an awfully big adventure

by Thealmosthethericalquestion

Summary

“Oh,” Magnus says quietly, all the breath rushing out of him. He grips hold of the doorframe tightly, knuckles whitening, shocked by how strong his reaction is.

Alec is lying on the carpet, surrounded by throw cushions and his discarded shirt, dressed only in a pair of threadbare sweatpants and holey socks. His hair is a ragged mess of curls, and there are dark circles under his eyes – he looks about as tired as Magnus feels, but he’s still eerily beautiful, and he’s holding the baby against his bare chest. Her eyes are closed, and she is lifted up and down gently with each rise and fall of Alec’s chest, her ear pressed against his heart.

“Oh no,” Magnus says faintly.

Notes

Beta'd by the wonderful int0-0blivi0n-x of the Shadowhunters Beta Net. Thank you so much, this has been so much fun! I changed the description/summary because I wasn't happy with it, but the fic is still the same.
Part One

Alec stumbles up the steps to Magnus’s loft and bangs on the door. He has a key, given to him by Magnus a year ago, after Valentine fell and they officially started their relationship, but the key is in his back pocket and he doesn’t have the energy to go searching for it. He’s exhausted, and his headache seems to grow with each passing second, but thankfully it doesn’t take long before Magnus hauls the door open. He takes in the blood all over Alec’s temple and sleeve with growing concern, and then his eyes stray to the bundle of fabric in Alec’s arms, tucked safely in the crook of his elbow, and widen to the size of dustbin lids.

“Is that…?”

The bundle makes a snuffling noise, and Magnus leans in slightly, entranced.

“Yeah,” Alec says. “Can you take her? I need to wash the blood off.”

“Yeah, of course.” Magnus shakes himself and darts forward, easing the baby out of Alec’s hands, which are grimy with dirt. “Are you hurt?”

“Jace healed me,” Alec says tiredly. “It was just a few cuts and bruises. I’m alright.”

Magnus eyes him shrewdly, perfectly aware that Alec probably wouldn’t admit if he had been seriously hurt, not now that he’s healed. Alec tries hard not to worry Magnus, even though he knows the other man is more than capable of dealing with it. Usually, Magnus doesn’t let him get away with it, but Alec takes advantage of his distraction and sidles past Magnus. Magnus leans up and kisses him on the cheek as he darts past, unaffected by the dried blood there.

“Go and get cleaned up,” Magnus says. He looks down at the baby settled in his arms. “It looks as though I’ve got some conjuring to do.”

Alec wants to take his time in the bathroom, rinse the ache from his bones, but he’s very conscious of the fact that he just brought a baby into Magnus’s home— their home, without any explanations. He watches the blood and dirt swirl around the drain and then shakes himself into action. He doesn’t technically live with Magnus yet, but he may as well. He has several drawers full of his sweaters and boxers. His toothbrush sits by the sink, and his slippers are tucked under the bed. He even has a coffee machine in the kitchen, specifically for him to use, since Magnus prefers his coffee when it’s been magically pilfered from far away.

Alec pulls a warm, oversized top on over his damp chest and looks around the room. It feels like home, more than the Institute does. The only thing missing is his family, his siblings, but he sees them almost every day, during training and patrols and small missions, and he thinks that if they were here, wandering around and teasing him and getting under his feet, Alec would go insane by the end of the day.

Magnus would barely last five seconds before he shoved them through a portal to a demon realm, with a pleasant smile on his face and a cheery wave.

A short cry erupts from the other room and Alec almost trips over a shoe in his haste to get to the living room. Magnus looks up, faintly amused, as Alec skids to a halt in front of him.

“You forgot your pants,” Magnus says, a glint in his eye. “Not that I’m complaining. In fact, I think I heard somewhere that pants are very bad for your health, and should be limited to outside use only.”
“I’m sure it’s my health that you’re concerned with,” Alec says, rolling his eyes when Magnus smirks. He jerks his head at the baby.

“She’s fine,” Magnus says, in response to Alec’s unasked question. “Just a bad dream, I think. She didn’t even open her eyes.”

“She was asleep the whole time,” Alec says. “She was asleep when we found her, despite the noise. Her name is Violet. She was wrapped in one of those monogrammed blankets, but it was pretty filthy so Izzy took it, to wash it.”

“Violet,” Magnus repeats, awe-struck. “What happened? I thought it was just a disturbance call.”

“It was,” Alec says, inching closer. “The disturbance just so happened to be a demon. She was the only one left.”

Magnus looks at him sharply. “Mundane?”

Alec shakes his head. “We aren’t sure. Izzy’s looking into it. I’m not sure about the baby, but I’m pretty sure the parents were Mundanes. They didn’t try to fight back, and there were no weapons in the house. We did a quick sweep, and there wasn’t even a nursery. Demons wouldn’t have attacked random Mundanes, unless they were important, or had something important.” He glances pointedly at the baby. “I haven’t looked for a mark yet. I can’t see one.”

“That doesn’t necessarily mean anything,” Magnus mutters. “Usually we’re born with them, but sometimes there are exceptions. I’ve known a few. It might turn up soon, or it might not turn up at all. It’s possible that it’s something small, something not easily spotted.”

“She might not be a Warlock,” Alec suggests, although he hadn’t fully wanted to voice this thought.

“It’s unlikely that she’s any other sort of Downworlder,” Magnus counters, and Alec can feel how much he wants this, to be holding a small, Warlock baby in his arms. “And like you said, the demons must have been there for a reason. She’s hardly a vampire, or a werewolf, and we’d know straight away if she was fae.”

Alec puts a hand on Magnus’s shoulder and squeezes. “I guess we’ll just have to wait and see.”

Magnus shoots him a grateful look, and then nods. “I guess we will. Are you sure you’re well? Don’t think I didn’t notice you trying to get out of that conversation.”

“I promise, it was nothing serious,” Alec says. “I might not want to worry you, but I wouldn’t lie about that. It was just a few scrapes. I’m tired though. We’ll have to find somewhere for her to sleep, and food.”

Magnus grins up at him. “Already taken care of.”

He jerks his head at the kitchen, and Alec arches an eyebrow before padding around the couch and into the room. He comes to a halt at the sight of the island counter, which is littered with toys and bottles and piles of clothes, all in varying shades of pink and purple and yellow. The counter itself is invisible, buried under the mountain of baby things.

Alec reaches out and selects a yellow rubber duck, holding it up and staring at it, bemused.

“Are you sure you thought of everything?” Alec asks, amused. “There are still a few spaces left in the kitchen for you to fill up. I could empty a few cupboards, if you like?”
“Don’t be so droll, darling,” Magnus says, coming up behind him with a grin that fades into a wince when he follows Alec’s gaze. “Perhaps I overdid it a little.”

“Perhaps,” Alec grins.

“You love me anyway,” Magnus says, waving one hand dismissively. He immediately places it back on the baby, cradling Violet’s head carefully. Alec does a double take when he notices that all his rings are missing, banished to who knows where, leaving Magnus with long, bare fingers.

“I do,” Alec says, almost absently. “Magnus…”

“Yes, love?”

Alec hesitates. He stares down at the baby, Violet, who still has her eyes closed. Her nose is tiny, all scrunched up, and her cheeks are rosy and dimpled. Magnus has already wrapped her in a new blanket; this one is softer, made of expensive wool, pale blue and perfectly wrapped around her miniscule frame. Alec lifts one finger and gently glides it over her cheekbone.

He thinks of all the things he wants to say to Magnus. Don’t get your hopes up, please, and I don’t know if we’re ready for something like this, it’s only been a year or so, and I love you too much to see this hurt you and I know how much you want this, but…

He glances up at Magnus. His eyes are wary and a little tired, like he knows exactly what Alec is about to say. Alec lets his hand drift from the baby to Magnus, cups his cheek as tenderly as he can, still slightly unsure, even after a whole year of practice, of learning to love this man.

“Alexander?”

“Never mind.”

Magnus kisses him.

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Alec stumbles into the living room in the early hours of the morning, dragging a hand through his hair raggedly and searching blindly for the source of the noise. It’s a piercing wail, and Alec's sleep-fogged mind immediately jumps to demon, but when he gets there, stele held tightly in his grip, it's just Magnus. Magnus and the tiny, loud baby that they've somehow acquired.

Magnus doesn't see him yet. He's busy rocking the baby, one hand supporting her head against his chest and the other supporting her weight. He makes soft, soothing noises as he bounces gently in place, and Alec wants to turn the stele on himself, to sear the memnosyne rune above his heart, to score this into his memory. He wants to preserve this moment, to take it out on cold days and feel warm again: everything, from the soft light bouncing off Magnus' bronze cheeks, to the warbling cry emitting from the little wool blanket.

"Is everything alright?" Alec asks, trying to keep his voice low. It makes no difference, because Magnus startles anyway, jumping a little and banging his knee against the side table. The lamp wobbles, but doesn't fall, but a few coasters make a bid for freedom.

"Sorry," Alec whispers, mouth twitching. "I heard crying."

"I didn't hear you," Magnus says pointedly, with a reproachful look. It fades quickly though. "I think she’s hungry, but she still hasn’t opened her eyes. She must be exhausted. What were you doing, lurking in the doorway?"
"I wasn't lurking," Alec protests. His voice grows soft without his permission. "I was admiring the view."

Magnus stills, head bowed to look at the baby. Violet gives a tiny sob, and Magnus immediately starts rocking her again.

"Oh?" Magnus asks, clearing his throat.

"Yes," Alec says. Then he screws up the rest of his courage and flings it forward. "I think it's a view that I could get used to."

Magnus doesn't stop this time, but Alec hears the tiny, sharp inhale, followed by a long, slow breath of relief. Magnus glances up fondly, his eyes crinkling at the corners, and Alec is reminded that there are so many layers to this man, so many faces. He's seen Magnus at his coldest, calculating and ruthless, his eyes dark and unforgiving, magic pulsing from his fingers like waves in a storm. He's seen Magnus at his happiest, too, bright and warm and cheeky, throwing his head back to laugh wildly, flirting with everything with a pulse but saving the most private, significant smiles for Alec. And he's seen Magnus after everyone goes home, when he strips out of his usual attire and makes himself comfortable on the couch, or lounges in the bed, hands tangled in Alec’s hair, his smile carefree and his gestures big and lazy. Alec always thought that he was seeing Magnus at his most vulnerable, but now, with the soft shadow of the lamp illuminating the sharp edge of his jaw, and the pure awe in his eyes, Alec has to wonder if he was wrong.

"I need to make her a bottle," Magnus murmurs. "Do you want to hold her?"

"I'll do the bottle," Alec suggests instead. "I'm so tired that I think I might drop her."

He brushes a kiss against the top of Magnus's head as he walks past, marvelling at the fact that he can do things like that now. It’s going to take a long time, he thinks, as he rifles through the bags on the counter, for him to get used to this. Or maybe he will never get used to it. Maybe it will always feel new and awe-inspiring, and beautiful, and impossible.

The bottle stumps him. He fiddles with the plastic part, puts it down, picks up another plastic part and stares at it blankly. He recalls the bottles in the Institute, for Max, but although Alec was older, and enjoyed holding his brother while he fed, he never actually made a bottle. If he ever saw his mother do it, the knowledge is long since lost.

"It can’t be that difficult," Alec mutters, and starts to piece it together. After five minutes of fumbling and muffled swearing, Magnus walks in and hooks his chin over Alec's shoulder, grinning at the destruction on the counter.

"Do you admit defeat?"

"Never," Alec swears, and then clicks the last bit into place. He holds the bottle up triumphantly as Magnus snickers into his t-shirt, and then almost breaks his jaw on a yawn.

"Did you sterilize it?" Magnus asks.

Alec groans and puts the bottle down, and Magnus outright laughs at him.

"Here," Magnus says, and gently pushes Alec out of the way. "Take Violet, and I'll do the bottle."

Alec stumbles back a little as the baby is thrust into his arms. All the breath freezes in his lungs, sticking his windpipe closed. He holds the baby away from him, inexplicably terrified.
“Magnus,” he hisses, and Magnus shoots him a fond look.

“Alexander, it’s a baby. You’ve fought demons, and helped to bring down one of the most horrendous men in existence. You’re capable of seven different types of hand-to-hand combat, fluent in a number of languages and extremely skilled with an array of weapons, but you’re unable to hold a baby? A baby, whom I might add, is unable to even hold her own head up.”

Alec immediately cups the baby’s head closer, rearranging her so that she’s closer to his chest, a little more secure.

“This isn’t a weapon though,” he mutters, watching Magnus fiddle about with a large, menacing machine. “It’s a baby. She’s a baby.”

“You’re excellent with Max,” Magnus points out. “And I’m sure you made a wonderful big brother to Izzy when you were younger. Not that you aren’t one now, of course.”

“That was different,” Alec insists. “Max is my brother, and I never had him on my own. This is someone else’s baby.”

“You held Violet yesterday.”

“I was running on fumes, it was instinct.”

“Exactly, instinct,” Magnus says, grinning like a cat that got the cream. “You instinctively knew what to do, and how to hold her. You’re a natural, my darling, and you’re just going to have to deal with it, because my hands are full.” He winks, and then, to Alec’s dismay, begins to dismantle Alec’s hard work until the bottle is in pieces again.

“What did I ever do to you?” he mumbles, and then turns his attention to the baby, although he doesn’t particularly want to.

It’s not that he hates kids. It’s not that he doesn’t want this baby in his life. It’s the opposite, in fact; Alec knows, somehow, deep down, that the longer he holds her, the more he cares for her and looks after her, the more he is going to fall in love with her. Babies are easy to love, to cherish. It’s small now, the urge to trace her tiny ears and rock her to sleep, but it’s going to get stronger, harder to ignore. He’s going to want to raise her, to watch her grow, to keep her safe.

He fell in love with Izzy right away, even though he was young. He peeked over the edge of her bassinet and his heart swelled three sizes. And he and Izzy only had to look at a black and white scan of a bundle of cells before they knew that they would do anything for their brother. Alec has always been weak when it comes to family, has always wanted one of his own. Always thought he’d never get it.

And now…

But Alec isn’t going to get to do that. This baby belongs to someone else, someone who loves her and wants all the same things that Alec does. They aren’t going to get to keep her. They might not even have her for more than a day. She isn’t theirs.

“Done,” Magnus says, turning around with a bottle full of formula. He waggles it at Alec teasingly. “See? Much easier than learning Latin just for the fun of it.”

