Summary

The door opens. Alec tenses, and his body throbs.

A man steps through, and Alec curls his fingers into his palms, terror pulsing through him. Because the man isn't a man. He's a warlock. A demon. The same person he felt crouching over him when he fell.

Why is he here? What has the warlock done to him?

"Well well, little angel. You're awake."

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Alec has been told the same stories all his life. He's been taught the same lines, over and over again. Downworlders are reckless, impulsive, demonic. They're not to be trusted.

And Magnus Bane is the epitome of everything evil about Downworlders.

At least, that's what people keep telling him. Alec's not quite so sure anymore.
Or: In which the Nephilim have wings, are taught to loathe Downworlders, and Alec is presented with a conundrum when Magnus Bane saves his life.

Notes

So, you know that wingfic I swore I would upload in November?

Yeah. Haha. Hm. *coughs* Well, here it is! It's based off of my Malec Week 2016 story, from the day 6 prompt. You lot were all eager for more, and I was very happy to oblige.

Let me know what you think!
"You're late," Maryse barks as the staccato click of Isabelle's heels announces her presence to those gathered in the Institute's meeting room. There's silence, save for the rhythmic tapping of shoes on the floor, Maryse's eyes fixed coldly on her daughter.

Isabelle ignores her, flipping her hair back over one shoulder, and struts further into the room. The slapping sound of a thick folder of paper hitting the worn wood of the meeting table breaks the quiet. It slides across the table, coming to a halt in front of Alec.

Alec looks up at his sister from where he's bent over the table, examining the strategy map they were drawing out, but she has her chin tipped up, eyes flashing as she holds Maryse's gaze.

He ducks his head, deciding that it would be more beneficial to everyone in the room if he pretends to be oblivious to their non-verbal sparring, and flips open the folder. His eyebrows shoot up.

"You got all this in two days?" Alec asks her, glancing up.

"I was told we needed intel. There's your intel."

"It's great." Jace peers over Alec - or, rather, around Alec, because Alec is too tall to be peered over - eyes skimming across the page. "This is exactly what we needed."

"You're welcome." Isabelle still hasn't looked away from Maryse. "Contrary to popular belief, I don't sit around painting my nails all day."

Alec snaps his head up at that, frowning. Nobody could think Isabelle lazes around. Her methods might be more than a little unorthodox, but it couldn't be argued that she doesn't get things done. She does. Superbly. It is, however, usually best not to ask where, or how, she's garnered her information.

"I take it this means you've changed your mind about this mission, Isabelle?" Maryse stands tall, broad-shouldered, hair scraped back from her face, expression impassive. The perfect commander. The Clave's most loyal leader, with no time for frivolity or compassion. The severity written into the tired lines of her face is even more obvious in the evening light, all shadows cast by cheap fluorescent light that catches on the weary faces of the Shadowhunters gathered.

Isabelle's nostrils flare. "No."

Behind him, Alec feels Jace tense at the same time he does. He glances back at his parabatai, and sees his own worry reflected back in his brother's eyes. This isn't going to be good.

Everybody gathered in the room knows that Isabelle loathes the Clave's attitude towards Downworlders: inferior beings to be protected only because they have use. Dangerous, savage, bloodthirsty, and a threat to peace.

Alec's interactions with Downworlders have been limited. In-out missions, interrogations, putting down those who cause trouble—he does his duty. He is a soldier, and he does what his commander demands of him.

Isabelle, on the other had, has defiance burning bright within her, an unending source of fuel keeping it alight; she's set fire to rooms full of people. And faced the consequences.

"This mission is a joke," Isabelle snaps. "You don't want to help any of those Downworlders. You
want to make sure they don't side with Valentine, because if the Circle gains the support of more Downworlders, this will be a war we can't win." Her eyes flash. "You couldn't care less about whether they live or die. And some of them will die, if we do this."

Maryse remains stoic. "The Circle is dangerous, Isabelle. Sometimes sacrifices are necessary to win a war. The Downworlders are foolish to be siding with Valentine. They shouldn't be meeting with him at all."

"Even if they are - which most of them aren't - who can blame them? What do they have to lose? We use them, and then we slaughter them in their thousands."

"Because Downworlders are animals, Isabelle." Maryse inhales, and then lets it out again in a long-suffering sigh. "They don't want the kinds of things we do. They have to be controlled for a reason."

"Besides which, Valentine doesn't want them alive," Alec says, straightening, interrupting before this can turn nasty. Isabelle turns her furious eyes on him. "He wants to take their powers for himself, and then he wants to eradicate them. We have laws, Izzy, and we abide by them. That's more than can be said for Valentine and the Circle."

"Enough." Maryse brings her hands down flat on the table, making the whole room flinch. Including Alec and Isabelle. "You will intercept this meeting, you will kill every Circle member in there, and you will take any sympathisers. Your priorities are the Shadowhunter children being held in there. If the Downworlders attempt to distract you from your mission, you kill them too."

Her eyes find Alec's, eyebrows raised slightly, as though daring him to disagree, as Isabelle had.
But Alec never disagrees. He obeys.

"Understood," he tells her, and flips the file shut, Isabelle's intel and Jace's strategy map safe inside.

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Alec motions half of his team forwards, curling his fingers and motioning round the side of the building. Jace nods his understanding.

At his back, Isabelle stands stock still, fuming, while Jace scouts the area around them for traps or unexpected defences. It's a simple mission. Get in, kill the Circle members, get the children, and go. The Downworlders are irrelevant. Focusing on which Downworlders to take will only district his team from the task at hand, so Alec instructed his team not to engage the Downworlders unless absolutely necessary.

Valentine might be completely insane, hell-bent on destroying the Clave, purifying the Nephilim bloodline and purging the Downworld, but he isn't wrong about everything. The Downworlders are powerful. Dangerous. They aren't to be trifled with. Especially not in the numbers they're expecting when they walk into the abandoned warehouse Valentine has, according to Isabelle's information, chosen for this meeting.

"Something's wrong," Jace murmurs, when he comes back round from scouting the perimeters of the building. "They're not inside."

"And no sign of the children," Raj says.

Alec glances back at Isabelle, and licks his lower lip. She's right, then. Valentine knows. They know they're coming. They're prepared. Prepared for Alec's team to try to butcher them where they sit, without mercy. And if they're prepared—
"We don't kill them," Alec says, quietly. "Not unless we need to. Is that understood?"

Jace frowns. "Alec—"

"They know," Alec states. "And if they know, they'll have moved the children. This is our only lead. They've been missing for weeks, and this is the only lead we've come up with. We need them alive if we want to find those children. Do not kill anyone, Downworlder or Circle member, unless you have to. Do I make myself clear?"

Isabelle is the first to nod. "Perfectly, big brother." She cranes her neck to look up at the top of the building, wings shimmering into appearance and spreading wide behind her. "They're on the roof. It's glamoured, but they're on the roof."

"According to your sources," Raj points out. Alec can hear the scepticism in his voice. He can't entirely blame him. There have been incidents in which Isabelle has been wrong. "Or they could be waiting inside to jump out and slit our throats. The meeting might not be here at all. They just made us think it's here by feeding us fake intel."

"You're the one who just looked inside," Isabelle snaps at him. "Did you see anyone?"

"No." Raj shakes his head. "I trust you, Isabelle, but—"

"That's enough, Raj." Jace has gone still all over, his voice quiet in the cold nighttime. The bustling life of mundane New York seems far away, though they're a mere block from a main road.

Jace and Alec exchange a long look, and then look back at Isabelle. The three of them understand each other perfectly. Alec made the right call. They agree with him. And he and Isabelle agree with Jace: they've stalled long enough. It's time to fly.

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There's a scream the moment they rise high enough into the air to be seen from where they're flying close to the building for cover. The hairs on the back of Alec's neck rise at the sharp, piercing sound. That's not a Circle member. That's a someone being tortured by the Circle.

Alec's heard it enough times to be familiar with the sound of Raziel's runes being burned into a Downworlder's flesh.

"Still ignoring the Downworlders, brother?" Isabelle asks. She doesn't look at him, but he can hear the suppressed rage in her voice. Alec understands. But he has to do as he's been told. "Still killing them if they're a liability?"

He glances across at her. "No. We're not killing anyone."

Raj nods. "If we kill the Downworlders, they're just more likely to side with Valentine."

Nothing crosses his face, as inscrutable as always, but Alec appreciates it. Jace and Isabelle siding with him when he overrules Maryse's instruction is one thing. They're notorious for being reckless, for disobeying, for spiting their mother. Raj is different. Raj's loyalties are unquestionable. His support solidifies Alec's certainty that, this time, Maryse's priorities are wrong.

He's not disobeying her. He's still going to finish this mission. It's quick, straightforward, in, out. But his team are doing this their way.

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The moment Alec hovers in the air, wings beating steadily to hold him still, draws back the string of his bow, and lets his first arrow fly, he feels something in his stomach settle. The world narrows. The past and the future become irrelevant. All that matters is hitting his targets, spot on, every time.

The first arrow embeds itself in the shoulder of the Shadowhunter holding a stele, drawing on the forearm of a Downworlder. The Shadowhunter cries out, dropping the stele with a clatter on the rain-damp roof, and the other members of the Circle turn to see Alec and his team hovering above them.

There's a moment of silence. And then a gurgling, choking sound, followed by a thud as the Downworlder being marked - a warlock, Alec presumes, from the stumpy brown horns that brand it as demonic - slumps sideways, dead.

And then the fight breaks out.

Seraph blades light up the night, Circle members spreading their wings and leaping into the air, shouts and screams and the shattering clash of blades the soundtrack to battle.

There's chaos below, as the Circle attempts to control the Downworlders. Alec keeps his spot in the air, firing off arrow after arrow at the Circle, aiming for hands, shoulders, thighs, wingtips if they're above the roof—anything to incapacitate, but not enough to kill. If there's nobody left to interrogate, they won't find these children.

The Downworlders keep casting fearful glances up at the blazing fight above them. There are no werewolves there, Alec notes. Fey, warlocks, vampires, but no werewolves. They're ducking, defending themselves against stray knives and arrows and vicious Circle members who are still fruitlessly attempting to keep them where they are, but they don't seem inclined to help in the fight.

Maryse won't be happy about that. Neither will the Clave. Alec supposes he should be capturing the Downworlders, because they're technically breaking the Accords, in not offering assistance to the Clave's soldiers.

But he doesn't. He hates being involved in anything related to the Downworlders. He'd rather ignore them. Eternally.

Jace appears at his side, suddenly, covered in blood. Alec doesn't break his gaze from his targets. He knows Jace is uninjured, through their parabatai bond.

"We're outnumbered," Jace says, breathlessly.

Alec lets another arrow fly, this time towards a woman who doesn't look much older than them, trying to escape down the stairs.

"I know," he replies.

"But we can't kill them." He feels Jace turn, so they're back-to-back, wingtips brushing every other beat, protecting each other as they always have. All that's missing is Isabelle at their side. "Because then we're back to square one."

And then Isabelle is there, hovering a little higher, snapping her whip through the air to wrap around a man's neck. He falls to the roof with a crunch, and rolls over, coughing blood.

"If we kill them, it takes us more weeks to locate those children, and they could be dead by then," Isabelle says, calmly, as though she hasn't just ripped out a man's vocal chords and splattered them across the rooftop. "Alec's right. We have to be smart about this."
There's someone coming towards Jace, at an angle, from the side. Alec's eyes widen as he takes in the bow with just a single arrow knocked against the string, the deadly gleam in the man's eyes, and the murderous rage etched onto his face.

Alec pushes Jace back through the sky with a grunt of effort. On pure reflex, he spins so his chest is against Jace's back, and his wings curl protectively around his brother, shielding him from the attack instinctively, as they've protected each other since they were ten years old.

The familiar whistle of an arrow let loose cuts through the air

There's a scream from his sister, a desperate shout from Raj across the sky, and he knows it's over. White-hot pain flashes through him as the arrow embeds itself in his wing, and he cries out. His grip on Jace slackens; he falls apart from his parabatai, but Jace is safe, even if his mouth goes slack in horror as he stares at Alec.

One wing beats furiously in an attempt to hold him in the air, where they're all suspended, fifty stories up, still locked in battle, but he's falling. Fast. Too fast. He knows he won't survive the fall. Above him, Jace dives down after him, wings tight to his sides, one arm reaching out, but Alec knows. He's much heavier than Jace. His wings are longer than Jace's, and he's taller. If Jace catches him, they'll both tumble to the ground and die.

Besides, he's falling too fast. Jace won't even get close to him.

"Stop!" Alec shouts. "You can't!"

Jace shakes his head, just as Alec sees the streets of New York fall into clarity below him. Jace strains his arm forwards, and then, to Alec's relief, pulls back with a scream of frustration that tears at Alec's heart. Jace's wings spread wide just at the last moment, and Alec hits the concrete with a crack.

For a moment, he's paralysed, unable to move, in more pain that he could possibly have imagined. He feels like every bone in his body is shattered. And his wings... His wings have crumpled underneath him, feathers sticky with blood. His vision is blurry, black spots swimming in front of him, ears ringing. He can't hear the traffic whizzing by next to him, or the loud hubbub of people going about their daily lives that is always present in New York.

He doesn't even know if his glamour rune is still in tact, or whether it's been slashed through. He doesn't want his death to be a mess that the other Shadowhunters will have to clear up. He's failed already. Failed in his mission to stop those Circle members, and find the children.

The instructions from the Clave had been to kill them. Alec told his team to capture them, and only kill them if absolutely necessary. And now he's dead. Or, at least, he will be, in moments.

He failed.

A shadow falls over him. Alec manages to turn his head just slightly in an attempt to see where he is, and who the shadow belongs to. It can't be Jace or Isabelle. They'd never have left the rest of the team unguarded when they know Alec will be dead. They wouldn't be that stupid. They wouldn't do something so futile.

Someone bends over him, crouching but not quite kneeling. His vision is still swimming, and he can't focus on whoever is beside him. But he can feel them. He can feel their presence, radiating calm, and power. So much power. Dark power. Not the angelic power the Nephilim run on.

If Alec isn't already dying, he'll be dead in the next minute.
There's movement, and a swirl of blue light, and everything goes dark.
Eagle

Chapter Summary

Alec wakes.

Everything hurts. It hurts so much. His back, his head, his right shoulder, and his wings... Alec doubts he'll ever be able to fly again.

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In which Alec is clinging to life by a thread, his saviour is revealed, and heated exchanges filled with prejudice ensue.

Chapter Notes

I do not condone Alec's opinions on Downworlders. I think that's probably fairly obvious, but, y'know, in case there's ever any doubt... (Speaking after seeing how much sarcasm and irony seems to go over people's heads on Tumblr :/)

My chapter titles are all going to be birds. Birds are associated with all sorts of awesome things in various cultures, so I'm picking birds that fit the general tone of each chapter, or the central actions of a character in the chapter, or any new main character introduced.

The eagle symbolises power, spirituality, strength, and wisdom. (There's a lot of hyper-masculine crap here, too, but let's steer clear of that.) Zeus - as in, lightning-bolt, Olympus, Greek God Zeus - is often associated with the eagle. A Google search tells me that some Native American tribes consider the eagle as a messenger of the gods, and depicts it as a symbol of spiritual power. (Let me know if I'm wrong about that, of course.) (I've edited this slightly after a comment below that reminded me that Native American culture is not a singular entity. Thank you to Jael, who provided me with some more info here)

No prizes for guessing who's being introduced this chapter...

Anyway, onwards, upwards, and I'll see you at the bottom!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alec wakes.

Everything hurts. It hurts so much. His back, his head, his right shoulder, and his wings... Alec doubts he'll ever be able to fly again.

How is he alive? He should be dead. From the fall. From landing near someone with that kind of dark power. From the poison in the arrow that pierced his wing.
But he's not.

He tries to open his eyes, but finds them too heavy. He inhales, and immediately winces. Ribs. His ribs ache. As though they've been broken, but are...healing? How can he be healing? Did his team manage to fight off the Circle members? Did they finish the mission, and come back for him? Was he still alive? Did they get him away from whoever he'd landed near, and perform some miracle to save him? By calling the Silent Brothers to heal him, maybe?

With a great effort, he manages to wrench his eyes open. He blinks rapidly, eyes moving around. He's lying in a bed, in a darkened room. The curtains are closed, the door shut. The mattress beneath him is soft, cradling his injured body, and the crisp sheets pulled up to his waist are warm, tucked around him with care.

He glances down at himself. His ribs are mottled with fading bruises, his shoulder wrapped in gauze, scratches all across his torso—but they, like the bruises, are fading.

He turns his head sideway, carefully, and lets out a moan of pain. His wings are spread out on either side of him, the bed clearly designed deliberately to be able to accommodate wings. So he must be somewhere in Nephilim care. Or with the Silent Brothers, perhaps. Where else would have a bed like this?

It's a miracle he's alive. He should be dead, he knows. He has to thank whoever saved him. But he's in too much pain to move, and everything feels sluggish. Probably because of the poison in the arrow. Even if it's been worked out of his bloodstream, it will take time for his body to recover from its paralysing effects.

The door opens. Alec tenses, and his body throbs.

A man steps through, and Alec curls his fingers into his palms, terror pulsing through him. Because the man isn't a man. He's a warlock. A demon. The same person he felt crouching over him when he fell.

Why is he here? What has the warlock done to him?

"Well well, little angel. You're awake."

His voice is smooth, even, but with an edge to it, as though there's a storm raging behind locked doors. It's the bitter-sweet clash of dark chocolate, the deceptive danger of rip tides beneath a beautiful, waveless ocean surface. It's soft and comforting and beautiful like a candle, but flammable, burning high and bright and explosive when it meets gasoline.

The warlock scans over him with a critical eye. "Hm. Those bruises should have faded by now."

He steps closer, twirling a hand to turn on a light. As soon as Alec can see him clearly, he feels even more frightened. The warlock looks dangerous. Dark hair is styled high, a deep maroon shirt buttoned to his throat with necklaces down to his navel, extensive numbers of rings on his fingers, and black eye make-up lines gold-green cat eyes.

He radiates power. Everything about him whispers - whispers, because he looks too formidable to need to shout - that he could destroy the entire city with a mere flick of his hand, all without having one hair moved out of place.

The warlock lifts a hand, blue swirls of magic drifting from his fingertips, and hovers his hand over Alec's torso. Alec flinches back, eyes going wide, wings curling protectively towards himself. Pain flashes through them as he lifts them off the bed, and he grits his teeth.
Lowering his hand, the warlock frowns. "I might be powerful, but I can't heal you from that kind of fall and such potent poison and have you ready to fly back out into the sky in a matter of hours. You need to relax. You'll hurt yourself."

He lifts his hand again, and then brings the other up to join it. Alec is breathing heavily, eyes wide, fixed on the warlock's glowing hands. He doesn't understand. Is the warlock trying to lull him into a false sense of security? Relax him before he kills him? What's he doing?

"No," he manages to get out through gritted teeth, pushing himself away from the warlock. He cries out in pain, every part of his body protesting.

The warlock's frown deepens. He doesn't drop his hands, but the magic disappears.

"I'm not going to hurt you, little angel. I'm trying to heal you. But you need to lie still, or you'll hurt yourself more."

Alec's chest rises and falls quickly, sweat beading across his skin. "Don't touch me."

The warlock looks almost...upset? Why on earth does he look upset? He's trying to kill Alec—and lying about it. Does he think Alec is stupid? He's a warlock. A demon. And Alec is one of the Nephilim. Warlocks loathe the Nephilim. Warlocks are evil. Demonic. Insane. Power-hungry beings conceived with Hell's fires, nothing in them but lust and chaos and destruction.

"You will die, Nephilim," the warlock says, shaking his head a little.

At least he's being honest, now.

"If you don't let me heal you, you will die. You fell from the clouds onto my doorstep, and your body is mortal. The arrow in your wing was poisoned, and the poison is still in your bloodstream. That's why you're not healing as you should be."


"My body is not mortal," he says finally, as indignantly as he can manage in his current predicament. "I'm a Nephilim. I have the blood of angels."

The warlock looks at him steadily. "And mundanes. You're human. You may be stronger than the average mundane, but you are not infallible. And you will die if you don't let me help you."

"You're a warlock. Why should I trust you?"

The warlock's eyes flash. "There was a time," he says, voice sharp like razor blades, "when the Angel's Children worked with my people, not against them. Building the Accords. Building alliances. We offered you our magic, and you offered us your angelic strength and protection when we could not finish a job on our own."

"I would never let a warlock take my strength," Alec chokes out.

He shakes his head, expression softening in...pity? Alec doesn't want this warlock's pity. He wants to get out. He wants to escape. He wants to be somewhere he's safe. Because Angel knows he's not safe here.

"I would never let you die when you crashed onto my doorstep. Even if you do hate me." He smiles
wryly. "Does that give me the moral high ground? I rather thought that was what the Nephilim liked to be on."

Alec's vision swims before he can respond, and he moans, head falling back onto soft pillows that cradle his aching skull. His eyes slip closed as pain flits through him, sharp and hot and absolutely everywhere. In his shoulders, down his spine, shooting down the backs of his legs, all along his wings, in his head, behind his eyes...

"It's alright, little angel," the warlock murmurs. Alec hears a snap, sees blue flashing behind his eyelids, and feels heat on his torso. "Relax. It's alright. I won't hurt you. You're going to be okay."

Alec slits his eyes, looking up at the warlock as best he can. The warlock's brow is furrowed in clear concentration, hands moving up and down the length of Alec's body, magic bleeding from his hands towards Alec.

The warlock flicks his fingers, and a swirl of blue drifts along both of Alec's wings, gliding along his feathers to the tips. Alec gasps, and jolts on the bed at the momentary pain, which is followed by a strange tingling sensation.

"Easy," the warlock says, voice soothing, like he's quieting a frightened, violate animal. "Easy. It's alright. I'm not going to cut off your wings and do heinous things with them. But they're going to fall off if I don't heal them, because you haven't got enough blood flow going to them, and you won't ever be able to fly if I don't mend the bones now, because they'll reset in the wrong position. Okay? I will not hurt you."

"I don't understand," Alec whispers, pressing himself back into the mattress, heart thudding in fear. "Why are you doing this? Why are you helping me?"

The warlock smiles. And...he doesn't look like a demon, when he smiles. He'd almost look like an ordinary person, but for the cat eyes. He almost looks...beautiful.

Alec snaps out of it. He's a demon. He's not beautiful. On any other day, Alec would have shot an arrow through his heart by now.

"Because you crashed onto my doorstep," the warlock says, "broken and mangled and bleeding and helpless. Because you were trying to stop those who wish to destroy the world and recreate it into a mass place of misery and destruction. Because despite who they were, you were merciful. Because--" His smile gets smaller, and softer, and suddenly, Alec is less afraid. "--I would like to see more of the Nephilim behave as you did. Thinking with your heads, not your blades. And perhaps, you will realise that there is a difference between a Downworlder and a demon. Perhaps you'll one day extend the courtesy of mercy to those Downworlders you let die, tonight."

Alec swallows. He doesn't know what to say. He doesn't know what to think. He doesn't even know this warlock's name. But the warlock saw the fight in the sky. Or he found out what happened. He knows what Alec did. And he...appreciates it?

"Who are you?" Alec asks, struggling to keep him in focus.

"I'm Magnus Bane, Nephilim." His fingers glow blue again, and Alec feels himself growing more sluggish. The warlock - Magnus - is putting him to sleep, Alec realises. Because it's going to hurt when he's healed? Because Magnus needs him to be still and silent when he works?

Magnus Bane.

Alec knows who Magnus Bane is. Of course he does. Magnus is notorious. Notorious for being the
son of Asmodeus—a Prince of Hell. Magnus is hundreds of years old - some say thousands - a criminal, wanted for unspeakable crimes against the Clave. He's broken a thousand laws, slaughtered ten times as many innocents, destroyed towns and villages.

And he's in New York, right under the Clave's noses. It's impossible. Utterly, madly impossible.

Yet, he's here, in front of Alec.

Alec should be stabbing a seraph blade through his heart.

"But you're..." Alec battles against the blackness closing in on him like a scene cut in one of those old mundane movies Jace has a bizarre interest in. "You're a demon. You're the son of Asmodeus. You're not supposed to- to help."

"I am not everything your people tell you I am," Magnus says.

"What are you going to do to me?"

"Heal you." Magnus' hands are shrouded in blue. He lowers one, and places his palm atop Alec's hair. "Close your eyes, little angel. Let me help you."

Alec obeys, and closes his eyes, unable to fight against the dark any longer. He feels warm, suddenly, the hand disappearing from his hair. There's light beyond his eyelids, and that strange tingling sensation is beginning to reach other parts of his body.

"Let go," Magnus whispers. "Sleep. When you wake, you'll be okay. You're safe, little angel."

And Alec lets go.

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When Alec wakes again, the room is bright, sunlight streaming through the edges of the curtains. Alec blinks rapidly against the sudden light, and lets out a groan when he tries to sit up. His entire body feels like it's bruised. And his wings... By the Angel, his wings feel like he's been flying for days, nonstop.

And yet...he should be dead.

He should have died from the fall. From the poison. From the warlock—Magnus Bane. But instead, Magnus healed him.

For what? What does Bane want? Is he going to threaten Alec? Force him into spying on the Clave? Demand some kind of horrific payment? Had he performed some kind of ritual on Alec, when Alec had consented to Bane healing him? Had he...signed over his soul? Was he to be the warlock's plaything?

Alec doesn't understand. But he knows he needs to get out of here. He needs to go back to the Institute. He needs to find out what happened to his team. Is his sister okay? His parabatai? Raj? Did they manage to capture Circle members?

Part of him - a small part of him - wants to stay right where he is, forever. The bed is incredibly comfortable. It's wide enough to accommodate his wings fully - a luxury he doesn't have at the Institute, where the beds don't even accommodate his tall stature, resulting in his feet hanging off the bed of the beds - and everything is so soft, and so warm. It's never warm in the Institute. Even in the height of summer, the stone walls seem to keep the place perpetually freezing.
But he can't stay. Not least because he's in a warlock's...lair? (It doesn't seem like a lair. It seems like a home. Do warlocks have homes? He's never really thought about it.) And Magnus Bane's lair, at that.

No. He has to go home. And he has to tell his parents - his commanders - that he's seen Magnus Bane. That Bane is here, in New York. And perhaps, finally, after hunting him for decades, centuries, the Clave will be able to bring Bane to justice.

Alec takes a deep breath, and then tries to sit up a second time. He grinds his teeth together as aching pain punches against every bone in his body, and his wings drag painfully against the bed.

He manages to haul himself into a sitting position, chest rising and falling rapidly. After checking that he's not going to destroy anything in the room and make any undue noise that would bring attention to himself and alert Bane to the fact that he's awake, he tries to flex his back muscles to move his wings. He winces in discomfort, but he can move them. He might not be able to fly far, but he seems to be okay.

Magnus Bane really has healed him. Saved his life. It doesn't make any sense.

Alec looks around for his stele so he can glamour himself, but it doesn't seem to be in the room. When he goes back to the Institute, he's going to have to be careful he's not seen. He's heard the hood stories of Nephilim being caught unaware by alarmed mundanes.

He's shirtless, he realises. And, when he pushes back the sheets, he notices that he's only wearing boxers. His own boxers - so the warlock hasn't violated his modesty, at least, although he supposes that modesty is secondary in life-threatening situations - but nothing else. And he can't see his clothes anywhere in the room.

Shit. He can't go back to the Institute in his boxers.

Carefully, he curls his wings in towards himself. He can't risk them disappearing while they're still healing, because Angel knows what kind of damage that will do to them, but he has to avoid knocking everything within four metres of himself over.

Satisfied that he has everything under control, Alec pushes back the sheets, and swings himself around, slowly, so his feet are on the floor. His eyebrows shoot up when his toes are engulfed by the soft, fluffy carpet. Is this...real? Warlock Bane with luxurious carpets?

Alec's not sure why he's surprised, really. Bane is known for being extravagant, and for enjoying all the pleasures of life. Alec supposes that could extend to things like carpets. Even if it does seem...strange.

He braces a hand on one of the posts at the end of the bed, and hauls himself to a standing position; every muscle in his body protests, joints aching, sharp pain shooting along his spine and down the backs of his legs. He ignores it. He's a soldier. He's used to pain. It's not like he hasn't been injured and fallen out of the sky before.

Possibly not from fifty stories up, admittedly. But still.

Still holding onto the bed frame for support, Alec looks around the room. It seems bare. A guest room, presumably. Do warlocks have guests? Other Downworlders, Alec supposes, might stay in the High Warlock's house. But Bane is hardly an ordinary Downworlder. He's unforgiving. Vicious. Cruel.

Which makes this whole saving-Alec's-life thing incredibly suspicious.
Other than the large, Nephilim-sized bed, a nightstand, and a stack of mundane fiction books in one corner, the room is empty. There's a door, closed, probably tall enough to Alec to walk through without banging his head or slouching (which is more than can be said for many of the Institute's doors) which Alec presumes leads through to the rest of Magnus Bane's lair.

To Alec's left, there's another door. It's slightly ajar, and, from what Alec can see, the walls inside are tiled. A bathroom, presumably.

Gingerly, Alec lets go of the bed, and steps towards the bathroom. His body protests at the movement, but he ignores his discomfort. He has to get out of here. He has to go back to the Institute. And...he can't do that in this state of undress.

He pushes open the bathroom door, letting out a relieved breath when it doesn't creak, and steps inside. A night vision rune is still burning on the inside of his forearm, so he doesn't need to turn on the light or open the blind to see around.

And it looks...ordinary. Completely ordinary. Significantly nicer than the Institute's bathrooms, admittedly, but Bane doesn't seem to be brewing anything heinous in here.

And there's a bathrobe hanging on the back of the door. It's plain white, and long enough to cover Alec, despite his height. Without further thought, Alec takes the robe off the hook, and slides it up his arms, hoping this is a random garment, and not a piece of clothing worn by Warlock Bane.

Before Alec can consider the next move in his escape plan, now he's at least covered, he hears movement outside the bedroom door. He freezes, heart pounding. Bane is going to catch him. He's going to find Alec, and he's going to realise what Alec is trying to do, and he's going to be furious. Alec's never going to get back to the Institute. Never going to be able to inform the Clave that their most wanted is here, living in luxury right under their noses.

The door handle squeaks a little as it's turned. Alec stares, eyes wide and pulse tripping, feeling like everything is happening in slow motion as it rotates, further, and then all the way down. The door slides open, smoothly.

Magnus Bane is revealed, in profile, as he peers round the door - literally, sticks his head in first - before he steps in, a frown on his face as he, presumably, realises that Alec isn't in the bed.

For a moment, Alec considers slamming the bathroom door, dashing to the window, and hopping out, hoping that his wings are healed enough to land him safely so he can get out. But he knows Bane is too powerful. The moment he realises, he'd be able to snatch Alec back in an instant. Or slit his throat with a flick of a single finger.

It's a momentary hesitation, as he considers. A split second. But that's all the time it takes for Bane to turn his head, and lock eyes with Alec, stood in the doorway of the bathroom.

The warlock blinks. Alec's heart thuds harder.

The warlock blinks a second time; Alec's nails dig into his palm nervously.

A third blink, cat eyes flashing, and then...

His mouth quirks up at one corner. He raises a single eyebrow, looking Alec up and down, and leans against the doorframe, arms folded over his chest. And Alec remembers that moment, when Bane had been healing him, when he'd smiled, and Alec thought he looked almost beautiful.

His head is clear, now. He's focused again. Sharp. He knows that Downworlders are often beautiful,
precisely so they can take advantage of their victims; make people trust them. Flirt with them, beguile them, even sleep with them, to achieve their goals. Beauty is merely another weapon in a Downworlder's arsenal.

Especially a Downworlder like Magnus Bane. He's notorious for his many lovers, his affairs, his seductions. He's managed to win over many with his charms. That's precisely why Alec has been trained against such things. He's trained to ignore aesthetic beauty and deadly promises. He's not going to be fooled by Bane's tricks and coquetry.

"What are you doing in there?" Warlock Bane asks, his entire demeanour one of amusement, relaxed and easy. But, like before, like when he'd been healing Alec, the sheer power bubbling beneath the surface is obvious.

Alec panics, searching desperately for an excuse. "I- I was- Clothes, I didn't—"

"Ah, yes." Bane smiles lazily, and flicks ring-laden fingers. "Your clothes were ruined, I'm afraid. I'm sure we can find you something. I have a rather large collection of clothes, and instant access to any shop in the world." His smile turns feral, and Alec takes a half step back, instincts flaring up, warning him of danger, telling him to run, fly, get out, get out, get out—

"Sit," Bane says, pointing to the bed, interrupting Alec's abrupt fright. "You fell two hundred metres onto concrete. You shouldn't be wandering around until you've been checked."

Alec doesn't move, frozen, staring at the warlock. He grips onto the side of the door, Bane's words drawing his attention back to how much he aches, all over, but he can't move. He's paralysed. From fear, or uncertainty, or literal magic Bane is using to fuck with his head, Alec doesn't know. But he can't move.

Bane raises his eyebrows. "Did you break?"

"What are you going to do?" Alec croaks out.

"We've had this conversation. I'm going to heal you, and that's it. Now sit down."

"You're wanted."

"Yes, I am aware of that, darling." He grins. "The Clave is far too corrupt and poorly managed to catch me. Besides, if they tried to get in here, they'd be fried. I ward myself against the Nephilim."

Alec's stomach drops. "Then how...? How am I here?"

"Because I'm allowing you to be. So don't say anything moronic that will make me want to fry you, too. I'm sure you're conditioned to hate and murder just like the rest of them, so sit your pretty little ass down, and don't speak unless you're going to say something that won't make me detest you."

Alec swallows. Bane hasn't raised his voice. He still sounds playful, in fact. And yet, Alec doesn't think he's ever been more terrified of someone. Not even his mother. He understands why Bane is so feared, and, within the Downworld, so revered. He commands attention, and his very presence demands respect, irrespective of Alec's Nephilim blood.

And, unwillingly, Alec finds himself bowing (metaphorically, of course) to Magnus Bane.

Chapter End Notes
I don't know if any of you are interested in my little birdy facts. If you're interested, let me know, and I'll keep writing a few lines on the bird in the title at the start of each chapter. If it's boring, say so, and I won't waste anyone's time, lol.

I'm aiming for a once-a-week update schedule, with Thursday postings. I may have to drop down to once a fortnight, but we'll see :)  

(Also, totally guessing with the chapter count -- could be anything.)
After a pointed look from the warlock, Alec makes his way back towards the bed, and lowers himself onto it, perched on the edge of the mattress. Bane hums, and moves in behind him, hands glowing blue like they did earlier, when he'd healed Alec. How long has it been? A few hours? A day? Several days?

Alec doesn't dare ask.

"You are allowed to speak," Bane says. "I'll only feed you to my hell hounds if you say something idiotic. Which I'm sure you won't, because you Nephilim tend to value your lives."

Alec twists his head, flinching away, and stares at the warlock. "Hell hounds?"

Bane's lips twitch. "I wasn't serious, little angel. I have a pet, but he's a cat, not a beast straight from hell. Well. When he's not shredding my clothes."

Irritation flits through Alec. "Stop calling me that."

"What, little angel? I thought it was rather appropriate." Bane laughs, and looks at the length of Alec's body. "In an ironic sort of way, perhaps."

Alec clenches his jaw, grinding his teeth together as he turns back so Bane can continue examine him from behind. He can't punch this warlock. And he doesn't dare say anything he wants to. It's incredibly frustrating.

"Come now." Bane sounds teasing. Alec hates it. "Is it really so bad?"

Apparently, Alec's silence speaks for itself.
Bane says, with a sigh, "Oh, alright. Why don't you tell me your name, then, Nephilim?"

It's not a question. Alec knows it's not. It's not even a request. It's an order.

"Lightwood," Alec says, wincing when Bane presses against his shoulder blade with his thumb.

"Just Lightwood? Dear me, do the Nephilim not even bother naming their soldiers anymore? You're all reared to be exact replicas of each other, so I supposed it's no surprise."

What the hell is *that* supposed to mean?

"My first name is Alexander," Alec says, awkwardly.

"Alexander." Alec can hear the caress in the way Bane says his name. "Interesting."

"Nobody calls me that," he blurts out, before he can help himself. "Everyone calls me Alec."

"I am not everyone, Alexander," Bane says. "I'm sure we established that before. Try to keep up. I know problem solving isn't exactly one of the Nephilim's strong points, but I'm sure you can make an effort."

"Are you this rude to everyone?" Alec bites out, a growl of indignation in his voice, before he can stop himself.

*Shit.*

Behind him, Bane stills, hands pausing in whatever they were doing. Alec wonders whether he's about to be fed to Bane's demon cat, or whatever terrible end he's got planned for Alec.

But the warlock just laughs, unfreezing, and continues his magic. "I don't get the chance to be rude to the Nephilim very often, darling," he says. "Forgive me for taking what I can get. I have to avoid you lot in person, you see. You have a nasty habit of trying to capture me and kill me. It rather takes the fun out of verbal sparring."

Alec doesn't reply to that. He's not sure what he can say. And he's too worried about involuntarily causing his own death by saying the wrong thing.

"Well." Bane stands up. "Thanks to my spectacular skills, you'll be fine. Flying not recommended. Feel free to use my bathroom to clean yourself up. I'd have cleaned the blood off your wings before, but I've heard it's a somewhat...intimate ritual."

Alec's face burns at that. Bane chuckles.

"Don't be embarrassed, little angel. Would you like some coffee?"

Alec gapes at him. "Co- Coffee?"

"Yes." Bane looks at Alec strangely. "You must know what coffee is."

"Of course I know what coffee is," Alec says. "But you- Why are you offering me coffee?"

"Well, it's ten o'clock in the morning, so I presumed you'd probably prefer coffee to whiskey."

Alec opens his mouth to say something in reply, but his mind is blank, so he stutters out a meaningless stream of vaguely insulted babble, before he's silenced - magically or not, he has no idea - by Bane lifting a purple-tipped finger and hovering it in front of his lips.
"Are you finished?" Bane asks, raising an eyebrow at him. "Go and clean up before you ruin my loft."

"Can't I just go back to the Institute?" Alec asks, a little desperate, but no longer caring quite so much. If Bane doesn't let him go, there's no point anyway.

Bane chuckles: it's a dark, low, wicked sort of sound, and it sends a shiver down Alec's spine, the hairs on the back of his neck prickling. His stomach twists in fear as Bane shakes his head, looking down at Alec from where he's standing over the bed.

"Oh no. I don't think so. I'm not suicidal, Nephilim. I'm hardly going to let you run back to the Institute to tell them where I am and how to find me. At least, not yet."

Alec swallows, desperate to ask, to clarify, to understand, but he doesn't quite dare. Until Bane's lips turn up a little, the ice in his demonic eyes thawing the way frost begins to melt at the first rays of morning sunshine in the dead of winter, and Alec feels a touch less terrified.

"I don't understand," Alec says, at last. "You said you have wards. Why would it matter?"

Something in the warlock's eyes flickers, hot but not passionate, annoyed but not angry. Alec understands even less, as Bane averts his eyes, glancing at the floor, before he looks back up at Alec.

"Even my magic is not infinite, Nephilim," he says, voice cold, firm, but not biting. "Especially not after I've spent hours healing a Shadowhunter whom I should have left to die."

Alec stares at him. Not because Bane has given him a valuable piece of information - the sorts of limits his magic has - but because that means Bane risked himself, exhausted himself, to heal a Shadowhunter.

"So why didn't you? Why did you save me?"

Bane huffs out a bitter little laugh, and shakes his head. "Because I always think you're going to be different. Every time, I see something, and it makes me think that there might be one Shadowhunter in the world who isn't infected with prejudice and lies. I'm disappointed every time. You're all the same, you Nephilim. I pity you."

"Infected?" Alec lets out a disbelieving laugh. "What, are you trying to convince me that you're a good Downworlder? That you haven't slaughtered innocents and destroyed villages? That you don't lie and deceive and—"

"No." The warlock interrupts him smoothly, voice level, eyes glinting like the sharp blades of knives in sunlight. "No, Shadowhunter. I'm trying to show you that I am a person. Not all that unlike you. I saved your life. I didn't have to, but I did. I pulled you back from the brink of death. You, who are part of an institution that has made my very existence a misery. But it doesn't matter to you, does it? It doesn't matter to any of you. You don't want to understand. You don't want to consider that everything you know is not everything that is."

Alec is breathing just as heavily as Bane by the time he's finished. He stares...and stares...and stares. He's insane. Magnus Bane is insane. Downworlders are part demon. Bane is the son of Asmodeus. He is literally the devil's offspring. How can he possibly be a person?

The warlock shakes his head, and turns away from Alec. "The Clave is poisoned, Alexander. One day, perhaps I'll help a Shadowhunter who'll be able to see that."

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Alec is dressed in plain jeans and a sweater that probably costs more than his entire wardrobe put together when he slips hesitantly out of the bedroom and into the main room. Only the price tags still attached to the clothing assured Alec that he wasn't wearing Bane's clothes—that would have been a traumatising affair, for more reasons than he cares to admit.

Bane's apartment is...shockingly normal. Brighter than an average apartment, large enough to presumably cost a fortune, with all sorts of trinkets and books and things Alec doesn't even have names for that look older than his grandparents, but other than that, it's...normal. Homely. Alec wouldn't describe it as a lair. It's just an apartment. Lavish, with plush sofas and an enormous TV to his left, and a modern, sprawling kitchen to his right. There are even a few pot plants scattered around, and photographs set along the mantelpiece over an ornate fireplace.

He can smell coffee, too. It's pleasant. Surprisingly pleasant.

He's not quite sure what he's supposed to do. He can see Bane in the kitchen, drumming long, painted fingernails against the countertop as the coffee machine whirs, but he's not sure he's even supposed to have come out of the bedroom, let alone wander around.

Bane doesn't leave him to wonder for long. He turns, eyes fixing on Alec immediately; Alec thinks Bane probably has some sort of magical tracker that means he can tell everything that's going on in his lair.

Lair? Home? Apartment?

Apartment, Alec decides. That's more neutral. He's struggling to wrap his head around what's in front of him. He expected heinous experiments laid out and dark rooms and spiders webs. He didn't expect this at all.

"Hello, little angel," Bane says, a smirk playing on the corners of his lips as he looks Alec up and down. Alec feels uncomfortable at the pointed attention. "You look refreshed. Coffee?"

"Okay."

Bane raises an eyebrow. "Okay?"

Alec nods his head hurriedly. "Yes, yes, coffee would be nice."

Bane turns back to the counter, and Alec catches sight of a grin, before it disappears, and Bane holds out a full, steaming mug of coffee. He doesn't move towards Alec; he holds the mug steady, waiting for Alec to come to him.

Swallowing, Alec steps forward. One step. Another. Another. Two more. And then he's in front of Bane, who's watching him as though he's a frightened animal. Alec's lips part in trepidation as he reaches out to take the mug; he's careful not to touch the warlock's hand as he takes it.

Abruptly, Bane grabs his forearm with his other hand, holding Alec still, leaning into his space, eyes searing into Alec's.

"I have your stele," Bane whispers, venom laced into every syllable, "and your bow. I've repaired both. They're by the door. If you try to kill me, I assure you, I will hang your head on my front door as a knocker. Do I make myself clear?"

Alec swallows around the terror in his throat. "Perfectly."

"Excellent." Bane smiles disarmingly, and lets Alec go, twisting round to make his own coffee.
Alec backs up, and lets out a breath. Fuck. He's going to die of a heart attack before he gets out of here. Magnus Bane has got to be the most intimidating person he's ever met in his life. And that's saying something, with Maryse as his mother.

"You are allowed to drink that, darling," Bane says, snapping Alec from his thoughts. "I haven't poisoned it. I don't want you dead. Not yet, anyway."

Alec chokes, eyes widening. Bane laughs.

"Relax. Honestly, you Nephilim. So serious." He faces Alec, amusement and teasing on his face, and makes a tutting sound. He wiggles his forefinger side to side, and takes three predatory strides towards Alec. Alec's cheeks heat up and his heart thuds at the look in Bane's eyes. "Learn how to loosen up a little," he murmurs, mouth by Alec's ear, hot breath rushing over his skin, voice husky.

A shiver runs down Alec's spine. And he's...not quite sure why.

He's also not entirely sure whether it's a good or a bad shiver. It's strange. It's like nothing he's ever felt before.

Magic, then, most likely. More of Bane's mind games.

Bane is gone, disappearing into the living room behind him, before Alec can fully comprehend what's going on. He fights to loosen his throat muscles so he can breathe again, and closes his eyes for a moment in an attempt to calm his racing pulse.

He can understand why people fear Warlock Bane.

Pushing away his thoughts, he takes a heavy swig of coffee, the bitter liquid scalding down his throat. He glances down at his cup, surprised when he doesn't find it to be unpleasantly milky. Huh. It's black. Which is what he likes, but...most people don't. Or they have sugar in it. Not just...black. How did Bane know?

A sudden thought strikes Alec. He spins on his heel, and, then somewhat hesitantly, says, "Uh, Warlock Bane?"

Bane is flicking through a magazine, one leg tossed over his other thigh. He looks up when Alec speaks, and arches an eyebrow. "Yes, Alexander?"

"What do you know about the meeting that was going on, between Valentine and the Downworlders?"

For a moment, Bane is still, all over, mouth tight, eyes fixed on Alec but looking somewhere far away. Alec presses his thumb into the palm of his opposite hand nervously as he waits, hoping Bane isn't about to kill him.

"I know that Valentine lied to my people," Bane says, at last, refocusing on Alec. "I know that they died. I know that his minions tortured them." His eyes turn cold. "I know that you did little to help them."

Alec's jaw tightens. "I let them be. I could have killed them for being seen with the Circle. I could have captured them for breaking the Accords—"

Bane barks out a harsh laugh. "Breaking the Accords?" He snaps his magazine shut, drops it on the table, and unfolds himself from the sofa, standing up in one smooth, lithe, terrifying movement. His cat eyes blaze as he takes a menacing step closer to Alec. "Not offering you their help, because they
were fleeing for their lives and thought it more than likely they'd be arrested for their efforts if they chose to help you?"

Alec swallows, palms turning clammy, but he doesn't back down. "I wouldn't do that."

"No?" Bane's lip curls. "You think I'm a demon."

Alec bites back the words he wants to throw out. Yes. Because you are. You're a Downworlder. And I should be killing you on sight.

"Why did you save me if you hate me so much?" Alec asks instead.

Bane waves a hand and stalks past him towards the kitchen. Alec turns, following him with his eyes.

"It was a lapse in judgement, I'll admit."

But his voice sounds softer. Less angry. And that's when Alec wonders.

"Did you- Did you know someone? Who died last night?"

Bane stiffens. He's facing the counter, body half shielding a bottle of something that looks like vodka. One hand is wrapped around the neck of the bottle, so tight his knuckles have turned pale.

"I knew them all," he says. "I'm not the High Warlock of Brooklyn for nothing, little angel. It is my job to know the New York Downworld. Lucian was right about that meeting, and I was a fool to ignore his warning."

"Lucian?" Alec asks, heart beating fast, before he can stop himself. "Do you mean Lucian Graymark?"

Lucian Graymark is another wanted man. A Shadowhunter, who, according to all their sources, had once been Valentine Morgenstern's parabatai. He'd been part of the Circle, along with Valentine's wife, Jocelyn. Nobody knows what happened to Lucian. There are rumours that he took shelter in the mundane world, but he's never been found.

The Clave is desperate to find Lucian. Desperate for any information he might have on how to stop Valentine. This war has been going on for too long. Alec's entire lifetime. And they're running out of ways to slow Valentine down. He's building power. Summoning demons, utilising their power, amassing Nephilim supporters, and now he's trying to win over the Downworlders.

Alec might not like Downworlders much, at all, but - like the rest of his people, some of whom believe all Downworlders deserve to burn to ashes slowly in hell - he knows that if Valentine wins their favour, the war is lost.

"It doesn't matter." Bane's voice snaps himself out of his thoughts. He sounds tired. Straightening, he unscrews the lid on the bottle and wraps his lips around the rim, tipping his head back to take a large swig. Alec winces slightly. Isn't it too early to be drinking?

"On the contrary—"

"Yes." Bane slams the bottle down, but doesn't turn round. "Yes, I knew someone who died. Elias. He was young. Foolhardy. He thought he had nothing to lose by going to that meeting. We're hunted by Nephilim of all kinds." He shrugs. "We're tortured by Nephilim of all kinds, often for no reason, and killed in cold blood. But the Circle didn't even attempt to give an excuse. I watched Elias fall from the top of that building after I felt him die. Twenty minutes later you fell. I couldn't save him,
but I could save you."

"I'm sorry."

And Alec realises he almost means it. He is sorry that someone innocent died. He can't quite find it in himself to feel real, bone-deep sympathy for Bane's loss, however. Not when he knows about all the equally innocent lives that have been taken by Bane's magic.

Bane looks at him, a wry smile on his face. "I'm sure." Exhaling, he says, "The werewolves were right to stay away from that meeting. I'm afraid I don't know much that would be of any use to you. Valentine is promising us that in his new world, we'll be safer, better off. Left in peace, I believe were his exact words to me. Left to our own devices. Ignored. Allowed to live without constantly looking over our shoulders."

"You've seen Valentine? Recently? And he let you leave alive?"

"Oh, yes." Bane flicks his fingers lazily. "Child's play, little angel. I'm centuries old. Valentine is like a dust mite. Admittedly, his bizarre demonic powers are a little problematic, but nothing I couldn't handle. I imagine he was very bruised for a few days. Poor wall. Probably the filthiest thing that's touched it."

Alec chokes. "Did you throw Valentine Morgenstern into a wall?"

Bane shrugs. "Perhaps. I told him it was rather ironic that he was promising me such riches, when he preaches to the Nephilim that he will cleanse the Downworld stain from the world. He didn't like that very much. So hyper-masculine, all that growling and snarling and sweat. Eugh. It's boring."

Alec can't help himself. His mouth opens to let out a spluttering laugh at the warlock's words, taking even himself by surprise.

Bane, however, looks more surprised. He watches Alec as he laughs, something strange passing over his face. Alec notices his staring; his smile drops, and he clears his throat awkwardly.

"I'm sorry," Alec says, though he isn't quite sure what he's apologising for.

"Don't be. I didn't realise the Nephilim were capable of laughing."

"There's not much to laugh about. Valentine is trying to destroy the world."

"Oh, Alexander." Bane shakes his head. "You'd make a terrible immortal. There are always things to frown about. Which is why you have to find the things that make you laugh, and hold onto them."

Alec is quiet for a moment, brow furrowed. "Are you giving me life advice?"

"Now, that would be telling."

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It's afternoon by the time Bane tells Alec he's free to go. Alec has spent most of the day looking around Bane's enormous collection of books, under the warlock's suspicious gaze. Bane is curled up like a cat in an armchair, pretending not to pay any attention to Alec but reaching out with his magic to pull books away from Alec's grasp if he deems them inappropriate for a Shadowhunter to read, without looking up from whatever horribly complex text he's translating. Alec can't help but find it somewhat amusing.
"Thank you," Alec says, pausing by the front door. Bane is standing a little way away with his arms folded across his chest, fingers drumming against his bicep, and he raises an eyebrow at Alec's words. "For helping me, I mean. You- I wouldn't have been surprised if you hadn't."

"Well, no." Bane purses his lips. "You think Downworlders are heartless monsters with no moral conscience."

"You think Shadowhunters are inbred soldiers with no independent thought."

"Touché," Bane murmurs, unmoving, but his lips are curling up just slightly at one corner. "I like the moral high ground, little angel. Especially when it's over one of the Nephilim."

Alec hesitates. He can see his bow and quiver out of the corner of his eye, along with his stele and his boots, which seem to be in tact enough to wear again, and he's itching to snatch them up, but he doesn't want Bane to think he's about to attempt an assassination.

"I'm contractually obliged to tell my mother about this," he tells Bane. "About you. And when they find out, they're going to find you. And they're going to kill you."

"Let them." Bane shakes his head, bitter amusement in his eyes. "I think you might be my greatest disappointment for at least three decades, Alexander. You're not quite as brainless as most of your people, I'll give you that. But you still can't see past my parentage. It's sad. I hope you know that. I pity you."

"I don't want your pity."

"Go." Bane jerks his chin towards the door. "Get out, before I change my mind and put your wings on my walls and your head in place of my door knocker. Go and tell all the little Nephilim that Magnus Bane is cowering in Brooklyn. Gather an army to hunt me. See if I care."

Alec's heart is pounding at the dangerous glint in Bane's eyes, and he feels his fingers trembling. He curls his hand into a fist, and rests it against his belt. "They won't stop."

"They never have stopped, Alexander." Bane looks bored, looking at some spot on the ceiling past Alec's head. "I've been running from the Nephilim for my entire life. I assure you, you won't catch me."

Alec's throat bobs. Bane doesn't look at him, even as Alec stares, trying to come up with something he can say to that. It's not like there isn't good reason for the Clave hunting Magnus Bane. He's dangerous. He's slaughtered hundreds and thousands of innocent people—mundanes and Nephilim alike.

And yet, he saved Alec's life. And Alec can't forget the way Bane had spoken to him, as he healed him. Assuring him he wouldn't hurt him. Murmuring that it would be okay, that he would be alright. Telling him that he wouldn't let him die.

It still doesn't make sense. It doesn't fit the picture of Bane that Alec has built up, over his years training. Alec should be dead.

So Alec says, "I'm sorry," and then bends to pick up his bow, slings his quiver over his shoulder, and tucks his stele into his pocket. He glances over his shoulder, and finds that Bane still isn't looking at him.

He turns. Just as he turns the door handle, Bane's voice reaches him.
"Wait."

Alec does.

"The children. The Shadowhunter children you're looking for. They weren't there, in the building. Valentine moved them."

"I know." Alec frowns at Bane, fingers tightening reflexively on his bow. "Do you know something?"

"Valentine has a meeting point. It's where he's been taking Downworlders and mundanes for experiments—"

"Experiments?" Alec drops his hand from the door and moves towards Bane. "Valentine has been experimenting? I thought his experiments were all on demons."

Bane raises his eyes heavenward. "Your ignorance to anything outside the realm of the Nephilim is genuinely astonishing. Yes, little angel, he's been experimenting. That's why Downworlders and mundanes keep going missing."

Alec bites his lip before he says something Bane will be even more exasperated by. He hadn't realised mundanes were going missing. They'd noticed the Downworlders disappearing, of course, but the Clave thought it most likely that they were going to join Valentine's ranks.

Crap. He has to tell his mother about this.

"If Valentine realised you were coming and moved the children, that might be where he took them. It's protected by the demons he's controlling. Heavily. But if you fancy a suicide mission..." Bane shrugs delicately, fingertips tracing along the chain of one of the many necklaces hanging around his neck. "There's an abandoned cinema near the docks. It reeks of dark, demonic magic."

A lead. Bane is giving him a lead. They won't have to start back at square one. This, along with any of the Circle that Isabelle, Jace and Raj managed to capture—

"Thank you," Alec breathes. "Thank you."

Bane looks distinctly unimpressed. "Get out. And don't fall out of the sky onto my doorstep again."

Chapter End Notes

I apologise for this being a day late. Let me know what you thought of the chapter!

Much love <3
Alec slashes a glamour rune into his arm the moment he steps outside onto the streets of Brooklyn. He doesn't want any mundanes to catch sight of his wings, which he doesn't dare conceal with rune magic just yet in case they're still healing, and he's not in the mood for people staring at his runes—mundanes seem to have an illogical fascination with them. Especially when they're on Jace and Izzy.

Jace.

Alec realises, abruptly, that he doesn't really know what happened to his siblings. He's been hoping. Pushing the thoughts to the back of his mind while he was with Bane. But he doesn't know. He doesn't know whether they're alive or dead or dying. He doesn't know whether they escaped, or whether others in the team died, or whether the Circle eventually slaughtered them all.

But surely... If they'd all fallen, surely Bane would have noticed? And surely he'd have told Alec?

Or perhaps he'd have more fun keeping the knowledge from him. Not telling Alec that his team are all dead. His sister. Raj. Maybe that's Bane's version of revenge. He knows Jace is okay—he can feel it. Can feel the bond still in tact. But what about Izzy? Raj?

No. He refuses to believe that they're dead. They can't be.

But...nevertheless, he wants to get back to the Institute and check. Quickly.

***

The moment Alec pushes open the heavy front door to the Institute, the muscles in his back twinging in protest when he slashes a rune into his wrist to make his wings disappear, the sounds of shouting meet his ears. He pauses as relief floods through him, hot and dizzying, at the sound of his sister's impassioned voice.

"Isabelle!" he hears Maryse snap, a hint of desperation in her voice. "I can't. I can't condone that
kind of mission. I'm sorry. But if what you and Jace reported is true—"

"It shouldn't matter!" Isabelle hollers, the sounds of her boots clopping noisily on the stone floors getting louder as Alec listens for longer. "Family is more important than anything. That's what you're always telling me. So what's more important that my brother?"

Alec's heart aches. Of course. He should have expected to come home to find Isabelle battling with their mother about this. About searching for him. He can't have been with Bane for more than a day, surely? But still, Isabelle saw him fall - his whole team saw him fall - so they must—

"We have to protect our family," Maryse is saying, "but not like this. Not by endangering those of us still—"

"Don't you dare," Isabelle hisses.

"Isabelle—"

Isabelle rounds the corner, just as Alec pushes the door shut behind him with a clang. Isabelle's eyes snap to his, and she freezes in place, one hand outstretched towards where her gloves and whip are slung across a chair, the other loose at her side. Her lips part; she stares at him.

"Alec," she whispers.

He feels tears sting at his eyes at the disbelieving note in her voice, but he swallows, and offers her a smile. "Hey, Iz."

Without warning, she unfreezes, grabs her gloves, and flings both of them at his chest, one after the other. The metal studs hit him, and he winces, gaping at her as they drop to the floor, smacking against the cold stone.

"What the hell?"

"I hate you! I thought you were— We all thought you were—"

A sob hitches in her throat, choking off her words, and Alec's heart breaks. He reaches his arms towards her just as she collapses into him, hugging him tightly, trembling—most likely with anger, he thinks.

A thought hits him, and he pulls back. "What do you mean, you all thought I was dead? I'm not dead. Jace must have been able to tell you that."

Izzy smacks him, and then hugs him tighter. "He could. But he could also feel that there was something wrong. We all assumed you were out there dying somewhere. And Mom wouldn't let us look for you."

After pressing a kiss to the side of his sister's head, he glances up, and sees his mother standing where Isabelle had been moments before, expression impassive. Isabelle must sense a change in his body tension, because she lifts her head from his chest and looks over her shoulder.

"I'm glad you're back," is all Maryse says, before she turns on her heel, and walks out.

Alec looks down at Izzy, who has her lips pursed.

"Come on," she says, taking his hand. "Let's find Jace."
They find Jace in the training room, pounding the living shit out of a punching bag. The door scrapes along the floor as Izzy pushes it open, and Jace swears, landing a harder punch on the bag before he sways back onto his heels.

"Izzy, please, I— *By the Angel.*"

Alec cracks a smile at that. Jace swears, flamboyantly, and strides forward, yanking Alec into a forceful, bone-crushing hug.

"Jace," Alec gasps, in protest, when Jace's knuckles press into a painful spot by his currently concealed wings.

"I'm sorry." Jace pulls back, hand going to Alec's neck and resting there as he speaks. "Are you okay?"

Alec nods, mind flashing back to the warlock, and the sensation of Bane bending over him when he'd fallen onto the sidewalk. All the power, all the demonic rage, all the terrible history... Magnus Bane is the most wanted Downworlder on the Clave's list, and he's in New York.

Alec has to tell the Clave.

More importantly, though, Alec has to tell Maryse about Bane's tip-off about the children.

"I'm fine," Alec assures him, gripping Jace's shoulder. "I promise."

"We saw you fall," Isabelle says, sounding worried. "You were so still, but then by the time the battle was over, you'd disappeared. I don't understand how you're alive."

Alec shrugs. He'll tell them later. He can't tell them now. He's got more important things to think about. "I got lucky, I guess."

Isabelle's eyes narrow, but she doesn't press. Not yet, at least. He knows she'll interrogate him later.

"What about the rest of the team?" he asks, looking from Jace to his sister. "Was anyone else hurt?"

"Not badly." Jace drops his hand from Alec's neck to grasp his shoulder instead, as though he needs the tangible evidence that his *parabatai* is alive. Alec can sympathise: he's needed it many times, when Jace went on suicide missions that ended with near-fatal accidents. "The Circle, though... Most of them escaped. We didn't capture any. Valentine appeared, and he had some kind of demon with him. Not one I recognised. I think it must have been some kind of Greater Demon, but not one any of us knew."

"How did you get out?"

"I don't know. He just...took his men and left. Didn't even put up a fight."

"But he must have known why we were there, surely?" Alec asks.

"Oh, he knew." Isabelle looks grip, and Alec sees her fingers trace along the length of her whip, which is wound around her wrist in its usual sleek bracelet. "He just didn't care. He knows we've got nothing. We can't find those kids with nothing."

"Actually," Alec says, "we might have something."

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The Institute listens with rapt attention as Alec speaks. He tells them about Valentine's meeting point - the abandoned cinema by the docks, which, according to Warlock Bane, is saturated with dark magic - and then about the mundanes going missing. The experiments, Bane had said.

"How do you know that?" Jace asks, when Alec is finished. "How on earth did you find all that out?"

Alec looks over at Maryse, who's watching him closely, suspicion written across her face, and then at Isabelle, whose eyes are curious, but in no way judgemental. He can't lie. He can't pretend he just found all this out by accident.

Just like he can't pretend he managed to haul himself back from the brink of death with no help.

"A warlock found me," he says. "When I fell. He healed me. Warlock B—"

"A warlock?" Maryse straightens from where she'd been leaning with her palms braced in the table. "You accepted help from a warlock?"

Isabelle rolls her eyes, jaw tightening almost imperceptibly. Beside her, Jace ducks his head to murmur something in her ear; Isabelle crosses her arms, but doesn't say anything.

"I didn't have a lot of choice, at the time," Alec says, as patiently as he can, because he's fairly sure there are more important matters at hand. "I was dying."

Jace and Isabelle both wince.

"The warlock could have done anything to you, Alec," Maryse hisses. "He could have been a spy. He could have—"

"He could have been trying to help," Isabelle said, coolly. "For no reason except, maybe, he's better than us. Downworlders are not all spiteful, power-hungry beings intent on wrecking havoc on this world. That's Valentine."

"Your attitude towards Downworlders is troubling, Isabelle." Maryse has turned away from Alec, everybody else watching as the scene unfolds, much like it always does when Maryse - or anyone else - starts off about Downworlders.

"My attitude is troubling?" Isabelle huffs out an astounded laugh. "You're stereotyping an entire race because of one part of their heritage. If anyone's attitude is troubling, it's yours. It's the Clave's. You might all buy into their bullshit, but I'm not quite that incapable of thinking for myself."

*I'm sure you're conditioned to hate and murder just like the rest of them,* Bane had said. And now his sister is saying practically the same thing.

Alec can understand Maryse's worries about Isabelle's views, but not for the same reasons. Alec can't help but fear that Isabelle will trust the Downworlders too much, and end up hurt. Maryse, he knows, is more concerned about their familial reputation in the Clave's eyes.

And...well. Isabelle has a point, this time. He still doesn't understand why Bane saved his life - he probably never will - but the fact remains that he did. He did save Alec's life. And he hadn't done anything heinous to him, or demanded anything at all in return. No payment, no favours, no riches. He hadn't even made Alec promise not to tell the Clave that their most wanted Downworlder is living within New York, right under their noses.

"Downworlders are dangerous, Isabelle. I'm concerned that you don't seem to understand that."
"I'm concerned that you don't seem to understand how utterly ridiculous you sound."

Maryse's face morphs into a glare, shoulders shifting back, drawing herself up to her full height. "You think you understand the Downworld through your dalliances with the fey. You don't. I hope one day you'll learn."

Isabelle matches Maryse's cold aura of power and dominance with one of fire. "Dalliances?" She barks out a harsh laugh. "You know nothing about it, Mother. Nothing at all."

Raj clears his throat before either of them can say another word. "Alec," he says, "do you have any idea what kind of defences Valentine is likely to have stationed nearby?"

Alec is incredibly grateful for the interruption, and he shoots him a tight smile across the table. Raj inclines his head.

"No specifics," Alec says, "but it sounded like it was Valentine's powerhouse."

"So we should be prepared for the worst," Jace states. "Demons, the Circle, Downworlders who've allied with him... But we have got to get those kids."

"And find out what kind of experiments Valentine is foolish enough to think he can get away with," Isabelle says, flinging an accusatory glare at Maryse.

_I think you might be my greatest disappointment for at least three decades, Alexander._

And yet, Bane still told him about Valentine's hideout. He didn't need to. It's not like the Clave would ever sanction a mission to save Downworlders that risked Nephilim lives. They were going there for the Shadowhunter children, and the children only.

But Bane told him anyway.

So Alec keeps quiet as Jace starts laying out the basics for a strategy plan, dragging over a sheet of paper to scribble out one of his ridiculous strategy maps. He feels Isabelle looking at him, intermittently, as Jace talks, and people around the table interject with suggestions and questions and protests.

By the time Jace has finalised his strategy, and Maryse is bending over the paper, discussing who should go on the mission, Alec's bored out of his mind, and he finds his thoughts drifting back to Bane. To the gentle tone his voice held when he healed Alec.

"Alec!"

He blinks, and finds that every head in the room is turned towards him. His mother has her arms folded across her chest, lips pressed into a severe line. Crap. He hasn't been paying attention.

"Do we need to request the Silent Brothers come in to check that the warlock hasn't done something to you?" she snaps.

Isabelle rolls her eyes, and flings Jace's strategy map back onto the table with a flourish, and far more force than necessary.

"No," Alec says. "I'm sorry. I'm fine."

"Clearly, you're not. Are you incapable of focusing for the duration of a meeting?"

"No, I—"
"I think you should sit this mission out," Maryse says, turning to sweep the paperwork off the table and into a neat pile. "You clearly haven't recovered from your ordeal. Isabelle and Jace will be perfectly capable of handling this."

Alec gapes at her. "Mom, I'm fine," he insists. "I'm tired, but if I get a few hours of sleep—"

"I'll call the Silent Brothers to check you," Maryse says. "Just in case."

Alec grinds his teeth together. "There is nothing wrong with me."

Maryse levels him with a cool look, but, after a moment, the corners of her lips twitch up into a sympathetic little smile. "I'd rather not risk the lives of twenty-some Nephilim children, Alec."

With that, she turns and sweeps from the room, barking at Raj to organise a patrol for the night. Raj shoots Alec a smile, significantly less irritating than Maryse's was, and squeezes Alec's forearm as he passes him to follow her out of the room.

Jace and Isabelle both linger, as the rest of the Shadowhunters file out, giving him concerned looks. He ignores them.

"Alec—"

Alec cuts his *parabatai* off. "Don't start, Jace. It doesn't matter. Just get those children back. And don't mess it up."

Jace cracks a smile. "Would I ever?"

There's a pause. Then:

"A warlock helped you, huh?" Isabelle's got a smile on her face. "Who?"

Alec shrugs. "No idea. He didn't stick around."

People are always telling Alec he's a bad liar. And he is, when he's caught off-guard. But when he's got time to think about it, to practise, he's a fantastic liar. And he knew that question would come.

Besides, it's not like he hasn't got enough practise lying to people about things. He's managed to keep one particular secret for his entire life.

"He didn't do anything, did he?" Jace asks. "He didn't ask you for anything?"

Isabelle throws her hands up. "Oh, for—"

"No. No, he didn't. He just healed me. I don't think he liked Shadowhunters very much, but..." Alec shrugs again, trying not to look at Isabelle, because he knows she's going to look horrifically smug. "He healed me anyway."

Isabelle gives him a one-armed hug. "We'll make an advocate of you yet."

Jace snorts behind them as Isabelle begins to pull Alec away from the table.

"Somehow, I doubt that, Iz."

Alec wonders what his siblings - his rebellious, reckless *parabatai* and his forward-thinking, modern sister - would think if they knew that the warlock who saved his life was Magnus Bane.
Late that night, there's a sharp knock on his bedroom door, and the sound of someone hissing his name. Alec blinks blearily, and glances at his phone.Fuck. It's three o'clock in the morning. There must be some kind of emergency, if someone's waking him up at this time despite Maryse's explicit instructions not to let him do anything until he's been examined by the Silent Brothers in the morning.

Alec stumbles out of bed, knocking his wingtip awkwardly against the wall, and rubs at his face with his knuckles, trying to look less like a grumpy twenty-two-year-old man and more like the leader he's supposed to be. It's a little difficult: has he mentioned that it's three in the fucking morning?

He yanked his bedroom door open, stifling a yawn, and blinks rapidly when he sees Raj standing there, dressed up in full gear, weapons strapped to him. Even more bizarrely, there's a little smile on his face.

"Raj?" Alec frowns. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." His smile widens a little. "The Silent Brothers aren't due until mid-morning tomorrow, and Jace and Izzy and the others are due to head out in a couple of hours. I thought you might want to be on the early morning patrol. In case they need a hand."

Alec stares at Raj for a moment. Raj is asking him to go out on patrol with him at a time that means he'll be out in the field when his siblings are going into Valentine's lair.

"You're supposed to be law-abiding before anything. You're supposed to be worse than me. What happened to you?"

Raj shrugs, and averts his eyes. "Maryse didn't technically say you couldn't go on patrol. She just told you to sit this mission out."

"I think that's splitting hairs," Alec says, while wondering at Raj's somewhat odd reaction. "But alright. Thank you. Give me ten minutes."

Half an hour later, Alec and Raj are striding along the Manhattan streets, searching - and listening - for signs of demonic activity. When Alec had first started going on patrols, back when he'd barely been more than a kid, Shadowhunters patrolled around Pandemonium, keeping an eye on demons preying on mundanes, and Downworlders doing illegal things. But then the Clave started cracking down on the Downworlders' every misdemeanour, and they'd decided to avoid Pandemonium for fear of the Downworlders starting a fight with them.

The Nephilim might generally loathe the Downworlders, but the Downworlders don't have much love for them, either.

Except, it seems, some of them have some sense of morality. Which is, truly, a somewhat new concept for Alec. But it seems difficult to ignore the evidence when it's right in front of him. Bane hadn't deceived him, hadn't hurt him, hadn't done anything more or less than what he'd told him he would.

It's more than a little bizarre.

"Alec?"
Alec glances across at Raj. "Pardon?"

Raj lets out a little laugh, and shakes his head. "Don't worry about it. It doesn't matter."

"I'm sorry. I was just thinking."

"So I gathered." Raj smiles wryly, and it occurs to Alec that he rarely spends time alone with Raj. Raj is a key part of his team - a fantastic strategist, a more than decent fighter, and his judgement is never clouded - but they're not exactly...friends, in the way Isabelle would use the word.

They're quiet for a moment, neither of them particularly great conversationalists, but it's not uncomfortable. Raj glances at him several times as they walk, and Alec tries not to feel irritated. It would be wonderful if people stopped looking at him like he's about to break. Alec turns to catch Raj's eye the sixth time it happens, and Raj looks away quickly, an odd look on his face. Alec feels slightly guilty for his thoughts. Raj likely has no ill intent.

When the turn away from the narrow streets into a wider area, Alec relishes in the opportunity to slash through the rune magicians his runes into nothing, and spread his wings just a little. They're always cramped in the Institute, his bedroom narrower wall-to-wall than his wingspan and the rest of the Institute so full of fragile items and carefully-ordered papers than the Shadowhunters dare't stretch out, for fear of knocking something. They usually keep their wings runed into non-existence in the Institute, anyway.

Raj is looking at him again. Unlike Alec, he lets his wings spread out wide. They're glamoured from mundane eyes, so it's perfectly safe. Alec just...doesn't like stretching out his wings like that unless it's for a purpose. Although, they do ache from where Warlock Bane healed them.

Raziel, if Bane hadn't healed him, he'd never have been able to fly again. The second time, when he'd woken up in Bane's apartment, he'd felt that he would live. He'd felt alive. But he would have lived as a cripple, a ruined Shadowhunter, a useless deadweight, if it weren't for Bane being generous enough to heal him a second time, and determined enough to get him back to full health.

"Are you okay?" Raj asks, eventually. "You seem quiet."

Alec snorts. "Isabelle and Jace say I'm always quiet. Too serious, too intent on following orders, not good at letting go..."

Raj shrugs. "In their opinion. Not in the Clave's."

Alec forces himself not to burst out laughing at that. Oh, if only the Clave knew. Knew about all his secrets. The secret he's going to be taking to his grave, the secret he's ashamed of, and, now, his secret about Bane. Oh, the Clave would adore hearing about it. They'd have him stripped of his marks on the spot.

For a moment, Alec considers telling Raj about Bane. But he sees the way Raj carries himself - entirely loyal to the Clave, with nothing else in his life to balance him (because, though Alec does what's asked of him, he'd put his family before the Clave in a heartbeat) - and decides not to.

***

By the time Raj and Alec return back to the Institute, it's nearly three hours since Jace and Izzy were due to set out with their team, and Alec can't help but wonder why Raj stayed back to go on a morning patrol with him rather than going with them. He doesn't ask.

Maryse is standing in the archway with her hands on her hips, hair scraped back into a bun even
more severe than usual, expression furious. And people wonder, Alec thinks, where his sister gets that impassioned attitude from.

"And where, exactly," she demands, "have you been, Alexander?"

Alec in straps his quiver, slinging it onto his forearm as he shrugs out of his jacket, which is covered in ichor after they came across a small group of demons trying to lure a drunk mundane woman down an alleyway near Central Park.

"On patrol," Alec replies. "Demonic activity was low. Which means Valentine is probably tightening his grip on—"

Maryse cuts him off. "I don't care. I gave you explicit instructions not to go anywhere until you'd been checked by the Silent Brothers. That warlock could have done anything to you."

"If he'd wanted to do anything that terrible, I'd be back without my wings, Mother."

Maryse and Raj both flinch at that. They all know that one of the prime methods used by Downworlders in the past to torture and maim the Nephilim in revenge for persecuting them was to hack off their wings and keep them as trophies, leaving hundreds of Shadowhunters unfit for duty.

"The Silent Brothers are waiting for you," she says, after several seconds of silence. "They're in the infirmary."

Alec nods, and picked up his things. He doubts they'll find anything. But it can't hurt to check.

Chapter End Notes

I promise Malec will have some scenes together next chapter. Pinky promise.
Owl

Chapter Summary

In which Alec bonds with a Silent Brother, Jace and Isabelle return, and a letter is written.

Chapter Notes

This chapter: the owl! (Also, as promised, some Malec moments!)

Owls are, as I'm sure many of you known, symbolic of truth and wisdom across many cultures. They're widely known for their intelligence, of course, in a more literal sense, and they're representative of something omniscient -- stemming from the fact that they can turn their heads so damn far round, I believe!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec hears his siblings' return before he sees anything. There's a shout, and a cry from a woman, and Alec can hear sobbing all the way from the Infirmary. He shoots upright, almost smacking Brother Zachariah in the face where he's bent over Alec.

"I'm sorry," he says. The Silent Brothers have always unnerved him, and getting on their bad side has never seemed like a good idea.

It's alright, Zachariah assures him, lowering gentle hands back down to continue his inspection.

Brother Zachariah is the most unusual of all the Silent Brothers, and by far and away Alec's favourite. He's had regular dealings with the Brothers during his life, mostly due to Jace's teenage tendency to get himself near-fatally wounded on a monthly basis, and also whenever they capture someone worth interrogating regarding Valentine and the Circle.

Unlike most of the Brothers, Zachariah doesn't have his mouth seen shut, and he still looks distinctly human, dark hair and dark eyes and smooth skin essentially unchanged from what Alec presumes he used to look like before he became a Brother.

And he's always exceptionally patient with Jace. Which is a miracle from anyone, let alone a Silent Brother who's probably saved the stupid blonde's life a hundred times. Zachariah had been the one to inform them, years ago, that their assumptions about Jace's parentage were incorrect—that he was a Herondale, not a Wayland. They still have no idea how Zachariah knew.

Your sister and your parabatai were successful, it would seem, Zachariah says, as the ruckus outside the Infirmary builds, the sounds of children screaming and parents crying meeting their ears.

"I hope so." He bites his lip, desperate to get the hell out of this stupid bed and go out to see what's going on. He hates being out of the loop about politics and missions even more than he hates being the distraction during missions.
Alec's head whips towards Brother Zachariah, and he gapes at him, horrified. Did Brother Zachariah just say Magnus Bane? He knows? Knows that Bane healed him?

"Did you— You— How did you—"

*Magnus Bane is a prideful man. He tends to sign his work.*

"Sign his—" Alec shakes his head, incredulous. "Isn't that a little ostentatious?"

Brother Zachariah's face gets as close to a smile as is possible for a Silent Brother. *Perhaps. I'll confess I used to think so. But I will not tell the Clave, Alexander Lightwood.*

Had Zachariah known Bane, before he became a Silent Brother?

"But— Don't you have to?"

Alec thinks that Zachariah would probably be raising his eyebrows, if he were still human.

*Don't you?*

Alec doesn't have a response to that; he just stares at the Brother.

*Some duties go beyond that of our duty towards the Clave, Alexander Lightwood. Some loyalties are stronger. I would not condemn you, nor Magnus Bane, to the Clave's mercies. Now go, and see your parabatai.*

"Thank you," Alec says, because he's not sure what else he can say to something like that. It seems he's having his eyes opened to more than just Downworlders, this week. He hadn't realised that the Silent Brothers still experienced emotions like that. Or, perhaps, they merely retained the intellectual ability to understand and infer emotions they'd had before they became Brothers, and act accordingly. He's known Brother Zachariah since he first met him when he was twelve, and yet, he's never really afforded much thought to anything beyond the obvious. "I— Thank you."

Zachariah inclines his head, and then Alec is up out of the bed, and dashing out of the infirmary towards where he can hear a ruckus building.

There's an enormous number of people gathered, is the first thing Alec notices. Jace's golden head is obvious, standing above most people in the room, and he spots Isabelle soon after. They're surrounded by anxious-looking children.

Alec stops in the doorway, eyes scanning through the room, and he counts. One, two, three—

Twenty-two. There are twenty-two children in that room. And twenty-two children had gone missing. Jace and Isabelle didn't just save some, they saved all of them.

Bane's tip-off had been right. He hadn't lied to them. Magnus Bane had made this rescue possible.

Jace meets Alec's eyes across the room, and Alec feels his face break out into a smile. He makes his way through the crowd, towards his *parabatai* and his sister, trying his best not to step on any children. They're all so tiny. It reminds him, painfully, of his little brother, Max, currently still in Idris with his father.

"You did it," Alec states.
Jace shrugs one shoulder. "Valentine must have been out. It got a bit bloody, and the Infirmary's going to be busy for a few days, but nobody died."

Alec rolls his eyes, and then notices a still-bleeding cut going down Jace's neck, just missing his jugular, down across his shoulder, where it disappears under his collar. "You're hurt."

"It's fine."

Ignoring that, Alec pulls his stele out, peels back Jace's jacket, and burns three *iratzes* into Jace's skin around the wound. By the time he's finished the third, they're already starting to take effect: the wound has stopped bleeding, beginning to turn an ugly, raw pink colour.

"We're *parabatai* for a reason," Alec states, to Jace's slight frown. "And I couldn't go on the mission with you, so..."

Jace rolls his eyes. "Please. Your intel made this possible. Shut up."

"It wasn't really my intel."

"Nobody's stupid enough to think a warlock would just give you that information for no reason. You must have asked. Whatever you did, it was smart, Alec. Take a compliment for once, and stop talking. Help Izzy find the parents of all these kids."

"Alright." Alec lets his gaze linger on Jace for a moment, then says, "Jace?"

Jace turns back to him and raises one eyebrow. "Yeah?"

"Thank you."

"I'm gonna knock you on your ass later, Lightwood," is all Jace says in reply, as one kid nearly takes another out with their wing while running towards her father, the little girl too young to bear runes, and so unable to conceal her wings yet.

Alec grins. "You wish."

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It takes several hours for the New York Institute to locate the parents of all twenty-two children. It takes even longer for the mission debrief from Jace and Isabelle, laying out all they managed to work out about Valentine's lair—in short, not all that much. Evidence of magic, of Downworlders, demons, and several locked rooms that the team hadn't dared venture into in case it jeopardised their mission. It had been almost deserted, as though Valentine had been targeting all his efforts elsewhere for the day.

Which, of course, has everyone on edge.

Alec feels battered from his sparring session with Jace, muscles burning pleasantly, knuckles aching from landing a satisfying hit to Jace's shoulder. Maryse had stood in the doorway for several minutes, watching while they sparred, eyes narrowed as she watched them. When Alec had knocked Jace to the ground, both of them sweaty and breathing heavily, and then extended a hand to help him back up, she'd pursed her lips and left, without saying a word.

Alec doesn't understand what's going on with his mother. She's been colder than ever, recently. Quicker to snap at Isabelle for her forward attitudes, sharper in her criticisms, more lethal with her words. Something is going on. He's just not sure what. Not sure whether it's Valentine, and the stress
that comes with dealing with the Circle, or whether it's something else.

And he misses Max. He hasn't seen his little brother for weeks and weeks, with both Max and their father away in Idris while Robert negotiates with the Clave regarding the Institute. It happens, sometimes. The Clave disagrees with a decision, or questions a ruling, and so calls for weeks of meetings.

A knock on his bedroom door snaps him from his thoughts, and he sits up from where he was laying back on his bed, reading. "Come in."

The door opens, and Isabelle appears in the doorway. She's smiling, stele slid through her hair to hold it up in a bun, dress tight and heels so high Alec doesn't understand how she can walk in them.

"Is everything okay?" Alec asks, when she comes fully into the room, shuts the door behind her, and draws a silencing rune on the wall.

"You tell me." She flops down on the end of his bed, crosses her ankles, and quirks her eyebrows, leaning back on her hands. "You're the one who nearly died a couple of days ago."

"I'm fine." Alec folds the corner of a page over, then shuts his book and tosses it to one side so that it lands cover-down, away from Isabelle's prying eyes. She'd never shut up if she were to find out that he's reading mundane fiction. "Mom made sure of that. I didn't think Brother Zachariah would ever finish examining me. And I went on patrol, and then kicked Jace's ass in the training room. So I'm good."

Isabelle smiles. "I know, hermano. I don't understand how, but..." She shrugs.

"Did you want something?" he asks pointedly, poking her in the side with his toes.

Isabelle slaps his sock-clad foot away, wrinkling her nose. "Ew. Have you showered since you were sparring?"

Alec grins at her. "Maybe. Maybe not."

"You're revolting."

"Of course I've showered. Now, are you going to barge in any longer, or do you have something you actually wanted to ask me?"

Isabelle's mock-disgusted expression falls away, and she looks suddenly serious. "I just want to make sure you know that I'm not stupid. I know that something happened that you're not telling us about."

Alec swallows, and lets out a breath. "Nothing happened, Izzy."

She places a hand delicately over his. When he looks up to meet her gaze, there's nothing but compassion in her eyes. The same expression of heartbreaking sympathy she wore when she told him that she knew who he was, knew what he had been trying so hard to hide.

"You were as good as dead, big brother," she says softly. "We saw you fall. Everyone in the sky saw you fall. Jace could feel your parabatai bond splintering when you hit the ground. And you got vital - and correct - information from whoever helped you. Something happened."

Alec presses his lips together. "What do you want me to tell you? A warlock helped me. That's it."

Isabelle shakes her head. "I don't want you to tell me anything. I just want you to know that you can.
If you need to.

Alec smiles at her, and shifts so he can wrap an arm around her shoulders. She smiles back at him, resting her head on his shoulder. They sit still for a moment, before Isabelle pulls back, and jumps up lightly from the bed.

"Well, that was all. You can go back to being boring and read now." She smirks at him.

Alec rolls his eyes. "Leave me alone."

"Fine," she chirrups, "I'm leaving. If Mom asks for me, I'm not available."

Alec frowns at her. "Why?"

Isabelle flips her hair over her shoulder, gestures down at her tight dress and heels, and quirks an eyebrow. "Why do you think?"

"I don't think I want to know," Alec tells her, firmly. "If I don't know, I can't be blamed."

He's lying. He knows where she's going. More or less. He can work it out. And if Isabelle were to come under any undue scrutiny from the Clave - not that she's breaking any laws, that Alec is aware of - Alec would do anything in his power to protect her.

"I'll see you later, Alec," she says, before waltzing out of the room, Shutting the door behind her with a resolute click.

***

Alec isn't really in the business of socialising with Downworlders.

Socialising, in general, isn't his area. He can play the diplomat - he has to - but parties, large groups of people, and reaching out to new acquaintances is usually Jace and Izzy's area.

So he's not quite sure what's possessed him, as he sets his pen down, scans over the thick paper, and folds it in half, and in half again. He picks up his jacket and slides it on, the leather cool through the thin cotton of his t-shirt, and drops the folded paper into his inside pocket.

It's second-nature for him to pick up two seraph blades as he leaves his bedroom, strapping them onto his body in strategic positions, and then slash another glamour rune against his arm to make sure his wings are hidden from mundanes, even if he ends up in a fight with demons or a rogue Downworlder, and has to un-rune them back into existence.

The Institute is quiet as he slips out of his bedroom, his feet silent against the stone floor. There are people milling around in the control room, he notices, as he passes by on his way out, most of them staring at screens, mouthpieces on, probably in contact with any Shadowhunters who are out on patrol tonight.

Jace would have a field day if he saw Alec creeping out of the Institute, trying not to be noticed. He'd probably assume Alec were going to meet some girl.

Alec's mouth curls into a wry smile at the thought.

Nobody pays him any attention as he strides past the Shadowhunters milling about in the Institute, through the long cold corridors, and out through the front door, bow and quiver slung over his shoulder, glamoured into invisibility.
Outside, it's nearly dark, and prime time for demons to be lurking in alleyways and behind dumpsters, Eidolon demons positioning themselves as mundanes, all waiting for the right moment to wreck havoc.

Alec wonders, once again, what he's doing, out alone, not even to patrol, or to follow up on a mission. He doesn't do things like this. But it just feels...right. It feels necessary. It feels unfinished, and Alec needs to acknowledge it.

The ground is saturated with rainwater, mist still hanging in the air around him as he walks through the busy streets of New York at night, forever grateful, as always, that he's invisible to mundane eyes with his glamours. He hates being seen. He much prefers fading away into the shadows.

It takes him a while. The subway ride is short, but the walk at the other end is longer, until, eventually, he turns onto the street he remembers all too well. The street he'd crashed on. The street he should have died on.

He inhales deeply as he stops outside Magnus Bane's front door. It looks like such an ordinary apartment block. Larger than most, perhaps, but it makes no illusions to the grandeur and luxury lying inside Bane's loft.

Alec glances over at the wall, and sees that Bane has written his name - just his surname - in elegant, looping handwriting, next to a buzzer. It's exactly the sort of handwriting Alec would expect Bane to have.

He doesn't press the buzzer. Instead, he unzips his jacket, reaches a hand into his pocket, and withdraws the note he'd painstakingly written out in his own scrawling script back in his bedroom at the Institute. For a moment, he stares at it. He didn't sign it, but he's sure Bane will work out that it can hardly be anybody else.

The Clave, though? Even if the Clave found it, they'd have no idea.

Before he can drop the note in the letterbox by Bane's name, the door swings open, and Alec stills, expecting to see a mundane about to crash into him.

Except—

"Nephilim." Bane looks utterly unfazed, a smirk playing at his lips. His eyes are glamoured, Alec notices, brown instead of those yellow-green cat eyes, and his shirt buttons all the way up, not leaving half his chest on display. "I thought my wards felt odd. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Alec feels his entire body go stiff, tense, and he glances over his shoulder before he replies. "Nothing. I just-- I wanted--"

"Oh?" Bane arches an eyebrow, both the gesture and the tone of his voice flippant, but genuine surprise flashes across his face. "You're not here with an army sent by the Clave to bring me down?"

"N-no?"

"Is that a question, darling? Or an answer?"

Alec flushed, and he glares at Bane. "An answer."

Bane lets out a soft little laugh. "I'm sorry. Nephilim are too much fun to tease. But what happened to being contractually obliged to tell the Clave that I'm lurking in Brooklyn, waiting for the right moment to burn the world to ashes and torture puppies?"
Alec opens his mouth, and then closes it again. He is obliged to tell the Clave that Bane is here. But he didn't. And he's not really sure why. Because Bane saved his life, maybe. Because it didn't feel right. Because, though he doesn't trust this warlock in the slightest, and clearly Bane has little faith in any Shadowhunter, Bane gave him a lead that saved twenty-two innocent children.

Bane is watching him, an odd expression in his eyes. "So, why have you deigned to honour me with your presence, tonight? Shouldn't you be out enacting your heavenly justice?"

It's a dig. Alec knows it is. Bane is trying to rile him up, trying to make him react, trying to make him lose his temper. Alec won't let him. He won't. Besides, he knows there's some truth to Bane's jibe—sometimes the Clave does go too far. Sometimes the lines blur. But he won't be tricked into feeling guilty for it. He's a soldier, and he does as he's told.

Until now, at least.

"I wanted to give you this," Alec manages to get out, voice neutral and devoid of emotion, holding out his note.

Once again, surprise crosses Bane's face. This time, it's replaced by apprehension, suspicion, as he takes the paper and unfolds it, gingerly bending back the creases Alec made. His eyes scan across it, and one corner of his mouth turns up.

"That's a very sweet attempt at civility, little angel," Bane says, and there's a smile that accompanies his words. It's small, on his mouth, but Alec can hear it in his voice, and it's visible in his eyes. "But it's also rather dull."

Alec narrows his eyes. "It's all true."

"On behalf of all involved, the Clave extends its gratitude for your assistance," Bane reads. He looks up at Alec with one eyebrow quirked. "Does it? I'm fairly sure the Clave would like to make a tapestry demonstrating my miserable demise, paint the Accords Hall with my blood, and hang my head on the Inquisitor's door as a souvenir. I'm not sure gratitude is part of their plan."

"Oh, for—" Alec snatches the letter back, and bawls it into a fist, embarrassment and anger rushing through him in equal portions. He'd known this would be a terrible idea. "I'll leave. I'm sorry to have disturbed you."

"You misunderstand me, Nephilim." Bane's voice is gentler, and it makes Alec turn back to face him from where he's halfway down the few steps leading up to the door. "Your gratitude is appreciated, even if I don't believe that the Clave has any."

Alec moves back up a step. "They were all alive," he says, "and they're safe, and reunited with their families. All of the children. They were where you said they'd be."

Bane inclines his head. "You're welcome."

"Valentine wasn't there." Alec bites down on his lower lips as he pauses. "It was near deserted, apparently. Which means Valentine must have been doing something else."

"Recruiting, I would suspect. If he was doing anything with dark magic again, I would have felt it," Bane says, with a dismissive wave of his hand. "Apparently? Were you not there?"

Alec tries not to feel indignant about that, again. He'd done enough of that while Brother Zachariah stood over him, searching for any untoward magic. "No. My mother insisted I be checked by the Silent Brothers, because I told her I'd been healed by a warlock."
Bane laughs, cold and humourless. "Of course. Tell me, little angel. Why are your people not barricading my door and charging in with blazing weapons?"

"They don't know," Alec says. "I didn't tell them you're here."

Bane is still, quiet for several seconds. Then: "At all?"

"No."

"You're a mystery, Alexander," Bane says. "But, if that's all, I'm afraid I have things to do and places to be."

It's not going how Alec wanted this to go. He's not quite sure what he expected from this interaction; he just knew he had to say something to Bane. After everything, after the warlock had saved his life - for nothing - and then enabled them to save another twenty-two Nephilim lives, equally freely, he had to say something. It couldn't just be left unrecognised.

But Bane doesn't seem overly interested in Alec's thanks. And Alec seems to be succeeding only in offending him every other sentence.

"I'm sorry," Alec says, stepping back down. He glances down at the floor before he meets Bane's gaze again. There's something lingering in the glamoured brown, but Alec doesn't understand what.

Eyebrows raised, Bane says, "I'm not sure apologies are necessary. I daresay my clients will survive being delayed by ten minutes. They won't deny me the privilege of experiencing a Shadowhunter come to my door, specifically to deliver thanks."

Alec stares at him, lips slightly parted, struggling to keep up. "I– I don't– You–"

One corner of Bane's lips tips up again, in that little smirk, and Alec realises he's being teased. He flushes, for about the hundredth time, and swallows around his nervous stuttering to offer Bane a sheepish smile.

"Go on, little angel," Bane says, flicking his fingers. "Go back to the Institute. Neither of us have the luxury of staying here socialising all night."

"No," Alec agrees, "we don't." But he doesn't go. Not yet. "I'm not going to tell them. I want you to know that. You didn't ask for anything, when you saved me, and when you told me about Valentine, and so– I'm not going to say anything."

Bane rolls his eyes. "My payment is that I will not be driven from my home by prejudiced Nephilim who have deluded themselves into thinking they can find me if I don't want to be found? That's generous of you."

"No," Alec sighs, and scrubs at his face. "By the Angel, I'm not good at this. I didn't mean that. I meant you– You don't deserve that. I know who you are, I know what you've done–" Bane snorts indelicately at that, but Alec ignores it "–and I know you're a warlock, but...you enabled us to save twenty-two kids. That's...that's a good thing. It's– Maybe not everything is– is—"

"Maybe not everything is quite so simple, so clear-cut right and wrong, so obvious black and white, as the Clave would have you believe," Bane interjects, smiling a little. He inclines his head. "I agree. So I suppose, little angel, thank you. And goodbye, now. You give me some hope that peace is possible. Perhaps I'll revisit the Shadowhunters, in three or four generations."

His smile turns sardonic, then drops, and he sweeps past Alec and down the steps, tweaking his
blazer so it sits better on his shoulders. Alec swallows.

Bane doesn't turn back to look at him, as he says, "Don't lingering on my doorstep all night, darling."

With that, he waves his hand, a portal appearing in the middle of the sidewalk, and he steps through. For a moment, Alec is captured by his rings glimmering under the street lamps, and then the portal closes, and Bane disappears; the crumpled letter Alec still has clutched in his hand disappears with him.

Chapter End Notes

As always, let me know what you think down below -- random thoughts, critiques, rambling enjoyment are all welcome—you're also allowed to tell me how you felt about the mid-season finale, if you'd like to, because I forgot to ask you all last week. Good? Bad? Rate it out of 10, 10 being The Wedding level?

See you all next Thursday! <3
In which Alec Lightwood is twenty-two years old, he has a secret, and there's just something about the High Warlock of Brooklyn that brings out his wild side.

This chapter's bird: the raven! Depending on which cultures you're looking at, the Raven has got a lot of very contradictory symbolism, which is quite appropriate for this chapter. A handful of Native American tribes, according to my quick Google search, have got it down pretty well, I think: ravens are symbolic of creation, and wish to protect the world as it is, and will do anything, unscrupulous and manipulative if necessary, to do so.

Okay. Ahem. Anyway. Enjoy this one!

Alec Lightwood is twenty-two years old.

He feels like he's spent his entire life battling the Circle - fellow Nephilim - first, and demons second.

The first time he was ever sent on a mission - a proper, Clave-sanctioned mission, not just a regular patrol - was at what many consider the peak of the Circle's power, seven years ago.

He'd been sent, along with the rest of a team, led by his father, to ambush a group of Downworlders who were suspected to be due to meet with Valentine, in order to offer him their blood for a sacrilegious ritual that would lead to the beginning of the end of everything planet earth held dear.

Or something like that.

In the end, six Shadowhunters had trailed behind an unlikely vampire-werewolf duo for three hours, following them halfway around New York City. They tracked the men in and out of a mundane restaurant and then a Downworld café, before the pair had sat down on a bench in Central Park, laughing together and pointedly ignoring the fey dancing around the bushes, and then started kissing softly.

(Even now, Alec can hear his father's choking noises of disgust when he'd realised that the two men were a couple. It still makes his heart clench and his stomach twist. But he has far more important things to think about.)

That had been the first time Alec had realised just how paranoid the Clave could be, about anything concerning Valentine and Downworlders in the same general vicinity.

And, now that the Circle seems to be rising back up again, harnessing the power of demons and
Downworlders and *mundanes*, and Raziel knows what Valentine is doing, it doesn't surprise Alec when his mother orders him to gather a team and follow a female warlock to a suspected Downworld meeting with at least two members of the Circle.

He didn't expect to find anything of much note. It's rare that they do, on these sorts of missions. The Downworlders aren't stupid—they know Valentine despises them just as much, if not more, than the Clave does. It's usually the young and the volatile who are fooled by his ploys. The older Downworlders are usually quite aware that he wishes to wipe the *Downworld stain* from the earth.

(The Clave likes utilising the skills and the strengths of the Downworlders far too much to do that, Alec knows. Raziel, they'd have to make their own wards and potions if they killed all the warlocks, and Angel knows what they'd have to complain about in meetings if there weren't any Downworlders. The Shadow world would collapse.)

And yet, Alec is standing beside his *parabatai*, staring wide-eyed across at his sister, watching four of the most influential Downworlders in New York sit demurely while they listen to two Shadowhunters branded with the Circle rune, at least another twenty Downworlders, including children, spread out around them.

And Magnus Bane is in there.

Bane told him he'd thrown Valentine into a wall. Bane also told him that he hadn't bought into Valentine's empty promises to leave the Downworlders to live in peace, in his *new world*. Bane had set aside his prejudices against the Nephilim to help Alec, because, clearly, he felt even less goodwill towards Valentine.

And yet, Alec can see him a mere few metres away, watching the Circle preaching their crap at him. It's so... *impulsive*.

He'd almost let himself forget, that that's what Downworlders are. Impulsive. Fickle. Capricious.

And *Magnus Bane*—he's not sure why he ever began to entertain the idea of harbouring even a modicum of trust for the High Warlock of Brooklyn.

There are twenty-six Downworlders in there, Alec counts, along with the two Circle members. Nine of the Downworlders are children. But four are powerful, and influential, and one in particular could probably destroy all of New York City with a flick of his ring-laden fingers.

Bane is the most powerful being in that room. They have orders to stop this meeting, and to capture the Downworlders who are *plotting with the enemy*. Bane has to go.

The two fey knights, too, are going to be their main targets, along with the tall dark-haired vampire, whom Jace is watching with narrowed eyes as the vampire rolls his eyes at something said by Valentine's men. He's the leader of the New York vampires. Raphael Santiago. And if he's here, along with two important fey knights and the High Warlock of Brooklyn, meeting with the Circle, all associating themselves with Valentine in what appears to be a peaceful setting, then—

Then the Clave is losing its grip on the Downworld, and the Accords are falling apart.

And if Valentine wins over the Downworlders, it's all over.

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The crack of Isabelle's whip as it flashes out from where they position themselves just out of sight is
all it takes for all hell to break lose.

Valentine’s men whirl round to face them, but they don’t seem surprised to see Clave-sympathising Nephilim interrupting their mission; on the contrary, they seem relatively relaxed.

If Alec’s orders hadn’t been specifically to capture the Downworlders, he’d have been far more preoccupied with making sure they didn’t walk out of the room with their hands still attached to their bodies.

He holds the gaze of one of Valentine’s men in between releasing one arrow and reaching for another, for just a moment; the man smirks at him, before both of them break into a run, out the door and into the night.

Raziel, he wants to leave the goddamn Downworlders to it and run after the root cause of the problem, here. But he can’t. He has orders.

He winces when he hears the howl of a child as a throwing knife from Raj draws blood from the arm of a female warlock. The warlock bars her teeth at Raj, green flames leaping out from her palms, while the child behind her quivers.

"Don't touch the children!" he hollers, a reminder, because they’ve already discussed this, and they’ve agreed, but he doesn’t want there to be any room for interpretation. They will not sink to Valentine’s level.

Shadowhunters are around him, seraph blades blazing, in various states of flight: Jace is hovering low to the ground, throwing knives at his belt and sword in hand, Izzy beside him on her feet, whip snarling as it snaps around the wrists of Raphael Santiago, yanking him backwards with a jerk.

Izzy’s face is grim as she hauls the vampire in. She's barely said a word about this mission, and Alec wonders, abruptly, whether it's because she knows someone here.

"Raphael!"

The cry, filled with fear, snaps Alec out of his daze. He turns sharply, wings unfurling so he can rise up above the raging chaos and destruction below him to see. Among the sparkling of magic and the blurry speed of the vampires and the golden flash of seraph blades, stands Magnus Bane, hands curled into fists, eyes glinting like daggers as he stares at Izzy.

But he looks wild, eyes wide and hair tousled, standing stock-still and trembling like a caged animal. Because he is, Alec realises. Not an animal - whatever Bane is, destroyer of worlds or otherwise, he's not an animal - but he's trapped. Someone has clicked bracelets around his wrists, etched with binding runes designed specifically to prevent warlocks from using their magic.

Bane looks murderous.

And, magic or not, the strength in every tightly coiled muscle of his body is obvious, and he's advancing on Isabelle, who’s distracted by a Shadowhunter behind her wrestling Santiago into handcuffs. There are two warlocks throwing magic at her—magic designed to kill.

There's no way he's letting Bane get anywhere near his sister.

Alec cocks an arrow along his bowstring, and aims. On his next inhale, he relaxes his fingers, and shifts slightly with his target. As he exhales, he lets the arrow fly, and it sinks into the leg of the warlock closest to her. Izzy is more than capable of twisting to avoid another scorching red flame, before she tosses the warlock behind her with a snag of her whip for someone else to handcuff.
His knees bend slightly to absorb the impact as he lands in front of Bane, between the warlock and his sister, wings flaring out wide to prevent Bane attempting to dart around him. He takes a menacing step forward.

"No," he says. "You're not touching her."

Bane's eyes flash, cat eyes narrowing. "You bastard. You didn't mean a word you said to me. You're just the same as the rest of the Clave. Stab first, ask questions later." Bane shakes his head in disgust. "Did you bother to question why we were here? Did you investigate the purpose of this meeting, before you stormed in and starting killing us?"

Alec feels a rush of anger, and, with adrenaline coursing through him and Bane's magic muted, he dares to talk back.

"We're not killing anyone," he spits. "And we have our orders. My job is to obey, not to question."

"Of course it is." Bane shakes his head, smiling bitterly. "There are children here, you soulless monster."

Alec bristles. "We're not touching the children. They can leave."

"While you take their parents, their guardians, and torture them in the Silent City?"

"You've got ten seconds, warlock," Alec snaps, because, loathe as it is to admit it, perhaps Bane has a point. "Ten seconds to persuade me why I shouldn't throw you all to the Clave. Every adult in here, but you, especially."

Bane blinks. Once. Twice. His expression goes blank, losing some of its anger in the presence of sheer surprise. Alec clenches his jaw, because goddamnit, he has his back to his sister and his parabatai, and he's supposed to be protecting them.

"Because," Bane says, "contrary to what your beloved elders would have you believe, I, along with everyone else in this room, despise Valentine infinitesimally more than I despise you. And whatever assumptions you've made, whatever prejudices you've drawn on to justify slaughter and the trauma you're causing to these children, we are not here to side with Valentine."

"But you're not siding with us, either."

"We don't side with the Nephilim. We learnt our lesson when the Clave began to hide behind loopholes in the Accords and abandoned us, instead sending out soldiers on missions like this. We're not interested in your war. We're not interested in which Shadowhunters win. We're interested in not dying, and not being turned into twisted weapons for the Circle's sadistic use before being slaughtered. If that means acting against Valentine—so be it. But it doesn't mean we are fighting for your cause. We're fighting for ours."

Alec holds Bane's gaze for several long seconds. Then:

"You saved my life."

Bane rolls his eyes. "Are you going to bring this up every time I'm forced to endure your oh-so-angelic presence?"

"You hate my people. You just said so. But you saved my life, for no reason except you wanted to."

"A mistake I may live to regret, as you're about to hand me over to my mortal enemy to be brutally
murdered."

"I am your mortal enemy," Alec says, impatiently. "I'm a Shadowhunter."

"You're a soldier." Bane's lips turn up in what's almost a smile, and for a split second, Alec forgets that they're negotiating Bane's life during the middle of a battle, and that his people are capturing Bane's to be interrogated by the Clave. "The Clave itself and a soldier of the Clave are very different."

Alec reaches a hand out towards the bracelets around Bane's wrists, his other hand going to his belt. The warlock's eyes go wide, and fear flashes across his face when Alec grabs his hand.

"Get off," Bane hisses, yanking his hands back as though Alec's touch burned him. "I will not become the slave of an institution that has been hunting me for my entire life for nothing more than the circumstance of my birth."

"No." Alec holds up his stele. "No, I— Please, give me your hand."

Breathing heavily, Bane watches him, warily, eyes flicking around his face as though searching for some clue as to whether or not he can really trust Alec, trust a Shadowhunter, just this once.

"Please," Alec says again, and holds his hand out, palm-up, letting his bow drop gently to the floor in an attempt to make Bane believe him.

Bane follows the path his bow takes, but his eyes go straight to the knives and daggers and stars in Alec's belt. He swallows visibly. But then, slowly, he raises a hand, fingers still curled into his palm, and offers it to Alec.

Alec steadies Bane's wrist lightly, holding his forearm between his thumb and fingers, and lowers his stele to the bracelet. The rune fizzes as he sketches it on, and the bracelet clicks open. Immediately upon having one taken off, blue sparks at Bane's fingers, and the other disappears. Alec flinches back as the flames flicker over his own extended hands, but, to his surprise, it doesn't hurt. It's warm, but not blistering, and licks across his skin harmlessly. He doesn't think he's ever felt warlock magic like that before. He expected it to burn like acid, but it's warm, gentle, like a careless, fleeting touch. It's...it's nice.

"What are you doing?" Bane whispers, glancing over Alec's shoulder at the other Shadowhunters.

"Letting you go. Because the Clave wants to interrogate the people in this meeting, not kill them. Except you're Magnus Bane, so you'll be dead the moment you get inside the Institute. And I swore I wouldn't tell the Clave that you're in New York." He pauses, then says, "And I'm not sure you deserve what they'd do to you."

There's a scream behind them, and Bane grinds his teeth together. Blue swirls at his fingertips again, but he doesn't make to attack.

"I'm warning you," he says, "so listen to me carefully, Shadowhunter. You can do whatever you want to me, but if you hurt them, I will bring hell down on the head of every Nephilim in New York. You letting me go will not excuse blatantly breaking the Accords."

Alec sees Raj turn towards them out of the corner of his eye. Before Bane has time to blink, he has a knife pressed to the warlock's throat; Bane's expression morphs into one of utter fury, hands rising, magic crackling.
"I'm not going to slit your throat," Alec hisses, "but this has to look like an escape, not me letting you go. And they're going to recognise you. So stop lecturing me and get out. Before they kill you."

"Don't you dare think that this forgives capturing and interrogating and whatever other heinous things you plan on doing to my people," Bane snarls, softly. "Because it doesn't."

And then Alec is being thrown backwards by a wave of magic so strong he's seeing black spots in his vision before he's even crashed to the ground. His entire body tenses in preparation for excruciating pain, but, a mere moment before he hits the floor, he slows, and despite the clamour he can hear around him when he lands, it doesn't hurt. Not much. He'll be bruised, but an iratze will fix it in moments. And his wings, still tender from where they were healed, nearly two weeks ago, now, feel like they hit a floor made of cotton wool.

"Alec!"

His parabatai is beside him in a moment, a hand on his shoulder as he drops to his knees. "Raziel, are you alright?"

"I'm fine," Alec says, hauling himself into a sitting position. He glances towards the door, but Bane has disappeared.

Good.

"We've got them," Jace says, and Alec looks over his parabatai's shoulder to see an enormous group of Downworlders all together, surrounded by Shadowhunters. Warlocks have all been stripped temporarily of their magic, vampires' wrists tied in thin braids of silver, faces already beginning to look gaunt, and the two fey knights are in handcuffs.

Isabelle's eyes flicker between the wall and the fey male at the back, repeatedly, as though she can't bare to look. He's staring at the floor, expression blank. Her fingers are rubbing circles together, whip coiled around her wrist; Alec's heart aches at the sight.

"The children?" Alec asks, looking to the group of children - mostly warlocks, but one or two fey - who are assembled, Raj standing in front of them.

"Protocol tells us to call the High Warlock," Jace says, with a wry grin that Alec forces himself to return, "but as ours hasn't been seen for decades, we alerted some Catarina Loss. She'll arrive in a few minutes, and Raj is staying with them in the meantime."

Alec exhales. "Good. Let's go back to the Institute, then."

Isabelle catches his eye as he walks past the Downworlders, Jace striding slightly ahead of him. She shakes her head at him, and, for perhaps the first time in his life, Alec thinks he might understand what she means.

He squeezes her hand on the way past, Magnus Bane's fear-filled eyes flashing in his mind.

***

The debrief takes longer than it should.

After they've handed the Downworlders over to Shadowhunters in the Institute tasked with imprisoning, questioning, and monitoring them, Alec attempts to tell Maryse the facts, leaving Bane well out of it. Isabelle, however, seems intent on making sure that Maryse is aware of how little evidence there was that the Downworlders had been doing anything that violated the Accords.
"They're siding with Valentine, Isabelle," Maryse snaps, with a roll of her eyes. "Really, I think it's quite straight-forward."

Isabelle folds her arms. "I'd agree with you," she says, "except I haven't been shown any solid proof that they were siding with Valentine."

Jace doesn't actively voice his agreement, but his makes a noncommittal humming noise that Alec, for all his years of knowing Jace, recognises to be a noise of acquiescence.

Maryse shakes her head as though she can't vocalise her irritation at her daughter's irrational behaviour, and refocuses on Alec.

"What about—"

"She's right," Alec blurts out.

Maryse stares at him. "About what?"

"About the lack of evidence."

Maryse exhales through her nose in clear frustration. "Alec, they were assembled in front of two of Valentine's men, freely. They weren't prisoners."

Alec chews on the inside of his cheek, and says, "Actually, one of the warlocks had his magic muted. With bracelets covered in runes. The same kind we use."

"Do you have the bracelets?"

Alec lowers a hand to his belt, and draws out the bracelet he'd unlocked from Bane's wrist, before the warlock had magicked the second off and out of existence.

Maryse waves a hand when she sees it. "Not good enough. The Clave will hardly consider that hard evidence, now will they? You could have taken it from the training room. There's no way of confirming it was ever on a warlock, let alone that it was put on by the Circle."

"Why would I lie?" Alec demands.

Maryse smiles, just a little, but it's lukewarm at best, almost entirely devoid of humour. "It's not about you. It's about facts. And you're presenting me with nothing solid. The warlock probably put them on himself for this precise reason. Now, if you're done wasting my time, can we finish this so I can go and inspect our prisoners?"

***

The rhythmic sound of flesh slapping against the tough leather of an old, ruined punching bag fills Alec's ears. He's out of breath, muscles aching, knuckles burning despite the gauze he's taped around them, and yet still, still, he can't put this morning's mission out of his mind.

He can't help wondering about all the things Bane had said. About him. About the Clave. About the children who've had their guardians and teachers and adult friends taken, so are left to the mercies of others who may not be so generous.

Not that he knows much about the childhood of Downworlders. Especially not fey children.

"Why did you do it?"
Isabelle's voice cuts through the silence so abruptly that Alec stumbles on his next step forwards, causing his punch to merely graze across the edge of the punching bag. His body surges too far forward, off-balance, but he rights himself quickly. He spins around to face her, dragging throbbing fingers through sweat-slicked hair.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he tells her, moving across to where he'd set a bottle of water on the table.

"Oh?" She arches an eyebrow at him. "Really? The warlock?"

He feigns ignorance, giving her an impatient and nonplussed look. "What warlock?"

"The warlock you pretended to fight with before he threw you off and disappeared. Don't think I didn't notice that you're completely fine, after flying twenty feet through the air." She taps the top of her heeled boot against the smooth stone floor, arms folded across her chest, clearly waiting for an explanation.

Alec shrugs. "I used an iratze."

"Alec, by the Angel, enough." She huffs at him. "That was who saved you, wasn't it?"

Alec's eyes flicker up to meet hers. Isabelle is watching him with compassion, her expression gentler than he expects; he feels himself deflate under her gaze. With a sigh, he feels his shoulders slump, and he nods.

"It was," he says, "and I let him go because he didn't deserve it."

"What?" Isabelle's voice is suddenly sharp. "Didn't deserve being captured? Interrogated? Tortured? None of them deserve it. You've met one Downworlder who saved your life out of the kindness of his heart—why is it so hard to believe that there aren't plenty more who are just the same?"

"No, Izzy, it's—" He bites his lip.

"It's Magnus Bane. They'd strip him of his magic completely, indefinitely, and torture him before they cut him into little pieces. It's different."

Isabelle's nostrils flare. "I swear to god, Alec—"

"I don't mean that." He shakes his head. God, he doesn't. He doesn't understand Downworlders, and he certainly doesn't like them, but he doesn't think they deserve to be brutally punished for actions there's no evidence of them ever carrying out. "I mean— It's not— It's him."

Her expression changes, features contorting in clear bewilderment, before it smooths out into an appearance of forced neutrality. "What about him?"

"I can't, Izzy, I—" He shakes his head, and exhales in frustration. "Forget it. We never had this conversation. There was no warlock."

Isabelle purses her lips, then opens her mouth to say something.

Cutting her off hastily, because he can't tell her that the warlock is Magnus Bane, he says, "You know that Seelie, don't you?"

At that, Isabelle's jaw slackens, and her eyes drop to the floor. "Yeah," she murmurs, and fiddles with a braided fabric bracelet tied around her wrist. Alec doesn't think he's ever really paid much attention to it before, but it strikes him now that it's an unusual accessory for Isabelle.
"I'm sorry." Alec reaches out and tucks Isabelle's hair behind her ear, affection and sympathy warm in his eyes. "Really. I'm sorry."

She offers him a small smile, and grips his hand in hers. "It's not your fault. You were just doing what they told us to. Besides, I was part of that mission, too. We're all responsible for not standing up and doing the right thing. And you made sure nobody touched the children. I'm proud of you for that."

_We're not touching the children._

_While you take their parents, their guardians, and torture them in the Silent City?_

_But what was I supposed to do, Warlock Bane? What's anybody supposed to do against the Clave?_

"It doesn't matter what we think," Alec says, dropping his hand and stepping away from his sister. "We're soldiers. We follow the rules. We do as we're told. That's all."

Isabelle sighs. "You said it yourself, big brother. There's no evidence that they were doing anything wrong."

Alec doesn't tell her that the thought only really occurred to him when Bane put it in his head. He can feel the disappointment and the devastation rolling off her as it is. He doesn't want to add to it.

When he falls asleep that night, aching and exhausted, his dreams are of flashing cat eyes, and sparking red magic wrapping around his sister and pulling tight, and the screams of his parabatai as the Clave strips him of his marks for heinous crimes.

He wakes up drenched in sweat, Bane's words swirling around in his head yet again. It takes him several minutes to settle down enough to close his eyes, and when he does, when sleep finally pulls him deep under, it's to the thought of that soft, tickling magic dancing across his skin.

Chapter End Notes

Part of me expects you all to hate me? Honestly? Let me know what you thought! And, quick question, if I made a playlist to go with this story, would anybody be interested?
Chapter Summary

In which we meet Raphael Santiago, Magnus shows the Clave who exactly has the upper hand, and the Shadowhunters are really going to live to regret taking the Downworlders.

Chapter Notes

To all of you who expressed interest in a playlist for this fic: listen!

Bird for this chapter: the rooster! The rooster is symbolic of family and protection, which, and I'm sure you can all work out, fits rather nicely with one of our Shadowhunters... ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nearly forty-eight hours after they captured the Downworlders from their meeting with Valentine's men, as far as Alec is aware, they have yet to gain any useful information. Partly, he suspects, because there isn't any useful information to be found. And partly, because none of the Downworlders will talk.

Alec detests interrogations. Especially when he has to sit and watch, stoic and unfeeling, while beings that look human, even if they're part demon, are put through mental and physical strain that borders on torture.

His mother is trying to tweeze information from Raphael Santiago, who's currently sitting in a chair, hands bound with silver, nothing on his face but a tiny little smirk. He's silent. He's enjoying the reactions his silence evokes in Maryse.

