinging together. The heat between them intensifying as Alec pulled his legs apart and wrapped them tightly around Magnus’ hips.

“You’re amazing,” Magnus whispered against Alec’s panting breath. “You feel like heaven baby… don’t stop.”

Alec took the queue and continued thrusting his hips up against Magnus’ groin as he clamped him tightly between his thighs. The feeling was insane, he felt completely unhinged.

“Yes, just like that,” Magnus urged him on.

Alec was transported into a pure euphoric state of ecstasy. The pleasure washing over him, like nothing he’d ever felt before. Every push into Magnus sent shockwaves through him, from the tips of his toes to the flush in his cheeks. He was consumed. The intensity building more and more as he slammed into him over and over. He thought he was going to either die or explode.

And that’s when it happened.

Before he even saw it coming.

And there was no way to stop it.

“Shit!” Alec swore. He dropped his legs back down on the couch and jerked his hands away from Magnus’ back. “Fuck, I’m sorry,” he muttered quietly in a state of panic. “I didn’t mean to.”

“Shhhh, Alexander don’t,” Magnus softly replied. “Don’t apologize… that was beautiful,” he said as he slid his hands underneath Alec’s body wrapping them around his back so he could hold him tight.

Alec felt himself turn to jell-o in Magnus’ strong arms. His embarrassment paralyzing him mentally, but his body was so completely relaxed. He could feel Magnus’ breath against his ear as his heart pounded fiercely in his chest. The weight of his body on top of him was comforting, despite the awkwardness of what had just happened. Alec’s heart rate slowly recovered as they lay there quietly together.

After a few moments Magnus lifted his head and looked into Alec’s eyes, his face gloriously calm and affectionate, his hair a haphazard sexy mess of black quills. He leaned in to sweetly place one feather light kiss on Alec’s bottom lip and smiled, his eyes creasing at the corners in a way Alec had never noticed before. “I don’t know how I’ve managed to live my life without you up until now” Magnus professed, “I don’t want you to ever leave.”

Alec couldn’t help but smile as his notorious blush spread like wildfire across his soft angelic face turning it a brilliant shade of crimson. He lifted his heavy arms back off the couch and enveloped Magnus in a warm embrace, feeling like the luckiest man in the world.

“I promised you I wouldn’t, remember?” Alec responded with a twinkle in his eye, his embarrassment dissolving into the deep brown pools of Magnus’ loving eyes. “Plus I can’t go now, I don’t have any clean clothes to wear.”

Magnus’ face blossomed into heartwarming fit of pure laughter as he reached down to playfully tickle Alec’s ribs. “Ha ha! Is that so? Well it was all part of my evil plan to trap you here forever! So it worked!” He replied as he continued his merciless assault.

Alec’s body spasmed as he laughed uncontrollably under Magnus’ barrage of tickles. “Stop it! Don’t! Ahhhh! Ok! Ok! Enough! You win!” Alec begged as Magnus finally ceased the attack and
pushed his upper body up off the couch with his arms.

“Come on, let’s go, I’ve got plenty of clothes you can borrow. Although I can’t say I’m opposed to you wearing nothing at all,” Magnus teased as he pulled Alec up off the couch and led him out of the room.

“Yeah, well don’t get your hopes up,” Alec replied sarcastically, following him, knowing full well he was miles away from doing something like that.

“Here, you go in and I’ll be right back!” Magnus declared as he pushed Alec into the hall bathroom and shut the door. Alec looked in the oversized mirror hanging over the sink and immediately saw the evidence of his shameful release.

“Great job Lightwood, you’re now officially a teenage cliché.”

Just about the time he got undressed the door popped open just far enough for Magnus’ arm to drop a handful of items on the counter. “Let me know if you need anything else!” He called out from the hallway and Alec felt relieved he hadn’t walked in on him.

Checking the pile there was a thick fluffy white towel with matching washcloth, a pair of creamy knit boxer briefs, and some fleece athletic pants with a coordinating t-shirt. It was exactly what Alec would have worn and it made him smile to think Magnus already knew him so well.

Alec got cleaned up and dressed in a hurry, anxious to get back to Magnus and see what he was doing. He padded out of the bathroom from its cool tile flooring out onto the thick soft carpeting that led to the great room. Magnus was seated at the piano, he had also evidently showered and changed into a comfy pair of loose fitting yoga pants, and much to Alec’s delight, no shirt.

“Hey,” Alec sighed as he took in the gorgeous sight. Magnus reminded Alec of an Arabian prince, only more regal and exquisite. The beauty of his chiseled chest, strong shoulders and sculpted arms made Alec’s knees buckle.

He is a fucking god among men.

“Ah, there you are,” Magnus called out to him across the room. “Come, sit next to me!”

Alec walked to the piano bench and sat down, he was immediately impressed by Magnus’ talent at the keyboard. Chopin’s Nocturne in E flat, played perfectly.

“Another surprise,” Alec sighed as he bent down and kissed the top of Magnus’ shoulder.

“As I said Alexander, there are many things you don’t know about me. But I plan to reveal them all in due time.”

Alec sat mesmerized, just watching Magnus’ long arching fingers dance along the keys. His nails were painted a deep cobalt blue today, even more alluring than the black he’d worn last night.

As the last chord of the piece rang out Alec nervously placed his hand along Magnus’ back, caressing the smooth skin, unable to stop himself.

“I meant what I said earlier, I want you to stay,” Magnus murmured softly as he placed his hand on
Alec’s leg.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Alec replied, his fingers tracing the outline of each of Magnus’ shoulder blades.

Magnus turned to face him, bringing his knee up and over to straddle the bench between his legs. He placed his hands on either side of Alec’s face, cupping it gently. “I’m not going to lie, I want you in my bed more than I’ve ever wanted anything in my life,” Magnus admitted. “And I’m used to getting things that I want.”

Alec’s lips parted letting the breath escape his lungs. He wasn’t afraid hearing what Magnus had to say, and he didn’t want to run, not this time. He lifted his own hands and placed them over top of Magnus’, gently rubbing the skin between his thumb and index finger. “Just give me time, and I promise you… I’m yours,” Alec confessed, feeling shook by his own honesty in this moment.

“For you, my darling, I would wait a hundred lifetimes,” Magnus pledged and Alec knew without a doubt that he meant it.

“Besides, this house has eight bedrooms and I’ve got one already picked out for you.”

“You do?” Alec smiled bashfully.

“Well it would be silly to have you running up and down this mountain every other night when I have all this space. I’m sure communal living down at Hendel House can’t be too difficult to break away from,” Magnus teased.

“Yeah, I guess you have a point there, it just makes logical sense,” Alec winked, then leaned in to give Magnus a kiss.

“Mmm, yes, it’s all based on logic of course. And has absolutely nothing to do with how pretty you are,” Magnus purred, leaning in to nip at Alec’s pouty bottom lip.

“Pretty? Yeah right. Come on,” Alec said rolling his eyes.

“You, Mr. Lightwood, are the prettiest thing I’ve ever seen. So don’t even try to argue with me because you’ll lose.”

Alec cocked his head in a defiant nod. “So I’m only here because of my looks huh? Wow, that’s shallow,” he taunted him, clearly not ready to back down.

“Mmm, so sassy! Come here and give me that pretty mouth, before I smack it,” Magnus growled as he slid down to the end of the bench and wrapped his legs around Alec’s waist and his arms around his neck, clinging to him like a koala bear on a tree.

Their bodies melted together as they sank deep into each other’s mouths once more. Alec felt himself drifting off into space as the rapturous pleasure of Magnus’ body pressing against his consumed him. He was never going to get enough of this. He knew he was falling, and falling hard.

The next morning Alec awoke with a pounding headache. He was surrounded by at least a dozen fluffy pillows and for a moment he thought he must be in a fancy hotel somewhere. The bedding was
so thick and luxurious and the room so tastefully decorated, it didn’t even feel real. Maybe he was dreaming? But then he slowly began to remember he’d been at Magnus’ house last night, and evidentially that was where he was right now. He remembered they’d had dinner, and there’d been a whole lot of making out. On the couch, at the piano, down on the floor, in the hallway. The memory brought a smile to his face. Later there’d been cocktails, lots and lots of them, and more making out, and singing, and dancing, and…

Oh god I was shitfaced!

Alec remembered, and he covered his face with his hands, moaning miserably.

The morning sun was pouring through the windows as Alec raised up on his elbows to survey the room. His clothes were folded neatly on the dresser.

He did laundry!

His shoes were positioned by the door, and a folded slip of paper caught his eye on the edge of the nightstand. Alec grabbed it and squinted to read the tilting handwriting through his blurring hangover.

Call me when you wake up!

I don’t want you to fall again!

- M

Alec’s knee twinged and he threw back the covers to investigate the pain. Sure enough it was swollen and crusted over in dried blood. Alec recalled a faint memory of standing up on top of the coffee table belting out an *Eagles* song into an empty wine bottle, then losing his balance and crashing to the ground.

I should be locked up somewhere.

Alec groaned with humiliation then it dawned on him to look back down at his body again. He saw he was completely naked except for the boxer briefs Magnus had lent him. “Oh Jesus.” He started tossing pillows aside in an attempt to reach the edge of the bed.

Christ he must have thought I’d roll off into the floor!

As embarrassing as that sounded the thought of Magnus bringing him into this room, undressing him and tucking him into bed. Then placing the pillows all around him so he wouldn’t fall, was just about the sweetest thing ever. He saw that his phone was plugged in on the nightstand next to the note.

He even charged my phone!

Alec smiled, although it made his head throb even worse, and he picked up the phone to call Magnus. But just before he dialed he decided he’d rather wait. He needed to get up, splash some cold water on his face and pray there might be a toothbrush he could use. Carefully he slid out of bed and gingerly walked across to the bathroom trying not to bend his sore knee. He flipped on the light and indeed there was a complete set of toiletries all laid out for him methodically.

This is a man to be loved. Alec thought as he gratefully picked up the toothbrush and set to work.
Feeling a bit more alive Alec pulled on the clean shorts he’d worn yesterday and decided he’d slip off to the kitchen to grab some bottled water. He knew he was insanely dehydrated after all the excessive drinking, his calves were cramping and the room was slightly tilting as he walked. He silently approached the door and turned the handle as slowly as he could so as not to make a sound. He didn’t know where Magnus’ bedroom was, but he didn’t want to wake him just in case he was close by.

Tiptoeing down the hallway he came out through the great room and headed into the kitchen. He contemplated making coffee but then decided water was better. He reached for the handle of the fridge and pulled it open. Just as he was about to grab a bottle of Evian from the shelf inside he was startled by a sudden voice.

“Lightwood! What the hell my I ask are you doing here?”

Alec spun around in a flash to confirm the owner of a voice he recognized but couldn’t believe he was actually hearing.

“You?” Alec exhaled, completely flabbergasted and shocked beyond belief. “How’d you get in here?”

“I could ask you the same, however by your current state of undress the obvious answer comes to mind,” Sebastian hissed looking Alec up and down with a disgusted look on his face. “Spent the night on your knees I see! How pathetically unsurprising.”

“You’re insane! I’m calling the police!” Alec yelled, taking his phone from his pocket to dial 911.

“Don’t bother you fool, I have a key,” Sebastian said as he dangled a silver keyring in front of his demented face.

“I don’t believe you,” Alec rebutted as he began to dial.

“Seb darling, is that you? Didn’t you get my text?”

Alec heard Magnus’ voice ringing out from the hall. The pleasant tone sending a shiver down his spine. His heart stopped beating.

“Oh, Alexander, you’re awake!” Magnus said with surprise as he entered the kitchen. “You should have called me.”

“What the fuck is going on here?” Alec asked, his eyes blown wide with shock.

Sebastian’s smile spread wider as he relished Alec’s shock and pain.

“Did you just call him Seb darling? Because if you did I think I’m going to be sick!!” Alec screamed out.

“Alexander I…”

“No!” Alec bellowed. “Answer my question!”

Alec was completely losing it. His initial shock now growing into a fit of blinding anger.

“Newsflash moron, he’s my teacher! Not that it’s any of your business!” Sebastian snarled, his voice scraping across Alec’s nerves, burning him like acid.
“Boys, that’s enough. Don’t fight,” Magnus insisted as he walked over to Alec and gently took his arm.

“Stop!” Alec snapped, ripping his arm out from Magnus’ grasp. “Don’t!”

Magnus’ jaw dropped, his eyes blinking rapidly.

“Just don’t.” Alec’s voice cracked as he backed away slowly.

“I’ve seen some desperate moves before Lightwood, but sleeping your way to the top? How embarrassing!” Sebastian needled him, enjoying watching Alec squirm.

“I said that’s enough!” Magnus fired back at Sebastian, a blazing look of rage behind his eyes. “There’s no lesson today. Leave now!”

Sebastian smiled wickedly, then reached to grab an apple from the bowl of fruit on Magnus’ kitchen table. As he brushed past Alec to leave he took a slow and deliberate bite, leaning in close to Alec’s face whispering just loud enough for him to hear. “Your money’s on the dresser.” Then he gave him a wink and walked away.

Alec felt his whole body shaking, the blood boiling in his veins. He’d never wanted to kill another human being in his life until this moment. His fists were clenched tightly at his sides as he somehow managed to control himself.

Magnus took a step back, giving him space to breathe. He could see the fury rolling off Alec’s skin and he knew he must tread lightly.

“Alec I know you’re angry right now, but please just let me explain.”

“You knew… all day yesterday… you knew,” Alec muttered under his breath.

“I should have…”

“You knew he was trying to end me! And you didn’t even say one word!” Alec shouted, unable to stop the venom from spilling out.

“I should have said something, it was a mistake.”

“He’s got it out for me! He’s a freaking psychopath who wants to ruin my career!”

“I know…”

“And he’s your student? And you didn’t say one fucking word about it all day?”

“I’m sorry. I just didn’t want to put a damper things.”

“A damper?” Alec scoffed.

“He’s troubled Alec.”

Alec shook his head. “How many years?”

“What?” Magnus replied.

“How many years has he been studying with you?”
“I don’t see what that has…”

How many!” Alec snapped again.

“19.”

“19? Jesus Christ! 19 years?” Alec was exasperated.

“You don’t know him Alec.” Magnus sighed.

“Are you defending him right now? Because if you are so help me God I will leave here right now and I’ll never come back!”

“I’m not defending him, I’m just trying to explain.”

“You know what, save it! I don’t want to hear any explanations because I already know everything I need to know about that sick, twisted, evil bastard! He’s going to make my life here a living hell!”

“I’m not going to let that happen,” Magnus promised.

“He hates me!”

“He’s jealous of you.”

“Why?” Alec bellowed, his arms outstretched with disbelief.

“Because you’re the most talented person here, and you’re his toughest competition. He’s going to use psychological warfare to try and break you down. So he can get inside your head, and he can beat you.” Magnus stated plainly, his voice in a monotone.

“The competition? This is all over one stupid competition?” Alec’s mind boggled, unable to believe this could even be true.

“This is just his way, he wants to win by any means necessary,” Magnus confessed solemnly.

“Why? Why would he do that?” Alec pleaded, his voice breaking again as he fought back the urge to cry.

“Because that’s what I taught him to do.”

Chapter End Notes

Alec sure didn't see that coming. Did you?

The music world is a tough place to survive. The competition is fierce and people will literally do anything to make it to the top. Magnus has learned the hard way what it takes to have a successful career, and he's tried to pass that toughness along to his
student. The problem is, Sebastian doesn't know when to stop. He's already showing signs of going too far and I'm afraid we've not seen the worst of it yet. ((don't kill me!!))

But every hero needs his villain, right? I have faith Alec and Magnus are going to come out on top! :) Besides, they've only completed one week of the festival, there's still 11 more weeks to go! In the next chapter JACE IS BACK and he's going to give Alec some much needed bro time. Hopefully it will give Alec some clarity, and maybe get him to laugh a bit too. ;)

The playlist has been updated and I also have created a second playlist for you guys of Magnus' favorites from the car. I hope you'll enjoy checking them out:

Main playlist for the story (Classical): https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7

Magnus' playlist (Classic Rock): https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-ytygO_COOibWxjR8Ng_waE

Thanks so much for reading, and I hope you're enjoying the story so far. :) As always I appreciate so much your comments and kudos. They keep me going during long sleepless nights of writing. Sorry if this chapter is a little rough grammatically. I don't have a beta and I edit everything myself. It was so long and emotional I think I gave up on consistency about halfway through my reread! LOL ;)

You guys are great! Thanks so much!!!! XOXOXOXOXO :)}
Alec stopped for a moment to wipe away the sweat that was dripping into his eyes. His arms ached. He’d been in the practice room all day, taking out every bit of his anger and frustration on Dvořák. Glancing down at the fingers of his left hand he saw his callouses were gleaming white with deeply embedded ridges. He tried to make a fist but his knuckles felt swollen. He’d lost track of time, having purposely turned off his phone wanting to disappear for a while. Looking toward the window he saw the sun was already dropping low in the sky. He hadn’t stopped for lunch and his stomach was growling angrily. He pushed Stella up from between his legs and leaned his forehead against her scroll, his breath jagged and labored.

“Sorry girl,” Alec mumbled as he closed his eyes for a moment, “didn’t mean to take it out on you.”

Alec felt what little bit of air circulating through the room dance across the wet cotton fabric which clung heavily to his back. He’d been playing for hours and his body had reached its breaking point. He lifted his head and saw beads of perspiration slowly running down Stella’s neck and clinging to her pegs. He’d run out of water hours ago and his vision was blurred. Gathering what strength he still had left he rose to his feet and gently laid Stella in her case. Switching on his phone it immediately rang, the screen showing Jace’s number. Alec felt a wave of guilt. Shit...this isn’t going to be good.

“Hey Jace,” Alec mumbled hesitantly.

“Jesus Christ Alec! Where are you?” Jace bellowed back.

“Sorry, I’ve had my phone off, was practicing,” Alec admitted somberly.

“Which room? I’ll come find you,” Jace hastily answered.

“Last one on the end… by the edge of the woods,” Alec responded, his voice nearly lifeless.

“On my way!” Jace snapped, hanging up abruptly.

Alec knew he was about to get an earful from Jace. As much as he hated to have upset him he secretly liked the idea that someone cared enough to worry about where he’d been all day. Alec had never had a best friend, other than his brother Max. The thought of Jace frantically racing towards his practice room forced a gentle smile to his lips. In this moment he knew he really needed someone to talk to, so much so it was worth the risk of being berated first.

Scrolling through his missed calls and messages he saw a text from Magnus.

2:37 PM – Magnus: Please call me, I miss you.
Alec’s heart lurched. He’d last seen him yesterday morning, having left shortly after the incident. Closing his eyes, the events of the previous day ricocheted like bullets inside his head. He could still hear Magnus’ voice echoing in his mind…

“But because that’s what I taught him to do.”

The words hung heavy in the air between them for what had felt like an eternity. The realization behind their meaning had coated Alec’s brain with a painful truth he didn’t want to face. How could someone he hated so much be tied to this amazing man? How could he be the devil’s teacher? It didn’t seem possible.

Alec’s consciousness slipped into a vacuum. He stood motionless in the tiny practice room unable to process anything he was feeling. He and Magnus had remained in that kitchen just staring into each other’s eyes, neither knowing what to say, until Alec’s phone had vibrated in his hand snapping him out of his daze. He’d received a text from Jace reminding him not to be late for rehearsal at noon. Magnus had apologized profusely, promising there’d be no more secrets between them. Alec knew Magnus hadn’t meant to hurt him, but his old habit of bringing down the protective walls and closing himself off from pain won out.

Magnus had stood barefoot on the slate stepping stones in front of his house watching Alec as Ragnor Fell pulled away. It wasn’t until they’d gotten about halfway down the mountain that Alec felt a wave of panic wash over him. It was almost as if Magnus had been acting as his shield while they were together and now that he was away from him the reality of the situation came raining down. Sebastian had not only put Alec’s entire career in jeopardy, but his mere presence had tainted the very essence of his budding relationship with Magnus. He’d felt sickened, violated, and most of all he’d felt robbed. He knew the only thing he could possibly do that had even the slightest chance of effecting Sebastian would be to fight back and win the concerto competition. That would surely be the ultimate revenge.

Alec’s competitive fire had begun to grow deep down in his belly. He’d decided right then and there he would commit his entire weekend to practicing as much as possible. This coping mechanism, practicing and practicing until his fingers almost bled, was always his way of dealing with pain. He internalized everything until he was so close to bursting the only way to let it out was through Stella. He’d play and play until his body literally gave out. Which in fact it just had.

Just then the practice room door flew open!

“Here you are!” Jace exclaimed. “Are you trying to give me a fucking heart attack?”

Alec rolled his eyes, “I saw you yesterday Jace. I don’t think it’s time to call out a search party just yet.”

“Yeah but this morning you weren’t in your room! And then you didn’t answer your phone all day! I was worried!” Jace replied, still frantic.

“I woke up early and took the first shuttle,” Alec grumbled, tucking the rest of his things into his case and closing it up. “I just needed to practice.”

“You’ve been practicing in here all day? Dude, that’s like 12 hours! No wonder you look like shit!” Jace stepped further in, closing the distance between them. “Come on man, it’s Saturday night! Let’s go into town, get drunk and make some bad decisions!” Jace was insistent, his eyes sparkling with deviant suggestions.

Alec tipped his chin down and glared at Jace disapprovingly. “What about Clary? Don’t you need to
check with her?”

Jace smiled. “First of all, Jace Wayland never has to check with anyone, I do what I want! Second, she’s actually going to see a chick flick with a bunch of girls tonight, not that is matters or has anything to do with why I’m saying let’s go out.”

Alec rolled his eyes again.

“Aren’t you happy you’ve got me all to yourself?” Jace winked.

“I guess it’s my lucky day,” Alec grumbled, his shoulders slumping in response.

“Come on grumpy! Turn that frown upside down! What could be better than a night spent with me?” Jace grinned, raising his eyebrows up and down devilishly.

Alec began to open his mouth to speak.

“Wait! Don’t answer that,” Jace snipped back covering his ears with both hands. “My virgin ears!”

Alec couldn’t help but smile, Jace’s enthusiasm and vile sense of humor was infectious. If there was anything that could cheer him up after 24 hours of feeling like complete shit, this was it.

“Come on man… I’ll even buy!” Jace offered with his best dazzling smile.

Alec shook his head in defeat. “Fine, but it’s all top shelf for me tonight.”

“There’s my boy! That’s what I’m talking about!” Jace declared, pulling Alec into a tight bro-hug. Then he reached down and took Stella over his shoulder so Alec wouldn’t have to bear her weight.

“Thanks,” Alec replied, appreciating the gesture.

“That’s what friends are for dumbass!” Jace said, playfully punching his arm. “So get used to it!”

Alec responded with his famous shy, crooked grin and the two men headed out into the night.

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Alec was thankful they first went back to Hendel House so he could change. He desperately needed a shower after stewing in his own sweat all day. Luckily Jace didn’t mind, saying he needed to run a quick errand anyway.

It was a particularly warm summer night so Alec decided to go with a pair of white linen shorts Isabelle had bought him for his birthday. He’d never worn them before but had a sudden urge to dress slightly better than his usual tired old wardrobe. Alec wasn’t into fashion, and usually just wore whatever passed the smell test, but meeting Magnus had made an impression on him already. He actually wanted to look nice for a change. He dug out the Tag Heuer watch his parents had gotten him for graduation, and an expensive pair of shoes Izzy swore wouldn’t be as uncomfortable as they looked, and he was ready to go.

“All dressed up for me?” Jace chimed from the door, letting himself in without knocking.

“I don’t know, I just felt like it,” Alec mumbled, a slight blush creeping up on his cheeks. Apparently Jace had had the same idea because he’d changed into a sheer lemon yellow shirt that his chest was
almost visible through. It heavily accentuated his tanned skin and sun-bleached hair. Alec looked away before his blush had a chance to increase.

“We’ll be the two hottest guys at the J-bar tonight, no doubt about that!” Jace replied in his normally cocky way.

“What’s J-bar?” Alec asked as he fidgeted with his watch.

“It’s the bar inside the Hotel Jerome, right downtown. Cool vibe, you’ll like it.”

Alec grabbed his phone off the charger and saw he had a new notification, another text from Magnus.

7:58 PM – Magnus: Still missing you...

Fuck, I gotta call him.

“Hey, do you mind if I meet you outside at your car? I need to make a quick call,” Alec asked trying to appear nonchalant.

“Sure, no problem. But don’t take too long, I need a drink in my hand ASAP!” Jace shouted loudly as he left the room.

Alec’s hands were trembling as he slid one finger across the screen to make the call. His heart beating wildly in his chest.

Lifting the phone to his ear it didn’t even complete one full ring. “Alexander!” Magnus’ voice answered anxiously. “I’m so glad you called!”

Alec felt a familiar wave of guilt crash into his stomach for the second time today. Why am I hurting people who care about me?

“Hey Magnus,” Alec replied tenderly.

“I was beginning to think you were angry.”

Alec let out a shaky breath. “Sorry, no, I’m not angry.”

“Oh good! Shall I come and fetch you from town? Maybe we can grab some dinner and a nice stroll. It’s a beautiful night.”

Alec’s tense stomach did a flip. “Uhhh, I’m actually headed out now, with Jace.”

The line was quiet.

“We’re just going to hit a bar downtown, just to talk and stuff.” Alec felt like he was admitting to some great sin. His palm was sweating against the cool metal of his phone, and he prayed Magnus would say something.

“Well that sounds fun, you two have a lot to talk about I’m sure,” Magnus responded flatly.

“Yeah, I haven’t really seen him much lately. I’ll probably fill him in about what happened yesterday, just so he knows,” Alec said nervously.

“Yes I can see why you’d want to do that, of course.”

Alec thought Magnus’ voice sounded sad. It tore him up inside to think he was hurting his feelings. But he knew right now he needed to get things off his chest, and Jace was the only one he could talk
to. “Can I call you tomorrow?” Alec asked timidly.

“Of course you can, you can always call me… anytime,” Magnus responded, his voice so sweet it caressed the insides of Alec’s heart like warm syrup.

“Ok, tomorrow then,” Alec said, and he ended the call with a quick “Bye” before he lost his nerve.

Flying down the stairs like he was running out of a burning building, Alec saw Jace’s car pulled right up to the door. He dashed out and jumped into the passenger seat.

“Everything OK,” Jace asked.

“Yeah,” Alec said, reassuring himself more than Jace. “It’s cool.”

When they arrived to the Hotel Jerome the J-bar was already packed. An interesting mixture of music students, local socialites, and cowboys. Alec was glad he’d dressed appropriately. The ambiance was a bit of the Old West with its hand carved woodwork and pressed tin ceiling, mixed with a modern air of people who had way too much money. Jace scanned the room and made eye contact with someone at a distance, then waved his arm overhead.

“Follow me,” he instructed Alec and they wound their way through the crowd towards the back corner. A row of tables packed with people overlooked the street outside. There was one empty table remaining right in the prime center spot with a sign that said reserved.

“Mr. Wayland, good to see you Sir. Will this be alright?” A man in a very fine suit spoke to Jace like he was some sort of visiting dignitary.

“This is great Raphael, thanks,” Jace responded, palming the guy an indeterminate amount of cash. “Tell Maia we’ll take a pitcher of the Mirror Pond and a couple of shots of Makers Mark.”

“Right away sir,” Raphael replied, pulling out a chair for Jace.

Alec looked between the two of them with his mouth slightly open. Raphael slid the money into his pocket and gave Alec a wink. Taken aback, Alec snapped his mouth closed and hurriedly took his seat.

“Do you literally know everyone?” he challenged Jace accusingly.

“I make a point of knowing the right people, yes. And hey, it got us this table didn’t it?” Jace smiled victoriously.

Alec rolled his eyes and grabbed the menu from the center of the table. He was adding this to the growing mental list of things about Jace he didn’t really understand. Sure he knew he’d been in Aspen before, lots of musicians made it their regular summer gig, but he seemed to be a favorite of every bar owner and restauranteur in town.

“So tell me what’s up with you and Bane,” Jace said, cutting right to the chase.

Alec was a bit caught off guard, not having formulated exactly what he was planning to say yet. “Uhh, we went out a couple of times,” he muttered, hiding part of his face behind the menu. “It was nice.”
“Nice? Is that all? Because you’ve been acting completely mental the last two days!” Jace fired back.

“It’s been… difficult at times,” Alec admitted, feeling suddenly nervous about opening up.

“Come on man, this is me! I can tell shit went down, so just spit it out already!”

Alec dropped the menu and threaded his fingers through his hair. “Yesterday morning… I was there, at his house… and something happened.”

“Wait, is this sex related? Because as much as I love you dude, some things are better left unsaid.”

“No! Jesus Jace! Get your mind out of the damn gutter for one second!” Alec yelled, a bit too loud as a group of people turned to look at him suspiciously.

“Ok, sorry, just tell me what happened because the suspense is killing me,” Jace asserted, leaning halfway across the table with anticipation.

Alec saw a waitress approaching with their pitcher of beer and shots over Jace’s left shoulder. He leaned back in his seat as she began sitting the drinks down on their table.

“You’ve got a lot of nerve showing your face in here again Wayland,” the waitress hissed. She was a very pretty girl with curly dark brown hair and large chocolate brown eyes. She spat venomously toward Jace. “A lot of nerve!”

“Maia, babe! You can’t possibly still be mad at me,” Jace replied smoothly, giving her his most sultry smile.

“Save that Casanova routine for one of your bimbos! I’m not hearing a word you say!” Maia lashed out, pounding the last beer glass down on the table and storming off.

“Well that was interesting,” Alec said, stifling a laugh behind his fist.

“We had a miscommunication, its fine, it was a long time ago. I’m sure she’s OK. She’s probably just having a bad day,” Jace explained, clearly in denial.

“I’m just wondering is it safe to drink these drinks?” Alec asked as he eyed the glasses suspiciously, his face lit up with amusement.

“Oh shut up and grab your shot you pussy!” Jace ordered, and the two of them clinked their shot glasses together. “Here’s to honor… well, actually, never mind that one… uhh, Cheers!”

They both slammed back the whiskey in perfect sync then grabbed their beers to chase it down. Alec found himself eagerly chugging his, welcoming the cold liquid.

“It’s good, right?” Jace asked pleasantly.

“Yeah, just what I needed,” Alec replied, already refilling his glass from the pitcher.

“Now back to where we left off, what’s going on with you and Bane? Because I get the feeling you’re not telling me something important,” Jace demanded, pointing his finger towards Alec’s chest to accentuate each word.

“It’s not Magnus,” Alec told him under his breath.

“No? Then who?”
Alec let out a deep exhale. “It’s fucking Morgenstern! You won’t believe this but he filed a formal complaint against me. Against me?! He’s trying to have me removed from the group,” Alec confessed angrily, trying to keep his voice down. “He made up a bunch of bullshit lies to the board about me not coming to practice or putting in any effort and honestly I’ve been close to tearing the asshole limb from limb!”

Jace was surprisingly calm hearing the news. He sat back in his seat and folded his arms across his chest. “I had a feeling something like this was going on. You two didn’t even make eye contact at rehearsal last night. I could have cut the tension with a knife.”

Alec was a bit thrown off, he’d expected Jace to be up in arms calling for blood. But he was remarkably cool and unaffected.

“No, well, tension is putting it mildly. I was already pissed as hell and then the bastard snuck up on me yesterday morning and scared the shit out of me!”

“Wait, he showed up at Bane’s house? While you were there?” Jace asked, puzzled.

“Apparently he’s the psychopath’s teacher! And he even has a key to his house! So he literally walked in on me in the kitchen half naked at the fridge! Hell I thought he broke in! I was about to call 911!”

People were shooting dirty looks at Alec now and moving away from their table like he might be a raving lunatic.

“Oh first, TMI man, TMI… and second, this dude is shady as fuck.”

“Yeah, tell me something I don’t know!” Alec replied, grabbing his second glass of beer and downing it in one long drag.

“Well, I’m glad you told me all of this and I hope you know I’ve got your back. He’s not going to be able to do jack-shit to your career, don’t you worry, I’ll make sure of that,” Jace proclaimed, calm and cool like he had the whole situation under control.

“I’m glad you think so, because honestly I feel like this is a lost cause. Basically all I can do now is kiss his ass and pray he doesn’t ruin me.”

“Bane isn’t going to let that happen, and neither am I. This fuckboy is only trying to rattle your cage, don’t let him do it. I swear on my Strad he’s not going to hurt you Alec, no way in hell.”

Jace was so overly confident Alec was struck silent. He just watched Jace sip his beer, his eyes focused steel. He seemed to be working something out in his head and Alec had a feeling there was more to this than Jace was willing to say.

“Are you going to clue me in about this plan of yours?” Alec asked.

“Let’s just say Morgenstern isn’t the only person who knows people at the top,” Jace declared as he tipped his drink toward Alec and grinned like the Cheshire cat.

Alec took this gesture as a sign the conversation about Sebastian was over. They both sat quietly while the crowd began to press in around them again. Alec’s thoughts began to drift toward Magnus, wondering where he was and what he was doing.

“I guess this explains why Clary was so confused earlier,” Jace mumbled, refilling his glass.
“Confused about what?” Alec questioned, suddenly snapped back from his daydream.

“Apparently Bane was supposed to give this big important masterclass today, like 40 violinists showed up. But he never came.”

Alec’s heart stopped. “What?”

“Yeah, people waited around for like an hour, just in case he showed, but he never did.”

Alec felt a surge of adrenaline charge through his body, electrifying every inch of his flesh. Magnus didn’t show up, oh Shit! This is all my fault! Fuck, fuck, fuck!

“You OK?” Jace said, noticing Alec’s visceral response.

“Jace, I’m sorry, I have to go,” Alec announced, standing up to take his wallet from his back pocket. “Something is wrong, I can’t stay.” He tossed two twenties on the table and finished off the last inch of beer in his glass.

“You’re leaving me here?” Jace replied, shocked.

“I’m sorry, but I have to go check on Magnus. This is my fault, and he needs me,” Alec admitted, feeling his heart swell from its very true and honest confession.

“Yeah, of course, you should go,” Jace reassured him. “You’re a good guy Alec.”

“Thanks, and thanks for listening to all this… this… mess.”

“Sure man, I hope it helped. And hey! You know what, take my car, OK? I want you to,” Jace offered with a smile pulling his keys from his front pants pocket.

“Seriously? That would be so great. I hadn’t really thought of how I was going to get there,” Alec blushed.

“Oh, it’s nothing. Don’t start balling all over me. I know I’m the best friend ever,” Jace said with a wink, tossing Alec the keys.

Alec smiled then turned and headed for the door.

*Hang on babe, I’m coming!*
“Magnus?” Alec called out again at the top of the stairs, pausing to get his bearings. He turned and followed the sound of Brahms, his concerto in D major was singing through the air with a heart wrenching, plaintive cry. It pulled Alec toward the end of the hall where there was a closed door with a thin strip of light coming from underneath. Alec approached quietly then pressed his ear against the wood, he could hear Magnus playing. He of course recognized it was him immediately, the passion, timbre and phrasing he’d know anywhere. It was the sound he’d fallen asleep to every night. It was beautifully tragic perfection, much like the man. There was more feeling in the pull of his right arm against those strings than most people felt in their entire body. He transcended the written music, taking it to a place few others could dream of going. It was alive, a living and breathing musical entity that saturated every molecule surrounding Alec’s body wrapping him in a warm, radiant light.

In this one sublime moment Alec had an epiphany. He realized for the first time, standing in the dark hallway alone listening to the thumping of his own heart mixed with the intoxicating second Adagio of Brahms, that he loved Magnus Bane, and he loved him with all of his heart and his soul. It was so clear to him now he almost laughed as a single tear fell down his burning cheek. He knew he would do anything for this man, anything to hold him, to cherish him, to protect him from pain. The understanding of these facts defied his sense of logic, but maybe that’s what love was all about. He stood there basking in his revelation for just another moment, then couldn’t stop himself from opening the door and rushing inside.

Magnus didn’t hear him at first, he was lost in the music, but when Alec laid his hand gently on his shoulder he stopped and turned.

“Alexander,” he responded breathlessly. “You’re here?”

Alec moved in one fluid motion, taking Magnus into his arms and wrapping him tightly against the full length of his body. “I’m here,” he said just before his lips crashed against Magnus’ startled open mouth.

Their kiss ignited and Magnus’ arms fell limp at his sides, still clutching tight to his violin and bow. Alec was kissing him now with a desperation and need he hadn’t shown before. His greedy mouth hungrily taking Magnus’, his tongue sinking deep into his warmth. It was passionate, raw and consuming. Magnus exhaled sharply and Alec devoured his breath like he’d been starved for it. With his hands firm against Magnus’ back he pulled him closer still, sealing their bodies together as one.

Alec’s heart was overjoyed, and he swore he could still hear the music playing.

As the intensity of their kissing slowed their mouths pulled apart but lingered close. Alec opened his eyes, finding Magnus was already looking at him.

“Take me to your room,” Alec whispered.

“Alexander-”

“Shh, don’t say it, just take me there… please,” Alec begged, his voice soft and low.

Magnus took a step back to place his instrument in its case. Then tilting his chin upward with a dark and sensual look he extended his arm as graceful and sure as a dancer. Alec grabbed hold without reservation and Magnus led him toward the door.
They made their way down the hall, hand in hand, to the opposite end where two large double doors stood open. Once over the threshold Alec immediately saw a large four poster bed which was covered in an impressive array of rich gold and deep red blankets, layered one over the other like something straight out of a home décor magazine. At least a dozen pillows in every shape and size mounted against the headboard beckoning to be laid upon, it was absolutely perfect. Magnus stopped just before reaching the edge of the bed and turned back around to face Alec, his eyes smoldering intensely. He grabbed hold of the hem of Alec’s shirt and lifted it slowly over his head, then tossed it to the floor. Alec felt no fear, he reached for the buttons of Magnus’ shirt and began unfastening them one by one. His hands trembling, but not from nerves, only from wanting them to move faster. Magnus took hold of Alec’s belt and pulled against the buckle. There would be no pausing to ask if he was OK, the language between them was unspoken, this is what they both wanted.

When the last button was undone Alec reached inside the open shirt front and smoothed his hands over Magnus’ chest. He caressed each ripple lovingly, tracing every dip and bend. His skin felt like warm silk under his calloused fingers. Magnus’ breath hitched from the contact, his lips parted seductively as his eyes blazed upward to Alec’s with hunger. Alec ran his hands up to Magnus’ shoulders pushing back the fabric and exposing his perfectly chiseled form. The shirt slipped down his arms and fell to the floor. Alec leaned in and placed a trail of tender kisses along his collarbone, relishing the warm salty sting against his kiss swollen lips. Magnus let out a soft moan as his head dropped back. Alec moved to his exposed neck, kissing his Adam’s apple, allowing his tongue to taste every inch of him.

The next set of movements came rapidly and all at once. Magnus’ hands moved back to Alec’s waist, pulling the belt from its loops and unzipping his pants. Alec’s hands traveled down the length of Magnus strong back, sliding into the waistband of his athletic pants. He was brave now in his thirst, reaching down to take hold of Magnus’ ass and grasping it firmly, their eyes never breaking contact.

As Magnus glided Alec’s pants and boxers down from his hips Alec did the same and within a moment their naked bodies were both in view.

“You’re so beautiful,” Alec murmured as he took his first look down to savor the full sight of Magnus’ exquisite build.

“You are a work of art,” Magnus responded, drinking in Alec’s statuesque perfection. “My Adonis.”

Alec smiled before taking back Magnus’ lips, his hands moving up into his hair to thread through the soft strands. His agile fingers curling against Magnus’ scalp gently tugging fistfuls causing Magnus’ gaze to shift upward again, his deep brown eyes shimmering like midnight pools. Magnus’ hands were gliding over Alec’s hips, his palms moving in a circular motion, first toward the back to knead the cool flesh of his cheeks, then shifting forward closer and closer toward Alec’s waiting erection. Alec could feel the progression of movement and his breath began to pant into Magnus’ mouth. “Yes,” he growled low as Magnus moved one hand to take hold of his firmness. He wrapped his delicate but strong fingers around him and Alec involuntarily thrust forward into the pressure. The blissful friction radiated heat throughout his body like wild fire. Magnus tightened his hold and Alec continued to move in and out, he knew if he didn’t find a way to stop it was all going to be over much too soon.

“Yes,” Magnus whispered softly against Alec’s wet lips. “I want you to lie down on the bed for me.”

Alec didn’t hesitate, he reached his arm down to the soft, awaiting bed and collapsed into it, still
breathless. Magnus paused to allow himself a moment to enjoy the sight of this beautiful man spread out before him then guided himself down on top of him.

Their arms simultaneously reached out to envelope each other in a loving embrace, their mouths reconnecting fervently. Alec felt a wave of pure joy crash over him as the full weight of Magnus’ naked body pressed against him. This is what he’d been waiting for all his life. This was the feeling his heart craved, the touch his soul longed for, it was finally happening. Magnus was the love of his life, and he was here in his arms making all of his dreams come true.

Alec couldn’t fight the need to tell Magnus how he felt, he couldn’t wait one more second to make it known. He pulled his lips away, Magnus chasing after them, and said what he knew without a doubt was true… “I love you,” Alec confessed, his eyes full of emotion.

Magnus drew in a sharp breath, his eyebrows lifting with surprise. Then his face transformed, melting into a soft reflection of Alec’s own joy and he replied, “Oh Alexander my darling, I love you too. With all I have to give.”

Alec’s heart soared as he pulled Magnus as tight to his body as he could, his lips pressed against the tender skin of his earlobe. He took it into his mouth, sucking for just a moment, then murmured softly, “and I want you, I want you to… m-make love to me, please.”

Magnus straightened his arms to push himself up from Alec’s tight hold so that he could look him in the eyes. One eyebrow was slightly raised.

Alec knew what was behind that look. So he put his mind at ease. “I’ve thought about it a long time, and I just know this is what I want.”

Magnus smiled and began slowly moving downward, slinking like a cat. Alec watched his lustful intent as Magnus retreated further down toward the foot of the bed, never taking his eyes off of him as he lightly planted soft wet kisses down the length of his chest. Alec’s back arched off the bed slightly as Magnus’ hot breath tingled against the moistened patches of skin. They looked like glistening stepping stones in the dim light of the room, Alec licked his lips.

Once Magnus’ face hovered just inches above its target he opened his mouth. Alec clutched the bedding underneath him with anticipation, sucking in his breath as Magnus bent to take the tip of Alec’s cock into his mouth. Alec released a melodic whimper, the feeling of warmth and pressure overwhelming him. His body spasmed and bucked involuntarily against Magnus’ face sending the entire shaft deep into his throat. Magnus hummed his approval and Alec saw stars flickering behind his closed eyelids. “Mag-nus… I-” but Alec couldn’t speak, Magnus had begun a slow rhythmic motion pulling and sucking his length. His strong tongue gliding along its muscular ridge was sending Alec into an ecstasy he’d never known. His body began to convulse from deep within, and he clawed at the sheets holding on for dear life. As the speed began to increase Alec cried out, unable to contain a symphony of erotic sounds. Magnus responded by taking him deeper still until Alec’s resistance dissolved into a euphoric release. He came with a force that shook him to his core, his body progressing through a series of tremors as Magnus firmly held his hips absorbing every quiver.

Alec lay motionless now, eyes closed, panting for breath. He felt Magnus shift and the sound of a drawer sliding open from the bedside table just to the right of him. He wanted to look but he couldn’t move. It wasn’t until he felt Magnus’ hand on his inner thigh that his eyes flickered open to investigate what was happening. He saw Magnus was on his knees, positioned between his legs, and he could feel his warm slippery hand moving further upward.

“Do you trust me?” Magnus asked him, his voice low and raspy.
Alec, now realizing what Magnus had taken from the drawer, felt his first inclination towards fear. His throat tightened for a moment before accepting the truth that he knew without a doubt Magnus would never hurt him. “Yes… I do.”

Magnus smiled sweetly with sensuous eyes. “Good, then take a deep breath and relax.”

Alec obeyed him, letting out a deep cleansing breath as Magnus delicately bent each of his knees upward and apart placing pillows under them for support. Alec felt completely comfortable and at ease as Magnus began to massage the warm liquid into his thighs moving slowly inward toward uncharted territory.

There was a pressure, and Alec inhaled sharply through his clenched teeth.

“Shhhh, it’s Ok, just breath,” Magnus whispered in the darkness, reassuring him lovingly.

Alec exhaled slowly as Magnus placed his unoccupied hand on his lower abdomen to soothe him. The pressure increased again but this time Alec relaxed into it allowing the progression to push past the slight discomfort and reach a new and pleasurable destination he’d never knew existed.

“That’s it baby, you’re doing so well,” Magnus praised him as he glided his fingers erotically across Alec’s sweet spot.

Alec was coming unhinged as his body began to push against Magnus’ hand, driving him deeper. Every delicious stroke sending him further and further into a state of frenzy. He wanted more, he was overcome with the need to have every inch of him filled with Magnus.

“More,” Alec pleaded, his body already starting to convulse.

Magnus responded quickly to his demand, the pillows were tossed away and his hands took the underside of both of Alec’s legs bending them forward with the weight of his upper body. There was a moment of pause then a thrust of intense pressure followed by a gratifying caress… and in that moment Alec knew he wasn’t a virgin any longer. His hands gripped the bed again and Magnus reached to take them in his own, intertwining their fingers.

“You’re so beautiful,” Magnus murmured. “My angel.”

Alec felt his climax building, his moans raising in pitch as Magnus increased his speed. His body in such a state of rapture it wasn’t until Magnus’ nails began to dig into the backs of his hands that he knew they were both close.

“Come with me baby,” Magnus requested as his powerful body tensed between Alec’s legs. Alec immediately spiraled into his own elated bliss and the two hit their peak with perfect synchronization.

When the waves of pleasure finally subsided Magnus collapsed onto Alec’s chest, his breath ragged.

“Y’ok?” Alec managed to ask between his own gasps, suddenly concerned if he’d done something wrong.

“Mmmm,” Magnus replied. “More than Ok.”

“Y’sure?” Alec asked again, reaching his hand to stroke Magnus’ hair.
“Alexander, I am perfect,” Magnus answered, turning his head to gaze up into Alec’s eyes. “And you… you were amazing!”

“Wha-” Alec started to question then it clicked. “Oh.” He felt a blush rise to his already flushed cheeks. “Uh, thanks.”

“That was truly incredible, you were incredible,” Magnus proclaimed, dropping his head back against Alec’s chest completely spent.

“You were incredible too,” Alec admitted, his head still in the clouds.

Magnus chuckled, his lips moving against Alec’s warm chest. “I did pick up on that, yes. You were hitting some notes completely out of your register.”

Alec felt a smile come to his lips, he was proud of himself although he didn’t really feel like he’d done anything to help.

“You did all the work babe, I should be thanking you,” Alec teased playfully, his ego boosted to see Magnus reduced to a pile of Jell-O on top of him. He was just about to say something else when his stomach suddenly growled noisily, reminding him he hadn’t eaten all day.

“We can argue over who was better later,” Magnus replied, his breath finally recovered. “But for now I think we need a shower, then you need something to eat! I’ve got to rebuild your strength for what I have planned, because I’m not even close to being done with you tonight!”

Far away, at the base of Red Mountain, Jace waited impatiently in the empty parking lot of Harris Concert Hall. Its secluded location ideal for what was about to be a very risky meeting. He sat low in his car, slumped down to avoid anyone who might happen to scan the lot. Checking the time on his phone he became more and more annoyed.

“Where the fuck is he?” Jace cursed out loud to himself.

Just then a tall figure of a man rounded the corner of the hall just in front of his car. Even in the moonlight Jace recognized the sheen of platinum hair reflecting in the darkness. Jace opened his car door with the interior lights disabled and silently slipped from his seat.

“This is clumsy and idiotic, even for someone as stupid as you,” Sebastian snarled as Jace approached him.

“Shut up asshole, and follow me,” Jace hissed low as he turned to walk towards the woods across the street.

Sebastian followed right on his heels through twisted pine trees and brambles until they reached the bank of the Roaring Fork River. The sound of the water providing additional protection in case anyone might be listening.

“What the fuck are you playing at?” Jace threatened as he grabbed the front of Sebastian’s shirt, clutching it tight in his fist.

“Now, now, Jonathan, let’s not lose our heads,” Sebastian purred with a sick twisted sort of
satisfaction.

“I don’t know who you think you are to even dream you’ll get away with this! But I’m warning you, leave Alec alone or I swear to God it will be the last thing you ever do!”

Sebastian laughed and jerked himself from Jace’s grasp. “I think you’ve actually grown fond of the boy. Isn’t that sweet.”

Jace clinched both fists tightly at his sides, his knuckles bright white, and his nails digging into his palm. “Alec is a good guy! He’s a decent and caring human being! Not that you can possibly relate! He doesn’t deserve this kind of shit being thrown at him from the likes of you!” Jace’s voice grew louder as his anger spread into a blinding rage. He faced Sebastian boldly, not backing down one inch.

“We can find someone else! Someone better than him!” Sebastian growled, the first sign he was losing control of his carefully crafted arrogance.

“He doesn’t want anyone else, can’t you see? You daft prick!” Jace snapped, poking a finger into Sebastian’s chest. “I can’t believe you showed up there! I can’t believe even in your sick, sadistic mind you thought that was a good idea! I swear to God If you keep this up we’ll all be out of a job! Unless you plan to tuck your tail and run back to Daddy come the end of the summer!”

Sebastian’s eyes narrowed as he stood up to his full and assuming height. “Don’t you dare mention my father, you spoiled, self-entitled brat! You’re only in the equation because your Daddy paid your way in! You’ve done nothing but lie to the boy ever since he got here! So don’t play the victim to me!”

Jace backed away, lowering his head from the sting of Sebastian’s words. “I’m not lying to him, I’m only trying to protect him.”

Sebastian gained strength from Jace’s withdrawal. “Is that what you tell yourself so you can sleep at night? Ha! You’re pathetic!”

Jace continued to step back. “I’m done with this conversation, you leave Alec alone. I’m warning you! You continue to hurt him and you’ll be the one whose career is ruined!”

Sebastian turned his head at an angle, the moon illuminating his sharp features as a cunning smile spread across his devious face. “You underestimate me Jonathan, you always have. Don’t you see that I always get what I want? One way or another. You and your feeble threats have no effect on me. And as for him, well, let’s just see what happens when the chips fall.”

Jace let out a nervous laugh, he turned and looked into the dark cresting waters of the river behind them as if contemplating his next move carefully. The cool night air tousled his hair every which way sending strands into his eyes and mouth. He knew he’d tipped his hand a bit too far and there’d be no way to back down now without giving up all control. He chose his words carefully. “You may think you have some sort of power over him, but he’s no fool. Remember how lucky you are or in the end you’ll be the one who ends up replaced.”

Sebastian’s smile widened as an evil glint flickered in his eyes, sparked from the moon’s bluish glow. It gave him an almost demonic presence. “Oh my dear now you see, this is what I’ve been telling you all along. I suggest you heed your own advice and remember how very fortunate you are. It would be a shame if some tragic event should befall such a beloved and promising young musician, don’t you think?”
Jace felt Sebastian’s icy threat hit him like a dagger right to the center of his chest. There was no sign of sarcasm in his words. This was a cold and calculated declaration of violence to which he had no response.

Sebastian’s smile vanished like the flick of a light switch, revealing only his dark and purely evil intent. “Yes, such a shame indeed.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry for the long delay between chapters. I was on vacation for nearly a month and have barely had time to write since I returned.

Wasn't it good to see Jace back!? I love writing his voice. I love his wit and sarcasm, and I love the way he cares about Alec. This chapter gave you the first real look inside the trouble that's brewing for these characters. Much of it unbeknownst to Alec. If you go back to previous chapters you might even notice some hints I gave along the way. ;)

Sebastian is evil, but of course we knew that.

Magnus and Alec's first time... sigh... I actually intended to have this a bit later in the story but felt inclined to write it sooner after certain events spurred me on. *cough* Shadowhunters *cough* *cough* where was the sex scene?? *cough* ;)

The playlist has been updated on YouTube with the new pieces mentioned. I hope that you'll enjoy listening to them. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7

Thank you so much for reading and I really appreciate your comments and kudos if you are liking the story so far.

Up next we've got some romantic moments for Malec mixed with the stress and strain of the Aspen Quartet's first performance. That is if they all don't kill each other first. Also the Concerto competition is on the horizon and some shocking moments you might want to punch me for.

I promise the next chapter won't be nearly as distant! Thanks again... so much!!! :)

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7
Rhapsody in Blue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alec was pulled from his deep and dreamless sleep by something tickling the end of his nose. His eyes fluttered open and immediately squinted against the bright morning sunlight. It was streaming through a large set of floor to ceiling windows bathing the room in a soft white glow. Glancing down, Alec saw the tickle was coming from a stray tuft of hair on Magnus’ head which was currently nestled into the crook of his neck. He smiled instantly but didn’t dare move for fear of disturbing this picture perfect moment. He could see Magnus’ dark curving eyelashes fanned against the soft caramel skin of his cheek. He could feel his gentle breath exhaling across his throat. His left arm was languidly draped over Alec’s chest and his left leg was wound between his thighs intensifying the heat between their naked bodies. Alec was delirious with joy. He closed his eyes, relishing their closeness as he replayed the events of the previous night. The feel of Magnus’ weight on top of him, the taste of his lips, the warmth of his skin, the sound of his moans echoing through the darkness. They’d stayed awake almost the whole night, kissing, touching, discovering and caressing every inch of each other’s bodies. They’d made love at least a half dozen times, in bed, in the shower, on the stairs when they couldn’t even make it all the way down to the kitchen. Alec’s body was deliciously sore in all the right places and his smile widened. Magnus must have felt the movement because his body shifted in response.

“Mmmm,” Magnus purred, stretching his limbs and snuggling against Alec’s frame. “Good morning my darling.”

Alec pressed his palm against Magnus’ lower back, squeezing him close. “Morning.”

“Did you sleep well?” Magnus asked as he turned his head to kiss Alec’s collarbone.

“Yeah, really well actually. You?”

“Like a baby,” Magnus cooed, lifting his knee to nuzzle it closer against Alec’s groin.

Alec wrapped his leg around Magnus’ in response to the friction and with his free arm enveloped him in a warm embrace. He buried his face into Magnus’ hair breathing in its earthy citrus aroma. It reminded him of their shower last night, when he had watched Magnus massage the shampoo into his hair. The way the lather slowly built up between his long, graceful fingers until it was streaming down his back in thick ribbons of foam. It had been one of the most erotic things he’d ever witnessed and his hips bucked gently against Magnus’ knee in response.

“You hungry?” Alec asked innocently, trying not to give away the fact that he was not only hungry but insanely horny as well.

“Mmmmm, yes… hungry for you,” Magnus growled, reaching down to grasp Alec’s morning arousal.

Alec inhaled sharply, surprised but very pleased and more than willing to put himself on the menu. “Hmmm, I like where this is going.”

“Oh I know you do, I think I created a monster last night. A greedy, insatiable, ravenous monster who just couldn’t get enough of me,” Magnus mused as he bent his head upward to kiss the tender flesh under Alec’s jawline and down the length of his neck. It sent tingles running all over Alec’s
“Well I had a good teacher,” Alec replied tracing the strong muscles up and down Magnus’ back with the tips of his fingers. His skin so warm and velvety soft under the pile of fluffy down comforters he forgot about his growling stomach and hoped they could just stay in bed all day.

“There are many more things I want to show you, since you’re so eager to learn. One of which is on my mind right now,” Magnus admitted sinfully before he quickly shifted on top of Alec to straddle him between his lean and flexible legs.

They were facing each other now, finally able to make proper eye contact. Alec thought Magnus was just as beautiful in the morning, if not more so than he’d ever seen him before. His hair a soft mess of black spikes falling every which way, and his eyes still sleepy but sparkling with a yearning smolder. His mouth was turned up at the corners into a cunning smile and Alec knew this look so well already.

“Now who’s insatiable?” Alec teased, reaching down to gently place his hands on Magnus’ hips. They moved minutely against Alec’s groin in a slow rolling motion. Alec’s thumbs were hooked into the crease feeling every exquisite pulse.

“Would you give me anything I wanted?” Magnus asked, his expression now serious and concentrated.

Alec answered immediately and without hesitation. “You know I would.”

Magnus’ smile transformed into a devilish grin and he reached to grab the nearly empty bottle of lube from the bedside table. Alec blushed in response, feeling less brave in the revealing light of day. He didn’t know why he was suddenly so bashful, he’d already given Magnus every square inch of his body the previous night. But something about the sun illuminating the room made the experience seem more real. He focused on Magnus’ intense eyes instead and allowed his calm demeanor to ease his own doubting mind. Did it really matter now? The answer to that was a resounding no. He was more than willing to give himself again and again to the man he loved, without apprehension. He allowed the realization to wash over him, wiping away his momentary shyness.

“Bend your knees my angel, I’ve got a surprise for you,” Magnus teased as he flipped the cap and poured the remainder of what was inside into his palm.

Alec did as he was told and brought his legs up behind Magnus, unsure of what was in store but ready to find out. Magnus reached behind his back and took Alec’s erection firmly into his lubricated hand. Wrapping it in warmth he glided his hand up and down the entire length coating it thoroughly. Alec was confused for a moment, unsure of why he would be the one to need this treatment, until he suddenly realized what was about to happen.

“Magnus… I- I thought?” Alec couldn’t say the words.

“You thought what my love?” Magnus murmured playfully as he continued to stroke him earnestly.

“That I- I that I was…” Alec was losing his ability to talk or even remember what he was going to say as Magnus continued to work his magic.

“As I told you before Alexander, there are many things you don’t know about me. One of which is my predilection for all manner of sexual delights. Including my wish to enjoy this impressive specimen I currently have in my hand.”

Alec’s toes curled as if he were trying to grip the bed. His hands dug into the soft flesh of Magnus’
hips as he bit down on his bottom lip so hard he thought he tasted blood. There was no way to prepare for what was about to happen, and he felt like he should brace himself not having any idea what to expect.

“Don’t worry my darling, you’re still my perfect little bottom,” Magnus sighed as he lifted himself up and onto Alec’s glistening member. His hands reaching back to clutch Alec’s knees for leverage as he slowly began to lower himself down.

“Fffffffuuuck,” Alec slowly groaned, his head shooting back into the pillows. The tightness pressing around him was so overwhelming his mind was catapulted into an oblivion. Eyes rolling back in his head, he clamped his teeth and tried to breathe but the feeling was too powerful. Alec thought he’d known pleasure, Magnus’ mouth had taken him there with such mind blowing success. But this was different, it was unparalleled, it was paradise found, nirvana, ecstasy… there was really no word that existed in his mind to describe it, it was simply incredible. Alec’s climax was building so quickly he had no prayer of controlling it. He didn’t dare move for fear he’d come immediately. Opening his eyes he saw Magnus rising and falling against him, his strong arms flexed to support his body weight, showcasing the definition of every muscle. His head tilted back toward the ceiling, mouth slack. Alec had never seen anything so fucking beautiful in his entire life.

“Mag-nus,” was all he could say as his body began to quake.

“Oh God Alexander, you feel so fucking good. Don’t come yet baby, just a little bit longer,” Magnus begged as he continued to grind against him with increasing speed.

Alec held his breath, praying he could hold on. He started trying to count but he couldn’t think of any numbers. He couldn’t think of anything at all except the immense wave that loomed over his head, threatening to crash down at any moment.

“I c-an’t,” Alec cried out unable to hold back another second. He instinctively reached down to give Magnus a few vigorous pumps just as his orgasm broke free. Finally he could give into his pleasure completely as Magnus pressed down into Alec’s release and quickly found his own. The warmth of it spread over Alec’s chest and covered his helping hand. The two of them already mastering each other’s bodies even after such a short time together.

Alec lay trembling with intense aftershocks, his chest heaving rapidly. Magnus placed two steady hands on either side of his torso to soothe him, their warmth radiating through to his core. These two gifted musicians with their beautifully skilled hands were in tune to an unspoken language only they could understand. Alec’s eyelids gradually lifted and he was greeted by Magnus’ most blissful and enamored smile.

“You alright my love?” he asked Alec gently.

“Perfect,” Alec replied on a deep, satisfying exhalation of breath.

Completely satiated, Magnus rolled off of Alec’s body and collapsed onto the bed next to him.

“Mmmmm, now that’s what I call a good morning.”

“Yeah, you can say that again,” Alec replied with a heavy sigh, basking in his afterglow.

“Now don’t you go falling in love with my ass because that’s only for special occasions,” Magnus
teased as he threaded his fingers through Alec’s limp hand and brought it up to his lips for a kiss. Then he popped up off the bed startling Alec a bit and bent to reach something on the floor.

“Here, use this to clean up and I’ll start the shower. You’re a dirty, dirty boy.” Magnus threw Alec his crumpled shirt from the night before.

Catching the shirt in midair Alec enjoyed the fine sight of Magnus’ naked backside striding toward the bathroom gracefully. “Yes sir!” He replied, using the shirt as instructed.

When Alec was done he tossed the dirty shirt back down on the floor and noticed his phone was halfway sticking out of his shorts pocket. He reached down to scoop it up and saw he had about a zillion missed texts and calls. He heard the shower come on and decided he might as well check his voicemail in case there was anything important.

*Tuesday, 9:41 AM – Alec, this is Mom. You haven’t answered my last three texts. How was your flight yesterday? Are you all settled in? Give me a call when you wake up and let me know you’re Ok. I’ve got meetings in Washington the rest of the week and I’d like to know you’re safe before I fly out tomorrow. Call me! Love you!*

*Tuesday, 8:46 PM – Alec, it’s Mom again. Did you get my voicemail this morning? Call me tonight, it doesn’t matter the time difference, I’ll be awake and waiting to hear from you. I hope you’re alright!*

*Tuesday, 11:15 PM – Alec this is your father. Please call your Mother tonight when you get in. She’s climbing the walls with worry. I’ve got a breakfast meeting with the joint chiefs in the morning and I’d really like to get some sleep tonight. Otherwise I’m going to have to sedate her.*

*Wednesday, 5:36 AM – Alec, it’s Mom. I received your text and I’m glad you’re alright but I really wish you’d call me! Your father and I are both headed to the airport but I’ve got another hour to kill before my flight so call me please as soon as you wake up. Love you!*

*Wednesday, 7:33 PM – Alec, it’s Izzy! Can you please call Mom as soon as possible because she’s driving me insane! I have three exams this week and I really don’t have time to deal with her endless stream of texts and bullshit! So call her tonight or you’ll be looking for a new sister! Ha ha…. Just kiddiiiiing! But please call her, OK? And how are things in Aspen? Any hot guys? Maybe I should come visit? Be safe! Love you!*

*Saturday, 9:06 PM – Alec this is Mom. I’m back from Washington and looking at flights to Denver to come and check on you. I suggest you call me back unless you want me on your doorstep this weekend young man! This isn’t funny. Call me tonight!*

*Sunday, 9:47 AM – Dude! I sent you about a hundred texts last night and I haven’t heard a word! I hope you’re OK. After you ditched me I spent about an hour getting my ass chewed out by Maia so I decided to take an Uber up to Bane’s house and get my car. Thanks for leaving the keys in it! I would have come back to get you if you needed a ride but I guess you must still be there… you sexy man you! I hope you’re finally getting some! But don’t tell me if you are, cuz gross! Call me later Romeo!*

*Sunday, 10:22 AM – Alec! It’s Victor. Lydia and I are still expecting you for dinner tonight! Does 6:00 work? I’ll text you the address now. Looking forward to hearing all about your first week! See you tonight!*

“Ugh,” grumbled Alec. “For fuck’s sake.”
“Did you say something dear?” Magnus called out from the bathroom.

“Uhhh, no babe, was just stretching!” Alec yelled back, tossing his phone on the nightstand. He’d deal with that shit storm later, after a much needed shower and some strong coffee. He dreaded a phone call with his mother more than a root canal. But the last thing he needed was her showing up here poking around in his business.

“How do you like your eggs?” Magnus asked from over by the stove as Alec fumbled around with a very intimidating looking coffee maker.

“Scrambled, and how the hell do I work this damn thing?” he grumbled, randomly turning dials and lifting levers on what appeared to be some kind of alien artifact.

Magnus saw him struggling and quickly came to the rescue. “Here, take the spatula. You do the eggs and I’ll make the coffee,” he suggested handing over the utensil but not before giving Alec a quick swat on the backside with it.

“Ouch!”

“Oh come on, you’re such a baby! I’ve got much scarier things than this spatula upstairs in my toy box,” Magnus teased, giving Alec a mischievous wink.

“Oh God, don’t even go there! My sister forced me to read *Fifty Shades of Grey* one time when we were stuck in the Dubai airport with a 14 hour layover. It still gives me nightmares!” Alec shuddered, rolling his eyes.

“Your sister sounds like an interesting woman,” Magnus replied with a taunting lilt to his voice.

Alec immediately swatted him back with the spatula. “Hey! My sister is not an interesting woman!” He said with a threatening glare.

“Now, now, settle down there Gordon Ramsey. I only meant interesting as in I can’t wait to meet her! From what I’ve already seen of her taste in clothes and shoes I think we’ll get along famously!”

Alec paused for a moment, letting Magnus’ words sink in. *Meet Izzy? Meet my family? Oh God, meet my Mother?*

Magnus picked up on Alec’s deer in the headlights look. “I mean you did say that you loved me, right? So isn’t that part of the deal?”

Alec was dumbstruck. He suddenly had a flash of Magnus standing with him in the middle of his parent’s living room in Manhattan. The look on their faces, full of judgement and criticism. His mother looking down her nose at the two of them like she did when someone suggested she fly coach. He’d seen it too many times already in his life and the thought of Magnus being subjected to that kind of prejudice terrified him.

“Alexander, are you alright?” Magnus asked, concerned by his silence.

“Sorry, yeah I’m fine. I was just thinking about how much you and Izzy would hit it off. She would probably be your new best friend. You guys would totally ditch me,” Alec lied, and surprisingly
pretty well for a change.

“Well then I can’t wait to meet her even more!” Magnus beamed. “I could use her help decorating the four empty bedrooms downstairs. I ran out of steam after the first four were done. Plus I’ve got an apartment in Paris that’s dreadfully in need of an overhaul!”

Alec focused on the eggs and tried to think of a way to change the subject as far away from his family as possible. “So, I’ve been meaning to ask you, what would you think about coming with me to a dinner party tonight?”

Magnus, having finished with the coffee, ran up behind Alec and wrapped his arms around his waist. “I think that’s just about the sweetest invitation I’ve ever heard! Yes, I’d love to!”

Alec smiled. The feeling of Magnus’ body pressed tight against his back made it very hard to continue stirring the eggs. “Great, I’ll call Victor and let him know we’re coming.”

“Victor?” Magnus said surprised, his body tensing. “The dinner is at Victor’s?”

“Yes, is that a problem?”

“No,” Magnus replied, dropping his chin against Alec’s back. “I’m just surprised you’d want to bring me along.”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“Well, he’s your teacher, as well as a colleague of mine. He might be a bit surprised to see us… together.”

Alec shrugged. “Victor and I don’t have any secrets. He’s probably the only person in my life who knows who I truly am and accepts every part of me.”

Magnus turned his head to lay one cheek against Alec’s warm back, nuzzling into him. “Of course he does. He’s a very kindhearted and easygoing fellow. But he might ask some difficult questions. I just don’t want you to feel stressed.”

“Well, you did say you loved me, right? So isn’t that part of the deal?” Alec said teasingly, repeating the same words Magnus had just used to him moments ago.

“Touché Alexander, touché!”

“Here, you finish stirring these and I’ll go call him.” Alec handed the spatula back to Magnus and stepped out into the great room to make the call.

Magnus could easily hear Alec’s voice from the other room thanks to the high vaulted ceilings. His heart rate increasing as he listened intently.

“Victor, Hi! Sorry I missed your call... Yeah… dinner at 6:00 is perfect. Yes… I got the address. Yeah…yep… sure, no trouble at all. Uh, actually, I was wondering if it would be OK if I could bring a plus one? Yes? Great! OK, thanks! Yep, see you then, bye!”

Magnus went back to scooping the eggs onto plates, pretending he hadn’t been eavesdropping.

“So we’re all set!” Alec announced as he came back to the kitchen. “Victor is totally fine with me bringing someone.”

“Did you tell him who?” Magnus asked even though he already knew the answer.
“No, should I have?”

“I’m sure it’s fine,” Magnus responded, dropping the now empty pan into the kitchen sink a little too roughly, making a loud clang. “As long as he’s got plenty of booze!”

Alec felt an edge of sincerity mixed with Magnus’ sarcasm and it made him wonder if he might actually be nervous. And if Magnus was nervous then he should probably be freaking terrified considering he’d never actually introduced anyone to Victor before. His stomach did a flip and he crossed the kitchen in 3 long strides to wrap his arms around Magnus’ torso squeezing him tight. “Don’t worry babe, he’s going to love you.”

“Alexander.”

“Hmmm,” Alec hummed against the back of Magnus’ neck, his lips dragging across the edge of his hairline sensually.

“If you don’t stop that we will never eat these eggs, and I fear possibly waste away from starvation.”

“Fine, but you better eat fast because I’m ready for dessert,” Alec murmured against Magnus’ ear, nipping the lobe with his teeth.

“Hmmm, what ever happened to waiting three hours after eating before resuming any vigorous physical activity?” Magnus teased as he arched his back and reached one hand up into the back of Alec’s hair.

“I guess we’ll just have to take it nice and slow,” Alec whispered, gradually rolling his hips. He felt Magnus’ body go lax against him.

“Oh screw the eggs!”

As Magnus pulled into the driveway of the address Victor had texted, Alec’s heart was in his throat. He was beginning to second guess his decision to invite Magnus along, not because he didn’t want him there, but because of the questions he might have to answer. Questions he wasn’t even sure he knew the answers to himself. Magnus had been right to be skeptical, but it was too late now to turn back. He’d just have to do his best to face this head on and pray it wasn’t a total disaster.

“Well, here we are,” Magnus declared, turning off the ignition and removing his keys. “Shall we go in, or make a run for it?”

“Very funny,” Alec said, rolling his eyes. He reached for Magnus’ right hand and gave it a little squeeze. “No matter what anyone else thinks, I couldn’t be more proud to have you by my side.”

Magnus’ face transformed into a soft, brilliant smile. He leaned forward, across the middle console, and placed a gentle, loving kiss on Alec’s unsuspecting lips. He paused for a moment to take in a deep breath, pulling the very essence of Alec into his lungs. “You give me all the strength I need,” Magnus said at a whisper. “Now let us go and make our debut!”

Exiting the car on shaky legs Alec thought if he were a religious person this would be a good time to pray. Magnus waited by the front of the car and reached to take Alec’s hand as he approached. His grasp was firm but his palm was sweaty.
“Here goes nothing,” Alec muttered under his breath and the two men approached the house as a team.

Once they were on the front porch Alec softly rapped his knuckles against the front door. Immediately a duo of voices rang out in unison, “Come in! Door’s unlocked!”

Alec took a deep breath to steady his nerves and reached to open the door. As he stepped across the threshold he held the door open for Magnus to enter after him. The house was a charming craftsman style bungalow with cheery bright colors and impressive original woodwork. The sound of a Rachmaninov cello sonata was wafting through the air providing an unnecessary feeling of foreboding that surely wasn’t going to help Alec relax. He and Magnus stood in the tiny entryway just staring at each other for a moment. A wordless acknowledgment of their mutually overwhelming sense of fear.

“Alec! We’re in the kitchen! Come on in and make yourself at home!” Victor’s voice called from somewhere inside.

“When’s the scotch?” Magnus mumbled, as Alec led the way into what appeared to be the main living room. It wasn’t more than a second before Victor came around the corner from the kitchen, two glasses of wine in his hands.

“Alec my man! Good to see-,” and that’s when it happened. Victor’s gaze caught sight of the person standing just over Alec’s shoulder. His face instantly morphing into a look of complete surprise. “Magnus?” he exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

The awkwardness of the exchange sent Alec rushing forward to grab the glasses of wine from Victor’s hands. “Thanks for these! Looks great! I love red wine!” Alec was attempting to recover the situation by startling Victor out of his embarrassing stupor. He passed one glass to Magnus who was glaring back at Victor with a look that said something to the effect of, “I dare you.”

Victor stood there stupefied, just staring at Magnus as if he couldn’t possibly fathom why he was standing in the middle of his living room.

“Victor, nice to see you too,” Magnus finally replied with a slight edge of cynicism.

“Boy something smells great!” Alec loudly interjected, clapping his hands and rubbing them together vigorously. He prayed Victor would scrape his jaw up off the floor and say literally anything. The tension was unbearable.

“Uh, yeah, it’s the garlic I used in the steak marinade,” Victor replied, finally snapping out of it. At least enough to form a complete sentence. His eyes bounced back and forth between Alec and Magnus as if he were watching a tennis match.

Alec thought he could literally see the wheels turning in Victor’s mind. “Awesome! I love steak,” Alec happily proclaimed then drained half his wine in one nervously long gulp.

“Pardon my mess I was pureeing the tomatoes and splattered it all over myself. I’m a disaster!” Lydia pronounced as she came out of the kitchen looking down, wiping red spots off her bare arms.

“Liddy?” Alec heard Magnus speak from behind him, sounding like he’d seen a ghost.

“Mags?” Lydia exclaimed her eyes blown wide with shock. “Oh my God!! What are you doing here?” she cried, rushing past Alec like he wasn’t even there and grabbing Magnus into a warm embrace.
“I’m serving on the faculty this summer! What are you doing here?” Magnus was hugging her back just as strong.

“I’m in town for the weekend to see Victor! My God how have you been? I haven’t seen you since our days with CSO!”

“I’m wonderful! You look absolutely radiant my dear, it’s been far too long!”

“Yes it has! And I am just thrilled to see you! Thrilled!” Lydia bellowed, hugging Magnus repeatedly around his neck like he was her long lost best friend.

Victor and Alec exchanged questioning looks. Alec cleared his throat.

“Alec! I’m so sorry, it’s good to see you too of course,” Lydia said as she finally pulled herself off of Magnus and came to give Alec a hug. “You’re looking handsome as ever, I swear you’ve grown just since I last saw you at graduation three week ago. Why it’s like you’ve become a man overnight!”

Magnus quietly giggled from behind Alec which caused Alec’s face to immediately burst into a flaming red blush.

“Victor didn’t tell me you were bringing a celebrity guest!” Lydia teased. “I would have opted for foie gras instead of steaks on the grill.”

“Alec didn’t tell me who he was bringing,” Victor chimed in with a less than friendly tone. “I just assumed it would be Mr. Wayland, considering they’ve been glued at the hip all week.”

Magnus choked on his wine and Alec’s blush burned so hot he thought he might faint.

“Well I couldn’t be more delighted to see two of my favorite people EVER, standing right here in front of me!” Lydia beamed. “Let’s all go out on the porch, I’ve already set out the appetizers. I can’t wait to hear all about your first week Alec.”

Victor stared at Alec now with a penetrating look as if he were trying to read the inside of his brain. Alec ignored his look and turned to follow Lydia toward the back of the house. She had Magnus hooked under her arm and they were tittering back and forth like two teenage girls.

I’ve got a bad feeling about this.