“You won’t ever let me live that down, will you?” Alec shakes his head. “We were going to have to learn it anyway, I was just getting a head-start on Izzy and Jace.”
“If you say so, sweetheart,” Magnus grins. He motions for the baby, bottle held aloft, and Alec hesitates. Magnus lifts an eyebrow. For a minute, they simply stand there, Alec with his arms around the baby, and Magnus with his eyes flicking all over Alec’s face, searching for something.

“Actually,” Magnus says slowly, “come to think of it, my arms suddenly seem to have grown rather weary.” He makes a show of dropping his arms to his side, flapping them around a bit, but the bottle remains the right way up the whole time, and there's a knowing glint in his eye. Alec glowers at him half-heartedly, and then takes the bottle as Magnus pushes it into his outstretched hand.

“You should probably sit down,” Magnus says. “She must be getting heavy.”

“She’s like a feather,” Alec says. “I could hold her forever.”

Magnus sucks in a breath, and Alec snaps his gaze up, alarmed. He hadn’t meant to say that, hadn’t meant to get Magnus’s hopes up, and his plan to detach himself from this baby is already off to a terrible start, but as soon as he catches Magnus’s gaze, he can feel his restraint beginning to weaken.

Magnus gets control of himself quickly. He’s had years of practice and Alec can see the wall slam down behind his eyes. It would have frustrated him, at any other time, but he gets it. Right now, he gets it, because this situation is so fragile and all it would take was one strike to shatter the whole thing.

“C’mon,” Alec says. “The basket will have to go in our room, so I might as well feed her in there. Besides, you look dead on your feet.”

Magnus snorts, some of his old humour creeping back into his gaze. “Such a flatterer. I wish I could say the same about you, but you look as delicious as always.”

They arrange themselves carefully on the bed. Alec leans against the headboard, legs tucked under the covers, and Magnus folds himself into the space beside him, reaching over to flick on one of the lamps. The room is hushed and quiet, and Alec can feel himself dozing off. The baby drinks, still mostly asleep, and Alec jerks upright when Magnus pokes him in the ribs.

“You’re falling asleep,” Magnus says. “Here, give her to me.”

“She’s nearly finished anyway,” Alec says, yawning again. He’s in the process of handing the baby over to Magnus when he glances down and almost chokes.

“Magnus,” he whispers. “She’s awake.”

Magnus goes still, and then crowds closer to look at her.

Her eyes are open, blinking slowly and sleepily and there are high spots of colour on her chubby cheeks. Alec doesn't know much about babies, and what they can see. She seems to be about a month old, although a little smaller than Alec would like. She does nothing more than blink at them, but it's enough for Alec's heart to swell again, like a red balloon.

It also answers one of their questions.

“Well,” Alec says. “I think we found her Warlock’s mark.”

Magnus laughs brightly.

Her eyes, so big and wide and curious, are bright, bright violet.
Magnus is still sprawled out over their bed when Violet starts to cry. Alec mashes his face against the pillow and then sighs, opening one eye and squinting at the clock. It reads 02:04. Groaning, Alec rolls off the bed and gets to his feet, stumbling blindly towards the bassinet, which stands beside Magnus. It’s dark, and Alec fumbles for Violet, wrapping her in the blue wool blanket and lifting her up, carefully making his way around the room and out into the hallway. He shuts the door as quietly as possible, leaving Magnus asleep, and then pads into the living room.

They've become rather practiced at taking turns with her over the past few days. She barely sleeps anymore, and the long nights are beginning to take their toll.

Violet is making small, whimpering noises and squirming, her face screwed up tightly. Alec finds himself panicking when she doesn’t stop crying, no matter how much he rocks her or soothes her. It usually works after a few minutes, but nothing happens today.

She doesn’t want her bottle, or her dummy. He checks her diaper, and her temperature, and then her teeth, even though she’s too young to be teething. He’s devoured dozens of obnoxious books on babies and motherhood over the past few days, so he knows this, but he checks anyway.

He tries distracting her with toys and her rattle, but that only seems to make her more upset. He opens the front door and stands, bare-footed, in the hallway, where it’s cooler, but it makes no difference.

The clock ticks over to three, and Violet isn’t screaming, but she isn’t quiet either. It’s just sad noises, whimpers and cries that break Alec’s heart, and he doesn’t know what’s causing them, or how to fix it. There doesn’t seem to be anything wrong, but she just won’t stop.

One of the books had said that sometimes babies just cry because that’s all they know how to do. Alec cups the back of her head as he bounces on the balls of his feet and wishes fervently that the books would go and fuck themselves, with their smug tone of voice and patronising instructions and unhelpful advice.

“Okay, so we’re both kind of exhausted here, sweetheart,” Alec slurs, rocking her. He knows he’s tired when the endearments slip out without permission. He can still remember Magnus’s glee when Alec called him Carino, in the dead of night. “What can I do, hmm? Shhh, it’s alright. Shh, c’mon.”

Violet blinks up at him, still crying, tears trickling down her cheeks. Alec wipes them away with his thumb, marveling at how it’s bigger than her whole nose, and then he falls backwards onto the sofa. He misses by an inch, grazing the upholstery and landing hard on the floor, which jolts them both. Violet opens her mouth and cries harder, and Alec is at his wits end. He stares at her, wide-eyed and exhausted.

“I don’t know what to do,” he mutters, dazed and tired.

Heartbeats, his mind supplies. One of the books said something about ‘recreating the safety of the womb’, and the word alone makes Alec wrinkle his nose in disgust, but he’s pretty much out of options. He shrugs out of his shirt and slides down the length of the sofa until they’re both lying on the floor, lets instinct take over as he puts Violet’s head near his heart, feeling slightly ridiculous, but mostly just tired.

It takes a few minutes of murmured reassurances, of soothing sounds, before Alec realises that Violet is quiet. He can feel her little snuffles as she breathes, asleep, and stares wide-eyed at the ceiling. His shoulders sag and he puts his arms carefully around her, gently grabbing throw pillows and building
little walls around him. He’s heard horror stories about babies falling asleep on chests and chairs, about crushing them with weight, and for a moment he doesn’t think he can sleep like this, out of fear, but then the exhaustion hits him again. *Magnus is close by,* he reasons.

He glances down at the single tuft of dark hair, at the slight curve of her nose. *She’s safe here,* he thinks. *I can keep her safe here.*

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Magnus makes his way through the hallway, sheet trailing along the ground. He’s too hot and too cold at the same time, and it’s only five in the morning, but he’s too restless to sleep. The bed feels cold without Alec there, and he didn’t miss the fact that Violet was gone too. He vaguely remembers hearing her cry in the night, but the noise had quickly faded to the living room and his fogged mind had accepted it easily before pitching him back into sleep.

He’s not ill, not really, but between juggling work and their newly acquired housemate, Magnus is feeling a little run down.

He stumbles, yawning, into the living room, and blinks at the sight that awaits him.

“Oh,” he says quietly, all the breath rushing out of him. He grips hold of the doorframe tightly, knuckles whitening, shocked by how *strong* his reaction is.

Alec is lying on the carpet, surrounded by throw cushions and his discarded shirt, dressed only in a pair of threadbare sweatpants and holey socks. His hair is a ragged mess of dark curls, and there are dark circles under his eyes – he looks about as bad as Magnus feels, but he’s still eerily beautiful, and he’s holding the baby against his bare chest. Her eyes are closed, and she is lifted up and down gently with each rise and fall of Alec’s chest, her ear pressed against his heart.

“Oh no,” Magnus says faintly.

Alec has always been big, muscular and tall, but Violet makes him seem enormous. One of his hands is big enough to dwarf her, cradling her entire body between careful, strong fingers. It’s not an intimidating size, but rather an enveloping one. Not smothering, but *protecting,* even if Alec doesn’t see it that way, even if he slouches and shrinks down and leans against things, rather than standing tall and proud the way he should. Magnus wants to take a photograph, to show Alec what everyone else sees when they’re near his tall frame: safety and strength, something to lean on.

Magnus sags against the doorframe. “Oh, this isn’t good.”

*It is* good, of course. There is nothing bad about this picture, and Magnus drinks it in again and again, unable to move his eyes away, because he has wanted this for so long, *craved* it. Family. He’s seen fellow immortals grow and marry, have children, have grandchildren, and Magnus – well, he’s still young, compared to them. He feels dreadfully old, at times, feels like a familiar dull ache in a world of creaking bones, but in the eyes of other Downworlders, Magnus is young. Young and stupid and free to make mistakes, to live before he loves, fully.

He has shoved those cravings down for so long that they have long since seemed impossible. Even now, the dreams of a normal, happy family are tainted by demons and monsters and the world in general, but it doesn’t feel as solidly hopeless as it did before. The possibility is right there, just beyond his outstretched fingertips, and if he could reach just a little farther, if the world could maybe be on his side for once and tip forward just a little, come to him, then – then he could have it all. Alec and a baby and a home that doesn’t feel cold and lonely, an existence that is full of warmth. Full of love.
Magnus takes a step closer, and then breathes deeply. They are both sound asleep, so he makes his way to the kitchen, where he makes coffee properly, to keep his hands busy, and tries not to think about how easily this could all be swept away from him.

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"What on earth are you doing?"

Alec glances up from where he's carefully holding Violet in the bath, making sure the water goes nowhere near her face. Magnus grins at him, obviously delighted, and then taps his chin.

"You've got a little something on your chin, darling," Magnus says.

Alec rolls his eyes and tries to look dignified, despite the fact that he's blushing beneath the bubbles. "It's a bubble beard, Magnus, it's supposed to be on my chin. You don't have to look so pleased, this was for Violet, not you."

"There's no reason why we both can't enjoy it." Magnus settles beside the bath, a mere breath away from Alec, and smirks. Alec refuses to wipe the bubbles off his chin; instead, he swipes up a handful of suds and smashes his hand against Magnus's face. Magnus splutters, spitting bubbles out of his mouth, and Alec can't hide his laughter. He snickers loudly, still holding Violet, who's watching them both with a bemused expression. At any given time, she either looks solemn or alarmed, and sometimes she smiles, but the books assure Alec that it's just gas.

"You're going to be a bad influence on the baby," Magnus says, wiping his mouth. There are bubbles on his eyebrows and his cheek, and under his bottom lip, and he looks ridiculous and soft. Alec gives in and leans over, kissing his lower lip gently. He tastes faintly of bubble bath, and Magnus hums, deepening the kiss and ruining Alec’s bubble beard.

"You're the one who's going to corrupt her," Alec points out, when he draws back. "I'm the better behaved one out of us both."

"Oh please," Magnus protests, rolling his eyes, but he doesn't get farther than that because Violet brings her hands down against the surface of the water with a crashing sound. Water cascades over the sides of the little plastic bath, soaking Alec's jeans, and he yelps and lifts her up slightly so that the wave doesn't catch her face. She continues to splash unrepentantly, blowing bubbles with her mouth, and Alec watches her incredulously.

"I don't think she needs corrupting," he says, voice pitched to carry over Magnus' cackling. "She's a little devil already."

Magnus catches one of her little hands, and she wraps her fist around one of his fingers and holds it tightly. The other hand comes back down against the water, and Alec finds himself spluttering with laughter as water splashes all over him.

"That's enough," Alec says fondly, once he's thoroughly soaked. "Little fish. She's going to be a water baby."

He scoops her out of the bath and wraps her gently in a yellow towel. It has a little duck hood with an orange beak, and he tugs it down over her head and smiles as she goes slightly cross-eyes in an attempt to see it. He isn't sad, but there's a weird ache in his heart that he can't describe.

"She's going to grow," Magnus sighs, voicing Alec's thoughts. "She's going to get bigger and grow up."
Alec winces. "Don't say that."

"It's true."

" Doesn't mean we have to think about it," Alec says, ducking his head to blow raspberries on her tummy. She doesn't laugh, but she makes tiny noises in response, looking completely scandalised.

"Ah, denial," Magnus says, with wry amusement. "Not just a river in Egypt. Alexander, we can't ignore this forever. We're going to have to talk about it."

Alec arches an eyebrow. "You're the one who's been avoiding this conversation."

Magnus looks rather glum at that statement. He props his chin on his hands and stares at Violet, who kicks her chubby legs, pushing her tiny, wrinkled feet into Alec's thigh. Alec wraps the towel around them so they won't get cold, marvelling at how small her toes are.

"I know," Magnus says, and he looks so old, so tired, so worn out, that Alec instantly reaches out and grips his wrist tightly, as though he's afraid Magnus might fade away there and then, right in front of him.

"Magnus."

"I know, and I'm sorry. I was trying to detach myself. I told you, that the older we get, the harder we become. The harder it is to love others. Not because people aren't worthy of it, but because it takes so much out of you, Alec, to see the people you love leave and die and fade. It's exhausting."

He has to get Violet into clothes, but Magnus just looks so utterly miserable, so despairing, that Alec can't move.

It's not just that, either. Magnus, in general, loves very freely. He doesn't see it, but he loves so fiercely that it takes Alec's breath away. Magnus is closed off, cold sometimes, and there is a dangerously hard look in his eyes far too often, but even as he refuses to let his walls down, he invites others to crash through them.

But despite how much he loves, Magnus doesn't talk. Not about his past, or his previous partners - there's nothing shameful about it, but to Magnus, this is still a very new relationship. It is to Alec, too, sometimes.

"I'm still human," Magnus says quietly. "I cannot pick who I fall in love with, but I am always careful with my emotions. I guard them closely. But with this, I never had a chance to do that. I tried so hard, after you brought her back, to stay distant and detached, but it just wasn't possible. She's so small, Alec, and she needs us. It's impossible not to love her."

"I know," Alec says, swallowing thickly. "I love her too."

He shouldn't. It's been a week and a half, but she's been with them constantly. Late nights and sick and baby formula and spilled coffee and not enough clean clothes and greasy hair and tired eyes and diapers that, frankly, belong in a toxic waste bin. All of it, combined with tiny hands and little feet and purple eyes and this little tuft of dark hair; it's all conspired to break Alec, in the best way possible.

Magnus looks so grateful, so relieved. He grips Alec's hand back, and his knuckles creak.

"I wasn't sure," he whispers, his voice breaking. "I knew, really, but I just wasn't sure. And I didn't want to talk about it. It makes it more real. Are you...?"
"Terrified?" Alec huffs. It should probably cost him something to admit it, but it doesn't, somehow. "Yes. What if they take her away? We don't - she's not ours."