And Alec can tell that he won't speak. He despises the Nephilim—that much is obvious. And he knows they can't technically torture him for information without breaking the Accords. Not unless they find some hard evidence.

"I'll ask you one more time, vampire," Maryse spits, leaning over Santiago, her expression carved from granite. "The purpose of your meeting. Of your allying with Valentine. What you said to the Circle. What they said to you. Tell me. Now."

Santiago rolls his eyes - for about the millionth time - and looks incredibly bored, gaze fixing somewhere behind Maryse.

Maryse lets out a hiss of anger, and, before Alec can react to prevent it, her hand cracks across Raphael's face. His head jerks back, and he lets loose a quiet snarl of pain as the silver of her wedding ring leaves a dark brand on his cheek.

"Mom," Alec says, alarmed.
Maryse flares her nostrils, eyes fixed with Raphael's as they stare each other down. Santiago is unblinking. She grinds her teeth together, the muscles in her jaw flexing, before she straightens, spins tight on her heel, and marches out of the room, head held high.

Raphael's fingers press against his own cheek, and he makes a strangled noise. Alec glances down at him, and at the mark his mother's ring left on him.

*If you hurt them, I will bring hell down on the head of every Nephilim in New York.*

Santiago looks up at him, and jerks his chin. "What's your plan now, Shadowhunter?" he asks, voice rasping. His face is cadaverous, the effects of prolonged contact with silver clearly beginning to affect him. The other vampires, back where all the Downworlders are being held, are in similar states.

"We won't tell you anything," Raphael says, to his silence. "You're wasting your time."

"I wasn't aware that there was anything much to tell," Alec says, carefully.

Raphael pauses, and looks up, directly towards the CCTV camera Alec knows is mounted on the ceiling behind him. "Perceptive Shadowhunters. Shadowhunters who don't just follow blindly. This is a new concept."

Alec averts his gaze.

*Dios,* I give you too much credit." Santiago shakes his head. "You're all of you incapable of saying no. Soldiers obeying your masters until the end."

Alec keeps staring at the wall, silent.

Santiago hums. "I saw what you did. During the fight. And I saw what he did."

Alec's eyes dart back to Raphael, wide, and he feels cold fear flash through him. "Shut up."

"Relax, Shadowhunter. *Dios.* I am aware of your little...tumble."

He...he knows? Raphael knows about Bane saving his life?

"How?" Alec manages to get out.

Raphael sighs, and folds his arms. "Because your saviour likes to spend his free time irritating me."

Oh. They're friends. Magnus Bane and Raphael Santiago...are friends. Somehow, Alec finds it difficult to see. They seem...different. Besides the little fact that Bane is in hiding, practically, and Raphael is leading the New York vampire clan.

The door bangs open again, interrupting whatever meagre conversation he and Santiago had been partaking in. The entering Shadowhunter glances at Raphael's cheek, at the mark on it, but doesn't comment; instead, she hauls him up and pushes him sharply out of the door.

Raphael turns to look over his shoulder at he leaves. His eyes lock with Alec's, and he jerks his chin up.

Alec realises a moment too late what it means. A thank you. It's gratitude that's in Raphael's eyes. A thank you for letting Bane go.

It's a thank you Alec is fairly sure he's undeserving of. But by the time he's worked out what the
vampire's gesture meant, Raphael has turned around to face forwards, and is rounding the corner back towards where the other Downworlders are.

***

Alec spends the majority of the afternoon and evening on patrol.

Maryse sends them out to follow up several reports of unusual demonic activity in the Manhattan area. Whoever sent the reports was right—the demons are behaving in an unusual manner. As though they have a goal beyond mindless, spontaneous destruction. And they'd run into a group of forsaken.

Valentine. It has to be.

"You're bleeding," Raj says when they return and begin shucking off the weapons, with a slight note of alarm in his voice that makes Alec turn, eyebrows raised.

Alec presses his palm to where he can feel a stinging sensation across the back of his shoulder, and frowns when his skin comes away stained red. "Crap. I didn't realise."

"Take your shirt off. I'll draw an iratze." Raj's voice is firm, booking no room for arguments.

Alec pulls his t-shirt off enough for Raj to get at the gash, which is probably oozing in an unpleasant manner, and passes him a stele.

At the burning sensation of the stele pressing against his skin, Alec let's his eyes close, exhaustion washing over him, suddenly. He thinks about Raphael Santiago, and about the look on his face when he'd nodded at Alec.

He's never really thought about that. About Downworlders - impulsive, reckless Downworlders, warlocks conceived in the scorching fires of hell, vampires and werewolves transformed in traumatising violence, the fey born from a devastating contradiction - being anything more than...Downworlders. A pain in his ass.

He's never really thought of them as...well, human. Or, rather, capable of human emotion. Bane and Santiago are friends. He can't imagine what they talk about, or do together, but nevertheless, they are. They care about each other—like he cares about his siblings, and about people at the Institute. Like he cares about his—

The door to the training room opens loudly, smacking against the wall, and Alec winces when Raj flinches, the stele burning a jagged, irregular line into the side of his shoulder. Jace stalks in, dropping weapons as he goes.

"Sorry," Raj mutters, and clears his throat. "Jace. Can you do Alec an iratze?"

Jace's casual "sure" is swift, effortless, and he takes the stele from Raj and burns two healing runes into Alec's skin with efficient care. Pain disperses out, easing and lulling, with every swish of the stele, but Alec is looking at Raj, a frown creasing his eyebrows. Yes, Jace is his parabatai, and runes from him are more powerful than runes from other Shadowhunters, but the wound wasn't serious enough to warrant Raj passing off to Jace, when he'd already started.

"Is he okay?" Alec asks Jace, quietly, when Raj leaves the training room with some line about going to the Ops Centre.

Jace shrugs behind him, and drops the stele into Alec's lap. "As far as I know. Why?"
"No reason, I suppose." Alec rolls his shoulder. "Thanks."

***

"Alec!"

A small force barrels into Alec as he steps out of the training room, knuckles still wrapped from where he'd been pounding into a punching bag in an attempt to release some tension. He stumbles a little, and glances down in surprise, because there's only one person who would say his name like that, and hug his legs.

"Max?" Alec peers down at his little brother, a smile stretching across his face before he can make to control it. He slips himself out of Max's hold, and crouches down to hug him properly. "Hey, buddy."

Max is grinning, and he throws his arms around Alec's neck with a boyish laugh that makes Alec's heart ache with the knowledge that reality is going to punch his brother's innocence right through in a few short years. If not sooner.

"I thought you weren't coming home until next week," Alec says, pulling back to look at him. "Is Dad home?"

"Yeah. He's talking to Mom."

"Boring, adult stuff?" Alec asks, raising one eyebrow.

"Obviously." Max rolls his eyes, and, if Jace were here, Alec is sure he'd comment on how much Alec does that. "It's all they ever talk about."

"What did you get up to in Idris, then?" Alec asks, standing up out of his crouch and gesturing with his head so they walk down the corridor towards where he knows Izzy was attempting to cook something. It had sounded mildly terrifying.

"Nothing." Max huffs. "It was so boring."

Alec smiles as he listens to Max talk, and shoulders open the door to the kitchen, nodding along and humming where appropriate, giving Max his undivided attention, because he doesn't see enough of his little brother. And with this life, in these times, anything could happen. He could die tomorrow.

"Izzy!" Max shouts, when they walk into the kitchen. "We're back!"

Isabelle grins. "Hello, hermano."

She pauses in the stirring of some ominously large pot that smells suspiciously like aubergine but looks more like tomato soup, and reaches down to pull Max into a hug. Max laughs when she tickles him, and shakes himself out of her hold.

"Have you seen Jace yet?" she asks, perching on the tabletop.

Max shakes his head. "I thought he'd be in the training room."

Alec rolls his eyes, lips twitching. "I see how it is. You wanted to find Jace, but instead you found me, so you had to go find Izzy because I'm just too boring."

"No!" Max says, but his eyes are full of mischief, and Raziel, Alec can already tell that he's going to be a force to rival Jace when he's older: he's only ten years old now, and no ten year old should have
that teasing look that promises all sorts of terrifying humour perfected.

Isabelle is snickering, and she opens her mouth to reply, when the lights flicker.

Immediately, the smiles drop from their faces, and they all glance up. The lights flicker again, this time blinking out for a full second before the room is illuminated once more. A shiver runs down Alec's spine; his fingers wrap around the only weapon he's got on him - a short throwing knife with a wickedly sharp blade - and he feels the muscles in his back shifting and tensing, wings ready to burst into being the moment he wills it. A rune might be required to hide them, but with enough adrenaline, they tend to come into being without needing to slash through any angelic marks.

There's a faint humming noise as the Institute is once again plunged into darkness. There are shouts from outside, the light of seraph blades flaring up, only to be extinguished a mere moment later. The sight makes the hairs on the back of Alec's neck stand on end.

Behind him, Max and Izzy are silent. Izzy, like him, is on high alert, every cell in her body tensed and ready to defend herself and their little brother the moment she needs too. He can feel Max's fear rolling off him in waves, and he reaches out a hand towards where Max had been standing last. His fingers make contact with his brother's hair, and he ruffles it gently in reassurance.

"What the fuck is this?" someone outside shouts, into the darkness that nothing seems to be able to penetrate. "Who did we pay to make our wards?"

"Quiet!" Maryse's unmistakable voice hisses, cutting through the air. "Enough. Nobody move."

"Alec," Max whispers from beside him, and steps closer, so their sides brush.

"It's alright," Alec tells him, praying that he hasn't just lied.

Max shuffles, rummaging in his pocket, and his witchlight flares up, brilliant white light flooding the kitchen and the hallway beyond. Isabelle's lips are pursed, and terror is written across Max's face, and Alec is holding the knife so tightly his knuckles are white, and—

And then the witchlight goes out.

Alec stares, spots of colour dancing in his vision for a moment, before, once again, all he can see is darkness, unending, stretching out in all directions. He wonders, momentarily, whether this is what it's like to be blind.

There's a shrill, piercing sound that slices through the heavy blanket of tense silence. Alec's lips part in a soundless scream, and he bites back the urge to bend over and smother his ears against such an awful noise.

Then it's gone, abruptly, and everything flares red. Max's witchlight, and the seraph blades held aloft by Shadowhunters all across the Institute, and pieces of adamas that are built into other weapons, and tiny pieces set in jewellery, and even in the hilt of a few steles.

It's impossible. Adamas doesn't glow red, it glows white. White, when held by a Shadowhunter—or an angel. It can't be extinguished, and it certainly doesn't just change colour.

"Nephilim."

The voice reverberates around the Institute, gravelling and deep and chilling, making Alec's blood run cold and his bones rattle and he swallows, because by the Angel, he knows that voice. He knows it far better than he should. And it's honestly the most terrifying thing he's ever heard.
"You are holding my people," Magnus Bane booms, each syllable echoing and changing direction just enough to make every Shadowhunter assembled shrink in on themselves in fear. Everyone knows who that voice belongs to. "You are torturing my people, for crimes they have not committed. You have imprisoned the head of the New York vampires, you have stolen Seelie Knights, you are killing my people by repressing their magic, and you refuse to accept that there is nothing to be found.

"We are not your enemies. The Accords were signed to signify peace and trust between our peoples. And yet, you have the audacity imprison us for crimes you have not even a modicum of evidence of us committing.

"I give you forty-eight hours, Nephilim. Forty-eight hours to release my people, to return them home, or hell's fires will rain down on you all. I am not your High Warlock for nought. I am not wanted by the Clave for child's play. You do not fear me unprompted. This is your only warning. I will not ask you again."

And then, abruptly, the all adamas flares white, and the lights flicker back on.

***

The moment they're bathed in daylight once more, there's mayhem. Shadowhunters are shouting incoherently, hollering across the hallways at each other, spoiling for a fight but with nothing they can attack. Maryse is barking orders around the Ops Centre, and Robert stands to one side, keys to where the Downworlders are being held gripped tightly in his hand.

"Alec." Max tugs on his sweater, and Alec looks down at him. "What was that?"

Alec glances up at Izzy, and they exchange a look filled with regret.

"That was Magnus Bane," Alec says, because Max is fully aware of who that is. Every Shadowhunter child who can speak in fluent sentences knows who Magnus Bane is.

Max rolls his eyes. "Yes, I know. But why did my witchlight turn red? And how did the lights go out? I thought the Institute was warded against Downworlders."

"It is." Alec swallows, and his eyes flicker upwards. He'd known Bane was powerful, but...that powerful? Powerful enough to cut straight through the Institute's wards? Powerful enough to manipulate angelic weaponry and magic? "I don't know how, Max. I don't know why."

"That was pretty badass," Isabelle observes, voice far too light considering the Institute has just been attacked and infiltrated by the most wanted Downworlder on the planet.

Her voice breaks the tension in the room, and Alec turns to look at her, feeling some of the tightness begin to bleed out of his muscles, just a little. He arches an eyebrow at her. "Really?"

She shrugs. "Really."

Alec rests a protective hand on Max's shoulder, and pushes his brother forward a little. "Come on."

Beside him, as they step out of the relative quiet of the kitchen, up the short flight of stairs, and into the Ops Centre, Isabelle seems to deflate. She exhales heavily, eyelashes dipping as she gazes around at the panicked, indignant Shadowhunters, furious at being threatened, spitting about Downworld scum, blaming their prisoners for this—although that's an oxymoron, if Alec's ever heard one.

"Where the hell is Jace?" Alec wonders, aloud, because his parabatai rune is aching strangely, and he
can't seem Jace in the midst of the action—which is, of course, where he prefers to be. He spares a
glance down at his cloth-covered torso as he rubs a hand against his rune, a crease forming between
his brows. It's not a painful ache, per se, but it's a little uncomfortable, and Alec's never felt anything
like it before.

"We will not release those prisoners," a Shadowhunter woman spits at a young man - a boy,
although not in the mundane sense of the word - no older than seventeen. He's from Idris, staying at
the Institute to train overseas for a year. "We will not bend to the wishes of some halfbreed demonic
spawn."

Warlock Bane's words echo in Alec's mind, and he feels his heart sinking. Because he knows - he
knows - that his parents have to be at least partially right. The Clave. Every Shadowhunter he's ever
learned from. Downworlders are slaves to their impulses. They're reckless, they struggle to abide by
the laws of the land, they're volatile.

But that doesn't mean they should be exempt from the protections supposedly afforded to them by
the Accords. The Law is the Law, after all, for all—it is not merely a prerogative of the Nephilim.

"We will call upon an emergency meeting with the Inquisitor," Maryse says, to the woman and the
young man, lips pressed tightly together. "Idris will want to hear about this. Warlock Bane has not
been heard from for decades. This is a crucial development."

"I don't know about that," murmurs a voice in Alec's ear, making him jump. "What do they think
they're going to do if Magnus Bane is pissed? Out-piss him? I don't think even the Clave could out-
piss Bane."

Alec smacks Jace's shoulder, and rolls his eyes. "You're insufferable."

"Ow!" Jace pouts at him. "That's mean. Just because I'm right."

"You're being ridiculous," Alec tells him mildly, for Max's sake avoiding any harsher terminology
for exactly how tiresome Jace can be. "If we don't let the Downworlders go, we're all dead."

Jace shrugs, and folds his arms, standing with one shoulder brushing Alec's and the other Izzy's.
"There's one Warlock Bane, but I'm pretty sure there are a lot more of us. Even if he is a high
warlock."

"Jace, he's destroyed villages in fits of rage. He's slaughtered thousands of people in cold blood for
the hell of it. Imagine what someone like that can do when he's that kind of calm, deadly furious?"

Izzy lets out a sharp laugh beside him. "Somehow, brother mine, I have a feeling those stories aren't
quite as simple as the Clave would have us know."

"Does it matter?" Alec snaps, because really, they haven't got time for this. Time is trickling away,
slipping through their fingertips like sand in an hourglass; there's no way the Clave is going to give
the order to release the Downworlders, regardless of their innocence, and Alec has every faith that
Bane will carry out his every threat to the letter.

"It always matters," Izzy fires back. "Meliorn—"

She bites down on her lip, hard, and sucks in her cheeks. Guilt floods through Alec, because he'd
forgotten that Isabelle knows some of these Downworlders—one, two, many, he doesn't know. But
she knows someone. Several someones, maybe. And she cares for them.

Whoever they are, Alec sincerely hopes they're worth her worry. Because, frankly, he can't think of
a single Downworlder he's ever met who'd be worth his sister's worry.

(Although, admittedly, he can't think of a Shadowhunter, outside their family, who'd be worth his sister's worry. Raj, perhaps. But Raj practically counts as family.)

Alec glances across at his parabatai, at his sister, both looking straight ahead, surveying the Shadowhunters panicking and shouting below, with no structure or sense. He looks to the other side, to Max, who's so young, and has so much to live for, and he wonders. He wonders whether Isabelle is right.

Because it does matter. The stories paint Bane as a murderer, unafraid to kill for no reason, and always willing to kill for causes he deems just.

And if the stories are true, and if the Clave refuses Bane's terms, Max's future might be extinguished in a mere moment. A single shower of cracking blue sparks, and Alec might watch the life drain from his little brother's body.

No. He can't let that happen. He can't let anybody hurt his family.

"Look after Max," Alec tells Jace.

"I'm not a kid," Max huffs, earning himself an eye roll from Alec, and a teasing hair ruffle from Jace.

"Where are you going?" Jace demands, taking a half step forward. "Alec—"

"Nowhere. I'm going for a run. I just...I have to clear my head." He shoots his parabatai what he hopes is a suitably pleading, desperate look. "I can't...I need a moment, Jace. I need to think."

Jace frowns, searching his eyes, and then nods reluctantly, once. "Alright."

Alec avoids Isabelle's gaze as he turns, because he's certain that she'll see through him in a moment. She always does.

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The warning tingle of Bane's wards is tangible the moment Alec steps within two metres of the warlock's apartment block. It's not uncomfortable—not yet, at least. It's freezing, and Alec's leather jacket is doing little to combat the frigid night air, and the magic pushing against him feels just slightly warm.

Alec knows, of course, that the moment he gets too close, he'll be fried alive. And his remains will probably be fed to some horrific demon. Or used in a potion that requires Nephilim body parts, or partially-Angelic blood, or something heinous.

He huffs out a tiny little breath, which is almost a laugh, at his ridiculous train of thought. There's no doubt that he would become a barbecued Shadowhunter if he were to attempt to invade Bane's loft, of course, but the rest? No. He has a feeling Bane would go for a more classy option.

Alec pushes the thoughts away, and, after a moment's hesitation, he presses the buzzer beside Bane's name, written in such an old-fashioned, lovely script, and swallows the fear that spikes in his chest. He's doing this for Max. For Jace and Izzy, for his family, for the people who love him, but mostly for Max. Because Max is too young. He's too young to bear runes, let alone to fight off arguably the most powerful Downworlder in the continent, and the most wanted being in the Clave's directory.

The wards push at him, magic making him shift uncomfortably. It's like a cat sniffing at him, trying
to decide whether or not he's trustworthy. The wards have probably sensed his angelic blood, or the magic of his runes, or something that identifies him as a Shadowhunter. He wonders how the Clave hasn't picked up on such obviously powerful magic. But then, he thinks, Bane has probably found a way to hide it from them.

Or, perhaps, he's merely decided that hiding in plain sight is the best cover of all.

"I'm busy," says a cool, entirely disinterested voice, floating through the speaker. "Who are you, and what do you want? Please do make it quick."

Sending up a quick prayer to the Angel Raziel to not get fried into a Shadowhunter kebab, Alec clears his throat and says, "Warlock Bane, I—"

"Oh, good god, it's you." Bane sighs audibly, and very dramatically. "If you're here about my infiltration of your beloved Institute, save your breath, and go home. Nothing you can say is of any interest to me. I don't care. You're holding my people, you're torturing them, and you're breaking the Accords. I warned you, Shadowhunter. I wasn't talking out of my ass."

Alec barely holds back his huff of frustration. "We're not breaking the Accords. They're suspected to be in league with Valentine, and—"

"Have you found any such evidence of that?" Bane snaps. "Any evidence at all? Good god, you're deluding yourself if you truly believe anything you've just said."

Alec makes an irritated noise in the back of his throat, and grips at the hilt of the seraph blade in his belt tightly. He wants to smack Magnus Bane. He's just making this so difficult. This is exactly why Alec hates working with Downworlders. They're so illogical. So emotional. So...so irksome.

"Will you just—"

"No, I most certainly will not," Bane tells him, no hint of leeway in his voice. His tone is glacial, and it makes the hairs on the back of Alec's neck stand on end. "I've had enough. Go home, Lightwood, before I make a human torch out of you for my cat's entertainment."

No. No, no, this can't be happening. Panic floods through every inch of Alec's body, and he feels his heart punch so hard against his ribs it hurts. Bane can't be making him leave before Alec has said his piece. He can't have fucked this up so much that the warlock won't even listen to him.

And, despite what he just thought about Downworlders being emotional, he lets the sheer desperation he feels bleed into his voice.

"Please," he begs Bane. "Please, I—" He leans his forehead against the cold wall beside the speaker, and curls a hand into a fist. "My little brother, he's— He's in the Institute. He's too young to wear runes. He'll die, if you attack the Institute."

He can imagine Bane rolling his eyes. "Well, isn't that tragic. I've given the Institute my ultimatum. There is a way out. Release those prisoners."

"You know we can't. The Clave will never allow it. And you haven't given us enough time to negotiate with the Inquisitor, or the Council, or— My little brother is going to die. He hasn't done anything. He's not even old enough to fight. Your argument isn't with him. Please, just—I made my team spare those Downworlder children. Spare my little brother."

There's a pause. It's long, and tight, and Alec's breaths are shaky and irregular, lungs burning with icy cold fear. He doesn't care that he's tossing away every shred of his dignity, standing here begging
a Downworlder - and Magnus Bane, at that - for mercy. He'd get down on his knees, if it would help.

A soft exhale comes through the speaker, followed by the click of the front door unlocking. "Come up here, little angel."

"Thank you," Alec breathes. "Thank you."

"I'm making you no promises. But I will listen to whatever it is you have to say to me. So I suggest you think very carefully about what that is, and come up with an offer that won't make me toss you into Edom."

"I– Yes, I– I won't– I'm—"

"Stop stuttering and move, Nephilim. You're shivering."

Alec feels his cheeks flush, because he's leaning against the wall in such a vulnerable position, and he hadn't realised that Bane had been able to see him all this time. Bane has seen the desperation in his voice, and in every inch of his body.

Swallowing, Alec turns, and pushes open the front door. He climbs the rickety stairs to Bane's apartment, which seem even more precarious going up than going down, and he wonders, momentarily, how Bane got him up here that day, when the warlock saved his life. With magic? Even with Alec's shattered, ruined wings?

The door slides open with a crackle of blue sparks when Alec approaches. He hears a hissing in his ears, an angry whisper, and then he feels the pressure and tingle of Bane's wards ease, allowing him to pass through.

There's a crack as the door slams shut behind him, a mere hairs breadth from cracking into his shoulder. He flinches, and looks around the loft, which is dimly lit, searching for Bane's silhouette.

"So." The voice startles Alec, and his eyes dart around in an attempt to find the face to match the voice. "What is it you have to say to me, little angel?"

"I—" Alec clears his throat. "You know as well as I do that the Clave is never going to let us release the Downworlders, and—"

"You've said this already."

"Right. Um." Alec shifts nervously. "Can you maybe...come out?"

There's a deep, throaty chuckle, and Alec shudders. "I did that about three hundred years ago, darling."

But, nevertheless, Bane steps out, into plain view. Alec isn't exactly sure where he came from, but he supposes that adds to the mysterious intrigue of Bane's aura, or whatever it is, exactly, that he's aiming for.

Bane hums lightly, eyes scanning Alec up and down, analysing him. Alec flushes at the pointed, clinical attention, detached and filled with barely-restrained anger. It's clear in the glittering of Bane's cat eyes, in the rhythmic way he flicks his ring-laden fingers, in the drama of his make-up and the tightness of his jaw.

He takes three steps towards Alec, making his necklaces jangle slightly. Alec glances down, and
realises just how low-cut Bane's glimmering black shirt is. The v of the neckline goes halfway down his stomach, to just below his navel, and Alec feels his cheeks burn red when he catches himself staring.

Bane is beautiful—there's really nothing to be gained by denying it. Alec's noticed before. But he's a Downworlder. His beauty is a lethal weapon, and Alec can't allow himself to be lured in, to be distracted, by such superficial attributes.

"Well?" Bane prompts, and taps his fingers against the cabinet of drinks set up at the side of the room.

"I—"

Angel, he really didn't think this far ahead.

"Do you have a plan, Alexander?" Bane asks, eyes flashing. Alec jerks at the use of his name, surprised that Bane has deigned to remember it. "Or are you wasting my time?"

"No, no, I just—"

Abruptly, the walls of the loft flare blue, and there's a sharp cry from outside. Alec's blood freezes in his veins, because he recognises that cry. He would recognise it anywhere, in any form, but it doesn't make any sense, it—

"Or—" Bane's eyes have turned to ice, and he takes another step towards Alec, this one full of menace as sparks jump to his fingertips, swirling dangerously "—are you the distraction?"

"The— What?"

"You've brought your people to my doorstep, tonight," Bane purrs, circling him with daggers flashing in his slitted pupils. "You swore to me that you would remain silent. Clearly I should have learnt, by now, that the Nephilim are not to be trusted."

Magic shoots from Bane's hands, and Alec gasps as he's slammed against a wall, head cracking against it. He blinks, eyes focused on the advancing warlock who's got murder in his eyes.

"You don't have an offer, do you?" Bane asks. "You don't have anything for me, except perhaps my death."

"No!" Alec hisses as the magic tightens against him, pressing against his chest. "No, I– I haven't– I swear!"

"What I don't understand," Bane murmurs, "is how my wards didn't detect whoever is with you, earlier. But no matter, I suppose. You're a fool, Alexander Lightwood, if you think two Nephilim are enough to kill me."

"I'm not—" Alec struggles against Bane's magic, and reaches desperately for the seraph blade in his belt.

The wards shudder, a rumbling sound reverberating around the loft, like something being thrown at a force field. It makes Bane pause, just for a moment, just enough for his magic to loosen.

Alec moves. His hand flies to his belt, and a throwing knife is leaving his hand and flying past Bane's head before his mind can catch up with whatever's going on. Bane whirls round to face him. His teeth grind together as Alec reaches for another knife, and flames leap from his hands. Blue races
towards him, and Alec has to dart sideways to avoid being scalded.

"I saved your life," Bane snaps at him. "Have you forgotten that?"

"I'm not trying to kill you!"

"Really?" Bane laughs, and tosses another wash of magic at him, hitting Alec in the stomach hard enough to wind him. "You just threw a knife at my head."

Alec coughs, choking and wheezing, and tries to speak. "It wasn't— It—"

The door slams open, hard enough to leave an indent on the plaster. A whip cracks, simultaneously knocking the knife out of Alec’s hand and surprising Bane enough for the blue to drop. Warlock and Shadowhunter both turn to gape at the intruder.

"Was this necessary?" Isabelle asks, whip falling to her side, one hand on her hip as she surveys the room. "Honestly. Men."

Chapter End Notes

Gasp! Drama ;) Next chapter is pretty Malec-heavy, just so you've got something to look forward to this week. Thank you so much for reading!

Also: follow me on my new Tumblr! I'll be posting little drabbles and short things on there intermittently when I get a little bit more time, and I might post updates on my fics over there, too -- all will be tagged, I promise ;)
Sankofa

Chapter Summary

In which Magnus meets Isabelle, Alec meets a demon, and they're all confronted with the roots of mutual respect.

Chapter Notes

So, confession: the bird for this chapter isn't an actual, biological bird. The Sankofa comes from African mythology (Ghana, specifically, Google says), and the design features a bird turning its head to look behind while picking an egg up off its back. It's supposed to represent bringing good things from the past as inspiration for improving the present and the future. Which isn't exactly perfect for this chapter, in an of itself, but this chapter is a little bit of a turning point, so the eagle-eyed of you (pun not intended) can deduce what you wish from that!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Isabelle's entrance shocks Bane for a mere moment. The moment she takes a step, he's snapped his fingers, and a tall wall of fire separates Alec and Izzy from the rest of the loft.

Isabelle appears unfazed. She holds up her hands, the woven bracelet on her wrist falling forwards. Alec sees Bane's eyes linger on it, and the warlock's brow furrows.

"Nobody is here to attack you," Isabelle says, and lets her whip fall from her hand. "I swear on the Angel."

Bane's eyebrows shoot up, but he drops the magic. "And yet," he says, "I've just been subjected to knives thrown at me."

Alec rolls his eyes. "If I'd wanted to hit you, you'd have a knife in your head. I wasn't trying to kill you, I was trying to make you listen to me."

"Well, that's a fantastic way to get somebody to listen, Shadowhunter," Bane snaps. "Throwing knives at them. God, why on earth haven't we all thought of that before? What a perfect solution. And you--" He turns blazing eyes filled with suspicion on Isabelle "--how exactly did you get so close without my wards flaring up?"

Isabelle shrugs. "You tell me. But, if I had to make an educated guess, I would presume that it's because your wards are at least somewhat created with blood magic, and, as I'm this idiot's sister, and he's clearly exempt from your wards for the moment, it took them a while to realise I'm not him. We do have practically the same blood, after all. After that, I was halfway through anyway. It just took a bit of...perseverance. And chemistry. And possibly the fact that you dropped your wards to throw my brother out. I just leapt in first."

Bane's lips part, and he looks between them, surprise flashing through his eyes. "You're Alexander's
"Isabelle," Izzy says, smiling. "Pleasure. I followed him, because he's terrible at lying, and he was clearly up to something. I didn't quite expect it to be high treason, though."

Her smile extends into a grin, and the corners of Bane's mouth turn up, just a little.

"I apologise, then, Isabelle," he says. He glances across at Alec. "I'm not apologising to you, though. You were being entirely moronic."

Alec splutters. "What? I was being—? I didn't—"

Bane's lips twitch, and Alec realises that he's being teased. He presses his own lips together firmly, and forces himself to shut up.

"You're Isabelle Lightwood," Bane says, turning his attention back to Isabelle. "I've heard about you."

Isabelle grins, and raises an eyebrow. "Good things, I hope?"

"Terrible things." Bane chuckles. "The Seelie Queen despises you. It's nice to know I'm not the only one she can't stand."

"Really?" Isabelle smirks. "I thought she hated everyone."

"Not entirely." Bane waves a hand. "Although I can't imagine she'd be too fond of any Shadowhunter, let alone one trying to beguile her loyal knights."

Isabelle rubs at the bracelet, and says, with a little less humour, "One particular knight."

"So I heard." Bane's smile drops, and he gestures to the sofa. "Have a seat. You--" He points at Alec "--You can stay right there, where I can see you. And don't try anything."

Alec wants desperately to protest his innocence in this whole affair, but he supposes he doesn't really have a leg to stand on. He folds his arms over his chest and slouches against the wall while Bane moves over to the drinks cabinet and pours himself a whiskey, before offering Isabelle a drink.

"He means well," Isabelle says to Bane, glancing back at Alec. "He's not very good at communication, but I promise, he wasn't trying to be an asshole. Well." She huffs out a little laugh, and a smirk tips up one corner of her mouth. "Probably."

With a hum, Bane folds himself into a chair with more elegance than anybody human has a right to have. Although he's not human, so perhaps that's why he's able to move in such an ethereal way. It's mesmerising, and, once again, Alec is very aware of all the things he's been warned about—Downworlders use such enchanting hallmarks to entice their victims, before they go in for the kill. He can't afford to lose focus.

"So." Bane flicks his fingers, and magics a shot of - port, maybe? - into Alec's hands. Alec jumps out of his skin, Nephilim reflexes saving the glass from shattering onto Bane's hardwood floors. The warlock doesn't so much as glance his way. "Do either of you have anything to say to me, or shall I send you home with another threat to your wonderful mother?"

Isabelle's eyebrows shoot up. "Do you know our mother?"

"Oh, yes." There's a dark, faraway look in Bane's eyes, and he runs one ring-laden finger around the
rim of his glass. "Yes, I know Maryse Lightwood. Unfortunately."

Isabelle leans forward a little, uncrossing her legs. "Really? You—"

"Ahem." Alec clears his throat and shoots her a pointed glare. She huffs, and sticks her tongue out at him. "Warlock Bane—" Bane rolls his eyes, but doesn't comment "—you want your people freed."

"Clearly."

Alec purses his lips, because by the Angel, he's going to regret this. This decision is going to come back to haunt him years from now. It's going to eat at him, and he can just tell that it's going to end up being a spectacular disaster.

But Max's life is on the line. So he doesn't really have much choice.

"So," he says, eyes drilling into the back of Bane's head, "let's free them."

The warlock's head whips round, cat eyes wide and lips parted as he gapes at Alec like he's some scandalous enigma. "Excuse me?" Bane manages to get out, after several shocked seconds.

Alec shrugs, and takes a swig of his drink. Hm. It's a little bit sweet. It's...actually not that bad. That's the second time Bane has correctly anticipated what he likes. First his black coffee, then his alcohol —and Alec really isn't much of a drinker, at all.

"You heard me."

"I don't think I can have heard you correctly," Bane retorts. "Did you hit your head? Are you having a relapse from your catastrophic crash? Do you need me to check your ridiculous little brain for demonic influence?"

"There's no need to be rude," Alec mutters, looking down into his drink.

"You're telling me that you're willing to go against the Clave, against your superiors, for me. For a Downworlder."

Alec snorts. He can't help himself. He meets Bane's gaze, adrenaline chasing away his anxiety, and says, "No. Of course not. I'm willing to go against the Clave for my family. For my little brother. And because, this time, I'm not sure this is right. There's just..." Alec makes a frustrated noise in the back of his throat. "It's so obvious that your people are completely ignorant. They don't know anything. It's a waste of time and resources. We could be doing much more productive things."

Bane raises one pierced eyebrow. Alec could have sworn it wasn't pierced any time they've met before. "Now who's being rude?"

But, yet again, he's got that tiny, almost imperceptible smile on his lips, eyes a little softer, some of the ice melting a little.

Isabelle is watching the exchange with amusement dancing in her eyes as she leans back against Bane's expensive leather sofa, sipping delicately from her glass. One leg folds over the other, heels drawing Alec's gaze when he turns his gaze on her for want of somewhere other than Bane to look. How on earth can she walk in those contraptions? Even for Isabelle, they look deadly.

"Well," she says, with a slow smile. "Now that's settled, perhaps we should decide on a plan for how we're going to do this."
Bane opens his mouth to respond, waving his fingers in that fluid way of his to articulate his carefully selected words, but Alec's attention is hauled away, over the warlock's shoulder. There's movement in Bane's kitchen, where it's dark, lights off. Alec wonders whether the wards on the building protect against all of Valentine's plentiful and revolting experiments, because whatever that thing is...

Bane is speaking, and Isabelle is nodding, and he's fairly sure he's supposed to be contributing something of value to this discussion, but every muscle in his body is tensed, fingers half-curled in readiness to grab a knife and throw it.

The creature, whatever it is, moves suddenly. Alec can see its shadow shifting, and then it darts forward, heading straight for—

"Bane, there's—!"

Oh.

The creature - the devil, the demon-spawn, the hell-originating thing Alec was sure he'd been monitoring - leaps up onto the back of the sofa, walks across Bane's shoulder, and then jumps down into his lap, nudge pointedly at his chest. Bane's lips quirk, and he obliges, stroking a hand across the cat's head.

Cat? Kitten, surely? It's fucking tiny.

"There's a cat?" Bane asks, looking up at Alec, eyes wide with mocking horror. "Oh, goodness, draw your seraph blade, reveal your wings, light up all those tasteless runes."

Isabelle snorts. Alec flushes.

"I didn't– I thought–"

"What? That my wards had failed unprompted for the first time in centuries, and a tiny, fluffy demon had come in to murder us?" Bane rolls his eyes and looks back down at the cat that's now purring under his hand. His lips turn up, but his expression hardens again when he looks back at Alec. "You Nephilim are so trigger-happy."

Alec glares at the warlock, cheeks red, and begins to bark out a rambling mess of a retort (he's really not sure where he's going with it, but for Raziel's sake, does Bane have to take the piss out of him at every opportunity?) when the cat jumps out of Bane's lap. Instead, it pads over towards Alec, sniffs at his filthy boots, and lets out a plaintive meow, gazing up at him with wide eyes. It melts his heart, because fuck, if it isn't the most adorable thing he's ever seen.

Thoughts scattered, he crouches down slowly, and reaches a hand out to pet the cat's head. It meows, pushing into his hand and meowing again as he scratches gently behind its ears.

"Oh, no, Chairman, please don't go making friends with nasty Shadowhunters, it's really not a good life choice," Bane says, and by the Angel, he actually sits up a little straighter on the sofa, as though he's concerned for his cat's welfare. "They'll shoot you because they think you're a demon and feel no remorse."

"Excuse you," Alec murmurs. A smile stretches across his face when the cat blinks up at him, entirely ignorant to the words of his owner, and paws at Alec's shoe. "Does he have a name? Just Chairman?"

"Chairman Meow." Bane has his lips pursed. "I swear to Lilith, Shadowhunter, if you stab my cat
"Why the hell would I stab your cat?" Alec demands, pausing in his petting to shoot Bane a scowl. Chairman Meow - it's such a stupid name, for such a tiny little cat - purrs a low noise of protest, and bats Alec's hand with his paw.


"Yes." Bane glares pointedly. "Give me my cat back. He's mine."

Alec rolls his eyes again, then scoops up the cat, which makes a plaintive noise at the abrupt change in position but curls into Alec's arms nonetheless, and deposits it in Bane's lap before the warlock can say another word. Bane stares up at him in surprise.

Alec sits down beside Isabelle, ignoring her smirk. "Shall we get on with actually formulating this plan, then?"

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They spend hours in deep discussion. Alec is entirely convinced that Bane is only tolerating his presence because he gains immense enjoyment and satisfaction from ripping Alec's dignity to shreds every other sentence.

It's incredibly irritating. But beyond the relentless teasing, he has to admit that Bane is smart. He knows what he's talking about. And he knows the way Shadowhunters - and the Clave, in particular - think.

Although it's a somewhat unnerving realisation, Alec supposes that nobody ever became a high warlock utilising ignorance and stupidity. Magnus Bane certainly didn't.

(Fear and intimidation and sheer demonic power, maybe. But that's another matter, and one that he isn't particularly keen to ponder, because, the devil's offspring or not, Alec has seen first-hand that Bane's magic can do good things, not just terrible things.)

"You can come again, my dear," Bane says to Isabelle as he walks her to the door, acting as though Alec isn't in the room. "I see why Meliorn likes you."

Isabelle smiles. It stretches right across her face, and she flutters her eyelashes at Bane. She's flirting - she and Bane have been flirting all night - but it's a playful, light, friendly kind of flirting, with no real intention behind any of it, rather than something sexual—or even romantic. Alec can tell that Isabelle isn't interested in the warlock. He's uncomfortably aware of the way she acts when she's set her sights on someone.

"You'll have to tell me what brand of make-up you buy, sometime," she says in reply, gesturing to Bane's face. "It looks fantastic."

Bane has been returning her smile for the last five minutes, but it softens into something gentler now, something amused, something with a hint of fondness.

Alec will never understand how Isabelle can walk into a room, say hello, and make everybody like her, instantly. She's that kind of person. Her personality is infectious: she's like a beacon, eyes turning to her wherever she goes, for the daring way she looks or the confident way she holds herself or the music of laughter bubbling up her throat.

And, clearly, she's worked her magic on the High Warlock of Brooklyn. Bane, who's a mass
murderer, who's slaughtered thousands, who bows to nobody, is watching a nineteen year old Shadowhunter with such an easy, unguarded expression of warmth.

Only Isabelle.

"I've had a few centuries to practise," Bane says, with a dismissive flourish that's charged with a lot less snark and ostentatiousness than any that have been directed at Alec. "But thank you. I try my best to be the epitome of good fashion."

Isabelle lets out a laugh. "After centuries, I'd expect you to have had it down to a fine art at least a hundred years ago."

"This perfection--" Bane points at himself "--was cultivated before YouTube tutorials were available to teach me how to do winged eyeliner, my dear Isabelle."

"Tragic." Isabelle's lips twitch, but then her face falls into something more serious. "Good luck, Magnus."

Just how has Isabelle secured rights to being on a first-name-basis with Bane? How does she do things like this? And all non-verbally?

Chairman Meow, who's been pacing on the sofa for the last two minutes, has clearly had enough of Alec ignoring him; he leaps up, claws catching on Alec's sweater and digging painfully into his shoulder. Alec hisses, and pulls the Chairman off, ending up with the cat cradled in his arms, purring. He swears the damn thing looks smug.

"And to you," Bane says. "Finding a Shadowhunter like yourself is shockingly rare. I'm keeping you in my social contacts." He tips his head to one side a little. "May I be presumptuous, and assume you are not averse to Downworld parties?"

Isabelle's entire face lights up, and she grins. "I love them."

"Consider yourself invited. So long as you two hold up your end of this deal."

"Barring any disasters," Isabelle tells him, with the utmost sincerity, "you can count on it. I swear on the Angel."

Bane's kohl-rimmed eyes study her for a moment, lashes dipping down as he blinks so they nearly brush his cheekbones. "Thank you."

Then he claps his hands together, and the intense, decisive aura that sprung up between them disappears. "Excellent. Now off you go, Isabelle, and I'll send your brother along shortly. Don't bother waiting anywhere nearby."

Isabelle's eyebrows shoot up in surprise, and her eyes dart over Bane's shoulder to where Alec is standing, Bane's cat licking and nudging at the back of his hand, pining for some more stroking.

"Is there any particular reason you require my brother?" Isabelle asks, and there's an edge to her voice, suddenly, dark eyes narrowed just a touch as she pushes her shoulders back, draws herself up taller, and scrutinises Bane unblinkingly.

"Yes," Bane says, and Alec stares at him. "Now off you pop, darling, or I will make you, no matter how much I like you. This is my home, after all."
Raising her hands, palms forward in surrender, Isabelle inclines her head. "Of course. Thank you for listening to us tonight. And for not decapitating my brother. He can't help running his mouth."

"I'm aware," Bane says dryly. "If I despised him half as much as I despise the majority of your kind, he'd be kindling for my fireplace by now, so don't worry about all the heinous things I might do to him."

Isabelle grins. "I trust you. Goodnight, Magnus. I'll see you in a bit, Alec, and don't think for one second you're escaping this conversation."

Alec gaped at her. "What? What conversation? What are you—"

"This conversation," she says, gesturing at Bane, and then at him. He blinks. "What, you just weren't going to tell anyone that the Clave's most wanted criminal is living a life of luxury in New York with his cat, hermano?"

Alec's heart skips a beat. "Izzy—"

Isabelle's face breaks into a smile, eyes twinkling. "I'm proud of you, big brother."

And, with that, she gives Bane one last smile, and then sweeps out of the loft, clicking the door gently shut behind her, leaving Alec standing cuddling a warlock's cat in the middle of his living room, with Magnus Bane staring at him, fingers restless.

***

For a moment, they both stand still, staring at each other. Alec wants to look away, wants to avert his eyes from the warlock, because that look is so intense, even though he's glamoured his eyes to a human brown with a normal iris—but he can't. He can't look away.

Bane's fingers are still shifting restlessly, feeling over the metal of his rings and then running them round his fingers, in one direction and then the other. It's like... It's like some kind of nervous tic. Which is a bizarre thought. Because the High Warlock of Brooklyn shouldn't have nervous tics. Because he's the High Warlock of Brooklyn. He's above that. He's Magnus Bane. He's far too powerful to get nervous.

Chairman Meow makes a purring noise of indignant protest, snapping the both of them out of their staring. Alec glances down at the cat, and strokes between its ears in an effort to appease him.

"I can't believe you've seduced my cat," Bane mutters, shaking his head. "A Nephilim, Chairman, really? You traitor."

Alec raises his eyebrows, but doesn't comment. Instead, he says, "Are you keeping me here, again?"

"No," Bane shakes his head and snaps his fingers, sending their used glasses to the kitchen with a glimmer of blue magic. "No, I just wanted to thank you."

Alec blinks at him while the cat in his arms nuzzles into his neck and paws at his chest. "Thank me?"

"Mm." Bane gives him a lazy smile, but it's betrayed but the intense look in his glamoured eyes, and Alec feels his confusion grow. "Whatever your motives, you're doing something no Nephilim I've ever known would dare to do."

"My brother—"
"I know," Bane says, gently. "I know this is about your brother, and about keeping your family safe. But you could have done that by leading a team here to make an attempt on my life."

Alec has to hold himself back from scoffing at that, because good god, he'd have to be stupid to attempt to kill Bane in his own home. Stupid, or exceptionally arrogant to the point of naïveté. An assassination attempt on Bane would be a suicide mission.

"I think," Bane says, carefully, head cocked slightly to one side, "I may have misjudged you, little angel."

They stare at each other again, Alec in astonishment, Bane with narrowed eyes, calculating Alec's every breath. Alec swallows, running his fingers through Chairman's fur in an attempt to hide the fact that they're trembling.

He's not sure why. But his palms are sweaty, and his heart is pounding, and he feels like he might collapse in a moment if he doesn't find some way to break eye contact with this warlock: he feels like Bane is gazing past every barrier he's ever thrown up, right into his very soul.

Which is ridiculous. Because no magic can do such a thing—at least, not without the recipient being very aware of such an invasion.

Heaving in a deep breath, Alec says, "Warlock Bane—"

It breaks the trance. Instantly. Bane rolls his eyes with so much drama it makes Alec pause, words dying on the tip of his tongue, because he's not sure what he's done. All he's done is address the warlock—why does that warrant such disdain?

"Magnus," Bane corrects him, finality in his voice, jaw set. He's probably four inches shorter than Alec, not counting his swept up hair - although at this distance of a few metres, it doesn't really notice - but with the way Bane is staring Alec down, the Shadowhunter feels about three feet tall.

It takes Alec a moment to clock what Bane means, and when he does, he feels heat rush to his cheeks, and he stutters out a meaningless jumble of syllables in protest.

Bane rolls his eyes again. "Very well, Nephilim Lightwood."

Alec pulls a face. "That sounds ridiculous."

"Precisely."

Bane folds his arms and tips his chin up, rings casting glittering shapes of light again the wall. Alec makes the mistake of glancing down, and feels his eyes drift to Bane's exposed chest without his permission. His cheeks get hotter, and he chokes down his embarrassment.

"Species titles are rather unpleasant. Especially when that title has been used to oppress my people for centuries," Bane continues, either not noticing or uncaring of Alec's momentary distraction. "So if I hear Warlock Bane out of your mouth once more, I'm going to call you Nephilim Lightwood for the duration of our acquaintance."

"What am I supposed to call you, then?" Alec demands, unconsciously shifting Chairman Meow in his grip and holding the cat closer to his chest. He spares a moment to be mildly surprised that Bane hasn't snatched the animal away from him yet, but the thought dissipates as soon as it appears, because he's more concerned with the conversation at hand. "I can't call you—"

"And why, exactly, is that?" Bane asks, voice turning to ice, glamour flickering so his cat eyes flash
at Alec, the pupils narrowed to slits, before they're replaced with brown once again. It makes fear spike in Alec's gut.

"Because you're the High Warlock of Brooklyn," Alec says, voice steady despite his thudding heart.

"Yes, and?" Bane raises an eyebrow. "I'm a warlock, so you can't respect my wishes about something so intrinsically simple, is that it?"

"No, you're- You're the High Warlock. You- You're—"

"What?"

"You're my superior!"

Alec hurls the words out, louder and harsher than he intended, and he clamps his mouth shut too late to catch himself, pressing his lips together. Bane stills, gaping at him.

"Excuse me?" Bane asks, eventually.

"I can't address—"

"No." Bane holds up a hand. "No, you just called me your superior."

"I didn't mean superior in the sense of going round giving me orders," Alec says, hotly, because he's mortified, and his knee-jerk response to being embarrassed is to be outwardly defensive. "I didn't mean you're- you're- But you're centuries old. You could snap your fingers and devastate the city without blinking an eye. You're more powerful than I am. I can't go around calling you Magnus like—"

"Like what? Like I asked you to?"

Bane takes a step towards him, arms still folded over his chest, drawing attention to his open shirt front, but Alec forces himself not to glance down. Bane exudes confidence and power, with the way he's got his chin held high and his shoulders pushed back, spine straight. The way he carries himself is enough, in and of itself, to convince Alec that this being has the capability of burning down a city with ease.

It sends a shiver down Alec's spine. But it's not entirely one of terror, or of discomfort. It is a little bit like that, because Raziel, Bane is, hands-down, the most powerful person Alec has ever shared space with. But it's also...something else. Something Alec can't pin down. Something that makes his throat dry.

"If you stopped calling me Warlock Bane," Bane says, voice quiet, but laced with a sharp edge of danger, "perhaps you'd stop thinking of me as warlock, and start thinking of me as something more human, and less demonic. Because I assure you, Alexander, I do not walk around thinking of you as angelic."

Alec sees the flaw in Bane's argument immediately, and he knows, he knows it's different, but he can't help himself. "But you insist on calling me—"

"Yes, little angel, I do. It's called satire, darling."

Alec bites down on his lower lip so hard it hurts, but he can't stop his lips quirking up, because something about the way Bane said it, something about the glint of mischief in his eyes, makes Alec want to laugh for days.
Bane lets himself smile. It's one of those small, calculated things, but it's better. It's better than the harsh way he's been watching Alec for the last several minutes.

"I am going to want my cat back, at some point," Bane says, tracking Chairman's cuddling movements with his eyes. "You can't kidnap him."

Almost absently - almost, because Alec is fairly certain that everything Bane does has intention behind it - Bane reaches a hand out and runs his fingers over the cat's fur, rubbing gently. And Alec finds himself watching Bane, watching the way his head bends forwards, and his lips part just a little, and his eyelashes dip and lower to hide the softening of his eyes.

"You're a very confusing man, Alexander," Bane murmurs, without looking up at him. "I don't quite know what to think."

Alec shrugs. "I'm really not anything special."

"Maybe. Maybe not."

This time, Bane lifts his eyes, and blinks up at him. All that dark eye make-up, all those harsh edges of black liner and stormy clouds of dark shadows—it all looks softer up closer. Alec can see the minute imperfections of his eyeliner, the deliberate little smudges under his lower lashes, the flecks of glitter than have landed further afield than presumably intended.

"I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt," Bane tells him, and his dark eyes are serious, but they're not threatening. "You and your sister. I'm choosing to trust you, with this. But that doesn't mean I trust you unequivocally, and it doesn't mean that this is some kind of alliance."

"I understand," Alec says, because he does.

"I think you should go, now." Bane's voice is low in the nighttime quiet of his loft, and still, still, Alec can't help but find him entrancing. It's becoming increasingly difficult to remember that this is exactly how Downworlders like Bane reel in their victims.

This is a mission. Alright, it's not a Clave-sanctioned mission - in fact, it's exactly the opposite - but it's still a mission. He's got a job to do. He's freeing Downworlders who are being held merely so the Conclave can claim to be doing something of worth, so that the Clave has a leg to stand on, and he's freeing them because if he doesn't, the most dangerous warlock in the United States is going to slaughter his family.

He has to remember that. He has to remember that he's only doing this, only breaking every rule ever laid down, because Bane has threatened the Institute. Threatened his siblings, his friends, his parabatai.

Although, some small, niggling voice in the back of his mind reminds him that Bane could well have friends being held in the Institute. Angel, he knows he does—he's friends with Raphael Santiago. Santiago, whom his mother slapped across the face, burnt with the silver of her ring, while already draining him of life by trapping him in shackles of silver metal.

Maybe Bane is right. Maybe the Clave is taking this too far. Maybe they are bending the rules laid out by the Accords to breaking point. Maybe that's a larger part of the reason why Alec is here than he'd like to admit. It's certainly at least half the reason Isabelle is doing this.

"I'm sorry," Alec blurts out, and feels his eyes widen, because he hadn't meant to say that.
Bane’s brow lifts. "You’re shockingly polite, for a Shadowhunter. That must be at least the third time you’ve apologised to me, and sincerely, at that. What have you done to feel so much guilt you have to lower yourself to apologise to a warlock?"

Ignoring the jibe, Alec says, "Just...in general. I'm sorry."

Bane’s expression gentles, and his fingers curl loosely along the top of his cat's head. "You're a soldier, little angel. You're not solely to blame for the decisions of your leaders. But forgive me if I don't let you use that as an excuse."

"I don't blame you," Alec says. "I just— I just don't understand. All the stories they tell, all the incidents that are in your file—"

"Been reading up on me, Shadowhunter?" Bane asks, the corner of his mouth quirking.

"Maybe," Alec says, stubbornly refusing to let himself be distracted by the embarrassment that claws at him. He did read on up Bane—but only to look at all the devastating catastrophes he's caused over the centuries, so Alec could persuade himself that whatever kindness he sometimes thinks he sees in Bane doesn't forgive all he's done. "But you don't seem like the same person. I don't see how you can have done all those terrible things, and yet also be...this. You saved my life for nothing, and you're willing to take a risk and work with two Shadowhunters, and—"

"You're thinking in black and white again, darling." There's so much patience in Bane's eyes, so much wisdom, that Alec remembers, abruptly, that the man in front of him is centuries old, whatever he looks like. "Nothing in the world is that simple. Certainly not people."

"I know that. But it's just—"

"It's just easier to see Downworlders as other, and not put too much thought into it?"

"Yeah."

And, however shameful that admission is, at least it's true. Because it is. It's so much easier to think of Downworlders as a minor annoyance - as impulsive, and irritating, and potentially dangerous, things that need close monitoring but not too much interference - than as beings just as complex as Shadowhunters and mundanes.

"Alexander," Bane says, and something in his voice, something that borders on compassion, makes Alec look back up at him from where he'd dropped his gaze down to Chairman Meow to avoid looking Bane in the eye. "Considering what most of your people are like, I don't think you're a bad person. God knows I, of all people, should know the dangers of condemning an entire group of people as evil personified. Even if my experience with the Nephilim suggests that that's not so far from the truth, I won't mindlessly despise every individual without an ounce of consideration."

Alec shifts uncomfortably, and all that stops him averting his eyes is the intensity behind Bane's words, the sincerity in his expression.

"Little angel, what matters more than anything else is what's here." Bane points to where Alec's heart sits behind his ribcage, thudding lightly. "And that you act on that, not on what other people try to tell you is the best thing to do."

Alec huffs out a tiny little laugh. "Now you're definitely giving me life lessons."

Bane smiles. "It would be nice to impart some of my wisdom onto one of the Nephilim. Perhaps it will spread a little." The warlock drops his gaze to his cat, and reaches out to take him back. "I think
I'd like my cat back, now. And a ten hour sleep to replenish my sanity after dealing with you Nephilim for so many hours."

It's a dismissal, Alec knows it is, but he doesn't mind. He nods in acquiescence, and passes Chairman Meow back to his owner.

"Say goodbye, Chairman," Bane says, as he walks Alec to the door. He's cuddling the cat, and fuck if it isn't a little bit adorable, the way he's talking to his cat like it's a child.

And—

Where the hell did that come from?

"Say goodbye to the nice Shadowhunter who managed not to stab you," Bane is cooing. "There's an oxymoron, if ever there was one."

Alec rubs his lips together. "Goodnight, Bane."

Bane sighs. "At least you've dropped the Warlock. Baby steps, I suppose."

"I can't," Alec says, almost pleadingly, because it goes against everything, every moral code ever ingrained into him, to refer to a Downworlder by their first name, to refer to a High Warlock by their first name, to refer to someone more powerful, someone therefore of a higher status than him, by their first name.

"It's okay, Alexander," Bane says, with a little chuckle, running his painted fingernails absently through the Chairman's fur. "I've been called much worse things than my name. I was antagonising you a little bit. But if you fancy dropping all this ridiculous formality, I won't curse you for it."

Alec looks at him steadily, trying not to let himself be pulled in by Bane's teasing again. He's not going to react. He's not.

"Goodnight," Alec says again, firmly.

This time, Bane sighs, but his lips are still twitching, trying not to tug up into a smile. "Goodnight, little angel. And please, don't disappoint me."

"I'll try my best," Alec tells him.

"If you try your best, darling, by definition you won't disappoint me."

Bane doesn't wait for a reply, to that. He opens the door with a flourish, gestures Alec out, and clicks it shut behind him the moment he's over the threshold.

Alec exhales, tension simultaneously bleeding out of his body, and crawling back in. One kind of stress leaves, to be replaced by that of a different cause and origin.

Part of him would really much rather go back in there and play around with Bane's stupid cat for an eternity.

Chapter End Notes
Soooooo ;) Thoughts?!

Also, quick question: on a scale of 1-10, how interested are you all in the minor relationships that will eventually make some sort of appearance in the story? They're all listed in the relationships tags, so let me know how much you care about them, or whether you've got one in particular that you love/loathe. They'll all feature to some degree, but if you all hate one of them, I won't bore you with it too much, so let me know in the comments!

Much love <3
Pigeon

Chapter Summary

In which Isabelle is proud, Jace knows exactly what's up for once, and Magnus is an emotional drunk.

Chapter Notes

Pigeons are all about home, familial love, and security. And in line with that, this chapter focuses a lot on our platonic relationships—Jalec, Alec and Izzy, Magnus and his friends.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alec is walking back towards the Institute from the subway station with his hands shoved deep in the pockets of his gear, head bowed. It's freezing, and he really wishes he'd thought to put on a sweater beneath his jacket, because a worn cotton t-shirt isn't doing much to combat the cold.

Something lands with a light thud on the pavement next to him. He wouldn't have heard it, if his hearing rune weren't active. He turns his head, unsurprised to see Isabelle straightening up from a crouch, wrapping her whip back around her wrist.

"How on earth," she says, "did my law-abiding, boring-ass big brother manage to keep the fact that Magnus Bane saved his life, and is lounging around in New York right under the Clave's nose, a secret for so many weeks?"

"Three weeks," Alec corrects her, with a slight roll of his eyes.

"Magnus was the warlock you let go, when we trashed that meeting between those Downworlders and the Circle. That's why you told me he was different." Isabelle smirks at him.

"What do you want me to say, Izzy?" Alec asks, as they continue walking. "That I'm allying myself with the most dangerous Downworlder in the Clave's directory, and I don't know whether I'm making the biggest mistake of my life?"

"Oh, come on, Alec." Isabelle rolls her eyes, and elbows him in the ribs. "Stop being such a drama queen. What did he want to say to you, just now?"

Alec opens his mouth to tell her, and then pauses. Because...what had been the point of that conversation, exactly? "I don't really know," he admits. "We just...talked. And argued a bit, which seems to happen every time we talk."

"Every time?" Isabelle asks, eyebrows shooting up, a grin curling at her lips. "How many times have you seen him, exactly?"

"A few. Are we done with this interrogation, now?"
"For now." She hooks her arm through his. "I'm impressed. Look at you, making friends with Downworlders."

He scoffs, stepping around a puddle glittering on the sidewalk. "I wouldn't say we're exactly friends."

"No? He's fond of you, and you've gone to him for help when you were desperate, and you seem to quite like him."

Alec turns to stare at her incredulously. Bane is not *fond* of him. Not even slightly. If Bane harboured any ounce of care, they wouldn't end up at each other's throats during every interaction. They certainly wouldn't have ended up throwing knives and balls of deadly magic at each other.

"You're deluding yourself," he says, shaking his head. "Bane hates me. He's definitely not fond of me. That's...ridiculous."

"Whatever you think." Isabelle lets out a little laugh. "God, you're so oblivious."

"Iz, in case you didn't notice, you walked in on us fighting, and he spent the entire night trying his best to verbally tear me to shreds."

"Maybe you've got some difficulties expressing your newfound friendship," Isabelle acknowledges. "But considering how the Clave has treated Magnus, it's pretty astonishing that he spares you a second glance. He agreed to call off his whole attack on the Institute for you."

They reach the Institute steps, and Alec looks heavenward at his sister's words as he pauses outside the front door. "Yeah, but only because we're going to do the dirty work for him."

"Come on, Alec, if you thought the Downworlders weren't innocent you would never agree to do this. You're just in denial, because you can't—"

"Alright, alright, enough." He shakes his head at her. "You shouldn't have followed me like that, you know." He's not angry - he can't find it in himself to be angry, when he's so worried - but Isabelle sneaking up on Bane's wards like that had been dangerous.

Isabelle rolls her eyes. "I'm sorry," she says, and it sounds mostly sincere. "You wouldn't have told me where you were going if you knew I was there, though. I was worried. And curious."

"I know. Just...don't sneak up on the High Warlock of Brooklyn."

"How was I supposed to know?" She gives him an incredulous look. "I didn't think you'd be popping out to chat with a high warlock!

He gives her a dirty look, and she sticks her tongue out at him as they mutually move to head inside.

Alec pushes the heavy oak door shut behind them, and shoots Izzy an urgent look. "Nobody can overhear us, or we'll have our runes stripped."

"You're so paranoid. Fine. I'll see you in a bit."

Alec reaches out and grabs Isabelle's wrist gently as she turns to leave. She quirks an eyebrow at him; he feels his expression soften, and pulls her into him gently, wrapping his arms around her. He can feel her smile against his chest, her hair soft against his jaw, and he rests his cheek against the top of her head.
"Thank you," he tells her, quietly.

"You're welcome, hermano." She tightens her hold on him a little. "Give yourself a little more credit, sometimes."

They pull back, and Isabelle shoots him the kind of smile that makes him believe, in his heart, that maybe what he's doing is exactly the right thing.

Even if his head is having trouble seeing it that way.

***

"You're back late."

The voice of his parabatai makes Alec jump out of his skin. He whirls round, hand resting on the handle of his bedroom door, and sees Jace leaning against the doorframe of his own room, arms crossed over his chest, dressed only in a pair of low-hanging sweatpants with his stele sticking out the top of the waistband. His body is decorated with swirling black runes, just like every other Shadowhunter in the building, marks scorched into pale skin layered over muscle like silk over steel.

"I told you, I needed to clear my head."

Jace raises his eyebrows. "For...four and a half hours?"

"Isabelle came out to find me. We got preoccupied. Ran into a few demons."

Alec feels guilt, deep inside him, gnawing at his gut. He feels terrible for lying to Jace, but he can't involve anybody else he loves in this direct move of betrayal against the Clave. It's bad enough that Isabelle has involved herself. If they get caught, he can't have Jace at fault, too.

It was supposed to be him. Just him. He was supposed to be the only one taking a risk, by doing this, by disobeying direct orders. He was supposed to be the only one who could be prosecuted, could have his runes stripped, could be cast out of the Shadow World entirely and tossed onto the streets to live as a mundane, if someone catches him.

But Isabelle's at risk, too. And he can't - he can't - get Jace into this mess, too. He can't.

Jace doesn't blink. "Really."

"Yeah." Alec clears his throat. "Why are you still up? Is everything okay?"

"No, not really."

Jace shrugs nonchalantly, and concern shoots through Alec's chest, because Raziel, he's been so preoccupied, by Bane and the Downworlders and Max and Valentine, and now by Izzy's involvement in his mess, has he been neglecting his parabatai? Has he missed something?

He feels himself scanning Jace up and down, looking for evidence of something physical that's wrong. He looks fine. He doesn't look like he's injured, and the way he's lounging against the doorframe means he's surely not in pain, but still, he could be pretending. Or it could be something non-physical that he's missed. Something—

"I'm worried about you," Jace says, and the admission knocks the breath out of Alec.

He gapes at Jace. "You— What?"
"I'm worried about you. You've been acting weird for weeks. Since you-- Since you fell."

Alec wonders whether Jace had been about to say "since you nearly died".

"Weird how?" Alec asks, and forces out a laugh of confusion. "I'm fine."

"You keep sneaking off. Don't think I haven't noticed. And you're being secretive. You're never secretive. You've never got anything to be secretive about."

Alec nearly bursts out laughing at that, because good god, he's been keeping the same secret close to his chest since he was thirteen years old. When necessity dictates that he must, he's fantastic at keeping secrets.

"I'm not being secretive."

"So then what is it?" Jace asks. "What's bothering you so much?"

"The same things that are bothering everyone else. Valentine. The Downworlders. This- this threat from Magnus Bane."

"Alec." Jace's voice drops, losing its harsh edge, and he unfolds him arms. He crosses the hallway to stand before Alec, and looks up at him with worry written in his eyes. "Whatever it is, you can tell me. We're parabatai."

Alec closes his eyes. "Jace—"

Abruptly, Jace swings open Alec's bedroom door, pushes Alec inside, and shuts it behind them, etching a locking rune and a silencing rune into the wood. He shoves his stele back into his waistband, and tips his chin up.

"Nobody's going to hear you except me. So tell me."

Irritation wells in Alec, even though he knows Jace is just trying to help, and he rolls his eyes, digging the nails of one hand into his palm. "For the last time, Jace, it's nothing," he snaps.

Hurt flashes in Jace's eyes, but he covers it quickly with an impenetrable expression of neutrality. Alec hates it when Jace does that, he loathes that expression with every inch of his being, because it's the one Jace uses to push people away when they try to help him if he's hurting. It had been the bane of Alec's teenage years.

Alec tries to gentle his voice a little through his frustration. "I'm fine. I'm—"

"Have you been seeing someone?" Jace asks, abruptly, and folds his arms across his chest. "Is that it?"

Alec wrinkles his nose. "What? No, of course not. In case you haven't noticed, we're in the middle of a war, I haven't exactly got time to go gallivanting off on dates."

"Everyone else has," Jace says, with a nonchalant shrug of his shoulders. "Dates, or sex, or whatever floats your boat."

Alec parts his lips a little and screws his eyes halfway shut in mildly revolted astonishment. "No."

"Look, Alec, whoever this guy is, if he's a mundane or something, it doesn't matter. You don't have to be ashamed of—"
Alec feels every cell in his body freeze at Jace's words, and he stares at his parabatai, unmoving, heart pounding hard against his ribs in double-time. He rubs the pads of his fingers together, biting down on the inside of his cheek at he feels all colour drain from his face. Panic consumes him whole, constricting around his lungs like an iron band until he can barely breathe.

"What?" Jace asks, exasperation in his voice. "What is it?"

Alec’s throat feels tight, but he manages to choke out, "You— What did you just say?"

"Mundane isn't a dirty word, Alec," Jace says with a smirk.

"No, you—" Alec sucks in a deep, shaky breath, because his chest feels painfully tight, and breathing is quickly becoming a thing of the past. "You said—"

Raziel, he can't even make himself say it.

But Jace seems to understand, because his expression softens. "Guy?" he suggests, and Alec jerks his head in what he hopes Jace interprets as a nod. "Alec, we're parabatai. I'm your brother. I'm closer than that. I know you're gay."

The word - that horrible, horrible word - strikes right at Alec’s heart, and he feels like Jace has just stolen all the oxygen in the room. He swallows, throat raw and tight, and closes his eyes, as though not seeing Jace will somehow block out the reality laid out in front of him.

Jace knows. His oblivious, ridiculous parabatai, who is even more blind than Alec is, knows. He's tried so, so hard, to hide it, to make sure nobody else finds out, but—

"You know," Alec breathes out, after several seconds of painful tense silence.

"Of course I know." A hand rests on his arm, and it's probably meant to be soothing, but it just burns, and god, Alec can't fucking breathe. "It doesn't matter. It's the last thing that matters. Especially to me. Come on, man, look at me."

Alec does, pulling his eyes open slowly, fear pulsing in his veins. "I—"

"Alec." Jace's other hand comes up, fingertips digging into his biceps, the pressure grounding Alec just enough to keep him in the present. "It's fine. It's who you are. I really don't care who you want to fuck."

Alec glares at him, and Jace chuckles.

"Alright, alright. Kiss. Date. Marry. Whatever. You know what I mean. It doesn't matter. It's not the most important thing about you. Not even close. It's just a part of who you are, like anything else. Like the fact that you're a stubborn asshole, and emotionally stunted, and a bit of a dickhead most of the time, and—"

Alec shoves him, a small, strangled laugh bubbling up out of his throat despite himself. Jace grins at him, wicked and teasing and full of the weighty emotion born from years of being the other half of Alec's soul.

"Fuck off," Alec tells him, and Jace smirks.

"I'm serious. You are a bit of a dickhead, but I don't care about that, and I don't care about the fact that you're gay. I've known for years. Ever since you told me that chick from Idris 'shouldn't be distracting me' when we were seventeen." Jace snorts. "By the Angel, Alec, every guy in the
Institute between the age of fourteen and forty was gaping at her. Except you."

Alec rolls his eyes, but there's a smile tugging at his lips that he can't quite fend off. The constricting
band of panic that was tightening around his chest, squeezing his lungs and crushing his ribs, is
loosening with every word falling from Jace's mouth, and the awful, terrified churning in his stomach
is settling.

"You really don't care?" Alec asks, ducking his chin a little to look Jace in the eye. "It really doesn't
bother you? At all? It's not weird?"

"Why would it be weird?" Jace shrugs, and slogs him lightly in the arm. "No, Alec, I really don't
care. So, who've you been seeing?"

Alec opens his mouth to deny that he's been seeing anyone - because he hasn't - but then he decides
that he may as well tease Jace a bit.

"Magnus Bane," he says, completely deadpan.

Jace stares at him. "Pardon?"

"Magnus Bane."

"As in...? Holy fucking shit, Alec, are you serious?"

Alec bursts out laughing at the look of incredulity on Jace's face, and he doubles over, cheeks
aching. He can't remember the last time he laughed like that, and it's over something so silly, but he
can hear Jace laughing too, so he supposes it doesn't matter why they're laughing.

"Of course not. But," Alec says, biting down on his lip. "If you really want to know—"

"I do."

When Alec is finished telling Jace everything, from Bane saving his life when he fell to the
discussion he and Izzy had with him earlier, Jace sits down on the edge of Alec's bed, heavily, and
stares into space for a moment.

"Are you serious?" Jace asks eventually, raising his eyes to Alec. "You're completely going against
the Clave, you're going to do some kind of jailbreak, and your ally is Magnus Bane? The Clave's
most wanted criminal? Whom you've been protecting for weeks?"

"He saved my life," Alec says. "For free. He didn't ask for anything in return. Not handing him over
to the Clave was the least I could do in return."

Jace lets out a low whistle, and shakes his head. "I'm impressed. I'm also pissed you didn't tell me,
because this sounds like fun."

Alec groans. He lets himself flop onto the foot of the bed beside Jace, and says, "Really, Jace?"

"Why not? You can't tell me you're planning this and then expect me to not want to help. Max is my
brother, too, in case you haven't noticed. This is my family as well as yours. I have everything to lose
if Magnus Bane attacks us, just like you and Izzy do. I have you to lose, just like you were worried
about losing me."

The rune on Alec's torso, the rune Jace burned into his skin when they were teenagers, aches at the
earnest intensity in Jace's voice. He and Jace don't do this very often. They don't have heart-to-hearts
in which they express their innermost feelings. So hearing it, hearing that Jace loves him, and cares
about him, just like he does Jace, makes his heart tighten and his stomach twist with fondness.

"I know." Alec exhales, and looks down at where their legs are a mere inch or so apart on the bed. "I
know. It's just... What if I'm not doing the right thing, Jace?"

"You've got good instincts. And I agree with you. I don't think the Downworlders we're torturing
know anything, I think what we're doing is pointless, and I think Bane is right to be pissed."

"We're not torturing anyone," Alec mutters, but it sounds weak, even to his own ears. The snort Jace
lets out tells him that his parabatai doesn't believe it, either.

"I trust you," Jace tells him, after several seconds of quiet. "I trust your gut. I trust that you're doing
the right thing. And if this goes wrong, I'm going to stand with you, no matter what."

Alec looks across at him, and finds that Jace's eyes are already on his face. They exchange a smile,
small, careful, measured, and then Jace has an arm around Alec's shoulders, and Alec twists to hug
him back. They're chest-to-chest, arms tight around each other's backs, breathing slowly, heartbeats
and breaths in synch; Alec lets his eyes slip shut.

They don't move for a long moment, twisted to face each other where they're sat on the end of Alec's
bed. And Raziel, Alec appreciates it, because keeping secrets from Jace is horrible; having
everything off his chest has him feeling overwhelmingly light, and impossibly exhausted. It feels like
he's shedding some of the weight, sharing it with Jace, and Jace is shouldering it easily, moving to
hold him up for a moment while he collapses.

Because that's what they do. That's why they're parabatai.

"It's gonna be okay," Jace tells him, quietly. "Whatever it is that's worrying you so much - this thing
with Bane, or something else - it's gonna be okay."

Alec huffs out a laugh, but it's bitter - so, so bitter - and he feels his chin digging into Jace's shoulder
as he lets himself tense all over. "You know that the something else is not going to be okay."

Jace pulls back, keeping his hands on Alec's shoulders, and smiles at him, gently. It's the kind of
smile that only a privileged few, those people Jace loves, ever get to see: Alec, and Izzy, and Max,
and, once in a blue moon, their parents.

"It's no wonder we became parabatai, Alec, you're a bigger pessimist than I am."

Alec cracks a smile, because it's probably true.

"If it's really not okay," Jace says, "then I'm here. And Izzy's here. And we're not going anywhere.
We're your family, and we love you a hell of a lot more than we care for the damn Clave. They pull
any shit on you, I'm shoving the mortal sword up their asses, consequences be damned."

Alec chokes on a the laugh that erupts from him, the malicious glint in Jace's eyes more than a little
terrifying.

"Please don't," he begs him. "I'm pretty sure that would make things worse, not better."

You know that, right?"

"Yeah, Jace." Alec lets himself smile, and he squeezes Jace's forearm. "I love you too."
It's been such a long time since he and Jace last stayed up together for hours, talking out of their asses, words that don't make sense strewn together and meaningless sentences tumbling from their lips, sending them off into snorts of laughter every time they say something stupid.

Outside, it's quiet, and it's dark, the moonlight and the stars casting light into Alec's bedroom in hollow patterns. It's long, long past midnight, well into the early hours of the morning, and he's leaning against the creaky old headboard of his hard-ass bed with his brother, errant thoughts tossed into the space between them, and by the Angel, it feels so nice.

Jace falls asleep before Alec does. He's practically halfway through a sentence, yawning every other word, eyes drooping, and Alec can't tell what he's saying, can barely understand him, and then he's asleep, head mushed against a pillow, legs sprawled out over Alec's sheets.

And Alec...

Well, when Alec wakes again in the morning, he's on his side, facing Jace, in an awkward position that's left him with a crick in his neck. But he can't help but smile a little. He's still fully clothed, save for his boots and his jacket, and he wonders how Jace just knew, so intuitively, without being asked, how much he'd needed a night of companionship, without the weight of expectations hanging heavy from his shoulders.

***

Across the city, Magnus Bane is sprawled on his bed, away from human companions, with his sleeping cat curled up in his lap instead. Photo albums are strewn on the crimson sheets around him, and copies of old paintings, and little trinkets of people whose faces he can no longer quite picture in his mind.

There's a bottle of whiskey sitting on his nightstand, a crystal glass in his hand, and a broken eyeliner pencil still in two pieces where he threw it across the room with a scream of frustration that had cracked the mirror on his chaotic dressing table.

He opened the whiskey before he took out the box full of all the things he doesn't want to forget. Because Ragnor always told him that his dependency on alcohol is a terrible way to deal with the world when it kicks him a touch too hard, and he remembers all the arguments they had about it every time he unscrews a bottle and chugs back four units without bothering to pour it into something first.

Especially now. Especially when he's been doing it more and more regularly, recently, and it's been getting less and less effective.

So, tonight, he's limited himself. And he's pulled out all of this crap, all of these well-worn photos and knickknacks that would look like tosh to most people, but bullet-point half of his life.

He wants to call Ragnor. He wants to pick up the phone and hear Ragnor's voice, grumpy and offended at being woken up - or interrupted, depending on where exactly in the world he'd decided to lock himself away this time - but full of sage advice and a thick layer of immense care and love hidden beneath all the irritatingly-British sarcasm and the impenetrable, deadpan rudeness.

But he can't.

He can't, and it kills him, and it's so, deeply unfair that the stupid, stupid Nephilim that crashed into a broken heap on his doorstep was Alexander Lightwood. It's awful, it's horrible, that he's spent the night with those two Lightwood siblings. It's some cruel cosmic joke, and he's had enough.
He's fucking had enough.

He hasn't been able to get Ragnor's face out of his mind all day, all week, ever since that fucking Lightwood flew into his life, and it's killing him.

He wonders, momentarily, what Ragnor would say, if he were to see how terribly Magnus is failing. Failing to keep himself together, failing to keep the New York Downworld together—because people - especially the younger ones - are splitting off, willing to take their chances with Valentine instead of the Clave, and they're dying.

They're going to keep dying.

And god, Raphael—

If Raphael is hurt, Magnus is never going to forgive himself. Because it'll be on him. It's his fault. Raphael had to go to that meeting, he had to, or the New York clan would have revolted, and Magnus had gone with him to protect him, to help him—

Instead, he'd let himself get into a verbal battle with a Shadowhunter, because he hadn't been paying attention, because he hadn't been quick enough.

Fucking hell, he's the High Warlock of Brooklyn. He's good at his job. He's amazing at his job. And he's been amazing at his job for decades. He came into a city divided and torn, and he made it better.

He's just...so unsettled. He can't ground himself properly, because what he used as an anchor is gone, and Raphael and Catarina are trying, they're trying, and he's trying to do the same for them, but...

But Raphael isn't here anymore, either. He's in some hellhole in the Institute, and Magnus has put his trust in two young, foolhardy Shadowhunters - fucking Lightwoods - to get him out of there, alive and well.

Magnus doesn't know what the hell he was thinking. Something in him can't quite say no to Alexander Lightwood, when he pleads and begs and sounds so horribly earnest with his heart on his sleeve in a way the Nephilim never do, and he can't help but wonder whether the Shadowhunter realises. He wonders whether he's being manipulated.

But it's too late for that, now. And besides, he'd meant what he said. If Isabelle - who's beautiful, and charismatic, and reminds Magnus almost fondly of Anna Lightwood, all those years ago - and Alexander, who's not quite like anybody Magnus has ever met, decide it's in their best interests to drop this alliance and betray whatever minuscule shred of trust they've built between them, then...

Well. Then Magnus is going to rain hell down on the Shadowhunters of the New York Institute.

Chapter End Notes

So there wasn't any Malec interaction this chapter, BUT I hope you enjoyed the excess of Jalec (it's all entirely platonic there, I promise) and there will be Magnus and Alec next chapter.

Come follow me on Tumblr!

If you've got any prompts for one-shots or little drabbles, drop me an ask. Have an
amazing week <3

(Also, edit: thank you guys so much for all the feedback last week, and I've got another question for you this week: does anybody mind if I raise the rating of this fic for later chapters?)
Blue Jay

Chapter Summary

In which Jace deems himself the master of seduction, the Bane-Lightwood alliance has its first test, and someone drinks a very pink tonic.

Chapter Notes

This chapter, the blue jay, which, apparently, is representative of the proper use of power. (Who knew? Also who comes up with things like that? I want to meet them and have an interview.)

Also, thanks to Andy (I'd link your profile but you were commenting as a guest—let me know if you've got a tumblr or Twitter or something you use for fandom things) for making me laugh last week -- I'm sorry, man, really ;)

Thanks also to all of you who asked me questions and are getting /nearly/ as invested in this as I am! I hope you all enjoy this week's chapter, also.

If you're an Easter person, religiously or otherwise, I hope you had a great weekend and ate lots of chocolate. If not, I hope you had a great weekend and ate lots of chocolate anyway -- why not, right?!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

How Jace manages to pull so many women on such a regular basis has never really been of much interest to Alec. Relationships, love, sex—it's all secondary to him anyway, because, as Isabelle and Jace regularly say, he's married to his job. It's background noise. Jace's flirtations and late-night excursions are something he's aware of, but not something he spends more than a moment's thought on. (Except when it makes Jace late to meetings and missions. Then he gets pissed.)

But, while he pretends to be simultaneously writing up reports on the day's missions and monitoring the surveillance systems in the Ops Centre, he's got one eye on Jace. One eye tracking his parabatai's movements while he flirts with the woman - Amanda - who's standing guard outside the entrance down to the Institute's cells.

It's something in his body language, in the little shifts of his eyes, one moment feigning interest in whatever she's saying, the next flickering around the Institute to keep up the air of mystery around him.

(Or something. That's what Izzy says. Alec thinks it makes him look like he's bored, which can't be particularly attractive, but apparently women have different criteria for their boyfriends than he'd expect.)

Jace makes her laugh, and, each time he does, Alec sees the tension always present in a Shadowhunter's posture begin to melt away, dispersing into the air until she's relaxed. Her eyes are
fixed on Jace's face, and she's standing on one hip. Jace reaches out to gesture to her hair, and his fingers accidentally brush against the strands, and she lets out a sudden yawn.

"You should get some sleep," Jace tells her, a smile in his voice and his eyebrows cocked in apparent concern. "You were out on patrol early this morning."

"Maryse asked me to stay," she says. "She wants someone watching the entrance. Raziel knows why. What does she think is going to happen?"

Alec snorts to himself, too quietly for Jace and Amanda to hear, even if they have their hearing runes activated. If only she knew.

"Alec'll watch it." Jace raises his voice. "Alec, man, watch the door for a bit, will you? I'll come back and keep you company."

Alec's deadpan, unamused expression doesn't change as he looks up, and he nods once. "Of course."

Jace winks at Amanda, and offers her his arm, jesting and humour written across his face as he leads her up the short set of stairs, out of the Ops Centre and up to wherever her bedroom is.

"Well."

Isabelle pops up behind him, pulling long pins out of her hair to let all her dark waves tumble down over her shoulders. Alec is so used to his sister appearing out of nowhere, with no warning, that he doesn't jump.

"That was a terribly boring show," she says, and drops a thick wad of papers in a dark blue file down on the table. It's in pristine condition, although it's been down in the lab with her for the last four hours while she was doing some autopsy on a mundane they'd found dead by very supernatural causes in Central Park this morning. "It would have been much more exciting if Jace had tried that on someone else."

Alec quirks an eyebrow at her, a wry smile twisting at his mouth. "Oh?"

"Mm." With her white lab coat still buttoned up, Isabelle flops down in the chair beside him. "You know, someone like Aline. It would never have worked. Much more entertaining."

"I'm fairly sure the whole point of this was that it needed to work," Alec points out. "And Aline? Why Aline?"

Aline is their cousin, and Alec's fairly sure they haven't seen her for at least two years. The Penhallows live in Idris, where Jia Penhallow must remain for her position as Consul, so he really can't imagine why Isabelle picked Aline, of all people, to use in her example.

Isabelle smirks, and kicks her terrifyingly high heels up on the table. Alec knows first hand what kind of damage those contraptions can do. She'd kicked one of Valentine's men in the face and sent her stiletto heel through his eye socket and out the other side, once, and proceeded to complain about the gunk on her shoes for the next three hours.

"Because, brother mine, Aline is beautifully, wonderfully gay. It would have been hilarious. She'd have handed Jace's ass to him."

"It would have been a disaster," Alec says shortly, and picks up the file Izzy flung down. "Anything interesting?"
"Death by demon," she tells him, and he frowns. "It wasn't a normal demon, though. See the scarring there, and those grey splotches on the side of his liver?" She gestures at the pictures; Alec finds the scarring around the victim's neck quickly, but he has no idea which one is the liver.

"This one?" he asks, pointing to a photo of something gross.

"No, this one." She huffs. "Honestly, Alec, do you know anything about basic anatomy?"

Alec rolls his eyes. "Unlike Jace, my knowledge of human anatomy is fairly limited."

"Oh my god." Isabelle chokes on a laugh, and flips her hair over her shoulder to look at him properly. "What the hell happened to my brother? Don't answer that. I'm not in the mood for your salty sarcasm. Anyway, those markings are completely unlike anything I've ever seen from a normal demon, or even a greater demon, so I'm guessing—"

"Valentine is experimenting again? On demons, this time?"

"Yes." Isabelle's inclines her head. "Off the record, I think it could be a Downworlder, too, but I've got no way of knowing, so I'm not giving the Clave another reason to hate the Downworlders. A few deflectors who have every right to despise the Clave and want something different shouldn't lead to the slaughter of thousands of—"

"Hey." Alec shuts the file, and puts his hand over hers, because she's getting worked up, fiery rage burning fierce in her eyes, and while he admires her passion (even if he sometimes questions its placement) this certainly isn't the time to be ruled by emotion. "Iz. You don't have to explain it to me. You do whatever you think you should. I trust you. And besides, that's exactly why we're doing this tonight, right? Because it's not just, and they deserve better than a prison."

"It's torture," Isabelle says, jaw tight. "And if she weren't my mother, I swear by the Angel, I'd—"

Footsteps echo on the stairs, and both of them whip their heads round, relaxing tangibly when Jace is revealed in profile, a cocky swagger to his steps. Alec rolls his eyes at the smugness rolling off his parabatai.

"Success," Jace says. "Jace Herondale: master of seduction, winner of women, flirtation guru—"

"Raging misogynist?" Isabelle suggests, with a wry smile that suggests she doesn't actually think that —although Jace's teenage objectification of women had been something of a sore spot between them that hadn't cleared up until Jace hit eighteen, and stopped being quite such an ass all the time— courtesy of a certain red-head.

"Nah." Jace smiles. "I know you're a hell of a lot smarter than me, and you can kick my ass in training."

"You say such sweet things," Isabelle tells him, with a smirk. She swings her legs off the table and stands up in one enviably fluid movement (Alec knows he's uncoordinated and lacks any sort of grace with his lanky limbs, unless he's in the middle of battle) and faces Jace and Alec with her hands on her hips. "Shall we stop stalling and get on with this, then?"

Jace and Alec exchange a glance, and Alec feels a pulse of anticipation through his parabatai bond. Jace jerks his head in a nod, and Alec returns it.

"Yeah," Jace says, stepping towards Isabelle and brushing his shoulder deliberately against Alec's as he walks past him.
"Let's go," Alec says, inclining his head, and moves to join his siblings, fingers resting playing across the strap of his glamoured quiver.

He's terrified - of course he is, because they're breaking a thousand Clave rules - but, by Raziel, he wants to do this. For once in his life, he's going to do what his thinks is right and damn the consequences.

It seems rather odd, really, that Magnus Bane is the catalyst for his change of heart.

***

Isabelle spent most of the previous morning etching runes into the stone walls of the corridor, hiding in plain sight, and working out how to disable some of the Institute's alarms, so they could creep down into the jail cells without alerting the rest of the Shadowhunters.

And, as they swipe steles across Isabelle's runes to activate them, progressing slowly, witchlights held prone at head height, Alec's phenomenally grateful that they've got such an intelligent sister. He knows full well that he'd never have managed to do this on his own. Even if he's only just realising it.

"This'd better work," Jace mutters, their boots silent on the cold, unyielding steps as they descended. "I don't really fancy getting my runes stripped. The mundane world looks torturously dull."

"Take up boxing," Isabelle suggests. "Punching the brains out of people - literally - sounds like a you thing."

"Excuse you," Jace says, outrage in his voice. "I am suave and cool. Your implications are insulting."

"Not at all. I'm sure Mohammed Ali was a great guy."

"Shh." Alec motions at them to shut up, and nods towards the next curve of the stairwell, beyond which they're expecting several guards. Several guards whom they certainly do not want to know about their midnight misdemeanours.

They exchange a look, and Alec pulls out the chain Bane had given them upon their departure the previous night. It's silver, catching the light of their witchlights and glimmering a little, with a small pendant hanging on the end. Dark silver embedded with some kind of stone, Bane had told them, but that wasn't important. What Bane had enchanted it to was the crucial element to the jewellery.

It wings in the air, held between Alec's fingers, as they pause, eyes on the Shadowhunters standing guard below them. There are six of them, three men and three women, and one of them men is standing in front of a scarred, bleeding Raphael Santiago. He's clearly antagonising the vampire: Santiago is snarling at him, lurching as far forwards as he can against the restrictions of his chains. The shackles are burning into his wrists, the sizzling sound of silver melting flesh audible even where Alec is standing.

He doesn't flinch, but Isabelle does, righteous fury burning bright and scorching in her deep brown eyes.

Jace catches Alec's eye, and they nod at each other.

Alec lifts the necklace, letting it catch the light, and Jace draws his stele over the tiny little runes etched into its side. They're not from the Gray Book, whatever they are—they must be demonic, not angelic, but Bane is apparently powerful enough, intelligent enough, to fool their steles into
activating something that's at least partly demonic.

Alec doesn't understand. He knows he could never hope to understand such a concept. But he's a soldier, and this is Bane's part of their plan, and he's going to trust Bane, because he's the expert. He's the leader where magic comes into play. He commands, and Alec obeys.

It's not what Alec expected.

He expected a bomb. Some kind of violent, magical bomb, making the ground shudder and the walls shake and their ears ring. He expected devastation, and chaos, and rumbling destruction.

But, of course, he should have known better.

He throws the necklace out towards the guards down below them, hard and fast, the moment Jace is done. It hangs in the air, suspended like it's floating in water. Every pair of eyes in the room turn to stare at it, entranced.

And then it explodes.

But it doesn't explode in the tumultuous way Alec expects.

It lights up, blinding and hot and bright white, making Alec fling his hands up in front of his face to protect his eyes from the glare. There's silence, for several seconds, while light, pure, singular sunlight, pours from the pendent, shooting out to every corner of the cells.

It doesn't burn Raphael, when it lands on him. And it doesn't scorch Isabelle's skin, when it cuts across her face.

But the guards...

They drop, boneless, like someone has switched off their muscle power so they can't hold enough tension in their bodies to stand. There's a soft moan from some of them as they fall, eyes drooping shut, and then they're splayed across the floor, still, limbs in disarray and weapons clattering around them.

Then the light disappears, as suddenly as it appeared, and the pendent falls to the floor with a tinkling crash.

For a long moment, there's silence. Alec stares at the fallen bodies - they're all still breathing, but they're asleep, or unconscious, or in some strange, magically-induced state of unawareness - and at the deceptively innocuous-looking necklace, and then at the Downworlders.

And the Downworlders are all staring at him. Him, and Jace, and Isabelle, some with parted lips, others with wide eyes and slack jaws, all like they can't believe what they're seeing.

Jace, of course, is the first to speak. "Alec, keys."

Alec spurs into action, fumbling for the keys he'd hooked in his belt before they'd headed down. The door down to the cells is runed shut at the top, and Bane's magic was so wonderfully silent, so Alec thinks they've probably got some time before anybody gets suspicious, but he doesn't want this to take longer than it needs to.

He tosses one set of keys to Jace, and the ones to the doors that lead outside to Izzy, and heads off to unlock the other cells himself.
The Downworlders in the first cell he unlocks are still gaping at him when he pulls out his stele to unlock their shackles and the magic repressors on the warlocks' wrists.

"Maybe I didn't give you enough credit, Nephilim," Raphael says, when Alec reaches him. Alec doesn't look up, embarrassment gripping him with strong fingers, but Raphael doesn't seem to be deterred. "You're unusual, for a Shadowhunter."

"Come on," Alec says, gesturing the Downworlders out. He meets Santiago's gaze, but otherwise doesn't acknowledge his statements. "We need to go."

"Where are we going, exactly?" asks a young warlock girl. At least, she looks young, but older than a child - fourteen or fifteen, maybe - but Alec supposes she could have stopped ageing centuries ago. "And who the hell are you?"

"It doesn't matter who we are," Jace says, from over where he's still letting out the last few Seelies. Not werewolves, once again, Alec notices. Whoever the leader of the New York pack is, he's keeping them on the down-low, away from Valentine and away from the Clave. "We're taking you home."

"We do not require Nephilim assistance," a vampire bites out, barring his teeth at Jace with a hiss. "You imprison us, torture us, and you expect us to trust you?"

"No," Isabelle says, voice calm, transparent in its honesty, but firm. "Of course not. We're letting you out, against orders, because what our superiors were doing to you was wrong. And, if you'll let us, we'd like to accompany you home for back-up, to make sure we finish our job. Not because we think your incapable of protecting yourselves, but because you've been tortured for days, weeks, and deprived of basic necessities."

Something about Isabelle's speech - her words, or her tone of voice, or her body language - seems to strike a chord with the Downworlders. They exchange glances, sceptical and thoughtful and resigned, and then they seem to acquiesce.

As Jace undoes the shackles of a Seelie knight with long dark hair streaked with silvery blue in one side, Isabelle surges forward and throws her arms around him. Alec raises his eyebrows at their exchange, but he's not surprised when she kisses the Seelie before letting him go. He's suspected as much for months.

The Seelie murmurs something to her, and drags soft brown fingertips down her cheek. Whatever he says, it makes Isabelle smile, and she leans up to press her lips to his cheek before she withdraws.

"I'm going back to the entrance to the Seelie Court," Isabelle says, wiping at the corner of one eye but standing tall, resolute, chin tipped up. One hand is curled around the handle of her whip, and the other is threaded through the Seelie's. "Jace is heading back to the Hotel Dumort, and Alec—"

"Magnus Bane's," Raphael says, where he's leaning heavily against the wall. "You're coming back to Magnus Bane's."

Alec blinks at him, but he doesn't protest. He doesn't dare. He'd been planning on going with the three warlocks, all women, and taking them back to wherever it is they want to go - Taki's café, or the Hunter's Moon bar, or home, or somewhere else safe - but he isn't going to pick a fight with Santiago "Alright. I can do that."

He glances over at Jace, who's frowning at him, and shrugs.

Isabelle, too, is looking at him, but her face is neutral when she says, "Let's go."
Alec waits for the others to follow her, filing out in front of him, and then he stoops to pick up Bane’s necklace before he too leaves, and clicks the door shut behind him.

***

Outside, it's cold.

The moon is high, half-full but shining bright in the cloudless sky. There’s a quick wind that penetrates Alec’s clothes and makes most of the Downworlders shiver, but he forces himself not to pay too much heed to his body's mild protests.

The warlocks portal away with a brief thanks, mostly directed at Jace and Isabelle, magic lighting up the street despite the exhaustion they must feel, before it blinks out of existence again.

It’s a mere few minutes, a question from a vampire to Santiago about why he's not coming home with them, and sharp order from Isabelle's Seelie (Meliorn, Alec thinks his name is, from the few times he’s met the Seelie Queen's court, but he wouldn't swear on it) to his fellows to get moving, and then Alec is alone in the street with Raphael, who looks, frankly, like he's about to collapse.

"Are you alright?" Alec asks, brow furrowing when Raphael staggers as they walk down a damp, street-lit pavement, hand reaching out to catch himself on the side of a shop front.

"Your mother doesn't like me very much," Santiago says, an edge to his voice that suggests he'd have been snapping at Alec if he could. It's defensive, and Alec supposes it must be fairly wounding to his pride, to be in this state.

Alec chews on the inside of his cheek for a moment, watching the vampire struggle. Then he throws caution to the wind. He stands by Raphael's side and hooks the vampire's arm around his shoulders, ducking slightly to grab his waist, and hauls him upright, forcing himself to ignore the gasp of pain Raphael lets loose.

"Come on," Alec says, practically dragging Santiago with him. "I don't like mundanes, but we're getting a cab, because you can't walk all the way to Brooklyn, and if I take you on the subway the mundanes will try to have us arrested."

"And you'd probably punch me in the face if I flew and carried you, Alec thinks, but he doesn't voice the option aloud.

"If Magnus weren't so melodramatic, he could have just given you his phone number so we could avoid all this crap," Raphael hisses, fingers digging into Alec's shoulder when they round the corner onto the busy main road.

"Tell him that," Alec says, rearranging his grip on the vampire so he can slash through his glamour rune and hail a cab.

It takes a mere few minutes, but a mundane pulls up, squinting suspiciously at Raphael. Alec is grateful that it's dark, so he can tell the man he's drunk and not get questions about the cuts oozing blood on Raphael's face.

"Shut up," Alec mumbles when Raphael tries to complain about something, and pushes him into the back of the car. "Why didn't you ask one of those warlocks for help?"

"In case you didn't notice, estúpido, they were drained and needed to go home," Santiago says, as heatedly as he can. "Dios, you Nephilim."
Alec rolls his eyes, and he's more grateful than he can express when they eventually arrive two streets from Bane's apartment block. Santiago groans and complains when Alec hauls him out of the car and pays the driver, and he's keeping up a steady stream of Spanish curses by the time they reach Bane's front door.

Bane's voice reaches him immediately upon him buzzing. "What?" he demands, and, clearly, Raphael isn't the only one who's run out of patience tonight.

"It's me," Alec says, and realises how stupid that is when Raphael snorts. "I mean, it's Alec. I mean —"

"Come up."

Bane is leaning in the doorway when Alec turns the corner to make up the last flight of rickety old stairs. He lets out a gasp when he sees Santiago, bloodied and supported by Alec, eyes going wide as his posture switches to ramrod straight and tense all over.

"Raphael!"

He rushes down, moving faster than Alec's eyes can follow, and he loops Santiago's other arm around his neck, helping Alec haul him up the stairs. Alec can feel the tension bleed out of Raphael; he realises that it's because he knows he's safe, now, with Bane.

It's such an alien thought, so out of the realm of Alec's imagination. That anybody can feel so acutely secure immediately upon being in Bane's home, in his care. He wonders, fleetingly, what kind of history the two men have. They seem close. They seem to know each other well, and they certainly seem to care about each other. Bane had been furious when Raphael had been captured, that day, and he's clearly deeply concerned by his injuries, now, and the way Raphael is clinging to him...

It's odd. It seems almost like the relationship between father and son, and yet not quite. Alec can't imagine Bane ever being a father-figure to anyone.

"Sit down here," Bane says, leading Raphael over to a plush sofa. He snaps his fingers to cover it with a sheet before they set Santiago down. Raphael groans, and curses again, eyes fluttering shut; Bane brushes hair back from the vampire's forehead, and purses his lips. "Don't move, mi hijito. I'll be back. Alexander, come with me. Now."

Bane's voice is freezing when his address switches to Alec, and Alec swallows the fear ignited in him at such a tone. The warlock sounds furious, coiled tight and ready to spring, itching to unleash the anger clearly boiling in him at the state of his friend.

His cat eyes are flashing, and magic is sparking at his fingertips, but somehow, it's the most non-demonic Bane has ever seemed. His care for Raphael, his fury at his injuries... It's so familiar. So ordinary. So human.

Bane leads Alec to his kitchen, out of Santiago's line of sight, and he whirls round to face him.

"You've got ten seconds to tell me what the hell is going on, Shadowhunter, or I'm summoning a hellhound and feeding you to it," Bane spits, voice like fire, shooting at Alec like hot coals.

"I don't know," Alec tells him, honestly, taking half a step back and raising his hands, palms forward in surrender. "I don't know who did this, and I don't know why. The last time I saw him, he was no worse than any of the others, and my mother had been interrogating him. I don't know what happened."
Bane exhales sharply through his nose, and closes his eyes for a moment. When they blink open, a few seconds later, he's controlled the inferno raging inside him, and he looks steadier. "Did it work? The necklace, and the plan?"

"Yes. Yes, it worked. They're free. All of them. Jace and Izzy are accompanying most of the others back, just to make sure. The warlock women portalled out."

"I despise the Nephilim," Bane murmurs, glancing out towards where Raphael is, worry clear in his eyes. He rubs his fingertips together, twists his rings around and around, and Alec finds himself with the most inexplicable urge to reach out and cover Bane's hand, just to stop the nervous fidgeting. "Have I mentioned that?"

"Once or twice," Alec says, but it's gentle, the kind of voice he uses on Isabelle when she's in emotional distress. He fishes Bane's necklace out of his pocket, and offers it to him. "Here."

"Keep it." Bane doesn't spare him, or the necklace, a glance, instead rubbing absently at his goatee. "I don't want the reminder. There's a jar in the top shelf labelled in a language you won't be able to read, right hand side, with a rose-pink tonic in it. Get it out for me, and pour some into a glass. Don't sniff it, or you'll pass out. Then put the kettle on and make some tea. Understood?"

While he pockets the necklace again, deciding to put it somewhere safe in case Bane ever wants it back, Alec blinks at him. "Tea?"

"Yes, Alexander, tea. Three cups. Get to it."

***

"I told you to stay still," Magnus says to Raphael, softly, when he walks out of the kitchen and back into the living room. He wants to reprimand the vampire for moving into a different position, but he knows Raphael doesn't like being coddled.

Raphael snorts. "And I told you not to make deals with Shadowhunters."

"Those Shadowhunters might well have just saved your life," Magnus tells him, pointedly, and clicks his fingers to summon his magic to the tips of his fingers, swirling around his hands as he lowers himself to a crouch beside Raphael. "And I haven't had to kill anyone to make sure you all got out of there safe. It was a win-win deal, Raphael."

Raphael closes his eyes and hisses in pain when Magnus' magic floats out to caress the cuts on his face and knit the mangled flesh back together. It makes Magnus' heart clench, and the rage bubbling inside him threatens to spill over. Whoever the hell did this, he wants to kill them. He wants to tear them apart. He wants to make them scream the way Raphael must have done. He wants to strip them of pride the way they have Raphael—a man who places such importance upon his dignity.

"I'm sorry, cariño," Magnus murmurs, as Raphael flinches away from the magic that has to cause him more pain to make it better. "I'm sorry. Ragnor would have my head if he saw you."

And that - that makes Raphael look even more pained than he does by the agony stemming from his physical injuries.

"Don't," Raphael says, harshly, biting out the word. "Dios, Magnus, don't."

"Raphael—"

"Don't."
Magnus shakes his head in silent reprimand, but they've had this conversation before, more than once, and he knows that having it again won't change anything. Raphael has to come round in his own time, as Catarina keeps telling him.

When Magnus' magic tickles gently up the next long gash on his face, Raphael lets out a strangled sound of pain and protest. It breaks Magnus' heart in two. He takes a deep, calming breath before he shifts his fingers across to the other cheek.

"One more," Magnus soothes him, and Raphael screws his eyes shut, fingernails digging into Magnus' expensive upholstery. Not that he could care less about his furniture, when it's up against Raphael's wellbeing. "Just one more, Raphael."

When Raphael swallows a noise of agony that shows clearly on his face despite his best efforts, Magnus curses every Nephilim in existence.

Except, perhaps, the ones who helped him save his people. Those ones...he's reserving judgement on.

Particularly the unfortunately pretty one in his kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

Sooooooooooo ;)

That happened! Yay! Will there be consequences? Will Magnus and Alec smooch goodbye? Will Jace barge in and beg for a room because he's been found out? Are these real spoilers or fake spoilers? Am I bluffing or double-bluffing? Who knows?

Also, the keen-eyed of you may have noticed a hint about what's coming in the next few chapters -- if you did, hit me up with a comment, I'll give you some more maybe-fake spoilers :)

Have an amazing week. Much love <3

Come follow me on Tumblr!
Blackbird

Chapter Summary

In which Alec makes tea, Magnus uses Chairman Meow as therapy, and Raphael does not have a thing for nerds (obviously).

Chapter Notes

The chapter: the blackbird! Blackbirds are all about the mystery of the world, and are a reminder not to attempt to predict the future, but to take each day as it comes. (@Alec...)

Anyway, enjoy this one! Considering this story so far, it's pretty...fluffy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Alec walks into the living room with three mugs of tea and one mug of some suspicious substance that appears to be moving on its own, Santiago's face is healed, and he and Bane are talking quietly. There's a small smile on the warlock's face, soft and caring as he looks up at Raphael from where he's crouched on the floor by his feet, elbows braced on his knees. He's nodding, and his eyebrows quirk at something the vampire says, lips parting a little. Another sentence, and an eye roll from Raphael, and he's laughing.

Alec clears his throat, because it's clearly a private moment between two people who are very close, and he doesn't want to intrude.

Bane turns to look at him, over his shoulder, and the smile on his face doesn't quite drop away. It changes, shifts to something a little more measured, more circumspect, but it doesn't evaporate away like Alec expects it to.

"I, um." Alec swallows, suddenly hot around the collar at the way Bane is just watching him, cat eyes unblinking and oddly gentle, from his crouched position.

It's...it's almost vulnerable. Not that Bane seems vulnerable, at all, but the position isn't...it doesn't exude danger and dominance. Not like his every movement does when he's standing tall. It's relaxed. It's easy. Alec hadn't realised how much tension Bane carries with him, until now, when he's witnessing him shed some of it.

Alec takes a deep breath, and forces himself to get his words out like a normal fucking human being. He doesn't stutter at the Institute, when he's leading his team and reporting back in meetings and doing his damn job. Why is he stuttering now? "I brought tea. And...this."

"Thank you, Alexander," Bane says, and extends a hand towards the pink solution. He makes Raphael drink some of it. The vampire grimaces, and Bane chuckles, patting his newly healed cheek with a patronising hum that makes Raphael scowl and Bane grin, before he stretches up out of his crouch to straighten up. His necklaces jangle as he moves, and Alec can't stop his eyes flickering down as they all catch the light.
"Sugar?" Bane asks, raising an eyebrow at Alec when he reaches for one cup of tea.

"I brought sugar," Alec nods to where he'd put the pot down on Bane's coffee table. "I wasn't sure— I wasn't sure what you wanted."

"Thank you," Bane says, again. He takes two mugs, stirs sugar into one, and hands the other to Raphael, who's watching the two of them with a distinctly unimpressed look on his face.

There's a moment of silence, during which Raphael and Bane drink their tea, and Alec stands awkwardly, desperate to just get the hell out of there and go home. He wants to go to bed. He wants to curl up and never have to face the consequences of what he's done tonight.

He's disobeyed the Clave, gone against everything he's ever been taught, put his trust in Downworlders, allowed his siblings to throw themselves right in harm's way, and he's done it all while forcing himself not to think about what's going to happen if he's found out. Raziel, he wants to go home and drown himself in the shower and curl up in bed, where he doesn't have to put on a front —where he can let himself fall apart.

But he can't just walk out.

"Drink, Alexander," Bane says, suddenly, breaking the quiet and snapping Alec from his thoughts. "You're shaking."

Is he? He hadn't really noticed. But when he looks down at his hands, he realises that Bane is right: his fingers are trembling, just slightly, and he can feel the twitching in his back muscles that always occurs when he's in high emotion, anticipating his fight-or-flight response and ready to let his wings burst free.

"Come, darling, sit down. Let's find the Chairman."

Bane waves a hand casually in Alec's direction, and a soft leather armchair with a fuzzy red throw rug tossed across the back shoots forward, and bumps the back of his legs. Alec sits down robotically, gripping his mug so tightly he's surprised it doesn't crack.

"Oh, gods above and demons below," Raphael mutters, watching Bane disappear down a little corridor, calling softly for his cat. "He's pathetic."

Alec doesn't dare ask what Raphael is referring to, exactly, but he has a niggling suspicion that it's not Bane's obvious adoration for his tiny little cat.

"Here," Bane announces a moment later, returning with Chairman Meow curled in his arms like a baby, purring happily. "Do you remember Alexander, Chairman? Do you remember the nice Nephilim who managed not to shoot you? Yes?"

The Chairman meows, and Alec's heart melts. Raziel, if his mother got a look inside his head whenever he saw Chairman Meow, she'd disown him and sack him on the spot.

Without warning, Bane deposits the cat in Alec's lap. Chairman makes a little noise of protest, claws digging into Alec's thighs. He circles round, padding over Alec's lap for a moment, and then he drops down and settles, resting his head on his paws and staring up at Alec with wide eyes.

Fuck.

"Fluffy animals are supposed to be good for anxiety," Bane says, watching as Alec goes to pet the cat gently with one hand, cradling his tea in the other. His heart-rate slows, just a little.
"It increases mine," Raphael mumbles.

"Raphael!" Bane turns on his heel, hands going to his hips, and he glares at the vampire in mock-outrage. Or maybe it's genuine. Alec can't quite tell. "How dare you? The Chairman is not an it. He is adorable, and does not deserve your insolence."

Alec tunes out the bickering, and instead focuses on the bundle of fluff curled in his lap. He's supposed to be a leader, strong and confident and married to the Law, and yet here he is, disobeying Clave orders, protecting a criminal, petting a fucking cat with shaking fingers.

He knows he needs to get home, soon. He needs to leave before anybody realises the Downworlders are gone, and notices that he, too, is gone, because then they'll put two and two together. He'll have his runes stripped if he's ever caught for this.

But he doesn't want to go back to the Institute. There's something about Bane's loft that's beginning to feel almost...comforting. Familiar.

And it's such an absurd thought that it makes Alec freeze, stiffening all over, his every muscle tensing. It's a dangerous thought. A dangerous feeling. He shouldn't feel this safe in a Downworlder's home, with a cat, the Clave's most wanted and a vampire clan leader for company.

Yet, he does.

"I have to go," Alec says, curling one hand into a fist on his knee, the other still on the Chairman's head, fingers just pressing between his ears. "I can't— I have to go."

Bane frowns at him. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine." He's not. Raziel, he's not. "I just have to go back before they realise I'm gone."

The little furrow Bane gets between his brows suggests to Alec that he's not convinced, but he doesn't say anything. He appraises Alec over the rim of his mug, and takes a sip of tea in contemplative silence.

"I'll show you out, then," Bane says, and his voice is decidedly and pointedly neutral. Alec isn't sure what to make of that.

Bane stands up, unfolding himself gracefully from where he'd been sitting on the sofa beside Raphael, and he turns on his heel to walk towards the front door without a word.

Alec feels a little guilty for disturbing Chairman Meow, who seems to be asleep on his lap, but needs must, he supposes. The cat lets out a disgruntled, confused growl when Alec picks him up and places him down on the floor.

"Sorry, cat," Alec murmurs, nudging him gently out of his path with his toes.

He's about to head out of the living room and into the hallway, when a voice cuts through the air.

"Lightwood."

He pauses, and turns to look at Raphael. "Yeah?"

Santiago watches him for a moment, his expression as inscrutable as always. "Thank you. For Nephilim, what you and your siblings did tonight was extraordinary. For beings with souls..." He shrugs. "You're making me think some of you might have one."
Alec cracks a smile. "You're welcome."

"You can consider this an alliance, Shadowhunter." Raphael tips his chin up. "If you, or your siblings, wish to negotiate with the Night Children, ask for me. But don't mistake this for trust. And I do not extend the same courtesy to your parents." He spits the words, lip curling, and Alec realises that Raphael is old enough to have some kind of history with his parents that he hasn't been privy to, because he wasn't born—past wrongs, disagreements, slights against each other.

But he doesn't ask. "Yes. Thank you."

Raphael inclines his head. "A favour for a favour."

When Alec reaches the front door a moment later, Bane has his arms folded, jaw set, but his posture softens a little when Alec spills out of the living room and into the hallway.

"Goodbye, then," Alec says, when Bane remains silent. He scratches awkwardly at the back of his neck.

"Goodbye," Bane echoes. "And thank you, little angel. For what you did tonight." He smiles, and it makes something in Alec's stomach clench. "Maybe you're not my greatest disappointment of the last three decades, after all."

For a moment, Alec's holds the warlock's gaze, staring into his glamoured eyes while trying not to fall so far down into their depths that he can't claw his way back out. He can't afford to get lost in a Downworlder. He knows better.

But then, he thought he knew better than to go against the Clave and release all the Institute's prisoners.

Bane shifts, just a tiny, imperceptible amount, and it's enough to make his necklaces catch the light. A thought flits through Alec's mind; he reaches into his pocket, pulling out the necklace.

"Are you sure you don't want this back?" he asks, extending his hand, palm up, necklace cradled in his hand.

Bane shakes his head, his smile getting smaller, but gentler. His eyes go soft, and the harsh line of his jaw relaxes, and Alec's stomach twists almost painfully again.

"No, darling," Bane says, and he reaches out to close Alec's fingers around the necklace. "I meant what I said. I don't want it."

Bane's fingers rest on his, lingering, and Alec can't help the way the touch makes him shiver in an entirely unfamiliar way. It's not uncomfortable. It's just...alien. The warlock's touch is warm, his skin impossibly smooth, and the cooler metal of his rings, some rough and some like silk, is noticeable in comparison. There's a tiny little chip in the deep red nail polish of his index finger, and a slightly larger one on his middle finger, as though he's been working with his hands today. It's such a little imperfection, but it's the fact that there are any physical imperfections within Magnus Bane that keeps astounding Alec. He's so put-together. He holds himself like he's a god—like he knows he's a god, walking among the clouds.

And yet, Alec thinks he might be the most grounded man he's ever met.

Everything about him is an oxymoron. Strength and defiance blazes in his eyes, and clashes with the vulnerability and fear he holds for those he loves. He's demonic, deadly, a murderer, but he's beautiful, and he's gentle, and he can be kind.
Alec doesn't understand. He doesn't understand at all. But he can't help wanting to work it out.

"Are you sure you're alright, little angel?" Bane asks, eyebrows furrowed in a concern that Alec is sure no Downworlder should have for a Shadowhunter, no matter how superficial. He still doesn't retract his hand from where it's resting against Alec's.

"I'm fine," he says, immediately, unthinkingly, because he is. He's always fine. He has to be fine. He's an older brother, and a leader, and not being okay makes him a liability to his team and to his family.

Bane's grip on his fingers softens a little, but he doesn't move away entirely. Instead, he shifts so he's holding the side of Alec's hand, where it's still curled into a loose fist around the necklace.

"You know," Bane says, "if there's a problem, and you return home to find that someone suspects you, I can always slip them a memory spell. Or a tonic. I can get creative."

Alec lets out a little laugh, and Bane smiles at him.

"Thank you," Alec says. "For trusting us with this. And for calling off your attack. I'm grateful."

Bane shrugs. "There was no need for bloodshed when you were presenting me with a sensible alternative. It was hardly a difficult decision, when my magic was central to your plan."

"Thank you for that, too."

"Alexander." Bane squeezes his hand, and he looks...amused, Alec thinks, with the low light of the hallway dancing in his eyes. "Stop thanking me, and go home."

Alec closes his eyes, and lets out a little sigh. Bane's fingers slip from his hand as he exhales, and the air rushing to his skin feels cold; it seems to seep into him, deep into his heart, the energy and willpower chased out of him by the sudden loss of warmth.

"I don't really want to go home," Alec admits, because it's true. It's not that he wants to stay here, particularly, with arguably the most dangerous person in the continental US, it's just that he doesn't want to go back to the Institute.

He feels like Magnus Bane has managed to uproot his entire world, casting all the certainties he's lived by for twenty-two years into doubt, and he's not sure he can go back to blindly disrespecting and disregarding every Downworlder in the world after all he's been exposed to. After Raphael, after Bane, after seeing Izzy and Meliorn...

Maybe Izzy has been right all along.

"Well, darling, as we were trying to kill each other twenty-four hours ago, I would hasten to suggest that while I quite like you, considering you're a Shadowhunter, I'd rather get lunch and play twenty questions before I lend you a guest bedroom."

Bane is teasing him. Alec knows he is. And god, he appreciates it, because the light-hearted humour makes his heart lift a little, and he can breathe a touch easier.

"I wasn't trying to kill you. But I am sorry about that," Alec says, with a rueful smile.

"A misunderstanding," Bane replies, with a dismissive wave of his hand. "I forgive you, even if I pretended not to. You're too much fun to mess with."
Alec flushes a little, but he's not insulted like he might have been, had Bane said that to him a month ago, when they'd first met. "It's not the first time my siblings have dragged me into trouble."

"No. Somehow, I can believe that." Bane's eyes are gentle when he ducks his head to better catch Alec's gaze, because even though Alec is a little taller, he has such an awful habit of slouching and hanging his head. Maryse was always telling him off for tilting his head down when he was young, looking up at people from under his eyelashes instead of staring straight ahead like a soldier should. "I think it's time for you to go now, little angel."

"Yeah. I, um—" Alec clears his throat. "Yeah."

Bane's eyes flicker for a moment, from brown to golden-green with slit pupils and then back again, and Alec is fairly sure the drop in the glamour is intentional. He's just not sure why.

"Goodnight, Alexander," Bane says, and there's something odd in his eyes, something Alec can't quite place, but it almost looks regretful.

He's not going to see Bane again, he realises, abruptly, as he stands there like an idiot. There are no more excuses. No more reasons for him to come knocking on his door, begging for help and making himself look like a fool in the process. Valentine has branded his mark on the world, and if Bane has any sense, he'll be taking the warlocks of New York and hiding them safely within his wards, somewhere far away from the Circle's clutches.