The conversations that followed were mainly dominated by Lydia telling old war stories of her and Magnus’ days at CSO. Abusive guest conductors, boring benefactor luncheons, late night bar crawls through the city of Chicago. Apparently they’d been very close friends, and Alec hoped it hadn’t been more than that. But by the way they talked it seemed like more of a brother and sister type of bond. It was actually really heartwarming to see Magnus so happy and at ease, his features had relaxed and he was sitting back in his chair smiling. Now Alec just needed Victor to chill and wipe the skeptical expression off his face.

“When did you leave Chicago?” Magnus asked Lydia as she refilled everyone’s wine.

“Oh, I guess it was about two years after you did. A spot opened up with the New York Philharmonic and you know that had always been my dream job, so I went for it! And by some miracle I got the position, packed up everything I owned, and I’ve been a New Yorker ever since. That’s how I met Victor, and Alec too of course.” Lydia smiled at Alec reassuringly. She had always been one of his biggest supporters.

Alec listened in awe to every detail of their old stories but every time he glanced over at Victor he
seemed to be a million miles away. It wasn’t until they’d killed their third bottle of wine that he finally snapped out of his daze and interrupted the trip down memory lane to address the elephant in the room.

“So Alec, how did you two meet?” Victor asked in a very candid and straightforward manner.

Alec paused uncomfortably, adjusting the collar of his shirt. “Uhh, it was on my first day here actually. We met, uhhh, in town. Just sort of by accident.”

“Well that must have been a thrill for you Alec! Seeing how you are no doubt Magnus’ number one fan!” Lydia announced boldly.

Alec’s expression flashed to a look of sheer terror.

“Is that so?” Magnus chimed, lifting an eyebrow towards Alec with a devilish smirk.

“Oh yes, you’ve been his favorite for years! Remember that little scrapbook you had Alec? With all the clippings from the Times? So adorable. It’s good of you to indulge him Magnus, not many famous musicians take time from their busy schedules to mentor young up and comers. You were always too snooty for such things back in our day.”

Alec honestly felt like he was going to drop dead of embarrassment. This was absolutely the single worst possible thing that could have happened in the history of embarrassing things. He wondered if he could just excuse himself from the table, go to the bathroom and climb out the window. Or better yet just turn and bolt right out the front door. He was so distraught he couldn’t even look up from his lap, and he didn’t dare make eye contact with Magnus or Victor. He just sat there silently wishing a meteor would come crashing down to Earth and bury him a mile below ground.

“Well that does sound adorable, I’ll have to get him to show it to me,” Magnus purred, reaching to grab Alec’s knee under the table.

“So you met a week ago?” Victor interrupted again, having drained yet another very full glass of wine before anyone else had even taken a sip of theirs. “And now you’re what? Friends?”

Alec kept his eyes down, he wasn’t ready for this conversation. Magnus had been right. What the hell was he thinking bringing him here and opening their brand new relationship up to this kind of scrutiny? All he wanted to do now was just leave and pretend this entire nightmare of an evening hadn’t happened. Magnus instantly picked up on Alec’s tension and took control.

“Do you have a problem Victor? I can’t help but sense an underlying hostility in your voice?” Magnus said, bravely confronting him.

Lydia stood up abruptly. “How about more wine? Hmm? I’ll go fetch another bottle from the kitchen!” She offered sweetly, trying to defuse the bomb that was about to explode.

“What are your intentions with my student?” Victor fired back angrily at Magnus, pounding his fist on the table violently, causing Lydia to let out a yelp.

“My intentions?” Magnus said in a clipped tone that balanced on the edge of a laugh mixed with a threat.

“Yes, you heard me! What is your interest in Alec? I’d like to know!” Victor bellowed, his voice bubbling into anger with his finger pointed toward Magnus accusingly.

Alec felt his body melting into the chair beneath him as if he were trying to make himself disappear
just by sheer will. He suddenly had a flashback of sitting at the dinner table with his parents as a kid listening to them brutally attack each other back and forth, one verbal jab after another. He couldn’t believe he was trapped between the two of them, helpless again.

“Why Victor? Are you his keeper?” Magnus said, his back straightening. He leaned forward protectively almost completely across Alec’s lap.

“He’s practically a boy!” Victor roared.

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Magnus spat back.

“We didn’t bring you here to the festival so you could use our students as your own personal dating pool!”

“Stop,” Alec muttered softly under his breath, his eyes still averted downward.

“Alec isn’t a student!” Magnus snarled.

“He’s my student!” Victor thundered.

“Please stop,” Alec spoke again, his voice still too low to be heard over the yelling.

“Yes, but he’s also an adult! And he can think for himself!” Magnus proclaimed angrily.

“He’s barely out of school a month! He hasn’t even moved out of his parent’s house for God’s sake!”

“ENOUGH!” Alec finally burst out.

Victor turned to Alec, his expression softening. “Alec?”

“No! Don’t! You’re being rude, and a bully! You can’t talk to him that way.” Alec was trembling with anger.

“Alec…” Victor said trying to reach for Alec’s arm.

“No!” Alec ripped his arm away. “I’m not going to sit here and listen to you attack someone I care about!”

“Alexander let’s just leave, OK? You don’t have to do this.” Magnus spoke gently against Alec’s ear, still patting his leg.

“Yes I do Magnus! He needs to know the truth!”

“Alec, listen, I’ve made you upset and I’m sorry. I’m just trying to look out for you as I promised your Mother I would before you left home.” Victor’s tone was sharp and his apology sounded like anything but one.

At the mention of his mother Alec had reached his breaking point. He stood up and sent his chair flying into the wall behind him. “I don’t need your protection!”

Victor responded by also standing up, his chair toppling over. “You don’t know him Alec, you don’t know what he’s capable of!”

Alec leaned across the corner of the table, bringing his face within inches of Victor’s. “Then I plan to get to know him, and if you have a problem with that I suggest you deal with it!”
“Alec he doesn’t mean to upset you,” Lydia added sweetly, trying to douse the flames of their argument. “He’s had too much to drink, and he’s just a bit shocked that’s all.”

“Yeah, I’m shocked too!” Alec bellowed. “Shocked you would be so disrespectful of me… and… and… my boyfriend!”

Victor laughed a single sarcastic “Ha!” His face breaking out into deranged amusement. “You’ve known him a week Alec!”

“And I’ve been happier this week than I’ve been in the entire first 22 years of my life!” Alec’s voice was now raging at full volume.

Victor was frozen, just staring at Alec with his mouth open, apparently unable to even process what he was hearing. Lydia came around the edge of the table and put her hand on Victor’s shoulder, patting him like he was an upset toddler.

“Vic honey let’s please not fight. Alec knows you care about him and that you only want the best for him. This is just going a bit too far.”

Alec raised one shaking hand into his hair grasping it at the roots. His heart was beating out of his chest and he felt very close to breaking down into sobs. Which was exactly what he didn’t want to do right now. He squeezed his fist tightly hoping the pain would fight back the tears. He felt Magnus’ hand gently touch his back which only added to his emotion.

“Alec, I’m sorry,” Victor uttered, this time with a genuine sense of remorse. “And Magnus, I apologize, I was out of line.”

Alec thought he saw tears forming in the corners of his teacher’s eyes, and that was something he’d never seen before in all the years he’d known him. He felt his breath stop, his emotions clutching at his throat.

“I apologize as well,” Magnus responded sincerely. “I only made the situation worse by continuing to argue.”

“I should have told you over the phone,” Alec managed to mumble out through his constricted windpipe. “Instead of springing this on you.”

“Well now there we go!” Lydia addressed them all. “Everyone is sorry and I think we should just continue with this lovely dinner and make the best of the night before I have to leave tomorrow. I know without a doubt you three are the most amazing men I’ve ever known. You’re passionate, loving, insanely talented human beings who fiercely protect the ones you love. And I think that is just beautiful,” she said as she raised her glass toward the center of the table.

Alec and Magnus reluctantly picked up their glasses simultaneously, Victor was a little slow to take his but eventually they each had their arm extended.

“To friendship!” Lydia toasted and everyone halfheartedly clinked glasses.

The remaining dinner conversation was polite but a bit fake Alec thought. It was obvious everyone was trying to stay away from anything that could become controversial or possibly bring up the
arguments from earlier. Alec kept checking his watch under the table, hoping it could just be over soon. The stress of making small talk was exhausting and all he really wanted to do was go back home. Home, he thought to himself. Home where? Magnus’ house? Alec knew that was an odd way to feel. Maybe he’d had too much wine, or maybe he was just too mentally drained to think rationally. But then the old saying popped into his head, home is where the heart is, and he couldn’t help but smile. He turned toward Magnus who was in the middle of giving Lydia his recipe for Pad Thai and stared at him dreamily. He really was stunning, his dark eyes sparkling as he told her exactly what his process was step by step. The way his lips pouted slightly at the end of each thought. His voice was melodic, and the way he moved his hands to accentuate certain words as he spoke was captivating. There was a sheen on his azure blue dress shirt that reflected with each movement, it reminded Alec of an undulating ocean. He knew he could happily sit there and watch him talk all evening. It had a calming effect on his nerves. It wasn’t until he got a sense he was being watched that he broke his gaze away from Magnus and turned his head toward Victor. Sure enough his eyes were fixed on Alec, and he knew he’d been caught red handed. Alec hastily grabbed his water goblet and took a long, slow sip.

“Alec, help me take these plates to the kitchen, I think Lydia’s done enough work for one day,” Victor instructed, standing to grab Lydia’s empty plate and his own.

“Sure,” Alec responded, picking up as many plates and bowls as he could and following Victor towards the kitchen.

Once they were alone Victor put down the plates and turned to take Alec by the shoulder.

“Victor, please don’t,” Alec said before he’d even had a chance to speak.

“I’m not going to lose my temper again, I promise. But Alec I want you to please just listen to me. You know I love you like you’re my own flesh and blood. We’ve been to hell and back over the last few years and I’ve always stuck by your side, haven’t I?”

“Yeah,” Alec admitted, feeling guilty.

“I’m just going to ask you straight out, no I’m going to beg you, please, please be careful. I’m not trying to make you mad, I just want you to keep your eyes open and be smart, OK?” Victor implored him.

“Yeah, OK,” Alec agreed, feeling for the first time the actual fear in Victor’s voice. He was legitimately concerned for some reason.

“Eh, hmm,” Magnus cleared his throat. He was standing behind Alec just inside the doorway of the kitchen holding a stack of dirty dishes. “Sorry, I was just bringing in the rest of these plates.”

Obviously he’d heard at least part of what Victor had said, Alec could read it in his eyes. His heart sank as he watched Magnus put down the plates and quietly walk back out.

Alec and Magnus made their polite goodbyes huddled back in the tiny entryway where the whole disastrous night had begun. Lydia was holding tight to Magnus, making him promise to call her the next time he was in New York or she would hunt him down. Victor had kept pretty quiet, his anger ebbing away as the night went on. Replaced by what Alec thought now was just a look of defeat. It made him feel a wave of guilt yet again. Why am I always hurting the people who care about me?
He thought to himself, realizing this exact phrase had plagued his mind all week. Hurting Jace, hurting his Mother, hurting Magnus, now hurting Victor. Alec felt his pessimistic default mode rear its ugly head and he couldn’t wait to get out of this house to some place where he could just escape it all.

Once they were seated back in Magnus’ car and both doors were shut, Alec let out a deep agonizing moan. “Uhhhhh, fuck me that was horrific.”

Magnus started the engine and backed out of the driveway with a squeal of his tires. “I didn’t know I had that kind of inner strength because I seriously wanted to punch him in his smug, arrogant face! I’m sorry Alexander, I know he is your teacher, and that is a very special bond, but he was more than out of line, he was unreasonable!”

Alec felt the annoying butterflies return to his stomach, fluttering away against the inside of his abdomen in waves that made him seriously worry he was about to lose his dinner. “Magnus pull the car over,” he ordered, feeling his stomach lurch.

Magnus turned the wheel abruptly and skidded down an unmarked lane just in time for Alec to eject himself from the car, as well as eject the contents of his stomach.

“Baby, are you OK?” Magnus called out as he leap from the driver’s side to come to Alec’s aide.

“I’m fine,” Alec coughed, embarrassed for Magnus to see him like this.

Magnus bent down to cradle Alec’s heaving shoulders against his chest, smoothing his back with long gentle strokes. Alec was so overcome by this gesture of care and concern the remaining strength of his defenses crashed down around him and all he could do was cry.

“It’s OK, you’re OK, I’m here,” Magnus chanted softly as he held Alec tight through his rolling sobs.

“It’s too hard!” Alec choked out through his gasping breaths. “I just don’t want to fucking deal with it anymore!”

Magnus knew exactly what Alec meant, because he’d been there so many times himself. He’d faced the prejudice, the fear, the overwhelming self-doubt and anger. He’d used the pain to forge himself a thick skin against the world, and that was something Alec would eventually have to do as well.

“I know it’s hard,” Magnus murmured softly as he slowly rocked Alec back and forth in his arms to soothe him. “But you’ve got me, I’m here, and we will deal with it together.”

Alec curled into Magnus’ strong chest, burying his face into the warm azure blue fabric of his shirt. He could hear his heartbeat, slow and steady like the sea. He thought if he closed his eyes tight enough he could pretend they were out in the middle of that undulating ocean, just the two of them. Away from all the pain and cruelty of the world, surrounded by calming blue waters.

“You promise?” Alec softly spoke, his voice muffled against cloth.

Magnus bent down and placed a kiss on top of Alec’s head, pausing a moment to breathe him in before confessing what he knew to be true in his heart. “I swear this to you on my life Alexander, I am never going to leave you.”
Poor Alec. :( It's so tough when someone who's close to you, rather it's a family member or a close friend, doesn't support you or accept you fully. I think Alec feels Victor has rejected him, not just because of his feelings for Magnus but just him as a person. Which is really a terrible blow. Victor has been the one person he can really count on, but now he's questioning that. The two of them are going to have to work through some stuff to get back to where they were. If they can. Thank God Alec has Magnus now. But maybe Victor's concerns are legitimate? Time will tell.

Thank you so much for reading and I hope you're enjoying the story so far. Up next we've got an intense week of practicing for the quartet's first big performance. As well as the concerto competition. Plus Alec and Magnus are going to make another road trip to another favorite place of mine. :)

The playlist has been updated if you'd like to take a listen: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7

I appreciate your comments and kudos so much! Thanks for being so supportive!! :) More coming soon!!!!
Élégie

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning for this chapter: loss of parent, funeral, and gravesite. I put everything in italics so you can skip it if you need to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

December 12, 1991

Magnus Bane stood quietly in the empty hall outside the Director’s Office, fiddling with his shirt collar. He hated wearing the over starched dress clothes his mother had packed for him to take to school, but she’d always insisted, “If you’re going to be the youngest student ever accepted to Curtis then you’ll have to look your best at all times. Otherwise they might rethink their decision!” She’d even gone as far as to arrange a weekly valet service to come and fetch his dirty clothes from the dormitory and deliver a fresh set of clean, crisp shirts and pants carefully pinned to wire hangers, wrapped in plastic. Magnus knew there was no sense trying to argue with her, she was convinced this was of the utmost importance.

The hallway Magnus was standing in was long and narrow with dark wood-paneled walls and ornate crown molding. The high ceilings soared regally over the faded Oriental rugs that covered the floors. Formerly a 19-century mansion before it was turned into a school in 1924, the Curtis Institute was a tuition-free merit-based music school attracting the most promising and talented musicians from around the world. The school had a lengthy list of renowned alumni. Their portraits hung up and down along every corridor, contributing an almost ghost-like presence. Magnus had been studying here for almost two years and yet he still felt the walls held the same magical enchantment as when he’d first arrived. He daydreamed about what his portrait might look like in the hall, and if it would hold the same magic for the ones who gazed upon it years from now.

Heavily recruited by his current teacher, Catarina Loss, Magnus had entered Curtis at age 7. He’d already made his mark across Europe as a virtuoso. Captivating audiences wherever he went. In Italy they’d named him “il piccolo Paganini” and in Germany “Der kleine Teufel” only because it was said his fingers could move faster than the devil himself. Some even claimed his real age had been kept secret, a ploy only to attract larger crowds.

Leaving his Mother behind in London, Magnus traveled alone to America, following an unknown course set for what was sure to be certain success. He’d hated to leave her, especially because she was prone to long bouts of depression. But she’d insisted that this was the opportunity of a lifetime, one he couldn’t pass up.

Magnus tugged at his collar again vigorously. He wished he could dress in regular clothes like the other students. He was jealous of their brightly colored sweatshirts and flashy sneakers.

“When I grow up I’m wearing whatever I want!” Magnus muttered to himself, kicking his shoe against the loose raveling of the thinly worn rug beneath his feet.
The waiting seemed to stretch on endlessly. He pressed his ear against the Director’s door but could only hear the murmur of hushed voices inside. Not wanting to admit it to himself, maybe his mother had been right. Maybe the school had rethought their decision and he was about to be expelled. Purely based on his horrible wardrobe choices of course. Musically he knew he was the best.

When the door finally popped open Magnus snapped to attention, always sure to be the young gentleman his mother expected him to be.

“Come in Magnus, we’re ready for you now,” said a young woman he’d never seen before. She hurriedly ushered him across the threshold.

Magnus entered cautiously, his dark and expressive eyes taking in the sights of everything and everyone around him. The large office was crammed with piles and piles of books and sheet music. It smelled like stale coffee and cigarettes. At a large wooden desk positioned in front of the window was an older man. Short, bald and sweating profusely. To his right was another man, only he was younger, wiry and stern looking. He didn’t smile. Sweeping in from his left was a familiar face at last, Catarina, his violin professor. Her face appearing uncharacteristically sad behind a forced smile.

“We’re so sorry to have kept you waiting out there my dear,” Catarina said, taking Magnus gently by the shoulders and guiding him closer toward the intimidating desk. He immediately followed, clinging to her side, nearly blending right into her stride. Seeking comfort from her reassuring touch.

“Young Master Bane,” the sweaty man choked out, as he wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. “We’ve called you here because there has been a situation. Huh hum!” He cleared his throat violently. “A tragic situation that we very much regret to inform you about.”

Magnus lifted his eyes from the sweaty man up to Catarina’s now trembling face. He saw a look in her eyes he knew was bad even before the man finished saying what he’d been called down to hear.

“Uh Humph!” The man continued again, seeming to choke on the words before they even left his throat. “We regret to inform you that earlier today we received a phone call from the City of London Police notifying us that your mother had had a very unfortunate accident. An accident that regrettably has resulted in her untimely death.”

Magnus froze. He felt the last word uttered by the sweaty man enter through his ears and saturate the inside of his mind like a glass of overturned milk. It spread quickly, covering every surface and fold of his brain in a thin, even coating of icy truth. Catarina’s arm grasped him even more tightly against her side but Magnus couldn’t feel the change in pressure. His body was numb, unable to respond to her contact.

“Magnus darling,” Catarina said, dropping her body down to his eye level, her skirt billowing out around her thin legs. “Can you look at me?”

Magnus couldn’t turn his gaze, it was locked straight ahead, boring a hole into the Director’s desk. Lost in a sea of dark brown mahogany.

“Let me take him to my office Director,” Catarina said, her voice raspy and wavering. “He’s in shock, he doesn’t need to hear anymore right now.”

“The Director has a job to do here Miss Loss, and since the boy has no living relatives it isn’t your place to dictate to him what will or won’t happen at this juncture,” replied the wiry, stern man angrily.
“I know that Charles, but I’m merely suggesting we should take this slow and use a bit of compassion…”

“That’s enough!” The Director interjected. “As I told you already, I have spoken to the Board and the decision has been made!”

“Yes Director,” Catarina responded in defeat.

“Young Master Bane, on behalf of the Curtis Institute of Music we are very sorry for your loss and we have agreed to give you a one week hiatus from all of your coursework so that you may return to London to grieve for your mother in private. We ask that you rejoin us after the winter holidays to resume your regular studies. This way you may retain your fully endowed scholarship without further interruption. If you are in agreement to these terms then I believe there’s nothing else to be said of the matter.”

Catarina wrapped her arm even tighter around Magnus, stroking his chest with her delicate hand. Smoothing it up and down the length of his heavily starched shirtfront in an attempt to soothe him. His eyes stinging with the impending tears that he begged not to come. Not while facing this horrible man who impatiently awaited his response. Magnus knew he was supposed to answer, but he also knew if he spoke he would cry, and he wasn’t about to let that happen. Struggling to breathe seemed futile, the ability lost somewhere down deep within his despair. Trapped in the strong undertow of the now watery desk, drowning along with the only visual memory of his mother he could recall. Her downcast face, calm and serene at the piano. The air around her resonating with Chopin as the smallest glimpse of a smile pulled at the corners of her mouth. That was his last memory of her, and he held it like a life preserver as the waves of grief crashed against his tiny body.

“Please Director, I beg you,” Catarina whispered through the tense air of the office. “He’s just a boy.”

The wiry stern man bent down and mumbled something into the Director’s ear to which he responded with a slow nod.

“Fine, you may take the boy to your office. We’ll continue this discussion tomorrow after you’ve ascertained his decision.”

And as simply as that Magnus felt his body being pulled backwards, out of the office and back into the hallway. He didn’t make it another ten paces beyond the swiftly closing door before he collapsed into Catarina’s arms, the tears overtopping his resilient façade. She scooped him up off his feet and cradled his lithe, quivering body against her chest.

“It’s alright, I’m here,” she repeated over and over as she stroked his heaving back. “It’s Ok… shhhh… it’s OK.”

Magnus couldn’t stop his sobs from pouring out, they surged and collided against Catarina’s thin frame almost knocking her off her feet. The realization of what had happened, even at his young age, was what Magnus had always feared the most. It was really his only fear about leaving home.

“It’s going to be OK, I promise,” she whispered against his ear as she briskly walked them toward her office.

Magnus wanted to scream out loud, he wanted to tell the world he’d made a terrible mistake. That he shouldn’t have left her. That he knew this was going to happen and that it was all his fault.

But in the end he could only manage to speak aloud one shaky, breathless word… “Mama.”
Catarina flung her office door open, rushing Magnus inside. Unable to hold his tense body any longer she gently dropped him down in an old leather armchair by the window. His body crumpling into the worn out cushions. She then crouched down in front of him, putting her face just an inch from his own, taking hold of both of his trembling hands.

“\You have me Magnus,” she swore, with all of her best and most honest intensions. “You have me and I’m not going anywhere.”

Magnus managed to focus his swollen, watery eyes at Catarina, still strikingly beautiful even though they were gleaming with tears. “You promise?”

She squeezed his hands tightly in her own and managed a brave smile on his behalf. "Yes my darling, I promise... we will get through this together."

The morning sun beat down on the hood of Magnus’ car casting a blinding glare across Alec’s eyes. Even through his sunglasses the intensity made him squint. He turned his head toward the driver’s side and noticed Magnus seemed unaffected, probably because their height difference placed his head lower down where the windshield could offer more protection. Alec didn’t mind though, it gave him a good excuse to look at Magnus. Watching the wind whip through his tousled hair and the sun reflecting warmly off his bronze skin was a pleasure.

Magnus soon caught Alec staring and smiled knowingly. “Enjoying the view?”

Alec grinned in return as he folded his arms across his chest. “Oh yes, it’s simply majestic.”

Magnus chuckled as he goosed the accelerator through a particularly sharp curve. Alec’s stomach lurched as his eyes were drawn to the right side of the car where the road simply disappeared down a steep cliff face.

“You’re such a show-off,” Alec teased, trying to hide the terror he always felt as a passenger along these narrow mountain roads.

“Ha, this is nothing. Wait until I take you up the Stelvio Pass. Then you’ll really know fear,” Magnus bragged as he increased their speed again.

Alec was reminded of his first week in Aspen and his morning rides up to the school with Jace. Apparently he wasn’t the only one who felt comfortable taking Alec’s life in their hands. Which meant Jace and Magnus were both either much braver than he was, or possibly just more reckless.

“Are you nervous?” Alec asked.


“No, I mean, this will be the first time we’ve driven up to the school together. And mornings are always so busy, I’m sure loads of people will see us,” Alec explained tentatively.
“And if they do?” Magnus said matter-of-factly, peering over the top of his sunglasses.

Alec rolled his eyes. “Come on, you know what I mean! When people see us… together, together!”

“Alexander, I can assure you people can probably handle two men getting out of a car together and walking into a building. I wasn’t planning on riding you piggy back,” Magnus teased as his face broke out into a brilliant smile. “Although now that I mention it, I do love that idea!”

Alec exhaled sharply and dropped his head back against the headrest. “Oh you are just hilarious.”

“Honestly, what do we have to worry about?” Magnus asked as the car made yet another hairpin turn. “We’ve already been seen together by Victor.”

“Oh and that went so well!” Alec responded dramatically, raising both hands into air, gesturing wildly.

“Darling, you’re getting yourself all worked up over nothing. We are two grown adults and we can do what we want. I’m not worried about what people think… I stopped caring about that a long time ago,” Magnus reassured him. “Unless you’re trying to tell me you’re ashamed to be seen with me?”

“Wha-What?” Alec yelped, his voice going high. “Of course not! I wouldn’t… I’d never… don’t be ridiculous! That’s not what I meant at all!”

Magnus grinned, secretly loving how easily he could rile Alec up. “Well then I guess we have nothing to be concerned about then do we?”

Alec felt Magnus was playfully dismissing this too quickly. Or maybe it was just his pessimism winning out as usual. “I just didn’t want you to get into trouble… you know, with the board. After last night… what Victor said.”

Magnus nodded. “I appreciate your concern Alexander, really I do, but I assure you I can handle the board. As I said last night, you are not a student so any accusations or criticism on anyone’s part will be in vain.”

Alec knew there was someone else that concerned him far more than any member of the board. The one person who was hell bent on destroying him by any means necessary. The person who was just biding their time, waiting in the wings for Alec to slip up. Ready to jump at any reason to cause trouble for him. But he didn't want to bring up Sebastian, knowing it could cause them to argue again.

“Yeah, OK… you’re right,” Alec responded halfheartedly. He had a nagging feeling Magnus was going to be proven wrong, but for now there wasn’t any reason to keep belaboring the subject.

Magnus’ car glided smoothly through town. Drawing a series of jaw dropping looks from any student they happened to pass by. As they made the final left turn onto Aspen Street Alec could see Hendel House come into view. His heart sank a bit as he remembered how he’d felt the last time he was here. Hoping he’d never have to feel that miserable again.

“You want me to come up with you?” Magnus offered kindly.

“No!” Alec responded a bit too enthusiastically, causing Magnus’ face to drop. “Sorry, I didn’t mean that how it sounded. It’s just that I’m OK going alone, I’m just going to grab Stella, won’t take me two seconds.”

“Stella?” Magnus said, cocking one eyebrow.
Alec froze. “Shit, uhh, yeah,” Alec mumbled, realizing he’d never told Magnus his cello had a name, or mentioned she was actually his best friend. His famous blush spreading rapidly across his face. “I meant my cello.”

“Alexander! You named your cello Stella?”

“Yeah…” Alec groaned, his cheeks burning red, dreading the onslaught of laughter which was surely about to commence.

“The movie or the play?” Magnus inquired.

“What?” Alec was caught off guard by the question, having braced himself for utter humiliation.

“A Streetcar Named Desire of course, the movie or the play?” Magnus said, his eyes soft and affectionate.

“Oh, well the movie first. I, uhh, use to go to MoMA all the time when I was a little kid. Izzy too. She was in love with the art but I was all about the films. Guess I became sort of obsessed. Then I saw a revival of the play on Broadway when I was 11, with John C. Reilly. That pretty much sealed the deal of it being my favorite. Well, almost as much as Brando.”

Magnus smiled and nodded. Not a single hint of a chuckle. “For me it was always Citizen Kane. Maybe if I would have named one of my violins “Rosebud” this story would have had the perfect ending.”

Alec smiled his lopsided grin, still shyly looking down at the floorboard of the car, but realizing slowly bit by bit Magnus wasn’t about to make fun of him. Or even crack one joke.

“You don’t think it’s weird?” Alec asked, still a bit mystified by Magnus’ reaction.

“Darling, I think it’s adorable, and so very sweet. Almost just as sweet as you,” Magnus cooed, leaning over the console toward Alec with his lips puckered.

Alec instantly swooped in to meet him halfway, connecting for a brief but intense kiss. He’d never felt so relieved.

“Now you go get your girl, and I’ll wait right here,” Magnus said with a wink, patting Alec on the knee.

“Be right back!”

Alec sprinted up the front walk and through the main entrance in only a few long strides, thanks to his very long legs. Then he turned to run up the stairs and was immediately thrown face to face with someone coming down.

“Oh! Sorry!” Alec apologized before he even realized who it was.

“Hey man! Where’s the fire?” Jace asked smoothing the long strands of hair out of his face with a smile.

“Hey, I was just running up to, uhh get something quickly,” Alec said, careful not to say Stella again.

“Yeah I went by your room and knocked, thought you might need a ride, if you were here. Did you get any of my messages yesterday?”
“Sorry, yeah, I did. Yesterday was crazy, I had this dinner thing, and I forgot,” Alec really didn’t want to get into it, but Jace always had this way of getting him to talk even when he didn’t want to.

“Bane brought you here?” Jace asked curiously.

“Yeah, and can you please stop calling him Bane. It makes me feel like I’m stuck in a Batman movie or something.” Alec replied, inching his way around Jace to try and continue up the stairs.

“Sorry, habit,” Jace mumbled as he took a step downward. “So anyway, you go get your stuff and I’ll see you later at rehearsal.”

“Yeah, can’t wait,” Alec said sarcastically, and he gave Jace a small wave as he took off back up the stairs toward his room. He dreaded quartet rehearsal more than anything he’d ever had to endure in his life. It was mentally and emotionally draining to have to sit there no more than five feet away from someone he hated with a passion. It was the ultimate practice in self-control.

Once he made it into his room he first grabbed Stella and then contemplated what else he might need.

“So this is the thing Stells, we might not be coming back here for a while, if ever. So what do we need that we can’t live without?”

Alec looked around the room until he found his largest duffel bag and started filling it with stuff. Clothes, music, his shaving kit, headphones, extra charger, more music… and soon he realized he wasn’t leaving much behind. Just his suits and dress clothes, which were hanging up in the small wardrobe, and Stella’s travel case, which he wouldn’t need. He looked at the bulging bag and wondered if he was being too presumptuous. But Magnus had said he wanted him to stay, he’d told him more than a few times he didn’t want him to leave, ever. But this seemed like a big step. Would Magnus take one look at him coming out to the car with this huge bag and realize it was too much, too soon?

Alec’s stomach tightened and his knees buckled. He dropped onto the bed causing the frame to pop loudly. “Damn it,” he swore to the empty room, cursing himself for being so scared. “Can I just once do something without second guessing myself?” Then he looked at Stella’s case and remembered how nice Magnus had been about her, how accepting. He really was the most amazing person Alec had ever known. And he proved it over and over again every day.

“Ok, enough. This is ridiculous,” Alec told himself as he stood back up and grabbed his things. “Stella, come on, we are going home!”

As Alec headed back down the stairs he came to the small landing between the first and second floor where there was a tiny round window, about the size of a porthole. It was just big enough to let in the natural light. Alec usually never paid attention to the view but the sight of Magnus’ car drew his eye, and he immediately noticed he wasn’t alone. Standing next to the car leaning over the door was Jace. They were having what looked like a pretty heated discussion. Magnus’ face was firm and bordering on anger, Jace was gesturing with his finger, pointing accusingly at Magnus. Alec was shocked.

“What the hell is going on?” Alec said to himself as he quickly made his way down the last flight of stairs hurrying back to the car. As soon as he came outside Magnus waved Jace away and he briskly jogged to his car, jumped in and drove off before Alec could even make it to the curb.

“What was that all about?” Alec asked, breathless and winded from running.
“What?” Magnus replied, acting innocent.

“I saw you two through the window upstairs! You were fighting! Why?” Alec’s voice was getting louder, he definitely wasn’t going to let Magnus brush this aside.

Magnus busied himself adjusting his rearview mirror. “It was nothing, everything’s fine,” he said without making eye contact.

“Like hell it is! What did he say? Was he threatening you?” Alec’s arms were beginning to shake as he stood there holding Stella in one hand and his huge duffel bag in the other.

“Oh he’s just making sure I treat you well. Being a good friend, that’s all. Don’t worry.” Magnus answered him with a kind and reassuring smile.

Alec was left standing there with his mouth hanging open. He didn’t understand this explanation. Why would Jace be worried all of the sudden about how Magnus was treating him? He’d always been their biggest supporter. Heck he’d been the one who’d set them up! There was no way this was the truth, Alec didn’t accept it. But he didn’t know what else could be wrong, so he just stood there speechless.

Magnus opened his car door and walked around to the other side where Alec stood. He placed his hands on Alec’s arms and stroked them up and down. “Alexander, please don’t worry. I promise you everything is fine. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Alec looked into Magnus’ eyes and knew he was trying to win him over. He might be young but he wasn’t a fool, something was most definitely wrong. “You don’t trust me?” Alec murmured under his breath.

“What? Why would you say that?” Magnus stopped rubbing his arms and clamped down on them tightly.

“You won’t tell me what’s really going on. So what other explanation could there be? You don’t trust me enough to tell me the truth.” Alec’s bottom lip quivered just a bit as he spoke the last few words, he averted his eyes.

“Alexander I trust you with my life. I trust you more than anyone. Please, please don’t think that my darling. Things just got a little out of hand for a minute. You know I’m not the type of person who likes to be questioned, and I admit he pushed my buttons. When it comes to you and me, and our relationship, I don’t want anyone to interfere. Does that make sense?”

Alec nodded, still not convinced this was the whole story, but feeling his resistance was fading.

“And not to change the subject, but I did happen to notice this very large bag you’re currently holding,” Magnus beamed proudly with a sparkle in his eye. “Which has officially just made me the happiest person in the world in case you want to know.”

“Mmm hmm,” Alec nodded again, trying not to give in to the obvious misdirection of their conversation.

“Here,” Magnus said, taking the duffel bag from Alec’s grasp. “I’ll put this in the trunk and you lay Stella in the backseat. We’ve got to get going or we’ll both be late.”

Alec begrudgingly obeyed, still not feeling they’d reached a resolution. “Tonight, after rehearsal, I want to talk about this.”
Magnus closed the trunk and returned to the passenger side of the car, sliding his arms around Alec’s waist pulling him close. “Alright my angel. Tonight when we get back home. Upstairs in our room. Snuggled up in our bed. We can talk all night if you want.”

Alec stared down at Magnus’ mouth, just inches away, pulling him in like a moth to a flame. Instinctively his lips parted and in that moment Magnus took advantage of the open space and swiftly invaded it with his tongue. Alec only hesitated for a split second, then returned the kiss with fervor. He didn’t even think of the fact that they were outside in plain view, he was lost in the intoxicating warmth of Magnus delicious mouth. Only when he heard voices coming out from the building behind them did he break away.

“We’d better go before I start ripping your clothes off right here on the street,” Magnus purred, nipping Alec’s bottom lip with his teeth before pulling himself away.

Alec was left breathless and dazed. Wondering if they had any chance of actually talking tonight when all he could think about was finishing what they’d just started. “You don’t play fair,” he grumbled as he reached to open the car door.

“Well you know the old saying my dear, all’s fair in love and war,” Magnus chimed as the engine rumbled to a start.

Alec fastened his seatbelt and pulled his sunglasses down from the top of his head. Let’s hope it’s the former and not the latter, he said to himself as the gaggle of onlookers who’d come from Hendel House stood gawking. Equally at them and the car. Alec bravely flashed them the peace sign as Magnus peeled noisily out onto the street.

Alec swiftly rounded the last corner, striding down the main hallway of the Pond building toward the quartet’s rehearsal room. His heart rate was increasing the closer he got to the door, the key held tightly in his sweaty hand. He was ready to storm in demanding answers. As much as he hated Sebastian and dreaded laying eyes on him right now all he really could think about was Jace. He was determined to get to the bottom of whatever was said between him and Magnus at the car.

As he finally reached the door he noticed it was slightly ajar. Pushing against it with the palm of his hand he discovered Jace, Clary, and Sebastian were already inside, seated and waiting.

Am I late? Alec wondered to himself as he hastily entered and took his seat.

“Hi Alec,” Clary greeted him after realizing the other two weren’t going to say anything.

“Hey,” Alec mumbled. “Sorry if I’m late.”

“You aren’t late, we all just happened to arrive early. You’re fine.” Clary was smiling and trying her best to defuse some of the tension. Jace was too busy glaring at Sebastian while Sebastian was completely ignoring him and only glaring at Alec.

“Rough morning Lightwood?” Sebastian finally spoke. His voice with a taunting syrupy lilt that sent
shivers up Alec’s spine.

“Let’s start with Brahms! I know I was dragging in the Allegretto last time,” Clary interjected, trying to save them from a fight.

“Shut your mouth Morgenstern,” Jace growled, his hand clutching the neck of his viola so hard it looked like it might snap.

“I don’t need your help Jace!” Alec fired back, his temper flaring.

Sebastian broke out into a fit of maniacal laughter seeing Alec snap at Jace. “Ha, ha, what’s this? Trouble in paradise boys?” He sneered through his wicked grin. Absolutely thrilled to see discord between them.

“Guys, please don’t fight. We have a performance Friday, we need to rehearse,” Clary begged them, feeling like the only sane person left in the room.

Alec slammed Stella’s case shut and opened his music. He wasn’t going to fight with either of them right now. Not here. “The F minor,” he instructed, and everyone turned their pages to the correct spot. Alec knew he could swallow it and be a professional. They needed a leader, and although Sebastian thought he was the obvious choice to take charge Alec knew his selfishness would never guide them in the right direction. He slowly let out a deep exhale, letting his anger slip away and when he refocused his gaze across the semicircle to where Sebastian sat poised to begin, Alec nodded.

“I’ve got to go speak with Professor Penhallow before she leaves,” Clary said to Jace as she packed up her case. “I’ll meet you at the car when I’m done, OK?”

“Uhh, OK, that’s cool,” Jace replied, eyeing Alec over his shoulder. He suspected Clary was only leaving the room so they could talk.

“Clarissa, I’ll walk with you. I’m headed that way as well, to see Magnus,” Sebastian announced, putting extra emphasis on the last word just to have one final dig at Alec before he left.

Luckily Alec’s back was turned, he winced hearing Magnus’ beautiful name uttered from Sebastian’s disgusting mouth. He knew he was goading him but he wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of seeing how much it hurt. He felt the hatred boiling back up after he’d managed to keep his focus during their long rehearsal. It wasn’t until he heard the door close and he knew Clary and Sebastian were gone that he turned to face Jace, man to man.

“Alec wait, I know what you’re going to say so please just let me talk first, OK? I can explain this,” Jace said with his palms held up in an attempt to conciliate their impending dispute.

Alec rolled his eyes, ready to hear another one of Jace’s famous bullshit responses that never seemed to add up. “Go on.”
“After you left me at the bar Saturday night and then I couldn’t reach you all day yesterday I guess I just started to worry. I know that isn’t fair of me to say, but it was just how I felt. And I was jealous this morning when I saw him sitting there in that fucking car. I don’t know man, I just lost it. Which was a shit move on my part, I admit. So can we please not make this into a big deal? I already feel bad enough, trust me. And I can’t handle you being pissed at me right now, OK? I’m just going through some really fucked up shit and I need you to not be mad, please?”

Alec stood there with his arms crossed in front of his chest listening to Jace. Without a doubt he knew he was a master of talking his way out of any situation. By the time he finished his speech Alec actually felt guilty for being angry at him, which only further proved just how good he really was.

“I just don’t want you interfering,” Alec finally answered, maintaining his stoicism. “Magnus and I have enough obstacles to deal with as it is, and we don’t need more trouble coming from you.”

“I won’t be trouble, don’t worry. I swear to you I am cool with you two, I think it’s great. Honestly I do,” Jace said with sincerity.

“Yeah, OK,” Alec said as he turned back to grab Stella and hoist her over his shoulder. “We better get going so we can rescue Magnus and Clary from that asshole.”

Jace spun around and kicked over his music stand violently. “Fuck! I swear to God if he turns up dead in a ditch one day you’ll know I’m the one who did it!”

Alec chuckled but felt there was truth behind those words. A truth not far from his own as he redirected his anger from Jace back to Sebastian where it belonged. He had this nagging feeling in the back of his mind that somehow all of these problems he faced, the fight with Victor, the argument with Jace, all stemmed back to one very evil and very dangerous source.

December 18, 1991

Magnus stood in the cold rain clutching an umbrella tightly in his gloved hands. He could see his breath as it exhaled from his lungs in shaky gasps. He didn’t think he could cry anymore after the funeral but something about standing on this blanket of too-green grass, surrounding the edges of his mother’s grave, brought on a fresh round of sobs he couldn’t control. He dropped his umbrella lower to cover his face, thankful to have a barrier between himself and the others who’d come to pay their last respects. Looking down between the bright green carpet and the base of his mother’s casket, beneath the shiny metal railings, he could see the hole. It was dark, muddy and deep. He leaned up on his tiptoes for a moment, but couldn’t see the bottom. Just then a voice began to speak…

“Because God has chosen to call our sister from this life to himself,

We commit her body to its resting place,
For we are dust and unto dust we shall return.”

Magnus actually felt like the ground under his feet was sloping forward. That if he simply laid down he would roll right into the hole, falling end over end into an oblivion. Maybe nobody would notice he was gone. After all, he had no one else now. He was alone in the world with no living relatives, just as the Director had said a week ago. Part of him thought he deserved to go into the ground with his mother. To make up for leaving her alone. He should really be with her now, it was only fair.

Breaking out of his grim daydream Magnus realized the voice had stopped and people were beginning to walk away. He felt a hand against his back and saw Catarina’s face peering underneath the edge of his umbrella. She had such a gentle and caring smile. Magnus closed his eyes.

“We’re going now darling, take my hand,” Catarina said, taking hold of his hand and leading him back to the shiny black town car.

Once inside it was warm and dry. Catarina peeled off Magnus’ soaking wet coat and boots and wrapped a dry blanket around his shoulders.

“It’s all over now, you were so brave.” She continued fussing with the blanket making sure it was wrapped around his shivering body as the car slowly rolled forward away from the gravesite.

Magnus turned and looked out the window, he could see the small tent, its thin sides billowing in the wind. There were two men now standing by his mother’s casket as it suddenly began to lower down inch by inch into that dark, muddy ground. He placed his hand against the glass and took his last and final look. He saw the beautiful cascade of flowers that had covered the lid fall slowly, bit by bit, until they were completely gone from view.

“She’s gone now,” Magnus said to Catarina, turning away from the window solemnly.

“Yes sweetheart, I know. And now we go home.”

“Where will I go?” Magnus asked her innocently, realizing for the first time he really didn’t know where home was anymore.

“We are going back to school, both of us,” Catarina told him with a cheerful smile.

Magnus thought about this for a minute. He knew his scholarship didn’t include winter break in the dorm. That was only for the wealthy kids whose parents could afford year-round housing costs. He was supposed to be in London for Christmas and New Year’s. The second semester of school was still weeks away.

“How?” He asked her, honestly confused.

“Well, there’s been a change. Someone contacted the school and set up a trust for you. So that you may stay there, all year.”

“Who?” Magnus wondered, his eyes blown wide with shock.

“We don’t know, it was an anonymous benefactor. Someone who thinks you’re very special and very talented. Someone who thinks you have a very bright future and wants to help you,” Catarina explained as she picked up a corner of the blanket and began drying Magnus’ hair.
“A benefactor?” Magnus repeated aloud, not sure what to think about this new information. He couldn’t quite understand why a stranger would care about his future or want to help him. He immediately thought of his mother. She’d always told him never to take money from strangers because they’d always want something in return. “What if I don’t want the money?” He asked, feeling somehow threatened by this person and their unknown motives.

“The money has already been given to the school in your name, so everything is all set,” Catarina said with a reassuring smile. “Don’t worry about the details, you just focus on your music and be thankful this is all taken care of for you. It’s a good thing Magnus, I promise you it is.”

Magnus turned and looked out the window again. The rain was trailing across the glass leaving paths of tiny trembling water droplets in its wake. They shimmered in the light of the streetlamps which had just switched on, signaling it must be evening. The beads of water danced to an aimless rhythm that suddenly made Magnus feel very, very sleepy. He let his forehead fall against the cold, smooth pane of glass, his eyes fluttering closed. Thankful to shut the world out, at least for a little while.

Just then the driver switched on the radio and the car was filled with the 4th movement of Tchaikovsky’s 6th Symphony. How fitting, Magnus thought to himself and he wondered if Catarina had also made the same morbid connection. As he listened intently with his eyes closed the melody began to fade away, and more than anything he just wanted to play his violin. He wanted it more now than he’d ever wanted anything before in his life. He knew he couldn’t change what had happened, and he couldn’t bring his mother back, but he could try to make her proud. All she’d ever asked of him was that he dedicate his life to being the best he could be, to practice hard, be strong, and never give up. And that’s exactly what he was going to do.

Our first look back into Magnus' past this chapter, and more of it will be revealed throughout the story. Events from his past play a very big role in what is currently happening, as you'll soon discover.

The playlist has been updated here: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7

And I've also started an IG for this story as well: https://www.instagram.com/downworldshadow/
Just a place for me to put pictures that either inspire me or show locations I've used.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter. It was very sad to write but important to share. Thank you so much for leaving kudos and comments. I love receiving them!! :) XOXOXOXO

PS. I forgot to mention, I wanted to tell you about my choice to use Tchaikovsky's 6th symphony at the end. The significance of it's use in this chapter is that it is often referred to as the "Suicide Note". Many people believe that Tchaikovsky committed suicide
shortly after this work was performed. I found the parallel to be fitting. Also you might have noticed in the first part there was another parallel between it and the previous chapter. In the dialogue. Just thought it was interesting to point out. Be sure you listen to Élégie by Gabriel Fauré, the theme of this chapter. I put it in the playlist, but you can also search many other performances by various artists. :)
“You’re becoming quite the barista Alexander,” Magnus praised as Alec topped off his latte with a thick layer of steaming foam.

“Yeah, once I figured out half the gadgets on this damn thing were freaking worthless it was a piece of cake,” Alec grumbled as he gingerly walked across the kitchen holding Magnus’ mug, trying not to spill its contents.

“I could get use to this kind of personal service,” Magnus replied sinfully as he reached to carefully take the mug with both hands. “It affords me the opportunity to just sit back, relax, and stare at your beautiful ass.”

“You’re so shallow.”

“And you love it,” Magnus said with a wink. “Now come sit down and eat something, you’ve got a big day today!”

“Ugh, don’t remind me,” Alec groaned, pulling up a chair. Today was more than a big day, it was the quartet’s first performance. A lavish fundraiser to benefit the festival and school, jam packed with Aspen’s wealthiest residents. Even Jace, who normally was the most laidback and confident member of the group, wanted to rehearse a few extra hours late last night to polish things to perfection.

“Don’t worry my darling, I know you will be fabulous. All four of you are brilliant musicians and you’ve put in an insane number of hours rehearsing this week. I have no doubt the old codgers will eat it up,” Magnus declared with a beaming smile.

Alec wanted to answer back with a snide remark, something about three musicians and a psychopath, but he managed to keep his cool. Working alongside Sebastian for two weeks had been torture, but what was even worse was knowing he had this deep connection to Magnus. Alec felt consumed by it. He wanted to ask a million questions, he wanted to find out their entire history… and then maybe, just maybe he could wrap his head around it all.

Magnus was slowly sipping his latte as Alec sat quietly trying to think of a way to breach the subject without really asking him outright. He wasn’t very good with this type of thing, being sneaky or manipulative, but maybe there was a back door.

“So, I guess you probably had to do this same sort of thing too, when you were younger?” Alec asked as he stirred a bit of sugar into his black coffee, not daring to make eye contact.

“What sort of thing?” Magnus asked, setting down his mug suspiciously.

“Oh you know, playing gigs for old codgers. Like benefits and stuff.” Alec didn’t look up, he just stirred and held his breath, hoping he wasn’t coming across as being too nosy.

“Well not really. I was mainly a soloist. Except for my brief stint with CSO. But you already know that?” Magnus was beginning to pick up on the interrogation. He stared at Alec now, trying to force him to look up, but Alec didn’t dare move.

“Yeah, but you were taking students back then you said, right? So I thought maybe there were
things… I didn’t know.” Alec was really pushing his luck now. He could feel Magnus’ eyes boring into the top of his head and he had no choice but to put down the spoon and look up to meet his gaze. The tension was palpable.

“Things you didn’t know?” Magnus questioned, raising one eyebrow.

“Well, just stuff that maybe wasn’t common knowledge to most people I mean.” Alec tried to come off nonchalant but Magnus was much too smart. They stared at each other across the table, neither backing down from their stance.

“I’m sure there are many things about my personal life that weren’t common knowledge Alexander. Was there something specifically you wanted to ask me?” Magnus’ dark eyes were penetrating and Alec felt himself begin to sweat. He was in too deep to turn back now. Magnus was definitely on to him, but if he backed down he didn’t know if he’d have the nerve to test this line of questioning again.

“Well, I guess I was curious about the timing.” Alec felt the words almost stop in his throat. They hung in the air for one painfully silent moment before Magnus answered.

“The timing of?” Magnus wasn’t going to make this easy on him.

“Of… the teaching.” Alec didn’t want to say his name, but he was sure Magnus already knew exactly which student he was interested in. They’d been skirting the issue all week.

Magnus let out a deep exhale. His eyes turned toward the window as if he were examining something in the distance. “Yes, I was very young, that’s true. But I had just graduated from one of the most prestigious music schools in the country. It isn’t hard to imagine there would be an interest in my knowledge as an instructor. In fact I was commonly turning away students who didn’t seem ready for my intense work ethic.”

Alec could sense apprehension in Magnus’ voice but his curiosity was overpowering his trepidation. “I guess that’s what doesn’t make any sense to me,” Alec pressed onward. “Why someone with your talent and fame would waste their time teaching a little kid who probably was barely old enough to hold a 1/16. It doesn’t add up!”

Alec’s voice was starting to raise in pitch as it usually did when his emotions got the better of him. “I just want to know why he seems to think he has some sort of power over you! And why you won’t tell me the reason?”

Magnus’ eyelashes fluttered as his gaze dropped from the window back down to his latte. He was now visibly upset.

Alec’s heart sank. He knew in this moment he’d pushed him too far. He’d gone from being inquisitive to being accusatory. Which was exactly the opposite of what he’d intended.

“Shit, I’m sorry Magnus. I’m being a jerk. Honestly, just tell me to shut up,” Alec said apologetically, feeling a wave of guilt crash through his stomach.

A hint of a smile flickered at the corners of Magnus’ mouth as he turned and placed both of his open palms on Alec’s knees. “Alexander, listen. I promise I will answer all of your questions. I want to answer them. But right now, this isn’t a conversation to have hurriedly over breakfast. You have a big day, and I need to get to the school. Can we please talk about this another time?”

Magnus’ eyes were hypnotic. Alec felt gravity shift as his entire body was slowly being pulled into swirling dark irises. “Um, yeah, OK,” he muttered, feeling entranced. His mind clouded over as
Magnus leaned in so close he could feel his breath.

“I promise you my darling, we will talk about everything. Maybe this weekend we can go away? Get out of town for a couple of days. How does that sound?”

Alec stared at Magnus’ lips, studying each dip and ridge, the fullness right in the center of his bottom lip, which was slightly larger than the top one. It curved into a perfect smile, moist and inviting. Alec licked his lips with anticipation. “Yeah, that sounds good.”

“Perfect! I’ll make all the arrangements. We can celebrate what will no doubt be the most successful fundraiser this school has seen in years.”

Alec wasn’t so sure about that. But some time away, with just the two of them… no rehearsals, no Jace, no Sebastian, no distractions, maybe that was what they needed. Maybe then Magnus would feel more at ease and he’d finally open up about his past. If not, Alec didn’t know how much more patient he could be. The daily irritation of Sebastian’s constant jibes and innuendos about his connection with Magnus was making Alec crazy. He felt like there was this big secret he wasn’t in on. Even Jace seemed off. Ever since he’d seen he and Magnus have that argument at the car last weekend, all these little things were mounting up and making Alec feel stressed. Even worse than that, he felt people were hiding things from him.

“Speaking of the fundraiser, I’ve gotta go meet Jace in town around noon. Clary has decided all our tuxes have to be the same, something about the fabrics matching, I don’t know. So I was wondering if I could drop you off at the school first. If that’s OK? Then I could maybe take your car?”

Magnus smiled like Alec had just said something absolutely wonderful. “Funny you should mention that, I’ve actually got a favor to ask of you.” Magnus’ voice floated with a sultry lilt, saturating the air around them with sweetness. He leaned in closer, bringing his lips within an inch of Alec’s.

“You need a favor from me?” Alec responded in a breathy whisper.

“Yes indeed I do. Come, let me show you something.” Magnus quickly pushed up from Alec’s knees to stand leaving Alec behind a bit dazed.

“This way!” Magnus extended one hand to help Alec up to his feet.

Alec shook his head to snap out of his momentary disorientation and allowed Magnus to pull him up to stand. He followed him back through the kitchen and across the foyer to another narrow hall that split off to the left toward the garage. Magnus was a few steps ahead as they made their way down the hall. Once they reached the end he fished something out of a bowl by the door, then swung it open wide as Alec approached from behind him.

“Whoa!” Alec exclaimed as he took in the unexpected sight of a brand new shiny black metallic Range Rover parked beside Magnus’ Maserati. It was so large it made the red sports car look like a clown car.

“Yes, it’s a beast isn’t it? The salesman told me it was the best option for driving these steep snow covered mountain roads in the winter, but I admit it isn’t really my style. I actually haven’t even driven it yet,” Magnus said very matter-of-factly.

“It’s insane!” Alec replied awestruck as he walked forward to take a closer look. Peeking through the window he could see the smooth light gray leather interior was still covered in protective plastic.

“When did you buy this?”

“Oh, I was bored yesterday while you were at rehearsal, so I drove over to Glenwood Springs for a
bit of shopping,” Magnus confessed as he crossed to the passenger side of the large SUV and opened the door. “Then late last night while you were still out I decided I wanted to buy it. So I sent Ragnor to fetch it for me early this morning. Come hop in and let’s check it out!”

Alec cautiously opened the driver’s side door and was immediately hit with the overpowering new car smell. *This car is probably worth more than everything I own combined.* As he climbed into the driver’s seat he first noticed the unexpected amount of leg room. Normally his knees would be scraping up against the dash. “Wow, nice.”

“The salesman recommended the extra-long wheelbase for comfort,” Magnus said proudly.

“For your extra-long legs, right?” Alec rolled his eyes and closed the door. He settled into the seat, easing it back a bit, and placed his hands on the steering wheel. He was beginning to put two and two together, but didn’t want to jump to conclusions just quite yet.

“It’s nice isn’t it? Do you like it?” Magnus was beaming from the passenger seat like the cat who swallowed the canary.

“It’s very nice, yes.” Alec spoke slowly. “But why does it matter if I like it? It’s your car.”

“Well, as I said, I do have a small favor to ask.” Magnus shifted in his seat to angle his body toward Alec, the look on his face already confirming what he feared was coming next. “You’d really be helping me out if you would… you know… **drive it** a bit for me.”

“**Magnus!**” Alec moaned loudly with annoyance.

“What? It would be really helpful if you could test it out, you know, break it in! Make sure I got my money’s worth.”

“Break it in? It’s not a new pair of shoes for God’s sake!” Alec bellowed, smacking his hands against the wheel.

“They could have sold me a lemon! And by the time winter comes it’ll be too late to take it back!”

Alec was flabbergasted, his hands gesturing wildly in front of him. “You expect me to believe you bought this giant ass car with extra-long leg room for **yourself**? And now you want me to drive it as a favor to you? Come on! You won’t even be here in the winter!”

“I might be!” Magnus said defensively. “Maybe I’ll take up skiing! Or skiboarding! Or whatever the kids are doing these days!”

Alec turned to face forward, folding his arms across his chest in a huff. “You’re not giving me this car!”

“You won’t do this little favor for me?” Magnus frowned dramatically.

“Watering your plants is a favor. This is ridiculous!” Alec held firm to his resolve.

“**Please?**” Magnus begged using his most syrupy sweet tone.

Alec’s mouth fell open, he wasn’t prepared to be hit with such a pitiful look. “Are you seriously giving me puppy dog eyes right now?”

“**Pretty please?**” Magnus cooed, batting his eyes and pouting his lips.

“You don’t play fair.”
“It would mean so much to me if you’d drive it. Just think, no more begging rides from Jace to rehearsal, you can come and go as you please. Plus there’s plenty of room in back for Stella.” Magnus was really laying it on thick.

“I can rent a car,” Alec said as a last attempt to dissuade him.

“That’s silly, why rent a car when there’s a perfectly good one right here!” Magnus responded, his arms spread apart like a game show host.

“It’s just so… extravagant!” Alec insisted.

“Hello! Have you met me?” Magnus fired back with both eyebrows raised.

Alec insisted. “It’s too much!”

Magnus reached out and took hold of both of Alec’s hands, pulling them toward his chest. Their eyes locked. “First of all, there is nothing on this Earth too good for the man I love,” Magnus said, lifting Alec’s hands to sweetly kiss the top of each one. “And second of all, you deserve this my darling. This and so much more.”

Alec exhaled deeply, finding it impossible to stay strong when Magnus was looking at him with so much love and devotion.

“Won’t you please just let me spoil you a little bit? It would make me so happy.” Magnus begged, his eyes sparkling.

“Now you’re guilt tripping me?”

A sly grin spread slowly across Magnus’ face. “Is it working?”

Alec dropped his head back against the headrest in defeat. “I can’t believe you bought me a car. This is insane.”

Magnus took advantage of the collapse in Alec’s defenses to drive the point home. “Just think, we can use it this weekend! There’s plenty of room for camping gear… or shopping bags. Oh! We could go antiquing! Or we could get kayaks! Or mountain bikes!”

Alec lifted his very large hands to vigorously rub his weary face. Then he threaded his fingers into the top of his hair clutching it tightly, completely exasperated. “Ok, Ok, fine! I get the point!” Alec couldn’t take any more of Magnus’ high pressure tactics. He knew there was no winning against him, not with this or with anything. “I’ll drive your car, as a favor to help you out. But remember, this is your car, not mine! Ok? Otherwise no deal!”

“See, that wasn’t so hard,” Magnus declared as he reached into his pocket and pulled out something shiny, then thrust it into Alec’s chest. “Here, something to sweeten the deal.”

Alec reached down to take the offering. It was a single car key next to another key that looked like it was probably a house key, both on a sturdy hoop that upon closer inspection had a tiny silver cello hanging from it.

“I noticed your keychain was just that dreadfully cheap metal ring, so I got you a new one.” Magnus smiled, his face radiating with joy.

Alec felt a lump form in his throat as he turned the tiny cello over and saw Stella was engraved on the back. He ran his thumb over the cursive lettering and swallowed hard. It was without a doubt the
sweetest gesture, and probably the most precious thing anyone had ever given to him in his life. Much more meaningful than even a brand new car.

“Babe,” Alec choked out, nearly on the verge of tears.

“Shhh, don’t say another word. I know I’m wonderful,” Magnus teased as he leaned over the console and found Alec’s pouting lips for a kiss. “And you’d better get used to it, because I plan to shower you with gifts, compliments, affection, and anything else I can give as often as I can. Until you never feel a single moment of doubt in my love for you.”

Alec smiled his signature little crooked grin, the slightest blush staining his flushed cheeks. He was feeling overwhelmed by Magnus’ outpouring of love, especially since not five minutes ago Alec had basically accused him of lying about his past.

“I love it,” Alec admitted softly, pressing his forehead against Magnus’. “And you.”

Their lips met for a passionate kiss causing Magnus to lurch forward even more, practically climbing over into Alec’s seat.

“I can think of another reason all this extra leg room could come in handy,” Magnus murmured against Alec’s open mouth sending a jolt of tingling electric current through his body.

Alec felt his heart rate increase as Magnus pressed his chest closer still, his warmth surrounding him. “I thought you said you were in a hurry to get to the school?”

“But you look so sexy behind the wheel of your new car,” Magnus purred as he slid his hand between Alec’s thighs.

“You mean your new car!” Alec corrected him, moving his hands up underneath Magnus’ shirt feeling the silky smooth skin of his back.

Magnus couldn’t resist crawling the rest of the way over the console, straddling himself across Alec’s lap. “Hmm, now all I want to do is christen this car properly,” he suggested, poised over top of Alec with his hands wound into the back of his hair grasping it firmly in both of his fists.

“Is that why you left the plastic on the seats?” Alec replied breathless and gasping as Magnus began to kiss his neck and grind his hips against him.

“I always like to be prepared,” Magnus whispered against Alec’s strong jawline, forcing his head up to expose the entire length of his neck. He covered the tender flesh with open mouth kisses, trailing his tongue along Alec’s collarbone and up behind his ear. Then releasing hold of his hair Magnus ran one hand down the front of Alec’s shirt to delve behind the waistband of his shorts. Anxious to see what was waiting for him.

Alec sucked in a sharp intake of breath as Magnus grasped his already firm erection.

“Mmmm, someone’s ready to play,” Magnus hummed against Alec’s heated skin, pulling and squeezing him tightly with his skilled hand.

Alec involuntarily bucked his hips, thrusting himself against Magnus’ touch. He tilted his head forward to find his mouth again, hungrily attacking Magnus’ parted lips, nipping at them with his teeth before sinking his tongue deep inside.

Magnus returned Alec’s deep and passionate kisses with fervor while gliding his hand up and down his smooth shaft with long, steady strokes. The pressure caused Alec to respond vocally with
pleasurable moans.

“I love it when you get loud baby, don’t stop.” Magnus pleaded between gasps for breath. Alec obeyed by giving him a high pitched whine in return, which caused Magnus’ entire body to go rigid. “Mmm yes, you’re killing me right now.”

Alec smiled sinfully, loving the fact he could do something to unhinge his far more experienced boyfriend. He reached for Magnus’ belt and began anxiously pulling it from its buckle. “If you’re already late we might as well make it worth your while,” Alec declared as he quickly had Magnus’ shorts unbuttoned ready to even the playing field.

Magnus raised himself up on his strong, muscular arms bringing his legs together between Alec’s so they could both shimmy their shorts and boxers down to the floorboard. Once naked from the waist down Magnus eagerly lifted Alec’s legs by pressing firmly against the backs of his thighs. This position caused one of Alec’s long legs to reach up toward the sunroof, his foot catching on the latch. The other leg spread across the driver’s side window, leaving his foot to rest on the dashboard.

“Now I’ve got you right where I want you,” Magnus growled as he took in the sight of Alec below him, ready and waiting. His eyes blazed with lust as he took three of his own fingers into his mouth and began sucking them earnestly. Alec watched, his eyes staring intently at Magnus’ mouth, squirming with anticipation.

“Is this what you want?” Magnus said with a devilish smirk as he placed his moistened fingers against Alec’s tight ring of muscles.

“Yes,” Alec whimpered thrusting himself against Magnus’ hand, longing to feel his fingers inside him.

Magnus withdrew again, adding more wetness, then plunged his middle finger deep into Alec, sending his head flying back against the headrest, his hands desperately clutching tight to the seat bottom.

“Fuck,” Alec called out. His body writhing.

“Do you want me?” Magnus purred.

“God yes!” Alec begged.

“How much?” Magnus taunted him.

“So bad… please,” Alec pleaded, his voice quivering.

Magnus shifted his hand away and fumbled down below the seat until he’d fished his wallet from his shorts pocket. Then he flipped it open and extracted a small packet of something from inside. He brought the packet to his teeth and ripped it open with a flourish, then carefully began squeezing the contents onto his fingers.

“You have lube in your wallet?” Alec asked, surprised.

“Like I said Alexander, I always like to be prepared.”

Soon Alec felt the coolness spread across his opening, his heart was beating out of his chest. “Hurry,” he moaned, his body unable to take another minute of the torment.

Within a few seconds Magnus had readied them both, his hands returning to press firmly into the
backs of Alec’s thighs once more. Gently spreading his lover apart the penetration came at last, and it was exquisite. Alec’s eyes rolled back and his mouth fell slack as Magnus took him to that place of ecstasy in his mind where the rest of the world drifted away.

“My angel,” Magnus sighed as he looked down upon Alec’s blissed out state. His mouth open, his eyes closed, and his hair already a sweaty wreck. His usually pale face flushed crimson, Magnus couldn’t resist driving into his deeper just to watch his reaction. “You feel so good baby… you’re so fucking perfect.”

The inside of the car was like a sauna, Alec could feel trickles of sweat running down his face and neck. The sounds coming from both of their ignited bodies filled the small space, enveloping them in a rhapsody of passionate groans. The tilted angle of the car’s seat was intensifying the rapturous pounding against Alec’s g-spot, his body trembled with each of Magnus’ thrusts. He shifted his hands from the underside of the seat bringing them up to cup Magnus’ face, pulling him close. Their panting mouths struggling to connect as Magnus’ hips crashed against Alec again and again, like ocean waves to a rocky coast. Each time their lips managed to brush Alec’s muscles tightened around Magnus’ cock causing him to bury himself even deeper inside.

The intense heat and friction coupled with the adrenaline rush of the impromptu romp in the car was unraveling Magnus faster than usual. Alec could feel his body tensing between his legs as his breath came in short bursts between clinched teeth. He knew he was close. Alec opened his eyes just in time to see the euphoric look overtake Magnus’ face which in turn caused him to give in to his own release. The two men came together calling each other’s names in unison, then collapsed into a pile of sweaty limbs and heaving chests.

“Jesus,” Alec swore. “That was fucking incredible.”

“We are definitely keeping this car,” Magnus moaned, his face buried in Alec’s neck.

“I hate to say it but I think you’re officially very, very late,” Alec murmured against Magnus’ ear. His body a boneless pile of Jell-O on top of his chest.

“Fuck it, I don’t care,” Magnus groaned, barely able to regain his breath.

“Also, I think we’ve used up all the oxygen inside this car,” Alec admitted with a chuckle. “We’ve gotta get out of here or we’re going to die.”

Magnus slowly peeled himself off of Alec and reached to open the car door, sending a grateful breeze across both their bodies. They managed to climb out, grabbing their shorts from the tangle on the floor as they went, quickly realizing they were both going to need showers again and new clothes before either could go anywhere.

“You go on in, I’ll take care of this,” Alec said, gesturing to the now very messy car seat.

“I’ll get the shower warmed up,” Magnus said with a wink as he turned and headed into the house.

Alec was left standing in the garage alone, his mind finally able to clear from the sexually induced fog being around Magnus always created. He turned and started slowly peeling back what was left of the plastic covering on the seat letting the events that just took place replay in his mind. Not only had Magnus avoided his questions at breakfast, making him feel guilty for even asking them, but he’d also completely redirected the conversation and somehow managed to convince him to accept a ridiculously expensive new car.

Come on Lightwood, you’re not this naïve!
He angrily crumpled the plastic into a tight ball and tossed it into the garbage bin. Frustration crept back into the forefront of his mind along with all the doubts and fears he’d momentarily forgotten during their mind blowing sex.

Now Alec had just as many questions racing through his head as before, if not more, and no clear path to any answers. Part of him wanted to blindly follow Magnus into this fairytale love story where the past didn’t matter and everything was going to be perfect. But deep down he knew he didn’t feel that was possible. The past did matter to him, and so did the truth. Right now there was only one feeling left to feel, and it made his stomach tie up in knots as he slowly walked back into the house a bundle of nerves and pessimism.

Alec felt like a fool.

There was long line of taillights ahead as Alec made the last turn toward Elk Mountain Lodge, the 82-acre compound of William Koch, where the fundraiser was being held tonight. Jace had told him earlier that day when they were out tux shopping the estate was easily worth over 100 million dollars. As the sprawling homestead came into full view Alec could see why. It was enormous, and breathtaking.

The traffic slowly made its way through the large wooden entry gates and Alec was suddenly very glad he was driving a brand new Range Rover. He fit right in amongst the parade of luxury cars, some he’d never even heard of before. He and Magnus had decided to drive separately since they’d be coming from different parts of town. Magnus had already missed his first two students of the day and wasn’t sure he’d be on time for the fundraiser. Alec didn’t mind, it gave him a chance to get his game face on… so to speak.

The main lodge was nestled behind a beautiful crystal clear pond, framed by majestic mountains looming in the background. It looked like something out of a movie, almost impossible to believe it was actually someone’s home.

“We’re almost there Stells,” Alec called out toward the back of the car where Stella was safely secured with ample room. He could have easily hauled an entire woodwind section, probably the brass too. It wasn’t a reality he would be accustomed to anytime soon.

As Alec approached the massive home he saw a frantic group of valets scurrying every which way, helping people out of their cars then whisking each vehicle off to some unknown destination. Suddenly there was a knock against Alec’s car window startling him. He jumped back in surprise then turned to see the smiling face of someone he recognized waving back at him enthusiastically through the window. Alec lowered the glass a few inches.

“Hey… you,” Alec said tentatively, the name of the person completely escaping him. “I’m not a guest, I’m just here to perform.” Alec wasn’t sure where he was supposed to park, or if maybe there was a service entrance around back.

“Hey Mr. Lightwood! It’s me, Simon! Remember? Well you called me Samuel actually, and you totally still can if you want, I’ll answer to anything!”
Of course, Alec thought to himself, *how could I forget? “Hey Simon… good to see you.”* Alec was flustered by Simon’s overly eager outpouring of attention. He noticed several people turn to look at them. “What are you doing here?”

“Professor Penhallow recruited a bunch of us from school to help with the fundraiser. Some are working inside, serving drinks and stuff, but I was lucky to be sent out here. This Range Rover is sweet! It’s the 5-liter supercharged V8 isn’t it? Did you drive it out here from New York? It looks brand new!” Simon’s eyes were ogling the car as Alec tried to contain his humiliation.

“Yeah, about that, I wasn’t sure where I was supposed to park?” Alec was desperate to change the direction of their conversation.

“Well you’ve come to the right place! I’m happy to park your vehicle for you and you can make your way inside through the main entranceway just there,” he gestured, pointing to the front door.

“Uh, OK, thanks,” Alec replied as Simon opened Alec’s car door and bowed at the waist. Alec blushed, feeling embarrassed by this unexpected regal gesture. He hurried around to the back to get Stella from the trunk before he felt even more awkward from their exchange.

“I’ll take excellent care of your car, don’t you worry,” Simon said with a smile. Alec thankfully had a five dollar bill in his pocket he’d put there earlier just in case. He handed it to Simon.

“No way, no tip necessary! I’m honored to be your valet. And good luck tonight! I’m sure you guys will kill it!” Simon bowed deeply again as Alec hoisted Stella over his back and turned to walk toward the front door, anxious to get inside. “Uh, thanks Simon.”

Just as Alec began to walk away another car pulled up next to his stopping mere inches from Alec’s legs, nearly hitting him. Alec jumped back, almost falling over, then looked through the windshield and saw Sebastian’s twisted gleeful face staring back at him.

*Fucking perfect.*

Obviously he’d stopped short purely for his own entertainment.

“Lightwood!” Sebastian called out as he exited his car. He completely ignored the valet, not bothering to return his greeting or even give him a tip. “That’s quite a fine automobile you have there!”

Alec’s skin crawled as he turned away and started walking straight ahead as fast as he could. He was desperate to escape what was no doubt about to be a dose of Sebastian’s worst. He only had about 10 yards to cross before he’d be safely inside the door. Unfortunately Sebastian was right on his heels. Soon he matched Alec’s strides step for step, walking so close to him their shoulders almost brushed.

“You’re probably feeling very special right now aren’t you Lightwood?” Sebastian sneered, his voice disgustingly cheerful. “Such a pretty new toy. Oh the *work* you must have done to earn such a prize.”

Alec kept walking briskly, his eyes locked on the door ahead, praying he could make it there before things got out of control.

“You aren’t the first you know?” Sebastian’s voice oozed with contempt. “It’s always a shiny new car for the boys, sparkling diamond jewelry for the girls, and a key to the house as well, am I right? It’s the same routine every time he has a new *pet.*” Sebastian emphasized the last word making sure
Alec felt the insult’s sting.

Blinding rage was boiling inside Alec now. He didn’t need this tonight, not when he was already feeling vulnerable.

Sebastian could tell his venomous words were working by the look on Alec’s face. “He’ll grow tired of you eventually, he always does. A month or two, maybe six of you’re lucky. He’s nothing if not predictable.”

Alec knew he shouldn’t engage but he couldn’t stop himself from responding. “Sounds like you’re jealous,” he fired back, his voice raspy and shaken.

Sebastian reacted with force, grabbing Alec by the arm, roughly jerking him backward. “Ha! Jealous? Jealous of what? You’re nothing more than a glorified whore! I’ve watched dozens of your type come and go over the years. Young and stupid, a pretty face, so easily manipulated and controlled. I’d almost feel sorry for you if you weren’t so pathetically arrogant!” He leaned in close to Alec’s ear, the grip on his arm so tight it was radiating pain throughout Alec’s body. “Mark my words, he’ll be on to the next conquest soon.”

Alec snapped, his anger finally bubbling over. He grabbed Sebastian’s shirtfront, balling it tightly in his fist. “Shut your fucking mouth Morgenstern or I swear to God you’re going to regret it!”

Sebastian face broke into a sickening smile. “Please, don’t make me laugh. Now you sound as ridiculous as Wayland! You two are as indistinguishable as an old married couple.” Sebastian jerked himself free of Alec’s hold, smoothing his shirt and tucking it back into his pants. “I’m not afraid of your empty threats.”

Alec shifted nervously on the balls of his feet, looking left and right to see if anyone was watching. In this moment all he wanted to do was punch Sebastian straight in the mouth. Actually, he wanted to do worse than that. He wished he could strangle the life out of him with his bare hands, stab him fifty times with a dull knife, shoot him in the face, push him off a cliff, run him over with his car. The murderous fantasies flashed through his mind as he stood there frozen, realizing he couldn’t do anything.

Sebastian could sense Alec’s apprehension, and he knew he had the upper hand. “Here’s a friendly warning, the next time you decide to fuck Magnus during my personal lesson time I’m not going to be this nice! So I suggest you perform your services during your own time! Some of us have legitimate careers to prepare for.”

Alec felt his stomach lurch, bile stinging at the back of his throat. Sebastian smiled sadistically, then turned and walked away leaving Alec standing outside the lodge breathless and fuming. He turned his back in a vain attempt to gain his composure, unable to watch him slip away.

There’s no way. Magnus wouldn’t have told him that. He would never say anything. No... No way.

But Alec didn’t know what to believe anymore. The anger was rolling through his body, rocking him to his core with hot waves of intense pain. He felt sick to his stomach, the fury overtaking every molecule of his being. Lighting him up like a roman candle.

Suddenly a hand grabbed Alec’s shoulder from behind and he violently spun around with his fist cocked back only to discover it was Jace.

“Jesus Alec, what the hell’s the matter with you?” Jace asked, his eyes blown wide with shock. “I’ve been looking for you inside everywhere!”
“Nothing,” Alec replied, lowering his fist. “You scared me, that’s all.”

“Yeah, I can tell. What the fuck just happened? You look like you’ve seen a ghost!”

Alec lifted Stella back up onto his shoulder and muttered “Morgenstern,” under his breath as he turned his shaking body and headed toward the house.

“Oh shit! What did he do now?” Jace followed, jogging to keep up with Alec’s long strides.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Alec said as he stepped across the threshold into the cavernous entryway, Sebastian’s poisonous words echoing through his mind.

“That sick son of a bitch! Which way did he go? I’ve fucking had enough!” Jace was on fire. He crossed in front of Alec like he was heading off on a rampage. Alec grabbed his elbow to stop him.