"She is," Magnus snaps, and his grip is painful now. "In all the ways that matter. Blood isn't always everything, look at you and Jace. And Clary and Simon. She's ours, Alexander."

"I know, I know," Alec whispers, soothing. "I know she is. But we have to do this properly, we have to make sure that there isn't someone out there, looking for her. We have to make sure that we do what's best for her."

Magnus drops his head onto Alec's shoulder, and Alec runs his fingers through his soft, un-gelled hair.

*

Alec is mobbed the moment he walks into the kitchen in the Institute. He’s run into a few fellow Shadowhunters in the halls, and they’ve all given him a nod or a sneer – the animosity towards he and Magnus is mostly non-existent now, but it lingers a little more obviously here, where the wedding almost took place. It’s been almost over a year now, and yet Alec’s father still refuses to look him in the eye when he sees him.

“Can I hold her?” Izzy asks, smushing her face against Alec’s shoulder and trying to snatch Violet out of his grip. Alec hefts Violet a little higher up his chest and rolls his eyes, placing the changing bag on one of the stools.

“Let me sit down first,” Alec says, batting away Jace’s questing fingers.

“She’s so small,” Simon observes, cooing. “I want one. Can I have one?”

“Who are you even asking?” Jace asks, arching an eyebrow. “Besides, there’s only one person in here with the right equipment for that and she’s too gay to function.”


Simon makes a triumphant noise, pointing a finger in Jace’s face, beside himself with glee. “You quoted it! I knew you liked the film, I knew it. Oh man, the next evening’s going to be even better. We’re watching musicals with the subtitles on and you’re going to sing. You don’t get a say in this.”

“What’s happening?” Alec murmurs to Izzy, narrowing his eyes at the soft, fond look on Jace’s face. He hasn’t seen that particular expression before, not on his parabatai. Jace always looked at Clary like she was something he wanted, not something he was fond of. This, this is different.

Izzy eases Violet out of Alec’s hands and then rolls her eyes at the two boys, who are now arguing quietly over whether or not Simon is allowed to sing now.

“Simon is attempting to introduce Jace to the world of Mundane pop culture because he wants to spend time with him and Jace is going along with it because he’s completely smitten,” Izzy drawls loudly. “All in all, it’s disgustingly adorable.”

Jace and Simon both go suspiciously silent. Izzy smirks. Alec rolls his eyes and decides he doesn’t want to know.

“Isabelle, this is Violet,” Alec says, smoothing a hand over Violet’s head. It still terrifies him, how soft her head is. “Violet, this is Izzy.”
Violet squints up at her and then yawns, her mouth crinkling. Izzy practically melts, the smirk sliding off her face to be replaced with a look of complete adoration.

“She’s beautiful,” Izzy says softly. “Look at her eyes! Does this make me an aunt?”

A temporary one, Alec thinks.

Everyone crowds around, making soft noises and waving. Alec would be amused at how easily everyone melts when it comes to a baby in their midst, but he’s worse than them all put together. He fishes a bottle out of the changing bag and heads to the sink, clearing off cereal bowls and bread so that there’s a clean space to work with. He runs the hot water and almost doesn’t hear Izzy creeping up on him.

“Have you left my – Violet with the vampire?” Alec says, coughing to cover his slip. He turns off the tap and busies himself with the bottle, trying not to look at Izzy.

“Jace is supervising,” Izzy reassures him, her voice low. She lays a hand on Alec’s arm, and he stills. “Big brother, I know you won’t want to talk about it, but I have to ask… are you sure you’ve thought this through?”

Alec glances at her. “We’ve been managing so far. I’m actually quite good at it, looking after her, and Magnus is a natural.”

“You seem pretty invested,” Izzy says carefully. “I haven’t seen you look at anything like this since I had that pink doll when I was a kid, and you weren't allowed one.”

“There was no need to bring that up.” Alec glowers at her from under his lashes, and she smirks, but Alec can see the worry in her eyes. He sighs, filling a plastic jug with hot water and letting the bottle float in it.

“We don’t know anything about her parents,” Alec says quietly. “There’s every possibility that she could be taken away from us at any moment, and I don’t think I can cope with that. I’m trying to be sensible about it, to be realistic, but Magnus and I both love her to pieces, Izzy. I want to raise her. I know Magnus does too.”

It's the most he's said on the matter, but he trusts Izzy.

Izzy purses her lips thoughtfully. “You haven’t talked to Mom, I take it? Right. I bet we can swing this our way somehow. I know a few people who might be able to help, and I’ll have a word with them. Our name might be mud in Mom’s eyes, but it still means a lot in some places.”

Alec’s throat closes up. “I don’t know what we’ll do if we have to give her up.”

“You won’t have to,” Izzy says, with a slightly vicious smile that softens at Alec’s grateful look.

“Have you drawn eyebrows on that baby?” Clary’s voice rings through the room, distracting Alec from Izzy’s kind, reassuring face. She’s standing next to Simon, her hair twisted up inside a towel and a graphite pencil clenched between her teeth as she stares over his shoulder in concentration. She spots Alec and offers him a bizarre smile around the pencil.

“Jace did it,” Simon says immediately, flinging Izzy’s eyebrow pencil across the table. It skids to a stop beside the rest of her make-up while Jace flaps a hand in Simon’s face.

“I just held her,” he protests. He’s smiling though. “You’re the culprit here.”
“They really are disgusting, aren’t they?” Alec mutters, and Izzy cackles. He can see dark, wildly disproportionate eyebrows etched onto his baby’s face from here, and he can’t help but snigger softly. She looks extremely annoyed, although that’s just the eyebrows. He takes the bottle back to the table and snaps a quick picture on his phone, sending it to Magnus.

He gets a reply, a few minutes later. *She looks just like you, darling.*

Izzy reads the message over his shoulder and starts to snigger. Alec rolls his eyes, blushing, and holds up the bottle. “Who wants to feed her?”

A volley of hands go up.

* *

Alec sprints up the stairs to the loft, unable to slow the fierce hammering of his heart against his ribcage. He has a fist clenched around a sheaf of important papers, crumpling them slightly, and he doesn’t care that he’s going to trip over his own feet any minute now. Excitement has stolen his grace, made his feet heavy and clumsy with relief. He bounds up the last step and throws the door open, practically falling into the living room. He holds the papers up, calling for Magnus, and then jerks to a halt, one foot frozen in mid-air.

Simon and Jace spring apart. Simon swallows back a shriek, tumbling backwards and knocking his own glasses off his face, whilst Jace rockets to his feet so fast that he leaves his stomach behind and sways a little, eyes wide, before shoving his hands nonchalantly in his pockets.

He gives a little head nod, at Alec, who doesn’t think he could move if he tried. “S’up?”

Simon snorts, despite his embarrassment. He props himself up on his elbows and levels an incredulous look at Jace. “S’up? *Really?*

Jace pauses to glower at Simon, his cheeks flushing red. “Well, what would you have preferred I said? It’s *not what it looks like?*

“I don’t know,” Simon splutters. “It was nothing! Just a moment of weakness!”

Alec arches an eyebrow at the silence that follows.

Jace gets this *look* on his face before an impassive mask slams down over his features, and then he mutters something under his breath before storming out of the room. Simon winces, and then glances at Alec, readjusting his glasses, offering him a slightly awkward wave from where he’s sat, cross-legged on Alec’s living room rug.

“That came out wrong,” Simon says miserably. “I didn't mean to say it like that.”

“I don’t really care,” Alec says. “But I’m going to do you a favour. I’m going to pretend that I didn’t just find you making out with my brother in my living room—”

“Making out, we weren’t *making out—*”

“If, and *only* if, you follow him and fix whatever you just broke with your mouth,” Alec says, and then cringes. “I meant that you messed up by *talking*, not that I want you to kiss him again to fix it.”

Simon is already up on his feet, saluting Alec as he walks backwards into the adjoining room. “Kiss him again, I hear you, loud and clear. Thanks for the advice. Magnus went out, by the way, on a job, hence why we were here to babysit. Your baby is painfully adorable. Jace had to punch a wall to feel
manly again after he saw her.”

Alec balks. “He called you?”

“Technically he called Izzy, but Jace picked up her phone because she was in the shower, and I came along because it was either that or sit and watch Clary and Izzy make eyes at each other.”

Simon mimes something popping out of his eyes and then trips backwards out of the room, leaving Alec to do a quick, panicked search for Violet. She’s lying in her bouncer chair, right next to where Simon and Jace were sat, one hand raised as she tries to catch the little soft stars hanging from the mobile attached to it. Alec falls into the space beside the bouncer and rocks it gently, laughing at the surprised face Violet makes, and then grabbing her foot and shaking it lightly. She tries to stare down at his hand, nose wrinkling, and it makes Alec laugh again.

He spreads the pieces of paper out on the floor and looks at them, swallowing thickly. There’s a birth certificate, a faint pink colour, with the ink only just drying. Runes are stamped into the corners of the stiff card, runes that will change the ink to what they want it to say before fading.

“See this?” Alec murmurs, holding the paper up in front of Violet, who peers at it before getting distracted by the stars again. “This is so you can have our name. Daddy’s, I think, or maybe both of ours. And this one is so everyone knows we get to keep you.”

He puts down the papers, stares at them for a moment. He can’t deny that he almost cried when he finished the meeting with the Inquisitor and the Silent Brother, but he’d kept the tears back, conscious of his mother standing in the corner of the room, her arms folded. It was only when the representatives left, leaving behind the sheaf of legal documents proclaiming Violet to be his daughter, that Alec turned and found his mother with tears in her eyes. It had shocked him – Maryse didn’t cry – but not as much as the hug that followed, or the whispers of pride or the blessings that she bestowed. She had mentioned nothing of Magnus, and Alec knows that she won’t, not until the Lightwood family name is restored to whatever glory it once had, but he’s content with this, for now.

Then she had held him firmly by the shoulders and insisted that she get to meet her granddaughter soon, and Alec had almost fainted. Granddaughter. He had a daughter.

He has a daughter with Magnus.

He stares at the papers until Violet begins to cry, and then he eases her out of the Bouncer and mumbles to her as he goes into the kitchen to make coffee, resolutely not thinking about Jace and Simon, and why they’re taking so long. He strains his hearing, but can’t hear any shouting, which is either a good thing, or a very bad thing.

“I’m not sure how Maryse will take it if all her children are gay,” Alec tells Violet, as he fiddles with the coffee machine. “Or bisexual. Or pansexual, or whatever. She wants to meet you, you know. Not sure about your grandad – Raziel. Grandad. That’s weird.”

“Not as weird as you talking to a baby,” Jace says, strolling out of the doorway. He looks suspiciously mussed and tousled, and Alec glances at him warily, and then over his shoulder, where Simon is just bumbling out of the corridor with a dazed look on his face.

“I don’t want to know what happened in there,” Alec warns him. “Just know that I am going to bleach my brain as soon as I have my hands free.”

Jace scoffs, “We have to watch you and Magnus sucking face all of the time. Besides, I’m hot and Simon’s not awful, so you can’t have suffered that much.”
“Did you just imply–”

“Anyway,” Jace says quickly. “You do realise that you look like an actual adult. You know, like a proper adult. With a kid.”

“I think the word you’re looking for is Dad,” Simon puts in, strolling closer. He makes a face at Violet, who simply stares at him. “He looks like a dad. And technically, he is, you know. He’s looking after her and taking care of her – stuff that dads do.”

“Not technically, not anymore;” Alec says, a grin stealing over his face. He still can’t quite believe it. “Have a look at the papers on the counter.”

He’s talking to Jace, mostly, but it’s Simon who goes over and picks them up, rifling through them as he brings them back to where Jace is waiting impatiently. Simon stops dead, whistles lowly, and then snaps his head up with a grin.

“Dude,” he says, looking as excited as he had during Alec’s disaster of a wedding. “This is awesome.”

Jace snatches the papers up and reads them carefully, his face blank. Then he puts them down on the counter, beside Alec’s mug of hot coffee, and then he grins so widely that Alec can hear his jaw creak in protest. Simon sighs kind of dreamily from behind him, staring at Jace’s face, but even that can’t ruin the moment.

“Give Simon the baby,” Jace demands, and throws his arms out for a hug. Alec obliges him, amused, and then coughs as Jace crushes him in his arms, squeezing him tightly. The excitement of today rushes back into him, and he grins into Jace’s shoulder.

“They’re having a moment,” Simon stage-whispers, nodding sagely at Violet, who stares back in alarm. “A brotherly bonding moment. You can tell by all the back-slapping. If we’re lucky, we might even see some very masculine tears.”

“I don’t know why I like him,” Jace mutters, and Alec claps him on the back consolingly.

“Me neither.”

Simon splutters at them as they break apart. “Vampire hearing, you assholes. I don’t like either of you.”

“Don’t swear around the baby,” Jace says, smirking. Alec takes Violet back, arches an eyebrow at the two of them, and then goes back to his coffee.

Simon narrows his eyes. “Alec, you’re going to be a great dad. Just don’t let Magnus give her a bath in glitter, and that’s half the battle won.”

Then he stands up and gathers up his jacket before heading towards the door. Alec grins, leaning back against the counter, and watches Jace fidget, shifting his weight back and forth subtly as he watches Simon get further and further away.

“Just go,” Alec says. “Please. This is painful to watch.”

Ten minutes later, as Alec is giving Violet her bottle, Magnus bursts through the door. He looks pissed, his eyes flashing wildly, his coat billowing grandly around him as he walks, despite the lack of wind. Alec feels his stomach flip over, tightening, the way it always does when Magnus is mad.
He listens to Magnus swear with an arched eyebrow.

“Bad day?”

Magnus jolts slightly, unprepared for the sight of Alec in their kitchen, leaning against the counter with the sunlight pouring over his skin like liquid silk. He opens his mouth to speak, and then sighs, slamming a hand down against the counter. It makes Alec’s hand slip, and Violet gives him a reproachful look as she searches for the bottle.

“Sorry, love,” Magnus says, wincing. “Very bad day. Irritating customer decided that he needed a portal as an emergency. I got there to find out that he actually needed three portals, and none of them were for him, and it was actually part of a revenge plot that he and his buddies had formed against his ex, who was perfectly justified in leaving that pig of the man.”

Alec winces. He knows Magnus hates it when people call him up for trivial things, when they treat his magic like a parlour trick, when in fact it’s incredibly powerful, complicated stuff that Alec can barely begin to understand. Alec himself has been guilty of taking Magnus for granted before – it’s been the source of one or two of their arguments, and he wants for it to never come up again, but sometimes he just doesn’t think. He’s better now, though. He doesn’t think he’ll ever take Magnus for granted again.