Alec isn't sure what to make of the acute feeling of discomfort that tightens in his gut and twists, at that realisation. He just knows it's strange, and foreign, and nerve-inducing, much like most things he experiences where Bane is concerned.

His mind and body reconnect, slowly, as he draws himself out of his head. He realises that he's staring, holding Bane's gaze in silence for longer than is strictly appropriate. But Bane isn't looking away, either.

And because Alec does something impulsive once in a while, whatever Jace and Izzy think, and because if this is the last time he'll ever see the warlock then he's got nothing to lose, Alec swallows, and says, "Goodnight, Magnus."

He doesn't wait for Bane to say anything else; he barely gives himself time to catch the fleeting expression of surprise that crosses the warlock's face, lips parting and eyes widening infinitesimally. He merely forces down the knot of anxiety in his throat, clicks open Bane's front door, and dashes down the steps before anything can make him stay a moment longer.

***

"You're disgusting," is the first thing Raphael says, when Magnus walks back into the living room.

Magnus scowls at him. He'd spent at least two minutes longer than he should have (which is no time at all) staring after Alexander when he practically fled from Magnus' apartment, out into the cold dark night. He'd watched him tumble down the stairs, followed him with his eyes as he'd yanked open the foyer door and jogged into the street, and he'd gazed at the closing door, even when Alec was well out of sight.

It was just so unexpected. So dramatic. And Alec...

Well. Okay. Maybe Alec is a little bit dramatic, even if he'd never admit it, nor does he seem it at first glance. He isn't dramatic like Magnus is, but he certainly never does things by half.

"Sephora and designer suits, Magnus, really?" Raphael leans his head back against the back of the sofa, eyes closed, a smirk on his lips. "And a Shadowhunter? Good god, the apocalypse really has arrived."

"Shut it," Magnus says, pointing a finger at him. The nail was perfectly painted this morning, and this particular manicure has been exceptionally long-lasting, so he's sad to see that it's chipped after several hours of making an incredibly complex potion that gave him immense trouble and left a lingering stench of overripe avocado in his bathroom.

"You hate Shadowhunters, not that I blame you," Raphael continues, clearly having no intention of respecting his elders and doing as Magnus damn well tells him to. As per usual. "Are you going soft?"

"No, this one just saved my best friend's life, so do excuse me if I hate him a little less than I despise most of them."

"Cat would be offended if she heard you say that. I'm going to tell her what you said."

"Oh, for—" Magnus throws his hands up, and rolls his eyes at Raphael. Dramatically. Very dramatically, in a way Alexander the-secret-drama-queen Lightwood could never hope to pull off. (Although, he does seem to have a penchant for rolling his eyes. Magnus has noticed.)

"What?" Raphael cranes his neck to look round at him, and Magnus purses his lips when he puts his vile teenage vampire feet up on his beautiful coffee table. Honestly. Have he and Ragnor really failed to reach this boy any manners? "Come on, Magnus, you saved this boy's life, and now you're giving him tea and letting him play with your cat because he's having an existential crisis? And you expect me to ignore this? Dios, you're stupid sometimes."

"And you're walking a thin line, cariño. You've already insulted my cat today, don't insult my new favourite Shadowhunters." He pauses. "Hm. Maybe you're right. I don't think I've ever had favourite Shadowhunters before. Maybe Will and Jem, but Will was such an ass. Hm. Henry. I liked Henry. And Anna. Do you remember Anna?"

Raphael raises one eyebrow, looking distinctly unimpressed. "Shadowhunters? Plural? Who's the other one? Not the blonde one. Tell me you don't fancy the blonde one."

Magnus frowns. "I don't fancy Alexander, Raphael, don't be ridiculous. And who's the blonde one? Do you mean Alexander's other brother, whatever his name is? No. I was referring to Alexander's sister. Isabelle. You know. Meliorn's girl. Not a favourite of the Seelie Queen. Wears great heels and likes my make-up."

"Not that you're narcissistic, at all."

"No, Santiago, just proud of my overwhelming beauty." He grins. "More tonic?"

"No. If you feed me that again, I'm going to put it in the washing machine next time you wash your whites, and see what it does to them."

Magnus gasps. "You wouldn't dare!"

"I would. And you're far too cheery." Raphael squints one suspicious eye at him. "You shouldn't be this cheery."
"Why not? I don't have to deal with any more Shadowhunters, the Shadowhunters I did have to deal with have freed my people, and you're okay. Why wouldn't I be cheery?"

Raphael's squinting gets more pronounced. "Because you had to deal with Shadowhunters for god knows how many hours?"

Magnus shrugs. "They weren't too bad."

"Dios, you're turning into a sentimental old man. Ragnor was right. He always said—"

Raphael cuts himself off abruptly. The teasing, scathing humour than had been written across his face disappears, to be replaced with a horrible, confused pain that tears at Magnus' heart. He wants to wrap his arms around Raphael and make all that hurt go away, if that would make it better. He understands - god, he does - but he doesn't know how to help. Raphael has always been a strange boy, and a stranger man, and he doesn't grieve like Magnus has seen other people grieve. He's so private, and keeps his emotions clutched so closely to his chest that Magnus fears one day they'll overflow and spill to the floor so catastrophically and entirely that no amount of grappling will be enough to pick them all back up.

Magnus takes a step forward, hand extended, and says softly, "Raphael—"

Raphael flinches the moment Magnus' hand gets anywhere near him, and Magnus' heart breaks, aching and painful and bleeding in the cage of his ribs.

"No," he says, practically spitting the word. "Don't."

Exhaling, Magnus sits down beside the young vampire—who, he supposes, really isn't very young anymore, but is still young in Magnus' mind, at not even a century old. He watches him for a moment, lost and hopeless because he's got no idea how to comfort someone like Raphael, even having known him, having loved him like something between a son and a nephew and a younger brother, for decades.

"He would want to be remembered," Magnus says, as gently as he can, because talking about it like this, with such raw emotion between them, hurts him, too. But, like a father, or an uncle, or an older brother, Magnus knows his job at this moment is to shoulder the burden.

He wonders, momentarily, whether this is the kind of thing Alexander does with his siblings. Take all the weight, and then take some more. There's so much resting on Alec's shoulders without anything like this added that it's painful to look at, sometimes.

"I don't want to remember him," Raphael says, staring resolutely ahead.

"That's not true," Magnus says, because he knows it's not. "You loved him, Raphael, and he loved you. He'd want you to remember that. He'd want you to remember him as something warm and light when the world gets dark, because in the end, we're all made of memories, and memories are all we've got."

Raphael closes his eyes, and exhales heavily, as though it might dispel some of the hurt from his body. It doesn't, Magnus knows. He's tried. So many times, when people he's loved have left him.

After a long moment of tense silence, charged with the weight of grief hanging around both of them like a noose, Raphael shifts closer, and rests his head on Magnus' shoulder. Magnus knows him well enough, by now, to know that Raphael doesn't want to burrow into a hug and cry. He needs a lighter touch, and a more subtle brand of physical comfort. It's something Magnus has never been very good at, because he's precisely the opposite. Ragnor had been better at it. But he's learnt, over the decades,
partly from watching how Ragnor dealt with Raphael's darkest moments. He's still learning, and he wishes Ragnor were here to help.

"I miss him," Raphael murmurs, and Magnus lifts an arm to wrap around his shoulders, fingers resting lightly on one side of his hair.

"I know," Magnus says, because he does. "I miss him too."

"I can't even remember the last thing I said to him."

"Neither can I," Magnus admits, but it doesn't hurt as much as it would have done had all this occurred two centuries ago. "But it's okay. I don't really remember the first thing I said to him, either. But I remember lots of things I said to him in between, and those were the important bits. Those were what defined our relationship. Beginnings and endings aren't always as important as people make them out to be."

"He shouldn't have got himself involved in Shadowhunter affairs," Raphael mutters, and Magnus smiles a little, sadly, wryly, because he recognises the stages of Raphael's grief, and recognises them as all those his younger self had once suffered through, while Ragnor held him and told him all the things he's now telling Raphael.

"You could never tell Ragnor to do anything," Magnus says. "He had an iron will. He did what he thought was right."

"But if he hadn't—"

"Raphael." Magnus shakes his head. "The only person you can blame for Ragnor's death is the person who drove that blade through him. You understand me? Looking for other people to condemn will make you miserable."

"I wanted to kill her," Raphael murmurs, and he turns his face a little against Magnus' shoulder so his voice is partly muffled when he speaks again. "When I saw her, I wanted to kill her."

"I'm glad you didn't, because if you had, you'd be dead too, and I'm not sure Catarina would be able to hold me together if you both left me so close together. Nor would I be of much use to her."

Raphael's lips quirk, and he tilts his face to look up at Magnus. "Selfish, as always."

Magnus lets out a little huff of a laugh. "Of course. You wouldn't have me any other way."

"Humph." Raphael makes a grumbling sort of noise that Ragnor used to refer to as his teenage moodiness (to which Raphael usually snapped some line about old man grumpiness, so beginning an argument that would last a good half an hour).

He smiles, and presses a kiss to the top of Raphael's head, before letting him go, gently—he can tell that Raphael is ready for the physical affection to end, now. He has a fairly low tolerance for touch, although he goes through moments of craving contact intensely. Ragnor, of course, had always been much better at sensing his moods than Magnus, which was always unendingly frustrating.

"Stay there," Magnus tells him. "Find something on Netflix. I haven't got any appointments until lunchtime, so let's binge-watch something crappy and get take-out."

Raphael rolls his eyes. "Fine. Just not Game of Thrones."

Magnus counts it as a victory, and he squeezes Raphael's shoulder as he passes him to get to his
phone and order them something from Taki's.

"Hey, Raphael?"

Raphael glances up at him, and quirks an eyebrow.

Magnus smirks. "How's Simon?"

He gets a pillow thrown in his face for that.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, blatant Simon-mention there -- all will be revealed next chapter! (Or, at least, most will be revealed next chapter.)

So I had this idea after I spontaneously did that random fake-spoilers (sorrynotsorry) thing in my end note last week, so imma try my idea this week. Let me know if you like it, or if you think it's boring, I won't be offended lol. On my tumblr I've posted two extracts from next chapter -- one real and one fake. Like or reblog whichever one you think is real, or comment A or B (links to my tumblr). Or if you think this is totally lame, gimmicky, and dumb, comment, "this is totally lame, gimmicky, and dumb, and also my socks are cooler than yours". Because I'm totally mature. (I've had a bad day, please someone make me laugh. Anything particularly hilarious will get an honourable mention next week to spread the cheer.)

Have an absolutely amazing week! Pet fluffy animals, do the nature thing, write, read, draw -- partake in self-care and self-love! <3

Come follow me on Tumblr!
Woodpecker

Chapter Summary

In which Raj is a convincing liar, hella pissed, and has a tragic backstory.

Chapter Notes

So as I'm sure you can see from the summary, this chapter features a lot of Raj! And also some Magnus, and some Alec, and some Ragnor. So HMMMM, what could possibly be going down?

(Shit, that's what.)

The woodpecker: symbolic of protectiveness and opportunity. There are a lot of opportunities suddenly appearing for a certain Lightwood in the aftermath of his Downworld rescue, both good and bad...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Clave is in uproar the following morning.

Alec stands between Jace and Izzy, and they watch, pretending to list with rapt attention, as his mother shouts and snaps at anybody who will listen, demanding that they find who's responsible for this. Find them, strip them of their marks, toss them into the mundane world.

"It's fairly obvious, isn't it?" Raj asks, arms folded across his chest, and Alec feels his heart thud once, in fear. Raj and Izzy have never really got along very well, and he knows that plenty of people already suspect Isabelle, with all her connections in the Downworld. He can see it in the faces of his fellows as they shoot her glances filled with accusation.

When Raj's eyes flicker, however, they don't rest on Isabelle; they rest on Alec.

"Clearly, it was Magnus Bane," Raj says, and he says the words to Alec, eyes landing back on Maryse only as he reaches his final syllable; Alec feels his eyes widen and his lips part in shock. "Warlocks created the warding on this Institute. Warlocks who could have been loyal to Warlock Bane. In fact, I'm fairly sure that the Clave files state that Bane put warding on the Institute when he was appointed High Warlock in the 50s. And we all saw what he did yesterday. He infiltrated us and turned our adamas red. That's some crazy shit. He's powerful. If he weren't, we wouldn't be so desperate to kill him."

Not the Clave wouldn't be so desperate to kill him. Not with Raj. We. One and the same, because Raj has nobody beyond the Clave to be loyal to. His parents are dead. He has no siblings. No wife, or girlfriend. Hell, he hasn't really let himself get close to anybody at the Institute.

It's why Alec would never include Raj on the sort of treacherous mission they'd carried out last night.
Maryse narrows her eyes at Raj. "The warlock threatened to kill us, Raj. Not just free his people."

Raj shrugs. "Clearly, he changed his mind. He's not going to pick a fight with a whole Institute on his own unless he has to. He's evaded us this long; he's clearly not stupid, and he must have a vast number of strong Downworld connections to have escaped our sight. Especially if he's in New York now."

"The guards," Maryse snaps. "Eight guards, not one saw him. They say they watched the Downworlders the entire night, and that they didn't realise they were gone until morning. Suddenly, between one blink and the next."

Alec finds a new bout of respect for Bane well up inside him. He knew how the spell would work, of course, but it's proven to be so seamlessly effective. It's clever, and it's neat, and it hasn't left any holes. The guards are unaware that they're missing hours of memories. Alec watched Maryse question them.

Interestingly, Amanda, upon questioning, seemed to remember nothing, either, claiming she'd spent the whole night monitoring outside the door in the Ops Centre, before finding herself abruptly in her bedroom. Alec wonders whether her strange amnesia is down to Bane's magic, or some kind of twisted loyalty to Jace.

Not that she remembers Jace's flirting, either, that much was obvious from the bizarre look she'd given Jace when he winked at her this morning.

It seems, Alec has realised, as he's assisted his mother in questioning every person in the Institute who could possibly have been involved, that Bane's magic has reached every crevice of every mind.

Of course, they haven't questioned Isabelle or Jace, yet. He, himself, hasn't been questioned, either—because nobody would ever, in their wildest dreams, presume him to be in any way involved. But his sister and his parabatai will be next on the list to be interrogated, if no conclusions are drawn in this meeting.

And they haven't had their memories altered.

"He's a warlock," Raj says, snapping Alec from his slightly hysterical musings, an edge to his voice that tells Alec he considers the conclusion he's about to draw entirely obvious. "It's more likely that a warlock can manipulate their memories than a Shadowhunter, don't you think? And one like Warlock Bane? He's got the motive. He'd do it just to spite the Clave. And he's certainly got the means."

Maryse stares at him for a long, hard moment, and the rest of the Institute is silent as they watch Raj stare right back, tipping his chin up.

"I agree," Maryse says, at last, and the room exhales collectively as the tension shatters. "But if anybody sees or remembers anything suspicious, you report to me or to Alec. Immediately."

It's ironic, really, that she's asking people to report to the very traitor the Clave wishes to hang.

After nearly an hour of more discussion, Maryse orders several Shadowhunters, including Jace, to accompany her to notify the Clave and discuss the next steps to take by taking an impromptu trip to Idris. Jace pulls a face, and Alec claps his parabatai's shoulder with a grin.

"Fuck off," Jace mutters.

"Hey, you might be able to see Clary. Don't complain too much."
"On official business? In my dreams."

Clary Fray had catapulted into their lives three years ago, appearing on their doorstep soaked through and bleeding, having been attacked by a demon, claiming to be the daughter of Jocelyn Fairchild—wife to Valentine Morgenstern.

She'd passed out before anybody had been able to question her further, and Jace had carried her to the Institute. He'd barely left her side for the next three months, while she underwent interrogations and tests and a trial by the soul sword, where she confessed that she'd been raised a mundane, and that her mother had told her the truth on her eighteenth birthday.

Alec can still remember the look of devastating heartbreak on Clary’s face when she'd told a hundred stone-cold Shadowhunters how her mother had died, attacked by a demon and slaughtered brutally in her own home, mere weeks after Clary had discovered the truth of her life. Which was when Clary had run to the Institute. She'd never met her father, she said. And she knew what he'd done, and what he was. But she wanted nothing to do with him.

The Clave, of course, was taking no chances. They'd ruled that they’d accept her into the Shadow world, but that she'd undergo four years of training in Idris, under the instruction of the Clave's best tutors. She'd agreed—on the condition that she would be allowed to continue to see her mundane best friend and step-father.

(Not that the mundane boy with stupid glasses and terrible t-shirts who could never stop talking had been much of an issue for long. Clary had apparently neglected to tell him that she'd run to the Institute, nor had she told him anything her mother had told her, and he'd chased her across the city only to get himself attacked by a nest of vampires, led by Camille Belcourt—ex-head of the New York vampire clan, and current rogue, exiled from her clan for heinous crimes to mundanes. The rest was history. Simon Lewis is possibly the lamest vampire known to mankind, and Alec feels incredibly grateful that he's only met him four or five times.)

Alec says his goodbyes to Jace, attention captured by Raj striding across the Ops Centre to the training room. He gives it a mere moment of thought, and then follows him, jogging to catch up.

"Hey, Raj!"

Raj turns, and when he sees Alec, his expression darkens. "What?"

Alec frowns at him. "Nothing, I just—"

"You just wanted to know why I saved your stupid ass?" Raj snaps, and Alec gapes at him.

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Everyone else here might be stupid, but I'm not. I know what you did. You and Izzy. And Jace too, I expect."

"Keep your voice down," Alec hisses, and pushes Raj none too gently into the training room, pushing the heavy door shut behind them. He slashes a silencing rune onto the door, and whirls round to face the other Shadowhunter.

Raj yanks himself away from Alec's grasp as though the touch of his hand burns. His nostrils are flaring, and he looks like he's about to punch Alec in the face.

"I don't know what the hell has got into you, Alec," Raj says, voice cold, "but that is the only time I'm covering for you."
"We didn't need your help," Alec snaps, curling his fingers into his palms. "We had it under control."

"Did you?" Raj laughs humourlessly, and rolls his eyes. "Ten minutes of investigation would have found that neither you nor Isabelle nor Jace were in the Institute last night, and that Jace managed to persuade Amanda to come off guard duty last night."

It's not strictly true, because Bane's spell means that nobody in the Institute is aware of having seen them last night after they all claimed to go to bed, but Alec's eyes widen and his heart rate picks up anyway, because Raj knows. He's worked it out. "How— How did you—"

"Because I'm not stupid, Alec, by the Angel. Problem solving is what I'm good at. And I know you." Raj grinds his teeth together, jaw clenching, and says, "I just want to know why the fucking hell you thought letting a bunch of Downworlders go was a good idea."

"They were innocent," Alec tells him, narrowing his eyes. From the way Raj jerks his head back and stares at him in disbelief, Alec knows it's not the answer he expected. "And if you're so good at problem solving, you should know that."

"Jesus Christ, they were in a meeting with Valentine's men." Raj's eyes flash. "What the hell is wrong with you? Have you been drugged?"

Alec scoffs. "Very funny, Raj. You know what's wrong? That you're so infatuated with the Clave's pretty lies that you're incapable of even admitting the truth in your own damn head."

"Oh, says you. Mr I-Have-Orders. You always play by the rules. You're always yelling at Jace for breaking laws. Don't be so hypocritical."

"Maybe I've just had someone change my mind about this! Maybe I've just realised that not everything the Clave claims to be true actually is! Maybe I've decided that I can't stand here and watch innocent people be tortured while their children have no parents!"

"Since when have you ever given a flying fuck about the welfare of Downworlders?" Raj narrows his eyes and shakes his head sharply, arms folded across his chest. "You're apathetic, at best. You avoid dealing with them. You do as you're goddamn told and you don't ask questions, because you're a good Shadowhunter, and that's what good Shadowhunters do. How did you do it, anyway?"

"Bane—"

Raj's eyes go wide, and his hands fall to his sides in shock. "Bane?" he spits. "As in, High Warlock Bane? You're helping Magnus Bane?"

Alec glares at him. "So? Those Downworlders were innocent. We had no evidence that they'd done anything, and what we were doing broke the Accords. Don't talk to me about rules when the Shadowhunters in this Institute choose to ignore some of our most important ones on a daily basis."

Raj laughs again, wildly, and gestures broadly with his hands. "Says who? Bane? A warlock notorious for lying and murdering? Why the hell would you believe him?"

Alec grits his teeth, and feels indignation, hot and fierce, rush through him at the accusation. Because even though those very same words have run through his mind near every time he's met the warlock, they sound so horribly wrong coming from Raj's mouth.

The man Alec has met—he hasn't lied. Not once. He's been nothing but ludicrously generous to a Shadowhunter to whom he doesn't owe the time of day. He saved Alec's life, when he could have
left him to die.

And the way he'd been last night, with Raphael, the way he'd touched his fingers to Alec's, given him a job to do instead of demanding he get out when Raphael was hurt, given him tea and let him play with his cat when he'd been on the verge of a panic attack... He'd been kind.

"He's not like that," Alec says, quietly, looking down at the floor between them, and he thinks it might be almost true. Just because what Alec has seen of Bane - of Magnus - has been such a generous portrayal doesn't mean that what Raj said isn't true. He has murdered people. He has slaughtered innocents, burnt down villages and devastated families. But—

Maybe not everything is quite so simple, so clear-cut right and wrong, so obvious black and white, as the Clave would have you believe.

Maybe Magnus Bane isn't such a simple person to understand as everyone thinks. Maybe there's more to him than that. Maybe he can be one person's murderer and another's saviour. Maybe he can be terrifyingly powerful and impossibly kind.

Raj is staring at Alec, astonishment written across his face. When he speaks, his voice is saturated with disbelief that seems to overpower his fury. "What is wrong with you? Do I need to remind you how many thousands of people have died because of him? Why the fuck are you defending him? Are you sleeping with him?"

Alec chokes, and feels his cheeks turn scarlet at the accusation. His heart beats so hard against he ribs he thinks they might break. Shit. Fuck. Raj can't know. No way. Not Raj too. He's tried so, so hard to keep this a secret, how the hell do so many people seem to know?

"What the hell, Raj? Why would you—"

Raj rolls his eyes. "I know you're gay, Alec, by the Angel, I'm not that oblivious."

"Oblivious?" Alec manages to force out, between the numb tendrils of horror spreading through him. "I'm not– I've never– When have I ever—"

"You haven't," Raj says, sharply. "You don't have to. I guess it takes one to know one."

Alec blinks at him. "Pardon?"

The anger, the indignation, seems to bleed out of Raj, dissipating into the atmosphere, and he sighs, shoulders slumping a little. "I'm not gay," Raj tells him, eyes dropping to the floor, thoughts clearly somewhere a long way away. "But when I was fifteen, I kissed a boy. A mundane boy. I kept going to see him, kept meeting up with him, kept tempting fate." He smiles wryly. "My mother caught us once. You can imagine what happened. Two weeks later, I found out he'd been mysteriously killed in a tragic car accident."

Alec lips part in sheer horror. Oh my god. "Are you saying—?"

"The Clave killed my boyfriend," Raj says, and inclines his head. "Yes."

"Then why the hell are you standing there defending them to me?"

Alec wants to shake him. He wants to make Raj see that this is exactly why he would put his family, his siblings and his parabatai, before the Clave's laws in a heartbeat. Because the Clave won't protect them. Not if they have the slightest reason not to. And nothing in the world is more important the the people you love.
"Because they were right, Alec." Raj shakes his head, and looks at him almost sadly. "They weren't right to kill him, but they were right that love like that makes us weak."

"Love like that? Love between two people of the same gender?"

"No. Raziel, you must know I don't think that. Love between people who aren't like us. Love between different species. Shadowhunters and mundanes. Shadowhunters and Downworlders." Raj touches his forearm lightly. "I thought you understood that, Alec. I thought you were different to your sister, and your parabatai."

"This situation isn't about love, by the Angel." Alec snatches his arm back, and hurt flashes through Raj's eyes. "This is about the law. This is about justice. This is about the Accords, and the fact that we were breaking them, and—"

Raj shakes his head, smiling a little. "It's always about love, with you. Don't you get that? Can't you see that? You love people too much. I know why you did it, I think. You did it because that warlock threatened your family, and you could never let anything hurt them, damn the consequences to hell. And that makes you do stupid, reckless things that I know you wouldn't do otherwise."

Alec stares at him in utter disbelief, and huffs out an incredulous laugh. "If everything I did was about love, I'd be fighting so my sister can be open about who she's dating, and so my brother can spend time with his inferior friends without being looked down upon. By the Angel, it was part of it, but I wouldn't have done that if I truly thought interrogating and torturing those Downworlders was going to help us defeat Valentine."

"You know why I can't look at you, sometimes?" Raj asks, completely ignoring what Alec said. "Because you look almost exactly like he did. His name was Cameron. You two could be brothers. I've never looked at another man like I did him. I don't know whether that's because I'm more attracted to women than men, or whether it was something unique to him, or whether I was so scarred by that experience that I can't look at men like that anymore. But sometimes I look at you, and you look so much like him that I think I feel some remnant of it again, and all I can think of is the time when love made me so weak it killed an innocent boy."

"No."

Isabelle's voice cuts through the air, sharp and cold, and Alec and Raj both whirl round to face her. Raj looks terrified, unadulterated fear flashing through his eyes, probably at being caught talking about his feelings for a boy by another Shadowhunter. He doesn't relax when he sees that it's only Isabelle, who, Alec is absolutely certain, has made out with at least two girls. He heard about one in excruciating detail; the other, he'd had the misfortune to witness, briefly.

(Isabelle is frustratingly willing to play the part of seducer in their missions. Occasionally, she gets a little too into it for Alec's taste, although she never fails to extract the necessary information.)

"You didn't kill Cameron, Raj. The Clave did. And you—" Isabelle looks at Alec. "Don't you dare buy into this. It took us long enough to hug to love is to destroy out of Jace. Don't force me to do it to you. Love didn't make you weak last night, Alec. If it was just love for Max and Jace and I that made you do that, then love made you goddamn strong."

Raj looks down, and shakes his head. "You're wrong," he says. "I know it's hard to see that, when you're friends with Downworlders, Isabelle, but—"

"They arrested my boyfriend." Isabelle flips her hair over her shoulder, and her eyes flash with defiance. "And my boyfriend is now my ex-boyfriend, because even if he forgives me, even if he
loves me, and even if I helped break him out, he can't get caught up with Shadowhunters, because our relationship put him in danger. From the Clave, and from his own people because of what they know the Clave can do. Just like the Clave put Cameron in danger."

"You've got it the wrong way round, Isabelle. We put them in danger, because we loved them, and love—"

"Raj." Isabelle's expression softens a little. "I'm grateful, for what you did. And I'm sorry about Cameron, and I'm sorry that nobody knew. But love gives you the strength to take chances and make leaps. Just because that can be hard, and have consequences, and make you go against the norm, doesn't mean it makes you weak. Especially when our norm is so revolting."

Raj exhales. "I'm sorry," he tells them. "I'll see you on patrol, tonight."

With that, Raj swings himself out of the training room, leaving Alec feeling like his world has just been rocked by one of the steadiest people he knows.

***

"You know," Magnus says, conversationally, that evening, legs throw over one end of the couch with his head on a pillow, laptop propped on his thighs and a book in one hand while he translates it for a client, "you never did tell me about Simon."

Raphael gives Magnus a Look. A deadpan, impatient, dios, really, Magnus? sort of look. He doesn't deign Magnus with a response, and instead turns back to his phone, texting furiously with someone. Lily, probably. His second-in-command is nearly as salty and prickly as he is. Magnus is sure they bond by gossiping about how terrible people are, and spend lazy middays mocking passers-by. Or something. Raphael and Ragnor always used to sit there making snide comments about Magnus' hair. He hadn't taken it to heart.

"Come on." Magnus swings a leg out and kicks Raphael where he sits in an armchair. "Tell me."

"You're annoying."

"Well, yes." Magnus grins. "Has it taken you eighty years to work that out?"

"Sixty," Raphael replies, automatically. "I'm eighty years old, I haven't known you since I was an infant. Thankfully. Otherwise I might have turned out like you." He wrinkles his nose in disgust, managing to look suitably revolted without sparing Magnus a glance.

Magnus' grin widens. "Ah, come on, be honest. Your admirable taste in suits hasn't exactly come from Ragnor. I've influenced you."

"It's still sixty years, not eighty."

"Technically, if we're going to be that picky, I'm pretty sure it's sixty-two—"

"Oh my god." Raphael looks up from his phone, finally, and glares at Magnus with the full heat of a vampire who was turned as a teenager. Or, perhaps, just a Santiago—they all had the same death-inducing, soul-destroying glare, Magnus seems to remember. "Shut up, Magnus."

"Tell me about Simon."

"Dios, not this again."
"What, I'm not allowed to take an interest in my best friend's love life? Lewis seems like a sweet kid."

"You met Simon once, for five minutes, two years ago, doing that terrible deal with Elliot. And he was only at the Dumort because he'd run out of blood, just like newborns always manage to do on an irritatingly regular basis."

Magnus raises him eyebrows. "Romantic. And ancient history. Anything a little more recent, Santiago?"

Raphael raises his eyes heavenward, as though looking to the deities for help maintaining his sanity in the face of Magnus' unrelenting probing. "No."

"Come on."

"Magnus." Raphael closes his eyes. "I don't like Simon. In fact, I'd quite like Simon to die."

Magnus purses his lips. "Raphael, you don't kill people just because you have a crush on them and don't know how to deal with it."

"Shut up."

"Ahh, so you do like him." Magnus smirks. "Gotcha."

Raphael tosses a cushion in Magnus' face. "Fuck off."

"Raphael is in loooovee," he sings, raising his arms half-heartedly to ward off Raphael's pillow cannons that keep flying his way. "I ship it."

"I've got some dumb crush on the world's worst vampire, you fancy a goddamn Lightwood who's almost certainly straight."

Magnus fixes him with a blank stare. "I assure you, I am not crushing on any Lightwoods. I do believe we had this conversation yesterday."

Raphael rolls his eyes. "You're stupid."

"Why, thank you. That might be the nicest thing you've ever said to me, my sweet blood-sucking friend."


Magnus smiles, gently, and reaches over to pat Raphael's arm. "There. See, that wasn't so hard. You can gush to me all about his nerdy cuteness, I won't judge you."

"Dios, you are insufferable."

Magnus winks at him. "You love me anyway."

Raphael mutters something under his breath. Magnus is fairly sure he's being sworn at, so he grins, and sits back to finish his work.

***

Magnus has always dreamt vividly.
Sometimes, his dreams are so full of reality that when he wakes, it takes him minutes to separate his dream world from the real one. Several times, he's spurred himself into action as a consequence of his dream, only to realise that the events he'd witnessed in his mind weren't real.

Sometimes, he dreams of Camille Belcourt, the beautiful vampire with a vicious tongue who'd taken his heart in her crimson-tipped hands and crushed it between them. She'd trampled over him, looked at the raw love he presented to her on a silver platter and laughed in his face. She'd sauntered away from him with another lover on a leash, leaving the tattered remains of a heart broken one too many times to stitch itself back together anymore.

Sometimes, he dreams of his father, of the burning world that is his father's realm, of the screams and cries of innocents that Asmodeus had evoked over millennia of cruel torture. He dreams of the promise his father, the repulsive being who raped his mother and brought him into this world, made to him once, a very long time ago: that one day, he will join him in Edom.

And sometimes, more recently - recently, at least, in the eyes of an immortal - he dreams of Ragnor Fell.

But this time isn't like the rest. This time, he's not standing over Ragnor's lifeless body. He's not there with his best friend, like everything is as it was, only to wake and remember that Ragnor is dead.

This time, he's standing over a different lifeless body, one hand on the edge of the front door to the lobby of his loft, magic still tingling with the sensation of Elias' death mere moments before. This body is covered in dark runes, wings extended out across the concrete, broken and mangled and ruined.

Ragnor stands on the other side of the fallen man, arms folded and head tilted slightly to one side as he observes him with clinical curiosity. "He's much more attractive when he hasn't broken half the bones in his body. One hundred and one bones, to be exact."

Magnus feels nothing, as he blinks down at the Shadowhunter sprawled across the sidewalk, eyelids fluttering. But something grips at him, and makes him crouch down and wrap him in swaths of healing magic. The Nephilim passes out with a soft little moan, eyes rolling back in his head, as Magnus slides an arm under his knees and another across his shoulders, mindful of his ruined wings, to lift him and carry him inside, leaving blood trailing in their wake.

Then he's inside, one knee braced on the edge of the mattress as he lifts his hands, determination set into every line of his body as he fights to save the life of a man who probably despises his mere existence. Sweat beads on his forehead and slides down the back of his neck, knuckles aching and muscles protesting against the effort of controlling his magic down to a molecular level to produce the effects he needs to. The arrow embedded in the Shadowhunter's wing was poisoned, and he feels like every problem he fixes only creates three more.

"I don't really understand this part," Ragnor says, from across the room, where he's leaning against the bathroom door. He's peering down at a book, and has a truly awful sweater on, but his words are clearly not regarding the text he's scrutinising. "What are you trying to prove, here, by saving his life?"

Then, abruptly, Magnus has changed clothes, and he's pacing, a glass of whiskey in hand, music playing quietly in the background in a failing attempt to distract himself.

"I can't believe you're worried about a Shadowhunter," Ragnor says, shaking his head as he appraises Magnus' movements from where he's sitting in an armchair, flicking through a magazine lazily. "The wonders never cease."
"I'm worried about Raphael being tortured," Magnus snaps at him, the first time his dream self has spoken. "I don't care about the Shadowhunters."

"Forgive me if I don't quite believe that," Ragnor says with a smile, before the world dissolves only to reinvent itself in the style of Magnus' hallway, and Magnus is standing in front of Alexander, eyebrows drawn together in concern.

Alexander looks mere moments from flying into a panic attack, although he calms somewhat at something Magnus says. A necklace glitters in his palm, and Magnus shakes his head, reaching out to cover the Shadowhunter's fingers. They're rough and calloused, a little bit cold and trembling just slightly, and it tugs on something deep in Magnus' chest that hasn't been touched in a long, long time.

"And there it is," Ragnor says, softly.

Ragnor's watching them, this time. His expression is open, confused and soft and wary as he watches Magnus and Alec, and his lips are drawn.

"You do care about him." Ragnor shakes his head. "Maybe not much, not yet, but you do. And with you, the most minute bit of care is enough to send you tumbling down headfirst into more care than you know what to do with."

"I don't." Magnus finds himself beside Ragnor, watching himself and the Shadowhunter, watching the way Alexander doesn't flinch away from his touch, doesn't try to pull away when Magnus' hand lingers for a little longer than it needs to. "I'm never going to see him again, Ragnor, why would I care about him? He thinks I'm a demon."

"Maybe," Ragnor agrees. "He finds you confusing. Much as we all do, I suppose. You've been kind to him. He has to reconcile that with what he's been told of you."

"I don't care about him," Magnus says again. "My feelings are entirely apathetic."

"Okay." Ragnor smiles at him, and cups the back of his neck as he turns to face him. "Be careful, my friend. This was merely the latest in an eternal line of atrocities the Clave will attempt to commit against our people. They'll come for you, next. Actively, not passively as they have for the last decades. Don't trust too well."

"I don't trust Alexander," Magnus says, but even as the words come and spill into the air between them, he realises that they're not true. He does. He does trust him, after the Shadowhunter rescued so many Downworlders, and brought Raphael home to him, and lowered himself to an alliance with a warlock, mostly in good humour.

And, from Ragnor's face as he glances over his shoulder to where Magnus is watching Alexander leave, he doesn't believe the statement either. "My dear friend, I think we both know that's a lie. But do you want to know the terrifying part?" Ragnor smiles. "I think he might just trust you, too."

***

Magnus wakes in a cold sweat. He bolts upright, gasping, the cold air nipping at his bare skin as cool silk sheets pool around his hips. Dragging a hand through his sweat-slicked hair, he glances over at the nightstand, where a digital clock proudly proclaims it to be the dead hours of the night.

_Fuck._ What the hell had that been about? What kind of crazy shit is his sleep-deprived mind going to come up with next? He hasn't had a dream like that for a while, and it's left him feeling oddly shaken, for what it was. It wasn't exactly the most terrifying dream he's ever had, and yet somehow, it's made his heart pound and his throat go dry.
He lays back down, slowly, and settles himself against the soft pillows with a long, deep exhale in an attempt to calm his racing heart.

He wishes, not for the first time in his many, many centuries, for someone beside him in his enormous, incredibly comfortable bed. The distance from one side to the other seems far too great when he wakes from a nightmare, feeling raw, exposed, vulnerable, small. He wants to roll over and feel a warm body beside him. He wants to be able to ground himself against something. Because god, nighttime can be a scary, horrible place, left to the mercy of his own thoughts and demons without the light of day to chase them away.

Inexplicably, his thoughts rest on Alexander, on the Shadowhunter who began the same as all the others, and then, abruptly, returned his dying, tortured friend back to him, in return for what? A promise to avert an attack that Magnus might not even have won? Since when do the Nephilim ever consider that they might lose a battle against the spawn of a demon?

And, more importantly, since when do they lower themselves to making deals with warlocks they consider inherently lesser? They'd rather fight and die.

The Ragnor in his dream was right, Magnus realises, just as the Ragnor of life almost always was. He trusts Alexander. Not completely, not with everything, certainly not with anything of enormous consequence, but he's starting to. He's starting to think that maybe, maybe, Alexander Lightwood has loyalties that are stronger than what he feels towards the Clave. And, more than that, having seen Isabelle, he's daring to consider that something in the young Shadowhunter's mind might just give, eventually, with enough pushing; there might be floodgates that Magnus can heave open to change his mind about Downworlders.

Someone, or something, has certainly opened those doors in Isabelle Lightwood's head. Magnus wonders whether it was dating Meliorn, or whether having those doors opened enabled her to ignore her long-conditioned prejudices and have a relationship with a Downworlder.

Magnus doesn't realise he's moving until he's sat up, bedside lamp glowing dimly and a fountain pen in hand, the nib hovering over a piece of paper.

He writes slowly as he considers his words, in careful, looping script that he'd developed over many decades as a young warlock to make himself look more professional, and then he folds the paper in half, twice, nails raking along the creases. He flicks his fingers, and the paper goes up in flames, burning away on Magnus' nightstand and making shadows dance across his bedroom until it crumples, and disappears.

Across the city, Alec lets his gear drop to the floor as he shrugs out of it, exhausted after a long night patrol. He pads over to his desk as he spots a fire message burning into existence.

Still covered in filth and grime, he peels back the folds carefully, and blinks when he recognises the handwriting as the very same curves and loops that form four letters outside an apartment block in Brooklyn.

_Bane._

He eases himself onto the floor, muscles aching and desperate for a shower, and reads.

_Little Angel,_

_Thank you. I'm not sure I said that to you. Perhaps I did. But thank you, for returning my friend to me, and for returning parents to their children. Also, thank you for once again not stabbing my cat –_
I think you might have gained his affections, which even as his loving and adoring human companion I'll confess is no mean feat, however small and adorable he may look.

If, in some hopefully-distant future, you need to find me, there's a rune on the back. A very dear friend of mine once showed it to me. It is, I believe, unsanctioned by the Clave, but you'll forgive me for assuming that that's no reason to consider it unsafe, or ineffectual.

But please, try not to crash doing any more wing gymnastics. Healing you was not an experience I wish to repeat, even if I find myself unexpectedly grateful that I did.

Remember what you did, Alexander, and be proud of it.

Magnus

Chapter End Notes

(So, yes, spoiler A was the real one -- you voted right, overall :D I may bring that idea back in the future, but not this chapter.)

I know lots of you were probably expecting greater consequences for the Downworlder rescue squad, but I'll just remind you that consequences can be long term. (AKA this is going to come back and bite someone in the arse. Hard.)

Let me know what you thought, and I promise you some actual (as opposed to dream) Malec interaction next week!

Have a great week, and for anyone like me who's got exams/is working extra shifts because it's getting to the "hot" weather where you are (quotes because I live in the UK, we don't know the meaning of hot) and is struggling, I get you, and I stand in solidarity. Good luck, and hold tight! It won't last forever!

Much love <3

Come follow me on Tumblr! (Also if you fancy it, I'd love some prompts for some short things?)
Cardinal

Chapter Summary

In which two new characters appear, Alec says the wrong thing, and Magnus is a little bewildered.

Chapter Notes

The cardinal: passionate, fiery, small, and, ahem, red. (No prizes for guessing who's turning up this chapter.)

(I feel like I haven't replied to your comments for ages? I promise I'll get to it this week!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alec is sprawled on his bed, legs splayed carelessly, running his fingers over old-fashioned, elegant script inked onto soft paper when he hears the commotion occurring downstairs.

It's been more than a week since it appeared on his desk, with Magnus Bane's words on it, thanking him, teasing him, telling him to be *proud*, and in writing, at that. He doesn't know what to make of it now any more than he had at the time.

And the name, at the bottom. *Magnus*. He's only ever called the warlock that once, on the whim of a man whose blood had been saturated with adrenaline, and he's never dared think of him as such.

*Magnus. Magnus. Magnus.*

It's as though he believes thinking the name over enough times in his head, staring at it for enough minutes, murmuring it under his breath enough, will make it seem less...


And the rune. What in Raziel's name does Bane's - Magnus'? - cryptic comment about the rune mean? Is it a tracking rune? Some kind of demonic rune? What exactly will it do?

But with the amount of noise seeping up from below increasing by the second, Alec knows that now is not time he's being granted to ponder the mystery. Not that any amount of pondering over the last twelve days has helped: merely frustrated him more.

He slips the note away, stashing it in his wardrobe between two folded sweaters that he knows nobody is ever going to touch. Except perhaps Isabelle, if she decides she needs to dress him, but...well. If anyone at the Institute has to find that note, Isabelle would be his preferred choice.

Downstairs, there seems to be a mixed feeling of elation and disapproval, and it takes mere moments for Alec to realise why. Jace, Maryse, and the other Shadowhunters she took to Alicante with her (leaving Alec to run the Institute in her absence) have returned, and, with them, Clary Fray.
Despite her vertical challenges, it's not particularly difficult to spot her, with hair that red and a presence that obnoxiously large. That, and the fact that Alec's parabatai is glowing, with that revolting, soft look on his face that he only gets around his girlfriend, whom Alec is fairly sure he hasn't seen for several months, until now.

Truly. It's revolting. Alec is sincerely relieved that his fifteen year old self, who found himself a little bit in love with his parabatai, never had to witness this. He'd have had a mental breakdown.

Isabelle is hugging Clary tightly, and Clary gasping, telling her that she can't breathe. Alec smiles to himself at the scene. While he'd been apathetic towards Clary at best, upon her arrival (and, really, he never quite reached that—it had been a steady feeling of mutual dislike) he's grown to care for her, he supposes, in the way one might grow to care for a relative's annoying, troublesome, but unswervingly loyal and frustratingly loveable dog.

(And, Alec is quite sure, Clary would have his head if she heard him comparing her to a dog, even in the privacy of his own mind. Or, rather, she'd try. If she could reach.)

"Alec!"

Jace spots him across the room, and the dopey, lovesick smile that he only ever gives to Clary transforms into a lopsided grin, which he reserves for his parabatai.

"Hey," Alec says, accepting his hug with warm arms. Twelve days has felt like a long time to spend without the other half of his soul, and, by the way Jace holds onto the hug a little bit longer than usual, and melts into Alec a little more than he would normally, Alec has an inkling that Jace felt the discomfort of their separation just as keenly.

"I missed kicking your ass," Alec tells him, when they pull back.

"Ditto." Jace smirks at him. "Still got those bruises?"

Alec rolls his eyes. "Shut up."

When they turn around, they find Clary squinting at them with one eye, arms folded across her chest. She raises an eyebrow when Alec makes a What? expression at her.

"And you wonder why I thought you two were an item," she says. "Your bromance is overwhelming."

"Those were words, yes," Jace says. "I'm not sure I understood them. Would you like a dictionary, so you can pick out some more?"

"I'm not sure bromance is a word," Alec says.

Jace shrugs, and nods his agreement. Clary shakes her head in clear despair, and mutters something under her breath about Shadowhunters having no culture.

"Yes, hello, Alec, how are you?"

Alec quirks an eyebrow. "Not dead?"

She snorts. "Cheery. At least you people understand the meaning of sarcasm. I don't think the dictionaries in Idris contain the word sarcasm. Honestly, they're all so damn boring. It's been torture."

"It's been torture because your tutors are boring?" Jace pouts at her, and Alec reigns in the urge to
smack him for being so ridiculous. Clary looks similarly inclined. "I think I should be offended."

She turns to look at Izzy and Alec; Isabelle grins, and Alec decides that there's no reason not to smack his parabatai when his girlfriend looks like she wants to, too, so he brings his hand across the back of Jace's head, lightly.

"Hey!" Jace turns his pathetic expression on Alec. "What was that for?"

"Being stupid," Alec tells him. "Max is more mature than you are."

"I think I'm going back to Idris."

"That can be arranged," says the cool voice of Maryse behind them.

Alec turns, tensing himself for a fight, but what he sees makes him blink. She looks tired - exhausted - eyes bloodshot and dark circles under her eyes clear despite a full face of make-up. Her shoulders are pulled in a little, and she looks...sad.

"Clarissa, you're aware of your return to Idris in three months for your final exams?" she asks.

"Yes." Clary glances over at Jace. "And I'm to train here until then, right? And go on a couple of patrols?"

"At Alec's discretion, and with the suitable accomplices, yes."

Alec frowns at that. "At my discretion? Does that mean you're going back to Idris?"

"I am." Maryse closes her eyes for a moment, and there's something broken in her expression when she meets his eyes again. "With Max, and your father. So you will be in charge of the Institute again. I trust there were no problems in our absence?"

"No, although no leads on Warlock Bane, either." It's true, but Alec wouldn't have told her if there had been. He's trying to divert the attention of the New York Shadowhunters onto more important matters.

"Good." She inhales deeply, and lifts her head a little, blinking rapidly. "Well, then, if that's all, I have some things to go through, and I will be departing for Idris tomorrow morning."

Alec watches the defensive lines of her body, and says, "Just you? Nobody is coming with you?"

"No. This time it's unnecessary. I'll be in my office if you need anything."

She sweeps out, chin up, back ramrod straight, heels clicking obnoxiously just as always. But it's...it seems so unnatural. Something about her whole demeanour seems distinctly off, and Alec can't begin to imagine why.

"Did something happen?" he asks Jace. "In Idris?"

Jace shrugs. "I don't know. The Council wasn't being very helpful, for a while. They spent a long time spitting about gross neglect of duties, but she shut that up eventually. She's probably tired."

Alec hums under his breath. "Doesn't she seem a little bit off to you?"

"Yeah," Jace admits. "But I don't know, man. I didn't hear about anything. Max said she's been fighting with Dad."
"Oh. Do you know what about?"

"No idea." Jace bumps his shoulder, lightly. "C'mon, Alec, you worry about things too much. If something's really wrong, we'll find out about it. Relax a bit."

And Jace turns back to his girlfriend, slinging an arm around her shoulders and pressing a kiss to her cheek, while Alec stares after his mother, and ponders what in the world could have occurred to make such a fearless, brusque, stone-hearted woman look so broken.

***

If there's one Downworlder in the world that Alec has always respected, it's Maia Roberts.

The leader of the New York wolf pack, whoever he is, keeps himself to himself, and, for reasons the New York wolves refuse to disclose to the Institute, hasn't been to negotiations in all the time he's been their alpha.

Instead, every time, he sends Maia Roberts to speak for him.

Which, Alec supposes, is how she and Clary became such bizarrely close friends. It's unusual, such open friendship between a Shadowhunter and a Downworlder, but Clary is hardly a normal Shadowhunter, having been raised in the mundane world, and Maia...

Well. Alec doesn't really know what made Maia give Valentine's daughter a chance. But something did, or they wouldn't be standing in the Institute hallway, laughing about something.

(He suspects it might have been Isabelle. Isabelle and Maia had been some sort of thing, for a while, when Clary had first arrived at the Institute.)

Maia's eyes flicker up when she sees Alec in the doorway, hesitating to walk in and interrupt the two young women. The grin on her face slips a little, becomes a little less friendly, and she jerks her head at Alec in a nod.

"Lightwood," she says, and Clary looks over her shoulder.

"Roberts," he says. "Clary, my mother wants to talk to you. She wants to run you over patrols before we let you out on one."

Clary rolls her eyes. "Because I haven't been briefed on how patrols work by my tutors for months. You people, honestly."

Alec shrugs. "If you got someone killed because you didn't know how we do things on missions, we'd be accused of gross misconduct."

Clary mutters something under her breath, and Maia snickers as Clary shoots Alec a sweet smile, and walks out, boots clapping noisily on the stone floors.

There's a long moment of silence, during which Alec shifts awkwardly, and Maia stares him down, chin tipped up. She's never been afraid of Shadowhunters, Alec knows. But she doesn't like them, or trust them.

Much like Magnus Bane.

"Clary invited me in," Maia says eventually, eyes flashing with defiance. "In case you were thinking of kicking me out. I'm not invading your over-primped church."
Alec chokes. "Over-primped..." He shakes his head, trying to fight down a snort of laughter. "I wasn't going to. I wouldn't dare kick out Clary's friend."

Maia's lips quirk. "You people need someone like Clary. She's good. I didn't always think so, when I first turned and realised my pack leader put some scrappy mundane before his own people, but I was wrong."

Alec opens his mouth to respond, and then stops, abruptly. Her pack leader put Clary before his pack? How on earth did Clary even know the leader of the New York wolves? Unless...

"Hold on." Alec lifts a hand. "Are you telling me that your pack leader is Clary's step father?"

Maia freezes, fear dancing in her eyes, and Alec knows he's right.

"Oh, god," she whispers, and closes her eyes. "I'm so stupid."

"Maia—"

"Shut up," she snarls at him, and when she blinks, her eyes turn a luminescent green. Alec lifts his hands, palms forward, but it does little to placate her. "I haven't said a word to anyone for five years, and two minutes having a conversation with you—"

Alec barely hears her, mind whirring and thoughts flashing faster than he can keep up with as he tries to understand what this revelation means. Why would Clary have said that her step-father was a mundane when he's an alpha? To hide him from the Clave? But why would an alpha want to hide from the Clave?

"Maia," he says, slowly, as he remembers Magnus Bane mentioning Lucian in the context of the Downworld, once. "Do you mean to tell me that your alpha is Lucian Greymark?"

Maia closes her eyes, and she doesn't have to nod to confirm Alec's suspicion.

By the Angel, just how many wanted people are sheltering in New York? How can the New York Conclave have missed not only Warlock Bane, but also Lucian Greymark, both living right under their noses?

"He won't help you," Maia tells him, quietly. "You can knock down his door and threaten him all you like, but he won't help you. Valentine Morgenstern tried to kill him. Luke isn't trying to hide our pack from the Clave, he's hiding us from Valentine. He's not joining your war, and neither is our pack. So shove it, Shadowhunter, and forget all of this."

Alec's eyebrows shoot up. "If I tell the Clave, I'm fairly sure they'll know exactly how to make Lucian join us."

"It's Luke," Maia snaps, anger in every tense line of her body. "And good luck to them."

"Clary," Alec says, and shrugs. "They'll use Clary."

"You asshole," Maia breaths. "You fucking– You people are inhumane. You'd threaten Clary just to get to Luke? What the hell do you think he's going to give you, anyway?"

"Contrary to popular belief, I like Clary." He shakes his head. "I won't tell the Clave yet, Maia. They wanted Valentine's parabatai. But if Lucian- Luke," he corrects himself, "is a werewolf, he's not going to be the kind of ally they expected. Just let me talk to him."
Maia barks out a harsh laugh of disbelief. "So you can threaten Clary and force him into joining an institution he despises? In your dreams, Shadowhunter."

***

It's dark by the time Magnus finishes with a Seelie client who'd wanted his expertise to assist in the downfall of her sister's ex-boyfriend, who, she told him, had raped her sister and left her to die. It had all been exceptionally dramatic—but Magnus would never complain about finding a suitable punishment for such revolting people. He suspects the man in question this time will rather miss having functioning genitals. The Downworld council had all deemed it a suitable punishment.

He's not in a particularly good mood, after the whole ordeal. So when he steps through a portal to see the lanky form of a man curled up on his doorstep, he sighs, tension inching into his shoulders. He'd really rather hoped that he could finish work for they day, and spend a lazy evening curled up with the Chairman eating pizza.

He flicks his fingers to close the portal behind him, and squares his shoulders, tipping his chin up as he approaches his apartment block. As he does, the man comes into view, and Magnus realises, with a start, that it's a Shadowhunter—it's Alexander Lightwood.

"Well," Magnus says, a teasing smirk tilting one corner of his mouth up even as, internally, he wonders at what on earth can have brought the Nephilim to his doorstep yet again. "This is unexpected."

The Shadowhunter looks up. His eyes widen when he sees Magnus, and he scrambles up so fast he stumble slightly, and has to catch himself against the wall. For one of the Nephilim, Magnus thinks, it's very uncoordinated. Is Alexander tired, or injured, or just so embarrassed he can't function properly?

And, rather than the vague disinterest he might once have found himself questioning that with, he realises that he actually cares about the answer.

"Sorry," Alexander says, and Magnus exercises heroic self-control to ensure he doesn't roll his eyes. "I- I didn't know who else to ask."

Magnus raises his eyebrows. "About what, exactly?"

"Maia, she said— I didn't mean to make her say it, I wasn't trying to lull her into a false sense of security or whatever, I just— And she said— I just want to talk to him, I don't—"

Magnus lifts a finger and hovers it in front of Alec's lips, cutting him off abruptly. Alec nearly goes cross-eyed as he stares at Magnus' fingertip, and Magnus has to quell the soft laughter bubbling inside him.

"Take a deep breath, little angel," he says, and, much to his amusement, Alexander does, in a most unsubtle fashion. "I think you'd better come in and tell me what's going on. How long have you been sitting out here?"

"An hour or two," Alec says, stepping aside so that Magnus can open the door.

"Well, no wonder you're shivering," Magnus replies, and shakes his head. "You Nephilim. Honestly."

Alec follows the warlock up the stairs, and hesitates on the threshold to Magnus' loft; Magnus encourages his wards to nudge Alec inside so he can close the door. Although he'd normally be
opposed to manhandling people without their permission, it's only a minute movement, and it's really far too cold outside to allow any more night air in. Alec doesn't look too perturbed.

"Sit," Magnus says, pointing sharply to the living room as he starts discarding layers on his journey towards the kitchen. "And talk. And if you say anything stupid, I'm not letting Chairman Meow out to fawn all over you."

Alec shoots Magnus a nasty look, and Magnus grins at him. He's far too easy to tease.

"Do you know Maia Roberts?" Alec asks him, rubbing at the back of his neck, while Magnus drapes his jacket over the back of a chair in the kitchen and waves his fingers to summon two coffees from Starbucks.

"I do." Magnus dumps sugar into the latte, and leaves the black americano untouched. "Don't mess with her if you want to keep your bodily parts attached."

Alec lets out a tired little laugh. "Yeah. I know. She's our liaison with the New York wolf pack."

Magnus hums to let Alec know that he's listening. As the Shadowhunter continues speaking, explaining his conversation with Maia that morning, Magnus nods. He can already see where this is going. He passes Alec his coffee, and Alec pauses long enough to let out a surprised thanks, before Magnus gestures for him to go on.

"I just—" He makes a frustrated noise in the back of his throat. "The Clave won't want anything to do with Luci— with Luke, if he's become a werewolf since he was Valentine's parabatai. But- But he must still know something, right? He still knew Valentine, and loved him. He must know something that can help us. And even if he doesn't, having an proper line of communication with the most powerful werewolf in the city is going to be useful. I want to talk to him. Not- not threaten him, or drag him to the Clave, I just want to talk."

Magnus appraises him over the rim of his cardboard cup where he's standing by his drinks cabinet, and raises an eyebrow. "You want to talk to Luke?"

"It's the logical thing to do," Alec says, and Magnus has to restrain himself from smacking his head against the wall.

"And you've decided that going against the Clave is going to be a bi-weekly thing for you, now, have you?"

Irritation flashes in Alec's eyes. "No, but this involves Clary, and if it involves Clary it's going to involve my parabatai. There's no telling what reaction the Clave will have if we locate Luke only to tell them he's no longer a Shadowhunter. And Clary knows him, but she told the Clave while under the soul sword that she had no idea who Lucian Greymark was, and I don't understand how she can possibly have done that. So I don't want—"

"Alright, alright." Magnus holds up a hand, because, admirable as Alec's loyalty to those he loves is, he doesn't particular want to hear another spiel about protecting his family. "And you came to me because I'm the only Downworlder you know, and you'd like me to be your mediator? Is that it?"

Alec grinds his teeth together, and he looks like he wants to snap something, but he merely says, "Yes." Magnus finds the whole thing rather endearing, and he despises himself for thinking it.

"Why not ask Clary?"

And Alec blinks, a slow, bewildered little blink, and he stares at Magnus for a good thirty seconds,
during which Magnus can't help but wonder whether he's finally said something to break the Shadowhunter. Although why such a perfectly ordinary question is the one that's finally got him, he can't fathom.

"I... didn't think of that."

Magnus rolls his eyes. "Of course you didn't. You Shadowhunters live to make my life more difficult than it needs to be. But very well." He flicks his fingers, blue sparks trailing from the tips, and a portal whirs into existence in front of his fireplace. "I never work after midnight, darling, so you've got an hour."

Alec stands up, and turns to look at Magnus with a frown on his face as he approaches the portal. "Midnight? Really?"

"No." Magnus grins. "My work hours are entirely spontaneous. But midnight is your limit tonight. So hurry your pretty little ass up, Alexander."

A flush spreads up Alec's cheeks. He averts his gaze, and redirects his attention to the swirling portal Magnus is holding open.

"Come on," Magnus says, and grips his arm, just above his elbow, to take him through the portal to Luke Garroway.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this one, and let me know what you thought! As always, my tumblr inbox is open, for questions or comments or prompts. Much love <3

Come follow me on Tumblr!
Cuckoo

Chapter Summary

In which we meet our favourite werewolves, Alec has (another) existential crisis, and Magnus appreciates Alec’s change of heart.

Chapter Notes

The cuckoo: chosen literally because somebody online claims its spiritual ability is to hide in plain sight -- which is precisely how Magnus hides from the Clave.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Alec's feet find solid ground on the other side of the portal, he takes a moment to look around himself. They appear to have landed in a bar—probably one that Isabelle and Jace know, although he doubts they're aware that Luke resides here (or, at least, if they do, he doubts they know who he really is).

It's dim, with fluorescent lights hanging at intervals along the ceiling, each one above a red-leather-padded booth, most of which are full with all variety of Downworlders. There's a bar at the other end, where Maia Roberts stands drying beer glasses with a shockingly yellow tea-towel, exchanging quips with a blonde-haired customer. And—

Oh. Of course.

Alec takes half a step back, bashing into Magnus as he does so. The warlock lets out a huff of surprise, still gripping his arm, and pushes him gently away, out of his personal space. He lets go of Alec's arm as he does so, portal closing behind them, and Alec notices the absence of the touch more than he noticed its presence.

"Sorry," Alec says, without thought as he stares at his parabatai, sitting at a bar beside a hunky young werewolf with dark curly hair, laughing while they chat to Maia. "I just— I think I should go."

"And why on earth is that?" Bane - Magnus, he reminds himself, because he'd signed his stupid letter Magnus so that's what Alec's damn well going to call him - asks. "We only just got here. And I thought you wanted to talk to Luke."

"I do," Alec says. "But that's— My parabatai is—"

Magnus follows his gaze, and he appears to notice Jace, who stands out like a sore thumb with all his dark swirling runes. Not that anybody seems to care very much.

"That's your parabatai?" Magnus asks, and lets out a chuckle. "Oh, Alexander Lightwood, it's really no wonder you're such a rebel, between your parabatai and your sister."
Alec doesn't get a chance to make a retort, because Magnus is telling him to keep his head down if he doesn't want to be noticed, and drags him around the edges of the room and out into the back. He pushes open a swinging door that nearly smacks Alec in the face, and Alec finds himself faced with a tall, buff, dark-skinned man with a gun strapped to his back and Clary Fray. Both of them are wearing identical expressions of mixed surprise and disapproval, eyebrows raised and lips pressed together.

"Magnus," the man says, eyeing Alec with a less than friendly expression. "I presume there's a reason you've brought a Shadowhunter here?"


Luke narrows his eyes. "Jace's parabatai?"

Beside him, Alec sees Magnus' jaw slacken in clear surprise and his eyebrows shoot up as he turns to Alec. "Your parabatai is Clary's boyfriend?"

Alec manages to tear his eyes away from Luke's, who's got his arms folded and is glowering at him, and turns to look at Magnus. "Yes?"

Clary rolls her eyes from where she's sitting on a countertop covered in boxes of beer and vodka, and swings her legs. "Long time no see, Magnus. How are you doing after three years?"

Magnus' eyes crinkle at the corners. "My apologies, biscuit. I'm wonderful. How was Idris?"

"Don't get her started," Luke says, with a wry shake of his head. "Appalling, apparently."

Alec gapes at the three of them as they bicker back and forth, and he wonders how many links the Institute apparently has to Luke. How many people know? If Clary knows who Luke is, Jace must know, and Isabelle does too, most likely. Why the hell did he bother coming here? And since when does Clary know Magnus Bane? He remembers sitting with Isabelle once, when Clary had first come to the Institute and they'd been trying to equip her with as much knowledge as possible, and giving Clary a run-down on the most influential Downworlders in America. She hadn't reacted to Magnus' name.

"How—" Alec clears his throat, and the three turn to look at him. "How do you two know each other?"

"Magnus was my mom's friend," Clary says. "I went to him first, before I went to the Institute. He told me I needed to go to you. He also told me what I needed to be careful of."

"Prejudice," Magnus says, "Seelies, anything the Clave says, indoctrination, kitten-killing Shadowhunters."

Alec rolls his eyes at that, because he knows it's a jibe, and Clary giggles.

"I'm not hosting the entire Institute in here," Luke tells her, sharply. "Don't get any ideas. I don't mind Isabelle, and I abide by your boyfriend. I'm not having the entire family in here. This is not a B&B."

Alec isn't quite sure how to respond. "I'm not here to—"

Luke is frowning by the time Magnus finishes explaining the situation, with some jokes at Alec's expense that make Alec want to wind back time and stab himself in the leg so he could never get to Brooklyn to ask Magnus to take him here.

"You want us to join your war," Luke surmises, and he doesn't sound at all uncertain. Nor does he appear even slightly surprised. Clary's eyes flicker between Luke and Alec nervously: she's stopped swinging her legs, and is leaning forward a little in anticipation.

"Your support would be invaluable," Alec says. "And you must have knowledge of Valentine that we don't."

Luke shakes his head. "Getting involved with Valentine would be detrimental to my pack. As would getting involved with the Clave. I've been keeping my pack out of this war."

"Even though Clary is part of our world?" Alec asks, and he knows he's walking a fine line. "Even though you could protect her from inside the Institute if you ally your pack with us?"

Magnus tenses beside him, and his glamour drops with a shimmer. "Be careful, Shadowhunter," he says, voice wavering between cool and outright icy. "That sounds suspiciously like a threat."

"No, no." Alec shakes his head urgently. Magnus' expression relaxes a little, and softens. "That's not— No. I wouldn't threaten Clary. My parabatai loves her heart and soul. I would never wish harm on her."

"Clary's in Idris for nine months of the year," Luke says, with a sharp jerk of his head. "She's not at risk from an attack by Valentine inside the city's walls."

"Only for another two weeks," Alec says. "Once she's passed her exams in a few months, she can go wherever she pleases. And as soon as she's outside the protection Idris grants, Valentine will want to lure her in just like he tried to lure in Jace."

By the way Clary freezes, and guilt steals across her face, he knows, somehow, that he's said the wrong thing. He doesn't know why, but he's sure that he has.

Luke raises his eyebrows, and turns to look at Clary. "Oh?"

"I was going to tell you," she says, and shakes her head. "I just didn't— I didn't know how to."

"I think we need a moment," Luke tells Alec and Magnus. "Excuse us. Lightwood—" Luke pauses, and waits until Alec holds his gaze before he continues. "Magnus has my number. You can tell your mother than the New York pack is willing to form an alliance with the New York Conclave."

"Thank you." Alec inclines his head. "Thank you."

***

The moment they step out of the back room, Alec finds himself abandoned in the middle of a crowded bar filled with Downworlders. He glances around himself, but Magnus is nowhere to be seen. So, inhaling deeply, he picks his way carefully through the swaths of people towards the bar, where he can see Jace.

When he rests a hand lightly on his parabatai's shoulder, Jace does a double take, chokes on his beer, and nearly falls off his bar stool. Maia folds her arms, a smirk on her face as she watches on.

"Jesus Christ, Alec," Jace says, hauling Alec up onto a stool beside him before a Seelie woman can
bash into him. "What the hell are you doing here? Did Maryse send you out to stalk me and tell me not to hang out at Downworld bars?"

"No." Alec shakes his head. "She tried that when you were sixteen, remember? Then she gave up, because you're a stubborn asshole."

Jace scoffs, and knocks his elbow against Alec's arm. "Says you. So why on earth are you here?"

With a glance over at Maia, who rolls her eyes and looks distinctly unimpressed, Alec tells Jace about his realisation about Lucian Greymark, and about asking Magnus for help, and about their consequent conversation with Luke.

Jace shakes his head. "You really over-complicate things sometimes, you know that?"

"Oh?" He quirks an eyebrow. "What, because I asked Bane for help and not Clary? I've already had that pointed out to me, I don't need it from you, too."

"That," Jace acknowledges, "but also, hello, if you've got suspicions about Downworlders, why the hell didn't you ask Izzy? Or me?"

For a moment, Alec just stares at Jace blankly, and then—

"Did you know?" he demands, turning on his bar stool to face Jace properly, hands braced on the sticky surface of the bar. "Are you telling me you knew that Luke was Lucian?"

"Alec, man, I hate to break this to you, but when you're dating someone, you tend to share your deepest darkest secrets. Clary told me about a year ago."

Alec closes his eyes. "I despise you."

"Nah." Jace is grinning when Alec looks at him, deadpan, and it's utterly infuriating. "You love me."

Ignoring Jace's self-assured statement, Alec says, "Do you know how she kept it from the Clave, when they asked her about Luke on trial?"

"She didn't know he'd changed his name." Jace shrugs. "Could have been anyone, for all she knew. She worked it out, though, and asked him."

"Raziel." Alec exhales, slowly. "Can I finish your beer?"

Jace frowns. "You hate beer."

"Thanks."

Alec chugs down the last quarter of Jace's pint with a wince, and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. He isn't a fan of beer, Jace is right, but he's heard good things about alcohol providing temporary relief from stress. And by the angel, does he need it.

"Why'd you go to Magnus Bane, anyway?" Jace asks, brow furrowed and nose wrinkled, in confusion rather than disdain. "You hate having to socialise with Downworlders."

Alec lets out a long breath, and twists the empty glass around in his hands. "I don't know. I guess I just– I don't know."

Jace's eyebrows shoot up. "Have you found a Downworlder you actually like? Oh, man." He lets out a chuckle. "You never do anything by half, do you? Had to be the High Warlock of Brooklyn."
"I don't like him, Jace, I barely know him." Alec rolls his eyes, but, unbidden, the thinks of all the times he's been utterly bewitched, unable to tear his eyes away from the warlock's. He wonders whether that's just because Magnus is so powerful that even with all his training, Alec can't resist the enchanting attributes Downworlders use to lure people - their victims - in, or whether it's something else.

"Dude, if you're gonna start making friends with Downworlders, don't let me stop you." Jace grins. "Izzy'll be proud of you."

"It's not like that," Alec tells him, warily. He slumps forward a little, elbows resting on the bar, and he feels his shoulders hunch in. "It's... We're not friends. I don't see how we ever could be. We know nothing about each other, really, and we don't ask, and we don't go and... do whatever the hell you and Izzy do with your friends. We only meet in emergencies, or for work."

"Highly illegal work that could have resulted in your death or the stripping of your marks," Jace says teasingly, but his voice is softer, and he's angled himself forwards, too, leaning in so he can give Alec his full attention while he listens. The angle of their bodies shield each other from the rest of the bar.

Alec shakes his head a little, as though to clear water from his ears. He's never been good with words, but articulating his thoughts and feelings about the High Warlock of Brooklyn is damn near impossible. They're unique, and so utterly out of the realm of his experience that he can't begin to put them into words.

"I just—" He huffs in frustration. "It's like— I don't know him, and I'm not his friend - that just seems weird, because he's some crazy, powerful warlock - but I—"

"You trust him," Jace says, gently, and—

Huh. Yeah. Alec realises that might be it. He does. He trusts Magnus Bane. He wouldn't trust him with the life of his family, maybe, or with huge, impactful decisions, but... He does. He does trust him. And the realisation doesn't bother him anywhere near as much as he thought it would.

"Where is he, anyway?" Jace asks, changing the topic as he's clearly aware that one epiphany is enough for Alec for one night. "If you came here with him, where is he? And how come I've never seen him here before?"

"That's a stupid question, Shadowhunter," Maia says abruptly, appearing out of nowhere to snag Alec's empty glass and bug Jace for cash. She taps his fingers against the bar while Jace counts out exact change from his wallet, clearly just to irritate her. "If Magnus doesn't want someone to remember seeing him, then they damn well won't. We—" (By we, Alec is fairly certain, she means the Downworlders) "—certainly won't go round dropping his whereabouts to Shadowhunters."

"You mean, I've seen Bane here before?" Jace asks in surprise, handing over the money without a sarcastic comment. "And I just don't remember?"

Maia makes a careless, nonchalant shrugging motion with her shoulders that tells Alec that she very much does not give a crap about what the High Warlock of Brooklyn may or may not have done to Jace's memory or general perception of those around him, and says, "Probably. He likes to use some spell he invented that he calls a perception filter." She rolls her eyes. "As though we don't know he stole that name from Doctor Who. But he's not going to live life shut up in his loft, is he? How do you think he's evaded the Clave for decades?"

She has a point. Jace considers Maia's words for a moment, head tilted to one side, and then he
seems to accept her conclusion without too much concern for himself, and orders another beer. Part of Alec wants to laugh (and there's a new thought, because really, this is just another reason to have Magnus arrested), and the other half wants to groan, slam his head into the table, and drag his parabatai back home before he has to witness him doing something wholly embarrassing. He doesn't want a repeat of the New Year's Day antlers streaking escapade.

"Cosmopolitan, please, my dear," says a smooth voice from behind them.

Maia smiles as Magnus takes a seat beside Alec, and says, "Coming up."

Jace gapes, first at Maia - because, Alec would presume, Maia never smiles like that, so genuinely and without any sarcasm, except occasionally with Clary - and then at Magnus. Magnus and Jace have never met, Alec realises.

(Well. Not that Jace knew about.)

"You– Did you just– She– Oh my god." Jace is gaping at Magnus like some kind of oxygen-deprived fish, and Alec cringes with embarrassment on his parabatai's behalf. Jace doesn't get particularly embarrassed at the best of times, though; with alcohol added into his brain's bizarre composition, it's not a word in his vocabulary.

"Eloquent, your parabatai," Magnus observes, giving Jace a clinical, detached glance up and down. "Hm. And blonde. Raphael warned me about you."

"Raphael Santiago?" Jace rolls his eyes. "He doesn't like me because I take the piss out of Simon all the time."

Magnus smiles, one corner of his lips turning up, and it's that terrifying, deadly smile that Alec has become strangely familiar with. And it doesn't made his heart thud so hard against his ribs he feels like they might break, anymore, either.

"Oh, I assure you, Raphael spends an enormous amount of time mocking the fledgling."

"Yeah," Jace says, sardonically, "I'm sure. He doesn't look like the type who knows what to do with a crush."

Magnus doesn't blink, but his cat eyes flash, and he doesn't put his glamour back up while he stares Jace down. The smile is still firmly in place, but without an ounce of humour in it. "Watch your tongue, Shadowhunter."

Jace looks a little intimidated—not that Alec blames him. It's with less cynicism that he says, "You can tell Santiago that Simon bleats on about him just as much as I'm sure he groans about Simon."

"Oh?" Magnus quirks an eyebrow. "Do I need to set this pair of idiots up?"

"Yes." Jace and Alec speak in unison, because Raziel, Jace is right: Alec can't have met Simon more than five times, because the Institute isn't in the business of inviting vampires over for tea, nor in dealing in vampire politics with newborns as their liaisons, but he's heard him gushing to Clary about Santiago on at least three occasions.

Magnus' other eyebrow lifts to join the first, and he makes an interested humming noise. He thanks Maia warmly when she brings his cocktail and Jace's beer, and slides her a bill that would cover the cost of his drink three times over.

"Compensation," Magnus says, shaking his head when she tries to give him change. "For me
dragging another Shadowhunter to your bar tonight."

Maia laughs. "That one doesn't talk very much. I mind less. If you could get rid of the other one for me..."

Magnus winks at her. "Say the word, Maia, and it's done."

Jace gapes, and Maia pats his hand mock-consolingly as she passes, before making a show of washing her hands afterwards. Alec chokes on a laugh at that. Maia flashes Jace a grin and a wink. "You laugh," Magnus says, quietly, turning his drink in his hands, "and god knows I understand why you young people all do, but when our people were signing the very first Accords, the Nephilim smashed and threw out every plate a Downworlder touched, because they considered it to be dirty."

Alec turns to look at him, and finds the warlock gazing down into the crimson surface of his drink, eyes a little glazed over, mind clearly somewhere far, far away. His rings catch the light as his fingers twist, and Alec wonders where he got them all. He wonders whether centuries of history is contained just in the jewellery on Magnus' fingers.

"That's ridiculous," Alec says, when it becomes apparent that Magnus isn't going to say anything else. "How can anybody expect to reach an agreement if they're behaving like that? That's just...illogical."

Magnus smiles, wryly. "It is, yes. But then, mundanes used to do very similar things to me because I'm not white." He wiggles the fingers of one hand pointedly. "The difference is, Alexander, that the mundanes are learning not to behave like savages much more quickly than the Nephilim. They're far from perfect, I'll admit. They're better in some areas of the world than others, as are you. But your people..." He shakes his head. "Sometimes, I wonder what people like your mother would do if I tried to eat off their plates, now."

"Stab you, probably," Alec says, trying for something a little more light-hearted, because he's not sure what else to say.

And it must be the right thing, he decides, because Magnus cracks a smile, and some of the tension bleeds out of his shoulders. "Probably," he agrees. "People like your sister, and your parabatai, and Clary, and the Downworlders they care for—they make me hope that perhaps, one day, your people and mine won't despise each other."

Magnus looks up, suddenly, cat eyes flickering to Alec's and catching there, locking him in so he can't look away. "And so do you, you know."

"Me?" He can't help his surprise. "But I-- I'm not like them."

"No, you're not. Isabelle and Jace are clearly people who are rather fond of words. I can sympathise entirely." He smiles a little. "And words are very important. Speaking out is important. Telling people you think they're wrong is important. But there is also, I believe, that quaint little mundane expression about words."

Alec's brow furrows. "What expression?"

"Actions," Magnus says, gently, with one of those soft little smiles curling on his lips, "speak louder than words. Specifically, little angel, your actions."

He feels the creases on his forehead deepen, and he stares at Magnus in utter bewilderment. "My...?"
What?"

"A few weeks ago, you called me a demon," Magnus says. "You thought I was going to kill you or torture you when I told you I was going to heal you. Two weeks ago, you saved my best friend, and you brought him home to me."

"I didn't do any of that on my own," Alec says, pulling a face. "And besides, you know why I—"

"You know that making an alliance with me was not your only option to try to save your brother." Magnus shakes his head. "And you don't have to do things on your own for them to matter, Alexander."

Alec huffs out a tiny little laugh, focusing on the simpler bit of Magnus' words in lieu of dissecting what, exactly, the rest of it means. "Life advice."

Magnus' lips quirk up. "Yes, alright, I'm giving you life advice. I think you need to let that go, now."

"I don't see why. You never let anything go."

"Oh?" Magnus looks amused. "Like what?"

"I don't know. Stuff." He waves his hand, and blames his newfound confidence on the alcohol. Even if he knows, logically, that he didn't have nearly enough to cause any effect on his body. "I helped Raphael. I threw a knife at your head. My relationship with your cat."

Magnus bites down on his lower lip, a grin on his face, and Alec realises that it's because he's trying not to laugh. "You seduced my cat," he corrects him. "I don't care whether or not you like him, I care that you're beguiling him away from me."

"I could never have a cat with such a ridiculous name," Alec says, rolling his eyes. "Chairman Meow? Really?"

Magnus gasps. "Shadowhunter, that is sacrilege."

"He's tiny!"

"He's perfect!"

"I hate to break up your bickering, but I need to kick you out and wipe down the bar."

Maia's voice makes Alec start, and he jumps. Beside him, Magnus lets out a soft little laugh; he glares at the warlock, but Magnus doesn't react.

"Move it, Shadowhunters," Maia orders, sharply, waving her dishcloth at Jace - who's in the process of chatting up some Seelie - and Alec. "And Magnus, your order from India is out back, if you want to get it."

"I'll come by tomorrow morning," Magnus says, and drops her a wink as he stands with fluid, feline grace. "Thank you for holding it for me."

"Anything for our best tipper," Maia replies, with a smile. She lowers her voice to a mock-whisper. "Please, please make the Shadowhunters leave."

"On it, darling," he says, and snaps his fingers to tug Jace back an inch, lightly, as one might give someone a tug on the arm.
Jace shoots him a scowl over his shoulder, and Alec snickers.

Over Jace's shoulder, Clary appears from out back, a smile on her face as she turns to say something to Luke, who laughs, fondness clear in his eyes. The sight makes a part of Alec that he usually keeps buried ache. A part of him longs for his parents to look and him and his siblings like Luke is looking at Clary.

Clary practically skips over to Jace, and stifles a laugh when she takes in his proximity to the very beautiful Seelie lady he's been flirting with.

"Jace," Clary says, eyes shining even though her voice is reproachful. "I'm fairly sure the point of being in an exclusive relationship is that you stop flirting with everything with a pulse."

Jace, to his credit, looks slightly sheepish; Clary slides her way under his arm, and he pulls her into his side to press a kiss to her forehead. It's sweet, Alec thinks, the way they clearly love each other so much. The frightened, abused ten-year-old boy that had been dumped on their doorstep by a mass murderer too infuriated by the kind heart of his son to keep him any longer wouldn't have been able to love anybody like Jace now loves Clary.

And it's testament to how much Jace has grown as a person since he became part of the Lightwood family, that he resisted all the many attempts Valentine made to persuade Jace to join him, when Jace had turned eighteen and Clary had appeared in their lives.

"Izzy's gonna be so mad that she didn't see you here," Jace says to Alec with a grin, arm still around Clary's shoulders. She's dwarfed under him, but Alec is fairly sure she could knock Jace on his ass, if she tried hard enough.

Alec rolls his eyes. "I take it she knew about Luke, too?"

Clary gives him a bashful look. "I told Iz before I told Jace."

"Of course you did." Alec shakes his head.

"Alec, chill," Jace says. "You're gonna go grey by the time you're thirty."

"People used to tell me that, too," Magnus says, reappearing out of nowhere. Alec hadn't noticed him leave, but he certainly notices his return. "Eight hundred centuries in, and still not a grey hair in sight."

Clary rolls her eyes. "You're such a liar. Oh, I watched the Roman Empire fall. I screwed Casanova. Michelangelo would be so impressed by your artwork. Did I tell you I was best friends with Cleopatra?"

"I didn't screw Casanova," is all Magnus says, wrinkling his nose. "Not my type. We did share a room in Paris once, but—"

"You know what?" Clary holds up a hand, looking mildly nauseous. "I don't think any of us need to know. Let's go." She looks up Jace, who's staring at her in clear astonishment. "What?"

"You didn't tell me you're friends with the High Warlock of Brooklyn."

Clary and Magnus exchange a glance of mild despair. Clary pats Jace consolingly on the ass, and then drags him out. At the bar, Maia lets out an exaggerated, audible sigh of relief.

"You like him more than you admit," Magnus tells her, throwing the words over his shoulder as he
turns sharply on his heel to head out. "He's growing on you!"

"Like a disease, maybe," Maia mutters, and Alec can sympathise. "Now get out of here, Magnus! And take the Shadowhunters!"

Magnus salutes, and Alec follows him out, leaving Maia, Luke, and the other staff to close up.

***

Outside, it's freezing, and Magnus shivers slightly as the icy night air hits them. It's a strange, imperfect movement, from Magnus Bane, but Alec isn't as surprised as he might have been, weeks ago. It's easier and easier to remember than for all his bravado and extensive magical power, he's not impervious to the human difficulties that affect everyone.

Jace and Clary are walking up the street towards the subway station ahead of them, talking and giggling in the darkness, arms wound around each other. A small smile crosses Alec's face, but it's tinged with sadness. Because he knows, with absolute, devastating certainty, that he's never going to be able to have that. He's never going to be able to feel for someone the way they feel for each other. He accepted that a long time ago. He buried that part of himself, deep, deep down, and instead married himself to his job.

And maybe it's the nighttime, or maybe it's the bizarre evening he's had, or maybe it's just something about all the events of the last few weeks, but he can't help the wistful feeling that wells up inside him.

A hand rests lightly on his arm, yanking him sharply from his thoughts. His head jerks to one side, stance becoming instantly defensive, and he sees Magnus, watching him with yellow-green eyes.

"Are you alright?" he asks, gently, brow furrowed in what Alec thinks might just be concern.

"Yeah."

The defensiveness doesn't leave him, every muscle in his body clenched and tense at being caught while thinking about—that. It must put Magnus off, because he withdraws his hand, but his frown doesn't ease, even as Alec stares resolutely ahead, forcing himself not to look at Magnus. Because if he does, he's scared he won't be able to look away. And nobody can know. It's bad enough that so many people seem to have been able to work it out already, like he's got the words branded across his forehead like some distasteful, ostentatious tattoo. He can't have Magnus knowing, too.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm fine," Alec snaps, and then closes his eyes. Fuck. He inhales deeply in an attempt to calm himself before he opens his mouth again. "Sorry."

"It's clearly a sensitive topic, whatever it is. I understand that. But it's not my fault, Shadowhunter."

"No, I know. I'm sorry. Really."

He chances a glance at Magnus, who's giving him a reproachful look, eyebrows slightly raised. He's got a piercing in his eyebrow, make-up dark and smoky, and with all that and his goatee shadowing the lower half of his face, he looks particularly dangerous, tonight.

"I'm sure I can find it in myself to forgive you just this once." He smiles tightly. "You got what you wanted, tonight, so—" Magnus waves his hand, fingers swishing elegantly in the air, and a scrap of paper appears in a shower of soft blue sparks. "Luke Garroway's phone number, as requested."
Alec takes the paper from where it's hovering in the air, and looks back up when he sees two numbers written down. "Who's is the other one?"

"The bottom one is mine," Magnus says, and he sounds teasing, but there's a flash of something in his eyes that's almost...uncertain. "So you don't need to sit outside my apartment in the cold for two hours, next time you have an 'emergency'."

"Oh." His eyes fall back down to the carefully formed numbers. It's Magnus' elegant handwriting, written in glittery silver pen. Something warm settles in Alec's chest. "Thank you. I'll- I'll try not to. Have an emergency, that is. I mean—"

"Shh." Magnus is smiling, softly, when he lifts a finger to Alec's lips, like he did before, and hovers it in front of his mouth. He's close enough for Alec to feel the heat of his skin, but not touching, and it makes the warmth settled in Alec's chest squirm. It's not an entirely unpleasant sensation, for all its unfamiliarity. "Go home, little angel."

"Right." Magnus lowers his hand, and Alec swallows. "Um. Yeah. Okay."

"Goodnight, Alexander," Magnus says, with a little laugh.

"Goodnight, Magnus."

Magnus' smile widens infinitesimally. "That's really much nicer, you know."

It takes Alec a moment to realise what Magnus means. His name. His first name. It's only the second time Alec has ever called him that, to his face. But by the time his brain has caught up, Magnus has turned, and is making wide sweeping motions with his arms, every movement impossibly fluid. A portal appears in the air, soft blue and shimmering, and Magnus steps through without looking back.

Chapter End Notes

Well! Got there in the end :)

I'm curious, because I saw some discussions about this on Tumblr: where do you guys stand on the immortality issue? What's your happy ending? As is? Magnus becoming mortal? Alec becoming immortal? (I already know how this story will end with regards to all that, but I'm curious!)

Have a great week, you guys! Much love <3
Quail

Chapter Summary

In which Maryse meets Luke, Alec has an existential crisis, and who does he call? (Not ghostbusters.)

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the chapter summary. Really. I just couldn't resist.

This chapter's bird is the quail! Protective, especially of their family, and they're pretty good at hiding. Hence -- Luke Garroway ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Let me get this straight," Catarina says from the other end of the phone line. She sounds utterly incredulous. Getting her to that state is some feat, after so many decades of friendship. "You're whinging to me because you saved some prejudiced Shadowhunter's life, he then saved Raphael's life, which you think means he's becoming less prejudiced, and— What? You gave him your phone number and had a moment?"

Magnus groans from where he's lounging in bed on his silk sheets, naked save for a semi-sheer silk robe that he acquired on a trip to India that he barely remembers in the mid twentieth century, due to how drunk he'd been for its entirety. The Chairman is curled up on his pillow, asleep, and Magnus wishes he could be so deep in slumber on a Sunday morning. He's clearly been spending too much time with the Nephilim. Their ridiculous sleeping habits must have rubbed off on him. It's revolting.

"We didn't have a moment, Catarina, he's a Shadowhunter. And he's probably straight. Two things I don't do particularly well with. I really wish people would stop assuming I fancy him. It's an entirely irrational conclusion, and it's not true."

"Is he handsome?"

"Well, yes," Magnus admits, because he has eyes. Of course Alexander is handsome. He's very handsome. But, again: he's a Shadowhunter, and a probably-straight one at that. Although he supposes he shouldn't assume. "But that's beside the point—"

"Is it?" Catarina sounds unconvinced, which Magnus thinks is most unfair. "Then why are you calling me, exactly?"

"Because he's so— I don't know, Catarina. See, this is why I'm calling you. I don't know what to think about him. He is changing. And I don't know whether that's because I saved his life, or because of what he did in rescuing the Downworlders, or because for some reason he's suddenly being exposed to Downworlders in different ways, but—"

"Magnus, I heard you the first twenty times you had this rant," Catarina says firmly. It's her nurse-
voice, and it never bodes well when she starts sounding like that. "I don't need to hear it again. I
don't see what you want me to tell you. It sounds to me like you've already made your mind up."

"I have?" Magnus perks up, and props himself up on an elbow. "Do tell."

He can practically see Catarina rolling her eyes at him.

"From where I'm standing, you seem to like him, and trust him. To some degree, at least. What else
is there to say? You've liked Shadowhunters before. Will Herondale. Jem Carstairs. Will was the
biggest asshole on the planet, or so you keep telling us."

"In a different way," Magnus says, although she's right. "He didn't buy into the Clave's shit like
Alexander does. Or did. See, I don't even know what he thinks. I don't think he knows what he
thinks anymore. It was all much easier to understand when he called me a demon and thought he
should kill me. But he doesn't do that anymore, he just keeps apologising and saying thank you.
When exactly did Shadowhunters learn to mind their Ps and Qs, Catarina?"

"Then help him," Catarina says, voice gentling a little. She wisely chooses to ignore Magnus'
ramblings, and focus on the bigger issues. "There's no reason not to. If you like his sister, and you
like him, why not? Just be careful. I don't want our next phone call to be you drinking in an attempt
to drown your misery. Or crying."

But I wouldn't phone you if you're dead. Obviously."

"Or you get your heart broken. I know what you're like. You throw everything in far too quickly
without a thought for the consequences."

"For the last time, Cat, I don't like Alexander. Not like that."

"If you say so." She sound mischievous, and horribly, horribly like Ragnor when he used to tease
Magnus about his romantic proclivities. "Look after yourself, Magnus."

They say their goodbyes, hang up, and Magnus tosses his phone down with a huff. Why are all his
friends so utterly determined to think he fancies the eldest Lightwood sibling?

***

The first time Luke came to the Institute, Alec knew, was never going to be an elegant, seamless
affair.

He didn't expect it to be quite as catastrophic as it turned out to be, however.

It had started out okay. He'd greeted Luke at the door with Clary, and led him and another wolf -
Alaric - through to the meeting room, where Jace and Isabelle were already waiting for him. Then
he'd disappeared to the Ops Centre to find his mother, and let her know that their guest had arrived.

Which, he thinks, is probably where it all went wrong.

Maryse walks into the meeting room with her chin tipped up defiantly, heels clacking on the stone
floor. She's returned to the Institute after a week in Idris just to attend this meeting, and it's only the
second time Alec has seen her since her trip. Her eyes are bloodshot, he notes, and she looks
exhausted, but she holds herself with the same strength and pride as always.

She greets Luke coldly, and by the Angel, Alec is fully aware that his mother has some particularly
strong opinions about Downworlders, but even for her, the icy greeting seems a little excessive. She ignores Alaric entirely. Alec glances over and Jace and Isabelle, who are sitting on the opposite side of the table, and they exchange puzzled looks at Maryse's behaviour.

Luke, to his credit, remains entirely professional as he lays out his terms and expectations upfront. Some points, he tells them, are non-negotiable. Others, he's willing to be flexible about.

Maryse forces out her own conditions, many of which have been mandated by the Clave, through gritted teeth, shoulders tensed and loathing clearly boiling beneath her skin. Alec wonders whether she and Luke have some kind of history, from when Luke was still a Shadowhunter. He sees no other explanation for her behaviour; he certainly can't fault Luke's behaviour today.

An hour into the negotiations, during which time Alec, Jace and Isabelle have interjected several times to prevent their mother's self-control slipping through her grasp, there's a knock at the door. It's cracked open the moment Alec asks whoever's outside to come in.

Clary pokes her head around. She glances at Luke, and offers him a smile; Luke's expression softens a little when he sees her. But her gaze slides across to Jace, who's lounging on one of the hard wooden chairs, fiddling with his stele.

"Jace," she says, "Raj and I have just located a hoard of six or seven Ravener demons hiding down by the docks. We were wondering if you could come with."

Jace is out of his seat the moment Clary asks him to come, and Alec has to press his lips together to stifle his laughter. Of course Jace would jump at any opportunity to get out of a boring, legal meeting.

Maryse, however, shoots out an arm to stop Jace in his tracks, and she rises from her own seat at the head of the table. "I believe, Clarissa, that you could be asking Alec about this. Jace will give you whatever you want because he's your boyfriend, so he's hardly an unbiased source."

Clary blinks, clearly taken aback, and Alec stares at his mother. Where on earth did that come from? Maryse has never really been Clary's greatest fan, but the more accustomed Clary becomes to their world, the higher she seems to go up in Maryse's estimation.

Alec can sympathise.

"I—" Clary looks to Alec, a little helplessly. "I didn't—"

"Mom, it's fine," Alec says. "I told her she could do any routine, in-out mission as long as she's got two people with her."

"I can run this by Alec if you need me to," Clary pipes up from the doorway. "I just asked Jace to come because I know you need Alec in here for the negotiations."

She's trying to be helpful, trying to diffuse the situation, like always. Once upon a time, Alec had found it immensely irritating, mostly due to the fact that points of conflict tended to rise as a consequence of her actions, and partly due to her insufferable holier-than-thou attitude. Alec thinks she's grown up and kicked the attitude. Isabelle says she never had it, and that he's the one who's changed.

Magnus would probably tell him it's a bit of both.

"Really, it's fine," Alec assures Clary. "Six Ravener demons and two and a half Shadowhunters—" She rolls her eyes, and he grins at her "—aren't going to be a problem."
Valentine's daughter can't always get her way,” Maryse mutters, under her breath.

Alec is fairly sure that Clary doesn’t hear her, but Jace does, and, although he's at the other end of the table, so does Luke. Both men tense all over, jaws tightening. Jace shakes his head at Maryse sharply, and Luke curls a hand into a fist.

"If you want this alliance to be successful, Maryse, be careful,” Luke says. He sounds calm, steady, but there's an underlying steel to his voice; Alec is certain Luke is no pushover, and he's not going to allow anybody to insult Clary for her unfortunate parent. Particularly not one who didn't have so much as a hand in raising her.

"You're lucky I don't deem Clarissa's concealment of your location from the Clave important enough to bring up,” Maryse snaps, eyes blazing as she turns on the alpha.

"She didn't know I was important," Luke says. "Neither Jocelyn nor myself told her. Not until later, when she heard about some Lucian Greymark in relation to her mother and asked me. Alec knows this."

"I explained," Alec says, with a nod in Luke's direction. "We discussed it."

Maryse leans over the table, towards Luke. "The only reason," she says, quietly, furiously, "that I am not reporting to the Clave about Valentine's daughter concealing the location of an ex-Circle member is that Valentine is gaining ground in the Downworld, and his experiments are becoming more and more successful."

For a moment, surprise shoots through Alec, and he sits back in his chair slightly. Luke used to be a part of the Circle? But then, he supposes, as Valentine's parabatai, it doesn't seem particularly extraordinary, if a little strange, for such a level-headed man to be part of something so destructive and irrational.

Luke doesn't look at all threatened. Instead, he raises his eyebrows, and says, "If once being part of the Circle in one's youth were an unforgivable crime, Maryse, you and your husband would not be running one of the most influential Institutes in North America."

The colour drains from Maryse's face. Pale, lips pressed into a severe line, she straightens. Her eyes are panicked, wild, darting around the room but resolutely avoiding the gazes of her children. Without a word, she turns on her heel, forces herself past Clary, and storms out, slamming the meeting room door behind her.

It takes Alec several seconds for Luke's words to sink in, as he stares after his mother with wide eyes, alarmed by her reaction. If once being part of the Circle in one's youth were an unforgivable crime, Maryse, you and your husband would not be running one of the most influential Institutes in North America.

Does Luke mean...?

"Well, that was a success." Jace's voice breaks the sudden silence that descended following Maryse's abrupt departure, and he shakes his head, shooting Clary a tense little smile. "Can we go stab some demons now?"


Luke inclines his head. "Of course."

The pair disappear, the door swinging shut more softly this time, and Alec turns in his chair to face
Luke, mind whirring with questions and heart racing.

"Luke," he says, "what you said, just then. Do you mean that my parents were part of the Circle?"

Luke raises his eyebrows, and glances between Alec and Isabelle, who are both watching him urgently. "You didn't know? Yeah, your parents were part of the inner Circle. Some of Valentine's finest recruits. When the Clave tried the remaining members of the Circle, your parents got a much lighter sentence than most. Partly because they're Lightwoods, and partly because of you."

"Sentence?" Isabelle asks, while Alec says in astonishment, "Me?"

"Yes. To both. Your parents were kicked out of Idris and told they had to run this Institute for the rest of their lives, as long as they were fit to do so. They're not allowed to return to their lives in Idris. Technically. I doubt the Clave will care too much what they do after twenty years, now you're old enough to run the Institute. And you, Alec, being so young at the time, meant that the Clave considered it immoral to do to your parents what they did to some of the others. Imprisonment in the City of Bones, or curses that kept people locked inside the walls of some location. One woman had her runes stripped."

"What about you? How did you escape the Clave? And Jocelyn?" Isabelle asks, while Alec tries to let the information settle in his mind. His parents were part of the Circle. They bought into Valentine's ludicrous beliefs and methods. They were part of an institution that seeks to destroy everything Shadowhunters are supposed to protect.

Alec has spent his life trying to do right, by the Clave and by his parents. The rules, the Law, the expectations his parents have of him, have always been at the front of his mind. He's a good Shadowhunter. He does his job. He does as he's told, and he doesn't question, because he's got no reason to.

Except now, maybe he has.

Luke is talking, telling Isabelle about he and Jocelyn escaping when they realised how corrupt Valentine and the Circle were and fleeing to the mundane world. But Alec can't focus on his words. He feels like his world is spinning, tilting, tipping on its axis as everything he used to believe, everything that's grounded him, the very foundations he's built his life upon - the fact that he can trust his parents - is uprooted, and shattered.

Maybe the events of the last couple of months have been pushing him ever-closer to this edge, anyway. Everything he's seen, everything he's been exposed to - Magnus, and Raphael Santiago, and the way Isabelle had gripped Meliorn's hand like a lifeline, and Luke, and Jace in that bar - has made its mark. But this feels like the last straw.

He's been teetering on the edge of the cliff for so many weeks, he realises. The knowledge of what his parents did in their youth, when he was young, has only served to push him over the edge.

Where he's falling to, he doesn't have a clue. It's an abyss, a bottomless chasm that fades into darkness before he can see where he's going to land. He wonders, fleetingly, what's going to meet him when he hits the ground. Or, indeed, if he'll ever hit the ground.

He thinks it's probably going to hurt.

He feels like he's been suddenly submerged in water, the world around him moving in slow motion, distorted and blurry as he blinks at the forms of his sister and Luke. Their voices are muffled, words slurring together and syllables incoherent.
"Alec?"

Fingers snap in front of Alec's face, nails painted with clear gloss and neatly rounded, and he blinks. Isabelle is peering at him, brow furrowed, and, behind her, he sees Luke standing, looking at his phone with a grin tugging at one corner of his lips at whatever he's reading.

"Maia wants to know whether she has permission to give some Shadowhunters a taste of their own medicine," Luke says, shaking his head fondly. "I think that means I need to get back before my pack breaks down your door and demands to know what you've done with me."

Alec replies with something fairly banal, and rises to show Luke out—and to ensure the alpha doesn't run into his mother. Enough damage has been done for one day.

***

[Unknown Number, 18:32]

Hi, this is Alec Lightwood. I know you must be busy, and don't feel obliged, but I was wondering if I could ask you something?

For several seconds after magicking open his front door and first reading the text, Magnus stares at his screen in amused bewilderment. It's such a shy message, and Alexander might be reserved, and easily embarrassed, and sometimes very self-conscious, but he's not really shy. Well, he is, but not like that, in a nervous, hesitant, ready-to-backtrack kind of way. He's a leader, and he acts like one.

Although, for a Shadowhunter, the acknowledgement that Magnus might well have other things to be doing than fixing scraped knees of Shadowhunters is rather delightful. Perhaps he has managed to impart some small sense of perspective onto this particular Shadowhunter. Or, perhaps, that's Isabelle's influence.

It's nearly ten o'clock, now, and Magnus had still got the sticky remnants of a healing potion all over his hands and blood stains up one arm from his emergency appointment with a vampire earlier in the evening. So, rather than respond immediately, Magnus sets his phone down and heads into the bathroom, discarding clothes as he goes.

When he comes out of the shower, feeling considerably more refreshed, he ties the sash on his robe, spares a moment to towel-dry his hair, and flicks his fingers to summon himself a coffee. As he sits down, phone in hand, the Chairman jumps up onto his thigh with a meow. He looks at Magnus' coffee with clear disdain, before nudging against Magnus' hand in a demand for attention.

"I know, I know," Magnus says, rubbing between his cat's ears. "Caffeine at bedtime is bad for my sleep. But I'm about to have a conversation with a Shadowhunter, Chairman, I need it."

He saves Alec's number in his phone before he calls him.

"Yeah?"

Honestly, does he not check who's calling him before he answers the phone?

"Hello, Alexander," Magnus says.

"Um, hi." Alec's voices comes through the speaker hesitantly, and Magnus can hear the jostling of clothes and the clank of metal bashing against metal from the other end. "Hang on, I just– Jace, for fuck's sake– No!"
A smile steals across Magnus’ face, eyebrows lifting. It sounds like Alec has just come back from a mission. A nighttime patrol, probably.

"Sorry," Alec says, and Magnus hears the hubbub of background noise diminish gradually as, presumably, Alec moves location. "We just came back from patrol. Jace was being an ass."

"So I gathered," Magnus says, and takes a sip of his coffee. Holding his phone in one hand and his coffee in the other means that he's had to neglect his petting of the Chairman, who chooses that particular moment to jump off his lap and dart out of the room in a huff. *Honestly.* He's worse than a teenager.

"Look, I– Are you busy?"

"No, little angel, that's why I'm calling you. I'm afraid you're not top of my priority list."

*Although you're climbing the ladder,* he thinks, trying not to consider just how concerning that is. Concerning for what it means. Concerning for what it means Magnus feels.

"Right." Alec lets out a little laugh. It's slightly self-deprecating, but mostly just sheepish. "This is a bit- This might sound weird, but- Well. I have a question about my parents."

Magnus blinks down at his coffee. "Your parents?" he repeats, blankly, because that's the last thing he expected. He expected this to be Alec asking for a favour. He expected to have to remind this Shadowhunter that despite their unlikely alliance, he is not a pet warlock to be called upon willy-nilly.

"Yeah. It's just something Luke said earlier today. He and my mother met. It didn't go very well. It's not- He didn't do anything wrong, but what he said has...freaked me out a little bit. And I didn't know who else to ask."

"Mm." Magnus takes another sip of coffee, and ponders Alexander's words. "You know, darling, I'm fairly sure that's the second time you've said that to me in the last ten days. You said the same thing when you wanted to speak with Luke."

"I–" That makes Alec pause, for several seconds. There's silence on the other end of the line. "I did."

He doesn't say anything else. Magnus can't help but wonder what he's thinking; he also can't fathom what on earth Luke could have said to throw Alexander into what's clearly something of an existential crisis. And concerning Alec's parents? Some anecdote of horror from their youth? But Luke's not a cruel man—he wouldn't tell those sorts of tales in front of the Lightwoods' children.

"Your parents are not my favourite topic of conversation," Magnus tells him, eventually. "But, if you wish, I have no appointments after half past eight tomorrow night. I'm sure I can slot you in."

"Come to your apartment?" Alec asks, the surprise in his voice clear. "Oh. That's– Oh."

Magnus rolls his eyes. "Problem, Shadowhunter?"

"No! I just– Thank you. You don't have to go out of your way, or whatever."

"Or whatever," Magnus repeats, lips twitching. "You were more eloquent when you hated me, darling."

"It's easier to hate mindlessly than actually put thought into the person behind the title," Alec replies, and it's such an immediate response that slips from between his lips so easily that Magnus pauses,
feels his ever-restless mind still and settle in on the idea for a moment.

"Yes," Magnus agrees, softly. "It is. I'm glad you realise that. Now, unless there's anything else I can do for you at this time—"

"No. That was all. Thank you."

"Tomorrow, half past eight." Magnus considers telling Alec to bring wine - jokingly, of course - but he thinks the Shadowhunter might take it a little too seriously. So he merely says, "Don't be late."

"Yeah. Okay." Alec clears his throat. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight, little angel."

And Magnus hangs up, wondering what it is, exactly, that enables Alexander to touch parts of Magnus that have been buried for so long he almost forgot they existed.

Chapter End Notes

So, yes, that does mean that next chapter is pretty malec-heavy. You're not complaining too much, right? ;)

I've had a couple of people ask me about how long this is going to be. At the moment, I can't give you a solid answer, because originally I was expecting this to peak at around 25 chapters. It's gonna be a lot longer than that! I'm guessing 40 chapters, but that might change.

If you haven't heard "Most Girls" by Hailee Steinfeld, seriously, go find it on YouTube.

Anyway, let me know what you thought, and, as always, Come follow me on Tumblr!

Much love <3
Cockatiel

Chapter Summary

In which Magnus' muscles fight his clothing, Alec definitely doesn't notice, and things get a little intense.

Chapter Notes

The cockatiel: friendship, comfort, and the opening of the heart. (Thank you to the person who pointed out to me that I'd already used the blue jay as a chapter title!)

(Also, I apologise for this being late -- I'm not at home, my wifi is a little limited. British countryside, what can I say?)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alec approaches Magnus Bane's apartment building at exactly half past eight the following evening. The press of the wards around him, hissing and defensive and warm, has become familiar, as has the way they ease back, slowly, gentling and softening when Magnus lets him through. Part of him is fascinated as to how, exactly, they work—is it a conscious decision on Magnus' part, to let people in and out? Does he have to perform a spell, each time? Or do they start to recognise and trust people, like conscious entities in their own right?

The man himself is stood in the kitchen eating cheap Chinese take-out with a pair chopsticks when Alec walks through the half-open front door. The monotony, the mundaneness of such an action makes Alec stop in his tracks.

Well. It's partly that. It's partly the fact that Magnus is dressed in horribly fitting black jeans and an equally tight blue shirt, which clings to him like a second skin and exposes a tantalising amount of very muscled chest—enough to tease, but not enough to tell.

Alec pushes away those thoughts hastily, and decides, very firmly, that he won't examine them. Now, or ever. They belong in that locked-away corner of his mind that he never, ever touches. And in this context, about this man, this warlock, they're especially...unsafe. Imprudent.

Magnus smiles at him when he walks in. It looks reflexive, but it doesn't look forced. It's as though... What, exactly? As though the High Warlock of Brooklyn genuinely gives a crap about a Shadowhunter coming to visit?

Alec's fooling himself. He's seeing things that really, really aren't there. And he won't consider why. He's just being stupid. He's unbalanced. His frame of mind is wrong, his thoughts are all scattered, and he doesn't know where to turn to after this realisation about his parents.

That's all it is.

When Alec doesn't return Magnus' smile, or say a word, Magnus' expression drops, and he raises his
eyebrows. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah." Alec clears his throat. "Yes. Sorry."

"Hm." Magnus surveys him, brow slightly furrowed and lips pursed. "Take a seat, and tell me what's bothering you so much that I'm the one you're coming to for life lessons."

Alec's lips quirk up at that. He does as Magnus says, and sits himself on one of the plush sofas; Magnus flops down at the other end, and kicks his socked feet up onto the low-lying coffee table. He's left his now-empty take-out box in the kitchen, but hasn't bothered to throw it away yet.

"So?" He quirks an eyebrow. "You had a question?"

"Did you know my parents were in the Circle?"

Magnus blinks, twice. "I did. Why?"

"Did everyone know except us?" Alec asks, exhaling heavily.

"Darling, I'm rather a lot older than you are. I was alive when your parents were part of the Circle," Magnus says, not unkindly.

"So was I, apparently."

"Well, yes, I suppose you were, but I was old enough to remember it." Magnus shakes his head. "Is that was this is about? Your parents being part of the Circle? Is that what Luke told you?"

"He insinuated," Alec says, squirming a little in place as he looks down at his hands, which are folded tightly together in his lap, the fingers of one hand digging arrhythmically into the palm of the other, in and out, press and pull, scratch and rub. "I don't think he realised we didn't know."

"Luke wouldn't have said anything if he thought you didn't know," Magnus says. "He's not a cruel man. I must say, I'm rather impressed they kept it from you all so well. But yes, your parents were some of Valentine's most trusted confidants, and they escaped the fates some of the others suffered. Though perhaps they shouldn't have."

His eyes go suddenly dark, and his jaw clenches, and Alec is reminded of exactly how much power lies underneath such calmness. Magnus is like the sea, powerful and unending and impossible to fathom or understand. His surface is gentle, although prone to storms of anger and indignation, but the smooth, even waves hide rip tides beneath that could devastate a city, given the right catalyst.

"I just- I don't understand," Alec says, frustrated. He turns to look up at Magnus, who's watching him steadily, with the patience of a being who's cultivated more wisdom than anyone mortal can comprehend. "All my life, they've stressed how paramount it is that we follow the law to the letter, and do the Clave's bidding. But they opposed it. They fought against it, fought to change it. I don't understand. Why?"

"I don't know," Magnus says. "People do things when they're young. Many later come to regret their actions. Sometimes people do things because the think it's the right thing to do, and later realise they were horribly, horribly wrong."

"They were my age," Alec says. "Older than me, even. They must have been, what, Isabelle's age, when they joined? So older than me by the time the Clave hunted down the Circle the first time. Being young doesn't make you stupid. Isabelle wouldn't be pulled into something that barbaric."
Magnus shakes his head. "Valentine was a very persuasive young man. And some of what he said wasn't wrong. The Clave is corrupt. You Shadowhunters have lost sight of the mission you were given, more worried by your own politics and status than protecting the mundane world and defending wronged Downworlders and keeping peace in our world. The Clave is more like Valentine than they realise. Valentine's solution to those issues just happens to be genocide."

"Why are you defending them?" Alec can't help his bewilderment. Or his revulsion. Nothing can excuse joining Valentine, and fighting for his cause.

A bitter chuckle bubbles up Magnus' throat. "Oh, Alexander, I assure you, I make absolutely no excuses for your parents. But it's too easy to judge a book by its cover, to judge a person by their past, without asking why. And even the most atrocious people and the most horrific actions must be understood, if a repeat is to be prevented. And sometimes, people improve, and realise their wrongs, and try to atone for their crimes. Even if you can't forgive their pasts, sometimes you have to learn to respect their present, if they put in enough effort. Although," he adds, and his eyes burn with a deep-seated anger for just a moment, like a scattering of magnesium igniting in the nighttime. "I'm not convinced your parents belong to that category of earning respect."

Alec holds his gaze, staring into slitted cat-eyes, and says, "What are you talking about?"

"You've read my file. You've bought into the Clave's tales of my youth. I'm quite sure you know all about the destruction I've caused." Magnus' eyes flash, as he stares at Alec unblinkingly. There's a challenge there, but Alec's not sure what he's being asked to do.

"I- Yes," Alec says, cautiously. Unconsciously, he finds himself running over where on his body he's got his weapons hidden. He catches himself before he gets too far: Magnus isn't going to start attacking him for verbal missteps. He's not in danger here.

And—

Huh. He's not sure when he realised that, that he's safe in the High Warlock of Brooklyn's apartment—the home of the Clave's most wanted criminal. But his gut tells him that he is. And what was it Jace said?

_You've got good instincts. I trust you. I trust your gut._

"Tell me, then," Magnus says, waving a bejewelled hand, rings glinting in the low evening light. "What does my file tell you about my murderous past?"

"Indonesia," Alec says, and clears his throat. Magnus inclines his head, but doesn't break away from Alec's gaze. "Centuries ago, there was a storm. A tornado, or a hurricane, or a lightning storm, or something. Villagers blamed it on a demon, or punishment from the gods. Your file says you caused it. Destroyed the entire village. Killed thousands of people."

Magnus doesn't react. He doesn't even flinch. He merely raises his eyebrows, and says, "What else?"


Magnus shrugs diplomatically. "I've had periods of sleeping around, I'm not going to pretend otherwise. It was all entirely consensual, so I don't see what business it is of anyone else's."

Alec nearly chokes at such a response. He splutters. "I- I didn't mean- You don't- I don't care, I just
"I know." Magnus tilts his head slightly to one side. His eyes are unglamoured, pupils slitted, and Alec feels like those eyes can read his every thought. "You're not entirely wrong. In fact, most of that is true."

Alec's lips part a little, and the world seems abruptly very quiet. And he realises that some strange, unconsidered part of his mind had wanted Magnus to deny it. He'd wanted things to be simpler. He didn't want to have to understand this Magnus, the Magnus he's come to know, but always in the context of the warlock he's been told stories of.

"But it's not that simple," Magnus says.

"How?" Alec bites out, harshly. "Either you murdered people or you didn't."

"I killed people," Magnus agrees. "It depends somewhat on your definition of murder."

"What does that mean?"

Magnus snaps his fingers, twisting his wrist elegantly as he does so, and a wine glass appears in his hand. Another appears on the smooth mahogany coffee table set in front of the sofa, clearly in offering to Alec, but he doesn't reach for it yet.

"I was born in Indonesia," Magnus says. He pulls his legs up onto the sofa, one knee bent up, the other sprawled sideways, and he stares out into space as he speaks. "My parents—Well. That story isn't really relevant. They made me an orphan when they realised what I was. I was alone, and scared, and I didn't know what I was. I didn't know what magic was. I didn't know how to control it."

Taking a sip of his wine, Magnus settles himself back against the sofa, and tips his head back so he's looking up at the ceiling. "After I first lost control of my magic, which was the first time I ever realised I had it in me, it was like I couldn't stop it. It leaked out of me at very inopportune moments." He smiles wryly, but there's no humour to it whatsoever, and the expression tugs at something deep in Alec's chest. "Obviously, that caught the attention of the Shadowhunters."

Alec sucks in a sharp breath. He knows what Shadowhunters do to young warlocks who are out of control now—take them to the nearest High Warlock, keep them away from the outside world, and monitor them until they're proven to no longer be a danger.

At best.

But before the Accords? Adult warlocks were punished, or killed, or locked away for all eternity. He can't imagine what they might have done to children.

"They ambushed me through the village, and they tried to corner me. I don't know what they wanted to do. I lashed out, of course, with my magic, because I was a terrified child who had no idea what the hell was going on and there were five men with magic glowing swords trying to capture me. So yes. I did cause that tornado. I did cause the storm. And half the population of my village died in it. I expect a lot more died from starvation because I ruined their harvest."

And Alec feels his entire world shift.

Again.

Because Magnus Bane - the Magnus Bane, the notorious, murderous High Warlock of Brooklyn, the
Clave's most wanted criminal - didn't murder all those people at all. By the Angel, he was a child. He must have been frightened. Terrified. Of his magic, of being orphaned, of those Shadowhunters. Is it really any wonder such a tragedy occurred?

Why the hell had nobody tried to help him, Alec wonders? Why try to capture an already scared child? Warlock or not, ambushing any child is never going to yield pleasing results. Besides, Shadowhunters are supposed to protect mundanes from the Shadow World, not force warlocks into corners and have them unintentionally display their magic to thousands of mundanes.

Rage, hot and indignant, burns in Alec's gut at the tale. He can't imagine how Magnus must have felt. Creating storms, watching people get caught in them, watching people die—and unable to control any of it.

"How--" Alec clears his throat when his voice breaks. "How did you get out? How did you...stop?"

Magnus has his eyes closed, head still resting back against the top of the sofa. Around the stem of his wine glass, his knuckles are white. He's entirely unmoving, a frozen tableau, a beautiful statue carved from bronze.

"I had help," Magnus says, voice softer where it had been harsh, quiet where he'd grown louder. "Not from the Shadowhunters, of course. They died." He smiles wryly. "I try to be regretful, but with hindsight, I'm not. At the time, I was horrified."

He doesn't say anything for a moment, and Alec wonders if that's all he's going to get. Not that he blames Magnus for not spilling the truth of all his darkest moments in the slightest. But he can't deny his curiosity.

"Do you know the name Ragnor Fell?" Magnus asks, breaking the silence but not opening his eyes.

Alec shakes his head, before realising that Magnus can't see him. "No."

"Hm. Ragnor Fell was a my best friend. And my oldest friend. He was a warlock. He was in the country at the time, somewhere nearby. He saw the storm, and recognised it for what it was, so he came to help. He talked me through it, and managed to calm me down enough to help me control it. If it weren't for him, I might have killed myself in that storm, too. Although perhaps you Nephilim would consider that a better outcome."

"No." Alec's horrified, and he says the word with more vehemence than he intended. It makes Magnus crack his eyes open and glance at him. "You were a child and you were frightened. That storm wasn't your fault."

Magnus' expression softens, and he lifts his head to look at Alec properly. "I know, darling. It took me a while, but I know. I've had a good few centuries to forgive myself for that day. But do you see what I mean? I despise your parents, Alexander, as I despise many of your kind for what they've done to my people, but you can't oversimplify things. You mustn't make judgements until you have the all facts, so far as is possible. Especially not regarding people, and why they do things."

"Yeah." Alec glances down at his lap, and then lifts his eyes back up to Magnus. "I– Can I ask about—?"

"The other things?" Magnus hums. "Briefly, I suppose. I didn't burn any mundanes alive, I wiped their memories. They were a cult, and they were trying to summon a Greater Demon. The building was mine, there were no people inside, and my girlfriend had just admitted to cheating on me.

Forgive me if I was a little upset. Yes, I've dealt in dark, illegal magic. It pays well. Nobody is ever
in any danger except me. I'm very careful, and I assure you, I know a lot more about magic than the Nephilim who wrote those laws. The Shadowhunters—" He shakes his head wryly. "I slaughtered four. They deserved it. I don't think you want to hear that story, little angel."