“Don’t,” Alec muttered, his voice cracking. “We have to get ready to perform.”

“Fuck the performance Alec! I’m tired of this!”

Alec shook his head, letting out a deep exhale. “If I let him get to me then he wins. And the quartet is too important to all of us.”

“Fuck the quartet!” Jace exclaimed, causing several guests to turn and stare with shocked expressions.

Alec guided Jace through the crowd, over toward the corner of the room. Away from prying eyes. “Listen, this is between me and him. It doesn’t involve you or Clary, so stay out of it! Let’s just do what we came here to do and get it over with.”

Out of the corner of his eye Alec’s attention was drawn to a tall blonde standing just a few feet away. It was Sebastian, surrounded by a gaggle of important looking men. He had a broad smile plastered across his smug face and right by his side, patting his back approvingly, was Magnus. They were graciously shaking hands with the older men, Magnus’ face full of pride. Alec’s knees buckled.

“What’s wrong?” Jace asked as he followed Alec’s gaze toward the group. “Oh fuck that,” he muttered, seeing what had caught Alec’s eye. He stepped in front of his view to block them.

“Move Jace!” Alec insisted, but Jace only squared his shoulders defiantly.

“Listen Alec, we can walk out the door right now. We can leave this stupid group of assholes and never turn back! You don’t have to do this! You don’t have to be here!”

Alec was taller than Jace so he could still see Sebastian’s satisfied smirk. He leaned up on his tiptoes to get a clearer view just as Magnus placed his hand on Sebastian’s shoulder no doubt praising his accolades to the wealthy onlookers. Alec was overcome with emotion by this small gesture of solidarity.

“Mr. Wayland and Mr. Lightwood! There you are!” It was Professor Penhallow, decked out in all her finest. “Come join me to greet Mr. Koch and the board of trustees. They are all dying to meet you!” She quickly ushered Jace and Alec out of their quiet corner before they could even voice an objection and led them straight to the group where Magnus and Sebastian stood. Alec’s entire body went numb. He’d never been so glad to have Jace at his side as they were thrust right into their huddled conversation.

“Alexander!” Magnus chimed, his face blooming into a look of pure delight. “I’ve been wondering
where you were!” All eyes were immediately drawn to Jace and Alec as the huddle spread apart to accommodate their arrival. In that moment Alec was almost sure his heart officially stopped beating. “Bill, Doug, Larry, this is Alexander Lightwood, an absolutely brilliant cellist you’ll have the pleasure of hearing tonight.”

“Another student of yours?” one of the men asked.

“No, not my student, just someone very dear to my heart,” Magnus said with a wink hooking Alec through his arm and squeezing him tightly against his flank.

Alec couldn’t stop himself from looking to Sebastian’s face for a reaction, and his instinct had been right. His face fell like wax melting over an open flame, he was truly mortified. Alec smiled triumphantly.

“A pleasure Mr. Lightwood,” one of the men said, extending his arm to shake his hand. Alec firmly returned the handshake and immediately joined into the conversation answering questions about his schooling and performance history. He introduced Jace as well and soon they were all talking amongst themselves. Sebastian stood motionless at the perimeter. He was silent.

Soon Clary came along, she looked stunning in a floor length emerald green gown. Jace practically fell over his own feet rushing to stand beside her, his face radiating with devotion.

As Alec listened to the men prattle on about America’s failings to support the Arts his mind wandered back to Sebastian’s words outside and the anger he’d so easily elicited from him. How could he have even for one moment doubted Magnus’ true intentions by listening to such hateful propaganda? It was obvious really, Sebastian was praying off of Alec’s insecurities. Attacking his weaknesses to only further his assault against his career and his happiness. Alec was letting him get inside his head, his words were eating away at his soul like a cancer. He looked over at Sebastian again, forcing eye contact. When their eyes met Alec glared back at him with a newfound confidence, he wanted him to know he hadn’t beaten him. With one bold and fearless look he wanted Sebastian to know he wasn’t going to win this time.

The dinner and performance had gone off without a hitch. Alec, Jace, and Clary stood in the tiny hallway behind the ballroom hugging and congratulating each other while Sebastian, who was several feet away, remained stoically quiet.

“We really did it guys! That was perfect!” Clary boasted, feeling so relieved to have made it through their entire program without any glaring mistakes. “The Brahms, the Mozart, all of it, perfect! Did you see Professor Penhallow’s face? She was so happy I thought she was going to jump out of her seat!”

“Yeah, she was already counting the money in her mind,” Jace responded sarcastically. “Her well trained seals honked every horn.”

“I’m just glad to have it over with,” Alec added, anxious to get out of his tux and as far away from Sebastian as possible.
That was fantastic!” Came a voice from behind them. It was Victor, his face beaming with pride.
“You really exceeded everyone’s expectations guys. A tremendous effort, really something phenomenal to witness. You should all be very proud.”

Alec smiled as Victor patted him on the back. They’d made a lot of headway over the past few days, dealing with the aftermath of last week’s dinner party. Alec was glad to see his teacher so pleased with their performance, not to mention it took some pressure off knowing the board wasn’t likely to kick him out now. No matter what lies Sebastian had to tell.

“You kids are free to leave and go celebrate. You’ve definitely earned it. This event will now become all cigars and politics, be glad you don’t have to stay,” Victor added and Jace immediately pulled at his bowtie to loosen the knot.

“Thank God, let’s get out of these monkey suits and go get some drinks! Alec you coming?” Jace asked as he stuffed his bowtie down in his jacket pocket.

“Thanks, but I really just want to get home,” Alec replied, digging his phone out of his pocket to text Magnus in hopes he could sneak away and join him.

“Suit yourself, but the invitation stands if you change your mind,” Jace told him as he took Clary’s hand and headed back toward the foyer.

“I’ve got to hurry back inside,” Victor added. “Congratulations to you all again.”

Alec stood there watching the three disappear from view knowing Sebastian was standing right behind him. He could feel his eyes boring into him, like lasers shooting into his back. He fought to keep his breathing steady and his heartrate slow. He wasn’t going to react this time, he wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction.

“Home sweet home, hmm Lightwood? Anxious to get back to work?”

Alec closed his eyes and took a deep breath, then he turned slowly around to face Sebastian, feeling brave in his new resolve. “Better than where you’re going I suspect. Party of one? Back to the drawing board to try and create some new way to insert yourself into Magnus’ life? When clearly he’s not interested in being anything other than your teacher.” Alec slowly walked closer, closing the distance between them. “And no matter what you do to me that’s not going to change, is it? No matter what lies you tell or accusations you throw out you’re still going to be alone. And you can’t stand that!”

Sebastian’s eyes flickered and Alec knew he’d finally struck a nerve. There was a long silence, neither of them moved or even appeared to breathe. Time itself seemed to stand still as the two men stood alone in the darkened hallway. Then suddenly Sebastian’s eyes dimmed, as if they’d turned black from the inside. His face was deadpan, not giving away a single emotion. He stuffed his hands deep into his pockets and took one step toward Alec to speak.

“You’ve just made my next move very easy Alexander,” Sebastian stated flatly. Then he turned on his heel and walked away, calmly strolling back down the hall like he was taking a Sunday walk through Central Park. When he was almost out of sight Alec heard him begin to whistle a tune which he swore sounded like some demented version of Bach’s Goldberg Variations. Alec felt all of the hair on his arms stand on end.

*This crazy asshole is going to try to kill me.*
So sorry for the delay! I was on vacation for a week and then I got the flu. So I've been almost completely out of commission, as far as any writing goes, for the last two weeks. Hopefully that won't happen again, at least not in the foreseeable future. I hope this chapter isn't too much of a mess. I'm still struggling to feel 100% back to normal. Ignore my editing blunders! HA HA

What can I say? Sebastian is a sick, twisted, son of a bitch. The Goldberg Variations mentioned at the end was my little nod to Hannibal Lecter, who always sort of reminds me of Sebastian in the way he keeps his calm, cool demeanor when he's being extra murderous.

This chapter is a bit awkward because we're leading into a big moment that I can't really tell you about. The next chapter begins with another flashback which is really going to explain a lot more detail about what is going on. Some of you may have already guessed, but I think you'll be surprised to hear the whole story. Plus Magnus and Alec are going to get out of town for a couple of days, which will finally give them a chance to talk.

I hope you're enjoying the story so far! I love reading your comments and getting your kudos, so thank you very much for that. :) If you have any questions feel free to ask. You can also hunt me down on twitter @malec_immortal if you want to yell at me.

Be sure you check chapter 1 to see the amazingly beautiful fanart MundaneLion made for this story!! Alec and Stella are just exactly how I've always pictured them in my mind! :) She is so incredibly talented!!

Thanks so much for sticking with me. I promise the next chapter won't be so late! :)

Chapter End Notes
April 12, 1996

Magnus hurried up the stairs to the second floor, already fifteen minutes late for his lesson. He’d lost track of time while in the listening library having found a rare recording of Berwald’s violin concerto being performed live. He was trying to fight the urge to check-out any more music since he was due to graduate in a couple of weeks. Catarina had reminded him several times over the last few days that he’d only have to remember to return it all before the end of school. And Magnus already had enough on his plate trying to figure out what he was going to do with his life, post-Curtis.

Finally reaching Catarina’s office he knocked twice then crashed through the door. “Sorry, sorry, sorry!” Magnus apologized profusely as he barreled into her office. “Lost track of time.”

Catarina was sitting at her desk holding what appeared to be some sort of document. She peered over the top of her reading glasses accusingly. “Well I was wondering if you were going to show up today or if you’d already moved on and forgotten about me.”

Magnus rolled his eyes dramatically. “Don’t be ridiculous, it will be at least another two weeks before I can do that.”

Catarina smiled, already accustomed to his particular brand of sarcasm. “Well then I guess I’d better enjoy you while you’re still here,” she teased, lowering the papers and gestured toward the chair in front of her desk. “Sit down and catch your breath, I was going to suggest we skip the lesson today anyway. I want to talk to you about something.”

Magnus raised one eyebrow suspiciously, crossed to the chair and sat down right at its edge. His back straight as an arrow. “We aren’t going to have the fight again are we?”

“The fight?” Catarina scoffed. “As if there is only one?” She leaned back in her swivel desk chair with a look of consternation.

Magnus chuckled at seeing how quickly he could ruffle her feathers. “Well, only one that really matters. Besides, as I told you yesterday, I’m perfectly capable of making informed, rational, adult decisions on my own, thank you very much.”

“Magnus you are fourteen years old!” Catarina reminded him.

“I’m almost fifteen! Plus I’m more mature at fourteen than 90% of the twenty-somethings at this school.” Magnus fired back, ready to defend his argument yet again.
“Yes I know that,” Catarina responded, sitting back upright. “But as I keep reminding you Philly is a great place to live. You’d be close to New York, Boston, and DC, all the major performance venues and airports. It’s a great home base for any musician just starting out. Plus I can keep an eye on you here. As much as it will surprise you to hear, you aren’t old enough to lease an apartment!”

Magnus folded his arms defiantly. “I’ve been at this school for seven years. I have my degree and two performance diplomas. I’ve done everything in this city that I can possibly do and now I’m ready to go! Surely you can understand that?”

“Ugh, I don’t want to argue about this again.” Catarina sat forward and dropped her head into her hands. “We’re just beating the same dead horse. Besides, that’s not even the reason I wanted to talk to you.”

Magnus noticed she seemed much more stressed than usual. He felt something was bothering her besides his eagerness to fly the nest. “What is it? Has something happened?”

Catarina lifted her head and exhaled deeply. Her face looked weary and sleep deprived. “There’s been a development… that concerns you... and your future.”

“My future?” Magnus said as he sat back into the chair realizing this was about to be something much more intense than he’d bargained for. He gripped the chair’s arms for support.

“Yes,” Catarina answered, straightening a pile of papers on her desk. “But before I tell you anything I want you to promise me you’ll listen to everything I have to say before jumping into any rash decisions. This is too important Magnus, and I don’t want your emotions clouding your judgement.”

Magnus felt every nerve in his body stand on end. He hadn’t felt this anxious since the day he’d been called down to hear the news about his mother. And something in Catarina’s eyes made him remember that day now very clearly in his mind. She’d had the same dire expression, and it left him with an overwhelming sense of foreboding. Part of him didn’t even want to hear what she was about to say, not if it was bad news. He wasn’t sure his wounded heart couldn’t take it.

“Two days ago the director received a certified letter from the attorney who handles your school payments, asking him to contact his office as soon as possible,” Catarina said, looking down at her hands.

Magnus felt his stomach seize and his throat constrict at the mention of his mysterious benefactor. This person who’d been paying all of his tuition and fees for the past 5 years as well as providing money for food, living expenses, books, music, summer festivals, a new violin just a year ago, as well as anything else he needed. It was unbelievable really. All Magnus had to do was simply charge anything he desired to his school account and magically at the end of every month it was taken care of. Catarina had always insisted the person wanted to remain anonymous and that even the director himself didn’t know who it was. All of the money had been sent from an attorney, and they’d never asked Magnus for anything in return.

“What did he want?” Magnus asked, his voice uncharacteristically soft and vulnerable.

Catarina could see the change in Magnus’ demeanor and she knew this wasn’t going to be easy for him. She did her best to remain calm, for his sake. “The attorney notified the director that the benefactor was ready to make himself known.”

‘Himself’, Magnus thought. So it was a man. Magnus’ heart was racing. The countless nights he’d laid awake in bed wondering who this person could be, where they lived, where all of their money
came from, and most especially, what was their interest in his life? He’d just about given up on ever having the answers to any of these questions, until now. As unbelievable as it seemed, Magnus was about to finally find out who his esoteric savior was. His palms were sweating as he leaned forward in the chair. His eyes wide and glistening. “Who is he Catarina? What does he want?”

“What he wants is not what’s most important here Magnus,” Catarina quickly answered back. “You don’t owe this man anything. Do you understand? You never asked for his help and you are under no legal obligation to ever even agree to meet him. As your legal guardian I can just tell him no, and he can wait a few more years until you’re 18. That’s a perfectly legitimate answer, and I’m sure he would understand.”

“Why wouldn’t I want to meet him? What do you know? Is he some sort of criminal or something?” Magnus felt a rush of panic at the thought of this man’s money coming from some sort of illegal activities.

“No my darling, he’s not a criminal. But I am concerned he might have… ulterior motives.” Catarina’s eyes shifted away from Magnus’ gaze as if she couldn’t look at him.

“Ulterior motives?” Magnus questioned, feeling another surge of anxiety grip his stomach. “Why would you think that?”

Catarina fumbled with the papers again. “Well, we can’t be sure.”

Magnus felt his fear suddenly take a backseat to a crushing wave of bitterness and anger. The surge broke forth before he could stop himself. “This is the same person you told me 5 years ago was a saint! That I’d be crazy not to accept his help! That I shouldn’t “worry about the details”! That it was “a good thing”?? And now you’re saying this man might have some hidden agenda? What? Does he want to sell me into sex slavery or something?” Magnus’ voice was bellowing through the tiny office, he was so upset he couldn’t even sit. He stood up and began pacing in a tight circle in front of Catarina’s desk, wringing his hands.

“Now don’t be ridiculous,” Catarina snorted. “This is not a time to be overly dramatic! I am simply trying to express to you that you should be cautious and really think this through before jumping to a decision. He’s a very wealthy and very powerful man Magnus, not someone who has gotten to where he is without stepping on a few backs along the way.”

Magnus stopped pacing and lunged over the side of the desk. “I understand, I’m not a child! Just please tell me his name at least! I can’t take another minute of this! I deserve to know!” Magnus said beseechingly, his face contorted with anguish.

Catarina released the papers she was holding and spread her open palms over the desk as if to steady herself. She closed her eyes and sucked in a deep cleansing breath, then exhaled and turned toward Magnus, addressing him face to face. “Alright. If you want to know I will tell you. But I have to say once again, you don’t have any obligation whatsoever. I will stand by that, and by you, no matter what.”

Magnus nodded, holding his breath. Bracing himself for Catarina’s reply.

“His name is Valentine Morgenstern.”
“Alexander! Grab my Louis Vuitton duffle from the foyer on your way out!” Magnus hollered on his way toward the garage. His arms laden with bags and totes.

Alec was in the kitchen packing up the last few items for the cooler. Some bottled water to accompany the five bottles of champagne Magnus had insisted on bringing. “Another bag?” Alec yelled in return. “We’re only going to be gone for two days you know!”

Magnus didn’t answer. He was either already out of earshot, or he’d chosen to ignore the comment. Alec rearranged some of the larger chunks of ice in an attempt to get the lid to close. “I don’t know how the hell I’m going to lift this,” he muttered under his breath, sizing up the massive cooler. He shuttered to think of what they’d need to bring if this was a longer trip.

When Alec finally had the trunk all packed, with enough luggage to be gone a month no doubt, he hopped into the driver’s seat already feeling exhausted. “If it takes this much work to go away for the weekend remind me we should never do it again!”

“Oh stop,” Magnus trilled. “It’s not that much. I wasn’t really sure what all we’d be doing, so I wanted to cover all the bases.”

Alec rolled his eyes for the tenth time in the last hour. “Yeah, well I’m more of a toothbrush and an extra change of clothes kind of guy. You brought six pairs of shoes!”

“I brought extras for you as well,” Magnus smirked shifting his sunglasses down from the top of his head with a flourish. “You can thank me later.”

Alec shook his head in response then started the engine with a roar. “Well we’d better go then, before you go back inside for more.”

As they headed out of town the sun was shining, there wasn’t a cloud in the sky, and Alec suddenly felt a lightness come over him. It was as if they’d just driven away and left all their troubles behind. One specific, very annoying trouble in particular.

“What a gorgeous day,” Magnus said from the passenger seat, leaning back to allow the sun to shine through the sunroof overhead and bathe his face in its warm glow. Alec thought his skin shimmered like desert sand. Each tiny facet reflecting the sunlight like a sprinkling of diamonds. He had to force himself to look away so he didn’t have an accident.

“Yeah, it’s beautiful,” Alec sighed, clearly not talking about the weather.

Alec hadn’t told Magnus about his encounter with Sebastian the previous night. He hadn’t told him about his hurtful and insulting comments by the car or his odd behavior and thinly veiled threats in the hall after their performance. Part of him knew Magnus needed to know, but another part feared he wouldn’t believe him. Alec knew it would take an hour to get to Glenwood Springs, so he’d hoped they could finally have some uninterrupted time to talk along the way. Maybe then he could tell him.
“Do you mind if I choose the music?” Alec asked innocently, fumbling with his iPhone.

“Of course not darling, fire away!” Magnus said as he slipped out of his shoes and propped his feet on the dash.

Alec switched on his Bluetooth and pressed play on the playlist. As the music began he prepared himself for Magnus’ reaction.

“Oh God! Is this me?” Magnus shrieked dramatically. “Why must we suffer?”

“I happen to love this album,” Alec replied sweetly. “It’s one of my favorites.”

“Ugh, 24 Caprices gives me war flashbacks,” Magnus mumbled, clearly not happy with Alec’s music choice.

“It was your first album, wasn’t it?” Alec asked, already knowing the answer of course. His entire discography was committed to permanent memory. He’d decided to use it as a way to break the ice. His number one goal for the weekend, above all else, was getting Magnus to open up about his past. Personally or professionally, anything would be a step in the right direction. And this was hopefully going to be the start.

“Yes, it was,” Magnus replied, saying nothing else.

Alec bravely continued. “You were what? Fifteen?” He was willing to literally pull the truth out of Magnus if he had to.

“Yep,” Magnus answered, his reply even shorter than the last, with no further information given.

“Sorry, it’s just fascinating to me. I can’t imagine a record label approaching me at that age. You must have been freaking out?” Alec pushed on, trying to keep the conversation light.

“I guess you could say that,” Magnus mused, clearly not taking the bait.

“But Alicante Records has all the greats! Pearlman, Bell, Davis, Woods, Joslyn, well and of course you. You’re better than all of them put together,” Alec praised, really laying it on thick.

“Flattery will get you everywhere my dear,” Magnus said with a sly grin and Alec finally felt he might have found a tiny crack in his nearly impenetrable armor.

“Well, I think Lydia already blew my cover anyway. You know I think you’re great,” Alec admitted, a slight blush betraying his cheeks.

“Ah yes, that reminds me, where is that little scrapbook you made? I’m dying to see it!” Magnus beamed devilishly.

“Maybe I’ll get my mom to send it out with my guitar,” Alec added, with no intention of saying anything to his mom or ever letting Magnus see it of course. That would be a humiliation beyond anything he could endure.

“Your guitar?”

“Yeah I was thinking of having her ship it out, you know, just for fun.”

Magnus huffed. “Alexander, you don’t need to have her ship it out, I have seven guitars back at the house. You can take any one that you like.”
“Seven?” Alec gasped, his mouth falling slack.

“Yes seven, the same number of times I’ve split my soul!” Magnus laughed maniacally.

Alec flashed his crooked little grin, his eyes playfully squinting over at Magnus who was raucously laughing at him. “Did you just tell a Harry Potter joke?”

“Impressed?” Magnus said, cocking his head and raising both eyebrows.

“A little, yeah. I didn’t take you for a Potter fan.”

“Ah yes, the boy wizard helped me survive many long flights over the ocean in my youth,” Magnus admitted, settling back comfortably in his seat once more. “I think the first book came out about the same time I was promoting this album actually.”

Alec saw another small window of opportunity open and he decided to probe further. “That must have been tough, traveling to all of those countries alone at such a young age. All those performances. How did you manage it?”

Magnus’ smile gradually faded away as his eyes glazed over. He seemed to be traveling a million miles away in his mind. Alec waited for what felt like an eternity for him to answer, terrified he’d said something wrong.

Finally Magnus let out a long sigh and responded. “You endure what is unbearable and you bare it, that is all.”

Alec was shocked by this dark and depressing remark. He gripped the steering wheel tightly with both hands trying to think of what in the world he could say back to him. The mountains that flanked the car on both sides were so peaceful and majestic it was tough to imagine how their conversation had taken this grim turn. He waited a moment, then chose his words very carefully. “That’s a tough lesson to learn as a kid,” he timidly replied, hoping he wouldn’t say anything to cause Magnus to shut down again.

“Yes, even tougher to remember as an adult,” Magnus added.

Alec pondered this cryptic statement, feeling he was losing track of where this discussion was going. “Why do you think that? I mean, why is it tougher for an adult?”

“Children are very resilient, they can endure a lot of pain and suffering because they don’t know any better,” Magnus stated somberly.

“Did you endure a lot of suffering?” Alec asked, for the first time feeling afraid of what he might hear.

Magnus was silent again and Alec didn’t dare breathe as he waited for his answer.

“Sometimes it’s much harder to watch someone else suffer than to experience the pain yourself,” Magnus murmured. His voice steeped in raw emotion.

Alec didn’t know who Magnus was referring to. He thought he must have meant his parents. He knew they had died when he was very young. Maybe they’d been ill? Maybe Magnus had watched them deteriorate? That would be devastating for any child. Alec felt a lump form in his throat trying to imagine losing his family. Watching them slowly and painfully slip away, knowing there was nothing he could do to help them. The fear of being left alone in the world, not knowing where home was anymore. Alec didn’t know what to say. He removed his right hand from the steering wheel and
reached to take hold of Magnus’, squeezing it reassuringly. Somehow the conversation had veered away from his intended course of digging up dirt on Sebastian and shifted to Magnus’ family.

“I can’t even imagine,” Alec admitted honestly. Rubbing the top of Magnus’ hand with his thumb in an attempt to comfort him.

Magnus didn’t seem to even notice the gentle touch of Alec’s hand. He just stared straight ahead out the front windshield, his eyes vacant. “No, you can’t.”

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Sunday, May 12, 1996

Magnus packed the last of his winter clothes into a large trunk that was to be taken to the school’s storage facility. The empty dorm room looked so much bigger now, every sound echoing and bouncing off the bare walls. All that remained was his packed suitcase by the door and his violin. His flight was in just a little over three hours and his stomach was fluttering with nerves. The events that had played out over the last few weeks had been shocking to say the least. Not only had he learned the identity of his unknown benefactor but a trip to meet him face to face had been planned. Despite the overwhelming objections given by Catarina. Magnus was set to fly to Los Angeles alone and stay there for one week. He would meet Mr. Morgenstern and be his special guest at several important events. A full itinerary was faxed to the school giving all the dates, times, and locations along with a list of contact information for the people who would be in charge of handling every aspect of Magnus’ stay. He’d studied over all of the paperwork for days and he couldn’t help but feel excited.

“Magnus?” Catarina called from the hall, tapping against his door.

“Come in!” Magnus replied back to her, closing the lid on his trunk.

“Well, it looks like you’re all packed and ready to go,” Catarina said, her voice a bit melancholy.

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” Magnus mumbled, stopping to take one last look around the room.

“There’s still time to change your mind you know. You don’t have to do this,” Catarina delicately responded, using her one last opportunity to discourage him from going.

Magnus exhaled loudly, his head falling back in dismay. “Yeah, you’re right. I can just head down to the Hallmark store and find a card that says ‘Thanks for the half million bucks, have a nice life!’ I’m sure they have several designs to choose from.”

“Don’t make jokes, I’m being serious Magnus.” Catarina’s voice was pleading. Her face distraught.

Magnus turned to lock eyes with Catarina, bravely defying her objection for the millionth time. “If taking an all-expense paid trip to LA for a week is what it takes to feel a little less guilty about all the
free money I’ve been sponging from this guy for the last five years then of course I’m going to go!”

Catarina lifted both palms as a sign of surrender. “Alright, OK, I don’t want to fight. Just please promise me you’ll be careful. And if for one moment you feel uncomfortable or pressured in any way I want you to call me. Please?”

“I’ll be fine, I promise,” Magnus said, reaching down to grab his violin case, swinging it over his shoulder. “I’m just going to smile and be my normally gracious, witty self. The week will surely fly by and I’ll be back here making your life miserable before you know it!” He said with a sassy wink.

Catarina smiled back at him sweetly, desperately trying to mask the awful feeling she had inside. In the end she’d let this be his decision because she knew if she tried to force him to stay he’d only be more guilt ridden than he already was. She’d tried to tell herself again and again, ‘What trouble could possibly befall him in seven days?’ He’d taken trips alone to Europe and Asia ten times as long. He was an expert traveler and she trusted him beyond any doubt. But no matter how many times she tried to convince herself she couldn’t shake the sense he was making a horrible mistake.

Magnus could see how upset Catarina was. “Oh give me a hug! I know you’re dying to!” And he welcomed her in with his arms outstretched.

Catarina grabbed him into a tight embrace burying her face against his shoulder, unable to stop the tears from falling. “You know I love you very much, and I’m so proud of you and all you’ve accomplished so far in your life.” Magnus squeezed her tightly as her sobs continued, his shirt quickly becoming damp. “As far as I’m concerned you are my family Magnus, and I’ll always be here for you no matter what.”

“I know,” Magnus replied, patting her trembling back. “I love you too.” He was a bit unnerved by her emotional breakdown. It suddenly felt like a complete role reversal where he was the adult and she was the child. He wasn’t use to feeling like the strong one in this relationship. “Please don’t worry, I’ll be OK.”

Catarina pulled away and wiped the wetness from her eyes. Magnus gently smiled back at her reassuringly.

“You’d better be, or I’ll never stop saying I told you so!” Her sad, tear streaked face breaking into one of authoritative mocking. She then leaned over to grab the pull handle of Magnus’ suitcase and offered it to him reluctantly. He took hold of it, smiled one last time, then left the room with a resolute confidence. He didn’t dare turn back to watch the door close behind him, his own tears already stinging at the backs of his eyes.

Magnus walked out of the dormitory and down to the curb to meet the taxi that was waiting to take him to the airport. He passed his suitcase off to the driver and climbed in the backseat clutching his violin tightly. Taking another deep breath he stowed the case in the floorboard in front of him, buckled his seatbelt, and turned to take one last look out the window. Curtis had been his home since he was seven years old and he’d been happy there, for the most part. After a week in LA he’d be back to see Catarina again before heading off to Austria for an international violin competition. But somehow it wouldn’t be the same coming back as an alum and staying at her house. He’d never again call Curtis home, never sprint down Locust Street late for a master class, or stay up all night cramming for a music theory exam. That stage of his life was over… over when most kids his age were just getting started.

The driver began to pull away and Magnus silently bid his school a fond farewell. He was feeling hopefully optimistic about his future. He already had several concerts booked as well as invitations to countless festivals and competitions. With Catarina by his side supporting him every step of the
way, he really felt the sky was the limit both personally and professionally.

But sadly what Magnus didn’t know, as the taxi picked up speed to merge onto the highway, was that after today it would be eight long painful years until he saw Catarina again. And by that time, he’d be nearly unrecognizable from this boldly idealistic version of himself. The pain and the heartache that lie in wait would alter Magnus’ life forever.

Alec and Magnus pulled underneath the portico of the Glenwood Hot Springs Resort and were immediately greeted by an enthusiastic blonde who was clearly so excited she was about to burst out of her skin. Magnus was the first to exit the vehicle and she anxiously rushed to his side with one arm extended.

“Mr. Bane, what an absolute honor and privilege it is to welcome you to Glenwood Springs! I’m Sophie Piper, we spoke on the phone yesterday. We’ve been anxiously awaiting your arrival!”

“Oh God, what did you do?” Alec muttered under his breath as he slowly exited from his side of the car. Magnus only turned back and gave him a single wink before spinning around to greet the woman.

“The pleasure is all ours of course!” Magnus answered her with his usual charm and grace. “Thank you so much for granting my request on such short notice. I’m sure it was no easy undertaking on your part.”

“Well it’s not every day we have a celebrity guest joining us here at the lodge! We were happy to accommodate you and we’ve got the entire top floor reserved! Just for you and Mr. Lightwood.”

Alec’s notorious blush instantly flared red hot as the woman smiled at him with a knowing look.

“I’m going to kill him.

The annoyingly energetic woman continued. “Harold here will take your luggage up to your suites, if you’ll come with me I have your key cards ready at the front desk.”

As the woman walked ahead to lead them inside the lodge Alec grabbed Magnus’ arm and pulled him close enough to whisper in his ear. “Was it really necessary to book an entire floor?”

Magnus smirked wickedly. “Alexander, these old hotels are notorious for having paper thin walls. I’m doing the other guests a favor, don’t you think?”

Alec’s blush deepened. “I seriously hate you right now.”

“Here we are!” The woman declared cheerfully. “These are your keys, feel free to stay in any of the suites you like. Also here’s my card, I’ve added my personal cell phone number on the back. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to make your stay more comfortable.”

Magnus shook her hand, palming a generous tip, while Alec stared at the floor. Sophie thanked them thoroughly then finally glided back to wherever she’d come from.

“Come on, cheer up!” Magnus said, playfully punching Alec in the arm. “I’ve got lots more fun surprises in store for the weekend, this is only the beginning.”
“Great,” Alec mumbled. “Do they all involve utter humiliation and embarrassment?”

“Only the really good ones,” Magnus teased as he hooked his arm under Alec’s elbow and pulled him toward the elevator.

Once they reached the top floor Magnus pulled the key cards out of his pocket and fanned them out in front of Alec like a deck of cards.

“Pick one!”

Alec pondered the five choices and went for the card in the middle. Suite 807, which turned out to be the last door at the very end of the hall.

As they made their way past the other four doors Magnus led Alec with his hand placed on the small of his back. Once they reached their door Alec fumbled with the key card until it finally clicked to unlock. Magnus guided Alec through the door and as soon as it closed behind them he was immediately pulling his body against him.

“I’ve been wanting to do this all day,” Magnus confessed into the warmth of Alec’s neck, breathing him in. Their bodies molded together perfectly although Alec could feel an extra bit of urgency in Magnus’ grasp.

“You OK?” Alec whispered against Magnus’ ear, holding him close.

“Now I am,” Magnus murmured, his lips moving against Alec’s velvety soft skin.

Alec squeezed him tighter, hoping to soothe the wounds he’d unintentionally reopened on their short but intense car ride.

“I’m sorry,” Alec said as he nuzzled into Magnus’ shoulder. “I hope I didn’t upset you… I mean I know I upset you… and I’m sorry. But I hope I didn’t ruin the weekend.”

“It’s alright my darling, the weekend is far from ruined. Let’s just find the luggage and pop open a bottle of champagne. I could really use a drink.” With that said Magnus pulled away, leaving Alec to stand there regretting his entire quest to exploring the hidden secrets of Magnus’ past.

The two men set off to find their luggage, which ended up being only one suite away. They poured two flutes of champagne and stepped out onto the balcony which overlooked the breathtaking Glenwood Canyon. The mountains were even more beautiful from this vantage point than they were from Magnus’ house. Their rocky faces seemed to be painted in hues of orange, with striations marking the passage of time. They were awe-inspiring in their grandeur. Leaning over the rail they could see the hot springs pools below. One large pool surrounded by a dozen or so private ones, many of those hidden behind intentional barricades of bushes and trees.

Alec wound one arm around Magnus’s waist, pulling him close against him. They slowly sipped their drinks just enjoying this quiet time in each other’s arms. Looking up they saw an eagle flying gracefully in circles over their heads.

“This is perfect,” Alec remarked, interrupting the long silence.
“Mmm, that it is,” Magnus agreed, draining the last of his glass.

“How did you know about this place? Have you been here before?” Alec wondered, knowing Magnus was pretty new to the area.

“I had Ragnor come investigate a few places for us. He knows what I like.”

Alec was shocked to hear his name again. “Wow, I guess he’s been working for you a long time if he knows you that well. Did he come with you here from California?”

Magnus absentmindedly twirled his glass, looking thoughtfully out over the canyon. “Ragnor doesn’t just work for me, he’s one of my oldest and dearest friends. More than a friend actually, he’s family to me. You see Alexander, I can count on one hand how many people in this world I trust. It isn’t an easy thing for me to do. But he’s one of them.”

“Who are the other four?” Alec asked candidly, very curious to know the members of this elite circle of trust.

Magnus took both empty glasses and set them on the railing then turned to face Alec, wrapping both arms tightly around his torso. “I can tell you one of them… he’s tall, extremely handsome, exceedingly kind, remarkably talented, and without a doubt the greatest thing that’s ever happened to me in my life.”

Alec felt a rush of blood flow straight into his heart, warming the center of his body right down into his soul. He dipped his head to seek out Magnus’ lips and their kiss connected with a fiery passion. Alec didn’t know what he’d done to deserve Magnus’ trust but the feeling of utter gratitude overwhelmed him. Desperate to show how much he loved him Alec enveloped Magnus’ mouth with his own and covered it with an array of the most fervent and tender kisses he could produce. First worshipping his top lip, its slight curl upward tickling Alec’s chin. Then he shifted to the bottom lip, pulling it gently into his mouth to suck the soft flesh. Magnus exhaled deeply and Alec plunged inside his warmth, tasting and devouring his very essence. Their tongues danced and twirled sensually, rolling against one another as their bodies pressed closer still. Alec could get lost in this feeling so easily, the perfection of Magnus’ kiss instantly transporting him into a state of pure bliss. Time always stood still in these moments, breathing in each other’s breath made Alec lightheaded and tingly. Their kiss swollen lips were warm and wet as he brought each of his hands up to cradle Magnus’ face, feeling his strong jaw clench as he held onto him so delicately. Alec pulled back slightly so he could gently kiss each corner of his mouth, then slowly traveled across the seam of Magnus’ lips as light as a feather before plunging between them again. Alec wanted to express everything he felt in his heart but couldn’t do justice to with words. He wanted Magnus to know he would always be there to protect him, to cherish him, and to love him with all his heart. He wanted to hold him in his arms forever and kiss away all his pain.

“I love you,” Alec sighed on a gasping breath for air, hastily reconnecting their lips not wanting Magnus to even have the chance to reply. This was all for him now, even though he knew it couldn’t change the past. Whatever pain he’d endured Alec couldn’t fix it. His love today and from this moment on was the only remedy he could offer.
Magnus made his way through the main concourse and down the escalator to baggage claim feeling a bit jet lagged already. The California sun was shining brightly through the massive overhead skylights but his internal clock was telling him it was nearly bedtime. He was hungry and groggy, not a fun combination. As he stepped off the bottom of the escalator he was met by a throng of drivers and tour operators holding signs and shouting names. It didn’t take long to find the one sign marked “Bane” being held by a very friendly and jovial looking man. Oddly out of place among the other faces in the crowd.

“Master Bane I presume?” The man said to Magnus, his eyes twinkling warmly.

“Yes, that’s me,” Magnus responded. “But please, call me Magnus.”

The man smiled even wider. “Alright, Magnus, welcome to sunny California! How was your flight?”

“It was fine,” Magnus answered, leaving out the part about the man seated next to him who snored like a grizzly bear for six hours.

“That’s wonderful! Now follow me, we’ll head right to carousel four and claim your bags.”

“Just one bag,” Magnus told him, wondering if maybe he hadn’t packed enough.

“Well then that makes it easy, doesn’t it?” The man said with chipper optimism. Obviously able to find a positive side to anything, probably due to his good-natured disposition.

Magnus had never been greeted at the airport by anyone quite like this before. His familiar British accent brought back memories of another life, one he didn’t often think about except when confronted with a recognizable sound or smell. It felt like being greeted by someone he knew.

“Mr. Morgenstern has appointed me your personal driver for the entire length of your stay. I’ll be taking you straight to the house to get settled, then there’s a dinner tonight with a few close colleagues who are more than anxious to meet your acquaintance.”

Magnus felt his heart sink. Ugh, a dinner. All he really wanted to do was get out of his crumpled traveling clothes and go to bed. A dinner meant excessive amounts of schmoozing and unavoidable personal and professional questions, which always turned uncomfortably invasive. Luckily he’d already discovered the magic of coffee at his young age, realizing it was about to be a very long night.

“Sounds great,” Magnus said, attempting to sound excited.

The man immediately picked up on his disdain. “Ah, I sense that might not be exactly what you had in mind for this evening?”

“Well, I am a bit tired,” Magnus admitted.

“Say no more! I can phone ahead and alert the staff you’re in need of a rest. The dinner can easily be rescheduled for a more convenient time.” Immediately the man whipped out a mobile telephone and pulled its antenna out with a snap.

“No, no, I’ll be OK,” Magnus objected. “Maybe just a quick stop for caffeine? That should do the trick.” Magnus definitely didn’t want his first impression to be that of an overly demanding diva; canceling plans the first moment he stepped off the plane.
The man popped the antenna back down and dropped the phone into his jacket pocket. “Of course. We can stop for a Coke? Or maybe a Mountain Dew? I’m not sure what the young kids are drinking these days,” the man joked.

“I’m more of a strong, black coffee kind of guy,” Magnus confessed, hoping he wasn’t being too difficult.

“Ah, a man after my own heart,” the man boasted, patting Magnus on the back in a very friendly and familiar way. “Coffee it is, and I know just the place!”

Magnus was relieved. It seems this man wasn’t going to be your typical everyday sort of ass kisser, but someone who genuinely wanted to help merely because they took enjoyment from it. It was a welcome surprise. “Thank you uhhhh… sorry I didn’t catch your name?”

“Ah yes, my apologies. I’m Mr. Fell, but seeing how we’re already on a first name basis, you can call me Ragnor.”

“Thanks, Ragnor,” Magnus nodded, feeling like he’d just made an unexpected friend.

“It is my great pleasure Magnus, my great pleasure indeed.”

Chapter End Notes

Things are slowly starting to make sense aren’t they? ;) You’ve got a few more pieces of the puzzle, although I think you’ll be surprised to see what happens next. Probably not what you're expecting.

This chapter was difficult to write because I wanted to weave Magnus' backstory into the events of their weekend away sort of bit by bit. More will be revealed in the next chapter as Magnus takes Alec to a very special location. We'll also get a lot more backstory too along the way…. Magnus meeting Val for the first time. YIKES!

After their weekend trip Alec will be heading back to the practice room to get ready for the big concerto competition. Then the shit is really going to hit the fan. {{hides}}

Don't you love Catarina? And Ragnor too of course. They are both very important parts of Magnus' life, more on that later. (I think you'll be quite shocked)

The playlist has been updated. Rêveries refers to the first movement of Berlioz' Symphonie fantastique. Which is known to be a sort of drug induced daydream which I thought fit this chapter's flashback sequences quite nicely.

As always thank you so, so much for your comments and kudos. I love reading your questions and theories. Some of you have come pretty close on some big secrets!! You're all just too smart. ;)
Stay tuned! Chapter 12 will be coming soon!! :)
“Shall we go and check out the hot springs?” Magnus asked as Alec pulled the sliding balcony door shut behind them.

“Sure, that sounds fun.” Alec really didn’t know what to expect, he’d never been to a hot springs before, but the thought of being in the water with Magnus definitely piqued his interest.

“I’ll call housekeeping to request an early turndown service and let them know they can send someone to come clear these lunch dishes after we leave,” Magnus said as he reached for the in-room phone. Clearly he was the more experienced one when it came to hotel etiquette.

They both quickly changed into their swimsuits, Alec’s a fairly plain navy blue one with white stitching at the seams. Magnus’ was jet black with gold threads running through the fabric. They donned fluffy hotel robes and complementary bamboo sandals. Magnus grabbed their wallets and phones and tossed them into a wicker tote bag along with another bottle of champagne.

“Don’t you look adorable,” Magnus purred, reaching to swat Alec playfully on his backside.

“I feel like an idiot,” Alec grumbled as he tugged on the straps of his robe. “Can’t I just throw on a t-shirt?”

Magnus smirked knowingly. “You’ll be glad you have that robe once the cool mountain air hits your wet skin.”

Alec rolled his eyes. He’d been swimming in the Atlantic Ocean all his life growing up in New York, he didn’t need some froufrou robe to protect him from the cold. But he went along with it, for Magnus’ sake.

They made their way down to the ground level where the spa was located, then turned toward the rear exit. Just before reaching the doors they were greeted by the overly exuberant Sophie Piper again. Her smile plastered across her face like a pageant contestant.

“Mr. Bane and Mr. Lightwood! So wonderful to see you again! Are you heading out to enjoy the hot springs?”

No, we just like walking around in dumb robes and uncomfortable sandals for the fun of it, Alec thought to himself.

“Yes, we are,” Magnus answered her, elbowing Alec as if he could read his mind.

“Wonderful! Let’s see what we have available… hmm…” She reached down below a gleaming marble counter. “Ah yes, you can take #7. It offers a gorgeous mountain view and has plenty of privacy.” She gave Alec a tiny wink then reached for something again, he could feel his cheeks starting to burn. “Here is your key and some extra towels. If there’s anything else you need just hit the call button by the gate and I’ll send someone right out to assist you.”

Alec sheepishly grabbed the warm towels as Magnus took the key to #7 and tipped her heftily again. Apparently he had cash in his palm at all times, which suddenly made Alec feel very inexperienced.
They made their way across the back lawn, following a stone path that led to a large sign with arrows pointing to the locations of each private hot spring. Alec felt like he was entering a garden labyrinth as they followed a meandering trail toward #7. The path turned and curved several times before they finally reached the gate marked with the correct number.

“Here we are,” Magnus declared. “Number seven!” He turned the key to unlock the wrought iron door and it squeaked loudly as they pushed their way through the small entranceway. Once inside, the gate went clanging back shut behind them. There was another short path of slate tiles that curved around a tall hedge, then hidden behind it was an oasis Alec hadn’t expected to see.

“Whoa, this is cool,” Alec said, taken aback.

There was a gorgeous wooden pergola intertwined with thick layers of vines, covered in tiny purple and white flowers. Underneath it were two overstuffed very comfortable looking lounge chairs which were draped in soft white towels. Just to the left was a large almost Jacuzzi like pool completely surrounded in dark, wet stones. They seemed oddly out of place, like they’d pushed up from the Earth’s core along with the swirling water. They were jagged, porous, and ancient looking. Very different from the smoothly beaten rocks he’d seen around the mountain streams in Aspen.

The water inside was gently whirling and rippling with billowing strips of steam drifting from its surface. Alec was reminded of a cauldron, and the dark stones made the water look black. Behind the pool was a gently flowing waterfall and an absolutely jaw dropping view of the mountains. The scene was like something from a travel brochure.

Magnus was the first to make a move. He kicked off his sandals, pulled off his robe, and tossed it across one of the empty chairs. Then he headed to the water’s edge, dipped his foot in slowly, and glided his toes in a tiny circle through the water. “Perfect,” he happily declared.

Alec followed suit, tossing his robe on top of Magnus’. “Is it hot?”

“Not really, more like a warm bath.”

Alec put one leg in and was pleasantly surprised by the water’s warm but not too hot temperature. It really wasn’t like a hot tub at all, Magnus had been right to call it a bath. He quickly made his way into the water, grabbing Magnus’ hand and tugging him along behind him.

“Wait, I want to get in slowly,” Magnus responded, resisting against Alec’s strength.

“Come here,” Alec said with the sexy growl in his voice, and he pulled Magnus into the water and right up against his chest, their bodies crashing together then slowly sinking into the warmth. Magnus wound his arms around Alec’s neck and his legs around his hips, his weightlessness making it easy to cling to his body.

“Mmm,” Alec moaned approvingly, placing his hands underneath Magnus’ legs, gliding them across his slick, soft flesh with ease. He gripped them gently and lifted Magnus’ buoyant body just an inch higher so he could position him over his lap. They fit together like two perfectly connected puzzle pieces.

“See,” Magnus sighed. “I knew you’d love this.”

Alec drifted in lazy circles, occasionally brushing his toes against the rocky floor to steer them. There wasn’t a person in sight, the thick shrubbery and arcing pergola insuring their complete privacy. The only occasional sound came from the rustling breeze or a bird circling overhead. It was like their own little corner of heaven where nobody could find them. It was the first time in days Alec had felt truly
safe. His mind still plagued by the chilling conversation he’d had last night after the fundraiser. As hard as he tried to forget about it, and enjoy the weekend with Magnus alone, he couldn’t stop picturing Sebastian’s eyes, how they’d shifted from green to black. It made Alec’s hair stand on end.

Anxious to refocus his attention on Magnus, Alec brought one hand up to the water’s surface and cupped it, filling his palm with water. Then he slowly lifted it to Magnus’ shoulder, tipping it gently and watching the water stream down his tan chest.

“You’re so beautiful,” Alec sighed, leaning in to kiss the glistening beads that clung to Magnus’ skin. It was warm and velvety soft against his lips. His hands moved to the small of Magnus’ back pulling him closer to his hips. “Can we stay here forever?”

Magnus raised his hands into the back of Alec’s hair, winding his wet fingers through his thick brown locks. “We could try my darling, but we might turn into prunes.”

“I don’t care,” Alec murmured, dragging his teeth along Magnus’ shoulder, gnawing at his flesh. Magnus squeezed Alec tightly between his thighs, letting his head fall back to expose the full length of his neck. The water soaked his nape and hairline as Alec’s mouth moved across the length of his collarbone, hungrily kissing and sucking his exquisitely defined bone structure. Magnus’ breath began to quicken and he could feel both of them growing hard against one another below the water’s surface.

“We’ll never last in here if you keep this up,” Magnus moaned as Alec’s tongue glided over his exposed Adam’s apple, his lips closing around the moist skin to kiss a trail up to his chin.

“Why don’t you fuck me right here then,” Alec whispered breathlessly against his jawline, his hands now digging into Magnus’ strong back.

“As amazing as that may sound, I don’t recommend it. It’s actually quite painful,” Magnus informed him. “And I wouldn’t want to hurt you.”

Alec glanced over at the chairs. “Then let’s get out of the water.”

“We just got in,” Magnus rebutted as he grasped Alec’s hair into tight fistfuls, digging his nails into his scalp.

“But I want you,” Alec whined impatiently as he finally made his way to Magnus’ lips. “It’s been so long.”

Magnus smiled at hearing the desperation in Alec’s voice. “So long? What about yesterday in the car?”

“That didn’t count.”

Magnus laughed a melodic trill. “Oh really! It didn’t count? And why pray tell would you say that?”

Alec didn’t let their conversation distract him from his course. He moved to Magnus jawline kissing its strong edge, following its curve with his tongue as he worked his way up toward his ear. He playfully nipped at his earlobe then softly spoke against his cheek. “Because I was mad about the car, so I didn’t get to enjoy it.”

Magnus laughed again, but this time it resonated deep, the vibrations from a place low and sensual. “Oh I beg to differ, I think you enjoyed yourself quite thoroughly.”
Alec moved his hands inside the back of Magnus’ waistband and slid them down low, grasping his bare ass firmly. Then he pushed their bodies to the edge of the pool, pinning Magnus against the rocks. The spray from the waterfall was casting tiny droplets of water onto their skin. Alec felt the mist only intensified his yearning as he dug his fingertips into Magnus’ flesh. “I want to enjoy every part of you… now,” Alec said, and Magnus responded with a sharp inhale of breath that dissolved into a high pitched whimper. Alec pressed his mouth into the sound with ravenous intensity. Using his tongue he forced even more delicious moans from Magnus, surging into him with unrelenting passion. He liked having the control, he felt a rush of excitement having unlocked this dominant side of himself. With Magnus’s body braced against the rocks his hands were free to come up out of the water and take hold of Magnus’ wrists. He pressed them back firmly, restraining him, then dove into his neck sucking a mouthful hard enough to leave his mark.

Magnus’ body was powerless as he willingly gave into Alec’s assault. His head was back and his eyes were closed, his breath ragged through his clenched teeth.

Alec didn’t know what had come over him, the taste of Magnus’ wet skin on his lips and tongue had sent him into a frenzy. He wanted to explore and savor every inch of him, he wanted to ravage his body like a feast. It was as if his innermost desires had unleashed and he moved to reclaim Magnus’ mouth again, sinking deep into its warmth. Their fiery kisses equally matched in their thirst to consume one another.

Releasing Magnus’ arms, Alec reached below to take hold of his legs again. With their chests pressed together and their lips still connected, Alec moved their bodies directly under the cascading waterfall. The warm water spilled onto their heads and streamed down their faces, tickling their lips as it flowed off their chins. It was the pinnacle of Alec’s erotic fantasies come to life, like something from movie… something almost too good to be true.

Unable to hold back his overwhelming need, Alec stood up to his full height lifting Magnus out of the water.

“Where are we going,” Magnus sighed against Alec’s lips, already knowing full well exactly where they were headed.

“I guess you’ll have to go wherever I take you,” Alec teased as he ascended the stairs, carrying Magnus toward the closest lounge chair.

Magnus held on tight as Alec straddled the chair between his long legs, then he laid Magnus down gently, hovering just inches above his body for a moment, taking in the sensual sight of his wanton expression. His eyes were sparking like bits of coal set to flame, his lips were parted and his breath was heavy and labored. Alec smiled as he reached to undo the laces at the top of Magnus’ swim trunks.

“Alexander Lightwood, you are wild as hell,” Magnus purred, lifting his hips so his suit could be pulled down.

“Too much for you babe?” Alec said with a sly grin as he reached for Magnus’ wicker tote bag.

“Fuck no, keep going,” Magnus sighed. “I live for you to surprise me.”

It didn’t take long for Alec to strip down his own shorts and make them both ready as Magnus gripped the back of the chair just watching him in awe. Gone was the nervous fumbling of the insecure virgin he’d deflowered two weeks ago, this was a man who knew what he wanted and wasn’t afraid to take it. He worked with expert quickness and Magnus felt a sense of pride as he regarded his handiwork.
They never broke eye contact as Alec slowly lowered himself down upon Magnus, finally getting the deep penetration he craved. He fell into a slow, gentle rhythm, rocking back and forth against the utterly mind-blowing pressure.

“My angel,” Magnus moaned. “God you’re so tight… don’t stop.”

Magnus’ voice was like liquid heat blazing through Alec’s body, igniting him in a fire of ecstasy. His head fell back and he let out a deep moan as he thrust himself downward to take every inch of Magnus inside him. It was delicious pain that blossomed into a blinding euphoria. They moved together in perfect synchronization, their bodies singing to one another like a brilliantly composed duet.

Grinding and thrusting again and again, their mutual rapture finally hitting its crescendo.

Alec collapsed onto Magnus’ heaving chest, breathless and completely satiated. They held each other through the trembling quakes until they could both regain their senses. The cool mountain air was chilling their wet skin and Alec’s body shuttered.

“I told you it was cold,” Magnus cooed against Alec’s ear, his lips stretching into a smile.

Alec didn’t want to admit he was right but his shivering wet body betrayed him. He decided the best solution was to rush back into the warm water. So he hopped up, ran to the pool, and jumped in, sending a flood of water sloshing over the edges and up onto Magnus’ legs. Rising from the water he pushed his fingers through his wet hair then down to wipe his face. “Come on in babe, the water’s perfect,” he proclaimed devilishly as he used his long arms to fling sheets of water up onto Magnus, drenching him and the chair completely.

Magnus rolled his eyes and stood up reluctantly. “Only you Alexander could go from being the god of sex to a bratty kid in 2.2 seconds!”

Magnus jumped into the pool and Alec immediately grabbed his naked body into a firm embrace, sealing them together. His crooked boyish grin and sparkling eyes showing just how truly happy he was in this purely sublime moment.

“You love me,” Alec teased, his eyes crinkling in that signature way that always made Magnus’ heart skip a beat.

“More than you’ll ever know,” Magnus replied, kissing him once more under the beautiful Colorado sun.

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Sunday, May 12, 1996

Magnus peered out from the backseat, through the heavily tinted window of Valentine Morgenstern’s black stretch limousine, as Ragnor passed between the inwardly swinging doors of an electronic...
entrance gate. The elaborate iron bars were ornamented with large scrolling M’s made of gold and Magnus felt his heart give a nervous flutter. They made a sharp turn down a private lane lined with palm trees and beautiful desert flowers. At first Magnus only saw a blazing reflection of orange and red up ahead until he realized it was actually the sunset reflecting off of a house that appeared to be made entirely of glass. The light was radiating off the structure like a beacon. It was blindingly brilliant and he thought to himself he’d never seen anything so magnificent in all of his worldwide travels.

“It’s quite something isn’t it?” Ragnor said from the front seat.

“It’s amazing,” Magnus sighed, feeling completely awestruck.

“Mr. Morgenstern had it designed by the famous architect Frank Gehry. Just wait until you see the inside.”

The car pulled up to the front entrance and two men quickly ran out. One to open Magnus’ door, the other to open the trunk. It was a chaotic flurry of activity as he was quickly ushered up to the house, Ragnor Fell leading the way, the other men just behind him. As the door opened Magnus stepped over the threshold into an impressive grand foyer. The glass walls gave the illusion you were still outdoors, but the mosaic tile floors underneath confirmed this was actual living space. As he gazed up to the ceiling he could see a massive chandelier which appeared to be made of broken shards of sea glass, ranging in color from pale blue to bright green. When his eyes drifted back down he caught sight of an enormous living room just off to the right with a breathtaking panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean. It was exactly what he imagined the home of a California billionaire to look like, but it still shocked him none the less.

Ragnor spoke quietly to the man holding Magnus’ suitcase, apparently directing him to where he should take it. The other man darted from sight leaving Magnus and Ragnor alone in the large airy space.

“Thomas has gone to alert Mr. Morgenstern that we are here. He’s no doubt buried in work and unaware we’ve arrived.”

Magnus nodded and continued soaking in the immensity of everything all around him. He felt his heart rate increase and his palms begin to sweat at the mention of his benefactor’s impending arrival. What would he look like? Would he be friendly? Should Magnus shake his hand? Or bow? Or just fall to his knees with gratitude? The more time he had to think about what his reaction should be the more nervous he became. Ragnor must have picked up on his distress because he was smiling with an exorbitant amount of encouragement.

“Ah, here he comes now,” Ragnor said, looking off to his left.

Magnus twisted his head but the hall was blocked from his view, he couldn’t see who was coming although he could hear his heavy footsteps smacking against the tiles.

“Ragnor my friend who have you brought with you!” An overly cheerful voice boomed from the hallway.

Magnus felt all of his bones turn to jelly as his mysterious benefactor rounded the corner of the hall and into the foyer, a warm welcoming smile beaming from his face.

“Magnus Bane! At last we meet!”

Magnus’ body stiffened as the tall, assuming man with piercing eyes and a strong chin walked
toward him with his arms outstretched. Magnus didn’t dare move for fear he might fall over. Mr. Morgenstern took hold of one of his limp arms and shook it vigorously, his jubilant glee quite unexpected.

“I’m Valentine Morgenstern, but please, call me Val. All my close friends do. I’ve been waiting a long time for this moment,” he said to Magnus, his eyes wide and twinkling. “A very long time.” Valentine swept Magnus into a tight hug, lifting him off of his feet slightly and stealing the breath from his lungs.

Magnus was speechless. He hadn’t been prepared for this type of reception at all. He’d expected someone businesslike, a firm handshake and maybe a pat on the back. Once Valentine’s hulking arms finally released him he stood dazed for a moment, frantically trying to find the words to return his greeting.

“Hello sir,” Magnus managed to squeak out. There was no way in hell he was calling this man Val. That was one thing he knew for sure.

“Sir? Pah! Look at the manners they’ve taught him back East, Ragnor! You can’t get that kind of formal training out here. Damn kids are too over privileged and snobby!”

Magnus was taken aback by his boisterous nature, he was loud and overbearing, obviously a person who always took command of a room. Magnus thought of a circus ringmaster. Standing under a brightly lit tent holding a giant megaphone. All he needed now was a red coat and a top hat.

“May I call you Magnus?” he bellowed, his voice echoing against the glass walls.

“Of course,” Magnus responded timidly, his voice not even half its usual volume.

Valentine eyed him suspiciously, turning his head as if he were trying to sort out something. “What did you do to him Ragnor? Frighten him with your old war stories?”

Ragnor rushed to Magnus’ side defensively. “I believe young master Bane is quite exhausted from his journey, and a bit jet lagged as well.”

“Ah, I see,” Valentine said, accepting this excuse and clapping his hands together loudly. “Well then my dear boy, you need an early night!”

Magnus’ eyes flashed to Ragnor looking for guidance on what to say.

Valentine followed his gaze, picking up on the comfortability Magnus seemed to have with his driver. “Ragnor, alert the staff the dinner tonight is to be rescheduled for later in the week. Tell chef to prepare a tray for Magnus and send it up to his room instead.”

Magnus felt a surge of panic finally break him from his frozen state. “I’m ok, really, you don’t have to do that.”

“Nonsense,” Valentine dismissed him. “You look like you’re about keel over! The last thing you need is a bunch of boring old men fawning all over you. It’s just my close circle of friends. They can wait.”

Magnus was grateful but hoped Valentine wasn’t just saying this to be polite. He really didn’t want to disrupt the plans that had been made for his benefit, and the last thing he wanted to do was make anyone angry.

“Ragnor will see you to your room now. You’ll be here in the main wing, with the family,” Valentine
boasted. "After all you are my most honored guest. I want you to feel right at home.”

Magnus stood silently frozen again. Unable to process anything he was hearing. Ragnor patted him on the side of the arm as if to wake him from his stupor. “This way my boy, follow me.”

“I look forward to seeing you at breakfast in the morning,” Valentine said, more like a demand than a wish. “We’ve got a busy day and you’ll need all your strength!”

Magnus nodded and Valentine smiled back at him, apparently happy to have his confirmation. Ragnor walked forward and led the way up a wide and impressive staircase leading to the second floor. Magnus, still dumbstruck by the encounter, followed silently behind him leaving Valentine standing in the foyer watching them. He could feel his eyes on his back as he made his way up the stairs.

“Here we are, third door on the left, this will be your room,” Ragnor declared as he pressed down the handle.

The door swung wide to reveal a large ultra-modern bedroom with pale oak flooring and a wall of floor to ceiling windows that must have been at least 15 feet high. To the left there was a heavenly looking bed of gray and white blankets piled high with fluffy pillows. The room was painted a sort of gunmetal blue that made it feel as if you were high in the clouds, or maybe on a mountain top. Out the window Magnus could see the gorgeous sunset dipping low into the ocean’s horizon. The orange and yellow hues melting into the black water. It was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen.

Ragnor was watching for his reaction and Magnus knew he needed to speak. “This is great, thanks… so much.” It was all he could muster.

“Mr. Morgenstern has been more than anxious for your arrival. I think he’s had this room redone ten times in the last two months. He wanted it to be just perfect.”

Magnus panned around the room and saw his suitcase and violin had already been brought up. There was a desk, a small table, and a music stand and chair in the corner by the window.

“You can practice as much as you’d like in here, the walls have been completely sound proofed. Nobody in the house will hear you or be disturbed. Mr. Morgenstern wanted to ensure you’d have freedom to keep your scheduled practice time.”

Magnus swallowed hard, feeling his throat was closing together from a mixture of nerves and fear. ‘Nobody to hear me scream’ he thought to himself.

“The door on the left leads to your ensuite. Just ignore this door on the right, it’s to an adjoining room but it’s been locked from both sides to ensure your privacy.”

Magnus looked at the two doors and noticed they seemed to be made from some insanely expensive reclaimed wood that probably cost more than a year’s worth of tuition. The amount of Valentine’s fortune was hard to fathom, this house alone was surely in the 10’s of millions. Suddenly his tuition seemed like a tiny drop of water in a vast sea of endless money. It was more than intimidating.
“This panel of buttons here on the nightstand puts everything right at your fingertips,” Ragnor continued with the tour of his room. “The large button on the left will open and close the curtains, the smaller buttons on the right alert various members of the staff. The one with the plate and fork is the kitchen staff, the one with the little broom is the cleaning staff, and the last one on the end, with the tiny car, that’s me. I’m one click away if there’s anywhere you’d like to go.”

Magnus nodded, understanding what he’d heard but still numb to the grandeur of it all.

“Well, I guess I’ll leave you to it then,” Ragnor said, turning toward the door.

“Wait!” Magnus called out, a bit more loudly than he’d intended.

“Yes, is there something you need?”

“Don’t go… I mean… can you stay for a bit?” Magnus felt a strong sense of fear at the thought of Ragnor leaving him here in this room alone.

“Well I really should get back to work.”

“Please, just a few minutes?” Magnus pulled out his best puppy dog look.

“Oh alright. Just a few minutes,” Ragnor agreed. “There's really no need to feel uncomfortable. I know he’s a lot to take in at first, his charismatic disposition can be a bit unsettling if you aren’t used to it.”

Magnus really liked Ragnor. He said everything he was thinking he wanted to say without having to actually say it. There was something about his personality, or maybe it was the comfort of his familiar voice. A voice that reminded him of home, and of his mother. He hadn’t thought of her much the last few years, he’d tried to push the pain away and focus on his studies. But the uncertainty of his future now that he was no longer a student made him miss her more than ever. He longed for her guidance and great advice. She’d always been the smartest person he’d ever known, and her love for him had made him who he was today. Now looking at Ragnor, Magnus felt compelled to tell the truth. His mother had always told him the truth was always the best course in life, she knew these wisdoms and tried to pass them down to him. So he decided to be honest and tell Ragnor exactly what was on his mind. He took a deep breath.

“I don’t know why I’m here Ragnor?” Magnus admitted, the relief of speaking the words aloud already a comfort to him.

“Well, Mr. Morgenstern is a big fan of your talent and…”

“That’s bullshit and you know it,” Magnus interrupted him.

Ragnor’s face reflected back what Magnus already knew in his heart. There was much more going on here than had yet been brought to light. Magnus could see a darkness flicker behind Ragnor’s eyes, he knew something.

“Everything is going to be alright,” Ragnor calmly spoke. “You’re tired and you need some rest.”

Just then one of the men who’d met them at the car, Thomas, came bursting through the doorway with a large tray. “Your dinner Master Bane!”

Magnus exhaled deeply, he was getting tired of being referred to as Master Bane. It made him feel weird. “Please, can you tell the staff to call me Magnus?”
“Of course sir,” Thomas said with a polite smile, but Magnus knew there was zero chance that was going to happen. They were obviously on orders from Valentine on how to address him.

Thomas arranged the various dishes and bowls on a small table near the bed. “When you’re finished sir please leave the tray outside and someone will come and fetch it straight away.”

Thomas bowed deeply then quickly made his way out of the room. Ragnor leaned in to investigate the meal.

“Ah, chef has really outdone himself, this is quite a feast!”

Magnus had already lost his appetite, he felt like he had a brick in his stomach. Ragnor could see the pained and desperate look in Magnus’ eyes, his face was full of sympathy. “I really should get back to work now, eat something, you’ll feel better.”

Magnus stepped away from the door, clearing a path for Ragnor to exit. He didn’t want him to go, but knew he couldn’t hold him any longer. Ragnor started to walk right past him then abruptly stopped to catch Magnus by the arm and lean in close against his ear.

“Try to eat something if you can... otherwise the chef will be looking for a new job by morning,” Ragnor said at a whisper, then let go of his arm and continued out the door, closing it behind him.

Magnus felt a chill run over his flesh as he was left standing in the now empty room, the last sliver of sunset fading at the horizon casting his room into darkness. He could hear Catarina’s voice inside his head just as plainly as if she were standing right next to him. He remembered her exact words...

“He’s a very wealthy and very powerful man Magnus, not someone who has gotten to where he is without stepping on a few backs along the way.”

“Just please promise me you’ll be careful. And if for one moment you feel uncomfortable or pressured in any way I want you to call me. Please?”

Was he uncomfortable? Yes. Was he being pressured? Well if you call being forced to eat dinner pressure, then yes to that too. He eyed the phone on the bedside table. He could phone Catarina right now and tell her he was coming back, that she’d been right all along and he was sorry. He could go back to Philly, far away from this too perfect house with its too perfect owner whose smile somehow made Magnus feel like he needed to run as fast as he could. Magnus crossed the dark room, flipped on the bedside lamp, and picked up the phone. His fingers poised over the buttons ready to dial. But before he could begin there was a strange sort of scratching at his door. Magnus put the phone back down and walked closer.

*Scrrrrape* *Scrrrratch*

Something was rubbing and scraping against the bottom of his door. Magnus knelt down and leaned in close, a shadow was moving underneath the crack. Did they have a pet? A dog perhaps? Whatever it was it had gone from scraping to now smacking the door roughly.
Magnus saw the doorknob turning and he braced himself for whatever was about to enter. He
looked for something to grab as a weapon and all he could reach was an empty vase from atop the
chest of drawers. He held it up over his head, ready to swing! The door slowly creaked open to
reveal a much unexpected surprise. Standing there in the hallway, with a curiously vacant
expression, was a little boy. He couldn’t have been more than 3 or 4 years old, his face as round as
a cherub and his hair as white as snow.

“Oh! Hello there!” Magnus responded, completely in shock but very glad he wasn’t about to be
pounced by a wild dog. He relaxed and set the vase back down, hoping he hadn’t frightened the
child.

The boy just stood there silently, his hand clutching tight to a small toy truck.

“Ah, so that’s what was scraping against my door,” Magnus said, realizing the boy must have been
driving his truck across the walls and doors as he made his way down the hallway. “I thought it was
a monster!”

The boy smiled and looked down at his truck, no doubt pleased he could have scared someone so
much bigger and older than he was. He raised it toward Magnus proudly.

“That’s a very nice truck you have there, I love the tires,” Magnus said sweetly, wondering who this
boy could be.

“Oh my goodness, there you are!” A woman cried out from the hallway. “Master Bane I am so very
sorry he disturbed you. Sometimes he just slips away from me, and he’s gone before I even know it!
He’s as cunning as a fox this one is!”

“Don’t be sorry, he didn’t bother me at all,” Magnus replied as he bent down to the boy’s eye level.
“My name’s Magnus, what’s your name?”

“This is Sebastian, he’s Mr. Morgenstern’s son. I’m afraid he doesn’t speak, but he can sure make a
racket when he’s playing with these trucks. I apologize again for the rude interruption.”

“Really it’s no problem, and please call me Magnus. Are you Mrs. Morgenstern?” Magnus asked
curiously.

“Goodness no, my name is Iris, I’m the nanny.”

“Oh, I see,” Magnus said as he pondered his unexpected visitor. She was unusually tall for a
woman, and her hair was a bright shade of red that he guessed was probably dyed. Her face was
kind but had a harshness too. It reminded him of a stern governess. He imagined she was very good
at what she did. “I’m sorry I wasn’t aware Mr. Morgenstern had any children.”

Iris smiled. “Ah well, he’s a very private man when it comes to his family. But he’s fierce in his
love.”

Sebastian dropped down to his knees and started running the truck around in circles on Magnus’
bedroom floor, scooting further and further inside.
“He’s such a handful, sometimes I feel like there are more than one of him! Let me take him out and leave you in peace.” Iris bent to scoop the boy up from the floor.

“It’s quite alright,” Magnus reassured her. “He can stay, it’s no bother really.”

Iris stood back up. “Well if you insist, then I’ll leave you two to get acquainted. But I’m just down the hall if he becomes too much to handle.”

“I think we’ll be just fine,” Magnus declared as he watched Sebastian drive his little truck up the table leg and across to the chair. Such a simple way to be entertained, Magnus was fascinated.

Iris walked away and Magnus watched Sebastian stand back up on his feet and begin to explore the room. His eyes immediately locked on the table of food.

“Are you hungry?” Magnus asked him. Sebastian looked at him intently, but didn’t respond.

“You can help me eat my dinner if you’d like, there’s chocolate cake.”

The boy’s eyes sparkled at the mention of cake and Magnus pushed the small plate to the edge of the table where Sebastian could reach it. He scooted up into the chair, picked up a fork, and dove into it excitedly. Soon his face was covered with chocolate frosting and Magnus had to suppress a laugh.

“I see you like chocolate, I do as well.”

The boy stopped midway to his mouth with the fork and turned it around to offer Magnus a bite.

“No thanks, I want you to eat it. Besides I’m not really hungry anyway,” Magnus assured him, feeling relieved someone could keep the chef from being fired.

Sebastian smiled and went back to joyfully eating the cake, bouncing happily in the chair, swinging his legs back and forth. He continued eating until he’d devoured every last bite. By the time it was gone he was wearing more of the dessert than actually went into his mouth. He was completely adorable, and Magnus couldn’t deny it warmed his heart. Sebastian’s angelic features and quiet presence somehow managed to calm him from his earlier panicked state. Truly how bad could Valentine Morgenstern be if he was a loving father with such a sweet little boy? He’d been nothing but kind and welcoming to Magnus so far, opening up his home and treating him like family. It seemed silly now that he’d been so unnerved he was ready to leave. He felt like a ridiculous coward.

Sebastian eyed the basket of rolls next and Magnus moved them over closer to him.

“Here you go, help yourself!”

Sebastian gleefully took a roll.

“Did you like chocolate, I do as well.”

The boy didn’t answer but seemed to be listening with interest.

“Here you go, help yourself!”

Sebastian gleefully took a roll.

“This is an amazing house you live in,” Magnus said, looking all around the room. “I bet you have lots of toys?”

The boy didn’t answer but seemed to be listening with interest.

“I was living at a school before I came here, but I use to live in a house when I was your age. Back in London. It wasn’t as nice as this but I use to love to play with cars and trucks too,” Magnus said as he stared at the boy, watching him eat. He’d really never seen a child with such striking features. His skin was as white and smooth as porcelain, it made him look like a living doll. He wondered why the boy didn’t talk. Was he just a late bloomer? Or had something happened to him? Maybe a
birth defect? He looked perfectly healthy. Magnus thought of music and had an idea.

“I play the violin, do you like music?”

Sebastian nodded and Magnus felt a surge of energy having drawn out an actual response from him. He stood up and walked over to his violin case, flipped open the lid and took out his instrument.

The boy’s eyes boggled.

“Ever seen one before?” Magnus asked as he put the instrument under his chin and held the bow in front of him.

Sebastian shook his head no.

“This is my violin, and this is the bow. It glides over the strings like this.” Magnus placed the bow to the strings and pulled it across producing a single, melodic note.

The boys’ face lit up like a Christmas tree.

“You like it?” Magnus played another riff and Sebastian was enraptured. His little eyes bulging and his mouth hanging slack. Magnus continued, feeling a rush of pride seeing the boy’s excitement. He’d never spent any time around children, he’d always been the youngest at Curtis and he’d never attended school back in London. As he thought back through his memory this was actually the first child he’d really ever come into direct contact with in his life. Suddenly he imagined what it must feel like to be a teacher, and he immediately thought of Catarina.

"Would you like to hear a song?"

Sebastian vigorously shook his head yes.

One of the first solo performances Magnus had ever given at Curtis was a small recital Catarina had thrown together for a visiting faculty member. He’d played Bach’s Air on the G String and it had made everyone cry. He decided he’d play it now, and from the first note Sebastian’s eyes were glazed over. He didn’t even blink. The melody filled the bedroom with sound that reverberated off the glass. It spun through the air weaving into a tapestry of beautiful music which enveloped them both for five blissful minutes of uninterrupted splendor.

After Magnus finished the piece he lowered his bow and smiled at Sebastian's shocked little face. Looking at his watch he began to worry he was keeping him up past his bedtime. “I think we’d better stop for tonight. I don’t want to get into trouble for keeping you awake or giving you food.”

The boy suddenly dropped a half-eaten roll, his eyes blown wide with shock.

“Oh don’t worry,” Magnus reassured him. “I won’t tell if you won’t. It’ll be our little secret.”

Sebastian's face softened and he picked the roll back up from the table. He took one more bite then looked directly into Magnus’ eyes, is head cocking to one side as if contemplating something. For a moment Magnus saw a little glimpse of Valentine in this small mannerism. It was the same way he'd looked at him when he had first arrived, and the same look now was a bit eerie coming from such a small child.

“Father has secrets too,” Sebastian spoke, his face deadpan.

Magnus was shocked to hear him speak, the uncanny tone of his voice causing the hair to stand up on his arms. It was much more articulate and intelligent than what he'd expect from someone his
age. Not to mention what he said was incredibly spooky and odd. The nanny Iris had said he didn’t
talk, Magnus assumed that meant he couldn’t talk at all, but clearly that wasn’t the case. Maybe
she’d meant to say he didn’t like to talk often, or that he was shy. Magnus felt he’d definitely won
some brownie points with the cake and the music. It must have made him feel more at ease.

“What kind of secrets?” Magnus asked, his curiosity at an all-time high.

“Alright young man!” Iris’ voice rang out as she came rushing back into the room. “Your bath is
ready and I think you’ve bothered this nice boy long enough!”

Sebastian scooted out of the chair, picked his truck up off the floor and scurried out the door without
question.

“I’m sorry if he interrupted your dinner,” Iris apologized again.

“No it was fine, I wasn’t very hungry anyway. We had fun getting to know each other.”

“Well that’s wonderful,” Iris smiled. "And don’t take it personally that he doesn’t communicate, I’ve
been here almost a year and he’s never spoken a single word to me. He’s a sweet boy, but he’s
never been quite the same since his mother died.”

Magnus felt the blood in his veins turn to ice water. He was completely and utterly flabbergasted. He
tried as hard as he could to keep his jaw from falling on the floor from shock. "Oh, th-that OK,” he
managed to reply. His mind was racing but he just didn’t know what to think. The boy had spoken to
him, his voice just as pure and clear as a ringing bell. Had he dreamt it? No, he knew what he’d
heard. Sebastian had spoken to him, there was no doubt. And what he’d said was an even bigger
mystery.

“I hope you’ll have a pleasant stay here. Mr. Morgenstern is so thrilled to have you with us.” Iris
nodded and bent down in a small curtsy, then turned and walked away.

Magnus was left completely shook. He sunk back down into the chair and glanced over at the boy’s
half eaten roll.

“What the hell is going on here?”