“I’m all for pettiness and spite,” Magnus says airily, “but only if it’s deserved, and this woman did not deserve it. I sent her a fruit-basket.”

“Did you tell them that?” Alec asks, mouth twitching into a wry smile.

Magnus pauses, a smirk curling his mouth. “I think they got the message.”

“You’re awful,” Alec says fondly, and leans forward to kiss him. Magnus hums, pulling him in, and they stand there, kissing slowly, until Alec is breathless and conscious of the fact that there’s a baby between them. He pulls away, only for Magnus to duck down and brush a kiss on Violet’s forehead. Her eyes seem to light up with recognition, and one of her hands comes along to poke at Magnus’s eyebrow.

“I bet I can make your bad day better,” Alec says. His pulse jumps, and he has to clear his throat. Magnus looks up at him inquisitively. “You already have, darling, but now I’m intrigued. Care to enlighten me?”

Alec bundles Violet into his arms and watches him coo for a moment. Then he picks up the papers and leads them both into the living room, where they fall onto the soft rug. Magnus arches an eyebrow, smiling bemusedly at Alec’s secretiveness, and then murmurs something. A wave of warmth hits Alec’s back as the fire roars to life in the grate. Alec bites his lip, both nervous and excited.

“I went to see my mother today, after patrol,” Alec says. Magnus pulls a face, and Alec rolls his eyes. “Let me finish. She said she had something important to talk about, so I went to see her. She had a few representatives from the Clave waiting for me, as well as a Silent Brother. They wanted to talk to me about Violet.”

Magnus stiffens, his spine going rigid. Alec can see the fear that floods his eyes and immediately crowds closer, puts a hand firmly on his cheek.

“Let me finish,” Alec says again, softly. “I would have called you, but I knew you had Violet, and I barely had a chance to speak before they started interrogating me. I don’t think they would have
“Alec,” Magnus says, and Alec almost flinches at the desperation in his tone. “If you’re going to tell me that we have to return her, that they found her family, then would you stop trying to soften the blow and please just do it.”

“Magnus,” Alec says calmly. “They gave us her adoption certificate.”

He holds up the papers when Magnus doesn’t speak. He sits there, frozen, his grip on Violet growing tighter.

“Birth certificates, adoption certificates,” Alec says. “Magically modified, but still completely legal. They found the mother, but she was dead, and several letters from her to the Mundanes that we found Violet with prove that she didn’t want the baby, that it was a mistake, that she left her with them with no intentions of returning. They think the demon that attacked the Mundanes was the father. The Silent Brothers have made the decision to trust both of us with her. They said there was no one safer to leave this child with than the High Warlock of Brooklyn and the Lightwood family.”

“Alec,” Magnus says, his voice breaking. “Alexander, this isn’t real.”

Alec grins, leans in and presses their foreheads together. He can hear Magnus’s breath catching and hitching, and his own heart is racing impossibly fast as relief bubbles up between them, until they are both laughing breathlessly and clutching each other.

Magnus glances down, and Alec follows his gaze. Violet is asleep, her mouth slack and her eyes moving beneath her eyelids. The tuft of hair is starting to curl at the end. Alec drops his hand and finds hers, and Violet grips his finger tightly in her whole palm.

“She’s really ours,” Magnus says, awe-struck. He runs a finger along her cheek.

“She really is,” Alec says softly.

*  

_Five months later_

Alec turns a page of his book carefully, slowly, taking the time to lick his finger before he places it on the thin paper and makes sure to keep his movements calm, measured. He hasn’t read a single word of the book so far, despite being a chapter into it, but he pretends to scan his eyes over the page as though he’s deeply interested in each overly-convoluted paragraph.

There’s a scoffing sound from the corner of the room, and Alec glances up.

Nate is still standing there. He’s small, for a twelve-year-old, but he has the usual gangly lankiness that precedes shooting up by about ten inches over one weekend. The way he’s hunched in on himself, thin arms crossed tightly over his chest and chin ducked down, doesn’t help to make him seem any more imposing.

He hasn’t moved since Isabelle dragged him into their flat half an hour ago. She stayed only long enough to explain that there was nowhere else for him to go before presenting Alec with a dirty, skinny boy in oversized, ripped clothes and then dashed off again. The boy had sidled into the room, ratty blonde curls tangled in the strap of his rucksack, and then pasted himself to the wall on the other side of the room to Alec, where he had a clear view of Alec, the door, and the window.
Alec turns another page. There’s another snort from the corner.

“Why are you even bothering?” Nate says. It’s the first thing he’s said in Alec’s presence, and he’s got a surprisingly low, gravelly voice, and it makes Alec jump.

“Bothering with what?”

Nate jerks his head. “With the book. I can tell you’re not reading it, you know. I’m thirteen, I’m not stupid.”

“Izzy said you were twelve,” Alec says slowly. He puts his book down and then pats the seat next to him on the couch. Nate straightens his spine and doesn’t move. “And I never said that you were stupid. I was just trying to make you feel less on edge.”

“Sound logic,” Nate mutters under his breath. Alec swallows a surprised laugh. “I’ll be thirteen in a few weeks, so I’m basically thirteen already.”

Alec arches an eyebrow. “How many weeks?”

Nate shifts uncomfortably, avoiding Alec’s gaze. “Twenty.”

Alec can’t hide his laughter this time. It bubbles out of him like champagne and he presses a hand to his mouth before getting to his feet. He doesn’t miss the way that Nate immediately shrinks back against the wall, trying to make himself smaller. Alec’s heart gives a painful lurch and he toes his shoes off, trying to make himself seem as small and unintimidating as possible. It doesn’t make much of a difference to his height, but he feels a little more comfortable, vulnerable, digging his toes into the carpet.

“You don’t have to come with me, but I’m going to make a drink,” Alec says, voice pitched low.

“Ran away from his Institute,” Izzy had said softly, as she watched Nate take in the flat with wary, narrowed eyes. “We picked him up a few blocks from here. This is the fifth time he’s run, and the Head’s had enough. They won’t take him back, and he obviously doesn’t want to be in an Institute. This was the only other place we could think of where he’d be safe and looked after.”

Nate glances at the front door. He doesn’t quite manage to make it look casual, the way he probably wants to. Alec lets his shoulders drop and sighs.

“Look, we both know that you want to run. You’re in shape, and I expect you’re fast, but you also look hungry and tired and I’ve been training to chase things for years. Which means you’d probably make it about three blocks before I caught up to you. Five, if I was being generous.”

Nate tilts his chin up defiantly, but Alec can see this thin desperation in his eyes and puts his hands out, palms up, like Nate is a skittish animal.

“I’m not saying any of this to intimidate you,” Alec promises him gravely. “I don’t want to keep you here against your will, but you won’t make it very far on your own, not in this state. You’re too young to be out on your own, even if you are nearly thirteen. And maybe I’m wrong, but I think that a part of you probably doesn’t want to keep running, am I right?”

Nate very carefully doesn’t say anything. He simply looks at Alec, wary but listening. Attentive.

“Look, we have a bed here you can use,” Alec says. “I can make you whatever you want to eat and drink, and you can have a wash and get into some different clothes, because you kind of smell really bad right now.”
Nate makes an offended noise, and Alec smiles slightly to let him know he’s teasing, even though it’s true. Nate glowers up at him, but it’s the same kind of glare that Magnus uses when Alec teases him for being shorter.

“I don’t smell,” Nate protests, cheeks a little pink.

Alec shrugs. “Okay, well, you can still shower. Or have a bath, or whatever. My boyfriend has ridiculous amounts of bubble bath in there.”

Nate, to his credit, doesn’t react to Alec’s use of the word *boyfriend*. He does look a little mutinous at the thought of using bubble bath, at his age, but Alec finds that he prefers that expression to the scared, cornered one that Nate’s been sporting all evening.

“Why don’t you stay for just the one night, and see how you feel?” Alec suggests. “And if you hate it here, then I promise I’ll try as hard as I can to find you somewhere that you’ll actually enjoy living in. How’s that?”

Nate tips his head to the side. He seems to be weighing up all the possibilities, all the pros and cons, looking for loopholes or insincerity. Alec sees how he looks at the door again, hesitation written all over his face. He still wants to run.

It takes a few minutes, but eventually Nate says, “Fine. I want soup.”

Alec smiles. “I think I can manage soup.”

*

Nate is sitting on a barstool, leaning away from Alec and blowing on a bowl of hot tomato soup when Magnus waltzes through the front door. There’s a yelp and a clatter as Nate drops his spoon and skids back until he’s plastered against the fridge, his eyes very wide. Magnus comes to a stop, blinking in bemusement at the newest addition to their flat, hands still grasping the stroller.

Alec picks up the spoon and sets it down on the worktop before turning to Nate. He looks pretty spooked, so Alec keeps his voice firm and gentle as he explains that Magnus is his boyfriend, the one he mentioned before, and that the baby in the stroller making curious noises is their daughter, Violet.

“He’s not going to hurt you,” Alec murmurs. “You’re completely safe here.”

Nate throws him a haughty look and draws himself up. “I *know* that. I was just surprised.”

Alec’s mouth twitches. “Of course. I’ll let you get back to your soup.”

“Alec, there’s a teenager in our home,” Magnus says quite calmly. Alec rolls his eyes and moves to unbuckle Violet, who grabs his nose in her chubby little fist. She’s almost six months old now, and growing fast. It was only a few months ago that she had to be held all the time, cradled and soothed and hushed. She can hold her head up now, and the other day Alec found her rolling over on her baby mat and almost choked up, although he wouldn’t admit it to Magnus.

“His name is Nate,” Alec says, tucking Violet against him. She grabs his shirt with her mouth and drools everywhere, and Alec should probably be more grossed out than he is. Behind him, Nate makes a sound of disgust and then hastily goes back to his soup when Magnus leans around Alec to look at him.

“What happened to him?” Magnus asks suddenly, brow furrowing. “He looks dreadful.”
Alec snags his hand and tugs him out of the kitchen, standing in the doorway. “Izzy brought him to me, to us. He’s a runaway from the Institute not far from here. Apparently, this is the fifth time he’s run away, and they don’t want him back now. He was caught near here, and everyone figured he’d be safe enough with us.”

“Parents?” Magnus inquires.

Alec shrugs. “I doubt it. I don’t know anything about him, other than he’s twelve, very wary, and wants to get the hell out of here. I know the Institute he’s from. It’s pretty much destitute, and the family are a bunch of old, stuffy Shadowhunters, very old-fashioned. I don’t think they treated him well at all.”

Magnus’s expression darkens. He peers around Alec’s shoulder at the quiet, withdrawn boy stabbing his spoon into a bowl of soup, and apparently comes to a decision. Alec watches him anxiously. He doesn’t know why, but he desperately wants Magnus to let Nate stay; he can’t help but let out a deep sigh of relief when Magnus informs him that he’ll set up a bed in the spare room.

“Thank you,” Alec murmurs, leaning in to kiss him soundly.

“Honestly, Alexander, did you think I was going to turn away a boy like that? Or any child, for that matter? What do you take me for?”

“No, I know,” Alec says hastily. “I know that. I just thought… we have Violet, and all of this has happened pretty quickly, considering how long we’ve been together. Or not been together, as it were.” He pauses. “That didn’t make sense.”

Magnus grins at him fondly. “Alec, my darling, I’ve been alive for a very long time, waiting for you. However fast or slow we move is perfectly fine with me. You could bring in a hundred stray children in one evening and I would still kiss you goodnight and good morning, as I hope to do every day, for the rest of my life.”

Alec stares at him, stunned into silence. Magnus darts in to kiss him again, softly, as though he knows exactly how fragile Alec is feeling at the moment.

“We will take it one day at a time, and see how things go,” Magnus whispers against his mouth.

Alec watches him walk away and then shakes himself awake when Violet yanks on his hair.

“Ouch,” he complains, trying to untangle her fierce little grip. “You’re a monster. C’mon, let’s go meet your new friend.”

Nate is just finishing up his soup. He plays with the frayed end of his jacket as Alec sits in the chair beside him, leaving plenty of space between them so that Nate doesn’t feel too trapped. Violet fixes her wide eyes on Nate and makes a babbling sound, still trying to rip Alec’s hair out at the roots.

“Nate, this is Violet,” Alec says. “Violet, this is Nate.”

Nate regards her suspiciously. “Her eyes are purple.”

“She’s a Warlock,” Alec explains. “Just like Magnus is.”

“She’s his baby, then?” Nate frowns. “I thought Warlocks couldn’t have babies.”

“She’s both of ours’, but not biologically,” Alec says. “And some Warlocks can have babies, but Magnus can’t. Violet was rescued from a fight with a demon and brought to us, so that we could
“So that’s what you do,” Nate says slowly, looking more and more annoyed by the second. “Take in strays? Rescue people? Well I told you, I don’t need rescuing, and as soon as I can, I’m getting out of here, and you can’t stop me!”

He’s standing by the end of his speech, his cheeks red and puffed up with anger and his hands clenched into fists at his side. He looks so small and bedraggled and tired, but there’s a fiery look in his eye that lets Alec know that he won’t be placated. He looks tense, poised to run, and Alec knows that unless he thinks of something fast, he’s going to have to give chase any minute now.

Quickly, he lifts Violet into Nate’s arms.

Nate moves to grab her instinctively, pure shock replacing his anger. He holds her carefully, clearly alarmed, but Alec crouches down and hovers nearby, just in case.

“What are you doing?” Nate hisses, looking terrified. Violet stays quiet, as though she’s trying to decide whether or not she likes her new position, but eventually she waves her little arms about and babbles something, stuffing her fist into her mouth as her eyes roam Nate’s face.

“I’m making sure you can’t run away just yet,” Alec tells him.

“That’s cheating!” Nate exclaims. He doesn’t put the baby down.

“It is,” Alec says. “I have a feeling that you fight dirty, though, Nate. Do you know who Magnus is?”

“How could I? I haven’t even met him before. Where did he go, anyway?”

“To make a bed up for you,” Alec tells him. Nate looks up sharply, but he’s quickly distracted by Violet again, his face smoothing out as he stares at the content little baby. “His full name is Magnus Bane, and he’s a very important man. Have you heard of him?”

Nate’s eyes go even wider. “He’s the High Warlock of Brooklyn. You’re dating the High Warlock of Brooklyn?”