Magnus stands abruptly, necklaces jangling as he does, and drains the rest of his wine. He tips his head back, exposing the long chords running down his neck, and his throat bobs as he swallows. It's horribly enticing, and Alec looks away, a flush covering his cheeks.

"What happened to him?" Alec asks, before he can stop himself. "Your friend?"

Over by the drinks cabinet, halfway through pours himself some kind of cocktail, Magnus pauses. "What?"

"Ragnor Fell. You said was."

"He died," Magnus says, a note of finality to his voice. "He was killed, by the Circle. I watched him bleed out while I poured as much magic as I could into trying to save him."

Magnus is facing away from Alec, his body angled so his face is protected from Alec's gaze, its silhouette shrouded in shadows. But regardless, Alec can see how tense he is, the way every muscle beneath that horribly tight shirt has contracted, shoulders stiff as he carries the weight of emotions Alec knows he can't begin to understand. To lose someone like that after centuries of friendship...

Unbidden, Jace flashes in his mind, and Izzy, and a shiver runs down his spine. The mere thought is horrible, nightmare-inducing, and makes his stomach squirm and his chest hurt. He can't imagine experiencing it.

Before he can consider what he's doing, he rises, slowly, and moves towards where Magnus is standing. The warlock must sense him moving, because the moment Alec approaches, he spurs back into action, twisting the cap off a bottle of vodka. His fingers shake a little. It's the first time Alec has ever seen Magnus so...vulnerable. He's seen him in states of high emotion, like with Raphael, but even then, Alec had had absolutely no doubt that Magnus could bare the weight of the world and shatter it whole.

The same man stands before him now, with just the same, devastating power. But this is another layer down. This is another facet to all the multitude of parts that make up Magnus Bane's whole. And it's a more intimate one.

This isn't the High Warlock of Brooklyn. This is Magnus Bane.

An unpleasant clinking noise resounds through the air when Magnus knocks the neck of the bottle against his glass, hard. It snaps Alec from his thoughts in time for him to lurch forward and catch the bottle cap that tumbles to the floor.

Alec doesn't say a word. He places the cap back on the cabinet, and wonders whether he should leave. He shouldn't be a witness to this. He's done nothing to deserve being shown this part of Magnus.

"Shit," Magnus mutters, and Alec realises that he's trying to screw the cap back on the bottle—only it won't quite go on straight, because his fingers are trembling.

Guilt washes through Alec. He shouldn't have asked. He should have left the topic damn well alone. Magnus hadn't invited him to ask such an invasive, personal question.

"Here," Alec says, rather than let Magnus struggle, and reaches for the bottle.
Magnus lets out a little laugh. It's not weak, but it's...embarrassed, almost? Sheepish? "Thank you."

"I'm sorry," Alec tells him. "I didn't mean—"

"Don't worry about it." Magnus waves a hand, and the movement seems steadier, whatever moment of crippling emotion he'd had clearly passing. "I can tell you the story, if you're sure you want to hear it. Your parents feature."

Alec freezes as he retracts his hand from the bottle, having successfully replaced the cap, and stares at Magnus. "My parents?"

Magnus inclines his head, and takes a long swig of his drink. "Well. Your mother, mostly."

"I—" God, does he want to hear this? It could be...awful. But then, he's never going to be able to look at his parents, trust his parents, in the same way again, now he knows who they are, and what they did. He's sick of lies. He'd rather know. "Yeah. Okay. If you want to."

"Ragnor tended to keep to himself," Magnus says, a fond little smile appearing on his lips. "He taught at the Shadowhunter Academy, for a while. Lived in Idris. He was in New York visiting myself and Raphael when he was attacked by Circle members, walking back to my apartment from the Hotel Dumort. He called me, because there were twenty-three of them, and he'd spent all day working, so he was exhausted."

Magnus shakes his head, a wry, humourless tilt to one corner of his lips.

"A few of them had managed to corner him in some tiny little derelict building at the end of an alleyway, and the others had left them to it. I opened the door in time to see your mother slit his throat with her seraph blade."

Alec's own throat closes up, and his chest tightens in shock. His mother had killed a Downworlder in cold blood? Hunted him down and murder him for no reason whatsoever? Blatantly breaking the Accords? The Law that she preaches to him now so regularly?

He feels sick.

"I was...so angry." Magnus inhales, deeply, and lets his eyelids flutter shut for a moment. "I can't express it. Imagine the rage that would overpower every logical thought in your head if you watched someone execute your sister for her mere existence."

Alec flinches, and a cold feeling of dread washes over him, until he's drowning in it. He shudders, and his heart aches with sympathy for Magnus.

"Exactly. So yes. Four of the five Shadowhunters in that room died. They moved forward to attack me, so I attacked them first." He shrugs. "It was very vindictive. Not that it made me feel any better. Your mother hid herself from my magic, and had the nerve to tell me she was cleansing the Academy of improper tutors while I held Ragnor in my arms and tried - futilely - to save him."

"That's ridiculous," Alec blurts out, unable to stop himself. "That's disgusting. You don't murder someone just because you want someone else to get their job."

"Valentine and the Circle disagree. And when I demanded to know why on earth she considered it in any way acceptable or fruitful to slaughter an innocent man, she told me she was building a better world for her son."

Alec's lips part when he realises what that means—what his mother had used him to defend. "Oh my
god." He shakes his head a little, horrified. "What did you say?

Magnus lets out a short laugh that doesn't sound as light-hearted as Alec thinks it was probably intended to, and waves a hand dismissively in a clear attempt to lighten the mood a little. "Oh, some line about my utter lack of care for her doubtless repellant brat."

Alec starts to nod, and then stops, and gaps. He lets out a mock-offended huff, a tiny little smile stretching across his face despite himself. "Doubtless repellant brat?"

When Magnus laughs this time, it sounds genuine, and he twists to put his cocktail glass down. "My opinions of Maryse's son may have changed somewhat in recent months." He meets Alec's gaze, yellow-green eyes surprisingly gentle. "It seemed like a horrible cosmic joke, when you told me your name. I'd saved the life of a Lightwood. The son of Ragnor's murderer. But you're not your mother."

"No," Alec agrees, quietly. "I'm not. I don't- I don't want to be like that."

"You're not," Magnus assures him, and covers the hand Alec has resting atop the drinks cabinet with his own. "I've never seen any indication of you preparing to go out and murder anyone."

Magnus' hand is warm against his, maroon-painted fingernails glistening in the light. Alec slides his thumb out from beneath Magnus' fingers, and lifts it to touch the side of Magnus' thumb knuckle. Not holding his hand, but acknowledging the contact. Accepting it. Because it- It's nice. It feels nice. It's warm, and gentle, and a little bit comforting, in a grounding sort of way.

"Except demons."

A smile curls up one half of Magnus' mouth, and his eyes shine. "I think I can forgive that one, darling."

"I—" Alec glances down at their hands, and then back up to Magnus, who's watching him patiently, as he always does, while Alec struggles to find the words to express his thoughts in a coherent manner. "Since you saved my life, I— I've seen things I didn't...accept, before. Things I didn't understand. Or try to understand. I just— Yesterday, on the phone, when you said— I just want you to know that I don't think that anymore. I don't think you're a demon, or- or predisposed to be evil, or totally lacking in self control."

Magnus' thumb brushes gently over the skin of Alec's hand, soothingly. "I know you don't, Alexander. But thank you for saying so."

"I- I don't- You're—" Alec shakes his head in frustration. He doesn't even know what he's trying to say. He wants Magnus to know how much meeting him, getting to know some small part of him, seeing him with Raphael and Luke and hearing all these stories tonight, has changed the way he looks at the world. It's removed some of the filters. It's made everything so much clearer—more complicated, but clearer.

"I know," Magnus says, and, abruptly, entirely without warning, Alec feels himself being tugged gently into a hug.

Magnus' arms slide around him, warm and solid and safe, and he feels his entire body sag just a little, tension sliding out of him as his own arms shift to return the gesture. And it's weird, if he thinks about it, to be hugging the High Warlock of Brooklyn. But it feels right. Letting his guard down so entirely, letting himself lean into Magnus, chins over shoulders and chests together—it feels right.

They stay like that for a long moment, and Alec lets his eyes close, contentment washing over him. It's light. Easy. Magnus' chest is rising and falling against his, the lines of his necklaces pressing
gently into his skin, a few strands of hair just brushing against him, and it's so unimaginably nice.

He could stay here, he thinks, errantly. He could stay right here, for a long, long time. He'd never have to think about anything too deeply again. He could let go, he could make his stupid brain shut up, and just feel.

That's another thing. It's silent. His brain has stopped, quiet, still, every cell in his body focused in on the feeling of Magnus around him, against him, holding him close with no indication of wanting to let him go. Not that Alec minds in the slightest.

Magnus exhales softly, and his breath disturbs the hair at the nape of Alec's neck, making goosebumps rise across his skin. Alec shivers a little, involuntarily, and Magnus' exhales again, in more of a huff this time, and Alec realises it's a laugh.

"Cold, darling?" Magnus whispers teasingly, and he pulls back a little so he can look Alec in the eye. Heat rushes up his neck, and his cheeks turn a deep, dark crimson that makes Magnus chuckle. It's not an unkind sound, gentle and soft despite the playful edge, and it makes Alec's suddenly racing heart calm, just a little.

Magnus' hands slide down his arms, dropping off at his elbows, and Alec does feel cold at the sudden absence of Magnus' touch. He swallows, uncertain, because he doesn't even understand what he did to warrant such unsolicited affection, let alone now he's supposed to respond to it, or what it means.

"Are you alright?" Magnus asks, one eyebrow raising a little. "Oh, dear, have I broken you?"

"No." Alec smiles a little, weakly. "Sorry. I'm good."

"Good." Magnus returns his smile, and it's so bright it almost hurts to look at.

"I, um. I should probably– I should probably go home."

Magnus inclines his head. "Probably."

He walks Alec to the door, much like he did that night when Alec brought Raphael to him, and, much like that night, he pauses, leaning against the door jam before he closes it behind Alec.

"Feel free to call me. Or text. If you need anything, or if you just want to anyway." There's a glint in his eyes, and Alec has to grin a little, feeling reckless and free and warm, deep inside.

"Yeah. Okay. Goodnight, Magnus. Thank you. For..." He searches for the right word, and settles with, "For everything."

Magnus leans forward into his space, close enough to feel the heat of his body, and his lips brush Alec's cheek so softly Alec barely feels it.

"Sweet dreams, Alexander," Magnus murmurs, warm breath washing over his skin, before he rocks back on his heels, smiles, and shuts the door. Alec stares, frozen to the spot and utterly stunned, the imprint of Magnus' fleeting kiss burning hot on his cheek.

Chapter End Notes
I think this chapter basically speaks for itself? Let me know what you thought, as always, and I hope you enjoyed it!

Much love, Lu <3

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Hawk

Chapter Summary

In which the author utilises text conversations, a Clave envoy arrives, and Magnus asks Alec to collect something.

Chapter Notes

The hawk: symbolic of traits such as protection, bravery, foresight and cunning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

[Alec Lightwood, 9:12]

Hey

[Mags, 9:35]

Have you just woken up like a normal person, or have you been awake since 6?

[Alec Lightwood, 9:35]

5:30. Morning patrol. You?

[Mags, 9:36]

I always knew the Nephilim were uncivilised. This is just proof. I just got up. I have decorum.

[Alec Lightwood, 9:36]

Don't you have clients?

[Mags, 9:37]

Yes. They just don't start until half ten. I take appointments until eight, I work until midnight. Usually. I'm fairly flexible.

[Mags, 9:37]

Also, the Chairman is not cuddling with me, and I think he's sulking because you didn't play with him the other night. As though that's MY fault.

Alec grins at his phone. He takes another bite of his apple, fingers poised over the screen to tap out a reply, when there's a knock on his bedroom door. He glances up, and raises his eyebrows.

"Yeah?"
Isabelle pushes open the door, and frowns when she sees him. "Why are you smiling?"

"Nothing."

"Bullshit." She glances down at his phone, and her face softens, before she plasters an expression of mock revulsion across it, wrinkling her nose. "Mags? Really? You two are giving each other pet names now?"

Alec rolls his eyes at her. "No. I'm not gonna call him that to his face, obviously. But I can't exactly have his full name in my contacts, can I? I'd have my runes stripped."

Isabelle hasn't bothered to rune her wings away, and they're currently curled into her to prevent her knocking against everything in Alec's tiny bedroom. She flicks one wingtip absently against the photograph of the three of them and Max that sits on Alec's bedside table.

"So your immediate choice of code name was Mags?" She arches an eyebrow at him, clearly a little doubtful. Alec's not sure what she's implying, and he really doesn't like it. "Not, like, John Ravenwood, or something random?"

Alec sighs, the long-suffering sigh of an older brother. "What do you want, Isabelle?"

"The Clave envoy just arrived. I thought you should know. No word from Mom or Dad."

That makes him pause, and focus in on her. Magnus has just sent him a photograph of the Chairman curled up on the sofa, an undoubtedly haughty expression on his face as he stares at the camera, but Isabelle's words suck any amusement he might have got out of the image right out.

"The Clave envoy? What Clave envoy?"

"The Clave envoy ordered after Mom told all of Idris about the Downworlders escaping. Didn't anyone tell you? Mom sent us a fire message a week ago."

Already spurring into action, Alec shakes his head and tucks his phone away in his back pocket. "No, but it doesn't matter. We're good. We know what we're doing. Is he here to look at Clary, too?"

"She, Alec." Isabelle shakes her head, a little smile on her face. "You're so stereotypical, sometimes, honestly. I don't think so. Jace is chatting her up now. Clary's in the training room. Had an argument with Simon, apparently."

"Let's go and meet her, then," Alec says.

***

The Clave envoy, it turns out, doesn't look much older than Alec. He spots her the moment he enters the Ops Centre, standing behind Raj and Jace as she watches them navigate through a map and talk her through their routine patrol routes, and their daily strategies. She raises her eyebrows and nods. She looks impressed. Alec feels pride flutter through him, and he shoots Raj a smile when he glances up.

Raj meets his gaze, but he doesn't return the look. They haven't really spoken since their argument the morning after they broke out the Downworlders. Alec isn't sure how to mend the broken fences between them, but he wants to.

*Maybe I should ask Magnus. Magnus is good with people.*
But then, he thinks, he's probably brought enough Shadowhunter angst onto Magnus' doorstep. He might not appreciate any more.

The Clave envoy lifts her eyes, and smiles tightly when she sees Alec and Isabelle entering. She straightens up, and walks over. She's dressed in a suit, neat and perfectly pressed, with long blond hair braided and falling down her back; it's an incredibly professional look, and it's so typical of an Idris native. It gives a fantastic first impression, but it's totally impractical for field work.

"Alexander?" she guesses as she approaches, and Alec nearly winces at his full name. "Lydia Branwell."

"Alec," he corrects her, firmly, and grips her proffered hand. "And this is my sister, Isabelle."

Lydia glances over at Isabelle, and smiles a tight-lipped smile that doesn't reach her eyes as she scans her up and down. She doesn't offer to shake Isabelle's hand, and instead says, "It's lovely to meet you."

Isabelle's eyes flash; Alec knows why. Isabelle and Lydia couldn't really contrast more, one dressed in beige and looking like the perfect Idris Shadowhunter leader, the other dressed in tight black leather pants, a red top that covers the essentials and not much else, and heels that go on for days—and are covered in studs and spikes.

(Alec admires his sister's sense of fashion. He's constantly surprised by the apparent practicality of some of her shoes—high heels are fantastic for spilling demon intestines onto the floor. And, irrespective of anything else, she likes it, and she's confident in herself, so who's he to judge?)

Lydia, apparently, isn't quite so in favour. She purses her lips, giving Isabelle another sweep up and down with her eyes.

"Likewise," Isabelle says, coldly. A smile tips up her lips, but her eyes are like ice.

Alec clears his throat, and the two women break away from their staring match. Lydia looks a touch embarrassed; Isabelle looks, if anything, even more furious.

"Lydia, shall we head to the office so I can point you to everything and show you around?"

"Yes." Lydia smiles up at him. The expression is warmer than anything she graced Isabelle with, but it's all professional, with no feeling behind it whatsoever. Alec wonders whether there's anything locked behind the frigid, steely outer case. "That would be lovely."

***

The metal of training room door handle cracks against the stone wall when Isabelle flings it open with all the force she can muster. Clary spins around, alarmed, and stares at Isabelle as she slams the door behind her again, and stalks over to the weapons rack.

"Are you okay?" Clary asks, hesitantly, one hand wrapped around a staff, the other hand resting on a punching bag.

"Fuck her," Isabelle snarls, searching for wraps to put around her knuckles. She needs to punch something. Hard. For hours. "Fucking Idris and their fucking archaic views. They can all go fuck themselves."

"Oh my god, Izzy," Clary says, eyes wide. "Calm down."
Izzy glares at her over her shoulder. "Don't tell me to calm down, Fray."

"Alright, alright, I'm sorry."

When Isabelle whirls round to face her, she's got both hands up, palms forwards, concern written across her face. It makes Isabelle soften a little, racing, frantic heart calming slightly, and she shakes her head.

"Sorry," she tells her. "I shouldn't have sworn like that. Or I should have done it in Spanish."

Clary laughs. "I don't mind. What happened? Something with the Clave envoy? Lydia, or whatever her name is?"

"Don't." Isabelle raises a finger. "We don't say her name. Okay? Henceforth, I refuse to call her Lydia. She's the dinosaur from Idris."

Clary quirks an eyebrow at her. "Okay."

"The look she gave me, Clary, Raziel. She looked at me like I was a prostitute offering my services to her while still covered in my last customer's semen."

"Ew." Clary wrinkles her nose. "Do you have to be that...graphic?"

"Side effect of being Jace's sister," Isabelle says, with a shrug and a grin. "I hate people like that."

Clary walks towards her, and squeezes Isabelle's hand gently. "Iz, if she's that bad, we can hate her together. Nobody slut shames Isabelle Lightwood."

Isabelle smiles at her, and squeezes back. "Thank you."

***

"I'm impressed," Lydia says, standing at the door with a clipboard in hand and a pen shoved in the front pocket of her blazer when Alec and his team return from their evening patrol, a week into Lydia's stay in New York. "I was tracking your progress, and Raj had the cameras on you. That was good work, and an efficient run when Raj called in about the demons causing trouble at the mundane bar."

Alec pushes the front door shut behind them, and catches sight of Isabelle rolling her eyes in response to Lydia's comments. Clary snickers, and whispers something to her. Whatever it is, it makes Isabelle grin.

Lydia's eyes flicker to the two women, and something flashes across her face, so fast Alec can't pin it down. But it's not a comfortable emotion; Alec wonders whether Isabelle realises that Lydia's not stupid, and is probably fully aware of what her and Clary's exchange was about.

Not that he has no sympathy for Isabelle. Lydia's earlier greeting upon meeting Isabelle had irked Alec no end, but Isabelle's not a child. She knows it's not an appropriate time to make snide commentary when Lydia's present.

"Thank you," Alec says instead, because it doesn't seem like Isabelle or Clary are going to respond, and Jace is preoccupied with drawing an iratze to close the gash on his arm. "If there's anything else, we can debrief in twenty. Let's unload and shower, first."

Lydia agrees, and turns on her heel to return to the Ops Centre. Isabelle shakes her head; Alec
catches her eye, and raises his eyebrows at her.

"Come on," Isabelle says, waving a hand when Lydia is out of sight. "She's annoying as fuck, and she's one of those moronic Idris crazy people stuck in the eighteen hundreds."

"She's a Clave envoy, you're being particularly unfair, and I don't care if you don't like her, stop acting like a child," Alec says. "She's not stupid, and that was mean. And you—" He turns to Clary. "I know you're trying to be a good friend, but Clave envoys are important and we're being inspected, so behave."

"You know why I hate her," Isabelle says. "You saw how she looked at me."

"I didn't like it either, Iz. But that was a lot better than how Mom looks at you, and you don't seem to care much when people on the street give you looks, so there's clearly something else bothering you." His expression softens, and he reaches out to touch Isabelle's shoulder. "If this is about Meliorn —"

"It's not," Isabelle says, a little too quickly. "I don't care. I'm fine."

She extracts herself gently from Alec's grip, shoots him a reassuring smile, and disappears off to the training room to get rid of her weapons. Alec watches her go, and then looks over at Jace and Clary.

"Think she's lying?" he asks them.

Their reply is instantaneous: "Yes."

***

[Alec Lightwood, 21:46]

What's a normal reaction to your boyfriend breaking up with you because your relationship put him in danger?

Alec doesn't expect a reply, as he kicks back on his bed after an hour long debrief with Lydia, which had been excruciatingly dull. But, halfway through attempting to finish a chapter of his book, his phone buzzes.

[Mags, 22:01]

Asking for a friend?

[Alec Lightwood, 22:02]

Um, sort of? Why?

[Mags, 22:02]

It was a joke, Shadowhunter. It depends. Break-ups aren't nice. Nobody's going to come out of one happy and rational.

Alec considers that for a moment. It makes sense, he suppose, that Isabelle might be more prone to upset and insult than usual, after being broken up with. She's usually the one who does the dumping. In fact, Alec doesn't remember anyone ever breaking up with her, before now.

[Mags, 22:03]
I've got a job to go to, Alexander, but if you need relationship advice, ask me later ;)

Alec huffs out a laugh at that, and types out a "sure" in response, before he tosses his phone to one side. Instead, he picks up his book with a yawn, and attempts to focus on the words.

***

The buzzing of his phone wakes Alec immediately. He jerks back into consciousness, and gropes on his nightstand for his phone. He must have fallen asleep reading, he realises, because his book is still on his chest, open to where he last remembers reading; he folds the corner with one hand while he locates his phone and switches the screen on.

[Mags, 00:17]

Can you do me a favour?

Alec frowns. A favour? What sort of favour could Magnus Bane possibly need from a Shadowhunter?

[Alec Lightwood, 00:18]

What sort of favour?

[Mags, 00:18]

Transport. I need someone to collect something from a roof.

Alec blinks in bewilderment. What sort of things to warlocks get up to for their clients, exactly? Why would any job require rooftop pickups? And can't Magnus portal there himself?

When he asks, Magnus' reply is almost immediate.

[Mags, 00:19]

The number of times I've saved your ass, Shadowhunter, just get over here and do it, it's nothing illegal.

There's an address typed out below, and Alec realises that Magnus has a point. He owes the warlock his life, probably several times over, and another lump of favours besides; he can fly up to a roof and pick something up for him, even if the request seems a little bizarre.

After replying to say that he'll be there, Alec picks up his bow and quiver from the corner of his room, sticks his stele, phone and witchlight into his pocket, and slips out into the darkened hallway. It's quiet, although he can hear the low hum of distant voices downstairs.

He lifts a hand to rap on Jace's bedroom door, lightly.

"Jace," he hisses, after a moment. "Open up."

Jace pulls the door open groggily, rubbing at his eyes. He's wearing a pair of boxers and nothing else, except the brown leather bracelet with that Clary gave him last year. Alec doesn't think Jace has taken it off since he first put it on. It's a very sweet gift, really. Rather than a traditional clasp, it's held together with a metal infinity sign, and Clary clearly put thought into the three charms slid on. A small bird, representative of the herons always inscribed on the Herondale family ring, flames for the Lightwood family, and a tiny, circular charm with clashing swords etched on.
Even Alec, who tends to avoid sentiment and sickly sweet feelings, can appreciate the thought behind the gift.

"What?" Jace mumbles, staring at Alec with bleary eyes.

"I'm going here." He shoves his phone at Jace, indicating the address Magnus gave him. "If I'm not back in three hours, come find me. Or I'll text you."

Jace furrows his eyebrows, and stares up at Alec. "Mags? Are you going to see a prostitute?" His eyes light up abruptly. "Or have you discovered Grindr?"

He huffs in exasperation. "Of course I'm not— What the hell is Grindr?"

"I'll tell you some other time that's not the middle of the night. But then who the fuck is— Oh." Jace snickers. "Pet names, that's adorable. What does he call you, Allie-Cat?"

"You're a fucking git," Alec tells him, pulling his phone back. "Why the hell are we parabatai?"

"Aw, c'mon." Jace grins. "You love me."

"When you're not being an ass."

"I'm always an ass."

"Draw whatever conclusions from that you wish."

"I'm telling Clary that you're being mean to me."

"Do I look like I care? What's she gonna do, strangle my kneecaps?"

"Fuck off, you human giant."

"With absolute pleasure."

Jace shuts his bedroom door with a bang. But not before he summons enough emotional maturity to stick his tongue out at Alec with an incredible amount of gusto and a grin that he can't quite fight down.

***

When Alec reaches the address Magnus sent him, it's cold, wind blowing softly but insistently, and he's grateful for his jacket. The moon sits high, half full and shining bright above the clouds, dwarfing the glittering stars around it.

He activates his glamour rune, and then wipes across the rune that keeps his wings hidden. They shimmer into existence, heavy and thick with feathers. He tips his head back, inhaling the cold night air as he surveys the building in front of him. It's high - more the twenty stories, Alec would guess - and directly vertical, with a flat roof that he can just make out in the darkness of the night with the aid of a night vision rune burning on his forearm.

He bends his knees, inhaling again, deeply, and then, on his next exhale, he springs up, hard, wings shooting out to the sides and beating once to propel him upwards. They stretch, easing out to their full extent, and he climbs steadily, wings beating on either side of him as he leaves the ground behind him.

The wind picks up speed as his altitude increases, ruffling through his feathers. He'd never have been
able to feel this again, if it weren't for Magnus, he thinks. He'd never have been able to fly again. He'd never have been able to let go of everything pressing down on him and let the wind carry him high above the world.

As he comes up to level with the roof, he begins to look around, searching for whatever it is that Magnus wants him to collect. Magnus' text said he'll know it when he sees it; he's not quite so sure, but he supposes he can always call, if—

"Hello, darling," Magnus says, with a smile that crinkles the corners of his eyes, as Alec rises up. "No need to ask if you've had any side effects since you fell, I see."

Alec lands with a gentle thud on the debris-covered roof, stray leaves crunching under his boots as he flexes his knees to absorb the impact. He pulls his wings into his sides the moment his feet meet the ground.

"Hi," he says, a little embarrassed. "What-- I mean-- I don't understand."

Magnus is sitting on the edge of a raised skylight, and he's dressed in a fitted three piece suit that draws Alec's eyes to all sorts of inappropriate places. A moment's lack of focus has Alec's eyes flickering to his arms, and his chest - where the lack of necklaces is immediately noticeable - and the way his dark pants are stretched over his thighs when he's seated, and—

"Well." Magnus spreads his hands out wide. He's wearing rings, still, but fewer than normal, and his nails are painted a dark bluish-purple to match his suit. "I did tell you you'd know what needs collecting when you saw it."

Alec stares at him, and squints one eye slightly. There's something a little...off, about the way Magnus is talking. His voice sounds different. Uneven. His syllables are just slightly slurred, and there's a heaviness to his intonation that isn't normally present.

"You want me to...collect you?" Alec asks, slowly, furrowing his eyebrows. "Can't you just portal? Or, I don't know, go through the building? Why are you up here, anyway?"

"Demons, Alexander," Magnus says, with a dismissive wave of his hand that's not quite as fluid as usual. "Valentine. It was all very tiresome."

"Are you alright?" Alec asks, more than a little perplexed by the whole situation. And, he's surprised to find, the thought of Valentine doing something to harm Magnus is... Well. Unpleasant. Once upon a time, he wouldn't have batted an eyelash at seeing Magnus brutally murdered. He'd have watched his blood wash across the ground and seep into cracks in the pavement have felt absolutely nothing. Now, the thought makes his chest tighten just a little.

"Did Valentine do something to you?"

"Psh." Magnus snorts, inelegantly, and Alec's eyebrows shoot up, because there's no way Magnus would usually make a noise like that without some careful consideration about who he's around, and what sort of impression he wishes to make. Nothing Magnus does is unconsidered. The only time Alec has ever seen him let his walls down was when he'd walked in on Magnus and Raphael talking.

"Let him try."

"I thought you just said he did."

"Mm." Magnus gazes up at him from where he's sitting, and he sighs, heavily. "Did you know Valentine wanted you Nephilim to intercept that meeting, Alexander? He wanted you to capture the
Downworlders. He wanted the Clave to torture them. He wanted to turn more Downworlders against the Clave by showing them what the Clave does to us. Did you know that? That's what he spat at me tonight. That's what you helped stop."

"Of course that's what he wanted," Alec says, distractedly, because it is obvious, and he's certain Magnus knew that without having to be told, and he's more preoccupied by the utterly bizarre way Magnus is acting. "Magnus, you're delirious, what the hell is going on?"

"I'm not delirious," Magnus tells him.

"Alright, let's go then." Alec is watching Magnus in utter puzzlement, confused and more than a little concerned at the warlock's strange behaviour. "Come on, we can go through the building, I've got my stele. Just put up a glamour."

Alec jerks his head and takes several steps towards where he can see a staircase several metres behind Magnus, and a door that clearly leads down into the building. He hopes there's some residual heat left inside, because, jacket or not, the wind is fierce seventy metres up, and New York is hardly the warmest city in the world.

Magnus rises from where he's sitting on the skylight. Alec falters in his steps to watch him. Every movement Magnus makes is so fluid, so effortlessly graceful, it's hard not to watch him, no matter how much Alec tries to resist.

But this time, when Magnus straightens, he sways a little in place, and when he moves to follow Alec, he stumbles. It's such a direct contradiction of everything Alec has ever seen from Magnus that his eyes widen and his lips part.

He's by Magnus in a moment, a single beat of his wings enough to propel him forwards faster than he could move on foot, and he reaches out a hand to steady the warlock. Magnus blinks down at where Alec is gripping his arm, and then transfers his gaze up to Alec's face.

Softening his hold, but not letting go entirely, Alec says somewhat urgently, "Magnus, tell me. What happened? What's going on?"

"I'm—” Magnus blinks again, slower this time, as though he's struggling to fix his gaze on one thing. "I just need to go home."

"I know," Alec says, gentling his voice. "I just—"

A thought hits him, abrupt and sudden, cutting off his train of thought and his words simultaneously, as he wonders.

Even my magic is not infinite, Nephilim.

Magnus had admitted to him, the first time they'd met, that even his magic has limits. And, from their sporadic text conversations today, Alec has inferred that Magnus has been working for most of the day. Has Magnus run out his magic? Like Jace occasionally collapses after he's run a mission entirely on adrenaline, and, as soon as it fades from his system, is too exhausted too stay conscious?

"Hey." Alec tightens his hold on Magnus' arm to get his attention. "Magnus. How much magic have you used to day? How many jobs have you taken?"

"Seven," Magnus tells him, a frown etching itself onto his face. "And then I killed a few of the Circle. Why do you think I called you? I'm burnt out."
And now, now, it makes sense. Well, it doesn't, not really, because there are probably more than a thousand people in Magnus' contacts, and there's no logical reason for Alec to be his first choice of transportation down off a roof when he can't use enough magic to get through the building the mundane way, or to portal home.

But at least Alec can assure himself that Magnus hasn't been a victim of one of Valentine's heinous Downworlder experiments, now. He's used too much magic - not that Alec really knows what that means, aside from the obvious - and he needs to go home and sleep, or rest, or...something.

Maybe he should call Raphael, or Luke. He's really got no idea what he's supposed to do.

Although, come to think of it, he's not entirely sure when he began to care. Why should it matter to him if Magnus dies tomorrow? It'd make his life a hell of a lot easier, as the New York Institute is currently supposed to be hunting Magnus for releasing their Downworld prisoners.

But he does. There's no point in denying it, in the privacy of his own head. After everything, he does care about Magnus, at least to some degree. He cares about Magnus, and he cares about his stupid cat, and—

Does Magnus know? Is that why Magnus asked Alec for help? Since when does Magnus trust Alec to do anything more than make a cup of tea without becoming a catalyst for the apocalypse?

Magnus is blinking up at him, kohl-rimmed eyes devoid of all the smoky eye-shadow he seems to be partial to. He's still wearing make-up, but it's softer, natural colours that match his bronze skin rather than bold shades that match his heart, and, for once, he's clean-shaven. Alec wonders where he's been.

"Alexander."

Alec realises he's been staring, and he clears his throat, averting his eyes quickly. Not that it helps. Magnus had been staring right back—he's been caught red-handed, gazing at the warlock for far longer than is appropriate.

"I need to go home."

"Yeah. Okay." Alec swallows, and takes a half step back, extending his arm to accommodate the distance between them but not letting go of Magnus yet. "Don't move for a sec, okay? I'm gonna check if there's CCTV."

Magnus arches an eyebrow. "Yes, sir."

Alec rolls his eyes, and catches sight of Magnus' smile as he turns to check the roof. A quick glance through a larger skylight on the north side of the building shows an incredibly complex mundane CCTV system set inside. There's a camera near where he flew up on the street, he knows, but round the back—

Alec calls Magnus over to the back ledge of the building, and turns to follow Magnus' progress across the roof with his eyes. He's not unsteady on his feet, this time, but his movements lack the seamless grace Alec has come to know. There's no sway to him, no intention behind every shift of every muscle.

"I can't fly you all the way if you're not glamoured," Alec says, glancing over his shoulder, "because the mundanes will have a field day if they see. But I can fly you down to the street, and walk back with you, if you- if you'd like me to."
There's something oddly soft in Magnus' eyes as he looks at Alec, head tilted slightly to one side, stars glittering in his slitted pupils and making his irises shine like they're embedded with diamonds. A smile is curling at one corner of his lips, so small it's barely perceptible save for the way his cheeks lift and his eyes crinkle, just slightly.

Alec's lips part, and he feels his cheeks turn crimson with heat as he realises that his gaze has fixated on Magnus' mouth—on the bow of his upper lip, the smooth fullness of his lower, both shimmering enticingly with lip gloss.

He forces his eyes back up, and sucks in a deep, sharp breath in an attempt to control himself. Magnus' little smile hasn't slipped, and, rather than reply, he lifts a hand towards Alec's face. His fingers brush Alec's forehead, just above the scar that cuts through his eyebrow. Alec feels the touch like a spark of electricity shooting over his skin.

"You'll have to tell me how you got that, one day," Magnus murmurs.

"Jace," Alec says, and his voice cracks. "Training accident. It wasn't his fault."

"Mm."

Magnus drops his hand and his gaze simultaneously, and Alec watches him as he sweeps his eyes across Alec's wings. He's still got them pulled into his back, and Magnus' scrutiny makes him draw them in tighter. For some unfathomable reason, the action makes Magnus chuckle, quietly, a fond little sound that Alec really doesn't understand.

"Home," Magnus whispers, brushing a hand against the front of Alec's jacket. "Please."

Alec swallows, and nods, extending his hand for Magnus to take as he steps up onto the ledge at the edge of the rooftop. Magnus' fingers curl around his. They're a little cold, but the contact sends sparks of warmth through Alec's veins, and his heart jumps when Magnus steps up beside him, palm pressed flush to his.

"I don't--" Alec bites his lip as he peers up at Magnus from beneath his lashes. "How do you want to...?"

Magnus touches the sole of his shoe to the top of Alec's combat boot. "How about like this?"

"That-- Yeah, okay."

Magnus steadies himself with a hand on Alec's shoulder, and Alec glances down at the drop to the ground. It's not too far. Eighty, ninety metres, maybe. It's certainly not the greatest distance Alec has transported another person - mundanes, injured Shadowhunters, the occasional young werewolf - down. But it's the first time the person has been someone like Magnus.

It's the first time he's seen Magnus so vulnerable, he thinks. So prone to attack. He's quite sure Magnus is not incapable of defending himself without magic, if necessary, but nevertheless, it's strange, seeing such a powerful, dangerous man at the mercy of someone else, just this once.

Hesitantly, Alec slips a hand around to Magnus' back, because if there's a sudden gust of wind that throws them momentarily off balance, the last thing he wants to do is drop him. Magnus glances up at him; their height difference, those mere three or four inches that are barely perceptible, most of the time, seem so much vaster up close like this.

Magnus inhales, and Alec feels his ribs lifting and his lungs expanding beneath his hand, expensive suit shifting against Alec's chest to accommodate the breath. He wonders what it would be like to be
able to feel Magnus' heartbeat against him.

But that's certainly not an area Alec is willing to stray into, ever, so he snaps himself out of any thoughts about his proximity to Magnus. Instead, he lets his wings flex once behind him, and he leans down until his feet tip off the edge, and they both fall.

For a mere second, they free fall, dropping off the rooftop like stones, and Alec thinks about the last time he fell off a roof. That one had been higher, and his fall had nearly crippled and killed him.

Magnus' eyes are wide as they near the ground, the wind ruffling his perfectly styled hair as they whip through the air like bullets from a gun. His grip on Alec's shoulder and hand is tight, fingers digging in, but Alec doesn't let go.

His wings stretch out behind him, slowing their fall instantly. After another second, he beats his wings, once, then twice, then a third time, hovering them just above the ground before he touches down, and Magnus steps back without preamble, away from him.

Alec relinquishes his hold on the warlock, and their hands drop. They've landed behind the mundane building, well away from the busy street out front and out of sight of any CCTV cameras.

"Thank you," Magnus says, and he sounds tired, weary, as though the world has worn him just a little too thin, today.

"You're welcome," Alec replies, and then pauses. "Do you want me to come? Back to your apartment, I mean. I don't mean— Just to—"

"Well, the Chairman has been pining," Magnus says, and there's something in his voice that Alec can't quite pin down. "If you wish, darling."

Alec nods, and lifts his stele to reactivate his rune to conceal his wings, when a cold hand grasps his wrist lightly. He glances up, stele hovering.

"Don't feel obliged," is all Magnus says.

***

Magnus is exhausted by the time they reach his loft, weariness long since having seeped into every cell in his body. He hauls himself up the stairs, Alexander behind him, wings still out and in the process of slashing through his glamour rune.

The sight of Alexander on these stairs, wings tucked neatly behind his back as though he's afraid to let himself stretch out, makes Magnus' mind flicker back to the day the Shadowhunter crashed into a broken, mangled mess of shattered bones and ruined, bruised flesh, bleeding all over the sidewalk. Carrying the dead weight of Alec up these stairs hadn't been difficult due to his weight, or even the extra weight of his wings, but due to the sheer size of them. Manoeuvring him without causing further damage had taken some minutes.

Chairman Meow darts out from under the sofa the moment Magnus opens the front door, summoning just enough energy to let blue sparks sputter out of his fingers to draw back the lock. The cat meows, curling around Magnus' ankles in a plea for attention.

Magnus bends at the waist to stroke the Chairman's head, and then moves further inside. He drops his jacket and waistcoat, eases off his shoes, and lifts his hands to tug off his tie, letting it fall on the floor behind him as he heads into his bedroom.
Alexander’s voice, hesitant and soft, makes him pause. He turns to see Alec loitering in the doorway, fingers running absently over Chairman Meow’s fur where he’s leapt up onto a side table.

"Shall I– Shall I go, now? Are you going to be okay?"

Something situated deep in Magnus’ chest, buried beneath layers of fortified walls and iron-clad barricades, aches to the point of physical pain at the question, and he has to curl his fingers into his palm.

"I am several centuries old, Alexander," Magnus tells him, and he’s going for firm, but it comes out gently. He’s finding it ever-harder to remember not to let himself do anything foolish when Alexander is in the room, looking at him like that, so earnestly, as though he genuinely gives a shit about whether or not Magnus is going to collapse and lie unconscious on the floor for hours.

(Which he might. It's happened before, when he's run his magic dry. His day has been filled with disaster after disaster, and expending his last reserves on fighting off six Circle members, headed by Valentine himself, has not helped matters. Valentine, clearly, has caught wind of the fact that the New York Institute is out for Magnus' blood, because it's the second time he's tried to recruit him in a week. Valentine is clearly more comfortable with force than diplomacy—his first attempt had ended with Morgenstern finding himself drenched in river water. This time he'd just run off.)

"I know. I could- I could call Raphael. I never asked, is he okay? After—"

"Fine," Magnus says, tiredly, and rubs at his temples. He's got a headache. He's had a headache for the past three hours, like a thousand tiny pickaxes slowly chipping into his skull, and he really, really wants it to go away. "He's fine. You don't need to call anyone."

"That's– Good. That's good."

Alexander shifts, from one foot to the other, and it's clear that Magnus is making him uncertain. Part of Magnus wants to reach out, at least verbally, and tell him that he doesn't need to be, that Magnus wouldn't have told him he could come back if he hadn't wanted him to, but he's too tired. They hadn't spoken a word on their walk back, and Magnus is just so tired. He just wants to go to sleep. He wants to collapse into bed, and he wants his head to stop hurting, and he wants the world to stop spinning in such an alarming fashion, and he especially wants to stop feeling so utterly confused about Alexander, and—

"Magnus, you're— Whoa."

Hands grip at his shoulders, and he opens his eyes - when had he closed them? - to see Alec in front of him, brow furrowed and lips pressed together. "Where's your bedroom?"

Magnus' gut instinct is to come up with an innuendo, a flirty joke, but he can't quite grasp at one. Instead, he pulls himself out of Alec's grasp, grabs his hand, and stumbles down the corridor into his bedroom.

Alec blinks when he's dragged in, and stops in the doorway, Magnus' hand dropping away from his, discomfort and hesitance clear on his face and in his hunched shoulders.

"You can show yourself out," Magnus tells him, as he sinks down onto his bed, relief overpowering him. "I'll just sleep for the next twelve hours."

"Okay."

Alec shifts, and licks his lips. He's still frowning. Magnus wants to tell him that he needs to worry less, but it seems to be in Alec's nature to worry about people. Well. People he cares about.
Does that mean he does care about Magnus?

No. No. Magnus isn't going to ponder that now. He's too tired, and it's too complicated, and he's hardly in the right state of mind to make an impartial hypothesis.

Between one blink and the next, Alexander has disappeared. He hasn't shut the door. Magnus huffs a little at that, but he can't quite find the energy to care. His remaining clothes get slung across the floor until he's left in his briefs and nothing more, and, after a moment of struggling, he manages to pull the crimson-red sheets out from beneath him.

He slides into bed, a moan of contentment slipping from between his lips as his mattress sinks to accommodate his weight and his pillow cradles his painful head. The sheets rest lightly around him, slung across his torso at an angle that's sure to leave him cold in a few hours, but right now, he doesn't care. He just wants to sleep.

The soft thud of boots on his flooring meets his ears, and he cracks one eye open. Is Alexander still here?

Light from the hallway spills into the room as the door is opened fully, and Alexander comes into view. His wings are pulled tight into his back, folded in a manner than has to be uncomfortable. Magnus watches through slitted eyes as he steps in, and moves to close the curtains, clearly making an effort to be as soundless as possible. He thinks Magnus is asleep, probably.

He approaches the bed slowly, and Magnus closes one eye, heart thudding against his ribcage in nervous anticipation. Alec bends, setting a glass of water down on Magnus' nightstand, and then pauses, gazing down at him.

Fingertips brush against his skin as Alexander reaches for the sheets, making goosebumps erupt across his flesh. Magnus tries not to shiver when Alec lifts them up to settle oh so gently around his shoulders.

"Goodnight," Alec whispers, softly, and Magnus has to fight every instinct in his body to remain still when Alec tilts his head down to brush a soft, fleeting kiss to Magnus' hairline. It's so light Magnus can hardly feel the touch, but it sets every nerve ending in his body alight.

With that, Alec straightens and withdraws, padding out of the bedroom as quietly as he entered. This time, when he leaves, he pulls the door shut, and the soft click of the latch resounds around the room, drowned out only by the rush of blood in Magnus' ears and the erratic pounding of his heart against his chest.

Chapter End Notes

Well. That happened.

I'd just like to remind everyone - especially anyone who's a newer reader - that I update every Thursday. I won't update any faster (once a week is pushing it, and I'm working so hard to get these chapters out). So if you're a newer reader, and haven't seen my old notes, Thursday is update day!

Let me know what you thought, go and vote if you're from the UK (it's half four going on five now, you've got until 10pm) and if you so wish, come follow me on Tumblr! I'm
open for prompts, questions and ramblings, as always :D

Much love, Lu <3
Hen

Chapter Summary

In which Chairman Meow is a very needy cat, French toast is Max's favourite, and Isabelle and Lydia have a chat.

Chapter Notes

The hen -- protective, with the occasional bout of panic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Four centuries in, Magnus has never managed to train himself into being a morning person. It's too bright, and too early - even if he wakes up late - and his brain takes at least half an hour after rousing from slumber to begin functioning at even half capacity.

He especially doesn't like mornings in which he wakes up and feels like he's died and been warmed back up just enough to be brought back from the dead—but not enough to cure whatever fatal illness caused his death in the first place.

Which is rather how he feels when he's woken by the sound of scratching at his bedroom door. He groans, running a hand over his face, and presses himself deeper into the pillows, drawing the sheets up past his chin. No. No. Fuck no. He really, really doesn't want to return to reality this morning. He feels awful. His head hurts. He feels like he might throw up. Every muscle in his body aches.

More scratching, accompanied this time by pitiful meowing, makes Magnus groan again, louder, with more frustration. It's too early, and he feels too crap, but it's probably actually late - at least, judging by the amount of light cutting into his bedroom through the sides of his blackout blinds - and clearly, Chairman Meow wants feeding.

He very, very much wants to cry. He despises running himself out of magic that severely, because it always causes this—and it takes him a good twenty-four hours to recuperate properly.

(Really, he knows he should be grateful for that. It takes most warlocks days, or weeks. Some can't survive it at all. But it's very easy to take things for granted, and very difficult to be grateful for blessings that come in such agonisingly painful packages.)

At least he's home. He tries to think back to the night before, to the last client - a mundane woman working in that building with the Sight who'd needed help - and to afterwards turning multiple Circle members to ash that the wind blew away. And then—

Oh, yes. Alexander. He'd texted Alexander. And the Shadowhunter had come, surpassing all of Magnus' expectations. Not only had he come, but he'd walked Magnus home, which was, Magnus thinks, really very sweet, but probably very unnecessary.

Although, Alexander is an older brother, and clearly a caring person besides, and Magnus'
appearance last night had probably been very alarming in comparison to his usual, energetic self.

The Chairman scratches at his door again, meowing louder this time, and Magnus cracks one eye open. The sound is utterly pitiful, at it's tugging at his heartstrings, but he's finding it near-impossible to summon the energy to move yet.

"Shhhh," a voice says, and Magnus hears quiet footsteps outside his bedroom door. "You've been fed, stop complaining. Leave Magnus alone."

Magnus freezes. Is that—? He turns his head in his pillow, and lifts himself up onto his elbows to stare at his closed bedroom door, eyes wide. The pounding inside his skull and the churning nausea in his stomach seems to fade into the background as his lips part, and he listens closely. There's no more scratching. He can hear murmurs, though, interspersed with soft, quiet little meows that don't hurt to listen to.

How the hell is Alexander still in his apartment? And why? Shouldn't he be back at the Institute, or out on patrol, or enacting the Clave's heavenly justice? Not that he's complaining, necessarily. He'd rather have an adorable cat-sitter than a rigid man with eyes only for that farce of a Law. He just doesn't understand.

Besides which, he's really not at his most attractive, and he's not quite sure Alexander has earned the right to see this, yet. Although, he supposes, he did fly him down from a roof yesterday, in the middle of the night. And walk him home. And get him into bed without letting him fall flat on his face.

And—

Did Alexander really kiss his forehead, or is that something dreamt up by Magnus' befuddled brain?

It takes him a further ten minutes to haul himself out of bed and stagger into the bathroom. And, yes, one glance in the mirror informs him that he does indeed look like a complete mess. He hadn't had very much make-up on, yesterday, but he's still got eyeliner and mascara smeared everywhere, and foundation and powder streaked across himself in ugly smears. He's a complete disaster.

After successfully cleaning off all his ruined make-up, he flicks the shower on, and drowns himself in water just shy of scalding in an attempt to soothe his muscles and get his mind off of Alec for five minutes. He doesn't quite manage either task, but it helps both just a little bit.

He drapes his long silk robe around himself when he's finished in the bathroom, and pads out of his room barefoot, bare-faced, with his hair towel-dried and unbrushed and sticking in all directions.

If Alec is too perturbed, Magnus is quite sure he can be directed to the front door without too much difficulty. And a phone number is very easy to delete.

The moment he steps out, a whirl of brown, white and black fur streaks towards him like a whippet and pounces on his toes, meowing like Magnus has been gone for years, not a day.

"You're so pathetic," Magnus says, bending to pick the cat up, even as he smiles dopily and kisses the Chairman's head. Twice. "Honestly, you embarrass yourself."

Chairman Meow blinks and head-buts him, knocking his head against Magnus' nose. Magnus laughs, and cradles him in his arms as he ventures further out towards the kitchen.

The smell of coffee hits him like a freight train, and oh, by Lilith, it's delicious. Magnus hasn't eaten since yesterday morning, too busy working to stop for lunch or dinner, and the thought of a hot cup
of coffee to settle himself is horribly appealing.

Equally appealing, in an ever-growing number of terrifying ways, is the Shadowhunter standing in his kitchen, one hand resting on the countertop next to two take-out cups, the other tapping at his cell phone. A frown is etched into his face.

Someone really, really needs to tell Alexander not to frown so much. Magnus thinks he's probably going to end up giving himself an aneurism, with how much he worries. He wants to tell Alec that not everything in the world is his responsibility.

The Chairman makes an unhappy noise from his place in Magnus' arms; it makes Alec start. He glances up, half-turning, and does a double-take when he sees Magnus standing there, fingers ticking soothingly against Chairman Meow's side. Magnus does not miss the quick up-and-down Alec does of him, nor the way his cheeks tint just a little pink when he meets Magnus' eyes.


Magnus can't help himself. He gapes at Alec, utterly astounded, fingers stilling in the Chairman's fur. Alec went out and bought him coffee? And French toast? He made the French toast, Magnus realises, when he sees a frying pan drying by the sink.

For once, Magnus finds himself at a loss. He opens his mouth to speak, but no words leap to the tip of his tongue, and he just...stares. He blames it on his current state. It's nothing to do with Alexander's terrifying ability to blow his expectations right out of the water. Nothing at all.

"What?" is the first word out of Magnus' mouth. "You– You didn't leave? Why on earth didn't you leave?"

Alec shifts, looking incredibly uncertain and a little uncomfortable, and Magnus realises that his words probably sounded like some kind of complaint, or accusation. Did he sound angry? He hadn't meant to sound angry. He's not angry. At all. Just...possibly more surprised than he's ever been in four centuries of (mostly) living.

"I did," Alec says, and it only increases Magnus' confusion. "I went home last night. I have to have left to get this, right?" He points to the coffee in cardboard take-out cups from Starbucks (and isn't Starbucks beyond the average Nephilim pay grade?) and Magnus thinks that that probably should have been obvious to him. "I went home, and then I went on morning patrol, and then I came back via Starbucks, because I—" He pauses, and then shrugs a little. "I wanted to make sure you were okay. You really didn't seem well last night."

But—

"How? How did you get back in?"

Alec furrows his eyebrows in confusion. "I didn't have a key, so I didn't lock the door. I couldn't. So I just came back in. I know that's not good practise, but I thought you'd probably have some kind of anti-thief magic deterrent, so I—"

"No, no, through the wards. My wards don't let people in, irrespective of the front door."

Alec's frown deepens. Magnus wants him to smile. It might make them both feel better. "I don't know. Were your wards up, when your magic was so...low?"

"They don't feed off my energy. They're just there," Magnus tells him. "There's no way they could have just let you through. Unless—"
Alec raises his eyebrows. "Unless?"

"Well." Magnus shifts Chairman Meow in his arms, fur tickling his chin. "Certain people are exempt. Myself, for example. Raphael. My friend Catarina. If I wasn't paying attention when I let you in last night, then I suppose..."

He trails off. Alec looks at him blankly, as though none of Magnus' words made any real impact on his brain. Magnus is too tired to explain how wards work to a Shadowhunter. He'll just have to check them all later, and make sure he didn't do anything stupid last night.

In lieu of commenting further, Magnus sets Chairman Meow down, and reaches out for the coffee that appears to be untouched. He takes a long, deep swig, letting the hot liquid scald down his throat, and the caffeine settles in to work its magic on his brain.

Alec shifts from foot to foot, fiddling with his own probably empty coffee cup, and glances around. He's clearly trying not to look at Magnus; he doesn't have the energy to consider what, exactly, is bothering Alec so much this morning.

Is it morning? Or afternoon?

"French toast?" Magnus asks, just to break the suffocatingly awkward silence that's sprung up between them. "I didn't realise male Nephilim knew how to boil a kettle, let alone cook."

Alec lets out a little laugh at that. It's nice, Magnus thinks, that he knows he's being teased, and that he's laughing about it. He wouldn't have been at all amused two months ago, when they first met. And Lilith, yes, even just a hint of a smile from Alec is making him feel exponentially better.

"Most of us don't," Alec admits, and passes the plate to Magnus in offering. "Hungry?"

"Starving," Magnus says, and Alec grins. It's a touch lopsided, errant and carefree and unreserved and so in contrast to the stoic, law-abiding Shadowhunter Magnus first met.

Magnus takes a bite, and makes a noise of appreciation in the back of his throat. He looks up at Alec in surprise, and says, "This is delicious."

Alec shrugs, looking at the toast rather than at Magnus. "My culinary skills are fairly limited."

"If most Shadowhunter men don't cook, why do you?" Magnus asks. He pads across the kitchen to the island in the middle, bare feet slapping lightly on the floor, and slides himself onto a stool, gesturing for Alec to join him.

Alec settles himself on a stool at the opposite side of the island, and leans his arms gingerly on the marble top, as though he thinks a demon might leap out of it and claw his face off. Magnus has to scoff down another mouthful of food to quell his smile.

"After I got to the age of about twelve, my parents didn't really worry too much about feeding us. We could do it ourselves. And most of the time, that was just take-out." Alec is tracing random patterns across the countertop with his index finger, eyes a little glazed over, clearly far away in his mind. "None of us knew how to cook, but we got sick of take-out eventually. So Isabelle decided she needed to learn."

"And you're a good big brother, so you decided to oversee?"

Alec smiles ruefully. "Not exactly. She was terrible at cooking. She still is. I don't know how she manages to make food so deadly. But after she gave us all food poisoning for the third time, Jace and
I decided that we needed to learn, just for the sake of not dying from salmonella-infested food. So we learnt some basics." He glances up, meeting Magnus' unglamoured eyes without flinching even slightly. "French toast is actually Max's favourite."

Magnus arches an eyebrow, because Alec is only ever so animated when he talks about his family, and he wants to encourage it. "Your little brother, right?"

"Yeah." A fond smile crosses his face. "He's in Idris with my parents a lot, so we don't see him that much anymore. Jace used to go and visit a lot, because he always wanted the excuse to see Clary. So did Izzy, a bit."

"You're just the unsocial butterfly?"

Magnus had meant it as a joke, but Alec shrugs, and nods diplomatically. "Pretty much."

There's a moment of silence. Alec stares steadfastly down at his hands, rubbing his thumb against the side of his opposite hand far harder than Magnus thinks is probably healthy. There are cuts and bruises on his knuckles, ugly and purplish and clearly not healed with an iratze. Magnus finishes his toast, trying not to be bothered by Alec's behaviour. Why should he care what he's doing?

But...that's got to hurt. All of it. How the hell did he get such battered hands, anyway? He's sure they hadn't been like that last night. He'd have noticed.

He watches Alec for a minute longer, pressing against and digging into his hand. It's not hard enough to leave any real damage, but it's enough to make a rose-red mark against porcelain-pale skin.

"Hey." Magnus reaches over and touches his fingers to the back of Alec's. The Shadowhunter glances up at him, fingers stilling. "Are you alright, little angel?"

"Do you have to call me that?" Alec asks in reply, a faint shadow of a smile tilting at his mouth.

It doesn't escape Magnus' notice that he avoided the question entirely, but he supposes he has to choose his battles with Alexander. He's stopped that infernal scrubbing at his hand, at least. He's doing that sweet little movement instead, lifting his thumb to brush the tip against Magnus'. It's not enough to class as holding hands, but it's enough for Magnus to feel sure that Alec doesn't mind being touched.

And it's warm. It's so warm, in the best possible way. It's the kind of warm that seeps into chilly bones on frozen nights in front of crackling fires, hands wrapped around mugs of steaming hot chocolate and sweater-clad torsos pressed together.

"Do you want me to drop the irony?" Magnus asks, wondering if Alec will remember.

Alec frowns a little, momentarily, before his expression clears, and his eyes soften. "I don't really care."

"Hm." Magnus shifts the tip of a finger, dragging it across Alec's hand, before stilling again. "Do you have to be going back to the Institute?"

"Soon." Alec licks his lips - another nervous tick Magnus has noticed - and clears his throat. "Are you, um. How- How are you?"

"Fabulous, darling," Magnus says, with a smile, before he lets it deflate a bit so that Alec knows he's being serious. "I'll be fine. I slept well. Until my cat got a little bit too needy."
Alec scratches at the back of his neck with his free hand in clear embarrassment. "I tried to stop him. Sorry. I was cooking."

"Oh, no, it's quite alright." He waves away Alec's apology with a flourish, bare fingers scattering blue sparks through the air just for the hell of it. Alexander's eyes follow the movement.

"Are you sure?" Alec asks, and it takes Magnus a moment to realise that Alec is asking if he's sure he'll be alright, not if he's sure he didn't mind being woken up by Chairman Meow.

He gazes at Alec across the island and squeezes his hand gently. "Perfectly. I have an automated system that sends off cancellation emails to my day's clients if I'm down, so I'll do all of nothing today. I think I'll survive. I've survived much worse without one of the Nephilim worrying over my shoulder."

He smiles, because he's teasing, yes, but he appreciates Alec's kindness. Alexander glances down at the countertop, embarrassment burning pink across his cheekbones; Magnus thinks he might want to brush his fingers over that blush. He also thinks he's a little more fond of it than he cares to admit. A little more fond of Alexander than he cares to admit.

"I'm sorry," Alec says, and Magnus wants to tell him that he shouldn't be apologising for being compassionate. But then, he supposes that compassion is hardly a rewarded trait among the Nephilim. "Maybe it's because I've got younger siblings. I can't help it. I worry. And last night, you were..." He trails off, and shakes his head.

"I know," Magnus tells him, softly. Alec doesn't lift his eyes from the countertop, but Magnus watches him anyway. "Everyone always panics when I'm anything but my usual fabulous self. I'm not really allowed to freak out, or crack."

Alec's eyes snap up at that, and he shakes his head with a vehemence that stops Magnus' thoughts instantly. "No, that's not what I meant. I just meant that you seemed really...I don't know, sick. And I don't want to leave and then have Raphael snapping at my ass because you're passed out or dead or—"

"Firstly," Magnus says, a little amused but nonetheless touched, "Raphael would sooner tell me it's my own stupid fault than blame you. And secondly, sick and exhausted are different. I've slept. I'm fine."

Alec smiles, small and bashful, but he doesn't say anything else, instead dropping his eyes back down to the marble surface of the island. Magnus can't help but wonder why he cares so much about whether Magnus is about to pass out, or die. He certainly didn't seem to care very much a few weeks ago.

"I think I should go," Alec murmurs, and he doesn't look at Magnus as he speaks.

He withdraws his hand quickly, sliding it out from underneath Magnus' without preamble, and takes several steps away, as though Magnus' presence is stealing all the oxygen in the room and he needs to put distance between them to breathe.

When he passes out of the kitchen without so much as glancing over his shoulder, Magnus rises, and follows him out into the hallway.

"Alexander—"

But Alec is already tugging open the front door. He steps over the threshold in silence, and Magnus stares after him in slack-jawed astonishment as he jogs down the steps and throws open the door to
the apartment block with so much force it startles the mundane lady walking up.

What in Lilith's name was that all about?

***

After they return from morning patrol, and Alec disappears with a muttered explanation to Jace that most definitely includes Magnus, Isabelle spends an hour in the training room, hitting a punching bag as hard as she possibly can.

She pounds her fists into it over and over and over again, until her knuckles are split and bleeding, and every muscle in her body aches, and all she can hear is the rush of blood in her ears, and the way Alec had said Magnus' name when he told her about the events stemming from Magnus' call last night. He'd been hyped up on adrenaline, frozen through and shivering and worried about the High Warlock of Brooklyn like he worries about her and Jace and Max.

She wonders, as the dull thwack of bruised and battered flesh hitting unforgiving leather fills the air, whether her brother realises. Whether he realises what's going on in his own head, in his own heart, or whether he's too deep in conditioned prejudice to understand his own emotions.

It's better, thinking about Alec, worrying about Alec, than worrying about her own mind. It's better fearing for what she knows Alec will have to do at some point soon—kill Magnus Bane. Or, at least, be a part of the team that does. Give the order.

And he will, she thinks, landing a harder punch that makes her grit her teeth and grunt. Because he's such a perfect Clave soldier, and whatever beautifully insane things he's been doing recently, he's not going to rebel that much. As soon as Maryse returns from Idris indefinitely, she's going to want to see the New York Institute actively tracking Magnus. She's going to want him dead. She's going to demand his slaughter in recompense for their own actions in freeing the Downworlders—the Downworlders they were coward enough to capture in the first place.

So it's her fault too, she supposes, bitterness filling her. Her fault that her brother is going to have to, at the very least, watch, while the man who's changed his life is hunted and tortured and executed.

They're supposed to be searching for him now. She wonders why Lydia hasn't brought it up. None of them have mentioned it - not even Raj - but she must know. She just...hasn't even alluded to the topic.

Which, Isabelle supposes, is a small blessing. But, at some point, unless Alec is willing to risk everything - and Raziel knows if he is, she and Jace will stand with him - the Shadowhunters of the New York Institute are going to murder Magnus Bane in cold blood.

And it's their own fault. Hers, and Alec's, and Jace's. They made the plan. They reached out to make such an alliance. They were too coward to say a word afterwards. They practically signed Magnus' death warrant.

Did Magnus realise, when he formulated such a plan, and made that alliance with her and Alec? Did he think about who the blame would inevitably land upon? Did he think about the consequences?

Or did he just see Alec begging him for mercy?

A sob hitches in Isabelle's throat. One fist meets the punching bag so hard she swallows a scream, and the next misses entirely, tears stinging in her eyes until she's blinded. She falls forward, gripping the top of the bag with both bleeding, throbbing hands, and lets her forehead rest against the leather, hot tears of fury and rage and hopeless indignation sliding down her cheeks. She cries for her
broken, irreparable relationship with Meliorn, and she cries for her own naivety, and she cries for her brother, because meeting Magnus Bane has been the best thing that's ever happened to him, and now it's going to scar him and ruin him forever.

And he doesn't even realise.

There's a creak, and the sound of heels clicking on stone, and Isabelle stiffens as the training room door slides open. There's only one other person currently in the Institute who wears heels and would walk into the training room at this time—Lydia.

Fuck, Isabelle isn't in the mood. Lydia is exactly why she came in here in the first place. Because no matter how much she wants to hate her, she can't. She despises her, and she despises the way Lydia looks down on her, and she despises how fucking perfect she is in all the ways Isabelle could never be, but for the love of God, she can't hate her. Everything in her heart wants to like Lydia.

And her head doesn't understand why.

Lydia makes her nervous, and self-conscious, because she can tell that Lydia judges everything about her—and Isabelle doesn't want her to. Isabelle cares about what some archaic bitch from Idris thinks, and fuck, Isabelle doesn't give a shit about what anybody thinks, unless they're someone she loves.

"We've got another body in," Lydia says, from the doorway, the sound of heels on the floor increasing in volume as she approaches.

Isabelle is facing away from the door, head still resting against the punching bag, and she's not going to turn around and look at her. She can't. She can't let someone like Lydia see her with her walls down, defences stripped away, all of her so entirely vulnerable.

Three people in the world are allowed to see her like this.

Well. Two. One of them had that status revoked when he broke up with her.

Fuck, she misses Meliorn more than she cares to admit. More than she expected to.

"Mundane with the Sight, we think. Preliminary observation suggests more of Valentine's experiments, but we need a full examination and a conclusive result, and— By the Angel, Isabelle."

Lydia sounds horrified. It's the most emotion she's ever heard in the woman's voice, and it's almost enough to make Isabelle look up.

Almost, but not quite.

"I'll be fifteen minutes," Isabelle says, into the punching bag, arms shielding her face from view where she's got her fingers up on the chains above her head that snake up to the ceiling to attach the bag to the rafters. "Let me shower and change and prep. Ditch the body in the lab."

"Isabelle—" Lydia sounds like she's barely heard her. Her voice is hushed, but perfectly clear, and Isabelle can see her standing to one side, a mere metre or two away. It's too close. Isabelle wants her to fuck off.

"What?" Isabelle demands. "If you're looking for Alec, he's out discussing an old case with a warlock."

"Your hands," Lydia says, voice heavy with emphasis and laced with what Isabelle thinks might be revulsion. "Are you alright? Raziel, did you do this now? Tell me this is from this morning."
"I did this now, training," Isabelle snaps. "My wellbeing is none of your business. Leave me the hell alone."

She looks up, finally, when Lydia doesn't speak. Lydia is staring at her, leaning a little away from her, clearly taken aback. She blinks, and shakes her head a little, clearly stunned into silence. Isabelle sneers at her.

"Why do you hate me so much?" Lydia asks, searching her face with infuriating earnestness. Isabelle slightly wants to slap her. She doesn't very often want to inflict bodily harm on other women - she's usually more into girl love, platonically and otherwise - but Lydia...

"Oh, please." Isabelle sorts, and lifts a hand to wipe at her tear-streaked face. "Have a fucking guess. You think I'm scum. You're so up yourself, such a perfect Idris woman, you can't abide anyone like me. I'm not going to like you for marching into my home and acting like I'm so disgusting you can't even bring yourself to shake my hand the first time you meet me."

Lydia's lips part, eyes wide, and she gapes at Isabelle in clear astonishment. "I what?" she asks, incredulity increasing the pitch of her voice. "I don't think you're scum. What in the world– Why would I think that? And what the hell did I do to give you that impression?"

"You look at me like that all the time," Isabelle says, rolling her eyes. "I'm not stupid, don't lie."

"Isabelle. Raziel. I don't think that. I really don't. I don't think I'm better than you. If anything, I think exactly the opposite. You're ridiculously intelligent, you're an incredible fighter, and I admire you for being so unashamedly yourself in everything you do. In the way you present yourself, in your passion for what you believe, in the way you love your brothers." She shakes her head, eyes boring into Isabelle's. "I'm not some old, backwards moron from Idris still living in denial about everything. I don't care what - or who - your social life comprises of, and I don't care what you do when you're not working, as long as it's legal, and I certainly don't care what you wear."

Isabelle snorts, and thinks about her escapade with Jace and Alec, freeing dozens of Downworld prisoners. "Some of what I do isn't legal."

"Then don't tell me about it and I won't be obliged to report you," Lydia says simply, reaching into the inside pocket of her jacket. She draws out a stele, and extends her other hand towards Isabelle, indicating her ruined hands. "May I?"

After a moment's hesitation, Isabelle inclines her head, and allows Lydia to draw a healing rune on the outside of both wrists. She hisses, knuckles stinging as the mangled flesh begins to knit back together and the bruises begin to heal over.

"You Lightwoods are terrible," Lydia says, with a shake of her head. "You're all predisposed to do this when you're upset."

"Mostly Alec," Isabelle admits, but she shrugs, and nods a little. "But yes. We're not exactly encouraged to talk about our feelings."

"Nobody is," Lydia says, and smiles a little. "Now, lab?"

"Shower first."

Lydia nods at her, just once, before she turns on her heel and strides out.

And Isabelle... Well. Maybe she can justify her inability to hate Lydia now. But a half-assed explanation certainly doesn't mean she likes her, or trusts her. She's still a Clave envoy, and she's
still, inevitably, going to be key in ruining everything bright that's suddenly blooming in Alec's life.

Chapter End Notes

Well, I hope you enjoyed this one, even though it ended on a bit of a bleak note...

If you like, come follow me on Tumblr!

Much love, Lu <3
**Nightingale**

Chapter Summary

In which Lydia has some news, Simon makes a rookie mistake, and sometimes Alec needs his parabatai.

Chapter Notes

The nightingale's song is said by some cultures to be a cry from a lost soul in purgatory. The nightingale is also often used to represent longing, to warn of impending death, or as a marker of a person taking the responsibility to bring about change.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec doesn't speak to Magnus for thirteen days after their impromptu breakfast.

He gets two texts from the warlock, during that time: one thanking him for breakfast, and one asking him if he's alright. And, frankly, neither are things the High Warlock of Brooklyn should be texting the Acting Head of the New York Institute.

He can't bring himself to reply. Not after that night, and the resulting morning. He doesn't know what kind of crazy magic pheromones Magnus Bane likes to release to fuck with people, but he's had enough. He's had enough of having his mind scrambled. He's had enough of being fucked with. He's had enough of feeling like his entire world is spinning and tilting and tipping to realign itself towards Magnus every time they're in the same room, breathing the same air.

He can't bear it. He can't bear the way the warlock makes his heart pound and his chest tighten and his palms sweat, and he despises how comfortable he's become in the home of such a lethal man, and he's furious with himself for how often he lets his guard down around Magnus.

He trusts him. And he likes him. And by the Angel, he can't help wanting to be around him. He can't help feeling warm whenever their hands touch, and then cold when Magnus pulls back.

But Jesus Christ, what had possessed him, that night? Walking him home had been one thing that crossed far too many lines, but going inside? Allowing himself to be led to his bedroom? Drawing his sheets up, kissing his forehead?

It's magic. It's got to be some kind of magic. And Alec is fucking pissed.

With Maryse due home in a matter of days, he can't afford to be distracted by such things. He's supposed to be hunting Magnus—hunting Bane, not cozying up to his cat and cooking him breakfast.

Bane has to die. He has to locate him, formulate a plan, and complete his mission, irrespective of anything else. It's his job. They're his orders. If he disobeys, he puts his entire family at risk.

He's done fucking around. He's done making nice with a warlock. He's done having stupid text
conversations. He has a job to do, and he can't afford to put anything before it. Certainly not some trivial friendship - if it can even be called that - with Warlock Bane.

He's surprised, honestly, that Lydia has yet to bring the subject of their supposed hunt for Warlock Bane up. She's been so thorough in everything else, he can't help but wonder why she's so far let the clear absence of any form of search slip.

It all makes sense, when they come back from morning patrol and she asks him to follow her into what used to be his mother's office. He raises his eyebrows, but, later, he thinks that maybe he knew exactly what was coming, somewhere deep in the darkest recesses of his mind.

"Take a seat," Lydia says, as she slides elegantly into her own chair and flips her braids back over her shoulder. She's pretty, Alec thinks, as he watches her. Beautiful, even. Smart, strategic, strong, determined.

Everything about her is the kind of thing someone like him is supposed to fall in love with.

But nothing gives. There's nothing in his heart that tugs, nothing in his chest that aches, no tripping pulse or rushing, roaring blood or adrenaline surging through him.

Nothing.

Nothing like with—

No. No. It's *magic*, it's not real. It's some stupid, fucked-up *Magic*.

"I'm fine," he tells her. "I don't mean to rush you, but I've got reports to file, so if we could..." He trails off, and makes a vague gesture with his hand to indicate that she should just say whatever it is she pulled him in here for.

"Yes." She folds her hands in front of her, and leans forward, looking up at him over the desk. "You know why I'm really here, Alec. Not because anything about the way you run things is ineffective. Certainly not because you are an ineffective leader."

He doesn't miss the emphasis, and he wonders whether she's implying things about his parents. Once, he might have bristled at the suggestion. Now, with Bane's stories ringing in his ears, haunting his mind, he can't find it in himself to give a shit.

"The Downworld escape," Alec says, nodding once. "I know."

"The New York Institute filed a very long report on the incident, with the conclusion that the most likely culprit was the High Warlock of Brooklyn, Magnus Bane. With, potentially, an inside accomplice, but as that's yet to be confirmed, I have instructions to focus on the larger issue. The issue of Warlock Bane, which is, of course, an issue that goes beyond this small, isolated incident."

Alec nods again to show that he's listening, while his heart hammers so hard against his ribs he's surprised Lydia can't hear. It's painful. His chest is tightening, and his stomach is churning, anxiety making his every nerve ending turn over and twist painfully.

"The Institute is supposed to be actively searching for Warlock Bane," Lydia says, "but, understandably, I've found very little evidence, save for a few automated systems on your computers that have found nothing."

Alec blinks at her. "Understandably?"
"Well, yes. I imagine it's a very daunting task, to be landed with the responsibility of hunting down a man who's evaded the Clave for decades." She unfolds and refolds her hands, locking her fingers together differently, and her gaze doesn't waver as she stares up at him. "Which is why I've made a decision about how to make this a more effective mission."

Alec tries to swallow, but finds he can't. He clears his throat, and curls his fingers into his palms in an attempt to stop them shaking. "O-Oh?"

"I believe that the sole responsibility to carry out this mission should lie with you, Alec," she says, and Alec feels the world crash and fall away around him, like someone just let off a grenade under his feet that destroyed everything in the vicinity but left him untouched.

He can't breathe.

"W-Why?" he asks, and digs his nails into his already-sore hands. They break the skin of his palms, and he feels the viscous sensation of blood seeping onto his fingertips. "Why not Jace? He's a better Shadowhunter than I am. A better fighter. He's an incredible tactician, he's—"

"I think you put yourself down far too much," Lydia tells him, with a small smile on her face. "Jace is the best fighter we've seen for generations, yes. But you have better control. You think with your head, not with your heart. Your sense of duty, your sense of loyalty and dedication to your family and to the Clave and our work, is unparalleled. Trust me, I've thought long and hard about this. I understand that what I'm asking of you is a lot. But I trust you. I trust that you'll do this."

He can't speak. He opens his mouth, words in his mind, but none of them can crawl up his throat into his mouth. His chest is rising and falling quickly, heavily, and he can't stay in this office a moment longer.

"Alright," he says, trying not to gasp, because it's the fastest way he knows to get himself the fuck out of here. "Alright. I'll do it."

Lydia smiles, and Alec thinks he's going to throw up all over the delicately embroidered rug on the floor—a rug looted from a Downworlder in the 1920s, his parents have told him proudly, far too many times. Maybe there would be some sense of dramatic irony in vomiting all over it.

"Excellent," she says, while Alec tries not to scream.

***

The moment he gets out of Lydia's office, he heads to the training room. He needs to punch something. He needs to get everything out of his system. He needs to shut off his mind for an hour, allow himself to focus in on what's important—his family, and his duty. Because whatever he feels about this, however it feels to think about killing Bane, he has to. He doesn't have a choice. If he doesn't, it'll be a lot more than his reputation that's damaged. It could destroy everything.

He loses himself to the rhythmic smack of fists against leather, to the dull thwack of arrows hitting the dead centre of targets, to the metallic clank as he smashes a sword against a wooden dummy over and over again, until it splits in two and the top half rolls across the floor.

"Wow," says a voice from the doorway. "Not even I've managed to do that. Well. Only that one time when Clary and I had our first fight. But I think you did it with more gusto."

Alec scowls at the dummy, and throws the battered sword to the floor. It clatters painfully loudly as it
hits the stone, but he ignores it in favour for reaching out for his bow and quiver. He pays even less attention to his parabatai, leaning against the closed door with his arms folded across his chest where his hoodie is half zipped up with nothing beneath it, hair still damp from the shower. Alec doesn't know when he got there, and he doesn't care.

He doesn't care.

He doesn't fucking care anymore.

"Do you know your hands are bleeding?" Jace asks, with the air of someone enquiring as to whether or not Alec is aware that he's got a fluffy piece of debris in his hair.

"Fuck off, Jace."

"Not until you tell me what's bothering you."

Alec closes his eyes for a moment as he lifts his bow in an attempt to calm the rage coiling in his gut, threatening to spill through his veins like magma rushing up inside a volcano before it explodes, hot lava and rock and ash raining down, devastating the area around it.

"I'm fine."

"Bullshit," Jace says, but it's mild. Jace has got so much milder, since meeting Clary. No longer so highly strung, so ready to rip into everyone and anything, so ready to launch himself into danger without a moment's thought.

It's fucking infuriating. Alec wants Jace to rage at him. He wants Jace to shout, scream, fight with him, punch him, throw him on the floor and make him kick back. He wants pain and blood and adrenaline to overpower every other feeling in existence, until he's made of anger and violence and cold, detached fury. He's want Jace to push him there.

But he won't.

"Alec, we're parabatai, I know you're not okay. You don't have to hide in the training room making yourself bleed because you're so upset. You can talk about it."

Alec chooses to ignore him, instead taking his first shot. He exhales as he releases the arrow, satisfaction stretching his lips into a thin, bitter smile full of harsh angles and unforgiving lines.

"You're rubbing off on Izzy, you know," Jace continues. "Lydia said she was in here punching that damn bag until her knuckles split. Hadn't even wrapped her hands."

Izzy had been upset? Why? Why hadn't she told him?

"By the Angel, Alec."

And, suddenly, Jace is in front of him, right as he's about to let an arrow fly, and it's only the quick-thinking rune on his forearm that stops him shooting his parabatai in the heart. Alec's eyes go wide, and he freezes, chest heaving as he stares at Jace.

"I was about to shoot you."

"Back at you," Jace says, with a roll of his eyes, looking entirely unbothered. His expression shifts to one of concern as he takes a step closer. "Alec, come on, I'm not really one for deep emotional talks, but you're hurting. And it's hurting me watching you tear yourself apart."
Lowering his bow, Alec lets his gaze drop to the floor, and shakes his head. Weights drag his shoulders in until he's hunched over, half the size he was before; then they pull him down further, until his bow drops to the floor and his knees fold and he sinks to the stone tiles of the training room floor. His fingers clasp at the back of his head, tugging and pulling at his hair insistently.

It's only when he hears Jace's sharp intake of breath, and feels warm arms wrap around him, that he realises what a mess he must look. Bleeding knuckles and bruised hands don't exactly give him the appearance of a stable leader.

"Tell me what happened," Jace murmurs, against the side of his head, and Raziel, Alec can't count the number of times they've been in this precise position, reversed, with Jace breaking down and falling apart while Alec attempts to hold him together.

"I can't, Jace," he whispers, letting himself fall against his parabatai, pressing into his side, head on Jace's shoulder. "I can't."

"Can't what?"

He shakes his head desperately, horrified to feel tears stinging at his eyes; he grips onto his parabatai, because he doesn't know what else to do. He doesn't know who to turn to. He doesn't know what to say, or where to beg for help.

Because Alec doesn't need help. Other people need his help. His siblings, his parabatai, his parents—they lean on him. And, of course, he leans on Izzy and Jace, sometimes, on missions, or if he ever gets hurt, or if he's particularly exhausted and had an awful day.

But not like this. Not for something this big. This is potentially catastrophic. Something with no simple answer. Something with no answer at all, other than the one he already knows.

Magnus Bane has to die, and he has to be the one to do it.

"Alec, hey, hey." Jace's arms tighten around him for a moment, before he's pulling back, holding Alec by his shoulders so he can search his face with devastating seriousness. "Can't what?"

"I can't kill him, Jace," Alec says, chest heaving, eyes wide and wild, thoughts erratic and disjointed, his mind unable to focus on one thing at once. "I can't. But I have to, and I—"

"Who?" Jace stares at him, eyes flickering between both of his. "Who? Alec, what are you talking about?"

"Magnus," Alec whispers, and closes his eyes as nausea rockets through him. "Jace, I can't."

"Did Lydia tell you you have to do this?" Jace asks, and there's a steel to his voice beneath the gentleness and the care and the love. "That fucking—"

"She's just doing her job," Alec says, tiredly, because Raziel knows this isn't Lydia's fault. After all, *the Clave itself and a soldier of the Clave are very different.*

But then again, it begins to sound meaningless, the more times Alec hears it, out of his parents' mouths, out of his own, out of every Shadowhunter he's ever met defending actions they know are diabolical.

*I must do my duty. I'm following orders. I'm just doing my job.*

Izzy's right. It's not good enough. But fuck, it's hard to know what else to do when the risk is
great. What difference can one measly Shadowhunter make against an entire Institution built on prejudice and blatant racism?

"Alec, listen to me." Jace tightens his grip on Alec's shoulders, the increased pressure grounding him. "You do not have to kill Magnus. The Clave has no right to turn you into a murderer."

"They think he's a murderer," Alec says, letting his eyes close. He's so tired. So fucking tired. He wants all this to stop. He's had enough. It was so much simpler before all this, but he can't go back to that ignorant mindset, oblivious to everything around him, unwilling to see beyond the poorly constructed façade.

When Alec opens his eyes again, Jace has raised his eyebrows. "They think he's a murderer?"

"He's not," Alec tells him. "Not any more than you or I."

Jace shrugs diplomatically, but he doesn't ask for Alec to expand. "I suppose it wouldn't be the first time the Clave's exaggerated stories about Downworlders to make them look like criminals."

"What do I do?" Alec whispers, imploring Jace with his eyes.

"You suck up whatever it was that made you go from worrying yourself sick about him to running away from him the other week, and you go and talk to him," Jace says, as though it's the simplest thing in the world. "You knock on his door, you tell him you're sorry for whatever happened— No, fuck that, you tell him the truth."

"I don't even know what the truth is," Alec admits.

Jace sighs, and pulls Alec back into a hug. "Oh, you poor repressed soul."

Alec smacks half-heartedly at Jace's shoulder, even as he's relaxing into his parabatai's embrace, their hearts beating not in synch, but in perfect alternation, one then the other, thud-thud, thud-thud, answering each other, two halves of the same soul.

"It seems pretty obvious from where I'm sitting," Jace says, softly. "But I think this is something you should stumble across yourself. Just don't let the Clave rule your heart, Alec. Okay?"

Alec nods against Jace's shoulder, although he's not quite sure what he's agreeing to. His heart? When did this become about his heart? This is about the fact that he can't murder an innocent man in cold blood.

Isn't it?

"Okay," Alec says, and closes his eyes again, just for a moment letting Jace carry all the responsibility that he can simply never shed.

***

Lydia's tapping at her laptop when her office door flies open, so hard it cracks into the wall and leaves a mark. She blinks, looking up, and she's horribly unsurprised to see Isabelle in the doorway, eyes frantic.

She's just not sure why.

"You can't do this," Isabelle says, and she's pleading, eyes wide, staring at Lydia with a devastating desperation that makes her chest ache. "You can't. Please, please don't do this."
"Do what?" Lydia asks, rising out of her seat to shut the door. She has a feeling that whatever this is, that's upsetting Isabelle so much, it's not something to be overheard by the entire Institute.

Isabelle's wearing her lab coat, hair pulled up and held in place by her stele, strands escaping at the front and framing her face. It's probably an inappropriate time for Lydia to consider that Isabelle is beautiful, in every sense of the word, but she does anyway.

"This," Isabelle says. "To Alec. What you're doing to my brother, you can't—"

Tears well in Isabelle's eyes. She blinks furiously, and Lydia turns away: she certainly doesn't feel like she's earned the right to be privy to Isabelle's innermost emotions like this. Instead, she pulls over a chair, indicates that Isabelle should take a seat, and then leans against her desk to listen.

"You can't ask this of Alec," Isabelle says, in a more measured, controlled voice. "It's not fair."

"Someone has to do it." Lydia replies, with a frown. Why is it such a problem that she's chosen Alec? Why has that upset Isabelle so much? Alec's the perfect candidate. He's loyal, he's dutiful, he's determined, and he's skilled.

"Not him. It doesn't have to be him. Lydia—" Isabelle leans forward and reaches out to grasp at her wrist. "Please. You don't- You don't understand."

"No, you're right," Lydia agrees, focusing on Isabelle's face rather than the sensation of smooth fingers on the vulnerable skin of her wrist. "I don't."

"No, you're right," Lydia agrees, focusing on Isabelle's face rather than the sensation of smooth fingers on the vulnerable skin of her wrist. "I don't."

"Ask anyone. Anyone in the world. By the Angel, ask me, ask Jace, ask Raj, just don't ask Alec."

Lydia stares at her, utterly confused, and shakes her head. "It's too late for that. I've sent the message to the Clave. It's confirmed."

"The Clave?" Isabelle looks horrified, and a deep, dark feeling of dread settles in the pit of Lydia's stomach as she considers that she might have done something very, very wrong. She just doesn't have the slightest clue why. "No, no, you can't— You have to do something, this can't—"

There's a light knock at the door, and it clicks open, slowly, light from the corridor trickling into the dimly lit office. Jace's silhouette is outlined by yellow fluorescent lighting; he pauses, eyes dropping down to where Isabelle has her hand wrapped around Lydia's wrist, and Lydia realises that she's curled her fingers towards Isabelle's—towards, but not touching.

"Excuse me for eavesdropping," Jace says, stepping further into the room and pushing the door gently shut behind him, "but I think, Lydia, you might have more luck if we take this away from my parabatai and to an entirely different angle."

Isabelle gapes at Jace, and then fury, fiery and passionate, flashes through her eyes. She snatches her hand back from Lydia's wrist and stands, toe to toe with her brother.

"Jace, what the fuck—"

"Why," Jace says, holding a hand up to Izzy, "exactly, is the Clave under the impression that Magnus Bane needs killing at all?"

Lydia blinks. Has everyone in this Institute lost their mind? No wonder she's been sent in. Alec seems to be the only one among them who's remained rational.

"He's a mass murdering warlock who practises dark magic, endangers the lives of millions, and
broke the Law by breaking out Conclave prisoners. Why on earth wouldn't he need killing?"

Jace's lips tip up at one corner, a faint smile on his face. "I trust you," he says. "I don't know why, because Angel knows you've done fuck all to gain our trust, but I do. I want you to swear to me, on the Angel, that what I'm about to say doesn't go outside of this room. For our sake. For Alec's, for mine, for Izzy's." He tilts his head to one side, considering. "For yours, because frankly, if you report this to the Clave and endanger my brother, there's a man in a Brooklyn loft who is going to be pissed. And I'm not sure even the Clave could out-piss him."

Involuntarily, her eyes flicker across to Isabelle, who's listening to her brother with her lips parted, astonishment and apprehension written into every line of her face. Lydia doesn't want her to be apprehensive. She certainly doesn't want any information leaked to the Clave that would harm her, or Alec, or Jace. She's been here for three weeks, but, nevertheless, she's fond of the Lightwoods. She cares about them. She hasn't let herself care about anybody for years.

But—

"Jace, you know I can't," she says, imploring him to understand. "I'm a Clave representative. I'm duty-bound—"

"To report innocent people to a corrupt central power that needs a huge overhaul and a kick up the ass?" Isabelle snaps. "No. You're not. You're a Clave representative, sure, but before that, you're a Shadowhunter. Your job is to protect mundanes, kill demons, and keep peace in the Shadow World by making sure our every decision is just. And before that? You're a living, breathing, conscious person, just like every other mundane, Downworlder and Shadowhunter in the world. There are morals and codes and duties at go beyond the Clave's twisted priorities."

She doesn't know what it is about Isabelle, about the way she talks with such unadulterated conviction, but it unsettles Lydia. The words strike right into her heart, and she's not entirely sure why. There's nothing personal about this. She's never been an unconventional Shadowhunter woman. Rather the opposite.

And yet, a mere few sentences from Isabelle has her with those words on the tip of her tongue. *I swear. I swear on the Angel. I swear on the Angel, I won't say a word to the Clave.*

"Trust me," Isabelle says, and Lydia's wants, so badly, to tell her that she does. "You want to know this. You'll want to do something about this. Because at the moment, you, the Clave, are making a terrible mistake."

For a long, hard moment, they stare at each other, Isabelle's gaze entirely steady as Lydia searches her eyes for some hidden clue as to what on earth the siblings are on about.

"Alright," she says at last. "I swear on the Angel's name, I will not allow this information to leave these walls. It remains between the three of us."

Jace and Isabelle both let out identical, audible sighs of relief. Lydia wants to smile in amusement, but she's too worried about what the hell she's getting herself into.

"You might want to sit down," Jace suggests, but she shakes her head, and folds her arms over her chest. Jace shrugs. "Well, I suppose we should start with the fact that Magnus Bane is not a mass murderer. And he's living in New York. Has been for decades. And Alec's with him right now."

***

Across the city, Clary Fray drags her best friend through the rain-splattered streets, with only the
ghostly moonlight and the hiss of rain as it slashes against them, the wind biting through their jackets and cold seeping into their skin.

Well. Cold seeps into her skin. Simon doesn't feel the cold anymore.

It's one of the many things he's had to get used to, over the last three years. Not feeling the cold, but feeling cold to other people. Not needing to breathe, but feeling decidedly inhuman when he doesn't. Wanting to drink the mochas from the cute little café by his old high school, but needing blood.

_Blood._

Just thinking the word makes his fangs extend, digging into his lower lip painfully. It's so stupid. He should know better than to do this by now, but god, it's hard. The last three years have been hard, and he's not really sure how to make it easier on himself.

He'd spent the first two months after he'd transformed hanging around with Luke, because heck if he'd known where else he was supposed to go. Home hadn't really been an option, and there was no way he'd lower himself to chilling out at the Hotel Dumort—not after Raphael Santiago had laid some whacked-up encanto shit over his mother, to make her think that he'd gone to university in London, or something.

Luke's pack seem to have got used to his presence, mostly because Maia had eventually given him her seal of approval. He gets kicked out fairly often, when they're discussing private, wolf-y things. Simon doesn't really care. He just wishes there was somewhere he fitted in. Because he's welcome with the wolves—but not by all of them. And he can't go home. And he's certainly not welcome at the Institute. Alright, Isabelle's nice enough, in a deadly sort of way, and Jace is cool, when he's not being an asshole, but everyone else? They hate him.

The look Alec Lightwood gives him every time they meet is enough to make Simon want to run for the hills. He's a Downworlder. They don't want him there.

Suffering so much time so far away from Clary has been just as hard. But it's no excuse for this. It's no excuse for behaving like a newborn again, and completely failing to watch his blood intake, until he'd been out with Clary and had had to restrain himself from digging into some poor dude that passed them.

He shudders a little at the memory of how desperate he'd been. He'd forced himself not to feed, but god, it had been hard.

The Hotel Dumort looms into view, and Clary glances over at him. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, Clary I'm great," he says, and lets out a weak laugh. "I'm trying not to eat you, but I'm great."

She rolls her eyes, a smile tugging at her lips. "You're such an idiot. Raphael is going to kill you."

"I really, really don't want to speak to Raphael. You remember when we were seven and I made you explain to my mom why I'd sprayed ketchup everywhere? You explain to Raphael why you've dragged his least favourite person in the world to his doorstep."

"I'm pretty sure Jace is his least favourite person in the world," Clary says. "And no. You're an adult."

Clary raises a hand to knock on the vampires' front door, and Simon raises his eyebrows.

"Since when do you knock? Don't you normally, you know, charge in, guns blazing, stab first ask
questions later?"

"Not since I've learnt about the Accords," Clary says, glancing over her shoulder. "Can you hear that? Is that a shax demon?"

"No, it's a cat. And it's tiny. Don't you think I would have heard the demon before you? Do you even have a hearing rune on?"

Clary looks back at him, nostrils flaring a little in irritation. "Simon, shut up."

"Jace would kill you. Going out without being runed up? Tut tut."

"Jace is stupidly over-protective, considering how often he throws himself in harm's way."

"You know, Isabelle told me he used to be worse."

"Yeah." A little smile flits across Clary's face. "Yeah, she told me the same thing."

Isabelle had actually gone off on a half-drunken rant at him when they'd bumped into each other in the Hunter's Moon one night. She'd been waiting for Maia to finish her shift (and Simon still isn't sure if the girls had actually been together, or whether the make-out he and Alec had both been unfortunate enough to witness was a one-time thing) and had told him how grateful she was that they'd met Clary, and how good she'd been for Jace. It had all been very sweet, even if it had made him burn with jealousy at the time.

It doesn't anymore.

The door to the Dumort is wrenched open, and the perpetually pissed off eyes of Raphael Santiago appear. His expression darkens when he sees who his visitors are, and his face seems to transform from mildly irritated to utterly, existentially done.

"What have we done to earn the pleasure of your company tonight, Shadowhunter?" Raphael asks, ignoring Simon in favour of directing his scathing tone at Clary, instead.

"I'm moral support," Clary says. "It's Simon."

Raphael closes his eyes for a moment, before he opens them to stare Simon down instead. "Well?"

"I— Blood," Simon says, eloquently. He groans at himself internally. "I need blood."

"When was the last time you had any?"


Raphael rolls his eyes. "Dios, you people. Come in."

Simon passes Raphael, stepping over the threshold awkwardly, and turns to make a comment to Clary, only to see Raphael barring the doorway.

"Not you, Shadowhunter. You can wait elsewhere. Goodnight."

"Wait!" Simon grabs Raphael's arm; Raphael physically flinches away. "No, Clary can come in, it's okay, she—"

"Do you live here?" Raphael demands. "No. You're not a dog, you can function without Clarissa."
Simon doesn't get a chance to defend himself; the door slams, and Raphael disappears almost simultaneously, leaving Simon stand alone, praying that none of the other vampires are going to turn up. They're not his favourite people. Nor is he theirs.

"You're such an idiot," Raphael says harshly, reappearing a mere moment later with two plastic packets of blood in his hand.

He throws them both to Simon without further comment; Simon can't rip them open fast enough. He can't even find it in himself to feel ashamed when he tips the first one down his throat, smearing blood across his face and dripping it onto his t-shirt. The second one goes nearly as quickly, and he can feel the blood revitalising him with every passing second.

Raphael has his arms folded over his chest as he watches, and he shakes his head. "Stupid vampire," he says, as Simon gasps in lungfuls of unnecessary air once he's finished. "You're not a fledgling anymore. You should know better than to starve yourself."

"It wasn't deliberate," Simon says, voice coming out strangely due to his fangs still being drawn. "It just happened."

"Well it can't just happen," Raphael says, sharply. "You'll end up dead. You'll starve, or you'll attack a mundane and the Shadowhunters will execute you. Clary won't be able to protect you. And neither will I."

Simon lifts his eyes to look at Raphael. The other vampire doesn't flinch at Simon's bloodied state, eyes instead drilling back into him. Simon thinks he might see concern flash across Raphael's face, for just a moment, but he dismisses it: Raphael is never concerned about anything. Least of all him. Raphael hates him.

"Thanks, but I don't need protecting," Simon tells him, and wipes his mouth with the back of his sleeve. "I've been doing just fine on my own for the last three years. It's not like you actually care about my general wellbeing."

He's knows that's not quite true, but he can't bring himself to admit that he might well be dead by now, if it weren't for Raphael. Apparently, Raphael notices the irony: his nostrils flare, eyes narrowing as he pins Simon with an icy gaze.

"I always offer you help when you ask. And you chose not to come to the Dumort. I offered. Several times."

Simon scoffs. "Yeah, because I really want to hang around with the guy who manipulated my mom's mind."

Raphael presses his lips together. "You know why I did that."

"Yeah, and you know what? You know why I don't like it. So screw you, Santiago. I'm done. I'm going. Thanks for the blood. I'll pay you back in never seeing you again."

"Simon—"

A hand wraps around his arm, and Simon pauses, turning to look over his shoulder. Raphael doesn't let go when he speaks.

"I'm sorry," he says, and it sounds like it's physically painful to say the word.

You don't want me here, anyway. You hate me."

"I don't—" Raphael shakes his head, and smiles a little, tightly. There's no humour in the expression; Simon thinks it might almost be a smile of regret. "I don't hate you, Simon."

"Oh, sure," Simon says, and he can't stop the sarcasm bleeding into his voice. "Look, we're done here. Goodbye."

Raphael doesn't say a word as Simon moves towards the door. He doesn't move, for several long seconds, until Simon's hand is on the door handle.

"Wait. You're covered in blood."

Simon grits his teeth. "It's dark. I don't care. If the police come to arrest me, I can run faster than them."

"Just..." Raphael appears at his side, and extends his arm, jacket held in his hand in offering. "Take it."

For a moment, Simon wants to bite out a retort. He's not sure why he's so angry with Raphael tonight - because god knows this isn't always how he feels when he has to interact with the leader of the New York vampire clan.

But Raphael is watching him with an unusual level of earnestness in his expression, so Simon swallows down his ricocheting emotions and reaches out to take the proffered jacket. It's cold to the touch - of course it is - but it's soft, and probably costs more than Simon's entire wardrobe.

"I'm gonna look stupid walking down the street in jeans and a suit jacket," Simon mumbles, as he slips it on over his hoodie.

Raphael's lips quirk up just a touch. "You do look ridiculous."

Simon has to bite down on the inside of his lip to hold back a grin. "Yeah, well. What can I say? It's my default."

"Goodnight, Simon."

"Yeah. Goodnight, Raphael."

Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to say that I am doing my very best to reply to all your comments, which are unfailingly lovely. If I have a particularly busy week, I'll reply to just those comments in which people have asked questions, but if I ever miss out your comment in replies, you won't be the only one, and I've absolutely read and cherished it.

If you like, come follow me on Tumblr!

Have a fabulous week,
Lu <3
Chapter Summary

In which Alec flies through the rain, Magnus is a little taken aback, and Star Wars and popcorn solve life's problems.

Chapter Notes

Kingfishers are said to be symbolic of beauty (obviously -- look at them!) agility, and a serene and peaceful approach to life. "Serene" doesn't quite fit the character I'm describing here, but I think the rest of it does, largely!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It's typical, Alec thinks, as he crosses his arms tightly over his chest, that it's raining, again, while he flies through the night skies, across the Brooklyn Bridge, high above all the mundanes racing across in their cars. Down below, the world is alight with life, the city that never sleeps transitioning into the nighttime. Lights flicker on, reflected through the puddles formed on the sidewalks and at the edges of the roads, illuminating the bustling mundane world that seems at once so alien and so familiar to him.

He's shivering when he gets to Magnus' apartment, landing lightly on the pavement and marking his wings away before he slashes through his glamour rune. It's hardly the first time he's arrived unannounced and frozen through, but he can't imagine anyone will appreciate sodden wings dripping water into the apartment block.

He knows that Magnus might open the door, take one look at him, and order him to get the hell out. God, he might not even get that far. The wards might ping him back, refuse to let him close enough to get to the front door.

He'd probably deserve it, after the way he'd left, and his radio silence since.

Of course, when he does get to the front door and press the buzzer by Magnus' name, that's not what happens at all. He should have learnt by now, he thinks, to expect the unexpected where the High Warlock of Brooklyn is concerned.

"Alexander?" Magnus asks, a note of incredulity in his voice even over the intercom.

"I'm sorry," are the first words out of Alec's mouth, as he leans into the porch to get out of the rain. "I'm sorry, please, I- I have to talk to you. You need to- You need to know something."

"Come up."

Alec dashes up the stairs, only to find Magnus' apartment door shut when he reaches the top. Before he can lift a hand to knock, it's pulled open, and Magnus is revealed on the other side of the threshold, dressed in a loose silk shirt in soft swirls of burgundy and gold and equally-loose velvety
pants, hair styled to hang down lightly over his forehead. He looks...softer, than Alec is used to. More casual. Edges blurrier.

It's nice. It's different. Alec thinks he likes it. But, more than that, the mere sight of Magnus in front of him eases the tight band around his lungs, and he finds himself suddenly able to breathe—albeit raggedly.

"I'm so sorry," Alec blurts out, before Magnus can say a word. "I'm sorry for leaving like that, and I'm sorry for ignoring you, and I'm sorry for— everything. I had to see you. The Clave, they—" He's breathing too quickly, inhaling too much oxygen but his lungs are burning, screaming that it's not enough, not enough and he doesn't know how to stop, how to calm down, but he can't, he has to get this out, Magnus has to know—

"The Clave want you dead. They- They're hunting you, they want us to hunt you, but we weren't, we couldn't, Jace and Izzy and I, but then— There's a Clave envoy, at the Institute, and she asked me— She said that I— That I have to do it, that it's clearly not working as a collaborative effort, that it should be me. I'm Acting Head of the Institute, I'm— I don't know, but they want me to kill you, Magnus, and I can't, I can't do it. I won't."

He stares at Magnus, breathing too heavily, anguish filling him as the warlock blinks those golden cat eyes, slitted pupils taking him in, clearly a little perplexed by Alec's rambling, incoherent mess of an explanation for his turning up on Magnus' doorstep entirely without warning.

But then, abruptly, his entire face softens, and he reaches out to cup Alec's cheek in one hand. Alec feels a sob building somewhere deep within him, but he doesn't let it out. He can't. He forces it down, even as his eyes flutter closed and he leans his face into Magnus' palm.

"Oh, angel," Magnus whispers, thumb brushing Alec's cheekbone lightly.

They're close enough for Alec to feel Magnus' body heat rolling towards him, thawing his frigid body at the same time as the warmth of his apartment just beyond. He can feel Magnus' breath washing lightly over his jaw, and he's sure that if he opened his eyes, he'd be close enough to count every fleck of glitter on his face.

"It's alright," Magnus says softly, voice barely disturbing the air, thumb still brushing back and forth. And Raziel, it feels so nice. Nice enough, comforting enough, to calm his frantic heart and his erratic breaths. "It's not your fault, darling."

"But it is," Alec says, opening his eyes to look at Magnus. He swallows, flushing a little in shame, and at their proximity, and at the nerve endings that alight under each gentle swipe of Magnus' thumb. Magnus is shaking his head, but Alec has to get it out. "Izzy and I, and Jace, we— It is our fault. We let you take the blame for the escape. And I got them into the idea in the first place. I got all of you into it. This is exactly my fault, Magnus."

"No, it's not." He drops his hand from Alec's face, slowly, and instead backs away. Fear spikes through Alec for a moment - fear that Magnus is about to tell him to leave - but Magnus merely opens the door wider, and says, "Come in, Alexander. Sit down, let's find you something to drink."

"Maybe vodka," Alec says, with a weak, shaky laugh.

Magnus smiles at him, one of those full, genuine smiles that's just a little bit crooked and a little bit careless, and the anxiety gripping at him eases a touch more.

A mere few minutes later, they're both curled on either end of Magnus' sofa, Alec with his knees
pulled up to his chest, jacket folded beside him, Magnus with his legs up on the sofa, bent and curled to one side of him, both cradling steaming cups of tea.

"I don't know what to do," Alec tells him, staring down at the curling, curdling steam rising up off his tea. "I can't– I have to-to—" He can't make himself say it, but Magnus nods his understanding. "But I can't."

"I didn't realise I'd made such an impression," Magnus says, a soft smile on his face.

It's a clear attempt to lighten the mood, and it works a bit. Alec lets out a huff of a laugh, and says, "You have."

And then, abruptly, he realises how true that is. Magnus has made an impression on him. He's made an impression on his whole life. He's entirely changed the way Alec views the world, and the Downworld, and the Clave, and his own place in all of that.

"What do I do?" Alec asks, turning his eyes on Magnus in sheer desperation. "What do I do, Magnus? I can't do nothing, I have to make sure I'm protecting my family, but this is—"

Deplorable. Revolting. Utterly inhumane.

"I don't know," Magnus says, and shakes his head. "I really don't know. But you must have some time to figure it out. I've eluded the Clave for decades, and I'm operating an exceptionally profitable business while partaking in an active social life, all right under your noses. You can't be expected to find me in a matter of days."

"No," Alec agrees, "but I have to start. How have you evaded them, by the way?"

Magnus smiles. "Magic, and the right contacts. And I'm generally either liked or feared in the Downworld. Or sometimes a healthy dose of both. If I ask people to cover for me, they do. Not that they have to, very often. Your people tend to stay out of our inferior business transactions unless you're there to stab someone. And besides, Shadowhunters don't often come to Downworlder meeting spots, especially after I managed to make you kick yourselves out of Pandemonium patrols."

Alec laughs. "Why am I not surprised that you had something to do with that? Do you own it, too?"

He's joking, but Magnus raises his eyebrows, and nods. Alec gapes at him, probably looking like some form of strange, oxygen-deprived fish. "You- You- What?"

Whatever idiotic creature Alec looks like, it's worth it for the laugh that spills out of Magnus. Bright and carefree and joyous, as he throws his head back and laughs, chest vibrating and shoulders shaking, a smile that could fuel the world stretched across his face, eyes sparkling with mirth.

Alec can't find it in himself to be ashamed of his staring. Right now, he doesn't give a shit about the Taj Mahal or Stone Henge or the fucking Great Pyramid of Giza, because the only wonder of the world he ever needs to see is Magnus Bane laughing like that.

And fuck, there it is again. These thoughts, all the time, bombarding his brain, seeping into his consciousness, voices whispering in his ear that Magnus is beautiful, voices in the other ear insisting that he's more than that, but—

Where the hell is this coming from? He's never let himself think anything like this about anyone. He's pushed away thoughts about things like beauty so much that it's become unnatural for him to consider them.
He doesn't understand what the hell is going on in his head. He doesn't understand the swooping, curling, glowing feeling in his stomach at the realisation that he's made Magnus laugh like that. He doesn't understand why he keeps crawling back to this loft, to this man, when he really has no reason to.

Magnus eventually calms down, and he takes a sip of his tea, but the smile doesn't slip off his face. It's gentler, less amused, more thoughtful, but it's still there. And it's...nice.

"Alexander," Magnus says, and rests a hand gently on his forearm, "I will understand - although I will also condemn - you accepting this mission, properly. But if you do, I promise you, you won't find me. You can look, you can employ all the forces you can think of, but you will not find me if I don't want to be found. I'm not going to let myself fall to your people. Ever. No matter who's wielding the blade."

Alec shakes his head vehemently. "I'm not going to. You don't understand. It's wrong. They're wrong. They're all wrong. You're innocent, you don't deserve to die."

Magnus shrugs diplomatically, withdrawing his hand to wrap it around his mug. Alec clutches his own tighter, and lifts it to his lips. Scalding liquid slides down his throat, bordering on painful against his tongue, grounding and comforting all at once.

"I'm not entirely innocent," Magnus says. "I have killed people. I do practise dark magic. I summon demons. I make illicit potions and perform illegal spells. I've mass distributed potions unsanctioned by the Clave to mundanes."

Alec's brow furrows, interest piqued at the anecdote. "Why? When?"

"The influenza outbreak," Magnus tells him. "1918. I was in Indonesia, at the time, and I found the mundanes in utter chaos. I couldn't do nothing." He exhales, and offers Alec a wry little smile. "I could get away with it there, where long-distance communications were fairly limited and none of the Shadowhunters knew me by face. I couldn't elsewhere in the world. I certainly couldn't in America, although there wasn't a price on my head at the time."

"But that's a good thing to do. How can that be cause for a death sentence?"

"It wasn't Clave-sanctioned, and I mass distributed to mundanes. It was very illegal."

"You don't get executed for healing people," Alec says shortly. "That's ridiculous."

"So is expecting you to be able to kill me on your own after the entire Clave has failed for the last twenty years. Honestly." Magnus huffs. "A twenty-two year old Nephilim on his own. Please. Do they think I'm getting lazy in my old age?"

"I won't take offence to that," Alec says, feeling some of the tension drain out of him as they sit joking lightly back and forth. "How old are you?"

"Four hundred and a bit," Magnus says, waving a hand. He catches Alec's doubtful look, and says, "Really."

"Clary says you lie about your age a lot."

"That's true," Magnus admits. "It comes in handy. But I'm not lying to you."

"Neither am I," Alec says, more quietly, more seriously than he'd intended to, because he has to make sure that Magnus understands. He has to understand that it's not just that Alec won't kill
Magnus, it's that he can't.

"I don't think you're lying, angel," Magnus says, eyebrows drawn together just a little as he watches Alec with wide, worried cat eyes. Alec wonders, absently, why Magnus has changed the pet name. He'd been fairly determined to call him that infernal little angel, no matter how much Alec had loathed it when they'd first met.

"It's just— Even if I wanted to, I couldn't kill you."

"You could kill me right now," Magnus says, sipping his tea unconcernedly. Or, at least, unconcerned for his wellbeing; he looks bizarrely concerned for Alec's.

Why the hell does the High Warlock of Brooklyn give a crap about him? And when did Magnus start to care? When did Alec start to care this much? So much that he's rendered incapable of doing his job?

Does the fact that their care appears to be mutual mean something?

"Well." Magnus lets out a little laugh, and corrects himself. "You could try."

"I couldn't," Alec tells him, and Magnus blinks, smile dropping away to be replaced by slack-jawed surprise that makes his lips part and the tension flee from his face. It leaves Magnus looking soft, disarmed, despite the smoky golden-red eyeshadow and the goatee and the piercing eyes lined with sweeping black liner. "I really couldn't."

Magnus seems to recover himself. "Well, then, the solution seems to be not to try."

"I—" Alec scrubs at his eyes with one hand, knuckles digging into the fragile skin around one eye and then the other. He wants to scratch his fucking brain out. It won't shut up, instead playing the same arguments over and over again in his head like a broken record that's superglued into a player.

It's infuriating. It's horrible. He wants to stop thinking about the fact that he's supposed to kill Magnus, and that for some inconceivable reason he just can't, can't even try, can't even entertain the idea of trying in any seriousness, and that if he doesn't kill Magnus, if he disobeys the Clave, then everything will go to shit.

"Alexander—" Fingertips brush his wrist lightly, clearly wanting Alec to stop rubbing at his face quite so viciously.

Alec draws his hands away and blinks at Magnus. Everything looks a little bit fuzzy, a little bit hazy, for a few seconds, while his eyes readjust and focus; when they do, it's to a look of heart-shattering sadness on Magnus' face.

"Oh, darling, come here," Magnus says, and their mugs disappear in a flurry of blue sparks, reappearing on placemats on the coffee table. Magnus extends a hand towards Alec, sliding it up his arm from his elbow when Alec shifts forward. The slow run of his hand, smooth skin and the bumps of rings traversing up his bare skin, makes Alec shiver.

Magnus' other hand moves to mirror the first when Alec doesn't protest, or stiffen, or move away, and then they slide up higher, past his shoulders and around, pulling Alec into his chest, broad and warm and vital.

This hug isn't quite like the first. Alec doesn't fall into it after a moment of hesitation—he jumps in, lets himself lean into Magnus' arms and press his face against the soft, silky material that covers the warlock's shoulder. His eyes slip shut, and the world outside of them, like this, disappears. Magnus'
hand cards up and down his back gently, fingers brushing over the knobs and dips of his spine, and he rests the side of his head against Alec's.

It's- It's-

Well. It's intimate. And Alec suddenly feels like he can breathe, like a normal, functioning person. The iron band around his chest loosens, the fuzziness clouding his brain disperses, and breaths come in easily through his nose.

"I want to cut my brain out," Alec mumbles into Magnus' shoulder, even as he realises that his brain is quieting, slowly, gradually, with every moment longer he lets Magnus' embrace tease the tension out of him and throw it into the air to diffuse through the room until it's nothing.

"Oh, no," Magnus says, firmly. "That brain is staying right where it is. I don't want your pretty little head ruined. And I wouldn't want all my hard work wasted."

Alec huffs out a little laugh. "Your hard work?"

"Why, yes. Mine, Luke's, Maia's, I suppose Raphael might get a little bit of credit, loathe as I am to admit it..."

Magnus trails off, and Alec smiles. Raziel, he never wants to move. He feels safe like this. His ever-noisy brain is finally shutting the fuck up, as though it's being muffled, locked away behind a soundproofed door. He doesn't have to protect someone like Magnus. Not in the way he has to protect his siblings. It's not like he thinks Magnus would never need help (although he can't think of a specific example in his current predicament) or comfort or reassurance from people he loves, but...

Well. Magnus is the High Warlock of Brooklyn. He's more than capable of taking care of himself. In more ways than the obvious. Alec doesn't have to pretend. He doesn't have to pretend that everything's okay. He doesn't feel obligated, because he's not the big brother here. He's just Alec.

He's not sure he's ever felt like this. He's not sure anyone has ever made him feel like this. And he doesn't know what it means.

"There," Magnus says softly, tugging him from his thoughts. He pulls back just a little, palms warm on his back, and peers down at Alec. He smells like sandalwood and coconut and something else, something a little musky that Alec wants to breathe in forever. "Better?"

Alec flushes, and pulls back all the way until he's sitting properly, not propped up on Magnus. "Yeah."

Magnus lets him withdraw without comment. Then he grasps the sides of Alec's face, gently, and leans in to press his lips to Alec's forehead. For just a moment, fleeting and frozen, they linger, warm and smooth and comforting against Alec's skin, before they're gone, and Magnus is letting go, and—

Holy shit, Alec's heart needs to calm the fuck down.

But such a simultaneously soft and bright smile from Magnus directed right at him isn't helping matters.

"Do you feel okay, now?" Magnus asks, arching one eyebrow elegantly.

"Yeah, I'm okay."

"That doesn't have to be your automatic response every time, angel," Magnus says, and his lips are
curling a little, teasingly; Alec gets the impression that he's trying to make light of a serious point to put Alec at ease.

But Alec can't go there. He doesn't know how to. He doesn't know what he's supposed to say to that, or how Magnus just knows that he often says he's fine when he's not, or why Magnus is bringing it up in the first place.

Instead, he wrinkles his nose a little, and says, "Angel? Really?"

Magnus laughs. "Damaging your fragile masculinity, Shadowhunter?"

Alec pulls a face. "No, I just... Really?"

"Well, you're the one who told me to drop the irony. I can go back to taking on the entirely inappropriate adjective if you so wish."

Magnus raises his eyebrows expectantly, and Alec clears his throat, squirming in place slightly. "It's-Uhm, it's...fine. I don't really... I don't mind. Whatever."

Magnus looks away from Alec's gaze, eyes bright and lips twitching as though he's trying not to smile. Alec wishes he wouldn't stop himself. Magnus is beautiful when he smiles - well, he's beautiful all the time - and even if it's some kind of hallmark designed to lure in his victims, Alec doesn't care.

It's seems stupid even in the privacy of his own head. It makes Magnus sound like a siren, or something similarly ludicrous. Besides which, if Magnus were going to use such things to his advantage against Alec, he'd have done so by now, surely?

And it's not like beautiful mundanes and Shadowhunters don't do it—flutter their eyelashes and pout and sway their hips to entice people in. It's what Izzy does, when she's flirting with someone for a mission to extract information. Why is it somehow deemed a trick, a trap, a criminal affliction when a Downworlder does it?

"Drink your tea," Magnus says, pushing himself up from the sofa gracefully, unfolding like a cat, long limbs stretching out. He rolls his shoulders, and Alec can't help following the movement with his eyes. "Unless you plan on going home, I'll be two minutes, and then we can do something mindless."

"I—"

Alec's about to say that he really, really doesn't want to go home, (ever, except for the fact that Jace and Isabelle and Max - sometimes - reside there) but then he remembers that he's a guest in Magnus' house. Magnus probably has work to do. He's a busy man. He probably doesn't want Alec lingering in his home unnecessarily, to sit and whinge about his latest dilemma.

Raziel, isn't Magnus getting sick of this? Of Alec turning up with a new problem every week?

Come to that, why isn't Alec sick of it yet?

Magnus inclines his head, waiting patiently for Alec to continue. He's always patient. He doesn't take any shit, but he has more patience than Alec would know what to do with. At least when it comes to people who aren't being singularly horrible to him.

"Do you want me to go?" Alec asks, and he's sitting up, half-rising from the sofa in preparation to leave. "You must have things to do, I—"
"Not unless you want to, or need to." Magnus waves a hand dismissively. "It's late, darling, I assure you, I can spare you a little time. Although excuse me if my phone rings. I'm waiting for an update on a delivery of—" He shakes his head, cutting himself off. "Never mind. Two minutes."

He turns before Alec can ask him to stop. Because something deep in him wants to hear the rest. He wants to hear what Magnus is waiting for, and why, and who it's for—a client, or his own personal use, or just something for his entertainment. He wants to know what Magnus does with his life: his job, things he does outside his job, the people he knows and loves, the people he despises.

Alec wants to know.

He doesn't have a fucking clue why, but he does. And it's not just idle curiosity—he's desperate to know.

"Here," Magnus says, strolling back in, loose shirt fluttering as he moves. He's carrying a slender plastic box in one hand, and it rattles dully when he shakes it. "You know the mundane response to problems you can't answer yet?"