Chapter End Notes

Good news and bad news!

First, the bad news, I had to leave you guys on this cliffhanger ending when you're
probably about ready to strangle me. SORRY!! :) But I wanted you to have a chance to
ponder what the heck is going on. Little Sebastian is cute but creepy and Magnus is not
going to freaking believe the secret that's about to be exposed. Not in his wildest,
craziest dreams! Oh boy, it's a doozy!
The good news, I’ve actually already written the next chapter, so you won’t have to wait long to find out what’s coming. I’m excited to get this first surprise out of the way so we can move to the really good part of the story. A hint... it will be a 4th of July none of them will ever forget. *running to hide now* :)

I updated the playlist and I’ve added more pics to the story’s IG. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7

Thank you so much for your comments and kudos! I love answering your questions and hearing your theories. Also a big thanks to those of you who’ve shared this fic on your twitter and tumblr recommendations. It really helps bring more readers, which I appreciate so much. :)
The Sorcerer’s Apprentice

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After a full day spent outside in the sun Alec’s skin was blazing hot and his body was chilled and tingling. He knew it was a sunburn. Magnus had badgered him several times during the day to reapply sunscreen, but he’d neglected to. The cool mountain air had given him a false sense of security, but now as he examined himself in the foggy bathroom mirror he looked like he’d spent the day lying at the beach. He should have known better, especially at this high altitude. As he carefully buttoned up his loosest and softest white cotton shirt he skipped the top two buttons so the fabric wouldn’t rub against his skin. He didn’t want to hear the “I told you so’s” all during dinner but the more time he spent in the bathroom getting ready the redder his face appeared. He didn’t dare shave, for fear it might aggravate the burn. So he left the light stubble and hoped it might mask the redness a bit. His hair was still slightly damp as he carefully styled it with his long fingers. Alec had always been a no-fuss type of guy when it came to his looks, but ever since he’d met Magnus he had tried to step up his game a bit. He’d started using high-end body and hair products, which surprisingly he enjoyed. He’d never noticed he had dry skin but Magnus’ sea salt scrub and lemongrass body butter were quickly becoming staples in his routine. He liked the way they smelled, especially because it felt like bringing a bit of Magnus along with him all day. By the time he was finished getting dressed he looked like a lobster. There was no hiding this burn. Alec exited the bathroom and saw Magnus sitting at the small table by the bed touching up his nails. “So where are we off to for dinner?” he asked, hoping to keep the conversation away from his glaring stupidity.

“Just downstairs, I’ve spoken to the chef and he’s making something special just for us,” Magnus said as he carefully folded his hand over to blow gently across the wet polish.

Of course he is, Alec thought to himself. Was there even a doubt dinner would be something over the top and extravagant. Alec just hoped he hadn’t closed down the entire restaurant for the two of them.

Magnus looked up, finally noticing the state Alec was in. “Oh my,” he gasped, his eyes blown wide. “That can’t possibly feel good.”

“I’m OK,” Alec grumbled, looking down at his feet, feeling a bit embarrassed. One good thing about the sunburn though, no visible blushing.

“We need to get some aloe on that burn, it looks horrible,” Magnus suggested as he stood up and walked toward Alec with a look of pity.

“I’m fine, it’s not as bad as it looks.”

“Hmmmm, well, if you’re sure. But we can always just strip you down and order room service. I’ll get naked too, as a sign of solidarity,” Magnus teased with a playful wink, grabbing the waist of his pants like he was going to take them off.

Alec rolled his eyes, but even that small movement painfully pulled at his stinging skin. “Tempting, but I think that might actually turn out to be more torturous than keeping my clothes on. Plus I’m starving.”

“Fine, have it your way,” Magnus pouted, pushing out his bottom lip with disappointment. “But after dinner it’s straight back up here for a rub down.”
Normally the thought of Magnus’ hands all over his body would have been a turn on, but now Alec just wanted to avoid any and all human contact until he recovered. As he stood there face to face with Magnus he was finally able to take in the full splendor of his stunning outfit. He was wearing white linen pants with a jet black silk shirt. The buttons were undone to showcase a glittering silver chain laying against his tawny brown skin. His nails were a freshly painted glossy black and Alec felt his heart give a flutter. He was so breathtaking, with his liquid black eyes lined in glittery charcoal and his luscious dark hair that Alec longed to run his fingers through, he couldn’t help but smile.

“What?” Magnus purred, noticing Alec was drinking him in and loving every minute of it.

“You look amazing,” Alec admitted bashfully as he flashed his famous crooked little grin.

“This old thing?” Magnus said as he did a little spin. He knew he looked good but he always relished a compliment. “Now you won’t give me such a hard time about my excessive packing. It takes work to be this fabulous!”

Alec chuckled but didn’t have the heart to tell him that his favorite was his sleepy, barefaced, tousled hair, first thing in the morning look. Especially when he was wrapped in his arms. The thought of this made his chest ache and he suddenly hoped dinner would be over quickly.

The two men made their way to the sixth floor of the lodge which was home to a quiet little restaurant overlooking the beautiful canyon. There was a large stone fireplace separating the bar from the dining room and the red and orange glow of sunset was bathing the polished wood floors and exposed wood beams in a warm, romantic light. Magnus gave his name to the hostess and she escorted them to a reserved table all the way back in the furthest corner by the window. It offered privacy and the perfect view. Alec lowered himself gingerly into his seat trying to hide the fact that his body was in excruciating pain. Magnus ordered wine, not appearing to notice Alec wincing through his gritted teeth.

“I meant to tell you this morning,” Magnus said, snapping his napkin open with a flourish. “I had a text from Jia late last night. She said the fundraiser was a huge success. They raised more money in that single event than they have ever raised in festival history! I told her the quartet will happily take all the credit.” Magnus’ face was beaming proudly but Alec couldn’t muster a smile. His mind was instantly flooded with memories of the previous night, realizing he hadn’t told Magnus anything about what had happened. Alec decided he was going to get as drunk as possible tonight in hopes he might numb himself… physically and emotionally.

The sommelier returned with their chosen wine in a spectacular looking decanter and Magnus offered up a toast to Alec’s stellar performance. They clinked glasses but Alec took no happiness in the news. As much as he hated to put a damper on what had been a perfect day, he didn’t want to keep the events that plagued his mind a secret. He felt there were already too many secrets between them and Alec had always prided himself on being a straightforward and honest person. He knew Magnus needed to hear the truth.

“There’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you,” Alec said, choosing his words carefully as he looked down at his empty dinner plate.

“Oh, I don’t like the sound of this,” Magnus responded, setting his wine glass back down on the
Alec fidgeted nervously with his fork, his eyes still averted. “Something happened last night… at the fundraiser.”

Magnus shifted uncomfortably in his seat and Alec wondered if he already knew what was coming. Or if he didn’t know, maybe he suspected.

“Believe me, I debated telling you any of this at all, especially after what happened in the car this morning. But I want to be honest with you and I feel you need to know.” Alec was trying not to let himself get too upset, but he was already feeling the sting of Sebastian’s words echoing in his mind.

“Alright,” Magnus said, pausing to smooth the napkin across his lap. “Then tell me.”

Alec took a deep cleansing breath and exhaled slowly. He still couldn’t look Magnus in the eye, so he focused on the small flickering candle that was positioned in front of his plate. It was a single votive inside a short, red glass. It cast a bloody glow across the table and Alec felt it was very fitting for what was no doubt about to be a fight.

“He threatened me,” Alec blurted out, managing to keep his voice down but still with an edge of animosity.

“Who?” Magnus asked with a shocked expression.

“Who do you think?” Alec snapped back, not wanting to play cat and mouse.

“Oh,” Magnus replied, obviously hoping for one brief moment maybe it could have been someone else.

Alec leaned in, noticing the eyes of a few dining room patrons were shifting in their direction. “And it wasn’t just the fact that he threatened me Magnus, but the way he said it. Honestly, I was afraid.”

“Alexander please don’t,” Magnus stretched his arm across the table in an attempt to make contact, but Alec jerked his hand away. “Listen, I know he has issues but…”

“But what?” Alec interrupted. “But he wouldn’t hurt anyone? But he’s all bark and no bite? Is that what you really believe? Or do you think I’d just make all of this up?”

“No… of course I don’t think that,” Magnus said softly, looking hurt by Alec’s swift move away from him.

“Then why won’t you believe me?”

“I do believe you, of course I do.”

Alec leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms in front of his chest. “You believe me but you don’t think he’ll actually do anything? So I should just what? Shut the fuck up about it?” Alec fumed. He was unable to hold back his anger.

“No, I’m glad you told me.” Magnus’ eyes were full of pity and a genuine sincerity. “I’ll have a talk with him, I promise. Just as soon as we get back to town.”

Alec’s back stiffened as his blood began to boil. He didn’t want to be placated like a child. He was tired of these excuses. “You can’t reason with someone who is pure evil Magnus! Don’t you see that? Or are you just going to wait around until he actually snaps before you agree to cut ties with table with a guarded look of apprehension.
“Alexander, please don’t ask me to do that.”

“Why? He means more to you than me?”

“Nothing means more to me than you.”

Alec lunged over the table putting his face right in front of Magnus’. “He called me a whore Magnus! He said I’m no different than all the others you’ve been with! That you’ll be finished with me soon! Is that the truth? I mean if he knows you so well and means so much to you then maybe I’m just kidding myself here!”

Magnus blinked rapidly and Alec thought he saw tears forming in the corners of his eyes. He fought back his emotions and remained calm in the face of Alec’s rage. “He’s just trying to get under your skin, I told you, he’s jealous.”

“I’m not buying it. This goes way beyond some stupid competition, or even the quartet. This is personal!” Alec was livid, he really didn’t know how Magnus could turn a blind eye to what was obviously going on here. He knew he couldn’t pretend to be OK with it anymore. Maybe it was his sunburn that was firing up his temper but there would be no going back from this night. He was going to get his answers.

Magnus looked down at his lap, shaking his head back and forth slowly like he was contemplating something. Alec felt like everything he said just bounced off Magnus’ impenetrable defenses. That he didn’t listen or believe there was any real danger. He didn’t know how to get through to him.

“I can’t help but think…” Alec felt his chest constrict around the words he was trying to say. He knew there was only one explanation for this. One reason that could explain it all. But the thought of putting it into words made bile run up the back of his throat. He balled his fists under the table in an attempt to control his fury. He could feel the edges of his fingernails cutting into the soft flesh of his palm as he squeezed as hard as he could. “I mean, what I really need to know is…”

Did you and he…

Did you two…

Did you sleep with him?”

“God no!” Magnus erupted. “No Alec! It’s not like that.”

Alec wanted to believe him, his shocked reaction was genuine. But what other explanation could there be? “This connection you two have isn’t a normal student and teacher relationship is it?” Alec asked, his voice quavering.

“No, it isn’t.”

“So obviously there’s something you’re still not telling me!”

Magnus stared across the table with a pained expression. “I’ve always been the one to protect him, and he’s scared of losing me to you. He sees how much time we are spending together, he sees the changes in me. He knows you’re different from anyone else I’ve ever been with.” Magnus leaned over the table, putting himself as close to Alec as he could. “He knows I’m head over heels in love with you!”
“Why is it any of his business?” Alec fired back. Not swayed from his course by confessions of love. It still didn’t add up. “Is he in love with you? Is that it?”

“It’s complicated,” Magnus murmured, his body crumpling in on itself with defeat.

“Bullshit! I’m so fucking tired of you saying it’s complicated! You’re the one who’s making this complicated by lying!” Alec scooted his chair away from the table, the legs loudly scraping against the wooden floor. “If you can’t tell me the truth I swear to God I’m walking out of here right now and it’s over! Do you understand? I’m going to leave you!”

Magnus eyes were glistening. “Please don’t…”

“Then tell me!” Alec pleaded. “Whatever this is I want to know right now!”

Magnus buried his face in his hands, he’d been pushed to his breaking point. But Alec didn’t care anymore, he wanted the truth no matter how painful it would be. He held his breath and silently waited for the response.

“He’s not just my student.”

And there it was. Finally something that made sense. Alec’s body felt like it had suddenly dropped through a hole in the ice, submerging him in crippling frigid waters. The fear gripped his chest, pushing against his lungs, stealing away his breath. He couldn’t move and he couldn’t speak. He just sat there looking at Magnus’ face, waiting for the death blow. Whatever was about to come out next he knew it was going to be devastating news. As badly as he wanted the truth for a moment he almost wished he hadn’t forced it to the surface. Maybe ignorance would have been bliss? But it was too late now. He braced himself for what was coming as Magnus slowly raised his head revealing his shimmering dark eyes were full of emotion and pain.

Alec waited…

Saturday, May 18, 1996

Sebastian tagged along right at Magnus’ heels for the remainder of the week. When he was practicing in his room the boy would lay on his stomach across the foot of Magnus’ bed, his ankles crossed in the air with his chin held up by two chubby little wrists, quietly hanging on every note. It didn’t matter how long Magnus played, he’d lay there and listen for hours and never move a muscle. When Magnus would go out to the various dinners and concerts Valentine had him scheduled to attend, Sebastian would stand by the front door waiting for him to come back. Iris would apologize profusely and tell them she’d tried everything to tear him away. But he absolutely refused to stay in
his bedroom, or in any other room of the house, only right by the door watching and waiting. He was like Magnus’ miniature blonde shadow. Most nights they’d get home very late and Sebastian would be curled up asleep against the back of the door surrounded by toy trucks and cars, still waiting. It was as if he were physically drawn to Magnus like a magnet. Valentine seemed annoyed by the whole thing. He was constantly shooing him away and demanding Iris come and drag him off. Magnus didn’t like it, he felt the boy wasn’t hurting anything by lingering and he didn’t understand why Valentine was so anxious to cast him out.

Now that it was the end of Magnus’ stay, he was due to leave on an early flight tomorrow morning. He actually felt excited to go back to Philadelphia. He missed Catarina and he’d had enough hobnobbing with celebrities and rich people to last him quite a while. Valentine had been dropping hints every chance he got, telling Magnus how much he would love living in California, about all the connections he had and all the things he could do to elevate his career. He’d taken him to meet a half dozen famous violinists who lived in the area, as well as symphony conductors offering immediate employment, and professors extending full scholarships to pursue a higher degree. The closer it got to his departure the more adamant Valentine became about the opportunities he’d be missing out on if he left. Yesterday he’d taken him on a special trip to Alicante Records to meet the chairman and CEO of the label. They’d told him he could immediately begin working on his first album and by next year head off on a world tour. All of the possibilities sounded amazing, yet too good to be true. Catarina’s warnings always spilled back into the forefront of his mind. He wished she could have been there to offer guidance and tell him what to do. It was strange, part of him was desperate for freedom and independence, yet another part him just wanted the shelter and protection she had always given him. He’d thanked Valentine over and over, and he’d promised he would seriously consider all of the amazing offers. But he wasn’t going to make any decisions until he talked to the person he trusted most in the world.

Magnus was packing his suitcase when there was a knock at his bedroom door. Assuming it was probably one of the staff he said “Come in,” without stopping what he was doing.

“I see your mind is made up,” Valentine’s voice cut through the silent room with a booming resonance.

Magnus quickly dropped the clothes he was holding and turned to face the door, feeling he’d been caught red handed. He didn’t answer, only stood there looking sheepish.

“I was really hoping the trip to the studio yesterday would have sealed the deal, but I see you still have plans to leave in the morning.”

Magnus looked at the floor. There was no point trying to deny it with his suitcase mostly packed and his violin case already by the door.

“I really wish you’d reconsider.”

Magnus felt the weight Valentine put on those last few words. They sounded more like an order than a wish. He dug deep for courage to resist him yet again. “As I said last night, I appreciate all of the wonderful opportunities. I’m just going to need time to think them over.”

Valentine slowly walked into the room, his hands clasped behind his back. Magnus involuntarily took a step backward to create more space between them. Valentine smiled as if he enjoyed seeing him back away. “Do you believe I have your best interests at heart?”

Magnus swallowed hard and felt his knees begin to wobble. “Yes,” he replied timidly. “I do.”

Valentine smiled wider, his eyes twinkling devilishly. “And do you believe I am a relatively
“Of course,” Magnus answered, feeling nervous about where this line of questioning was going.

“Good, then I think you should listen to me now and put your trust in the person who has cared for you and supported you for most of your life.”

Magnus froze, his mouth falling open slightly. This was it. This was exactly what Catarina had warned him about. His “ulterior motives” were finally going to come out. The years of money given freely had come to an end and the manipulation was about to commence. Magnus felt an anger rising inside of him. He didn’t ask for any of this, he hadn’t even wanted to take the money in the first place! His mother had died and he was so young and had nowhere to turn. The school had basically made the decision for him, against his own better judgement, and now he was left paying the price. He felt vulnerable and indebted, and he didn’t like being backed against a wall. Before Valentine could even continue with his planned collusion Magnus held up one hand, his palm facing outward, and spoke one very loud word. “Stop!”

Valentine’s mouth snapped shut and his eyes flashed a hidden spark of suppressed rage. This was a man who’d probably never been told to stop doing anything ever in his life, especially not by a kid. But Magnus didn’t care, he had had enough of the guilt. He was now going to make himself very clear and settle this once and for all.

“Mr. Morgenstern, I have told you countless times I appreciate all of your help as well as these opportunities you’ve extended to me. I’ve come here as a way of showing you how thankful I truly am for all that you’ve done. But now I must go back home… I want to go home, and I ask that you please stop trying to change my mind. All of this,” Magnus extended his arms, gesturing to the luxury surrounding them. “This isn’t for me!”

Valentine narrowed his eyes, the corners of his mouth twitching as he fought back his dominant urges. “You’re just as stubborn and hardheaded as your mother, do you know that?”

Magnus felt a jolt of shock almost knock him off his feet.

“She always thought she knew what was best, that she was blameless in all of this. But in the end her mistakes were her downfall. She couldn’t live with what she’d done to you, or to that idiotic husband of hers.”

“What are you talking about?” Magnus said, grabbing the bedpost to steady himself.

“They were both cowards who never did anything right and then abandoned you! Choosing suicide as a way out, leaving me with no other choice but to come forward and do the job they couldn’t!”

Magnus stood there listening to this complete nonsense. It rattled around inside his brain, bouncing around like a pinball machine.

“The only smart thing she ever did was to send you here to America to that school. Far away from her toxic, pathetic fragility. You see I had Ragnor watching over you all those years in London, he kept me informed on every part of your life. I saw a fire in you, a tenacity of spirit, and a ruthless competitive nature. You were just like me, half the blood running through your veins was burning with the same hellfire that has gotten me to where I am today. You and I are the same my dear boy. That’s why I’ve supported you, given you anything and everything you needed. I’ve made sure you’d want for nothing. I even bought Alicante Records just for you! I would do anything to help you succeed… you are my greatest accomplishment!”
Magnus stood there shaking his head back and forth unable to believe one word he was hearing. “No, this can’t be, it’s not possible…”

“Oh it is very possible. I met your mother in the summer of 1981 while on business in London. She was playing the piano in the lobby of my hotel. Chopin, Opus 34, #2, I can close my eyes even now and still hear that melody as if it were yesterday.” Valentine closed his eyes and his head gently swayed as if he were hearing the music. “I was immediately drawn to her brilliant musicianship, it wasn’t something anyone would expect to hear in the middle of a crowded hotel. I stopped to listen and time simply slipped away. Her long dark brown hair cascaded over her flawless skin. Her eyes penetrated my soul. Her arms moved just as graceful as a dancer. She was incredible.”

Magnus pictured his last memory of his mother just before he left for school. She was at the piano, her face downcast with a slight smile as she played that bit of Chopin she always tended to repeat when she was struggling through a bout of melancholy. It was always that same tune. Could this have been the reason?

“We spent a week together, and when I left to go back to California I begged her to come with me. But she refused. It wasn’t until months later, when I sent Ragnor back to check on her, that I found out she was expecting you. I hopped on the first plane.”

“Please stop,” Magnus moaned pitifully, the tears rolling down his hot, flushed cheeks.

“No, you need to hear this! I hopped on the first plane because I had to find out if you were mine.”

“I’m not listening to anymore of this,” Magnus said, crumpling into a ball on the floor, his knees tucked into his chest. He felt like he was that 7 year old boy again. Wishing he’d never left home, that he’d never left his mother alone.

“She refused to see me, claiming to be in love with another man, and that it was his child. Of course I didn’t believe her. And it wasn’t difficult for me to have a paternity test done. Ragnor found out who your pediatrician was and I bribed him for a DNA sample.”

“I don’t care, I-I know who my real parents are…” Magnus choked on the words as his shoulders heaved. The cries now ripping from his chest with uncontrollable wails of grief. He felt like everything he’d ever known about himself and his life was drifting away from him like dust in the wind. He saw the faces of his mother and father dissipating into a puff of smoke.

“I confronted her with the proof and she threatened to jump off Blackfriars Bridge, killing both of you, if I ever came around her again,” Valentine confessed, his impassioned speech full of emotion for dramatic effect. He was like an actor doing a well prepared monologue.

“I don’t believe you,” Magnus whimpered from the floor. “She would never…” But Magnus was unable to continue, his body wracked with pain and anguish.

“She was delusional, and already showing signs of mental illness. I reluctantly returned home, but Ragnor was always there. Watching you and making sure you were safe. I would have never let anyone hurt you don’t you see? I am your father, I always have been. I want you to know me as I am, to know the truth about me… and you.”

Just then the bedroom door popped open and Sebastian came running in. He saw Magnus on the floor and immediately rushed to his side.

Valentine looked down and smiled wickedly. “Blood calls to blood, no?”

Magnus looked up at the boy’s angelic face through the glare of his burning tears. Sebastian looked
concerned and he placed one tiny hand on Magnus' shoulder, patting him softly.

“My dear family, my sons, together at last.” Valentine boasted proudly. “Two brothers finally united.”

Magnus’ face slowly transformed from a pained expression into a resolute confidence. A strange hush fell over the restaurant as if everyone knew something important was coming. Alec was quiet and didn't move. Whatever doubts or fears Magnus had had a moment ago were now gone. They’d been replaced by a fresh, brave face. He looked at Alec across the table, he’d decided to tell the truth and lay it all out there for the man he loved. Trusting that Alec would stand by him and accept him for who he truly was, skeletons and all. He would be the first person to ever know, the only one he'd ever trusted this much.

“Everything that he’s doing to you, the way he’s acting… the things he’s saying… they are all my fault,” Magnus said with a serious and profound expression.

Alec didn't respond verbally but his heart lurched.

"He’s my brother Alexander. And I failed him.”

Chapter End Notes

Are you surprised?? I don't know if anyone saw this coming, but believe me I've been dying to tell you! When I first started outlining this story last fall I knew Magnus couldn't have demon blood in the real world. And his father couldn't be a demon obviously. So I had to think of a human solution. That was when I started to play around with this idea that Valentine was his father, which in turn would make Sebastian his brother. I haven't read any other fics with this combination although I'm sure I'm probably not the first to do it. But beware, Valentine's version of the truth might be very far from the actual truth. *hint, hint* I think Ragnor can shed more light on the subject.

Now you're probably wondering what in the world Magnus did to "fail" his brother, and that will be revealed later. Also you're probably still wondering how Jace plays into all of this, and I think you're going to be very surprised yet again! Maybe even more surprised than you are now! HA HA ;)

So next up, how is Alec going to deal with this news? And what the heck is Sebastian
planning??? As I hinted before, it will be a Fourth of July nobody will forget!

I hope you'll stick with me to see how things play out. I have promised a happy ending, but we've got some more drama in store before we get there. *insert demonic laugh*

Thank you so, so much for your comments and kudos. I really appreciate your support. Life has been a bit crazy the last few weeks so this chapter is shorter than usual. But more is coming soon! :}
“That’s not funny,” Alec objected, his fear suddenly overtaken by a feeling of bitter annoyance. He didn’t understand why Magnus would choose this pivotal moment to make a joke when he was standing on the precipice of finally telling him the truth at last. This was serious, not something to make light of. Alec glared at him suspiciously trying to figure out where he was going with this nonsense.

“I’m not joking,” Magnus said, with as much sincerity as he could muster. He could tell Alec didn’t believe him by the skeptical look on his face. “He is my brother… well, my half-brother. I wouldn’t joke about something like this.”

Alec was dumbfounded. He could hear the words being spoken but his brain couldn’t process the information. *His brother?* That was just completely ludicrous. Over the years he’d read every single article about Magnus’ life and he knew he didn’t have any siblings. In fact it was widely known throughout the music world he had no family or living relatives whatsoever. There’d been stories written about it many times. Alec’s eyes shifted focus from Magnus’ eyes to his lips and back again, just waiting for him to either crack a smile or playfully wink. Something to let him know this was a sarcastic remark or joke intended to lighten the mood and not the actual truth.

“Say it,” Magnus said with a defiant edge to his voice. “Tell me you’re completely disgusted. That you’re angry, disappointed, outraged… whatever it is just let it out please. I can’t take the silent treatment.”

Alec settled back against his chair and considered these options. He didn’t feel angry or disgusted, and there was no outrage or disappointment either. None of these described what he was feeling at the moment. He just felt numb, and literally at a loss for words. He sat quietly and thought about what to say. His mind was racing through an endless number of questions. He debated each one until he settled on, “How long have you known?”

“Alec?” Magnus immediately answered, grateful that Alec was finally saying something.

“Since I was 14,” Magnus confirmed as a shadow of embarrassment drifted over his face casting his soft features into darkness. Even after all this time he was still greatly affected by the painful truth. The humiliation he felt had shackled him to an unimaginable burden for the last 20 years. He couldn’t remember his life before he’d had to bare the shame of it.
It was a difficult thing for Alec to witness. He could feel Magnus’ pain emanating from his side of the table. It curled and wrapped itself around Alec like a snake, constricting his heart and lungs. The fact that there was nothing he could do to fix it, or even make it better, only made Alec feel worse. “You must have been so freaked out,” he wondered aloud, trying to imagine being faced with such a shocking revelation at that age.

“It was a lot to take in.”

“Yeah… wow.” Alec was still struggling to come to terms with the news as the waiter appeared and placed their appetizers in front of them. Three glistening sea scallops set atop a black truffle puree garnished with fresh tarragon and pea shoots were staring back at him. Normally he would have been diving in voraciously but his hunger had been replaced with a thirst for more knowledge. He was now more desperate than ever to know every detail of Magnus’ past. He wanted to understand the whole situation, especially the part about Magnus “failing” his brother. He wondered what on earth that could be about. His brain was swimming as he tried to focus his deluge of thoughts on one very important question. “So why didn’t you ever tell anyone?

“Two main reasons,” Magnus said quite matter-of-factly, picking up his fork and digging into his appetizer. “Number one, since both my parents were dead I didn’t want this news to tarnish their memory. My mother had her issues, but she was a good person. I felt there was a reason she didn’t want people to know, and an even better reason why she never told me the truth. Plus she wasn’t around to defend her decisions or give her side of the story.”

“And number two?” Alec urged him to continue.

“Number two, I didn’t want to be associated with my biological father publicly. He’s not a good man Alexander.”

Alec could see a flash of anger behind Magnus’ eyes at the mention of his father. He didn’t know much about the man, other than the fact that he lived in LA and he was very rich. Now he was suddenly consumed with a desire to know everything he could dig up, particularly what he’d done to hurt Magnus. The thought of him being mistreated or harmed in any way made Alec’s blood boil. He thought back to their conversation in the car, Magnus’ comment about children enduring pain, Alec wanted to know exactly what he’d done to him and how soon he could confront the bastard.

“Please tell me how you’re feeling right now,” Magnus asked, his face troubled and his voice beseeching. He was anxious to determine how Alec was taking the news and what the ramifications might be on their relationship in light of his shocking admission.

“I feel…” Alec tried to put it into words. With every new bit of information another piece of the puzzle was unlocked. But with it came more questions. His mind was overwhelmed. “I feel… shocked. Very shocked and surprised. But mostly…” Magnus was hanging on Alec’s every word, his eyes staring up at him expectantly. “But mostly I feel… relieved.”

“Relieved?” Magnus was taken aback. He was bracing himself for bad news but he hadn’t expected that as his answer.

“Relieved yes, because I’ve spent the past two weeks thinking you two were… well, you know, very close. And not close in the brotherly way. Now of course that just seems gross, but at the time I couldn’t help but think it was the most logical explanation.”

Magnus took a deep breath, his shoulders drooping with what was no doubt total mental exhaustion. “Yes, I can see why you might have thought that.”
“But now this actually does make more sense to me,” Alec said, putting more pieces of the puzzle together bit by bit. “I mean, I can sort of relate to the whole sibling thing. I’ve watched my sister date some real losers. Guys I knew were going to fuck her over and I definitely didn’t want to stand by and watch. Some I probably would have threatened, maybe even turned violent against, if I was that type of person. So I get that, sort of. But what I don’t understand is why he’s so against me? What have I ever done to make him hate me so much? Or does he just not want you to be with anyone?”

Magnus took a moment to think, he seemed to be debating this question with himself. “I think he doesn’t want me to be with anyone who might disrupt the normal routine of how we’ve been surviving day to day since I moved back to California. He’s never really objected to my casual relationships, but you of course are so much more than that.” Magnus was showing a more vulnerable side of himself than Alec had ever seen before. He wanted to be understanding, but he couldn’t imagine giving up his life to keep his brother happy. It seemed like an awfully steep price to pay. Alec loved his brother Max, more than anything in the world, but this was different. This was a suffocating, toxic, destructive sort of love.

The delicious aroma coming from Alec’s plate finally won him over. He decided to eat while he continued thinking. Soon an awkward silence settled between them as they both quietly ate their scallops without talking. They took long sips of their wine between bites and Magnus refilled their glasses twice. Alec was grateful for the wine’s effect, his inflamed skin was no longer causing him pain and his nervous energy was dulled. He felt guilty for taking so much time, but his brain was still trying to play catch up. He really needed to just let it all sink in. The truth was, if he was going to stay in this relationship with Magnus then he’d have to accept Sebastian as a package deal. He was reminded of the fear he’d had last week thinking about his own family meeting Magnus for the first time. How they might possibly mistreat him, especially his mother. Wasn’t that the way it was in all relationships though? Accepting the person’s family no matter what? Of course maybe that doesn’t apply when your boyfriend’s brother wants you dead. A rational, intelligent person might see that as a doomed partnership. But Alec knew he loved Magnus. He felt their love was strong enough to overcome anything really. Even a crazed psychopath hell bent on his destruction.

Alec felt a calmness wash over him. He caught Magnus’ eye and the two of them stared silently for a moment. “Thank you,” Alec said breaking the silence, a gentle smile pulling at the corners of his mouth. “Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me this. I know it couldn’t have been easy, and I feel bad for pressuring you so much these last few weeks. I just hope you know I only did that because I was scared.”

“I know my darling,” Magnus responded, his eyes two dark pools rippling with emotion. “I feel just terrible for letting you think the worst. I wanted to tell you the truth so many times, but I was afraid as well. Afraid once you found out, you wouldn’t want to be with me anymore.” Magnus’ face was grief-stricken as he solemnly looked down into his own lap, defeated.

Alec quickly squashed that theory. “This isn’t your fault. You can’t change who your parents are, and I would never hold that against you.” He placed his open palm across the table and Magnus gently laid his own hand into its warmth, his face turning hopeful. Alec caressed the top of his knuckles with his thumb then squeezed it reassuringly. “I’m not going to lie, this is tough. But I love you, and I know we’ll find a way to make it work.”

For the first time since his confession Magnus smiled. A fire ignited behind his eyes and it illuminated his entire face with a radiant glow. “You never cease to amaze me Alexander.”

“In good ways I hope,” Alec said with a wink, squeezing Magnus’ hand even tighter.

“Gentlemen, how were the scallops?” Said the waiter, returning to check on them.
“Absolutely divine,” Magnus responded, pulling his hand free so that he could dab the corners of his mouth with his napkin.

“Splendid. Shall I continue with your entrees now?”

Magnus glanced at Alec and he nodded back. “Yes, that would be perfect, thank you.”

The waiter bowed slightly, took their empty appetizer plates and briskly set off toward the kitchen. Magnus and Alec rejoined hands, both smiling sappily at each other.

“I should have known you’d be totally accepting of me and my past. Your capacity for love and acceptance knows no bounds,” Magnus gushed, his face nearly splitting open with joy.

Alec grinned but fought back the urge to tell him that his love and acceptance did have bounds. He’d never be able to forget the horrible things Sebastian had said to him. No matter how much he loved Magnus he couldn’t accept that kind of hate. He couldn’t accept him. There was no way. But there was also no way Alec was going to give up Magnus. All that would do is make Sebastian happy and him miserable. He’d meant what he said, they’d find a way to make it work. Maybe once Sebastian saw Alec wasn’t going anywhere he’d ease up. Especially now that Alec knew the truth.

The meal continued as their conversation drifted to tomorrow’s activities. They only had one more day until they’d need to get back to the festival and Magnus had lots of adventures planned. Alec loved listening to him describe their itinerary, all the attention to detail was so impressive. He would have been an excellent travel agent if he weren’t a musician. Alec nodded and smiled, agreeing happily to all the plans while they finished their entrees and switched from wine to some sort of fancy whiskey drink. Alec had never drank so much in his life as he had the last few weeks with Magnus. The booze was radiating heat throughout his body, making him feel giddy and lightheaded. He watched Magnus’ hands as he gestured while he spoke, the gleam of candlelight reflecting off his black nail polish. He imagined for a moment those nails tracing across his skin, scraping along his back… he licked his lips. Magnus seemed to pick up on Alec’s preoccupation and he turned to gesture for the waiter.

“Would you like another round gentlemen?” The waiter asked.

Magnus wiped his hands, but instead of returning his napkin to his lap he carefully folded it across his plate. “We’re both feeling a bit drained after spending the entire day out in the sun. If it wouldn’t be too much trouble we’ll have you send dessert up to our suite, number 807.”

“No trouble at all sir, consider it done.” The waiter scurried off, probably so he could alert the chef to the change in their plans.

Alec cocked his head to one side giving Magnus that look he always gave him when he was up to something.

“What?” Magnus cooed sweetly with a twinkle in his eye. He could read Alec’s mind so easily.

“Why don’t you tell me the real reason you want to leave in such a hurry?” Alec asked with his eyebrows raised playfully.

“Well, it might be due to the fact that I feel an overwhelming urge to kiss you right now. And I’m afraid it might be too much excitement for this fairly tame dinner crowd,” Magnus purred sinfully, then raised himself from his chair and pushed it away from the table. He tucked three crisp $100 bills under the edge of his plate and downed the last remaining sip of his drink. “Shall we?”
The two men clasped hands and quickly wound their way out of the now crowded restaurant, back out to the elevator’s foyer. When the elevator finally arrived the doors slid open, they both stepped inside, and Magnus immediately launched himself toward Alec, enveloping him in a passionate kiss. Their bodies tumbled backward, slamming against the elevator wall, knocking the breath from Alec’s lungs. Magnus grabbed the front of Alec’s shirt, balling it in his fists. His tongue was urgent, sinking deep into Alec’s slack mouth. His body pressed against him with so much force Alec could feel Magnus’ heart thumping rapidly against his chest. Alec now felt he knew why people were always talking about hot make-up sex, it was such a rush. The stress and tension they’d both been feeling while sitting at the table across from each other all evening had finally been released. They were like two caged tigers whose doors had suddenly swung open. Desperately clinging to each other’s bodies, devouring each other’s gasps for air, and swallowing each other’s moans. Alec’s hands were cradling Magnus’ strong back as they gratefully melted into one another at last.

Magnus pulled his mouth away for just one breathless moment to speak. “I love you so much, I don’t even know what I ever did to deserve someone like you in my life.”

Alec moved his hands to adoringly cup Magnus’ face. “I promised you remember? I promised I was never going to leave, and I meant it.” Magnus smiled lovingly in return, then Alec reconnected their lips with the same fiery intensity.

As the doors opened to the 8th floor thankfully they didn’t have to worry about any other guests waiting to board. Magnus had been smart to reserve every suite. Alec scooped Magnus up off his feet and carried him off of the elevator with his legs wrapped around his hips. They stumbled a bit but their lips never broke apart.

Magnus gestured toward the first door on the left and Alec turned them toward suite 801. He thrust Magnus against the wall beside the door, pinning him in midair, then reached around to his back pocket and dug out his wallet, still kissing him fiercely. Magnus fumbled inside as Alec held the wallet open. Finally he came to the small stack of room key cards, almost spilling them all over the floor of the hall. Alec found the one marked 801 and hurriedly swiped it across the door’s lock. There was a click and Magnus grabbed the handle behind them to swing the door open. They tumbled inside.

It was pitch dark after the door closed. Alec carried Magnus further into the room and in the direction of where he imagined the bed would be based on the layout of the other suites. He continued walking, bumping into a table and bouncing off the wall, until his shins banged against the mattress, stopping him. Grateful to have found the bed he tossed Magnus down then fell on top of him, pressing the full weight of his body against him at last. Alec’s wet mouth sealed to Magnus’ swollen lips as his long, graceful fingers threaded up into his hair. Passion consumed them as their whiskey laced kisses turned into untamed explorations of nips and bites. Sucking and licking along each other’s jawlines and down to the soft indentions of their clavicles. Losing control, they gave themselves over to their every desire. Wanting to let go, they spiraled into an oblivion of bliss. Magnus’ hands were tugging at the hem of Alec’s shirt. Their intense need to feel every inch of each other’s flesh overtaking them. It was a flurry of thick, strong arms grabbing and pulling at unwanted clothes. Moans in the dark and heavy exhales of breath danced over sweat-glistening skin. Alec felt a hedonistic urge take command, after all, this had to be considered a special occasion. He inched himself lower, kissing a wet trail down Magnus’ neck and continuing to his chest. His tongue licking and stroking every taught muscle and delicious valley as Magnus’ back arched toward each pleasurable sensation. When he’d finally slunk down to the very edge of the bed Alec pushed Magnus’ legs apart and spread him open. His tongue sinking in expertly.
Magnus clawed at the bed and swore to the heavens. “Yes baby, fuck yes,” he whined as he squirmed and pushed into each blissful stroke. His thighs trembling against Alec’s hot, sunburned face.

Once Alec could tell that Magnus was more than ready he raised himself up on the heels of both hands and glided into him with a deep, penetrative thrust. Sparks danced across his closed eyelids as the exquisite tightness squeezed around him. The slow, delicious grind so euphoric Alec unraveled himself in the process. They moved together in perfect sync, their bodies composing a symphony of pleasure from their high pitched sighs on ragged exhalations of breath to their deep guttural moans each time Alec bottomed out. This was how they created their masterpiece.

Magnus reached for Alec’s hands and interlaced their fingers as the rapturous pulsing began to speed up. Alec felt his conscience mind float away from his body as he gave into the purely selfish satisfaction of fucking Magnus as hard as he could. It was uninhibited and wild, but also full of passion and tender affection. He was making love to him with every fiber of his soul until his knees became so weak his body began to quake. Magnus was a shuttering mess of whimpers and groans, his nails painfully digging into Alec’s skin.

When the peak of Alec’s climax was hovering over top of him like a giant ocean wave he pinned Magnus’ hands to the bed and curled over his body thrusting again and again until his orgasm broke free. Magnus quickly pulled one hand from Alec’s grasp and with very little effort he exploded between their heaving chests just before Alec collapsed on top of him from exhaustion.

“That was mind-blowing,” Magnus sighed, still unable to fully regain control of his breathing.

Alec’s lips grazed against the edge of Magnus’ ear, his entire body limp and lifeless next to him on the bed. “Hmmm, your ass was mind-blowing,” he teased, still seeing the flash of red and purple lights against the backs of his eyes, his heart hammering against his ribcage.

“I’ll never get enough of you I hope you know. Or of this,” Magnus praised, turning his face to gently kiss Alec’s parted lips.

“That’s good, because you’re stuck with me,” Alec replied, now able to see Magnus’ face illuminated in a thin crack of moonlight that was peeking through the seam of the curtains. They smiled at each other and Magnus nuzzled his face against Alec’s warm cheek, breathing him in. Alec suddenly felt very thankful they were both the type who liked to cuddle after sex. Even with the mess, he was in no hurry to move.

Magnus gently kissed the edge of Alec’s jaw then shifted slightly to whisper into his ear. “There’s no one I’d rather be stuck with, my angel. It was worth enduring all the pain of my past because it led me to you Alexander. You are my future.”

The sun was beginning to set as Alec merged onto the long ribbon of gray highway stretched
between two mountains. It would take them back to Aspen, and back to the reality they’d momentarily escaped. It had been an amazing but very, very tiring day. He and Magnus had spent the afternoon exploring vapor caves and hidden waterfalls. Which required a lot of hiking but rewarded them with breathtaking views. Once the car was at full speed Magnus’ head lolled back against the headrest and he was sound asleep in a matter of seconds. Alec forced himself to keep his eyes on the road, stealing glances every few minutes to gaze at Magnus’ perfect, peaceful face. There was just a slight shimmer on his eyelids, probably leftover from last night’s dinner out. He imagined the glittery makeup he sometimes wore was probably hard to remove completely.

As the sun continued to sink behind the mountains ahead, Alec felt like he was driving into the background of an artist’s painting, brushed with broad strokes of orange, yellow, and pink. He knew he’d never get used to the beauty of Colorado, just the thought of leaving in a matter of weeks made his heart heavy. He loved New York, but this was definitely more his type of place. He longed for the outdoors and the fresh, clean air. That was the worst part of living in the city, the smell. Before he’d left home his parents had arranged for him to have an apartment with a fantastic view of Central Park. They’d spared no expense. Alec knew it was coming with strings attached though, they’d always wanted their children to stay close to home. Alec looked over at Magnus again and suddenly felt a crushing wave of sadness at the thought of them going their separate ways. He remembered his first day arriving at Hendel House, how he’d told himself this would be the perfect place for a short summer romance. But his heart had gone way past that now. When he looked at Magnus he saw everything he’d ever wanted in his life, and everything he couldn’t live without. Magnus had basically said the same thing to him last night, about Alec being his future. There was no way he’d be able to go back to New York after the festival. For him this was a forever kind of love.

Alec slipped his iPhone out of his pocket and started up his Colorado playlist. He hadn’t listened to it in a long time. Schumann’s cello concerto was where he’d left off and he kept the volume low so as not to wake Magnus. As much as he tried to redirect his thoughts to his music his mind went right back to thinking about the future instead. Playing devil’s advocate, Alec imaged what kind of response he’d get from his family and friends if he told them he’d met a man, fallen in love almost immediately, and was moving to California. Of course, Alec reminded himself, Magnus hadn’t asked him to move to California. But just imaging for a moment if he did he knew his mother’s head would literally fly off of her shoulders. And his father would probably attempt to haul him back to New York in handcuffs. They’d tell him he was a fool, that he was only 22 years old, that there was no way he was ready for that kind of commitment to a person he’d just met. But when Alec looked at Magnus he didn’t feel like he was someone he’d just met, he felt like someone he’d waited his whole life for. So what would be the reason to wait? For someone better to come along? Not possible. To see if he’d change his mind? Highly unlikely. Alec felt anxiety pressing in all around him, it made his heart flutter with irregular beats and his palms sweat against the leather wrapped steering wheel. Why was it anyone’s business what he did with his life? He was an adult. Magnus had more money than they’d probably ever need, so he could continue with his plan of performing until he resolved himself to a more longstanding job. Probably with a symphony, and California had plenty of those.

Suddenly Alec hit a patch of uneven pavement and Magnus stirred from his sleep. “Sorry I dozed off,” Magnus said, rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands. “All those stairs today and the crazy heat, I feel exhausted.”

“That’s OK babe, you sleep. I’ll get us home. Home, Alec thought. That was a word that triggered all sorts of mixed emotions.

“Mnnmm, you’re so good to me,” Magnus purred, curling up in the reclined seat like a cat and closing his eyes again. It didn’t take a minute before his breathing was slow and his eyes flickered rapidly behind closed lids. Alec was once again failing at keeping his eyes on the road, mesmerized by Magnus’ beauty. He felt a tug at his heartstrings watching him sleep. He knew there was no way
he was leaving his side, not at the end of the summer, and not ever.

“I love you,” Alec murmured sweetly, and for just a moment he thought he saw a fleeting smile pass across Magnus’ face.

“The prodigal son returns!” Jace shouted as he jogged across the field in front of the Pond Building toward Alec with a beaming smile, his arms outstretched. “Damn you look so tan, how was your weekend away?”

“Great,” Alec said, smirking a bit as Jace wrapped him in a tight hug.

“I fucking missed you!” Jace bellowed as he smacked Alec hard on the back.

“Yeah? Well maybe I should go away more often. So you’ll appreciate me,” Alec teased as he pushed out of Jace’s arms and punched him in the shoulder.

Jace laughed then slung one arm over Alec’s shoulders so they could walk together. “God I dread this fucking rehearsal so much, even Clary says she’s completely done with Mr. Psycho.”

Alec felt a tinge of guilt. Which was odd considering he hated Sebastian more than anyone. But now that he knew he was Magnus’ brother he felt like maybe he shouldn’t talk about him behind his back. Which was completely ridiculous considering how terrible he’d treated him. “Yeah, well, we’ll just ignore him and do what we have to do. Hey Clary.”

“Hey Alec,” Clary called out as she approached them from the left, obviously coming from the practice cabins. “Wow you look so tan! Did you and Magnus have a nice weekend?”

“Yeah, we did, thanks.” Alec blushed as memories of Saturday night came flooding back. He quickly filed them away otherwise he knew he’d never be able to concentrate through this rehearsal.

The three of them walked together inside, chatting and catching up about their weekends. Alec told them about the hot springs and the vapor caves. Clary said she’d love to see them and Jace immediately piped in that he would love to take her there. Alec had to admit they were a cute couple. Jace being the loud mouthed, sarcastic, lovable jerk and Clary being the calm, levelheaded one with a ridiculous amount of kindness towards everyone. He felt a lot less guilty about the amount of time he spent with Magnus knowing Jace was happily occupied. He wondered if they’d fallen in love as quickly as he and Magnus had. Maybe there was something magical about this place that just brought people together.

“You guys ready to get this over with?” Clary grumbled as they turned the last corner and arrived at the practice room door.

“Ugh, I’m gonna start bringing a flask to these rehearsals to see if being drunk makes Morgenstern easier to take,” Jace complained just as Alec saw Sebastian come around the corner behind him. His violin case was tucked rigidly against his shoulder as he stalked toward them with a look of utter disdain.

“Shall we go inside or are you three going to stand out here in the hall and continue to waste my time?” Sebastian sneered as he turned sharply to enter the practice room, flinging open the door with a loud crack.
“Maybe we can poison him,” Jace suggested. Alec and Clary simultaneously rolled their eyes.

“Let’s just focus on having a perfect rehearsal so we can get the hell out of here quickly,” Alec surmised. “We know this repertoire like the back of our hands, and there’s really no reason to keep meeting more than once or twice a week.”

“That’s a bloody brilliant idea man,” Jace said, clapping Alec on the arm. “Why the fuck should we kill ourselves rehearsing when we’ve already blown everyone’s mind? I mean we are pretty damn near perfect as it is.”

“I have to say I agree,” Clary added. “We can just brush up a bit before each performance.”

“Good, then it’s settled,” Jace declared, hooking Clary under the arm and heading off into the room together.

Alec stood in the hallway an extra moment just to compose himself. For the first time since finding out the truth about who Sebastian was he realized he had absolutely no idea if Sebastian knew that he knew. Alec hadn’t thought to ask Magnus if he’d planned on telling him. A panic gripped his chest as he lifted Stella higher up on his shoulder and headed in, totally unprepared for what might happen next.

The room was hot and stuffy, no doubt the school had turned back the A/C over the weekend. The now sweltering heat of June was turning this small, windowless room into an oven. Alec felt sweat already breaking out on his brow as he settled into his chair with Stella, so grateful to have her in his hands again. The weekend of course had been amazing, but Alec never felt more calm and complete than when he was holding her.

“Someone had quite an exciting weekend,” Sebastian snarled in a mocking tone toward Alec. His face a cool, smug façade that barely masked his underlying contempt.

Alec ignored him, pretending he didn’t even know the comment was directed at him.

Sebastian sat up straighter, leaning his upper body forward so that there would be no mistake who he was addressing. “You should really take better care of that pretty skin of yours. It would be a shame to lose your looks prematurely.”

Alec felt a lightning bolt of anger shoot up his spine. He raised his gaze from the sheet music on the stand in front of him to meet Sebastian’s cold, menacing stare. Jace and Clary sat motionless, their mouths hanging open in shock.

“I’ll take that under advisement,” Alec replied with a controlled anger just balancing on the edge of tipping over. Sebastian’s green eyes were narrowed and focused like he wanted to communicate something wordlessly to Alec. Whatever that message was it was radiating enough hate and malice to make the hair on Alec’s arms stand up. The room was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop.

“We should all be taking full advantage of this glorious mountain air before we’re thrust back into the real world. Back at home... with our families.”

The word families slowly rolled off Sebastian’s tongue as sweetly as if he’d said lovers. And that was all it took. Alec knew now that Magnus had told Sebastian he knew the truth. And it was also very apparent he was not happy about it. Of course that was no shock to Alec, he wouldn’t have expected him to be. But he was surprised he was making it known in front of Jace and Clary. Obviously they had no idea what the hell was really going on, but they could tell whatever it was, it wasn’t good.
“I suspect some people will,” Alec answered, lowering his eyes back to his music and adjusting Stella’s position between his legs. “But some of us aren’t going back home. So I guess our families will just have to deal with that.”

Sebastian’s face contorted into a look of disgusted outrage. Alec had skillfully thrown his own words right back at him while also getting his point across quite nicely. If Sebastian thought he was going to be rid of Alec by the end of the summer he was very mistaken.

“Let’s start with the Beethoven!” Clary interjected enthusiastically in hopes of diffusing the situation.

“Yes, good call babe,” Jace replied reaching between his legs to bring his seat forward. “Let’s hit it guys, we all want to get out of here.”

Alec shuffled his music to the right piece then positioned his bow just before daring to look up at Sebastian again. When he did he found that he was still staring daggers right through Alec’s head. He hadn’t even bothered to turn his pages to the right music. Alec thought he could see literal flames flickering behind his eyes. His pale, angular face had never appeared more demonic. Alec didn’t back down. It was like high noon on a dusty street in the old West as the two glared at each other across their stands, neither of them even blinking.

Sebastian was the first to break, his expression morphing into a wicked grin. He flipped his music open and settled his violin against his shoulder, tucking the chinrest under his chiseled jawline. “Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo,” he muttered to himself as he gracefully drew his bow across the strings to tune, choosing to end with a diminished fifth. The Devil’s tritone as it was known, due to its eerie dissonance.

Alec didn’t need help with the Latin translation. He was very familiar with Virgil’s Aeneid and the quote Sebastian had spoken. *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo,* meant: “If I cannot bend the will of Heaven, I shall move Hell.” It was a declaration of war between the two of them now. Sebastian was going to move heaven and earth to keep Alec out of Magnus' life no matter what it took. Alec swallowed against the lump that constricted painfully in his dry, parched throat. He tried to appear calm and unaffected by Sebastian's threat, but deep down inside he knew he was in big trouble.

Chapter End Notes

Oh Seb you are an evil, evil boy! Is anybody going to be able to shut you up?

Of course Alec accepted Magnus' past. Was there ever a doubt that he would? :) Now they just have to figure out a way to deal with this Sebastian issue, which I'm sorry to say is only going to get worse before it gets better.

Sorry I had to cut this chapter a bit short again. I've got family in town visiting and I didn't get a chance to write as much as I wanted to.
Coming up next we'll have another flashback. More insight into why Sebastian is the way he is, some wise words from Ragnor, as well as Magnus making a very painful decision.

Oh, and Shadowhunters is back Monday! WOOHOO!! If you want to gush over Malec with me all of my SM info is in my profile.

Thank you so much for your comments and kudos! They mean the world to me! :) XOXOXOXO
“Tequila, please. And lots of it.”

“Ugh, you again?” Maia growled. “Didn’t I tell you last time to stay out of my bar?” She leaned forward across a row of dirty glasses and narrowed her eyes at Jace as if daring him to even think about sitting down.

“Maia, babe. You can’t hate me forever! Besides, my boy here has had a shit week,” Jace said as he patted Alec firmly on the back. “He’s in desperate need of a shot.”

“He can have anything he wants,” Maia gestured toward Alec. “You on the other hand, can fuck off!”

One thing was certain, Alec thought, Maia was definitely immune to the charming wit and dazzling smile Jace was currently flashing her way. She only continued to glare at him viciously, flames practically shooting from her eyes. Alec blushed, hoping the two weren’t about to make a scene as he and Jace bravely sat down in the last two empty stools at the end of the bar. Alec a bit timidly, unsure of how Maia would react to them obviously not leaving.

“Is there a problem here?” Raphael said, coming out from behind a swinging door that must have led to the kitchen. His face looked concerned and Alec wondered if he’d been watching Jace and Maia’s interaction from a hidden camera or something.

“No problem at all, Maia was just getting us a bottle of your best tequila. Some limes too please,” Jace said with a wink.

Maia huffed as she grabbed a bottle of Patrón from way above her head and slammed it down in front of Jace violently. “Pour it yourself!” She snarled then turned and headed to the opposite end of the bar.

“Self-service, I’ve got no problem with that,” Jace replied sarcastically as he reached one arm behind the bar and grabbed two short glasses.

Raphael placed a bowl of precut limes in front of Alec. “If you two need anything else, or you decide to order some lunch, just let me know.” He smiled graciously then exited back through the same door he’d come from.

“Why does she hate you so much?” Alec asked as he took hold of his glass and grabbed a lime. “You’ve never told me the story.”

“Yeah, well, there isn’t much to tell. Last summer we had a thing. You know the type, burned so hot all it could do was flame out,” Jace said as he downed his tequila then immediately bit a wedge of lime, wincing from the burn. “Just wasn’t meant to be.”

Alec rolled his eyes. “Yeah, uhhh, I have no idea what that’s like, obviously. But maybe you should try apologizing to her? Either that or we need to find a different bar.”

Jace refilled their glasses all the way to the rim. “Nah, I love this bar. Besides, she just likes giving me shit… that was sort of our thing.”
Alec threw back the second very large shot and felt the heat coat his throat. His body already beginning to feel a warm tingle radiating down through his elbows and knees. He worried the stress he was under this summer was slowly turning him into a borderline alcoholic. The tart lime against his teeth helped soothe the burn, but he realized he wasn’t going to get much of a reprieve as Jace filled his glass again for the third time. He had a feeling this liquid lunch meant they probably wouldn’t be heading back up to the school again today, which meant yet another lost afternoon of much needed practice time.

“So, when are you going to tell me what the hell is going on with you?” Jace asked outright as the clear liquid sloshed over the edges of the overfilled glasses. He was always keenly perceptive to Alec’s woes.

Closing his eyes, Alec contemplated what sort of lie he could make up that Jace might actually fall for. He’d been giving him lame excuses over and over the last several days. It was getting harder to be creative. “Oh you know, same old, same old. Morgenstern making my life a living hell plus too many hours stuck in a hot practice room preparing for a competition I have no chance of winning.”

“Bullshit,” Jace immediately replied. “You have an excellent chance of winning! A better chance than I do!”

“Yeah, well, it doesn’t matter anyway. The faculty loves their golden boy and I’m sure he’s the one they’ll choose.” Alec really didn’t care if Sebastian won, maybe winning would take some of the heat off his intense hatred of Alec. That would be a win/win situation for them both.

“He’s not nearly as good as he thinks he is, plus I’ve heard you practicing, your Dvořák is killer,” Jace declared, tossing back his third shot and bobbling a bit on his stool.

“Yeah, well, I don’t know if I even want to win. My parents would want to come and I don’t really feel like dealing with their shit right now.” Alec hadn’t mentioned a word to anyone in his family about Magnus. They had absolutely no idea he wasn’t living in Hendel House or that he was even seeing anyone.

“They know that you’re gay, right?” Jace asked before biting into another lime.

“Yeah, but they act like it’s a temporary condition. I think my Mom secretly hopes I’ll show up one day with her future daughter-in-law on my arm. And my Dad thinks it’s just a phase. Spending too much time around ‘artistic people’ is what he likes to call it.”

“That’s fucked up,” Jace said, grabbing the already half-empty bottle and nearly knocking it over in the process. “No wonder you don’t want them here.”

Alec picked up a menu, deciding he’s better order some food to help soak up all this liquor he was drinking on an empty stomach. The last thing he needed was to make himself sick, and after 3 very large shots his mind was already in a haze.

“So, you and Magnus, you’re not having any trouble, are you?” Jace inquired, apparently set on probing Alec for information.

“No, no trouble. Other than the fact that the festival is almost half over and I have no idea what I’m going to do when it’s done.” Just saying the words out loud and hearing his own voice quaver at the end, Alec knew he wasn’t going to be able to fool Jace for long. The alcohol was betraying his carefully guarded secrets and Jace was much too smart to miss the cues.

“Have you guys talked about what you’re going to do? I mean, Clary and I have talked a bit. She’s
obviously going back to New York to finish up school. I was thinking maybe I’d move there. Now
that I’m done at IU and some stuff I thought was going to happen in the fall fell through, I don’t
really have any plans. Even if she dumps me New York’s a great place for any musician to be,
wouldn’t you say?”

Alec turned his body so he could look at Jace properly. “Clary is not going to dump you. Are you
kidding me? The girl thinks you hung the moon. I see you two together and I can tell. I mean, I’m no
love expert, but I don’t think you need to worry.”

Jace folded his arms across his puffed out chest and smiled. “Yeah? Well buddy you should look in a
mirror, because I’ve never seen two people closer than you and Bane. He looks at you like you are
the moon! Hell, like you’re the whole damn solar system! I’d put Vegas money on you two making
it work. And if you guys can’t, then nobody has a snowball’s chance in hell!”

Alec sat quietly letting Jace’s words sink in. He wanted to believe it so desperately, but of course
Jace didn’t know the whole story. He didn’t know his boyfriend’s brother was a sociopath hell bent
on his destruction. He wished he could tell him the whole truth, then at least he’d have one person to
confide his fears in and maybe help him figure out what the heck he was going to do. Sebastian had
been eerily quiet the last several days. Whenever they’d been forced to see each other he’d only
glared at Alec, never saying a word.

“Maia! Babe! Can we order some nachos pretty please?” Jace hollered down to the far end of the
bar, sporting yet another winning smile.

Alec buried his face in his hands not wanting to see what kind of violent reaction she was bound to
have to his bellowing request. Common sense told him that calling an old girlfriend “babe” over and
over again probably wasn’t a good idea. Sometimes Jace could be really smart about things, his street
smarts especially, but other times he seemed hopelessly trapped in a world of bad clichés.

“Listen,” Jace said, lowering his voice and patting Alec on the back to get his attention. “I’m gonna
give you some advice from Jace Wayland’s book of taking life by the balls. Don’t let your parents, or
anyone else, make you feel ashamed of who you are or what you want to do with your life. It’s up to
you to decide what’s best. Because this is all we get, this one life is all we get. And if they don’t
like it, then fuck ‘em! You are talented, good looking, and probably the nicest person I’ve ever met,
sickeningly nice I have to admit. So just follow your heart and stop overthinking everything, OK? I
can see your brain churning right now as we speak. So stop it!”

Alec nodded and averted his eyes. He felt emotional hearing Jace’s speech and also guilty that he
was keeping things from someone who was being such a great friend. Alec had never had anyone
support him like this before, nobody that really ever seemed to care what he wanted for himself, or
for his life. Certainly not his parents. He felt an overwhelming feeling of gratitude wash over him.
Gratitude for not only finding the love of his life this summer but also for finding a best friend.

“Yeah, well you talk too much when you’re drunk,” Alec teased, knowing Jace always appreciated a
gibe more than any mushy term of endearment.

“And you get too damn quiet when you are,” Jace replied lifting his glass and clinking it against the
side of Alec’s. “To us!” He toasted and Alec smiled his crooked little grin just before gulping down
yet another burning shot of tequila.
“Magnus, I’m home!” Alec called from the kitchen as he set down his car keys and a small cardboard box, then jerked open the fridge. He knew Magnus was there, having seen his car in the garage when he pulled in. He could smell something heavenly wafting from the oven and the mellow sound of Roberta Flack echoing through the room. It instantly relaxed him. He grabbed two beers from the bottom shelf of the fridge and had the first one almost finished in one gulp. He and Jace had decided to walk their drunk asses from the J bar all the way back past Hendel House and up the side of Aspen Mountain to enjoy the gorgeous weather. When they’d hiked as far as they could they’d found a large rock to sit on and spent the rest of the day soaking in the amazing view. They’d talked about their hopes and dreams for the future and their music careers, as well as confessions of just how scared they both were about their intense feelings for Magnus and Clary. It had been just what Alec needed to clear his head and say everything he’d been feeling out loud. Still somehow managing to avoid mentioning Sebastian. That of course wasn’t his secret to tell.

“There’s my sexy man,” Magnus cooed as he sauntered into the kitchen and right up to Alec eagerly. “You look so rugged and sweaty! I’ve been waiting very impatiently for you to come home so I can kiss you hello.”

Alec smiled, set the beers on the counter, and then wrapped his arms tightly around Magnus’ waist, pulling him close. Their lips finally connecting. Every time they were apart for more than a few hours their reunion was always electric. Literally like a jolt of electricity traveling through their bodies. Alec sank deep into Magnus’ warm and inviting mouth. He tasted a sweet tang of wine that mixed with the citrusy smell of his smooth, flawless skin. His body felt firm, yet soft at the same time. He wanted nothing more than to melt right into him, like butter against warm bread.

“I made you something special,” Magnus purred after pulling their lips apart. “Penne with roasted red peppers, spinach and pancetta. I had a craving for comfort food.”

“It smells heavenly,” Alec murmured before hungrily attacking Magnus’ lips again. As he tightened the hold around his body the hem of Magnus’ shirt hiked up on the sides. Alec slid his hands underneath the loose fabric and ran them up the length of Magnus’ back, feeling his warm, velvety skin against his very cold fingers, which had been holding the two chilled beers just moments ago.

Magnus shuttered. “Ooo your hands are so cold!”

“Mmm, but I found the perfect way to warm them up,” Alec sighed moving his mouth down to the underside of Magnus jaw, kissing and sucking down the length of his neck.

“What’s got you in such a frisky mood this early in the evening?” Magnus giggled as Alec continued to devour him.

“What?” Alec spoke softly against Magnus’ moistened skin. “Can’t a man be excited to come home and kiss the man he loves?”

Magnus smiled, winding his fingers into the back of Alec’s hair, his neck extending. “Well I know you spent the afternoon with Jace, so I’m assuming booze was involved.”

Alec stopped abruptly to jerk Magnus up off his feet, and plop him down on top of the kitchen island, bringing them exactly eye to eye. “Are you complaining?” Alec teased, raising both eyebrows seductively.

“By all means, please continue,” Magnus replied, wrapping his legs tightly around Alec’s hips pulling him in.

After about thirty minutes of thoroughly appreciating every inch of exposed skin Alec could put his
lips on, the oven timer dinged and Magnus scooted himself down from the counter to attend to their
dinner. Alec was left wanting more, his lips numb and his head spinning.

“This has to sit for about 10 minutes before I can cut it so why don’t you jump in the shower,”
Magnus suggested as he pulled open the oven door.

“What? You don’t like me dirty?” Alec asked with a devilish smirk, one sly eyebrow slightly raised.

Oh don’t you worry my darling, there are plenty of other ways we can get dirty later, I promise.”
Magnus playfully winked, then leaned over and grabbed a healthy handful of Alec’s left cheek
giving it a squeeze.

Alec felt invigorated after his shower. Looking at himself in the bathroom mirror he could see he’d
gotten some sun on his hike. His face was glowing and his hair was beginning to lighten from all the
time he’d been spending outdoors. For once in his life he actually felt like he looked pretty good. Not
a normal feeling for him to have since self-deprecation was more his forté. Padding out of the master
bath he pulled a pair of soft cotton lounge pants from the dresser drawer and loosely tied the
drawstring. Magnus had given him three drawers here and another 3 in the top of the chest by the
closet. It had felt strange to Alec at first, having never shared a room with anyone, not even as a
child. But now it felt normal, like it was their room together. Even though he knew it was technically
Magnus’ house, Magnus never let him feel that way. He went out of his way to refer to everything as
“theirs”.

His hair was still slightly damp as he headed back to the kitchen shirtless and barefoot, his stomach
hungrily rumbling. Once he arrived he saw the island had been set for the two of them but there was
no sign of Magnus anywhere. He listened carefully for a moment and thought he heard voices
coming from the hall. He headed off to investigate.

“Alec? You out here?” Alec called as he made his way into the foyer. He found the front door
was slightly ajar and the voices he had heard appeared to be coming from just outside. Alec could tell
one was Magnus and he sounded strained. Not yelling, but very agitated. Something was wrong.
Then, before Alec even had time to approach, the door flung open wildly, revealing Magnus headed
back inside and Sebastian just behind him looking upset. Not his normal smug expression but
something that was more along the lines of being hurt and disappointed. He actually looked human
for a change.

Alec was very surprised to see him standing there, he hadn’t dared to show his face at Magnus’
house since their angry confrontation in the kitchen weeks ago. He was totally caught off guard.
“What’s going on here?”

“Alexander, it’s fine,” Magnus said, looking more upset than Alec had ever seen him before. “He was
just leaving.”

Alec’s eyes scanned Magnus’ body and noticed his hands were trembling. This caused an immediate
physical response in Alec like he’d been shot with dose of adrenaline. “Are you OK? What
happened?” Alec reached forward and placed one hand on Magnus’ arm, he could feel him shaking
and it scared him.

The front door was still wide open, Sebastian stood there looking in at them, his eyes flickering angrily to Alec’s hand on Magnus’ arm. “Lightwood!” he sneered, his face transforming back into its usual disgusted, self-righteous look. “Half naked as always I see. Don’t you ever wear clothes?”

Alec fought back the overwhelming urge to rush forward and punch Sebastian right in his snide, obnoxious mouth. Be the better person, be the better person, he told himself. Knowing if he pummeled Magnus’ brother right in front of him it wasn’t going to help matters.

“Let’s eat please,” Magnus muttered quietly as he stepped behind Alec, visibly shaken.

“What did you do?” Alec accused, bravely squaring his shoulders toward the door, not backing down from Sebastian’s verbal attack one bit. Magnus was just behind him now and Alec felt like a human shield for whatever bullshit was about to be fired their way.

“Mind your own business,” Sebastian hissed. “This is a family matter and it doesn’t involve you.”

“If it involves Magnus then it involves me!” Alec demanded, taking two steps closer to Sebastian, putting himself right inside the frame of the door like a barricade.

“You should tighten your leash on this one dear brother, he obviously doesn’t know his place,” Sebastian taunted, fearlessly staring down Alec as if daring him to make another move.

“Alexander, please,” Magnus spoke from behind softly. “Just let him go.”

Sebastian’s face twisted and contorted into maniacal glee, no doubt thrilled to see Alec responding to his goading and Magnus asking him to back down. There was nothing he wanted more than to pit the two of them against each other, or find some way to come between them. “How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle,” he proclaimed, hoping to pull Alec further into the jaws of a fight.

Alec stifled a laugh. “Ha, I see you’re moving from Latin poetry to the Bible now. Am I supposed to be impressed that you can read?”

Sebastian savagely lunged forward, thrusting his face within an inch of Alec’s. Green eyes meeting hazel. They were the exactly the same height. Alec had never been this close to him before, he could see each individual fleck of color in his irises, and his lashes were as pale as his hair. His poreless skin was like luminous silk pulled tight over his angular facial structure. He could have been beautiful if he wasn’t so evil and full of hate. Alec could feel the rage rolling off of him like steam, he wished he had a shirt on, his lack of clothing made him feel vulnerable, but he still didn’t flinch. As intimidating as Sebastian could be Alec’s desire to protect the man he loved outweighed any fear inside of him. He stood tall and motionless, his broad shoulders nearly blocking the doorway completely.

Sebastian’s face softened as the corners of his mouth turned up into a smile. “You’re a fool Alec Lightwood,” he said at a whisper, easing back away, taking slow, measured steps, never breaking eye contact. “and you will lose… everything.”
Magnus slowly walked through the expansive rose garden behind Valentine’s sprawling mansion as the last remaining bits of daylight began to slip beyond the ocean’s watery horizon. The sun cast a shimmer of gold across each delicate rose petal making the blooms look as if they’d been lit from within. They were truly beautiful to see, if Magnus would have been in the right frame of mind to appreciate their beauty. But his thoughts were elsewhere. He wound his way deeper and deeper into the garden, between dozens of Greek statues, until he came to a small wrought iron bench that offered the perfect view of the Pacific Ocean. He sat down, leaned back, and closed his eyes as the intoxicating fragrance of the roses made him feel dizzy and lightheaded. He thought a bit of fresh air would have done him good, but the pungent floral smell only reminded him of the last time he’d been in London. That rainy, cold December day four years ago at his mother’s funeral. There’d been flowers everywhere, at the hotel, the church, the funeral parlor, and at the grave. There’d been a particularly elaborate spray of white roses that had covered her casket. He remembered watching them slowly sink into the earth as the car had pulled away from the cemetery. He’d hated the sight of roses ever since. The memory was just as vivid now as it ever was. The smell of all of those flowers had clung to his wool coat for several days after her service until he’d decided to accidentally leave it in a public restroom just to escape its scent.

Magnus’ head was still buzzing with the overload of information he’d been hit with from Valentine. He couldn’t even begin to process this so-called truth when almost every fiber of his being denounced its legitimacy completely. How could his mother have kept up this charade for so many years? How could she have looked at him every single day and never said anything? Had the lies been too much for her to bare alone? Is that why sadness and depression had plagued her mind? Did she really threaten to jump off that bridge? Would she have gone through with it? And his father, what Magnus could barely remember of him since he died when he was just a toddler, had he really taken his own life? Was it because he found out the truth? So many questions were piling up one on top of another with no way to ever get any answers from the dead. If there’d been other family, or close friends, maybe he could have sought them out and tried to learn more. But Magnus felt lost and alone. More alone than ever. Two dead parents who suddenly seemed like strangers to him. He was reminded of a quote from a book by John Steinbeck he’d been required to write an essay about in school.

When a child first catches adults out—when it first walks into his grave little head that adults do not always have divine intelligence,

that their judgments are not always wise, their thinking true, their sentences just—his world falls into panic desolation.

The gods are fallen and all safety gone. And there is one sure thing about the fall of gods: they do not fall a little;

they crash and shatter or sink deeply into green muck. It is a tedious job to build them up again; they never quite shine.

And the child’s world is never quite whole again. It is an aching kind of growing.

Magnus’ gods had definitely fallen. They’d crashed and shattered all around him, leaving nothing
but broken fragments of a past that now seemed somehow fraudulent. He questioned every single memory, every bit of advice and guidance his mother had ever given him, and he looked back on it all with skepticism and distrust. He felt the last frayed threads of his childhood innocence twist and pull against his heart, and he knew they were going to snap. He could feel the dark cynicism of adulthood looming over him like a black cloud. There was no going back from this, no way to preserve the old truths he used to hold so dear. It was like trying to grab fistfuls of smoke. Somehow it was even worse than their deaths. He’d come to accept the fact that his parents were gone, but now even their memories were tainted with lies. He felt angry that he couldn’t confront them about this. His only source of information now was Valentine, and Magnus didn’t trust him one bit.

The sun was sinking further into the infinite expanse of charcoal water as Magnus watched orange and pink reflections bounce off the glass house behind him, intensifying the sunset like a giant mirror. The light was blindingly brilliant, and Magnus imagined anyone who lived here and witnessed this kind of beauty every single night would no doubt become immune to its radiance over time. He imaged Valentine rarely noticed sunsets anymore and probably never even came out to this garden. The entire estate was obviously just for show and it made Magnus long for his tiny dorm room back at Curtis where he always felt safe and protected. But he knew there was no going back to school, those days were over now. He had to make a decision about where his life would go from here and as much as he hated everything and everyone for putting him into this mess there was one very small glimmer of hope. One thing that might turn out to be something good amidst all this pain and confusion.

“I have a brother,” Magnus muttered aloud to himself, the sting of tears once again threatening behind his eyes. He knew Sebastian was the only other innocent victim in all of this chaos. Maybe together they could break away from Valentine, maybe they could somehow become a family for each other. Maybe they didn’t even need parents, or anyone. That small hope traveled down into the deepest recesses of Magnus heart and he knew he couldn’t get on that plane tomorrow and leave Sebastian behind.

Walking back up to the house Magnus dreaded the phone call he’d have to make. Catarina was going to be beyond shocked to hear his decision to not come back. He’d just have to tell her the career opportunities in LA were too good to pass up. He’d let her know about the recording contract and the world tour. Surely that would be enough to convince her he wasn’t crazy for staying. He’d have to sound excited and happy, which wasn’t going to be easy. But he didn’t feel he had any other choice, if she detected trepidation in his voice she’d no doubt be on the first plane there.

Magnus and Alec sat silently at the kitchen island somberly eating their dinner. After Sebastian had left they’d both been quiet, Magnus sad and despondent, Alec biting back his anger and frustration. It was difficult for both of them, neither wanting to make the other feel worse.

Roberta Flack was strumming her pain with her fingers in the background and Alec could no longer stand the painfully awkward silence between them. “Magnus, listen. I’m sorry if I made things worse. I honestly tried to keep calm, but I can only take so much you know? And then I just snap.”

Magnus carefully set his fork down next to his plate and lowered his head. He looked like he had the
weight of the entire world on his shoulders. “You have nothing to be sorry for Alexander, I’m the one to blame for all of this. I’m so, so sorry for the way he treated you. It tears me apart inside that I can’t fix this.”

Alec shook his head then gently laid one hand on Magnus’ back to comfort him. “Don’t say that, you are not to blame. I won’t let you take responsibility for his actions. He’s an adult.”

Magnus turned his head toward Alec, his eyes swimming with emotion. He looked completely crushed, like the situation was nothing but entirely hopeless. “I shouldn’t have let him speak to you like that, I… I should have stopped him.”

A feeling of empathy swept over Alec like a tidal wave and he shifted his hand from Magnus’ back to wrap it around his shoulders, pulling him into his chest. It was an odd sort of role reversal, Alec not used to being the pillar of strength in their relationship. He set his chin on top of Magnus’ head and just held him in his arms listening to the music and allowing it to soothe them. They sat like this for a few moments until Alec had an idea that might turn things around.

“Hey, do you know what today is?” Alec murmured gently, his hand lovingly caressing Magnus’ arm.

“Thursday,” Magnus responded, his voice still sounding disheartened.

“Yeah, but do you know the date?”

“Ah, June 23rd I think,” Magnus said as Alec released his hold and stood up from his seat.

“Yep, that’s right, June 23rd!” Alec quickly walked over to the counter near the fridge and picked up the small cardboard box he’d brought in earlier. As he turned back and walked toward Magnus he had an impish grin spreading across his face and Magnus’ eyes widened with curiosity.

“What have you got there?” Magnus asked, eyeing the small box.

“Why don’t you open it and find out,” Alec beamed, his face lit up with pride as he extended his arms toward him with affection.

Magnus took the box from Alec’s hands and set it on the counter in front of him. Alec stepped around to stand beside him, placing his arm back around Magnus’ shoulders again, practically bursting with excitement.

“Well, go ahead!” Alec encouraged, he could barely stand the suspense.