“Against my better judgement,” Alec agrees, and there’s an outraged noise from behind them. Nate flinches, but it’s just Magnus, who strolls in, clutching his heart in a scandalised fashion.

“You wound me, darling,” Magnus says, flicking his fingers at him.

“Gross,” Nate mutters, and then jumps as Violet pokes him in the cheek. His expression softens slightly as he stares at her, and then he stretches his arms out a little to accommodate her, moving to sit on the floor, cross-legged. Magnus summons a cushion from the living room and sits on it, ignoring Alec rolling his eyes.

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“Did you sort out the bed?” Alec asks.

“I did,” Magnus says, turning to Nate. “But you may want to get a bit cleaner before you go to sleep.”

Nate gives him a considering look. “Are you really the High Warlock of Brooklyn? The people I was with, they said that Warlocks were bad, that they were evil because they were part-demon. Is that true?”
Magnus and Alec share a glance. Magnus doesn’t look offended, although Alec didn’t expect him to get mad at a teenager, especially not for parroting what he’s heard. There’s something a little dark in his eyes though, aimed at the men and women behind this question, the ones who should know better, who promised they would learn when the accords were first proposed.

Nate shifts a little uncomfortably, and Magnus immediately says, “I’m not mad at you, Nathan. Is it Nathan or Nathaniel?”

“No, but most people just call me Nate.”

“Nate, then,” Magnus says. “I really am the High Warlock. It doesn’t make me evil, though. It just means that I have a lot of power and I used it well, and helped enough people that I climbed the ranks, in a way. Ambition and a touch of patience will get you where you want to be.”

He winks pointedly at Alec, then, who can’t help but blush. He covers it by rolling his eyes and leaning over to babble nonsense at Violet, who gurgles back. She needs feeding, and a bath, but Magnus is talking quietly to Nate, and the boy seems to grow more and more at ease with each word. Alec doesn’t want to disturb this.

“I think,” Nate says slowly, after they’ve talked for a while longer, “that I’d like to get clean, please.”

His expression is so hesitant, so fearful, and it makes Alec’s blood boil at the thought that someone made him this way.

Alec shows him how to use the shower while Magnus changes Violet. He pulls out their softest towels and the spare bathrobe, which will undoubtedly be too big but is better than nothing. He finds a comb and a spare toothbrush and thanks the heavens that Magnus is always over-prepared.

“You can use any of the soaps and hair stuff,” Alec says. “Just not the pink jar. It makes your skin all glittery and it doesn’t come off for days. Trust me, you don’t want to walk around looking like a talking Christmas tree.”

That had made for a pretty awkward week of patrols.

Nate snickers into his sleeve before practically shoving Alec out of the bathroom. He staggers out into the hallway, staring at the shut door in amusement, and then goes to find Nate some spare clothes.

“Hello beautiful,” Alec murmurs to Violet when he walks into the living room. She waves her fists and babbles something, whacking Magnus in the side of his face.

“Hello to you too, love,” Magnus says, winking at Alec. “You don’t look too bad yourself.”

Alec snorts, sitting cross-legged on the floor and watching Magnus wrestle Violet into her pyjamas. He’s holding Nate’s clean clothes and contemplating the spare room, which looks a hell of a lot different to what it did an hour ago. Magnus has gone all out this time.

“What do you think, then?” Alec asks. He reaches out for Violet and holds her so that she’s standing up, her little knees bent, his hands tucked under her arms so that she can bounce where she stands.

“I think he needs someone to look after him,” Magnus says, after a thoughtful pause. “And I think it’s going to be even more difficult than this little one.”

Alec bounces Violet up and down for a few moments before he says, quietly, “It could be just as worth it, though.”
“How’s that, then?” Magnus asks, crossing his arms and surveying the room, his nervousness hidden behind a quirked eyebrow. The spare room was supposed to be Violet’s room, but she’s not yet one and still sleeps in their room for the time being. He’s going to have to do some reworking in the loft if Nate stays - Magnus is trying to be realistic, and not get any of their hopes up, but he can already see that Alec is gone, completely enamoured with this skinny little boy. The prospect of using his magic for something a little more fun is exciting, though.

“I can’t conjure everything up, but there should be enough to keep you going here for a little while,” Magnus adds, when Nate doesn’t respond. He resists the urge to fidget, staring at the dresser and the blue walls and the space rocket lamp. Is it too young for Nate? Too dull? Does he just not like it? “I would have done something a little more extravagant, but it’s your room. I figured you’d want to pick our accessories and toys yourself, when you get the chance, to make it your own.”

He walks across the room and starts smoothing the chequered bedspread. The covers are soft and warm and there’s an abundance of little pillows and cushions all over the place (Magnus has a weakness for small, useless cushions) and the sheets smell like fabric softener. The dresser is mostly bare apart from an alarm clock and a little bedside lamp, and there are a few books on the shelf above it.

“If there’s anything you want to change or add, I can probably fix that for you,” Magnus says. “And if you hate it completely, that’s fine too. We can do something else with the room. Whatever you like.”

Nate has his head bowed, his damp curls falling over his face, obscuring his expression. Magnus can feel the worry growing the longer Nate stays silent, but he doesn’t want to push. He thinks that enough people have probably pushed this child in his lifetime, and Magnus doesn’t want to be one of those people.

“Nate?”

“Stop,” Nate croaks. “Stop being so nice.”

Magnus blinks at him. His shoulders are shaking, hunched over even further, and Magnus walks steadily over until he’s kneeling in front of Nate. He uses one finger to tip Nate’s chin up, peering into watery grey eyes and seeing the mix of fear and confusion there.

“I didn’t have a bed,” Nate says, sniffing. “In the old Institute, I slept on the floor. Stop being so nice.”

His heart turns over.

“Never,” Magnus says simply. “Look, let me tell you how things work around here. If you’re hungry, you get to eat whatever you want, within reason. If you’re dirty, you get to have showers and baths. If you don’t feel well, we’ll look after you, and we won’t make you do anything you don’t want to do. Again, within reason. Nobody’s going to get mad at you unless you run off and put yourself in danger, and even then, it’ll be out of worry. Whatever you need, you get. And you certainly don’t sleep on the floor unless you actually want to.”

Nate bites his lip and swipes a hand over his eyes, rubbing the tears away fiercely. He seems to shrink a little in the face of Magnus’s words, so Magnus grabs his sleeve and leads him over to the bed, where he helps him onto it.
It takes a while, but Nate eventually snuggles down amongst the covers, clutching one of the patterned cushions to his chest, as though he’s afraid someone might take it away any moment now. Magnus has no such plans, and would probably turn anyone that did into a toad.

“Do you like the room?” he asks softly, smoothing the covers up to Nate’s chin. The boy’s eyes are already drifting closed.

“I love it,” Nate mumbles, yawning, and then falls straight asleep.

*

It’s not easy. Alec had no expectations going into this, but although he never thought it would be a piece of cake, he also didn’t think it would be quite this difficult. Not only do they now have to juggle the baby and their separate work, but they have a teenager in the midst now, and teenagers and babies are completely different things.

Nate runs away three times over the space of two weeks.

The first time that he does it, Alec races after him. He leaves the dishes in the sink, the tap running, and sprints out of the open door with sudsy hands, bare feet and a wet mark on his shirt from the spray of dishes. He catches up to Nate - who dives down a side alley - on the edge of the road almost three blocks away and grabs the boy by the back of his collar, sending them both flying into a brick wall.

There’s a lot of shouting from the both of them, although Alec tries to keep calm and not panic too much. Nate glares up at him defiantly, but stays silent when Alec suggests that he call the Institute, and then eventually starts trudging back to the loft, where a rather soggy kitchen awaits them. The evening is quiet and tense, and Alec tries hard to get Nate to talk, but he refuses. Things go back to normal the following day, although they’re all a little unsure around each other.

The second time he runs away, Magnus is the one at home with him. Alec hears about it later, when he comes back to find Magnus and Violet camped outside of Nate’s door, playing with bricks and toy cars. Violet throws a car at him in greeting, and Nate refuses to come out until dinner is ready, and even then he doesn’t speak for the rest of the evening.

The third time that he does it, Alec stares at the open front door and considers calling Izzy. He can’t keep doing this. He can’t keep dragging the boy back to somewhere that he doesn’t want to be, not if it makes him this unhappy. He has the phone halfway to his ear before he thinks of Nate’s tired, wary face the night that Izzy brought him here, and then he crushes the phone in his fist and grabs his jacket, and then Nate’s jacket. He has a hunch, and he hopes to Raziel that he’s not wrong, because if he is then this isn’t going to work any longer.

He strolls quickly down the path until he gets to the third block of their neighbourhood. At first he thinks he’s wrong, and his heart turns over in his chest, and then he sees a small figure standing at the curb with his head bowed and his bare arms crossed over his chest. He’s standing taught as a wire, unmoving.

The road is clear, and there’s nobody else around.

Sighing, Alec reaches out and puts a hand on Nate’s shoulder. In hindsight, it’s not his best idea.

Nate whips around and yells, lashing out with his arm in surprise and tripping backwards over his own feet. He lands hard on the path, hands thrown out and a stunned expression on his face as he looks up at Alec, who stares at him in shock, arm still outstretched.
“I thought you weren’t coming after me,” Nate blurts out. He looks so stunned, and he lifts his hand back up to find it bleeding, and Alec can feel a pit in his stomach open up as the boy starts crying. They’re silent tears.

He kneels down on the path beside him. “Can I come closer?”

Nate nods miserably. Alec creeps a bit closer and reaches out carefully for Nate’s hand, hesitant. Nate lets him take it, and Alec brushes away the dirt as gently as he can and inspects the graze.

“It’s not deep,” Alec says quietly. “Just a scratch. We can patch it up if you still want to come back with me.”

Nate looks at him with huge eyes. “If I want?”

Alec sighs. He reaches out again, this time to brush Nate’s curls back from his face, and then to wipe away the tears as best as he can. Nate watches him the whole time, his eyes big and sad and full of confusion that shouldn’t be there.

“Is this why you keep running away?” Alec asks. “To see if we come after you?”

Nate ducks his head.

“To see if we want you there?”

His shoulders start to shake. Alec holds his arms out and is shocked when Nate falls into them eagerly, as though he’s been waiting for it. He abandons the jacket in favour of scooping Nate up - it’s far too easy, he’s much too light, and barely weighs an ounce. Alec can feel him crying quietly against his shoulder and he holds Nate tighter as he starts the trek back to the loft, moving quickly to get them both out of the cold.

It’s easy enough to settle Nate on the couch. He finds a blanket and throws it over Nate’s shoulders, switches the television on and turns the volume on low, so that there’s no awkward, expectant silence. He’s not sure if he’s being too coddling, too tentative, but he tells himself that it’s like when Max has a bad day and just wants to sit and think. Max has always been quite a serious boy, underneath the cheer and excitement. Nate seems similar, although Alec knows there are big, fundamental differences. It’s why he’s been so nervous.

Babies are one thing. Babies take constant attention and energy and care but teenagers are different. Complicated. That doesn’t mean Alec doesn’t want to try, doesn’t want to get it right. He wants this, fiercely, and he knows Magnus does too.

He just has to work out what Nate wants.

Alec sets a glass of water down beside Nate and a packet of antiseptic wipes on the floor as he kneels in front of Nate. Nate clings to the blanket a little and then offers Alec his hand. It doesn’t take long to clean the graze and wrap a thin bandage around it, just in case. Nate makes little faces the whole time and then curls up when Alec pats his shoulder and sits carefully on the other end of the couch.

“I’m just going to call Magnus,” Alec says quietly. Nate hunkers down under the blanket and won’t look at him.

“Nobody’s going to get mad, or shout, and you’re not in trouble,” Alec promises him. “I just want to find out where he is and when he’s coming home, okay?”
“Okay.”

It’s sarcastic, but that’s better than nothing. Alec fishes his phone out of his pocket and creeps into the hallway to call Magnus, who picks up the phone with a slightly harassed, “Darling, this isn’t the best time.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I just – Violet, shush, sweetie – I’m just talking with the cashier whose window Violet just broke.”

Alec can feel his mouth fall open. “She broke a window? How did she break a window? She’s six months old!”

He can hear scuffling sounds and then Magnus lowers his voice, presumably to keep the cashier from eavesdropping. “She spotted something sparkly, as we were walking past this little boutique and started babbling. Next thing I knew she screamed and the entire thing just shattered. I have a feeling our days of peace and quiet are about to come to an end.”

Alec snorts. “It’s never been peaceful or quiet around here. She really broke a window?”

“A window that is currently costing me an arm and a leg to pay for. I would have just fixed it with magic but the woman came out screeching and there were quite a lot of witnesses, so I’m just pretending that I bumped into it. She’s not buying it, but I’m paying her, so she’ll have to just deal.”

Alec whistles through his teeth. “Violet’s going to be powerful, isn’t she?”

“Incredibly. I’ll be home soon, love, as soon as I finish up here.”

“Good. Hurry.”

There’s a pause, and then Magnus says, sounding worried, “Is everything alright? Why did you call?”

“Nate ran away again.”

There’s a rather long silence.

Alec says, “He fell down and cut his hand but I’ve fixed it up, and he’s sat watching the television. He’s quiet though, and upset. I think we all need to talk when you get home.”

“Alec, we can’t keep doing this,” Magnus says quietly. “Not if it’s not what he wants.”

“That’s why I think we all need to talk,” Alec says calmly, although he can’t deny that his heart beats a little faster at the words. He really doesn’t want to lose this. He’s not sure what will happen if Nate goes away, if they have to find him a new home.

“Don’t send me back.”

Alec whips around to find Nate standing there, chin up and arms crossed over his chest defensively. He has a red nose from crying and his mouth is set into a bitter twist, but his voice is firm.

“Just come home,” Alec says into the phone, and then he ends the call. “Hey. Were you listening?”

Nate shifts a little guilty. “Yes.”
“Then you know that neither of us said we were going to send you anywhere.”

“Magnus said that you couldn’t keep doing this.”

Alec kneels down in front of Nate. He’s so small, defiant and strong, but there is a sadness in his eyes and a wariness to his stance. He still doesn’t know what to expect from Alec. “Magnus meant that we couldn’t keep making you stay here when it’s obvious that you don’t want to. He definitely did not mean that we want you gone, or that we’d stop trying to make this work just because it’s difficult.”

“I don’t mean to be difficult,” Nate says, with an awkward shrug of his shoulder.