Alec stares at him as he snaps his fingers, causing the enormous flatscreen situated midway up the wall to jump into life. A flick, and a disk swirls out of the case he's holding, and slides into a tray that opens and closes under a spray of blue sparks.

"No?" Magnus grins, tossing the box behind him with no regard for where it lands. "Movies and comfort food."

Alec regards the TV dubiously. Something has started playing on the screen, but the volume is turned down so far he can't really hear anything, and it doesn't appear to be the movie itself.

"Movies? Like, a mundane movie?"

"Is there any other kind?" Magnus asks, raising his eyebrows. He flops down on the other end of the sofa, retaking his seat, and kicks his feet up in the coffee table. Another wave of his hand, and a bowl of popcorn appears between them. "Popcorn is a staple part of movie watching."

"I wouldn't know," Alec admits, but he follows Magnus' cue and reaches for a handful of popcorn. It's sweet, buttery, melting on his tongue and sliding down his throat. It's not the kind Izzy makes in the microwave at the Institute that always gets horribly stuck in his teeth.

Magnus' gaze lands on him, eyes wide and mouth open. "Alexander! Do you mean you've never watched a mundane movie? Ever?"

"Of course I have," Alec says, rolling his eyes. "Just...not many."

"Less than ten?"

Alec nearly snorts. Less than ten? He remembers watching something about an animated Native American mundane woman meeting a white coloniser with Izzy when she was young, and he's fairly sure he sat through a rather long spiel about lions and circles of life or something that absolutely did not bring tears to his eyes with Max, but other than that...

"Less than ten."

"I'm assuming you haven't watched Star Wars?"

Alec frowns. Isn't that one of the many things Simon is always going on about?
"I don't think so."

Magnus' lips turn up. "Well then, darling, I think you're in for something of a treat."

He grabs another few kernels of popcorn, hits play on a remote that seems to materialise into his hand from nowhere, and then the lights dim, the screen casting a flickering luminescence across the room.

It's takes everything in Alec to focus on the images playing across the TV, and not look over at Magnus, and the silvery glow cast across the elegant planes of his face by the TV screen.

Chapter End Notes

So this is technically, like, two minutes early, but it's nearly midnight, it's /basically/ Thursday, I thought you probably wouldn't mind.

I'm having a bit of a crap week, so please talk about nice things! Chat to me about the story, or the show (those 2x15 promo pics are going to haunt me forever) or drop me some prompts/headcanons on my Tumblr -- questions & comments about literally anything are all more than welcome :D

(Side note, if anybody works in medicine - human, animal, dentistry, anything medicine-related at all - in the UK or Ireland, please please please drop me a message on Tumblr.)

Have an amazing week -- and if you're not, like me, let's try to cheer each other up in the comments! Here's my starter -- next week's chapter follows straight on from this week's, was one of my favourite chapters to write, and I'm really excited to share it with you!

Much love, Lu <3
Flicker

Chapter Summary

In which Magnus spends some time thinking, Alec has a dream, and pillow talk cures everything.

Chapter Notes

Hey!! How's everyone holding up through this two week gap in episodes? (It couldn't have come at a worse time, honestly -- why do we have to wait so long for /this/ episode?!) Thank you all for the kind wishes last week. I'm sorry I didn't get to everyone's comments, but I did read them all, and I think I answered all of your questions -- if I didn't, get on my case about it.

This is the first bird I've come across that I didn't know was an actual species -- I'd never heard of it! But, apparently, a flicker symbolises authenticity, introspection, and the healing of emotional wounds.

(Yeah, this chapter is pretty heavy.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When the credits roll around, signalling the end of the first Stars Wars film (the real first, not the first in Anakin's angsty sob story) Magnus clicks mute on the remote, and glances over at Alexander to ask for his opinion.

His lips part, but the words die on his tongue when he takes in the sight that meets his eyes. Alexander is curled up in the corner of the sofa, head pillowed on the padded arm, knees drawn up, fast asleep.

A smile tinged with melancholy makes its way across Magnus' face. Alec looks so young, asleep on Magnus' sofa, soft vulnerability on his face, the tension that's always held in every cell of his body having evaporated away.

Quietly, Magnus turns off the TV with a wave of his hand, and unfolds himself to climb off the couch and pad into the kitchen. He fills a glass with water, summons a blanket from the cupboard, and then heads back into the living room.

Once he's set the glass down on the coffee table, he opens the blanket - canary yellow and unimaginably soft - and drapes it gently over the sleeping man on his sofa. Alec doesn't stir as he tugs it down to cover his feet.

Magnus feels something buried deep in his chest ache as he gazes down at Alexander. Something hidden beyond walls that tower like skyscrapers, erected from stone and reinforced with steel and tipped with the poisoned spikes of a broken heart.
He thinks about Alec disappearing on him, abruptly, a fortnight ago, and how utterly confused Magnus had been until he realised that clearly, feeling any modicum of care for a warlock - a **Downworlder** - someone Alec has been raised to consider a monster, was too much for Alec to handle.

It hadn't surprised him, when he realised. But it had– Well. It had hurt. Far more than he'd ever have expected it to. Because Alexander knows, Alec's seen, that what the Clave preaches isn't only a blatant lie, but also hugely hypocritical.

Yet, somehow, it was still too much. Giving a damn about Magnus' wellbeing had been too much. Being friends with Magnus had been too much.

But now, tonight, after everything, Magnus can't help but wonder whether it was something else. Whether there'd been something else that had driven Alec to flee from his loft that morning, after making him breakfast.

(Magnus still hasn't quite worked out how, or why, Alec got through his wards. Although Catarina had offered a horribly perfect explanation that Magnus refuses to pay too much thought to, because it's not going to lead anywhere happy.)

Why would a man who couldn't stand being in any way close to a Downworlder, who couldn't make himself reconcile his present situation with his past beliefs, turn up on Magnus' doorstep soaked through and shivering, appearing on the verge of a panic attack, and declare that he can't kill him? That he can't do what he's been ordered to, by the Clave, even though there's no other way forward?

He can't, not because he's physically incapable, but because he won't. He refuses to kill Magnus. Because—what? Because he cares? Cares too much?

That long-buried corner of Magnus' heart hurts again at the thought, tightening and twisting in his chest until he has to close his eyes and breathe in deeply, slowly, to stop it being so painful.

"What are you doing to me?" Magnus whispers when he opens his eyes again, and looks down at Alec, asleep and ignorant to the turmoil he's thrown Magnus' mind into. "What am I doing?"

It's ironic, really, Magnus thinks, that the Clave has asked Alexander to kill him. In many ways, of course, but especially because out of every Shadowhunter on Earth, Alexander probably has a better chance than any of them of killing him, because Magnus trusts him. He trusts Alec enough to let his guard down around him in the way he does around a mere handful of people.

He's not sure when, or how, Alec earned that. Somewhere between saving Raphael and allying with Luke and cooking him breakfast, he thinks.

Then he realises that's a lie. He might not be able to pin down when, exactly, he began to trust Alec so implicitly, but he knows exactly why.

Because whatever Alec might once have thought, and whatever lingering doubts there might be in his mind, he's so open to change. Lilith, he's stubborn, and he's infuriating, and he needs evidence for bloody everything, but once he's got it, he doesn't refute what he's seeing. He hasn't tried to explain away the good things he's seen from the Downworld. He's adapted. He's evolved.

And Magnus understands how hard that must be, to change his opinion so entirely after growing up indoctrinated by such a corrupt and poisoned institution, with Robert and Maryse Lightwood as his parents.

But he has. Alec's been kind in return. He's become respectful. He's become open-minded enough to
shirk his duties for the sake of a warlock he's known for a mere three months. He feels safe enough to come to Magnus' loft, to practically fall apart, to find refuge in a hug, a cup of tea, and a movie, and to fall asleep on Magnus' sofa.

Alec shifts slightly, a frown overcoming his face, tension seeping into his shoulders. Magnus wonders what he's dreaming about, and wonders why it's making him look so miserable, as though the weight of the world is once again resting on his shoulders.

Magnus reaches a hand out, and runs his fingers through Alec's hair, lightly so he doesn't disturb him. "It's alright," he murmurs, in a possibly-futile attempt to soothe away that look. "You're okay, Alexander. You're safe here."

And he is. Magnus hopes Alec knows that he's safe in Magnus' loft, inside his wards, in his home. He hopes Alec can feel it.

It takes a moment, but, gradually, the tense expression slips from Alec's face, and his lips part just a little, a sigh leaving him as he exhales.

Magnus withdraws his hand, and stoops to press his lips to Alexander's hair, before he straightens. He spares the Shadowhunter who's wormed his way into Magnus' heart one last sweeping look, and then waves his hand to dim the lights right down, disappearing into his bedroom to sleep.

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Magnus Bane is on his knees.

He's staring up at Alec, cat eyes wide, yellow irises furious and flashing with anger that could burn down a continent and drown an entire city, but pupils filled with shock, betrayal, uncomprehending astonishment.

Blood is dripping down his chin from his lip and his temple, trailing rivers of vermillion along bronze skin. Bruises are forming across one side of his eye, streaks of mascara painting his cheeks, the colours of ruin and fragile humanity painted across his face like brush strokes on a canvas.

"Alexander," he whispers, blood staining his lips like wine. "Alexander, please."

Alec swallows, and realises that he's holding a seraph blade in one hand. Strange, he thinks, that he's not using his bow. He can't even see it. He glances down at his fist, tight around the hilt of the glowing weapon, and sees red trickling down the blade from his own knuckles.

He's done this, he realises, with a sick, sinking feeling clawing at the insides of his stomach, bile rising up his throat. Magnus' blood is on his hands. This is his fault. It's all his fault. Magnus is on his knees before him, begging, and it's Alec's doing.

He stares down at his own hands, bruised and battered and bleeding as though he's been raining down punches on something that fights back. His wings are stretched out behind him, and when he looks across to his left, he sees that the feathers are saturated with thick scarlet blood.

"Alexander," Magnus says again, from where he's on the floor, clothes torn and ruined.

When Alec's eyes drift back to his, he sees behind Magnus, and he sees the bodies strewn across the floor. Downworlder bodies. He can see Meliorn, neck twisted like someone had tried to rip the head off a rag doll and given up halfway through, and Raphael to his left, sheet white, eyes blank as they stare up at the ceiling, his blood pooled on the stone beneath him from a slash across his stomach.
Dozens. Dozens of Downworlder bodies, drained and lifeless.

Where are they? It looks like the Institute. But it's not. It's a Church, double oak doors bolted shut beyond rows and rows of pews, across which lie slaughtered Downworlders making a frozen, eternal tableau of heedless, ruthless destruction.

He's standing on the altar, Alec realises, a glimmering golden cross situated directly behind him atop the decorated table. Candles stand proudly either side, lit, but burnt down to the bitter end, dying and flickering ominously. They cast shadows across the scene in front of him, Magnus' eyes and jewellery catching the light, drawing Alec's gaze back to him.

Always, back to Magnus.

Magnus is on the hard stone steps of the altar, gazing up at him pleadingly like he's praying, like Magnus is without hope and Alec holds his salvation in his hands, like Magnus is a mere mortal and Alec is his divine redemption.

It's wrong. It's so, so wrong.

Magnus shouldn't look like that. If either of them is a deity, it's not Alec—it's the beautiful man on his knees at Alec's feet.

He wants to tell Magnus to get up, to spit in his face, to fight back and wrap him in magic and squeeze until he chokes, because Raziel, he deserves it. He deserves the wrath of this prince of Hell, demonic and divine, for such an act of sacrilege.

But when he tries to open his mouth, the words elude him. Instead what comes out is a laugh, high-pitched and hysterical and bordering on manic, sadistic mirth curling at his lips as he stares Magnus down.

Alec is screaming internally, but it's like he can't control himself.

"Do you really think," Alec breathes, "that I would make myself choose you, over my people, my duty, my family?"

"You can have both," Magnus says, and his voice is steady despite the tremor in his ring-laden hands. "You don't have to choose. You just have to fight."

"You don't get it." Alec takes a step down, closer to where Magnus is kneeling on the second step of seven. "I can't fight. There's nothing to fight. You're a warlock. A demon. And this is your execution." He grins wickedly. "This, Magnus Bane, is your retribution."

Magnus' eyes turn glossy, unshed tears glistening in the flickering candlelight, and Alec's heart shatters when they roll down his cheeks, making shining paths of unblemished bronze skin through the swaths of blood and filth.

"Angel," he whispers, and it takes Alec several uneven heartbeats to realise that he's not using the Nephilim expression: he's addressing Alec. "What have they done to you?"

"Nothing," Alec sneers. "I opened my own eyes to reality, Magnus. The truth is ugly. The truth is that you have to die. Because if you don't, everything and everyone else I love is going to crash and burn to the ground."

"Not if you fight," Magnus says, tears still running steadily down his cheeks and dripping off his chin. "Not if you fight, Alexander."
"I am fighting," Alec tells him, more quietly. "I'm just not fighting what you want me to fight. I'm not fighting the Clave. I'm fighting myself."

Magnus closes his eyes, then. He closes his eyes, and folds his hands together, and tips his head back, exposing his neck for the executioner's blade to slice through his throat and sever his spinal cord.

Then Magnus begins murmuring.

"Bapa kami yang ada di surga
Dimuliakanlah nama-Mu
Datanglah Kerajaan-Mu
Jadilah kehendak-Mu
Di atas bumi seperti di dalam Surga
Berilah kami rejeki pada hari ini
Dan ampunilah kesalahan kami,
Seperti kamipun mengampuni yang bersalah kepada kami
Dan janganlah masukkan kami ke dalam percobaan
Tetapi bebaskan la kami dari yang jahat
Karena Engkaulah yang empunya Kerajaan dan kuasa dan kemuliaan sampai selama-lamanya."

He pauses, and his eyes flutter open to stare up at Alec, and he whispers, "I forgive you, angel."

And Alec's seraph blade, held prone in the air over their heads, bright like an angel's halo, comes down in an arc, and Magnus falls, blood spraying across the alter like someone sending a goblet of wine flying.

There's silence, save for the steady drip-drip-drip of viscous crimson trickling from Alec's seraph blade to the ground and his own ragged, uneven breaths as he stares at Magnus' body, lifeless and severed and utterly, horribly still. He's surrounded on all sides by dead bodies, by people he's murdered; he feels nothing. He feels cold, numb, empty, like a conker husk with no glossy brown seed inside, lying split and frozen on the ground.

He killed Magnus Bane.

He murdered Magnus.

He slaughtered him, in cold blood.

A clatter resounds through the church as the seraph blade slips from his sticky fingers, and he drops to his knees with a thud, bone cracking painfully against the stone steps.

Magnus is dead.

Oh, Angel, what has he done?

What has he done?

What has he done...?

***

Alec wakes in a cold sweat, gasping for breath and still half in the clutches of his dream. He bolts upright, breaths coming too-quickly-not-enough in ragged inhales that overflow his body with too much oxygen even as he feels like he's drowning and suffocating. He's drenched in sweat, shivering
and freezing and he feels disgusting, feels like he wants to scratch his own skin off and tear his hair out.

"Fuck," he gasps, choking on the word as his lungs scramble for more air than they need and his brain turns into a restless cacophony of thoughts that won't quiet, won't still, won't settle for even a moment so he can calm the fuck down, and—

"Mmrow."

A small, agile figure jumps up on the coffee table. It blinks up at him with yellow-green irises that remind him too much of Magnus. And—

Oh.

He's still at Magnus' loft. He hasn't gone home. He must have fallen asleep on Magnus' sofa, and Magnus must have left him to sleep rather than wake him up. He wonders momentarily what time it is, and then he decides he doesn't care.

Chairman Meow springs onto the sofa, beside Alec, and when he reaches out to pet the cat in an attempt to calm himself, something constricts his movement. A blanket. A blanket that most certainly hadn't been wrapped around him while they watched Star Wars. He blinks down at it.

The Chairman meows again, the sound undoubtedly unhappy, and Alec scratches between his ears. His pulse slows with every more-contented purr the Chairman makes, until he's breathing steadily, in and out.

Chairman Meow soon settles, curling up into a corner of the sofa to sleep, but Alec feels like he's being watched over. It's strangely, pathetically comforting.

He can't find it in himself to care.

He just wants to see Magnus. He wants to see him, and assure himself that he's here, breathing, with his head still firmly attached to his shoulders and his heart still rocketing blood around his body.

There's no point in denying it, Alec thinks. He feels things about Magnus that he hasn't let himself feel for anyone. He feels things he's locked away and forced back behind steel doors ever since his fifteen-year-old self forced away his crush on Jace. And no amount of attempting to convince himself that it's Magnus' magic, no amount of blaming it on spells and warlock pheromones and demonic hallmarks, no amount of denial and refuting the evidence, is going to change the fact that all of it, every last bit, is Alec.

The air of the loft is freezing, biting at his skin when Alec pushes back the soft blanket and stands, sock-clad toes curling in protest against the cold. He shudders, goosebumps rising across his skin, and sees a glass of water sitting on the coffee table. He drinks, water cleansing some of the dry roughness of his throat, induced by his nightmare.

He wonders how he could ever have thought Magnus Bane a demon.

The loft is still lit, albeit very dimly, so it only takes him a few moments to cross towards where he remembers Magnus' bedroom to be. Slowly, carefully, he clicks open the door, ensuring he's quiet enough not to wake Magnus.

Magnus' room is pitch-black, but faint light spills in from the rest of the loft, and it takes Alec's eyes only a few seconds to adjust to the darkness. When he sees the Magnus-sized lump under the sheets, sprawled across the bed haphazardly, chest rising and falling with even breaths, a smile curves at
Alec's mouth, and something churning and uneasy in his stomach, something aching and anxious and painful in his heart, settles.

Magnus shifts a little in bed, the movement minute, but enough to rustle the sheets; Alec is gripped with the horrible, awful realisation that he shouldn't be here. He's got no right to be in Magnus' room, even on the threshold, and he's certainly got no right to be glancing in while he sleeps, for Raziel's sake, and he has to leave, he has to get out before Magnus sees and brands him a creep, and—

Magnus turns over from where he had his face half pressed into his pillow, and yellow-green eyes open dazedly. The warlock lifts a hand to his face, the other shifting to prop himself up on one elbow, and he blinks at the doorway several times until his brain seems to wake up enough to register what his eyes are seeing.

"Alexander?" he says, and his voice is raspy, thick and heavy with sleep, and Alec swallows. Fear and shame clutch at him, caging him in and freezing him in place with icy claws.

"I'm sorry." It comes out quietly, and he wants to look down, wants to look away and just get the fuck out, but he can't. It's so hard to look away from that gaze.

"What are you doing?" Magnus asks, lifting himself higher on his elbow to peer up at Alec, still rubbing gently at one eye with his hand. "Is everything okay?"

Alec feels something deep and devastating inside him threaten to crack at Magnus' words, and he has to haul in a deep, shaky breath to hold it back. He can't. He can't let anything break. He can't afford to have even the merest fault line give way now.

"I'm sorry," Alec says again, and his voice wobbles dangerously, throat tightening as Magnus' eyebrows furrow in concern, becoming more alert by the second. "I'm so sorry, I shouldn't be– I'll just– I–"

He doesn't know what he's trying to say, and by the growing confusion on Magnus' face, it seems his mumbled mess of words aren't helping Magnus' comprehension of the situation, either.

Magnus waves a hand, and the lamp by the side of his bed turns on, illuminating the room with a soft glow that paints Magnus' skin with glittering gold and turns his eyes to liquid. He's not wearing any make-up, and whatever hairstyle he might have had earlier has been brushed out, or washed out, and he's—

He's beautiful.

Magnus sits up fully, sheets pooling around his waist. He's in the most indecent tank-top Alec has ever laid eyes on, exposing far too much muscle and skin to deal with even if he were in a healthy state of mind, and the shifting of the sheets exposes a pair of silky blue boxer shorts. Alec feels like he can't breathe again.

"Alexander, hey, come here," Magnus says, extending a hand towards him. "You look like you're about to throw up, darling. What's going on?"

Alec wavers in the doorway, hesitating. Because everything in him, every cell in his body, every instinct he has, is telling him to move forwards, to grab Magnus' hand, to tell him exactly what's going on. All of it. Every single bloody thing that's haunting him.

But his brain - his stupid, fucking brain - won't shut up. Won't stop antagonising him, telling him it's a bad idea, that he shouldn't, he mustn't, he can't, because his duty, his family, the Clave, the Clave, the goddamn fucking Clave.
Magnus doesn't drop his hand in the face of Alec's hesitation. Of course he doesn't. He just sits there, arm extended, fingers soft and bare without the glittering rings, waiting patiently for Alec to choose. For Alec to decide: does he want to accept Magnus' proffered comfort, or does he want to back out into the living room, go home, and pretend none of this happened?

But he tried that last time. He tried running away last time, and not speaking to Magnus for a fortnight, and all it lead to was denial that hurt more than it helped, and forcing emotional distance between them in his mind that tore at him, and a build up of so much desperation that he's reduced himself to this.

So he steps forwards.

The moment his palm slides across Magnus', and the warmth of the warlock's fingers enfold his, a sob hitches in his throat, and he chokes on it, tears stinging at his eyes and throat closing up so much he can't do more than croak out, "Magnus."

And, immediately, he's being pulled down onto soft red sheets and enveloped in strong arms, head tucked into Magnus' neck like it's his last refuge on Earth. He shudders, trembling and shaking, and Magnus runs a hand up and down his back, the other pressed against the back of his head, fingers tangled in his hair.

"Shh, darling," Magnus murmurs. "It's okay. It's okay. You're going to be okay."

"It's not," Alec chokes. "I'm not."

"You are," Magnus says, and Alec realises that he's being rocked just slightly, side to side, the movement almost imperceptible, but soothing and steady and grounding.

They're silent after that. Magnus keeps holding him, keeps up the slow, tiny rocking motion, while Alec feels hot tears leaking out of his tightly closed eyes. He curses himself, internally, because he can't even remember the last time he cried, let alone in front of someone. But a small part of him finds it so relieving to let go, just for a moment.

"Do you want to tell me what's going on?" Magnus asks, gently, after several long moments.

Alec swallows, and pulls back from Magnus unceremoniously, scrubbing a hand quickly over his face in an attempt to hide the tears still clinging to his cheeks and eyelashes. As though Magnus hasn't noticed that he's crying. Besides, he's got a horrible habit of turning a horrible blotchy red when he cries, so he's fairly sure it would be obvious anyway.

"I'm sorry," Alec says, and shakes his head a little. He looks down at the silky red sheets they're sitting on in lieu of looking at Magnus. "I shouldn't have– I didn't mean to– to load myself on you, and—"

"I'm going to stop you right there," Magnus says, and touches Alec's hand with his fingertips. He doesn't make any further move to touch; a terrifyingly large part of Alec wants him to. "You don't have to apologise to me for crying, Alexander. I know the Nephilim probably consider allowing yourself to have emotions and be emotionally vulnerable some horrible sign of weakness, but they're not."

"Emotions distract us," Alec says, and then laughs bitterly. "Which is true, they do. But Isabelle always says that bottling them up doesn't make them go away, and doesn't mean they distract you less."

Magnus inclines his head. "Exactly. If anything, bottling your emotions up will make them a greater
distraction. They fester, and develop into ugly, nasty things, even if they started out as something pure. Take it from someone who's tried the hard way. So far as is possible, it's best to lay things out in the open."

And...Alec considers it.

For the first time in his life, he considers telling someone. Not having someone guess, or just know, but actually telling someone. Because when Magnus talks about bottling things up, and pushing them down where they can warp into something horrible, he can't help where his mind goes. Being fourteen and feeling so horribly isolated, and being fifteen and forcing his eyes away from his parabatai, and being sixteen and seventeen and feeling sick, and twisted, and revolting, and being eighteen and deciding that he can't ever think about it, or have it realised. Being eighteen, and realising that he can never, ever have the sort of thing Jace and Clary have. Being eighteen, and realising that Shadowhunters consider it unnatural, and repulsive, and that it's a secret he has to take to his grave.

He can't help himself. Magnus is watching him with such an open expression, brows slightly furrowed in concern, eyes warm, fingers just brushing his. He feels safe. He feels warm. And— Well, he's never really given it much thought, but Magnus is like him. Magnus is... Well, not the same, exactly, because he's read the Institute's file on him about his multitude of relationships with all sorts of people of all sorts of genders of all sorts of species, but he's... He'd get it. He'd understand.

"Magnus, I—" He swallows, choking on the words that he's never said aloud, even in the privacy of his own room. He can't say it. He can't force it out. His throat's closed up, scratchy and tight, and he can't do this, why the hell did he think he should start this? After that dream? That fucking nightmare? He's just going to have a panic attack, and—

"Hey." Thumbs runs over his cheeks, one side and the other, wiping away stray wetness from his crying spree. "It's okay, just take a breath."

Alec does.

"Magnus," he says again, and clears his throat before his second attempt. "I—" Magnus lifts his eyebrows just slightly in invitation when he hesitates, expression inviting, the curiosity in his eyes overshadowed by warmth. "I'm gay."

And Magnus—

Magnus smiles. It stretches across his face - small on his lips but reaching up his cheeks to his eyes - one of those careless smiles that's just slightly lopsided and so bright it lights up the room. If Alec couldn't breathe before, he certainly can't now.

Magnus makes an encouraging little nodding motion and reaches out to squeeze Alec's hand before relinquishing his hold. Reflexively, however, Alec's fingers close around Magnus', keeping their hands together.

Magnus glances down at their hands, and his smile turns small, soft, delicate. He curls their fingers together, interlinked like they're holding hands across a table, and says, "Was that the first time you've ever said that?"

"Yeah." Alec can feel blood rising up his neck to stain his cheeks scarlet, and he smiles sheepishly. "Yeah, it was."

"I'm proud of you," Magnus tells him, and Alec's heart makes an odd, aching lurch. It's not entirely
unpleasant. "Really. I know how hard that is. Especially the first time."

"Yeah." He lets out a little laugh, somewhat self-deprecating due to his own ineloquence. "I, um, thank you. For not...being weird."

"Darling, I've been flamboyantly tossing my freewheeling bisexuality in people's faces for the last three centuries. I assure you, other people's sexuality doesn't bother me in the slightest."

Alec laughs again, and this time it's brighter. Magnus is smiling beautifully, bordering on a laugh, and god, Alec wants to—

No.

Just because he's said it doesn't make his general situation even slightly different. He can't. Ever. Acting on it would practically be suicide.

Magnus' smiles falters, and his face in Alec's dream flashes in his mind. Ruined, crying, desperate, but strong, head held high, forgiveness in him even then, and oh, god, Alec had killed him. Severed his head from his body with his seraph blade. He'd killed Magnus is his dream, just like he has to in real life.

"Do you want to tell me about that dream?" Magnus asks.

Alec frowns, because he hasn't told Magnus why he actually acted like a creep and wandered into his bedroom in the middle of the night. So how does he know?

"How— How did you know I had a dream?"

"Alexander, I'm four centuries old. I've known and loved many people, and I've seen my own face in the mirror. I know the look of a man who's been shaken by what he's seen in his nightmares. You don't have to tell me, but you can, if you'd like to."

"I—" Alec swallows. "I dreamt that I killed you. You, and Raphael, and so many other Downworlders. By the Angel, there were so many bodies. And what I said to you, what I did to you, Magnus—" He breaks off, shuddering, and runs his hands over his face. His fingers are shaking. "And that's what I've got to do. That's what they want me to do. I can't."

"I know," Magnus says. Fingers slide under Alec's chin, tilting his head up until he's looking at Magnus, into eyes that seem to see past every barrier Alec has ever erected in himself. "I know. But whatever you dreamt, it wasn't real. I'm fine. I'm right here."

"I cut your head off," Alec whispers, unable to look away from Magnus' eyes, unglamoured and saturated with more concern and sympathy than Alec has ever received in his life. Alec's receiving comfort, when they're discussing Magnus' death. It doesn't seem fair. "I taunted you, and I called you a demon, and I cut your head off, and I stood staring at a pool of your blood."

Magnus doesn't flinch. He drags his thumb lightly along Alec's jawline. "No, you didn't. You dreamt that you did, but you didn't. Look at me, I'm fine. Raphael is fine. You haven't hurt anyone."

"I don't ever want to hurt you."

The moment the whispered confession leaves his lips, he feels how true it is, deep inside him. He doesn't want to hurt Magnus. Never. He doesn't want anyone to hurt Magnus. He doesn't want to see Magnus hurt, ever, period.
"Oh, Alexander," Magnus murmurs, leaning forward to rest his forehead against Alec's. His eyes flutter closed just before their skin makes contact, and Alec feels his own eyes slip shut as everything goes blurry at Magnus' proximity. "It's okay. You don't have to hurt me."

"I'm sorry."

"No," Magnus tilts his head up to press a kiss to Alec's forehead, right where his brow furrows and creases whenever he frowns. It makes Alec's chest ache. "Don't. Don't apologise, just fight. Say no."

"Don't you get it?" Alec asks, a little desperately, because Magnus can't think it's because he doesn't want to. He does. He wants to say fuck the Clave, but— "I can't. If I say no, it's not just me who's going to suffer. It's everyone around me. My family. My parabatai. Even if they're not ruined along with me, we'd lose the Institute. We'd lose everything."

"I understand," Magnus says, and, not unkindly, but firmly, continues, "but sometime, you're going to have to make a choice. This isn't arresting some Downworlders. This isn't a mistake that you can fix, if you regret it. You can't be apathetic anymore, angel."

He says it all so plainly, so matter-of-factly, as though it's not his life that they're discussing. As though they're not talking about whether or not Alec should murder him for crimes he hasn't even committed.

Alec opens his mouth to reply, to demand to know - to beg to know - what on earth he can do that won't either make him a murderer or ruin his family, but Magnus gets there first.

"Change starts with people saying no." Magnus' gaze doesn't waver. "Change starts by people standing together and all saying no. Because the Clave can't just silence ten, twenty, fifty people. There aren't enough of you. You'll be heard. There are more Shadowhunters in the world than just you and your siblings who oppose what the Clave is doing. You just have to find them."

Alec nearly chokes. "You want me to start a revolution?"

Magnus smiles. "That's a little dramatic, but yes, why not? Call it a revolution. Inspire change in someone, Alexander. Make the Clave listen to you."

"How?"

It seems so impossible. Isabelle has been hollering about the atrocities the Clave commits for years, and it's like she's been like screaming into an abyss. Nobody hears. Alec never really believed that she was right; he does now.

"Be patient," Magnus tells him. "Find people who agree with you. Find people who'll help you. Identify an event, a trial, a person, you can use to make the Clave look incompetent. Prove them wrong."

Alec searches Magnus' face, searching for something to suggest that he's not entirely serious—but he is.

"Do you really think I could do that?" he asks.

Magnus' expression softens, and he squeezes Alec's hand. "If you put your mind to it, Alexander Lightwood, I think you could do anything you want."
You made it ;)

This has actually been my favourite chapter to write so far. I had so much fun with the imagery in Alec's dream, and the resulting conversation between them. So I hope you guys enjoyed it too!

The verse Magnus recites in Alec's dream is the Lord's Prayer in Bahasa Indonesian. Not because I want to tie Magnus to any particular religion (I do NOT want to get into that discussion, but I wouldn't have thought he has strong ties to any!) but because of the prayer he recites in - cover your ears if you're easily offended - the books.

Also it was one of the few prayers of any religion I could find fairly reliably online in Indonesian. I'm sorry.

I've cross-referenced the translation through several websites - I didn't just bung the Lord's Prayer into a translator. That being said, if it's horribly wrong, please feel free to correct me!

As always, please let me know how you felt about the chapter! I hope you enjoyed it, and, if you like, come follow me on Tumblr

Much love, and I hope you have a fabulous week,
Lu <3
Chapter Summary

In which Catarina sees through Magnus' façade, Isabelle and Lydia still aren't seeing eye to eye, and Magnus' client delivers a gift.

Chapter Notes

The aspect of the flamingo that really fits this chapter is that of contemplation. There's a lot of contemplation in here. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"So you do like him."

Magnus pauses in adding ingredients to his potion—it's incredibly complex, and going to take several days and a lot of patience to complete, but he's negotiating a number with an obscene number of zeros on the end into his bank account, so he's not complaining too much. The mundane woman is shockingly pleasant.

He frowns at his phone, which is sitting innocuously on the very end of the workbench, well out of the way, on speaker phone so he can talk to Catarina without sacrificing any hands.

"I don't think I said that," he says. "I just said—"

"Magnus." Catarina sounds like she's running out of patience. "You just gave me a long, pathetic speech about how devastating he was last night, and you lamented about how much you loathe the Clave for making him do this, and for making him feel so guilty about being gay, and you had an intimate heart-to-heart in the middle of the night, in your bed. You called him for help when you were completely burnt out and vulnerable, so you clearly trust him, and you have fucking inside jokes." She makes a frustrated noise in the back of her throat. "Are you hearing yourself?"

"Okay," Magnus admits. "There is, perhaps, some degree of truth to the idea that I am somewhat fond of him, but—"

"Jesus Christ, Magnus. You let a Shadowhunter interrupt your beauty sleep to have a whine about how hard his life is."

"Hey." Magnus shoots the phone an affronted look, while the potion bubbles and begins a slow, ugly transition from mustard yellow to a dull pink. "Alexander doesn't whine. And besides, he insisted on going home afterwards, even though it was the middle of the night. Something about intruding. He's just so..."

Magnus realises he's smiling fondly as he speaks. Alexander hadn't even let him get up to walk him to the door, insisting that he'd been to Magnus' apartment enough times to know where it was.
Magnus had heard him stop to pet the Chairman on the way out, and then the front door had clicked open and closed, and the apartment had been silent. Unpleasantly so.

"You are revolting," Catarina says, flatly. "And you're here calling me on my day off to rant about your relationship woes. I thinks we both know what that means."

Oh, he does.

Which was exactly why he'd decided to call Catarina in the first place. He'd spent the night dreaming of Alexander tumbling out of the sky, crashing down into a broken, mortal heap, but this time, Magnus hadn't been able to save him. He'd been too late, every time.

He'd woken in a cold sweat, heart pounding, and he'd had to roll over and grab his phone, because he had to text Alec, he had to make sure that his dream had just been a dream, and that it hadn't been a premonition—Asmodeus liked to send him horrible things, sometimes.

But there'd been something sitting in his messages already.

I'm sorry for falling apart last night. Thank you, for everything.

And then, even more surprising, below that, a text from Isabelle Lightwood, thanking him for helping her brother, and promising that they'd find a way to fix 'this mess we've put you in'. He'd stolen Isabelle's number off Clary weeks ago, because he really had liked her, the time they'd met in Magnus' loft, but their communications have been fairly sporadic.

Catarina's right. He knows. He knows exactly what's going on. He knows what this is, what it all means, but it feels so different. It's not like every other time. And he thinks he's probably been in denial about what he feels for Alexander for a long time.

"This conversation isn't going to the way it was supposed to," Magnus admits, swirling his fingers to cast a spell over the potion. It curdles, hisses, and then settles again, wisps of grey-pink smoke floating off. It smells a little bit like peaches. "You were supposed to convince me that I'm not falling in love with a Shadowhunter, not tell me that I am."

"Magnus," Catarina's voice gentles. "I know you haven't opened your heart to anyone for a long, long time, but—"

"I haven't opened my heart this time," Magnus says, exhaling. "He's unlocked it. It's a little unsettling. And I'm not sure he has a clue. He can barely admit to himself that he's gay, let alone admit anything else."

"Don't work yourself up too much," Catarina says, not unkindly. "Whatever happens, happens. And however much I joke about not wanting to hear you crying over another pretty boy that's got under your skin, if you need me, you know where I am."

"You're too good to me," Magnus tells her, smiling over at the phone even though Catarina can't see him. "You're far too good to me."

"No, sweetheart, I'm your friend," she says, and he hears the unmistakable sound of a box of frozen pizza being opened. "You've just got low expectations of your support network because of The Bitch."

Magnus rolls his eyes, even as an amused smile twitches at his lips. "I'll talk to you later, Cat."

Catarina snickers. "Bye, Magnus."
Lydia despises working through the intricacies of the Clave's often-outdated laws. They've been written and edited and entirely overthrown on a whim so many times, it's often impossible to draw lines between them.

Trying to get Alec out of killing Warlock Bane, even just temporarily, is just as impossible as she expected it to be. By law, what Bane has been accused of, over centuries, is worthy of a death sentence. But if what Jace and Isabelle say is true, she can't condemn one innocent being to death, and make a man a murderer.

The only thing she's managed to latch onto is the report about what occurred in Bahasa Indonesia, sometime in the seventeenth century. According to Jace, it's the first domino, the first time Bane's name has been besmirched by lies. But filing a warrant to gain access to that kind of document takes time, and the Clave will want to know why she's asking to see it.

Just as she's about to flip a page of the thick stack of papers she's got laid out in front of her, her office door rips open, and Isabelle Lightwood stalks in.

Lydia is hit with a distinct sense of déjà vu, because it was just last night that Isabelle flew in in much the same dramatic manner, but it disappears abruptly when she sees the expression on Isabelle's face.

Isabelle's eyes are blazing, fury igniting fires deep in her pupils, and she's fixing Lydia with the kind of glare that could bring a city to its knees. Her lips are curled slightly at one side, and she's got one hand clenched into a fist. She's clearly about to go on morning patrol, because she's dressed head to toe in leather gear, metal studs set in her fingerless gloves and all along her heels, and her whip is, as ever, curled around her wrist.

"How dare you?" Isabelle spits out, her every syllable laced with venom and thinly veiled loathing that makes Lydia's heart hurt. She doesn't want Isabelle to hate her - quite the opposite, in fact - but it seems that at every turn, she only succeeds in widening the enormous chasm of distance between them.

Lydia sets down her papers, and rises from her desk. She braces her hands against the edge, and looks Isabelle in the eye. "Isabelle, I haven't left this room since Jace and yourself gave me your information yesterday. So whatever it is—"

Isabelle laughs, an ugly, bitter sound that sounds so, so wrong bubbling up from her throat. Even when she's angry, Isabelle is elegant. Dangerous and deadly, yes, but like the thorns on a rose. This is like demon venom, thick and black and vile.

"Oh, no, I'm sure you've been planning this for a while," she snarls, eyes flashing like the blade of a dagger. "You come in, you charm my brother, you convince my parents that they're going to lose the Institute because of their failures, and you offer up the perfect solution to gain you everything you've ever wanted in life. You're a snake, Lydia Branwell, and I swear, I will burn this place to the ground before I let you ruin my brother's life anymore than you already are."

Lydia feels her lips parting and her eyes widening in utter astonishment as Isabelle hurls accusations in her face. The words scald, painful and blistering, and she feels like the gradual tensing of Isabelle's jaw is in synch with the invisible hand tightening around her chest.

"Isabelle," she says, and she tries her best not to sound pleading, "I have no idea what you're talking about."
"Of course you don't." Isabelle's mouth tightens, eyes flashing. "I'm talking about whatever the hell you said to my parents to make them think that this is their only solution. My father hasn't been home from Idris for months, and this is the first thing he has to discuss with my mother?"

Lydia opens her mouth to say something, because she can't even begin to fathom what Isabelle is referring to, but Isabelle beats her to it.

"I am talking about your delusion that you can gain control of this Institute by marrying my brother."

For a moment, Lydia just stares at her, expression blank, because where on earth has this rumour come from? She's so bewildered that a little laugh of incredulity escapes her before she can stop it; Isabelle looks like she's about to murder her.

"Isabelle, I assure you, that's not what's going on."

"Really? Then why have I just heard my parents discussing your impeding marriage to Alec?" She cuts Lydia off when she tries to speak, to counter the claim. "You come in here like you own the place, and now you think you can marry my brother? Fuck you, Branwell."

"Isabelle." Lydia shakes her head, and she feels her expression soften, because it's clear that beneath the irrational, destructive rage, this baseless attack is motivated out of love and concern for Alec's happiness. And that's one of the reasons Lydia likes Isabelle so much. Isabelle, and Jace, and Alec, because they've all got it. Even Clary, frankly. "I don't want to marry Alec. I like him and I respect him as a Shadowhunter and as a leader and as a man, but I don't want to marry him. And if he proposes to me—" She nearly shudders at the thought "—I'm going to say no. I don't want to take this Institute. I like my job. This Institute belongs to your parents, and to your family, and to Alec, in the future. Not to me. Whatever you think of me, I would never enter into a loveless marriage for the sake of politics. Not unless something important was at stake. If your parents were really about to lose the Institute, things would be a little different. But they're not. Alec practically runs this place, regardless, and he's a more than competent leader."

Isabelle's nostrils flare, eyes burning as she stares Lydia down. "Fuck you," she says again, and then turns on her heel, hair flipping over her shoulder, and struts out, slamming the office door behind her.

Lydia's breath leaves her in a messy, fractured exhale, and she collapses back into her chair. The weight of her hair all pinned up for the twenty-four hours she's been awake is beginning to make her head hurt, throbbing with an oncoming headache, but it's nothing compared to the pain of seeing Isabelle look at her with such unbridled hatred.

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Alec is distracted during morning patrol.

Primarily, he's distracted by thoughts of Magnus, of last night, of his confession and the urges he's barely clamping down on. Because it's one thing to admit that Magnus is aesthetically gorgeous, but it's quite another to admit—

He manages to stop himself before he admits anything further at all.

When they get into a fight with four Eidolon demons, he's distracted by Clary, because she's inexperienced, and he's distracted by Isabelle, because she's fighting with her heart and not her head, clearly fuelled by anger, and he's distracted by Jace as he tries to work out why this, Magnus, is so different from those flickering feelings his fifteen year old self had.

So by the time they return to the Institute and take off their gear, and Isabelle snaps something at
Clary and storms off, it's really no surprise that he jumps out of his skin when someone calls out his name.

Raj is standing behind him, lips pressed together. Alec hardly notices Clary walking off, clearly upset at Isabelle's harsh slew of words to *just leave me alone, I'm fine*, and Jace dashing after her, still loaded with weapons.

Because Raj has barely spoken a word to him for weeks, since they argued after Alec had let the Downworlders go and Raj had protected them. Raj has made excuses to go on different patrols, and given any necessary communications to Alec via messages, and refused to meet his gaze whenever they pass each other.

"Lydia wants to see you," Raj says, sharply, and the cold look in his eyes tells Alec that he very much has not forgiven Alec for anything.

Alec wants to be angry. He wants to shake Raj, because for fuck's sake, Raj told him that the Clave *murdered his mundane boyfriend*, when the very purpose of Shadowhunters is to protect the mundane world. What greater proof can he need that the Clave is corrupt, and not to be trusted blindly?

But Magnus' voice rings in his ears, firm and clear and soothing, reminding him that the world is complicated, that people are complicated, and that splitting things into black and white is impossible.

So Alec takes a deep breath, because Raj is already turning, not waiting for an answer, and he says, "Raj, wait."

Raj pauses, stiffening. He doesn't turn back to face Alec, but he stops dead. "What?"

"I—" Alec drops his jacket on the table, and walks over to Raj, facing him. "Are we going to be like this forever?"

Raj glares at him. "I don't know, Lightwood, are you going to cozy up with a mass murderer forever?"

Alec nearly snaps at him for that, but he stops himself, physically biting down on his tongue to prevent words that he knows he'll regret pouring out.

"No," he says, "because he's not a mass murderer."

Raj rolls his eyes. "Look, I respect you as a leader, but you're delusional, and I don't have time for this. I've got work to do."

"You told me problem solving is what you're good at," Alec says, latching onto the first thing he thinks of that will stop Raj walking away. "I've got a problem for you."

It makes Raj stop, tight jaw slackening a little, eyes sparking with interest rather that irritation. "What kind of problem?"

"I want you to help Lydia prove that he's innocent of the crimes the Clave accuses him of."

Raj gapes at him. "Are you completely out of your mind?"

"Go and see Lydia," Alec says. "Later. Tell her I sent you. Tell her what I said."

And, before Raj has any time to respond, and before Alec can worry about whether he's misplacing
his trust, he pats Raj's shoulder and walks past him, towards Lydia's office, leaving the other Shadowhunter standing stock-still, clearly astounded.

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When Alec knocks, Lydia's "come in" sounds tired, at best. She smiles at little when he enters, but she doesn't move to stand from her seat behind her desk.

"Jace told me," Alec says, before she can speak, "about last night. About what they told you, and about what you're doing. I--" He shakes his head. "Thank you."

Lydia shrugs. "My job as a Clave envoy is to follow the Law to the letter. But above that, my duty as a Shadowhunter is to be just. It seems like ordering Warlock Bane's execution infringes upon both."

A slight smile curls at one corner of Alec's lips, and he inclines his head, and says again, "Thank you."

Lydia folds her fingers together, as she always seems to before she says something important, and exhales heavily. "I don't know whether you're aware, Alec, but if you're not, I feel like I should tell you." She looks up at him, maintaining steady eye contact that's just shy of too intense. "Your sister came in, before you went on patrol, to tell me that she overheard your parents discussing a marriage arrangement. Between the two of us."

The first thought that flits through his mind, far from relating to the idea of his apparently prospective nuptials, is that he wasn't even aware that his father had returned home from Idris.

He stares at her for a moment, trying to process the words, and then lets out a little laugh of bewilderment. "Are you serious?"

Lydia doesn't smile. "Perfectly."

"I, ah." He scratches at the back of his neck. "Lydia, I like you, really, but I-- I'm not really-- I don't think--"

"Alec." She holds up a hand, palm forwards, and a somewhat amused smile flits across her face. "I don't want to marry you, either. In this line of work, the only thing worth falling in love with is the job itself."

"Oh." He lets out a laugh that's undoubtedly relieved, and he hopes it doesn't sound too rude. "I'm actually—"

He stops, because fuck, why the hell had those words come out of his mouth? What is he thinking?

Lydia raises an eyebrow. "You're actually...?"

Alec chews on the inside of his cheek for a moment, hear thudding lightly, considering. He'd been so terrified to say the words, last night, even to Magnus, whom he knew wouldn't care. And Magnus had smiled, like the fucking sun, and told him he was proud of him just for saying it.

But that was Magnus. He trusts Magnus and he knows Magnus a hell of a lot better than he does Lydia. Lydia's a Clave envoy, and a Shadowhunter besides, and most Shadowhunters he's ever met think anyone like him is an abomination.

Then, most Shadowhunters he's ever met would have suggested Jace and Isabelle spend a night in the Silent City for daring to suggest that the Clave's accusations regarding Magnus were false. Lydia
had agreed to help them, risking her own career in the process.

"Swear to me," he says, "you won't tell anyone."

Lydia frowns. "I swear on Raziel's name, Alec, but whatever it is—"

And, throwing caution to the wind and not giving it a further thought for once in his life, he says, "I'm gay."

Her eyebrows shoot up, and she appraises him carefully, giving him a brief up and down. Then one corner of her mouth tilts up. "Well, that explains why an attractive guy has a distinct lack of a girlfriend."

Alec is still, eyes the only point of movement as they flicker across her face. "You don't care?"

She smiles. "I'm currently questioning whether it would be perverted or disrespectful of me to ask your sister out, or whether she'd just punch me in the face. Of course I don't care."

It takes him a good fifteen seconds to dissect Lydia's sentence, and when he does, his mouth falls open, before abruptly snapping shut again, because he doesn't know what he's supposed to say to that.

"Isabelle?" he says, at last.

Lydia smiles. "Yes, I believe that's your sister's name."

"Why on earth would you think that's perverted?"

Lydia shrugs. "I suppose it's not. She's legal. But I am twenty-four."

"I'm fairly sure she's dated Seelies who were a lot more than twenty-four," Alec says, mind casting back to Meliorn.

"It doesn't really matter," Lydia says, with a dismissive, cheerful smile that doesn't reach her eyes. She sits back, tossing her braid over her shoulder. "I'm fairly sure she loathes my very existence."

"I think it might be a little more complicated than that," Alec says, and Raziel, he needs to stop this conversation soon, because discussing his sister's love-life with the woman who is effectively his boss is not his idea of a pleasant morning. "She— Well. I don't know. But a lot of it doesn't add up. And she broke up with her boyfriend recently. Because of— Well, me, I suppose. Something we did. I don't think it's all on you."

Lydia inhales, and this time, her smile is smaller, but it seems more honest. "I appreciate the vote of confidence," she says. "Now, I've got some things to get you out of, so I'm afraid I can't sit and chat. Unless there's anything else?"

Alec decides not to mention that it was Lydia who asked him here, and instead says, "No, that's everything. I volunteered you some help, if you'd like it. From Raj."

Lydia wrinkles her nose. "Really?"

Alec's lips quirk up. "He's not that bad," he promises her. "He's just a little...rigid. And his insensitivity is to cover up any vulnerabilities."

"Hm." Lydia raises her eyebrows. "It's not really any wonder you understand him so well. Thankfully, you're just sarcastic instead of a perpetual dick."
Alec rolls his eyes, even as he lets out a laugh, and Lydia grins at him. "Alright, I see how it is. I'll leave the report from this morning on your desk later. And I've got some notes on Clary's training over the last week from myself and Jace and Isabelle."

Lydia agrees to look them over and sign anything off to be sent back to Clary's trainers in Idris, and shoots Alec a smile as he leaves.

As he walks out, he feels his phone vibrate in his pocket.

[Mags, 10:15]

Anytime, darling. And if you fancy watching some more inter-galactic battles, let me know.

And his heart turns over, a smile catching at his lips, and he's helpless, a slave to the feelings Magnus Bane ignites inside him with a mere handful of typed words.

***

Magnus isn't expecting any clients today, because he's left himself a day off meetings to stock up on supplies, finish several potions, and start translating an ancient demonic scroll for the Seelies—they're paying handsomely for it, as they always do, so ignoring it in favour of increasing his workload doesn't seem like best practise.

He's caught up in trying to balance the right amount of ingredients in one potion while simultaneously casting intermittent spells over a second, so when the buzzer goes, it makes him jump out of his skin. He scowls at the offending noise, and waves a hand to keep the potions going while he goes to deal with whoever has turned up at his door.

Unbidden, the thought that it might be Alexander flashes through his mind, and hope blooms in his chest, sharp and aching, before he pushes it firmly back down. He saw Alec twelve hours ago, the Shadowhunter isn't going to be coming to bother him again. They both have lives.

It doesn't stop his heart fluttering when he presses the button beside the intercom, and says, "Who dares disturb the High Warlock of Brooklyn?" in a deep, growling voice.

"I do," says a soft, male voice that Magnus doesn't recognise. "My name is Cirrus. I require warlock help on a...personal matter."

Magnus' eyebrows raise. "Very well, then. Come up."

The man who appears in Magnus' doorway a few seconds later is, as Magnus had suspected from his manner of speaking, a Seelie. His hair is black but tinted a dark blue at the tips; he's slight, a little shorter than Magnus, and very handsome, despite his somewhat unadventurous sense of fashion.

He's holding flowers.

"These are yours," Cirrus says, extending the flowers out to him with a look of distinct discomfort on his face.

Magnus stares at him for a moment, and then down at the flowers, in astonishment. Does he know this Seelie? Have they slept together? He looks like the kind of person Magnus might have slept with, but he certainly doesn't remember him. At all. Has Magnus had him as a client before? Is this some kind of thank you gift?

Hesitantly, Magnus reaches out to take the flowers. They're a little wilted, and tied together with a
piece of brown string, and they're not wrapped in paper, nor do they appear to have anything with
them. They don't look shop-bought.

"Ah, thank you," Magnus says, trying not to pose his statement as a question in his bewilderment.
"Come in, I'll just...put these away."

He's never had a client bring him flowers before any transaction. And, although he despises
stereotypes, it is true that it's usually women who give him flowers, even afterwards. Men -
especially straight men - tend to just pay him, or send him food, or, if they're very lucky and very
pretty, kiss him. Not that there aren't women who spark his interest too, of course.

But that's afterwards. Before? Not before. This is unusual. This is, in fact, a first. It's rather thrown
him—and not in a good way. He feels just a touch uncomfortable.

"They're not from me," Cirrus says, moving into Magnus' loft with relative ease. "They were on your
doorstep. I presumed they were intended to be for you."

"Oh." Magnus smiles at Cirrus over his shoulder. "Well, thank you for passing them along."

That's significantly less cringe-worthy, Magnus decides. Not that he can think of anybody he knows
who would leave him flowers. Catarina leaves him flowers, very occasionally, when she knows he's
had a hard week, but they're always beautifully presented. These are decidedly not. They're lovely
flowers, if a little mismatched, but they're not precisely Interflora standard.

Magnus snaps his fingers to set the flowers in a vase of water - he can sort them later - and forces
himself not to ponder who on earth would leave flowers on his doorstep. His social life hasn't really
been the most active, lately, with the ever-looming threat of Valentine and the Clave. He hasn't even
thrown a party for eighteen months. Although he has been to a fair few.

"So." Magnus whirls back round to face Cirrus, and shoots him his best business-charming smile.
"What can I do for you, darling?"

Cirrus flushes dully, and averts his gaze. "It's a little...improper."

Magnus tries not to laugh, because he can see where this conversation is going. "It won't go outside
these walls. And I assure you, I've dealt with more embarrassing things than you can even begin to
imagine. I won't be judging you."

So Cirrus explains, recounting a tale about a gay mundane bar, a handsy mundane, and a sweet
werewolf who'd been all too happy to help—beyond merely terrifying the mundane enough to make
him leave Cirrus alone.

"See, much as I know we like to gently roll our eyes at mundanes," Magnus says, already snapping
his fingers to summon some items to fix Cirrus' problem, "they do have some rather useful
inventions. Condoms, for example. Fantastic for when getting an STD test would kill the mood."

Cirrus' scowls. "I was told by a warlock that such things were unnecessary. She gave me a spell."

Magnus snorts, waving his fingers as he empties the contents of various jars into a bowl. "I'm sure
she did. Did you visit our darling Iris Rouse, by any chance?"

"Perhaps."

Magnus drops Cirrus several tips on which warlocks to trust, while he finishes up the potion that will
sort all of Cirrus' medical issues, and hands it to him in an attractive glass vial, scrawling dosage
instructions on the side with a snap of his fingers.

"You can come back in a week if there are any remaining issues," Magnus tells him, and then begins to move towards the front door so he can usher the Seelie out. "I'll send you a cheque to sign."

It's strange, Magnus thinks, idly. Cirrus is a very attractive man, and he told Magnus he likes men within five minutes of walking through the door, recounting his story about meeting the werewolf at the bar—and yet Magnus has absolutely no urge to flirt with him.

"Thank you," Cirrus says, and Magnus shoots him one last smile, before shutting the door firmly behind him.

His eyes land, immediately, on the flowers sitting on the table in his living room. They're a little mismatched, some colours clashing, others overwhelmingly vibrant, they haven't been arranged at all, and their stems haven't been cut to make them all sit at a similar height, but they're lovely, nonetheless, and there's something personal about them. The sight makes his lips curl up in a smile. Magnus just wishes he knew who on earth they're from.

Chapter End Notes

So let's all yell in the comments about who the flowers are from, because I know you know!

I know this chapter didn't have Magnus and Alec interacting directly, but I hope you enjoyed it regardless. (And they do have a scene together next chapter!)

I don't know about you, but I'm still not over 2x15, and I've been reblogging the same two scenes about a hundred time on my Tumblr (which you can come follow if you fancy it, I reblog other people's incredible gifsets, wish I could draw, and write the odd little thing -- prompts are welcome).

Anyway, I hope you have a wonderful week, and if you're not, go watch an episode of Lucifer, because I've just started it and it's bloody hilarious. (Alternatively, eat ice cream and cry. Both are good remedies.)

Much love,
Lu <3
Chapter Summary

In which Isabelle talks to Lydia, Maia is totally done with Shadowhunters being stupid, and Alec ruins Simon and Raphael's mood.

Chapter Notes

The goose! We haven't had (as far as I remember) a bird representative of Simon or anything to do with Simon's plotline yet, so here we go! Geese can symbolise happy-go-lucky, talkative individuals, who sometimes do foolish things in a quest to escape their problems.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After three days of glancing at his phone every half an hour, hoping for a text from a certain warlock but too much of a coward to send one himself, Alec finds himself being cornered by his sister after a tiring midday mission in the depths of an old subway station, where demons had been running rife.

"Bedroom!" she barks at him. "Now! Come on, we don't have all day! And you--" She peers around Alec to fix Clary and Jace, who are doing that vile, nauseating, in-love thing, with a hard stare "--stop frolicking."

"Iz," Clary says, smiling a little. "I'm pretty sure he said seven o'clock. In the evening. We've got four hours."

Clary's got one hand slipped into Jace's and the other loosely around his neck, fingers playing idly with the hair at the nape of his neck. It makes Alec's chest ache—because he can never have that. He can never do that. He's never going to be allowed to behave like that with someone he loves, out in the open for all to see.

"I know what you two are like," Isabelle says, and, to be fair, she's got a point—not that Alec has a clue what either of the women are on about. "We are not going to be late. It's poor show."

"There's such a thing as fashionably late," Jace points out.

"Yes, if you're an obnoxious ass," Isabelle says, with a sweet smile in Jace's direction. Jace sticks his tongue out at her. "Come on, Alec."

She grabs his hand, and hauls him through the Ops Centre unceremoniously, ignoring his confused protests. What the hell is going on? And why has nobody told him about it? Late for what? Where are they going?

"Isabelle, what—"
"Sit and shush," she says, pushing him none too gently into his bedroom and pointing to the bed. She walks over to his closet and yanks the doors open, beginning to rifle though. "If there's anything in here that's even remotely appropriate, I'll be astounded."

Alec is too disorientated and too taken aback by the afternoon's abrupt turn of events to notice when Isabelle strays too far to the left of his closet, and begins to rifle through his sweaters and hoodies—which is where he'd placed Magnus' letter from all those weeks ago, because nobody ever looks through his clothes.

"Wait, don't—!"

But it's too late. Isabelle pulls the piece of paper out, spares it a momentary glance, and tosses it behind her carelessly. Alec gapes. There's no way Isabelle would see a letter hidden amongst Alec's things and not read it, just out of frustrating sisterly curiosity. And she certainly wouldn't throw it over her shoulder with such disregard for Alec's possessions.

What the hell is going on today?

"What?" Isabelle looks at him like he's the most bizarre thing she's ever seen. "It's a blank piece of paper and I threw it on the floor, is that a crime?"

"A blank—" Alec snatches it up, and, as he'd expected, the familiar lines of Magnus' handwriting are scrawled across the page, line after line, until his name is signed at the end. He turns the paper towards Isabelle. "It's not blank!"

Isabelle's frown deepens from one of mild irritation to one of genuine concern. "Alec, that's blank. There's nothing on it."

Alec opens his mouth to refute her statement, because quite clearly it is not blank, but then a thought hits him, and he wonders. Could Magnus have enchanted it? Magicked the paper, so that the words are only visible to Alec? So that no snooping, Clave-loyal Shadowhunter could find it and have him hanged? His chest tightens a little at the thought: it's such a fucking considerate thing to do.

It's so Magnus.

"What's going on today?" Alec asks, setting the paper carefully under his phone, on his nightstand. "Where are we going?"

Isabelle frowns. "Didn't you get a text? Your warlock invited us to a party. It promises to be a night beyond your wildest dreams." She smirks. "Downworlder parties are notoriously fabulous, and one thrown by him? Yes, please."

Alec barely hears the rest of what she says, mind too stuck on your warlock. He knows, logically, that Isabelle is referring to Magnus as that partly because they can't risk being heard to say his name in the Institute, and partly just to rile Alec up. But something in him twists, at the thought: it's such a fucking considerate thing to do.

It's so Magnus.

"Clary's Jace. Isabelle's Meliorn. Alec's warlock."

"Alec's Magnus."
"Alec?" Isabelle waves a hand in front of his face. "Really, are you okay? You keep spacing out. Did you get hit during the mission?"

"What? No, of course not. I'm fine. Sorry."

Isabelle's brow doesn't smooth out. She makes a noncommittal humming noise, and then turns back to Alec's clothing, rifling through significantly more slowly. It takes her several minutes, but she finds a pair of dark jeans that Alec didn't even know he owned and a denim shirt, and tosses both on his bed, and then hangs his leather jacket - which she'd bought him for his birthday two years ago, insisting that a leather jacket and his gear jacket were entirely different things, Alec - on the back of his door.

"That'll do," she says, and then she smiles wickedly. "Although I don't think he'll care much what you're wearing."

Unimpressed, Alec quirks an eyebrow at her. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing," she says, with a conspiratorial smirk. "Put that on, then come and find me."

"Wait, Iz." He reaches out to grasp her hand, gently, before she can waltz out. She raises her eyebrows. "Will you talk to Lydia?"

Isabelle's expression hardens, and, when she speaks, her voice is like granite, unforgiving and impermeable. "Why should I?"

"Because she thinks you hate her," Alec says, softly, with the patience he only has for his siblings, for the people he loves, cultivated over so many years of being the older bother of the household. "And I'm fairly sure you don't."

"So?" Isabelle's words are harsh, and she spits them into the air, but there's something in her eyes that's a little bit broken. "So what if she thinks I hate her? Why do you care? Why should I care?"

"Because I like her, and because she doesn't want you to hate her. Look, I get that--"

A little hopelessly, he grasps at the air for words that won't come. What would Magnus say to Isabelle, now? How would he phrase it? Magnus always manages to find the right words, the right turn of phrase; why does Alec find it so difficult?

"I get that you're upset, about Meliorn, and I get that Lydia embodies everything you hate about the Clave, but Lydia isn't the Clave, and she's not what ruined your relationship. Everything she's doing, inspecting the Institute under my leadership rather than our parents' lack thereof, ignoring the fact that Luke is a werewolf pack leader and Clary's stepfather, trying to clear M-- his name, just because she's got our word for it—she's not a bad person."

All the breath seems to leave Isabelle, and her shoulders slump in a little. She drops her gaze to the floor, and glances down at where she's gripping Alec's hand a little too tightly. "It's not just that," she says.

"I know," Alec says, and he does. He squeezes her hand. "You're always telling me that if I want to talk to you about things, I can. Back at you, Izzy. You're my sister, I love you. I want to help."

She smiles, and reaches her arms down to hug him, having to bend only a little even though he's sitting and she's standing. Alec wraps his arms around her, and presses his cheek to her hair, before kissing the side of her head.
"I love you too, big brother," she tells him. "And you help more than you know."

***

"You didn't tell me you were throwing a party," are the first words out of Alec's mouth when Magnus picks up the phone.

Magnus pauses, the greeting he'd had prepared dying on his tongue. He stops stirring his potion. Of all the things he'd expected Alexander to say, that certainly hadn't been it.

"I told your sister," Magnus says, resuming his stirring slowly. It's not a complex potion, but over-stirring will leave his apartment stinking for days. "And I extended the invitation to the rest of the New York Nephilim with whom I'm acquainted."

"I know," Alec says, and his voice is quiet on the other end of the line. There's a pause, and Magnus hears the distinct sound of someone scuffing the heel of their shoe through fallen leaves. He wonders where Alec is—not the Institute, clearly.

"Then what is it?" Magnus asks, softly, because he can tell that something's wrong; what, he really can't imagine.

But he wants to know.

"It's just— I don't know." Alec exhales through his nose, clearly frustrated with himself, and Magnus wants to tell him not to be, because he holds himself to such impossible standards in everything, and it can't be good for his mental wellbeing. "It's not about that, I know parties are more Isabelle's thing than mine, but I— I thought you might...text. Or call. Or something. I don't know. Forget it."

Magnus' brows draw together, and, for a moment, he's silent, trying to work out what Alec's talking about. Because there's clearly some event, some reason, Alec had thought Magnus would reach out to contact him, but Magnus can't fathom what it would be.

But, before he can give it much thought, Alec's speaking again, and this time he's rambling, stuttering, tripping over his words and mixing them up in his haste to get them out.

"I didn't mean— When I left them, I didn't— Well, I did, but it wasn't— I was just—"

Magnus' eyes fall on the flowers still sitting in his living room, having recovered from their wilted state after a few days of care, and it's like every puzzle piece he's been given over the last week suddenly slots together to form a single picture.

"Alexander," he says, "did you leave me the flowers?"

There's silence. Then:

"Yeah? I— Didn't you see the note?"

Magnus snaps his fingers to put his potion in stasis - he can spare five minutes, and he could do with a break to regain some concentration - and rises, moving towards the flowers. He rifles through, searching for a note, while he tells Alec that he didn't get it.

"Oh!" He finds a piece of paper slipped between two thick leaves, and he beams. "Found it! You know, I really should have realised these were from you, note or not. They're very you."

"Why— Me? They're just flowers."
Magnus can't stop himself grinning. "It's not a bad thing," he says, sliding a finger under the intricate folds to open the paper. "Should I be worried?"

"No." Alec laughs, sounding embarrassed. "Don't read it out, please."

Magnus raises his eyebrows, but he acquiesces, and reads through in silence.

*Magnus,*

*Words aren't really my thing, so maybe this is all a really bad idea, but I wanted to say thank you. For last night, but also for everything else. I'm never going to be able to tell you how much meeting you has changed everything about my life, in the best way possible.*

*So thank you, for saving my life, and for giving me a chance to become a better person, and for last night, and for everything. And for the record, I don't think you're a demon. I don't think you're predisposed to be evil because you're a Downworlder. I don't think any Downworlder is. I'm ashamed I ever did. I think you're the best man I've ever met.*

~ Alexander

Smiling, Magnus runs his fingertip over the words, over the soft little dents in the paper where Alec has pressed in a fountain pen. His handwriting is all messy loops that manage to have a little elegance in them, scrawling across the page carelessly. It's very Alexander. The note itself is very Alexander. All of it is, right down to the mismatched flowers with the uneven stems and the note folded like a piece of origami.

He reads the note a second time, and then a third, and his heart does a little somersault in his chest at such words from Alec—who is essentially incapable of anything but honesty, even when he tries.

"Well." Magnus clears his throat when it doesn't quite come out as strongly as he'd intended it to. "I think I prefer this letter to your last one."

That last one, oh so very long ago, after Magnus had given him a tip-off he'd heard at a bar one night that had led to the rescue of twenty-some Nephilim children. Alec had hidden his every word behind the Clave, then. It had been impersonal, stilted, formal. This isn't. This is exactly the opposite.

This one makes Magnus' heart turn over.

Alec lets out a little laugh. It's nervous, giddy, and Magnus realises that it's exactly how he feels, as his eyes roam over the words, again and again and again, with the knowledge tucked away in his mind that Alec came to his apartment block sometime and left him flowers, entirely unprompted—hand-picked flowers, at that.

"I think I prefer this one, too," Alec says.

"Thank you," Magnus tells him, finally setting the note down. He props it up against the vase, and decides that he'll put it away somewhere later—in the same drawer as the one in which Alexander's first letter currently sits, perhaps. "Really. Thank you. It's sweet of you."

He wants to say more. He wants to take away the filter, and tell Alec how warm it's made him feel, the knowledge that someone - someone, anyone, but especially Alexander - has thought about him long enough to give him flowers, for no real reason except—

What?
"You're more than welcome," Alec says, and his voice is low, soft, introspective. "It wasn't exactly a hardship."

Magnus smiles at that, but he doesn't comment. Instead, he says, "Will I see you, tonight?"

"Jace would be planning my funeral about now if I'd told Izzy I wasn't going," Alec jokes, and Magnus snickers. "Yeah, I'm coming."

"Good. That's good." Magnus barely has time to curse how pleased he feels that he gets to see Alec tonight, because his potion is being to bubble, and if he leaves it any longer, everything's going to go horribly wrong. "Alexander, I hate to cut this short, but I've really got to go. My potions are throwing tantrums. I'll see you soon."

Alec's resulting laugh is enough to set something in Magnus' heart alight for an eternity.

"I'll see you tonight, Magnus."

***

Lydia doesn't expect a knock on her bedroom door at half past five. She's been awake for thirty-six hours, and she's veering towards so tired everything around her starts to blur and tilt every time she forces her eyes open for a moment longer. Raj's grumbling hadn't helped matters, as she'd talked him through the contents of the documents she had on the Clave, on the Accords, on laws regarding Downworlders and criminals and convictions, and on Magnus Bane.

Hence why she'd left Raj to finish reading, and had retired upstairs to fucking sleep. Because Raziel, she likes her job, and she likes the Lightwoods, but she's so tired, and she needs to catch a break, just for an hour.

Clearly, the universe is conspiring against her.

"Lydia?" Isabelle's voice is muffled, and it lacks the anger and the frustration and the everlasting note of underlying irritation that Isabelle seems to hold whenever they exchange any words, no matter how inconsequential. "Can I come in?"

Lydia exhales, heavily. She's dressed to sleep, in shorts and a tank top, and she's only been in bed for three minutes, and she's really not in the mood for politics right now.

But this is Isabelle, and she can't say no to her.

"Yes, come in," she says, swinging her legs out of bed and flicking on the lamp.

The door is opened just a little, and Isabelle pokes her head around as she says, "Lydia, I– Oh." She pauses when she sees Lydia's attire, and sweeps her eyes up and down, before her eyes fix deliberately on Lydia's face. "I'm sorry. I didn't realise you were... Would you like me to come back?"

"No, it's okay." Lydia feels a little taken aback by Isabelle's sudden change in attitude. She swallows, sitting on the edge of her bed with the toes of one foot on the floor, one leg bent under the other.

Isabelle slips fully inside, and pushes Lydia's door shut behind her. She's dressed up, in ripped back jeans that huge every curve and dip of her body, and a silvery grey top that exposes one shoulder, the sleeves pushed up to her elbows. She's got an extensive amount of jewellery on, and—

Well. Her hair looks more or less as it always does, but Lydia doesn't really see how Isabelle could
ever need to do anything more to her hair than whatever she already does, except decide whether she wants to wear it up or down. It's down, currently, falling over her shoulders like a waterfall.

"I wanted to apologise to you," Isabelle says, and Lydia blinks at her. "I don't– I haven't been fair to you. We got off on the wrong foot, and I wasn't really willing to give you a chance in the first place. You're from Idris, and...most people I've ever met from Idris hate me upon first glance."

"Isabelle, I—"

"I know," she says, and shakes her head. "I know you're not like that. It's just...taken me a while to accept it. It was easier to hate you. I'm not used to having my judgement controverted by the subsequent experiences." She smiles a little. "I'm very opinionated. You might have noticed."

Lydia lets herself smile back. "You? Never."

"It gets me into trouble a lot. I should probably have learnt better by now. Look, I—" Isabelle exhaled. "I'm sorry, Lydia. I'm sorry for how I've behaved towards you, and I'm sorry I didn't give you a chance, and I'm sorry it's taken so long to get my head out of my ass. This is the kind of thing I'm supposed to yell at Alec for."

"You're both stubborn as hell," Lydia says, not unkindly. "I forgive you. I've been treated far worse, I assure you."

Isabelle frowns at that. "Why? By who?"

"Well, I'm young, and female, and I hold a fairly high position within the Clave's ranks. Certain old-fashioned people in Idris weren't overly impressed by my appointment."

"Bullshit," Isabelle says, waving a dismissive hand. The bangs on her wrist catch the lamplight. "You're good at your job. That's obvious. Nothing else should matter. But— Please, let me start over. Let me—"

"I don't do starting over," Lydia says, interrupting her smoothly. "But I stand by what I've said. I don't hate you. I like you, Isabelle. And I forgive you. I do understand, whatever you might think of me. Your break-up with your boyfriend—"

Isabelle rolls her eyes. "Alec told you."

"He was defending you," Lydia tells her. "He didn't tell me anything detailed. Just that you broke up and that it upset you, as I'd imagine it would anyone."

"Yeah." She sighs, leaning back against the door, and lets out a tired little laugh. "I'm okay. Meliorn wasn't— We were never going to end up growing old together, let's put it that way. But we loved each other, in our own way. Our break-up was partly my fault, anyway." She shrugs. "I arrested my own boyfriend. I didn't stand against it. I suppose that makes me all bark and no bite, and no better than the Shadowhunters I spend my life insulting."

"Obeying orders doesn't make you a bad person."

Isabelle smiles wryly. "If I preach it, I should have the strength to have my actions reflect it."

Lydia's voice drops to a murmur when she says, "I think you do that plenty just by being yourself."

There's a pause, a silence that hangs in the air between them, and Lydia feels like something fundamental has shifted between them. She's just not quite sure what it is, or what it means, or why.
"How do you feel about parties?" Isabelle asks, abruptly, scrutinising her with slightly narrowed eyes. The aura of discomfort and regret that had been hanging around her dissipates, and she seems more like herself again. Or, rather, more like the version of herself she usually chooses to let people see.

Lydia raises her eyebrows. "Classy parties, or Downworld raves?"

"Classy parties thrown by classy Downworlders," Isabelle says, and, to Lydia's doubtful look, she snaps, "Going to Downworld parties isn't technically illegal, you know. It might break every unspoken social rule we have, but it doesn't break the Law."

Lydia's lips turn up. "Are you asking me to come to a party with you?"

"I'm offering."

Lydia looks at her for a long, hard moment, wondering whether this is some kind of test. Isabelle merely returns her gaze steadily, unblinking as she stares back with her chin tipped up defiantly.

"Alright," Lydia says. "I'll come."

***

It's not often that Shadowhunters allow themselves to have fun.

It's especially not often that Alec allows himself to have fun with his siblings, returning to the days of childhood wherein their responsibilities were few and far between and the world seemed that much lighter, and that much more wondrous.

But as he flies through the air, rolling and spinning and making shapes with graceful arcs, laughing with Jace and Isabelle as they do the same, he can't help but remember how much fun it used to be, to do this as children.

They're not born able to fly perfectly. Shadowhunters don't really use their wings until they get their first runes—they're not allowed to. As children, they can't rune their wings away, but the Clave insists that no child is permitted to learn how to fly until they're able to suppress, and therefore control, their wings.

(Not that that had stopped Jace, of course.)

But it means that Alec spent a lot of time, as a child, and as a young teenager, swirling and twirling through the sky with Jace, and then with Isabelle when she was old enough, practising flying in a straight line, practising moves of agility and stealth in the air. Because, of course, flight combat is just as integral to their training regime as anything else.

And when Clary had first come to them...

Well. Alec still snickers when he remembers the first time Jace had told her that she had wings, that the scar on her shoulder was a rune designed to suppress them that had been glamoured by a warlock, and that she'd probably seen her wings, as a child, but had had her memories altered so she didn't remember.

Apparently, Jocelyn had left the bit about wings out of her explanation of the Shadow World.

"You three are such show-offs," Clary mutters from where she's flying steadily beside them, keeping her distance. They're all glamoured to look like birds native to New York, but she keeps looking
down at the mundanes below.

Lydia laughs from her vantage point overhead, making elegant rolls in the air. "Clary, you just need to give it a shot. You're too worried."

"That's easy to say for someone who's been flying since they were ten."

A smile curls at the corner of Lydia's mouth. Alec isn't entirely sure why Lydia Branwell is with them, because parties seem like about as much of her thing as they are Alec's—and she doesn't know Magnus. Although, he supposes, it's tactical; she probably wants to meet the man she's trying to defend.

And, according to Isabelle, Magnus doesn't mind, so long as there's no trouble.

It's rather a lot of trust to put in them, Alec thinks, although he supposes Magnus is more than capable of protecting himself. He has been for the last four-and-a-bit centuries.

"Believe it or not," Lydia says, swooping down gracefully until she's beside Clary, "I used to hate flying. I was scared of heights."

Clary raises her eyebrows. "Really?"

Lydia replies in the affirmative, and sets about showing Clary how to roll sideways in the air, while still controlling forward speed. He notices Isabelle slowing in her somersaults, watching Lydia and Clary; a fleeting smile crosses Isabelle's face when Clary rolls over successfully, and whoops.

Flying to Magnus' loft is a lot quicker than taking the subway, and they touch down on the pavement near-silently. Isabelle is the first up to the door to knock. It's flung open almost immediately, and Magnus smiles at her.

"Isabelle Lightwood," he says, eyes crinkling at the corners. "You look ravishing."

Isabelle grins. "Of course I do."

They exchange a few more words while Alec hangs back, because parties really aren't his thing, and he can already tell that this evening is going to be horribly awkward. Other people are going to be there. Downworlders. People he's never met. People who'll hate him on sight.

He really hasn't thought this through.

And, of course, there's the little fact of Magnus, who looks like Lust incarnate in a pair of ripped black jeans that hug every curve, a burgundy shirt that's open to below his navel, and a fitted navy blazer. The amount of skin on display makes it unfairly difficult not to stare.

"Alexander!"

Alec glances up, and sees that his companions are all filing in. Magnus stands in the doorway, smiling at him, and he jerks his chin.

"Come on, darling," he says. "I'm the host, I'm not standing here all night."

"Yeah, I—" Alec shakes his head. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be silly." Magnus ushered Alec inside, and then pushes the door shut while Alec busies himself with concealing his wings away.
Then he glances up, and realises exactly how far out of his comfort zone this is.

***

Alec isn't good at socialising at the best of times. It's something he's been told by his siblings all his life. But he's especially terrible at socialising with people he doesn't know.

And the people currently filling Magnus' apartment aren't just strangers, but Downworlders, most of whom take one look at his runes and give him a wide berth and a disapproving look.

Magnus' loft has been altered so much to accommodate all the people that Alec hardly recognises it. The furniture has been moved, some disappearing entirely, and a bar has been set up where the sofa and coffee table once sat. A space has been cleared in the centre, and it's currently being occupied by people dancing. Just the sight of all those people in such close proximity makes Alec feel uncomfortable. The lights have been dimmed, replaced with colourful flashes and the heavy fluorescence of a club.

It's really not his scene. Not when he's essentially alone. Despite Isabelle's promise that she wouldn't abandon him, she's currently in conversation with Lydia and Magnus across the room, and Clary and Jace are dancing together, exchanging kisses that are so sweet Alec can't look at them.

"Refill, Shadowhunter?" Maia asks, from where she's standing behind the bar, clearly having been employed by Magnus to serve drinks for the night. She seems to know most of the people attending, and has been chatting and laughing with those she knows as they come up to the bar.

Alec looks down at his beer, considering. He's had...four? Five? And he doesn't even like beer. He needs some of that slightly-fruity thing Magnus had given him, once, but he hasn't got a clue want it was.

"Yeah, alright," Alec says. "Thank you."

Maia hums as she turns, and reaches down to grab a bottle from under the bar. "You're a lot politer than your brother," she says, snapping the cap off and pouring it into his glass. "I can see why Magnus is giving you the benefit of the doubt."

Alec huffs out a laugh through his nose, and shakes his head. Because, really, Magnus shouldn't be. Alec is all too aware of the fact that he's supposed to be killing the man, not attending his parties.

"Don't throw a pity party at my bar, Lightwood," she says, sharply. Then she tilts her head slightly to one side. "Why are you sitting here all on your own, anyway? Haven't you got a girlfriend? Why not go and join her?"

For a moment, Alec stares at her, perplexed, because can't imagine who on earth Maia would be referring to, because he's never had a girlfriend, and he certainly hasn't taken anyone to Magnus' party. Unless Maia thinks...

"Do you mean Lydia?" Alec asks, incredulous, and a laugh bubbles up his throat. "Oh my god. No. No. She's my boss."

Maia pauses. "She's the Clave representative? And Magnus has let her come here? Are you joking?"

Alec frowns. "You're not doing anything illegal. And she knows about Magnus. She's trying to get rid of the kill order on him."

Maia rolls her eyes. "Not doing anything illegal hasn't stopped Shadowhunters arresting and torturing
us before," she says, wiping a glass dry with a cloth. "And forgive me if I'm not convinced that some blonde from Idris is going to be Magnus' saviour."

He bristles a little. "We follow the Law, Maia. Just because—"

"No." She slams the glass down, and fixes him with a glare. "You don't. You know damn well you don't. You twist the Law to fit your own agendas. Not all of you, I'll give you that much, but the Clave? The Clave doesn't uphold the Law. The Clave upholds its own archaic beliefs that totally disregard any progress we managed to make when the Accords were signed. And you want to know why so many Downworlders are siding with Valentine?" She leans forward, eyes flashing. "Because there's a Shadowhunter out there who wants to commit mass genocide, and the Clave has failed to take any measures to stop him. They're more worried about him exposing their own incompetence."

"That's exactly why so many Shadowhunters think Downworlders are irrational," Alec snaps. "Valentine wants to slaughter every Downworlder in existence, yet you side with him over the Clave?"

Maia throws her cloth down. "And that, Lightwood, is exactly how much we despise the Clave. They treat us like dirt, so much so that some of us would rather take our chances convincing Valentine that we deserve to live. And if the Clave can never see that, one day we're going to be the ones waging war on you. Without Valentine."

And, with that, Maia snags his empty glass, shoots him a glare, and stalks over to the vampire waiting at the other end of the bar, leaving Alec to ponder her words.

***

"Do you think I should go over?" Simon asks, leaning into Clary nervously, eyes fixed across the room. "I think I should go over. I've got to go over eventually. I'd rather do it when I'm not so drunk I can't walk straight, because then I'm doubly likely to embarrass myself. Although honestly, I'm probably going to embarrass myself anyway. Because, you know, I always do. If I'm drunk, maybe I won't remember it in the morning. Can vampires get that drunk? I can't believe I said all that crap to him the other night, I just—"

"Simon." It's Jace who speaks, rather than Clary, and he's looking at Simon with thinly veiled amusement laid over unending irritation. "Shut up. If you don't go over there, right now, I'm going to hijack Bane's music and announce to the room that Simon Lewis is utterly, pathetically in love with the leader of the New York vampires."

Simon shoots Jace a glare. "You're an ass."

Jace grins. "Oh, I know. Has it taken you this long to realise? I'm disappointed. I'll have to up my game."

"For god's sake, Simon," Clary says, but with more care and less sarcasm that Jace. "Go on. All you want to do is give him his jacket back."

"And get a kiss," Jace says, with a smirk that Simon really, really wants to smack off his face.

Simon raises a single finger in Jace's direction, and then pushes through the crowd towards where he can see Raphael, walking away from where he'd been making conversation with a slightly-drunken, very-miserable looking Alec Lightwood.

(Simon wonders whether Alec thinks he's being subtle. He's not. After having a clearly heated discussion with Maia, Alec has been brooding and drinking, alone save for his five minute
convoertion with Raphael just now, sneaking particularly unsubtle glances towards where Magnus is surrounded by people.)

(He hadn't realised someone like Alec was even capable of having a crush.)

"Hey— Raphael."

Simon reaches out to tap Raphael's elbow lightly as they pass each other. Raphael snaps his head round to look at Simon, and he blinks once, blankly, and freezes immediately.

"Simon," he says, expression inscrutable.

"Yeah. I mean, obviously I'm Simon, you know that. I mean—" Simon shakes his head, and wonders whether vampires can actually get mind-numbingly drunk. He hasn't tried since he's transformed. "I just wanted to give this back."

He extends Raphael's jacket out to him. Raphael stares at him for a moment, then down at the jacket, then back up to Simon's face.

"Keep it," Raphael says, with a shake of his head. "It's probably the most fashionable item of clothing you own."

"Your inner Magnus is showing," Simon says, with a grin, because even if Magnus has apparently been using his perception filter spell (who knew America's most powerful warlock was secretly a Doctor Who nerd?) on every Shadowhunter in New York, Simon hasn't been subject to having his perception of reality altered. He's seen the High Warlock of Brooklyn around and about in the Downworld, in passing.

(Jace's pissy attitude when he'd realised Simon had known of Magnus Bane's existence and approximate location for years had been the best gift Simon has ever received.)

Raphael rolls his eyes. "He did practically raise me."

"I know." Simon gentles his voice a little, and pushes the jacket towards Raphael. "Just take it. It's too fashionable for me."

"Fine." Raphael snatches it out of Simon's grip, and turns, but Simon's fingers snag on his sleeve, and he pauses. "What?"

"What I said, the other night— I'm not going to pretend I'm glad about your involvement with my mom, but I get why you did it. And you're right. You've offered to help me at every turn, and I— You deserved better than my shitty attitude. So I'm sorry. Really, I'm sorry."

Raphael looks at him for a long, hard moment, not a single muscle in his face so much as twitching, and Simon shifts nervously under the other vampire's scrutiny.

Then Raphael's face breaks into the closest thing to a smile Simon has ever seen from him, and he shakes his head. "You were starving. It gives us bad attitudes. I'm sure I'll get over it. But you need to get it into your head that I don't hate you, amigo."

Simon huffs out a laugh. "You hate everyone."

Raphael shrugs. "Perhaps. I hate you less than I hate most people."

And—
Well. Okay. If Raphael wants to make Simon's undead, unbeating heart arrest, he's succeeding.

"Do you, um." Simon clears his throat, and Raphael raises his eyebrows. "Do you– Maybe we– I mean, would you want— Drink?"

Holy shit, he needs to stop taking the piss out of Alec's lack of subtlety. He's worse. What the fuck was that? That wasn't even remotely coherent.

Raphael's lips are twitching, and fuck, he's so cute. Simon wants to hug him, and kiss his cheek, and ruin his stupidly perfect hair, and preferably not get his head bitten off for it.

"Drinks are at the bar, Simon," Raphael says, lips still doing that infuriating twitching-pouting thing. "Maia's serving."

Simon rolls his eyes. "You're such an asshole. You know what I mean. Come on."

Simon grabs the startled Raphael's hand in his determinedly, and marches them both through the crowds towards the bar. He pretends not to see the grin on Raphael's face, because if he acknowledges it, he knows he's well and truly fucked.

Although, when Raphael's grip on his hand tightens infinitesimally, palms pressing together, he thinks maybe that wouldn't be so bad.

***

Alec can't remember the last time he ingested enough alcohol to actually feel its effects. Shadowhunters - and most Downworlders - have a much higher alcohol tolerance than mundanes. Jace takes it as a challenge, to drink as much as he can and get completely pissed regularly. Alec takes it as a reason not to bother drinking in the first place, as he doesn't exactly enjoy the taste of most alcohol.

But, seven - or is it eight? - pints down, and he's feeling a little bit fuzzy. He's certainly not drunk enough to forget anything in the morning, or to start falling on his face, but he feels a bit...emboldened.

Across the room, he can see Magnus. He's been glancing over his shoulder to find him every now and then all the time he's been sitting here, but now Magnus has moved, he barely has to turn his head.

And there's some boy standing with him.

He's a Seelie, Alec can see, with a shock of dark hair that's been dyed with streaks of blue and purple, and he's dressed to impress, showing off as much skin as he can without being indecent. He looks young - younger than Alec - but he knows he's probably older than he looks, as most Seelies are.

Magnus, Alec has noticed, doesn't stay talking to the same person for too long. He flits around, making conversation and then pulling himself gently out to move on, speaking to as many people as he can. Because, clearly, the people here are his friends, people he likes, and as their host, Alec supposes he wants to converse with them all.

But this Seelie, Magnus has been talking to for nearing half an hour.

Magnus hasn't given Alec a second glance, since Alec had walked in and Isabelle had dragged Magnus' attention away to introduce him to Lydia.
Alec has never thought he's a particularly jealous person. He never resented all those girls Jace used to pick up when they were teenagers and Alec had an unpleasantly overwhelming crush on his parabatai. He didn't like hearing about Jace's latest hook-up, but he wasn't jealous.

But he is now. Not resentful of the Seelie - well, maybe just a little - but he is jealous. Maybe it's more like envy than jealousy, he thinks. Because Magnus... Well. He'd thought, recently, that they'd been... What? Closer? More friendly?

Clearly, however, Alec's been fooling himself. Because, surrounded by all his friends and acquaintances - people he likes and loves and can have fun with, people who understand him and can empathise with the abuse he's suffered at the hands of Alec's people, people who aren't supposed to be killing him - Magnus seems to have forgotten Alec even exists.

And it's... It's something about him. Magnus spoke to Isabelle and to Lydia extensively when they'd arrived. He went to talk to Clary, some time later, and exchanged verbal quips with Jace, and had another fleeting conversation with Isabelle, but he hasn't even glanced in Alec's direction.

He knows - by the Angel, he knows - that it's moronic to be so disappointed. It was foolish to think that he had anything remotely close to friendship with Magnus Bane. He's a Shadowhunter, and the Acting Head of the New York Institute, and a Lightwood. Magnus is a Downworlder, the High Warlock of Brooklyn, and there's no reason for him to be willing to associate himself with someone like Alec.

With hindsight, it all seems so very obvious.

Alec only wishes he'd had the clarity to see it three nights ago, when he'd spilled his heart to Magnus on the warlock's doorstep, and then on his sofa, and then in his bedroom.

"Alec, man, seriously. You're making me depressed."

An irritated frown crosses Alec's face as he looks up to see Simon and Raphael sitting at the bar a few stools along from him, both with blood-infused drinks. Simon has his eyebrows half-raised in mild concern, and Raphael is halfway through rolling his eyes.

"Look the other way," Alec says. "I'm not making you look at me."

"You're not subtle," Simon tells him. "You're lucky nobody here is paying you any attention, because you are honestly the most unsubtle person I've ever seen in my life. And trust me, I've been to Comic Con, I've seen a lot of very unsubtle people."

Alec glances past Simon to Raphael. "Does he ever shut up?"

Raphael shrugs. "No. But he's got a point. Honestly, you and Magnus are just as pathetic as each other."

Alec squints one eye at him. "What's the supposed to mean?"

"It means that you're looking at him every five seconds," Simon says. "Go on, stare at that poor bloke with him a bit harder, he might spontaneously combust."

Raphael's lips twitch up, and he ducks his head quickly, but it's too late to hide the grin that flashes across his face.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Alec says, shortly, and turns back to his half-empty beer.
"Lightwood," Raphael says, "if you want to go and talk to him so badly, go and talk to him. He's not going to eat you. He's a soft touch behind the bravado. I'm sure you've noticed."

"I don't know," Simon says, doubtfully, "I'm fairly sure he could, y'know, burn down the world and not bat an eyelid? Torture someone who's done him wrong and leave them screaming for mercy and not give a shit? Be a total badass and stand for zero bullcrap?"

Raphael shrugs. "He could," he agrees. "But not to Alec. Except perhaps the last one."

Alec blinks. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

Raphael looks skyward. "Dear God, I am surrounded by morons. Get up, Shadowhunter, stop moping, and go over there. You're insufferable. And ruining the mood."

"We had a mood?" Simon asks, sounding a little bewildered but horribly hopeful. "What kind of mood? Was it a good mood?"

"It was fine," Raphael says shortly, and Simon beams.

It's a little sickening. And it's definitely enough to make Alec get up. Especially when he looks over to where Magnus is, and sees that bloody Seelie with one hand on Magnus' chest, leaning up to whisper something to him.

"Fuck it," Alec says, and tips back the rest of his beer. "Fuck all of this. Fuck them. Fuck everyone."

And, leaving Maia and Simon staring slack-jawed and Raphael looking just a touch amused, Alec stands up, slams his empty glass down, and stalks through the crowd towards Magnus.

Chapter End Notes

So Alec Lightwood is a dramatic drunk in this verse, is anybody really surprised?

We had a few Magnus/Alec scenes this chapter, and some Saphael, and some Lyzy, so I hope everyone enjoyed this chapter! Next chapter is pretty much entirely Magnus and Alec, so, something to look forward to!

This is totally random, but if you're into biology, or medicine, or health, or you like cool science-y crap, then 10% Human by Alanna Collen is a really great read. It's not too long, and it's all about how microbes affect our health, happiness and fitness.

But back on the fic, I hope you enjoyed this chapter, and if you've got questions, prompts, want to scream at me, or have cute dog photos, come follow me on Tumblr!

Also, quick question, would anyone be interesting in live-tweeting? If I made a tag on Twitter, would anyone do it?

Much love,
Lu <3
Peacock

Chapter Summary

In which Alec talks to Magnus, gets (another) drink, and proceeds to abandon it for something more interesting.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for your comments last week, you beautiful humans, and because some of you expressed an interest, I'm going to do live tweeting for this chapter! @ me on my Twitter and I'll be looking in the #fwwfic tag to find all and any of your live tweets!

This bird's chapter is the peacock: beautiful, proud, with an edge of drama and flare, and, interestingly, in some places is said to symbolise immortality. (No prizes for guessing who this chapter title is referring to!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cirrus is very sweet.

That's about as far as Magnus can go, as he stands conversing with the Seelie for longer than is entirely appropriate, mostly owing to his unwillingness to hurt the feelings of a man so very nice and so very pretty. He's polite, and he listens, and his flirting is obvious enough to notice but subtle enough to be classy, and he's gorgeous.

But, beyond a nice conversation, Magnus doesn't feel all that much. He doesn't even have the desire to drag him out of the party and into his bedroom, when the guests have gone. Or right now.

The reason, he knows, is currently sitting at the bar, nursing yet another glass of beer, with a scowl on his face. Part of Magnus wants to go over there, slide into the empty bar stool next to him, and strike up some stupid, meaningless conversation to make him smile. But Alec's entire being screams fuck off, so he thinks he's probably going to have a more pleasant time with Cirrus. Even if he's going to have to let him down gently later.

Magnus forces his thoughts away from the Shadowhunter apparently having an awful time, and returns his attention to the young Seelie, instead. He's caught up in conversation, focusing on being an attentive listener and a polite host, and he doesn't notice someone approaching them until he hears someone saying his name.

"Magnus."

Magnus glances up, and sees Alec walking through the crowds towards them. He can't help the way his eyes dip down, flickering over every inch of the Shadowhunter stalking up to them in a huff, determination setting his brow. He suspects Isabelle is probably to credit for Alexander's attire— flattering fitted jeans, a denim shirt, and a black leather jacket that does everything for his shoulders.
He's really never had any problem admitting that Alec is more than a little attractive. It's the rest that he can't quite bring himself to embrace—Alec is a Shadowhunter, for god's sake. It's only going to end in heartache.

Cirrus glances over his shoulder as Alec nears them, and his eyes catch on Alec, clearly noticing the object of Magnus' attention. He raises his eyebrows, and a small smile of understanding flits across his face.

"Ah." He looks up at Magnus, and shakes his head. "I'll leave you to it."

Magnus feels instantly guilty. "Cirrus—"

"I'm not a fool, Magnus. I know a look of longing when I see one. I'll be at the bar. If you desire companionship."

With that, Cirrus tilts his chin up to kiss Magnus' cheek, the merest breath of a kiss, platonic at best irrespective of any intentions Cirrus may have had tonight, then he smiles, and disappears through the crowd.

Magnus meets Alec's gaze. He's stopped several feet away, and is staring at Magnus with his lips pressed together and a hard look in his eyes.

"Was– Who was– Was that your date? Or your boyfriend, or—?"

The words are blurted out in a rush, tumbling over each other, face full of discontent and discomfort, and Magnus nearly smiles.

"No," he says, leaning back against the wall and taking a sip of his cocktail. "He's a client. I met him a few days ago. I remain decidedly single."

He leaves out the anecdote about Cirrus unwittingly delivering Alec's flowers.

"Oh." Alec chews on his lower lip. "Oh."

Magnus raises an eyebrow at him. "Are you going to come over here, or are we going to shout across the room?"

"I– Yeah." Alec steps closer, and Magnus doesn't miss his eyes dropping down from Magnus' face, lingering on his partially exposed chest and abs, before he drags his gaze back up. "Magnus, I– Have I done something wrong? Said something?"

Magnus blinks. "Not that I'm aware of. Why? What are you talking about?"

"You haven't spoken to me all night. I just– I know we're not exactly friends, and I know you probably don't want to spend all your time making nice with someone who's– someone like me, but you spoke to my sister, and to Jace, and I just..." He shrugs. "I don't know. Forget it."

"Alex– Alec," Magnus says, firmly, Isabelle's passing comment from earlier as she'd dragged him over to introduce him to Lydia Branwell ringing in his ears.

*Nobody calls him Alexander, you know...*

"I don't know what you think I do with my business partners, but Stars Wars, sleepovers, and pillow talk isn't usually on the agenda."

Alec opens his mouth, and then closes it again. "What does that mean?"
"I've been more honest with you than I've been with anybody for a long time," Magnus says, dragging a finger through the condensation on the side of his glass, eyes following the path he makes. "There's no reason I wouldn't want to talk to you. If I didn't want you to be here, rest assured, you wouldn't have been invited."

If anything, Alec only looks more bewildered. "Then why—?"

"Because—" Magnus pushes off the wall, and comes to stand in front of Alec, close enough that their breaths intermingle "—you walked in having spaced out on my doorstep for a good minute, barely said a word to me, and then went straight for the bar. Forgive me for thinking you didn't want to talk to me."

Alec's brow furrows, eyes flickering around Magnus' face as though he's not sure where to look. He's quiet for a moment, mouth open slightly, and then he says, "I always want to talk to you."

Magnus' breath catches, heart stilling for a moment before it restarts, thudding double-time against his ribs. His lips part a little as he stares up at Alec, and by Lilith, he hasn't wanted to kiss anybody this much for such a long time.

"How much have you had to drink?" he manages to get out, eventually, and the delivery isn't as smooth as he'd like it to be, but it's better than whatever jumbled, incoherent mess is running through his brain.

One corner of Alec's mouth tips up. "I don't know. I had, like, five, and then I pissed Maia off, so I picked up the pace. By the Angel, I sound as bad as Jace."

Magnus raises his eyebrows. "What did you do?"

"To piss off Maia? Put my foot in my mouth. I was being ignorant. I think." He frowns a little. "Maybe I should apologise."

"I'd wait twenty-four hours, if I were you. If you'd like to keep your head attached to your shoulders," Magnus advises him. He snaps his fingers to make his drink disappear, and then says, on a whim, "In the mean time, how do you feel about dancing?"

Alec blinks, looking adorably confused in the way people do when they're a little bit drunk with fuzzy brains, and they can't quite keep up with quick changes in topic.

"Dancing?"

"Yes, Alec, dancing." Magnus jerks his head towards where people are meshed together in what had been his living room. "Like that."

"With you?"

"Mmmh."

"Yeah, okay. But—" His face falls almost comically. "I don't know how to dance."

"I'll teach you," Magnus says, and holds out a hand. He wiggles his fingers pointedly when Alec just looks at it, making no move to take it. "Come on. Nobody's going to be looking at you. They'll all be looking at me." He drops Alec a smirk and a glittery wink, and delights in the flush that covers Alexander's cheeks.

Uncertainty flashes in Alec's eyes. "Are you sure?"
Magnus arches an eyebrow. "That they'll be looking at me rather than you? Yes."

"No, that—" But Alec cuts himself off, and odd expression covering his face, and he shakes his head, resolve setting into the lines of his face. "No, fuck it."

While Magnus recovers from his surprise at Alec's abrupt change of tone, he takes Magnus' hand, gripping firmly. Magnus flashes him a smile over his shoulder, and then drags him through the people milling around towards the centre of the room.

The music is loudest over there, the bass drum of the song pulsing through the floor, vibrations running through Magnus' feet and diffusing through his entire body, until he feels like his heart is in synch with the song, the music washing over him until he's drowning in it.

He twists, pulling Alec to a halt, and turns to face him, dropping his hand but staying close.

"Think of it like fighting," Magnus says, already swaying his hips to the beat of the music. "There's a rhythm, and you don't need to overthink it."

Alec is standing frozen, rubbing his lips together as he watches Magnus ease himself into the movements. Magnus has to bite down on the inside of his cheek to stop himself laughing, because Alec looks so utterly lost.

"Come here," Magnus says, reaching out to drag Alec closer by his hips, trying to ignore the way Alec's body feels under his palms. "Don't worry about what anybody else is doing. Nobody is looking at you. I promise."

"I can't do that," Alec says, eyes flickering down Magnus' body. "And you're looking at me."

Magnus shrugs, a smile tugging at his mouth. "Darling, most people can't dance like me. I've had four centuries to perfect it. I won't judge you."

That makes Alec laugh, and Magnus' smile stretches out into a full grin.

It takes him a moment, but Alec manages to follow Magnus' instruction, shifting his hips side to side under Magnus' hands. It's inelegant, movements stilted and stiff with nowhere near enough flex in his knees, and it's painfully obvious that Alec has never danced like this before, but Magnus couldn't care less. Because it's fun. This is fun, dancing with Alec, watching him loose some of that infuriating Shadowhunter decorum as he throws his head back and laughs when Magnus executes a particularly spectacular full body roll. It makes Alec's eyes crinkle at the corners, and god, Magnus wants to evoke that reaction again.

After a while, he slips one hand off Alec's hip, instead draping his forearm over his shoulder, so they're actually dancing together. Alec looks momentarily panicked as Magnus' body shifts, the angle between them changing, bringing them closer together so that Magnus can really let loose.

"Relax," Magnus says with a smile, and reaches up to brush a strand of hair out of Alec's eyes. "You're fine."

The song changes twice before Magnus feels fingers brush hesitantly against his hip. Alec's eyes have dropped down, watching where his hand is going; Magnus slows their movements a little, realising that Alec has seen how other people are dancing together, and is trying to imitate it.

"Go on," Magnus murmurs, when Alec hesitates.

"This isn't as awful as I always thought it would be," Alec says, securing his hold and glancing up at
Magnus. 

Magnus laughs. "It's only a little bit awful?"

"Well. Yeah." Alec shrugs, and it throws off his rhythm, but it doesn't matter. Nothing matters, except this, right now, making Magnus feel elated in ways he hasn't for years.

Just because a pretty boy - and a Shadowhunter, at that - is dancing with him.

"You're such a Shadowhunter," Magnus says, shaking his head, still smiling so wide it's making his cheeks ache.

"Hey! What's that supposed to mean?"

He looks adorably outraged, and Magnus can't resist tilting his chin up to kiss his cheek, laughing again. Alec's eyes glaze over a little as Magnus pulls back, expression softening, and—

_Fuck._

Magnus spins, arms above his head, flinging his head back so that he can look elsewhere, just for a moment. He can't look at Alec with that expression on his face. It makes him hope. Makes him consider than maybe, maybe, _he hasn't_ been reading too much into Alec's actions, that maybe—

The song comes to a rather abrupt end, and the soft guitar chords that float through the air are decidedly slow, intimate, and Magnus decides that enough is enough. He can't slow dance with Alec. It'll tear him to pieces.

"Drink?" Magnus suggests, stepping back to put a little more space between them.

"Yeah." Alec's eyes flicker, up and down again, several times. "Yeah, okay."

***

Isabelle offers Jace a grin as he approaches the bar, dragging a hand through his hair. Clary's standing across the room, trying to convince Lydia to dance, and Jace, apparently, has decided to leave her to it and grab a drink.

"Here." Isabelle slides a glass of vodka and coke over to him.

He catches it before it slides off the bar, and winks. "Thanks, Iz."

She jerks her chin up towards where Alec and Magnus have been dancing for the last five minutes, Alec having finally gone over to talk to the warlock after hours of pining at the bar. How Alec can be so dense he can't see the way Magnus looks at him, she'll never know.

"Alec's having fun," she says, as Jace stands beside her, both of them leaning back against the bar in lieu of utilising the bar stools provided.

"I noticed," Jace says, and shakes his head, smirking. "Walked straight past me when Bane was dragging him over to dance."

Isabelle rolls her eyes. "Why do you call him that?"

Jace shrugs, taking a long swig of his drink. "He's got eyes for Alec. I can't be too nice, can I?"

"You're an ass," Isabelle tells him.
Jace hums noncommittally. Isabelle can't help glancing over to where Clary and Lydia are; Clary appears to have given up on convincing Lydia to dance, and is instead pointing out people around the room. She's gesturing at Simon and Raphael, who are at the other end of the bar, leaning towards each other. Simon is babbling, talking so rapidly Isabelle is surprised Raphael can understand him, and waving his hands around dangerously. Raphael has his eyebrows half-raised, lips turned up just a touch.

Lydia meets Isabelle's eyes across the room, and Isabelle can't hold her gaze. She drops her eyes, focusing instead on the toes of her boots. The guilt she feels about how she's treated Lydia is still eating at her.

She can't count how much she's fucked up in the last few months. First not paying enough attention, letting her brother get shot and fall out of the sky, because she'd been so desperate to see whether Meliorn had been part of the Downworld group the Circle had been meeting.

Then she'd arrested her own boyfriend, unable to practise what she's spent her life preaching. She hadn't stood up to her mother's orders to arrest dozens of innocent Downworlders, leaving children without parents and the most powerful warlock in the country with a desire for revenge.

And, however hard she's tried since, she can't stop making things worse. Their rescue plan had succeeded—but it had been Alec's idea to go to Magnus, not hers, and he's the one whose favour won them such an alliance, and Meliorn had dumped her anyway.

She's been so determined to disobey authority, since, that she's ended up alienating one of the few people in Idris who isn't a stuck-up bigot. Her fury with herself, her devastation about how terribly everything ended with Meliorn, led to a fierce prejudice against Lydia before they'd even met, just because she knew she was a Clave envoy from Idris.

And now—now, she can barely look her in the eye. Because Lydia is doing everything she's never managed to. Lydia is putting words into action. Lydia is trusting them, trusting that the case the Clave has built around Magnus isn't as simple as it seems, and investigating, trying to find a way to prove it.

Trying to find a way to save Alec from a mess Isabelle had a hand in creating.

She pushes the thoughts away. She's not going to think about it. She's going to watch her hopeless brother try to dance with the most graceful man in the room.

"Do you think he realises?" Izzy asks, abruptly, wrapping her lips around the neck of the bottle of beer to take a swig. She's leaning back against the bar, arms braced on the rough surface, and has her ankles crossed, balanced on the long heels of her shoes.

Jace quirks an eyebrow, but doesn't glance over at her, instead watching Alec try to follow Magnus' instruction. He's moving in time with the music, but his motions are stilted, awkward, especially in contrast to Magnus'. Magnus is laughing, eyes bright, and he tilts his chin up to kiss Alec's cheek.

It's not that Magnus looks at Alec as though he's the only person in the room. He doesn't. Isabelle's always thought that's an odd expression, because if there's only one person in the room, where else would you look? It doesn't mean you'd look at them favourably, or willingly, or with any pleasure. No. Magnus looks at Alec like he's fully aware of the fact that there are a few hundred utterly beautiful people surrounding him from all sides, all probably more than eager to impress the High Warlock of Brooklyn with their flirting and their seductive dancing, but he doesn't care; he only cares about Alec.
"Realises what?" Jace asks.

"That he's in love."

Jace snorts into his vodka and coke. "No. He hasn't got a clue. Not that Bane could make how besotted he is any more obvious. Although, I'm surprised he's into someone like Alec."

Isabelle turns to glare at him. "Really, Jace? What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well—" Jace waves a hand at the pair of them. "Magnus is...all that. Alec's more...low-key."

Isabelle smiles, and leans her head against Jace's shoulder. "Yeah. He is. I think that's part of the reason Magnus likes him."

Jace wraps an arm around her shoulders, and kisses the top of her head. "Whatever it is, I like it. Magnus seems good for him. And he's patient with him. God knows things haven't been easy recently, but Alec... I don't know. He feels calmer. More settled. Less on edge."

"Yeah." She snuggles against Jace a little. "Yeah, he does."

"They're coming this way," Jace murmurs. "Shall we go find Clary and Lydia?"

Isabelle follows Alec and Magnus making their way through the crowd with her eyes. Magnus is leading him again, their hands linked, and it's obvious that Alec can't take his eyes off the warlock. Not that Isabelle blames him—Magnus is gorgeous, and he's dressed to impress.

Lydia's face flashes through her mind, and, unbidden, she remembers what Lydia said to her.

_I like you, Isabelle. And I forgive you._

"Come on," Jace says, straightening up and offering Isabelle his arm with a lopsided grin on his face. "Let's leave them to it. I wouldn't want to interrupt, if Alec is finally pulling his head out of his ass. Maybe you'll have more luck convincing Lydia to dance than Clary did."

Isabelle doubts it, somehow, but she takes Jace's arm anyway. Just for once in her life, she wishes something could be simple.

But then she catches sight of Magnus and Alec smiling at each other as though nothing else in the world matters, and she thinks that maybe some things are.

And she swears to herself that irrespective of anything else, she's not going to let circumstance fuck things up for Alec. Not any longer. She's going to fight the Clave with her bare hands before they can even try to force Alec to kill the man he's falling in love with.

***

"Pulled your head out of your ass, Shadowhunter?" Maia asks, sharply, when Magnus approaches the bar with Alec in tow.

Alec swallows. "Maia, I'm sorry. I didn't-- I'd never thought about it like that. I don't think I really understand, what we do to you and why it makes you so desperate. But I'd like to."

Maia purses her lips. "Apology accepted. Drink, Magnus?"

"I'll have a margarita," Magnus says, leaning one hip against the bar and sending Maia a lazy smile. "Alec?"
Alec considers asking for something non-alcoholic, because he's probably had enough for one night-it's more than he's ever drunk in one period, ever-but then he registers that Magnus' hand is still wrapped around his, and he thinks that he might need a top-up, if he's going to survive the rest of the night.

"I, um." He looks across at Magnus. "What was that thing you gave me, once?"

"Port?" Magnus raises an eyebrow. "Oh, no, I know what you mean. A Manhattan, please, my lovely Maia."

Maia rolls her eyes. "You're such a flirt, Magnus. And your friends are just as bad. It's a good thing you're paying me so much for tonight. Do you know how many times I've been hit on?"

Magnus smiles. "I apologise for their poor behaviour. If I need to perform any castrations, let me know."

Maia shakes her head, lips twitching. "No. You got this one away from moping at the bar, that'll do."

Magnus glances over at him, smile not diminishing, and Alec finds himself drowning in the depths of Magnus' slitted pupils, gold-green irises glistening like halos around them, enchanting every cell in Alec's body.

But it's not some demonic mark of seduction. It's just Magnus.

"Here you go," Maia says, sliding two glasses towards them. "Enjoy."

Alec breaks his gaze away from Magnus', not without effort, and turns to take his drink and thank Maia, their hands dropping as they both reach forward. He glances back over at Magnus, and finds the warlock already watching him, that same small smile still on his lips.

He's fucking beautiful.

It's the only thought Alec can get through his stupid head. Magnus Bane is beautiful, and he's not smiling at anyone else, he hasn't been dancing with anyone else, he isn't holding hands with anyone else—he's doing all that with Alec.

"You're really pretty," Alec blurts out, because, apparently, being slightly drunk dissolves his brain-to-mouth filter.

Fuck.

He feels himself flush the moment the words are out, and Magnus' face goes blank in surprise, lips parting. Alec busies himself with taking a sip of his drink, instead. He's fairly sure it tastes of whiskey, and it's sweet, but not overpoweringly so. It's nice. If a little...red. It's a nice distraction from his sheer idiocy.

Then soft laughter meets his ears, and he looks up to find Magnus watching him as though—

"Thank you," he says, a smile on his face and something gentle in his eyes. "You're very pretty too, angel."

Oh.

That's new. Alec's been called handsome before, by his parents and by other adult Shadowhunters when he was younger, but never by anybody he's been...interested in. And never pretty. Male
Shadowhunters aren't really allowed to be pretty. It's not considered masculine enough. But from Magnus, it makes his stomach flutter.

"Hey." Magnus ducks his head to catch Alec's gaze more fully. "You okay?"

"I'm good. Where, um. Where does Chairman Meow hide, while all this is going on? Does he go somewhere else?"

"He tends to hide behind closed doors," Magnus says, dragging a finger around the rim of his glass but not breaking his gaze away from Alec's eyes. "Why don't we go and have a look?"

The idea is awfully appealing - getting away from the plethora of sticky, writhing bodies and the excruciatingly loud music with that thudding bass drum - but Alec doesn't want to take Magnus away from something that he clearly enjoys.

"It's okay," Alec says. "I wouldn't want you to miss out. It is your party, after all."

"No." Magnus straights up from where he's been leaning against the bar, and turns away, already walking through the crowd, swaying his hips in a way that tugs Alec's attention downwards, as he turns to call over his shoulder, "I think I want to find my cat, in the company of the prettiest boy in the room."

Alec's brain revolts at that description, because Magnus is in the room, for Raziel's sake, but he can't stop himself following, as though Magnus is a magnet that he's eternally attracted to.

It's like chasing an elusive ghost, following Magnus through the crowds. Without their hands joined, Alec has to push past people and crane his neck and utilise every last drop of his agility rune to successfully follow Magnus through to a door—his bedroom door, Alec realises.

By the time Alec reaches him, Magnus is already inside, and he's got the Chairman cradled in his arms, petting the cat and murmuring to him. His eyelashes are swept down, almost brushing the sharp edges of his cheekbones, and the line of his mouth is soft, relaxed. Kissable. Alec takes a moment to simply stare, leaning back against the door once he closes it behind him, because Raziel, Magnus Bane is so beautiful.

In more ways than the obvious.

Magnus glances up. Alec knows that there's a quip, a snarky comment, on the tip of his tongue, because there's that glint in his eyes that he always seems to get when he's about to make that sort of comment. But it disappears after a mere moment, and instead he steps towards Alec, the Chairman purring contentedly against his chest while Magnus scratches at his fur absently.

"Alec," he says, a look of concern on his face, "you know you don't have to be here, don't you? If this makes you uncomfortable—"

"Magnus, stop."

Alec shakes his head in frustration, taking a step forwards, towards the warlock, so he's away from the door. Like this, standing up straight, he's a few inches taller than Magnus. The height difference only really notices when they're this close.

"I'm not—" He makes a noise of annoyance in the back of his throat when he can't find the words, and takes a breath before he tries again. "I'm not some innocent kid who needs protecting."

"I know, Alec, I—"
"Then why do you always do this?" Alec asks, softening his voice. "You're always so considerate, it's— I'm not afraid of you. Not like that. If I were uncomfortable, I wouldn't be here. I know what I want."

Magnus raises his eyebrows just as the Chairman leaps from his arms, dropping onto the floor and disappearing into Magnus' en suite.

"And what is it that you want?" Magnus asks, voice low as he moves closer, so there's a mere handful of inches between their faces.

"You're doing it again," Alec whispers, while he tries, desperately, not to let his eyes stray from Magnus'. If they do, he knows they'll fix on Magnus' lips. "You're testing me, or trying to make me nervous, or something. You don't need to."

Fingers brush against his forehead as Magnus reaches up to push Alec's hair back. It's not a practical movement: Alec's fringe isn't quite in his eyes, and it flops back down the moment Magnus finishes brushing it back. It's...affectionate, Alec thinks. The kind of thing he might do to Max, or his mother might do to him. But...different, somehow.

It's puzzling, and confusing, and feels unlike anything Alec's ever felt—much like every emotion he experiences around Magnus. Beyond that, it lights something warm in Alec's chest, and he has the horrible urge to lean into the touch.

Magnus drops his hand, letting it slide over the curve of Alec's shoulder and down to rest on his bicep. His eyes flicker, down and near-instantly back up again, and Alec freezes. Did Magnus just—?

"Don't I?"

"No," Alec breaths, and shakes his head in a tiny motion. "No, you don't."

"And why—" Magnus' eyes dip again, and this time, it's unmistakable, and it makes Alec's heart hammer against his chest, anticipation and desire flooding through him "—is that?"

"Because I trust you," Alec tells him, and he lifts a hand, fingers just flitting against Magnus' side before dropping down again. "And I like you, and I'm not scared of you. Not like that. I know you're powerful, and I know you could devastate the city with a snap of your fingers, but I also know that you won't. Because you're not like that. Not unless something's at stake. You're a good person. You're an incredibly good person."

Their gazes are locked, and Magnus is staring up at him in wonder, eyes wide and jaw slack, and he shakes his head, not moving his hand from where it's still resting lightly on Alec's arm.

"Alec," he whispers, searching the Shadowhunter's face as though looking for something that might explain the impossible enigma Alec is apparently presenting him with.

"Why have you started calling me that? You never call me Alec."

Magnus shrugs. "Your sister said that nobody calls you Alexander. I presumed that meant you didn't like it."

Astonished, Alec huffs out a little laugh, and shakes his head. "Don't you think I'd have said something by now if I hated it so much?"

"Hate is a strong word."
"Magnus." Alec lifts a hand, and brushes his thumb against Magnus' cheek, where glitter from his eyeshadow has fallen in a perfectly imperfect little circle. "I don't mind you calling me that. It's...it's just what you do. It's a you thing."

"Alexander," Magnus whispers, something desperate, something almost pleading, in his voice.

Alec doesn't realise that he's had his eyes fixed on Magnus' mouth until he glances up to see that Magnus' gaze is locked down below his eyes, too. Magnus is the most beautiful man he's ever had the privilege of seeing.