Magnus took hold of the front flap of the box and slowly lifted it back to reveal a small cake inside, frosted white with tiny pink and yellow flowers around the edges. A large “1” had be drawn with pink icing right in the center with a tiny candle just above it. Magnus was speechless.

“Happy one month anniversary babe!” Alec exclaimed, squeezing Magnus’ shoulders even tighter. “One month ago today you changed my whole life for the better, and I wanted to get something to mark the occasion. Because I love you.” Alec kissed the top of Magnus’ head feeling a bubble of joy swelling inside his ribcage at having surprised Magnus with something for a change.

“Alexander,” Magnus sighed, his voice barely audible. “This… this…” But Magnus couldn’t continue, he swiveled his stool around toward Alec and threw his arms around his chest in the tightest bear hug he could give him. Burying his face against his sun warmed skin he squeezed him with all his might. “This is the most glorious cake I’ve ever seen. Thank you baby, thank you so
much. I love you too, more than anything."

Alec could feel Magnus’ tears wetting his skin and his heart skipped a beat. “Don’t cry, this is supposed to cheer you up,” Alec said, scooping Magnus underneath his armpits and pulling him up to standing. “Don’t, please don’t.” Alec cupped Magnus’ tear streaked face and kissed the salty wet trails of each of his reddened cheeks. “This is a happy day, OK? You make me the happiest person on the planet and I thank my lucky stars every day for bringing me here to you.”

Magnus couldn’t help being overcome by his emotions. “You are a miracle to me,” he muttered, his voice still shaky and quivering. “I don’t deserve you, of that I am certain. But if it’s the stars that brought you into my life then the luck they hold is what I am thankful for.” He lifted his arms around Alec’s neck, interlacing his fingers and pressing the length of his whole body against him. “One month of experiencing the pure light that shines from the very essence of your soul. What a gift. I want nothing more than a lifetime with you to bask in its glow.”

Alec leaned in and kissed Magnus tenderly then they clasped tightly to each other in a warm, loving embrace. “We’re going to get through this babe, I know we will.”

Ragnor Fell sat dozing in his favorite armchair, a book laid open across his chest, having fallen asleep while reading. His tiny little chalet was nestled in the trees within sight of Magnus’ impressive mountain home, but tucked away enough to not be noticed. When he and Magnus had first moved to Aspen a few months ago Magnus had wanted him to live in the main house, not only for convenience but also to keep him company. Ragnor had considered the offer but in the end had opted for the little wooden chalet saying he longed for solitude and privacy after so many years living under Valentine’s roof. Magnus had been slightly disappointed, he enjoyed their fireside chats with robust glasses of port, but he’d understood Ragnor’s wishes. From time to time Magnus would knock on his door to visit, making some excuse about needing his help when Ragnor knew he only wanted his ear. He didn’t mind though, he’d spent the better part of the last 20 years listening to Magnus and counseling him through many trials and tribulations. They’d built a deep and lasting friendship, Magnus trusted him implicitly.

A loud knock at the door woke Ragnor from his slumber, he sat bolt upright, which caused his book to topple to the floor. “Who’s there?” He shouted, not expecting to see Magnus tonight, knowing he’d be otherwise engaged with Mr. Lightwood, as he had been for the last several weeks.

The knock came again, this time even louder.

“Alright, alright, I’m coming, I’m coming,” Ragnor responded, shuffling his feet into a pair of ragged old slippers and tightening the straps of his robe.

When he pulled the door slightly open to see who was there he was greeted by a stiff arm, bracing itself firmly against the door so he couldn’t close it back in response.

“Ah, ah, ah, not so fast old man. Is that anyway to greet your employer.”

Ragnor stepped back and allowed Sebastian to push his way inside, closing the door behind him.
“What are you doing here?” Ragnor asked, clearly shocked to see him.

“Believe me, it is a last resort that I’d come here to this hovel of yours but I’m unable to reach father I need you to get in touch with him for me.” Sebastian’s eyes scanned the room, his face full of disgust.

Ragnor straightened his shoulders and stood up brave and tall. “Perhaps he does not wish to speak to you, did you happen to think of that?”

Sebastian turned his face to glare at Ragnor with an evil, menacing look. “It is not in your best interest to concern yourself with the nature of my business old man. I just need you to ring him on whatever private line you two share and tell him it is of great importance that we speak as soon as possible.”

“And why should I?” Ragnor retorted. “Whatever it is you want I’m sure it’s nothing good!”

Sebastian stepped in further, closing the distance between them. He lifted his gloved hands in front of him and tented his spread fingers, touching them tip to tip. He turned his head at a sharp angle to stare down Ragnor like an animal stalking innocent prey. “Do you mean to make me angry? Is that what you’d really like to do?”

Ragnor gulped nervously, realizing he’d pushed him too far. “No Mr. Morgenstern, of course not. I shall ring your father straight away and tell him to call you immediately.”

Sebastian flashed his most cunning smile, his eyes illuminating in the darkness. “Now see, wasn’t that easy? I knew you couldn’t be as stupid as you look.”

“Is there anything else you’d like me to tell him for you?” Ragnor was backtracking now, trying to smooth things over with niceties.

“Yes, actually there is. I’d like you to tell him about my brother’s lingering houseguest. I feel it’s time for him to know what’s been going on around here, I’m sure he’d be quite interested.”

Ragnor nodded in agreement. “Of course sir, right away.”

Sebastian continued to glare at him, running his gaze across Ragnor’s face as if his eyes could slice into his flesh like lasers. “Your loyalty has always been in question you know. I suggest if you value your personal safety you’ll keep this conversation between the two of us.”

“Of course,” Ragnor answered, feeling a bead of sweat trickle from his brow down the side of his face.

“Self-preservation should be at the top of your list should an exchange of power increase your likelihood for early retirement.”

“You can trust me sir,” Ragnor said, making his best attempt to sound convincing. He noticed for the first time since Sebastian’s arrival that his shoes were caked with red mud. It looked as if he’d been hiking up the mountainside. Ragnor thought it seemed rather odd and his mind immediately went to the steep dirt slope that ran up from behind Magnus’ house. A cold chill ran over his body.

“We shall see about that,” Sebastian sneered, turning back toward the door. “We shall see.”
Chapter End Notes

Oh he's soooo bad! We are getting so close to July 4th I'm starting to panic about what's going to happen. xD

First I just have to say that I was cracking up Monday night during Shadowhunters with the Jace and Maia scene knowing I'd already pictured all of that quite clearly in my head when I started this fic! There's just something about their love/hate relationship that is so intriguing.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter! We are probably about 4-5 chapters away from the end and I'm getting sad about it already. I have grown so attached to this AU, it has really given my Malec brain something to think about when left unsatisfied with the lack of Malec on screen. ;)

I've updated both playlists and as always I super appreciate all your comments and kudos, they mean the world to me!! :)

If you want to find me on social media all my info is in my ao3 profile. The next big chapter, which includes the 4th of July *FIREWORKS* wink wink, will be ready for you guys just in time for the real 4th of July! I couldn't have planned it better! xD

Thanks so much for reading, let me know what you think! XOXOXOXO
Alec was startled awake, his heart hammering with a sudden jolt of adrenaline. His eyes blinked rapidly, struggling to see in the darkness. He carefully lifted his right arm, which was currently draped over Magnus’ shoulders, and slowly reached toward the nightstand, fumbling for his phone. Once his hand finally made contact with its smooth surface he brought it close to his face and clicked on the screen to check the time. 3:27 AM. Ugh, Alec thought to himself. Why am I awake again?

This was the third time since they’d gone to bed that Alec had woken up with a surge of panic pulsing through his body. He knew exactly why of course, in a few hours he’d be competing in the AMF’s concerto competition with the Dvořák he’d been slaving over all summer. There would be no more practicing or polishing, no more last minute changes or adjustments. This was it. And he’d never felt more uneasy about a performance in his life.

Alec ran through every possible scenario and outcome this competition could result in, and none of them seemed desirable. If he did his best and lost, then he’d feel completely miserable. Especially if Sebastian was the one to beat him. If he did his best and won, he’d momentarily be thrilled until Sebastian found out and then he’d probably strangle the life out of him. He could go in and purposely throw the competition, making some critical mistakes. That way his ego would be protected and Sebastian could enjoy the false victory. But the thought of watching him gloat made Alec’s blood boil, it was nearly as bad as being strangled. Ideally if he and Sebastian could both lose that would probably be the best outcome. But knowing Jace hadn’t really been practicing and Clary had backed out at the last minute feeling unprepared, the other guest artists didn’t seem to be much of a threat to either of them.

Magnus must have picked up on Alec’s restlessness and he stirred against him, wrapping himself even tighter around his body. Slowly he nuzzled his face against Alec’s warm chest and moaned softly against his skin. “Mmmm… why are you awake again baby?” he sighed. “Are you still feeling nervous?”

“Sorry,” Alec responded, feeling guilty he’d disturbed him. “Yeah I guess I am.” He had told Magnus earlier in the evening how nervous he was about the competition. They’d cuddled while talking and Magnus had tried to get Alec’s mind off things by telling him funny stories about his life on the road. The nightmarish flights, dodgy hotels, and endless number of bad meals had Alec laughing in no time. He was grateful to be momentarily distracted from his anxiety and stress, and eventually they’d both fallen peacefully asleep in each other’s arms.

“You need to get rid of some of that nervous energy,” Magnus cooed, pressing his knee up between Alec’s legs as one delicate hand drifted lower, past his abdomen, letting Alec know exactly what he meant. “And I know just the thing to do the trick.”

The adrenaline that was coursing through Alec’s body quickly transferred into a fierce sexual hunger that focused into Alec’s groin causing him to buck his hips up against Magnus’ firm grasp. He let out a low groan.

“Hmmm, that’s more like it,” Magnus purred, his lips smiling against Alec’s chest as he felt him stiffen inside his hand. “Just leave it to me my darling and I’ll have you so exhausted you’ll sleep like a baby for the rest of the night.”

Alec was more than willing. There was nothing in the world that could soothe his mind and satisfy his soul like Magnus’ touch. Their bodies intertwined, thick strong arms wrapping around smooth, muscular backs, as they moved slowly, grinding against one another in rolling waves of passion.
Inching upward from Alec’s chest Magnus brushed his velvety soft lips up the length of Alec’s neck and along his jawline until he came to his breathless, awaiting lips. Their kiss connected with languid, open mouthed urgency. Magnus’ tongue danced against Alec’s, slowly and sensually pressing into him deeper with every exhale. They moved together in sync, their hands exploring every dip and curve as their fingers traced each exquisitely taught muscle.

Magnus quickly shifted, moving on top of Alec with agile, catlike flexibility. He straddled his hips then dipped his head down to take one of Alec’s soft nipples into his mouth, circling it with his tongue and biting down to make it hard. Alec let out a high pitched whimper that ignited a fire within Magnus like nothing else in his life ever could. He pulled at the raised flesh, sucking and stroking it deliciously as his hips continued to grind against him. He hummed against the moistened skin and Alec’s back arched into the pleasure.

Alec had come to the point in their relationship where he could completely let go and surrender himself to everything Magnus had to give. As a person who’d spent most of his life bottling up his emotions and closing himself off to anyone who tried to get too close, this was a new freeness Alec had never experienced. He didn’t allow himself think about what was happening, only feel it. This new sense of physical awareness only came about because he trusted Magnus implicitly. He didn’t have to worry about how his body moved, or the moans that escaped from deep within him. There was no shame or fear, only bliss.

Magnus’ mouth moved from Alec’s chest down to the quivering ripples of his abdomen. He kissed a wet trail across his skin just before plunging down upon his firm erection, taking it deep into his throat. Alec’s body writhed then stilled as he allowed Magnus’ expert tongue to do its magic. Each sublime suck and pull sent intense waves of pleasure throughout every inch of Alec’s body, curling his toes and driving his hips forward. He exhaled long ragged breaths that ended with deep satisfied groans. His hands gently wound their way into the silky strands of Magnus’ hair, clutching it tightly as his mind tumbled end over end into an oblivion of ecstasy.

Alec didn’t wake again that night. He slept in the warmth and safety of his lover’s arms with peaceful dreams of their perfect and unending love for one another. Nothing else on this earth mattered to him… not a silly competition or a pathetically vengeful enemy. He knew there was nothing that could ever come between them. He would never let that happen, no matter what it takes.

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Saturday, May 18, 1996

“Surely I’m not hearing you correctly Magnus?” Catarina uttered into the phone with confusion. “You’re staying?”

“I’m sorry,” Magnus replied, feeling his voice stop in the back of his throat before he could even continue explaining.

“I don’t understand?” Catarina’s voice was shocked with disbelief. “Just two days ago you told me you couldn’t wait to come home!”
Magnus had indeed said that, and he’d meant it at the time. But so much had changed over the last two days, his entire life had been flipped on its head. He couldn’t tell Catarina the truth though. He had to convince her he was making the right decision career wise, leaving the personal developments out of it. “This is the opportunity of a lifetime. To travel the world and have a real career. I’d be crazy to turn it down.”

Catarina was silent for a moment. Magnus worried at first that she’d hung up, until her voice finally came back on the line. “Magnus, my darling, this is me. I know you better than anyone.”

Magnus closed his eyes tightly and swallowed hard… this was going to be even more difficult than he’d been prepared for.

“Just tell me what has happened. Are you in trouble? Do you need me to come there and get you?” Catarina’s voice was growing more desperate.

“No… no… I’m OK. I swear I am,” Magnus assured her. “It’s really an amazing chance for me… and I need your support right now on this. Please Cat? Please just tell me you understand?”

Catarina was silent once again. Magnus held his breath, hoping he’d said enough to sell her on his lies.

“Alright,” she finally responded. “Alright Magnus. If this is really what you want, of course you have my support. But I’d be lying if I said I was happy about it.” Her voice was quavering and Magnus felt his knees buckle. “I’ve spent the past week getting your room all ready. I went to the store for all your favorite foods, and I even rented a ton of old Gene Kelly movies for us to watch. I thought you wanted to come back here… to live with me. I thought it was decided?”

Tears were now streaming down Magnus’ face as he fought as hard as he could not to audibly cry into the phone. He could picture Catarina’s old brownstone in Philly, and the upstairs bedroom she’d told him he could have for as long as he wanted. He could see her stocked fridge with cans of root beer and gallons of ice cream in a half dozen different flavors. He could visualize the pile of VHS tapes sitting on her coffee table, ready to make them giggle and laugh. No doubt they would have danced around the room, twirling each other in circles and stumbling over their clumsy feet. The longing Magnus felt now for that picture perfect life nearly crushed his soul to dust, and in this moment he knew he was breaking not only her heart but his own as well.

“I’m sorry, but this is just something I have to do… for me,” Magnus said with as much courage as he could muster. The lie so thick on his tongue he wanted to choke on it.

“Of course my darling, of course. As you should, as you should.” Her voice fading off to a whisper.

Magnus told her goodbye then placing the phone back on the nightstand he collapsed onto his bed in tears. He had held it together for as long as he could but lying to Catarina was something he never thought he would ever do. He felt completely awful especially hearing about her preparations for his arrival, knowing he was really all she had in the world. Thinking of the wonderful things she’d done for him over the years, how she’d treated him like a son. It left an aching in his soul.

Sobbing uncontrollably into his pillow Magnus didn’t hear the door to his bedroom pop open. He also didn’t hear the patter of little bare feet approaching his bed, or the shift of weight being added to his mattress. It wasn’t until a small hand was placed against his arm that his eyelids flattered open to find Sebastian there looking at him with his penetrating green eyes. His face as pure and angelic as a Raphael painting, his hair hanging in damp ringlets just fresh from his evening bath.
“Play?” Sebastian said, his voice always a welcome surprise since he’d barely said a dozen words to Magnus all week. Which apparently was more than he’d ever said to even his own nanny.

"I’m sorry I can’t right now,” Magnus managed to choke out between sobs. “I’m too upset to play.”

Sebastian tugged at his arm, pulling it out from under the pillow with both hands, clearly not taking no for an answer. “Please play!”

Magnus looked at his pleading little face, too precious to even consider saying no to him again. “Oh alright,” he sighed, climbing down off the bed and forcing himself to walk over to his music stand. His violin still by the door where he’d placed it earlier. Back when he’d thought he was actually leaving. Grabbing it by the handle now it felt ten times heavier than usual. Even his feet felt like they were set into cement blocks. He reluctantly took out his violin and bow and with a deep breath began to play the first thing that came to mind.

The 2nd movement of Tchaikovsky’s violin concerto seemed perfect for his current state of misery. Sebastian took his regular spot on the bed and as Magnus started to play he found himself quickly lost in the music’s mournful, lyric simplicity. It was as if Sebastian knew this was the best remedy for what ailed him. Even at age 4 he seemed keenly in tune to Magnus’ needs. Magnus redirected his sadness into his playing and let the heartbeat he felt about Catarina, and his mother, pour out of him through the music. The melody swirled through the air and up into the high ceiling filling the room with beautifully expressive melodies.

As Magnus slowly pulled his bow across the A string, resonating the final note of the movement, a slow clap broke out from his bedroom door, startling him back to reality.

“Bravo, bravo!” Valentine proclaimed, clapping and walking toward Magnus with a sickeningly gleeful smile across his face. “My son the virtuoso! What a gift it is to have you here filling this dull and lifeless home with the sweet sounds of your musical genius.”

Magnus looked to Sebastian who had drawn his knees up into his chest, rolling himself into a ball like a little blonde hedgehog. His eyes barely peering over the tops of his legs. Apparently when he’d come in while Magnus was crying he must have left the door ajar. Valentine had heard him playing and that realization made Magnus feel a crippling fear like ice water running through his veins.

“Tomorrow we’ll go back to the studio and sign the contracts so you can immediately begin working on your album! I’ve got to check my schedule for possible dates to host a launch party here at the estate. Also we’ll need to find you a manager, as much as I’d like to handle this myself I’m far too stretched between a dozen different projects right now. We’ll need someone who can be available 24/7.”

Magnus’ head was spinning just thinking of all this entailed. His eyes kept drifting over to the small, trembling boy on his bed and suddenly an idea came into his mind that seemed of dire importance.
“I have a condition,” Magnus spoke aloud bravely. His voice snapping Valentine’s gaze back to him, his eyes narrowing.

“Is that so?” Valentine threatened, as if daring Magnus to continue.

“If you want me to sign the contracts there’s something I need from you first.”

Valentine pursed his lips and rotated his head upward without breaking the lock he had on Magnus’ eyes. You could see the wheels turning in his head as he sized up Magnus like a boxer in a ring. “Well, I’m all ears, please, continue.”

“I want a violin!” Magnus blurted out, then hesitated a moment before the words could properly form in his mouth. “I mean... I want a violin, for my brother.”

Valentine barked out a bellowing laugh. “Ha ha! Why? He’s much too young! Not to mention his other deficiencies,” he scoffed. Dismissing the idea completely.

“I was his age when I started lessons,” Magnus countered.

“That’s different, you were a prodigy. It was in your blood.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Magnus asked, slightly taken aback by his comment.

“Your mother, she obviously passed her exceptional talent down to you,” Valentine stated very matter-of-factly.

“I’m pretty sure that’s not how it works,” Magnus rebutted, feeling quite certain his musical abilities came from many hours of practicing, and not by something in his blood.

“Well I’m sure it helped,” Valentine said bitterly, apparently not interested in taking his request seriously.

“I want to teach him myself,” Magnus declared, just as surprised to hear the words come out of his own mouth as Valentine was to hear them.

“Don’t be ridiculous, you’re at a pivotal time in your young career, you can’t afford to waste it teaching a beginner!” Valentine’s voice was now becoming agitated to the point of anger. He was allowing his fatherly façade to crack and show the true person who lied deep within.

Magnus paused for a moment, digging down to find hidden recesses of bravery and the ability to remain strong. “You want me to sign the contract? Well, this is how I’m negotiating.”

Valentine let out a deep exhale then closed his eyes and clinched his jaw, struggling to keep his cool. “And if I agree to this ridiculous idea, then you will sign?”

Magnus looked him straight in the eyes, feeling for the first time this week the ball was in his court for a change. “Yes, I will sign.”

Cocking his head Valentine squinted at Magnus, as if he were trying to discern if he was lying to him. “Why the sudden interest in teaching?”

“I guess I’ve just found something I feel passionate about,” Magnus answered honestly, looking over at Sebastian and giving him a soft reassuring smile. “Very well, I’ll have Ragnor take you both shopping tomorrow for whatever he needs. But I still say it’s a waste of your time.”
Valentine stormed out of the room, slamming the door, and Magnus was left feeling victorious. He lifted his chin proudly and smiled at Sebastian, causing the little boy to uncurl from his protective ball. “Things are going to change around here,” Magnus proclaimed. “You’ve got a big brother now and I’m not afraid of him.”

Sebastian jumped down off the bed, ran to Magnus and wrapped himself tightly around his leg. Valentine had been right about one thing, these two brothers had bonded. They’d found something they were both desperately missing from their lives, and they’d found it in each other.

Alec had a death grip on Stella’s case as he entered Harris Concert Hall through the back door marked “Performer’s Entrance.” There were only about ten cars in the parking lot and his footsteps echoed loudly through the vacant backstage hallway.

As he continued on inside he came to a woman sitting at a small table with a clipboard. “Hello Mr. Lightwood, please sign in here,” she said, pointing to the sheet of names. “Then you may proceed into the green room to await your turn. There is a 30 minute allotment of time between you and the next competitor, so the room is yours to tune and prepare in private.”

“Thanks,” Alec mumbled, his mouth full of invisible cotton balls. He’d left his water bottle in the car purposely so he’d stop nervously drinking so much. Otherwise he’d never make it through his performance without running to the bathroom.

Once inside the green room he found an assortment of drinks and snacks as well as mints and packs of tissues with a sign that read, “Courtesy of the Aspen Historical Society.” He thought it seemed odd but he gratefully popped a mint hoping to restore his ability to swallow. Placing Stella’s case on the ground he unlatched her lid just as his phone began to vibrate in his suit jacket pocket. He fumbled to grab it, nearly dropping it on the ground, then smiled to see Magnus’ number illuminated on the screen.

“Hey,” Alec spoke softly, unsure of how soundproof the room was.

“Did you make it there OK?” Magnus asked, sounding concerned.

“Yeah, I’m here, I’m OK. Just getting ready to go in now.”

“Good, good. I know you’re going to do splendidly Alexander.”

“Yeah, well, don’t celebrate just quite yet.”

“We will celebrate tonight my darling, no matter what the outcome.”

“As long as booze is involved. So I can drowned my sorrows.”

“Stop being so hard on yourself. Just be confident in your amazing talent and blow their socks off.”

“Yeah sure, ok,” Alec grumbled, wishing he’d never even entered the competition at this point.
“Whatever happens, just know that you’ve already won my heart and I love you with every ounce of it.”

“Love you too,” Alec replied, his crooked little grin springing up unexpectedly.

“Come straight home after!” Magnus sweetly insisted.

“You know I will.”

“And break a leg!”

Alec tucked his phone into the inside pocket of his cello case and closed the lid. There’d be no more distractions now, it was time for him and Stella to do what they do best.

Moments later there was a gentle knock at the stage door and Victor popped his head into the green room. “Alec, you ready?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be I guess,” he answered, feeling his heartrate increase as a thin sheen of sweat broke out across his face.

“Obviously I’m not allowed to judge for your performance, but after spending the whole morning here listening to everyone else I know you’ve got this in the bag. Just relax, breathe, and go out there and kick some ass.”

“I’ll try,” Alec grumbled, lifting Stella up from the floor and following Victor through the door.

Walking out onto the brightly lit stage the entire theater was empty except for a half dozen shadowed figures sitting along the back row. Alec was glad he couldn’t see the judge’s faces. He seated himself in the lone chair at center stage and positioned Stella without looking up. After a few deep cleansing breaths he readied his bow pausing only for a few moments to clear his mind of everything but the music. As he tried to focus he could only think of one thing, one very nasty, violent, psychotic thing. And he hated the fact that this asshole was able to bleed into his consciousness at an important time like this.

Fuck you Morgenstern, Alec thought to himself. Burying his bitter rage and channeling the hate and anger into the pit of his stomach to use as fuel for his performance. He looked over and saw his right elbow was shaking, then he closed his eyes and refocused all of his thoughts on Magnus. His dark smoldering eyes, his soft kissable lips, and his beautiful loving smile. The vision of his face in Alec’s mind began to calm him and bring him peace. Suddenly the answer he’d struggled to find for the last few weeks came to him, and he knew without question what he had to do. The only outcome that really made any sense in this crazy, messed up, impossible situation, was to throw the competition and lose on purpose. He would do it for Magnus, and for himself, so that maybe they could finally have a break from the suffering they’d both endured at the hands of this crazy person hell bent on their destruction. Because at the end of the day nothing was as important to Alec as Magnus’ happiness. He’d give up anything in the name of love.
Magnus perused the kitchen cabinets and fridge trying to think of what he could make for dinner. He wanted to create something extra special for Alec since he was having such a stressful day. There was little doubt he’d be starving after the competition, he’d barely eaten a bite that morning, or the night before. Magnus didn’t mind though, he’d always loved to cook anyway. Since Alec had moved in he’d found an even deeper joy watching how excited he would get for meals. The twinkle in his eye as he’d lift the lid of a pot or sneak a peek into the oven. He was adorably childlike in this way, his honest sense of wonderment with even the most mundane tasks. Magnus had to admit he was addicted to making him happy, he couldn’t help himself. He made mental notes of all of Alec’s favorite dishes, what types of spices he preferred, which cuts of meat, what types of sushi, and he cataloged them all in his brain. He knew he was spoiling him rotten, but he loved every minute of it.

As Magnus reached down to grab a cutting board from the cabinet under the sink he sensed movement behind him. Releasing his hold on the cabinet door handle he spun around quickly and found he was no longer alone.

“I let myself in,” Sebastian said, standing only a few feet away, a silver keyring hanging from his left index finger.

“I can see that. Now why are you here?” Magnus asked, eyeing the clock on the wall, hoping Alec wouldn’t be walking through the door anytime soon.

“Our conversation here last Thursday night was cut short. I wasn’t finished with what I’d come to say.” Sebastian was staring at Magnus with a disturbing look on his face. A sort of emptiness that made him feel very uneasy.

“I don’t want to argue with you again, I’ve already told you how I feel,” Magnus responded brusquely. Remaining calm, but still getting his point across.

“And what about my feelings?” Sebastian asked, eyeing him with a malevolent glare.

“In regards to what?” Magnus said as he walked toward the center island, creating space between the two of them and also a barrier.

“In regards to the promises you made to me!”

“I haven’t broken any of my promises,” Magnus stated very matter-of-factly. “I’ve done exactly what I said I was going to do.”

“That’s a lie,” Sebastian countered. “You brought me out here to this joke of a music festival only to turn your back on me and humiliate me in front of everyone!”

“That’s ridiculous. You’re the one humiliating yourself with your immature behavior and hateful attitude,” Magnus said, calmly correcting him. He wasn’t going to fight, but he wasn’t going to be wrongfully accused either.

“You’ve had a lifetime in the spotlight! It was supposed to be about me this time! We had a plan!” Sebastian walked forward, following the curve of the island until he was right next to Magnus again. “You promised we’d build something together! That I wouldn’t have to go back home to him!”

Magnus flinched at the thought of Valentine. Sebastian always knew how to use words as weapons. He took a deep breath to steady his nerves. “I know we had a plan, but sometimes plans have to change. It doesn’t mean I’ve given up the idea. I think we can still make it work.” Magnus reached out and placed his hand on Sebastian’s arm to soothe him. “You don’t have to go back to LA, nobody is asking you to.”
“So where do you suggest I go?” Sebastian snarled.

“Come to San Francisco with me. Build a new life, make friends, start a career. I will help you in any way that I can. I am helping you now if you’ll let me.” Magnus’ eyes were honest and sincere, it was plain to see he truly did want to help.

Sebastian shook his head, a sadistic smile spreading across his face. “Ah yes, come to San Francisco, sure. To be the third wheel? Completely ignored just as I’ve been here all summer? Such a tempting and generous offer dear brother,” he said sarcastically, rolling his eyes.

“You’re the one who decided to wage war against my boyfriend! I never wanted it to be like this!” Magnus shouted, feeling his anger bubbling over.

“You chose him over me! Your own brother!” Sebastian roared with fiery venom.

Magnus jerked his hand away. “You drew a line in the sand and made me choose! It didn’t have to be like this! There was enough room in my heart for both of you!”

Sebastian momentarily froze like a deer caught in the headlights. Then he clapped both hands behind his back and spun on his heel, pacing around the kitchen with a thoughtful expression. “I should have known this is how it would turn out.”

“Please don’t go there…” Magnus sighed, his voice weak and emotional.

“History repeating itself once again,” Sebastian spat. His wicked smile contorting into a pained expression.

“You’re not being fair. It’s not the same situation at all,” Magnus pleaded, shaking his head slowly back and forth.

“Isn’t it though? I see the magnificently gifted Magnus Bane having whatever he wants, with whomever he wants, and to hell with everyone else!”

Magnus felt those words hit the center of his chest like a bullet. A bullet that sunk deep into his chest, lodging itself between his ribs and radiating pain through his lungs. “I couldn’t live in that house another minute, you know that! I had no freedom, I had no identity!”

“Of course I remember it quite clearly. He caught you red handed didn’t he? ‘A disgrace to the name of Morgenstern’ I believe were his exact words. But you should have known better than to sneak that boy into your bed right under father’s nose. There were cameras everywhere in that house!”

Magnus felt a rush of blood to his cheeks as the embarrassing memory of that night returned very vividly to the forefront of his mind. “Well he didn’t have a problem when it was a girl, did he? The sick bastard. He probably watched.”

Sebastian circled back around to Magnus right side like a spider weaving a web. “Hmmm, that would not be surprising.”

“Don’t you see that was the reason I had to go? I was a 22 year old bisexual and I couldn’t be myself in that prison he called our home! I had reached my breaking point! And I was too old to be treated like a child!” Magnus’ voice was painfully beseeching. He placed his palms together in front of his chest praying that Sebastian would listen to reason.

“I begged you not to walk out the door that night,” Sebastian lamented, his voice at a whisper mere inches from Magnus’ ear.
“I know,” Magnus murmured, his head falling in defeat.

“Did you know I sat there on the stairs for hours? That I kept thinking you’d come back? Just like when I was a little boy, remember? Waiting for you by the door.”

“I remember,” Magnus admitted, picturing his little brother asleep by the door surrounded by his collection of tiny cars and trucks.

Sebastian saw Magnus was crumbling and he knew this was his opportunity to drive the stake even deeper through his heart. “I sat there all night because I knew you wouldn’t leave me in that house with him alone. My only brother would never do that to me.”

Magnus’ eyes were burning and he felt the tears begin to stream down his face. These painful memories of the past he’d tried so desperately to bury were coming up from the depths of his soul, rearing their ugly heads. “I didn’t want to leave you there, but what choice did I have? You were a child, I couldn’t take you with me!”

“So you left me to bear the brunt of his wrath,” Sebastian accused. “I was only 12 and I had nobody. Not a soul on this earth who could help me… but you.”

“Please don’t…” Magnus sobbed, the grief crashing against him like a tidal wave of guilt and pain.

“He was so angry,” Sebastian murmured, his eyes fixed on the wall behind Magnus’ head. “His favorite son, his shining star, the only person he really ever gave a damn about, had walked out of his house never to return again.”

“How many times do I have to tell you I’m sorry?” Magnus implored him. Desperate to escape the guilt he was currently drowning in.

“I knew he was evil, I’d experienced it firsthand my whole life, but I never saw true rage until that night. The way he looked at me, the hate in his eyes. The disappointment that all he had left was me, and I of course would never be you. No matter how many hours I practiced, until blood was dripping from my fingers, I’d never be good enough for him.”

Sebastian placed both palms on the island and bent down, forcing Magnus to make eye contact. “When morning came he jerked me up off those steps and pinned me against the wall. He held me there by the throat, kicking and gasping for breath until I finally blacked out.”

“Please stop…” Magnus wept.

“I actually thought I was dead… but sadly I wasn’t that lucky.”

Sebastian reveled in the misery he was inflicting on Magnus. He twisted his words just like twisting a dagger into an open wound. “Six years I endured the most horrific suffering you could ever imagine. Day after day, night after night, unrelenting pain and torture because of your absence. And with every black eye and cracked rib I prayed you’d come back. That my brother would return and save me.”

“I know, I know… I’m so sorry.” Magnus buried his face in his hands while Sebastian began pacing back and forth again, like a lion eyeing a lone antelope who’d been separated from its herd. He wanted desperately to go in for the kill, but he was enjoying the torture far too much.

“But you were safe in Chicago weren’t you? Drinking and fucking and living it up. While I paid the price for your desertion and betrayal. I paid for it all in my blood!”
Magnus’ head snapped back upright and he reached to take hold of Sebastian’s arms. “I came back for you! The day you turned 18 I walked away from my job, my friends, and everything I had built for myself, just to come back for you!”

“It was too late then,” Sebastian responded flatly, his eyes vacant and without expression. “Just as it is too late now, don’t you see? I’ve already had every shred of humanity beaten out of me, and I don’t care anymore about what you want or who you love.” He inched even closer toward Magnus, placing the tip of his finger right over his heart, tapping against his chest menacingly. “You owe me a life dear brother, and I intend to collect.”

One week later ~ July 4, 2016

“Alec! Wait up!”

Alec turned around and saw Jace jogging up the path behind him up toward Benedict Music Tent. The sunset was glinting off the bouncing strands of his golden blonde hair, and he had a huge smile on his face.

“Hey,” Alec responded halfheartedly. Not in the mood to fake excitement.

“Did you just get here? Where’s Magnus?” Jace asked, looking around.

“He came earlier, to do some stuff. I just got here.” Alec didn’t want to get into the reason why Magnus came earlier, the situation was bad enough already.

“Oh OK, well, Clary told me to get some good seats while she parks the car, you know, so we don’t get stuck out on the lawn. Will you guys sit with us inside?”

“Yeah, sure. We can look for four together.”

“Cool. You feeling OK?” Jace was picking up on Alec’s tension.

“I’ve been better. But yeah, I’m OK.”

“Well I stand by what I said last week. The dude obviously cheated. He probably got his daddy to bribe the judges. I wouldn’t put it past him anyway. An asshole like that always plays dirty.”

“Yeah, well, it’s over after tonight. I just don’t want to think about it anymore.” Part of Alec was very glad he’d thrown the competition. Sebastian had basked in the glory of his victory for the last seven days and Alec had been spared a week of death threats and intimidating looks.

“Totally, yeah, who gives a fuck about a stupid concerto competition, right? We’ll be having more fun down in the seats tonight anyway, thanks to Mr. Daniels.” Jace said with a wink.

“Thanks to who?” Alec was clueless.
Jace lifted the edge of his shirt revealing two silver flasks tucked into the waistband of his shorts. “We are gonna get shitfaced tonight my brother! By the time the fireworks start we’ll be feelin’ just fine!”

Alec rolled his eyes. “Come on man, don’t you think someone will notice if we’re drinking during the concert?”

“Jace Wayland is the king of being discreet. Here, take one. I’ll teach you my ways.”

Alec and Jace made their way inside the tent and into the bustling crowd. Even though the concert was still a good 45 minutes away from starting people were filing in by the droves jockeying for a good seat. They made their way down the center aisle and managed to find four seats together with a nice unobstructed view of the stage. Although Alec didn’t care one bit to watch, he knew Magnus would want to see his brother perform.

“Hey guys, good seats!” Clary said as she shuffled in front of Alec’s knees and down the row to sit next to Jace, leaving one empty seat for Magnus.

Alec tried not to look as Jace greeted Clary with a warm embrace, kissing her neck and causing her pale skin to burn pink with a rosy blush. She seemed embarrassed by the PDA and Alec could totally relate.

“Hey, save these seats, I’ll be right back,” Alec said, deciding to go to the bathroom before the concert started. Clary immediately draped her silk shawl over one seat and sat her purse on the other to keep anyone from trying to snag them while he was gone.

Alec quickly made his way up the aisle, hoping he could return before Magnus arrived. When he got to the top of the steps he saw the line for the men’s room was stretching all the way back to the entrance of the tent. There was no way he’d make it back before the concert started. Not with a line like that. Luckily he remembered there was another smaller bathroom performers sometimes used that was just down the far aisle tucked away from view. He sprinted toward it hoping nobody else had the same idea.

Thankfully when he arrived there didn’t seem to be a line so he hurried inside finding the restroom completely empty. It was a tiny space, only one urinal and one stall. Alec noticed there was something scrawled on the wall in pen, he stepped closer to read what it said.

What’s the definition of “perfect pitch?”

Throwing a viola into a dumpster without hitting the rim.

Alec couldn’t help but laugh, he’d definitely have to remember that joke the next time Jace teased him.

As Alec was finishing up washing his hands the bathroom door swung wildly open and the absolute worst thing that could possibly happen did.

“What are you doing back here Lightwood?” Sebastian snarled. “This is strictly for the use of the performers. Not the wannabes.”

Alec looked up from the sink and in the reflection of the mirror he saw Sebastian, dressed in a black tuxedo, standing right behind him. “Don’t talk to me,” Alec threatened, grabbing a paper towel to dry his hands.

“Aww, what’s the matter? Still upset about being beaten? You really didn’t have a chance you
know. I’m in another league you couldn’t possibly hope to ascend to.”

Alec’s jaw clenched, trying to hold back his anger.

“Magnus and I saw you come in with your date, we were standing in the wings discussing my concerto with the maestro. You and Wayland make an adorable couple,” Sebastian teased, apparently set on trying to upset Alec, one way or another.

“Jace is my friend, and we go a lot of places together. That’s what friend’s do, not that you’ve ever had one.” Alec felt instantly proud of himself for putting Sebastian in his place. Watching his face react to Alec’s jab was nearly as good as winning the competition.

“Your friend? Right,” Sebastian chuckled, his face wild with glee. “I’m sure you whack off to thoughts of his pretty blonde head down in front of you on his knees. I know exactly what kind of friendship you’re looking for. Ugh, you two make me sick!”

Alec lost control, his temper flaring into a fit of rage. “You think you could beat me? Ha! I let you win! You stupid, pathetic, waste of human life! I let you fucking win so you’d get off my back! So Magnus and I could have one week of peace without you ruining it with this sick, twisted jealousy you can’t seem to let go of! Because you can’t stand the fact that he loves me, and we’re happy! And that he doesn’t need you in his life!”

Sebastian’s face fell flat. Alec had struck a nerve, actually he’d struck every single nerve, and then some. He’d let it all out at last. Everything he’d been holding in for the last six weeks. He’d never felt so free.

“You think Wayland is your friend?” Sebastian spoke in a slow and deliberate monotone. “You’re such a fool. Why he’s no more your friend than I am.”

“I don’t have time for this nonsense, move out of my way,” Alec ordered, clearly not interested in whatever crap Sebastian was going to make up next.

Sebastian extended one stiff arm to block the door as a devious smile spread across his face, his eyes twinkling like bit of black coal. “He’s been lying to you since the day you met.”

“What are you talking about?” Alec asked with exasperation, feeling cornered in the tiny bathroom. Seeing the look on Sebastian’s face he instantly regretted everything he’d said. Because this was about to turn ugly.

“Oh I know all about that first day. You two bumping into each other in the hallway. Quite a coincidence don’t you think?” Sebastian’s eyes sparkled. “He had the room right next to yours. Hmm, what are the chances?”

“I’m not listening to this garbage. Just let me out of here or I swear to God I’ll punch you in your disgusting face!” And Alec meant it, he wasn’t afraid to fight him. Sebastian was tall but his frame was thin and lean, Alec knew he could take him down.

“He was so very interested in spending time with you that first day wasn’t he? A total stranger just latching himself right to your side. Such an odd sort of thing to have happen don’t you think?” Sebastian’s voice was melodic and taunting. He spoke with singsong lilt that felt like fingernails on a chalkboard.

Alec tried his best to ignore him, he knew this was all just part of his game. “I know what you’re trying to do, you want to provoke me. You probably hope I will punch you. So you can run to Magnus and tell him how awful I am.”
“Yes it was a night just full of coincidences. Wayland your new best friend, taking you to every bar in town, getting you drunk off your face.” Sebastian’s smile was growing more and more demented as he wove his retelling of the tale of that night for Alec. “Then the last stop of the evening, that club.”

Alec froze, everything was sounding just a little bit too accurate. The phone in his pocket was vibrating continuously, no doubt his lateness was beginning to arouse suspicion.

“Yes, that club where by some freak chance Magnus Bane himself just happened to be there right at the exact same time. Doesn’t really seem like an establishment he would prefer, does it?”

Alec replayed the events of that night in his head as Sebastian ticked them off one by one in perfect order. “What are you trying to suggest?”

“Oh it’s not a suggestion. I’m giving you the facts as I know them to be. You were nothing more than mouse set loose in a maze that night. A maze with only one path that led right to the cheese.”

“You’re a liar.” Alec snapped, as he tried and failed to explain all of these coincidences away in his mind. Maybe Sebastian had overheard Jace or Magnus talking about that night. Or maybe Magnus had told him how they’d first met. There had to be a logical explanation for him knowing all of this.

“It was the plan all along you see. The three of us… Magnus, Wayland, and myself, we listened to every single audition tape for months. We didn’t stop until Magnus found the perfect cellist for our blossoming new quartet. It was supposed to be his gift to me, a way to jumpstart my career and right old wrongs. Wayland of course was immediately onboard, ever the ass kisser as usual. It was decided he would bring you in and Magnus would charm the pants off of you. Which I have to say he did quite easily. Of course they were both convinced you were the one we needed... but not me. I knew immediately you were weak! I knew you’d never fit in with our group.”

Alec stood motionless. His mind reeling with these impossible facts that he wouldn’t allow himself to believe. "You’re a liar." Sebastian was an expert with manipulation. There was no way he was going to fall for these tricks, he knew in his heart it couldn’t be true.

“Think Lightwood! Have you ever seen your dear best friend ever go in or out of his room? Have you ever actually seen him sleep there?”

Alec thought back to those mornings at the beginning of the summer, how Jace had always knocked on his door first, how he’d always come first thing in the morning and ask him if he needed a ride. Alec couldn’t remember a time he’d seen him actually open the door of his room, or come in or out from it. He’d seen him on the stairs sure, but he’d never actually seen him in the room itself.

“Think all you want, but I can promise you that you haven’t. Because his father is Michael Wayland, the billionaire commodities trader. He lives just two houses down from Magnus, in fact he sold him the very property that his house is built upon. I’ve met him many times myself and I can assure you his very talented and privileged son Jonathan would never even think of sleeping in that broken down old joke of a ski chalet.”

Alec couldn’t breathe. He thought of the night he’d gone to Magnus’ house for their first date. When he’d called Jace to come and get him he’d been at the end of the driveway faster than Alec could walk there from the house. He’d been close by. Plus he knew every bartender and restaurant owner in town, hell he knew every bit of Aspen like the back of his hand. It all made sense now of course. He was local.

“If you don’t believe me, go see for yourself. Go back to that horrid, dingy place and check his
room. I guarantee you it’s empty without a sign anyone has been staying there!” Sebastian moved his arm from the door to allow Alec to leave. His face full of triumphant joy.

Alec didn’t hesitate, he ran from the bathroom, down the corridor, out of the tent, and into the darkness of twilight. Behind him he could hear the orchestra begin to play and he knew Jace and Magnus would be wondering where he was. There was no point trying to get his car out of the overfilled parking lot, so he ran down the dirt path, past the families in lawn chairs and children sitting on blankets, all of them anxiously awaiting the big fireworks display. He ran and ran out to the road and back towards town. It was a short trip up 3rd Street then down to Main, and a right onto Aspen, which dead ended right in front of Hendel House. It was less than a mile total, and with the adrenaline boost Alec was there in minutes. Out of breath but fueled by the truth he so desperately sought.

The building was vacant, evidently everyone was at the concert, and Alec raced up to the 3rd floor, back to his old room. Along the way he’d come up with the perfect plan. Luckily he had his keys with him so he let himself into his old room first. Then pushing the bottom of the old fashioned swinging window over his bed, he slid out onto the roof on his belly, pulling himself by his fingertips against the rough asphalt shingles. The surface was flat, without much of a pitch, so he easily walked over to Jace’s bedroom window and peered in through the glass. The room was dark which made it impossible to see. He first tried to tilt the window inward, but it was locked. So he drew back his foot and kicked in the glass, breaking the window with ease. Then he climbed carefully inside avoiding any of the stray broken shards, and shimmied himself onto the bed. Then he stumbled in the darkness towards the light switch, blindly feeling his way along the wall. Once his hand was on the switch he took a deep breath then flipped on the lights revealing the truth at last. Sebastian had been right, the room was completely empty. No clothes, no bedding, no personal items of any kind. There was a fine layer of dust covering all of the furniture, proving no one had inhabited this room for quite some time.

He lied, Alec thought to himself. Jace lied to me. His mouth fell slack ogling the empty room, his blood running cold with the terrible revelation of the truth. His best friend, the one person he had confided in and trusted more than anyone else this summer, had been lying to him since day one.

Alec fumbled for the doorknob and thrust himself out into the hall. He ran down the stairs with tears in his eyes and a blazing fury in his heart, frantic to get back to Jace and confront him. He'd find out the truth, beat it out of him if he had to. He didn’t even want to think about Magnus’ possible involvement in this plot. If Sebastian was telling the whole truth about all of this, it meant their entire relationship was built on a scheme to bring Alec to Aspen and woo him into joining their quartet. A decision purely based on their desire for his talent, the thought of which made Alec feel sick.

Running across the threshold of the front entrance and back out into the night air Alec had almost reached the sidewalk when something heavy and blunt smacked him in the back of the head sending him toppling to the ground. An explosion of stars flashed behind his eyelids as the pain of the blow radiated through his skull sending electric currents of agony through him. He tried to scream out for help but a violent kick to his stomach knocked the wind out of him. He gasped and choked for breath as an onslaught of kicks, jabs, and punches riddled his body from every direction. Alec couldn’t do anything but curl up in a ball to try and protect himself.

“A car! Someone’s coming!” A voice called out and Alec heard footfalls scrambling to run away.

Coughing up the taste of blood Alec thought it was finally over until someone grabbed his left hand and spread it out flat against the warm pavement of the walkway.

“This is how you lose everything,” a voice hissed from just above him as a crushing blow came
down upon his hand, tearing the cartilage and crunching the bones under the weight of a steel-toed boot.

The blinding pain, more excruciating than anything Alec could possibly endure, sent a burst of white light across his vision and a scream of agony ripping from his throat. His head fell backwards against the concrete as his body went limp. His eyes flickered for a moment to glimpse a star filled sky, then his lips managed to form a single spoken word. “Magnus,” he uttered into the night as his body gave one final spasm before everything went dark.

“I’m worried,” Magnus said to Jace as the orchestra began to take the stage. He’d called and texted Alec again and again with no response. It wasn’t like him to ignore his phone. Something was definitely wrong.

“Yeah, me too. What should we do?” Jace asked, looking distraught.

“I’m going to go look for him.”

“Well I’m going with you.”

Clary looked at them both, her face full of concern. “You guys aren’t leaving me here alone. I’m coming too!”

The three of them got up and left their seats just as the audience began to applaud the arrival of the conductor. They headed back up the aisle deciding to separate so they could cover more ground in their search. Jace taking the bathroom, Magnus the outer lobby, and Clary the tent’s perimeter.

After thoroughly covering every nook and cranny they reconvened outside the tent away from the noise where they could hear each other talk.

“No sign of him anywhere,” Jace said in a panic. “What are we gonna do now?”

“You keep trying to call him,” Magnus said to Jace. I’ve got an idea.

Jace dialed Alec’s number again as Magnus frantically typed a text message.

“What’s your idea?” Jace asked, trying to see who Magnus was contacting.

“I know someone who can put a trace on his phone. As long as it’s still on.”

“OK that’s super creepy, but handy I guess,” Jace replied, eyeing Magnus suspiciously.

“I wouldn’t do it if this wasn’t an emergency,” Magnus insisted. “I mean people don’t just go to the bathroom and disappear!”

“Yeah, yeah, do what you have to do, of course,” Jace agreed. “Friends in high places are good to have at a time like this.”
“Is everyone’s car blocked in?” Magnus asked, heading further away from the tent.

“Jace’s isn’t,” Clary answered. “I purposely parked it down at the end of the lane where we could get out quickly.”

“Smart girl,” Magnus smiled. “Let’s go!” And the three of them hurried off to Jace’s car.

The streets were practically deserted since everyone in town was at the tent. Jace drove up and down each one, back and forth along the grid of the city hoping for the impossible. Every time they saw anyone tall or with dark hair they’d slow the car and pray it was Alec, even though it seemed ridiculous to hope he’d just be out walking the streets alone. The night air was particularly humid for this altitude and the car windows were beginning to fog up. Clary rolled the windows down so they could see each passerby, while Magnus stared at his phone waiting to get an answer. The group was silent, not one of them wanting to even suggest anything bad had happened… although they were all thinking it.

“I’ve got it!” Magnus exclaimed, startling Jace so badly his foot slammed on the brakes. “720 South Aspen St!”

“That’s Hendel House!” Jace shouted, shifting his foot from the brake to the accelerator and jerking the car forward at warp speed. His wheels shrieking against the pavement.

The souped-up Dodge Charger lived up to its name as Jace cornered each street on two wheels, driving like a bat out of hell. Magnus and Clary didn’t complain, they were all desperate to get to Alec as fast as they could.

As Jace made the last turn from Durant Ave onto Aspen Street Magnus unbuckled his seatbelt and placed his hand on the door handle. As soon as the car slowed in front of Hendel House he jumped out running at full speed toward the door. It didn’t take a second before he eyed a dark figure laying on the ground just ahead of him.

“Oh God no, no!” Magnus cried through the dark as he hurled himself toward the figure of an unconscious man, crumpled and bleeding in the shadows.

“Alec!” Jace howled from behind him as Magnus gently lifted Alec’s bloodied face from the pavement, cradling it in his lap.

“Baby, oh my God, no,” Magnus wailed, as he took in the full state of Alec’s horrific injuries.

“I’ll call 911,” Clary said shakily, taking out her phone.

“What has happened my love?” Magnus sobbed, rocking back and forth clutching Alec’s limp body in his arms. “Who did this to you?”

“Magnus,” Jace gasped. “Look at his hand!”

Magnus shifted his gaze from Alec’s bloodstained face to his mangled hand and let out an anguished cry. “God no, no, not his hand!” He picked up Alec’s arm and folded it against his chest hugging it to his body as the tears streamed down his face.

“They’re on their way,” Clary told them, having given 911 the address. “They said less than five minutes.”

Magnus was inconsolable, he just held Alec in his arms crying and muttering, “No, no, no,” over and over again. Jace was completely shook, he just stood there staring at his best friend’s beaten and
broken body. There were no words.

Suddenly a moan escaped from Alec’s lips as he was beginning to regain consciousness.

“Alexander! Baby I’m here,” Magnus reassured him. “I’m here my darling, everything is going to be alright.” He smoothed Alec’s hair and gently stroked his arms and shoulders giving him comfort, careful to not touch his injuries. Then taking out his phone with one hand while holding Alec tight with the other, Magnus called Ragnor.

“There’s been an attack at Hendel House and Alec is hurt bad... it-it’s really bad… I need you to call for a medevac... I know! I don’t care! Just call the airport and offer them whatever they want... just get them here NOW!”

Alec shuttered and moaned, his body convulsing from the unimaginable pain. Magnus tossed his phone to the ground and held Alec in his arms, caressing the side of his face with the back of his hand, gently moving his blood soaked bangs away from his forehead. “Just hold on baby, help is coming.”

“My hand,” Alec mumbled, barely coherent. “It hurts.”

“I know baby, I know… just hold on,” Magnus whimpered.

“Magnus please tell me what I can do,” Jace muttered, feeling helpless and completely wrecked seeing Alec lying there in pain.

Magnus didn’t respond he just rocked Alec gently in his arms chanting, “Just hold on OK… you’re going to be alright… you’re going to be OK.” Clearly trying to convince himself as much as he was trying to convince Alec.

The local EMT’s were the first on the scene. Clary waved down the ambulance, directing them to where Alec was. Two men jumped out of the back with their medical bags and a large board. Within seconds they were flanking Alec’s sides trying to get a look at his injuries.

Jace bent low to Magnus’ ear and whispered. “Help is here Magnus, you have to let him go now, OK? Let them help him.”

Magnus didn’t flinch, he just held onto Alec like a life raft in the middle of the ocean. His body wracked with sobbing wails of grief.

“Sir, we need to check his vitals,” one of the EMTs said, making a move towards Alec’s wrist.

“Don’t touch him!” Magnus bellowed, unwilling to let go of Alec’s body and not wanting the medics anywhere near his hand.

“Sir, I just want to feel his pulse, I’m not going to hurt him, I promise.”

“It’s OK Magnus,” Clary reassured him. “They’re here to help Alec.”

Magnus allowed the two men to examine Alec’s injuries while his head was still cradled in Magnus’ lap.

“He’s taken some pretty serious blows to the head and chest,” one EMT said. “Could be cracked ribs. And this hand is clearly broken,” the other one responded. “We need to get him into the ambulance and to the hospital immediately.”
“You’re not taking him anywhere,” Magnus threatened, wrapping his arms tightly around Alec’s torso protectively. “I’ve called for a helicopter, he needs to get to Denver to see a specialist!”

The two EMTs eyed each other as Alec let out another semiconscious groan. “Magnus… help me,” he said on a ragged exhale, his eyes rolling back in his head.

“I’m here my darling,” Magnus lovingly answered. “Just hold on.”

Jace was the first to spot the helicopter as it floated in from the west. “There! It’s coming!” He shouted, pointing into the sky. Everyone looked up.

“Thank God,” Clary sighed, thankful Magnus’ standoff with the EMTs would now be over before things got any worse.

The helicopter drifted down from the sky and landed right in the middle of Aspen Street. The wind from its propellers whipped violently across everyone’s body and Alec shuttered in Magnus’ arms, still barely conscious. It was a flurry of fast movements and quick thinking as the paramedics took over. They carefully fastened Alec’s body to a stretcher, bracing his neck and limbs while Magnus kept one arm on Alec’s shoulder to reassure him.

“Go up to my house,” Magnus said to Jace. “Get Ragnor, have him contact the Lightwoods. They need to know what has happened.”

“I’ll go right now,” Jace responded, relived to finally have something to do that might help his friend.

Alec moaned again in agony. His pain nearly unbearable for Magnus to witness. He turned toward the paramedics, grabbing one of them by the arm. “All he had to do was hold on until you arrived! Now give him something for the pain!” Magnus angrily demanded. “Can’t you see he’s suffering!?”

“We’ll administer something through his IV once we’re airborne,” the paramedic answered as the two loaded Alec up into the chopper.

Magnus began to follow behind them until the paramedic held up one arm to block his entrance. “Only immediate family sir,” the man stated with authority.

“I’m his fiancé damn it!” Magnus roared. “Now let me in!”

As the helicopter slowly floated back up into the sky Magnus held tight to Alec’s uninjured hand, his head bent low over his face so he could hear him speak. “They’re going to give you some medicine now sweetheart, just close your eyes and I’ll be right here.”

“My hand,” Alec moaned. “It’s all over.”

Tears welled in Magnus’ eyes as he placed an open palm against Alec’s cheek and kissed the top of his head. “Don’t say that my darling, you’re going to be alright. I promise you, you’re going to be just fine.”

As the paramedic finally shot a full syringe into Alec’s IV the fireworks began to erupt all around the helicopter, sending bright flashes of red, blue, gold and green all throughout the cabin. The dazzling sparks of light reflected off the glass and illuminated Magnus’ face with a brilliant glow. As the warmth of the drug spread quickly through Alec’s veins he could feel the tingling and burning traveling throughout his body. His eyes became heavy and he could taste the metallic tinge of the drug flooding the inside of his mouth.
“He won,” Alec softly muttered as his mind began to slowly slip further and further back into a state of unconsciousness. “He won, Mag-nus… he wo-…”

Alec’s voice faded away. His eyes finally fluttering closed as the canon fire of the 1812 Overture rattled and boomed through the tiny helicopter. It pitched wildly as the blasts echoed in Magnus’ chest causing his heart to thump fiercely within his ribcage. The last words Alec had spoken seeped into the darkest recesses of his mind where he knowingly buried down all of the proof he had let himself deny for far too long. In this moment he finally faced the reality he’d been ignoring the last six years and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt exactly who was to blame.
Magnus struggled against a heaviness that had settled across his eyelids. The weight of a sleepless night pulling them further and further down until there was only a crack of dim fluorescent light seeping in along their edges. The room was quiet except for the steady rhythm of the heart monitor accompanied by the gulp and hiss of a continuously pumping ventilator. Together the two established a set tempo that only made the fight against sleep that much more challenging. Magnus had pushed a bulky recliner from the corner of the room right up next to Alec’s bed, as close as he could get it. His upper body leaned all the way forward so that he could reach Alec’s unbroken hand. He held it carefully as to not disturb the IV that was inserted into the top. There was just enough space for Magnus to twine his fingers between Alec’s, leaving his thumb free to rub tiny reassuring circles against his skin. More than anything he just wanted Alec to know he wasn’t alone.

The waiting had been horrific. When the helicopter landed at the University of Colorado hospital a medical team had been on the roof waiting for their arrival. Alec was immediately whisked away leaving Magnus behind with a nurse who directed him to the ER’s waiting room. For three hours Magnus paced back and forth, wringing his hands and cycling between bouts of crying and fits of despair and rage. He’d never experienced such a traumatic moment in his entire life. Every 10 minutes he’d been at the nurse’s station begging for updates, his eyes swollen and his voice shattered. The nurses had been kind to him, seeing how terribly distraught he was, offering as much information as they could give. The *not knowing* was the worst part, and Magnus’ mind only drifted to the most unimaginable and devastating outcomes.

When the ER doctor finally came out to the waiting room he explained to Magnus that Alec had suffered blunt force trauma to his head and chest which had resulted in a severe concussion, three cracked ribs, and a bruised lung. Thankfully no sign of subdural hematoma, but the “pulmonary contusion”, as the doctor called it, would need to be closely monitored. There were some concerns Alec’s shallow and labored breathing could result in a buildup of fluid in his lungs, so he’d been put on a ventilator. Magnus wasn’t a medical expert but he knew that was very serious. However the doctor insisted it was the best way for his lung to heal while his blood could be properly oxygenated. Also the heavy sedation would keep Alec from moving his hand until the surgeon arrived. Seeing Magnus’ state of emotional distress the doctor assured him Alec’s injuries were stabilized and he’d been upgraded from “critical” to “fair”. They would take him off the ventilator as soon as his lung showed improvement. Alec’s hand unfortunately was another matter entirely. They’d cleaned the wound and wrapped it loosely in gauze until it could be evaluated further. Magnus had already contacted the best hand surgeon he knew back in LA, Dr. Kevin Carson. He would be arriving first thing in the morning, having dropped everything when he received Magnus’ call. He promised he would make Alec’s case his top priority.

Once Alec was assigned to a room in the ICU, Magnus had been permitted to join him. Still under the guise of being his fiancé the hospital had been treating him like immediate family. Jace had called several times over the last few hours with updates, letting Magnus know he had contacted Alec’s parents as well as Victor. All three of them were on their way. Jace and Clary were also coming, along with Ragnar. Soon the hospital would be bustling with people concerned about Alec’s condition, so Magnus wanted to cherish this bit of private time before the chaos ensued.

Looking at the clock on the wall Magnus realized it was still a couple of hours before Dr. Carson would arrive. Morning light was beginning to flood the room, illuminating it with a bluish glow.
Alec looked peaceful, his chest rising and falling to the same steady monotonous beat that drifted through the air. Magnus wished the bed was large enough for him to climb in and curl up next to him. Even though they were only a short distance apart it seemed like there were a million miles between them. He wanted to talk to Alec and find out why in the world he’d suddenly left the concert to go to Hendel House alone. What could have been so urgent that he had to leave without telling anyone, or even answering his phone? But as much as Magnus wished he could have the answers to these questions he knew it was better Alec was asleep. That way he didn’t have to feel any of the pain, and he didn’t have to face the truth of what had happened to his hand. At least not yet.

Every hour a technician would come in to draw Alec’s blood and check his vitals. Magnus would nervously busy himself straightening Alec’s blankets or brushing his hair off of his forehead, anything to keep close physical contact while waiting for them to finish. After the three hours they’d been painfully separated last night he didn’t want to leave his side again. The technicians were friendly and didn’t seem to mind Magnus’ hovering. He guessed they were used to seeing nervous and frantic family members in their line of work. They’d smile and ask Magnus if he needed anything, some of them would glance down at his clothes noticing the blood smeared across his pants legs. But Magnus didn’t care about the state of his appearance, there was no way he was leaving Alec, not even for a minute.

As the intensity of the morning sunrise increased, the room warmed to a brilliant lemon yellow. Alec’s contusions and lacerations became more prominent in the daylight. Magnus could see the outline of four knuckles across his right cheek, and a gash through his left eyebrow which had been stitched closed. There were dark shadows of bruising under his eyes and around his neck and arms, the sight of which made Magnus feel physically ill. His mind kept going over Alec’s last words as the helicopter had taken off, “he won.” Magnus of course knew exactly who he was. It was the one person who had openly threatened Alec countless times since the moment they’d first met. The same person who just two weeks ago told Alec, right at Magnus’ own front door, that he would “lose everything.” Magnus felt bone crushing guilt remembering all the times Alec had told him he felt Sebastian was dangerous, a “psychopath” he had called him. But Magnus had downplayed Alec’s concerns. He’d done nothing but make excuses for his brother, who he still saw as a frightened little boy curled up on his bed and not the grown man who could be capable of this kind of brutality. He knew of course Sebastian was jealous, but he never thought he would actually become physically violent. But Magnus had been terribly wrong… wrong about that as well as so many other things.

Studying Alec’s battered face, Magnus could see tiny flickers of eye movement behind his closed eyelids. He wondered if Alec was dreaming, and if so he hoped it was something good and not visions of the attack. Despite what he knew in his heart to be true, that Sebastian was the one to blame, he also knew he couldn’t have been at Hendel House last night. He’d been on stage in front of hundreds of people performing his concerto. It was genius really, he had ensured himself the perfect air-tight alibi and gotten someone else to do his dirty work for him. Like father, like son, Magnus thought to himself. It seemed exactly like something Valentine would do.

The early morning hours were busy. A new shift of nurses had come on duty and each one had a checklist of items to complete in Alec’s room. They introduced themselves with sympathetic smiles and offered Magnus food and coffee. Sometimes it felt like he was the patient, they were all so concerned about his wellbeing. But Magnus didn’t feel worthy of anyone’s care and concern, Alec was here because of him and this was all his fault. I deserve to suffer, he said to himself when the
nurses turned to walk away.

The pulmonologist had also come by, personally checking on Alec’s progress and giving Magnus more reassurance that things were stable. The hospital was running like a well-oiled machine and Magnus gained a new appreciation for this kind of dedicated work. Especially the nurses, their kindness and compassion overwhelmed him really. Something about the way they spoke reminded him of his former teacher Catarina, who’d been the kindest person he’d ever known. Perhaps she’d missed her true calling in life? Thinking of her now made his heart ache even more, and he vowed to himself that once Alec made it out of this he’d take him to Philly to meet her. That is, if Alec was still willing to be part of his life.

After the flurry of morning activity finally settled down there was a light tapping on the sliding glass door of Alec’s room. Magnus looked up and saw Jace standing in the hall, holding a duffel bag and wearing a grave expression. Just behind him was Clary, smiling with flowers. Magnus nodded his approval for them to enter and they both shuffled in silently.

Jace stopped at the foot of Alec’s bed and gazed down at him with a look of utter devastation. It was so upsetting to witness Magnus had to look away. Seeing Jace’s pain only amplified his own. Clary set the flowers down then came around the corner of the bed and gently settled her hand on top of Magnus’ shoulder. “I’m so sorry,” she whispered with deepest sincerity. Magnus reached up and placed his hand over top of hers, appreciating the gesture.

“We brought some stuff,” Jace muttered, placing the duffel bag he was holding on a small table by the window. “We went to your house, Ragnar packed some clothes and personal things you might need. He’s coming too, but later. Said he had some stuff to do first.”

“You should take a moment and freshen up Magnus. Get out of those dirty clothes and take a shower. You’ll feel better.” Clary suggested, speaking with a gentle and uplifting voice. “Jace and I can sit with Alec for a bit, we’d like to.”

Magnus knew she was right, he was a mess. And if visitors were coming it wouldn’t be a good idea to greet them covered in blood. Especially Alec’s parents. “I’ll just be gone a few minutes,” he replied, reluctantly letting go of Alec’s hand so he could stand up for the first time in hours.

Once on his feet Magnus almost fell back down into the chair not realizing his legs were so weak and wobbly. Clary reached out and steadied him by the elbow, then handed him the duffel bag from the table. Magnus took hold of the strap and headed out of the room, avoiding eye contact with Jace as he passed him.

The small locker room was thankfully empty and Magnus quickly went to work removing his bloodied clothes and tossing them into an orange bin marked “hazardous material.” Unzipping the duffel bag he saw Ragnar had done an amazing job putting together a few simple and comfortable outfits as well as travel size bottles of all his face and body products. Everything was packed and organized neatly giving Magnus a pang in his heart for is oldest and dearest friend. He was one of the few people who always had his back, even though Magnus didn’t feel like he deserved it.

The warm water from the shower ran down the length of Magnus’ naked body and formed a puddle around his feet that was tinged with blood. The swirls of reddish pink, in stark contrast to the bright white shower tiles, spiraled toward the center drain ominously. Magnus hadn’t realized as he’d
cradled Alec’s body on the ground the blood had soaked through his clothes and onto his skin. The sight of the stained water made tears come to his eyes and he collapsed against the wall of the shower sobbing. Watching these precious droplets of Alec’s blood mix with the water that flowed down the drain, was more than his broken heart could take.

As crippling as his sadness was, it was overshadowed by an even greater feeling of tremendous guilt. More than anything he just wanted to turn back the hands of time. Go back to the beginning of the summer, back to that night he and Alec stood on the rooftop overlooking the city, and tell him the truth. Tell him it hadn’t been fate that had brought them together that night in the club, and that he had lied. It was a lie that sat like a lead weight on top of his chest, pressing down against his sternum and squeezing the very breath from his lungs. The thought of Alec ever finding out the truth absolutely terrified him. He’d grown to love him so deeply, right down to the core of his soul, that even the idea of possibly hurting him was unimaginable. He loved him so completely he would have gladly given his life to protect him. Without question, there was nothing on earth that even came close. But now, Alec was the one paying the price for what Magnus had done. He was the one beaten within an inch of his life, unconscious on a ventilator, facing a future where his entire career could be ripped away from him, and all because Magnus had been too selfish to do the right thing.

After Magnus finished drying off he wrapped a towel around his waist and headed back out to where he’d left his bag. Now that he was clean he was anxious to get dressed and get back to Alec as quickly as possible. His heart was already beating faster with the anticipation.

“Hey,” a voice said, catching Magnus unaware.

“Jace?” Magnus replied, not expecting to see him standing there. “Is everything OK with Alec? Did something happen?”

“No, no, sorry, he’s the same,” Jace quickly answered realizing his presence had been a cause for alarm. “I just wanted to talk to you privately, away from Clary, because there’s something you need to know.”

Magnus heard fear in Jace’s voice that instantly made his skin prickle with dread. He stood frozen in place waiting to hear what would no doubt be bad news.

“Last night, shortly after the helicopter took off, the police arrived. They wanted statements from Clary and me about what we saw. They had a lot of questions about if we’d seen anything suspicious... or if we knew anyone who would want to hurt Alec. Stuff like that.” Jace took a step closer, his eyes intently focused on Magnus’ questioning look. “Then they had me go with them inside, to check Alec’s room, since they didn’t know which one was his.”

“And?” Magnus asked with agitation, wishing Jace would get to the point so he could get back to Alec.

“And... they found something,” Jace admitted, his face growing pale and grim.

Magnus felt anger lick at his insides, he didn’t have time for cryptic words from Jace when the love of his life was down the hall breathing from a machine. “Just spit it out! I don’t have the patience or energy to deal with your bullshit today Wayland!”

Jace winced, then ran one shaky hand through the front of his hair in an attempt to collect himself.
“Alright, okay, just listen. So when the police went up to Alec’s room they saw the door of the room next to his was wide open. They thought it looked suspicious, so they decided to go inside there first.” Jace had a hard time looking at Magnus while he spoke. Something about the state of his undress and the pained look on his face made his story even more difficult to tell.

“Ok, and?” Magnus felt like he was pulling the truth out of him.

“They found the window in the room had been kicked in. They said it looked like someone had come inside from the roof, then exited out the door and left it wide open.”

Magnus felt an icy chill run up his spine, stopping his breath with a gasp.

“It was my room, Magnus. My empty, unused room.”

Magnus’ mouth fell slack as his eyes darted around the tiny locker room trying to process what he was hearing.

“You know what this means, don’t you?” Jace exclaimed, trying in vain to keep his voice down. “It means Morgenstern told him I didn’t live there! Just as I warned you he would weeks ago! He fucking told him that last night! And Alec must have ran out of the concert to go see for himself!”

“My God,” Magnus muttered, his eyes blown wide with shock. He pictured Alec in his mind running away from the tent, frantic to get inside Jace's room. So desperate to prove Sebastian wrong he climbed out onto the roof and kicked in his window.

“The whole thing was a setup Magnus! To get him there alone so he could have him attacked! He planned it all!” Jace was beside himself in a blinding rage. His anger mixed with overwhelming fear that had his whole body shaking uncontrollably.

Magnus couldn’t speak, his eyes nervously fluttered back and forth as the growing panic constricted his chest like he’d been locked in a slowly tightening vice. Alec had seen Jace's room was empty. Sebastian had told him everything. Or some sick, twisted version of the truth most likely. This was the absolute worst possible thing that could have happened. And now Alec was sedated, his mind locked in a dreamlike state surrounded by the lies intended to hurt him and destroy everything he and Magnus had built together. He thought of Alec’s flickering eye movements and didn't want to let himself imagine what kind of horrible nightmares were plaguing him. Magnus couldn’t even talk to him to try to explain. There was nothing he could do at all, except wait for Alec to wake up and pray it wasn’t too late.

“He’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me,” Jace admitted, collapsing down onto a bench with his head in his hands. His rage ebbing away to reveal the raw emotional pain underneath it. “And he’s never going to forgive us.”

“We’ll find a way,” Magnus muttered, feeling the situation was almost completely hopeless. “We have to find a way.”
“Mr. Bane, thank you so much for coming back into town on such short notice,” the excessively kind real estate agent said, greeting Magnus at her office door with a pageant winning smile.

“Well, I can’t say it was easy, but I’m here,” Magnus grumbled, completely exhausted from taking a redeye from JFK after a performance at Lincoln Center last night. Then he’d rented a car to drive up into the mountains, arriving just after dawn. “And I’m very anxious to close this deal so construction can begin immediately. Time is of the essence,” Magnus reminded her, for what was surely the hundredth time.

“Of course, I completely understand. The other party should be arriving momentarily. May I get you anything? Coffee perhaps?”

Magnus politely declined then looked out the window of the tiny real estate office, noticing it had begun to snow. “Great!” He thought to himself, hoping he wasn’t about to be snowed in. “It’s imperative we break ground before ski season hits next month,” he told her. “Otherwise the house won’t be ready in time for the festival.”

As if it were even possible the agent’s smile widened more. “I assure you we will not let that happen Mr. Bane. I am confident we will be signing the papers today!”

Magnus rolled his eyes, he could spot a line of bullshit better than anyone. “In all my many real estate dealings in the past I’ve never had a seller so adamant to see me in person. This seems highly irregular.”

The woman’s face fell slightly, she struggled to reapply her plastered expression sensing Magnus wasn’t falling for her optimistic routine. “Well, he’s quite attached to the property, for personal reasons, so he insisted on speaking with you first before signing the offer of agreement. I’m sure it will be fine… Ah, here he comes now!”

Magnus looked toward the door and saw a tall, middle aged man with fair hair and piercing blue eyes flanked by what looked to be a body guard, wearing a black suit with closely cropped hair and an earpiece. For a moment Magnus thought maybe this man was some sort of movie star or political dignitary but as he came closer he was pretty sure he’d seen his face on the cover of Forbes.

“Mr. Bane, what a pleasure!” The man announced, jutting forward one stiff arm. “I’m Michael Wayland, owner of that perfect little piece of heaven you’re hoping to buy today.”

Magnus reached forward and shook the man’s hand, immediately noticing his cowboy boots and gaudy silver belt buckle. A true local indeed. “Mr. Wayland, the pleasure is all mine of course.”

“Gentlemen please have a seat,” the realtor said, motioning for them to sit at a narrow table along the window. She suddenly looked a bit peaked and in need of a chair herself.

“I appreciate your willingness to meet with me Mr. Bane. It shows real commitment to this pending sale,” Mr. Wayland said as he pulled out a chair for himself. The bodyguard remained standing by the door with his arms crossed in front of him. The sight of which made Magnus extremely uncomfortable.

“Yes, well I’m more than anxious to see this through, I’ve got a flight to Copenhagen in the morning.” Magnus added with a salty edge to his voice. He hoped that sufficiently dropped the hint that he was more than pressed for time.

“If you two wouldn’t mind I’d like to speak with Mr. Bane alone first,” Mr. Wayland insisted, seeing
“Oh, of course,” she replied nervously. “I’ll go grab a fresh pitcher of water and see what other kind of refreshments I can offer you gentlemen. When you’re ready for me I’ll be just across the hall.”

The woman hurried out of the room and the menacing bodyguard followed close behind her, closing the door as they exited. This left Magnus and Michael Wayland sitting across the narrow table from each other, silently sizing up their competition. Magnus actually felt more at ease now that they were alone, and if this blowhard thought he was going to be intimidated he was very, very mistaken.

“Mr. Bane. The reason I was so interested in speaking with you face to face is because I’m a man of very simple ways. I believe there’s not much in this world that can’t be handled with a firm handshake. That might seem old fashioned, but we do things differently up here on our mountain. Time in many ways stands still when you’re this far from the rest of civilization.”

Magnus stifled a laugh. If this guy really thinks a town full of billionaires with J. Crew, Ralph Lauren, and three different furriers is “away from civilization” then he was clearly delusional. Magnus lifted one fist to his mouth in an attempt to cover his internal laughter as the man continued to enlighten him.

“Owning the last buildable piece of property on Red Mountain has put me in a position to be very choosy about who I sell it to. As soon as your offer came across my desk I had my team do a thorough background check of course, and I was pleasantly surprised to discover your long list of accolades and achievements in the music world. I’m not much of a connoisseur of the fine arts, but my son is a musician so I admit my interests in facilitating this sale were heightened.”

Magnus’ internal laughter was immediately replaced with dread as he imagined just how thorough this investigation into his personal life might have been. Magnus hadn’t been particularly secretive about some of his more extravagant predilections, but seeing that he was still here maybe the digging hadn’t gone too deep.

“My son Jonathan is completing his final year at IU, which I’m sure you know is one of the top music programs in the country. He plays the viola, in fact he’s been attending the music festival here every summer since he was old enough to hold it. I’m sure you’ll cross paths come next June, he’s not hard to miss.”

Magnus didn’t really understand where this was going but he listened and nodded as the man continued to drone on about his son.