“You’re not being difficult,” Alec says softly. Nate arches an eyebrow and Alec grins at him. “Well, the running away is a bit of a pain in the ass, but I’ll still come after you each time. We want you here, forever.”

“Yeah?” Nate gives him a rather watery smile.

“Yeah. C’mon, let’s go and watch television until Magnus gets back.”

He can feel glances on the side of his face every now and again as they settle on the couch and makes sure to keep his body language as open as possible. Slowly, in small increments, Nate shuffles along the length of the couch until he’s within reach of Alec, who gently wraps an arm around him and pulls him in until he’s resting against Alec’s side. Nate makes a soft sound and squishes himself up against Alec, who holds him a little tighter.

They’ve been careful with Nate. They haven’t touched him, they’ve let him come to them, which doesn’t often happen. No matter how much Alec has wanted to hug Nate tightly and ruffle his hair and make sure he’s okay, he’s kept his distance. Held himself back. Now he’s beginning to wonder if maybe they were going about this all wrong.

There’s a slight rustle from the doorway and Violet announces her arrival with a loud gurgling cry. Alec turns his head in time for Magnus to drop a kiss on his forehead and then drop gracefully onto the rug, holding their daughter in his arms. Alec’s heart still does flips when he sees them together.

Violet babbles and reaches for Alec, waving her little fingers at him. Alec mentally prepares to get his hair ripped out as he draws Violet towards him and babbles at her. She seizes a fistful of his hair delightedly and then switches courses and grabs Nate’s ear instead. Nate yelps and shoots upright, clutching the side of his head with a wounded expression.

“She almost ripped my ear off,” Nate mutters, looking rather betrayed. Violet drools all over Alec’s shirt, unbothered.

“That means she likes you,” Magnus says. He grins when Nate glares at him, and then beckons him over. Nate shoots Alec a hesitant look before complying, sitting gingerly on the floor beside Magnus. He looks thoroughly startled when Magnus takes one of his hands and turns it over, obviously looking for the cut.

“The other one,” Alec says. “I cleaned it up and put a bandage on it. Ow!”

Violet babbles at him unapologetically as Alec prises her hand out of his hair.

“It’s just a graze,” Nate says, shrugging as he draws his hand back. “I’m fine.”

Magnus hums thoughtfully, leans over slowly and drops a light kiss on Nate’s forehead. Nate goes
still. He doesn’t look up, still staring blankly at his hand, but Alec can tell that he’s blushing.

“Why did you do that?”

“You got hurt,” Magnus says fondly. “Even if it is just a graze. And I wanted to.”

It’s a sweet moment, which is thoroughly ruined when a horrible smell fills the room. Alec stares accusingly at Violet, who grabs his hair again.

“How can someone so small create something so disgusting?” Alec says.

“She stinks,” Nate says, wrinkling his nose.

“It’s your turn,” Magnus says, with a pointed look at Alec. “I’ve had her all day.”

Alec sighs, conceding the point, and lifts Violet up to go and fetch the changing bag. He changes her quickly, listening to Magnus and Nate talk quietly together on the rug. It varies from the running away, to Violet, to Alec, and back to the running away again. He listens to Magnus affirm what Alec has already said, that they want Nate here, as a part of their family, for as long as he wants to stay. He listens to Nate ask shyly, quietly, to add glow-in-the-dark stickers to his room, if he’s going to stay. He turns around in time to watch Magnus yank him in for a hug, a brilliant smile lighting up his face. Alec smiles back.

It isn’t going to be easy, but it’s going to be worth it.

*

Part Two

“Where the hell are the keys?” Alec hisses. He bought the blue bowl years ago, specifically for the keys to go in and Magnus stuck it to the counter with a wave of his hand but, as usual, the only things in the bowl are sweet wrappers and snapped crayons. The counter itself isn’t even visible, buried under mountains of coloured paper, cutlery and stray bits of stale cereal. Somehow, no matter how often Alec cleans or how much magic Magnus uses, the flat always looks like it was raided in the night. Alec has half a suspicion that Magnus likes it like this, that he enjoys seeing the evidence of their kids and their lives spread out across the flat.

“Isaac! Violet!” Alec yells, shuffling papers aside. “Have you got your shoes on?”

“You swore,” Nate announces from the doorway. Alec jumps and swears again, knocking several toy cars to the floor. One of them skids under the counter, and Alec gives it up for lost.

“You startled me,” Alec says, and then levels a look at his son, to no effect. Nate has had years to perfect the innocent look that he now directs at Alec, but it quickly morphs into something smug as he leans against the doorframe. He looks smart, dressed in a pair of slim black trousers and a well-fitting shirt. His tie is slightly crooked, but at least he’s wearing one, Alec thinks. If Alec weren’t about to blow a fuse, he might possibly tear up. Magnus probably already has.

“I never said a swear word. You didn’t hear anything,” Alec informs him. Nate rolls his eyes, mimes zipping his lips shut.

“You and Dad are way too obsessed with the rule about swear words,” Nate says loudly. He’s gotten into the habit of calling Magnus and Alec Dad simply because the younger ones do it, and
Alec won’t say it doesn’t make him feel warm every time.

Nate disappears down the hallway. He kicks at the skirting board as he goes, banging his bag against the wall, which is blue today. Alec doesn’t know how Magnus finds time to redecorate in between all the school runs and tantrums and appointments but the loft is always different in the morning. Sometimes there are new rooms tacked on to other rooms and sometimes there are rooms missing, and often Alec ends up in the airing cupboard when he’s looking for the bathroom, but he’s grown used to it now. It brightens up the kids’ lives too.

“It’s called responsible parenting,” Alec calls, opening the fridge and staring blankly at the contents. “Plus, swearing is for plebeians.”

“We’re going to be late,” Nate yells back.

“That’s usually your line,” Magnus says, darting out of the utilities room. He looks mildly harassed, coffee cup bobbing along beside his head as he hauls a pile of freshly laundered clothes onto the table. His hair is stuck up wildly in every direction, a mix of red and blue and the usual brown today, and there’s a pencil tucked behind his ear, a pencil which will probably disappear the moment that Magnus needs it and result in a rant about how there are never any working writing utensils in this house, what the hell kind of void are they disappearing into and can Magnus follow them because he’s had enough, Goddamnit. It usually ends with Alec gently reminding the man that he can simply conjure up another pencil if he wants one and then plying him with alcohol, if Magnus is particularly frazzled.

“Violet!” Magnus yells, sipping at his cold coffee and making a face. “Your cardigan is here.”

Alec plunges a hand into the mess on the counter and freezes as his hand connects with something squishy. Grimacing, he withdraws a soggy apple core from the mess, holding it up for Magnus to see.

“That might actually have been me,” Magnus admits, wincing. Alec sighs in exasperation, dropping the apple into the bin with a pointed look. It hits the bottom of the bin with a hollow thud. There’s a pause as they both stare at the bin, and then Magnus winces again.

“I also might have forgotten about the bin bag,” Magnus says. He attempts a charming grin, and then holds his hands up in surrender as Alec glares at him. Coffee slops over the side of his mug and splatters all over the clean clothes.

Magnus lowers his cup with considerably more care and groans loudly.

Violet wanders into the kitchen moments before Alec unleashes a torrent of swear words. He snaps his mouth shut hurriedly and glances at Magnus, who is busy laughing into his sleeve. There’s a look in his eye, a sort of unholy glee that Alec never gets tired of seeing, no matter how often it’s usually at his own expense.

“You said a bad word,” Violet announces. Her hair is pinned up on one side with an array of vividly bright clips and one clothes peg. The rest is a curtain of tangled brown curls. Alec stares at the mess in horror, aware that it’s his turn to do her hair, and shudders, already imagining the ensuing argument.

“Daddy’s sorry for swearing. Maybe we can do something simple with your hair today?”

“I want a fishtail braid,” Violet says, and then skips out of the kitchen.

“A fishtail braid,” Alec repeats blankly, looking helplessly at Magnus. “What the hell is a fishtail
braid? Why can’t she ever just want a ponytail, or a messy bun or something? I can do messy buns. They don’t require any actual talent.”

Magnus winks at him. “My condolences, darling.”

Alec sighs. “Have you seen the keys?”

“Spend too long in this house and you forget what keys look like,” Magnus says unhelpfully. Then he pauses, a look of fear flicking across his face, one hand buried in the washing. “What am I touching? Alec, what am I touching?”

Alec glances up on his way to the computer. “Judging from where you’ve put the clothes, I’m going to guess that you’re touching Isaac’s breakfast.”

Magnus makes a retching sound. “Porridge. Disgusting.”

“He’s convinced that if he eats enough, he’ll get to meet a real-life bear,” Alec mutters.

“But he never actually eats the porridge, he just stirs it around the bowl. And why is that? Because porridge is disgusting, that’s why. Goldilocks had extremely questionable taste-buds if she thought that porridge tasted perfect. Why would he even want to meet a real-life bear? Wait, don’t tell me, he wants to stab it with a Seraph Blade. He gets that from you.”

“I think he said something about a lightsabre, actually,” Alec mumbles distractedly.

“What on earth is a light sabre? Is this another one of Simon’s obscure pop culture references? I think we should ban him from talking to the children.”

Alec swears loudly at the computer screen.

“It’s a stupid rule,” Nate yells from the hallway. “You both swear more than the French do!”

“That’s a stereotype,” Magnus yells back. “We raised you better than that. I think we did, anyway. We tried. Go and help your brother with his shoes!”

Nate thunders up the stairs, and they can hear him shouting about how first days at work are hard enough without useless parents who are useless losers.

Magnus directs a look of mock-bliss at the ceiling. “Ah, children. The gifts that keep on giving. Wait, what are you doing?”

The last bit is probably aimed at Alec, but he’s busy fashioning an angry response to Isaac’s secondary school teacher, and barely hears Magnus striding towards him.

“No, no, no, Alec, darling. Light of my life. Cream to my coffee. Back away from the keyboard.”

“I just need to reply to this idiot,” Alec seethes. “Every week she sends me stupid emails about how Isaac is disruptive and badly behaved, but he only acts that way because the classes are so damn boring! He wants to do creative things, like dancing and acting, not long division.”

“And I’m as incensed about it as you are, love, but we’ve talked about this already,” Magnus says soothingly, pulling Alec’s chair away from the computer. “Now, you have one daughter who’s hanging from the banister and two sons who are suspiciously quiet, which means something’s inevitably going to break in the next five minutes.”

Alec watches the computer screen get farther and farther away with a bemused expression as he
listens to Magnus ramble. “We have approximately ten minutes to get all of the kids to school, and it’s Nate’s first day at this new job of his, and even if he won’t admit that he’s nervous, we both know he is. He’s wearing a tie, for goodness sake. You plus computer equals dangerously vicious circles of increasingly angry emailing and then a dozen phone calls where you grit your adorable teeth, so I am begging you to step away.”

“Well I hardly have much of a choice about that,” Alec says drily, from halfway across the kitchen. Magnus continues to wheel Alec down the hall, laughing, until Alec jumps smoothly up from the chair and tackles him against the wall, caging Magnus in. Magnus grins up at him. There’s a smear of porridge on his chin and he looks exhausted, but he’s still just as beautiful as he was on the day that Alec first met him.

“I’m just protecting our family from the darker side of my boyfriend,” Magnus says cheekily, winking. Alec removes the pencil from behind his ear and taps him on the nose with it.

“I’ll show you the darker side,” Alec warns him.

“Please do,” Magnus says, with a wicked grin.

The kiss lasts for a record-breaking five glorious seconds before Isaac shrieks from the top of the stairs. Nate thunders down them, incapable of walking, and makes a retching sound. He sounds remarkably like Magnus when he does so.

“Get a room,” Nate tells them, whilst Isaac continues to shoot them horrified looks from behind his hands.

Alec pulls away and sighs, rolling his eyes. Magnus pouts up at him, and then tucks his head briefly beneath Alec’s chin. He presses a small kiss to Alec’s neck before untangling them and straightening up.

“No rest for the wicked,” Magnus sighs, and then he whips up a miniature storm that steers the computer chair down the hall, chasing after Nate, who yelps and begins to run. Alec watches his ridiculous boyfriend cackle maniacally, sprinting after their eighteen-year-old son, and resigns himself to something being broken relatively soon.

“You’re going to have germs now,” Isaac says solemnly. He actually looks a little excited at the prospect. “Did you know that a toilet has less harmful bacteria than the human mouth?”

Alec winces.

“Isaac wants to kiss a toilet,” Violet pipes up. Her head appears over the banister on the top floor of the house. Even from here, Alec can see the tell-tale red marks of lipstick all over her face, and silently curses Magnus for leaving his make-up all over the place. The loft has been extended a total of six times, using magic, and yet there’s no room that Magnus can invent that will keep their children out of it.

“Violet, go and wash that off please,” Alec pleads. “And Isaac, get down here so I can have a word.”

Isaac looks at him thoughtfully for a second, as though considering Alec’s request, before turning on his heel and sprinting up the stairs. Violet shrieks with laughter and disappears too. Alec listens to them run all the way up the stairs, listens to the respective slam of their bedroom doors shutting, listens to Magnus yell with pain as something crashes to the floor in the kitchen. Nate races out of the kitchen with a wild look on his face.
“I didn’t do it,” Nate blurs out, and then dives past Alec into the living room.

Swear words drift into the hallway. They carry Magnus’ signature creative twist. Alec tilts his head to the side. Piss-pies is a new one, and so is Mega-fuck-a-muffin.

“Is that all one word?” Nate shouts, from the safety of the living room, and Magnus’ shouting increases in volume and pitch.

“Obviously it’s hyphenated, Nate, don’t be ridiculous,” Alec calls through the door, listening to his son giggle like a schoolgirl. There’s another crash from upstairs, followed by a scream. Outside, the car alarm starts blaring, and it takes Alec a minute before he realises that it’s Simon’s van, parked there because his own flat doesn’t have a parking space, and their loft is the closest out of all his friends, which technically makes it Alec’s van for the foreseeable future.

“Just another typical Monday,” Alec says, laughing a little hysterically before he storms outside to kick the van, subtly, so that the neighbours won’t see him.

* 

Alec shuts the front door behind him and drops his bag on the floor, where it lands on top of a pair of discarded shoes and a squeaky dog toy.

“We don’t even have a dog,” Alec mutters, kicking the toy lightly. It groans pathetically. “We’ve never had a dog. We haven’t even looked after someone else’s dog. Why do we have a dog toy?”