And he's staring at Alec like he's the wonder in the room.

Fuck, he wants to kiss him. He wants to kiss Magnus Bane. The skin of his jaw is warm against Alec's palm, and they're close enough to feel the heat rolling off each other, to feel the pounding of each other's hearts, and Alec has his chin angled down a little, head tilting to one side without conscious thought.

"Alexander," Magnus murmurs again, this time so lowly it barely disturbs the air, but Alec hears him, because they're so close. He can smell the citrus of Magnus' drink on his breath, and he slides his fingers back to tilt Magnus' head up as their eyes just begin to flutter closed, and—

"Alec!"

Isabelle's voice cuts through the air. Alec screws his eyes shut, a breath leaving him suddenly as the tension in the room shatters, and the real world comes crashing back around them like an icy shower after too long in the sun.

Magnus leans back, clearly planning on putting a vast amount of space between them to accommodate for Alec's closeted status, but Alec doesn't let go of him, dropping the hand on his jaw to his shoulder, and resting the other lightly on his hip in a sober imitation of how they'd been dancing, earlier. His fingers are light enough to let Magnus step back is he wants to, but firm enough to communicate that he wants him to stay close. He knows Isabelle doesn't care, and he's fairly sure she knows about this, anyway.

She probably worked it all out before he did.

"We've got to go," she says, and she has the decency to sound apologetic, but the tone of her voice is just slightly harried. "Mom just called. The Institute—they're under attack. We need to go. Max is there, and—"

Alec's eyes snap open at that. Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. The Institute is under attack, his family, his little brother, is in danger, and he's at a Downworld party, a mere moment away from kissing the High Warlock of Brooklyn. He shouldn't be here, he should be doing his job, he should be protecting his family—

Fuck.

"Shit," he says, turning to look over his shoulder at Isabelle. He relaxes his hold on Magnus, but he doesn't let go. Not yet. Not when he feels like Magnus' hand on his arm might be the only thing grounding him and stopping him flying off into self-deprecating hysterics in his head. "I'm coming."

"Alright. Lydia's looking for Jace and Clary, we'll meet you outside."

He hears the click of her heels as she jogs away, and he turns back to Magnus. Magnus is curling his fingers lightly into the sleeve of Alec's shirt, worry - for what, Alec doesn't know - plastered across
his face, brow furrowed anxiously.

The urge to reassure Magnus that this isn't an embarrassing drunken moment that he never wants to speak of again grips him. It's not. He's not that drunk. He's drunk enough to feel the effects, and he's perfectly certain that he'd never have leant down to kiss Magnus and would never have said such things perfectly sober, but he's far from out of his mind.

In lieu of a real kiss, he leans in and presses his lips to the elegant arch of Magnus' cheekbone, letting the touch linger for several long seconds. Magnus tilts his head into the contact, and Magnus' free hand rests on his forearm.

When he pulls back just slightly, he lets his mouth brush Magnus' skin as he whispers, "I'm sorry."

He feels Magnus' eyelashes flutter against his cheek, and Magnus' grip on his arms tightens. They're close enough for Alec to feel Magnus' heart thudding, rapid and heavy against his chest. It's intimate, and closer than Alec's ever dared to hope he'd be to any man—let alone Magnus Bane.

"Be careful," Magnus murmurs, turning his head so that his cheek rests against Alec's, their hair brushing together. "Please, angel, be careful."

"I'm always careful," Alec says, chest tightening, and Magnus pulls back, eyes searching Alec's with a desperation that Alec doesn't understand.

At last, he shifts back, loosening his grip. "Go on. Go. Get out. And for god's sake, call me. I want to know you're okay."

"Promise," Alec says, inclining his head. He holds Magnus' gaze for just a moment longer, and then he turns, before anything can persuade him to stay.

"Alexander!"

Alec pauses at the door, hand resting on the handle, and he glances over his shoulder at the man who's haunted his dreams in the best and worst way for so many weeks. "Yeah?"

"If you need help, call me. I'll be there."

Alec shakes his head. "You can't come to the Institute. We'll be fine. Just- just enjoy all this, or whatever. This is our job. We've got it."

"If you do any more wing acrobatics, I swear—"

"I won't," Alec says, with a little laugh that eases the tight band of worry around his lungs. "I've got to go. I'll text you."

"Stay safe, Alexander."

And, with that, Alec slips out of the door, pulling it shut behind him, and makes his way through all the people entirely ignorant to the battle waging a mere few miles away, out towards his siblings and his friends.

Because by the Angel, he isn't going to let anybody, not even Valentine, hurt his family. He's good at his job. He's a leader. They're going to kill whatever has infiltrated the Institute, and then—

Then, Alec is going to come back, and he's going to kiss Magnus Bane.
Yeah, that just happened! ;)

I hope you enjoyed the chapter, even if it (probably) made you scream in frustration. (And also, for all of you worrying about all the stupid things Alec might do drunk -- not too bad, right?!)

If any of you live tweeted, thank you so much! And as always, I'd love to hear what you thought down in the comments, and I'll reply to as many as I can!

If you like, come follow me on Tumblr! I am still taking prompts, but it might take me a little while to get to them.

Much love,
Lu <3
It takes Magnus several moments to find the sense of mind to move.

He's caught in his head as he stares at the space where Alec disappeared from. The memory of Alec so close to him, eyes fixated on his lips, hot breath washing across his skin, is so sharp in his mind it's almost tangible.

In a split second of weakness, Magnus lifts his hand to his face, brushing fingertips across where Alec's lips touched his cheek in a kiss so soft and so tender it could only be described as a caress. His eyelids flutter closed, and he exhales. He can't remember the last time somebody got under his skin quite like this—so intensely, but in such a good way.

Well. He can. And perhaps that's what terrifies him.

But, right now, he knows he can't stand around in his bedroom and reminisce. The Institute is under attack from Valentine, which means every Shadowhunter in New York is in danger. Including Alec, but also, more urgently, Clary. He knows Alec can look after himself. But Clary hasn't even passed all her exams.

He has to call Luke.

He clicks his fingers once to sound-proof the room, because he really doesn't need his guests overhearing this, and then slides his phone out of his pocket.

"Magnus?" Luke's voice comes through the speaker gruffly, as though he's just woken up. A quick glance at the clock shows that it's long past midnight. "What's going on?"

"The Institute is under attack," Magnus says. "Right now. I'm assuming Clary isn't going to call you and say anything, but they're all going to be there, and they're all going to be in danger."

"What?" Luke's voice is clear, and Magnus can hear the rustling of sheets as Luke gets out of bed. "How do you know this? Tell me you're not at the Institute, Magnus, they'll kill you."
'No, of course I'm not.' Even if that's exactly where he wants to be, to defend those in the younger generation of Shadowhunters he's come to care about, despite the fact that he doesn't give a rat's ass about what happens to the rest of them. "But I thought you'd want to know. I'm throwing a party. I invited some of them. Isabelle, Jace, Clary, Alexander, their Clave envoy—"

"You invited a Clave envoy to a party?" Luke demands. "Magnus, what the hell are you thinking? Have you forgotten that you're being actively hunted?"

"I'm being hunted by Alexander," Magnus reminds him. "And, apparently, he's convinced said Clave envoy that I'm not a heinous monster who deserves to rot in hell for all eternity."

"When I'm done ripping out Valentine's intestines, we need to discuss your lack of self-preservation tactics." Magnus hears the sound of a door being ripped open, the handle smacking against plaster. "I'm going to grab the pack and get over there. I'm supposed to be their ally, and if Clary's in danger —"

"She'll be fine, Luke," Magnus says, quickly. "She's with Jace and Isabelle and Alec. Jace especially isn't going to let anything happen to her."

Luke makes a strangled noise in the back of his throat. "They're good kids," he admits. "I don't like Maryse and Robert, but their kids give me hope."

The sight of Alec grinning flashes through Magnus' mind, and he smiles a small smile as he remembers Alec's most recent letter. I think you're the best man I've ever met...

"Me too," he says, a little wistfully. "Be careful. And Luke, please—"

"I'll look out for Alec," Luke says, before Magnus can voice his urgent desire to ensure that Alec isn't harmed.

He doesn't even know how disastrous this attack is. The Institute could be burning, its inhabitants could be dead, and Valentine could have raised his proverbial flag up onto the rafters. Or there could just be a single Forsaken that's managed to get through the wards.

But the panic in Isabelle's voice when she'd burst into the room and called Alec's name...

"Look out for all of them," Magnus says, and drags a hand over his face. "God, I want to be there."

"You can't be," Luke says, not unkindly. "I promise I'll do my best, Magnus, but I've got to go now."

And, feeling more helpless than he has for decades, Magnus stares at his phone screen when Luke disconnects the call, wondering how in the world he's allowed himself to come to care so much for the children of people who murdered his friends and persecuted his people.

***

When Alec reaches the Institute with his siblings, all of them clattering down onto the pavement from flight in their haste, too rushed to activate any more runes than the essentials, it's like the world is burning.

The Institute is alight. Flames are licking up its walls, casting eerie shadows in the darkness as sizzling timbers fall from the roof with crashes that make the ground beneath their feet tremble. It's a picture of tragedy painted against the obsidian background of the nighttime, devastatingly beautiful beneath glittering stars that hang overhead, peering down at the destruction.
"Holy shit," Clary breaths, eyes wide. Alec glances over at her, and sees the fires reflected in her pupils, her lips parted, horror and wonder spread across her face in equal proportions.

It's a gorgeous tableau of ruthless chaos, the fires lighting up the stain glass, causing colour to splatter across the ground. They're all of them enraptured by the sight. But it's their home, broken and flawed and ruined as Alec knows it is, and people they love are inside.

He can hear screaming. He prays it's not Max. Not Raj. Not his mother.

"We have to go in," Alec says, grabbing Jace's shoulder and a stele to activate his parabatai's fireproof rune, while the others turn to activate their own runes and Jace tugs at Alec's sleeve. The rune won't stop them burning to a crisp if they walk straight through the fires, but it'll protect them against the heat.

The moment Alec steps over the threshold, flames trying to catch onto his gear as he leads the team with Jace at his shoulder, there's a roar, and a Forsaken appears in their path.

Clary shouts, but Alec has an arrow released and embedded in the creature's eye before the sound can die. It staggars, but it doesn't fall, and Alec barely has the chance to share an astounded look with Jace before it's on them again.

"Izzy, get Clary out of here!" Jace hollers as he shoves Alec sideways before the Forsaken can land a blow, rolling after him quickly. "Find Maryse!"

Alec slashes at the Forsaken's legs with a seraph blade, but it merely turns its head and spits. He spins the blade in his grip, so the tip faces himself, and brings the hilt across the creature's face, again and again, quickly brushing and battering its nose.

It screams, reeling back, and Alec's seraph blade clatters to the floor as Alec jumps up, wings flaring out to shoot him up to the high Institute ceiling. He catches onto the chandelier overhead where Jace is already poised, eyes flashing as he watches the progress of his parabatai. Jace grabs Alec's free hand, the friction of their gloves stopping Alec slipping back to the floor the moment the propulsion of the single beat of his wings runs out.

Wings tucked tight into his sides, Alec lets go of the chandelier, and snaps off one of the ornate candelabras. His shoulder wrenches as Jace takes his weight, and he swings, right in time to scratch the uneven edge of the metal of the broken chandelier across the Forsaken's face.

Viscous black blood oozes out of the wound, dripping from its eye socket and pooling at its lips. Jace lets go of his hand. Alec lands in a crouch beyond the Forsaken, almost back by the front door, right by where he'd tossed his seraph blade before he jumped up.

He turns, sweeping up his fallen weapon with his wings spread wide, and raises it, ready to cut the creature in two. But Jace is already there, hovering in the air, plunging his blade into the Forsaken's neck. Blood spurts out of its jugular, painting across Jace's gear and feathers, and the Forsaken roars at him, swiping Jace across the chest. Jace lands halfway across the entry hall, skidding across the stone floors, narrowly missing a burning chair with his wingtip.

"Jace!" Alec shouts, and the creature spins, clearly about to attack him too, but it freezes suddenly. It reaches up to pluck the seraph blade from its neck, stares, and then its knees flood, and it falls to the floor, dead.

"Jace," Alec says again, rushing to his parabatai's side, but someone is already there, crouched over, a stele in hand as runes are burnt into Jace's skin. Iratzes, energy runes, stamina runes...
"Alec," his mother says, relief clear in her voice as she looks up. She presses the stele into Alec's hand immediately. "Help him. The runes from his parabatai are stronger."

Alec does, but he can feel that Jace is okay. He's breathing, he's alive, and as Alec pulls away his jacket to activate another healing rune, he coughs, eyelids fluttering before he sits bolt upright. Alec ducks to avoid being hit in the face with Jace's wing.

"Shit," Jace hisses, rolling his shoulder, and then blinks when he sees Maryse. "What the hell is going on?"

"Valentine," Maryse says grimly. "He's not here, but he's sent half his forces. And they're not...natural."

"We know," Alec says, and Jace nods as he sits up, looking better by the minute. "That Forsaken wouldn't die."

Maryse shakes her head, and, to Alec's shock, she leans forward and presses a kiss to first Jace's forehead, and then his own. Her hair is pulled up in its signature, scraped-back style, but strands have escaped, and are falling around her face. Clearly, the attack took the Institute by surprise—she's still in a blouse and a skirt, and she's barefoot, as though she hadn't had enough time to find a pair of flat shoes. Fighting in heels is more Izzy's style.

"Where did Lydia go?" Alec asks, suddenly, realising that she's not here. "We told Izzy and Clary to go, but—"

"I don't think she'd have let Izzy go on her own without fully trained backup," Jace says, and jumps up onto his feet. "We have to find them. Mom, where is everyone?"

"I don't know," she says, and bites her lip. "I was in my office when people started screaming. Raj was trying to control the Ops Centre, and without you three here—" Alec sees her lips tremble, but she shakes her head, hauling herself back together instantly. "We've done our best. But Valentine must have employed a warlock, because the Institute, it just lit up. Things exploded and fires appeared out of nowhere, simultaneously."

"Where the hell is Dad?" Alec asks. "And where's Max? Is he okay?"

"He's fine," says a voice behind them, and Alec turns to see Max's hand clutched in Clary's. Max's wings have jumped free, apparently too frightened to override his instinctual fight-or-flight (literally) response. "But his room was burning. I didn't know where else to—"

"Alec," Max says, and lets go of Clary to barrel into him.

"Max, Max, it's okay," Alec says, because there isn't time, not now, for comfort. Not when everyone could die in a mere moment. He wraps an arm tight around Max's shoulders. "Come on. I need you to hold together, okay?" He looks up at Clary, and purses his lips. "Where did Izzy and Lydia go?"

"The Ops Centre," Clary says. "I think that's where the battle's raging. And also—" She drags a hand through the fire consuming the charcoaled chairs beside her. Jace flinches next to Alec, reaching out to her with one hand reflexively.

But when Clary removes her hand from the scorching flames, her skin is untouched, blister free, smooth and unblemished.

"It's warlock fire," she says. "It's not real. If you know it won't hurt you, it won't."

"Not now," Alec says, straightening up out of his crouch while he fights down the urge to snap at his mother that, actually, the Downworlders he's come to know in the last months are some of the best people he's ever met. "Max, I want you to stay with Clary." It's killing two birds with one stone, getting the two most untrained people out of the firing line. He fixes Clary with a sharp stare. "Don't attack. Don't antagonise. Defend yourselves, but don't go looking for trouble. Hide, if you have to. Understand?"

Clary nods sharply. "Max, come on."

Alec turns to his mother and parabatai. "Ops Centre. Now."

***

The Ops Centre is a breeding ground of death.

Not even the fire can cover the stench of overheated, decaying bodies lying around the stations. Computer screens are cracked, glass covering the floor in a fine sheen, and Alec glances across at his mother's bare feet.

But she, he reminds himself with considerable bitterness, has been in this war for far longer than he has. And she learnt from the best Shadowhunter of her generation. She learnt from Valentine, when she was in the fucking Circle. She's grabbing at a dead woman before Alec can blink, tearing off her shoes and gear jacket without mercy, unconcerned at wearing a dead woman's clothing.

Alec looks away in time to see Lydia standing balanced on Isabelle's shoulders with her wings tucked tight into her sides to decrease the amount of vulnerable bodily area that the demons can target, physically ripping off a Forsaken's head with her bare hands and tossing it into one of the fires. She somersaults down gracefully.

"Alec! Jace!" Raj hollers from across the room, where he's locked in a battle with a demon that has to be six times the size of an ordinary Drevak. "Look behind you!"

Alec whirls, just as a whip whistles past his ear to wrap around the neck of a Moloch demon, yanking it away from the rest of the group. The demon screams, folding in on itself as Lydia slices a seraph blade across it.

"For an Idris girl, you're not bad at this," Jace says, not looking at Lydia, already palming a seraph blade in one hand and a throwing knife in the other. There are another seven demons behind, all with the same semi-corporeal, liquid appendages in place of their legs, and shrunken, ruined faces that have always reminded Alec of half-decomposed corpses.

Alec knows his bow isn't useful in close-range combat, so he kicks up off the wall, flipping back over Jace's head to land on one of the consoles in the middle of the room. He knocks an arrow against his bow, and exhales as he shoots the first demon, firing off another six arrows in rapid succession.

But the demons, like the Forsaken, don't die.

One screams, launching itself at Lydia, and only Maryse stepping in front of her and flicking a double-ended blade through its sternum prevents another tragedy.

"This is insane," Isabelle shours. "What the hell has Valentine been feeding these things?"
"Or the Downworlders," Maryse snarls, as she ducks a blow from a stray Eidolon demon. "Brooklyn's supposed High Warlock, that vile monster Bane—"

"Enough!" Alec hollers, and tries not to let himself be so consumed by rage that he becomes distracted from the battle. "It doesn't matter! Not now!"

Just as Isabelle dispatches the last of the Moloch demons, and he hear the slick sound of Raj withdrawing his blade from the Drevak with an audible sigh of relief, a small figure appears in the doorway. Alec's heart leaps into his throat when he recognises Max, and he freezes. What the hell is his little brother doing in here?

But then he sees Clary in front of him, two blades raised in front of her. Fear flashes across her face, but she's covering Max as she backs away from—

Fuck.

"Well," hisses the demon, with a broad grin as he surveys them all. "Isn't this a delightful little gathering?"

Every Shadowhunter in the room is frozen, staring at the writhing mass of smoke and oil that's walking through their door. Moloch. The Greater Demon, who commands the lesser demons that are his namesake.

"Don't look so frightened," he says, with a laugh. "Valentine sends his regards. As does Iris. Delightful woman."

Maryse's lip curls, and Alec feels his own stomach swoop with guilt at the resentment for the Downworlders that builds inside him. They've done this. A warlock has let this happen. A warlock has worked with Valentine to achieve such chaotic, meaningless destruction. People lay dead around him with their guts and blood slicking the floor, and a warlock has let it happen.

But it's not all warlocks, he reminds himself, tightening his grip on his blade. It's not all warlocks, and it's not all Downworlders. It's not even most. It's not nearly most. It's a handful, who have a right to be pissed, anyway.

And he can think of five Downworlders, just off the top of his head, who would be repulsed by the sight of so many dead people, no matter their race. There are horrible people in every niche and corner of humanity. There are horrible Shadowhunters, horrible Downworlders, horrible mundanes—their race is irrelevant.

He repeats it to himself, twice, because he knows it's true, and he won't let himself be hauled back into such a close-minded mindset. Not after all he's been exposed to. The voice in his head sounds exactly like Magnus.

"What?" Moloch laughs. "Cat got your tongues? No witty comebacks from the Nephilim? No futile attacks? Tut tut." He clucks his tongue, but with his swirling, almost-gaseous form, it sounds more like the hiss that results from water being flicked on boiling coals. "I'm almost disappointed. I suppose that makes it easier to—"

A snarl, unlike any Alec has heard all day, meets their ears, and an enormous dark mass boulders at Moloch. The Greater Demon snarls as a werewolf rips through him, dispersing part of him through the air before he reforms across the room.

"What in the name of Raziel is a Downworlder doing in the Institute?" Maryse demands, fury written into every line of her face, but they ignore her.
"Luke?" Clary breaths, as the werewolf circles, still snarling, and moves to stand in front of her, hackles raised. "It is you. How did you know?"

Alec doesn't know why she's bothering to ask. He's fairly sure he knows, anyway. The only other person who knew about this attack who might have told the leader of the biggest werewolf pack in New York is Magnus.

Luke gives Clary an affectionate swipe of his tail before he leaps forwards, snapping his teeth as he sails over Jace and Alec's heads to roll right through Moloch this time.

When the demon reforms, his face is set, all amusement disappearing from his features, just as two more wolves appear at the door, moving to flank Luke.

"I am a Greater Demon," Moloch spits, smokey tendrils of fires jetting through the air. "Mortals will not harm me."

Abruptly, Jace is standing beside Alec, teeth barred and weapons held aloft. "Try murdering my family and my friends again," he growls. "We're going to blast you back to hell."

Moloch sneers. "Oh, the arrogance of the Nephilim."

With that, he dissolves, appearing around the wolves, and he wraps himself around one of them, smoke tightening until the werewolf is choking, collapsed onto its belly.

Adrenaline surges through Alec, and he jumps, snatching a blade from Jace's belt as he catapults thorough the air, slicing through Moloch, wings beating harshly to blow his atoms through the room.

The wolf is still for a moment, before it picks itself up, shaking its fur like a dog coming out of water. Alec almost smiles at the disgruntled look in its face, and, abruptly, he feels like he recognises the brown eyes, set with anger and determination.

"Maia?" he asks, eyebrows shooting up, and she kicks at him lightly with a paw.

Maybe their alliance with Luke and his pack wasn't such a bad idea, after all.

But Moloch is reforming, and he dances out the way of Izzy's whip and then Lydia's throwing knife, appearing behind Jace. Jace lands a blow to the demon's face, but Moloch is by Clary and Max in a moment, and, before any of them can move, he plunges a hand into Max's chest.

"Max!" Alec screams, while Isabelle and Maryse make similar sounds of distress. Only Maia and the third unknown wolf leaping in front of him stop Alec running forward, and he clenches his jaw.

"He's not just here to kill us," Lydia says, voice strained, holding back Isabelle. "He's here to taunt us. He's a Greater Demon. Don't give into his games."

"Games?" Alec spits. "He just——"

He looks back over at Max, whose eyes are rolling back in his head. The smoky nature of Moloch means he hasn't just ripped through Max's flesh, he's infected him, done something, because Max's veins are turning to liquid gold, sparking like forks of lightning as the demon withdraws his hand.

Moloch grins round at them. "Who shall I target next, for the most destruction?"

He peers round at them all, and then his eyes fix on Jace. Alec stills, every function in his body pausing as he takes in the smirking, predatory look Moloch is fixing Jace with.
"Friend, brother, son," he says, tilting his head to one side. His eyes fix on Jace's parabatai rune. "Parabatai. Boyfriend to the girl? Friend to the Downworlders, too?"

Jace grits his teeth. "You're not getting inside my head."

"Oh, my dear boy." Moloch lets out a delicate little laugh, and it sounds like the dripping of hot oil. "I don't need to get inside your head to know how loved you are. The innocent--" he doesn't even spare Max a glance, where he's on the floor, clutched in Clary's lap "--was obvious. You, I think, will be a nice addition."

With that, Moloch disappears, and, almost instantaneously, reappears, warping his form to wrap itself around Jace. He grips Jace's throat before Jace can kick out, and smoke floods out of Jace's nostrils. He chokes; Alec's parabatai rune throbs.

"Come on, child of the angels," Moloch hisses. "Give in. Your father will be so pleased to see you."

"Valentine is not my father," Jace gasps, as Alec catches Luke and Isabelle's gazes. A look from Luke, and Maia and Lydia both step back slightly, loosening their grips on Alec and Isabelle as they communicate, silently, as only siblings can.

"No?" Moloch's form expands, until he flicks a grossly elongated finger against Clary's cheek. "Perhaps I should just kill you and take this one instead. Valentine longs to be reacquainted."

"Fuck you," Clary spits, slashing a knife through Moloch's smoky finger, and, despite himself, Alec feels a flash of pride.

"Ouch," Moloch says, pouting, one hand still wrapped around Jace's throat, slowly replacing the air in his lungs and the oxygen in his veins with smoke, while Jace chokes and writhes. Alec has to look away before he's sick.

The wolf that Alec knows is Luke - bigger than the other two, his fur a dark umber colour - pads up silently onto the table directly behind Moloch, and jerks his chin to the right. Isabelle understands, eyes flashing with rage as she curls her fingers tighter around her whip.

Luke rears up, front paws slamming into Moloch's back and tossing him to the right. The Greater Demon is caught by surprise, reforming almost immediately in the direction Luke tossed him—

And Isabelle is there, whip cracking with deadly precision, flinging him across the room as the smoke begins to lose its ability to reform, and the oil begins to move sluggishly, lacking the energy required to hold Moloch's form together.

Alec's bow is held steadily against his arm, and Luke lands the other side of Jace, crashing into and wrecking the computers on the table, just in time for Alec to let three arrows fly.

Moloch screams at the arrows hit him near instantaneously, another two whooshing through the pitiful curls of smoke that try to regroup. The scattered smoke begins to disperse as he tries desperately to haul his form back together, to make himself semi-corporeal again rather than mere atoms in the air.

Alec drags his stele over one of his arrows, activating the fire rune, and the tip lights up. The arrow soars through the air, catching on an oil droplet, and the meagre remains of Moloch flare up. For just a moment, the air burns as the volatile oil flames.

And then, fuel gone, the fire extinguishes itself, and all that's left of the Greater Demon is the lingering stench of burnt oil.
The sound of Jace coughing hauls them all out of their frozen staring. Alec's parabatai clutches at the edge of the table he's sprawled on, head hanging over as he dry-heaves, body trying to reverse whatever Moloch did to him.

Alec is torn, as Isabelle flings herself down by Max lying limp in Clary's arms, between which brother to go to first. Luke stands by Jace, eyes fixed on him as though...

Well. As though - even if only because he knows what Jace means to Clary - he's protecting him.

"I'm fine," Jace gasps, when he sees Alec lingering, hesitant. "I'm fine, I'm fine."

Alec's parabatai bond feels strong, steady, stable like it hadn't when Moloch had his hand around Jace's throat, but it's fizzing, hissing, restless. So Alec drops everything in his hands, stops by Jace, and hauls him off the table and to his feet.

"Okay?" Alec asks, as he slings one of Jace's arms over his shoulders. Their bond seems to settle with the physical contact, and Alec's restless mind eases a little, slowing enough to become clear.

"I really fine," Jace says, but he leans into Alec and clutches at the material of his jacket. "Max—"

"I know," Alec says, already easing Jace to the ground as they both fall to their knees beside their little brother.

"I don't know what to do," Maryse says, looking up at Alec and Jace with panic in her eyes. "The healing runes— They're not working, I—"

"Let me try," Alec says, taking his mother's stele to sear healing rune after healing rune into Max's near-unmarked skin. He's only had his first rune for a few months. He's ten years old.

He can't die. Alec won't let him.

"I called the Silent Brothers," Lydia says, while Isabelle clutches at Jace's hand, both their knuckles white. "They said there have been attacks in other cities, and in other countries, but that they'll come when they can."

"There isn't time for that," Alec says, abruptly, tossing the stele back at his mother. And, whatever her emotional state, she catches it cleanly. "Iz, can you grab my bow?"

Isabelle flies up into the air, apparently as unwilling as everybody else is to walk through all the dead bodies, and scoops up everything Alec dropped when he dashed for Jace.

"Here." Raj's voice is quiet as he slides several arrows back into the quiver still strapped to Alec's back. "Alec—"

"Not now," Alec says through gritted teeth. "Thanks, Iz."

"Alec."

Maryse's voice is shaky, but her jaw is clenched and her eyes are dark, full of icy rage. She looks, in that moment, so very nearly like Isabelle, full of passion and feeling and emotion. But whereas Isabelle explodes in burning flames, Maryse is trapped, frozen and repressed behind walls of ice that are too transparent to truly mask the storm brewing beneath.

"What are you doing?" she demands, when Alec slips an arm under Max's shoulders and another
under his knees. "Alec, what in Raziel's name are you doing?"

Alec lifts his little brother, whose eyes are still rolling and whose veins still look like rivers of magma, and fixes his mother with a blank stare. "What do you think I'm doing? I'm taking Max to someone who can help him."

"You can't just fly to the City of Bones and demand to see a Silent Brother," Maryse says, standing. "There might not even be anyone there!"

He doesn't bother correcting her. "Watch me," he says, coldly, and then he's in the air, because flying is less jarring than running, and he won't let Max be in any more pain.

Jace's hand wrapping around Maryse's arm is all that stops his mother coming after him.

***

Magnus lunges across his apartment when his phone buzzes, Isabelle Lightwood's name flashing up on the screen. He pauses for just a moment before answering. Why on earth is Isabelle calling him? Why isn't Luke calling him?

Is Luke hurt? He's never going to forgive himself if Luke is hurt from a battle he was only in because Magnus alerted him to it.

"Isabelle?" he says, when he answers. "What's—"

"It's me, Magnus," comes Luke's deep, gravelling voice, warm and rich and soothing. Magnus exhales a little. "My phone got fried. Literally. I need to brief you on this attack. And someone needs to arrest Iris. I'll get on it, unless you've got objections."

"She helped Valentine?" Magnus asks, horror pulsing through him. He'd visited Iris, after Cirrus had first come to him and reported that she'd fed him lies. He'd warned her about poor trade, and dishonest business. How hadn't he noticed that something was more wrong than the norm?

"Warlock fire," Luke says, grimly. "It's fading, now, but it looked like the Institute was going to burn to ashes. And plenty of the Shadowhunters didn't realise what it was. Some are waking up now. But a lot of them died. Valentine sent Forsaken and demons way beyond the ordinary, and Moloch paid us a visit."

Magnus' heart is thudding against his ribs, hammering arrhythmically. It's so much to take in. It's too much to take in. And he knows, logically, that it's because of who's there, and who was caught in the crossfire, and that on a normal day he'd process Luke's words instantly.

But it's not a normal day. And it's not a normal battle.

"Are they alright?" Magnus asks, and he manages to force his voice into something that resembles a vague sense of decorum. "Clary, and Jace, and Isabelle, and...?" He trails off.

"They're fine," Luke says, shortly. "Clary's traumatised by her first real battle and Jace is vomiting Moloch's remains out in the bathroom, but they'll be fine. I took Maia and Alaric, and we've all been kicked out by Maryse. She's not happy. Iris' involvement only seems to have fuelled her hatred and her prejudice. Magnus—"

"The others?" Magnus asks, feeling desperation claw at him. "Lydia, and—Alec?"

He hadn't wanted to say the name, because he'd known that his voice would break the moment he
did. It makes Luke pause, and his answer comes painfully slowly.

"They're both unharmed, to my knowledge," Luke says, and relief floods through Magnus so forcefully he collapses into a chair, uncaring of the debris from his party that he has yet to finish cleaning up. "But Magnus, the little boy, the Lightwoods' youngest—Moloch did something to him. Whatever he was doing to Jace stopped, once we killed him, but this..."

Magnus sat up straight. "Max?" he asks, and fear pulses through him - fear for Alexander, because he knows, painfully well, how much Alec cares for all his siblings, and how entirely it would break him if any of them were to be incurably wounded - quickly followed by concern for a child so young. "What kind of something?"

"I don't know exactly, but—"

The buzzer to Magnus' apartment goes off, and Magnus makes a noise of frustration in the back of his throat. He tells Luke that he'll call him back, and then forces himself up off the sofa. He buzzes whoever it is up without question, because his wards don't detect danger, but familiarity, and footsteps thunder up the stairs.

He opens the door, and the sight that greets him makes him freeze.

Alexander stares up at him from where he's on the floor, a shivering, convulsing boy in his arms. The boy is young, not more than twelve, Magnus would guess, and his veins, quite literally, are flooded with fire.

Magnus can't help scanning over every inch of Alec that he can see, cataloguing every cut and bruise and tear in his clothing and reassuring himself that Alec is fine, he's fine, he's not hurt. But his little brother...

His little brother looks an inch from death, and sheer agony is written into Alec's face.

"Please," Alec whispers, and his voice is so broken and so desperate it makes Magnus' heart crack in two. "Please, help him."

Chapter End Notes

I would just like to defend myself and say that although, obviously, I stole Max getting mortally wounded from canon (book canon, that is) I did not intend for this week to be a double-whammy of Max-related angst! It's total coincidence that this chapter happened to line up with this week's episode, so I'm sorry!!

I know this chapter wasn't particularly Malec heavy, but I hope you enjoyed it anyway, and I think you guys might like next chapter. I dunnno. Just a guess!

Also, side note, the warlock fire Clary describes, I am like 99% certain I stole that idea from a film -- anybody who's less useless than me know what film it was?!

As always, let me know what you think, and if you like, come follow me on Tumblr! (Come cry about Malec or send me prompts -- I'll get through them eventually!)

Much love (particularly to anyone in a country who's had a shitty time of it this week - Venezuela, America, the Philippines, anyone affected by the flash floods and forest
fires, I hope you're hanging in there)

Lu <3
Alec can't fight down his terror as he gazes up at Magnus from the floor, Max cradled in his arms —dying. Magnus has to help him. He has to. He'll pay, he'll pay anything and everything, he'll pay with his wings or his bow or his own damn life, but Max can't die.

"Come on, come in," Magnus says, and relief hits him.

As Alec straightens up with Max held close to his chest, he realises that Magnus is dressed as though he'd been about to go to bed. He's in a robe, make-up gone from his face and hair down, washed, free of product and a little bit fluffy, as though it's been towel-dried but no more.

"Here." Magnus snaps his fingers, cleaning everything off his sofa and laying a white linen sheet over it. "Put him there."

"Can you help him?" Alec asks, hovering a few feet away with his wings pulled tight into his back.

Magnus is peering down at Max, peeling back his eyelids and pressing fingers against his neck. He shoves Max's sleeve up, examining the veins in his wrist and their path up his arm.

"I don't know," Magnus says, dropping Max's arm, and Alec doesn't think he's ever heard words that terrify him more. Magnus always knows. Magnus knows everything. He's the High Warlock of Brooklyn, he's arguably the most powerful warlock in all of America, and he creates spells and potions as a hobby in his free time.

He has to know.

Magnus is no longer by Max's side, and Alec drops to his knees at the end of Magnus' sofa, by Max's feet. Magnus is rummaging through the jars and bottles and boxes on his shelves, clearly looking for something specific, and items appear magically on the coffee table.

"There's a pestle and mortar sitting in the kitchen on the draining board," Magnus says, while picking leaves from a box. "Go and get it, and then start peeling that ginger root."
Alec has a feeling he's being given jobs to distract him, because he's fairly sure Magnus could do both of those things instantly with a wave of his hand. But he doesn't argue. He appreciates it.

"What's this for?" Alec asks, a minute later as he's peeling the ginger and Magnus is adding careful quantities of various ingredients into a bowl.

"If I get this out of his system, he's going to be sick in the morning," Magnus tells him, snapping his fingers over the glutinous liquid in the bowl. Blue swirls around the bowl, and its contents bubble. "The ginger will make him feel less nauseous, and kick his immune system up a notch."

Alec pauses. "Like, old mundane medicine?"

"This might surprise you, but the health benefits have been extensively researched. Mundanes are not entirely stupid."

Alec doesn't argue. Hands trembling, he continues, peeling rhythmically while Magnus steps towards Max with the contents of the bowl, and sets it on the arm of the sofa. He snaps his fingers, blue sparks cracking in the air, and runs a hand along the length of Max's body, fingers twitching and fluttering in the air.

Max gasps when Magnus' magic begins leaking down, into his skin, eyes rolling back in his head. He arches up off the sofa, and Alec drops the ginger and finds himself on the other side of the sofa. He leans over the back, one hand reaching down to Max's sweaty hair, and he looks up at Magnus in terror.

"Help him," he begs. "Please, Magnus, help him."

"I'm doing my best," Magnus says, brow furrowed in concentration. "Greater Demons are tricky creatures."

He drops his hands, magic dissipating, and picks up the potion still bubbling lightly in the bowl. It's gentling to a fizz as Magnus stirs, and it smells like cardamom oil; it's a soft, sunset pink in colour that belies the severity of its purpose.

"Tilt his head back," Magnus says, "and hold him still."

Alec does as he's told, rounding the sofa so he's at Max's head. He presses one knee into the cushions, bracing one arm over Max's chest and holding the side of his head simultaneously as gently and firmly as he can.

Magnus' eyes are unglamoured, flashing and sparking with magic as he places the bowl at Max's lips, tipping the potion down his throat slowly. For a moment, there's nothing, and Alec's eyes dart over Max's body, where his veins are still bright, filled with fire and glowing through his skin, the wound at his chest still seeping blood everywhere.

Then Max's eyes shoot open, and his lips part in a wordless scream. His irises have turned the colour of thick petrol, resembling Moloch's oily form, and it's all Alec can take in before Max begins to thrash.

Blue sparks at Magnus' fingertips, and he spreads his hands wide, fingers steady as his magic flows into Max. Alec grips his little brother, his throat tight with fear as though Moloch had tried to strangle him, not Jace.

"Come on, Max," Magnus murmurs, as every piece of glass in the loft begins to rattle, ornaments wavering precariously on the edges of tables and countertops. The bottles set on Magnus' bar clink
together, and a crystal bottle of whiskey shatters, liquid spraying everywhere.

Alec's heart is pounding against his ribs as magic pours from Magnus' hands, as though a dam has been breached. He's chanting in a language Alec has never heard, sweat beading on his brow, and Alec can feel the sheer power radiating off of him.

Raziel, he can see why people fear Magnus. And he knows this is a mere fraction of the full ferocity of his magic that lingers beneath the surface. He can't tear his eyes away from Magnus, from the elegant lines and curves of his body, the way he glides his weight slowly, steadily, from one foot to the other, stance wide as though to balance himself against the chaos his magic is causing.

He's powerful, and he's beautiful, and he's making Alec breathless.

Alec wonders how hard Magnus has worked to cultivate such a mass of raw, writhing power into something like this—focused, contained, able to heal rather than escaping in destructive, defensive whirlwinds. He wonders who taught him. Ragnor Fell, perhaps? He wonders how many other warlocks Magnus has taught the same things.

Magnus' chanting becomes louder, and his magic crescendos, items clattering to the floor around them as sparks zip off Magnus' fingers, rebounding off walls and causing wind to flood through the loft out of nowhere.

And then Max gasps, stilling in Alec's arms, eyes wide and his back bowed in a perfect arch. Golden rivers of fiery magic seem to rise out of his veins and evaporate off into the air like a thousand shimmering dust mites made of polished metal, glinting in the light.

Magnus claps his hands, and they explode in the air in a roar of blue flames. Alec stares, entranced by the sight.

Then Max starts convulsing.

"Magnus," Alec says, panicked, as Max's eyes roll back in his head, eyelids fluttering restlessly, foam forming at the corners of his mouth as though he's been poisoned. "Magnus—"

But Magnus' fingers are already pressed against Max's chest, where Moloch had plunged a hand through his ribs and straight to his heart to sink his curse deep into Max's body. Swirls of blue glow around Magnus' hands like smoke, untouchable and ethereal. The magic sweeps along Max's body like a caress, and, as it falls into his skin, disappearing, Max falls limp in Alec's arms, head lolling against his elbow. The pulse in his wrist is heavy and rhythmic against Alec's fingers.

Magnus snaps his fingers once more as he straightens up, the blood disappearing from Max and the sofa as well as from himself and Magnus.

"Thank you," Alec says, shifting his grip on his brother so he can cradle Max in his lap, feeling his chest rising and falling steadily under his hand. He strokes the fingers of his other hand slowly through the feathers of Max's exposed wings. "Raziel, thank you."

Magnus smiles at him tiredly, already bending to pick up a fallen book. "You're welcome."

"I—" Alec looks down at Max to reassure himself that he's really okay, that he'll be fine, that Moloch hasn't left any lasting damage, and then he stands, resting Max's head on the pillows. "Let me tidy up. And tell me how much I owe you."

Magnus' eyebrows shoot up. "You don't owe me anything."
"Bullshit," Alec says, and Magnus blinks. "This is your job. You get paid for it. It's not like the Institute can't afford it. I can't send it straight to you, obviously, but—"

"I'll ask Catarina Loss to send your mother a bill," Magnus says, pursing his lips a little. "If you insist."

Alec nods, and feels a wave of vertigo hit him. He sways a little on the spot, reaching up to clutch at his head as it pounds, and swallows a moan of discomfort. By the Angel, what's wrong with him? Max is the one who nearly died. Magnus is the one who's just used a considerable amount of magic to fix a curse in a mere few minutes that the Silent Brothers would have been hard pressed to cure at all. He's got no such excuses for feeling like this. He should be fine.

"Hey." When Alec opens his eyes, Magnus is watching him with his eyebrows drawn together, and he's considerably closer than he was a moment ago. He's got one hand hovering by Alec's forearm, reaching out but clearly wary of touching. Why, Alec can't imagine. "Are you alright?"

Magnus is in a robe, Alec registers. A red silk robe that barely reaches his knees, and his hair is fluffy, free of product, going wildly in every direction, and he looks like he stepped out of the shower thirty minutes ago. Alec is hit by the hysterical urge to laugh. The High Warlock of Brooklyn and Magnus Bane have just clashed so dramatically—casting powerful spells in his fucking bathrobe.

"What happened to your head?" Magnus asks, lifting a hand to brush the skin to one side of Alec's eye. The touch stings, makes his face throb, and Alec flinches, realising that the area is cut and bruised. "Did you get hit in the face?"

"I—don't remember," Alec admits. "It happened so fast, it's all a blur."

"Hm." Magnus studies Alec's face for another moment, eyebrows furrowed, then says, "Go and clean up in the bathroom. If that still hurts in the morning, or you still feel dizzy, tell me. Or find a Silent Brother. Head injuries aren't things to be scoffed at."

"Alright." Alec clears his throat. "Thank you. We can- We can go, when I'm done. We'll get out of your way. I can glamour us and fly, it's how I got here. It only takes a few minutes."

"Oh, no, I really don't think so." Magnus shakes his head, determination flashing in his eyes. "You're not going anywhere tonight except to bed. I'm not letting your brother leave until I'm certain my magic has got rid of every last atom of Moloch's influence. And you look like you're about to pass out. I wouldn't trust you to fly yourself home, let alone Max, too."

His eyes flit across Magnus' face, and he forces himself not to glance down at his lips. This evening, he'd almost kissed Magnus. He'd wanted to. God, he still does. But without the alcohol riddling his brain, he can't help but think that perhaps he'd been a little too arrogant about the whole thing. He'd wanted to assure Magnus that it wasn't a drunken mistake—but what if that's exactly what it had been for Magnus?

After all, what, exactly, could Magnus possibly see in someone like Alec - a Shadowhunter, a Nephilim, a part of the institution that slanders his name and slaughters his people - that he'd find attractive?

"I'm going to put your brother in my guest room," Magnus says, leaving no room for Alec to argue. He has a feeling that he'll lose any debate he has with Magnus over this. "And my bed is at your disposal. Providing you're not a blanket-hogger."
Alec stills, chest tightening when Magnus' words sink into his foggy brain. "I– It's fine. I can...sleep out here. I don't need to...impose on you."

Magnus shakes his head. "Alexander, I like you, I trust you, and you nearly kissed me six hours ago. You do not need to sleep on the couch, unless you are wildly uncomfortable with sharing a bed. But I assure you, I can keep myself to myself. My bed is enormous. And very comfortable."

Memories of earlier assault him, and he feels his stomach churn and his chest tighten. Magnus' breath hot on his cheek, the feeling of his skin under his fingertips, standing close enough to feel Magnus' heart hammering against his ribs just like Alec's had been...

He wishes there were something in Magnus' voice that would clue him into how Magnus feels about it. But his tone is flat, factual, stating rather than feeling, the words hanging in the air, charged but elusive.

Fuck it. He has to know. He has to say something about it.

"I wish I had kissed you," Alec murmurs, eyes dipping to the floor, while his heart thuds, hard and heavy against his chest, nervousness clawing at him.

Warm fingers cup his cheek. Skin sliding against skin sets Alec's nerve endings alight, and he feels goosebumps spread down his neck. The absence of the smooth metal of Magnus' rings is noticeable, and Alec wonders when the touch of the High Warlock of Brooklyn became so familiar to him.

"I wish you had, too," Magnus says, voice soft.

Heart skipping a beat, Alec's eyes snap up to his, searching his gaze for some evidence that Alec should be distrustful, that his words aren't as simple as face-value would imply. "Really?"

"Yes, sweetheart, really." Magnus leans in and brushes his mouth against Alec's cheek, a mere breath away from the corner of his lips, and Alec shivers. Magnus stays close, nose and lips and eyelashes caressing Alec's skin as he murmurs, "Really. Because then I could kiss you now."

Magnus pulls back far enough to meet his gaze. Alec's breaths are shaky, cracking and catching a little when he reaches out to clutch at Magnus' elbow, keeping him close. Close enough to share body heat, and for their breaths to intermingle, because the thought of Magnus moving away makes his heart physically hurt.

"Why can't you?" Alec whispers raggedly.

Magnus' smile is small, sad, as his gaze drops behind Alec to the sofa, where Max is lying, safe and healed but unconscious. "Because I don't want to kiss you for the first time when your brother nearly died, after a battle that devastated your home and your family, when you're half-delirious from exhaustion and I'm not exactly full of energy myself."

The hand still resting on Alec's jaw shifts a little, and a thumb strokes along the length of his cheekbone, up to just below the bruise by his eye. The tenderness of the touch makes Alec's breath hitch, and his eyes flutter closed, leaning into Magnus' hand. Warmth spreads through him, radiating out from the single point of contact.

"Come on," Magnus says, his voice quiet in the silence of the loft at night. He drops his hand, and Alec feels cold. "Clean up, then sleep. I don't want any more unconscious Nephilim in my house that need watching. One is plenty."

"Magnus."
Alec catches Magnus' bicep as he turns, and Magnus' eyes fixate on where Alec is holding his arm before they flicker up to his face, uncertainty flashing across his face. He's caught Magnus unaware, he realises—Magnus doesn't know what he's going to do.

"I just—"

He can't finish the sentence. He doesn't know how to. So instead, he pulls Magnus into him, wrapping his arms around his torso and dropping his head onto his shoulder. And, finally, as Magnus' arms close around him and warm breath hits his neck, he feels himself relax. Only now, with Max fighting off any lingering aftereffects of the curse and Magnus warm and solid against him, does he feel like everything might just be okay.

What would the Alec Lightwood of three months ago have said, if he'd been told that his future self wouldn't feel safe after a battle until he's in the arms of the High Warlock of Brooklyn?

Reflexively, as though they're mere extensions of his limbs, his wings follow the lines of his arms, stretching out from where they're pulled in behind him back to curl around Magnus, close but not quite touching. He barely registers what he's doing. It's the kind of thing he might do with Izzy, or Max, or Jace, but not anybody else. It's an intimate gesture. Part affection, part protectiveness, part desire to be close, to connect.

To other people, to people outside of those closest to them - family, a long-term lover, friends more that just good - a Nephilim's wings are a private, untouchable phenomenon. Simultaneously delicate and powerful, they're seen by many Shadowhunters as a symbol of status and power—a gift from Raziel that marks them as superior.

And, of course, such a gift is the sort of thing that many angry, wronged Downworlders have wished to cut off and hang on their walls in revenge, like how Shadowhunters once collected warlock marks as common practise—except the Shadowhunters had done so essentially unprompted.

The Alec Lightwood of three months ago was genuinely concerned that Magnus had had the same fate in mind for his wings, when he'd healed him. And now, Alec's exposing himself in such a vulnerable manner, yet he's never felt safer.

Magnus tips his head up, and his goatee catches lightly at the skin of Alec's neck. "I'm surrounded by feathers."

Alec huffs out a laugh, because he knows it's a joke. He can feel Magnus' smile. "Sorry."

"No. It's...more than alright."

Alec wonders if Magnus knows how unusual it is, for Alec to have his wings so close to Magnus like this—almost close enough to brush against him. He wonders if such matters are common knowledge, amongst Downworlders, or whether they have more important things to worry about.

"Maybe I should call Jace," Alec mumbles against Magnus' shoulder; he tucks his face into the warlock's neck, and exhales slowly. "I didn't stay around to check that everyone was okay."

"Everyone is fine," Magnus says firmly, holding him tighter, thumb drawing circles into his shoulder. "Luke told me everyone is fine. And Max is going to be perfectly alright."

He pulls back a little at that, just so he can catch Magnus' eye. He drags his wings away, tight into his back, trying to ignore the embarrassment flooding through him at how inappropriate that was. "You know I'm not—I'm not here just because I want to...leech off your good will, right?"
Magnus raises his eyebrows. "You're here because your brother was dying, and you trusted me to do my best to help him. You trusted that I'd be able to. That seems perfectly reasonable to me. If I felt I was giving and giving to you and receiving nothing in return, I wouldn't keep doing it. I don't offer people things unless I want to. Honestly, Shadowhunter, I'm not a doormat. You don't have to feel guilty about asking for help and support." He pats Alec's uncut cheek condescendingly, and Alec glares at him. Magnus winks. "Now enough talk. Wash and sleep. You stink, and you look like you're about to pass out, which would be very inconvenient. I'm going to put Max in my guest room. Okay?"

Alec nods his consent. "Yeah. Thank you."

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Magnus has just finished carefully settling the still-unconscious Max into his guest room when his phone rings, glaringly loud in the quiet and darkness of the room. He sets a glass of water by Max's bed, and walks to the window to answer the phone.

"Isabelle," he says. "To what do I owe the pleasure of your call?"

When she speaks, Isabelle sounds breathless with worry. Magnus can hear a dog barking on the other end of the line, so he presumes that she's walked out of the Institute to call him, to avoid being overheard. "Magnus. It's Alec, he— Max was hurt, and he just took off with him, and now he's not answering his phone, and Luke thought maybe—"

"Luke was right," Magnus says, gently. "Your brothers are both here, and they'll both be fine."

"Max is going to be okay?" Isabelle asks.

"Absolutely."

"Oh, thank Raziel," she whispers. "Thank you. Thank you so much, Magnus, I—"

"That's quite alright," Magnus tells her. He likes Isabelle, and he knows - knows, and has inferred - that she hasn't had a particularly easy time as of late.

Isabelle says something, but there's a sudden gasp from behind him, and he whirls round to find Max awake, eyes wide and clutching at the sheets, terror written across his face as he stares at Magnus.

"Isabelle, my darling, I'm so glad you're alive and kicking, but I'm afraid I have to go," he says, and hangs up before she can reply.

He takes a step towards Max, hands raised with his palms forwards. "Max, it's okay, you're—"

"How do you know my name?" Max demands, and sits up a little straighter. "Who are you? Where am I? I was with Clary, where is she? What's going on?"

His posture is defensive, poised ready to take a swing at Magnus should he need to. There's something horribly sad about the picture—both the fact that a ten year old child thinks he needs to be prepared to physically defend himself against Magnus, and the fact that he knows how to.

"Hey, hey, it's alright, I'm not going to hurt you," Magnus assures him gently, with a small smile. "You were injured in the attack at the Institute. I healed you."

"How do you know about that? And how did I get here?"
"Your brother took you. He's here, he's just—"

"Why should I trust you?" Max clenches his teeth, fear and anger flashing in his eyes in equal measures. He's brave for a child, Magnus thinks. Too brave. "You're a warlock. How do I know you're not lying?"

Magnus closes his eyes for just a moment. He doesn't know why he's surprised at the way Max spits the word warlock as though it's a brand that marks him as something filthy, but he is. Perhaps he expected better, because all the other Lightwood children are so open-minded.

But Alexander wasn't, when they first met. And Max has probably met no more than a handful of Downworlders in his life. He's been exposed to the bigoted, hateful views of ex-Circle members, tempered only by comments from Isabelle, and, perhaps, Jace and Clary, which are eternally dismissed as the ludicrous rebellions of the younger generation.

"Alexander is here," Magnus says, keeping his voice level. "He's in the other room. I can get him in a moment."

Max narrows his eyes. "Nobody calls him that. You're lying."

"No, I—" Magnus takes a deep breath, and tampers down his growing frustration. Max is a child. He's scared, and he's in pain, and his immediate distrust of Magnus based on his species is not his fault. "Your brother has a scar on his eyebrow that he got from training with Jace. He insists it wasn't Jace's fault, but he makes excuses for the people he loves like it's his heavenly duty, so it probably was."

Max's eyes go wide, and Magnus sees him swallow. "You do know Alec."

"I do. I swear to you, Max, I'm not going to hurt you. Do you feel okay?"

Max looks horribly confused. "My chest hurts, but— You're a warlock, why does Alec—?"

A voice in the hallway interrupts them as Alec calls Magnus' name. He appears in the doorway a moment later, and relief floods across his face when he sees that Max is awake.

"Max," he says, and rushes over to his brother to wrap him in a hug. Max clings to him, fingers digging into Alec's shoulders, and Magnus has to look away. It feels too much like intruding upon a private moment.

The brothers are talking to each other quietly, Max shooting Magnus suspicious glances over Alec's shoulder while Alec soothes him, so Magnus steps out of the room, letting himself collapse onto the sofa. He snaps himself a glass of whiskey, and pulls open his chat with Isabelle to apologise for hanging up on her.

The feeling settling inside his chest is bitterness, he realises. Bitterness because a ten year old child actively distrusts him just because he's a warlock. He's become so used to Nephilim not looking at him like he's the dregs of the planet that he's forgotten that most do—adults and children alike. He's forgotten. He's been lulled into a false sense of security, by Alec and Isabelle and Clary, and even Jace and that Clave envoy, Lydia, who'd been clearly dubious about him and suspicious of every word he spoke, but unfailingly polite nonetheless. He's let himself forget that most Shadowhunters despise every fibre of his being. Most of them want him dead.

So much so that they've instructed Alexander to execute him.
Footsteps pad across the floor of the loft, soft and hesitant; Magnus glances over at Alec, and sends him a small smile. His wings are still out, pulled right into his back, and he's put on the sweatpants and t-shirt Magnus left him—the former too short and the latter a little looser at the shoulders than it is on Magnus.

"I'm sorry," Alec says, scratching at the back of his neck. "About— that."

"It's not your fault," Magnus says, and Alec shrugs.

"It is. I've been as much a part of the rhetoric telling Max that Downworlders aren't to be trusted as practically every other Shadowhunter in the world."

Setting his whiskey down, Magnus rises, and crosses to where Alec is standing, swaying dangerously in place.

"We're both too tired to have this conversation now," Magnus tells him. "And laying blame doesn't help anybody. All that matters right this moment is that Max is okay."

Alec frowns at him, eyes flickering across his face. "That's not true," he says. "Your feelings don't become irrelevant just because someone else is hurt."

"Alexander," Magnus says, shaking his head even as Alec's words make his heart ache. Never, in four centuries, would he ever have believed that he'd one day meet a Shadowhunter and be able to change his mind about Downworlders. "I've received far worse than a terrified child telling me they don't trust me because I'm a warlock."

"So?" Alec demands, folding his arms across his chest and staring Magnus down with a ferocity that causes Magnus' mind to scatter. "You shouldn't have. Not from my parents, not from me, not from anyone. Especially no Shadowhunter. You shouldn't be treated like you're lesser, because you're not."

"Alec." Magnus' voice rasps a little, and fuck, it's only the image of Alec at his door, terrified and desperate and covered in his little brother's blood that stops Magnus from leaning up and kissing him. "You have no idea—" He exhales, and closes his eyes to ground himself for a moment. "Is Max okay?"

"He's fine, I think," Alec says. One corner of his mouth curls into a humourless smirk. "He's asleep now. He said his chest aches, but I'd imagine that's fairly normal after having a demon rip through his ribcage."

"Fairly," Magnus agrees, but he's a little distracted by the way Alexander is shifting involuntarily, as though he's struggling to stay upright. "If you're happy your brother is alright, then I'm going to insist you go to bed, now."

And who in the world would dare argue with the High Warlock of Brooklyn?

***

Alec is perched on the edge of Magnus' bed when the man himself walks through the door, twenty minutes after he told Alec he wasn't allowed to stay awake a moment longer. He'd pulled his phone out to text Jace and Isabelle, to let them know that he and Max are alright, and then he'd gone to pick up his stele to rune away his wings, only to realise that they were aching and cramping far too much for that.

It hadn't quite felt like the acceptable course of action to sprawl out in someone else's bed with his
wings still on display, so he'd decided to just...wait.

"Alexander," Magnus says, a reprimand in his voice as he enters. "I'm fairly sure you should be asleep. You've been a moment from passing out since the second you came in."

Alec's lips quirk up. "I'm sorry. I just– You might...prefer me to sleep elsewhere."

Magnus rolls his eyes as he turns to his wardrobe so he has his back to Alec. "We had this conversation earlier, darling. Unless you don't want to sleep here because it makes you uncomfortable, there is no reason at all for you to force your frankly ludicrously long frame onto my five foot sofa."

Alec realises a moment too late that Magnus has undone his silky robe, and is about to drop it. He gets a flash of the smooth bronze skin that makes up Magnus' incredibly muscular back, broken only by the waistband of his briefs, before he averts his eyes, heart hammering against his chest.

It's not that he's being exposed to a half-naked man. He's seen plenty of men with most of their clothes off, in the infirmary and in the training room and ripping off shirts or pants in the middle of a mission to get at injuries that require urgent attention. Most of them don't set his heart racing. In fact, nobody has ever set his heart racing quite like this. It's that it's Magnus half-naked—Magnus, who's beautiful beyond any fantasy man Alec's most forbidden dreams could ever have imagined, and who admitted a mere hour or so ago that he wished Alec had kissed him.

"It's not that," Alec says, staring down at his hands rather than risk looking up at Magnus, and end up leering. He doesn't want to be creepy. Even though he's currently wondering whether Magnus' back would feel as smooth beneath his fingers as it looks, like silk laced over steel. "I've got twelve feet of extra limb. I can't rune away my wings, because I've exacerbated my back muscles too much, and—"

"I'm not at all bothered," Magnus assures him, and Alec feels the bed dip behind him as Magnus climbs on. "Nephilim wings are far from the most inconvenient bodily part that have shared a bed with me."

A chance glance over his shoulder provides Alec with the sight of Magnus wearing a t-shirt with 'best bi' picked out across the front in silver thread and a pair of boxers, so he lets himself meet Magnus' gaze properly.

"I could extend the bed," Magnus says, with a hum of consideration. "Perhaps—"

He snaps his fingers, and a line of blue flames licks up the side of the bed. They fan out, spreading in the direction of Magnus' en suite, dragging out Magnus' bed to extend it horizontally by four or five feet. Objects in its path - the nightstand, a discarded box of make-up, a haphazard pile of books on the floor - dart magically out of the way.

"There," Magnus says, apparently satisfied. He swings his legs out from underneath him and slips his toes beneath the sheets. "Be honoured. This is the first time I've ever willingly made concessions for a Shadowhunter."

Alec smiles briefly. "Thank you."

He turns, deciding that it's time to bite the proverbial bullet and fall asleep willingly before he's dragged over the edge and passes out in an inconvenient position. His head is swimming, temples pounding lightly as they have been for the last hour, and by the Angel, Magnus' bed is so soft.

A quiet, strangled noise that originates in the back of his throat escapes him as he sits fully on the bed
and reaches for the sheets. He's got his wings tucked into his back as he moves, and every muscle in his back screams in protest at each minute shift.

It's not uncommon, muscle pain after using his wings more than he's used to. They train in flight, of course, and train to improve their flight endurance, but he's flown to and from the Institute and Magnus' house three times, today, and he flew during the attack at the Institute, and he'd flown on morning patrol—

And he hasn't been training back up to full strength for long after he fell out of the sky all those months ago. He's a little out of practise. With the adrenaline finally fading out of his bloodstream after such a warm hug from Magnus and a hot, soothing shower, the pain is finally beginning to hit him.

"Are you alright?" Magnus asks, frowning as Alec hisses while lowering himself to the mattress. He's propping himself up on one elbow, surveying Alec as he shifts around.

"Fine," Alec says. "I overdid it. It happens. I'll be fine."

"Alexander, if you're hurt—"

"I'm not." He meets Magnus' gaze straight-on. "It's just muscle strain."

Magnus lips twitch upwards, and he moves to sit up. "Well, I can fix that. Take your shirt off, and turn around."

"You don't have to. You've used a lot of magic already."

"Alexander, you seem to be under some kind of misapprehension. I don't do things for you because I feel obliged to. I do them because I care about you, and because I want to. And that was at least an hour ago. I'm the High Warlock of Brooklyn. I'm more than fine."

Alec doesn't have the energy to argue; he moves as Magnus instructs him to, until he's sitting cross-legged, elbows on his knees with his head braced in his hands and his shirt in his lap, exhaustion beating against his skull like the thump of the bass drum in a club.

Magic crackles behind him, and the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end as he feels wisps brushing against his skin. A moment later, he feels Magnus' hands resting just below his neck, bare skin brushing bare skin tantalisingly.

Thumbs dig into his aching shoulder muscles, and a moan rips its way out of Alec's throat at how good it feels. The firm, circular motions are almost relieving enough on his sore body to distract him from the fact that Magnus has his hands on him like this, in such an intimate way.

Almost.

Magnus' hands massage down, into the grooves of his spine and each painful, knotted muscle he encounters. Alec feels tension bleed out of him slowly, Magnus' ministrations easing the discomfort settled deep within him with warm fingers and soothing breaths of magic that tickle across Alec's skin.

His hands reach the join between his back and wings, where skin melds into coarse scapular feathers. Alec's breath hitches at the touch, sensation rocketing through him, densely packed nerve-endings firing off at lightning speeds, and Magnus pauses.

"Would you rather I avoided your wings?" His voice is barely a murmur.
"It's okay," Alec says, before he can consider saying anything else.

Lit with smoky plumes of magic, Magnus' fingers brush against the base of his wings again, before shifting along, up a few inches. He hesitates.

"Can I—?"

"Yes."

He shouldn't. He should say no. He can count on one hand the people who have ever touched his wings, outside of medicinal purposes. His mother, Isabelle, Jace, and Max. And he's fairly certain that his mother hasn't done such a thing since he was younger than Max.

And like this? He's never been touched like this.

But Magnus' fingers are running through his feathers, smoothing them into place where they've been knocked about and crumpled during the battle and during flight. His breath leaves him in a heady rush, and he shivers as Magnus' careful sweeps become surer.

He's never felt anything like this in his life. Grooming each other's wings is a bonding habit, done between family, between the closest friends, between lovers. Certainly not between business acquaintances, or tentative friends, or whatever Alec has been trying to convince himself he and Magnus are.

This, Magnus' fingers straightening his primaries and his magic floating across his secondaries, is unlike anything he's felt with his siblings tidying up his feathers—or, indeed, when he's helped them with theirs.

This feels like a thousand tiny explosions everywhere Magnus' hands venture. Like a supernova erupts at every fleeting kiss of magic. Like his every nerve ending is a firework that Magnus' touch sets off, blazing into the sky in a bright spray of colour, blinding and beautiful and breathtaking.

It's making his heart stutter, his breaths turning ragged, blood singing and pulse racing, thrumming beneath his skin. He wants to shy away, because he shouldn't allow himself to feel like this, but he wants to lean into it, to melt under Magnus hands, because it feels so wonderful, warm and tender and intimate.

"Oops," Magnus whispers behind him, sounding a tad sheepish but not particularly apologetic. There's a shimmer above the nightstand in Alec's peripheries, and a grey-white feather lands on the polished wooden surface—one of Alec's.

"It happens all the time," Alec says, voice low. "Don't worry."

"I wasn't," Magnus replies, matching his tone in a way that sets something in the pit of Alec's stomach on fire. He's close, closer than Alec realised, and when he speaks, warm breath curls around Alec's ear. "Feel better?"

"Yeah. I— Yeah."

Magnus' hands run up the length of his back to his shoulders, and then he's being turned around, gently, until he's facing Magnus. Alec is sat with his legs sprawled sloppily beneath him, but Magnus is leaning back on his haunches, a deep-seated fire burning in his eyes, chest rising and falling deeply.

"I've never been drawn to the Nephilim's wings," Magnus says, eyes raking across Alec's, tracing the
paths his fingers just made. "They've always been used by your people as evidence of some kind of heavenly gift. An excuse for retribution the Clave considers its divine right. But you..." Magnus trails off, and snaps his eyes back to Alec's. "Even when you loathed me, you didn't see them like that. You didn't use them like that."

"They're just part of our anatomy," Alec replies, without thought. "They're not replicas of angel wings. Every depiction of angels we have shows their wings as something entirely different. My wings are no more angelic than any other cell in my body. And I'm just the same amount of angelic as Valentine and the Circle, which I've been aware of all my life. It's never seemed like a particularly wonderful attribute."

One side of Magnus' lips curl up, just enough for the corner of his eye to crinkle. "Your self-awareness does you favours," he says. "And you're beautiful."

Red stains Alec's cheeks, bleeding across his skin like ink spilling across thick paper, sinking into the fibres and spreading out, a river of crimson heat. "So are– God, Magnus, so are you."

A little laugh escapes him, gold-green irises shining in the low light of his bedroom. "Well, yes. I know." His expression softens, the teasing evaporating as he gazes at Alec with impossible tenderness. "Thank you, darling."

"I never thought I'd get to tell a man he's beautiful," Alec admits quietly, looking up at Magnus from beneath his eyelashes. "It's not– It's never been something I allow myself to think about. This."

"I know." The backs of Magnus' fingers brush his cheek. "I know."

Alec reaches up to catch Magnus' wrist before he can withdraw his hand, and leans into the warmth of his touch.

"Alexander," Magnus whispers, reaching up his free hand to run fingers through Alec's hair. "You're making this very difficult."

"Sorry."

"No, you're not," Magnus says, lips quirking upwards. "But we have to stop. Otherwise I am going to kiss you, and I'm not going to be happy about it."

"Isabelle told me once that no moment is ever perfect."

"Isabelle is right. Imperfections are often what make moments special. But not like this. Not with Max, and Moloch, and you being so delirious I'm not convinced you'll even remember this conversation in the morning."

Unbidden, his eyelashes dip and his eyes fix on Magnus' lips. He's not wearing any make-up - he hasn't been since Alec turned up at his door - but his lips look so soft, drawing his gaze and holding it captive.

"I'd remember kissing you."

Magnus makes a strangled noise in the back of his throat, closing his eyes for a moment as though to steady himself. When he reopens them, he's glaring at Alec; he kicks his shin lightly with the ball of his foot.

"Stop it," he says, with a huff of indignation. "You're being a manipulative little shit, and I will not stand for it."
Alec laughs. "My apologies."

After a rather exaggerated amount of huffing and humphing from Magnus, Alec finds himself lying stiffly in Magnus' bed on his stomach, wings folded up either side of him. He's got one arm tucked beneath the pillow, and he's turned his head away from Magnus in the darkness of his bedroom.

He can't quite relax. He's exhausted - he has been for hours - and his entire body hurts, although less than it did before Magnus' magical massage, but he can't let himself slip into sleep. He's too tense. His brain is too active, filled with thoughts about this being Magnus' bed, and Magnus' loft, and Magnus being right next to him in very limited clothing, having just touched his wings like—

"Alexander."

Magnus' voice comes as a mere whisper, and the sheets rustle before Alec feels a hand on his back, below where feathers meet flesh.

"Mm?"

Alec glances over, turning his head the other way on the pillow so he can face Magnus in the dark. He can make out only slitted golden pupils, but they're filled with mixed concern and amusement.

"You are allowed to relax, angel. Nobody is going to ambush you in your sleep. This loft is perfectly secure."

"I know. I'm sorry." It's a fact he's perfectly aware of, that Magnus' loft is safe—he wouldn't have left Max alone if he had any doubts as to its security.

He takes Magnus' proffered hand when it slips across the sheets, and sighs. "I suppose I just haven't slept in the same bed as someone else since I was a kid. Jace and I fall asleep in the same place mid-conversation, sometimes, but not...like this."

Not with someone I'm half-way to falling in love with, Alec thinks, and then freezes.

In love with?

Magnus doesn't reply, merely humming in acknowledgement. Instead, he slides his body forwards, closer to Alec's so that he's resting a mere few centimetres from Alec's curled wingtip, and brings their joined hands up in between them. His lips press against Alec's knuckles, lingering for a single golden moment that makes Alec's entire body hot.

It's...less awkward, Alec thinks, as Magnus settles their hands back on the bed, not relinquishing his hold, and closes his eyes, clearly settling in to sleep. He's separated from Magnus by the barrier of his wings - their bodies can't touch beyond their hands and feet unless Alec lifts up a wing and drapes it over Magnus, which he certainly won't be doing - but they're recognising the fact that they're sharing a bed.

It's with Magnus' fingers laced through his and the soft sound of Magnus' breaths filling his ears that sleep finally hauls him under, his aching body sinking into the mattress and his mind falling to rest at long last.

Chapter End Notes
Does this chapter speak for itself? I think it does.

I'm not totally sure what's going to be occurring in my world this time next week, so I /might/ have to skip a week and update chapter 27 in two weeks time. As soon as I know for certain whether or not I'll update next Thursday, I'll let you know on my Tumblr, so check in there over the next few days.

And if I don't upload FWW next week, I'm definitely uploading an extra part to my Celebrity!Magnus Cop!Alec AU in the next day or so.

Please excuse my shameless self-promotion, and let me know what you thought in the comments!

Much love,
Lu <3
The insistent buzz of magic wakes Magnus far too early in the morning. For a long moment, he lays in bed, groaning, with one arm slung over his eyes, wondering what on earth his magic is monitoring that's woken him up at such an ridiculous time. It's not even light outside.

It takes him several moments to force his eyes open, and when he does, it's to the fuzzy silhouette of a body sprawled out in bed beside him. Alec's chest is rising and falling steadily beneath the sheets, nose pressed into his arm, wings curved around his body like a barrier between himself and the outside world. His fingers are still resting a hairbreadth from Magnus', where they'd fallen asleep with their hands joined.

Something in Magnus wants to stay. He wants to card his fingers through Alec's unruly hair and watch the growing daylight filter through the curtains and spill across his back like glistening honey. He wants to witness Alec wake, slow and drowsy and dazed, to hear the low rasp of his voice in the morning. He wants to find out whether Alexander is a morning person, or whether he's monosyllabic before ten o'clock.

Unfortunately, he's all too aware of why he's being woken, his magic acting like an alarm to alert him to Max's transition into the land of the waking. He spares Alec, peaceful in the realm of slumber, a fleeting glance as he slips out of bed, tugging on a robe and waving his hand to summon himself a coffee.

Max Lightwood is awake when Magnus enters his room, having knocked and been bidden entrance. He's upright, wings - significantly smaller than Alec's, unruly where Alec's are carefully groomed, fluffy white where Alec's are silky and speckled with grey and faint streaks of silvery blue - twitching behind him in what Magnus interprets as nervousness. Not that he's particularly well acquainted with the subtleties of Nephilim wings.

"Good morning," Magnus says, with a soft smile that he hopes puts Max at least a little at ease.
"How are you feeling?"

Eventually, after teasing out of Max that he still feels sore, but otherwise alright, Magnus manages to coax the youngest Lightwood out of the bedroom and into the living room, where he offers him croissants or pancakes.

Max's face positively lights up at the mere mention of food. "Really?"

Magnus raises his eyebrows. "Is that not on the menu in the Institute? Shame." He tuts. "You should adopt a warlock parent. We don't abide by such silly rules about fun-policing."

Albeit involuntarily, Max looks like he's about to smile, when their conversation is interrupted by an obnoxiously loud purring noise. A jet of fur darts out from under a chair, shooting for Max and leaping up onto the sofa beside him. The Chairman sniffs at Max's legs, scrutinising him closely, before apparently deciding that he'll do as a pillow; he settles on Max's lap, and fixes Magnus with a distinctly unimpressed look. It's very unfair. It's hardly Magnus' fault that he's got a devastatingly attractive Shadowhunter in distress who needed to steal Chairman's sleeping spot for the night.

Max glances from the Chairman to Magnus and back again. "You have a cat?"

"Mmhm. He's called Chairman Meow. And I think he's upset with me because your brother stole his bed."

"He's sweet. We used to have a cat called Church, but he was really, really grumpy. Brother Zachariah stole him," Max says, stroking between the Chairman's ears. Magnus nearly laughs. Then Max looks up at him, eyes horribly earnest. "Can I have croissants? Please?"

It's not until an hour later, when Magnus is sorting through his emails and Max is entertaining himself watching TV while they wait for Alexander to wake, that Magnus realises he's got his eyes unglamoured, as he usually does in his home.

Max Lightwood looked straight into his demonic eyes, and didn't so much as flinch.

***

Isabelle can't remember the last time she saw so much destruction in one place. She's not sure she's ever seen anything so catastrophic—and this in her own home. In the one place in the world she's supposed to feel safe.

Nobody's slept. The sun is rising outside, shining through the stain glass and casting intricate pools of colourful incandescence across the stone floors. A new day has dawned, the world still spinning on its axis, and yet all around her is the stark reminder of the tragedy of the previous night.

She feels a hand on her arm, and turns towards Clary, who's dragging Simon with her by the hand. Clary looks exhausted. There's a cut on her cheek that nobody has helped her heal, but she's otherwise unharmed. It's a miracle, really, that they've come out as well as they have. Isabelle knows all too well that much of the thanks lays with Luke and the wolves who came with him.

"Did the wolves toss you out again, Simon?" Isabelle asks, summoning a tired smile to her face.

Simon shakes his head. "No. Magnus kicked everyone out pretty much as soon as you lot left. Raphael demanded to know what was going on, so I heard about it. I wanted to come and check you were all..."

Alive goes unsaid, but the word makes Isabelle's skin prickle with discomfort anyway, as Max's limp,
bloodied body cradled in Alec's arms flickers in her mind. Alec had texted her, and Magnus had texted her after she'd called, and she knows he's alright, but she can't help fearing how close her little brother came to death.

Like so many of her colleagues, dead on the floor of the Institute.

"If I can help," Simon says, uncharacteristically solemn, "let me know."

Isabelle doesn't flinch. "You could help Raj drag the bodies out back."

Simon's eyes widen almost imperceptibly, and she sees him glance at Clary. They appear to have one of those silent conversations that only people as close as siblings can have, and then Simon shrugs, jogging over to Raj. For once, Raj doesn't make a comment about a Downworlder being in the Institute. He merely gives Simon a tired, disinterested once-over, and continues his work without comment.

"Luke's going to arrest Iris Rouse," Clary says, quietly. "But I'm fairly sure they want to trial her by the Downworld Council, not by the Clave."

Isabelle exhales, and flexes her wings. She doesn't care. She doesn't care who punishes Iris. She just wants justice, without the Clave's inane and outdated rhetoric regarding the Downworlders.

"Have you got your stele?"

Clary replies in the affirmative, confusion clear on her face, and hands it to Isabelle when she asks. Isabelle takes Clary's chin between her fingers gently, and traces an iratze onto her cheek, before tossing the stele back at her.

"Thanks," Clary says. "I'm going to help the others clear up the Ops Centre. I think Lydia was looking for you."

Isabelle finds Lydia in her office, pouring over documents. She's too tired to feel resentment at the fact that Lydia is looking at papers and legalities when the rest of the Institute and several Downworlders are picking up the dead bodies of their friends.

"Isabelle," Lydia says, straightening when Isabelle walks in. "Are you alright?"

Isabelle shrugs. "Fine. You wanted to see me?"

"Not—" Lydia purses her lips. After setting a stack of papers down with a soft thud, she rounds the table, and comes to stand close enough for Isabelle to feel her breaths disturb the air. "I've received a bill from one Catarina Loss."

Isabelle raises her eyebrows. "Okay?"

"She's currently in England meeting with the High Warlock of London, but has historic associations with Warlock Bane, before he went into hiding," Lydia says, plainly. "And your brother has been miraculously healed from injuries inflicted by a Greater Demon. Might I presume that Alec did not go to the Silent City last night?"

"Raziel, Lydia, do we have to do this now?" Isabelle asks, dragging fingers through her tangled hair. "Ask Alec when he comes back. Call him now. I don't— I don't know what you want me to say."

"Hey." Lydia catches her hand, pulling it gently down from her hair, and Isabelle's heart stutters oddly, skin flooding with warmth. "It's okay. I understand why he would. But untoward relations..."
with Bane are only going to jeopardise this case, and—"

"It's too goddamn late for that," Isabelle snaps. "Untoward relations already exist."

"Alright." Lydia swallows visibly, and Isabelle can see that she wants to say something else, but she merely says, softly, "Alright."

"Make sure my mother doesn't see that bill," Isabelle says, as she turns to leave. "If she asks, which she won't, tell her Max saw Brother Zachariah. Alec doesn't need any more shit from her. Least of all for taking Max to the one person in the world who could help him."

She goes to slam the door behind her on her way out, but catches it with the heel of her hand at the last moment, and lets it slip shut with a soft click.

***

*Moonlight is pouring down over the balcony, liquid silver spilling across Magnus' bare back, making the sporadic flecks of glitter on his face glisten and shimmer like precious gems. He's smiling, eyes radiant and unglamoured, lips parting when he throws his head back and laughs, exposing the length of his neck to Alec's gaze.*

*Alec is smiling back. They're on a creamy wicker sofa, long enough for Alec to be sprawled out on his back, gazing up at Magnus above him as though Magnus' eyes hold every star in the vast night sky.*

"What are you thinking about?" Magnus asks, picking up Alec's hand to brush his lips across his knuckles.

"You," Alec says, the simplest answer in the world, and Magnus' smile becomes dazzling, so bright it almost hurts to look at.

"Good things?" Magnus leans down a little, until he's got his arms folded on Alec's chest and his chin propped on his hands, mischief glinting in his pupils.

A hand reaches up to tug through Magnus' hair, silky strands slipping through his fingers. "Always."

"Mmm. What kind of good things? Really good things?"

"Magnus," Alec chastises, laughing through the word. "You're shameless."

Still grinning, Magnus sits up again so he's hovering over Alec's thighs. "You love me."

"Somewhere deep down," Alec murmurs, and follows Magnus up, leaning on his palm to bring his face towards Magnus'. He brushes his nose against Magnus' cheek, eyelids fluttering closed as Magnus' breaths wash across his cheek, warm and tantalising in the cool summer air. "You're so beautiful."

"So is the moon," Magnus whispers, fingers coming up to cup Alec's cheek with the utmost care, "but I don't seem to notice it when I'm with you."

Alec would only need to tilt his head slightly to brush their mouths together, but he can hear something faintly in the background, distracting him, making him pause in his movements.

"Alexander," Magnus whispers, and Alec feels fingers in his hair, raking through in a slow rhythm. "Alexander, darling."
And the scene dissolves, Magnus disappearing beneath his hands, while he falls into deep, empty space, down and down and down in an endless chasm of black.

***

Despite his dream, Alec feels himself wake slowly. His eyelids flutter open, and screw immediately shut when he registers the bright sunlight streaming through the curtains. He's far too comfortable, he thinks, on such a soft mattress with such silky sheets and—

Oh. Magnus. He's at Magnus' loft.

"Hey," says a voice to his left, and Alec blinks his eyes open, staring at the figure beside the bed blearily. "Good morning, sweetheart. Just about."

Alec's brow furrows as he realises that it's Magnus by the bed, fully dressed with his hair styled and his make-up painted intricately across his face, armour and fashion and sheer beauty all in one.

"Hi," Alec rasps. "What time is it?"

"Half past eleven," Magnus tells him. "I only woke you because you hit your head yesterday. I wanted to make sure you've still got all your faculties."

"Not around you," Alec says, and then flushes bright red when Magnus laughs, and he realises he's spoken aloud.

"My my, Alexander, flirting," Magnus says, with a wink that absolutely doesn't make Alec's heart thud double-time. "You are adventurous in the mornings."

"Shut up," Alec mumbles, sitting up. He scrubs a hand across his eyes. "How's Max?"

"As good as can be expected. I'm sure he'll be back to normal in a few days. He's playing with my cat. You Lightwoods and cats. I've got no hope of retaining prime position in the Chairman's life."

Alec smiles a little, ducking his chin to hide how charmed he is by Magnus' huffy complaints about his fluffy companion.

"Come here," Magnus says, extending a hand towards Alec. Alec acquiesces, and lets Magnus tug him up off the bed and in towards him. Fingers rest on his temple, and he feels the tingling warmth of magic flooding through him, chasing away a headache he hadn't realised he had. "Better?"

"Yeah." Alec tries - really, he does - not to look at Magnus' lips, but it's an impossible task. He wants to kiss this man so much it almost hurts. "Thank you."

Magnus' hand slides up from his temple to swipe his hair back off his forehead, the touch saturated with tenderness, slitted pupils following the movement. Alec can't look away from Magnus' face. He wants to kiss him. He wants to feel the suppleness of Magnus' lips against his, he wants to feel hot breaths hitting his jaw, he wants to map the shape of Magnus' mouth with his tongue.

But he wants more than that. He wants to cradle Magnus' face in his palms and trace over every line and plane of his face with his fingertips. He wants to press their foreheads together, kiss his nose, his forehead, the spot that creases when he frowns. He wants to drag his lips along the sharp line of Magnus' jaw to his ear, and whisper everything Magnus makes him feel. He wants to press his mouth to every inch of his face, until they're both breathless with laughter, and then he wants to lose himself in kisses and drown in Magnus' touch.
He doesn't realise how close they are, or that he's staring at Magnus' mouth, until Magnus whispers warningly, "Alec."

Alec closes his eyes, pulling back abruptly. "I'm sorry."

Magnus shakes his head, a small smile on his lips, but he doesn't say anything further. Instead, he steps away, out of Alec's grasp, leaving cold air in his wake. "There are some clothes in the bathroom. I think they'll fit."

A smile flits across Magnus' mouth, but it doesn't sit quite right on his face. It doesn't look...honest. Not entirely. But Alec doesn't have the chance to say anything, because Magnus is already slipping out of the room, leaving Alec alone.

***

It only takes Alec a few minutes to dress and rune away his wings, while he ponders Magnus' abrupt exit. Had he said something inappropriate? Was he being too forward about just how much he wants Magnus? Had it made Magnus uncomfortable?

But all that disappears the moment he steps out of the bedroom, and sees Max on the sofa, chatting to Magnus while he strokes Chairman Meow absently. Nothing in his body language suggests that he's in pain, and he looks—

By the Angel, he looks fine. He looks healthy. He looks perfectly healed, even his energy seeming rejuvenated.

"Alec!" Max says, when he spots his brother standing still behind the sofas. "God, you've been asleep for hours."

Alec shakes his head. "Hello to you too, Max."

Max grins cheekily as Alec makes his way over, sitting down beside him while being mindful of the sleeping cat between them.

"How do you feel?" Alec asks, lifting a hand to Max's forehead. "You feel okay?"

Max's eye roll is so hard Alec wonders it doesn't make him dizzy, and then realises that it's probably a rather hypocritical thing to think. Izzy's always saying that Max gets his eye-rolling abilities from Alec.

"I'm fine," Max says, giving Alec the kind of look that suggests he considers the question obsolete. "Do you think Magnus would just be sitting there doing— doing whatever it is he's doing, if I were sitting here in agonising pain?"

Alec raises his eyebrows at Max's apparent goodwill towards Magnus. Max has had even less exposure to the Downworld than Alec had, before he met Magnus, and he's fairly sure Max has been just as indoctrinated by the Clave and their parents as he had been.

"The curse is all gone," Magnus says, before Alec has a chance to bring the subject up. "You're welcome to bring him back in a few days if you'd like me to check anything, but you can consider yourself discharged and medically fit, Mr Lightwood."

Max gives Magnus a deadpan, unimpressed look. "Are all warlocks this dramatic?"

Alec chokes on a laugh, while Magnus leans forwards, playful sparks flying from his fingertips as he...
waves a hand. "Oh, no. I'm just particularly fabulous."

Max snickers; a faint smile crosses Alec's face, but he's too busy trying to clamp down on the suffocating rush of affection that overcomes him. Magnus earning his brother's seal of approval, and smirking and playing carelessly with his magic, eyes gleaming—

Maybe the Alec in his dream had been right. Maybe he is falling in love with Magnus, somewhere deep down in layers of his heart he thought he'd barricaded. He's spent so many years trying to sterilise himself, to prevent any planted seeds of desire and romance and love germinating, and yet here he is, heart blooming, so overgrown with affection for this man that he doesn't know what to do with himself.

He shouldn't. Nothing's changed. He shouldn't let himself do this. He shouldn't let himself fall in any deeper. But every time he tries to stop, he feels like he's drowning. This, whatever this is, with Magnus, isn't like an addiction that he needs to stave off tremors and sweats and hallucinations. It's like oxygen, clean and sweet and healing. Trying to cut himself off from Magnus, emotionally, had only led to heartache.

And it hadn't worked at all. He'd just fallen apart in the training room when Lydia told him of his mission.

By the Angel, he shouldn't. There are so many reasons he shouldn't. The Clave, and his family, and the Institute, and the fact that he's supposed to be hunting Magnus, just off the top of his head.

But he wants to. Oh, god, he wants to. He wants Magnus. He wants to fall in love with Magnus. And then he wants to shout to the world that he's utterly, stupidly gone for the High Warlock of Brooklyn.

"We can go," Alec says, hauling himself out of his thoughts before he has a meltdown in Magnus' living room. "Get out of your way. You must have clients."

"A few," Magnus says, inclining his head. "But in the aftermath of a party, I tend to limit my workload where possible. Luckily for you."

Alec smiles faintly. "Thank you, Magnus. I'll make sure Lydia pays that bill."

Magnus looks like he wants to say something to that, but Max interrupts, rising up off the sofa to tap the stele Alec has shoved in the pocket of his jeans. He's fairly sure they're not Magnus', because they're long enough, but he's equally certain that they're not his.

"Can you rune away my wings?" Max asks, and, to Alec's hesitant expression, adds, "Magnus says it's fine."

"You need to learn this rune properly," Alec says, but he crouches down and tugs at Max's t-shirt to activate his wing rune, two curling arches that tip together, swirling into a spiral at the base, close but not quite touching at any point. "When we get back to the Institute, ask to do some runes with Clary."

Max adores Clary. He didn't, to begin with, but he realised that as a mundane, she'd read comic books, and that she liked art, and that Jace wouldn't abandon Max just because he and Clary were clearly very interested in each other, and his suspicious dislike had turned into a fierce friendship. Especially when it transpired that Clary was perfectly happy to sit and go through the tedious task of learning runes with him whenever she came back from Idris.

He finishes the rune, and Max's wings - significantly smaller than his own, feathers shorter and
fluffier - shimmer in the air, turning translucent while they fold up and then disappearing entirely.

Magnus walks them to the door, and Alec pauses on the threshold, turning back to face him. He's not exactly sure what he wants to say, but he needs to say something.

"Magnus—"

"Call me," Magnus says, with a small smile. "I haven't got any clients tomorrow afternoon. Let me know how Max is doing." He turns his gaze on Max, and Max looks back at him with surprising transparency.


He wants to reach out. He wants to touch. He wants to grab Magnus' hand, or squeeze his forearm, or press a kiss to his cheek, but he knows he can't. Not with Max here, and not after Magnus' oddly swift exit from the bedroom earlier.

"Goodbye, Alexander. And you, Max."

Max bids Magnus a fairly cheerful goodbye, and Alec swallows. He needs to make sure Max won't mention Magnus' name at the Institute. "Bye, Magnus."

***

Simon isn't really in the business of making social calls to the New York Institute. Hearing about the attack, however, and learning that both Luke and Clary had been in the middle of such destruction, had forced him over there in moments.

Spending extended periods of time around Shadowhunters, in their home, always leaves Simon feeling inexplicably uncomfortable in his own skin. The way they look at him, and at Luke and Maia and Alaric, makes him feel as dirty as so many of them think he is.

He feels particularly awful this time, when he leaves just before midday, having spent much of the morning helping the Institute clear up, while Luke took his pack to find Iris Rouse. So many Shadowhunters are dead. So many people died in that battle. And little Max, a child in every sense imaginable, harmed in the crossfire.

And yet, most of the people dead wouldn't bat an eyelid at his brutal destruction. Most of them would be happy to be his executioner. Is he supposed to feel remorse, or relief? Is he becoming some cruel, frozen immortal for feeling both?

Worse, he finds himself sympathising with the warlock suspected of helping Valentine's attack, when Maia tells him about her. She's a criminal, Maia says, in every sense of the word, and has been for decades. The warlocks have reported her to the Clave, but, as her misdemeanours were directed merely towards the Downworld, they chose to turn a blind eye. Even when Valentine kidnapped her granddaughter and exploited her for her magic.

The little girl is suspected dead, or abandoned, Maia had said, her expression calm but rage simmering in her eyes. And the Clave had made no attempt to find her, irrespective of Iris' pleading, claiming that they did not help criminals.

Simon can understand why the woman would resent the Shadowhunters. He can't help the fury he feels at an Institution supposed to protect the world letting a little girl die at the hands of a genocidal maniac. He can't possibly condone her actions, causing the deaths of dozens of people, but he can't quite find it in himself to feel nothing but contempt for her.
The Shadowhunters - Maryse, Raj, Lydia, but even Jace and Izzy and Clary - don't quite see it that way. He supposes it's hard to feel sympathy for a woman who enabled the slaughter of dozens of their friends and coworkers. But he can't stay in the Institute.

Inexplicably, he finds himself standing in front of the Hotel Dumort. It sounds quiet inside, as Simon would expect at midday, and the place looks distinctly less desolate and haunted than it does at night.

He doesn't so much as raise a hand to knock, before the door is ripped open, and Raphael is revealed. He's shirtless, hair tousled and eyes a little bleary, and Simon has to take a very deep, deliberate breath to stop himself doing something stupid, like staring at his gorgeously defined torso, and the sharp lines of his hips, and—

_For fuck's sake._

"Simon," Raphael says in clear exasperation. "What are you doing here?"

Simon blinks a little, hauling himself out of his appreciative musings about Raphael's abs. "I... What?"

Raphael rolls his eyes. "What are you doing here, at the Dumort? Why have you graced us with your presence?"

"I don't really know," Simon admits. "I just, sort of, got here. It wasn't really a conscious decision."

"Get in, before you start attracting attention just standing in the sun like a mundane," Raphael says. There's a note of that perpetual irritation in his voice, but the way he reaches out and grabs Simon's arm to pull him inside is decidedly gentle.

The door shuts behind him, and Simon blinks a little at the abrupt lack of light.

"You've been at the Institute," Raphael states. "And something's bothered you."

"Something's always bothering me," Simon says, with a forced laugh. "It's how I roll."

"Simon."

He exhales heavily, and shakes his head a little. "Alright, alright, I just– How am I supposed to trust my own judgement, when I'm standing here feeling sympathy for some crazy cat lady who just helped an insane, real-life Darth Vader murder dozens of people?"

To Simon's shock, Raphael's expression softens. A smile, minute but tinged with sadness, flits across his face, and he shakes his head, taking half a step closer, so they're standing a mere few inches apart.

"Simon, you're a Downworlder," Raphael says. "You're never going to see the world like they do. You're never going to experience the world like they do. Not until Downworlders are afforded the same rights and protections and respect as Shadowhunters."

"But she killed people," Simon says, guilt twisting in his gut while he gesticulates his frustration. "Or, at least, she helped some demons do it, that's basically assisted murder, she—"

"Simon," Raphael says, yet again, this time reaching out to grab one of his wildly flailing hands. Simon fixes his gaze on where their fingers are suddenly intertwined, heart thudding. "Someone very wise with _horrible_ hair once told me that the world is not black and white, that people are not black and white, and that to see the world and its inhabitants in monochrome does the universe a great
injustice. That our world isn't just shades of grey, but a technicolour display in a thousand tones. People can never agree because issues are never simple, and to oversimplify a situation is often to lose essential aspects."

Simon thinks, almost comedically, of technology fifteen, twenty, thirty years ago, saving photographs in low resolution, pictures pixellated and distorted until the image itself was all but unidentifiable. An analogue image oversimplified digitally until it was distorted entirely.

"It takes a strong person to see the wider, clearer image," Raphael says, quietly. "Because seeing more means our perception of reality is constantly being challenged, and our opinions must be constantly evaluated. You are not a horrible person for being able to see the tragedy in Iris Rouse’s story, however vile the ending. Her granddaughter was kidnapped and is most likely dead because of the Clave."

"It's not black and white," Simon murmurs, lifting his gaze up from their joined hands to look at Raphael.

"No," Raphael agrees. "It's not. It never is. Not even Valentine and the Circle. If I remember correctly from when Magnus dragged us to the cinema, neither was Darth Vader and Luke."

Good god, Raphael Santiago has seen Star Wars? Simon thinks he's going to have an existential crisis over that, too.

Simon is silent for a moment, holding Raphael's gaze, and then he says, "Magnus told you that?"

"He did," Raphael says, lips quirking up. He looks skyward, amused resignation on his face. "He'd gloat for all eternity if he heard me say this, but he does often have stellar advice."

"So Magnus is, like, the Downworld Dad?"

"Ragnor bought him a mug saying 'world's best dad' once. He—"

Abruptly, Raphael's face shutters, and he snaps his mouth shut. His jaw clenches, eyes fixed determinedly somewhere over Simon's shoulder. Simon feels his own face twist into a frown, and he glances behind him to locate whatever it is that's made Raphael freeze.

But there's nothing there. Raphael is staring into space.

Simon turns back to him, questions on the tip of his tongue, but they evaporate when he notices the way Raphael is trembling all over, lower lip quivering and eyes glossy. Is Raphael Santiago...crying?

More taken aback than he knows how to express, Simon squeezes Raphael's hand and ducks his head in an attempt to catch his gaze. "Raphael?"

Raphael glances at him for a fleeting fraction of a second, and then wrenches his hand away from Simon's.

"Go," Raphael says, voice rough.

"Hey, no." Simon steps towards him, and rests a hand on his shoulder. "What the hell is going on?"

"Nothing. It's—"

"Who's Ragnor?" Simon asks, and feels Raphael flinch beneath his hand. "Oh."

"Oh, nothing," Raphael spits, and whirls round to glare at Simon. "I asked you to leave."
"Because you're upset?" Simon demands, feeling anger rise within him at how fucking frustrating Raphael is. "Because you're embarrassed at showing an ounce of emotion? Raphael Santiago, cold-hearted bitch, daring to feel something? Shocking."

His voice drips with sarcasm, as bitter as the revoltingly strong black coffee Clary likes to drink, but he doesn't let his gaze stray from Raphael's.

Raphael is the first to break. He blinks, slowly, and then his eyes flutter shut, eyelashes almost brushing the tops of his cheeks as he bows his head.

"Raphael..."

Simon's gut instinct is to reach out and wrap his arms around the other vampire; hold him tight and let him cry out whatever it is that's tearing at his heart. But he knows Raphael isn't the greatest fan of physical contact. The last thing he wants to do is make this situation any worse.

Hesitantly, Simon slips a hand down Raphael's arm, touch light, until their palms slide together. Surprise washes through him when Raphael grips his fingers tightly, but he doesn't draw back.

"I'm sorry," Raphael whispers, and Simon's eyes widen. "Please, just— Don't go."

Heart hammering, Simon lifts his free hand to Raphael's face and brushes back several stray strands of hair. "I won't," he promises. "I won't. I'm right here."

A sob, unmistakable in its intensity, wracks through Raphael's body. Alarm claws at Simon's skin while he watches Raphael fall apart, but none so great as when Raphael shifts forward to rest his forehead against Simon's shoulder.

Simon swallows, and curls his hand lightly around Raphael's neck. "I've got you."

He feels Raphael huff out a watery laugh. "I know."

They don't move for several long moments that seem to stretch out into an endless infinity. Eventually, Raphael withdraws, but only far enough to tug Simon onto a sofa, and whisper stories about Ragnor Fell into the dying light of the afternoon.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that wasn't tooooo horribly disappointing after two weeks! ;) Thank you so much for all the asks and prompts and questions this week. I've got a LOT of prompts sitting in my inbox, so I'll get on them, and I'll probably post a separate collection of FWW gap-fills and/or extras a little bit later. I'll let you know as and when.

I'd just like to take this opportunity to say that I've emerged from under my rock and finally listened to Praying by Kesha, and holy shit, this woman has blown my mind. If you haven't listened to it, you're missing out. Really.

If you fancy it, come follow me on Tumblr!

Let me know what you thought, and much love <3
Dove

Chapter Summary

In which Raj and Alec talk, Alec finds a necklace, and Raphael wants Alec to do his job.

Chapter Notes

The dove: peace, hope, compassion (ie Alec is a Good Shadowhunter in this chapter)

Enjoy! (and love me this chapter is looooong)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The dull *thwack* of a thick paper folder of official documents hitting his desk makes Alec glance up from reports and details about the attack on the Institute the previous day. It's all so complicated it's making his eyes glaze over. Partly, he knows, because his thoughts are otherwise occupied, with concern for Max and...

Well. It's probably best that he doesn't let himself fantasise about Magnus again.

Raj stands over his desk, square stature casting shadows across the room. He's in gear, a pair of seraph blades strapped to his belt, but his clothing and weapons are all perfectly clean. He must be about to go out on patrol.

*Figures.* Alec was on morning patrol with Jace and Clary. He can't remember the last time he went on patrol with Raj. Sometime before they freed the Downworld prisoners, he supposes. Some part of him can't help doubting that Raj will ever forgive him for that.

Raj jerks his chin at the folder, but stays silent as Alec's gaze flickers between the folder and his coworker. There's a deep-seated anger in Raj's eyes, but it's not quite the blazing rage and bitter betrayal of a month of two ago. It's dimmed a little, but the embers are very much remaining, hot and blistering.

Alec flicks the folder open, and is immediately greeted by a cover page with Magnus' name on it. He turns the page, and finds himself looking at a summary page of, he presumes, everything Lydia and Raj have put together on Magnus over the last week or so, in an attempt to pick holes in the Clave's case on him.

Fleetingly, Alec wonders if Lydia is a lawyer in another life.

He reaches a loose page, not attached to the rest of the document, and picks it out to scrutinise its contents more closely. On it, are written a variety of estimates of the total people dead *at Bane's hand, or as a direct result of his actions.*

The numbers are all astonishingly high—even those estimated by three different councils of
warlocks, and one mixed Downworld council. The bulk, of course, are quoted from the incident in Indonesia.

"Do you see now?" Raj says, voice quiet but saturated with flames on the cusp of licking across the desk to envelop Alec whole. "Do you see how pointless this is? Do you see what he is?"

Alec throws the folder down and fixes Raj with a cold look. "I'm sorry, Raj, what exactly is he?"

"He's a murderer," Raj snaps. "He's a murderer, and he's a Lothario, and he's playing you, and you're so busy thinking with your dick that you can't see it."

Fury rushes through Alec's veins so fast it's blinding, and he's on his feet before he makes a conscious decision to move. He leans across the desk, narrowing his eyes.

"Say that again," Alec breathes, "and I swear to you, Raj—"

"Look at the numbers, Alec!" Raj gestures frantically at the folder on the desk, as though desperate for Alec to understand. "Look at all the people he's killed!"

"It's not that simple."

"How the hell can dead innocents be anything other than simple?" Raj's gaze doesn't waver as he stares Alec down. "Warlock Bane has killed thousands of people."

"The single biggest incident was Indonesia," Alec states, jabbing at the folder with a finger but not breaking eye contact. "He was a child. He was being hunted by adults, what the hell do you expect to happen when people terrify a warlock child?"

"Child?" Raj asks, with a laugh that sounds on the edge of hysterical. "He'd call anything under the age of fifty a child."

"Stop." Alec softens his voice, not without effort, and shakes his head. "I knew all of this. I'm not a fool. Nothing you can uncover will change my opinion of him."

"By the Angel, Alec, you're insane. This is insane. Even if this is true, do you really think the Clave will change their mind?"

Realisation hits Alec like a freight train, and he stills, lips parting as tension begins to ease out of his body.

"Is this about Cameron?" Alec asks, as gently as he knows how to—as gently as he imagines Magnus would, with that open expression and the encouraging eyebrow tilt and warm duck of his head, eyes searching but not pushing.

Raj stiffens. His teeth snap together, jaw locking, and he pale visibly. He shakes his head sharply and curls his fingers into his palms, cold indignation in his eyes. For a moment, Alec thinks Raj might hit him.

"No."

"Isn't it?" Alec asks, tilting his head a little. "Is this because you're scared the Clave will end up doing the same thing now they did then—kill an innocent man?"

"He's not innocent," Raj spits. "Cameron was. How dare you compare—?"

"But if you and Lydia prove that he is innocent of the crimes the Clave accuses him of, then you've
got to accept that they're trying to do to him the same as they did to Cameron. But this time, you can't hide behind some misguided thoughts about love, because he's not being put to death for love. You'll have to accept that the Clave isn't as perfect as you're determined to think."

Raj closes his eyes. "Enough."

"Raj—"

"I said, that's enough."

When he looks at Alec, his eyes are wild, uncertain, flitting around Alec's face in clear desperation. Alec feels sympathy shooting through him, as Raj begins to confront everything Alec has been faced with since he was shot out of the sky all those months ago, only to catapult onto the doorstep of the man who would change his life.

As though someone up high is observing Alec's thoughts, his phone rings, flashing up with Magnus' name. He glances back at Raj, who's standing stock still, frozen in place. A sad smile tugs at his lips.

"I'm sorry," he says, squeezing Raj's shoulder in an attempt at comfort as he passes, and hits accept on his phone.

He doesn't stay to see the tears glistening in Raj's eyes.

***

New York is beginning to show signs of summer, Magnus thinks, as he strolls down the street after an exceptionally successful meeting with a client, in which he'd negotiated a deliciously obscene number of zeros into his bank account. Green is beginning to overshadow the eternal grey of winter, and the sun has chased away the hard-set chill in the air just enough for Magnus to take out merely a light blazer.

He hums as he scrolls through his contacts to find Alexander's name, deciding that a call on his walk home will fit nicely into his schedule, before he starts translating that awfully long text for the Seelies this evening.

A wonderfully familiar voice crackles through the line after a few rings. "Magnus."

"Alexander," he says, a smile turning up the corners of his mouth. "Hi."

"Hi."

He can hear his smile reflected in Alec's voice, and it's all too easy to imagine the way it crosses his face, reluctant and then eager, hesitant and then unashamed. It makes Magnus' heart soar.

"I was calling to see how Max is doing," Magnus says breezily, glancing up the road as he crosses to the opposite side of the street. "And the rest of you at the Institute. Well." He pauses in momentary contemplation. "Those of you I care about."

Alec lets out a little laugh. "We're okay. I heard Luke arrested Iris Rouse, but that you don't want to hand her over to the Clave."

Magnus' smile slips. "No. I don't think that's going to be happening."

"I—" Alec exhales. "I know the Downworld has a very limited voice in Clave legalities, so I told Luke and Raphael that if the Clave calls a meeting on the case, I'd speak for them. Whatever they
want to be known, I'll tell the Clave. Luke accepted. Raphael is considering. I wanted to extend the invitation to you. To the warlocks, in general."

Magnus' eyebrows shoot up. "You're not going to tell me that she's a criminal who needs to be brought to justice?"

"She is, and I was," Alec admits. "But I had that argument with Luke, earlier. He told me about her granddaughter and what Valentine did to her, and the Clave's lack of action in helping. I don't...agree, necessarily, but I understand. And it's hardly as though she'll go unpunished by the Downworld Council, which is the important thing. Right?"

Magnus is momentarily taken aback at Alec's attitude, and at his willingness to listen, despite how close to home - literally - the attack had been. He can't imagine Iris' actions - allying herself with the man who wronged her and took away her granddaughter in the first place - make much sense to the Shadowhunters. They don't understand the desperation the Clave drives people to.

He's impressed, and proud, that Alec is listening anyway.

"Right," Magnus agrees. "And I'd be very grateful to have you talk on our behalf, Alec. Although you don't technically have any alliance with the warlocks."

"Technically," Alec says wryly. "Although I suppose I can't name-drop you in a Clave meeting."

Charmed, Magnus lets out a laugh. "I'll put you in touch with Catarina Loss. I believe the Institute has had some dealing with her, in the past."

"With our resident High Warlock conveniently disappeared off the face of the planet, she has been our go-to."

Magnus can't stop smiling as they quip back and forth, half business talk and half friendly banter, and he tries to conjure up an image of the last Shadowhunter who spoke to him like Alec does. Will Herondale, perhaps? Jem Carstairs?

But, whatever alliances and friendly acquaintances he'd had with the London Institute back in Victorian London, none of them had ever been...like this. London had been the setting of a blooming love that had exploded and broken him into pieces. He'd drowned his heartache in sex and smoggy streets and opium dens and the nasty, cruel business around poor Tessa, and all it had done was prolong the bleeding.

Victorian London isn't a place he's in a hurry to remember.

So, frankly, it's just as well he's in New York, with the warm breeze that comes just before spring turns into summer blowing through his hair, the rich warmth of Alec's voice in his ear rather than the deceptively silky, biting lines of—

"Magnus?"

Magnus blinks out of his reverie - not there's much pleasant from the nineteenth century to reminisce about - and shakes his head a little. "I'm so sorry, I spaced out. Tell me again?"

"It's not important. I was just saying thank you, again. For Max. I paid Catarina Loss this morning."

"Not out of your own pocket, I hope," Magnus says, because he's entirely aware of how poorly paid the Nephilim are. He remembers once asking a lone - and rather rude - French Shadowhunter who was under the mistaken impression that he could afford Magnus' services whether he was dealing in
meth or cocaine. The Shadowhunter had been terribly offended, even once he'd realised Magnus was being sarcastic.

Alec assures him that the money is from the Institute's reserves. Magnus lists off a few symptoms he should keep an eye out over the next few days while Max recuperates, and their conversation quickly dissolves into meaningless chatter.

Alec is halfway through an amusing account of his exasperations with Jace when Clary first arrived at the Institute, when Magnus hears a snap behind him. He whirls around, Alec's voice fading into the background as he scans the darkening street.

Nothing. It's empty, not a soul in sight. But something makes the hairs on the back of Magnus' neck stand on end; his cat eyes flash into existence, fingers twitching and swirling by his side as his magic itches to defend him, to eliminate the threat he can sense.

He can hear Alec calling to him on the other end of the line, but he doesn't dare reply. He doesn't want to draw the attention of whatever's lurking in the shadows—or startle it, if it does, in fact, hold no malicious intent.

There's a deep growling sound from one of the bushes just off the sidewalk, and Magnus' eyes snap sideways. A stench permeates the air, and Magnus chokes, lifting his hand to cover his nose and mouth in an attempt to ward it off. It can only be described as the smell of death. The repugnant, putrid smell of rotting flesh makes Magnus gag.

A figure appears out of the shrubbery, seeming to expand as it reveals itself to Magnus' gaze. The demon gazes down at him with enormous gleaming white eyes, their circumference larger than Magnus' handspan, set into a mass of thick dark gas that seems to ooze an unspeakable viscous liquid onto the sidewalk.

Magnus raises a hand, blue sparking at his fingertips and turning a livid scarlet as he prepares to attack. Every muscle in his body tenses as the demon roars, and he tilts his elbow to shoot his first attack, and—

"Magnus? What on earth are you doing?"

Magnus' eyes widen and he freezes, magic dying on his fingertips. Catarina Loss stands before him, eyebrows drawn together as she watches him with clinical concern that borders on bewilderment.

"Catarina?" he says, deaf to Alec's muffled voice shouting from the other end of the phone, lying on the sidewalk where he tossed it away in readiness to attack. "What are you doing here? I saw—"

"What did you see?" Catarina asks, taking a step towards him. "Magnus, are you alright?"

"Going insane, I told you so. Too many centuries, old man," says Raphael with a smirk in Magnus' direction, appearing behind Catarina as though he'd been strolling down the sidewalk a moment ago. But Magnus had looked behind him, he'd—

"Raphael," Catarina chastises him. "I'll remind you of that, on your four hundredth birthday."

Magnus is too confused, too taken aback by the sudden appearance of his friends, to notice the man striding down the street, a determined purpose to his gait. He feels like he's got whiplash. He'd been talking to Alexander, and then he'd seen something, sensed something, and then—

"Downworlders," the man spits, and, before any of them have a chance to make a move to defend themselves, he's bringing a shimmering silver seraph blade down across Raphael and Catarina,
slicing through them in a smooth arch. The thick crack of the blade cutting through their spinal cords fills the air.

Magnus is too numb with shock to scream as blood sprays across the sidewalk, splattering like fat droplets of rain. The bodies of his friends slump. Blood bubbles at Raphael's lips and Catarina's eyes roll back as they fall, choking and gurgling.

Chest heaving, eyes wide in unadulterated horror, Magnus dashes across the few metres separating him from his friends and flings himself to his knees beside them. He stares between them for a moment. He's frozen, fear and rage and utter despair oppressing him. Even as magic bleeds from his hands in a desperate attempt to haul them back into the world of the living - to restart Catarina's heart, to force blood back into Raphael's body - he knows it's hopeless.

He's trembling all over as he looks up at the Shadowhunter standing over them. The Shadowhunter is tall, his face obscured by the hood of a dark black clock that's drawn tight around him, pushed back at his hip to expose a long line of wicked glimmering blades in his belt.

Magnus is going to kill him. He's going to tear this man apart, limb from limb. He's going to scatter him through the forest and set him alight. He's going to make him scream, for what he's done. He's not going to see another sunrise without feeling the agony ripping through every cell of Magnus' body. He's not going to take another breath without it rattling in his chest, without his heart clenching and twisting in his ribcage, without pleas for mercy falling from his mouth.

"Show your face," Magnus snarls to the Shadowhunter. "You coward."

Pale hands raise, long fingers curling around the material as he pulls the hood back. Magnus' nostrils flare as the dying light of the evening casts shadows across the planes of his face. A beat, and the man turns his head, eyes meeting Magnus', and every breath Magnus was clinging onto leaves him.

"No," Magnus whispers, clutching at Raphael's suit jacket involuntarily. "No, no, you— No."

Magnus shakes his head in vehement denial, and the Shadowhunter laughs, cold and cruel and merciless. It shatters any illusions Magnus retained of this being some elaborate trick. Some cruel joke. A startling, awful vision sent by his father.

Nothing could recreate such a horrific sound from those lips.

"Cat got your tongue, Magnus?" Alec asks, eyes flashing as he speaks, voice a deadly caress that makes Magnus shiver. "You're a fool."

"Alexander," Magnus chokes out. "You– You can't—"

Alec tilts his head slightly to one side, narrowing his eyes a little. The expression is so Alec that it makes Magnus feel physically nauseous; he has to grip tighter at his dead friends to stop himself vomiting all over the filthy pavement.

"And why, exactly, is that?" Alec asks, a sickening smile on his face. "Because you trusted me? Because you liked me? Because I nearly kissed you?" He bends over so he can whisper in Magnus' ear. "I lied, Magnus. It was all lies. As though I would ever kiss a Downworlder."

"I don't believe you," Magnus says, closing his eyes and leaning away from Alec. "I don't believe you. Everything you did, everything you said—"

"You know nothing about me!" Alec's eyes are maniacal, gleaming beneath a street lamp that's just beginning to flicker on, and it ignites a deep-rooted fear in Magnus' gut—a fear of the Nephilim that
no Downworlder, no matter how powerful, is ever quite able to shake. "You know nothing about what I'm capable of! All of it, every bit, has been a ploy, Magnus. This is a Clave mission. This is a play. A script. I was acting. I lied to you, for months. Every word, every moment, was a lie."

"Freeing those Downworlders—"

"Clave-sanctioned," Alec snaps. "God, keep up. As soon as you saved me, as soon as the Clave knew you were in New York, they wanted to find a way of getting to you. Previous methods hadn't been particularly successful. They needed a soldier to infiltrate you. To gain your trust. To strike you when you're at your weakest."

Magnus stares up at Alec - so familiar, but with such an alien note of utter hatred in his voice and disgust in his eyes - and feels horrific realisation clawing at his heart. He's been betrayed. He's been taken in by Alexander, and all of it has been a lie.

Lilith, he's just as naïve as he's always been. He trusts too fast. Ragnor always said so. How many people has he let in, only for them to destroy him, tear him apart, betray him in the worst of ways? Camille, and now Alec...

Alec moves in close—close enough for his breath to hit Magnus' face as he murmurs, "And you know the best part?" A smirk curls at his mouth. "I get to enjoy that heartbroken look on your face as I kill you."

Cold lips brush his cheek, and Magnus shudders, and then retches as the smell of decaying flesh and rotten eggs hits him, making him reel back in revulsion.

Alec is stepping away, talking, but Magnus' mind is spinning, because that smell... It's the same thing he'd smelt before Catarina had appeared, right before he'd seen, just for a split second—

"Agramon," Magnus whispers, blinking. His eyelashes cling together, and he realises he's been crying. He lifts a hand to wipe at his face, smearing make-up and dirt in equal measures.

Alec stills. "What?" he snaps.

"Agramon," Magnus repeats, surer now, voice steadier, the terror beginning to bleed out of him, slowly, drop by drop. He focuses on the smell - that awful, awful smell - and holds it in his head. "The demon of fear."

Alec - not Alec, Agramon - bars his teeth, snarling. "Enough, warlock."

Magnus rises to his feet, jaw set, and shakes his head sharply. "No. No, not enough. You're a Greater Demon. You show people their worst fears." He gestures to the ground with a quickly steadying hand, where Raphael and Catarina are sprawled on the floor. "The death of my best friends at the hand of someone I've grown to trust implicitly. The ultimate betrayal."

With a roar, Agramon lunges forward, hands rising to slash the seraph blade down on Magnus' neck.

But Magnus is faster. He whirls out of the way, ducking the blow as though evading a stray ribbon in the midst of a dance, and snaps his hand forward to shoot a sizzling ball of magic at the demon.

Agramon's form flickers as the magic hits him, and an inhumane spitting noise escapes his mouth as Magnus spins to avoid a second attempt at an attack, and tosses twin flares of magic at him, again and again and again as he twists and leaps and contorts his body to escape harm.

His magic drives Agramon back, further and further, until he slams a hand into the demon's chest.
His eyes are wild, flesh scorched and marred, and he looks almost as other as he sounds, like a monster from a horror movie. Skin is peeling away to reveal bloodied flesh below, hair charred and burnt off, and Magnus can't look at the demon wearing Alec's face a moment longer. He knows it's not Alec, in his head, in his heart, in his gut, but something in his subconscious wants to save the face of the man he's some to care so much for.

"Your father is looking for you, Magnus Bane," Agramon whispers, eyes darting between Magnus', white rather than the familiar hazel hues of Alec's. "He'll find you. He'll claim you."

"I don't like being claimed," Magnus snarls, shoving harder at Agramon's chest. "Enjoy hell."

With a final pulse of magic, Agramon screeches, fire consuming him, licking through his stolen body from the inside out. A beat, sharp and ragged in the silence of the evening, and he explodes in an effervescent crackle.

Breaths coming heavily, Magnus glances down, and nearly weeps in relief when he sees no evidence of Catarina or Raphael—merely a smear of blood from—

*Shut.*

He hisses as he presses fingers into his side. When he draws them back, they come away slicked with crimson blood. He can't remember Agramon landing a hit, but in the adrenaline of battle, he supposes it could have gone unnoticed.

He has to get home, he thinks, waving a hand to slip his phone back into his pocket. The screen is smashed, and it's clearly fucked, but he's not going to leave it laying around for the mundane police to find.

Gritting his teeth against the growing pain, he swirls a hand to open a portal, and topples through into his loft.

***

Frantic doesn't begin to describe how Alec feels as he runs down yet another street, Magnus' necklace from all those weeks ago when they'd freed the Downworlders clutched in his hand. He's terrified. Terrified in a way he can't remember ever being.

It had been so sudden. Magnus had gone silent on the other end of the phone, and then his phone had clearly clattered to the floor, and then Alec had heard voices, and then awful, sickening sounds—the sounds of death and battle, and then the line had gone dead.

It was only minutes between the call ending and Alec finding Jace, necklace in hand, begging him to help him track Magnus from his bedroom, out of sight of anyone else in the Institute.