“I admit he’s a bit spoiled, being my only child, and my only heir, but he’s a smart young man, street smart is what I like to call it. Not many can pull the wool over his eyes, not even me. But what my boy lacks is the proper motivation and discipline to really be successful. He’s always been a bit of a rebel you see, and I worry where he’ll be come this time next year.”

Magnus was growing more confused as to the direction of this very one-sided conversation, but he continued to indulge the man, trying his best not to yawn or check his phone.

“He really needs a mentor, and a role model. Someone with his best interests at heart, who can steer him in the right direction for his career. I might not be a musician but I’m a businessman, and I know the real key to success is making the right connections with the right people. Because at the end of the day it’s not about talent is it? It’s about who you know! And you sir, are exactly what Jonathan needs.”
Magnus finally picked up what this man was laying down. As difficult as it was to believe. “So let me get this straight, you’re willing to sell me this property if I agree to help your son’s career?” Magnus wasn’t mincing words, he wanted to skip the crap and get right to the gist of this strange conversation.

“As I said, my team was very thorough in their research Mr. Bane. Two are former CIA, one use to work for INTERPOL, and why Davidson out there in the hallway, he was Secret Service with the Clinton administration. So believe me, there is nothing I can’t find out about a person’s past.” The man smiled knowingly.

Magnus felt the last mysterious puzzle piece click into place, revealing a very shocking truth he wouldn’t have even dreamed possible if he hadn’t just heard it with his own two ears. Not even in his wildest imagination could he have come up with this. It was insane. Boldly holding his poker face, Magnus didn’t say a word. He allowed the man to study his empty expression intently. He was clearly looking to see if his thinly veiled threat was making any headway. Realizing after a few minutes he wasn’t going to get a response he continued on.

“You see, your deep and lasting connection with Alicante Records as well as the vast reach of Morgenstern Enterprises could insure the road to my son’s future is paved in gold. Sure I have plenty of money, but my business connections are all tied to Wall Street, why you on the other hand, probably have Riccardo Muti’s personal cell number, am I right?”

Magnus’ eyes shifted to his iPhone which was laying on the table in front of him. Of course he had any conductor across the globe at his fingertips, not only due to his musical talent but the connections he’d built through his own father over the last almost 20 years. And the man was right, if you wanted an ace in the hole, Magnus would be the prime candidate.

Michael Wayland didn’t seem to know how to interpret Magnus’ silence, so he drove his point home one last time, just to make sure he knew what was on the line. “Well like I said, I have the privilege of owning the last buildable home sight on Red Mountain, and I have more money than I will ever need, so my only incentive to sell is securing my son’s happiness. You may find my negotiation tactics a bit ruthless, but if I’ve learned one thing in my life it’s to strike first and strike hard. And that Mr. Bane is why I’ve summoned you here before me today.”

This was blackmail. Plain and simple. Magnus wasn’t being given a choice here at all. It was either buy this land and help his son, or have his past exposed. Magnus didn’t even have to ponder what dirt he might have dug up, his confidence spoke for itself. He had all the information he needed, and he had the upper hand.

“I suppose that’s all there is to say about the matter then,” Magnus clipped, realizing he hadn’t been backed into a corner like this since the day he met his biological father. He didn’t like the feeling of being a powerless victim, but if helping this boy was going to keep his past in the past, then that was the price he’d have to pay.

“Wonderful, I was hoping you’d see reason,” Michael Wayland praised with a cocky, arrogant smile. “My son can never know the truth about this arrangement of course. It would undermine his confidence to think such extreme measures had to be put into place for his benefit. No, this will be a gentlemen’s agreement between the two of us. You shake my hand on this today and by Monday the excavation can begin on your new home.”

Magnus regretfully shook the man’s hand wishing he’d never come to this backwoods billionaire’s playground in the first place. What was supposed to be a relaxing summer away from the exhaustion of travel, complete with palatial mountain estate, had turned into yet another moment in his life steeped in coercion and deceit. A viciously repetitive cycle from which Magnus felt there was no
escape.

“Mr. Wayland, might I add that you’d be wise to remember just how deep my connections to Morgenstern Enterprises run,” Magnus said with a tone that would leave no confusion as to how his father dealt with situations like these. “I am agreeing to help your son as much as I can, mostly to avoid any sort of ugly conflict. Because that’s not how I do business. But I’m not a miracle worker and I’m not making any promises to you about what he will or won’t achieve. You see, I can be quite ruthless myself, when I need to be.”

Michael Wayland’s smile morphed into an almost proud grin. “Well, then I think I’ve found an even better role model for my son than I originally expected. I can’t wait for you two to get acquainted.”

Magnus rolled his eyes and folded his arms across his chest. If his father were here he would have already mounted this man’s head on a pike. But Magnus really loved the property and he had his heart set on building a spectacular mountain dream home. He liked to picture himself slowly breaking away from life on the road and eventually getting to the point where he could actually enjoy owning a real home. Plus the views were like nothing he’d ever seen before stateside, and truth be told, he didn’t like to lose.

“I look forward to it,” Magnus lied. Hoping that when it came time to meet Jonathan Wayland, he’d discover the apple had fallen very far from the tree.

After Jace pulled himself together and finally left the locker room, Magnus finished getting dressed then quickly made his way back down the hall to Alec’s room. When he arrived he saw Clary had given Jace the chair next to the bed and he was holding the same unbroken hand Magnus had clung to all throughout the night. The sight of it made him envious, and he wished in that one selfish moment he and Alec could just be alone again.

Seeing Magnus standing in the doorway, Jace let go of Alec’s hand and stood up abruptly as if he’d been caught doing something he shouldn’t have been doing. He slowly backed away from the bed, toward where Clary was standing, and Magnus could see tears were welled in the corners of his eyes. Clary wrapped her arms around him for comfort and this simple sign of affection between the two only made Magnus increasingly resentful. As glad as he was Alec had made such a close friend, and as much as he could appreciate the genuine connection they’d built, seeing Jace healthy and happy in the arms of the person he loved didn’t seem fair. He was just as much a part of this failed plan as Magnus was, if not more so. He had lied and kept secrets from Alec since day one, and it was his empty room Alec had broken into last night. Magnus thought Jace deserved to have just as much misery, pain and heartbreak as he was facing. He felt tears fill his eyes once again as the hurt and jealousy flooded his mind with bitterness.

Jace noticed Magnus was becoming more upset. “We can go,” he muttered, his voice raspy and strained. “If you want us to leave just say so.”

Maybe it was the lack of sleep, or the pure mental exhaustion Magnus was facing, but he felt more alone in this moment than he’d felt in a very long time. Not since he’d stood in the cold London rain staring hopelessly into the muddy pit of his mother’s grave. That overwhelming sense of loss had become all too familiar. First his father, then his mother, now his only brother had betrayed him.
Facing the reality of this situation was nearly impossible because deep down in his heart he knew he couldn’t survive losing Alec too. Just the thought of trying to make it through the rest of his life without Alec’s crooked little smile, his explosive fits of laughter, and the warmth of his body pressed against him every night as he drifted off to sleep. There was no way to even comprehend this kind of loss, and his heart ached with painful longing.

Clary must have sensed Magnus’ despair because she pulled one arm away from Jace and extended it toward him with a gentle smile. She was very sweet, a truly genuine and sympathetic person. Magnus couldn’t reject her kind offer, so he took her hand and created a physical bond between the three of them. That connection gave Magnus a boost of inner strength and the loneliness he had felt eased slightly. This unlikely trio, thrown together by an improbable set of circumstances, bravely turned toward Alec feeling united in their courage to get through this nightmare together.

“My baby boy!” A woman’s voice suddenly cried out from behind them causing Magnus, Jace, and Clary to turn in unison toward the door. A tall, dark haired woman came charging into the room, headed straight for Alec like she didn’t even see anyone was standing there.

“Excuse us,” a man interjected, bolting in right behind the hysterical woman. He shoved his way past them, looking stern and weary.

“Robert look! Oh God, who could have done such a thing?” The woman cried placing her hands on either side of Alec’s torso so she could bend down to kiss his forehead. “My sweet, sweet boy. Mama’s here now, Mama’s here.”

“Dad’s here too pal,” the man said, his voice cracking as he gently placed the back of his hand against Alec’s cheek. “We’re both here son.” He draped his arm over the woman’s shoulders and they huddled together over Alec’s bed.

“His parents,” Clary whispered, dropping her arms and backing away toward the door. “Jace we should go.”

Jace didn’t move, he remained there transfixed by the sight of Alec’s parents overcome by grief and shock at the state of their son. Magnus was next to Jace and he wasn’t moving either. He stood rooted to the spot just beside the foot of Alec’s bed, his mouth agape.

“My baby,” the woman whimpered, smoothing Alec’s hair away from his face and gently patting his head with a loving tenderness. “I know you can hear me sweetheart. Everything is going to be alright, I promise.”

Magnus examined the man and woman closely. It was easy to see where Alec got his good looks, his mother was strikingly beautiful with the same glossy dark hair and his father had a strong, intimidating presence the evoked a bold sense of confidence. It was the same confidence Magnus often saw in Alec when he was playing his cello. Strong evidence to support the claim that children were the mirror images of their parents. It was also very clear they loved their son immensely, so much so that Magnus felt guilty he hadn’t insisted Alec do a better job staying in touch with them over the summer.

“Mr. Bane, Dr. Carson is here,” the nurse said, popping her head inside the door. “We’re going to have to ask that you clear the visitors from the room now. Only immediate family are allowed to be
Hearing the nurse, the man who Magnus now knew was Robert Lightwood turned and walked toward the door. “Are you the nurse on duty overseeing my son’s care?” He asked her abrasively.

“Your son? Oh I’m so sorry sir, I wasn’t aware you were immediate family. Yes, I am one of the nurses on staff today, I just came down to inform Mr. Bane here that the surgeon he requested is going over Mr. Lightwood’s X-rays and scans from last night. He’ll be in shortly to speak with you.”

Robert Lightwood looked at Magnus with a perplexed expression, clearly having no idea who he was, why he was there, or why he would have taken it upon himself to bring in a surgeon of his own choosing. “What’s going on here? Who are you?”

Magnus knew this was a crucial moment, his first time meeting Alec’s father had to start out on the right foot somehow. He reached down deep to find the courage to answer him, then bravely extended his hand. “Hello Mr. Lightwood, sir. My name is Magnus Bane.”

Robert looked down at Magnus’ hand like he was offering him a poisoned apple. Then he cautiously reached forward and shook it, eyeing him suspiciously.

“Magnus Bane?” his wife called out from behind him with disbelief, leaving Alec’s side to come join her husband by the door. “The famous violinist? What on earth are you doing here?”

Magnus felt a lump develop in this throat, he desperately tried to swallow so he could confidently respond but his knees were giving way underneath him and his heart was wildly hammering against his ribs. “Uhh, I’m serving as a member of the faculty this summer at AMF,” he managed to choke out. “And I was the one who found him… found your son… last night.”

“Oh!” They both responded in unison, their faces transforming from skepticism to relief. “Pardon our rudeness, thank you so much for helping Alec,” the woman replied. “I’m Maryse Lightwood, Alec’s mother, this is my husband Robert. We received a call late last night from one of Alec’s friends letting us know he’d been attacked.”

Jace cleared his throat nervously, he’d been the one to make that call and of course hadn’t mentioned anything about Magnus.

“Thank God you found him,” Robert said, reaching out to take his wife’s hand. “We don’t even want to think what could have happened if someone hadn’t come along.”

Clary roughly grabbed Jace by the elbow and pulled him toward the door, desperate to get them both out of this awkward situation. Thankfully Jace startled out of his daze enough to follow her. Magnus and the Lightwoods didn’t even seem to notice they were leaving, they just stood there facing each other in an uncomfortable silence.

“Dr. Carson is the best hand surgeon on the west coast, and quite possibly the world,” Magnus informed them. “He’s done amazing work for several of my colleagues and friends, that’s why I called him immediately last night. So he could get here as quickly as possible.”

Robert pouted his lips and nodded, as if taking this information under advisement. Maryse turned back to look at Alec, her tear-stained face overcome with emotion.

“I assure you he’s Alec’s best chance right now. I’d stake my own reputation on it,” Magnus added for good measure, hoping the Lightwoods would believe him and agree to let Dr. Carson perform the surgery Alec no doubt needed to have right away.
“We appreciate your concern Mr. Bane,” Robert said sincerely before turning to glance at his wife. They exchanged an odd sort of look, communicating something wordlessly between one another. “You’ve gone above and beyond the call of duty caring for our son until we could arrive. The festival is lucky to have such a kind and thoughtful representative here to smooth the waters.”

Magnus was shocked. Was Robert implying he was only there to reduce the festival’s liability for what had happened to Alec? Then he remembered, his parents were both lawyers. Of course their minds would immediately go to the legal ramifications and culpability of such an attack on school property. They must have assumed he was there to keep them from suing the school. Magnus was deeply offended but more importantly he had to set them straight.

“Thank you Mr. Lightwood,” Magnus said, remaining calm despite feeling slightly insulted. “I appreciate that, but I’m actually not here as a representative of the school. In fact I’m not sure anyone on the board is even aware this has happened. I’m not acting in any sort of official capacity… I’m just here for Alec.” Magnus held his head high, keeping his face calm and resolute. He wanted Alec’s parents to know this was personal not professional.

“I see,” Robert said, contemplating Magnus’ words with a furrowed brow. He seemed to be picking up on the subtext, while Maryse on the other hand only looked increasingly annoyed.

“As my husband said, we appreciate your concern Mr. Bane. And we are thankful for your assistance getting Alec to the hospital so quickly. But it’s been a long night for you and I’m sure you probably need to get back to the school.” She was coldly succinct, moving her body over a few inches to protectively block Magnus’ view of Alec completely. “If you’d like to leave your number we’d be happy to update you on Alec’s condition.”

Maryse felt her words like a cold, stinging slap across his face. He looked at Robert and his eyes were averted, clearly letting him know his wife was the one in charge.

“I appreciate the offer but there is nothing at the school that can’t wait,” Magnus replied, trying not to lose his cool as his blood was beginning to boil.

“As you wish,” Maryse responded with a clipped tone. “But, as the nurse informed us, only immediate family can be present during the surgical consult, so we’ll have to ask you to leave now. I’m sure there is a waiting room somewhere on this floor. We’ll have someone escort you.”

Magnus felt the tight grip on his temper begin to slip. He balled his hands into tight fists and attempted to breathe slowly in and out through his clenched teeth. As much as he knew these were Alec’s parents and he needed to at least try to show them respect, this was not a point he was willing to negotiate. “I’m sorry but I can’t do that, I need to be here to speak with Dr. Carson when he arrives. He’s a personal friend and he has only agreed to come because I called him.”

Maryse audibly sucked in a gasp, apparently unaccustomed to being challenged on her rulings. Robert reached to grab her forearm as if he were afraid she’d launch herself forward.

“I’m sure you can understand that this is a family matter, Mr. Bane,” Robert clarified, putting extra emphasis on the word family.

“Yes, I can. But this is also a matter of Alec’s life and his professional future,” Magnus countered. “Both of which I am a part of.”

Maryse ripped her arm from Robert’s firm grasp and emphatically pointed it at Magnus, drilling it into his chest. “Excuse me sir, but who do you think you are?” She commanded, her voice booming through the tiny room.
Magnus felt a surge of anger rush through his body with such a force he released the tight hold on one of his balled fists and swatted Maryse’s hand away from his chest. “I’m the man who’s in love with your son! And I’m not leaving!”

Ragnor Fell spent the early morning hours of July 5th taxiing to and from town to retrieve Magnus and Alec’s abandoned vehicles from the parking lot of the Benedict Music Tent. They were not hard to find, being the only two cars remaining from the concert the night before. Ragnor of course had extra sets of keys for both and he tipped the cab driver heftily for the half dozen trips shuttling him up and down the mountain. Once both cars were safely parked at home in Magnus’ garage Ragnor walked with purpose back to his tiny chalet which was tucked into the woods beside the main house. The morning sunlight was seeping between the thick branches of pine and spruce, and a steady wind rustled through the quaking Aspen trees. Ragnor moved stealthily, his face concentrated and emotionless, as he retrieved a black metal box from behind a wood pile that ran along the eastern side of his house. Then he went inside and collected a folder of paperwork from a small safe hidden underneath a loose floorboard in his kitchen. Thumbing through a set of documents he came to the one he was looking for and hastily stuffed it into an envelope that already contained several other pieces of paper. He returned the folder to the safe, took the envelope and the small metal box in hand, and headed to his car.

The city streets were beginning to show signs of life as students carrying a variety of instrument cases paraded toward the bus stop in front of Aspen Lodge. Just around the corner from the main lodge, nestled right into the base of the mountain, was the very posh and private condominium residence known as Aspen Alps. This was the luxurious address Sebastian Morgenstern called home for the summer, having no intention of staying in any of the school provided housing. His father had acquired the property on very short notice after Magnus had decided it wouldn’t be appropriate for Sebastian to stay at his house with him.

Ragnor parked a block away, slid the now empty metal box underneath his front seat, and put on a lightweight jacket. He cautiously made his way up to the condo marked #12, feeling as if he were headed right into a lion’s den. Upon arrival at the door he lifted one shaking fist and pounded on it firmly three times, nervously waiting for the beast to answer. For a moment he thought maybe he wasn’t at home, until the lock clicked and the door swung open revealing a sleepy-eyed, tousle-haired Sebastian. Shirtless and barefoot, wearing only a loose pair of blue knit sleep pants. Clearly having been woken by the knocking.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?” Sebastian mused with a smug expression.

“I think you know why I’m here,” Ragnor muttered, not in the mood for games. “Let me in, we need to talk.”

Sebastian opened the door wider and gave an obnoxious little bow, gesturing Ragnor inside with a devilish look in his eyes. “Right this way sir.”

Once inside Ragnor saw a jaw dropping view out the back of Sebastian’s living room, which seemed to be entirely made of glass. It was a gorgeous panoramic scene of breathtaking mountains, providing nothing but the best for the overly entitled son of a billionaire. Although Ragnor felt quite certain it was much too beautiful to be appreciated by someone so inherently evil.

“Well I’m all ears old man,” Sebastian commanded, having closed the door and locked it behind
them. “Say whatever you’ve come to say, I’m quite busy today and not really in the mood to entertain guests.”

Ragnar shook his head, there was so much about this young man that reminded him of his father. His charming wit mixed with his pretentious snobbery, coupled with a terrifying presence that reflected his vile intentions. The resemblance was uncanny.

“I know you’re behind the attack on the boy,” Ragnar stated plainly, bravely cutting right to the chase.

“Is that so?” Sebastian snarled, his eyes full of glee.

“You must be so disappointed Magnus got to him in time before your thugs could finish the job?”

Sebastian let out a single barking laugh in response. “There are fates worse than death my friend, especially in the music world,” he teased, displaying a sickening pride for what he had done.

“You aren’t going to get away with this,” Ragnar informed him, not allowing himself to cower under Sebastian’s heinous words.

“I think you’ll find I have an air tight alibi for my whereabouts last night, over two thousand eyewitnesses can place me on stage during the time of the attack. Such a necessary part of any good plan don’t you think?” Sebastian chimed wickedly. “Of course you should know that better than anyone, aren’t alibis one of your specialties?”

Ragnar flinched at the suggestion he would ever stoop to something so low. “You’re insane, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t you though?” Sebastian questioned, tilting his head in that eerie way which always made him look like a predator contemplating which part of your body he was going to eat first. “You’ve been covering my father’s tracks for years.”

“That’s a lie!” Ragnar bellowed. “I’ve done no such thing!”

“One could argue I’ve had two of the best teachers when it comes to making problems go away.” Sebastian voice was syrupy sweet. “I daresay you’ve turned it into an art form by now.”

“You don’t know anything about me!” Ragnar vehemently objected as he moved closer to where Sebastian was standing.

“I knew you were the wild card who could disrupt my carefully laid plans. I knew your close ties to father and the trust you’ve managed to manipulate from my brother, could put you in the perfect position to cause problems for me.”

“I love Magnus like he’s my own flesh and blood!” Ragnar insisted. “I would never do anything to manipulate him or hurt him! Why do you think I’ve dedicated the last 6 years of my life to keeping such a close eye on him? It was to protect him from you!”

Sebastian let out another sickening laugh. “And why would he need protection from his own brother?” He trilled.

“Because I know what kind of monster you really are!” Ragnar shouted as he pulled a 9mm Glock from the back of his waistband and pointed it directly at Sebastian’s face. “Just give me one reason why I shouldn’t shoot you right here where you stand? You sick, twisted, selfish bastard!”
“I can give you two,” Sebastian sneered. His smile curling tightly against his perfectly white teeth, as if he were daring Ragnor to pull the trigger. “You see, in addition to my perfect alibi I also had to create an insurance policy. Something that could successfully thwart any possible revenge you might attempt to plan in that feeble old mind of yours.”

Ragnor brought his empty hand up to steady the gun that was beginning to shake. “What could you possibly have on me? I’ve committed no crimes! I have nothing to hide!”

Sebastian’s eyebrows raised with amusement. “All those years of keeping quiet about father’s misdeeds, helping him tidy the messes he made. There’s far too much blood on your hands old man. Starting with the two reasons I know you won’t pull that trigger.”

“Who’s blood? Tell me!” Ragnor demanded, his eyes blown wide and his voice pleading.

“Dear, sweet, Mr. and Mrs. Bane of course. So young, so innocent. They had their whole lives ahead of them.” Sebastian mocked. “Such a tragedy, two suicides in the same family. The chances seem nearly impossible don’t you think? Why you must have been devastated from the news, after all those years tailing them everywhere they went, reporting every move they made back to father. When you heard of their sudden and untimely deaths how truly shocked you must have been.”

“What are you suggesting?” Ragnor asked, feeling the blood in his veins turn to ice water as his whole body went numb.

“All of those carefully handwritten notes, the dates, times, addresses, daily routines, such a handy weapon in the hands of those who would wish them harm.”

Ragnor felt a burn of acid in the back of his throat. His heart was beating inside his chest like a caged bird. “I couldn’t have known that… I… I was just doing my job. I didn’t think… I never thought…”

Sebastian’s smile grew wider as he continued to carefully weave his tale. “What would Magnus think of his dear sweet, beloved Ragnor if he knew you’d been an accessory to his own parents murder?”

“That isn’t true.” Ragnor murmured, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Come on dear fellow, do you expect anyone to believe that you followed this poor man and woman for years, carefully documenting every move that they made, then when both of them turned up dead you had nothing to do with it?”

“I was there to protect Magnus!” Ragnor asserted. ”To make sure he was being well taken care of and safe!”

“Yes, you made countless trips to London on father’s behalf, right up until the week before his mother died. Quite a coincidence don’t you think?”

Ragnor tightened his grip on the gun. “Why didn’t you just get rid of me then? If I was such a threat to your plan. Why go to all this trouble?”

Sebastian let out a long exhale. “For some reason my father and brother feel you’re indispensable, plus blackmail is so much more fun don’t you think?” He winked at Ragnor, delight spreading across his devious face.

Ragnor exploded. “I don’t care what you do to me! I’m not going to let you continue to hurt Magnus! There is nothing you can threaten me with that is going to keep me from putting a bullet in your head and ridding the world of your evil!”
“Hmmm, I beg to differ,” Sebastian sighed. "You see while formulating my very carefully laid plans I made arrangements that if anything unfortunate should happen to me my attorney has instructions to mail proof of your nefarious activities directly to Magnus, ruining your perfectly crafted image in his eyes for good, and tearing away the last remaining person he can trust in this world. Once he finds out you delivered his parents right into the arms of their murderer he’ll be done with you, and the last remaining pieces of his sanity will be gone forever.”

Ragnar’s arms slightly lowered from the weight of the gun as the words Sebastian spoke failed to make any sense in his mind. “What do you mean his sanity?”

Sebastian turned toward the window, clasping his hands behind his back. Then began pacing very slowly as if he were going to admire the view.

“I was three years old the night my mother flung her largest suitcase up on top of the bed and began throwing in all of her clothes. I thought it was rather odd, she didn’t even remove the hangers. She just ripped them down and stuffed them in frantically. I was so young, I didn’t understand what was happening. But I saw the tears streaming down her face, and I knew enough to be very afraid.”

Ragnar’s arms fell limp at his sides, the gun hitting the carpeted floor with a muted thud, as his memories of Jocelyn Fairchild came tumbling back into the forefront of his mind. It had been decades since he’d last thought of her.

“When father began pounding on the door mother took me roughly by the shoulders and told me to hide under the bed. She said I was to stay quiet, and not make a sound. She made me promise that no matter what I heard I would stay hidden. ‘Not a sound, not a sound,’ she repeated again and again as I crawled away.”

Ragnar stood frozen, mesmerized by Sebastian’s memories of a woman he didn't even think he would remember.

“Curled underneath the bed with my hands clamped tightly over my ears I still couldn’t block out the screaming. Mother was going to take me far away she said, somewhere father would never find us. I couldn’t see anything of course, only their feet, but when mother’s voice suddenly changed from screams to gasps and chokes for breath that was when I saw her levitate right off the floor. It was as if she were floating away, like an angel drifting up into the heavens. Soon only her toes were visible and they dangled just inches above the ground. They hung there limply at first, then began to jerk violently in a sort of strange ballet. It matched the rhythm of the gurgling and sputtering of her last desperate attempts for breath.”

Overcome by what he was hearing Ragnar staggered backwards, clutching the wall behind him.

Sebastian wasn't phased by Ragnar's reaction, he just paced back and forth continuing with his gruesome story. "When I realized the sounds she was making had finally stopped and her toes were completely still, I removed my hands from my ears to listen. You see I thought she’d be calling for me to come out. But instead, in the blink of an eye, she disappeared.”

Ragnar saw Sebastian’s face was thoughtful, as if he were remembering a fond childhood memory. The sight of which made chills run over his body. This boy was more unhinged than Ragnar had even thought possible. He wasn't just selfish and narcissistic he was a complete dissociative sociopath. Far beyond any hope of saving.

“I heard my father’s footsteps begin to move away from where I was hidden, they echoed heavily across the wooden floor. When the door closed behind him I remained in that spot under the bed for many hours, I didn’t make a sound all through the night. You see what a good boy I was don’t you? I
did just what my mother asked me to do. In fact even after my hunger finally forced me from my hiding place later that next day, I still never spoke a single word to anyone. Because in my childish mind keeping that last promise I made would be the only way mother could ever come back for me. And in that silent prison I was trapped with the memory of her last wish... so I remained silent, waiting for her to return.”

Ragnar hadn’t realized he’d begun to cry. But hearing the heartbreaking story of Jocelyn's tragic death had made his face wet with tears. He stood staring at Sebastian, as he turned back from the window and looked Ragnar dead in the eye.

“Something happens to your humanity when you watch your own mother die by the hands of your father. And I never forgot the lesson I learned that day: to love is to destroy, and to be loved is to be the one destroyed. You see now, that is why I know Magnus would never recover if he found out the truth of what happened to his mother. He would never be the same again... just like me. And if you love him as much as you say you do, you’ll turn around, walk out that door, and never threaten me again.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry for the delay! XOXOXO
Thank you all so much for your comments and kudos, they mean the world to me. :)


Lacrimosa

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Magnus never realized until two days ago just how truly horrific hospital waiting rooms were. Rows of empty chairs, shitty cell phone service, and sterile, beige walls covered with the most depressing inspirational quotes a person could imagine. The bitter smell of antiseptic mixed with cheap, stale coffee wafted through the air and the buzzing fluorescent lights overhead made everything they illuminated look utterly bleak. Magnus wondered if this was what hell felt like, because he couldn’t imagine anything worse.

At the opposite end of the waiting room, sitting side by side, were Robert and Maryse Lightwood, both with their laptops out, furiously typing away. It appeared they were attempting to conduct business as usual, and Magnus imagined there wasn’t much that would drag them away from their work. It made him wonder just how long they would even stay in town once Alec was out of the woods. A few days? A week? Of course they hadn’t said a word to Magnus since Alec had been wheeled back to surgery, and he definitely wasn’t going to be the first to break the silence. Especially after their turbulent first meeting yesterday.

Jace had left a few hours ago. He was taking Clary back to Aspen, feeling she’d already been away too long, but he’d promised to return to the hospital by the time Alec was out of recovery. Magnus knew there was no point in them sticking around, Dr. Carson had said the surgery would take several hours, and there wasn’t anything to do except sit and wait. But a vulnerable part of Magnus wished they would have been there with him. Not because he had anything in particular to say, but he would’ve liked to have had people around who didn’t look at him like he was an intruder. As much as Jace could be a real pain in the ass sometimes, he’d grown accustomed to his presence over the last 48 hours. Truth be told, Jace had somehow found his way onto Magnus’ short list of people he could trust. Though stubborn and often arrogant, he had this genuine quality about him. He was brave, fiercely loyal, and someone who would do anything to protect the people he cared about. Even if that meant risking everything. Magnus had to admit, as much as he hated it, Alec’s happiness was now their common ground. The only way to repair the damage done by Sebastian was to work together as a team to show Alec the real truth of what had happened. Then somehow convince him to forgive them both.

After the showdown with Robert and Maryse yesterday morning, Alec’s room had quickly turned into a three ring circus. It had been a nonstop parade of visitors, interspersed with medical staff, stretching on and on for hours. First there’d been the consult with Dr. Carson, where he’d given a careful explanation of what type of repairs Alec would need to have made to his hand. Just listening to the graphic details had made Magnus feel like he might faint. But the prognosis hadn’t been hopeless and Dr. Carson had said he felt confident in his ability to do the surgery. Next Ragnor had arrived, acting very strange and distant. He’d arranged to have Magnus’ car delivered to the hospital in case he needed it, and he’d brought food and more clothes as well. But then he’d left without even saying goodbye. There’d been something peculiar about his eyes, something that resembled fear and also a thinly veiled secrecy. But Magnus hadn’t quite been able to put his finger on it, and he’d been too emotionally drained to give it much more thought afterwards. Whatever was going on, he’d decided he’d have to worry about it later. Shortly after Ragnor had left, Victor showed up, as smug and full of himself as ever. Magnus had literally felt the “I told you so’s” radiating off of him as he’d talked to Alec’s parents. He’d acted like Magnus wasn’t even there, no doubt basking in his self-congratulatory glory knowing his words of warning to Alec had been validated. He’d told him to be careful, that night last month when they’d all had dinner together at his house. He’d told Alec to
“keep his eyes open and be smart.” Magnus had overheard their conversation when he’d come back to the kitchen carrying dirty plates. As angry and offended as he’d felt by Victor’s words, they’d been replaced with only a feeling of guilt. He’d thought maybe Victor had been right after all, maybe Alec shouldn’t have trusted him. And in that moment of doubt Magnus had been suddenly very glad Alec wasn’t awake.

Snapping back to the present by the sound of Maryse slamming the lid of her laptop closed, Magnus decided to forget the events of yesterday and focus on the future. Right now the most important thing was Alec’s surgery and his recovery. There was nothing he could do about the past, but he knew damn well there would be a lot to deal with in the coming months. Alec would need adequate time to heal then lots of physical therapy to regain strength in his hand. Magnus didn’t want to be naive about it, but his hopes were high Alec would play again.

The torturous waiting went on for what felt like an eternity. Magnus found himself unable to pace one more step, so he collapsed into a chair giving in to his own exhaustion. With his elbows propped on his knees, and his head in his hands, he felt the crushing sadness threaten to wash over him again. Alec had to be OK, that was all there was to it. The surgery must be a success or he’d never forgive himself. Pressing his thumbs against the corners of his eyes Magnus barely stopped the flow of tears. Why do I have to be so weak? He asked himself. He didn’t want to lose it in front of the Lightwoods, but his strength was dissolving as each painful hour progressed. It was all too much to bare.

At last the doors to the waiting room popped open and Magnus sprang up from his chair like a startled cat. Confidently strolling in, still in his scrubs with his surgical mask pulled down around his neck, was Dr. Carson.

“Magnus,” the doctor said first, his face soft but serious. Then he turned his head to the other side of the room, “Mr. and Mrs. Lightwood.” Alec’s parents shifted aside their laptops and quickly rose to join them by the door. “I’m sorry to keep you waiting for such a long time. Surgery is over, we finished a couple of hours ago. It went very well I think. Post-surgical lung functions looked normal, the excess fluid of concern yesterday had diminished, so I recommended extubating Alec in recovery. I didn’t think further ventilation was necessary at this time.” Dr. Carson shifted his gaze and focused on Magnus more closely. “I have to say I’m very pleased with the outcome thus far. Of course it will be a while before we can make any definitive assurances with fine motor skills, but for now I feel quite optimistic.”

Magnus nodded, his eyes fluttering rapidly to keep the tears at bay.

“So that means Alec is awake?” Maryse asked, her voice coming out strained but grateful.

“Yes, he is awake,” the doctor told them with a cautious smile.

Magnus felt himself take the first deep breath he’d had in days, his shoulders slumped with overwhelming relief. To his right he heard Robert and Maryse also give a similar sigh.

“Can we see him now?” Robert questioned with a pleading tone, taking his wife by the hand to form a clearly united front that didn’t include Magnus.

Dr. Carson’s eyes darted back and forth between the two separate parties, his face unreadable. “He’s still in recovery for just a bit longer, and we don’t typically allow visitors back there, but he has asked repeatedly to see you… Magnus.”

Magnus felt his heart drop into the pit of his stomach as the Lightwoods simultaneously turned to look at him, their faces locked in a shocked expression.
“But just for a few minutes, then we’ll need to prep him for transfer.”

Magnus felt paralyzed with fear. There was nothing in this world he wanted more than to see Alexander. He’d walk through the fires of hell just for a glimpse of his hazel eyes open and alert again. But he was also terrified of what his reaction would be. Was he asking to see him so he could tell him to leave? Would he look at him with anger? Or worse, contempt? He knew even a tiny hint of doubt in Alec’s eyes would literally rip his heart out of his chest. Magnus honestly didn’t know if he could survive it.

“Alright,” Magnus managed to mutter out, not daring to look at Alec’s parents, knowing fire was probably shooting from their eye sockets.

“Mr. and Mrs. Lightwood, it should only be a short while longer until Alec is back in his room. I recommend heading there now so you can see him the moment he’s wheeled in.”

Robert and Maryse grumbled in unison. Magnus thought he heard something to the effect of, “this is ridiculous,” as they stepped aside bitterly, clearing a path to the door.

Dr. Carson smiled kindly, then turned to leave. Magnus followed close behind, still not daring to turn around. He felt fairly confident the Lightwoods now hated him more than ever.

“Sorry if that put you in an awkward position,” the doctor said as he led Magnus back through another set of doors down a long, chaotic hallway bustling with doctors and nurses. “Like I said, normally we don’t allow visitors back here in recovery, but Alec was emphatic that he see you immediately and I didn’t want him to get overly agitated. We need to keep him as calm as possible with those broken ribs.”

Magnus felt like his heart was going to hammer its way completely out of his chest. Alec had insisted on seeing him, was this good news or bad? His mind raced through a dozen painful scenarios as he tried to hold on to some hope that this could be a happy reunion. Somehow.

Taking a sharp left turn down a quiet corridor they followed a dim path until it took them to a dead end that opened into a brightly lit and mostly empty room full of beds and equipment. In the very far back corner he could see three nurses standing over someone’s bed and Magnus’ heart lurched. He knew that must be him.

“Remember what I said,” the doctor whispered to Magnus. “Keep him calm or I’ll have to sedate him. I don’t want him getting worked up again.”

Magnus nodded, but worried his presence was only about to make things worse. As the two of them approached, the nurses caught sight of Dr. Carson and they parted to reveal Alec lying semi-upright, the head of his bed having been raised. Magnus could see that yes, he was indeed awake and alert. His eyes now focused intently on Magnus as he came closer and closer to his bed. In this highly anticipated moment of reconnection Magnus’ whole universe came crashing down around him like an avalanche.

“We’ll leave you two gentlemen,” Dr. Carson said, ushering the nurses along. Magnus stood silently staring until the four others finally cleared the room, then he completely broke down. His grief washed over him like an overturned pail of water, soaking his body from head to toe. The last bit of his strength now eviscerated at the sight of Alec’s beautiful face staring back at him.

“Magnus,” Alec spoke, his voice a bit hoarse but stronger than Magnus had anticipated.

“Alexander,” Magnus sobbed as a river of tears flowed down his face overtaking his entire body
with shuttering spasms of agony and remorse. He was overcome by emotion hearing Alec speak his name, and he knew there was no way he could hold it in. He was so thankful and relieved, but also scared to death of what Alec would have to say next.

“Damn, do I look that bad?” Alec asked, reaching up to touch the side of his face. “Nobody will give me a mirror.”

Magnus sucked in a gasp of watery breath as he choked through his tears. “You’re the most beautiful sight I’ve ever seen,” he stammered. “Thank God you’re awake and you’re OK.”

Alec grimaced. “Yeah, well, I’ve been better. My throat feels like it was burned with a blow torch.”

“There was a tube,” Magnus tried to speak, but he could feel the tears dripping off the edge of his chin and it only made him want to cry more for being so weak and broken in front of Alec. He deserved better after everything he’d been through.

“Yeah, the doctor told me,” Alec replied, his face weary and ashen. “He told me everything.”

Magnus felt another stinging wave of guilt as he gave a furtive look toward Alec’s left hand. He saw it was meticulously bandaged with only a tiny bit of his fingertips visible.

Alec noticed him looking and he followed Magnus’ gaze down to his own hand. “He said the surgery went well, but no guarantees,” Alec said, his downcast face painted with a sad, forlorn expression.

“He’s done tremendous work for many famous musicians and athletes. He’s the best in the world, I made sure of that,” Magnus affirmed, hoping in some small way to boost Alec’s spirits.

“I guess that was the least you could do,” Alec said sharply, his eyes like narrowed steel boring into Magnus’ soul with an unrelenting intensity.

Magnus felt his fluttering heart seize up as the blood slowly drained from his face. This was it, Alec had made his decision. He was going to throw him out of the hospital and never forgive him. Magnus could feel it coming and he knew, as much as it killed him, he deserved it. Not knowing how to take the bad news without breaking down even more, he bravely set his tearful eyes to Alec’s face knowing he might never see him again after this day. “I would do anything for you,” Magnus replied with as much sincerity and love as he could muster, then he held his breath for Alec’s response.

Alec pursed his lips, pausing for a painfully long ten seconds or so before answering. “Hmm, anything?”

“You know I would,” Magnus pleaded, clearly not ready to give up.

Alec turned his head slightly as if contemplating his next words very carefully. The sideways angle cast a glowing light across his array of bruises and cuts that made him look every bit as beaten down physically as Magnus felt beaten down emotionally. The two of them were both in shambles.

“You and I have a lot to discuss,” Alec finally answered. “And to be totally honest with you, I don’t know how things are going to turn out between us. I’m upset—” His voice broke off as his top lip quivered slightly. “And I have a lot of questions. But right now I don’t have the energy to get into it with you.”

Magnus nodded, feeling dead inside.
“I’m tired Magnus, and I feel like shit. But the thing I’m most worried about right now is my family.”

“Of course, I understand,” Magnus said kindly but with deep underlying sadness. “Do you want me to go and get them for you?”

“No, that’s not what I mean.” Alec attempted to adjust his upper body slightly so that he could scoot himself further up on the bed, but even this small movement made him wince from the intense pain. He clutched his ribs with his uninjured hand and inhaled sharply through clenched teeth. Then closed his eyes and tried to settle back against the raised mattress without hurting himself further. “I’m worried because I know them and I know how they operate. They are probably freaking the fuck out right now, and working every legal angle they can come up with. They’ll want private investigators, and they’ll want them to talk to every person who ever met me here. They’ll want to investigate you most of all I’m sure, and they’ll probably want to sue everyone, the school especially. They’ll never stop digging until they find out the truth. I know how they think, better than anyone.”

Magnus listened to everything Alec said even though seeing him in pain at the start only made him want to die a thousand deaths in his place. “What can I do?” He asked, worried Alec was getting himself too worked up. “I’ll do anything I can to help.”

Alec became calm as he looked at Magnus with a steady concentration. “You need to come up with something… I don’t know, a lie, a trick, a diversion of some sort. Something to throw them off the truth. It seems you’re very good at that sort of thing.”

Magnus felt Alec’s accusation hit him like a knife to the heart. It was brutal. The cold blade of truth turned and twisted against his chest as his stomach squeezed into a tight knot of regret and shame. He deserved the guilt, and worse. But it was still unbearable to admit he’d played a part in all of this.

“I don’t want them meddling in my life Magnus. You and I both know what really happened that night. I just want them to go back home where that psycho can’t hurt them, and leave us here to deal with this ourselves.”

*Ourselves?* Magnus thought, feeling his soul tether to the weight behind that word. Did Alec want them to handle Sebastian on their own? Just the two of them, together? That shocking revelation made Magnus’ heart soar, but at the same time it also terrified him. Of course he wanted his brother to pay for what he’d done, Magnus hadn’t even had time to really process the full depth of his anger and rage because he’d been so worried about Alec. But Sebastian was dangerous and he needed to be dealt with carefully. Magnus definitely didn’t want Alec putting himself at risk, he didn’t want him anywhere near his brother ever again.

“You would stay?” Magnus asked, his voice barely above a whisper. “Even after everything that’s happened?”

“If it means that asshole pays for what he did, then yes,” Alec confirmed, his face resolute.

Magnus felt his knees buckle from the stress and shock of this entire conversation, he leaned against the edge of the bed for support. “Of course I will do everything in my power to satisfy your parents and encourage them to go home. I’ll do whatever it takes. But Alexander, my darling, I love you too much to let you put yourself in jeopardy again. I have to keep you safe above all else.”

“I think it’s a little too late to keep me safe,” Alec grumbled, looking down at his hand again. “Just look at me, you know I’ll never play again.”

“Don’t say that,” Magnus whined, feeling Alec’s anguish grate over his flesh like sandpaper.
“Why? Isn’t it best to accept it now instead of setting myself up for disappointment later?”

Magnus shook his head slowly back and forth. “You can’t give up, I won’t let you. You’ll fight your way back from this, I know you will. And I’ll help you every step of the way.”

“What if I don’t want your help?” Alec said coldly, his face stoic and emotionless.

Magnus felt his body go completely numb, it was the worst feeling imaginable. “Then I’ll make sure you have the help you need from someone else. Your family, your friends, Victor, whoever is in your life. I’ll never let you give up hope as long as I have breath in my lungs.”

Alec’s head dropped back against the mattress and he closed his eyes. His right hand settled gently across his bandaged ribs. “I don’t know what’s truth and what’s fantasy anymore.”

“I know,” Magnus murmured, setting one hand nervously on Alec’s shin wishing more than anything he could set his mind at ease. “And that’s my fault. But if you’ll allow me the chance I’d like to prove myself worthy of your trust again. You see—” Magnus paused as a tight lump formed in his throat threatening to take away his ability to speak. He swallowed against the pressure and fought back another onslaught of tears. He had to say this now, before it was too late. “You see I never saw a future for myself until the day I first saw you. And even though I had heard you play and I knew you were an incredibly talented musician I never in my wildest dreams thought I’d see everything I had ever wanted walk through the door of the club that night. My whole life was turned upside down in an instant, and I know you felt it too. There’s nothing in this entire world that means as much to me as you. I want to earn your forgiveness, no matter how long it takes. Because I can’t imagine any other outcome than you and I together. You’re everything to me.”

Alec’s mouth was slack and his eyes were searching. Magnus’ words had resonated deep within his soul and he knew he was telling the truth. He started to speak in response just when they were unexpectedly interrupted.

“Excuse us, Mr. Bane,” a woman said from the door. “We’re here to take Mr. Lightwood to his room now.” The three nurses who’d been attending to Alec when Magnus had first arrived were back again, smiling and looking at him with sympathetic eyes.

“Could we please have just one more minute?” Alec asked, not moving his eyes away from Magnus’ face as he spoke to them.

“Of course,” the first nurse answered, shooing the other two nurses back out into the hallway. “We’ll be right outside.”

Magnus stood motionless unsure of what to do other than wait and see what Alec was going to say. He held his breath and nervously rubbed his thumb against Alec’s shin not even realizing he was doing it. The hospital bed was quite high off the floor which made it so easy to keep physical contact with Alec’s body. If he would have been in his right mind he probably wouldn’t have dared touch him, but the only thing guiding his decisions right now was the love he felt in his heart. He prayed he’d said enough to buy at least a bit more time at Alec’s side. The fear of being separated from him again was incomprehensible.

“I can’t promise you anything,” Alec finally answered with a sober expression.

“I wouldn’t expect you to,” Magnus reassured him, knowing he was asking for too much.

“Things may never go back to the way they were before, you know that, right?”

“I know,” Magnus admitted. “And I don’t want them to. I want to make it so much better Alexander.
I want to be completely honest with you from now on, so we can build a life together that has a strong foundation based on trust and love. I know we can do it if you’ll give me another chance.”

Alec was calm and detached as he pondered Magnus’ words. Magnus felt like the fate of his entire life was balancing on a tightrope that stretched the space between them.

“I just don’t know,” Alec confessed finally. “But I guess I can say… maybe.”

Magnus responded with a tender smile that pulled against the damp skin of his tear streaked face. *Maybe* was just about the best he could have hoped for right now. *Maybe* meant there was still some small grain of hope for their future. *Maybe* wasn’t a yes, but it wasn’t a goodbye either. Magnus clung desperately to this single word, pinning all of his hopes and dreams against its loosely woven fabric. It wasn’t much, but it was something, and it would have to do for now.

Not wanting to push the conversation any further, Magnus softly patted Alec’s leg as a few more tears escaped, then went to the hallway to get the nurses. They quickly came back in the recovery room and began a flurry of activities adjusting Alec’s bed back down to a flat position and pulling up the rails on either side so they could safely roll him away. Magnus stood back in the doorway watching, his heart returning to its first slow and steady rhythm in days. He finally felt a sense of hope that somehow this entire disaster was going to be set right, and as much as he still felt he didn’t deserve it, *maybe* there was still a chance for happiness. *Maybe* Alexander Lightwood would not break his heart.

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**Wednesday, May 25, 2016 (flashback to chapter 3, and what happened immediately after)**

Alec grabbed his phone off the dresser, along with his single key that hung from a cheap metal ring, and dashed towards the door. After locking his room he turned to run down the stairs and bumped immediately into Jace coming up. Their eyes met and Alec could see Jace was full of remorse over what had happened earlier. His blue eyes swimming with a conciliatory offering.

“Hey, have fun tonight,” Jace said with genuine honesty.

“Thanks,” Alec responded, feeling he’d already forgiven him.

“And if you need me, I mean, if you need to get out of there... you know... if something doesn't feel right. Or you feel pressured, or whatever. Just call me and I'll come get you,” Jace offered sincerely.

Alec felt overwhelmed by this gesture of concern. He’d never had anyone in his life say something this heartfelt to him before and really mean it. As unexpected and unexplainable as it was, Jace wanted to protect him.

“Jace, I...” Alec started.

“Don’t, it’s OK. We were both idiots before, myself the more colossal idiot as usual. We can debate the finer points later, but for now your carriage awaits!” Jace declared with a dramatic hand flourish towards the steps.
Alec smiled an adorable crooked grin then proceeded down the stairs playfully punching Jace’s shoulder as he passed by him.

“Have fun, remember to be cool, drink plenty of water, and don’t do anything I would do!” Jace added sarcastically as Alec waved back, turned the corner, and disappeared from sight.

Jace lingered on the steps for a moment then pulled out his phone to fire off a quick text. Once finished he fished his car keys out of his pocket and headed back down the stairs. “Don't blow it kid.”

Jace’s phone vibrated almost immediately after the text was sent and he looked down to see Magnus’ number flashing on the screen. He was calling him. “Fuck,” Jace swore, then tentatively answered the phone.

“What the hell was that supposed to mean?” Magnus’ voice came booming from the other end.

“Calm down dude, I didn’t mean anything by it,” Jace responded, seeing that clearly Magnus wasn’t in the mood for jokes.

“You text me that ‘dinner is on its way’ and you think that’s funny?” Magnus bellowed, his voice in a high pitched frenzy.

“Relax, I just meant that Alec left. I saw him head out the door and thought you’d want to know.”

“Ragnar already texted me that they were on their way, I didn’t need a report from you! And I especially didn’t need your shitty, sarcastic remark!”

“Ok, ok, sorry. What the hell has gotten into you tonight?”

Magnus exhaled loudly and was silent a moment, then cleared his throat. “Listen, I’ve been thinking about this plan of ours all day. I know we made a decision that Alec was the perfect person to complete the quartet. But things are different now.”

“In what way?” Jace wondered, feeling very confused.

“Well, it’s really none of your business, seeing as this is a personal matter, but I’ve had a change of heart.”

“Really? You don’t want Alec in the quartet anymore?” Jace was very surprised, Magnus had been adamant for months that he was clearly the best.

“Well no, I mean he’s perfect of course, there isn’t anyone better suited for the spot. But this idea that I would sweet talk him into sticking around, once the festival is over, I can’t do that anymore. I mean, I won’t do it.” Magnus declared unapologetically.

“Well, you-know-who isn’t going to like to hear that!” Jace countered, knowing Sebastian already had his sights set on forming the greatest quartet since Kronos and touring the world like royalty.

“I don’t care what he thinks, this isn’t his decision. If Alec wants to remain in the group come fall, then of course he is welcome. But we aren’t tricking him into coming with us. I can’t do that now, too many things have changed.”

“I don’t understand. You think he’s perfect for the quartet, but you don’t want to encourage him?”

“I don’t want to manipulate him into staying! I thought I could do it, well I knew I had the ability to
do it, but now I just can’t!” Magnus was emphatic.

“You’re being very cryptic. What are you like falling for him now or something?”

The phone was silent.

“Shit! Are you serious? Like for real?” Jace swore into his phone, not expecting to hear anything like that from Magnus Bane.

“Why so shocked?” Magnus asked.

“Well I didn’t think you were the one-man type of guy I guess. I mean, are you saying this date tonight is a real date?”

“Yes, it is. And I’m quite looking forward to it.” Magnus proclaimed in a salty, annoyed tone.

“Morgenstern is going to flip his shit if he finds out you aren’t going according to the plan. Didn’t you promise him already? Not to mention, my father as well?”

“You don’t need to remind me of my promises,” Magnus insisted. “I haven’t forgotten. But Alec is special, and I’m not going to lead him on. If he stays with us it will be his decision. Of course I still have hope you four can build something truly great. But I haven’t felt like this about another person in many years, and I’m not going to risk messing it up by playing some kind of game with him.”

Jace was taken aback. “Well dude, I didn’t know you had it in you. But I have to say, I’ve only known the kid for 3 days and he’s probably just about the nicest, most genuine guy I’ve ever met. I can see why you’d fall pretty hard.”

“He can’t find out the truth about this scheme. If he learned we’d been planning this for months, that you’d purposely brought him to the club to meet me, he’d never forgive us.”

Jace audibly grumbled, he knew that was true. “Yeah, he’s definitely the honorable type, believe me I don’t want him to know I got him drunk off his ass on purpose. He’d think I was some kind of predator or something. Or he’d think you were.”

“Don’t even say it, I’m embarrassed enough as it is. Alec can never find out about any of this no matter what. From now on we’ll just treat him the way we’d treat anyone we just met. As far as I’m concerned the plan is over.”

“Ok, you’re the boss. But it sure would be great if he decided to come along. There’s no fucking way I’m going back to my Dad’s house this fall. I’m done with his manipulative bullshit.”

Magnus knew he’d have hell to pay if Jace didn’t have professional success lined up without fail as soon as the festival ended. But he also knew he couldn’t use Alec to make it happen. There was no way he would be able to live with himself. “If Alec walks away at the end of the summer, we’ll take the rest of the quartet to San Fran just as we planned and we’ll find a cellist when we get there. I’m not worried.”

Jace gave him a loud, sarcastic laugh. “Yeah, well if Morgenstern finds out you aren’t grooming Alec for the job he’s going kill both of us.”

“I’m not afraid of him, he’s all bark and no bite. He’ll get over it.”

“Hmm, if you say so.” Jace wasn’t convinced. He’d been around Sebastian enough to know he was unpredictable and spoiled rotten. If he didn’t get his way there was no telling what kind of
vengeance he’d inflict on both of them. “Well, good luck tonight I guess.”

“Thanks, I’m as nervous as I can ever remember being in my entire life.”

Jace chuckled, thinking of Magnus Bane being nervous was probably the hardest thing he’d ever tried to imagine. The world’s most famous violinist, terrified of a 22 year old kid from New York. “I have to tell you man, even though it’s none of my business, Alec is really innocent. Like I don’t think he’s ever been with anyone, ever. I don’t even think he’s been kissed before. You gotta take it easy on the kid, don’t freak him out tonight.”

“Jesus Wayland! What kind of person do you think I am?” Magnus shouted, feeling insulted.

“Well, I don’t know dude, the guy is good looking, I mean if you’re in to the tall, dark and handsome type, or whatever. So just don’t push it too far.”

“I can assure you, Alec is perfectly safe here with me. I would never even think of pushing him into anything. And I’m offended you’d even suggest it!”

“Fine, fine, don’t get your panties in a twist. I’m just looking out for my new best friend. He’s special Magnus, really special. I’m never gonna let anybody hurt him.”

“If I didn’t know you better I’d say you had a crush on him yourself,” Magnus clipped, feeling annoyed by Jace’s assumptions.

“Don’t be crazy. Jace Wayland would never switch teams, he’s captain of the heteros. A lifetime MVP!”

“Oh God, you are ridiculous. I can’t deal with this conversation anymore, I’ve got rice that’s just about to burn. I have to go!”

Jace heard the call disconnect, Magnus had hung up on him. Not sure what to think of this new plan of throwing away the plan, he decided to head home for the night, thinking there wasn’t much chance Alec was going to need him anyway. And even if he did, he’d be closer to Magnus’ house at home than he would be here sitting in an empty room.

“God help us all.” Jace muttered as he skipped down the stairs and headed off to his car. An old saying he couldn’t quite remember was echoing through his mind, something about the “best laid plans.” His mind raced through the endless number of disastrous outcomes this new set of circumstances presented as he sped off into the night hoping Alec was prepared for what was surely going to be one hell of a date.

“Are you sure you’re going to be OK?” Clary asked for the hundredth time as Jace’s car turned off of highway 82 onto Galena Street.

“Yeah, of course,” Jace answered her again, keeping the conversation light while they drove past the many designer storefronts, Gucci and Dior among others. Clary had fretted the entire three hour car ride back to Aspen, asking over and over if he was sure he would be alright driving back to Denver alone, and was he positive he didn’t want her to stay with him. Jace just smiled and reassured her again and again he would be fine and she should get back to the school before she missed out on anything else important.
Jace’s shiny black Dodge Charger pulled up in front of the Aspen Lodge and he quickly jumped out so that he could open Clary’s door for her. Grabbing him tightly around the waist as she exited the two held each other by the side of the road for a few moments, neither wanting to say goodbye.

“Friday after my lesson I’m coming back to you,” Clary murmured against Jace’s chest, not wanting to let go. “I can take the bus from Glenwood Springs, I’m sure I can get a ride there from someone.”

“No way, I’ll come back and get you, you’re not getting on a bus,” Jace rebutted, nipping that idea in the bud.

Clary squeezed him even tighter. “You don’t have to do that, it’s too much driving back and forth.”

“Shhh, no woman of mine is riding a bus,” Jace stated matter-of-factly as he ran his hands up into the back of Clary’s hair twining it around his fingers gently.

“Hmmm, am I your woman?” Clary cooed affectionately. “That sounds simply barbaric.”

Jace chuckled lightly. “Yeah, I’m like a modern day caveman, dragging you back behind me by this pretty red hair of yours,” he teased sarcastically as he playfully pulled at her hair.

Clary’s head extended back from the gentle tugging, exposing the full sight of her delicately parted lips. Jace then hungrily attacked, earnestly devouring their soft, pink sweetness. Neither of them seemed to care the sidewalk was bustling with students headed to the bus stop, they kissed like one of those old iconic black & white postwar photos, not caring who was watching or even if the world was still turning. They were lost in the moment.

“I don’t want to leave you,” Jace sighed as their kiss finally broke apart.

“Then don’t,” Clary responded breathlessly, still holding him tightly in her arms. She could feel his heart beating against her cheek as her hands spanned across his strong, muscular back.

“I have to go back, to be there when Alec comes out of surgery,” Jace spoke begrudgingly, hating so much to leave her here alone.

Clary buried her face into Jace’s shirtfront and breathed in deeply, hoping to keep his very essence trapped within her lungs. “You’re such a good friend.”

Jace blanched at those words, knowing Clary had no idea just how wrong she was. “No, I haven’t been… not really. But I’m going to be from now on.”

The two kissed again, holding each other close one more time before Jace stiffened his arms to slowly pull himself away. “I’ve got to go.”

“I know,” Clary replied wistfully, reaching down to grab both of Jace’s hands, squeezing them tightly in her own. She took a few seconds to stare into his crystal blue eyes, trying to imagine how she’d survive the next couple of days without him.

“I love you,” Jace declared with complete and utter sincerity, all traces of his cocky sense of humor now pushed aside.

Clary smiled knowingly as her thumbs caressed the tops of Jace’s hands. “I love you too.”

“Be careful, please,” Jace added. “Don’t walk around at night alone, stick with your friends.”

“I’ll be OK, don’t worry.”
Their hands reluctantly broke apart as Clary took a few steps backward toward the lodge. Jace matched her step for step as he walked back around to the driver’s side still keeping his eyes locked on hers.

“Parting is such sweet sorrow,” Clary called out as she turned in a graceful pirouette and walked up the lodge’s front steps, slowly disappearing from sight.

Jace sighed, collecting himself for a moment, then immediately switched his mind from loving, attentive boyfriend mode into a more serious and boldly determined mindset. He had a job to do now. It was time for the real reason he was so intent on getting Clary back to the festival. Over the last two days he’d been carefully formulating a plan in his mind that required not only he come back to Aspen as soon as possible, but that he be completely alone.

From the lodge it was just one right turn and a block away to his next destination. Jace’s heartbeat had begun to increase as he drove closer and closer to the Aspen Alps condominium complex, home to the psychotic bastard he was about to unleash his full wrath upon.

Parking his car a safe distance away and walking up the sidewalk with his face carefully disguised under the brim of a baseball cap, Jace approached the southeast side of the complex, dodging between parked cars to blend himself into the trees surrounding Sebastian’s building. He wasn’t going to knock on his door, he’d been given his unit’s precise location by making a call to his friend Maureen, coincidentally the same person he’d lied about to Alec, saying she’d helped him find Magnus’ house. What a strange turn of events that had been.

Once Jace was 100% sure he was at the right place he quietly removed a long, thin metal rod from his jacket pocket and wedged it carefully between the two glass sliding doors of Sebastian’s back patio entrance. Taking a deep breath first, Jace slowly applied pressure against the locking mechanism until he heard a tiny pop letting him know the job was a success. Placing two gloved hands against the cool glass, Jace slid one door back just far enough so that he could edge his way inside. He held the metal rod tightly over his shoulder, ready to bring it crashing down should he be met with anyone on the other side of the billowing curtains.

The living room appeared to be empty. Scanning to his left and right Jace didn’t see signs that anyone was home, so he discreetly moved the sliding glass door back into place behind him, sealing himself inside Sebastian’s lavish condo.

With the door now closed Jace could hear the sound of running water coming from somewhere off to his right. He guessed it must have been the bathroom, and thought maybe Sebastian was in the shower. Perfect, Jace thought to himself as he stealthily approached the closed door, still gripping the metal rod tightly in his fist.

Slowly pushing the door open with the palm of his gloved hand Jace quietly entered what he found to be a brightly lit bedroom. The furnishings and bedding were all in a stark white palette with a pale oak floor that looked particularly sterile and clean. This room was also empty. Walking further in Jace saw another closed door with a thin strip of light coming from underneath. The sound of the running water becoming louder the closer he got. He realized this must be the bathroom.

Laying his hand on top of the doorknob Jace first checked to see if it would turn, thankfully it was unlocked. He slowly rotated the knob as silently as he could, readjusting his grip on the makeshift weapon in his other hand. There was no turning back now, Jace had come to settle the score and this was finally going to be his chance. Hopefully he’d catch Sebastian by surprise, and the anticipation of their fight had his heart hammering wildly against his ribs.

The bathroom was humid and wet, probably due to the running water, and Jace felt the moisture hit
his face like walking into a greenhouse. Surprisingly there was no steam, maybe Sebastian preferred cold showers, which made Jace grin slightly, remembering how shamelessly he had flirted with Clary at the beginning of the summer.

The source of the running water, as it turned out, was not the shower but the sink. Someone had left the tap running, which Jace found rather odd. The immense bathroom was state-of-the-art with expensive looking stone accents and brushed chrome fixtures. At the far back, along the wall, was a roman style shower that could have been the perfect hiding place if Sebastian had heard someone coming. He raised the metal rod high, ready to wield its full weight against his enemy’s head as he stepped around the corner of the shower wall. What he saw next was the absolute last thing he had expected. Jace let out a loud gasp and dropped the metal rod on the shower’s stone floor. It clanged loudly and rolled away as Jace staggered backward, reaching for the shower wall to steady himself. Lying on the floor in front of him, in a pool of dark crimson blood was none other than Sebastian Morgenstern, his eyes open, locked in a state of terror. He was, without a doubt, thoroughly and most definitely dead.

Jace panicked, reached down to grab the rod, and ran back toward the patio doors from which he’d entered. There’d been a murder here, and the perpetrator could still be hiding anywhere inside the condo. He flung back the sliding glass door, and took off running at full speed not daring to turn around. Once he got back to his car, he tossed the metal rod in the backseat and screeched away as fast as he could. Fumbling for his cell phone he dialed Magnus’ number but it went straight to voicemail. Listening to the automated greeting Jace felt his body begin to shake uncontrollably. Finally the beep…

“It’s me, call me as soon as you get this message.”

Jace hung up, then dialed Clary’s number next.

“Well that was fast, you missing me already?” Clary purred into the phone.

“Where are you?” Jace implored, his voice bordering on hysterical.

“I’m still at the lodge, in the lobby, what’s wrong? You sound like you’ve seen a ghost?”

“I’m coming back to get you, meet me out front as fast as you can.”

Jace hung up before Clary could even answer. He turned the corner onto Durant Ave practically on two wheels, and he could already see the Aspen Lodge on his left. Then he spotted a shimmering cascade of red curls floating down the front steps towards the road, it was Clary. He stopped his car in front, almost driving up onto the sidewalk.

“Jesus Jace what has happened? You’re scaring me!” Clary exclaimed as she quickly got into the car.

As soon as the door shut Jace sped off like a bat out of hell, taking them both as far away from the crime scene as possible. “Did you see anyone? Did anyone see you?”

“Where, just now?” Clary asked, confused.

“Yes, did anyone see you come back to the lodge?”

“I don’t know, I was reading the bulletin board in the lobby, they posted the seating chart for the end of the summer concert. I don’t think anyone saw me, why?”

“Someone killed him.”
“What? Someone killed who?” Clary gasped gripping the sides of her seat as the car squealed up another one-way street.

“Morgenstern. He’s dead. Someone got to him before I could.”

“What do you mean before you could? Where did you go? What happened?”

“I’m sorry Clary,” Jace lamented, tears already beginning to stream down his face. "I didn’t want you to get involved in this. I thought I could handle him myself. He’s the one who hurt Alec. I couldn’t let him get away with it so I went to his place to find him.”

“Oh my God, Jace, oh my God.”

“And I found him alright. Dead. A bullet right through the chest. I saw the hole myself. And all the blood.”

“We have to call the police Jace, no matter what you think Sebastian did to Alec, we have to call the police right now.”

“I know. We will. But first we’re getting the hell out of this town. We’ll call once we’re safely away.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Clary reassured him. I know you were angry, but you didn’t kill him.

“I know, but I wanted to. And I would have, if I’d had the chance.”

Clary settled back in her seat and pulled the safety belt tightly across her chest. She was in shock. Jace was already back onto highway 82, his hands gripping the steering wheel tight as the mountains zoomed past them on both sides of the car. The two sat quietly not saying a word as the Dodge Charger sped down the narrow ribbon of highway that would carry them both safely back to Denver. Far away from the Aspen Music Festival, and far away from their former quartet-mate’s very dead body.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys!!!! I'm so sorry this update is late. I have had a crazy last few weeks and I hadn't had a single moment to write. But I'm back now and I've got a ton of free time to get this story finished up. So I'm excited! :) 

Soooooo, what do you think? Who killed Sebastian??? I'd love to hear your theories!

I can't believe this story is ending, I'm going to miss it so much. Who knows, maybe this story will need a sequel. HA HA ;)

The playlist has been updated to include the chapter title track, Lacrimosa. Which is part of a standard Requiem, I chose Mozart's because it's probably my favorite. Although Verdi's is also high on my list. I like to imagine it as the background music to Sebastian's
wonderful death, which I've been so ready to write ever since he hurt my Alec! ;)

Thank you so much for your comments and kudos. You guys are so supportive and have really given me tons of confidence as I slowly learn this process of writing fanfiction. I've actually been thinking about taking some writing classes so I can continue getting better as time goes by. Thanks so much for reading and I'll have another chapter ready asap!
Yesterday - July 5, 2016

Ragnar waited until Magnus was thoroughly occupied by the doctors before he carefully snuck out of Alec’s hospital room without saying goodbye. He felt guilty abandoning his friend in his greatest time of need, but the situation had gotten so far out of hand now, he felt he had no choice. Checking his watch again as he headed to his car he saw he only had about an hour to catch his flight to LA. It was going to be a close call, but he’d checked-in online and had no bags, so it would just require a dash through security then straight to the gate. Barring no unexpected delays he’d arrive by 8:00pm.

Normally when traveling Ragnar would have requested one of Valentine’s private jets, but this time he wanted to keep the element of surprise. At least for as long as he could.

When Ragnar had fled Sebastian’s condo earlier that morning, before coming to the hospital to check on Magnus, he’d never felt so deeply disturbed by an encounter before in his life. His mind raced through each unbelievable and terrifying revelation like the most frightening horror movie imaginable. Made even worse by the fact that it was all apparently true. First, the shocking discovery of Magnus’ parents true deaths. Not suicide after all, but murder. Murders supposedly orchestrated and carried out by his boss, a man he’d worked for most of his life. He knew of course that Valentine could be ruthless in business. He’d seen him destroy entire corporations, leaving hundreds out of work, without even batting an eyelash. He’d also seen him fire people at the drop of a hat for the most ridiculous and petty reasons. But could he really be capable of coldblooded, pre-calculated murder?

Next he thought of Sebastian’s mother Jocelyn, had he really killed her as well? Strangled her with his own bare hands? The mere thought of this possibility was truly heartbreaking, Jocelyn had always been so kind to him. Three murders, and all of the victims had been parents of Valentine’s own children. Two loving mothers and one innocent stepfather, dead for what reason? Jealousy? Or were their deaths merely a necessary evil to facilitate a greater plan? Ragnar didn’t want to believe it could be true, he knew this man, probably better than anyone, and as vicious as he could be he didn’t believe he would do something so heinous.

On his three hour drive from Aspen to Denver, Ragnar had contemplated long and hard about what to do. He’d thought of calling Valentine and confronting him with this information over the phone, but he’d decided that wouldn’t be a wise choice. This was a dangerous accusation, one that could unleash the literal fires of hell on everyone associated. And right now his number one priority was protecting Magnus above all else. He wanted to shield him from these truths, if they were indeed true, and if that meant sacrificing himself in the process, then so be it. He’d left Sebastian under the guise of remaining silent about what he’d done. Promising to keep quiet so that his lawyer wouldn’t divulge these buried secrets from the past to Magnus. But Ragnar had lied, and quite convincingly at that. He had no intention of letting Sebastian get away with hurting Alec, and he knew there had to be a way to take care of all of this without getting Magnus involved. With Alec lying unconscious in the hospital he’d been through enough already. Somehow Ragnar would find a way to make him pay, even if he had to do it all on his own.
Jace and Clary arrived back at the University of Colorado Hospital by midafternoon, feeling as if they’d passed themselves coming and going. They’d barely spoken on the three hour drive back except when they’d briefly stopped in Glenwood Springs to call the police from an old payphone they’d found in front of an abandoned gas station off the highway. Jace had also texted Magnus in hopes of catching him with his phone out. But he hadn’t responded.

Thankful to finally be off the road, Jace pulled into the hospital parking garage and turned off the engine. He and Clary sat in the car, silently stunned for a moment as if they were waiting for something or someone to guide them on what to do next.

“I should have left you back at the lodge. I’m sorry,” Jace muttered, his voice flat and lifeless.

Clary immediately turned to face him. “No Jace, I’m glad you came and got me. I wouldn’t have wanted you to be alone right now.”

Jace leaned forward and dropped his forehead against the steering wheel, feeling utterly lost. “What am I gonna say to him Clary? What in God’s name can I even say?”

Clary reached over and stroked Jace’s back in an attempt to soothe him. “I don’t know… I guess we just take him somewhere private and try to explain. But I don’t think you should say you were going there to hurt him, maybe just tell him you went to give him a piece of your mind.

Jace gently rocked his head side to side. “He’ll know that’s a lie. He’ll know exactly why I went there, and what I was planning to do.”

Clary continued rubbing Jace’s back with long, slow, calming strokes. “He’ll understand you were angry. I’m sure he’s just as upset.”

Jace scrunched his eyes shut tight. “Upset sure, but homicidal? I doubt it. He was his teacher for years, since he was a little kid, that’s a bond almost like family. As mad as he is I’m sure he wouldn’t have wanted him dead. And now that he is dead, I don’t know how he’s gonna take it.”

“It’s going to be OK Jace, this isn’t your fault. I know in my heart you wouldn’t have gone through with it, you wouldn’t have hurt him. You’re a good man and a loyal friend. We’ll be there for Magnus, and for Alec. They’ll find whoever did this and nobody is going to blame you. I promise.”

After a few more painful minutes of silence Jace lifted his head resolutely and firmly took hold of the car door handle. “Alright, let’s go.”

When Alec was wheeled out of recovery and taken back to his room, Magnus had decided not to follow. Of course he wanted to be with him every moment, but it was the Lightwoods turn now, they deserved to have some privacy with their son.
Alec’s last word before he'd been taken away had been “maybe,” and Magnus clung to that small thread of hope as he walked alone through the maze of endless hallways and corridors. Finally coming to a bank of elevators he saw a directory listing of all the different areas of the hospital. Carefully looking through the list his eyes fell on the word “Cafeteria” and he decided he should go get something to eat since he hadn’t had a bite all day.

When Magnus arrived at the cafeteria it was pretty empty. Technically now the middle of the afternoon, it was too late for lunch and too early for dinner. Magnus grabbed what looked to be a fairly safe chef salad and a bottle of water then found a quiet booth in the corner where he could sit alone in his misery. Pulling out his iPhone he noticed he had several missed calls from numbers he didn’t recognize, plus a call and text from Jace, sent three hours ago, asking him to call him back immediately. Magnus felt a chill run up his spine, hoping this wasn’t more bad news, he didn’t think he could take any additional heartache today.

Touching Jace’s number to return his call Magnus reluctantly lifted the phone to his ear and Jace answered almost immediately.

“Magnus! Thank God. Where are you right now? Exactly.”

“I’m in the hospital cafeteria, why?” Magnus asked cautiously, hearing the panic in Jace's voice. “What has happened?”

“I’m just coming through the front entrance downstairs right now, I’ll be there in one minute. Don’t move!”

Magnus heard the call disconnect and he wondered what in the world was going on. At that same exact moment the television mounted on the wall just in front of where he was sitting suddenly flashed to a familiar scene, pulling his eyes to the screen. It was a reporter, standing in the middle of a crowded street, right in front of Aspen Mountain. Behind her there was a crisscrossed string of yellow police tape, swaying in the breeze. Magnus felt his heart drop into the pit of his stomach as the building just over her right shoulder slowly came into focus. It was the Aspen Alps condominium complex where his brother lived, and it was surrounded by at least a dozen police cars and what appeared to be a SWAT team. Magnus immediately thought the very worst, and as the reporter began to speak he carefully read the closed caption writing as it scrolled across the bottom of the screen.

*Tragedy in the Valley…*

*Man found dead…*

*Brutally murdered in a downtown Aspen apartment complex…*

*This is the first murder reported within the city limits of Aspen in over 27 years…*

*The victim’s identity is being kept confidential until his immediate family can be notified…*

*Aspen Police Chief Luke Garroway told reporters the body was found by an anonymous phone tip the police received at around 1:00 pm this afternoon…*

*Chief Garroway will hold a press conference sometime later today once more definitive information is available…*

*Stay tuned to Fox 31 Denver where we’ll bring you our live continuing coverage as this shocking story continues to unfold.*
Magnus couldn’t breathe. He just sat there, his mouth slack, silently staring up at the TV. His brother was living in that complex, he was sure of that fact. He recognized the building almost instantly, there was no mistaking its location. Frozen by a chilling fear that gripped his entire body, Magnus began to recount the reporter’s words in his mind. Someone had been murdered there, a man. Police were attempting to reach the victim’s family, those strange phone numbers. Magnus felt his heart thumping wildly in his chest, his blood pressure rising so high that his eardrums were beginning to pulsate. He didn’t want to believe his brother was the victim, but after what had happened to Alec Monday night could someone have gone to settle the score? He picked up his phone again and went back to his list of missed calls. Scrolling back to Jace’s number he saw he’d called him at 11:55 am. That was just an hour before the police had found the body. Could Jace have been involved? Could he have killed Sebastian and then made an anonymous phone call to the police? Magnus’ imagination was running wild. He tried to get a hold of himself but something deep inside his heart told him his brother was dead and that Jace had been there.

“Magnus,” Jace said as he and Clary approached, having spotted him easily in the almost empty cafeteria.

Magnus didn’t hear them at first, he was still transfixed, staring at the TV, his face a mask of shock. Jace reached out and put one hand on his shoulder to get his attention. “Magnus?”

Magnus snapped out of his daze and turned abruptly to find Jace standing right beside him. The surprise of seeing him there jolted through him like a surge of electricity. “Wayland! You did this, didn’t you?”

Jace retracted his hand as quickly as if it had been slapped. “What?” He replied, feeling caught off guard by Magnus’ intense, accusatory reaction.

Clary immediately interpreted the look, she could tell Magnus must have seen something on the TV. She attempted to signal Jace a warning, letting him know her suspicions, but his eyes were glued to Magnus’, completely taken aback.

“I know what you’ve come to say,” Magnus exploded, standing to grab Jace by the arm. “Tell me what you did!”

Jace stood dumbstruck, staring back at Magnus in shock. He could see the fear and panic in his eyes and he knew he was too late. “I’m sorry,” Jace sniffed, his emotions bubbling up to the surface, causing his voice to quaver. “We got here as fast as we could, I wanted to be the one to tell you.”

“To tell me what?” Magnus demanded, his grip on Jace’s arm tightening. “What?”

“About what happened… to Sebastian,” Jace replied solemnly, using his first name instead of calling him Morgenstern as he usually did. “But it wasn’t me Magnus, I swear to you it wasn’t. I didn’t lay a hand on him. You have my word.”

“It wasn’t Jace,” Clary reiterated, anxious to clear his name.

Magnus released his hold on Jace’s arm and took a step back, his chin dropping to his chest. Gone now was the tiny shred of hope that he might have jumped to the wrong conclusion. It was replaced instead by a crushing weight of cold realization that his brother was actually gone. Someone had killed him.