“Hodge says that the first sign of madness is talking to yourself,” Nate tells him as he barrels down the hallway. Alec has long since accepted the fact that all his children are incapable of simply walking from place to place. They either have to skip or sprint, or in Isaac’s case, roll.

“No, the first sign of madness is adopting three children who don’t do their chores when they’re asked to,” Alec says, gesturing pointedly at the mess. “Isn’t cleaning the hallway and the upstairs landing on your chore list?”

Nate adopts a wounded expression and bites down hard on the apple in his hand. Alec silently congratulates himself on succeeding in getting at least one of his children to eat healthily, even if it means Nate probably won’t eat his tea in a minute, when Alec gets around to making it.

“I tidied it,” Nate says indignantly, through a mouthful of apple.

“Which bit?” Alec asks pleasantly, putting his hands on his hips and feeling awfully like his mother when he does so. He refuses to cower though, and leaves them there. “The ceiling? Because that’s the only clean part of this entire house. Even the wall’s got something on – what, is that jam?”

“You never asked me to clean the entire house,” Nate says solemnly, shaking his head as he retreats slowly upstairs. “And I did clean it, but then Isaac and Violet messed it all up again, and I’m not doing it more than once. That’s child labour.”

“It’s true,” Magnus shouts from the kitchen. Alec is immediately wary – Magnus isn’t allowed in the kitchen near dinnertime, not unless there’s some kind of emergency. “Not the child labour bit, but he did tidy. I almost had a heart-attack!”

Alec sighs exasperatedly and heads for the dulcet tones of his boyfriend, which seem to echo strangely.

“What the hell are you doing?” Alec demands, stopping in the doorway. “Why is your head in the
“My head is in the oven,” Magnus begins, in a rather muffled tone, “because your darling son attempted to cook slugs again. And they have fused themselves to the bottom of the oven, so I am cleaning them up, in between retching.”

“He’s thrown up twice,” Isaac puts in helpfully, from where he’s perched on the kitchen counter, holding a plastic gun. “That’s what the bucket is for. And he’s sweared lots, too.”

“Is ‘sweared’ a word?” Magnus asks, pausing.

“No, but idiot is,” Alec says, yanking Magnus out from under the oven by his ankles. “I can’t believe I have to say this to a man who claims to have been alive for hundreds of years, but don’t put your head in a large cooking device.”

“What about a small one, then?” Magnus asks sarcastically, dusting off his hands and brushing a kiss against Alec’s cheek in greeting.

“Your head wouldn’t fit,” Nate says pithily, from the doorway. “Especially not with all your hair.”

He takes another bite of his apple, and then tosses the half-eaten thing in the direction of the bin. It lands on the floor. Magnus squeaks in protest, both at the insult and the apple, but Nate is already leaving the room.

“There’s nothing wrong with my hair. And I swear he only enters a room so that he can make a dramatic exit.”

“He gets it from you,” Alec agrees.

“Oh, please, Mr I’m Going to Come Out in the Middle of My Very Straight Wedding,” Magnus says.

Alec can feel his cheeks burning, and Isaac giggles. He’s always liked the story of how they got together, and Jace and Izzy are always unreasonably eager to retell it in varying degrees of theatricality. It makes things slightly awkward if Maryse or Robert happen to be in the room, but unfortunately awkwardness has no effect on Jace or Izzy, and they seemed to have passed that trait onto Isaac.

“That was years ago,” Alec protests weakly.

“Eight years, love,” Magnus reminds him, patting him on the shoulder. “Not that long at all, really.”

* *

“The television is in pieces,” Magnus says, leaning up against the doorjamb. His face is a mask of impassiveness. Alec shifts awkwardly in the computer chair and pretends to be engrossed in something on the blank screen.

“Is it?” he asks, trying for innocence. Magnus shoots him a deadpan look to let him know that he’s lost that battle.

Alec deflates, sighing as he stabs at the keyboard. He grimaces at something sticky that’s lodged itself between the keys and hopes to God that it’s just marmalade.

“I may have had something to do with it,” Alec admits, avoiding Magnus’ gaze.
“Oh, really?” Magnus says, his voice dripping with mockery. “I never would have guessed. I thought all televisions spontaneously exploded after you’ve owned them for a couple of weeks.”

“It’s your fault,” Alec says stoutly. “It’s that Wii Game. The controllers are too small, they just fly right out of your hand.”

“You hands, you mean,” Magnus says, and then he starts to laugh, and Alec sighs dramatically. He spins around in the chair, mouth twitching reluctantly as Magnus cackles. He’ll never tire of that sound, no matter how old he grows. There are lots of things that he will never tire of, not Magnus, or his children. He wants to keep them like this forever, for them to stay young, and with him.

His head feels heavy all of a sudden, and he turns rigidly back to the computer. The screen is still blank, insisting that there’s no printer in the house, despite the fact that it’s pushed up right against it. There’s the soft patter of footsteps, and then Magnus plasters himself against Alec’s back, arms wrapping firmly around his shoulders. He smells sweet, like sandalwood, and the warmth of him is enough to make Alec deflate against him.

“You’re thinking too hard, darling,” Magnus murmurs. He kisses the space behind Alec’s ear, and Alec hums. “Violet is insisting that we watch Anastasia again, and Nate found a bag of chips from somewhere. It’s pretty comfortable, if we ignore the smashed television.”

Alec manages a smile. “I’m sure you can conjure something up.”

“I already did.” There’s a short sigh against the back of his neck, and then the weight is gone from Alec’s back, and he finds himself being turned around. Magnus crouches down to look him in the eye, equal amounts of fondness and worry in his gaze. “What’s on your mind?”

Alec shrugs. “Nothing much.”

Magnus stares at him, deadpan. “Alexander.”

Alec leans up and kisses him, tries to put everything he can’t say into the kiss. When he leans back, one hand still cupping Magnus’s face, Magnus looks rather dazed, a little sad and a lot in love. He strokes the crease between Alec’s eyebrows with one finger and kisses his cheek softly.

“Alexander.”

“It’s alright,” Alec promises him. “Come on, those chips sound good right about now. And the rest of it, I suppose.”

He winks and Magnus laughs, and Alec feels alright again.

*

The mall is packed full of people and Alec would honestly rather be anywhere else than here. He would literally rather be at the bottom of the ocean, without weapons and about to be eaten by a demon, than sat here. It’s a Saturday afternoon and the sun is shining brightly, which is practically a miracle considering they’re in Brooklyn. He’s already been waylaid three times by people looking for donations, and the next person who asks him for money is going to get a face full of arrows.

“This is boring,” Isaac says, kicking at the floor.

“Don’t do that, you’ll scuff your shoes,” Alec says absent-mindedly. Isaac’s next kick is a little harder.
“If you scuff your shoes, Dad will make you go shoe shopping with him,” Alec warns him, trying another tactic. “You’ll have to go to every single shoe shop in the mall, and you’ll be stuck in each shop for hours, and you’ll have to try on every single pair that Dad likes. Every single pair.”

Isaac grows pale, and whispers, “But Dad likes all of the shoes.”

“Exactly.”

There’s blissful silence for a few minutes, and Alec watches an old woman hobble past, tugging a little tartan trolley along behind her. Then the silence breaks, and Alec groans quietly.

“There’s nothing to do here,” Isaac whines. “I thought we were going to the park! I wanted to try out my new roller-skates.”

“You already tried them out,” Alec says. “That poor woman had to have stitches because of you. You’re lucky the police weren’t involved.”

Isaac is too old for the police threat to work on him now, but Alec is tired. He swears that Isaac actually wants the police to get involved half of the time, just so that he can interrogate them on what they do and how many handcuffs they have, and whether they’ve ever shot anyone (never mind the fact that Isaac’s entire family is made up of Shadowhunters and Warlocks that fight demons on a daily basis). From behind them, Nate groans loudly and mutters a swear word. Alec cuts him a glare.

“Don’t swear,” Alec tells him, to which Nate and Isaac just scoff. “What’s the matter with you now?”

“He’s texting Allison,” Isaac says with a smirk. “Allison’s his girlfriend.”

“Shut up,” Nate hisses, whacking Isaac’s shoulder. “She is not.”

“She is too,” Isaac says loudly, ducking out of the way. “I saw them kissing, outside of our house. That’s what you do with girlfriends, isn’t it? She’s your girlfriend!”

“Isaac,” Alec says, a touch of warning in his voice. “Don’t tease your brother.”

“But he’s got a girlfriend,” Isaac says plaintively. “And I’m bored.”

“So you’ve mentioned,” Alec says. He drags a hand through his messy hair and sighs. “Look, if I buy you both milkshakes, will you please just stop whining for long enough for your dad to finish getting his hair cut? Or whatever the hell he’s convincing them to do.”

Both Nate and Isaac perk up considerably once they’ve both got milkshakes, although Nate hides his delight behind a scowl and stands a few yards away from them, obviously hoping that anyone who sees him will assume he’s there alone. Alec buys himself a milkshake too, on a whim, and pretends not to see the narrow-eyed look that Magnus sends his way when he finally leaves the salon, Violet in tow.

“You’re on a diet,” Magnus reminds him. “Although personally I think it’s a crime to view your body as anything other than perfect.”

Violet wrinkles her little nose. “Ew.”

“It’s fat-free,” pipes up the girl behind the counter, and Magnus levels her a look that makes her squeak and duck down to arrange some glasses. Alec snorts, almost chokes on his straw, and then hastily rearranges his expression into something guileless.
“Smooth,” Magnus says drily. Then he winks.

“Dad bribed us,” Isaac tells Magnus solemnly, walking over to grab his free hand.

“Did he now?” Magnus asks, swinging their hands and grimacing at Isaac’s sticky fingers. “I’m not surprised, he’s got a sweet tooth, your father has. Do you know where he brought me for our first date?”

Isaac slurps his milkshake, shakes his head.

Alec grabs Nate in a light headlock and drags him along behind Magnus as they walk through the mall, ignoring the way Nate whines in protest and tries to kick him. They spill milkshake on the floor, and Magnus keeps whipping his head around to stare exasperatedly at them, but they both assume guiltless faces when he does. Nate goes so far as to whistle innocently, twiddling his thumbs, and Alec has to grit his teeth to keep his gaze solemn instead of laughing like he wants to – Nate is definitely Magnus’ son, regardless of blood.

“The sweet shop,” Magnus says to Isaac, shaking his head. “He bought me a bunch of sherbet, ate too many flying saucers, and then threw up in a bin, right next to this elderly couple on a bench. They looked so horrified.”

“And you carried on dating him anyway?” Nate demands, voice muffled by Alec’s forearm.

“Best day of my life,” Magnus says fondly, turning his head, and then he scowls at them both. “Alec, don’t strangle our son in public – Nate! Don’t kick!”

“It’s practice,” Alec says, ruffling Nate’s hair. “He’s been skipping out on Shadowhunter training because of this new job, so I’m just reminding him of what’s in store when he goes back.”

“Wise words, brother,” Jace says, slipping out of the shadows of one of the stores, hands stuffed casually in his pockets.

Violet shrieks as soon as she sees him, dropping Magnus’s hand and bounding towards her uncle, who picks her up easily and settles her on his hip. Violet immediately starts to pet his hair, which sticks up in blonde peaks, artfully arranged. Jace lets her do it, conceding with good grace.

“Family outing?” Jace asks. He holds his fist out to Isaac, who leans forward a little shyly and bumps his own, tiny fist against it. Alec is amused to find that he’s wearing one of Magnus’s rings, even though it’s a little too big on him.

“Magnus made us leave the house,” Alec says, around his straw.

Jace arches his eyebrow in amusement. “Is that a milkshake? I thought you were on some kind of sugar purge.”

“How did you know that?”

Jace shrugs. “I vaguely remember Izzy talking about it, although I wasn’t really listening at the time.”

“Too busy staring at Simon?” Magnus asks innocently, a slightly wicked grin playing around his mouth as he glances at the shop behind Jace, where he’d been waiting. Alec stares at Jace’s red cheeks and then cranes his neck to look through the window. It’s a comic book shop, which is all Alec needs to know.

“Date night?” Alec asks.
“Is Uncle Simon in there?” Isaac asks, perking up.

“Taking his sweet time, as usual,” Jace says. “If you make the right face, he’ll be forced to buy you a new comic. Trust me.”

Violet and Isaac shriek and then disappear into the shop. In the five second before the door slides shut behind them, Alec hears a yelp and a crash and winces, taking a careful step away from the shop.

“If we get banned from another mall, I swear to all that glitters, I will cook dinner,” Magnus says lightly.

“This was your idea,” Alec reminds him. “And you’re not allowed in the kitchen. We’ve discussed this.”

“Irrelevant,” Magnus flaps a hand. “How’s the domestic life treating you?”

Jace blushes, scratches his nose and avoids their gaze.

“That means something happened,” Nate observes, slurping his milkshake. Violet and Isaac crash through the door and sprint towards Jace, yelling and talking over each other and gesturing wildly. Alec catches words such as baby and cousin, and meets Jace’s eyes. He shrugs, a little sheepish and a lot pleased, and Alec can feel his heart grow warm, disbelief and delight warring for dominance within him.

Simon sneaks out of the comic shop a moment later, bright red and beaming, and Alec grins widely when he spots the stroller. He meets Magnus’s eyes and smiles, softly, and knows they’re both thinking of a night several years ago, when Alec knocked on his door with a baby cradled in his arms and changed their life forever.

Jace strolls over and links arms with Simon, who can’t seem to decide between being embarrassed, proud, or just downright joyful. He settles for beaming at all of them, and Alec walks over to clap them both on the shoulder.

“She got a name?”

*  

Alec remembers when Violet was small, when she fit comfortably within the cradle of his arms, when she was just a tuft of black hair and soft skin and wide, bright eyes, curious even at a young age. He remembers the long nights spent soothing her, murmuring in hushed whispers and stroking soft circles onto her wet cheeks as she cried for her missing parents, and he remembers wishing desperately to fill that gap for her, for him and Magnus to become the arms she craved and the smile she needed. He remembers a small, vulnerable creature, and looks at the sweet, clever creature teetering on the edge of a stool as it floats in mid-air, and he wonders how they got from there to here.

"You’re doing wonderfully, sweetheart," Magnus says, his grin lighting up the room. He has his arms outstretched to catch Violet should her magic fail her, but he meets Alec's eyes over the kitchen counter, and Alec can see the same awe and wonder mirrored in his gaze.