Not that tracking the High Warlock of Brooklyn would ever be simple. He doesn't know why he'd been so naïve as to think that Magnus would just let anyone track him. They'd found an approximate location, not many streets away from Magnus' loft, but—

Alec has been searching for an hour - more than - and he's found nothing.

Helplessness is beginning to overwhelm him as he skids round a corner, darting around another mundane as he glances at faces, scours the ground for clues, for indications of Magnus' presence, for anything at all—

Is that——?
Alec drops to his knees when something glittering catches his eye, and he picks up the ruined remains of a necklace that's clearly been ripped off and tossed on the floor. Is it Magnus'? It looks like something Magnus would wear, but it's difficult to recognise in pieces like this, and—

*Shit.*

Smears of red cover the floor, thickest on the sidewalk, thinning into a trail of drips further along, and then disappearing abruptly a few metres away. Because Magnus went through a portal, maybe?

But where the hell would he have gone to? And why did they track Magnus here, if he's portalled elsewhere?

Both necklaces in hand, Alec pulls out his phone, and dials Raphael's number with shaking hands.

"Shadowhunter."

"Raphael, I— I'm sorry, it's about Magnus, I— I don't—"

"My god, Lightwood, calm down. What is it?"

"Have you heard from him? I— I don't know where he is, and something's wrong, something's—"

Raphael's voice on the other end of the line is oddly soothing, if a little impatient. "Magnus is four hundred and some years old. I'm sure he's fine. What's going on?"

Alec explains, in breathless, fractured sentences that are barely coherent. But somehow Raphael seems to understand. He hums his attention as Alec speaks, and, when he's done, is silent for several seconds.

"If Magnus was in a fight or attacked, and you think he's portalled somewhere, his most likely destination would be home. And if he's not at the loft, I can make some calls. Check. If he's not there, call me again. Otherwise, leave me be. It's rather peaceful *without* calls from the Nephilim."

Alec huffs out a strangled laugh. "Alright. Thank you. I— Thank you."

"I'm quite sure he's fine, Alec," Raphael says, and then hangs up.

He takes a steeling breath as he shoves away his phone, tucks the necklaces into his pocket with more care, and then takes off down the street at a run. If Magnus is hurt, there's no time for dawdling.

***

A mundane woman keeps the door to the foyer open long enough for Alec to slip in without buzzing. He takes the stairs up to Magnus' loft three at a time, hollering Magnus' name as he goes.

"Magnus!" he shouts as he slams his palms into the door, barely registering the abnormality of the door swinging open without Magnus bidding him enter. "Magnus! Magnus!"

A series of plaintive meows meets his ears. Almost robotically, he steps in the direction of Chairman Meow, who's standing a few metres into the loft, tail swishing behind him as he stares up at Alec with wide eyes.

"Where's Magnus?" Alec asks the cat stupidly, as though it can understand him. Fleetingly, he thinks that Magnus must be rubbing off on him.

Chairman twists, leaping elegantly and trotting across the floor towards the living room and out of
sight. Desperate, Alec follows, heedless of how utterly ridiculous he's being, following a cat, and—"Magnus."

Magnus looks up from his spot on the couch, where he's reading an intricate-looking text, expression entirely blank as he takes in the Shadowhunter abruptly in his loft. Alec feels relief crash through him at the sight of Magnus, alive and in the flesh, giving him that look. He seems perfectly put-together, wearing a loose pair of sweatpants and a silky shirt that's undone to his navel, make-up minimal but just as perfectly done as always. He must have been in the shower, Alec thinks, because his hair isn't styled and is free of product, fluffy and chaotic and going in all directions.

"You're okay," Alec states, stupidly, exhaling. "God, you're okay."

Magnus frowns. He shuts the gold-gilded book with a soft thud, and swings his legs off the sofa. It's only a slight wince and a pause before he stands that gives Alec any indication that something's wrong. Magnus' movements aren't normally disjointed like that. That blood was his. He was in a fight. And he was hurt.

"I'm fine, Alexander," Magnus says, standing in front of him. Absently, he reaches up to fix Alec's collar where it's half tucked in, fingers skimming his neck as he does. He smoothes his hand along the material of the jacket, hand gliding along his shoulder. "What's this about?"

Alec chokes on a laugh of sheer disbelief. He catches Magnus' arm before he withdraws his hand, slipping his hold down until their fingers are tangled together. He wants the reassurance that Magnus is real.

"You can't abandon a phone call that dramatically with no warning, sound like you're in the middle of a fight, and not expect me to be worried," Alec says, shaking his head. "What the hell did you think this was about?"

Magnus seems to pause, and his eyes glaze over a little. "I...forgot we were on the phone. I—" He shakes his head as though to clear his ears of water. "I'm sorry. I was a little distracted."

"What happened?" Alec searches Magnus' eyes, tightening his grip on his hand infinitesimally. "I— I tried to track you with Jace using your necklace, and we found your approximate location, and I found this—" He pulls the tattered remains of Magnus' jewellery out of his pocket, holding it in the small space between them. His fingers are trembling. "And there was blood, and—"

"Hey, hey." Magnus' free hand grips at his shoulder, the pressure of his fingertips grounding enough to make Alec suck in a long, deep breath. "Alexander, I'm fine. I promise, I'm fine."

"You were hurt," Alec says. "You must have been. Unless that wasn't your blood."

"It was, but I'm a warlock. I can deal with minor wounds."

Alec is about to protest, to say that that much blood does not constitute a minor wound, but Magnus is ahead of him. He lifts the hem of his shirt, exposing a thick, raised red wound across the side of his torso. It looks deep, but it also looks at least a week old.

He doesn't realise he's reaching out to touch the skin around it until Magnus' stomach tenses. Alec pauses, embarrassment flushing through him, and he glances up at Magnus.

"I'm fine," Magnus whispers. "I'm fine."

Instead of inspecting the wound like he wants to, Alec covers the hand Magnus is using to pull up
his shirt, and pulls the garment gently back into place. He slides his hand up Magnus' arm, heart thudding as he gazes down at him, searching the depths of his eyes.

"What happened?" Alec asks, voice a mere breath between them. Without conscious thought, he finds himself chafing his hand up and down Magnus' arm lightly, touch fleeting and barely there. "Who did this?"

"I had an encounter with Agramon," Magnus says, and just the name strikes fear deep into Alec's heart. Agramon. The Greater Demon who transforms into a person's greatest fear. A being who literally scares people to death.

If anything in the world is the epitome of sadistic, it's Agramon.

"By the Angel." Alec swallows. "How did you... How did you get out?"

Few people can. Few people are strong enough, clever enough, to find the flaws in the illusion Agramon creates. Few people are able to break through the horrifying fantasy to see the grotesque reality beneath.

"I'm not the High Warlock of Brooklyn for nothing, angel," Magnus says, with a smile that, for all its softness, is overwhelmingly sad. It tugs at Alec's heartstrings until he feels himself cracking down the middle. "The demon transformed into Raphael and Catarina, and had them die in front of me at the hand of a Shadowhunter. You. And you - or, rather, Agramon - told me everything between us was a lie."

Alec stiffens in surprise, eyes widening, equal parts horror and guilt flooding through him. That's Magnus' greatest fear? The death of his best friends—at Alec's hand?

"Magnus," Alec whispers, shaking his head. "I would never—"

"I know." Magnus brings their joined hands up between them and presses his lips to Alec's knuckles. His eyelids flutter, lashes brushing against Alec's skin as he looks up at him from beneath them. "I know this isn't a lie. And I know Catarina and Raphael are far more capable of defending themselves than Agramon implied. But fears aren't rational. Not even mine."

"I'm sorry," Alec murmurs, and, before he has time to second guess himself, he's drawing Magnus towards him, wrapping his arms around his waist and tightening his hold until they're flush together. "I'm sorry."

Magnus doesn't tell him it's not his fault, but Alec knows it's because he understands. That's not what Alec means. *I'm sorry*, in that ridiculous mundane sense of *I share your sorrow*. Because he does. He's never faced Agramon, but he's been trained to fight against him, and just the training was the most nightmare-inducing thing Alec had ever experienced, at the time. He can't imagine how awful the real thing must be.

And, perhaps more terrifyingly, he feels Magnus' pain and discomfort something like he does his siblings’—more keenly than he feels his own.

Magnus merely presses close, nose pressing against Alec's hair where it's short, shaved close to his scalp, and his voice is quiet but seemingly loud in
the near-silence of Magnus' loft. His lips are close enough to brush the curve of Magnus' ear if he were to tilt his head slightly to the side.

Magnus huffs out a little laugh, and he draws back just enough to meet Alec's gaze without their faces blurring. "I didn't realise you cared so much."

And that—

Fuck. That's a misconception Alec wants to get rid of right this second. The idea of Magnus being dead is as gut-wrenchingly nightmarish as the idea of someone cutting his parabatai bond, or finding his siblings murdered.

He doesn't know when he began to care so much. He doesn't know whether this began at the first, infuriatingly sarcastic little angel, or in the aftermath of their Downworlder rescue, or when he told Magnus he's gay, or the first time he made Magnus laugh so hard he outshone the goddamn sun, but whenever it started, it's here. This feeling in his gut, this desperate adoration and overwhelming desire for Magnus to be okay, to be happy, to be safe. The need to make him laugh, the fluttering feeling in his chest when he succeeds, the sparkling warmth at every press of Magnus' lips against his skin—

"Magnus." Alec's voice comes out as a croak, voice broken and cracking as he shakes his head. A hand slides up from Magnus' waist, over his shoulder to cup his face, goatee just catching at his skin. "Of course I care. Of course I care. Magnus, I—"

Words evade him. He shakes his head again in a desperate plea for Magnus to understand him, to realise what he wants to say without him having to find the words, like he always seems to.

Magnus' eyes are liquid soft, unglamoured and impossibly tender as he gazes up at Alec with a smile flickering at the corners of his mouth. Fuck, he's the most beautiful being Alec has ever had the privilege of laying eyes on.

Something about Magnus' expression stirs instincts that Alec's heart has reserved for his family—for his siblings and his parabatai and nobody else. He's hit with the crippling need to protect the man in front of him from every blow the world wants to land on him. He wants to defend Magnus with blades and shields, to be the armour he wears to war.

He knows - Raziel, does he know - that Magnus doesn't need protecting. He's one of the most powerful warlocks - the most powerful people - in the world. He's four centuries old. He doesn't need a Shadowhunter to defend him against the sadistic cruelties of the universe.

But Alec wants to anyway.

"Magnus," he says again, almost pleadingly.

"I know," Magnus whispers back, and Alec is helpless, a slave to the feelings erupting inside him. He's spent so long trying to repress them, trying to force them down and lock them behind steel doors, but they're too much. They're too powerful. Like magma brewing beneath a dormant volcano, they're rushing up, exploding into existence, bright and burning and devastating. And all the forces in the world couldn't stop them.

He tilts his head down just a little, because fuck, they're so close he could count the flecks of green in Magnus' golden eyes, and their lips brush together. The touch is fleeting, barely half a second, but it sets Alec's heart alight like a match thrown on gasoline.

He exhales shakily, pulling back mere millimetres, heart hammering against his ribs and blood
rushing through his veins until it's deafening. Magnus' breath is warm on his mouth, fingers sliding round to his waist, curving into the small of his back to keep him close.

His eyes are half-lidded, open just enough to see most of Magnus' face, but he feels Magnus angle his chin up in encouragement more than he sees it.

It's invitation enough. Their lips slide together again, firmer this time, surer, and Alec feels at once horribly uncoordinated and too exhilarated to care. The hand cupping Magnus' jaw trembles a little as they part again, lips dragging against each other as they both exhale, breaths turning shaky and heavy between them.

"Alexander," Magnus breaths, and that's all it takes.

Alec surges forward, free hand fluttering for a moment before landing on the back of Magnus' neck, fingers just sliding against his hair as their lips meet, harder than before. Magnus inhales sharply against his lips, and Alec's heart hammers so hard he's sure Magnus can feel it, with how close they're pressed together.

He can certainty feel every beat of Magnus' heart, tattooing a wild rhythm against his chest. He remembers wondering, once, what it would be like to be this close to Magnus.

"Oh, god," Alec rasps between kisses, drawn to Magnus' mouth like a planet orbiting a star. He feels like a starving man, desperate for more now he's been gifted with the slightest taste. He can't find it in himself to stop as their mouths slip and slide together, Magnus' goatee scratching tantalisingly against his stubble.

Magnus' hand finds his cheek, and he tilts Alec's face so he can kiss him deeper. Teeth nip at the seam of his lips as Magnus pulls back just enough to press a messy kiss to Alec's cheek and whisper, "You never cease to surprise me."

"In good ways?" Alec asks, voice a mere breath against Magnus' jaw as he presses his nose into his skin and inhales deeply.

He feels Magnus smile against the arch of his cheekbone. "Always."

"Kiss me," Alec whispers, and Magnus obliges, dragging his mouth across Alec's skin tantalisingly as he makes his way back to his mouth.

A strangled moan forms in the back of Alec's throat when Magnus' teeth tug at his lower lip again, lightly enough to be teasing but hard enough to make him press into the kiss in an attempt to alleviate the overwhelming desire for more.

Their teeth click together awkwardly at the jarring, inelegant movement. Mortification floods through Alec, but it lasts only a moment; Magnus lets out a laugh, warm and kind, and he presses sweet kisses against Alec's jawline.

"Smooth," he says, teasing but not unkind, and Alec finds himself smiling at his own inexperience as they pull back just enough to stare at each other.

"You're so beautiful," Alec tells him, thumb brushing beneath Magnus' eye. "I don't— You're so beautiful."

Magnus' expression softens into something decidedly vulnerable. He leans in until their foreheads are pressed together, and tips his chin up to brush a featherlight kiss to Alec's nose.
"As are you, my darling."

From anyone else, Alec thinks it would sound insincere, a compliment returned because it's easy, the polite thing. From anyone else, he'd protest; he'd reject such a description of himself. But from Magnus, it sounds painfully honest. And being touched like this, being looked at like this, with equal parts tenderness and passion and affection, he feels something akin to beautiful.

"In fact," Magnus says, lifting his hand to lay it along the length of Alec's cheek, "I found how attractive you are rather annoying, for several weeks."

Alec's lips twitch as he leans into Magnus' touch, chest aching at it's warmth. "I spent months convincing myself that my attraction to you was due to some kind of seductive magic you were casting."

Magnus looks like he's trying very hard not to laugh, eyes shining with mirth. "Shadowhunters. Honestly. As though I'd be so tacky. I rely on my natural charm and charisma and devilishly good looks."

Words had been brewing in Alec's throat, ready to quip back at Magnus, but he's distracted by Magnus' lips, and the way his mouth curves and pouts and shifts to form each syllable. It's alluring, heady, entrancing, but he knows it's not magic. It's just Magnus.

He doesn't know who moves in first, but frankly, he couldn't care less. He just needs to get his mouth back on Magnus'. Their lips press together, kisses warm and quickly turning hot, fingers clutching at each other, dragging them closer, until they're pressed together, chest and hips and thighs.

Magnus' fingers sink into his shoulders, slipping round to tighten in his hair, turning his head to change the angle, their lips sliding together slower, every touch more tantalising. Magnus' other hand moves beneath his gear jacket to press into the small of his back, over his t-shirt, and Alec shudders at the press of rings against his spine.

"Magnus," Alec gasps, when Magnus pulls back to trail soft, wet kisses along his jaw.

Magnus doesn't descend any further; Alec can't help but be glad. This already feels like more than anything Alec has ever experienced. There's so much. Too much. It feels like Magnus is everywhere, all around him, invading his every sense and casting his mind into chaos. He's already too turned on to function, kissing Magnus and feeling him beneath his hands and how close they're pressed together, and—

Oh, fuck.

Alec goes stiff, and Magnus pulls back slowly, dotting kisses against Alec's face as he shifts so he can look him in the eye. "Are you alright?"

Alec is sure his eyes are wide, and he must look like a complete mess, and he's sure Magnus can feel how hard his heart is hammering against his ribs. The hand that shifts from his hair to press along his jawline doesn't calm him quite as much as it should.

"Yeah," Alec says, and clears his throat. "Yeah, I just-- It's just-- I'm--"

He glances down at where they're in close proximity, and nudges his knee against Magnus' in the hope that Magnus will get the hint. If he doesn't, he's not sure how to say it. I'm hard because I'm kissing the most beautiful man in the world but I don't want to have sex and what exactly is the protocol, here?
To his relief, after a moment of scrutinising him, Magnus seems to catch on, and he smiles a little. "So am I," he says, and shifts his hips just slightly, and—

Oh, by the Angel, Alec is going to explode. Magnus' crotch just brushed the top of his thigh, and he's—

_Fuck._

"It's fine," Magnus says, and drags his fingers lightly through Alec's hair. "It doesn't have to mean anything. I certainly don't expect it to mean anything."

Alec exhales. "I can't believe I just kissed you."

Resting a hand on Alec's chest, Magnus smiles, leaning in and tilting his head up. "Neither can I," he says, and brushes their lips together lightly. "But I don't think I ever want you to stop."

"Neither do I," Alec murmurs, hand migrating to Magnus' waist, and—

"Ow."

Alec snaps his head back, eyes scanning across Magnus' body urgently. Magnus' face is twisted in discomfort, and he's cringing back from Alec's touch, and—

"Your side?" Alec asks, brows furrowed. "I thought you said—"

"I may have glossed over it a little," Magnus admits, wincing as he shifts in place. "It was demonic. The wound itself was an easy heal, but demonic injuries are always a bit sore for a few days."

"I barely touched you," Alec says, still frowning. "That's more than a bit sore."

"Alexander—"

Alec grabs Magnus' hand in his before he can trot out another _I'm fine_ speech, and drags him gently over to the sofa.

"Sit," he says, letting go of Magnus' hand so he can stoop to pick up the discarded mug sitting on the floor, "and tell me what I can do to help."

Magnus rolls his eyes spectacularly. "Alec, _I'm fine_."

"No, you're not." Alec feels his expression soften, and he reaches out to touch Magnus' face lightly with the backs of his fingers. "You've helped me so much, Magnus. Let me help you. Just this once."

Magnus lets out a frustrated sigh. "It's so hard to say no to you. Coffee would be nice, if you insist."

"I can manage coffee," Alec says, and is momentarily distracted by Chairman Meow pouncing on the toe of his boot. He smiles, and reaches down to pet Magnus' cat, fingers stroking over soft fur. The Chairman arches his back into his touch, purring loudly, before apparently deciding that Magnus's lap looks like a more comfortable napping spot.

"Hello, you," Magnus says to his cat, face breaking into a smile so sweet it takes Alec's breath away. He runs a hand over the top of the Chairman's head, scratching between his ears. "Did you miss Alexander too, hm? Are you trying to steal my Shadowhunter's attention?"

And if that doesn't make Alec's heart lurch and twist and stutter in his chest, he doesn't know what would. Magnus missed him. Magnus wanted to see him, wanted to spend time with him. And _my_
Shadowhunter... He knows - or, at least, he presumes - Magnus is using it as a figure of speech. A little joke. Baby talk for his cat. But he can't help wondering...

What if he really were Magnus' Shadowhunter? What if they really had some kind of claim on each other? Not in a possessive, creepy way, but...

Well. How many times has he heard Clary's tutors in Idris refer to Jace as Clary's boy? How many times has he heard Clary? Jace's Clary? from people in New York?

He pushes the thoughts away hastily, before they can overwhelm him. It's too much, and it's too soon. He kissed Magnus for the first time all of ten minute's ago. Magnus is in pain. It's not the right time to be thinking about anything except that.

Alec slips out of the room without a word, and sets about making coffee in the kitchen as quietly as he can. It becomes apparent rather quickly that while Magnus' cupboards are stocked full with tea of more varieties than Alec knew existed, coffee is clearly something he's less picky about. He's got a single jar that's past its sell by date—Alec wonders whether it's because Magnus always summons coffee. He doesn't think he's ever seen Magnus make himself coffee.

"Here," Alec says, coming back into the room with two mugs. He slips one onto the table and offers the other to Magnus, who's got that enormous book propped against his thighs, and is scribbling notes on a pad of paper with a ballpoint pen, brows drawn together in concentration.

Magnus glances up, and smiles. "Thank you, darling."

"I think you need new coffee," Alec tells him, trying his best not to turn into a fool and do something stupid like drop the mug when Magnus' fingers graze very deliberately against his as he reaches out to take the drink. "It's past its sell by date."

"I'm lazy," Magnus says, waving a hand to shut the book on his lap. It's not in a language Alec recognises - it's not even an alphabet Alec is familiar with. He's fairly sure it's demonic. "I don't usually make coffee."

Alec picks up his own mug, and stands by Magnus' coffee table while he tries not to grin. "I've noticed," he says dryly. "I gave you sugar, in your coffee. I wasn't sure, but I remembered you put sugar in your latte when I got Starbucks, and—"

"Will you go on a date with me?"

Stilling, Alec stares at Magnus, feeling like his entire world has just been hit by an earthquake. "What?"

Magnus is smiling, soft and small, gazing up at Alec with an expression of mixed amusement and affection so tender it makes Alec's chest ache. "I said," Magnus says, "will you go on a date with me?"

Alec's lips part. He can't find it in himself to be embarrassed by his gaping, because he's far too stunned to consider anything aside from the words that just fell from between Magnus' lips.

"Really?" Alec asks, and he tries not to sound too hopeful as he grips at his mug and wills himself to keep it together, when all he wants to do is holler in ecstasy that Magnus Bane just asked him out.

Magnus lets out a laugh. "You kissed me not five minutes ago, Alexander. Yes, really."

"Yeah," Alec says, quietly, smiling at him while his heart swells. "Yeah, I'll go on a date with you."
Magnus' smile broadens, one of those lopsided grins that's wide enough to split his face and bright enough to blind any onlookers, and by the Angel, Alec wants to kiss him until neither of them can breathe.

And he can, he realises abruptly. He's stepped over that first hurdle. He's kissed Magnus before. Magnus reciprocated, and asked him out, and is looking at him like that. He can kiss Magnus.

But, before he can even begin to consider how to do so smoothly, when both of them are holding hot drinks and Magnus is sitting down, a shrill ring pierces the air, and his phone vibrates in his back pocket.

"It's Raphael," Alec says, to Magnus' questioning look. "I called him to ask after you, so he's probably calling to see whether I found you." He swipes to accept the call, and holds his phone to his ear. "Raphael, hi."

"Lightwood." Raphael's voice is dark, serious, and there's an underlying note of panic that makes Alec straighten, senses on high alert as his smile drops off his face. "I need you and your sister down here right now. Do not bring Clarissa. Or her blonde boy. Is that understood?"

"Of course," Alec says, confusion and mild concern filling him, "but where are you? What's going on? Are you in danger?"

He sees Magnus sit up straighter through his peripheries, eyes staring sharply at Alec's phone, worry pinching at his features.

"No. I'm outside Taki's café," Raphael says, "with Luke. We've had an...incident."

"What kind of incident?"

"A vampire drank from a mundane," Raphael says, and Alec raises his eyebrows, because while Shadowhunters are notoriously repulsed by vampires feeding - on any blood that's not packaged prettily in a bottle until it could be mistaken for wine - it's not against the Accords. "Maia Roberts separated them before the girl lost too much blood, but she's got the Sight, and she's terrified, and this seems like the kind of incident Shadowhunters are supposed to assist with."

Alec notices the sarcasm in Raphael's voice, but, rather than get offended as he might have done months ago, he feels determination fill him: this is the perfect opportunity to prove to the leader of the New York vampire clan that not every Shadowhunter is so blinded by prejudice that they're unable to do their true duty.

"We'll be there," Alec promises him. "Is Maia alright? And the vampire?"

He knows vampires - especially if they're young, or starving - can get violent if they're interrupted mid-feed. It's not their fault, he supposes, thinking about it now—three months ago, it had just seemed like another marker of how inherently wild and volatile Downworlders were.


Raphael cuts the call, and Alec shoves his phone in his back pocket. "He's fine," he tells Magnus, before he can ask. "There's been an incident with a vampire getting overly excited on a mundane. Raphael's asked Izzy and I to help clean the situation up."

Magnus nods, relaxing back into the array of cushions. "Alright. Be careful."
"Always," Alec says, taking a deep swig of coffee. "Are you going to be okay?"

"Alec, I'm a four hundred year old warlock," Magnus says, lips twitching upwards.

"And I'm a twenty-two year old Shadowhunter," Alec replies, deadpan. "Your point?"

"Oh my god." Magnus rolls his eyes even as he laughs. "I'll be fine. Go! Raphael isn't particularly patient." His mouth twists wryly.

"Okay, I'm going," Alec says, and has only taken two steps forwards to walk past the sofa when he feels fingers wrap around his wrist, halting his progress. He glances down at Magnus, who's got his eyebrows raised.

"Come here," Magnus says, and tugs him down gently to press a soft kiss to his mouth that leaves Alec's blood thrumming and his head spinning. Magnus smiles. "Now you can go."

And Alec does, fighting to keep the idiotic smile off his face, stumbling down the stairs and tripping on his way out and making a complete fool of himself—but frankly, he couldn't care less.

Chapter End Notes

SO THAT HAPPENED and if you're a total birdy nerd like me and you read the thing at the beginning in which I go super birdy nerdy every week, you probably noticed that I missed out one of the things the dove is best know for, which is LOVE!!!

Thank you so so much for all the comments last week, and if memory serves I've barely replied to any (or maybe none? Oops) so I'll flick through and reply to a few ASAP.

Let me know what you thought in the comments, or drop me a message on my Tumblr. I love hearing from you, about literally anything (including but not limited to thirsting over Magnus Bane, cute animals, prompts, headcanons, and why reality TV stars haven't just taken over politics yet because honestly they'd do a better job) (I'm joking please don't hate me) so don't be shy!

Much love (especially to everyone who's picked up exam results in the last few weeks!) Lu <3
Alec reaches Taki's café before Isabelle. Night has fallen since Alec desperately scoured the streets for Magnus, and the moonlight is casting a milky glow over the city. Fluorescent streetlights flicker overhead, the windless atmosphere distinctly eerie as he rounds the corner.

Luke stands outside Taki's, face set in grim resignation. He's talking to two mundane women who have their arms around each other, gesturing down the street, clearly making up some story as to why they can't go into the café. He shifts his jacket a little to draw attention to his NYPD badge, and they look a little less irritated and a little more respectful.

"Alec," Luke says, once the women have left. "How much did Raphael tell you?"

"Just that a vampire drank a bit too much from a mundane who has the Sight," Alec says, "and that Maia broke them up."

"That vampire was Simon," Luke says. "And he's pretty shaken up about it, so cut him a bit of slack, okay? He's not had an easy time."

Whether it's because of the events of the last few months, or just because of Magnus' influence, Alec doesn't know, but as he agrees, he feels sympathy shoot through him. He's not always very generous where Simon is concerned, because he is practically the most infuriating person on the planet, but equally, he can't imagine how hard such a drastic change in lifestyle must have been for Simon. Also, he supposes with some shame, he might have been a little uptight about a Downworlder getting at all close to the lives of Shadowhunters in the Institute.

He'll do better, he decides. He'll be better.

Inside, the lights have been dimmed to prevent too many mundanes getting curious. Maia is sitting
atop the bar, cleaning a deep slash on her arm with an antiseptic wipe. She glances up when the door swings open, and purses her lips.

"Shadowhunter," she says. "Don't be an asshole."

"It's alright, Maia," Luke tells her. "I'll be watching."

Luke leads Alec through to the back, the double doors swinging back and nearly smacking Alec in the face as Luke shoves them open. Raphael is crouched beside Simon in a corner, murmuring lowly, one hand on Simon's arm. Simon is trembling, head in his hands, protests muffled and indistinct but clearly more than a little self-deprecating.

Alec clears his throat, and the two men look up. Simon goes pale - even for a vampire - and swallows heavily.

"It's okay," Raphael tells him, and then straightens, narrowing his eyes as he approaches Alec with the aura of someone preparing to protect their own at whatever cost. "Don't imagine for a second that I won't tear your face off if you hurt him."

Alec promises Raphael that he won't, and walks over to Simon slowly. He's got a blade strapped to his hip, so he slides it out and tosses it on a countertop before sitting down on the floor across from Simon.

"Please don't tell Clary," are the first words out of Simon's mouth. "Or Jace. Please, just—"

"Relax," Alec says, holding up a placating hand to quiet Simon before he gets hysterical. "I'm not going to tell anyone. Nobody died. You didn't do it purposefully. You're not in trouble."

Simon blinks a little, clearly taken aback, and glances over at Raphael uncertainly before returning his gaze to Alec. "I'm not? Even though I attacked a mundane?"

"She'll be okay, won't she?" Alec asks, looking to Luke for answers. Luke nods sharply. "Then no. You're not. I'll file a report, but you won't be mentioned by name. Just location. However, I do need to know what happened, and why, so we can prevent repeats."

"I—" Simon twists his hands together on the table, eyes fixed on his fingers instead of Alec; he stiffens abruptly when he appears to take in the smears of blood caked into his skin, and flinches visibly. "I was— It was too long since I last fed. I just didn't— I guess I just didn't really pay enough attention to what my body was telling me, you know?"

Alec raises both eyebrows. "How long have you been a vampire?"

"Three years, but—" Simon pauses. "That was rhetorical. You were being sarcastic. Right."

"What's going on?" Alec asks. "I know this isn't the first time this has happened recently." Simon's eyes widen, so Alec says, "I mean you starving yourself, not you attacking people."

Simon shrugs, picking at a rip in the knee of his jeans. "I don't know."

"Simon—"

"No," Simon looks up, then, staring Alec right in the eye with a desperate ferocity than makes Alec swallow the words of doubt on his tongue. "I really don't know. I guess..." He exhales heavily, and lets out a weak laugh filled with self loathing. "Look at me. Do vampires get depressed? Is that a thing, or am I a freak in that way too?"
Alec frowns, about to tell Simon that he's not a freak, but Raphael beats him to it, speaking quietly from where he's standing across the room. He's got his arms folded across his chest, suit jacket nowhere to be seen, and is leaning against the wall with his eyes fixed unblinkingingly on the proceedings.

"Anyone can get depressed," Raphael says. "There's nothing to be ashamed of. If that's what this is __"

"For fuck's sake, I don't know, Raphael!"

There's a crack as Simon flings the nearest object to hand, which happens to be Alec's discarded blade. It embeds itself in the wall a mere inch from Raphael's head.

There's silence. Simon's rest rises and falls rapidly. Horror is clear in his eyes and his lips part as he stares at the blade stuck in the wall, gaze flickering between the weapon and the vampire beside it.

Raphael, in contrast, looks entirely calm, unmoving and unflinching. Luke is glancing between the two vampires, clearly ready to get involved if need's be, but willing to stay out of their business unless necessary.

"Raphael," Simon whispers, brows drawn and face gaunt. "Fuck, I'm so sorry."

"It's alright," Raphael replies, with a gentleness that Alec would never have believed the fierce leader of New York's most powerful vampire clan capable of. He's reminded that Raphael is more than a friend to Magnus—he's Magnus' family. And, whatever their differences, it's clear that Magnus has taught Raphael more than how to pick out the best suit.

Luke catches Alec's eye, and nods lightly out into the main room. "Isabelle got here a few minutes ago," he says. "And the blonde woman from Idris. You done here?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm done." Alec chews on the inside of his cheek for a moment. "Simon, you've got nothing to worry about."

Simon doesn't look at him as he rises and passes both vampires, following Luke out to see Isabelle and the mundane girl Simon attacked.

***

There's silence in the back room after Luke and Alec leave. Simon stays on the floor, arms curled loosely around his bent-up knees, and drops his chin, trying his best not to look at Raphael.

A scraping sound fills the air, followed by a clank. Simon glances up just long enough to see Raphael dropping Alec's blade onto a countertop, and then lowers his eyes. He doesn't know what the hell is going on in his head, but he wants it to stop.

"Hey." Raphael rests a hand on his shoulder. "You okay down there?"

"Peachy, Raphael."

Raphael's hand slips away. For a moment, Simon wishes he hadn't moved, missing the grounding sensation of Raphael's palm pressing against his skin through his t-shirt. But then a sleek, slate-grey suit moves into his line of vision, and Raphael drops onto the dirt-ridden floor opposite him. His hands cover Simon's, and Simon snaps his eyes up, jerking away from the touch and curling his arms tighter around his legs.
Raphael lets him go, but frowns. "Simon, it's okay."

"I just attacked a mundane," Simon says, letting out a short, bitter laugh. "How is that okay? How is that in any way okay? You know, if it hadn't been for Maia, she could be dead. How old is she, eighteen? Nineteen? I can't even blame it on being a vampire, because it's not like you'd ever do something like that. It's just me. It's me who can't function, it's me who—"

"Stop." Raphael shakes his head. "Stop. You're being irrational because you're upset. There's nothing wrong with you. If you're struggling with your mental health—"

"If?" Simon shakes his head. "I feel like I'm going insane."

Raphael watches him for a long, hard moment, scrutinising him so thoroughly that Simon feels like every facet of his mind is being put on display. It's not a comfortable feeling. But being around Raphael is.

"Perhaps we should take a trip to see Magnus," Raphael says. "He's probably got better advice than me."

"And what's your advice?"

"I don't know yet," he admits. "But I swear, I'll help you. Whatever's going on, I'll help you."

Simon huffs out a laugh that's a little more sincere than the last one. "I didn't know you were a sweetheart, Santiago."

Raphael fixes him with a glare. "Don't push it, Lewis."

But Raphael's eyes are soft, concerned, the bite behind his words a little less frigid than normal. And when he lifts a hand to offer it to Simon, the only logical course of action seems to be to slide their hands together. Palms press together, and fingers interlace, and the restless, writhing mass of self-hatred and anxiety and guilt in Simon's stomach eases, just a little.

"It's going to be okay," Raphael whispers. He squeezes Simon's hand, and Simon feels his heart glow in response, like sunset-orange embers on a fire. It's the most human he's felt for three years. "I promise."

"Raphael?"

"Mm?"

"Can I come back to the Dumort? Tonight?"

Raphael nods, and picks up Simon's other hand, pulling both into his lap. "Of course you can. You don't have to ask."

Simon nods, suddenly exhausted, and lets Raphael rake a hand through his hair, the touch soothing beyond belief. He sighs, eyes slipping shut, and Raphael pulls him into a hug, taking the weight Simon didn't realise he was holding like it's nothing.

"I've got you," Raphael whispers against his hair.

Simon smiles against his shoulder, their conversation a mere couple of days ago after the attack on the Institute flashing through his mind.

"I know."
For a mundane, Isabelle thinks, the woman is remarkably calm. Alec thinks she's probably got some Seelie blood, to have the Sight. But after allowing Isabelle and Lydia to ask her a few questions, her only real desire had been to go home.

Lydia is walking her out, standing by the door of the café while the woman calls a taxi to take her home, at Lydia's insistence—because she was exhausted, Lydia had said, and shouldn't be walking around at night on her own after that much blood loss.

Isabelle feels as though she's being exposed to a new side of Lydia. A more compassionate side. A woman a little less cold-hearted, a little less stoic, a little less orientated around the Law.

Although, perhaps that's not quite fair. Lydia's proven herself more than a heartless bitch from Idris time and time again. Perhaps it's Isabelle who's struggling to accept that not everyone in a senior Clave position is a complete asshole.

"Okay?" Alec asks, walking up to her from where he was conversing with Luke.

Isabelle smiles at him. "I'm fine. Jace said you were looking for Magnus. Did you find him?"

Fascinatingly, Alec's cheeks go pink, and he clears his throat, averting his gaze and studying something on the wall with astonishing intensity. "Yeah. He was hurt, but he's okay."

Smile blooming on her face, Isabelle raises her eyebrows and nudges Alec with her elbow. "Did something happen?"

He glances down at her. "Other than Magnus being attacked by Agramon?"

Her eyes widen. "Holy shit. That's got to be Valentine, right?"

Alec scrubs a hand across his eyes, and shakes his head. "I've got no idea. It could have been anyone he's pissed off. Magnus managed to fight Agramon off, but Raziel knows how. If Valentine wants one of America's most powerful warlocks on his side, that's not a very smart way of going about it."

"Who ever said Valentine is smart? It wouldn't be the first time he's sent greater demons after powerful Downworlders."

Alec huffs out a tired laugh. "That's true."

They're quiet for a moment, standing side by side, arms pressed together. Isabelle can't help but wonder what exactly is going on between her brother and Magnus Bane. Their mutual adoration of each other was made blatantly obvious at Magnus' party, but her brother has a habit of sinking a long way into denial.

"Lydia and I can finish up here," Isabelle says. "You can go. I know you want to."

Alec frowns over at her. "What?"

"Back to Magnus'. I know you want to go and make sure he's okay, because you worry incessantly. Nobody minds you going. You've been on your patrol shift today, and we can cover your paperwork for one night."

"I do not worry incessantly—"

Isabelle snickers. "Yeah, Alec, you do. Go on. We all know he's fine, but go and check anyway. It'll
The longing in Alec's eyes is clear, but he hesitates, uncertain, unwilling to abandon his duties for even a moment to make sure the man he's so clearly enamoured by is alright after being attacked by one of the most feared greater demons to ever enter their dimension.

That conflicted expression shatters Isabelle's heart. She wishes Alec hadn't been held to such an impossible standard for all his life. He tries so hard to be perfect, because that's what he's expected to be. The perfect Clave soldier, the perfect leader, the perfect brother, the perfect parabatai. He struggles with not reaching that ideal. He blames himself for every minor shortcoming, for every anomalous failure, for every mission that goes awry. He bears the weight of the world on his shoulders by taking it off everybody else.

She hopes Magnus doesn't hold him to such standards. Not that she imagines he would, logically - Magnus is far more well-balanced and realistic and in-tune with the truth of humanity than the Clave - but Alec is her brother. It's her job to worry about him.

"Alec." She softens her voice, and reaches out to touch his arm. "It's okay. Someone you care about was hurt a few hours ago. It's not unreasonable to want to reassure yourself that they're okay. I'd want to, if it were you that'd been hurt."

"I'm your brother," Alec says, brow furrowing. "That's different."

She smiles, thinking of the way Magnus had kissed Alec's cheek when they'd been dancing together, and the way they'd looked at each other as though nothing else in the world mattered, and the way their hands had fitted together.

"Is it?" she asks.

Alec opens his mouth, presumably to refute her statement, and then pauses. "I- I don't know."

"That's okay," Isabelle tells him. "Being confused. But Jace said you were pretty frantic when you thought he'd been hurt."

"I was," Alec admits. "I care about him. I don't want him to be hurt."

"I know," Isabelle says, and squeezes his arm gently. "So go and see him."

***

Magnus doesn't realise he's nodded off on his sofa in practically the same position Alec left him in until he's awoken by a growling, snarling sound coming from by his feet. Blearily, he rubs at his eyes, and glances around himself in an attempt to combat his disorientation. It's dark, the lights in the loft low due to the the light that had been present outside in the early evening when Magnus had fallen asleep, and it takes his eyes a moment to adjust to the dark.

At the end of the sofa, Chairman Meow is curled up, head pillowed on his paws, looking entirely unfazed. His eyelids are drooping, disinterested in the proceedings—Magnus would almost describe his expression as disparaging.

By the end of his coffee table, a dark, four-legged figure stands with its hackles raised, snarling quietly in the direction of the front door. Its ears are back, fur on end, iron-tipped mace-like tail swishing in unhappy suspicion, while red eyes peer through the dark.

Magnus flicks his gaze up, following the direction of his hellhound, and sees a man standing a
couple of metres from the sofa, frozen, hands raised with his palms forward in surrender, clearly attempting to placate the dog. Frankly, if she hasn't torn his face off, yet, he can't have any ill-intent.

"Magnus," Alec whispers, entirely unmoving. Magnus isn't even sure he's breathing. "Magnus, what —?"

"It's alright," Magnus says, to the hellhound and to Alexander. "Padfoot, sit. Don't be so pathetic." The dog whines, turning her head to stare at Magnus with wide eyes. Magnus raises an eyebrow; she sits.

"There we go," he says, and scratches between her ears. A pleased rumble sounds from low in her throat, and she tips her snout up towards his hand. "That's Alexander, you silly dog. Don't start scaring off my dates."

Alec makes a choking noise in the back of his throat, and Magnus lifts his eyes to meet his, waving a hand to turn some lights on. It takes a little more out of him than it should.

"I thought you were a cat person," Alec manages to get out.

"I like both," Magnus says, as Padfoot curls up at his feet, glaring up at Alec. "Mundane dogs are a little impractical with my job. I decided to piss off my father by taming one of his hellhounds instead. She spends most of her time in Edom, but she always comes when I need her, or fancy company of the canine variety."

"Oh my god." Alec lets out a weak laugh. "You're insane."

Magnus grins wickedly. "My dear, has it taken you this long to realise that?"

Shaking his head, Alec looks down at the hellhound, a conflicted, nervous look in his eyes. He reaches out a hand, as though about to approach, but then pauses, catching Magnus' eye instead.

"Can I—?"

"Go ahead. Just be careful."

Padfoot sniffs at Alec's proffered hand with snooty suspicion that could rival even the Chairman's. Alec remains still, knees bent in a half-crouch so he's at her level. Padfoot nudges her nose against Alec's hand, and lets out a short, gravelly bark.

"Hey," Alec says, while he scratches behind Padfoot's ears. The hellhound relaxes, flopping onto her stomach while tilting her head to encourage Alec's attention. Magnus is determined to believe that it's a coincidence that every animal he ever domesticates is simultaneously too proud to bother with humans and an attention whore on every occasion they allow themselves to be pampered.

Magnus settles back against the sofa while he watches Alec play with Padfoot, now sitting on the floor with his legs sprawled around him. A smile quirks at the corners of Magnus' lips. Padfoot has been exceptionally well-trained—he'd spent a whole four months abandoning his job to dedicate his time to domesticating and training her. Padfoot is trained to detect threats and intimidate ill-intentioned clients, and she often comes to stand guard when she senses that his magic is low, and he's alone to defend himself. That she trusts Alec like this says rather a lot.

Alec lets out a laugh when she licks his hand and swats at his knee with her paw. Magnus feels his expression soften. He wants to bottle that sound and hear it forever.

God, he's so far gone. Alec kissed him a few hours ago, and already, he's too far gone. Always,
always, he falls too hard, too fast, and it's too much. He's determined not to do that this time. He
cares about Alexander too much. He *likes* Alexander too much. He won't fuck this up by becoming
too intense before they've even been on a date.

As though sensing his inner turmoil, a quiet meow sounds from the end of the sofa. Tiny paws press
into the cushions, and the Chairman hops up onto Magnus' lap. He doesn't whine, or beg for
attention, but he curls up on Magnus' chest where he's reclining against the arm of the sofa with his
feet up.

The Chairman feels warm against him, the joyful sounds of Alexander and his hellhound oddly
comforting, and Magnus feels exhaustion wash over him in waves, eyelids drooping as he watches
the man he's sure he's falling in love with.

***

"Magnus."

A hand rakes through his hair, fingers gentle and soothing. He hums, the sound originating from
deep in the back of his throat, leaning into the touch.

"Magnus, hey."

The noise he makes this time is one of protest. He frowns. He doesn't want to wake up, or open his
eyes: he wants to stay right here, and he wants the slow rhythmic caresses to continue, and he wants
the voice to shut up.

"Magnus."

The voice sounds a little amused now, but fond. It makes Magnus think of a warm summer breeze
tumbling through the air and rushing over his skin, blowing through his hair and bringing with it the
smell of fresh grasses. It makes his chest tighten, and he really can't think why.

"Come on," the voice whispers, suddenly close enough for Magnus to feel air particles shifting as
they breathe. "Beds are more comfortable than sofas."

Magnus cracks his eyes open to glare at the person ruining his perfectly lovely sleep. Alexander's
face is a mere few inches from his, and he smiles when their eyes meet, the skin around his eyes
crinkling and melting Magnus' bad mood instantly.

"I hate you," Magnus mumbles, rubbing his knuckles over his eyes. "I was asleep."

Alec's smile only widens, and Magnus wants to kiss the damn thing right off his beautiful face.
"How about you go to sleep somewhere you aren't going to wake up with a bad neck and a
headache?"

He huffs. The movement startles the Chairman, who jerks awake, head snapping up. He shoots
Magnus an utterly disparaging glare, and leaps off his chest with a disillusioned meow of irritation at
his stupid human, disappearing into the kitchen.

Magnus looks after his cat for a moment, chewing absently on the inside of his cheek. It takes him a
moment to realise that Alexander's hand is still resting lightly by his hair, fingertips skimming the
strands.

He glances back over at Alec—and finds that Alec is already gazing at him. He's watching him as
though Magnus is the single most important thing he could lay eyes on. As though he needs to
commit every fleck of glitter and stray strand of hair to memory.

He's kneeling on the floor, Padfoot nowhere to be seen, and his free hand is a mere hairsbreadth from Magnus'. The temptation to reach out and touch is astonishing. It grips at Magnus, hot and overwhelming, until the inconsequential distance between their hands is physically painful, making a sick and desperate aching sensation form in his chest that he knows can only be relieved by the heat of Alec's skin against his.

They've been staring at each other for far too long. Magnus blinks twice, hauling himself from the depths of Alec's entrancing eyes. They don't pull Magnus in like a black hole, sucking him in and in and in without heed nor mercy; it's like gazing upon a nebula and being willingly transfixed by something utterly breathtaking.

"Will you stay?" Magnus asks, voice soft in the silence of the night.

Alec's brow furrows. He slips his hand across the distance between them as though it's irrelevant, covering Magnus' hand without preamble. Something anxious in Magnus dissipates. He lets out a breath and turns his hand over to curl his fingers around Alec's.

"Are you alright?" Alec asks, searching his face with devastating intensity.

"I'm fine," Magnus tells him, although he'd probably tell Catarina that no, he's not, because although his working day was successful it was so long, and he's tired - from working and from the mental exhaustion of experiencing his friends die right in front of him, albeit in a demonic illusion - and his head hurts, and his side still stings despite having healed it with magic, and all of it together just means that he really, really doesn't want to be left alone, which is exactly why he called Padfoot, but canine company isn't quite sufficient this time.

He doesn't say any of that to Alec.

Alec is quiet for a moment, lips pursed, the set of his brow suggesting that he's not convinced. "Are you sure?"

"I'm fine," Magnus says again, trying to sound dismissive but sincere. He's not sure he succeeds. "You don't have to stay, darling. Don't feel obliged. I'm sure you want to get back to your family."

"No, I'll stay," Alec says, but the creases between his eyebrows don't smooth out. "Just— You seemed— Never mind."

Alec rocks back to rise up onto his feet, and reaches down a hand to help Magnus up. It's sweet, Magnus thinks, and it makes his heart turn over and his stomach flutter, because when was the last time someone offered him a hand up? Not because he needed it, but just because they wanted to?

He takes Alec's hand firmly in his and follows him up. He pauses, holding fast to stop Alec turning and tugging him towards Magnus' bedroom, and touches his knuckles to the side of Alec's eye.

"Alexander," he says. "You don't have to worry so much. Certainly not about me."

The stubborn set of Alec's jaw becomes infuriatingly more pronounced, and Magnus doesn't know whether he wants to scream or kiss him when he says, "Someone has to."

"Leave that to the Chairman," he says, as off-handedly as he can manage with Alec's eyes boring into him with such sincere intensity. "He's always fussing."

For a moment, the seconds stretching out between them, Alec just stares at him, one eye squinted,
eyebrows furrowed, entirely unconvinced by Magnus' easy deflections. His lips press together in a thin, unhappy line, but he seems to relent. He threads his fingers through Magnus', apprehension only noticeable because Magnus notices the flicker his eyes do, darting down to where their hands are joined, and pulls Magnus gently away from the sofa.

When they reach the bedroom, Alec turns away pointedly when Magnus begins to slip off his shirt. Lips quirking, Magnus takes pity on him, and reaches for a tank top that he'd discarded on the floor that morning, and a pair of boxers.

"You can look," Magnus says, wincing as his side twinges. "I'm not exposing anything scandalous."

Alec rolls his eyes and opens his mouth, clearly about to let out a snarky retort—but he stops. His eyes are flickering over Magnus' torso, and, for a split second, Magnus is ready to preen under Alec's gaze.

But it's not an appreciative gaze. It's detached. Clinical. Raking over every inch of him not out of passion, or attraction, or even admiration, but out of a pertinacious resolve to locate something specific. It's horribly unromantic.

Or at least, it is until Magnus realises what Alec is looking for.

"I know I'm not a warlock," Alec says, voice gentle, "but I am a Shadowhunter. We get injured pretty often. You could have told me it still hurts."

Frustrated, Magnus exhales through his nose. "Alexander, for the last time, I'm fine."

"Fine isn't good enough," Alec says firmly. "Tell me how to help."

Lilith, Magnus is so gone for this man he can't breathe. He wants to wrap Alec in his arms and never let go. He wants to have this - and so much more than this - until the day he dies. He wants to keep Alexander Lightwood.

And it's such a horribly dangerous pathway to go down. Those thoughts. Those feelings. It's like kissing Alec punched a hole in a dam, and now water is rushing through faster and faster as the whole widens, emotions and desires Magnus isn't at all ready for crashing over him relentlessly like waves breaking on a beach, over and over and over, knocking him off his feet each time.

"Alec," Magnus says, a little weakly, while his heart twists.

"Tell me how to help," Alec says again, but this time it's softer, the harsh edge disappearing from his tone. He reaches out a hand slowly, and Magnus finds himself leaning towards Alec before their skin meets. Alec's palm skids across his cheek, and oh, god, Magnus wants to kiss him, more than he's wanted anything for so long.

"I just need to sleep," Magnus says, honestly. "It's rejuvenating."

"Then sleep," Alec replies, suddenly close enough for Magnus to feel his body heat rolling off him in tantalising waves. His eyes dart down, and his thumb drags across Magnus' cheek, leaving a blazing trail of warmth in its wake. "Sleep."

Clutching loose handfuls of Alec's shirt in his hands, Magnus tilts his head up, and whispers, "Can I kiss you first?"

Alec's eyelids flutter, chest heaving. "Yeah," he whispers back, tongue darting out to wet his lips. "Yeah."
It's softer than Magnus expects, when their lips press together. Alec exhales, eyelashes fluttering, and Magnus releases his shirt to rest a hand on his shoulder, fingers curling to press into the muscle as they lean into each other.

"I never thought I could have this," Alec murmurs, as they break apart. "With a man."

Magnus' lips drag against the stubble on his chin as he pulls back. "What changed your mind?"

"You."

A smile tugs at Magnus' lips. "Charmer."

"It's true." Alec's eyes dip to his lips, but he doesn't lean in again. "You've changed my mind about so many things."

Magnus' heart aches. He slips his hand down to twine his fingers through Alec's, and tugs him gently towards the bed, pulling him down onto the mattress beside him. Alec spares a moment to kick off his jeans, and then slides into bed beside him.

"Didn't anybody know?" Magnus asks, while they shift into place.

"Jace knows," Alec says, and, fascinatingly, something about the anecdote makes his cheeks turn pink. "I'm fairly sure Isabelle knows. And Lydia. Oh, and Clary, but that...was a mistake."

Magnus hums in acknowledgement, giving Alec the space to elaborate if he so desires. When he doesn't, Magnus snaps his fingers to turn the lights off, kicks the sheets up over their legs, and says, "The first person I ever came out to was Ragnor. Not that we had the word bisexual then."

The sheets rustle as Alec turns on his side to look at him. It's too dark to make out more than his silhouette and the whites of his eyes, but it takes a horrible amount of willpower to prevent himself cuddling up against the Shadowhunter in his bed.

"Did he mind?" Alec asks, voice quiet.

"No." Magnus stifles a yawn. "No, he didn't mind at all."

Silence falls between them. Magnus can hear Chairman Meow scratching against the closed bedroom door, and he feels momentarily guilty for kicking his cat out. The Chairman has always been rather fond of sleeping on the spare pillow in Magnus' bed.

But then fingers brush his forearm, and Alec shifts close enough for Magnus to feel the warmth of his body rolling across the space between them, and something inside him churns, nervous and excited and anticipatory.

"Turn over," Magnus whispers.

The broad expanse of Alec's back is presented to him, regretfully covered by the thin cloth of his t-shirt, and Magnus swallows. He can't remember the last time he felt like this, like a teenager sharing a bed with a crush for the first time, infatuated and falling far too hard and far too fast, but too naïve to care.

It's almost like—

No. No, it's not. It's nothing like that. Alexander is nothing like that.

Slowly, giving the man in his bed the chance to say no, if he wants to, Magnus lets his arm drape
over Alec’s waist, and settles himself in behind Alec, chest pressed to his back, legs aligned beneath
the sheets.

Alec isn't breathing. Magnus can feel his heart hammering, but he's holding his breath, rigid and
frozen, as though he dare not move for fear of scaring Magnus off, or doing something wrong.

Drawing attention to Alec's reaction feels too patronising. He's young, and he's closeted, but he's not
a child. He's not incapable of making decisions. He's certainly not incapable of saying no, if
something's making him uncomfortable. And he doesn't seem uncomfortable, he seems cripplingly
nervous. Which is understandable, Magnus supposes, for a closeted twenty-two year old man who's
probably never been in bed with a man before, for sexual or romantic activities.

So, instead, Magnus dips his head to press a kiss against the back of Alec's neck, to one side of the
ridges of his vertebrae. Goosebumps rise across Alec's skin at the touch in such a vulnerable, intimate
place, and then he positively melts. The breath leaves him in a messy, fractured exhale, and his
eyelashes flutter, and he curls lightly back into Magnus, sinking into the mattress.

"Isn't this hurting you?" Alec asks, voice a mere murmur in the nighttime, and then, right there, in
such a broken, beautiful second, Magnus feels himself give his heart over to Alexander Lightwood.

"No," Magnus whispers, but it is. Not in the way Alec means, but buried inside his heart in places
untouched for so long, where scars run deep like chasms in mountainsides. He screws his eyes
tightly shut before he can become any more overwhelmed than he already feels, and nudges the hair
at the nape of Alec's neck with his nose. The scent of sweat and leather and cheap all-in-one
shampoo is quickly becoming familiar, and it slows his racing heart. "No, Alexander."

_I'm not in love with him_, he thinks, desperately, while the hand not wrapped around Alec's waist
clutches at his pillow. _I'm not in love with a Shadowhunter. I'm not in love with the son of my best
friend's murderer. I'm not. I can't be._

A hand grasps at his own, tugging until Alec can reach to press a kiss to his knuckles. "I wish I could
tell you what you make me feel."

Magnus lets out a weak laugh, because he's quite sure that if he doesn't, he'll cry. "I think I know,
darling."

Chapter End Notes

Yes, Magnus has a hellhound, yes, Magnus named it after Sirius Black, yes, I might be
self-projecting a little here because I adore Sirius' character, let's not talk about that ;)

Padfoot is actually a hellhound's name, and if you're interested you can read more about
hellhounds from what turned out to be my favourite of the resources I used while
procrastinating - I mean researching - [here](#)

Let me know what you thought in the comments, as always, and if you want to worship
Harry Shum Jr, coo about puppies, or scream (in general, about anything, I don't
discriminate) [come talk to me on Tumblr!](#)

Much love, (especially to anyone going back to school/college/university/work after a
nice summer break!)
Lu <3
"Good morning, Magnus."

Magnus stares at Ragnor Fell, sitting at his kitchen table with a copy of the New York Times open in front of him, a steaming mug of tea set beside him. Sunlight is spilling through the kitchen window, casting golden beams across the early morning scene of domesticity so reminiscent of Magnus' youth, when Ragnor had helped him all those centuries ago.

It's not an image Magnus has been greeted by for twenty years.

"What are you doing here?" Magnus asks, unmoving from his frozen position in the doorway of his bedroom. "This is impossible."

Ragnor peers at him over the top of his newspaper, one eyebrow quirked. "And why is that?"

"Because you're dead," Magnus says bluntly. The words hurt less than they did twenty years ago, but he's not sure the sting will ever go. "I'm hallucinating."

A smile, small and tinged with sadness, passes over Ragnor's face. Without setting his newspaper down, he waves a hand to push out a chair with flares of green magic that are more familiar to Magnus than his own.

"Sit," he says.

A second mug appears in front of Magnus, and he reaches for it. The sensation of scalding liquid against his tongue and sliding down his throat distracts him from the utter impossibility of Ragnor Fell being in his kitchen in the morning.

Come to think of it, hasn't he got things to do? He must have clients. He needs to check his phone. Although, that's usually the first thing he does upon waking. And—

"Have you worked it out, yet?" Ragnor asks, sipping his tea nonchalantly.
"Worked out what? Ragnor, this is insane, what—?"

"How's that cat of yours doing?" Ragnor is scrutinising a section of the paper closely, brows drawn together. "Still tearing up cushions?"

"You weren't alive when I had the Chairman. I'm definitely hallucinating. I'm going insane."

"You're not hallucinating."

"You're not hallucinating," Ragnor says, not looking up, with the patience of a teacher and a parent and a friend who became family and knows Magnus better than he knows himself. "You just needed me, so I'm here. Like I always am."

Magnus chokes out a bitter laugh. "I've needed you in the last twenty years, but you're dead. I couldn't save you."

"Pity," Ragnor says, as though they're discussing the high probability of a rainy afternoon. "Didn't you want to talk about your little existential crisis?"

For a hot, blistering moment, Magnus is gripped by the urge to snatch that goddamn newspaper out of Ragnor's hands and smack him over the head with it. He's so infuriating. He can never just give a straight answer, and it's always maddened Magnus.

"What existential crisis?" Magnus demands. "My only existential crisis is that I've got clients, and I've got things to do, and my dead best friend has turned up for breakfast."

"The Shadowhunter." Ragnor taps the newspaper and lets out a disapproving tut. "I knew Brad and Angelina wouldn't last."

The Shadowhunter? Magnus thinks, puzzled. What Shadowhunter?

"Your Shadowhunter," Ragnor replies, as though he can hear Magnus' every thought. "The one sleeping next to you."

"I'm not asleep. I'm talking to you."

"Of course you are," Ragnor says, with the tone of one placating a young child. "The Shadowhunter who's dreaming about you. Very nice things, I hasten to add. It's all sickeningly nice. I may have to go and vomit." He pauses, appearing to consider something he's reading, and then says, "Alec might actually be halfway deserving of you."

Magnus' mind whirls at Ragnor's words, sentences and names and syllables jumbling together, tumbling over and over each other like seeds dispersing in the wind. Your Shadowhunter. Alec. Dreaming.


"Delayed reactions." Ragnor still doesn't look up. "Nothing to worry about. Now, come on, tell me. What is it?"

"I think I love him."

"Well," Ragnor says, rustling his paper with disinterest, "then you love him. I can think of worse people in the world for you to fall in love with. The vampire bitch, that insane werewolf you were convinced loved you in a healthy manner, and the mundane who stalked you across the world in the seventies, for starters. Your Shadowhunter is much nicer. Etta-style nice. She was lovely. Shame she
"But he's a Shadowhunter." Desperation fills him, while Joy followed by fear - fear at who Alexander is, and fear at the power he holds over Magnus' heart - and he feels like the child Ragnor saved on the filthy streets of Indonesia, unable to properly control his magic and entirely out of his depth, terrified of who and what he was. "He's a Shadowhunter, and he's mortal, and he's supposed to be my executioner, and he's a Lightwood, and—"

Finally, finally, Ragnor looks up, and fixes Magnus with a piercing stare that steals every hysterical word brewing inside him.

"And you love him," Ragnor says, so simply that Magnus' heart stutters.

"But he can't love me back."

Ragnor raises an eyebrow. "Why not? Because of all those silly things you just said? Good god, Magnus, when has that ever stopped anyone? You don't get to choose who you love. No amount of screaming and wrestling and digging your heels in will stop anyone falling in love. And he doesn't seem to be trying all that hard to fight it."

"Not yet," Magnus whispers. "But he will. The Clave will ruin him, and they'll ruin his family, and his family means everything to him."

"The people he loves mean everything to him," Ragnor agrees, inclining his head. "So the way this will play out seems really rather obvious, to me."

"Exactly," Magnus says, leaning forwards across the table, begging Ragnor to understand, because nobody else will. "Exactly. He won't have a choice. He'll hunt me, because they'll threaten his family, and he'll break my heart, just like—"

"Magnus." Ragnor's hand covers his. The touch is warm, solid, and Magnus turns his hand over to grip at Ragnor's fingers as though it's the last thing anchoring him to sanity. "You underestimate what you mean to people. You always do, after what life has done to you. Your parents, and the Shadowhunters, and too many mundanes to count, and the vampire bitch. But I think perhaps you need to give Alec a chance to show you."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you should love him," Ragnor says, simply. "It means you shouldn't run away from what you feel. You should embrace it. Because even if this day isn't quite yet, one day I think you're going to be loved like you deserve to be."

"I can't," Magnus whispers. "Ragnor, I can't. The last time I let myself—"

Ragnor shakes his head, and lifts his free hand to cup Magnus' cheek. "You've been broken into so many pieces," he says, softly. "You're so much more broken than you let anybody realise, because you're powerful and strong and don't take any crap. You never let yourself heal, always too determined to insist that you're fine. I think it's time to let somebody in, my friend. It's time to accept that those walls you've built around yourself are nothing to the right person. It's time to stop fighting what you've found."

"What is it I've found?"

"Love." Ragnor smiles. "The love you should have been blessed with from the start."
The sound of scratching meets Magnus' ears, and he frowns. There aren't any closed doors. Why would the Chairman be scratching at open doors?

"Have you worked it out, now?" Ragnar asks, as a bird tweets a tune outside in the early morning sunlight.

"You're not real," Magnus says. "You can't be real."

"Of course I'm real," Ragnar says, patting his cheek gently, eyes shining with the sort of love Magnus has felt bereft of for twenty years—Ragnar's love for him, which has always been unlike that of anybody else's. "You needed me, so I came."

"But you're dead."

"Yes." Ragnar's smile turns soft. "You're dreaming, Magnus. But that doesn't mean it's not real."

Magnus shakes his head firmly, tears stinging at his eyes. "Dreams aren't real. This is all just a figment of my imagination."

"You're a magical being in a world of angels and demons, and you believe dreams can't be real?" Ragnar lets out a little laugh. "Oh, Magnus. Always so cynical. Don't you remember the last thing I ever said to you?" He pauses, and tilts his head to one side, expression turning serious. "I will always be here for you."

And the world dissolves, Ragnar floating away while Magnus screams.

***

When Magnus wakes, his face is wet with tears. It takes him a moment to orientate himself, to haul his mind out of the dreamscape his subconscious created and pin it back in the harsh vista of reality.

It's still dark, the contents of his bedroom barely visible even with his glamour down. And it's cold. A shudder runs through Magnus' body, goosebumps rising across sweat-slicked skin, and he lifts a hand to drag it through his hair, fingers trembling and heart pounding against his ribcage.

He turns over in bed, drawing his knees up to his chest; he tries to exhale steadily, deliberately, in an attempt to calm his frantic pulse. Dreams about Ragnar always throw him. There's nothing he can do to quell the overwhelming feeling of being so utterly alone after he dreams of his best friend—his dead best friend. Ragnar was the most important person in Magnus' life for so very long, and he's never coming back.

It's always harder at night, without the clarity of the daytime to chase away the demons lurking in the corners of his mind. It's harder to remember that Ragnar has been dead for twenty years, and that Magnus has managed. It's harder to remember that he's not alone, not really, because—

"Magnus?"

The voice is low, raspy, and Magnus freezes, panic consuming him as he remembers that he's not alone at all, that Alec is here, in his bed, right next to him, and oh, god, he can't, he can't do this now.

A hand brushes his shoulder clumsily, the movement laden with the heaviness of sleep, and Alec says, "Why are you crying?"

"I—"
I'm not, Magnus thinks, because that's what he should say. That's the lie he should tell. That's the emotional barrier he should erect between them, to reinforce the fortress around his heart. I'm fine. You must have been dreaming. Go back to sleep.

But the words of Ragnor in his dream ring in his ears, and he finds the words dying on his tongue like flames extinguished under the steady beat of rain.

I think it's time to let somebody in, my friend.

"I don't know," Magnus says instead, voice cracking, more broken than he'd intended to let Alec hear, and it's not quite true, but neither is it precisely a lie. It's more honest than Magnus has been with anyone who's shared his bed in more than a century.

Alec doesn't speak, but Magnus feels palms slide over his back, pulling him in close, and he exhales shakily against Alec's neck, relishing in the solid warmth of another body against his. He's not sure whether Alec is really awake, or whether Magnus' restlessness merely roused him enough to alert his senses to Magnus' distress and little else, but he decides it doesn't matter.

"S'okay," Alec mumbles into his clavicle. "'M here."

It makes Magnus' heart thud faster, and he presses closer to Alec, clinging on.

"I'm sorry," Magnus whispers, and he's glad when all that meets his ears is the soft sound of Alec's breaths evening out as sleep tugs him under. Because if Alec were to ask what, exactly, he's apologising for, he really wouldn't know what to say.

***

"Knock knock."

When there's no response, Isabelle slips the door to Lydia's office open a couple of inches, and glances inside. Lydia is at her desk, just as Isabelle expected, papers strewn around her, laptop sitting atop a large pile of books.

She's thrown herself into things in New York more entirely than Isabelle would ever have expected from a Clave envoy. Not only has she fully embraced Jace's request to investigate Magnus' potential innocence, but she's delved into the general running of the Institute, helping Alec with all the tasks that everyone knows Maryse and Robert are supposed to be doing.

And since the attack, mere days ago, Lydia hasn't stopped for a moment, working almost as tirelessly as Alec always does. Isabelle almost wishes they wouldn't, either of them. If they didn't, it might stop Maryse and Robert portalling back to Idris the moment their immediate attention isn't required.

Isabelle's expression softens as she takes in the sight that greets her. Lydia has one arm folded, the other sprawled across the desk with her fingers curled lightly around a rollerball pen, head resting in the crook of her elbow. Her chest is rising and falling steadily, eyelashes fluttering against her cheeks.

Quietly, Isabelle steps in, closing the door behind her. She makes her way over to Lydia, manoeuvring around the chaotic piles of books and papers and folders - Raj has clearly been in here recently - and sets the mug of decaf coffee she made down on the edge of the desk.

"Lydia," she says, resting a hand on her shoulder. "Lydia, hey. Wake up."

Lydia blinks, and sits up sharply, without any sleep-ridden preamble. She blinks again when she
Isabelle takes in Isabelle in front of her, and frowns. "Isabelle. Is everything okay?"

Isabelle thinks about all the dead Shadowhunters no longer working in the place she's called home for her entire life. She thinks about her brothers, the youngest having diced with death a mere few days ago and the eldest being forced into a corner by a corrupt institution; she tries not to wince.

"Everything is fine," she says. "I just came in to see you."

The furrows in Lydia's brow deepen. "Any particular reason?"

"No." She smiles faintly. "Although maybe it's a good thing I did come in. You look like you need some sleep."

"Probably," Lydia admits, and, as though to prove Isabelle's point, yawns. A rueful expression crosses her face. "Definitely. Thank you for the coffee."

"It's decaf. Won't stop you sleeping. But I didn't peg you as a tea drinker."

"I'm not," Lydia says, picking up the mug and blowing across the surface of the steaming liquid before she takes a sip. "Mm. That's nicer that the crap I get in Alicante."

Isabelle scoffs. "They don't even sell nice burgers in Alicante. It's why Alec hates going so much."

Lydia's mouth curls up at one corner, and Isabelle is reminded, horribly, of that conversation she walked in on, what seems now like years ago, between her parents as they discussed encouraging a match between Alec and Lydia. They'd be good for each other, in another world. They're similar people with similar outlooks on life, both hard-working and competitive and, it seems, fiercely loyal.

In another world, Isabelle thinks, in which her brother isn't solely into men. If such a world could possibly exist.

Regardless, in this world, Isabelle will fight tooth and nail if she has to, to prevent such a marriage taking place. It would spell disaster for Alec. There's no way she's letting it happen.

"I don't know whether I can sleep," Lydia says, quietly.

Startled, Isabelle lets out a laugh. "You seemed to be doing alright a moment ago."

"I know. But I feel...restless. After the vampire attack earlier, and that poor woman..."

For a moment, Isabelle just watches her as Lydia trails off, eyes gazing into the distance, her mind clearly far away from the dimly lit office they're inhabiting. What is it about Lydia that makes her want to wipe that conflicted, upset look off her face and replace it with a smile?

"Come upstairs with me," Isabelle says, extending a hand towards Lydia in offering. "We can find something to put your insomnia into."

Lydia's eyes meet hers, and Isabelle's breath catches in the back of her throat as the moment stretches out between them. It's like Lydia is moving through treacle as she rises, moving around the desk to reach out and clasp Isabelle's proffered hand. Their palms slide together, Lydia's smoother than hers, lacking the callouses Isabelle has from daily combat with demons and Circle members.

They reach Isabelle's bedroom without speaking a word. It doesn't seem necessary. And Isabelle isn't quite sure what she would say, irrespective of necessity. Lydia has cast her preconceptions and assumptions about Clave officials into disarray anyway, highlighting the prejudices Isabelle hadn't
It seems natural to reach over and flick her speakers on, hitting play on her iPod to fill the room with music, quiet due to the late hour but infectious nonetheless. Music is how she always unwinds at the end of the day, when she returns to her room and falls into bed, sleep scrabbling to overcome her without the nightmares sinking their claws into her subconscious. Alec reads, and Jace is prone to a late-night training session - in which he just somersaults off the rafters repeatedly - followed by an extortionately long shower, but Isabelle has always found solace in music.

Lydia glances at her, a smile catching at the corners of her lips. "I shouldn't be surprised," she says, softly. "You and music."

Isabelle can't help the way her own expression mirrors Lydia's, a smile sneaking across her face before she has the chance to quell it. "Why's that?"

"It seems like something you'd appreciate," she says, with a small, diplomatic shrug.

"It was something Meliorn and I had in common," Isabelle tells her, glancing away, out of the window, her gaze drawn to the trees she can see in the distance, leaves rustling and beaches swaying just slightly in the breeze. Her mind always flits to nature when she thinks of Meliorn. "He liked things you could dance to. Or have sex to," she adds, and her smile curls into a smirk at the memories.

"Me and dancing don't really mix," Lydia says, unfazed. "Do you miss him?"

"Sometimes," Isabelle says. "We weren't monogamous, sexually. But we were emotionally, and I miss that. Having someone to confide in, and to talk to. I mean, I have my brothers, and I have Clary, and I love all of them to pieces, but it's not quite the same. They're family. Even Clary is more like my sister than anything else. I don't know if any of that makes sense."

"I get it," Lydia says, and Isabelle is suddenly very aware of the fact that they're still holding hands. She doesn't let go. "I was married, for a very short while, until my husband died three years ago. I've made my peace with that, but I miss him, and I miss what we had."

"I'm sorry. I had no idea."

"No."

"No." Lydia shakes her head. "It's alright. I loved John, and a part of me always will, but life goes on. There's no point dwelling on the past and losing all possibility of a better future."

"Can you tell Alec that, next time he mopes about a mission going wrong for a week?"

"I can try. I don't know if I'll have any luck. He's stubborn, and determined to carry the weight of the world."

"He is," Isabelle agrees. "But I'm not. Dance with me."

The mere suggestion makes a look of terror flash across Lydia's face, and she stares at Isabelle in abject horror. "I can't dance, Isabelle. At all. There's a reason I didn't dance at the Downworld party."

Isabelle shrugs, slinking backwards until their arms are stretched out between them, fingers just touching. She begins to shift her hips, shoulders moving as she lets the beat of the song spilling from the speaker wash over her, sinking deep into her bones.
"You don't have to be good at dancing to have fun."

"No, really, I am a horrible dancer."

Isabelle raises her eyebrows. "I don't believe you."

She lets go of Lydia's hand and twirls, tossing her hair over her shoulder as she looks back at Lydia, a smirk playing on her lips.

"Dance," she says. "I dare you."

It takes a moment. A moment of awkward shifting, and embarrassed laughter, but then, between one turn and the next, a mere second in which Isabelle's eyes aren't trained on the woman in her bedroom, something seems to flip inside Lydia.

"I'm never going to believe anything you say, ever!" Isabelle says, laughing incredulously as Lydia flicks her hair sharply, body rolling as her fingers tangle together overhead before sliding back down.

"I can't dance, my ass."

Lydia rolls her eyes, but she's grinning. "What can I say? You bring out my wild side."

The song changes three times, running on shuffle through Isabelle's playlist, before Lydia collapses onto Isabelle's bed, laughing and out of breath. Hair has fallen across her face, and her cheeks have turned pink with exertion and joy, and Isabelle wants to kiss her, and she can't even begin to fathom why, or how feelings of utter hatred a few weeks ago have transformed into this.

"Can I just stay here and not move?" Lydia asks with a gasping laugh, eyes bright as she looks over at Isabelle. "I don't think I have the energy to walk all the way across the Institute."

Isabelle shakes her head. "Far be it from me to complain about pretty people in my bed."

Something about that seems to make Lydia pause, and Isabelle sees the smile slip slightly from her face before she turns round to change the music to something softer, and to turn down the volume.

"Hey." A hand catches her elbow, and she turns to see Lydia sitting up, concern creasing her forehead. "Are you alright?"

Isabelle nods, because she is, she really is. She's confused, and she's conflicted, but she's alright. She's no stranger to the intricate and confusing workings of the heart. She's learnt to hang on and enjoy the ride as best she can.

"Perfectly," she says, and it's not a lie. She sits down on the bed, and reaches out to push hair back from Lydia's face; Lydia's lips part as they gaze at each other for a moment. "Will you tell me something about yourself?"

Lydia blinks. "What sort of something?"

"Anything." Isabelle pulls her legs up onto the bed and leans back against the pillows. "I don't know much about you."

"Okay," Lydia says, and the smile has returned to her face. "But only if you tell me something about you, too."

Isabelle's lips curl up. "Deal."

They talk until the battery on Isabelle's iPod runs out, and light begins to ease into the impenetrable
darkness of the deepest night, leaking slowly across the skies outside Isabelle's window. It's not until they hear the faint clattering of the night patrol returning, just before four o'clock in the morning, that they succumb to the inevitable pull of sleep, sinking beneath the waves and letting dreams wash over them.

And something about the press of Lydia's shoulder against hers, and the tickle of blonde hair against her neck, seems to drive away the unending nightmares filled with blood and death and her brothers' faces saturated with terror.

Instead, Isabelle dreams of a beach, wind whipping through the air and waves crashing onto golden flakes of sand, and the laughter of a blonde-haired woman with soft hands and a well-armoured heart.

***

Beauty has never been something Alec has had much time for.

It's always been an arbitrary distraction. People describe Isabelle as beautiful. That's as relevant as the word has ever been to Alec. It's not something he pays an awful amount of attention to, the beauty of other people, or the beauty of landscapes and objects and materials.

But being roused into consciousness while blanketed in the warmth of Magnus' bed affords him the sight of Magnus staring at him, eyes half-slitted and face sleep-ridden, hair tousled and chest rising and falling slowly, a smile just curling at his lips.

And Alec decides that the only thing in the world deserving of such an adjective, other than perhaps his sister, is Magnus Bane.

"Morning," he says, voice husky and a yawn catching at the back of his throat. He turns a little so that he's facing Magnus properly. "How do you feel?"

Something odd flashes across Magnus' face, something Alec can't quite place, and the smile drops away as though Alec's words doused him with a bucket of icy water.

"What?"

"Your side," Alec says, brows drawing together at Magnus' strange reaction. "From Agramon, yesterday. Does it still hurt?"

Magnus' expression clears like wind blowing away rainclouds, and his eyes sparkle softly. "No. Not at all."

Alec reaches fingertips to brush across Magnus' face, bare and cleansed of makeup. It's not that Magnus looks more beautiful with or without makeup, but he looks different. He looks more vulnerable, like this. It's a sight Alec is well aware not many people get to see. And he feels privileged to be granted the opportunity to see Magnus Bane as few do.

Falling into Magnus is natural. He can't look away from those eyes, soft and gleaming and unglammed, and it's like Magnus commands the powers of all the seas and the heavens, an irresistible magnet that drags Alec in.

Magnus makes a soft sound when their lips meet, and curls a hand around the back of Alec's neck, fiddling with the downy hair there. Magnus' nose presses against his cheek as he tilts his head, Alec's lips parting under Magnus', and he shifts closer, until their knees bump and their feet touch.
It's silent in Magnus' bedroom save for the sounds made between them. Slow breaths as they exhale, and sharp gasps on every inhale; the soft sounds of lips meeting and parting; the rustle of sheets as they move together. Alec doesn't want it to end. He could kiss Magnus like this for an eternity.

"We're doing everything the wrong way round," Magnus whispers, lips dragging across Alec's jaw and making him shiver. "Sharing a bed without a date, and morning kisses without sex..." He trails off, nipping lightly at Alec's earlobe in a way that makes Alec swallow a moan. "And I here I was presuming you'd be traditional."

Alec pulls back just enough to look Magnus in the eye. "I don't care about traditional."

Magnus' mouth twists into a smile, and the look is so undeniably fond that Alec's heart turns over, thudding heavily against his ribcage. "I'm sure this will shock you, but neither do I."

"Magnus," Alec says, glancing down between them where they've got their hands loosely twined together. "I think you should know that I've never-- I've never done this before."

Magnus raises his eyebrows. "Which bit of this?"

"Any of it." He clears his throat nervously. "I mean, you must have guessed. You were the first person I ever came out to."

"No women?" Magnus asks, with a clear note of caution in his voice, unglamoured eyes flickering across Alec's face.


"Okay." Magnus says the word slowly, syllables dragging through the air like it's honey, and he strokes the hand at Alec's neck round and up to cup his cheek. "You don't owe me anything. You know that, don't you?"

"What?"

"Just because you kissed me," Magnus says, softly, "doesn't mean you've entered into some kind of contract with me. You don't have to do anything."

"I know. I want to. I meant what I said, that night at your party. I like you, Magnus."

Magnus' lips quirk up, eyes turning to liquid caramel in the morning light. "I like you too, Alexander."

Alec lets loose a breath he hasn't realised he's been holding, and feels Magnus' legs shift beneath the sheets until he has one ankle crossed over Alec's. Their calves brush, Magnus' skin bare and warm. It's so intimate that Alec's chest thuds harder against his ribs, exhilaration rushing through him.

"I'm sure the Clave has educated you about my extensive and illustrious dating history," Magnus says, and the words are lazy, unconcerned, tossed into the air with immeasurable casualness, but there's a flicker of uncertainty in his eyes.

"I'm not sure those are the words they used," Alec replies, "but your file is fairly...comprehensive on the subject."

Alec wants to make a quip about Magnus fishing for compliments, but, despite the lightness to Magnus' tone, something tells him that the topic at hand is decidedly more fragile than either of them are willing to acknowledge.

"Yes," Alec tells him, honestly. "Although not in official print. Even the Clave aren't that indiscreet. But I don't see why that's their business, or why your dating life should be used against you. Last time I checked, dating isn't illegal."

Magnus' expression goes soft, and he leans in to press a kiss to Alec's lips. "You're sweet," he murmurs. "For a Shadowhunter."

Alec huffs out a laugh. "Should I be offended?"

"Mmm." Magnus kisses him again, lingering for long enough for Alec to return the kiss before he pulls back to speak. "No. You're sweet for not a Shadowhunter, too. I just like teasing you too much."

Their lips meet for a third time, and, as Alec sinks his fingers into Magnus' bicep, he thinks that this, here, with Magnus beside him in the light of the morning, soft and warm and sleep-ridden, might be the most wonderful thing he's ever experienced.

And he knows, with absolute certainty, that he wants to experience it again, and again, and again.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the chapter! But now I'm going to put a downer on everyone, I'm afraid.

I don't know how many of you follow my tumblr, or how many of you follow any of the activity there, but I've certainly had some interesting anons this week. Most of them got deleted. I acknowledged a few. My best guess is that they all came from one or two people, but just a single hate anon is enough to be disheartening.

So. 1) If you don't like this -- don't read it. 2) If you're a masochist and for some reason you ignore number 1, don't drop hate in my inbox. 3) If you like the story but something has bothered you, you're more than welcome to come talk to me about it. I've had two very productive conversations this week, and both of them benefited me and the person who asked the question and you all, as readers.

Constructive, polite critique is more than welcome, as you all know. Hate, especially hate which is anonymous, is not.

I just wanted to put that out there, and this is just to bear in mind, this isn't a lament or a plea for sympathy in the comments -- talk to me about the chapter, not rude anons, please!!! It's much nicer!!

Also, just so you're all aware, I may be having another posting gap next week. Come follow me on Tumblr for updates -- I'll aim to have made a decision by Sunday/Monday!

Much love, especially to anyone at all affected by hurricane Irma this week.
Lu <3
Ibis

Chapter Summary

In which Alec still hasn't discovered Grindr, Iris makes some demands, and Isabelle sees an old friend.

Chapter Notes

The ibis refers to a "spiritual esoteric" (so quoted and stolen from my source because I think that's a nice way to put it) and can also be indicative of a person dwelling in evil.

So, yes. Iris.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"I'm glad to see you've finally discovered Grindr."

Alec glances up from the pile of papers regarding the Downworld Council's sentencing of Iris Rouse on his desk that are signed by Catarina Loss but have definitely been written by Magnus. Jace is leaning against the door jam, arms folded across his chest, a smirk on his face.

"What?"

"Grindr," Jace repeats, eyes alight with mischief. "I'm glad you've found it. Great stress relief."

"I don't know what you're on about," Alec tells him, honestly, "but I need to get these sent to Mom or Dad to sign, so if you could arrange a secure transportation to Idris—"

Jace shakes his head, and covers Alec's hand instead of taking the proffered papers, pushing it away. Alec stops and raises his eyebrows at his parabatai.

"No," Jace says. "You sign them. You're Head of the Institute."

"Acting," Alec corrects him, and, when Jace rolls his eyes, adds, "These aren't just patrol reports, Jace. This is approving a decision made by the Downworld Council about a Clave-wanted criminal."

"If you don't sign them, I'll forge your signature as soon as you give them to me."

"For god's sake." Alec exhales in frustration. "Just—"

"No, you just. We all know that Luke, Raphael, Meliorn and your warlock aren't going to let Iris off with a slap on the wrist. If you think it's fair, sign it yourself. It was our home that was attacked, after all. Not the Inquisitor's."

Alec shakes his head at Jace, but he concedes. Why his twelve year old self decided a hot-headed, rule-breaking golden boy with a bit too much love for twisting the law would be a good parabatai, he really can't imagine.
The quiet, distinct thud of the door shutting fully makes Alec lift his gaze from the night's patrol report and back to his parabatai. Jace is watching him with a strange amount of intensity, but he doesn't speak when Alec meets his eyes.

"What is it?" Alec asks at last, exasperated by Jace's continued staring. "If this is about that Grindr thing, I still don't know what that is, so—"

Jace cuts him off by breaking away from his frozen position by the door. He sits in the chair opposite Alec on the other side of the desk, and braces his elbows on the worn wooden edge, fingers folded beneath his chin.

"Where were you, last night?" Jace asks.

"Didn't Izzy tell you?"

"She told me about Simon," Jace says, inclining his head. "And I know you were at Magnus' before that. Thanks so much for telling me you'd found him, by the way."

Alec lets out a groan. "I'm sorry, Jace. I forgot I'd asked you to help track him. I got...distracted."

Magnus' lips have a tendency to do that to a person, he thinks.

That night - which was only just twenty-four hours ago - seems like such a long time ago. Running across the city to find Magnus, seeing him at home, kissing him for the first time, desperate and biting and filled with longing...

"It's fine," Jace says, with a quick shake of his head. "Izzy told me you went back to see Magnus, afterwards. But then you didn't come home until seven o'clock this morning. Where were you all night?"

Alec tries not to think about this morning. It had taken him a moment to extract himself from Magnus' kisses for long enough to remember that he had a job to do, and that he had to go. It had taken him even longer to persuade Magnus that he really didn't have to get him breakfast or make him a portal or show him to the door.

Magnus is a hard man to dissuade, once he's got something in his mind. And his insistence has only succeeded in leaving Alec wondering what it would have been like if he'd given it, and stayed for toast and coffee and jokes over breakfast.

He wants to find out what that's like. He wants to spend a morning with Magnus like that. It's a ridiculous thought, really, because he only kissed him for the first time a few hours ago, but he can't strike it out of his head. He wants to see Magnus get dressed, and put on his make-up, and get ready for his day. He wants to hear about what he's going to be doing, and he wants to kiss him goodbye, and he wants...

"I was at Magnus'," Alec says, gaze unwavering as he looks at Jace.

Jace's eyebrows shoot up. "All night?"

"All night."

"Alec..." Jace tips his head to one side. "Are you and Magnus...?"

"I don't know," Alec says, exhaling. He shakes his head, and runs a hand through his hair. "I don't know what we are, Jace. I've never known. He's always...confusing me."
"Have you kissed him yet?"

Alec closes his eyes. "Maybe."

"Oh, thank fuck." Jace makes a triumphant sound, and Alec glares at him. "What? Come on, man, I've only seen you two together a few times and it's so obvious that you like each other. It's nauseatingly sweet."

"You're not helping."

"I'm not?" Jace grins, but then it fades, to be replaced by something infinitely more serious, and unusually caring. "Alec, I'm just looking out for you. I know Lydia and Raj are doing their thing, but even if they work some miracle and the Clave absolves him of all blame, nothing between a Shadowhunter and a Downworlder is ever going to be easy. Look and Iz and Meliorn."

"I know," Alec says. "I'm not stupid. And we're both men. It's doomed before it's even begun, I know, I just... I can't help it. I like him."

"Hey, I didn't say it's doomed."

"Then we fight," Jace says, simply. "None of us, not me or Izzy or Clary or anybody else you care about, want you to hand Magnus over to the Clave. Not if he's innocent."

"We can't fight the entire Clave."

Jace's lips curl up. "That's where you're wrong, Alec. Do you know how many people would support you, if you could gather enough evidence to prove, unequivocally, that Magnus is innocent?"

"Three?" Alec suggests, serious despite the sarcastic note to his voice. "Four?"

"More than you might think," Jace tells him. "The Clave has fucked over a hell of a lot of people, with its incompetence regarding Valentine. And just about everything else. There are Institutes that have been left smouldering by Valentine's attacks. People have been slaughtered. And there are a fair number of people who are getting sick of the Clave's attitude towards Downworlders. Particularly our generation."

"I'll believe that when I see it," Alec says. "But none of it's going to help us unless we can prove that Magnus is innocent."

Jace purses his lips. "Does he have anything?"
Alec arches an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"Well." Jace pauses, looking uncharacteristically thoughtful. "Lydia and Raj are struggling to find something concrete to latch onto, but Magnus might have something. He might be able to point us in the right direction. Or the right century."

"I can ask," Alec says, but he's a little hesitant. "I suppose."

"Have you not told him?" Jace asks, catching on irritatingly quickly. It's supposed to be Isabelle who knows things she shouldn't, not Jace. Jace is supposed to be oblivious. "About what Lydia is doing?"

"We don't really talk about it," Alec admits. "Or, we haven't. Not recently."

"Well maybe this is something you should talk about," Jace says, not unkindly. Then he smiles, and makes a shrugging motion with his shoulders as he says, "Take him out for dinner, chat about all your woes over drinks."

Rather than paying any attention to the way his stomach curls and twists not altogether unpleasantly at the thought, because Magnus did ask him out on a date last night, Alec shoots Jace a glare.

"I have work to do," he says, shaking his head. "Go. I'll see you on morning patrol."

"Just one more thing," Jace says, as he stands. "Then I'll leave you alone. Do you think Iz and Lydia have some kind of thing going on?"

A smile curls at Alec's lips. "I think they're getting there."

***

Alec doesn't hear from Magnus for four days following their night spent together. He finds himself glancing at his phone at every opportunity, hoping for a text from the man who's entirely taken over his thoughts, but he gets only radio silence.

He can't quite bring himself to be the first to reach out. Magnus had said, so clearly, that they didn't owe each other anything. They haven't talked about any of it, and Alec doesn't know what the protocol is. Where's the handbook for what to do when you finally kiss the man you can't stop thinking about?

So, rather than let himself mope about it, he throws himself into his job. Into the routine monotony of training and early morning patrols and endless amounts of paperwork, and, also, into his new attempts to keep some degree of open communication between the various Downworld leaders and the Institute.

"Alec."

The knock on the door makes Alec glance up, and he smiles faintly at Lydia as she walks in. "Lydia. Hey."

"I just wanted to let you know, the Clave has approved my reports on the leadership of this Institute. They'll be appointing a new head shortly."

Alec's eyes widen, fear shooting through him. He's worked so hard to help his parents keep this Institute, to do proud by them and ensure that it's kept by his family, and now the Clave wants to give it to someone else, anyway?
"What?" he demands, setting his pen down. "Why? Who?"

"Your mother was officially in charge, here," Lydia says. "But she wasn't really. And she's spending more and more time in Idris, pouring over intelligence regarding Valentine and the Circle, so it didn't seem practical to me to recommend that she remain in charge."

"So who are they appointing?" Alec asks, feeling his heart calm a little at the easy, unhurried tone in Lydia's voice. She doesn't sound like she's bringing bad news. "Are they putting Jace in charge?"

To Alec's surprise, Lydia lets out a snort. "God, no. That would be a disaster. I can't tell you who I've recommended for the position, Alec, but my advice came from many weeks of observation and close contact. He's exceedingly familiar with how this place runs, and I think he'll do a phenomenal job. Especially in the Downworld. He's already improved relations with the wolves immensely, drawing their leader out of hiding and anonymity by extending the proverbial olive branch, or so I hear."

The insinuation makes Alec gape at Lydia, jaw going slack. "You– Really? Even after...what I told you?"

Lydia seems momentarily bewildered by that, but then her expression clears, and her lips twist into a wry smile. "It's completely irrelevant to how you do your job. Trust me, I'd know," she tells him. "I also told your parents, in no uncertain terms, that there is not going to be any kind of marriage arrangement between us. Your family is keeping this Institute. A political alliance is totally unnecessary."

Still stunned, Alec lets out a weak laugh. "Yeah. Okay. Thank you, Lydia."

Her expression softens, smile turning into something more generous, more genuine. Slim fingers reach out to cover his hand, and she squeezes lightly. "The Consul's approval is a formality rather than a decision. So congratulations, Alec."

She turns to go, but before she can reach the door, Alec calls out to her. "Hey, Lydia?"

"Mm?"

Lydia never seems to get to go on practical missions. She's fully trained in field work, despite Isabelle's initial assumptions when she'd first arrived - Alec's read her file - but she never seems to get much practical experience in New York, and he can't imagine she got any in Idris.

"There was a call about a demon sighting near the Hunter's Moon that came in a few minutes ago," he tells her. "Izzy's going to have a look. Will you go with her?"

Lydia's eyebrows raise, but she doesn't question Alec's request. "Of course. If that's what's needed."

Alec inclines his head. "Thank you."

"No problem," Lydia says, clearly a little mystified. She shakes her head slightly as though to clear her ears of water, shoots him a fleeting smile, and then slips back out of the office.

*My office*, he thinks, a pleased, twisting sort of feeling settling in the pit of his stomach—the same sort of feeling he'd got when Magnus had told him he was proud of him for coming out. Really, officially, his office.

***
Iris Rouse is a tall, solid woman with a heart far more vicious than the soft wisps of auburn hair and the flowing clothes that drape across her body would suggest. There's a streak of defiance blazing in her eyes as she stands before the Downworld Council, chin tipped up and shoulders back despite the sizzling orange magic holding her wrists together.

Magnus doesn't think he's ever seen The Hunter's Moon so empty. They've commandeered the entire building, kicking out half of Luke's pack, several vampires and a number of warlocks in the process. Maia had shut down all and any protests with a sharp word.

Magnus drums his fingers against the table as Luke and Meliorn argue hotly across the room. They've discussed Iris' sentence on several occasions since the attack, in two official meetings and on a brief Skype conversation that Meliorn was exceptionally reluctant to participate in. It hasn't quite been long enough for Luke and Meliorn to iron out all their differences.

Iris, for her part, hasn't made any attempt to deny any of the accusations they threw her way, confessing to her part in the attack on the Institute with only minimal prompting. She'd also admitted to a long-standing agreement with Valentine—that he'd help her find, or avenge, her lost grandchild, if she continued to help him.

"Gentleman," Magnus says, clearing his throat as he hears Luke and Meliorn's argument turn a corner, straying a little too far from the topic at hand. Meliorn is less than impressed with Luke allying his pack, officially, with the New York Institute. He's similarly snooty about Raphael and Magnus' more informal agreements.

Meliorn and Luke both look over at him. Luke exhales, and Meliorn rolls his eyes; through his peripheries, Magnus sees Raphael bite down on the inside of his cheek to hold in a laugh.

"Iris," Luke says, suddenly calm following his heated debate with Meliorn. "We've made our decision. You will be banned from practising magic in North America indefinitely, you will serve a sentence of fifteen years exile with the warlocks in Iceland, and you will be subject to sporadic follow-up calls, irrespective of your location. Any contact with Valentine Morgenstern will result in further consequences. Is that clear?"

"Yes," Iris says, eyes flickering between them but face impassive. "And I'll do it, without any fuss, but only if you promise to find out what happened to Madzie."

Magnus feels his breath leave him at Iris' demand. It's what the Clave refused to do, and their decision to ignore Iris' pleas had led her, in her desperation, straight to Valentine. The Clave brought more trouble upon themselves by angering a warlock with a more than competent grasp on defensive and offensive magic.

"You are not in a position to be making demands," Meliorn says, coolly. "We will not do the job of the Clave. Few Downworlders would be willing to risk their necks investigating Valentine for the sake of a girl who is probably long since dead."

Iris clenches her jaw, anger writing itself into every line of her face. "Then I will not go quietly."

"You're not getting out of those in a hurry," Luke says, nodding to the magical cuffs around Iris' wrists. "Not unless Magnus wants you to."

Magnus lets the conversation wash over him as Iris attempts to negotiate. Meliorn isn't wrong—there aren't many Downworlders who would be willing to poke their noses anywhere near Valentine. It's the Clave's job to investigate such cases, but the Clave has proven itself ever unwilling to intervene in the case of a missing warlock girl.
The New York Conclave, however...

"I will make inquiries," Magnus says, "regarding Madzie. I will not ask any Downworlders to risk their lives, but I will do my best, Iris. You have my word."

He can feel his colleagues staring at him, clearly taken aback by his declaration, but he doesn't look away from Iris. For a moment, she merely stares back, frozen and unblinking. Then she swallows, and inclines her head.

"Alright."

Magnus doesn't reply, instead turning towards Raphael, Luke and Meliorn. "I'm going to bring the topic up with the New York Institute," he tells them. "Unless I'm still needed here."

"No," Luke says, talking over Meliorn's bewildered protests. "You can take the cuffs off. We've got it."

Magnus waves a hand lazily, the cuffs fizzling out from around Iris' wrists and dissipating into the air. He doesn't look back at Iris, and steps towards the doorway with a nod to the other Downworld leaders.

"Magnus." Raphael catches his forearm as he passes, meeting his gaze. "Be careful. You're putting a lot of trust in these Nephilim."

"You trusted them enough to call them in for Simon," Magnus points out, and Raphael shrugs. "I know it's a risk, and I know they're still Clave soldiers, but it's the best we've got. And I'd rather try to build alliances than carry on as we are."

A small smile crosses Raphael's face. "I know. Just...be careful."

Magnus pats a hand lightly against Raphael's cheek. "I always am, cariño."

He's a mere two steps away when Raphael says, "And Magnus?"

Magnus turns back, peering over his shoulder and blinking. "Mmm?"

"Your Shadowhunter. The Lightwood boy. I like him. He could be an invaluable ally to the Downworld among the Shadowhunters. I can count on one hand the number of Shadowhunters I've ever thought were good, and he's one of them."

Magnus scoffs. "You could count on one hand the number of people in general you've ever thought were good, Raphael." But his voice softens as he says, "You're right. He is good. He's a good Shadowhunter and he's a good leader."

"Then this is his chance to prove himself to all of us." Raphael tilts his head a little to one side and steps closer, lowering his voice so that Luke and Meliorn, standing behind and clearly pretending they're not curious as to what he and Raphael are saying, can't hear. "I saw Maryse Lightwood every time I looked at him until the other night, with Simon. She'd have executed or arrested Simon on the spot. Alec was...fair. He didn't do anything spectacular, he just did what any Shadowhunter should have done. Which I suppose is somewhat spectacular in itself, as depressing as that sounds. And then I realised that I can't pin the actions of his parents on him anymore than I can his race in general."

"No," Magnus agrees, and glances down at his hands, where he's spinning rings around his fingers. "I found it hard, sometimes, to separate him from his mother. But he's so unlike her. He wants so badly to do good. He always has. The Clave just lied to him about what that was."
A smile tugs at the corners of Raphael's lips, and Magnus wonders, momentarily, whether this conversation was some sort of devious ploy on Raphael's part. He looks oddly triumphant. Magnus can't imagine why.

"So let's encourage him to do some more of that good. Let's encourage him to be an active ally to us."

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It only takes a moment after Isabelle plunges a seraph blade into a demon, spraying Lydia and herself with thick, acidic ichor, that they both burst into laughter where they're kneeling on the filthy sidewalk.

Lydia's eyes are bright with mirth as the soles of her boots hit the floor and she lifts herself up onto her feet in one smooth movement that makes Isabelle's eyes flicker down. She's not sure she's ever seen Lydia in gear like this—in a fitted leather jacket and leggings and a skin-tight burgundy top. It's inappropriately appealing.

As Lydia reaches a hand down to help her up, Isabelle hauls her gaze back up; she grasps Lydia's hand and pulls herself up, only to find herself a little closer than she anticipated. Unable to help herself, she glances down at Lydia's mouth.

"I've never seen you move like that," she murmurs, looking back up and noticing that Lydia's eyes at this time in the evening look like moonlight reflected in an undisturbed stretch of water.

Lydia's lips twist up in a wry smile. "You've never seen me fight."

"I have now," Isabelle says, eyes flickering between Lydia's. "I'm impressed. How can an Idris native fight like that?"

"I don't know," Lydia says. "How can a New York Shadowhunter be the city's best forensic pathologist?"

"I'm a woman of many talents."

"Mm." Lydia is smiling lazily, and it's stirring the fires of desire in Isabelle's gut. "That you are."

For a moment, Isabelle thinks she's going to kiss Lydia Branwell. She can see the stars reflected in Lydia's pupils, she can feel her every breath disturbing the air, she can smell the coconut scent of her shampoo—and she wants to taste her lip balm.

Then a slam resounds through the night from the Hunter's Moon, just a few metres away where the call about the demon had come from, and Isabelle glances up, over Lydia's shoulder. Footsteps sound along the pavement, and she sees a shadowy silhouette rounding the corner to turn into the alleyway she and Lydia are standing in. The figure turns, just slightly, and the moonlight hits his face.

Isabelle freezes.

So does the figure at the end of the alleyway. They stare at each other, eyes locked and bodies externally still but internally restless. Isabelle's stomach churns and her blood pounds through her veins, heart thudding against her ribs so hard it's just shy of painful.

Or maybe that's just the emotional pain wracking through her.
She can feel Lydia’s hand still curled around hers. She can feel the body heat rolling off Lydia and crashing into her like waves rippling onto a beach and rushing up the sand. She can feel Lydia reaching her free hand up to grip her shoulder in a gentle attempt to draw her attention.

But all that her mind can accommodate is guilt, and devastation, and a longing she didn’t ever expect to feel. In front of her is the marker of everything she’s done wrong in the last four months; the physical reminder of all her failings.

"Isabelle."

Meliorn is the first to break out of it. He inhales visibly, shoulders shifting back as he rises up tall, eyes clear and unconcerned as he looks her up and down with clinical detachment. The only sign he gives to let her know that he’s just as affected as she is is the hand that drags through his hair, fingers catching in the knots and yanking through.

"Meliorn," she says, voice steadier than she feels.

This - this emotional distance and dancing around their deepest and darkest secrets and desires and selves - is just one of the multitude of reasons she always knew that she and Meliorn were never going to be an eternal thing. But the way they ended, the reason they ended...that was never part of the plan.

"How are you?" Isabelle asks, stepping away from Lydia and dropping their hands but making no move to close the distance between herself and the fey she’d shared much more than a bed with for many months.

"Better than the last time you saw me," Meliorn says, and Isabelle winces. The last time she’d seen Meliorn was when he’d dumped her after she’d arrested him upon Clave orders and only broken him out because of a plan that was really concocted by Alec and Magnus, not her.

"I'm sorry," she says. "For...all of it."

Meliorn inclines his head. "I know," he says. "And I forgave you for all of it long ago, Isabelle. That doesn't change our situation."

"I know," she echoes, because she does. In an attempt to change the subject, she says, "Why were you in the Hunter's Moon?"

"The Downworld Council were meeting," Meliorn says carefully, with a glance towards Lydia. His wariness is obvious.

"It's okay," she tells him. "You can trust Lydia."

"I trusted you," Meliorn says bluntly, and Isabelle flinches. "I learnt my lesson."

Isabelle feels her heart break all over again. "Meliorn—"

"Isabelle." Meliorn says her name with impossible gentleness, kindness clear in his face, and she can't help but feel like she doesn't deserve any of it. "I don't blame you for what happened. You broke us out." Isabelle feels Lydia's eyes turn on her sharply, but she doesn't look away from Meliorn. "There aren't many Shadowhunters who'd do that. It's just a fact of our world. The Clave isn't a democracy, it's a dictatorship, and dictators are always going to prioritise themselves above justice."

"I don't want that to be true," Isabelle says, and takes a step towards him without conscious thought.
"That's what I want to change."

"I know," Meliorn replies, and smiles sadly. "But in the time of Valentine and rampant racism, perhaps our relationship was always a little over-optimistic."

"Do you really believe that?" Isabelle whispers, Alec's face flashing in her mind, and then Magnus', and then the image of them together at Magnus' party as they looked at each other like they could find the world in each other's eyes. "Do you really believe that a Shadowhunter and a Downworlder can't be close?"

Meliorn shakes his head. "It would be an unending uphill battle against both Shadowhunters and Downworlders that won't end for a very long time. Friendship...maybe. With people like you forging the paths forward, maybe. A monogamous romantic bond? I don't think so, my love."

Isabelle closes her eyes for just a moment. Meliorn is one of the fae - he can't lie - but he can believe things that aren't true. Isabelle refuses to believe that the one true chance at love her brother has ever had is doomed before it's even begun. It can't be. She won't let it be. She'll burn the Clave to the ground before she lets them ruin her brother's chance at happiness, as they have for the last decade by making him believe that there's something wrong with him.

She doesn't know what's going on between Magnus and Alec, really, but she knows that there's something there. The position she found them in at Magnus' party was only the most concrete evidence she's seen. She's never seen Alec look at anybody the way he looks at Magnus, like he's the only wonder in the world he gives a shit about.

And she swears, then and there, that she'll protect Magnus Bane with her life. She doesn't know Magnus very well - not really, despite how much she likes him - but she knows that he loves her brother. Or, at least, something very close. She'll protect Magnus, just like she'll protect Alec, with everything she has.

"It's time I returned to the court," Meliorn says, walking towards them slowly and pulling her from her fervent thoughts. He stops before Isabelle, and reaches out to touch her hair. "Goodbye, Isabelle."

Isabelle squeezes his hand, and summons a smile. "Goodbye, Meliorn."

He jerks his head in a nod at Lydia, and then strides past them, disappearing at the other end of the alleyway.

There's silence, save for the soft sounds of their breaths in the cool air of the nighttime. Isabelle turns to look at Lydia. Her expression is inscrutable.

"That was your ex-boyfriend," Lydia says, and it's not a question, so Isabelle nods. "And you broke those Downworlders out of the Institute prison. You're the leak I'm supposed to be bringing to justice. Jace, too?"

"And Alec," Isabelle says, quietly. "And Magnus."

Lydia exhales, and shakes her head, eyes lifting skyward. Stars reflect in the black of her pupils. "Why am I not surprised?"

"You're not going to arrest me?"

"Of course I'm not going to arrest you," Lydia says, scoffing. "Don't be ridiculous. I had my suspicions, when Jace told me about your acquaintance with Warlock Bane."
Isabelle wonders whether Lydia has realised the rest of it—that Alec isn't just a friendly acquaintance of the High Warlock of Brooklyn.

"Hey." Lydia has come to stand in front of her, and has ducked her head to better catch Isabelle's eye. "Are you okay?"

"Not really." Isabelle admits, with a bitter laugh. "I just— Can we go back to the Institute?"

"Yeah." Lydia nods, and lifts a hand to brush Isabelle's hair back from her face, fingers skimming the skin of her cheek. Isabelle finds herself leaning towards the touch without conscious thought, seeking comfort she doesn't deserve from a woman who has every right to hate her, but, for some inexplicable reason, seems to like her. "Isabelle, whatever it is that's bothering you so much, it's probably not as world-ending as it seems now."

"Probably," Isabelle agrees, and manages to offer Lydia a weak smile. "Please, let's just go home."

"Okay." Lydia drops her hand from Isabelle's face and reaches down to grasp her hand, wings stretching out behind her in preparation to fly. "Okay. Let's go."

Chapter End Notes

I'm unnecessarily proud of myself for actually getting this chapter out, I really didn't think I'd hit my writing target for this week, but here it is! Expect a gap at some point in the next few weeks, but we're okay for the moment, and I'll let you know nearer the time if any gaps will be occurring. (What are sentences does any of this make sense oh my god.)

Anyway! There was no direct malec interaction this chapter, but a fair few hints that way, and I promise there'll be some scenes between them next week!

I've been genuinely terrible at replying to comments recently, I am going to try to do better... I do read them all (and also my tumblr messages!) even if I don't reply, and I genuinely appreciate everyone who takes the time to drop me their thoughts. Thank you particularly for the kind words last week :)

If you fancy it, Come follow me on Tumblr and scream at me about random crap/puppies.

Much love, Lu <3
Alec doesn't expect Magnus' abrupt text message as afternoon begins to slide into evening. Even less does he expect Magnus to be asking him to get drinks and dinner at the Hunter's Moon later, after so many days of no contact following that night.

The Hunter's Moon is awash with activity as Alec touches down in the street at half past seven, folding his wings in behind him and activating his rune to make them disappear before he walks into a crowded bar.

The sidewalk glistens with rainwater from this morning's downpour, and silvery moonlight reflects off its surface. Wind casts through the trees, strong enough to rustle the leaves but not cold enough to make Alec do up his jacket.

Outside the bar, a portal shimmers into existence, the blue achingly familiar as magical swaths of incandescence light up the nighttime. An equally familiar figure steps out, waving an elegant hand to close the portal behind him.

Alec's heart twists in his chest at the sight of Magnus a mere nine or ten metres away, totally unaware of Alec's presence. He's so beautiful. Everything about him, from his perfectly styled hair to the fitted blue jacket, makes Alec's stomach swoop.

Magnus turns and glances up just as Alec approaches, and a smile crosses his face. It's warm, genuine, but it's small. He looks tired. Not physically - not like he's been using too much magic, and is on the verge of collapse again - but emotionally. He looks...world-weary. Mentally exhausted.

It makes Alec want to sit him down and make him tea and listen to every worry plaguing his mind.

"Alexander," he says, looking genuinely pleased to see him. It makes Alec's mind go blank. "I'm glad you could come."

Alec stops just out of touching distance, hands shoved deep in the pockets of his jacket, because he's not sure what he's supposed to do. They've kissed—does that mean he's supposed to kiss Magnus
hello, like Jace and Clary do? But they're not in a relationship. Should he hug him? Shake his hand? Touch his shoulder?

"Yeah," Alec says, internally wondering how he can be twenty-two and curgently have only one relationship in his life - and Jace and Clary's fucking mess of a relationship, at that - that's an example of a healthy romantic relationship between consenting adults.

Although, referring to Jace as an adult is, perhaps, a bit of a stretch.

"It's, um." Alec clears his throat. "It's nice to see you."

Magnus' expression softens. He reaches out to cup his palm around Alec's elbow to pull him closer, and presses a kiss against his cheek. "And you, darling."

As he pulls away, Alec feels his heart swell in his chest. By the Angel, he's missed Magnus. It's been days, but his absence has felt like a physical ache that he didn't fully register until it disappeared mere moments ago as their eyes met. The only thing even remotely comparable is when he and Jace are apart for long periods of time—but this is different. He's not missing part of his soul.

Maybe, though, he's missing part of his heart. Because, whatever his intentions, and however much it's surely going to come back to ruin him, he feels like he gives Magnus another piece of his heart every time they're together without even realising it.

He's missed Magnus. And he wants to tell him, desperately. He's just not sure if he should. He's not sure if it's appropriate, or if it would be well-received. So he doesn't say a word.

He's so caught up in his thoughts that it takes him a moment to notice the way Magnus tilts his head slightly to one side, watching him closely. His smile stretches across his face until the skin around his eyes crinkles. It simultaneously makes Alec want to kiss him and hide away.

"What?" Alec asks self-consciously, as Magnus just looks at him without saying a word, smile impossibly bright. "What is it?"

For a moment, Magnus is silent. Then he shakes his head slightly, smile not disappearing. "Nothing. Shall we go in?"

Alec agrees - at least, he thinks he does - and Magnus holds the door open for him and strides confidently towards the bar, entirely unfazed at the transition from the relative emptiness of the street to the hot, densely packed environment of the Hunter's Moon.

"You two keep turning up like bad eggs," says a familiar voice from behind the bar. Maia Roberts is wiping a dishcloth along the counter, a half-eaten bowl of peanuts in her free hand. She raises her eyebrows as Magnus leans against the bar, Alec hovering just behind him. "You two got some thing going on?"

"You could say that," Magnus says, dropping her a wink. "May I trouble you for an espresso martini, darling?"

One corner of Maia's mouth lifts in a smile. "For my best tipper, I can manage that. Alec?"

Alec starts at that, because he's fairly sure Maia has never called him Alec before (and this development, surely, is a positive thing?), and glances over at Magnus, as this is really more his area of expertise. Alec doesn't even know what the Hunter's Moon sells.

"Not beer," Maia interjects, and Alec shoots her a sheepish smile. "I'm not serving you beer again for
at least another year. I've never seen anyone down that much beer without needing a piss."

"House red?" Magnus suggests, raising an eyebrow at Alec, who shrugs and nods, because it's not like he knows anything at all about alcohol.

Maia returns with their drinks moments later, and, rather than take a seat at the bar, Magnus gestures them towards a table at the back of the room. It's tucked in a corner, offering semi-privacy while still including them in the general atmosphere of the place.

Alec takes a sip of his wine as they sit down, and sees Magnus smiling into his martini. It makes something in his chest ache, because he's missed that smile, and he's missed the elegant, purposeful way Magnus moves and the way the light glints as it reflects off his rings and catches on the shimmer in his makeup. He's just missed Magnus. More than he thinks he's ever missed anybody in his life.

"How have you been?" Alec asks, because he thinks that it's probably politer than commenting on the fact that Magnus looks like he needs to go on a sixth-month vacation away from everything brewing in New York.

Magnus makes a small, diplomatic shrugging motion with his shoulders. "I've had worse weeks. However..." Setting his glass down, he exhales, and leans across the table slightly to peer into Alec's eyes, something distinctly serious in the planes of his face. "There is something I need to discuss with you. And it's...more business, than pleasure."

Alec nods, although he can't help the twinge of disappointment in his gut. "I'm listening."

"It's about Iris Rouse," Magnus says, and Alec's eyebrows shoot up. "She's agreed to her sentence, she won't be allowed to practise magic in the United States and she's being given a temporary exile, but she has a condition. And not, frankly, an unreasonable one. But it's a responsibility that none of the Downworld leaders would wish to place upon our own people. It's not our job."

"Is this about the girl?" Alec guesses, frowning a little. "The Clave—"

"I know." Magnus exhales. "Iris wants to know what happened to Madzie. I know the Clave has dismissed her as dead, but Iris would like to know, for certain. It's not an unreasonable request."

"No, it's not," Alec agrees, but he shakes his head. "I'll have to bring this up with Lydia. She's Head of the Institute, she—"

Then he pauses. Because, although it's not official, not yet, Lydia isn't going to be in charge of the Institute for much longer. He'd always presumed that the Institute would be returned to his mother following Lydia's investigation, but that's not what's happening at all.

"Alec," Magnus says, apparently mistaking Alec's pausing to think for hesitation at accepting Iris' request. "I know the Clave has signed this one off, but they shouldn't have. This is your job. This is what the Shadowhunters are supposed to do. You're supposed to keep our world safe. And Madzie is just a child. She deserves better than to be abandoned, even if it does turn out that she's been killed."

"I know," Alec says, inclining his head. "It's not that. I agree with you."

"Oh." Magnus lips turn up in a small smile that seems to start from his eyes and ripple outwards, and he tilts his head slightly to one side. "Then I apologise for the assumption. Go on."

"I was just thinking, maybe I don't have to go through Lydia."
Magnus raises his eyebrows. "Are you being rebellious, Alexander?"

Alec laughs, and shakes his head. "No. No, it's just– Lydia said that she'd recommended me for the position of Head of the Institute."

"Alec." A grin spreads across Magnus' face, and he reaches out to squeeze Alec's hand across the table. "That's fantastic. Congratulations."

Stomach squirming pleasantly, Alec curls his fingers around Magnus', and returns his smile, glancing up at him from beneath his lashes. "Thanks, I, um. If I get the position, I want to try to improve our relations with the Downworld. Better communications with the wolves, and an official alliance with the vampires and the warlocks, and the Seelies... Well. They might be more difficult. But—"

"One step at a time. Before any of that, you will get this position," Magnus says, eyes bright and lips curled up in a fond smile that's slightly lopsided and heart-stoppingly beautiful. "I'm proud of you, darling. Really. You deserve this."

Alec ducks his head, embarrassment shooting through him, but he tightens his grip on Magnus' hand in recognition of his words.

"And the girl—Madzie," Alec says, correcting himself, and Magnus' eyes go sharp the moment they return to business. "The Clave will never allow missions specifically set to determine what happened to her, but I can do my best. If we raid Valentine's strongholds, or capture anyone, we'll dig for information."

Magnus nods. Alec knows he wants to push, wants to say that someone should petition, should argue with the Clave about the decision, because that's exactly what Alec would want to do, but they both know the Clave won't budge. They'll dismiss the request, and put eyes on New York's every decision. Alec's plan might be slow, but at least it'll avoid the Clave's scrutiny in its execution, if not in its consequence. It's tactical.

"That's a decent start," he says. "I'll take it."

"We can see how it goes. Discuss it again in a few weeks. But I can't push the Clave too hard too fast. It won't yield the results anybody wants."

"I trust your judgement on this," Magnus says. "Although the Downworld Council will want updates."

"I can do that."

"Excellent." Magnus smiles at him, business-bright. "I do like it when we see eye to eye."

"There's something I should tell you," Alec blurts out, almost before Magnus has finished speaking. Magnus blinks, clearly a little taken aback as his smile drops, but he inclines his head and lifts his eyebrows, waiting for Alec to speak. "You know Lydia?"

Magnus' lips quirk up. "The Clave envoy Lydia who's got a thing for your sister, yes."

Alec doesn't bother asking how Magnus knows that; he's accepted that it's the sort of thing Magnus just seems to be able to pick up on within five minutes of knowing somebody.

"Jace told her about you," he says. Magnus already knows this, but he's not entirely sure where to start. Context seems like as good a place as any. "And she's been trying to make the Clave retract the kill order, by proving that you're innocent. It was for me, at first, but she wants to do the right thing
regardless. She doesn't want to condemn you when you haven't done anything wrong."

As Alec speaks, Magnus' attentive expression morphs into a small, sad smile. The weariness in his eyes reminds Alec that he's four centuries old, and has seen people and institutions and species rise and fall, all making the same mistakes as each other.

"I appreciate that," Magnus says, softly. "But you must know it's not that simple. On paper, I have done the majority of what the Clave accuses me of."

"But in Indonesia—"

"Indonesia is just the tip of the iceberg," Magnus says, and withdraws his hand from Alec's to curl both around the tall, slender stem of his cocktail glass. Alec wishes he hadn't. "I do practise illegal magic, and I have broken dozens - hundreds - of Clave Laws, and I have consorted with criminals, and I have killed people. And I'm a Downworlder. In the Clave's mind, nothing more needs to be said."