“Magnus we are so sorry,” Clary offered sincerely. “He was your student, and that’s a special thing. No matter what he did to Alec it doesn’t justify this, or make it any easier. So we are here for you,
Magnus stared at the floor, swaying minutely, his body and mind completely numb. He didn’t feel a single feeling or emotion, only a vast emptiness, like he’d been pulled into the vacuum of space. It surrounded him, pressing against his consciousness from all sides, forbidding any thoughts from forming.

“What can we do?” Clary asked, hating to see Magnus in such a state.

Jace felt sick to his stomach, knowing how close this had all come to being his fault. He wanted to help, but didn’t know what to say. He hadn’t been prepared for this look of utter devastation on Magnus’ face. It was so much worse than what he’d anticipated.

“I have to go,” Magnus finally responded, his voice broken and weak.

“We’ll go with you,” Jace offered, not wanting Magnus to leave by himself.

Magnus turned and grabbed his phone off the table, his salad and water still untouched. “I’m going back to Aspen, I have to talk to the police.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Jace said, reaching his hand out to stop him. “You’re better off here with us, where you won’t be involved. Once they notify his family and the media goes nuts we’ll all be better off far away where we can’t be questioned or implicated.”

“You don’t understand,” Magnus muttered through his grief. “I don’t have a choice, I have to go.”

Clary gently placed one hand on Magnus’ arm. “Listen to Jace, you really don’t want to do that Magnus. Stay here with us, Alec needs you… we all need each other.”

Magnus looked down at Clary’s hand, his jaw clenching beneath the surface of his taught skin. He paused as if contemplating something and nobody dared make a sound.

“Please look after Alec for me,” Magnus murmured, his vacant expression beginning to contort into a look of pain and sadness. “He’s awake and with his parents. But he’s going to need your support now more than ever.”

“Magnus, wait,” Jace begged. “Just wait and go tomorrow or the next day. Once the dust settles.”

Magnus slowly shook his head side to side. Jace and Clary of course had no idea that he was the family the police had been trying to track down all afternoon. He was sure the strange numbers he’d seen in his phone were law enforcement officials trying to make contact with him as Sebastian’s teacher in hopes of locating his family members. There was also a good chance his father would also be getting those same calls and could very well already be on his way now. Magnus had to be there to handle the nuclear bomb that was surely about to go off.

“I’m sorry, I have to go,” Magnus repeated, this time more firmly. “Take care of Alec please, Jace. I’m counting on you.”

“Of course,” Jace promised. “We’ll stay with him every minute.”

Magnus walked with purpose through the empty space between Jace and Clary’s shoulders and exited the cafeteria. Part of him wanted to tell them the truth, about his past, and his brother. But now wasn’t the right time. He knew he had to get back to Aspen immediately and put all of his focus on what was left of his family. As much as he hated to leave Alec behind there was no other option.
After Magnus had gone Jace and Clary were left feeling confused and unsure of what to do next.

“Alec is awake,” Jace said with surprise. “Do we tell him what happened? He’s going to wonder where Magnus went.”

Clary scrunched her forehead, thinking of what to do. “No, I don’t think we should say anything. He’s just had surgery and his parents are here. We should just go check on him and make sure he’s OK. We can keep him calm until Magnus gets back. We won’t even let anyone turn on the TV in his room.”

Jace nodded his approval and the two set off to go see Alec. Anxious to honor their promise.

Yesterday – July 5th, 2016

Ragnor arrived at Valentine’s estate just as the sun was taking its final dip into the Pacific. Swiping his keycard at a small metal box by the front gate the ornate doors swung inward granting him entrance. Ragnor was relieved his card still worked as he followed the sharp turn then carefully made his way up the narrow lane.

A low rolling fog had begun to billow and creep in from the ocean. The exterior lighting of the house illuminated the swirling tendrils with an ominous glow. Ragnor stopped just short of the end of the driveway, parking his rental car away from Valentine’s fleet. He knew of course the staff would have already been alerted to his arrival, and he imaged his employer had also been told. Although technically working for Magnus as of late, there was no doubt in his mind who was really in charge. Ragnor’s heart was beating rapidly in his chest as he bravely headed toward the front door, hoping for a miracle.

Just before he could knock, the door opened and to his surprise Valentine Morgenstern himself was standing there staring back at him.

“To what do I owe this immense pleasure?” Valentine asked, his face conveying a look of keen interest mixed with doubt.

“Sir,” Ragnor responded. “I’m very sorry to arrive here unannounced, but a sensitive situation has developed and it required the utmost discretion.”

“I see,” Valentine pondered as if contemplating for a moment if he should let him in or not. Ragnor faced him bravely, looking him right in the eye without wavering, even though his blood was running cold in his presence.

Valentine took a long pause, enjoying watching Ragnor squirm. “Then I guess you’d better come inside,” he finally responded, holding the door open wide with one long, stiff arm.

“Thank you,” Ragnor muttered, saying a silent prayer as he stepped across the threshold.

Once inside, Valentine closed the door and locked it behind them.
Ragnor wondered where the usual doorman was. “Is Thomas no longer with you?” He inquired innocently as he looked around to see if there were signs anyone else was in the house with them.

“Yes, of course. But I gave the staff a few days off for the holiday. I’ve been in Vienna and just returned a short while ago. A bit earlier than I had planned.”

“Ah, I see.” Ragnor said, swallowing hard against a lump of fear that was lodged in his chest. They were alone, just the two of them, something he hadn’t counted on when the house was normally bustling with staff.

“Would you like a glass of cognac?” Valentine offered as he turned to walk into the dimly lit living room. The last remnants of sunset, just barely visible at the ocean’s horizon, had painted the room in soft pinks and purples.

“No thank you.”

“Suit yourself,” Valentine said dismissively as he continued to the bar. Unstoppering a vintage bottle of something expensive he poured three fingers of the brown liquid into a glass. Then he took a slow sip and turned to glare at Ragnor suspiciously. “I have to say I’m surprised to see you here. When we spoke last week you seemed to have matters well in hand. Have my boys finally proven to be too much for you? Or has one of them sent you here on a fool’s errand?”

Ragnor ran one nervous hand through his hair and wished he would have accepted that drink.

“Actually neither of the boys know that I am here. I’ve come of my own accord. To tell you something that’s quiet urgent.”

Valentine’s eyes narrowed, his sickening smile curled against his teeth as he attempted to feign disinterest. “Ah yes, the discrete matter you mentioned. Well I’m all ears, please enlighten me.”

Ragnor cleared his throat, still struggling against his constricted windpipe, then plucked up the courage to begin the story of what had happened. “Magnus’ friend—”

“The one he’s been shacked up with you mean?” Valentine spat venomously.

“Yes, Mr. Lightwood, the cellist. Your son is quite fond of him you know.”

“Don’t remind me,” Valentine replied sarcastically, rolling his eyes.

“Sir, he was viciously attacked, and almost killed. His playing hand was smashed and his ribs broken. It was truly horrific,” Ragnor informed him beseechingly, hoping to pull some sympathy from his normally cold heart.

“Is that so?” Valentine pondered. “Is Magnus safe?”

“Yes, Magnus is fine, I’ve just come from the hospital. The boy was alone when it happened.”

“Ah, well, good. Then no harm done.”

Ragnor shook his head with disbelief. “This time perhaps, but what’s to say it won’t happen again? There could be another attempt, and next time Magnus could be hurt!”

“Why are you getting so upset? My oldest son is always my number on priority of course, but we don’t concern ourselves with one of his momentary distractions. If we did we’d have a laundry list of whores and scum to protect stretching a mile long. The idiotic boy probably owed somebody money,” Valentine snorted, downing the rest of his drink in one long drag.
“No, he didn’t owe anyone money. I’m upset because it was Sebastian!” Ragnor fired back, not able to hold in the truth any longer. “He ordered a hit on the boy himself!”

Valentine’s face burst into a beaming smile. “Ha! Well isn’t that something! I didn’t think he had it in him.” Unaffected by the facts, he reached for the bottle of cognac to refill his empty glass. “Turns out he might not be such a diseased branch on this family tree after all.”

“I warned you a week ago!” Ragnor exploded. “I told you about his threats against me and the mud all over his shoes! I knew he was up to something and you did nothing about it!”

Valentine chuckled. “And what do you think I was supposed to do? Ground him?”

“I don’t know, but next time Magnus could be caught in the crosshairs! And then it would be all your fault!”

Valentine shook his head in disagreement. “Don’t be ridiculous. Sebastian may be many things, but he loves Magnus, he would never hurt him.”

“He already has hurt him,” Ragnor stated calmly, trying to regain control of his anger and gather some composure. “Magnus was devastated. You don’t understand what has happened this summer. I’ve never seen him like this before. Nothing even close. He loves this boy and he’d do anything to protect him. And now that Sebastian is set on his destruction I believe Magnus is in grave danger.”

Valentine pursed his lips as he contemplated what Ragnor had said. “Hmmm, well, the summer is almost over, I’m sure this fling will run its course.”

Ragnor placed his palms together, extending them toward Valentine to make a desperate plea. "You must listen to me now. You know more than anyone the extent to which a person will go for the people they love. I swore to you when I left here last spring, Magnus’ safety would always be my number one concern. So after the attack, I went to confront Sebastian about what he’d done." Ragnor paused for a moment, realizing that what he was about to say could very well put his own life in serious jeopardy. But he knew it had to be done if there was any hope of saving Magnus from Sebastian’s wrath. “He told me some very disturbing things. Things about the past… that he claims to have discovered.”

“Such as?” Valentine asked with exasperation, clearly unaware of how serious the tables were about to turn.

Ragnor nervously glanced behind his back toward the locked door, realizing if things went south he’d never make it out alive. His gun was back in Colorado and he had no means of protecting himself. But he’d come all this way and there was no turning back now. Everything needed to be brought to light, no matter what the outcome would be. “He claims to have concrete proof that the Bane’s were murdered, as well as Jocelyn Fairchild.”

Finally Valentine looked as if he were taking the conversation seriously. His eyes flickered like a switch had been flipped, and his smile slowly dissolved into a tight, thin line. He set down his glass and threaded his hands together in front of him. Taking a wide, military stance.

Ragnor continued. “He said he saw you kill Jocelyn, he was in the room when it happened. And that you also killed Magnus’ parents, sir, and he has the evidence currently being held by an attorney. He warned that if anything should happen to him the attorney will send everything straight to Magnus.”

Ragnor stood silently waiting for a response, trying to be prepared for anything. But the look on
Valentine’s face said it all. He was churning with a fiery rage that was palpable. It was a whole new ballgame now that he was the one being threatened. Ragnor could already tell this wasn’t going to end well.

“What sort of evidence?” Valentine snarled as he stepped closer to where Ragnor was standing.

“He didn’t say, but he seemed completely convinced without question. I thought… well I wondered… if there could have been something he might have seen or read? Perhaps in your office? Something that would have given him the wrong idea?”

“Are you accusing me?” Valentine questioned, angling his head to glare at Ragnor menacingly, as if daring him to continue.

“No sir, but as I said, my number one priority is to protect Magnus. If his parents were murdered it will hurt him deeply, possibly beyond repair. I don’t want to see that happen.”

“His parents?” Valentine sneered. “Have you forgotten that I AM HIS FATHER!”

Ragnor flinched in response to Valentine’s stinging words, knowing he’d made a terrible mistake.

“Of course not. I know that, I just meant—”

“I know what you meant,” Valentine interrupted him, then he turned back to the bar and picked up his empty glass. “Your motives are quite clear to me, lest we not forget our fates are intertwined old chap.”

“My only—”

“Silence!” Valentine erupted, throwing the glass violently against the fireplace mantle, shattering it into a million pieces. The shower of glass shards sparkled in the dim light like glittering diamonds before settling into the carpet below.

Ragnor’s mouth snapped closed.

“I don’t want to hear another word,” Valentine threatened, angrily enunciating each word slowly, his fury transformed into an eerie calmness.

Watching him closely, Ragnor stood quiet, careful not to move or make a sound as Valentine appeared to be calculating his next move. His face was stern and concentrated, his eyes darting rapidly back and forth as if contemplating his options. He’d seen this look many times from him in a million different scenarios. He was the puppetmaster of everyone and everything. Watching him was enthralling.

“You want to protect Magnus?” Valentine asked, finally breaking his silence.

“More than anything.” Ragnor answered with honesty, his breath soft and shaking.

“Then you’ll listen to me now, and follow my instructions to the letter.” Valentine’s index finger was raised in front of his face with the utmost authority and seriousness. “It’s about time I cleaned up this mess once and for all, and you are going to help me.”

Ragnor listened intently as Valentine began to carefully lay out his plan in great detail. It was so detailed it was as if he’d been formulating it for months. Ragnor made a meticulous mental checklist of everything his boss said insuring he wouldn’t forget a thing. He was used to this of course, he’d been taking orders from this man for most of his life. He listened attentively, detaching himself from all of his own emotions and judgement. He focused on the task at hand and on their shared mutual
goal: protecting Magnus no matter what the cost.

Just behind Valentine the pale glow of moonlight was beginning to reflect off the surface of the inky black ocean, washing the room in silvery light.

“You understand of course?” Valentine said, verifying Ragnor was clear on every step.

“Yes sir, I understand.”

“It was inevitable that this moment would come. For many years now I’ve known that one day my true heir would come to light without question. And I believe we are in agreement?”

“Yes,” Ragnor admitted, knowing full well exactly what he was agreeing to. Protecting Magnus by sacrificing Sebastian, it was the only way.

Valentine smiled sadistically and took a new glass from behind the bar. “You see old friend, the cream always rises to the top.” He poured another full glass of cognac, sloshing it over the sides. “It’s a game man has been playing since the beginning of time. You can call it survival of the fittest, or the circle of life. But it was only a matter of time before a decision would have to be made.” Valentine took a long drink from his fresh glass and licked his lips. “There was never going to be room at the top for two kings. One shall fall like any prince, isn’t that what the Bible tells us?”

Ragnor walked to the bar, took a glass for himself and poured it full to the rim with cognac, joining Valentine for drink. “I don’t know much about the Bible sir, but I believe my father used to say: Truth is Truth to the Day of Reckoning.”

“Hmmm,” Valentine replied thoughtfully. “Yes, I think I can drink to that.”

The two men clinked glasses, their silhouettes bathed in pale moonlight, as they silently drank to the inescapable consequences of their own destinies.

“What’s wrong?” Clary asked Jace noticing he had stopped midway down the hall toward Alec’s room.

“I think I need to go in alone,” Jace muttered, his eyes already glazed over with impending tears.

“Ok, that’s fine. I can go get some coffee.”

Jace reached out just as Clary was about to walk away and pulled her tight into his chest. The two held each other for a brief moment as Jace pulled some much needed strength from her warm embrace.

“I’ll text you soon, OK?” Jace said sweetly, tucking a stray strand of her fiery red hair behind her left ear.

“OK, don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine,” Clary replied with a loving smile. “Good luck in there.”

“Yeah, thanks. I’m gonna need it.”

Jace watched Clary walk back down the hall and out of sight. Then he took a slow, deep cleansing breath as an attempt to calm his nerves. He didn’t know what kind of reaction to expect from Alec,
but he knew the last thing he wanted to do was upset him. As he began walking forward again he noticed the Lightwoods were standing at the nurse’s station just outside of Alec’s room, which meant he must be in there alone. They were so deep in discussion they didn’t even see Jace as he approached.

“And how long will it take to prepare the paperwork?” Maryse Lightwood asked the nurse as Jace walked by. The look on her face very stern and businesslike.

“We’ll have it ready for you as soon as possible Mrs. Lightwood,” the nurse responded, nervously typing frantically into her computer.

Jace kept his head down and walked slowly as to not draw attention to himself. When he came to Alec’s room he glided in silently and was instantly surprised to find Alec sitting up in bed drinking something from a large plastic tumbler. He looked much more alert and himself than Jace had expected. Their eyes met and Alec gave him a look of reproach.

“Hey,” Jace said with a timid half-smile. “It’s good to see you awake.”

“What do you want?” Alec clipped, giving Jace a look of contempt.

“I wanted to see how you were.”

“Well, you’ve seen me. Now leave!” Alec fired back angrily.

Jace grimaced and looked down at his feet. He had never been good at groveling and he especially didn’t like situations where he felt this much overwhelming guilt. But he was determined to at least try to explain himself, even if that meant getting his ass chewed out.

“I know you’re upset with me—”

“Upset? Ha! Try furious!” Alec interrupted, pounding his cup down on the rolling food tray causing it to drift away from the bed. The aggressive motion must have been too much stress on his injuries because he immediately clutched at his ribs.

“Alec—”

“No! Don’t even try to come in here and lay some bullshit story down and expect me to listen. I’ve heard enough lies from you to last a lifetime!”

Jace sunk back against the doorframe feeling he deserved every bit of Alec’s resentment. “I know you have, and I’m so sorry. But I really just want to try to explain what happened.”

“Save it,” Alec said dismissively, clearly not interested in anything he had to say.

Jace’s head fell back against the doorframe and he looked up to the ceiling trying to think of a different approach. Something that would allow him the chance to say the things he felt Alec needed to hear without him being thrown out in the process.

“You were the best, you know. The best by a mile,” Jace murmured, still keeping his eyes on the ceiling over Alec’s bed. “It didn’t take even half a day to listen to every audition tape and know you were the one.”

Alec glared at Jace but let him continue. As much as he didn’t want to talk to him right now he still had a strong desire to hear the events that had led up to this fateful summer.
“Magnus had just moved in and my father was hell bent on introducing us. So when I went over to his house I found him and Sebastian together. Father introduced us then made an excuse to leave. I thought it was odd, but I ended up staying. Magnus and Sebastian had been huddled at the kitchen table working. They had applications spread out in front of them for every string player in the program. It’s funny how willing they were to let me see what they were up to. Here I was, a total stranger, they’d never even heard me play, and just like that I was sitting at the table listening and critiquing right along with them. What a fool I was.”

Alec could visualize the table in Magnus’ kitchen. He could see the three of them sitting there, it wasn’t hard to picture. Sebastian’s sneer, Magnus’ prideful grin, and Jace’s cocky self-confidence. What a trio they must have been.

“It wasn’t until much later on that I learned it was just a setup. You see my father had already made a deal with Magnus, basically blackmailing him into helping me with my career. I never let on that I knew of course, but Morgenstern figured it out pretty easily. He was always the best at reading people.”

Alec remembered the story Sebastian had told him in the bathroom of the Benedict Music Tent. He’d told him that Magnus had purchased property from Jace’s dad. It was a spider web of manipulated circumstances that had brought them all together. Lies upon more lies, woven together in a seemingly perfect pattern that would give these four accidental companions a perfect future beyond their wildest dreams.

“When I figured it out I could have walked away. I could have gone back to Indiana and told them all to fuck off. But I got swept up in the idea,” Jace admitted, his voice emotional and crackling. “It was a dream you know, the whole concept of the quartet hitting the road, taking the world by storm, making our own success despite our unlikely odds. What an idiot I was.”

Alec could see the appeal. He longed to make a permanent break from his parents control. To be able to support himself financially. Any musician would jump at the chance. But could he resort to this? Lies and manipulation, hurting anyone who got in the way. He liked to think that he wouldn’t, but maybe it was one of those situations you didn’t know how you’d react to until you were in it.

“Magnus shut it down though, from week one! That’s why Morgenstern was so furious. You see, after he spoke to you face to face, that first day of school, he told me on the phone the plan was over. He already knew he couldn’t continue tricking you, even before I did. So even if you hate me, and I don’t blame you one bit if you do, I want you to know that Magnus loves you man. Loves you like nothing I’ve ever seen before. And that kind of love is too rare to throw away just because of this fucked up mess we’ve made... that I’ve made. I could have told you the truth a hundred times, but I didn’t. So really it’s all my fault this happened to you and Magnus is innocent in this. That’s all I care about proving to you now. You two have to find a way to work this out.”

Alec felt Jace was sincere, and part of him wished it was so easy to just forgive and forget. But then he looked down at his bandaged hand, and thought of everything that he’d lost. His hopes and dreams, everything he’d been working for since he was a little boy, and he couldn’t do it. He couldn’t forgive him.

Jace’s eyes moved down from the ceiling and locked on Alec’s. The tears he’d been trying to hold back with gravity during his speech now came spilling forth, streaming down his face like two rivers of regret. He didn’t care that Alec saw him cry, he wanted him to know that the truth of what he had done was ripping his heart out. He wanted him to see the remorse and the sadness. It was a vulnerable side of himself he’d never shared with any other person before in his life. “You’re a good man Alec. Probably the best person I’ve ever known. And I just want to say how sorry I am, from
the bottom of my heart. If there was a way I could trade places with you, and I could be the one laying there where you are now, I’d do it in a heartbeat.”

“I don’t hate you,” Alec admitted, letting his anger ebb away for just a moment. “Believe me I wish I did. I think it would make this all a lot easier to be honest.”

“I know I let you down,” Jace confessed. "And it’s killing me Alec, it really is. But if you’ll just let me try and make it up to you, I want to prove I can be the sort of friend you can count on.”

Alec felt Jace was genuinely sorry, and as much as it didn’t change anything it still felt good to hear. “Jace, I—"

“Good news!” A voice bellowed from behind Jace, practically scaring him out of his skin. He quickly turned around and saw Alec’s mother barreling through the doorway with a huge smile plastered across her face.

“Better than good!” Alec’s father added, coming in just behind her with an equally beaming smile.

"What's going on?" Alec asked, utterly confused by their happy appearance.

“Your father and I have talked to your doctors and made all of the necessary arrangements!” Maryse proclaimed joyfully, taking her husband's hand to stand together at the foot of Alec's bed.

“For?” Alec said, having no idea what in the world they were so excited about.

“It wasn’t easy, and we unraveled about a mile of red tape! But tomorrow my darling, first thing in the morning, we are all going home!”

Chapter End Notes

Oh boy, the Lightwoods are taking Alec home and Magnus isn't even there! :( 

I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I've only got a couple more to go until the end. SAD! :( 

If you haven't checked out my new Malec fic please do! Chapter one is already published and chapter 2 is coming soon! It's my next big project to get me through this long, miserable hiatus.

Thank you so much for your comments and kudos. They really mean so much to me. :) 

Oh, and the playlist has been updated: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV_8s0DQn-yt_dV89D1c5MqnT2YEPXgr7
“Hold up, home?” Alec asked, his mother’s words catching him by complete surprise.

“Yes my darling, home sweet home! The doctors have agreed that your post-operative care and rehabilitation can just as easily take place in New York. We’ve already phoned ahead to make arrangements for a private nurse and physical therapist while you recuperate in the comfort of your own room. I’m going to take family medical leave so that I can oversee every aspect of your care, and your father is in complete agreement that your health is our number one priority from now on. Isn’t that right, Robert?” Maryse asked pointedly.

“Of course, yes, our number one priority,” Robert responded, right on cue.

“He’s even called in some favors to get us a medically equipped charter plane to make the trip home as safe and easy as possible,” Maryse proclaimed with a beaming, proud smile. “Everything is going to be just fine and we know you’ll be back to your old self in no time.”

Alec’s jaw fell slack as he looked back and forth between his two overly protective parents, wondering how in the hell this just happened. “I…uhh… don’t know what to say,” he stuttered, unable to put into words exactly how he felt about their carefully crafted plan.

“Don’t say anything dear, you just rest and let us handle this. Your only job now is to heal,” his mother instructed, patting his leg with sympathy.

“But I can’t just leave, there are things here that uhhh… need to be dealt with,” Alec replied, verbally stumbling through his excuse thinking back to his conversation with Magnus earlier and how he had told him he wanted to stay until he found a way to make Sebastian pay for what he had done. If he went home now, then Sebastian would win.

“Don’t worry, your father has already contacted the festival to let them know we’ll be sending someone to Hendel House to collect your things. I promise your cello and personal items will be in the safest of hands,” Maryse informed him, appearing to have thought of every detail.

Alec felt a ripple of panic move through his body. All of his personal items, including Stella, were at Magnus’ house. He’d barely left anything in his old room. If his parents sent someone to pack up there wouldn’t be enough to even fill one suitcase. Feeling helpless his eyes flickered to Jace and he gave him a look that said, if you want to help me now’s your chance!

“Mrs. Lightwood,” Jace interrupted, having quickly interpreted Alec’s plea for help. “I would be happy to go and get Alec’s stuff for you. My room is right next door to his and I can easily bring everything back here before tomorrow morning, no problem.”

Maryse spun around toward Jace, noticing him for the first time. “Well that would be very helpful of you… I’m sorry, what is your name?”

“I’m Jace, Jace Wayland. I was the one who called you Monday night. I’m Alec’s friend,” Jace said nervously, extending one hand to introduce himself.

“Oh yes, I recognize your voice now!” Maryse exclaimed as if she’d just unraveled some great mystery. “Thank you for calling us and for being here to support Alec this week. You seem like a
very fine friend indeed.”

Jace looked at Alec just in time to catch him rolling his eyes. But apparently he was willing to let Jace play the role of best friend if it meant keeping strangers out of his room at Hendel House.

“Mom, can I just talk to Jace alone, before he goes,” Alec requested with an edge of annoyance. “I need to tell him some stuff privately.”

Robert gently grabbed Maryse by the elbow. “Let’s go call Max, it’s almost 10:00 pm in London, I think we can catch him now before he goes to sleep.”

Maryse seemed hesitant to leave, she looked at Alec and Jace skeptically for a moment before an amusing realization dawned across her face. “Oh alright, I guess there are some matters that aren’t fit for a mother’s ears,” she trilled giving them both a knowing grin.

Alec blushed, imagining his mom was probably thinking he’d stashed condoms and porn under his mattress. But whatever it took to get her out of the room was worth it in this case.

“Ok listen,” Alec whispered to Jace after his parents were finally gone. “Magnus is supposed to be working on a story for me to give them about why I need to stay here. So you need to go find him right now and tell him to hurry up. There’s no way I’m leaving Colorado until Morgenstern is either arrested or face down in a river.”

Jace grimaced hearing those last few words and he slowly lowered himself down to sit on the edge of Alec’s bed. He realized the time had come to tell Alec the truth, even though he didn’t know quite how he was going to say it. “Ummm, Alec. Something has happened,” Jace murmured, staring down at the blankets trying to find the right words to explain. “And I’m not sure how to tell you this.”

“Tell me what?” Alec nervously questioned, feeling the sudden and very serious shift in Jace’s tone and demeanor.

“Magnus had to leave the hospital,” Jace said grimly. “He had to go back to Aspen.”

“He left? Why?” Alec burst out, feeling shocked and betrayed. He couldn’t fathom why Magnus would leave without telling him. Not now, not after he’d stayed by his side all this time, and especially not after the talk they’d had no more than an hour ago.

Jace hated to upset Alec after everything he’d just been through. The disappointment that spread across his face as he realized Magnus was gone was heartbreaking. But he knew this was the only way. “Listen Alec, I don’t know how much time we have before your parents come barging back in here, so I’m just gonna say this fast,” Jace said in a hushed tone, his eyes focused steel. “Sebastian Morgenstern is dead.”

“What! How?” Alec gasped, Jace’s words coming as such a total surprise he gripped his broken ribs as they constricted achingly against his lungs. The quick response causing a searing pain to shoot through his chest.

Jace nodded. “Someone shot him, that’s all I know. And Magnus had to go talk to the police. I’m sure he didn’t want to leave you, but he felt he had no choice.”

“He was murdered?” Alec surmised, his eyes blown wide with shocked confusion.

“Yeah, it seems that way.”

“By who?” Alec asked, looking to Jace for answers.
“I don’t know man,” Jace replied, shaking his head. “But I can’t say the bastard didn’t deserve it.”

Alec’s face was locked in a stunned expression, his eyes boggling as he tried to understand what he’d just heard. “I can’t believe it. I really can’t believe it. What did Magnus say? Is he OK?”

“He looked pretty shaken,” Jace confessed, remembering how Magnus’ anger had shifted to a look of utter devastation. “I mean he was his teacher so I guess part of him probably feels bad. I don’t know, we really didn’t talk to him much. He just heard the news and took off.”

“Yes, his teacher,” Alec muttered, realizing Jace had no idea Sebastian and Magnus were brothers. Magnus hadn’t told him the truth.

“He made me promise I would look out for you while he went to handle things. You were the most important thing on his mind for sure,” Jace added, hoping to ease Alec’s pain a bit. “So whatever you need man, I’m here.”

“I just can’t believe he’s dead.”

Jace nodded again, his mind flashing back to Sebastian’s lifeless body on the shower floor, surrounded by a pool of blood, his eyes open and fixed. It sent a chill up his spine. “Me either, looks like he finally crossed the wrong person. You know what they say, karma’s a bitch. But I’m not gonna pretend to feel sorry for the guy. Not after what he did to you,” Jace admitted, not mincing any words. He wanted Alec to know just exactly how he felt. “I guess the good thing is someone saved me from having to settle the score myself. There was no way I was gonna let him get away with hurting you.”

Alec nodded wordlessly, halfway listening to Jace but mostly thinking about Magnus and wondering how he was dealing with the news.

Jace picked up on Alec’s worry, noticing the concerned look on his face. “Hey, you OK?”

“Yeah,” Alec mumbled. “I guess I should feel relieved. I mean, I don’t think I could have done it you know, like actually killed him myself. No matter how much I wanted to.”

Jace shook his head. “Clary said the same thing about me, and maybe she’s right. But I guess we’ll never know now.”

Alec sat quietly for a moment letting the full weight of the truth soak in. Sebastian had made his life a living hell for two months. He’d threatened him countless times, treated him like complete garbage, and relished every chance to make him miserable. He’d had him beaten within an inch of his life, his hand smashed to a pulp, probably ending his entire career, and all because he was too jealous and selfish to care about his own brother’s happiness. But now he was dead, and Magnus was gone, and Alec knew in his heart it was over. There was an emptiness that began to settle in the place where the rage had been. There’d be no getting even, no revenge to exact, Sebastian had paid the ultimate price and Alec could finally let it go. “Jace, I want you to go get my things from Magnus’ house. Especially my cello, I need it.”

“Yeah, of course man, like I said to your mom, I’m happy to go get your stuff. I can leave right now and be back before morning,” Jace reassured him, anxious to help. “But I have to ask, does this mean you’ve decided you’re going home?”

Alec’s face had slowly transformed from a look of questioning shock and doubt to a peaceful and resolved calm. “There’s nothing left for me here.”

Jace nodded solemnly. He understood Alec’s decision but it didn’t make it any less heartbreaking.
“I’m gonna miss you, ya know?” Jace sniffed, fighting the urge to cry. “You’re seriously the best person I’ve ever had the privilege of calling a friend, even if only for a little while.”

Alec’s mouth turned slightly upward in one corner, hating to admit the same. In many ways he would miss Jace. He’d miss his humor, his cocky arrogance, and his bold, fearless confidence. Despite how things had turned out between them, and the trust that had been broken, he couldn’t hate him, not really. He knew they’d shared something special. “Maybe if you end up moving to New York like you said, you know to be with Clary, maybe I might see you around.”

Jace’s face perked up from that small bit of hope causing a brilliant smile to illuminate his face. “That would be great! I mean no pressure, but if you ever wanna do tequila shooters in the middle of the day, I’m your man.” Jace playfully punched Alec’s leg and gave him a wink, showing his famous self-assured swagger.

Alec smiled, not able to hide the fact the idea sounded pretty good. He liked to think that someday in the future he could put all of this behind him. Everything that had happened, the lies, the secrets, the violence, all of it. There was no guarantee time healed all wounds, but it was something to hope for. “Not sure it would be half as entertaining without a bartender who wants to rip your face off,” Alec teased, unable to resist the chance to give Jace hell.

“Yeah, give it time,” Jace scoffed. “I’m sure I can make plenty of new enemies.”

The two shared a laugh and Alec felt a bit of peace being able to part from Jace on a good note. Maybe he would take him up on that offer for drinks one day.

The dusty mountain peaks ahead were silhouetted against the soft orange glow of sunset as Magnus drove the last few miles toward the city of Aspen. The long and lonely trip had been one of the most difficult of his life. Every mile he put between himself and Alec was another tug on the metaphorical fishhook that was buried deep in his heart. The physical pain of their separation, coupled with his grief and confusion over Sebastian’s death, was quite honestly more than he could bear. He’d tried to quiet his brain with his usual playlist of 70’s classics, then he’d switched to another playlist that was all classical, but even music was no consolation to him now. Nothing could take his mind off of Alec’s injuries and the uncertainty of his future as a musician. And nothing could stifle the increasing fear that he had lost him for good. Just the thought of even trying to live the rest of his life without Alec by his side was unimaginable. As for his brother, even after the initial shock had a chance to sink in, he still felt numb and unable to process what had happened. Logically it didn’t make sense. The circle of people who Sebastian had any direct contact with over the summer was small. The most likely suspects to want him dead would have been Alec and himself, but of course he knew they were both innocent. Up next would be Jace and Clary, mostly Jace since he’d had run-ins with Sebastian before and he was equally devastated over Alec’s attack. But he’d sworn himself to be innocent of the crime, and Clary had vouched for him. The only other person who came to mind was Ragnor, Magnus remembered his odd behavior at the hospital yesterday and how he’d left without saying goodbye. But what would his motive be to kill? He barely knew Alec plus he’d pledged a lifelong allegiance to all members of the Morgenstern family. He couldn’t imagine he would betray his father by murdering his youngest son. With that thought the brief image of his brother at the age of 4 flashed in his mind’s eye. How could he really be gone now? Magnus couldn’t understand it.
With his brow furrowed and his jaw tightly clenched, Magnus drove in silence reflecting back over the events of the last two months. It felt like a lifetime ago since he’d first arrived to this tiny mountain paradise hoping to have a relaxing summer away. But now, more than anything, he just wished he could find a way to repair the damage that had been done. If he wouldn’t have encouraged his brother to attend the festival, and he’d refused to help him with his plan to create the perfect quartet, then Alec wouldn’t have been hurt and Sebastian would still be alive. Those were indisputable facts, and Magnus knew deep down there was nobody else to blame. The blinders he wore when it came to seeing his brother for the monster he truly was had put the love of his life in danger. The overwhelming guilt suffocated his thoughts to the point where he couldn’t see his way out of the hopeless situation he was in. It was a merciless assault from which he could find no reprieve, and he feared the shame would swallow him whole.

As he passed the Aspen-Pitkin County Airport Magnus knew it was only about another three miles to the police station. He’d never been there before but he’d passed it on many occasions driving in and out of the city. He’d debated if he should call first to let them know he was coming, especially after listening to about a half dozen urgent voice messages they’d left for him. But in the end he’d decided to arrive unannounced hoping this sign of good faith would help draw away any suspicions they might have about his involvement. Thanks to the TV in the hospital cafeteria he knew the police chief’s name, so that would be a good place to start.

Pulling into the parking lot of the Aspen Police Department, Magnus noticed several news vans from various surrounding cities were pulled up in front of the building. He then remembered the reporter on TV had said the chief would be giving a press conference later today, which he guessed must be happening here at the station. Finding a parking spot out of the way Magnus turned off the engine and took a moment to breathe, slowly in and out, as an attempt to calm himself before going inside. He knew it was very important to remain levelheaded and relaxed while speaking to the police. They’d definitely want to question him, but luckily he had a rock solid alibi for his whereabouts over the last few days. Any number of doctors and nurses could verify that his location had been right at Alec’s side, morning, noon and night. His relationship to the victim on the other hand, had always been his most carefully guarded secret. Magnus had no intention of revealing to the police, or anyone else for that matter, that he was Sebastian’s brother. That was a fact he intended to keep buried.

As Magnus made his way through the front entrance of the station he passed several members of the media exiting through the same doors, each of them carrying a load of camera equipment and supplies. He listened intently as they talked amongst themselves.

“That was anticlimactic.”

“What did you expect from this sleepy little town?”

“Where can I pick up a copy of the coroner’s report?”

“Paul had extras he was bringing out.”

“Does anyone want to go grab dinner?”
“Yes, I’m starving.”

Magnus pretended he wasn’t listening to their conversations even though he was hanging on every word. It seemed as though he’d missed the police chief’s news conference and by the sound of it the update wasn’t what the members of the media had hoped to hear. Nothing really made sense, but the picture Magnus had been painting in his mind was starting to take shape.

There was a female officer sitting at a desk just inside the door looking tired and overworked. “Can I help you sir?” She asked grumpily, having spotted Magnus as he walked in.

“Yes, I’m here to speak with Chief Garroway,” Magnus requested as politely as he could, though his voice was shaking a bit from nerves.

“Who are you and what is this in regards to?” The officer questioned, looking him over skeptically.

“My name is Magnus Bane and I’m here to speak to him about my student,” Magnus paused a moment to swallow against his constricting throat. “Sebastian Morgenstern.”

The female officer’s back straightened as if someone had goosed her from behind. “You’re Mr. Morgenstern’s teacher?” She asked as her eyes scanned him with disbelief.

“Yes, and I believe Chief Garroway is anxious to speak with me.”

The woman rose from her seat abruptly, sending her desk chair rolling backward toward the wall behind her. It made impact with a loud thwack. “I’ll go alert the chief that you’re here, please have a seat, it will only be a moment.”

Magnus really didn’t feel like sitting down, he’d been sitting in the car for three hours and it felt good to stand up. So instead he walked over to a bulletin board in the hallway which was littered with missing person’s reports and most-wanted flyers. He scanned the faces of the many strangers noticing most were missing hikers. He wondered for a moment if any of them could possibly be alive, just wandering out there in the wilderness, lost for days and living off the land. He imaged if a person was smart enough to stay warm and find fresh water they could survive for quite a long time. But usually people lost in the mountains would die of exposure, not starvation or bear attacks as some might assume.

“Mr. Bane?” A voice called out from behind Magnus, causing him to spin around quickly. “I’m Chief Garroway,” the man said, offering one hand to shake Magnus’. “Thank you for coming in, we had officers attempting to call you all day, but we didn’t know if you’d received any of our messages.”

Magnus shook the chief’s hand, immediately noticing his very strong and firm handshake. “I’m sorry for the delay, I was in a poor cell service area. But once I was able to hear your messages I jumped in my car and came straight here. I’ve been in Denver all week.”

Chief Garroway nodded and continued squeezing Magnus’ hand very tightly. “Well I appreciate you coming in, if you’ll follow me to my office we can continue speaking there.”

Magnus followed the very tall and broad-shouldered man through a maze of cubicles and offices until they arrived at what appeared to be the largest and most impressive office which was walled completely in glass.

“Right this way Mr. Bane,” the chief said, holding his office door open for Magnus.
Once inside the chief closed the door then took a seat behind his desk. Magnus followed suit and sat in an empty chair just in front of him. His heart pounding wildly in his chest.

“First of all Mr. Bane, I assume you know the reason for our calls?”

“Something has happened to Sebastian,” Magnus offered, trying to sound as if he didn’t know for sure.

“Yes, I’m sorry to confirm that Mr. Morgenstern did pass away earlier today. We were given your name by representatives of the festival, they told us you had been Mr. Morgenstern’s teacher for quite some time?”

“Yes, that’s correct, since he was a child,” Magnus admitted, feeling intimidated by the chief’s piercing gaze and authoritative tone. This definitely wasn’t a man you wanted to cross, and Magnus had no intention of dodging his questions.

“I see,” Chief Garroway replied, taking a small notebook out of his front shirt pocket to begin taking notes. “And when and where did you hear the news?”

“I was in Denver, visiting a friend in the hospital, and I saw the report on TV. They didn’t give his name of course, but I recognized his residence in the background, that was when I went back to listen to the many voice messages I received from your department and I guess I just put two and two together.” Magnus felt a single bead of sweat travel down the length of his face as the chief diligently scribbled notes.

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

Magnus nodded and returned a very small appreciative smile. “Thank you.”

Chief Garroway cleared his throat and sat up a bit straighter in his chair. He seemed to be deep in thought as he tapped his pen rhythmically against his desk. “When was the last time you saw Mr. Morgenstern?” The chief asked very frankly, not looking up from his notepad.

Magnus nervously rubbed the palms of his sweaty hands down the front of his pants legs. “I saw him at the Fourth of July concert Monday night, he was performing as a soloist.”

“And what would you say his mood was that night?” The chief inquired, raising his eyes to meet Magnus’, still tapping his pen.

“His mood, sir?” Magnus questioned, thinking that was an odd thing to ask.

“Yes, did you find him to be agitated or upset about anything? Were there any family or personal problems weighing heavily on his mind?”

Magnus blinked rapidly, his lips pouting out as his head pulled back with surprise. “No, not that I’m aware of. He was very excited to perform and seemed his normal self.” Of course Magnus left out the part that his brother’s normal self was actually a murderous sociopath. That part he’d leave out.

“I’m sorry for the intrusive questions, I’m just trying to establish a motive,” the chief added, still aggressively taking notes. “I don’t know if you had a chance to hear the press conference before you arrived.”

“No, I did not,” Magnus replied honestly. “I was driving at the time.”

“Well, just to brief you on the most important aspects, the county coroner has ruled Mr.
Morgenstern’s death a suicide.”

“Suicide?” Magnus uttered in shock. “But the news reports said he was murdered?”

“The officers who originally responded to the scene reported the incident as a shooting which was picked up by various sources over the police scanners. But after closer investigation the gunshot wound was proven to be self-inflicted and the firearm was recovered from the scene with no visible signs of a break-in. The apartment was secure, all windows were locked and the doors were deadbolted from the inside.”

“I see,” Magnus pondered, feeling in his heart there was absolutely no possible way Sebastian would have shot himself. Whoever had staged this had done a professional job. They’d gone to a lot of trouble to make it look like a suicide.

The chief continued. “Gun powder residue was found on Mr. Morgenstern’s hand matching the weapon found next to him, as well as his fingerprints on the trigger and barrel.”

Magnus nodded as his mind reeled through each of these impossible facts. There was no way any of this could be true. The police had been duped, he was sure of it.

“We also recovered a note from the victim, in what appears to be his handwriting going by other samples we found in the apartment,” the chief went on to explain.

“A note?” Magnus interjected, feeling his lungs seize up as fear cut off his breath. He was not at all prepared for this. Whatever was in that note could be very damaging to him. In fact he could already be caught in a lie. Fighting back the surging panic, Magnus gripped the bottom of his chair forcing himself to remain indifferent. “What did it say?”

“Mr. Morgenstern expressed deep sadness about his estrangement from his family. He also confessed to having arranged an attack on a fellow musician up at the school. A cellist named Alec Lightwood. Our department had been investigating this crime for the last several days. Am I correct to assume that is the friend you’ve been visiting in the hospital?” The chief asked outright, his eyes narrowed and unmoving.

Magnus was floored. His well-rehearsed plan of appearing to be completely open and honest with the police suddenly took a drastic turn. He needed to come up with some sort of story, and quickly. “Yes, that’s correct. I’ve been there with him since Monday night.”

“I see,” the chief acknowledged, adding more scribbles to his notepad. “Our investigators didn’t have you on the list of witnesses at the scene.”

“I went along in the helicopter to the hospital, it was before the police arrived, and I’ve been there ever since. I haven’t had a chance to speak to anyone, I’m sorry.” Magnus felt he’d made a mistake coming here to the station. Jace had been right, he should have waited until the dust settled.

The chief nodded and continued to look skeptical. “I have to ask you Mr. Bane, what do you believe the possible reasons were for Mr. Morgenstern wanting to harm Mr. Lightwood?” The chief’s eyes were focused intently, waiting for an answer.

“Well, I can’t be sure,” Magnus responded, trying to keep up his innocent façade. “But I suppose it could have been jealousy, which is quite common among musicians.”

The chief turned to a fresh page of notepaper, apparently writing down every word Magnus said. “Did you suspect Mr. Morgenstern could be involved when you first arrived at the scene?”
“I… I didn’t really think about it,” Magnus stuttered, hating the fact that he was lying right to this man’s face.

“You didn’t think about who would want to hurt your friend?” The chief asked suspiciously.

Magnus realized he was painting himself into a corner. His eyes shifted rapidly from side to side as he struggled to find the right words to say. “I guess I assumed it was a mugging, or random act of violence.”

Chief Garroway placed his notepad down on the desk in front of him then leaned forward on his elbows, tenting his fingers together. “Mr. Bane, I’m here to help you and the only way I can do that is to establish what the facts are in this case. If you have information as to why Mr. Morgenstern would want to have Mr. Lightwood attacked or why he would then take his own life, it is imperative that you tell me. I have already made calls to Mr. Lightwood’s family as well as Mr. Morgenstern’s father, and I can assure you the truth will come out.”

Magnus’ mind was churning through the information the chief was relaying to him with total disbelief. Coming in he thought he would be the only one privy to these facts and he could choose to divulge them as he saw fit. Now the tables had completely turned and he was frantically trying to scrape together some sort of legitimate story of what had happened without looking like a total liar. “I apologize if my actions over the last few days seem illogical. Mr. Lightwood is much more than a friend to me, he is someone that I love very deeply. So my focus has been on his condition and the treatment of his injuries. I admit I haven’t been thinking about anything else.”

The chief picked up his notepad and began writing again. “So you had no inclination to believe Mr. Morgenstern would have been involved in your boyfriend’s attack?”

Magnus felt his heart skip a beat hearing the chief use the word boyfriend. Oh how he wished that were true. But right now he felt like Alec was barely someone who would even look at him again, let alone consider him his boyfriend. He fought back the raw emotion attached to the word and struggled to keep going. “I knew my student was on stage at the time that Alec was injured, so I guess I never considered him to be a possible suspect. But I haven’t really been thinking clearly the last few days.” Magnus reached up and wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. He didn’t know if he was more nervous about the questions or the thought that the chief had actually spoken to his father already.

The chief stopped writing and turned back several pages in his notebook, clearly looking for something. “Do you have knowledge of the current whereabouts of Mr. Jonathan Wayland or Miss Clarissa Fray? I understand they were in a quartet this summer with the two victims and I’d very much like to speak with them.”

“Yes, Jace and Clary are my good friends, as well as Alec’s, they’ve been at the hospital right at my side all week. They are there right now as we speak.”

“I see,” the chief sighed, looking tired and a bit exasperated. “Well, it seems the loose ends all tie up neatly. That doesn’t usually happen in cases like this.”

“Sir, if I may ask, you said you spoke to Alec’s family?” Magnus was very interested to know exactly what the Lightwoods knew.

“Yes, I contacted them personally a few hours ago to let them know the perpetrator of their son’s attack had been found and was now deceased. They seemed very relieved and said they would be taking their son back home to New York.”
“Back home?” Magnus puzzled, wondering how in the world they’d managed to arrange that when Alec was just hours out of surgery.

“Yes, I believe she said first thing in the morning.”

Magnus’ heart sank. He’d known there was a strong possibility Alec would be going home soon, but he’d thought he’d have more time with him while he healed. More chances to explain things and put things right. “And you also spoke with Sebastian’s father?”

“Yes, his number was listed as an emergency contact with the school. I spoke to him earlier this afternoon just after his body was positively identified by a festival representative. We faxed him the initial coroner’s report and he did not feel it necessary to conduct a full autopsy. He is sending a private plane to transport Mr. Morgenstern’s body back to California for burial. A local funeral home is handling the details.”

Magnus felt relieved. No autopsy meant no more investigating, which meant no more chances for him to get in trouble for lying. “Thank you, I’ll be sure to get in touch with him right away to see if I can be of any help.”

“Yeah, he seemed like a nice man, though his British accent threw me.”

Magnus froze, it was at that exact moment he remembered that Sebastian had put Ragnor’s number down as the emergency contact, not his real father. Which meant Ragnor had received the call and impersonated Valentine. Which suddenly made Magnus feel quite certain Ragnor knew the truth of how Sebastian had really died.

Chief Garroway took a long moment to look at Magnus as if contemplating what he was going to say next. Magnus felt like he was under the heat of a magnifying glass as he tried to remain calm even though he was completely freaking out inside.

“Well, I think that’s all for now Mr. Bane,” the chief said, rising to his feet and extending one arm to shake Magnus’ hand. “In these clear cases of suicide we try to respect the family’s privacy as much as we can. So I don’t foresee any additional press conferences or police attention drawn to the matter.”

“Thank you,” Magnus said, shaking his hand and feeling like he’d dodged a bullet.

“If we have any more questions we’ll contact you.”

As Magnus walked briskly away from the police station and back toward the parking lot his mind raced through everything he’d just learned. He was oscillating through a million different emotions. Confusion, disbelief, shock, and even fear. He didn’t know what to think. As soon as he reached his car he pulled out his phone and immediately called Jace who thankfully picked up on the first ring.

“Magnus, how did it go?”

“Not great, how’s Alec?”

“He’s OK, but some shit went down here after you left and I had to tell him what happened.”

“How did he take it?” Magnus sighed, wishing he could have been there to tell him personally.

“Honestly, he seemed more worried about you.”
Magnus felt his heart flutter at the thought of Alec being worried about him. “Please tell him thank you and that I’m OK. The chief told me he talked to the Lightwoods and they said they’re planning to take Alec home?”

“Yeah, I was there when they told him. He was asking for you so I had to explain why you left.”

“That’s alright, he needed to know the truth.”

“Also, and you’re probably not gonna like this, I’m headed to your house right now.”

“My house? Why?”

“Alec asked me to come get his stuff.”

Magnus felt the weight of Jace’s words crush his soul like a sledgehammer. Alec wanted his stuff, this break-up was actually really happening.

“Magnus, I couldn’t say no.”

“Yeah, of course. I understand.” The painful realization that Alec was actually leaving him radiated all throughout his body causing such an intense physical reaction he doubled over against the steering wheel in agony. The hand that held his phone collapsed lifelessly into his lap and he squeezed his eyes shut tight praying he could wake up from this nightmare.

“Magnus? Magnus? You still there?”

Magnus could hear Jace’s voice coming from the phone in his lap. He let out a long exhale then brought the phone back up to his ear again. “Yeah, I’m still here.”

“I left Clary at the hospital with Alec, to keep an eye on things. She’ll call me if anything happens. And I should be at your place in about an hour, maybe less.”

Magnus nodded his head against the steering wheel, still with his eyes clamped shut, wishing more than anything he just had more time. “Alright, I’ll meet you there.”

“I’m sorry folks, visiting hours are over and I think Mr. Lightwood is going to need to get a good night’s sleep before his big travel day tomorrow,” the nurse informed Clary, Maryse and Robert from just inside the door. “You’re all welcome back first thing in the morning of course, I’m sure you could use some shut eye as well.”

Clary rubbed the backs of her hands across her eyes realizing she’d been asleep in the chair next to Alec’s bed. Maryse Lightwood had droned on and on for hours talking nonstop about her plans for Alec’s care and she had thankfully dozed off, sparing herself from the torture. Sitting up to look around she noticed Robert Lightwood had made himself a makeshift bed in the window seat and he appeared to also have been asleep.

As the three visitors gathered their things and shuffled out of the room Alec’s nurse made herself busy tending to her patient. She hung a fresh bag of saline from his IV stand and evened up the blankets that had bunched down around his feet.
“Thank you,” Alec sighed, appreciating his nurse now more than ever.

“You’re quite welcome dear. Your mother, bless her soul, has a voice like the Energizer bunny. She just kept going and going and going,” the nurse teased, giggling quietly to herself.

Alec chuckled along with her through his exhaustion, his eyelids getting heavier as the now quiet room began to soothe him. “She means well,” he mumbled already feeling half asleep.

“Your friend who was here before, the nice looking young man with the beautiful eyes, he was quiet as a mouse at night. That’s why I always let him stay. He was so sweet and so worried about you, I didn’t have the heart to send him out,” she informed Alec cheerfully as she straightened the pillows behind his head.

Alec knew of course she was talking about Magnus. Through his sagging eyelids he could see her kind smile as she spoke about him and it made his heart lurch to think about him being at his side all that time.

“I’ve been a nurse for over 40 years now, and I’ve seen a lot of people come and go through here. Some with happy endings, some with sad. It never gets easier, but I do love my job.”

“Well you’re very good at it,” Alec muttered, feeling the warm blankets she’d pulled up over him begin to relax his aching body.

“You’ve really got yourself one of the good ones, I can tell. I don’t often get to witness a love so strong and selfless like that up close. Why the way he held your hand, like it was as precious as gold and as delicate as a flower, it reminded me of one of those old black and white war movies. You know the ones, where the soldier is lying unconscious while his tearful lover pines away at his bedside. He fuss ed over you so, the poor lab techs could barely get past him to draw blood.”

Alec felt a lump form in his throat imagining Magnus just the way she described him. Protectively standing guard, questioning everyone who came through the door, worrying and fidgeting like he always did when he was nervous. And all those long hours just sitting here staring at his comatose body, probably talking to him and apologizing over and over. Beating himself up over everything that had happened, blaming himself for it all. Even after only two months together he knew Magnus so well he could picture it all perfectly in his mind.

“Finally on the second day I convinced him to at least go change out of his dirty clothes and have a glass of water. I was worried we were going to have to bring in another hospital bed!”

That was the last straw. Alec couldn’t stop the tears from welling in his eyes thinking of Magnus refusing to leave his side, not even taking care of himself. It really shouldn’t have surprised him, not after all the wonderful things he’d done for him since the first day they met. Alec had never felt so cherished and adored ever in his life. The time they’d spent together had been such a blessing, it had been everything he’d always wanted but didn’t believe he’d ever find.

“I’m so sorry son, I didn’t mean to make you cry,” the nurse said, noticing the tears that had begun to spill down Alec’s cheeks.

“It’s OK, I’m happy you told me. Otherwise I wouldn’t have known,” Alec replied, his voice broken and raspy.

“Well, I’m glad then too. You’re a very lucky man to find someone so special. A love like that only comes around once in a lifetime.”

With a tender smile the nurse clicked off the light over Alec’s bed and left the room, closing the door.
behind her. In the darkness, with no sound but the steady beep of the heart monitor he allowed himself to fully cry. Sucking in ragged gasps of breath, his chest shaking against his bandaged broken ribs, Alec cried only the way a person could cry when they knew they were completely alone. He cried for Magnus, and the horrible nightmare they’d been through. He cried for the perfect love that was stolen from them by a man who had no conscience. He cried for Stella, and how he longed to hold her in his hands and feel the pressure of her strings against his fingertips. He cried for everything he’d worked his whole life for and everything he’d lost. The pain and emptiness overwhelmed him. He felt like he was falling end over end into a deep, black pit of despair. He could literally feel his heart breaking into a thousand slivered pieces, their jagged shards cutting him to the quick. It was the worst feeling in the world. It was complete utter hopelessness. Through his heavy sobs he desperately spoke aloud into the empty room, his voice thick and quavering. “I don’t know what to do,” he cried out. “I can’t take this… I just can’t.”

Listening for a response in the darkness that he knew would never come, Alec’s mind was spinning like a top, unable to grab onto anything that made sense. The tears rolled down his cheeks and past his ears, soaking the pillowcase beneath him. He’d never felt so lost and alone. It was the same feeling you had when you tried to imagine the deep and unending universe. That fear in the pit of your stomach that your brain had no answer for, like trying to grasp the concept of infinity or how time stretched without end. It was something that couldn’t be explained. Alec knew he couldn’t stay in Colorado, but he didn’t want to leave. He knew his parents wanted the best for him, but how could anything ever be good again without Magnus. It was the same way he felt about music. The feel of the bow as he pulled it across Stella's strings, her weight in his hands, how could life ever be whole again without it? There were no answers to these questions, because he couldn’t see a future without the two most vitally important pieces of himself. Music was by definition his very beating heart, and Magnus' love was the blood that flowed through it.

Magnus turned the key to unlock the door to his very large and empty house, feeling strange to be back home. The surroundings felt unfamiliar to him now, especially since he was alone. He tossed his keys into an empty bowl by the door and suddenly felt an odd sort of déjà vu. Looking into that small bowl he thought of another set of keys that usually clinked against his and he wondered where they might be. He imagined Alec’s wallet, keys, phone, and whatever personal items were on him at the time he’d arrived to the hospital had probably been collected and secured somewhere safe. Thinking of the small cello keychain he’d given to Alec he wished he’d have thought to inquire with the nurse about where his things had been stored. He would have liked to have kept it as a memento, realizing he didn’t really have anything tangible to remember Alec by. Of course he had the memories, he imagined those would stay with him for a very long time. But having carried the small token around with him for several days before giving it to Alec initially, there was something appealing about the weight of the tiny cello in his hand. The thought of holding it now seemed comforting.

Flipping on the lights in the kitchen Magnus quietly made his way to the refrigerator. After the long and stressful conversation at the police station his throat was parched. Reaching to take a bottle of water from the top shelf Magnus thought he heard low voices coming from the next room. He stopped cold, straining to identify who could possibly be inside his house. Feeling quite sure he’d been alone he panicked and grabbed a kitchen knife out of the block just next to the toaster. The voices seemed to be coming from the living room, so Magnus inched forward, tiptoeing on the balls of his feet, the knife held out in front of him defensively. Once he was close enough to the doorway he bravely peeked around the corner to see who was there. In the dim glow of moonlight he was met
with a shocking discovery.

“My son!” Valentine bellowed, a sickeningly sweet smile flowering across his devious face. “Is that anyway to greet your old man? Put down that ridiculous knife and come give me a hug!”

Magnus looked at his father, standing boldly in the middle of his living room, and lowered his arm. “What in God’s name are you doing here?” He muttered in horror as a cold wave of fear crept up his spine.

“I’m here to see you of course,” Valentine declared, spreading his arms wide apart like he actually believed Magnus would come running into them. “After everything that’s happened I wanted to make sure you were safe.”

Magnus caught movement out of the corner of his left eye and he turned to find Ragnor was over by the bar, his face cast with a grave expression. “Did you let him in here?” Magnus asked him, feeling betrayed.

“Your father was quite adamant to see you,” Ragnor sputtered. “He wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

Magnus’ jaw tightened and so did his grip on the knife as he turned back to face Valentine once more. “You did this, didn’t you?” Magnus accused, raising the knife boldly, pointing it toward his father’s chest.

“Did what?” Valentine chaffed, his eyes twinkling gleefully as if he found the whole situation amusing.

“You’re the one who killed him, aren’t you?” Magnus roared, his arm shaking as he confronted his father with what he felt was the obvious truth. “You killed your own son!”

Valentine’s smile morphed into a devilish glare that made goosebumps rise across Magnus’ skin. “Be careful what accusations you throw at me boy, it seems to me someone did you a favor today. And you should be thankful.”

“A favor? Really? Is that what you think it was?”

“Magnus, don’t,” Ragnor spoke with fearful warning, his head imperceptibly shaking from side to side. “Don’t do this.”

“No Ragnor, he’s gone too far this time! Murdering my brother, no matter how sick and twisted he was, did not do me a favor! This man is pure evil!”

Magnus turned back to his father again, the knife still raised. “He was nothing more than a puppet to you, wasn’t he? A failed experiment gone wrong. You abused and manipulated him, you tried to teach him to hate without conscience. You wanted him to walk in your footsteps, until what? You realized you couldn’t control the monster you’d created? He did something you didn’t expect so it was time to get rid of him? Is that it?”

“Hold your tongue, you spoiled ungrateful little bastard!” Valentine demanded, springing toward Magnus, closing the small distance between them.

“No, I won’t! I’ve had enough of this! I’m not living in fear, cowering like a child under your brutality for the rest of my life, I’m done! Done with this toxic, destructive so-called family I never wanted to be part of in the first place! You destroyed my brother, and you ruined my life! I hate you!” Magnus spat, finally unleashing the true feelings he’d bottled for so many years.
“Your life?” Valentine laughed. “You mean the life I so graciously gave to you? All of this wealth and privilege, everything you ever wanted since you were 9 years old, all with the snap of my fingers!” He seethed, gesturing wildly to the luxury that surrounded them. “You’d be nothing without me!”

“I don’t care about your money, or any of this!” Magnus blazed, his hatred burning inside of him with an uncontrolled fury. “I’d rather live off the streets than take another penny from you!”

Valentine’s face contorted into diabolic triumph. “Oh I don’t think so, there are a number of ways I can keep you exactly where I want you. Starting with whatever’s left of your filthy boy toy.”

“Don’t you dare threaten Alec!” Magnus screamed, charging forward with the knife in a blinding rage, ready to do whatever it took to protect the man he loved.

Valentine was too quick though, he reached out and grabbed Magnus’ wrist forcing the knife upward until the steely blade was positioned exactly between their faces. “You fool!” Valentine snarled, their bodies locked in a struggle as the knife shook and quaked in their mutual grasp. “You think you can defeat me? You’re just as naive and pathetic as your brother.”

“Good!” Magnus shrieked. “Then you can kill me too, and make it look like a suicide! Since that seems to be your specialty!”

As the last words Magnus spoke rang out through the rafters of the cavernous room he was suddenly hit by a gruesome revelation. His eyes blew wide with shock as he stared into the demonic gaze of the man in front of him. “This isn’t the first time… is it?” Magnus’ voice quivered as he tried as hard as he could to keep hold of the knife while his mind began to collapse in upon itself like a house of cards. “You’ve done this before.”

A glint of hellfire flamed across Valentine’s gaze as his maniacal grin twisted joyfully with Magnus’ epiphany. “And I’m going to enjoy it even more this time,” he confessed, grabbing the hilt of the knife with his other hand jerking it from Magnus’ weakened grasp. “So you can tell your mother I said hello, and I’ll see you both in hell!”

Raising the knife up over his right shoulder to strike Magnus down right where he stood, a deafening shot rang out from behind them freezing Valentine's face in a stunned scowl.

Magnus staggered backward from fright, tripping over his own tangled feet, and fell to the ground.

“Magnus!” A voice cried out from somewhere in the room as Valentine crumpled in on himself, his knees buckling as he dropped to the floor. For a moment his eyes were locked on Magnus’, staring at him in disbelief as a blossom of crimson sprang from the center of his chest, spreading across the stark white fabric like a red rose opening its petals. He swayed minutely on his knees, as if he were balanced on a precipice, then toppled over lifelessly, his head hitting the ground with a loud crack.

In the air behind where Valentine had stood were twirling wisps of smoke which quickly dissipated to reveal Ragnor standing tall, his arm outstretched, a gun clutched tightly in his hand.

“Don’t shoot him!” The same voice called out again, rushing in from behind Magnus, shielding his body with his arms.

Ragnor lowered his weapon and placed it on the floor, then backed away slowly, his face terror-stricken.

“Magnus are you OK?” Jace asked beseechingly as he noticed the growing pool of blood that saturated the thick white carpeting. “Are you hurt?”
“I’m OK,” Magnus replied weakly as his back slumped against Jace’s arm. “It’s not my blood.”

Ragnor raised both palms in front of him as a sign of surrender as he cautiously walked toward where Jace and Magnus were huddled on the floor. “It’s alright, it’s over, he can’t hurt anyone again,” he muttered softly, looking as surprised as anyone to see Valentine lying dead on the floor.

“You saved me,” Magnus stammered, looking up at Ragnor in awe. “You shot him and saved my life.”

Ragnor’s astonishment softened as he knelt down beside Magnus and placed one hand on his shoulder. “I’m sorry it took me so long. I’ve been a coward Magnus… please forgive me.”

Magnus lunged forward and threw his arms around Ragnor gratefully, squeezing him with all of his might. “There’s nothing to forgive,” he muttered against his shoulder appreciatively, knowing there was no way to thank him enough for what he’d done. This man who had stood by his side for over two decades and given his life in service to a family that had done nothing but abuse him, had just sacrificed everything to liberate Magnus from hell. There would never be a way to repay him.

“No, no way,” Magnus shook his head in disagreement. “I can’t let you taking the heat for all of this. I was the one he was angry with, this is my mess.”

“No Magnus, believe me, this falls on my shoulders. After all those years I turned a blind eye to his villainy and corruption. Your beautiful mother, she was so innocent, I blame myself for what he did to her. I was a fool to trust him, her blood is on my hands as much as his.”

“But you’ll go to prison, or worse. I can’t let you do that.”

“Please Magnus, let me do this, otherwise I won’t be able to live with myself,” Ragnor pleaded, his eyes swimming with emotion and pain.

Jace stood up and walked to the window, peering out to see if there were any signs of police lights. “If we’re gonna go we’ve gotta go now.”

Ragnor stood up and pulled Magnus to his feet. Then the two of them turned simultaneously toward Valentine’s body, eyeing it with disbelief.

“Family isn’t about blood you know, it’s about love,” Ragnor affirmed, patting Magnus gently on the back. “And I love you like the son I never had. You’re my family Magnus, now and always.”

Magnus turned and hugged Ragnor one last time, the tears flowing freely down his grief-stricken face. “I love you too.”

Jace was still looking out the window. He kept his eye on the long ribbon of mountain road that led up toward Magnus’ house.
“Here, take this,” Ragnor added, reaching down to pick the kitchen knife up off the floor, handing it to Magnus. “Toss it into the canyon on your way back to Denver.”

Magnus took hold of the knife, remembering how Valentine had held it over his head, ready to plunge the blade into his chest. His own father poised to kill him without a moment of hesitation. It made his stomach lurch.

“Now go, please,” Ragnor prayed, giving Magnus a reassuring smile. “I promise I’ll be fine.”

Jace left the window and came to Magnus’ side for support. The two then retreated, Jace back through the front door and Magnus out to the garage, both to their respective cars, neither saying a word.

Ragnor stood silently, gazing down at Valentine, his blood now soaked deep into the carpet making it look almost black in the pale light of the full moon. “You were right old friend, there was never going to be enough room at the top for two kings. So I hope you burn in hell for all eternity knowing I beat you at your own game.”

Chapter End Notes

Well the villains are finally gone! Thank goodness!

Now the question is, what's going to happen between Magnus and Alec? Will Alec go back home to New York? Will Magnus stay in Aspen or go back to California? You'll have to wait until the last chapter to find out!

The playlist has been updated. Thank you so much for the comments and kudos. You guys don't even know how much I love to hear all your thoughts and opinions! You should scroll back and read through some of the amazing comments from the last few chapters. Someone wrote a beautiful message to Alec, and a few others have given some really great insights to the story. It means so much to me! You guys are awesome!! :)

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Magnus followed closely behind Jace’s shiny black Dodge Charger as they slowly made their way down the twisting mountain road and back through town, careful not to draw any suspicion. As both cars merged onto the dark ribbon of highway that would lead them away from Aspen, neither felt the desire to gaze back longingly through their rearview mirror. They were glad to be leaving, and grateful to Ragnor for staying behind to deal with the aftermath of what had just happened. Of course they knew they’d have to return eventually, this nightmare was far from over, but for now the goal was to put as much distance between themselves and Valentine’s dead body as possible.

Thinking of the horrors they’d left behind, Magnus was still in a state of shock. His pulse throbbed painfully against his temples causing his vision to blur, and his palms were so slick with sweat they slid clumsily against the leather wrapped steering wheel as he tried his best to keep the car between the white and yellow lines. He didn’t look at the traffic as it zoomed by, he only focused on the two red taillights of Jace’s car in front of him, knowing they would lead him back to the hospital and back to Alec. That was the only thing he cared about now.

Just a few miles into the journey Magnus zoned out, lulled by the monotonous roar of pavement underneath him. His mind slipped back in time until it was caught in a loop, replaying the same gruesome events of the night over and over again. He envisioned his father’s shocked expression when the gun had gone off, the expanding circle of blood at the center of his chest, and the crack of his head hitting the floor. It seemed like a dream, an eerie manifestation of the darkest part of his subconscious. One of those hidden desires that you never vocalize to anyone but you hold somewhere deep inside yourself, knowing if it ever came true the result would bring you immeasurable peace. It was almost impossible to comprehend that the visions he was seeing in his mind were actual memories. Magnus tightened his grip on the steering wheel and tried to refocus his thoughts on the present, but resisting the visions seemed futile.

What Magnus was beginning to slowly realize was that Valentine’s death had unlocked a set of invisible chains that had bound him to a life indebted. The sudden impact of one fateful bullet had laid open the shackles of his world-wearied flesh, finally setting him free. He didn’t even realize he’d started to cry until he felt the wetness on his cheeks being cooled by the car’s a/c. It left his skin icy and chilled. Reaching up to touch his own face, Magnus felt the tears had come from someone else. Not a stranger, but more like a long-lost friend, one he’d not seen in many years. This familiar person rising from the deep, having held their breath underwater for far too long, resurfaced to suck grateful gulps of frozen air into their watery lungs. Magnus recognized this younger, more optimistic version of himself. He’d last seen him back in Philadelphia so many years ago, the day he’d left to go in search of his rightful place in the world, only to find danger and betrayal lying in wait. It had been a long journey through muck and darkness, grief and pain, but he’d somehow found his way out. It was a miracle really, one he hadn’t dared to let himself hope for.

Magnus took a deep, cleansing breath and exhaled slowly in an attempt to calm himself. Where there had been sadness and despair he now felt lightness creeping in, right at the center of his body. A buoyancy that hadn’t been there in ages was steadily growing inside of him. It was beginning to replace the hopelessness that had enslaved him and he imaged this is what it must feel like to receive a death row pardon just moments before execution. Suddenly his life had a future again, and it wasn’t clouded in lies and corruption but was paved in second chances and new possibilities. He felt an overwhelming sense of relief coupled with an urgency to drive as fast as he could, longing to be
by Alec’s side.

After about an hour of driving Magnus noticed the Dodge Charger’s right turn signal had switched on. The exit for Glenwood Springs was just ahead so Jace must have remembered Ragnor’s instructions about disposing of the knife. Magnus followed him off of the highway and down the ramp, then into an immediate sharp right turn that took them onto a narrow two lane road headed east. Another few miles and Jace signaled to the right again, slowing into the parking lot of a trailhead that was completely abandoned this time of night.

The two cars parked side by side and Jace was the first to spring out. “You OK?” He asked Magnus with concern as soon as his feet hit the ground.

“I’m OK,” Magnus responded, his legs feeling a bit like Jell-O as he climbed out of his car with the kitchen knife in hand and slowly walked toward where Jace was standing.

“This way, I know where to go,” Jace instructed, heading toward the first trail marker using the flashlight on his iPhone to guide them.

The two walked carefully up a long winding dirt path, the cool night breeze tousling their hair and sending shivers over their exposed skin. They hadn’t dressed for a late night hike, and the cold was easily penetrating through their thin summer clothing. Plus the terrain was rough and it was difficult to see. Magnus tripped over a few roots and rocks along the way but somehow managed to stay on his feet. Jace blazed ahead, leading them onward and upward without a moment of hesitation.

Luckily they didn’t have to walk far before reaching the edge of the canyon. When it came into view Jace slowed first and Magnus quickly caught up to stand at his side. The full moon shone bright overhead illuminating the rocky precipice before them. Magnus inched forward, feeling slightly unnerved looking down the sheer cliff face into the canyon below.

“So, you just gonna toss it over?” Jace asked, leaning forward to peek over the edge.

“I guess so,” Magnus answered, wiping the knife across his pants legs to remove any fingerprints. It wasn’t likely anyone would ever find it, the canyon was deep with sharp crags jutting from the rock face. Plus Valentine had died from a bullet wound, so the knife was really of no consequence. The only thing it did was put Magnus and Valentine together at the scene, which he guessed could be enough to convict him, not that he wanted to risk finding out.

“You want me to do it?” Jace offered, noticing Magnus was hesitant.

“No, I got it,” Magnus said, his voice flat and lifeless, such a stark contrast from his usual melodic tone. He inched forward a bit more, the knife held firmly in his grasp. His heart fluttered like a dove’s wings beating against his ribcage and his stomach tightened as he felt a wave of nausea send the sting of acid against the back of his throat.

“Who was he?” Jace asked bluntly, trying to be supportive but at the same time dying of curiosity. He’d never been the best at filtering himself but right now the desire to know the whole story outweighed his ability to mind his own business. “I heard you say the word “family” to Ragnor, back at the house… and I guess, well, I just assumed he was somehow related to you?”

Magnus stepped forward and hurled the knife over the edge of the canyon, a low grunt escaping through his exhaled exertion. It spun end over end, the blade glinting in the moonlight, until it was completely gone from sight. “He was my father,” Magnus confirmed, his voice full of bitter resentment as his eyes pierced through the darkness like focused steel.
“Shit, I’m sorry,” Jace replied, not really sure what he was sorry about since the guy looked like he had been a grade-A asshole, not to mention homicidal. But he guessed Magnus was probably feeling pretty torn up inside over it. He noticed, after having let go of the knife, Magnus seemed to be swaying minutely right at the canyon’s edge, his face locked in a vacant expression. “You sure you’re OK?”

“Yeah,” Magnus sighed, his eyes shifting focus from the dark horizon down to the bottom of the canyon. “Nobody is going to find it down there. It’s gone for good.”

Jace and Magnus stood silent for a moment as if waiting to see if the canyon would spit the knife back at them like a boomerang, rejecting it from its hiding place. But nothing happened.

“Well, I guess that’s it,” Jace surmised, indicating now would be a good time to leave.

Magnus didn’t respond right away, his thoughts were still on the knife and how it had looked in his father’s hand when the weapon was poised to strike. It was in that millisecond of time, when it seemed all hope was lost, that he’d pictured Alec’s face and his perfect little lopsided smile. In that moment there was nothing in the world he cared more to lose, and nothing else he wanted to live for. He knew he would do anything now to win back Alec’s trust, as well as his love, no matter how long it took. He’d have to find a way to make things right again and repair whatever damage had been done. There was no other option.

“Thank you,” Magnus muttered, his dark eyes flashing with the reflection of the moon’s glow as he blinked rapidly against the threat of stinging tears. “I couldn’t have done this alone. I couldn’t have even left the house without your help.”

“You never give yourself enough credit,” Jace corrected him, reaching to pat Magnus firmly on the back. “You stood up to that monster, I saw it with my own eyes. That’s more than I could’ve done to my father. More than most anyone could’ve done. That takes real courage man… real courage.”

Magnus shook his head side to side, looking down at his feet. “I should have done it a long time ago Jace. Before I let him ruin my life, and so many other lives. Sebastian, Ragnor, you, Alec, I allowed him to hurt so many people that I care about.”

Jace shook his head in disagreement. “It’s hard to see our parents for who they truly are. I mean, we’re taught to love and respect them no matter what, right? So sometimes we don’t see the damage being done until it’s too late. Especially when it’s being done to us. And you can’t blame yourself for everything that happened, you’re a victim in all of this as much as any of us. You have to know, you are not the bad guy.”

Magnus thought back to his strained dealings with Jace’s father, Michael Wayland, and he knew Jace’s own personal struggles put truth behind his words. He suddenly felt a kinship with Jace that he hadn’t felt before and it compelled him to want to tell the whole truth, once and for all. “Jace, that man back there… my father… he was Valentine Morgenstern.”

Jace flinched back as if Magnus’ words had stung him, his eyes widening in shock. “What?”

“Valentine Morgenstern was my father,” Magnus repeated solemnly.

“So that means-”

“Yes,” Magnus interrupted. “Sebastian was my brother.”

“Oh my God, Magnus, I… I don’t know what to say!” Jace struggled, his mouth agape, not able to find any words.
Magnus kept his eyes downcast, the shame of his family name always making him cringe with embarrassment. He hated how the word *Morgenstern* made him feel like damaged goods. Even with Valentine’s death he still felt his tainted blood burning through his veins. It was inescapable. “I found out when I was 14 years old, and my life has been an absolute nightmare ever since.”

“And Alec knows?” Jace sputtered as he reached one hand up to the long strands of his hair that were blowing into his eyes and smoothed them back up on top of his head.