"I nearly have it," Violet says. There's a crease in the middle of her eyebrows that Alec wants to smooth away, and her tiny pink tongue pokes out of the corner of her mouth as she concentrates. Slowly, but surely, the third chair leg lifts off of the ground, with Violet seated on top of the purple cushion. Alec dutifully applauds her, his heart swelling with pride as he watches his daughter beam.
up at Magnus, obviously proud of herself.

"Last one," Magnus urges her. "C'mon, you can do it. I know you can!"

It takes a few moments, and a squeak of frustration, but then the entire chair is lifting up off of the floor, and Violet shrieks with laughter as she wobbles in mid-air, floating in tiny, slow circles. Alec laughs with her, clapping loudly as Magnus whoops and cheers, and Alec almost doesn't hear the tiny sob from the doorway over all of the noise. By the time he turns around, the shape in the kitchen doorway has fled the room, and Magnus has lapsed into a gentle lecture about steering and knowing your limits, which Violet mostly ignores.

"Daddy, did you see me?" Violet demands. "I did it! I was flying! Did you see?"

"I saw," Alec reassures her. He pokes her nose lightly, brushed a swift kiss to her cheek as he stands up, his knees creaking. "It was beautiful. I'm very proud, peanut."

Violet scrunches up her nose. "I'm a big girl now, you can't call me peanut anymore."

"Oh is that so?" Magnus asks, amused. "I suppose big girls have no need for ice cream, either?"

There's a short pause, and then Violet scrambles off of her chair and launches herself towards the freezer. Alec watches her go fondly, then jerks his thumb at the door and catches Magnus's eye.

"I'm going to go and check on Isaac," Alec says quietly. Magnus winces, nodding slowly.

"I wish there was something we could do," Magnus says. Alec bites his lip.

"Maybe there is. He'll be fine, I'll go and talk to him. You handle the ice cream."

"Yes, darling," Magnus says, mouth twitching. He drops a kiss on Alec's knuckles, unable to reach his lips, and then walks away, humming. Alec falls in love all over again, as he always does.

Isaac isn't in his room. The toys are all over the floor, and the bedcovers are on everything except the bed, and there are clothes strewn all over the place.

"Just like your father," Alec mutters, kicking a sparkly headband off of the end of his foot.

"M'not," comes the despondent voice from beneath the bed. Alec crouches down and lifts the wrinkled sheet where it lies over the edge of the bed, and peers into the dark space. A little light flicks on in the corner, illuminating Isaac's soft, tear-streaked face, and Alec can feel his stomach twist itself in knots. He wastes no time in cramming himself into the space under the bed, until he's lying awkwardly beside Isaac, barely able to breathe.

"M'not like Dad at all," Isaac says again. He puts his thumb in his mouth, an old habit, fiddling with the little green torch that Izzy bought him for Halloween a few years ago, decorated with cartoon bats. It gives everything a slightly ghoulish tinge, but Isaac doesn't seem to mind.

"Course you are," Alec says, careful to keep his voice soft. Isaac doesn't particularly like loud noises. "You're just like Dad, and you're just like me, and you're just like you. You're a bit of all of us."

Isaac shakes his head frantically, soft black curls bouncing all over the place. It makes him look like a cherub, albeit a rather gangly one, and Alec gently winds a curl around one of his fingers and tugs lightly.

"What's wrong?" Alec asks. "What's got you all upset?"
Isaac sniffs. "Violet can do magic, like dad. And Nate’s older now, so he works like you do, and he’s done most of his training, and he fights well. He’s good at that sort of stuff."

"You’ve only just started classes at the Institute," Alec reminds him. "Nate had to wait years before he could learn to fight too, and he’ll have to wait even longer before he’ll be good at it. Me and Uncle Jace and Auntie Izzy had to wait a long time too."

"I don’t want to fight," Isaac says, his voice slightly muffled. "But I don’t want you and Dad to not love me anymore."

Alec jerks forward so hard that he almost snaps his neck. "What? Who told you that?"

Isaac shrugs, tries to duck his head. Alec puts a knuckle under Isaac’s chin and nudges his face up to look at him, a fist squeezing his heart at the sad, wet eyes that greet him.

"Who told you that?"

"Callum, at school," Isaac says eventually. "He says that you already had Violet and Nate, and that I just came along at the end but you didn’t really want me. And Violet’s a Warlock and Nate’s a Shadowhunter, but I don’t want to do any of those things."

Kids, Alec decides right there, are assholes.

"Well, Callum is wrong," Alec says, a steely note slipping into his tone. "Very wrong. He's never been more wrong about anything in his entire life, okay? Your Dad and I love all three of you equally and we won't ever stop, no matter what. And nobody is getting rid of anybody, do you hear me? You're ours."

Isaac sighs quietly, and Alec can tell that he doesn't quite believe him, and he vows to have a word with both the school and Callum's parents. He's already writing a stern letter in his head when there's a knock on the open bedroom door.

"Anybody in here?" Magnus calls. A pair of odd socks stride into view, expertly avoiding the bits of Lego littering the floor. "Room under the bed for another monster?"

"Your ass is too big to fit in here," Alec says loudly, and Magnus makes a scandalised noise. Isaac snorts with reluctant laughter. Alec clammers out from under the bed, pulling Isaac with him when the boy looks like he's going to stay in there.

"What are we doing, then?" Magnus asks, brushing Isaac's curls behind his ear.

"Talking about how much we love him," Alec says firmly. "And about how Callum is a bully, and nobody should listen to him."

Magnus shares a quick glance with Alec before scooping Isaac up, poking him in the ribs. He’s twelve, but still small and light. He wraps himself around Magnus like a koala. "And who's this Callum, then?"

"A boy at school," Isaac says, dodging Magnus's attacks. "He's a pain. I don't like him, even if he is pretty."

Magnus chokes on a laugh. "Well, we can fix that, I'm sure."

"How?"
"With lots of love," Magnus says, picking Isaac up and squeezing him tightly. Alec stands up with them, one hand on Magnus's shoulder and the other stroking Isaac’s curls. "Love, and ice cream, and stealing your brother’s fluffy blanket. That's the best medicine of all."

*

The dance studio is shut, so Alec makes Isaac wait in the car with him until he can see the teacher.

“Are you excited?” Alec asks. Isaac is practically vibrating, thrumming with movement as he sits on the edge of his seat and stares hard at the studio. It’s some kind of dance class for teenagers that Magnus found in a school newsletter and thought might be a good idea, to get Isaac out of his head about not being good at anything, to stop him from comparing himself to his siblings. Alec tried to tell him that it didn’t matter if he didn’t want to do it, if he didn’t want to do anything, because it made no difference to them; Isaac had screeched and snatched the newsletter out of Magnus’s hands so quickly that it ripped in half, and Alec had shut his mouth and offered to drive him there.

“Obviously.” Isaac rolls his eyes. “Did you do clubs when you were little?”

“I didn’t, but Max did,” Alec says. “Some kind of club for people who liked comics and books and things. And chess club, I think.”

“Uncle Max is good at chess,” Isaac says. “I was going to join the chess club at school so I could learn to beat him, but…”

He snaps his mouth shut quickly, as though he’s said too much. Alec gets a bad feeling in his gut.

“It’s that boy again, isn’t it?”

Isaac sighs heavily. “Callum said it was a nerd club for people that didn’t have friends.”

“Why are you still talking to him?” Alec asks, glancing at him sharply.

“I’m not,” Isaac protests. He blushing a little, squirming around in the seat and keeping his eyes fixed on the closed door. “He’s not so bad.”

“If he’s telling you things like that, and that you aren’t a part of this family then he –”

“That was something he said ages ago,” Isaac interrupts. He’s fiddling with a ring that sits on his finger, another one stolen from Magnus’s collection. “Like, ages and ages ago. It just kind of stuck with me. All the other stuff, from the other day, under the bed, that was from ages ago too.”

Alec isn’t entirely sure that he believes that but Isaac is still blushing and Alec can vaguely recall something about Isaac calling Callum pretty, so maybe it’s just an unfortunate crush on an unfortunate person. He narrows his eyes for a moment longer but Isaac won’t look at him, and he seems pretty embarrassed, so Alec decides to let it go for now.

“As long as you know that you have an entire family behind you who would gladly intimidate this boy to death, then fine.”

Isaac ducks his head and grins shyly. “You and Dad can be pretty scary.”

“True, but I was actually talking about your Aunt Isabelle,” Alec says, and Isaac laughs loudly. The silence settles around them. Alec watches Isaac fidget – the boy is never content with just sitting somewhere. His hands move and his feet tap and he bites his knuckles and his lips until they’re red and painful, but he does it absently, without purpose.
“You came into this family a lot later than Violet and Nate did, that’s true,” Alec says quietly.
“Violet was only one month old when we found her and Nate was the same age as you are now. But just because you were older and we got you last, doesn’t mean we love you any less. We love you all the same. And I know that sounds like something I have to say, as your Dad, but it’s true.”

“Even though Violet has magic and Nate is good at everything?”

“Violet is mostly terrible at magic and Nate has been lying to you,” Alec says succinctly, prompting a laugh from his youngest son. “And none of that even matters. You don’t have to be good at something to be worthy of love. That’s not why we love them, and it’s not about what you do. You know we’d love you all even if you all turned out to be – I don’t know, murderers or something.”

Isaac looks at him incredulously.

“That was a bad example,” Alec admits. “I just mean that–”

“Yeah, Dad, I know, you love us, I get it,” Isaac interrupts, one hand shooting towards the door handle. “Look, they door’s open! I’m going in.”

He scrambles out of the car so quickly, bag banging against his back.

It’s true that Isaac came into the family a little late. A year and a half after Nate, to be exact. Alec still remembers walking into the Institute with Violet on his hip and Nate trailing behind him, pretending to be bored and kicking at the walls, only to find a little boy with black skin, broken glasses and bouncy black curls seated at the kitchen table. He remembers Izzy’s quiet words in his ear and a familiar sensation in his heart as he ducked down to talk to him, expecting sadness and wariness, only to be met with a bright grin and a request to play with a pack of cards covered in strange monsters and stats. It had taken Alec less than five minutes to call Magnus and ask if he could set up a spare bedroom, because they were going to have a visitor for a few days. And a few days had quickly turned into weeks, and then into months, and then into forever.

It’s also true that both Magnus and Alec love him just as much as they love Violet and Nate.

Alec watches him go with a quiet smile, turns the key in the ignition only to halt as Isaac suddenly turns around and races back to the car. He clambers back into the car and crawls over the seats to give Alec a hug, and Alec manages to a sneak a kiss to his cheek before Isaac backs away.

“Love you too,” Isaac says shyly. Then he’s scrambling back out of the car and yelling, “Pick me up at five!”

Alec rolls his eyes fondly and waits until Isaac’s fully in the building before he drives away.

* 

Nate coughs into his pillow, sallow-skinned, with dark circles under his red-rimmed eyes. Alec combs a hand through his hair and frowns, worry shooting through him. Magnus tip-toes in with a plastic basin and a glass of water in his hands, arranging it all on the side table before lowering himself gently into the bed beside Alec. The bedsprings creak, and a hand finds Alec’s, squeezing it fiercely.

"He’s going to be fine," Magnus says quietly, although Alec can hear the tremor in his voice. "Ragnar says it’s a simple fever, and as long as it breaks soon then we won’t have a problem."

"And if it doesn’t?" Alec asks.
Magnus grips his hand harder. "Then it's a good job I'm such a good Warlock, isn't it? I know how to make him better should it come to that, darling, but for now he just needs rest and lots of liquids."

"I hate this," Alec hisses, frustrated. "I hate being helpless. I want to do something, I want to make him better."

"You're here with him," Magnus says. "Talk to him, or read to him."

"He's eighteen, Magnus," Alec says, laughing. "He won't let me read to him. If he knew we were doting on him like this, he'd have our heads."

"Well he can't exactly protest," Magnus points out, and then he lopes towards the bookshelf on the far side of their room. Nate had wandered home from work, shivering and pale and flopped onto Alec's bed in a daze, obviously confused. He hasn't left their room since, lying in the middle of the king-sized bed with a bundle of blankets on top of him, head propped up on a mountain of pillows. He insists that he's too old for this, really, but Alec still sees a skinny, scrawny boy standing in the corner of the room, demanding soup.

"Anything in particular?" Magnus asks, running a finger along the row of book spines. Some belong to Magnus, and some are Alec's, and although he's not a big fiction reader, he knows that Magnus quite likes his voice, and sometimes he reads aloud in the evenings as a way of tricking Magnus away from his desk, and into some proper sleep.

"Nothing too complicated," Alec says, rearranging the pillows so that he's lying beside Nate, one hand on his head, feeling the heat of his scalp. He presses a kiss into Nate's burning skin just as Magnus joins him, a slim novel trapped between glittery fingers. Alec takes it and arches an eyebrow at the cover.

"Peter Pan?"

Magnus shrugs. "I seem to recall you reading it to Violet and Isaac when they were younger. I didn't think it was fair that Nate missed out."

There are a lot of things about this that aren't fair. It’s not fair that Nate suffered through shit years before he found a home with people who loved him, somewhere where he was safe. It’s not fair that Violet will never know her mother, or that kids will tease her for her purple eyes. It’s not fair that Isaac, on some level, feels unwanted, even though Magnus and Alec have done everything they can to make him feel loved and cared for.

It’s not fair that Alec is going to leave them, one day. It’s not fair that Magnus is going to have to watch them leave him.

Violet and Isaac skid into the room, shrieking with laughter, and Magnus hushes them, pointing at Nate, who shifts and murmurs. They fall quiet, eyes wide, and then clamber onto the bed. Alec gets a knee to the chest and Magnus gets an elbow to the eyeball, and Isaac continues to squirm and flail around for a good few minutes before he sprawls across all of them, comfortable.

"Your dad’s going to read to us," Magnus says lightly, grinning.

There are lots of things that aren’t fair, Alec thinks, but there are a thousand more things that make this family worthwhile, worth fighting for. He opens his book and sets it on his knees, one hand on Nate’s shoulder, Isaac’s hair tickling his chin and Violet curled up with her head on his shoulder. Magnus snakes a hand around to land on his knee, squeezing gently. They catch each other’s eyes a moment before Alec opens his mouth to read, and he knows they’re thinking the same thing.
They have their family, and nobody’s going to take it away from them.

End Notes

Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed it. Gimme a kudos/comment to let me know what you thought, and thank you so much! Come say hey @thealmostrhetoricalquestion on tumblr.

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