“That my father was the prince of hell? Yes, he knows.”

“Jesus, it all makes sense now! I mean, I couldn’t understand why on earth you would want to help that asshole, uhh sorry, I mean Sebastian, but you know what I mean, even as his teacher I couldn’t figure out why you would be so dead set on helping him with his career. But he was your brother… I get it now. Of course.”

“I tried to do what I thought was the right thing,” Magnus replied, wanting to find words to explain his decisions. “I thought I could help my brother, thought I could save him, even change him if I really tried hard enough. But he’d spent his whole life with Valentine, closed up in his house of horrors, away from any decent people who could provide a positive influence in his life. His mind had been corrupted with hatred and lies from the day he was born. I couldn’t erase the damage that had been done. He was just beyond saving.”

Jace felt incredibly sad hearing Magnus speak about his brother’s past. Although he was an only child himself he imaged it must have been terrible watching someone who’s literally part of you suffer that kind of fate. “Hey man, I’m glad you told me. I know it couldn’t have been easy. But I want you to know you are nothing like them Magnus, you are a good guy! I know we’ve had our differences, but that’s mostly because I’m just jealous of how fucking amazing you are. And what you and Alec have, it’s so special. It’s what everyone searches their whole life to find. And I know you’re gonna come out of this OK. Just take it one day at a time and you’ll get through it.”

A ringing from Magnus’ pocket disrupted their conversation. Magnus pulled out his phone and saw Ragnor’s number, his heart dropped.

“Ragnor! Are you OK?”

“Magnus, yes, I’m fine.”

“Thank God. Where are you?”

“I’m still in Aspen, I’m on your father’s plane. The police never showed up at the house. Where are you and the Wayland boy now?”

“We stopped and did what you said. We’re just getting back on the road now.”

“Good, good. And Wayland, can we trust him?”

Magnus turned to Jace who was staring back at him with a questioning look. “Yes, I think we can.”

“Good, I’m going to be leaving here shortly. I have them both with me.”

“Both? How?”

“It wasn’t easy, but I managed to reach the funeral home after hours and arrange transportation to the airport. All the paperwork is done and he’ll be buried back at home... next to his mom.”
Magnus felt his heart lurch again, thinking of his own mother. “And my father?”

“Luckily I had already procured incriminating evidence against those two thugs your brother hired to attack Mr. Lightwood. Needless to say they were both more than willing to come help me.”

“Won’t people question what happened to him?”

“Don’t worry, the staff thinks he’s still in Vienna, so that buys me a few days to come up with a story. Your father had no shortage of enemies you know, and to my knowledge not a single friend. Plus you’re his only living relative, so by the time anyone else raises concerns I can have his remains accidentally discovered in some remote desert. Believe me, nobody will be surprised.”

“Ragnor, I… I don’t know what to say.”

“Don’t say anything, just know I have everything under control. As the executor of your father’s estate I’ll keep the household running and the staff happily employed until you decide what you want to do with the house and the company. I have spent my life serving this family and that isn’t going to change now.”

Magnus’ heart was nearly ready to burst. Ragnor had saved his life more than once tonight and there would never be enough words to thank him for all that he’d done.

“You tell Mr. Lightwood hello from me when you see him alright?” Ragnor’s voice was strained, choking back his emotional goodbye.

“I will,” Magnus managed to squeeze out as his throat tightened.

“Remember, true love is always worth fighting for,” Ragnor added. “You two take care of each other.”

Before Magnus could even say goodbye he heard a click and the call ended. He stood there looking at his phone feeling Jace’s eyes boring into the back of his head.

“Is everything OK?” Jace asked anxiously, worried Magnus had bad news.

“That was Ragnor, the police didn’t come. He has both bodies on the plane headed back to LA. It’s over.”

After driving through the night Magnus and Jace stopped just outside of Denver to finally get something to eat. Magnus hadn’t had a bite in two days plus he desperately needed to change out of his blood spattered clothes. He hadn’t even noticed the tiny spots of red until he was under the bright lights of the restaurant. Luckily he had a bag of clean clothes with him, thanks to Ragnor, and the thought of his kindness made Magnus’ chest ache for his dearest friend. Where would he be right now without this one man’s selfless dedication? He shuttered to think.

“Ready to go?” Jace asked, digging his keys from his front pants pocket.

Magnus nodded, he was desperate to get to the hospital. His increasing anxiety over the fact that the Lightwoods were planning to take Alec home today had him moving at a frantic pace. The sun was just beginning to rise, painting the sky a dusty bluish gray, as he tossed his duffel bag back into the
trunk of his Maserati. “I just hope we aren’t too late.”

Jace could tell Magnus was nervous and he was feeling just as anxious to get back to the hospital himself. Worrying he’d abandoned Clary with Alec’s less than enjoyable parents for far too long, which she definitely didn’t deserve. It was a strange and new instinct for Jace to feel so concerned about someone other than himself. He’d lived most of his life in a perpetual state of self-preservation due to having grown up with a very controlling and manipulative father, and no mother or siblings to help share the burden. His mother had died in childbirth and his father had never remarried. Although he’d introduced Jace to a string of girlfriends over the years, each one as stunningly beautiful as the last and barely older than Jace himself, he’d continued to remain single. When Jace had left for college it had been a welcome reprieve from life at home, and now that he had graduated more than anything he just wanted to build his future far away from his father’s influence. He guessed that was why he was so interested in forming the quartet, it seemed like the perfect opportunity. But now that that dream was over, he’d have to go back to square one. Pulling out his phone he sent a quick text to Clary letting her know they would be there soon. Her immediate response was a smiley face and a “drive safe” which made his heart flutter. She was really too good for him.

Stepping off the elevator onto Alec’s floor Magnus felt the urge to run. He was so close now he could literally feel his body being pulled toward Alec’s room like a magnet. He was so determined to get there he almost didn’t see Clary standing in the hall in front of them.

“Clary,” Jace sighed with a grateful exhale, rushing into her arms like he’d just traveled across a vast desert to return to her.

“You’re shaking! What happened,” Clary exclaimed, not expecting to see Jace in such a state.

“Long story,” Jace muttered against the welcoming scent of her soft red hair. “We’ll fill you in later.”

“Magnus, wait,” Clary called to Magnus as he continued to walk away. “He’s alone in there, but you don’t have much time. Robert and Maryse have already ordered the nurses to bring a wheelchair right away. They plan to leave as soon as the attending physician signs off on his discharge papers.”

Magnus heard her words but didn’t respond. He kept right on walking toward Alec’s room knowing there was nothing that would stop him now. Not the doctors or nurses, not even the Lightwoods. He was going to Alec and God help anyone who tried to stand in his way.

“Good luck,” Jace added, feeling he’d brought Magnus as far as he could, now it was up to him to close the remaining distance.

Magnus’ heart was hammering out of his chest with such a violent force he could barely breathe. Every step toward Alec’s room felt like three steps back as he jogged down the seemingly endless hallway. It was like one of those dreams where you’re running but you can’t ever get to where you want to go, and your legs feel heavy like they’ve been strapped to concrete blocks. It wasn’t until he could finally place the palm of his hand against Alec’s door that he realized only one final barrier existed between his old life and a possible future with the man he loved. A future he never thought he’d have, and didn’t believe he deserved, but still wanted so desperately. He laid his other hand atop the door handle and let out a long, ragged exhale. “This is it,” he whispered to himself, praying this
wasn’t about to be a goodbye. He knew he couldn’t let the Lightwoods take Alec away, he wouldn’t survive another loss today. He closed his eyes and turned the handle slowly, then pushed open the door and revealed a flooding stream of morning sunlight that almost knocked him over.

“You’re back!” Alec gasped aloud from his hospital bed, his face a mask of shocked surprise.

“Alexander,” Magnus cried, rushing into the stream of bright light that washed across Alec’s bed, illuminating his face like an angel. “I’m here my darling, I’m here.”

Raising both arms toward Magnus, Alec’s face softened, transforming from a look of shock into one of utter relief. “I-I’m so glad.”

Magnus melted into Alec’s outstretched arms, wrapping him in a loving embrace. Careful not to squeeze his injured ribs, he held onto his shoulders for dear life, so thankful to be reunited.

“I…I didn’t think I’d see you,” Alec confessed, his voice quavering with emotion. “After what happened, I thought you were gone for good.”

“I’m so sorry I had to leave without saying something, I knew you were with your parents and I just had to go as quickly as possible. But I came back as fast as I could and I’ll never leave you again, I promise.” He buried his face into Alec’s shoulder, breathing him in. There was no stopping the flow of tears, after everything Magnus had been through over the last 24 hours he was coming apart at the seams. Unable to hold back, he let all the fear he’d been bottling up unleash, he had officially reached his breaking point.

“Shhh, it’s OK, you’re OK,” Alec repeated over and over as he smoothed his hand over Magnus’ trembling back and kissed the side of his head. He’d never seen him like this, shivering and shaking like a frightened child. He was quite literally scared to death and Alec knew something terrible must have happened.

“It was awful,” Magnus whimpered, his voice muted against Alec’s shoulder. “Sebastian—“

“I know, Jace told me.”

Magnus pulled himself back so that he could look into Alec’s eyes as he spoke. “When I got home, Ragnor was there… and my father.”


“Yes, they were both there… waiting for me.” Magnus’ voice was terror stricken and Alec was afraid to hear what was coming next.

“My father said he killed him, he killed Sebastian. He admitted it right to my face!”

“His own son?” Alec stammered, unable to comprehend what he was hearing.

“And he said that he had… he had done it for me. Killed my brother for me. And when I stood up to him, and told him he was wrong… he… he said he had killed my mom and that he was going to kill me too!”

“What? Oh my God!” Alec’s jaw fell loose from its hinge. It was an absolutely unbelievable turn of events and so much worse than anything he’d been prepared to hear.

“He was going to stab me, he had a knife, and he would have killed me, but Ragnor shot him! He shot him and saved my life!”
Alec didn’t know what to say he was so shocked, he simply grabbed Magnus back into his arms and squeezed him as tightly as his ribs would allow, ignoring the searing pain. “I can’t believe this. Thank God you’re alright.”

“When I thought I was going to die the only thing I could think of was you, and how I’d never see you again,” Magnus stammered, his arms clutching tightly to Alec’s back like someone holding a life preserver in the middle of a stormy sea.

Alec rocked Magnus gently from side to side, patting and stroking his back, trying desperately to calm him. “I’m here, you’re safe. He can’t hurt you ever again, I promise.”

“I’m so sorry,” Magnus replied through heavy sobs.

“Shhh, don’t.”

“I’m so sorry for the mess I made, for the danger I put you in, for everything. I don’t know how you’ll ever forgive me.”

“It’s over now… it’s all over.”

Magnus shook his head. “You’re here in this hospital because of me.”

“It’s all in the past, they’re both gone and I’m here… I’m here and I love you.” Alec could never have been prepared to see someone as strong and fearless as Magnus Bane, a person he had idolized and admired for over a decade, curled up in his arms absolutely terrified beyond belief. Seeing him like this, so broken and vulnerable, had rocked him to his core and opened a floodgate of protective instincts that made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end. It was a good thing Valentine Morgenstern was dead, because Alec knew he would have killed him.

Magnus pulled away again and faced Alec, his tear streaked face staring heartbreakingly up at him, his lips quivering. “I don’t deserve your love… or anyone’s.”

“Please, don’t say that.”

“I never wanted you to see this terrible, ugly side of me… of my past. My father’s blood runs through my veins, just like it did in my brother’s… and I didn’t want you to know… I was too ashamed.”

“You are nothing like him,” Alec strongly insisted, refusing to let Magnus continue to beat himself up over this. “Nothing at all. You’re kind and loving and generous, you’re the best person I’ve ever known.”

“How can you say that after the lies I’ve told?”

“Are you lying to me now?”

“No,” Magnus sighed. “And I swear on my life I will never lie to you about anything ever again. I want to tell you everything about my life and every part of my past. Everything I’ve been through, all of it. I trust you with my life Alexander and every bit of darkness inside of me. These demons that tear at my insides and try to keep away any chance I have for happiness. I’m so tired of living like this, of letting fear and anger steal every bit of joy from my life. I just want it to end.”

“You’re strong and you can do anything you set your mind to,” Alec said with encouragement. “And I believe that together we can make it through this.”
“But your parents, they’re taking you home.”

“My home is wherever you are,” Alec professed, bringing his uninjured hand up to cup the side of Magnus’ face, wiping the tears away gently with the edge of his thumb. “If you’ll have me.”

“Have you?” Magnus replied in awe. “There is nothing else in the world I could ever want more than you. You are everything to me… everything.”

Alec leaned forward and pressed his lips against Magnus’, sealing their declarations of love for each other with a heartbreakingly tender kiss. The taste of salty tears stung Alec’s lips as he moved his hand from the side of Magnus’ face to the back of his head, winding his fingers into the silky strands of his hair, to pull him deeper into him. Magnus wrapped his arms around Alec’s neck fully surrendering to his affection. His exhausted body floated like a cloud that was drifting right up to the heavens. Relishing the familiar taste and exquisite softness of one another’s lips as their breath intertwined. It was just like coming home again.

“I love you,” Magnus muttered against Alec’s open mouth as they took a moment to catch his breath. “With all that I am and all that I hope to be.”

“I love you too,” Alec replied, touching his forehead to Magnus’, feeling so grateful to have him back literally from the jaws of death. “Just the way you are.”

“Finally!” Maryse Lightwood blurted out, seeing Jace and Clary standing in the middle of the hallway. “I was hoping you’d arrive before Alec’s discharge so I’d have a chance to organize his things before we go. Where are you parked?”

Jace suddenly remembered he’d been sent back to Aspen to retrieve all of Alec’s belongings as well as his cello, but of course he hadn’t even thought about that, he was too busy fleeing a crime scene. Now he frantically searched his mind for an excuse as to why he’d returned empty handed.

“Are you in the garage? Or pulled up out front?” Maryse continued, obviously in a rush to go.

“I, uhh,” Jace stuttered, unable to come up with a valid excuse. “I’m in the garage.”
“Perfect, so are we. I’ll send Robert with you and you two can transfer everything from your car to ours.” Maryse pulled out her phone and began typing a message to her husband as Jace exchanged worried looks with Clary unsure of what to do.

“Mrs. Lightwood,” Clary stated very calmly. “I think we still have plenty of time before Alec is cleared to leave, why don’t we go down to the cafeteria and get some breakfast. I’m sure you could use some coffee at least.”

“I’m fine, thank you. I just want to get Alec’s things loaded in the car quickly so we can follow behind the ambulance that’s transporting him to the airfield. I’ve gone to great lengths to cover every detail and quite frankly, I am sick to death of this hospital. I hope I never set foot in here, or in the state of Colorado, ever again for as long as I live!”

Maryse was nothing if not dramatic and Jace knew they were going to have a hell of a time keeping her out of Alec’s room. But he also knew Magnus needed time to talk to Alec alone so he’d have to find a way to stall her. Unfortunately before he could even formulate a plan she immediately set off again at a clipped pace.

“Wait!” Clary exclaimed, startling Maryse with her booming outcry. “You can’t go in there!”

“What are you talking about? Of course I can,” Maryse replied, giving them a bitter look of animosity.

“Jace and I… we uhhh… we really wanted to talk to you before you go.”

“What?” Maryse hissed venomously, clearly annoyed at being delayed.

“Well…” Clary struggled to find something to say. “I wanted to tell you that I uhhh, I- I live in Manhattan. So I thought maybe I could be of some help to you, and to Alec. Like if you need anyone to run errands or check on Alec during the day. I’d be more than happy to help.”

Maryse looked at Clary skeptically as if she could tell she was trying to stall her. “That’s very nice of you, but I’ve got everything more than covered at home. Now if you’ll excuse me.”

Clary turned to Jace with a beseeching look and he lunged forward to grab Maryse by the arm. “You can’t go in there!”

“What is the meaning of this?” Maryse snapped, jerking her arm out of Jace’s grasp. “I don’t know what you two think you’re trying to accomplish here, but I am going to go now and check on my son! I suggest you both stand aside or I’ll have to call security!”

Jace took a step back, raising both palms innocently. “Hey, relax. Let’s not lose our heads.”

Maryse raised one finger and pointed threateningly at Jace. “You wait right here for my husband! I want my son’s things out of your car and then I want you gone!”

Jace and Clary knew they’d done all they could to stall Maryse, but unless they wanted to risk being forcibly removed from the premises they’d have to let her go. All they could do now was watch her stalk off down the hall toward Alec’s room, hoping they’d given Magnus enough time to say what he’d needed to say.
Magnus was curled up next to Alec on his hospital bed listening to the sound of his beating heart. “I understand your parents desire to take you home and nurse you back to health. But may I offer an alternative?”

“Why do I get the feeling you’re going to offer it regardless of what I say,” Alec chuckled, the corner of his mouth lifting into his signature crooked grin.

Magnus took hold of Alec’s uninjured hand and interlaced their fingers. “I want to be the one to take care of you.”

“Magnus, I—“

“Just listen,” Magnus interrupted before Alec could continue. “We can go back to Aspen until you recover then leave Colorado together and go anywhere you want. New York, Paris, San Francisco, or someplace totally new. I’ve got all the time and money in the world, and I know I can make you happy. Plus you already love my cooking and I promise you my bedside manner is even more impressive.”

Alec smiled remembering their first date and how Magnus had prepared the most amazing feast for him. He had no doubt in his mind he could take care of him better than anyone. And as for his bedside manner, well, just the idea of curling up next to Magnus every night, sleeping in his arms, made his heart ache with longing. But the thought of hobbling around helpless with an unusable hand and busted ribs, keeping Magnus distracted from his brilliant career, worried him. He didn’t want to be a burden to him now. “The summer is almost over,” Alec replied. “You’ll be back on the road with Kronos soon.”

“I told you weeks ago, I’ve grown tired of life on the road. I don’t care about performing or about anything at all, except helping you recover and being right by your side every step of the way. You’re the only thing that matters to me Alexander, there isn’t anything else I will ever want but to be with you.”

“But you built your dream home here,” Alec reminded him, knowing Magnus had put so much of himself into every detail of the design.

“I don’t care about the house, we can build our own dream, together. Anywhere you want to go, anywhere in the world. Just please… please don’t leave here without me.”

“You again!” Maryse exploded, coming into Alec’s room finding Magnus curled up in her son’s arms.

Magnus was startled by her abrupt entrance and leapt up, standing to face Maryse as she barged into the room.

“Mrs. Lightwood,” Magnus replied with a nervous tone, feeling caught red handed. “Lovely to see you again.”
“Well I certainly can’t say the same! I don’t know what you think you’ve come here to do, but we are taking Alec home today. Back to New York and away from all of this craziness for good!”

“Mom, don’t.” Alec warned her, angrily narrowing his eyes.

“No Alec, this man needs to leave. I didn’t want to tell you but I received a call from the police last night, informing me that your attacker had been found and he was this man’s student! Which means, Mr. Bane, I’m putting you partially to blame for what happened to my son! Whoever this deranged psychopath was, he was under your tutelage! Which makes you an accessory to attempted murder! So we are leaving here at once and I don’t want you anywhere near our family ever again!”

“Mom! That’s enough!” Alec bellowed, mortified by his mother’s behavior.

Magnus slunk back from Maryse’s hateful words, feeling their venom sink deep into his unhealed wounds. Everything she was saying he’d already been feeling for days, and he didn’t have the nerve to even try to disagree with her. He fell back against the edge of Alec’s bed defeated.

“Magnus had nothing to do with the attack!” Alec countered. “You can’t just come in here and start flinging accusations at him!”

“Well, Chief Garway thought he seemed a bit suspicious, and I agree with him. I can tell by his eyes that he’s hiding something!” Maryse accused, crossing her arms defiantly.

Magnus averted his eyes to the ground, deeply hurt by Maryse’s observations.

Alec saw the pained look on Magnus’ face and finally snapped. “That’s where you’re wrong!” He roared, sitting up as tall as he could in his bed with one hand braced against his aching ribs. “I’m the one who’s been hiding something and it’s time for you to know the truth! I don’t live at Hendel House, and I haven’t for weeks! I live with Magnus and we are in love! So the only home I will be going to is our home that we live in together!”

Maryse’s mouth fell open with utter disbelief, clearly unprepared to hear the extent of her son’s relationship to the man standing in front of her. “Well Alec, that’s fine, if that’s the way you want it, your father and I will go home and leave you here to continue ruining your life! Which you seem to be hell bent on doing! I have had it up to here with your disrespectful attitude and I’m not going to sit by and watch you make the biggest mistake of your life with this… this… this celebrity!”

Turning on her heel with a flourish Maryse threw open the door and walked out leaving Alec and Magnus speechless. Her words still ringing in the air.

“Well, that was one way to do it,” Magnus marveled, still staring at the closed door, feeling shocked by Alec’s blunt admission.

“She’ll get over it,” Alec replied. “She’s just not used to losing control.”

“Did you mean what you said, about it being our home?” Magnus asked, turning back to face Alec, his eyebrows raised with shy curiosity.

“Well, I feel more at home there than I’ve ever felt anywhere to be honest. That’s where my things are, and where Stella is… and that’s the one place where I can truly be myself. With you.”

“You’re going to make me cry for the hundredth time today,” Magnus gushed, hurrying back to Alec’s side and taking him into his arms once again.

Alec nestled into the warmth of Magnus’ embrace, his faced pressed against the soft, smooth skin of
“Alexander hurry or we’re going to miss them!” Magnus shouted down from the top of the stairs, waiting impatiently on the rooftop for Alec to come and join him.

“I’m coming, I’m coming,” Alec replied, taking the stairs two at a time, careful not to spill the hidden contents of his inside jacket pocket as he sprinted up the narrow metal staircase.

Magnus was breathless with anticipation, having timed a special surprise for Alec at the exact moment the 4th of July fireworks were set to go off. He’d been planning it for months, careful not to give Alec any indication of what was coming, as well as going to great lengths to keep it a secret. Now the moment was mere minutes away and Magnus wanted everything to be perfect.

“I’m here babe,” Alec announced from the top step, struggling to catch his breath.

“Finally!” Magnus exclaimed, handing Alec one of the two flutes of champagne he held in his hands while reaching up to kiss him sweetly on the cheek. “Come over to the railings, that’s where we’ll have the best fireworks view.”

As the two walked hand in hand toward the edge of the roof Alec felt a sudden déjà vu remembering the first time he’d ever seen the view from up here. It was on a warm summer night very much like this one. The lights from the city below were twinkling like stars and the Benedict music tent was glowing in the distance as the faintest sound of the 1812 Overture could be heard wafting on the breeze. Alec reached up to adjust his suit jacket, Magnus having insisted they dress up, and his heart was beating out of his chest.

“Before the show starts I actually have a surprise for you,” Alec confessed, shakily setting his glass down on the railing so he could reach into his suit jacket pocket.

“Oh! You do?” Magnus exclaimed, suddenly very concerned his carefully made plans were about to be disrupted.

“I didn’t want to say anything, you know, to jinx it. But I think now is the perfect time to fill you in on something I’ve been working on.”

Magnus’ eyes were fixed on Alec’s hand as he held his breath. Alec slowly slid a long, white envelope out from behind his lapel and handed it to Magnus with a flourish.

“For me?” Magnus asked, having absolutely no idea what this could possibly be.

“Yes, open it!” Alec said with a smile, his eyes twinkling in the moonlight.

Magnus carefully untucked the envelope’s flap and pulled what appeared to be a letter from inside.
His heart racing, he opened the sheet of folded paper and began to read. His eyes boggled as they rapidly moved from side to side reading its contents.

“Alexander!”

“Yeeees,” Alec said, drawing out his yes into a long tease with a devilish smile across his face. He enjoyed watching Magnus freak out since he rarely was able to ever surprise him with anything.

“You’ve been accepted to the masters program to UC Berkeley! With a full assistantship! This is amazing!” Magnus was completely surprised, having no idea Alec had anything related to schooling in the works. “But—but you said you didn’t want to go to grad school?”

“Yeah, well, that was before I spent six months with my hand out of commission. Now it seems like the best idea. So I can try to get back to where I was, you know, before.”

“Your playing is beautiful, and getting better every day.” Magnus assured him, reaching to take hold of Alec’s left hand and rubbing his thumb gently across the thin white scars left behind by the career-saving surgery.

“I know, but this will really whip me into shape, plus I know you’re dying to get back to the Bay Area. You never shut up about the lack of good seafood here.”

Magnus rolled his eyes. “But I didn’t think you were listening.”

“I always listen,” Alec teased. “Sometimes I just pretend like I don’t.”

“I don’t know what to say… are you sure this is what you want?”

“I know this is what I need, I can’t push myself hard enough here. I need the structure and the competition if I ever have a chance of making it.”

“You can do it, of that I am quite sure.” Magnus stated confidently.

“You haven’t gotten to the best part yet. Keep reading!”

Magnus’ eyes went back to the letter and he continued reading where he’d left off. It wasn’t but a few seconds until he sucked in a gasp of breath once again receiving a shock. “You didn’t!”

“I did! And Dean Herondale said they would be thrilled to have you back as a teacher, or mentor, or performer, or in any capacity that you are interested in,” Alec said with a smile, feeling very proud of himself.

“What did you tell them? That we were a package deal?”

“I told them the truth, that I wouldn’t be able to take them up on their offer unless my boyfriend came with me.”

Just then the sizzling crack of the first firework exploded over the town, almost at eye level to where Alec and Magnus were standing. It sparkled bright gold then dissolved into a shimmering trail of gold dust that fell gently from the sky like snowflakes. It illuminated the rooftop with a golden light that was nothing short of truly magnificent.

“I think you misspoke,” Magnus replied, discretely shifting one hand to his pocket, ready to reveal his own surprise.

“Did I? In what way?” Alec asked confusedly, turning his head to give Magnus a suspicious side-
“You said boyfriend when you should have said fiancé,” Magnus corrected him, pulling out a small box and flipping open the lid to reveal a shining silver ring. “I hate to one-up your surprise my darling, but this one has been in the works for quite some time and I can’t allow something as trivial as your academic future to stand in the way of this moment.”

“Magnus,” Alec sighed, staring at the ring in stunned amazement as another brilliant firework erupted behind them, this time in a blaze of fiery red and cobalt blue.

“Alexander Gideon Lightwood, you are the greatest joy to my heart and the sweetest music to my soul. I knew from the first time our eyes met, and the world around us melted away, that my life would never be the same again. You are the epitome of all that is good and pure in this world and a shining light of hope even in my darkest hour. You’ve helped me heal my past, you’ve filled my present with love and laughter, and you’ve made me believe that happily ever after can truly exist. I know without a doubt you are the one great love of my life. There is nothing more I could ever want but to hold you in my arms for the rest of my days and try my very best to be the man that you deserve.” Magnus then dropped to one knee at Alec’s feet, holding tight to his hand and never breaking eye contact. “So I ask you now, with all the love I have to give, will you please marry me?”

A radiant beaming smile of pure bliss blossomed across Alec’s face just as another burst of gold exploded in the sky above them. “Yes!” He replied without a moment of hesitation. “Of course I’ll marry you!” And he bent down and swept Magnus into his arms squeezing him against the full length of his body as tightly as he could. Magnus returned the same joyous enthusiasm, clutching to Alec’s frame, molding their two bodies into one under a shower of sparks that included every color of the rainbow.

As their bodies pulled apart and their eyes met Alec saw Magnus’ face was wet with tears, and he knew his were just the same. Gently he reached up to cup his face, and smoothing away the falling tears placed a tender kiss on each cheek. “I love you so much,” Alec murmured softly. “You are all those things to me as well, even though I don’t always know the right words to say it. But I feel like the luckiest man in the world to have the chance to call you my husband one day. There’s nothing that would make me happier.”

“Mr. and Mr. Lightwood-Bane?” Magnus suggested, his eyes glittering with the mixture of tears and the reflection of fireworks. “Has a nice ring to it don’t you think?”

“Sounds perfect,” Alec cooed, leaning in to fervently kiss him once again.

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Magnus and Alec lounged together on the rooftop’s outdoor couch, wrapped in each other’s arms, their bodies intertwined, gazing up into the velvet blanket of diamond encrusted stars. Alec was on his back with his newly ringed hand atop his chest and Magnus, nestled in the crook of his shoulder, was absentmindedly tracing Alec’s ring with one finger. The stones reflected the flickering flame of the fire pit light which bathed the soft, contented smiles on both their face.

“I’ve got to call Iz,” Alec muttered sappily, still on cloud 9 from Magnus’ proposal. “She’s gonna
“Well, she might not be that surprised actually,” Magnus admitted sheepishly. “She helped me with the ring design when she came to visit last month.”

“Ha!” Alec laughed. “Damn you two are sneaky. I thought all those huddled talks were about furniture and shoes!”

“Well, there was plenty of that too. But I daresay she’s got the wedding half planned by now, and thankfully she has impeccable taste.”

“Oh no, that could be very dangerous,” Alec grimaced, knowing his sister would want to plan the most extravagant, embarrassing, over-the-top wedding ever seen. She’d been collecting bridal magazines since she was old enough to read and kept them piled in the corner of her old bedroom at home nearly touching the ceiling.

“Don’t worry, I gave her a budget and a few design parameters, she knows what we like. Plus we’ll have final say of course.”

“I guess you two were betting I’d say yes?” Alec teased, lazily twirling soft tufts of Magnus’ hair between his thumb and forefinger.

“She was on board for plan B as well, kidnapping you and driving to Vegas. But luckily we won’t have to resort to that.”

Alec let out a deep belly laugh. “I always knew you two would hit it off.”

“You’d have been proud, I even called Robert. And let me tell you that was an interesting phone call indeed.”

“Oh God, what did he say?” Alec moaned. “Do I even want to know?”

“He was congenial and wished us his best, but said he wasn’t planning on telling your mother until she finished remodeling their kitchen. Apparently she’s still in denial that you’re not coming back to New York and tells anyone who will listen that you’ll be waltzing back through the door any day now.”

“We’ll tell her tomorrow,” Alec grumbled, ready to pop the bubble of his mother’s fantasy world in the hopes that she’d finally stop embarrassing him. Or at least do a better job of faking it.

“Well, I admit I’m hoping you’ll flaunt that ring to everyone we know, I’m very proud of it!” Magnus boasted.

Alec held the ring up to the firelight to inspect it closer. He noticed there was some sort of pattern on the band as well as stones catching the light.

“You see those engravings there,” Magnus pointed. “Those five lines represent the lines of the staff, and the stones are black diamonds, they represent notes along the staff that wrap all the way around, see?”

Alec could see the lines and he followed the movement of the stones trying to identify a melody.

“It’s the first two measures of the Brahms I was playing the night you told me you loved me for the first time. Remember?”
“Of course I remember, I could never forget that night,” Alec murmured low. “It was the first time for a lot of things.”

Magnus smiled knowingly. "That was the best night of my life, well up until tonight when you said you’d marry me, so I wanted you to carry a piece of it with you. That way in hard times you can look down and remember that night and how magical it was.”

Alec sighed and bent down to seek out Magnus’ lips. He gently lifted him higher up onto his chest so they were face to face, then pulled him close to cover his mouth with slow, languid kisses.

“Mmm, on that note, I think we should go downstairs now and do our best to recreate that moment. Because as handsome as you look in this suit it’ll look even better on the floor,” Magnus suggested, his eyes smoldering.

“Why Mr. Lightwood-Bane, are you trying to seduce me?” Alec taunted him with a sexy grin.

“Ah, ah, ah,” Magnus playfully scolded him. “You can’t call me that just quite yet my darling, for now you can refer to me as my dearest fiancé or my adoring husband-to-be.”

“How about I just call you mine?” Alec stated with the most sincere and loving expression, his eyes ablaze, laying claim to the man he loved.

“Oh Alexander,” Magnus replied, feeling his heart swell to bursting with love for this plainspoken man who could permeate the depths of his soul with the simplest of phrase. “Forever thine, forever mine, forever us… always.”

The two men held tight to each other under the dark and infinite night sky, their dreams of love being composed into one exquisite Bitter Sweet Symphony of life together.

The End.

Chapter End Notes

It's over! :*(

Thank you all so much for sticking with me through this story for ONE YEAR! I can't believe it has been that long since I posted the first chapter. This fic has been a huge part of my life for the last 12 months and I really and truly hope you enjoyed the end of the
story. The love I have for Magnus and Alec is really overwhelming at times and you
guys have all been an important part of this journey with me. A very special thank you
to Lion (@mundanelion on twitter) who made this absolutely amazing and beautiful
piece of art for the final chapter, as well as the art for chapters 1 and 6. Please follow her
on Twitter and also IG: mundanelion and Tumblr: mundanelion because her fanart is
amazing and she deserves tons of appreciation for her work! :)

If you enjoyed this story I have already started a new multi-chapter Malec fic called
"The Shop Around the Corner" so please check it out! Chapter 4 will be coming soon!

Thank you so much for the comments and kudos! If you don't have an ao3 account you
can talk to me on Twitter: @malec_immortal

I can't believe it's over!!!! Thank you again so much!!! XOXOXOXOXOXO
Bonus Chapter: Dreaming of a White Christmas

Chapter Summary

Surprise!! :) This is a special bonus chapter as a way to say MERRY CHRISTMAS and HAPPY HOLIDAYS to all my wonderful readers. You guys have been such an important part of my life this year, I can't even thank you enough for all the support you've given me. I'm truly grateful. I hope this revisit to Alec and Magnus from Bitter Sweet Symphony brings you holiday joy. I have missed them so much my heart is just bursting with love for these two.

Thanks again, and enjoy this very special Christmas Eve....

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Christmas Eve 2017

A frosty winter sunset fell upon Red Mountain, casting a long evening shadow across the city of Aspen below. The sky, drenched in pink and purple hues, reflected against the thick blanket of fresh snowfall causing it to glow bluish-white as if illuminated from beneath by some hidden heavenly aura. The air was still, with not a breath of wind, and soft, downy snowflakes slowly drifted from the sky like fluffy angel’s wings onto the pale, wintry landscape. Alec stood alone in the living room window watching it snow while the sweet sound of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio wafted high into the
vaulted ceiling overhead. To his left the towering twelve-foot Christmas tree, trimmed in lush red and brilliant gold, soared high into the rafters. While the radiant glow from a large stone fireplace bathed the room in a blaze of orange, keeping the air toasty warm.

Absentmindedly sipping from a mug of mulled wine Magnus had given him, Alec glanced down at his watch and saw the time, 5:15 pm. Their dinner guests would be arriving soon, and he felt the familiar flutter of butterfly wings begin to beat furiously inside his empty stomach. Feeling nervous with hopeful anticipation for what was sure to be an unforgettable evening, Alec indulged in a generous swallow of the warm beverage, hoping to dull his nerves.

“Alexander? Come away from the window and help me finish tying these holly branches!” Magnus frantically called to Alec from the kitchen. He’d been fussing over last minute decorations all day and their Aspen home surely rivaled even the North Pole in its abundant holiday splendor. The decision to leave San Francisco and return to Colorado for the holidays had been an easy one for many reasons, most of all the quintessential white Christmas that would serve as a backdrop surrounding their gorgeous mountain estate.

“Babe, get down from there before you break something,” Alec scoffed, coming around the corner into the kitchen to find Magnus teetering on the edge of a barstool attempting to tie holly branches to the pendent lighting that hung over the island.

“I’ve al-most got-it,” Magnus strained as he leaned dangerously far across the wobbling stool trying to reach the last light.

“Here, here, give that to me!” Alec insisted, rushing to Magnus’ side to take the branch and coordinating green twist-tie from his hands, saving him from what was no doubt about to be a terrible fall.

“Thank you, my darling, you’re my insanely tall knight in shining armor! Now make sure you align the branch correctly, so the fullest side is facing out. Yes, like that, that’s good. Oh, and be sure to twist the tie behind the cord and tuck it under so it doesn’t show!” Magnus instructed, picking up Alec’s mug so he could drink while shouting out directions.

“Please tell me this is the last of it,” Alec grumbled as he tightened the branch. “Really, you’ve done enough. More than enough.”

“I just want everything to be perfect,” Magnus sighed before gratefully draining the last of Alec’s wine. The anxiety he’d been experiencing over the last few days topped even his debut at Carnegie Hall, and the final preparations for tonight had actually helped him cope with the fact that his soon-to-be in-laws would be knocking on their door at any moment.

“It is perfect, so stop stressing OK?” Alec insisted, suspiciously eyeing his now empty mug of wine. “And get your own drink!”

Magnus smiled and leaned in close. “Husbands share everything my dear, didn’t you know? What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine. So, you might as well start getting used to it.”

Alec flashed his signature lopsided grin then reached to pull Magnus by the waist into his arms. “Good, then that means these lips are mine,” he teased, dipping down to steal a wine flavored kiss, their bodies pressed together under a fresh bouquet of holly and mistletoe.

Relishing a few last minutes of alone time, their mouths lingered close, quietly breathing each other in. They both knew, even without saying a word, that they needed each other’s strength to get through this difficult night. They were a team united in love and devoted to bringing everyone
together for the holiday, rather they liked it or not! But there was also an unspoken fear and a desperate need to make this Christmas Eve a success, more so than ever. Gathering every bit of their courage the two stood quietly with their foreheads together as the violin solo of Schließe, mein Herze, dies selige Wunder wove a tapestry of beautiful music all around them.

*ding dong*

“Ah! They’re here!” Magnus shrieked, pulling out of Alec’s soothing embrace to nervously fiddle with his hair then smooth the front of his shirt back into his waistband. “How do I look? Am I a wreck? Ugh, I should have waited to put this shirt on after I’d finished with the holly!”

Alec stifled a laugh watching Magnus needlessly freak out. He was a stunning vision of holiday glamour in a deep-red silk shirt, that probably cost a fortune, tucked into a pair of well-tailored black dress pants with a black satin stripe running down the hem. His nails were painted the same luscious shade of red as his shirt, and for a moment Alec imagined the feel of those glossy nails against his bare skin and it gave him goosebumps. “You look beautiful, as always.”

Magnus immediately stopped and met Alec’s eye, his face instantly relaxing into a peaceful smile. “Helpful in the kitchen and doling out compliments? Hmm, I think someone’s getting an early Christmas present later tonight,” he cooed wickedly, giving Alec a teasing wink then reaching out to grab him by the necktie.

“Enough flirting, go to the door already,” Alec sarcastically reminded him, startling Magnus out of his momentary sexual fantasy.

“We shall go to the door together! After all this is our home and our Christmas Eve dinner,” Magnus declared, hooking Alec under the arm and ushering them both toward the front door.

Once they reached the entry way they could hear the frantic flurry of loud voices on the other side of the closed door. “Here goes nothing,” Alec muttered, letting out a deep exhale, then reaching to place one hand on the doorknob.

“We’ve got this,” Magnus replied, squeezing Alec’s other hand with reassurance as he bravely swung open the door.

“Alec!!” Max Lightwood bellowed, running across the threshold and grabbing Alec into a tight hug.

“Hey buddy,” Alec choked out, overcome by a flood of emotion seeing his little brother again after such a long time. “It’s so good to see you. God, you are getting so tall!”

“Mags!” Isabelle Lightwood squealed, rushing from behind Max to throw her arms around Magnus, crushing him in a powerful squeeze. “You look like a million bucks! Is that Valentino? Oh god, wait, no! It’s Hermes! Ahh! I can’t wait to get inside your closet!”

“Izzy, darling,” Magnus gushed, kissing Isabelle on each cheek. “Just wait until you see what I brought back from Paris!”

“Don’t say another word or I swear I’m going to die of jealousy!” Isabelle announced dramatically, raising her wrist to her forehead to feign swooning on the spot.

“There might be a little something for you too, if you’ve been a good girl this year,” Magnus teased, giving her a playful wink.

“Shut up! Are you serious? Ahhhh you are the best! THE BEST!” Izzy proclaimed moving over to
hug Alec next. “Your fiancé is the greatest man alive!” She continued to rave, squeezing Alec tightly while she bubbled over with happiness.

Maryse and Robert Lightwood stood frozen on the front porch, their arms laden with gifts, watching their children inundate Alec and Magnus with hugs and kisses. They exchanged nervous side-glances at each other as if waiting for one of them to speak first.

“Mom, Dad, come in,” Alec greeted them, extending one arm toward his parents, welcoming them inside.

“Merry Christmas,” Robert responded timidly, shuffling in first to leave his wife on the stoop alone. “Max, take these presents so I can hug your brother properly.”

Max obeyed, rushing forward to take all the gifts from his Dad, freeing up his arms to hug his oldest son.

“Thanks for coming Dad, I know it’s a long trip,” Alec thanked him, feeling emotional by his father’s rare display of affection.

“We wouldn’t want to be anywhere else,” Robert replied, clapping Alec firmly three times on the back then pulling away to extend a friendly handshake to Magnus next. “Nice to see you again, Magnus.”

“Welcome Robert,” Magnus stated with genuine sincerity. “It’s an honor to have you here for Christmas.”

Last of the family, Maryse quietly entered behind her husband, looking awkwardly uncomfortable. Izzy shot her a death glare that clearly stated, ‘say something nice or else!’ And she anxiously cleared her throat to speak. “Alec, Magnus, hello. Thank you for sending Mr. Fell to come fetch us from our hotel, although it really wasn’t necessary for him to bring a limousine.”

“I loved it!” Max enthusiastically exclaimed as he came back empty handed. “I thought it was totally badass!”

“Max!” Maryse admonished him, her face turning a bright shade of red.

“Well it was,” Max replied. “The only time we ever get to ride in limos is when someone dies.”

Alec stifled a laugh at his brother’s honest and very uncensored comment and Maryse rolled her eyes with annoyance. “Maxwell Joseph, where are your manners? Here, take these gifts as well,” she instructed him, and he took the remaining gifts to put them under the tree. “Alec, you’re looking thin. Are you eating well? You can’t spend every waking moment in a practice room you know. You always forget to eat!”

“Yes, Mom, of course I’m eating,” Alec groaned, accepting his mother’s stiff and very brief hug. “And I haven’t lost any weight.”

“Well then,” Maryse declared, then she turned toward Magnus and tipped her head. “Magnus,” she stated plainly, with no offer of a hug or handshake.

“Maryse, welcome to our home,” Magnus responded, putting extra emphasis on the word our, just to ruffle her feathers. He had promised Alec they wouldn’t fight tonight, but he couldn’t help himself from making a tiny jab.
“Something smells incredible!” Robert piped in, ending the painfully unpleasant exchange between the two.

“Magnus cooked!” Alec proudly informed them as the group made their way into the living room. “And you guys are really gonna love it.”

Magnus placed one hand on Alec’s back and smiled appreciatively, he knew his fiancé was going to go above and beyond to praise him tonight, and he couldn’t help but love him for it.

“Well you didn’t have to go to all the trouble, the restaurant in our hotel was offering a seven-course holiday dinner,” Maryse chimed, always having a comeback anytime Alec tried to brag about his future husband.

“Pah! We’ve got the finest chef this side of the Atlantic!” Boasted Ragnor, unexpectedly entering from the kitchen having parked the limo and come back inside through the garage. “Those Michelin star wannabes in town couldn’t even dream up such a festive culinary masterpiece!”

Magnus’ face lit up hearing his oldest and dearest friend commend his efforts. It was so good to have him back for the holidays, he’d missed his companionship and most especially his ear. After his father’s funeral last spring Ragnor had stayed on until the Morgenstern estate was sold and the company dissolved and liquidated. He had been a godsend during one of the most stressful times in Magnus’ life and he honestly didn’t know where we would be right now without his help. Magnus had given him a large chunk of the financial windfall from the sale and Ragnor had used it to take early retirement back home in England. But he’d agreed to return to the states for Christmas at Magnus’ request, having no other family to spend the holidays with.

“How about a glass of champagne to start off the night?” Magnus suggested, heading over to the bar in the corner of the living room where he had several bottles chilling.

“Oh yes!” Izzy chimed. “Let’s officially toast to your engagement since we’re all finally together in the same room!”

“How about a glass of champagne to start off the night?” Magnus suggested, heading over to the bar in the corner of the living room where he had several bottles chilling.

“Only if I get to have some too!” Max exclaimed, rushing to the bar where Magnus had begun to pour his best bottle of Dom Perignon into seven crystal flutes.

“If it’s alright with your Mom and Dad,” Magnus told him, attempting to earn brownie points with Maryse by thinking of her authority first, even though he’d already counted him in the total number of glasses.

"I suppose one glass won’t hurt,” Maryse agreed, giving her fifteen-year-old son a small reprieve.

“Can I do the toast?” Izzy vehemently requested, leaving little doubt she was going to give a toast rather anyone agreed or not.

“That would be wonderful,” Magnus replied, gently placing one hand on her arm as he handed her a glass, appreciating her support tonight more than ever.

“Here’s to my amazingly talented big brother and his handsome and equally as talented husband-to-be, soon to be married this coming Valentine’s Day!” Izzy proclaimed joyfully to a chorus of enthusiastic woohoo’s. “Magnus, you are such an incredible person, I feel truly honored to welcome you to our crazy little family. I never thought I’d be so happy to have a third brother in my life, but you have been such a welcome surprise and a true blessing, honestly your presence is the greatest gift I could ever receive. I can’t imagine my life now without you.” Izzy paused for a moment to swallow back tears, the room falling so quiet you could hear a pin drop. “I’m just so proud of you
both, and I love you dearly with all my heart. I can’t wait to be there on your wedding day, smiling, and crying, and looking fabulous in my custom Carolina Herrera gown!” The silence was immediately interrupted by an outburst of laughter at Izzy’s shameless brag about her wedding wardrobe. Alec rolled his eyes. “But seriously guys, I can’t imagine a more romantic and fitting day for you two to become one. Your love inspires me every single day and it fills my cynical heart with hope that true love can exist for each of us. I wish you all the joy this world can give. May you both share an eternity of happiness together!”

“Here, here!” Ragnor bellowed, and all seven glasses raised simultaneously to toast to the happy couple.

“Isabelle, that was simply beautiful. I-I don’t even know what to say, it was so lovely, my heart is soaring. Thank you, my darling, thank you,” Magnus effused, putting one arm around Izzy to squeeze her tight.

“Thanks Iz,” Alec added, a rosy blush blossoming on his cheeks as he gave her a beaming smile. “That was really great.”

As Magnus and Izzy dove into their first of no doubt many discussions of the upcoming wedding plans, Alec turned to look at his parents. He noticed his mother had set her champagne flute on the coffee table, and it was still full. She hadn’t even taken a sip to toast to him and Magnus, even after Izabelle’s beautiful words. His heart dropped, and his face fell realizing his mother still didn’t approve of their relationship.

Robert saw Alec’s dejected expression and walked in front of his crestfallen gaze to start up a conversation. “The house really looks great son, and this tree is incredible!”

“Oh, we had quite an adventure procuring that beast, I can tell you,” Magnus interjected, having overheard Robert’s complement. “I think your son missed his true calling wielding a bow saw for a living!”

“Is that right?” Robert hesitated, unaware Alec had any skills as an outdoorsman.

“Cello bow, bow saw, same difference,” Alec mused, craning his neck to catch Izzy quietly berating their mother near the window. He wished he could hear their conversation, and guessed it was probably about her refusal to drink to Izzy’s engagement toast, the thought of which made Alec’s blood boil. How could his mother still be holding on to her pipedream after he and Magnus had been together going on two years now. Not to mention they were about to get married in just a little over a month. He hated to admit to himself that it also made him incredibly sad and he wished her opinion didn’t mean so much to him.

“Everyone, let’s make our way to the dining room!” Magnus announced, snapping Alec out of his daze. “Look for your name, there are place-cards at every seat!”

Izzy gave her mother a few more reprimands as the Lightwoods made their way to the dining room. Ragnor walked close behind them very obviously eavesdropping on their argument.

Magnus had given many hours of thought to the seating arrangement for dinner, trying his best to eliminate any possible altercations or awkward lulls in conversation. He’d put Alec and Robert at both ends with himself and Maryse to their immediate lefts, making sure they were sitting as far apart as possible. Then he’d put Izzy between himself and Ragnor, and Max between Alec and his mother, guaranteeing the best possible outcome for a pleasant meal.

The dining room table with its gorgeous holly and pinecone centerpiece interspersed with fresh
poinsettias and flickering globed candles would have put Martha Stewart to shame. Each place-setting had a forest green linen napkin that had been folded into the shape of a Christmas tree and a sprig of holly tied to a cluster of cinnamon sticks which had been dusted in gold glitter. The antique china was trimmed in ribbons of red and green sitting atop shiny, gold scalloped charger plates. Swags of fresh pine and fir garland hung over the table, tied with bright red bows, filling the air with a heavenly scent.

“Magnus, this is unbelievable!” Izzy marveled, her eyes blown wide in wonderment. “It’s the most beautiful table I’ve ever seen!”

Magnus smiled with pride as he stood watching all of the Lightwoods take their seats. “If you’ll all please excuse us, Alec and I will return momentarily with our holiday feast!”

Alec followed Magnus into the kitchen where they quickly began pulling bowls and trays from the warming drawers.

“How do you think its going?” Magnus asked as he tucked sprigs of rosemary into his rack of lamb.

“My mother is being her usual self,” Alec grumbled, angrily tossing rolls into a large woven basket. “Would it kill her to fake it for one night? Just one!”

“Alexander, don’t be upset, I actually think she’s handling things much better than she did during our last visit. She’s slowly coming around, have faith.”

“I’m not going to hold my breath,” Alec mumbled bitterly, wishing he could just call her out on her shit. “I swear if she ruins tonight I’ll never forgive her!”

“Shhh, don’t even say it, everything is going to be wonderful, I promise,” Magnus assured him as he pulled heavy sheets of foil off multiple steaming side dishes.

“It better, or I’m gonna throw her off the top of this mountain, so help me God!”

“Deep breaths my darling, in a few hours they’ll all be back at their hotel with visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads.”

Alec rolled his eyes as he hoisted the giant platter of lamb up from the counter and headed toward the dining room. “I can’t wait.” He mumbled, forcing down his anger for the sake of the rest of the family.

“Dinner is served,” Magnus announced as he and Alec began placing the food up and down along the huge dining room table. Everyone’s eyes were boggling as they took in the sight of Magnus’ mouthwatering feast.

“This looks outstanding,” Robert declared cheerfully, leaning forward to inhale the delicious aromas.

“I can already feel the ten pounds I’m going to gain and I’m not even mad,” Izzy joked as she spread her napkin across her lap.

“Well there’s more where this came from, so have as much a you’d like,” Magnus added, placing ladies and slotted spoons between each serving dish.

“Magnus cooked enough to feed an army,” Alec told them, scooting his chair in at the head of the table.
“It wouldn’t be Christmas Day without plenty of leftovers,” Magnus trilled happily, already planning to feed the Lightwoods again tomorrow when they came to open their gifts.

“Yeah, well nobody in our family can even boil water, so the only leftovers we ever get on Christmas are cold pizza and Chinese takeout,” Max blurted out, always saying exactly what came to mind no matter who might get offended in the process.

“Max!” Robert chided him, seeing the look of sheer humiliation on his wife’s face. “That’s quite enough of your rudeness!”

“Well it’s true!” Max insisted, paying no mind to his mother’s embarrassment.

“Magnus has yet to experience the joy of having an annoying little brother,” Izzy pointed out, laughing at Max’s perfect timing to give her mother a taste of her own medicine. “They’ll drive you to the brink of insanity but they’re too damn cute to get rid of!”

Alec dropped his fork and it noisily clattered against his dinner plate. He turned toward Magnus and saw a shadow of darkness pass over his face, making his eyelids flutter rapidly as an attempt to push his morbid thoughts away. Alec of course knew Magnus was thinking of his own little brother, who had been so much worse than annoying, and he realized just how difficult it must be to sit down and dine with the boisterous Lightwood family knowing all of his own family members were dead. Alec had been so busy stressing about the drama with his mother and the stress of having his whole family here for Christmas, he hadn’t stopped to think about how Magnus might be feeling. He was glad Ragnar had come to be there as pretty much the only representative of Magnus’ past, but nothing could erase the fact that his parents and brother were gone. It made Alec’s heart ache and he wished he could pull Magnus into his arms and hug him. Picking his fork back up he planned to talk to Magnus about all of this as soon as Christmas was over.

“So, Alec, how were finals?” Robert asked before stuffing his mouth with a very large chunk of lamb.

“Uhh, they were good. I’m still on track to finish my Masters next December,” Alec replied, the thought of next year making his heartrate increase.

“Finishing in three semesters is quite a feat, any plans to apply to their doctoral program?” Robert continued, vigorously chewing with gusto.

“No, I don’t think so. I’ve already pretty much lined up a job with SFS as soon as I graduate. Thanks to Magnus,” Alec bragged, smiling over at Magnus appreciatively.

“Friends in high places, huh Magnus?” Robert concluded, knowing he had plenty of connections.

“Alexander is a brilliant musician, any symphony in the world would be lucky to have him,” Magnus replied, returning Alec’s smile.

“Where are you working now Magnus?” Maryse piped in, seeing an opportunity to pry.

Alec dropped his fork again, taken aback by his mother’s audacity. “Magnus doesn’t need to work _mother_, he performs regularly plus he started his own charity! To help foster kids in the Bay Area find permanent homes. Plus he’s on the board of at least three other huge philanthropic organizations. He’s one of the hardest working people I’ve ever known!” Alec’s temper had begun to flare and everyone around the table stopped eating and stared between the two of them, waiting to see Maryse’s response.

“Well that sounds very noble indeed,” his mother replied with a condescending tone and Magnus
reached under the table to place one hand on Alec’s left knee, hoping he’d let it drop.

“Are there more of these roasted potatoes?” Izzy interrupted, holding up the empty bowl. “They were so delicious I’m going to definitely need more!”

Magnus smiled and took the bowl from her hands, rising to head toward the kitchen. Alec inhaled a deep cleansing breath and fought back his urge to fight with his mom, thinking of much more important matters they’d no doubt be fighting about later.

After dinner the seven very full and very satisfied diners, waddled to the living room and collapsed into the plush furniture feeling dangerously overstuffed.

“That was the best meal I’ve ever had,” Max groaned from the love seat where he’d propped up his feet to lazily stretch out.

“I’m going to remember that apple pie for the rest of my life,” Izzy sighed, kicking off her heels to drop down on the floor in front of the crackling fireplace.

“And you’ll get to eat it all again tomorrow,” Magnus teased them, happy to have all of his holiday cooking and baking done for the year.

The post-dinner conversation continued on into the night, steering clear of any hot topics or obvious reasons to fight. Ragnor entertained everyone with tall tales about his life in London complete with a real-life version of Ebenezer Scrooge that soon had everyone laughing. It seemed as though the brief moment of unpleasantness at dinner had passed and even Maryse was laughing and smiling along with the family.

Shortly after the clock on the mantle had struck 9:00 the doorbell rang sending Alec immediately to his feet. “I’ll get it!” He announced as he exchanged nervous looks with Magnus before heading to the front door.

“Are we expecting someone else?” Izzy asked quizzically wondering who would be ringing the doorbell at nine o’clock on Christmas Eve.

“Maybe its Santa?” Max mocked comically as Magnus stood up from the couch restlessly, then sat down again.

At the front door Alec ushered in their latecomer, taking her coat and hat.

“Sorry I’m late, Raphael really needed me to stay until closing, since everyone else had family waiting for them to come home,” Maia apologized as she kicked snow off her tall, black boots.

“That’s OK, no problem. How were the roads?” Alec asked her as he hung her things in the hall closet.

“Complete shit, of course, it’s still snowing, and the wind is picking up.”

“We could have sent Ragnor to come get you!” Alec objected, not liking the idea of Maia driving alone on slippery mountain roads. It was hard enough driving up Red Mountain on a clear day.

“I’ve lived here my entire life Alec, I know how to drive on snow,” Maia protested, clearly feeling
confident in her ability to handle the snow-covered roads, rather Alec liked it or not. “How did the dinner go?”

“It was bearable. Are you hungry? Did you eat yet?” Alec anxiously inquired.

“Yeah, we had a carry-in at work so I’m good. I’ve been pigging out all day. Jesus Alec you’re shaking. Are you OK?” Maia asked him, just noticing Alec’s overly nervous state.

“Yeah, I’m fine, it’s just my Mom, she drives me insane, and I’m not really sure how the rest of the night is going to go. I just can’t even deal with her crap right now.”

“Oh God, now you’re making me nervous,” Maia moaned, fluffing her hair and straightening her clothes.

“No sorry, don’t be. I’m just being a coward. Come on, I’ll introduce you to everyone.”

Alec and Maia walked into the living room and everyone’s head snapped toward them, their eyes wide and curious. Magnus quickly sprang up from the couch to hug Maia and kiss her on the cheek while the Lightwoods silently gawked.

“Everyone, this is Maia,” Alec announced with his arm over her shoulder. “Maia this is everyone.”

“Hi Maia,” the group replied slowly in chorus, still with no clue who she was or why she was there.

“Hello,” Maia responded nervously, feeling every eye in the room was boring into her. She tugged at the hem of her baggy green sweater wondering if she should have worn something else.

“Hi, I’m Alec’s sister Isabelle, but you can call me Izzy. I love your boots, and your hair is gorgeous!” Izzy trilled, popping up off the floor to come give Maia a warm welcome.

“Uh, thanks,” Maia replied a bit apprehensively, shocked to discover Alec’s sister was a complete polar opposite to his shy, standoffish ways.

“Would you like to try some of Magnus’ mulled wine? It’s super delish! Or I think we still have some champagne chilling!” Izzy offered kindly.

“Oh, uhh, no, thanks. I’ll just take a water. That would be great,” Maia stuttered feeling nearly at a loss for words.

“I’ll go and get the water,” Magnus chimed. “Take that empty seat there in the big armchair by the fireplace Maia dear, so you can prop your feet up.”

“Good idea,” Alec agreed, guiding Maia towards the large, overstuffed chair.

“And I can warm you up a plate!” Magnus added, heading off toward the kitchen at a clipped pace.

“She already ate!” Alec called back gruffly, helping Maia to her seat.

“Maybe she’s still hungry!” Magnus shouted back from the kitchen, the sound of rattling plates echoing into the room.

“I’m good, thanks!” Maia called back to him feeling horribly self-conscious and on display, as Alec stood worriedly hovering over her chair.

“So, who are you anyway?” Max asked Maia pointblank, clearly the only Lightwood brazen enough to cut right to the chase. “And how do you know my brother?” Normally this would have been the
cue for someone in the family to correct his manners, but everyone was too curious to know the answer to bother chastising him again.

“Oh, well, I uhuhh, first met Alec two summers ago. In town, where I work, at the Hotel Jerome. And we’ve been good friends ever since,” Maia shyly surmised, shrinking under the stares from five judgmental sets of eyes.

“What do you do there?” Izzy asked next, contributing to the invasive line of questioning.

“I’m a bartender,” Maia replied, dropping her gaze into her lap.

Robert and Maryse exchanged quizzical looks, not sure why their son would have invited his bartender to their family’s personal Christmas Eve celebration. Clearly this didn’t add up.

“But that’s just a job for right now,” Maia added. “It’s not what I want to do permanently or anything. I’m actually a painter.”

“Maia is an amazing artist,” Alec gushed, pulling the ottoman up close to her chair, forcing Maia to put her feet up. “You should see her work, it’s so incredible, I swear it rivals anything you’d see at the MoMA!”

“Alec is exaggerating of course, because that would be ridiculous,” Maia corrected him, feeling her face burn from embarrassment.

Maryse looked back and forth between her oldest son and this mysterious stranger, catching a glimmer in his eye that made her heart suddenly flutter into overdrive. “Well my son seems quite taken with you and your work young lady, you must be truly special indeed. Talented, beautiful, and outspoken, hmmmm what a perfect combination.”

Robert glared at his wife, instantly picking up on her hopeful expression praying she wasn’t about to horribly embarrass them both.

Magnus returned with a glass of water and a slice of his homemade apple pie. “There’s always room for dessert,” he insisted as he handed Maia the plate. She reached to take the dessert from his hand and the tips of her fingers brushed against his skin. “Your hands are like ice! Alec, go and grab the throw blanket from the guest room for Maia!”

“I’m OK Magnus, I don’t need a blanket, my hands are just cold from being outside,” Maia reassured him, taking the glass of water and giving him the evil eye.

“You should be wearing gloves in this weather, you can take an extra pair of mine when you leave,” Magnus stated, without asking.

Isabelle looked back and forth between Magnus and Alec watching them fawn and fuss over Maia feeling there was something unusual about the way they were acting. But she couldn’t quite put her finger on it. Her intuition told her something was going on here, and the answer was right on the tip of her brain.

“Where did you study?” Robert asked Maia, hoping to direct the conversation onto a more suitable topic as his wife’s insane matchmaker wheels were loudly turning in her delusional head.

“I’m self-taught right now, but I’ll be attending RISD in the fall. Magnus hooked me up with an old friend of his on the faculty there, and by some miracle I was accepted.”

“Wow, the Rhode Island School of Design, that’s impressive,” Robert nodded, being familiar with
one of the top art schools in the country.

“Well, it’s all thanks to Magnus really,” Maia countered, not willing to take any credit for the acceptance since she felt she’d had an unfair advantage.

“Don’t be silly, I merely pointed you in the right direction, the acceptance to their degree program was totally of your own doing,” Magnus corrected her. “If you wouldn’t have had the talent nothing I could have said would have changed things.”

“Congratulations, that’s quite an accomplishment,” Ragnor complimented Maia from his place behind the couch. He was happy to be included as part of the family, but his years of service still forced him to the perimeter of the room, feeling more comfortable in the background.

“Do you have a boyfriend?” Maryse burst out, having held back her curiosity for as long as possible.

“A boyfriend? Ha, no, no boyfriend,” Maia chuckled, holding back an outburst of laughter as if Maryse had just told a very funny joke. “I’m focusing on more important matters right now, first school and then I’d like to do a lot of traveling. I really want to see the world. So dating… well, it’s just not in the cards for now.”

“Present time!” Magnus declared, nipping Maryse and Maia’s uncomfortable conversation in the bud before Maryse stuck her foot any further into her own mouth.

“Now?” Alec gasped, thinking maybe they had more time before the cat was out of the bag.

“I thought we were exchanging gifts tomorrow?” Izzy questioned, looking confused.

“Just one special present tonight, and then the rest tomorrow,” Magnus informed her as Alec walked over to the Christmas tree and bent down to grab something from underneath. It was a small stack of red envelopes tied with a single strand of gold ribbon. Pulling one end of the ribbon he untied the stack and began to pass out the envelopes, one for each of the Lightwoods and also one to Ragnor.

“Now don’t open them until we say go!” Magnus instructed, watching closely to make sure no one was peeking inside. Once Alec had finished distributing the envelopes to everyone except Maia, he walked back to stand next to Magnus, the two clasping hands to brace for what would come next.

“Oooo, what could it be!” Izzy smiled gleefully, squeezing her envelope tight against her chest.


“All good guesses,” Alec smirked smugly, knowing she’d never guess right no matter how many chances he gave her.

“Ugh, I hope it isn’t some lame donation to a charity in my name,” Max whined, holding his envelope up to the fire attempting to see through the paper.

“All good guesses,” Alec smirked smugly, knowing she’d never guess right no matter how many chances he gave her.

“Max!” Robert scolded. “No matter what the gift is we show our gratitude.”

“Yeah, yeah, sure,” Max bellyached, feeling this envelope wasn’t going to contain anything he would care about. Unless maybe it was cash.

“Allright folks, on the count of three,” Magnus directed, looking over at Alec with a huge sappy smile on his face and squeezing his hand tightly. Together the two of them counted aloud, not taking their eyes off each other for one second. “1… 2… 3!”
With a flurry of ripping paper and frantic tearing, one by one the Lightwoods and Ragnor tore open their bright red envelopes and pulled out their Christmas surprise.

“OH. MY. GOD!” Izzy was the first to cry out. “I can’t believe it!”

“My heavens,” Ragnor muttered, clapping one shaking hand over his mouth.

“Is this what I think it is?” Max questioned turning the contents upside down and from side to side squinting with his nose crinkled.

“Alec?” Robert gasped, dropping his arms into his lap, his face blanched white with shock.

Alec stepped forward, still holding tight to Magnus’ hand and lifted his chin proudly to speak. “Mom and Dad, Iz, Max, and Ragnor, I’m happy to announce that Magnus and I are having a baby!”

“AHHHHHH!!!” Izzy screamed, jumping to her feet and rushing to grab Alec and Magnus into her arms, squeezing the life out of them. “Oh my god I’m so happy for you! I can’t believe it! I’m going to be an AUNT! You guys are going to be dads! This is incredible!!”

“I don’t understand,” Robert muttered breathlessly, looking like he might pass out. “How?”

“Well,” Magnus responded, taking a deep breath and stepping forward to stand at Alec’s side. “That’s why Maia has come here tonight to meet all of you. She agreed to be our surrogate and that’s the ultrasound picture from her appointment yesterday morning.”

“Oh my GOD I knew you guys were fussing over her like she was about to break! Maia! Congratulations!” Izzy squealed bending down to grab Maia into a gentle hug, crying happy tears all over her.

“Surprise,” Maia sighed nervously, feeling awkward and unsure about how the Lightwoods were taking the news. “I’m about ten and a half weeks along, due July 4th. Everything is going really well, no problems or morning sickness or anything, basically I feel great.”

“A fourth of July baby!” Izzy screeched nearly reaching hysterics. She was now a full-blown blubbering mess, standing back up to hug Magnus and Alec again.

“Who’s the dad?” Max inquired, continuing with his fearless and unfiltered questioning, despite being warned over and over again.

“Max!” Isabelle scoffed, whacking her little brother on the shoulder, mortified by his thoughtless behavior. “They are both the dads, don’t be rude! They probably don’t even want to know!”

“Actually, we do know who the father is,” Magnus corrected her as Alec sheepishly looked down at the floor. “Due to some concerning genetic abnormalities in my family history, I insisted that Alec be the donor.” Magnus tugged on Alec’s hand until he lifted his head back up again and they exchanged a knowing look. “Besides, who would miss the opportunity to pass down this much brilliant talent and charming good looks,” Magnus teased. “I want my child to be as beautiful and perfect as possible.”

Alec’s famous blush burst forth across his flushed cheeks causing them to burn bright crimson as he leaned in to sweetly kiss Magnus in response. He of course knew the real reason Magnus had insisted he be the donor, he was too afraid some inherent evil from the Morgenstern bloodline would pass on to their child, even though Alec had assured him over and over that he didn’t think that was even possible. But Magnus had been adamant, completely unwilling to take even the smallest risk, after watching his own brother grow up to be a monster. He wanted Valentine’s lineage to die with
“But you’re so young,” Maryse finally spoke to Alec, breaking her silence.

Alec swiftly turned toward his mother, ready to handle any negatives she could dish out. “I’m three years older than you were when you had me, mother,” he calmly replied, praying this wasn’t about to be a war.

“That was a different time Alec, you’re only 24, you’re still in school, why are you rushing into this?”

“We aren’t rushing into this at all. We’ve been talking about it for months. I’ll be 25 soon, and Magnus just turned 36! Maybe he’d like to have kids before he’s too old to play with them!”

Magnus turned to Alec with mock outrage, raising both eyebrows with his mouth agape. “Gee thanks, honey,” he jeered. “I’ll try my best not to drool on the baby.”

Alec rolled his eyes, unwilling to let Magnus’ sense of humor stop him from setting his mom straight. “Listen, the details have already been worked out. In May, when the semester ends, we’ll be coming back here for the summer. Then once the baby is born Maia is heading off to school and we’ll be returning to San Fran. Magnus will be at home fulltime while I’m finishing the last semester of my Masters, then I’ll be done next December before the baby is even six months old. It’s not going to be a problem. We have all the resources we need, and Magnus is thrilled to stay at home because he can still perform and keep up with all his charitable work. It’s going to be fine!”

Maia noticed the troubled looks on Maryse and Robert’s faces and she knew they were skeptical about all of this. She felt maybe she knew the real reason they were feeling unsure and wanted to put their minds at ease. “Hey, I know your first gut reaction is probably that this is a terrible idea, plus I'm a complete stranger who you have no reason to trust. But honestly Magnus and Alec are two of the kindest most giving people I’ve ever met in my life and I know they are going to be the most amazing parents. They have been by my side every minute, at every appointment, and already smothering this baby with unending love.” Maia told them as she smoothed one hand over her stomach. "I don’t want you to think that they’re bribing me with a fancy east coast college or trying to buy me off, because I would have gladly done this for them even without the connections for school. Really this entire plan was mostly my idea, I felt like this was a way for me to help them, and already taking the baby with unending love.” Maia told them as she smoothed one hand over her stomach. "I don’t want you to think that they’re bribing me with a fancy east coast college or trying to buy me off, because I would have gladly done this for them even without the connections for school. Really this entire plan was mostly my idea, I felt like this was a way for me to help them, and already taking the baby with unending love.”

Maia felt tears sting the backs of her eyes as she stiffly held herself together. Robert, Isabelle, and Max watched her closely without saying a word.

“Mom, this is a good thing, I promise,” Alec spoke honestly from the heart, wishing his mother
would just understand. “So can’t you just be happy for us?”

“Happy?” Maryse choked, her emotions cutting off her voice. She stood up, dropping her arms lifelessly at her sides. “I’m going to be a grandmother… that makes me the happiest person in the world right now.” Visibly overcome, she rushed forward and grabbed Alec into a fierce hug, clutching him as tightly as she could while her impassioned sobs finally escaped. She’d been holding back not only tonight, but for the last two years, so afraid her oldest son was making a mistake. Afraid he was choosing the wrong partner and rushing into a relationship he wasn’t mature enough to handle. But now she could finally see his path clearly laid out before him, and as much as he was still her baby, he was a grown man about to be married to the person he loves most in the world and become a father. It was really all she’d ever hoped for any of her children and the pride she felt seeing what an amazing person he’d become was overwhelming.

“Thanks Mom,” Alec wept in his mother’s arms, feeling closer to her than he had in years. Magnus had been right, she was making progress and had come a long way. Maybe there was hope she wasn’t too old to change and the two of them could start over fresh and build trust where so much had been broken.”

“I love you so much,” she cried against Alec’s shoulder, squeezing him tight in her arms. “And you too Magnus,” she added, lifting one arm toward him to grab his hand.

Alec released his mom and let her hug Magnus for the first time since she’d known him, and the sight of it made him breakdown. It was the miracle he’d been praying for, that two of the most important people in his life could find a way to accept one another, and it felt like the greatest gift he’d ever received.

“You take care of my boy,” Maryse whispered softly against Magnus’ ear as she gently stroked his back.

“I promise I will,” Magnus whispered in return. “For the rest of my days.”

“Well I think this calls for another toast!” Robert boomed proudly, hoisting his glass into the air. “Congratulations to the dads-to-be, and to the beautiful Maia for giving them this amazing gift. I can’t wait to meet my grandchild, so I can spoil him, or her, completely rotten!”

“Here, here!” Ragnor replied, feeling such joy to see Magnus loved and accepted by his new family. One he so greatly deserved.

“Actually, I have a surprise of my own,” Maia added, standing with her glass of water to face the sniffling Lightwood family. “The preliminary results from the genetic testing came back today. And it’s a girl!”

Taken completely by surprise with the news, Alec and Magnus turned to each other with tearful expressions of joy and exuberantly hugged while Maryse couldn’t stop herself from crossing in front of them, with her arms outstretched, to envelope Maia in warm, motherly embrace.

“A girl!!” Izzy burst out, unable to contain her excitement. “I can’t wait to start shopping!”

The family continued to gush and celebrate on into the night with more champagne and heartfelt offers of support and congratulations. The mood had been lifted to a euphoric high that was unparalleled to any previous Christmas they’d ever experienced or would ever experience for several years to come. When the clock struck midnight it was time to say goodnight and Ragnor happily transported the Lightwoods back to their hotel, with Maia following close behind in her car.

Everyone was excited to come back tomorrow to exchange gifts and especially to enjoy more of
Magnus and Alec had finished cleaning up the last of the plates and glasses and were finally relaxing alone on their couch in the now dark and empty living room, lit only by the lights from the Christmas tree. With the fire dying down to embers they watched the snow fall out the window, the flakes shimmering like diamonds in the beam of the outdoor flood lights.

“I’m so incredibly full I can’t move,” Alec muttered, sitting back against the fluffy, deep couch cushions with Magnus draped under the crook of his arm. “I really didn’t need that third piece of pie, I feel like I’m in a food coma.”

“Hmm, that gives me déjà vu,” Magnus mused, his face pressed against Alec’s chest, listening to his heartbeat. “Do you remember the very first time I ever cooked for you?”

“Of course I remember, it was the night I fell in love… with your cooking!” Alec teased, playfully squeezing Magnus’ shoulders.

“Well I knew the quickest way to a man’s heart was through his stomach, that’s why I brought you back for leftovers the next day, just to seal the deal,” Magnus replied, wrapping his arms around Alec’s torso to nuzzle against him.

“And afterwards we were curled up on this couch just like this,” Alec added, shifting to pull Magnus even closer.

“Until you pounced on me.”

“Wha!?” Alec gasped in fake shock. “I seem to remember you were the one doing the pouncing. Ensnaring me with your fancy cooking so you could have me for dessert.”

“I don’t think you put up much of a fight,” Magnus cooed, tilting his head up to kiss the underside of Alec’s jaw, snuggling into his warm neck.

“Like I said, I was already in love,” Alec admitted, bending down to find Magnus’ lips and kiss them sweetly with tenderness.

“Let’s hope our daughter isn’t as gullible as her old man,” Magnus gibed, an impish grin curling the corners of his mouth. “Falling so easily for such obvious devices, why she could trust the first person who wows her with a French béarnaise.”

Alec huffed angrily at the mere suggestion, his entire body going rigid at the thought. “That is never going to happen! Because our daughter won’t be allowed to date until she’s 40!”

Magnus erupted into a fit of laughter, always loving any opportunity to get under Alec’s skin. “Careful my darling, you’ll start to sound like your mother.”

“I’m actually going to kill you,” Alec growled, pushing Magnus off his chest and throwing him across the couch on his back before slamming down on top of him, their faces just inches apart. “Take it back, or I swear you’re gonna get it.”

“Ooooo that sounds intriguing,” Magnus teased, purposely licking his lips. His dark eyes sparkling in
The reflection of the Christmas lights as he wrapped his legs around Alec’s hips pulling them tight against him. “What do you have in mind?”

Without a moment of hesitation Alec’s mouth hungrily fell down upon Magnus’ moist lips, sinking into their warm softness for a deep and passionate kiss. After the long night’s emotional roller coaster ride their bodies melted together gratefully, reveling in their love and good fortune. It had been a perfect Christmas Eve, full of family, friends, love and laughter. A night for renewed hope and belief in the future as their two worlds came together as one.

“I love you so much,” Alec murmured low, pausing to lay his left hand against Magnus’ face, gliding the edge of his thumb over the silky-smooth skin of his cheek. “Thank you for making this the best Christmas ever.”

Magnus leaned against Alec’s warm palm, loving the way he caressed his face and especially the feel of his calloused fingertips. “I love you too Alexander, more than words could ever explain. Thank you for loving me and sticking by my side through the most difficult times in our lives. But most of all thank you for giving me what I’ve always wanted for Christmas…”

Alec was confused, knowing Magnus hadn’t opened his gift from him yet this year. “I did? What was it?”

“You gave me a family.”

Chapter End Notes

I just want to give a special thank you to two of my best friends @patronusmalec and @everydayfandom for all their support and encouragement with my writing. I love them so much, they’re like family to me. :)

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