"No." Alec grinds his teeth together, fury shooting through him. "Everything more needs to be said."

"I know. This is the frustration that the entire Downworld has felt for decades. Centuries."

That makes Alec glance down, peering into his wine instead of holding Magnus' gaze as regret and determination fill him. Regret, that it's taken him this long to discover how narrow his worldview had been, and stronger than that, determination to widen other people's, and to ensure that the next generation grow up in a better world than he did. Shame and self-pity won't help anybody. Action will.

"I never realised."

"But you're starting to now," Magnus says, "and that's what matters. Darling, I know I can't hide from the Clave forever. One day, I'll have to fight for my freedom, or change my name and set up camp with the penguins. One day, I might well be very grateful for anything and everything Lydia has put together. But I don't want to expose myself until I have to. I've managed to hide for the last two decades, since they put a price on my head. I can stay out of their reach a lot longer than that."

Alec stills, and looks back up at Magnus. Something in his voice makes everything churning and bitter and furious inside Alec calm. His brows furrow a little as he searches Magnus' face.

"Are you afraid?" he asks, softly. "Of what's going to happen?"

"A little," Magnus says, "yes. It's hard not to be afraid of an Institution that will most likely, one day, hold my life in its hands. And I— Well. To be entirely honest with you, the likelihood of emerging from a battle with the Clave with my life seems slim enough, let alone my livelihood."

"I won't let them," Alec says, and he's surprised by the ferocity in his voice. "I won't let them hurt you, and I won't let them manipulate me into doing their dirty work."

"You don't have to fight my battles for me," Magnus says gently. "I can take care of myself."

"I know you can. But I want to fight them with you, because you don't deserve...any of this."

Rather than reply, Magnus unfolds one hand from around his glass, rests his palm along the length of Alec's jaw, and leans across the table to kiss him. It's soft, brief, lips melding together just long enough for Alec to taste coffee and vodka before Magnus is pulling away and settling back into his chair before anyone else in the bar so much as glances their way.
Nobody appears to have noticed that the High Warlock of Brooklyn, wanted by the Clave, just kissed a Shadowhunter—and the very one who's supposed to put a blade through his heart.

"You're something else, Alexander Lightwood," Magnus says, and he's smiling, properly this time, the light back in his eyes and the sadness chased away.

Alec shrugs. "Only because of you."

"No. I don't mean that. The way you care about people." He huffs out a little laugh, and Alec's heart turns over. "I think I was locked in on you the moment you gave me that ridiculous letter. You'd told me you were *contractually obliged* to sign my death warrant and give the Clave my location, and then instead you gave me a letter of gratitude. I've seen a lot in four centuries, but even I was surprised. And not at all in a bad way."

Alec smiles sheepishly at the memory. "You had just given us the location of twenty-some kids."

Magnus takes a sip of his martini, a smirk on his lips, as though to say *damn right I did.*

"Will you tell me something about yourself?" Alec asks, twisting his wine glass in his hands just to give himself something to do as an outlet for his restlessness. Not because he's not utterly enraptured by every minute thing about Magnus, from the dips and peaks of his voice to the shifts in his expressions and the intricacies of his movements, but because he's not really very good at sitting still. He has to move his hands.

Magnus looks a little wary, glamoured eyes losing some of their carefree warmth. "What kind of something?"

"Nothing deep and serious," Alec says. "Something I don't know."

"You know lots of things about me already," he replies, still looking a little guarded.

Alec doesn't want him to. He wants Magnus to trust him. He wants to prove to Magnus that he can trust him, absolutely, with more than just the obvious things. He wants Magnus to trust that Alec will respect him, and his boundaries, and his heart.

"I know, but..." Alec shrugs. "What did you do this week, other than meet with the Downworld Council regarding Iris?"

Magnus' eyebrows shoot up. "You're interested in what being a High Warlock entails?"

"I'm interested in you," Alec tells him honestly. "I guess I just want to know about your life, and what makes you you. The mundane things as well as rescuing Marie Antoinette in a hot air balloon. Which I still don't believe, by the way."

"Alexander!" Magnus gasps in mock outrage. "That story is entirely true. Although I may have left out the fact that there was a very pretty man involved."

Alec arches an eyebrow at him, and says, deadpan, "Of course there was."

Magnus lifts one eyebrow unapologetically, and takes another sip of his martini before saying, "If you really want to know about my tiresome and terribly unexciting week, I spent most of it concocting a ridiculously complex potion for a werewolf..."

Alec settles in to listen to Magnus speak, letting Magnus' voice wash over him as he laps up his every word, unable to look away. The lilt of Magnus' voice is soothing, and everything anxious and
turbulent in Alec's gut seems to still and melt away, like the sea calming after a storm.

And he thinks, as Magnus weaves tales and pictures and people with a confident control over his every word that Alec can't help but be envious of, that's he's never been so glad to have met someone as he is to have met Magnus.

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They end up walking back to Magnus' loft together, after several drinks, an enormous portion of nachos, and a game of pool that turned a little more competitive than Alec had expected. He can't wipe the grin off his face as Magnus waves his hands, off on a tangent about some time he'd been drunk with Ragnor and they'd tried to convince Catarina that selling flying pool tables would be an incredibly profitable business.

"—and frankly, I'm grateful she didn't— Alexander?"

Alec raises his eyebrows. "Hm?"

"Am I boring you?"

"No," Alec tells him, with a smile. "Sorry. I was listening. Really. Catarina locked you both in separate bedrooms and made you listen to each other's music as punishment."

They reach Magnus' building, and Magnus' eyes soften. "Your eyes glazed over. My apologies."

"Don't worry," Alec tells him, as they stop outside the door. "You're just—"

Magnus raises an eyebrow at him. "I'm just?"

"Never mind," Alec says, because he can't quite find the courage to tell Magnus that he's so beautiful, especially when he's happy, that he has trouble concentrating. On anything.

"Would you like to come in?" Magnus asks, moving away from Alec a little, hand resting on his front door. "And come in is not a euphemism for have sex. I don't sleep with people on the first date when I want to see them again," he adds, with a wink.

Fucking hell, Magnus is trying to kill him. It's official.

"I should probably be getting back," Alec says, thinking of the patrol he's due on in six hours. He could do with some sleep.

He regrets it the moment he sees something in Magnus' expression fall, and close off, and he begins to nod, opening his mouth to say something that Alec knows will be dismissive, and understanding, and belie the hurt Alec has managed to inflict.

"No no no," Alec says hurriedly, shaking his head vehemently and waving a protesting hand in front of him. "That's not an excuse, I've got patrol in the morning. Early. I had fun tonight, Magnus. And I —" He hesitates for only a moment. "I missed you. Before."

Magnus is smiling now, that breathtaking smile that Alec wants to see every day for the rest of his life. He wants to put it there.

Magnus takes a step closer, and reaches up to brush his fingers through the hair at the nape of Alec's neck. "I'll let you off, in that case. I'm sorry for making assumptions. Again. I should have known, really. You're very straightforward. You don't seem the type to dance around the truth and make up
Alec smiles right back at him, running a hand up Magnus' arm to his shoulder. "It's okay. And I'm not. Izzy tells me off for it sometimes."

"I bet."

Magnus pauses, licking along his lower lip, something in his expression shifting.

"It's been a long time," Magnus tells him quietly, the words hanging low and serious in the air between them, "since I last did this. Since I last opened my heart to anybody. I'm going to make just as many mistakes doing this as you." He pauses, and lets out a wry little huff of a laugh. "I've already told you things I haven't told anybody for more than a century."

"Why?" Alec asks, staring down at him, and he's not quite sure what he's asking. Why are you so afraid to let people in? Why don't you trust people not to hurt you? Why me?

"I might tell you," Magnus says, and reaches up to touch his cheek, "but not now."

Alec gazes at him, the glamour on Magnus' eyes showing him soft brown irises watching him with impossible tenderness, and he doesn't know how the hell he's supposed to pull himself away from this, from him, and go home. It's an impossible task.

"Maybe I could come in just for ten minutes," Alec says, voice low, whispering the words between them like they're a secret.

Magnus' lips turn up, and he slips a hand into Alec's. "If you'd like to."

The door has barely clicked shut behind them before there's a loud, reproachful meow, and Chairman Meow curls himself around their legs, arching his back and pawing at their boots in a plea for attention. Nudging his cat away, Magnus rolls his eyes and walks towards the kitchen, shedding layers as he goes, but Alec sees the fond quirk of his lips as he spares Chairman a glance when Alec reaches down to pet him.

"Is Magnus being mean to you?" Alec asks, scratching between the cat's ears as he tries to claw at Alec's laces lightly. "Is he? Is he?"

Chairman Meow meows in apparent agreement, and shoots Magnus a distinctly snooty look where he's flicking the kettle on and pulling down mugs. It's the sort of look only a pet of Magnus' could pull off.

"I think Magnus is tired," Alec whispers, stroking a finger along the Chairman's cheek, just beyond his whiskers. The cat stares up at him, eyes wide and tail waving slowly behind him. "When does he ever make tea the mundane way? What's he been doing, huh?"

The Chairman meows at him again, and Alec shakes his head, straightening. God, what the hell is he doing? Talking to Magnus' goddamn cat like it's human? Magnus has clearly been rubbing off on him more than he'd like to admit.

"Do you want anything?" Magnus calls from the kitchen.

"It's okay," Alec tells him as he walks in, leaning up against the counter. "I shouldn't stay for long."

Magnus finishes stirring sugar into his tea, and then he turns to Alec, a smile on his lips and something bright and teasing in his eyes. "You just came in to bond with my cat, hm? Make sure he's
still irrationally attached to a *Shadowhunter*?"

Alec rolls his eyes as Magnus leans into his space and rests a hand on his shoulder. "I'm not trying to steal your cat's affection."

Magnus scoffs as he tilts his head up. "Could've fooled me."

Alec is sure he has something to throw back, some line on the tip of his tongue to dispute Magnus' frankly ridiculous words, but Magnus is so close, and his lips are right there, and all Alec can possibly do is lean down to meet him halfway.

The press of their lips together is sweet. Magnus' fingers curling into the sleeves of his jacket as Alec's hands rest lightly on Magnus' sides. Magnus is smiling between kisses, and Alec finds his own lips curling up; their teeth click together the next time they lean in, and Magnus huffs out a soft laugh against Alec's mouth.

"I'm sorry," Magnus says, amusement in his voice, and by the Angel, Alec can't remember the last time something so uncoordinated made him so happy.

"What, for making me smile so much I can't kiss you?" Alec asks, arching an eyebrow in amusement.

"Exactly," Magnus says, eyes twinkling, arms loose around Alec's shoulders. "Kissing me is a privilege only a select few have been afforded. I wouldn't want to deprive you."

Alec snickers into the minute space between them as he leans in. "You're such an asshole," he murmurs, and kisses him again.

He's not sure how long they stay like that, Alec leaning against the counter and Magnus pressing close, trading lazy kisses, warm but not hot, slow but not tantalisingly so. It's just...*nice*. Comfortable. Soft. It's easy.

"Hm," Magnus says, pulling back just far enough to meet Alec's gaze. "What was that about ten minutes?"

"Two more," Alec murmurs, dipping his head back down to capture Magnus' mouth again. He can feel Magnus' chest vibrating against his, and he realises that Magnus is laughing at him.

"I've unleashed an insatiable beast," Magnus says, and he's trying to press his lips to Alec's jaw but he's still laughing, breaths huffing out and washing across Alec's skin, and he ends up resting his forehead on Alec's shoulder as he chuckles. "Someone should have warned you that this is what happens when you kiss a man after twenty-two years of pretending you don't want to."

"Someone should have warned me that this is what happens when I kiss *you* after pretending I don't want to," Alec says, and feels his heart thud harder against the cage of his ribs, because it's a little bit daring, and a little bit deeper down into the layers of his heart and his feelings than he's entirely sure he's ready to delve.

He doesn't know how to describe what he feels about Magnus. And he doesn't know whether Magnus realises. Or whether Magnus' feelings are as confusing and intense as his own. But neither does he want to lie. He wants to be honest. He's spent so long pretending, and avoiding the truth, he wants to be genuine just this once.

Magnus tilts his head so his cheek rests against Alec's shoulder instead of his forehead, and looks up at him, something soft in his eyes. The glamour flickers, irises going from brown to golden-green and
back again over and over, like a neon sign flashing in the street. Then it fizzes out, pupils settling in their slitted state, and Magnus blinks, closing his eyes, hiding them from view.

"Hey," Alec says, softly, brushing a hand up Magnus' arm. "Are you okay?"

Magnus hums, lifting his head off Alec's shoulder as he straightens up, takes a step back, and reaches out for his tea. Some of the walls seem to go back up. The tension, where it had melted away between wine and kisses and laughter, seems to seep back into his shoulders. Alec wishes the world would lay off Magnus and leave him in peace, just for once. It seems like there's always something around to plague him at night.

"Are you?" Magnus asks, raising his eyebrows, and Alec pauses, a little taken aback.

"I'm fine," Alec tells him. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"Your home was attacked," Magnus says, "and your little brother was nearly killed, and you've been living under the scrutiny of a Clave envoy, and you're harbouring too many secrets to count, and you're realising that the institution you've pledged your life to is ruled by bigoted dickheads, and in the midst of all that you're sneaking around with your first man—do you really need me to go on?"

There's a smile, small and tinged with sadness, curling at the corners of Magnus' mouth. He watches Alec for a moment, and Alec senses that there's something left that he wants to say.

"Alexander, I know you want to fix everything and make everyone happy, and god knows I admire you for how fiercely you defend people you care about, but sometimes things can't be fixed. Sometimes things just are."

Alec frowns. "Does that mean you're not okay?"

Magnus rolls his eyes and huffs out a laugh, exasperated and fond, and he shakes his head. "I'm a lot more okay now than I was before our date."

"Oh." Alec watches him, one eye squinted, looking for any clues as to what's bothering Magnus. Iris and Madzie, perhaps? Or the Clave's death warrant? Something someone has said to him? "That's—That's good."

"I think your two more minutes have come and gone," Magnus tells him, nodding to the clock hanging on the wall. "I don't want to kick you out, but neither do I want your sister to call me and tell me you've been mauled by a demon because you collapsed from exhaustion mid-hunt."

Alec laughs a little. "Yeah, okay. I'll- I'll text you."

Magnus smiles. "Goodnight, Alexander."

Before he has the chance to get embroiled in another conversation, or caught up in concern for Magnus' wellbeing, or spend too long staring at him, Alec leans down to kiss his cheek. "Bye."

"Hey, Alec?"

Skidding to a halt by the front door, hand resting on the handle, Alec turns over his shoulder to look back at Magnus, who's standing by the counter with the Chairman rubbing lazily against his calf.

"Yeah?"

"I missed you, too. Before."
It takes everything in Alec not to go back over there and kiss the stupid little smile right off his face. He tightens his grip on the door handle, and says, eloquently, "Oh."

"I thought you should know." Magnus' smile widens a little. "Call me."

"Yeah. I- I will. Night."

"Goodnight, darling."

And if Alec trips on the second stair down from Magnus' apartment and catches himself on the rickety railings, summersaulting inelegantly over the top of the banister and landing awkwardly on the floor, nobody ever has to know but him.

Chapter End Notes

What was that, a whole chapter of fluff?! *gasp*

This is the bit where I moan, because apparently that's the way the world is going to be atm, so I'm very sorry to the 99.9% of people to whom this does not apply -- but I'd like everyone to read it anyway:

There's been a huge plagiarism scandal this week, with a Wattpad user copying and pasting stories - including this one - from AO3 to WP and attempting to pass them off as her own. After a large fandom effort, most of the Malec fics copied have been removed. MOST. A fair few fics are still up there. So a) head over here if you're a writer to scan through the fics there and check that yours isn't one that's been stolen, and b) if you see plagiarism happening, REPORT IT! And let the original author know! Leave them a comment on their fic, DM them, tag them in a tumblr/twitter post, whatever.

This kind of thing is absolutely disgusting and it needs to stop. This girl is utterly unashamed about her plagiarism, and as per usual, the WP team are so desperate to legally cover their asses that they're exceptionally reluctant to investigate without someone filling out a whole DMCA report, which is plain ridiculous and has pissed me off no end.

So, bottom line, if I see plagiarism, you sure as hell bet I'm reporting it, and this is me asking that all of you do, too. Not just of this fic - ANY fic. From any fandom and any site. Plagiarism is totally unacceptable.

Onto the next cheery subject! There will, unfortunately, be no update next week. My life is really hectic at the moment, so we're probably going to slip into a once-a-fortnight update schedule for a little bit, but I'll keep you all updated. So, NO update next week, update the week after, and then we'll see how things are going :D

As always, I hope you enjoyed the chapter, and if you fancy it, come talk to me on Tumblr!

Have an absolutely amazing week(end), everyone, and I'll see you in a fortnight!

Much love, Lu <3
Magnus knows it's probably not the best idea to start thinking about Alec when he's in the shower. It's evening, the light of the day dying outside Magnus' loft as the sun slips below the horizon, low enough in the sky to cast a blinding golden glow across the city for another half an hour or so, before they're plunged into the impenetrable darkness of nighttime.

Four finished potions are sitting on Magnus' desk, bottled and ready to be collected by various clients tomorrow, and Magnus had set aside a demonic translation when his eyes started to glaze over and his temples began to ache. He got through sixteen pages of the fifty-four he needs to do by the end of the week, so it's not like he's behind in his work. On the contrary.

Rather than tear off his clothes and collapse into bed, Magnus had decided that he could really do with another shower. Letting the hot water soothe over his muscles, which ache after a spontaneous early morning workout, seemed impossibly appealing.

Of course, the moment he's in the shower and his thoughts have time to wander for the first time in at least two days, they stray, inevitably, to Alexander.

Their impromptu dinner was only three days ago, and Magnus hasn't seen Alec since. But they've texted, both dancing around the topic of what the hell their relationship is, or what it means, and...
Magnus can't help feeling a little agitated about it. He told Alec that he doesn't owe Magnus anything, and he meant it, but he wants to know. He wants to know what Alec wants. He wants to know where they stand.

He's just so horribly attractive and distractingly lovely that Magnus can't seem to find the sense of mind when they're in the same room to bring up the topic. Frankly, it was an effort not to just kiss the breath right out of his lungs all night.

He tips his head back and lets water cascade over his face and slick his hair to his temples and neck. Thoughts of Alexander invade his mind. Kissing Alec, Alec's heart thudding against his chest and his pulse tripping beneath his skin, the hot breaths and sharp, aborted gasps when they kiss. He thinks about the sensation of Alec's skin beneath his hands, when he'd massaged his back and shoulders and groomed his wings, and he wonders what other parts of Alec would feel like against him.

Unbidden, the memory of the last time he kissed Alec forces its way to the forefront of his mind. Alec leaning back against the counter, Magnus leaning into him as they traded slow, lazy kisses that had melted Magnus from the inside out and made it very difficult to pull back and remind Alec that he needed to go home and get some sleep.

What would it be like to be pressed so beautifully close to Alec, but without the rather inconvenient layers of fabric between their torsos? He's sure Alec has been blessed with Raziel-given abs. All Shadowhunters have. And he'd felt hard lines of muscle through Alec's well-worn shirt that night, shifting slightly as they negotiated kisses.

He presses a hand to his navel, and wonders how the roughened skin and callouses of Alec's palms would feel. How would Alec touch him? Carefully at first, probably. Not as though Magnus is delicate, or breakable, because Alec is very aware that he's not, but as though Magnus is something precious that deserves to be treated with care akin to reverence. Not like Magnus is glass, but like he's diamond. That's how he kisses. And it ruins Magnus a little more every time.

Would Alec be hesitant, or certain? He'd move slowly, Magnus is sure. Take his time. He'd probably be nervous—at least to begin with. Alec is an adult, but one who hadn't kissed anyone until a short time ago. Nerves are natural.

Magnus would be nervous, too, he thinks - the good kind of nerves - the first time he got to touch Alec so intimately. If. If he got to touch Alec so intimately. He was nervous the first time they kissed, and in the immediate aftermath. Not crippling so, of course, but a little. Because he cares about Alec, so much, too much, and he can't bear to mess this up. It's too special.

"What are you doing to me?" he whispers, the words swallowed by the rush of the water around him and the rhythmic thud and patter as it hits the floor of the shower around his feet.

The hand on his torso slides up, over the grooves and lines of his abs, brushing over a nipple and lingering for a moment, enough to make the tendons in his neck go taut as, in his mind, another hand follows the same pathway.

"Oh, god," Magnus breathes, because what is he doing? This is only going to end badly, giving into these thoughts and these desires about Alec. Not because there's anything wrong with what he's imagining, or doing - there isn't, at all - but because there's every chance that he'll never get anything more than a sliver of a taste of Alec Lightwood, of being with Alec, physically and emotionally.

All they've done is kiss, and go on a date that wasn't officially a date. And Magnus keeps thinking about Alec like they've laid some kind of claim on each other. He keeps forgetting that just because
he's falling in love so fast and so hard the world around him has gone blurry doesn't mean Alec is.

Sometimes he sees things, fleeting moments of open expression in Alec's eyes, that make him think that maybe Alec does feel something akin to the depth of care Magnus does. Other times, he's sure he's deluding himself.

None of that stops him imaging Alec kissing him on the sofa in Magnus' living room, one hand on his jaw and the other braced on his thigh as he begins to turn, kiss slowing and deepening as lust overrides them both.

In his head, as Alec turns to kiss Magnus deeper, he swings a leg over Magnus' thighs, and one of Magnus' hands goes to his hip to steady him, encouraging him to settle in Magnus' lap.

He remembers touching Alec's wings, brushing his fingers through all that softness and working kinks out of the sensitive muscles where human skin slips into feathery white. He wonders what other kind of reactions he could evoke, imagining sinking his hands into the plush feathers as they're plastered close together, lips locked hotly and hips pressed close.

The Magnus of reality closes his eyes as he feels heat build between his legs to an unavoidable degree, and he drags his free hand against himself, eyes heavy-lidded and chest rising and falling deeply.

It's not that Magnus is a stranger to jerking off in the shower that's making him do this slowly. He's not. This is an activity he indulges in frequently. It's that he can't remember the last time he jerked off in the shower while thinking about someone he feels more than just superficial desire or fleeting romance for.

A choked-off moan slips from between Magnus' lips as he remembers the sensation of kissing Alec and imagines feeling Alec sprawled across his thighs with their mouths pressed together. Water hammers down on his shoulders, steaming hot and secondary to the thoughts running through his head and the tangled mess of feelings in his heart and sinking down through the pit of his stomach.

The sensations build, rising higher and higher as everything in him pulls tight, tighter, tighter, until everything crests and spills in a heady rush of endorphins. Magnus' jaw slackens and he sucks in a sharp, ragged breath that borders on a husky sort of gasp, before the world begins to fall back into place around him.

After another few moments, Magnus shuts off the water and steps out, snapping his fingers to summon a towel from the rack to his hand without dripping water all over the floor, and then again for the robe hanging on the back of his door.

As he climbs into bed, Chairman Meow curled on the other pillow and Padfoot standing at the foot of the bed, having appeared that morning for no apparent reason other than a desire for attention, he grabs his phone and scrolls through to his most recent messages with Alec.

[From: Alexander Lightwood, yesterday]

I want to shove Jace's fries up the Inquisitor's left nostril, it would improve her face

[From: Magnus Bane, yesterday]

You're the only thing that's made me smile all day

[From: Alexander Lightwood, yesterday]
:( bad day?

[From: Magnus Bane, yesterday]
Not bad, just boring

[From: Alexander Lightwood, yesterday]
Well you always manage to make me smile, so I'm glad to return the favour

[From: Magnus Bane, yesterday]
You're too sweet to me

[From: Magnus Bane, yesterday]
Much as I adore your conversation, I need to go to bed. Goodnight, Alexander

[From: Alexander Lightwood, yesterday]
Goodnight <3

Magnus smiles fondly at his phone, and at the silly little heart Alexander had sent. He’d stared at that for a solid minute before finding the sense of mind to click off his phone and actually go to sleep.

He wants to send Alec a text, now, but he hasn't really got anything of any importance to say, and he doesn't want to risk waking him up for something trivial. Or, worse, distract him if he's out on patrol.

So instead, Magnus forces himself not to scroll back and look at his entire text thread with Alec. He puts his phone down and clicks his fingers to turn the lights off, before settling down in bed to sleep.

There's a faint meow from the side of the bed that Alec used every time he slept here, and Magnus feels the mattress compress just slightly as the Chairman's paws press into it. Fur brushes against his arm, and with his glamour down he can see his cat curling up right beside him on the bed.

"You wuss," he tells the Chairman, but he's smiling. "Padfoot is giving you such judgemental looks, you know..."

The Chairman lets out a soft little meow, opening one eye for a brief moment before curling up tighter, letting Magnus know that he absolutely does not care.

***

"Magnus," Alec whispers into the lacking space between them where they're standing, arms around each other. It sounds like a prayer as it spills from his lips, a divine promise breathed into the nighttime, a warlock as his altar and a warlock’s home as his church.

Magnus sees it in Alec's eyes. He's seen it before. Desire. Desperation. Hesitation, uncertainty, yes, but evermore overshadowed by the want that Magnus is so intimately familiar with.

He saw it when Alec nearly kissed him the first time, in Magnus' bedroom while a party raged beyond the walls. He saw it after he healed Max, and later that night when he ran his fingers through Alec's wings. He saw it when Alec confessed his darkest secret, as though Magnus could absolve him of the sin he believes himself to be committing, in the eyes of his people.
"I know," Magnus says, because he does. Because what he sees in Alec's eyes, he feels, deep in his gut, in ways he hasn't for so, so long.

He can't tear his eyes away. He should. He should pull back, should pull away, should brush his fingers down Alec's cheek in affectionate acknowledgement and then withdraw. Alec must be flooded with adrenaline, having tracked Magnus through the city after Magnus hung up on him due to Agramon's attack. He shouldn't be the temptation that drives Alec to wreck and ruin.

But he knows, in layers of his heart that he hasn't listened to since before the world cut scars into his soul, that he won't. All the forces of heaven and hell could combine in a singular mass of raw, writhing power, and it wouldn't change a thing.

It wouldn't change how Magnus feels about Alexander.

He's so sure that the Shadowhunter in front of him doesn't feel what he does. Not like this. They never do. Alec won't risk throwing away everything for something that can only end in disaster, in tragedy and heartbreak.

But then, once upon a time, Magnus was sure that Alexander Lightwood was just like his parents.

He should have learnt, by now, that Alec is impossible to predict.

The entire world tilts and shifts and trembles beneath Magnus' feet when Alec angles his head and kisses him. It's nothing, a brush of lips so fleeting it can barely be called a kiss at all, but Magnus has to fight to stop his knees buckling.

He wants Alec, perhaps more than he's ever wanted anything.

Which is why, when Alec's lips descend on his, the hand on his jaw trembling slightly and his heart hammering against Magnus' chest, Magnus presses close, and throws his heart and soul into a kiss that he's sure could tear apart worlds.

***

"And Magnus calls my sense of interior design bland."

Alec whirls around at the voice coming from his bedroom doorway. He drops his stele on his bed, hand shooting to the seraph blade in his belt as he narrows his eyes at the man scrutinising his room with distaste written into the furrow between his eyebrows.

"Who the hell are you?" Alec demands, muscles tensing as he readies himself for a fight.

The man turns his head and meets Alec's eyes, and this time it's Alec who's being inspected, as though he's an animal on a table for dissection.

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It goes against Alec's every instinct to turn his back on the man - the warlock - who's managed to break through the Institute's wards and enter his bedroom, but he doesn't appear to have any ill-intent.

Alec turns. Outside, the sun is high overhead, shining, burning, onto the city below. In the distance, he can see glass skyscrapers glinting and glistening, and rainbows are thrown onto the ground where the light catches the Institute's stain glass windows, like reflections off precious stones.

Something flashes in his mind, rings slid onto elegant bronze fingers, patterns strewn across walls as painted nails shift restlessly, sparks of blue scattering through the air—

Alec turns back around.

The warlock has one eyebrow raised, and he says, "Well? Have you worked it out yet?"

"Downworlders can't get into the Institute. It's impossible."

The man spreads his hands out wide, challenge glistening in deep brown eyes. "So kill me, Alec Lightwood."

"Don't be ridiculous. You're not doing anything dangerous, so-- How do you know my name?"

He smiles. "You're right. I'm not doing anything dangerous. But who taught you that? Most Shadowhunters would have gutted me by now."

_I am a person. I saved your life. You, who are part of an institution that has made my very existence a misery. But it doesn't matter to you, does it? You don't want to understand. You don't want to consider that everything you know is not everything that is._

_Whatever prejudices you've drawn on to justify slaughter and the trauma you're causing to these children, we are not here to side with Valentine._

_Nothing in the world is that simple. Certainly not people._

Dark hair flashes through his mind, golden-green cat eyes shining, lips tugged into a half-smile, gaze directed at Alec and filled with amusement and undeniable fondness.

"_Magnus,_" Alec gasps as memories flash through his mind. He clutches at his head and stumbles back, smacking into the windowsill, breaths coming heavily. He looks up at the warlock in his bedroom, eyes wide. "How-- How could I forget?"

"Delayed reactions," the man says, with a wave of his hand. The movement is achingly familiar. "Don't worry too much about it."

"You're Ragnor," Alec says, and he doesn't quite know why he's so certain, but something about the man's mannerisms reminds him too much of Magnus. "Ragnor Fell. Magnus' friend."

"I am," Ragnor says, and inclines his head. "And yes, I am dead, please do try to get over it. I'm not a ghost, and I'm not a figment of your imagination, and I've heard it all before, so move on. It's not important."

Alec is fairly sure he's going insane. He must be dreaming, to be seeing Magnus' deceased best friend in front of him, in the flesh, talking and breathing as though he's very much alive.

If he notices it, Ragnor chooses to ignore his minor existential crisis.
"How I'm here and what I am isn't important," Ragnor tells him. "All you need to know is who I am. Which, I gather, you do. I thought you would."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that I am Magnus' oldest friend," Ragnor says, "and you're the man with the power to utterly ruin him."

Alec nearly snorts at that. Him, with the power to inflict any kind of damage upon Magnus Bane? The mere suggestion is ridiculous. He'll probably wake up in the infirmary in a moment, and someone will tell him he's been poisoned. He must be hallucinating. There's no other explanation.

Ragnor arches an eyebrow. "While I'm impressed that there's a Shadowhunter in the world who truly recognises what Magnus is capable of, you seem to be under the mistaken impression that nothing can hurt him."

That makes Alec frown. "No. I know things can hurt him. I know that your death hurt him. I know that people he loves suffering hurts him. I know he's not invulnerable. It's just... Me?"

"He cares about you," Ragnor says.

"I know he does, and I care about him, but—" Alec drops his hand from the hilt of his seraph blade and lets his shoulders slump as he leans back against the window. "He's centuries old. And yet you make it sound like I hold something over him."

"You do." Ragnor's gaze doesn't waver as he stares at Alec, unsmiling and calculating. "And if you really haven't worked it out yet, I rather think that's something you should discover for yourself. I just wanted to make sure you're aware of what you're doing."

Alec throws his hands up in frustration. "Look, we kissed. That's it. That's literally it. We don't– We haven't made vows or declarations, so please stop talking in riddles and just—"

Ragnor ignores him. "I don't care about what you've done, I care about what you're going to do. Magnus is four centuries old. He's seen more things that you can possibly comprehend. He's been through hardships that would make you sick."

Images flash in Alec's mind, pictures he's created of a frightened small boy at the middle of a storm that's spilling from his hands and ripping apart the village around him, decimating his home, entirely beyond his control. The thought makes his heart ache, for a boy he never knew—and for the man that boy has become.

"Or," Ragnor says, tilting his head to one side, "perhaps you already know some of it."

"If you're talking about Indonesia—"

"It doesn't matter what I'm talking about," Ragnor says sharply, eyes flashing. "It's not my place to tell you. Magnus isn't always an easy person to care about. I know that better than most people. He's far from perfect. He can be difficult. He'll probably make you want to tear your hair out, if he hasn't already. But if you're committing to it, to caring about him, through actions if not through words, then you'd damn well better do it properly. Do I make myself clear?"

Alec's lips part. Has he committed to caring about Magnus? What does that even mean? How do you commit to caring about someone? You just do it. It's not avoidable. You either care or you don't, surely? He couldn't choose not to care about Isabelle or Jace or Max—he just does. Caring about Magnus was never a choice. Kissing him, sleeping wrapped in his arms, listening to his woes and
tragedies, finding excuses to see him, those were all choices. Caring about him wasn't.

"I'd never do anything to hurt him," Alec says, and it must be the right thing to say, because Ragnor's expression softens, and Alec sees the years in his eyes, and the wisdom in the slow curl of his lips.

"We always hurt the people we care about, in some way. It's unavoidable. What matters is how you make it right. What matters is that you know what's unforgivable, and that you never stray down such a path. What matters is that your intentions are good."

Ragnor shifts his gaze to a spot over Alec's shoulder, and he shakes his head, a fond smile flitting across his face. "He's so pathetic," he says. "Both of you are." His eyes return to Alec's. "Look after my friend, Alec Lightwood."

"Is this real?" Alec asks, blinking. "Am I dreaming?"

"I think you'll find, Nephilim, that those two things are not mutually exclusive."

And then the world around him seems to dissolve, the fabric of reality coming apart like smoke dispersing through the air, and Alec falls, lips parting in a silent scream.

***

When he wakes, he's slick with sweat and shivering, breaths coming raggedly as he drags a hand over his face. Trembling fingers reach for his phone, the screen lighting up to illuminate the room and cut through the darkness.

He's not totally sure why his dream has spooked him so much. Except for the fact that it didn't feel like a dream. It still feels real, tangible, like a memory that's crystal clear in his mind rather than the fuzzy haze of a dreamscape that's quickly fading.

Like the dream he had of killing Magnus.

And, like the last dream he had that left him reeling and shaking and confused, this dream is impossible. He doesn't know what Ragnor Fell looked like or sounded like. And dream people don't impart that kind of advice.

It's equally as mad as his mind conjuring the lines to an Indonesian prayer, when he's never so much as heard a word of Indonesian.

He's going insane.

Hauling in a deep breath and tugging his fingers through hair that's damp with sweat, he clicks his beside lamp on and reaches for his phone. The glowing digital display reads four minutes to four, but he barely registers the time as he unlocks his phone and navigates through to his contacts.

He indulges in only a momentary hesitation before he's hitting call. While he waits, he hauls his sheets tighter around him and burrows into his pillow, wishing, perhaps foolishly, for silky sheets and plump, feather-soft pillows and a mattress that feels like a cloud—and the calming, wonderful warmth of the man that comes with them.

Just as he's beginning to consider that maybe he should have padded down the hallway with his duvet and curled up on Jace's floor instead, the line crackles as it connects, and a husky, sleep-ridden voice says, "Hello?"

"Hey," Alec whispers, conscious even now, when nobody is awake except someone two floors
below watching the night patrol on the video streams, that he can't risk saying Magnus' name in the Institute. "It's me, I— Did I wake you?"

"Yes," Magnus says, although he doesn't sound upset. "But I thought it would be a client calling me, not you, so this is much nicer."

"I'm sorry," Alec says anyway. He curls up a little, duvet at his chin like a child and phone clutched to his ear. "I didn't know who else to talk to."

Magnus' tone switches instantly to one of concern. "Don't worry about it. What's the matter?"

"I had a dream," Alec says, "but it wasn't like any dream I've ever had. Except maybe one. I— I dreamt of Ragnor Fell. Only it feels like a memory, not a dream, and I— It was so real. Too real. There were details that came outside of my imagination."

For a moment, Magnus is unnervingly quiet. Alec swallows.

"The only other dream I've had like this was that nightmare I had about killing you. I didn't think about it at the time, but I dreamt of you saying a prayer. In Indonesian. I don't speak Indonesian." He exhales shakily. "Am I going mad?"

"No," Magnus tells him, firmly. "No, Alexander, you're not going mad. What did Ragnor look like?"

"Tall, with kind of grey hair. Horns. He said— He talked about you. And then he told me that dreams and reality aren't mutually exclusive. Or something. Then I woke up."

Magnus hums lightly, and Alec hears the rustle of sheets on the other end of the line. What he wants, more than anything, is to clamber into that impossibly comfortable bed, bury his face in Magnus' shoulder, and feel those arms close around him.

"I've had dreams about Ragnor, too," Magnus says. "Dreams that didn't seem like dreams. It could be some kind of magic that Ragnor developed. There were some rather odd things in his will. Or it could be something sent to fuck with us. There are more than a few people who don't like me very much. But nobody knows that you and I... What exactly did Ragnor say to you?"

Alec pauses, wondering how much to reveal. "He said a few things, but it was all... He basically told me to be good to you. That you deserve someone who's good to you, and no less."

"...Oh."

Magnus' voice sounds small on the other end of the line. Small, melancholy, and a little vulnerable. Whatever the Ragnor Fell of life was like, it's clear that he was beloved by Magnus.

"I'll look into it," Magnus says, clearing his throat when it comes out a little rough. "And I'll let you know if I find anything. As for your other dream... I don't see how that could be related. Maybe it was just a dream. That would explain how you've told me so confidently that I spoke Indonesian in your dream when you can't recognise Indonesian."

"I hadn't thought of that," Alec admits, pressing his phone close to his ear and closing his eyes. "You're probably right. Thank you."

"Anytime."

The syllables sound like a caress, and Alec exhales softly, sinking into his bed as much as the hard mattress affords.
"I'm sorry for waking you at such a stupid time," Alec murmurs. "I'll make it up to you."

Magnus lets out a little laugh, barely a breath through the line but filled with fondness that makes Alec’s chest tighten pleasantly. "I'm sure you'll think of something. Feel better?"

"Yeah. Goodnight, Magnus."

"Sweet dreams, Alexander."

Chapter End Notes

Is this plotline relevant? Yep ;)

It feels great to be back on, so I really hope you enjoyed this chapter! I don't have anything in particular to say this week, other than the standard. If you fancy it, come hit me up on Tumblr! Talk to me, I love hearing from you -- about literally anything in the world :)

Quick shout-out to Jehanne_d_Arc, bhairoo, and magnificentbeth who have all been super lovely to me in the last two weeks -- thank you, all of you!!

As always, let me know what you thought in the comments, or drop me a message on Tumblr, or @ me on Twitter at LucysRebelHeart or use #fww <3

Also, to anyone who’s wondering and didn't infer from the text -- yes, Magnus' dream in italics is him dreaming about the first time he and Alec kissed. I wrote it ages ago, and suddenly found a place to work it in!

I hope you have an absolutely amazing week, and much love,
Lu<3
"We found something."

Alec pauses in the middle of shucking off his gear after a mid-morning patrol two days after his haunting dream, and looks from the folder being shoved under his nose to Raj, standing straight-backed and tense. Every muscle in Raj's body is pulled taut; he doesn't think he's seen Raj relax for weeks. Months. Ever.

After glancing around to ensure that there's nobody around besides Clary and Isabelle, and double-checking that he's not in view of the CCTV camera, Alec takes the folder and flips it open.

"A mundane...?" Alec lifts his gaze to Raj. "I don't understand."

"Not a mundane. A Silent Brother. This was written by a Silent Brother. It's an account of the events of the day, detailing—"

"Exactly what he told me," Alec says, scanning down the page again. "Chased by Shadowhunters, antagonised, threatened, cornered, brought under control by an adult male warlock..."

"This is evidence," Raj says, "and the eye-witness was Brother Jeremiah. Incidentally, he was also located in Madrid at the same time a lone young warlock was being mentored by the Brothers in a church there."

Alec pauses at that, but he doesn't let it show on his face. *Madrid? Mentored by the Silent Brothers?* Magnus had never mentioned Spain. He only ever mentioned Ragnor. So Alec had presumed Ragnor was the one who raised him after the incident in Indonesia.

Clearly not.

"This is fantastic, Raj," Alec says, passing him back the folder. "Thank you. Really. I went through the Clave's claims against him last night and highlighted some things I think need fact-checking. I left it with Lydia."

"I'll ask her," Raj tells him. He chews on the inside of his cheek for a moment, and then says, "Look,
Alec, I still think you're insane. Even if - if - all of what you've said is true, it's still technically illegal, and the Clave won't give a crap about the particulars."

Alec's expression sets. "They will if we make them."

"Maybe."
He shakes his head and sighs, resigned and long-suffering. "The thing is, even if I think this is totally crazy, I trust you as a leader and I respect you as a friend. So we're gonna solve this. Properly. And legally."

Alec smiles, amused by Raj's emphasis. "That's good."

When he goes to flick through the patrol timetable on the Institute's electronic system in the afternoon, he sees that, for the first time since he collaborated with Magnus to free the Downworlders being held in the Institute, Raj hasn't switched himself onto another patrol to avoid going on a patrol with Alec.

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Simon is making a scene of himself.
Raphael hates it when Simon makes a scene.

The fact that he's glaring at his phone, fingers hovering over the keyboard, rather than paying any attention to the fact that Simon is standing in broad daylight in the entrance to the Dumort is only the most obvious sign that he's severely distressed.

The furrow between Raphael's eyebrows deepens, and his fingers tap out a message faster than any human could manage. Glistening white fangs have extended down, and he's chewing absently at his lip. Simon manages to be only a little envious—whenever he does that, he ends up with a bloody chin. Three years to attempt this vampire thing has not been enough for perfection.

A vampire is standing overhead on the gallery that runs around the main room of the Dumort, arms folded as she peers down at him with narrowed eyes. She doesn't look particularly threatening, or angry, just a little disgruntled. All the vampires in the Dumort have been polite to him in the days since he attacked that poor mundane woman and has been under Raphael's constant observation.

Too polite, Simon thinks.

"Lewis," Lily barks, from where she's standing with her arms braced against the railing. She doesn't move as she speaks, a frozen marble tableau. "Get inside."

Simon rolls his eyes. "There aren't any mundanes for miles, and I had a bloody mocha an hour ago. I'm not going to attack anyone."

Lily purses her lips and shakes her head sharply, eyes unblinking. "No. But your status might be a little too interesting for our guest."

She spits the word like it's venom, disgust and thinly veiled hatred creasing the planes of her face. The newest arrival at the Dumort has evoked similar reactions in practically all of Raphael's clan. Simon doesn't quite understand why, and nobody seems to be willing to tell him. It's seriously frustrating.

"I don't really want to be skewered, so..." Simon steps back inside, and pushes the door firmly shut, blocking out the rays of warm spring sunlight just being to turn orange as the sun peeks up above the horizon.
Lily straightens when Simon relocates to a position she apparently approves of, and disappears without a word.

"Raphael," Simon says, "is anyone going to tell me what the hell is going on?"

Raphael looks up from his phone distractedly. "What?"

"Some mysterious vampire rocks up and claims to own the universe--" Raphael's lips twitch up "--you all look like you've swallowed a lemon, you start angsting about Magnus, of all people--can you understand my confusion?"

Raphael squints one eye at him, raising the other eyebrow. "Why shouldn't I angst over Magnus? He practically raised me after age fourteen. He's my family."

"Um." Simon looks at Raphael in mild concern. "Because he could probably burn the entire city to the ground in one of his gorgeous jackets while sipping a vodka martini with his feet up on the coffee table?"

It's the kind of thing that would usually make Raphael laugh. Or, at least, do the little lip-twitch smile, which is as close as Raphael gets to laughing. This time, however, he just looks immeasurably sad.

"Even Magnus has his weaknesses," he says, "and I don't know whether or not to tell him that he's going to have to face this one, when he's already facing so much else."

Simon frowns, and comes to sit beside Raphael. He's got a text thread open with Catarina Loss, whom Simon knows of but has never met, and the number of swear words being tossed around by both sides makes him raise his eyebrows.

"You can't not tell him," Simon says, gently. "If whatever this is is so important, he needs to know, and be prepared, not- not stumble across it."

He thinks of his own struggles, recently. He thinks of how hard it was, going from a mundane to a vampire, from Clary's best friend to someone she loved but rarely saw while she was away in Idris, from someone who was rarely looked at twice by law enforcement to someone who was scrutinised at every opportunity.

He thinks it might have been easier if he'd had someone to warn him. If he'd let Raphael help him at the beginning, rather than push him away every time he tried.

"He can't be prepared for this," Raphael says.

"You can't make it worse by telling him." Simon touches Raphael's forearm lightly. "Would you rather he found out from you, or accidentally from some other source?"

"You're right." Raphael closes his eyes. "Fuck." Abruptly, he cuts his eyes across to Simon, and says, "What if I called the Shadowhunter?"

It takes Simon a moment to realise who he means, and, when he does, he blinks, a little taken aback. "Alec? Why would you call Alec?"

"Emotional support. A buffer. Someone who doesn't know the history but who also cares about Magnus."

It's almost odd, to think that Alec - who, up until a mere few months ago, always seemed to be cold,
repressed, stoic, and eternally miserable - has become someone Magnus cares about. It would be obvious to an idiot that there's something going on there, Simon thinks, whether it's come to fruition or not. The way they gravitate towards each other, the way the rest of the world seems to dissolve around them, the light in their eyes...it's incredibly transparent.

Not that it's not weird. Because it is. Alec has done such a one-eighty in the last few months, and it's clear every time he opens his mouth. Simon, alive and free and not dead somewhere in the Clave's cells, is living proof that Alec isn't the same man he was.

"Yeah." He nods a little. "Yeah, I think calling Alec would be good."

Raphael's lips form a thin, unhappy line, tight at the corners. "He might be upset at Alec being dragged into his past."

"Then don't tell Alec exactly what's going on, just tell him you think Magnus might need him." He glances down. "Look, I've never really got on with Alec, but he's changed in the last few months. He's kinder. He's...I don't know. Steadier. He seems more at peace, even if he is still a bit of a hardass. And he and Magnus...they clearly trust each other."

When Simon looks up, Raphael is already watching him; this time, the sharp edges of his face have softened, some of the tension has left his shoulders, and he's breathing. Simon didn't realise Raphael had been holding his breath until the sight of his chest rising and falling became so obvious.

"Yeah," Raphael says, quietly, eyes not straying from Simon's. "They do."

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Alec lets his head fall back with a groan, tossing his staff from one hand to the other. He fixes Jace with an exasperated look.

"She'll be fine," Alec tells his parabatai. "She's going to take a few exams, she's not going into battle."

Jace glares at him. "She's going to Idris to determine her entire future."

"Yeah," Alec says, rolling his eyes, "but every Shadowhunter has to pass those exams. Alright, not all of us are specially tutored and monitored in Idris, but Clary is Valentine's daughter. What do you expect?"

"I'm just—I'm worried, okay?" Jace lets his own staff drop to the floor with a clatter, and he grabs a towel to wipe the sweat off his face. "She wasn't supposed to be called back for another two weeks."

"Hey, I get it. But Clary isn't a prissy little princess. She can look after herself."

Whatever Jace wants to say in reply is drowned out by the sound of Alec's ringtone. A frown overtakes his face when he sees Raphael's name on the screen, and he answers a little distractedly. He's supposed to have a meeting with this evening's patrol team in five minutes.

"Raphael," Alec says, "hi. I'm really sorry, but unless this is urgent, can I call you back in fifteen?"

"It is urgent." Raphael's voice on the other end of the line is severe, cold, and underlain with a faint note of worry. "Magnus needs you."

Everything in Alec's world seems to stop, as though Raphael's words hit pause on the reality outside of their conversation. He doesn't hear Jace asking him what's going on. He doesn't register the
argument that breaks out across the training room between two of his colleagues.

Magnus needs you.

The words make his heart thud. What does that mean? Does it mean he needs Alec's help with a job—a business matter? Why else could Magnus possibly need him? There's nothing Alec has that he could possibly give Magnus that he can't very well get himself.

But the way Raphael had phrased that... It wasn't that Magnus needed his help, or his Shadowhunter expertise, or his unique method of transport—Magnus needs him. Not something from him.

But why?

"Is he okay?" Alec asks, the words leaving him in a rush as he unfreezes. "Is he hurt?"

"No. Not physically. Alec, I didn't know who else to call. Magnus is...difficult, sometimes. This is when I wish Ragnor were still alive." He exhales heavily, and Alec feels unending sympathy for Raphael. He doesn't understand what's going on, but Raphael is clearly struggling. "Magnus—He might just need someone to...be there. It's hard to predict how he's going to react, but just—get your ass over to the Dumort, okay? We've got a situation that could do with a Shadowhunter."

"I'll be there in fifteen," Alec tells him, a little confused by the direction Raphael's speech took. Is he going to the Dumort as Magnus' friend, or as Raphael's ally?

"Make it ten," Raphael tells him, and then he hangs up, leaving Alec feeling more than a tad bewildered.

"Is everything okay?" Jace asks, wiping sweat from his hairline with a discarded towel.

Alec frowns at his phone. "I don't know."

Jace claps Alec lightly on the shoulder. "Whatever it is, you'll figure it out. And if not, call us. We've got your back."

"Yeah." Alec smiles a little. "Thanks, Jace."

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From his viewpoint two dozen metres above the ground, Alec spots Magnus as he appears through a portal in a shimmer of blue. The way he steps through gracefully and strides along the sidewalk without so much as a hitch in his step suggests that Raphael was telling the truth—he's not hurt. At least, not physically.

Alec tucks his wings into his sides as he slips into a dive, wind ruffling his feathers as he rushes through the air. He pulls out of the dive at the last minute, wings spreading out wide to slow his fall in time for him to touch down beside Magnus, hair falling across his eyes.

"Well, hello," Magnus says, eyes flickering up and down with what can only be described as appreciation. "My day has just been improved tenfold. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Raphael called me," Alec says, watching Magnus carefully. He's not sure what he was expecting, but it wasn't...this. Magnus seems more than fine. He seems like he's in a good mood. He looks a lot less tired than he was the day they'd gone out for their...date? Was it a date? "He gave me some cryptic message about needing a Shadowhunter and—" He makes a vague gesture with his hands. "I don't know."
"Thank god for that. I thought I was the only one who didn't understand. He seemed very wound up about something, but he wouldn't tell me what. Let's go and face the music, hm?"

Magnus' eyes shine as he smiles up at Alec, and it's almost enough to make Alec forget everything Raphael said on the phone. His own lips curl up in a response he couldn't control if he'd wanted to. It takes everything in him not to lean forward and kiss Magnus' cheek.

Inside the Dumort, Raphael is standing stiffly, Simon at his side. His jaw is set, and, when Magnus walks in, he swallows visibly.

"What's going on, cariño?" Magnus asks, bypassing the three vampires who snarl at Alec and walking straight up to Raphael. He rests ringed fingers on Raphael's shoulder, brows drawn together in concern. "What's wrong?"

"Leave the Shadowhunter alone," Raphael says sharply, voice carrying across the room towards the vampires crowding close to Alec, eyes narrowed in suspicion. "He's on our side. And he might stop this getting ugly."

A female vampire with razor-sharp eyes whips her head round, gaze slicing from Alec to Raphael. "I seem to recall that the case is usually the opposite where Shadowhunters are concerned, Raphael."

"You can trust this one, Lily," Raphael tells her. "And if anyone is getting killed, he'll probably be her first target."

That doesn't fill Alec with confidence.

"Raphael," Magnus says again, with a little more urgency this time. "Tell me what's going on."

Raphael's eyes are saturated with sorrow as they flicker back to Magnus, and he shakes his head a little. "Magnus, I'm sorry."

Magnus scans Raphael's face. "Why? What did you do?"

"I couldn't do anything," Raphael says, deflating visibly. "Camille's here."

The name means nothing to Alec, but he sees the way Magnus freezes, as though his every bodily function, right down to breaths and heartbeats, ceases. His face goes entirely blank, unblinking and unflinching.

Then, abruptly, he exhales, dropping his hand from Raphael's shoulder and shaking his head with only mild irritation showing in his eyes. "Good god, you made me think something serious had happened. What does she want?"

"To see you," Raphael says, and he sounds as close to miserable as Alec thinks Raphael would ever let himself get in the presence of other people. "We've imposed...restrictions on her movements, after the trick she tried to pull last time, but she's adamant that all she wants to do is see you."

Magnus rolls his eyes. "Well, that's nice for her. And if I don't see her?"

"She won't leave."

Magnus' eyebrow arches. "You are an intelligent and well-respected Downworld leader. I fail to see how that is my problem."

"She can't know about Simon. You know what she'll try to do if she finds out."
Chewing on the inside of his cheek, Magnus stares at Raphael, fiddling with his rings and twirling them round and round his fingers, forwards and then backwards, sliding them up and down again, clearly deep in contemplation.

"Alright." Reluctant doesn't nearly cover the discontent in his voice. "But I reserve the right to turn her straight over to the Clave."

Alec blinks in sheer surprise. Magnus wants to turn a Downworlder over to the Clave? A Downworld criminal, by the sounds of it? Someone disreputable, whom the Clave would rip to shreds and burn alive? Who the hell is this woman?

But Raphael was clearly expecting the ultimatum, because he inclines his head in acquiescence, and gestures to Alec. "That's why I called the Shadowhunter."

No, it's not, Alec thinks, but he doesn't say anything. The situation feels too fragile.

Raphael jerks his chin in a nod, gesturing to the other vampires in the room to follow him out, leaving Magnus and Alec alone in the main hall of the Dumort.

Magnus is studiously avoiding Alec's gaze, pretending to be immersed in the small, unhappy spurts of magic he's releasing from his fingertips as he plays with his rings again. Alec can't bear it.

"Magnus," he says, taking several steps to close the distance between them, pulling his wing back to avoid knocking Magnus with it. "What's going on? Who is this woman?"

"Camille Belcourt," Magnus says, but he doesn't look up. "Before your time, I suspect. Your parents might remember her, although they were a little caught up in genocide at the time she was wrecking havoc in New York. She was the last leader of Raphael's clan. She went rogue. She went insane. She's wanted by the Clave, but she's not considered to pose as much of a threat to the Clave as I am, so they're not too worried. It's only mundanes and the odd Downworlder that suffer at her hand."

Magnus smiles bitterly, and Alec feels like there's something he's missing, here. Raphael's odd message, and Magnus' behaviour and attitude... None of it makes sense.

"And you'd want to hand her over to the Clave?" Alec asks, softly. "Knowing what they'd do to her?"

"I just told you she's a murderer, and you're choosing now to be merciful?" Magnus scoffs. "Right."

"Hey." Alec can't help the hurt leaking into his voice. "I'm just trying to understand. You hate the Clave's methods of punishment. Iris Rouse collaborated with the man who's tried to kill you on multiple occasions, and you didn't want to hand her over to the Clave. What makes Camille different?"

Exhaling, Magnus lets his eyes flutter closed, and he turns his face away a little. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you. It's just-- It's complicated. It's really complicated. And no. I don't want to hand her over to the Clave. But that might be the only option. And if it is, I'll do it."

"Okay," Alec says, and he reaches out to brush his fingers against Magnus', making him turn back to look at Alec. "I still don't understand, but I'm here, okay? Whatever's going on, if you need something..."

A soft smile spreads across Magnus' face, and he leans a little closer, curling his fingers around Alec's. "Thank you," he whispers, and tilts his chin up a little to press a fleeting kiss to Alec's lips, warm and unexpected and undeniably tender.
It's a mere touch of lips, no more than a handful of seconds long, but the moment is shattered anyway by the sound of a door banging open, and a taunting voice ringing through the air.

"Well well well. A Shadowhunter. Magnus, darling, I know you've always had exotic tastes, but really. This is just excessive. And a tad masochistic, if you don't mind me saying so. Fancy being stabbed in the back in your sleep?"

Alec pulls away from Magnus, a frown on his face, and he turns to see a tall, curvaceous woman clicking across the floor in towering black stilettos and a crimson cocktail dress, smirk plastered across her lips.

"Hello, my love," she says, waltzing towards Magnus and dragging blood-red nails across his chest lazily, prowling around him in a circle like an animal stalking its prey. From behind him, she leans close, lips a hairsbreadth from Magnus' ear, and whispers, "It's been too long."

*My love?* Alec thinks, bewildered. *Darling?* Do Magnus and this woman have some kind of...history?

Magnus has gone stiff, the corners of his mouth twisted down. "Camille."

Camille's smile turns positively predatory. She presses a cold kiss to his cheek, and pats it condescendingly. "Cheer up. You look so much prettier when you're smiling."

She turns away from Magnus, who seems to be trying to put as much distance between himself and Alec as possible without looking like he's moving, and fixes her eyes on Alec instead. Deep brown irises glint like the wicked edge of a dagger, capable of inflicting grievous harm with a mere flick.

"Hmph." She grasps Alec's chin between her thumb and forefinger, turning his head to one side. "You're not quite Magnus' usual type. Although you are a classic pretty boy." She pouts in consideration, forcing his head to the other side with vampiric strength like he's a doll on display for her viewing pleasure. "What do you think, Magnus, hm? Ten years until this beautiful hair starts disappearing? Twenty until he goes all wrinkly? Fifty until he's old and decrepit?"

More than done with her analytic insults and the gleeful glint in her eyes, Alec jerks himself out of her hold and straightens, emphasising his full height and the inches he has on her as he stares her down. "Get off me. I can hear you."

"Oh!" Camille sounds delighted as a laugh bubbles up out of her throat, delicate as wind chimes and fake as the talons tipping her fingers. "This one has *bite*, Magnus! A step up from your usual wishy-washy boy-toy." She drags a finger down Alec's cheek. "Tell me, little Nephilim, has Magnus taken you to bed yet? He always was exceptionally fun between the sheets. I don't suppose you've lost it, my love."

Alec waits for Magnus to roll his eyes and snap out a vicious remark at such a grossly callous comment, or quip back a snarky retort that will make Alec snort, but it doesn't come. When he glances across, Magnus is tense all over, looking unimaginably uncomfortable, and Alec realises that there's something here that he's missing. There's something here that's wrong. He just can't imagine what it is, that could give a woman like Camille such power over Magnus.

He's never seen Magnus like this. Ever. He looks stripped, vulnerable, and so, so on-edge. Everything about his body language is defensive, as though he's expecting to be attacked. And when Camille lets out another one of those tinkling laughs that are grating on Alec's nerves increasingly, Magnus physically flinches.
Alec has never wanted to murder anybody as much as he wants to murder Camille Belcourt—which, frankly, is no mean feat, because he wants to murder a plethora of people on a daily basis. He's already got four people on his hit list today.

"Alright, enough," Alec says, sharply. "This conversation is irrelevant to the matter at hand. Or do you want to be taken to the Clave for questioning?"

Camille pouts at him. "But Magnus and I have so much catching up to do. Don't we, sweetheart?"

Magnus’ eyes flicker to hers for a moment, and her expression turns victorious as their eyes meet. She knows. She knows exactly how much power she has over Magnus. She knows exactly how to use it to inflict the most damage. She knows exactly how much to push.

"What do you want, Camille?" Magnus asks, tiredly. "You didn't come here just to mess with me."

"Mess with you?" Camille's eyes go wide and she puts a hand over her chest in mock horror. "Never! No, Magnus, I came here to ask one, teensy little favour of you." She steps closer and lets her breath wash across Magnus' ear as she whispers, "I want you to lift this silly little exile and let me come home. To you."

Magnus swallows, Adam's apple bobbing, but he doesn't move away, as though too revolted to so much as flinch. "I can't do that. That decision requires the approval of the entire Downworld Council, and I assure you, that won't be happening."

"Oh, but you can," Camille says. "You have influence, don't pretend you don't."

"You murdered people," Magnus tells her, gritting his teeth. "Over and over again. You ruined people's lives. You don't get any passes."

"Now now." She looks reproachful as she steps back, folding her arms across her chest in a way that accentuates her already sizeable chest further, plunging neckline shifting slightly to give Alec a view of far more than he ever wanted to see. "Let's not make this personal."

"Everything with you is personal," Magnus mutters, and Alec sees that he's got his eyes closed, as though to ward himself against the vampire in front of him.

Camille lets out a frustrated huff. "You always were so over-sensitive," she says, as though Magnus is child having an emotional rage about nothing. "I see not much has changed. Really, is it any wonder things ended the way they did? How could you expect me to deal with this, constantly?"

"I don't know about you," Magnus says, voice ringing with sarcasm that gives Alec a little hope, "but when someone tells me they love me, I don't generally expect to find them fucking another man in my house, but you always were a heartless bitch, so I never should have expected anything else."

Camille lets out a laugh, but this time it's less sickly sweet—this time it's mocking, disbelieving, pitying. "What, and you think one of the Nephilim is going to be your shining saviour? You think a Shadowhunter—?"

"Enough."

Sparks fly from Magnus' hands, sizzling scarlet and scorching with fury as they slam against Camille, wrapping around her neck like rope as she's pinned to the wall, head cracking back against it with the force of Magnus' magic. She gasps, nails flying to her throat, and she lets out a rasping, breathless laugh.
"Oh, Magnus," she whispers, voice hoarse as Magnus' fingers curl tighter, magic pressing her harder against the wall. "How I've missed your volatility. It made foreplay so much more exciting."

"Shut your mouth," Magnus snarls, cat eyes flashing as he takes a menacing step towards the vampire trapped against the wall. "You will leave Alec alone, or I swear, I will tear you apart, limb from limb."

"You wouldn't."

"Oh, believe me, I would."

Uncertainty flits across Camille's face. "For a Shadowhunter?"

"For a man."

Magnus drops his hands, magic disappearing as his fingers curl into his palms. A crash resounds through the Dumort as Camille drops to the floor, like marble hitting granite, and she chokes, one hand raising to press against her throat.

"Unless there's anything else," Raphael says, from where he's standing in the doorway, "it's time to leave, Camille. You've got your answer. You're already breaking the Law by being here."

"Oh, what are you going to do, Santiago?" she snaps. "Hand me over to the Clave?"

"Yes," Raphael replies coolly, but there's rage simmering beneath the surface, held back by only a sheet of ice that's quickly melting. "The only reason I haven't is because of Magnus. So get over here before I change my mind."

She turns back to Magnus, a smirk on her face and a flirty quip clearly on the tip of her tongue, but Raphael beats her to it.

"Don't even think about it," he tells her, flatly. "You're done here. Now come with me."

As Raphael escorts her out, Camille turns her head towards Magnus, long hair spraying out around her shoulders like a waterfall, and says, "You know the only person you can ever rely on is me, Magnus. That's why you always come back. Because I'm always here. The rest—they leave you. I'll never leave you. And you'll always love me."

And, with that sickening declaration, she follows Raphael through the doorway, and the door flies shut behind them with a thud that seems to make the entire building vibrate. When the sound disperses, Magnus and Alec are alone in the room, nothing but silence for company.

Chapter End Notes

Oh look it's the plot.

Yes! Camille! Yayyyy, who's excit— Oh, no, nobody. But! Camille is part of the overarching plotline, so I'm not just throwing her in here for the angst. (I mean, I am throwing her in for the angst, but she serves a function. The angst has a purpose. Promise.)
There's lots of malec cheesiness next chapter to make up for this, but I hope you enjoyed this week's chapter! As always, feel free to come follow me on Tumblr and if you want to yell at me on Twitter, it's #fwwfic (NOT whatever bull I said last week about #fww -- my bad, I'm sorry) or I'm @LucysRebelHeart.

Have an amazing week! Much love,
Lu <3
Chickadee

Chapter Summary

In which Magnus opens a box, the whiskey bottle remains unopened, and Alec makes tea.

Chapter Notes

The chickadee: a bird for Magnus, this chapter. The chickadee is symbolic of higher thinking capabilities, solid knowledge of oneself and the surrounding world, and fearlessness in expressing yourself.

Yes AKA they get dark and deep this chapter who's surprised.

As always, if you want to live tweet, I check #fwwfic and you can yell at me: @LucysRebelHeart

Magnus' fingers are trembling.

It's been decades since he last had to stand in the same room as Camille, more than a century since she broke his heart, and yet, she still knows how to push his buttons. She still knows how to nick him in the jugular and let him bleed out slowly while she waltzes off, knowing that she's the only one who can stitch him back up.

He can't quite believe he just slammed Camille against a wall. There's a hairline fissure in the slate-grey brick where her head smacked against it, and Magnus is reminded, rather ironically, of that day - what seems like so long ago but was really little more than five months previously - when he'd thrown Valentine Morgenstern into a wall.

They're both awful, despicable people. Both have no qualms about killing for their respective causes: Valentine, genocide, and Camille, omnipotence. Both are bizarrely desperate to lure Magnus in for their own gains.

So why is it that only Camille makes him feel like this?

He swallows. He knows the answer. Camille ruined him. Camille saw his heart, raw and healed over from too many losses to count, and she promised to look after it, to cherish it, to flood it with love and affection.

But she didn't. She crushed it between snowy palms and dropped it in the dirt, walking all over Magnus in the sharp blades of her stilettos, leaving a ruined, mangled mess in her wake.

If it weren't for Ragnor, Magnus thinks, he might never have gotten over that. He might have revisited Blackfriars Bridge.
He's turned away, but he can feel Alec's eyes on him. Alec must be confused, and probably a little revolted, and he'd seen the anger flashing in Alec's eyes, heard it in the icy edge to his voice. He'll want explanations. He'll want to know. Of course he will. It's not unreasonable.

Magnus just isn't sure he's ready to go there yet.

"Magnus," Alec says, and his voice is as soft as the footfalls that meet Magnus' ears. "Magnus—"

"Simon and I have got this, Raphael," they hear from through the door. It's Lily, Magnus thinks, absently. "Get out. You're required elsewhere."

Magnus hears Camille's voice, syllables muffled and indistinct through the thick wooden door, and he flinches. God, he's pathetic. It's been more than a century. More than a human lifetime. And he still can't be in the same vicinity as his ex-lover without remembering...everything. Everything they had. Everything she said that left permanent scars. Everything she did to hurt him.

All those things that Alexander could do, too, if Magnus opens up and makes himself vulnerable, like he did with her.

The door opens again, this time more quietly, and Raphael appears, face pinched with anger that doesn't quite conceal his concern. He strides forward, glancing between Magnus and Alec, and purses his lips.

"Magnus," he says, stopping a few feet away. "I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault," Magnus tells him, with a smile that he doesn't feel. "Ignoring and refusing Camille never helps. And when you're trying to protect Simon, too, I understand. It's okay. I can handle it."

Raphael's frown deepens. "Ragnar would say you shouldn't have to. So would Catarina."

"Ragnar isn't here," Magnus says, a little more sharply than he'd intended to. He wonders what happened, for Raphael to suddenly be able to talk about Ragnar without closing off entirely. He wonders whether it's got a little more than something to do with Simon. "And neither is Cat, and you should be grateful for that, because Camille might be dead if they were."

Raphael raises an eyebrow. "The only reason I haven't torn her head off is because Ragnar used to tell me that would make things worse, not better."

"It would." Magnus exhales heavily, and presses the heels of his palms against his eyes. "Look, Raphael, I'm sorry, but I'm going home. I need some whiskey. If you want a second opinion on the professional side of this, you'll have to ask Alec."

Magnus lifts a hand, about to create a portal to take him home, when he feels cool fingers wrap around his wrist, halting his progress. There's a steely look in Raphael's eyes, and he shakes his head once.

"No," he says. "Ragnar didn't let you do this, Cat wouldn't let you do this, and I'm not letting you do this. You don't get to drink your sorrows away at home and pretend everything's peachy the next day."

Magnus' lip curls. "Oh, don't I?"

"No."
"Good luck stopping me. You've got a rogue vampire to deal with."

"I know. And I don't think I've ever been the best person to deal with the emotional side of things. You're going to walk home. With Alec."

Magnus' eyebrows shoot up, horror washing through him. He's not talking to Alec about this. He can't make himself that vulnerable. Talking about losing control in Indonesia was one thing, but this? This is no less painful than the events that had led up to that storm—and he's certainly not planning on telling that story during an afternoon stroll through the city. Or ever.

"Pardon?"

"You heard me. Now, out. I have political matters to deal with."

***

Alec watches in silence as Magnus grits his teeth, twisting his fingers together and curling his nails into his palm before unclenching his fist, over and over again like the rhythmic movement is helping to clear his head, helping him order his thoughts into something he can base decisions on.

It's the kind of soothing rhythm that Alec finds between bare knuckles and the sturdy leather of a punching bag.

A breath leaves Magnus in a rush, and he seems to visibly deflate. His shoulders curl in a little, fingers stilling, as though he's lost any remaining mental energy he'd retained after seeing Camille. Who, apparently, had once been Magnus'—what? Girlfriend? Lover? Fiancée? Magnus has never been married, according to his Clave file, but that doesn't mean he's never...wanted to be. And the way she'd spoken to him, the way she knew him, the way she knew how to hit places that clearly hurt...

"Alright." The brightness of Magnus' voice ringing through the room surprises Alec. "I'm going home. You don't have to come."

"Magnus—"

"No, really." Magnus turns to face him properly, and the upward tilt of his lips is heartbreakingly fake. "Raphael is being a melodramatic teenager. You've got things to do, I've got things to cancel and whiskey to drink, we can have a chat tomorrow. In fact—"

"Hey." Unable to stand the distance, or the fake smile plastered across Magnus' face, Alec takes several steps towards him, finally allowing the concern to wash over his face openly as he comes to stand before him. "Are you okay?"

Something in Magnus seems to crack. He looks over at Alec, and the glamour is gone from his eyes between one blink and the next, golden irises shining and hurt and vulnerable.

"Magnus," Alec whispers, desperate to reach out but unsure whether it would be appreciated.

Magnus gives him the kind of smile that looks like it'll disperse through the air and disappear entirely at the merest breath of wind. "I'm fine."

Alec frowns at the blatant lie, but, rather than press the matter right now, he slips his hand into Magnus', and squeezes. Magnus' gaze flickers up from where it had dropped back to the ground, and this time his smile is genuine, if a little weak. He squeezes back.
"Let me walk home with you," Alec says, softly, "and then if you want me to go, I'll go."

"Alright. Thank you."

"Of course. But Magnus—" He shakes his head a little. "Don't shut me out, okay? I get that whatever...history you and Camille have isn't pretty, but you don't have to tell me your darkest secrets to admit that you're not fine and dandy. You don't have to pretend."

"I know."

"You don't have to apologise," Alec tells him. "Let's just go back to your loft before Raphael comes and bites my head off for not being a satisfactory therapist."

"You don't have to ask me," Magnus snorts. "Therapist. Right."

"Hey." Alec pretends to be affronted. "I'd make a great therapist."

Magnus scoffs, but his eyes are lit with amusement. "What, just punch out your feelings until your knuckles bleed, you'll feel loads better? Right."

"Exactly." Alec grins at him, a little sheepishly. "Alternatively, walk through New York and have a really strong coffee when you get home."

"Mm. That sounds like a plan."

***

When Magnus goes to unlock the front door of his loft with a wave of his hand, there's the sound of scuffling inside, and a wet-nosed snout appears in the hallway. Padfoot whines when she sees him. She pads across the hard floor of the hallway, claws scratching against the wood, to nudge against his leg.

Magnus reaches a hand down to scratch between her ears, but he can't quite find it in himself to summon his usual enthusiasm for his hellish canine companion. Everything in him wants to bury himself under the sheets, curl up, and cry until dawn. He wants to scrub the phantom sensation of Camille's presence away. He wants to drown himself in something else, in someone else, in someone else's life and problems, until he's forgotten everything she threw at him at the Dumort. He wants to drink until he forgets his own fucking name.

A hand rests lightly on the small of his back, warmth spreading through the material of his blazer; he remembers why he's not going to do any of that.

"Do you want me to go?" Alec asks, voice quiet in the stillness of the midday sun that's just begun to warm up the fresh spring morning, casting swathes of butterscotch light through the windows of the apartment. "Leave you in peace?"

"You can go if you need to," Magnus says, but he doesn't look over his shoulder as he snaps his fingers to close the front door and pushes past Padfoot to hang up his blazer and unlace his boots. "I'll be fine."

"No, Magnus—" Alec sounds frustrated. "You're not fine. If you'd prefer me to give you some space, I'll go. If you want company, I'll stay. I can delegate my patrol to someone else. The rest can wait."
Magnus' eyes flutter closed of their own accord, as though depriving himself of his sense of sight will make him deaf to Alec's words—to the tone of his voice. Caring, selfless, and so, so easy to love.

God, he wants Alec to stay. He doesn't quite know whether or not he wants to talk about it, but he knows Alec wouldn't push him to. He wants to drink coffee and curl up on the sofa and feel someone beside him, because things always feel so much more manageable when he's got another pair of shoulders to help carry the burden—or just to rest his head and cry on. The demons that plague his mind might be held at bay by the presence of someone he loves.

Because he does. He loves Alexander Lightwood, unlike he's ever loved anyone. It's new. It's terrifying. It sets Magnus' heart racing and makes his chest ache with an overflow of emotions he can't express.

But he's raw. Vulnerable. Exposed. Camille never fails to rip away the layers that he's built around himself so carefully. She knows his weak spots far too well. She knows just which brick to fire at to bring the entire fortress crumbling down. She knows how to turn his castle of steel to glass and shatter it whole.

He doesn't know whether he's ready to let Alec see this. Magnus loves him, and he trusts him, but telling Alec about the true stories behind the Clave's claims was one thing; telling him about Ragnor's death had been another entirely.

This? Camille? It's on another level. It is, perhaps, the darkest time of Magnus' life—save those days in Indonesia, before he'd destroyed his own village. He's got no way of knowing how Alec will react. It's not that he's ashamed, exactly, but—

Well. Maybe he is a little. He knows he shouldn't be - god knows Ragnor and Catarina have told him enough times that he can't blame himself for the abuse Camille inflicted upon him, and he knows, that, in his head - but even after so long, she remains his darkest moment and his weakest point. And his heart can't help but feel the shame.

"You've got things to do," Magnus says, after a longer pause than he intended. "It's okay; go. I'm good."

Alec's voice, when he speaks, is impossibly gentle, but with an underlying note of steel. "Look me in the eye and tell me you'd like me to leave."

He will. Magnus turns, fully prepared to stare across the three metres separating him from Alec, into the eyes he could lose himself in for an eternity, and tell a white lie. Because he wants Alec to stay, but he's not sure he wants Alec to stay.

The moment their eyes meet, Magnus freezes, the words dying in his throat.

Alec is watching him, brows drawn together and forehead creased with concern. His eyes bore deep into Magnus', and Magnus feels naked, as though Alec is seeing right through all the layers he's wrapped himself in over the last four centuries, straight to his core—straight to all the things he's become so very good at concealing.

"I—" Magnus stares at him, confused in the helplessness that he feels - because he's the High Warlock of Brooklyn, he's Magnus Bane, for fuck's sake, people don't make him feel helpless - and shakes his head. "I don't know. Oh, god, I just want the last hour to never have happened."

"You can't undo what's happened," Alec says, not unkindly, "but you can deal with it. You taught me that. Just please, tell me what I can do to help. Even if you just want me to leave. Tell me."
"I don't know what I want," Magnus says, dropping his eyes off to the side, away from the unbearable tenderness of Alec's gaze. "I know that isn't very helpful."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Magnus lets out a tired little laugh, and shakes his head. "Not right now. It's complicated. Camille and I dated a long time ago, and we've got a lot of history, but it was..."

"Complicated?" Alec suggests, with a small smile, and Magnus nods. "Want a hug?"

Magnus looks up at him. He's not sure whether or not to be surprised by the ease with which Alec is digesting the information being given to him about Magnus' past with Camille. He's sure it can't be too difficult to realise that it's a messy kind of history. It's the sort of thing that often sends people running, when they're not particularly experienced in the dating world.

"That might be nice," Magnus says, shrugging one shoulder in an attempt to play off the way his heart twists at the offer. It's the sort of thing Ragnor would have done—insist on a hug, or a cup of tea, or some absolutely appalling movie, in place of Magnus' go-to fix of a bottle of whiskey and burying everything that hurts deep down where he can ignore it for another few years.

It's gentle, Magnus thinks, as Alec's arms slide around him and Magnus lets himself sink into the embrace. Despite everything, despite the precariousness of their situation, despite the fragility of the moment, despite the ultimatum hanging over their heads, Magnus feels bizarrely safe, standing in his loft in a still moment of time, chin resting on the shoulder of the man who's supposed to be his murderer.

The man he loves.

It's an oxymoron riddled with inevitable heartache, and somewhere deep down, Magnus knows that, in the end, this won't conclude with golden bands of warmth that swathe them in their own imperfect utopia. In the end - whatever the end is - it will end in tragedy.

But that doesn't stop him, now. It doesn't stop him closing his eyes and tightening his grip, daring to press closer; daring to hope that he'll only be held tighter.

The warm curl of fingers against his back isn't disappointing.

How long has it been since he last barred his soul to someone like this? How long has it been since he let someone see so deep into the layers of himself that he's tried so hard to hide? How long has it been since he let down the stone walls he's spent so long constructing and reinforcing and perfecting?

He wants to say that he's walked into this with his eyes wide open, but he hasn't. None of this was intentional. But Alec is his own brand of magical, and Magnus can't help loving him for it. All of it. Imperfections and scars and all.

Something feather-soft brushes his cheek, and Magnus slits his eyes open to search for the source of the sensation. He realises that it is a feather—that, like the last time they'd stood in Magnus' loft like this, wrapped together with Max healing in the next room and Alec's heart raw and bleeding with worry, Alec's wings have curled around him.

But it's not like last time. This time, when Magnus lets his eyes slip shut again and tucks his head into the crook of Alec's neck, Alec's wings curl tighter around them, pressing against Magnus' back and wrapping him in a cocoon of...
Well. Perhaps it's a little soon to call it a cocoon of love, even if that's what it feels like. Magnus knows he's unusual, in how hard and how fast he falls for people. Too many times, he's crashed to the ground in a mangled heap because there hasn't been anybody to grasp his outstretched hand and fall with him.

"Do you do this with all the boys?" Magnus asks, because he doesn't want to drown in those thoughts any longer. He won't let Camille win this one. He won't. He's stronger than that. He's the fucking High Warlock of Brooklyn. He's Magnus Bane. He's the Great Destruction. He makes people tremble at the knees. He won't let anyone do the same to him.

Alec sounds genuinely puzzled as he says, "What?"

"Catch them at emotionally vulnerable moments and give them fuzzy warm wing hugs?"

Alec laughs, the sound reverberating against Magnus' chest as he presses his smile into Magnus' neck. It makes Magnus' heart skip. "No, Magnus. I can count on one hand the number of people I've done anything like this with."

That piques Magnus' interest. He pulls back a little, but only so he can see Alec's face; he leaves his arms around Alec's shoulders, and can't help but be pleased when Alec doesn't draw away, either.

"Really? As in--" He brushes his fingertips lightly over a few feathers, and sees Alec's throat bob "--this?"

"Yeah. My siblings, and you. And I guess my mother, when I was little, but not for a long time. This isn't-- Our wings are a bit of a big deal to us. Touching them, being close to them, it's intimate. Especially between people who aren't family. Jace didn't let any of us this close to his until after he and I became parabatai. Not even just to straighten out his feathers."

"I didn't know that," Magnus says, quietly, thinking about the night they'd sat on his bed and he'd...groomed Alec's wings. He knows, through the grapevine, that Nephilim wings can be sensitive, and something of an erogenous zone, but he hadn't know how particular the Shadowhunters are about others touching them. "I knew they were personal, but I didn't realise they were that personal."

"Yeah." Alec offers him a smile, but there's something intrinsically nervous about it, as though he's about to make some terrifying sort of confession. "I wouldn't do this with someone I didn't trust implicitly. Or someone I didn't care about. A lot."

Magnus' heart cracks at the words, at the sheer earnestness in Alec's eyes. He's utterly without guile as he speaks, and it's so foreign to see on the face of a Shadowhunter. It takes Magnus' breath away.

He smiles, soft and fond, and reaches up a hand to press his palm against Alec's jaw, thumb dragging over his cheekbone. Alec leans into the touch; his eyelashes flutter a little, gaze turning heavy-lidded.

"I hope you know that I trust and care about you, too," Magnus says. His lips quirk up teasingly as he adds, "A lot."

"I do know," Alec says, turning his face to kiss Magnus palm lightly, and any remaining hope Magnus might have had of retaining a semi-collected façade melts into nothing. He's so gone for Alec Lightwood.

"Raphael likes you, you know," Magnus says, changing the subject a little before his heart actually breaks out of his chest. He's not sure his ribs are strong enough to contain it.
Something pleased flashes in Alec's eyes. "Yeah?"

"I know sometimes it's hard to tell, but he wouldn't have called you if he thought you were just another self-servicing Shadowhunter. Not for that."

"Not..." Alec frowns. "What?"

"Alexander." Magnus' lips turn up fondly, tone amusedly reproachful. "I know why Raphael called you, and I know it wasn't business. What did he tell you, exactly?"

Alec chews on the inside of his cheek. "He told me you needed me."

Magnus rolls his eyes. "That's a tad devious, but I suppose he learnt from the best. I do appreciate you coming, though. Really. This is a lot better than what I would have done otherwise."

Alec quirks an eyebrow at him. Magnus chuckles.

"Let's just say that that open bottle of whiskey sitting on my drinks cart? Would be empty by now."

"I'm sure that's not healthy," Alec says, shaking his head, but there's a hint of amusement tugging at his lips.

"You sound like Ragnor," Magnus tells him, and he's not sure whether Alec knows that, even in disparaging jest, it's perhaps the highest compliment he could pay to someone. "He always told me I drink too much. He was probably right."

"Izzy always tells me I drink too much coffee," Alec says, in a clear attempt to lighten the mood, "so how about we both break bad habits and have tea from your ridiculously big collection, instead?"

Magnus grins. "Ragnor would have loved you, my darling."

"I'm gonna assume that's a good thing," Alec says, pressing a kiss to Magnus' cheek as he unfolds his wings and draws away, dragging his fingers against Magnus' arm and not dropping them until the last possible moment as he heads towards the kitchen.

It is, Magnus thinks, as he wonders how this has happened - this, this undeniably wonderful thing, with Alec - and how he can possibly hold onto it forever. It's an amazing thing.

Chapter End Notes

I promised you cheese, look at this fluffy crap, good god I need to go and write about death or torture or kicking puppies or something evil... (I'm kidding, I'm kidding!)

So you guys, I have a seriously important question for you. I am OVER this username, to be totally frank with you. Nobody knows how to spell it, it's ancient, it's meaningless to literally anybody but me - you get it. SO, my question for you this week: if I change my AO3 username to match my tumblr URL (which is notcrypticbutcoy) will that confuse the fuck out of everyone, or will you cope? (I know old links to my username from other sites won't work, but I could make a redirect page...
ALSO, I have a playlist for this fic which, like the fic itself, started off as a fun little thing and has turned into a monster. You can find it [here on Spotify](https://www.spotify.com), and if you've got any recommendations for songs you think I should add, drop me a comment or hit me up on my [Tumblr](https:)! 

So lemme know about the (potential) username change, and I really hope you enjoyed this chapter! Next week will be similarly Malec-centric and gooey, before shit blows up.

Literally. Valentine will blow up New York. With a bomb. Funded by Russia. (I will see myself out.)

Much love,
Lu <3
Magnus takes a moment to watch Alec, Padfoot following after him with a wag of her lethal tail that makes Magnus smile through his heartache. Clearly, he's not the only one who's been charmed by Alexander.

For the second time in too few months, Magnus drags an intricately engraved wooden box out of the closet, worn and bowed and scratched where metal decorates dovetail joints and a clasp that hasn't opened by hand for a hundred and fifty years.

Folding one leg under himself, Magnus sinks down onto the bed, waving a hand to open the box. It creaks in protest, lid flopping back to reveal the contents: crap that's utterly worthless to anyone except Magnus.

He leafs through the stack of photographs until he finds the ones he wants, and lays them out on the bed around him, before shuffling through trinkets heading into their fourth century to pull out all those things that Ragnor used to tell him he should burn to cinders.

There are centuries of memories contained within the box, serving as reminders of people and places and particulars that Magnus can't hold in his mind any longer: lovers from long ago, tickets and memorabilia from trips that he barely remembers, a lock of his mother's hair and a sketch of her as a young woman.

His fingers brush something soft, and a smile saturated with melancholy flickers across his lips. A feather, white-ish grey and tinted with faint hues of rich blue that seem to shimmer when it catches the light. Alexander's, from that night they'd sat together and Magnus had smoothed his fingers through crumpled feathers, grooming them back into order.

One day, however this ends, Magnus won't be able to picture Alexander's face in his mind. He won't be able to feel the phantom touch of feathers under his fingertips. He'll forget the soft press of his lips and the timbre of his voice.

It's the curse of immortality - losing even the memories of those you once loved. And it's a burden
Magnus has struggled with for four centuries. Sometimes, he wishes he could unload it all, and never have to forget another face again.

"Magnus?"

A voice from the doorway makes him start, and he looks up to see Alec watching him, mugs in his hands and wings tucked close to his back.

"Mm, that smells nice," Magnus says, eyeing the tea appreciatively. "Come sit. I want to show you something."

Alec quirks an eyebrow as he walks over, placing both mugs on Magnus' nightstand. His eyes land meaningfully on the feather. "Is that mine?"

"Maybe," Magnus says, injecting as much teasing into his voice as he can. "Oh, no--you don't have to."

Alec pauses with his stele pressed to his skin, tip alight and burning into his flesh as he prepares to activate his wing rune to make his wings disappear. He frowns questioningly at Magnus. Apparently, a stele searing into his skin doesn't bother him—Magnus always has considered Shadowhunters weirdly masochistic.

"You're welcome to leave your wings out," Magnus clarifies, as Chairman Meow pads into the room and leaps up onto the bed. "Whatever you prefer."

"Is this some convoluted way of telling me you like my wings?" Alec asks, laughter bright in his eyes and warmth clear in the curl of his mouth. He slides his stele into his pocket and folds himself onto the bed beside Magnus so that they're face-to-face, knees brushing.

"I do," Magnus tells him, with a wink, "and I liked that lovely line you came out with earlier about—what was it? Trust and care?"

Alec rolls his eyes, but he's still grinning. "Shameless."

"Oh, I know," Magnus agrees, and pats Alec's knee. "It's a defence mechanism. I've been perfecting it for the last four centuries."

The smile drops from Alec's face, eyes turning abruptly serious. "You don't need a defence mechanism, Magnus. You can trust me."

"I know." Magnus lets the glamour over his eyes dissolve, and blinks slowly at Alec as slitted pupils ringed by eerie yellow that drove a woman to her death appear. "I do. But I'm sure you know that being honest is often easier said than done."

Something guarded flashes across Alec's face, and Magnus wonders whether he's thinking about how long it had taken him to admit to being gay - to being attracted to men at all - or whether there's some other secret Alec has kept under wraps for his own short eternity.

"It can," Alec agrees, and then drops his eyes to the box, gaze curious. "Who's that?"

Alec is looking at the sketch of Magnus' mother, faded now but preserved with magic for at least the last two hundred years. It's simple, a black-and-white pencil sketch that Magnus suspects was drawn by his step father when the two of them were young, early lovers embarking on the journey of life together.
Little were they to know, then, that they'd have a half-demon son come along to fuck it all up, Magnus thinks, bitter to stop himself feeling devastatingly guilty for the lives he's cut short—unintentionally, yes, but he did it nonetheless.

"That's my mother," Magnus says, voice stronger than his tumultuous emotions want to allow. "That's the only image I have of her."

"She looks beautiful." Alec looks up, something soft and bright in his eyes. "I see where you get it from."

Surprise pulls a laugh out of Magnus, lips tugging up crookedly. "I'll give it to you, that was smooth."

"Yeah?" Alec's smile widens, and he looks stupidly pleased with himself. "Sorry, I'm distracting you. You wanted to show me something."

When Magnus reaches a hand out to smooth over the photographs splayed out across the sheets around them, his fingers tremble a little. He can't tell whether or not Alec notices, but if he does, he doesn't mention it; Magnus is grateful. It's not what he needs, now.

"I wanted to tell you about my time in London," Magnus says, quietly, looking down at the stamps of time long gone beneath his palms rather than up at Alec. "About Camille. If that's not too weird."

"It's not weird," Alec replies, without a hint of hesitation. "You just...say what you think. However much you want."

"Well." Magnus clears his throat, and offers up a photograph for Alec's inspection, of Camille with that werewolf she'd had a thing for, before the two of them reunited. "Camille and I met in Victorian London a few times, before anything...happened. I was fairly infatuated from the get-go."

Alec's eyes flicker up to meet his, lips quirking. "Well, she is very beautiful."

"She is." Magnus sighs. "Dangerously so. I pride myself on being a man who sees the truth in others, even when I don't like it, but Camille...I managed to fool myself."

"She hurt you."

A bitter laugh bubbles up out of Magnus' throat as Alec picks up another photograph. He shakes his head. "Camille ruined me. Ragnor used to say that she killed me. Which is some feat, as I'm immortal."

Magnus remembers how broken he was, after Camille. How he'd felt like she'd ripped his heart into tiny pieces, scattered them across the floor, and dragged her nefarious affairs all over them. More times than he cares to count, Ragnor had yanked a bottle from his hand and picked him up off the floor where he'd collapsed in a drunken stupor.

It had gone on for too long. He'd pretended publicly, of course, that he was fine. He'd taken clients. He'd continued his dealings in London. He'd moved to New York and travelled and had scorching hot affairs with men and women and everything in between. But privately, he was crushed, the mangled remains of who he had been before she sunk her claws into him and lured him in like a siren does their prey.

Never again, Magnus had told himself, time and again. Never again would he let himself fall in so deep for someone. Never again would he open his heart up, make himself vulnerable, offer anybody anything that gave them power over him—power over his heart.
He'd sealed his heart off, hidden it behind an impenetrable fortress of heartbreak and depression and a bitter need to shut off from the world of romantic happily ever afters—because he didn't believe in them. Not after Camille.

And yet, somehow, he's here, pouring out his darkest moments to a Shadowhunter who's been handed an executioner's blade that has Magnus' name on it.

"Hey."

Alec's hand on his knee, warm and solid and steady, brings Magnus out of his thoughts and to the present. To Alec, who's looking at him as though he'd pull down the stars if Magnus asked him to.

He never saw that in Camille's eyes. Camille would have told him which star to bring to her and reclined somewhere in Paris while he did so, only to laugh in his face when he presented it to her and tell him that he took everything too seriously.

Camille was cruel. With hindsight, it's clear. At the time, it was all terribly blurry. Alec is as far from cruel as it's possible for someone to get. Well. Not to the people he cares about. Magnus imagines he can be exceptionally cruel to those who threaten his beloved siblings. He's a man made of good intentions, even if he is, sometimes, a little misguided in his actions.

It's what made Magnus begin to trust Alec, months ago, despite the racist rhetoric that Alec had thrown his way early in their acquaintance. It's what made Magnus trust that Alec's apparent change of heart was genuine.

It's what makes Magnus trust him now.

"I loved her," Magnus tells him, simply. "I made her my world, and I was so blinded by how brightly she shone that I couldn't see that she didn't love me. Not in the same way. She was manipulative. Abusive. Coercive. But she was also... She could be kind, and she could make me feel like I meant something. She talked me down, too. That probably didn't help my adoration of her."

The hand resting on Magnus' knee squeezes lightly, but Alec doesn't speak, and lets Magnus continue uninterrupted.

"She cheated on me. She had other lovers, all across the world. And it destroyed me when I found out. I realised she didn't love me as I'd loved her, and it broke everything inside me that was breakable. I was incredibly naïve. I was unimaginably stupid. I trusted her too much, and too easily, and it stopped me trusting anyone with anything for more than a century. I convinced myself I was unlovable."

"You weren't stupid."

The vehemence in Alec's voice makes Magnus blink in surprise. He's had his eyes trained on Alec's hand, resting lightly on his knee, but he looks up when Alec speaks. There's defiance in his eyes, and thinly veiled fury, and more care than Magnus' knows what to do with. It's a cocktail of intense emotion that sends a rush of fondness flooding through Magnus, affection for this ridiculous, insane Shadowhunter enough to make him feel weak.

"She manipulated you," Alec says, shaking his head a little. "What she did to you was not your fault. That's on her."

Magnus smiles a little, melancholy hitting him as he slides his hand over Alec's to grip onto his fingers. Alec doesn't turn his hand over, but his thumb comes up to brush against Magnus', and it reminds Magnus of so long ago, when this was the most intimate contact between them—when this
was all they allowed themselves. Not quite holding hands, but alluding to it.

"Ragnar used to tell me things like that. *Being in an abusive relationship doesn't make you unlovable, Magnus.*" He shakes his head. "I know that, logically. But it's..."

"Sometimes hard to believe?" Alec suggests, and Magnus nods. Alec runs his thumb over Magnus', and something about it makes Magnus feel so safe he could cry. "I know. I mean, I know that you know, I don't know what it's like to be in an abusive relationship. Sorry. That just...seemed like something you might want to hear."

"Yeah." Magnus exhales, slowly. "It was. Thank you."

"Don't thank me. Not after everything you've helped me through."

"It's not a competition, Alec," Magnus says, the corners of his eyes crinkling a little in amusement despite the heaviness of the conversation hanging between them.

"Shut up," Alec tells him, but there's no heat to it. Instead, there's kindness behind his eyes, and sympathy, but not pity. Alec never looks at him like he's fragile when Magnus lets him see the vulnerable parts—he just looks at him like he remembers that Magnus is human, too, for all his ostentatious flirtations and powerful displays of magic.

Something about the ineloquent response lightens the load on Magnus' heart, the weights dropping off to leave him with the exhaustion of carrying it for so long without reprieve—without anyone to share the burden. It's hard to separate the feeling from a total magic depletion. He wants to curl up under the sheets and sleep it off, knowing that he'll be okay by the morning.

It's just a mental cause, not a physical one.

"Come here," Alec says, softly, and Magnus thinks of all the times he's said that to Alec, and wonders why it's making his heart thud so hard when said in reverse.

Alec's arms open slightly, and Magnus shifts forward, pushing the photographs between them aside with one hand to close the distance between them and melt into Alec's embrace. He tucks his face into Alec's neck as arms close around him, tight and solid, heartbeat steady against Magnus' chest, encouraging his own into a calmer rhythm.

He thinks of the last time they sat like this, on Magnus' bed, wrapped in each other's arms for comfort. He remembers being roused by something, and waking to see faint light spilling into his bedroom from the rest of the loft, the tall silhouette of the Shadowhunter he'd left sleeping soundly on his couch hesitating in the doorway.

He remembers the apologising, the stuttering, the shame apparent with every syllable that tumbled from Alec's lips and every blink of his eyes. He remembers the fear that radiated from him, the way his fingers trembled as he finally took Magnus' hand and let himself be pulled onto soft sheets. He remembers how Alec's entire frame had shaken as he let himself be held while he cried, terrified of what he'd seen behind closed eyelids, afraid of the equally bleak vista of reality, driven to despair and desperation by his own people, his own family, and his desire to protect everyone he cared about.

Now, Magnus wonders how he didn't see it, then. How he didn't see that Alec cared for him, as more than just a casual friend, or a rebellious acquaintance. He wonders how he didn't see that he cared about Alec in just the same way.

He didn't *love* Alec then, but...there was something. And not something insignificant.
When Magnus blinks, he feels tears slide down his cheeks, dampening the fabric of Alec's t-shirt. He doesn't know why he's crying. For Camille's taunts today, or for everything she did to him a century ago, or for how much he loves the man holding him together while he falls apart, or for the fact that all that will ever come of this is heartbreak and misery.

But he can't make himself pull away. He can't make himself put all those walls back up. Building them was hard. It's even harder to look at their ruins and try to remake them from something different, something stronger, something that even Alec won't be able to break through.

And he doesn't want to. Not when Alec is tightening his hold, splaying his fingers across Magnus' back, and pressing closer. Not when Magnus closes his eyes to breathe in the scent of leather and sweat and cheap shampoo and even cheaper deodorant that's quickly becoming his favourite scent in the world.

Not when Alec presses his cheek against Magnus' hair and murmurs, "It's okay."

*I love you,* Magnus thinks, but he doesn't say it. He knows Alec wouldn't appreciate it. Alec probably doesn't feel anything even remotely similar to what Magnus does. Magnus has known Alec for six months—it's not close to the fastest he's ever fallen in love, but he knows that other people rarely see things with the same intensity he does.

It's the mistake he makes every time. It's the mistake he won't let himself make this time.

He won't let himself ruin this.

*I love you,* Magnus thinks again, *for this, for your heart, for your willingness to learn, for everything you are.*

Magnus wonders whether Alec is going to wait for him to pull away first. Whether he's one of those people, like Ragnor, who doesn't offer this kind of comfort very often, but does it beyond properly when he does.

If so, Alec might get bored. Because Magnus has absolutely no plans of moving an inch. He feels emotionally drained, and he wants to scrub the image of Camille from his mind and erase her words from his memory, but he knows he can't. So instead, he's going to bury her beneath better things. And this—this is a lot better than a bottle of whiskey.

Soft warmth folds around him, and Magnus smiles into Alec's shoulder as he feels Alec's wings settling against him in a movement that's clearly conscious, this time.

He could fall asleep like this, he thinks. Drift off on a cloud of care and safety that he's been bereft of since Ragnor died. Because he has other friends, of course he does - Catarina and Raphael especially would castrate him if he tried to deny it - but not like Ragnor. And he's closed himself off, even to them. He is, as Ragnor said, too determined to insist that he's fine to let anybody close. Especially Cat and Raphael—if he can convince them he's perfectly dandy, he can convince the world. They're his benchmark.

"Thank you," Magnus breathes, eyes still closed.

The near-silent laugh Alec huffs out against his neck is clearly taken aback. "For what?"

"Letting me talk about my ex-girlfriend. Not running in the other direction. Not slitting her throat where she stood." Magnus turns his head a little. "I do know how tempting it is."

"Mm. You seemed to have it covered. You slammed her against a wall and crushed her trachea. I
didn't want to interfere."

Magnus knows he shouldn't smile, but he does, and he presses it into the trapezius muscle sweeping down from Alec's neck to his shoulder. "She was really bothering me."

"I could tell."

They're quiet for several long moments, lingering in the seconds that seem to stretch out into an infinity that Magnus wants to live in forever. He wants to exist only in this fantasy created between them, where every hurt he's suffering from is soothed away.

But reality bites. He knows he can't, however much he wants to. So, inhaling deeply, he pulls back, easing himself out of Alec's embrace and reaching up to brush the stray tears from his cheeks.

Alec's wings unfold from around him, stretching out into a more natural position out of Magnus' reach. He lays a hand along Magnus' cheek and leans forward to press his lips between Magnus' eyebrows, and Magnus feels his entire being melt. He's gone. He's fucked. He's in love.

He doesn't regret a goddamn thing.

"Better?" Alec asks, dragging a thumb under his eye, probably to wipe away a stray smear of kohl.

"Much better," Magnus says, and turns his head to kiss Alec's wrist. "I'm going to drink that tea, now. Can you stay, or do you need to go?"

"No," Alec shakes his head. "No, I can stay."

Magnus narrows his eyes a little, but he decides not to press the point. If Alec is telling a white lie, it's nobody's business but his own. He's an adult.

"We never did watch any more Star Wars films," Magnus says, instead. "Fancy it?"

Alec rolls his eyes, but he's smiling. "I'm going to have to pretend not to understand Simon's stupid Darth Vader references, now."

"Mmm," Magnus says, and leans in to kiss him, just once, fleetingly, for the sake of contact, as the only way he knows to unload some of this overwhelming affection. "Is it a sacrifice you're willing to make?"

"Yeah." Alec threads their fingers together and squeezes lightly. "Yeah, it is."

***

However much Magnus clearly enjoys these ridiculous films with their horribly unrealistic fight scenes, by the time they're half an hour into the sixth film (and the best, Magnus says, although Alec can't quite tell, because they've only seen three—Alec doesn't begin to understand), Magnus' eyes are fluttering, glamour fritzing and fizzing, irises flickering from brown to golden and back again, over and over, every time Alec glances across at him.

Alec still hasn't quite worked out all the patterns of when Magnus puts his glamour up. He does it when he goes out into the mundane world in full visibility, and sometimes doesn't bother to drop it off again. But Alec thinks he might also put it up when he's feeling vulnerable—another wall between himself and the outside world.

"Hey," Alec says, turning his head towards Magnus while Luke and Leia are attempting to rescue
Han—and Alec is fairly sure that a gold bikini isn't the best attire to do it in, frankly. There are only a couple of inches of space between them, and they're angled towards each other, but they're not touching. "Do you want me to leave so you can sleep?"

"No," Magnus tells him, firmly, without an ounce of hesitation in his voice. "We haven't got to the best bit yet."

Alec makes a great show of rolling his eyes, because really, but he doesn't protest. Magnus is an adult—he knows what he needs, and if he wants to watch this stupid film instead of sleep, Alec isn't going to stop him. Even if the fussing older brother in him wants to.

But he's slumping a little, body posture turning lax, lazy, languid, sinking into the soft cushions of the sofa and letting his head rest against the back of it while his eyes are trained on the television screen.

Alec's eyes are trained on Magnus. The lights in the loft have all been turned down low - mood lighting, Magnus had said, is essential for movie-watching - and nighttime is falling outside, but he can still see Magnus beside him, the light from the movie casting an ethereal glow across the planes of his face, glistening across his hair and making his irises glint.

The desire to wrap his arm around Magnus' torso and—well, cuddle, is overwhelming. Alec has never considered himself much of a tactile person. He was never allowed to show affection like that. It's not what Shadowhunters do. Even with his siblings, intimate touch isn't exactly a daily occurrence.

But with Magnus, he feels like he never wants to stop touching.

Not in a sexual way, necessarily - although he'd be lying if he said he'd never thought about that, too - but just...in the little ways. He wants to twine their fingers together, and brush his hands through Magnus' hair, and press his head to his chest and hear his heart thump-thump beneath his ribcage, the eternal clock of Magnus' life tangible against him.

Perhaps it's the heavy-lidded tiredness beginning to seep into his own mind, or perhaps it's the warm, safe bubble they're wrapped in, or perhaps it's just that it's Magnus, but Alec doesn't think before he slips his arm around Magnus' waist and pulls just a little, tugging him into his side.

Magnus moves, resting his head on Alec's shoulder and pressing against him, bodies plastered close as Alec's cheek comes to rest against Magnus' hair. Alec has runed his wings away, because that much extra limb is just inconvenient, sometimes, but he gets the desire to be close to Magnus like that again, anyway. It's so intimate but it feels so right; it's addictive.

"I'm sorry," Magnus says, and Alec frowns down at him.

"What? Why?"

He feels Magnus smile against his neck, slow and sleepy, lips dragging across his shoulder carelessly. "I think I'm going to fall asleep before the end. We're just going to have to watch the whole film again."

Alec huffs out a laugh, and tilts his chin up to kiss Magnus' temple. "Just don't tell Simon."

"Would I betray you like that," Magnus mumbles, the smile still audible in his voice but sleep more apparent as his syllables slur just slightly.

It ends up being Alec who falls asleep first, lulled by the warm breaths washing across his neck and the thud of Magnus' heart against him and the sensation of being pressed close to a man he feels this
way about.

But Magnus barely has time to notice, before he's pulled under too, forcing his eyes open for just long enough to hear Han tell Leia that he loves her.

Chapter End Notes

I keep saying things are about to blow, and then I post more gooiness.¯\_(ツ)_/¯ what can I say. Slow burn, lol.

(Also side note, my dumb line at the end last week about Valentine and bombs was a joke, lol. I was not serious. It was just a jab at current affairs. Some of you seemed very concerned...) Anyway! I really hope you enjoyed this chapter! Magnus is getting back to some warlock badassery (at least, verbally) next week, so something to look forward to!

If you fancy it, come follow me on Tumblr! You can also tweet at me: @LucysRebelHeart, or use #fwwfic

Quick admin thing, I might try out this new username thing at some point this week, just FYI. I'm slightly undecided lol.

Much love (especially to anyone from New York),
Lu <3
There's a crash from the back of the Hotel Dumort.

Simon’s head snaps up from where he's texting Jace - which is an activity that only ever occurs when they're both worried about Clary - and he sees Lily frowning across the room. She puts down a tall glass of blood and rises, zipping through to the back room—the blood store.

"Dios, what now?" Raphael's voice floats across to him, and Simon watches him roll his eyes. "Is it too much to ask that we have a peaceful evening?"

"Apparently," Simon says.

"Raphael." Lily appears in the doorway, a worried look etched onto her face. "We have a problem."

"What sort of problem?"

Lily glances between them. "Camille," she says, "she's gone."

There's a moment of pin-drop silence, during which Raphael stays entirely unmoving, horror washing through his eyes and across his face as he stares at Lily. Simon still doesn't quite understand what's going on with Camille Belcourt, but he gets enough to realise that this is bad. She's evil, and she's manipulative, and she's a criminal, and apparently, she's got some pretty nasty history with Magnus.
"Gone where?" Raphael asks, jaw tightening. "How can she have gone? There's nowhere to go. She was being held there until—"

"Until a warlock could portal her out of New York, I know," Lily says. She shakes her head. "You know there's only one person who could have done this."

A frown pinches Raphael's expression. "Who?"

"Valentine."

Raphael looks like he's going to be sick. Worry makes Simon slide his phone away and rise from the sleek leather sofa (and, really, black? It just makes the place look even more gothic and creepy) and move towards Raphael, eyes flickering between him and Lily.

"It's no secret that Valentine wants Magnus on their side," Lily continues, ignoring Simon—or perhaps just not caring that he's there. "And if he thinks Camille can help him, he'll use her, like he'll use any Downworlder if it helps him with his end goal of burning civilisation to the ground."

Simon can't help but think that it's is a bit of a stretch to describe the Shadow World as "civilisation" in its current state. The Downworlders and the Shadowhunters are participating in their very own Cold War, even without adding Valentine's desire for genocide into the mix.

"If Valentine is getting involved with Camille to get to Magnus," Raphael says, "then he's planning on making a move."

"Or he's just trying to get Magnus anyway," Lily says. "Besides, nothing Valentine or Camille could say would make Magnus join him. You know that as well as I do."

Raphael glances down. "Maybe," he says, and then turns on his heel, striding through across the room and heading out, slamming the door behind him so hard Simon could have felt the vibrations through his feet even if he weren't a vampire.

He looks over at Lily, uncertain. "Should I go after him?"

Lily purses her lips. "In a minute. Are you okay?"

"Me?" Simon blinks at her in confusion. "I'm fine."

"You're depressed. We're supposed to be keeping an eye on you."

Simon rolls his eyes. He doesn't need mollycoddling, and he's beyond sick of people watching him with those big, concerned eyes every time he ventures into the outside world. It's like they see Depression before they see Simon. Maybe he should just hang a neon sign saying I fancy Raphael around his neck. It might give them something else to gawp about.

"Yeah, I'm not going to go outside and sink my fangs into some mundane's throat, if that's what you're asking. I'm good."

"That's not what I was asking," Lily says. "I was asking you if you're okay. I was being nice. But if you're giving me sass, you're clearly fine. Go. Sort Raphael's ass out."

***
Outside, nighttime has fallen across the city. The ground is painted with artificial light, the breeze warm as it floats across Simon's skin. Summer is nearing, and it's evidenced by the soft rustle of leaves on the trees and the nostalgia Simon can't help but feel in his heart for the simpler times, before all this. Before the monsters and the demons with kind hearts. Before the angels and the gods with venomous smiles.

He finds Raphael leaning with his back pressed against a green ash tree in full bloom. Silvery moonlight is streaked across his face in ribbons broken by the shade of the leaves, which create a canopy of silence above him. His face is tipped up towards the sky, eyes closed, as though he's praying, offering himself up as a sacrifice, begging for something from a higher being he can find in the twinkling beauty of a clear summer night sky.

Simon pauses on the street several metres away, staring at Raphael, unwilling to intrude. He looks like something ethereal, untouchable, divine—but Simon knows he's not. He's just a man scared for someone he loves.

"I'm fine," Raphael murmurs, as Simon approaches. He doesn't open his eyes.

"You're not fine," Simon says, leaning back against the tree beside him so their shoulders brush. "You're worried about Magnus. But I don't think you need to be."

"You don't know Camille like I do. You don't know what she did to him. You don't know what she's capable of."

"Maybe," Simon agrees, turning his head to look over at Raphael instead of up at the sky, unfazed when Raphael remains entirely unmoving, not even breathing. "But I know what Magnus is capable of. I saw him slam her against a wall. And I saw how much Alec wanted to slit her throat."

Raphael's lips twist up at one corner. "That's not an entirely unprecedented reaction to meeting Camille for the first time. I want to slit her throat, too."

"Yeah, and you know what else you and Alec have in common? You care about Magnus. It's not like the guy is alone in stamping out this bitch. He's got you, and Alec, and he can do that crazy twirly-hands, blow-your-brains-out thing, and—"

"Simon, shut up," Raphael says, smiling despite himself. "People usually talk like that when they're talking about hooking up with him. It's revolting. Please don't."

"Oh god." Simon can't quite manage to keep the horror out of his voice. "No. On so many levels. But mostly the one where Alec would stab me. Multiple times."

Finally, Raphael moves. He turns his head towards Simon and lets his eyelids flutter open, gazing across at him from under his lashes. Simon hadn't realised how close they were until now—close enough that Simon is sure Raphael can feel his every breath.

"I wouldn't let the Shadowhunter stab you," Raphael murmurs. Fingers brush the back of Simon's hand, and he feels his heart skip in his chest. "Not that he'd try to. I think he likes you. Deep down."

Simon scoffs, but it comes out a little less solidly than it should. He's more than a little distracted by the way their hands keep teasing together, touching and hinting but not clasping, as though they're playing some infuriating game.
"Alec hates me," Simon says.

Raphael's mouth quirks at one corner. "I don't think he does. Besides, I'm much harder to impress than Alec Lightwood. I like you."

"You're good at hiding it," Simon tells him, but he doesn't mean it.

"Bullshit." Raphael is smiling. Or, rather, the other corner of his mouth has lifted minutely to join the first, which accounts to smiling, for Raphael Santiago. "I distinctly remember you calling me a sweetheart." He wrinkles his nose. "As if."

Simon feels the smile drop off his face, and, if it were possible, he knows his heart would be pounding. Something in his chest clutches, curling and twisting and aching. He has to say something, but he's crippled by nerves. He doesn't know how to—

"Simon." Raphael's body twists, turning so he's facing Simon fully, shoulder against the tree instead of his back, a frown creasing his brow. It pulls his hand away. Simon doesn't know whether it's a blessing or a curse. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." He shakes his head. Much as he wants to snap out of it, he can't. He can't. "It's nothing."

"I said I'd help you," Raphael says, the expression in his eyes raw and honest and stripped of his usual frigid disinterest. "I-- I know I've been distracted. By Magnus, and Iris Rouse, and now Camille, but—"

"You have helped me," Simon says, softly, but he turns his head away, looking up at the stars overhead. Sometimes he wishes he could be that far away from everything. "It's not-- It's good days and bad days. And it's not...new. I know I acted like it was, but it's not. Ask Clary. It's not a result of being a vampire. Sure, all this hasn't helped, but I'm not-- I know how to deal with it. I just didn't have to worry about killing people before. That's what I need help with. And you've done that."

"Look at me," Raphael says, and Simon does, unable to do anything but obey. "You're not alone anymore."

"I like you," Simon whispers into the nighttime between them, because he can't pretend he doesn't any longer.

Raphael's expression softens, eyes melting into liquid, and he slides his fingers between Simon's. "I know," he says, and leans in to press his lips to Simon's forehead. Against Simon's skin, he murmurs, "I know."

Simon feels impossibly young as he looks up at Raphael, uncertain. Was that a Han-and-Leia kind of I know?

"You do?"

"I do," Raphael confirms. "You think I tell just anyone about Ragnor Fell?"

"I'm assuming that's a rhetorical question and the answer is no?"

"You're a complete moron," Raphael says, rolling his eyes, and kisses him, so softly Simon feels like he's going to break. Tears sting at his eyes when Raphael's hand comes up to cup his cheek, lips unmoving against his, lingering in the moment, and he sucks in a sharp, aborted breath when
Raphael moves back just a little, just enough to let him fucking breathe.

Their lips brush again, once, then twice, and Simon tastes salt on Raphael's lips as he grasps at the hand on his face with a desperation he doesn't understand. The kiss is so slow, so careful, so physically uninvolved it's almost innocent. But there's nothing innocent about the sensations coursing through Simon's veins. There's nothing innocent about Raphael's thumb stroking across his cheek.

It's divine. It's pure. It's the most precious thing Simon has ever felt. It's not a kiss for lust, for sex, for physical desire, it's a kiss for emotional intimacy, for the sensation of being close, an outlet through which to channel...this.

"Oh god," Raphael whispers, laughing a little as he pulls back to brush away the tears on Simon's cheeks with his knuckles, tenderness written into every touch. "I haven't kissed anyone for a long time, but I didn't think it would make you cry."

"I didn't realise I was," Simon says, a sniffs, hating himself even as he smiles. "Sorry."

"Don't," Raphael squeezes Simon's hand, their fingers still interlaced. "Simon, I don't mean to...break the mood, but you know I don't like sex, don't you?"

"I give absolutely zero fucks right now," Simon says. "We can talk about it later. I'm supposed to live forever, I don't think sex is going to be the most important thing in the world to me."

"Okay."

Something bright explodes in Simon's chest, and he lifts their joined hands to brush a kiss against Raphael's knuckles. "Okay."

***

The feeling of tiny points of pressure on his thigh wakes Alec deep in the night.

At first, he's confused, and disorientated. He's practically upright, and he's simultaneously warm and cold, and he's more comfortable than he's ever been in his life yet he has has an aching neck, and he hasn't got a clue where he is. Nowhere in the Institute looks like this. The last time he fell asleep on a sofa was as a teenager, reading too late in the library.

Then he registers the Chairman nudging his wrist with his nose, and he remembers. He's in Magnus' loft. He came back with him after Raphael called them both in, to see...

Oh. Camille.

Alec moves his hand to let the Chairman curl up where he wants to, and turns his head slightly to look at Magnus. He's asleep, breaths slow and even against Alec's neck, the tension gone from his shoulders. He looks at peace. And, much as Alec knows he should wake him up and make him move to a bed, and then go back to the Institute before someone accuses him of neglecting his duties, he just can't bring himself to do any of it.
Instead, he rests his forehead back against Magnus', and lets sleep pull him back under.

***

"You should really have paid more attention to the reading of my will, you know," Ragnor says, sitting in the corner of Magnus study with the Book of White open on his lap, glasses perched on the end of his nose. "It would have saved you a lot of questioning."

Magnus glances outside. It's daylight, early morning, and he appears to be fully clothed. It can't be eight o'clock in the morning yet. Definitely not real.

"This is real," Ragnor says, "so stop that train of thought right there. God, you're more cynical now than you were as a child. I didn't think that was possible."

"Maybe I wouldn't be if you hadn't abandoned me to the Silent Brothers," Magnus snaps, hotly, unthinkingly, and Ragnor looks up from the book.

His eyes are old, world-weary, and full of regret, as he watches Magnus with a small smile that's saturated with sadness and fondness in equal measures. Magnus isn't sure whether he wants to shout at Ragnor or hug him.

"You know I couldn't have raised you, Magnus," Ragnor says, softly. "The Shadowhunters would have considered it a crime for me to protect and shield a warlock who'd killed mundanes."

"I was a child. That wasn't my fault. You're the one who told me that."

"And I wasn't lying," Ragnor tells him, and rises, sliding the book onto the table as he moves to stand with him. "It wasn't your fault. But the Shadowhunters would never have seen that. They would have hunted you and me. It was better to do the legal thing. At least then you'd be alive. You'd have a chance."

"That month, with you, was the best month of my childhood." Magnus swallows. "I hated my time with the Silent Brothers."

"I know." Ragnor lifts a hand to cup his cheek, and shakes his head. "I'm sorry. I wish I could have done something different."

"It's not your fault." He shakes his head a little. "You made up for it a million times over, my friend. But why are you back in my head?"

"To help you figure things out." The hand drops away from Magnus' cheek, and Ragnor settles himself in the chair by Magnus' desk, folding his fingers together and looking up at Magnus pensively. "This spell is a safety mechanism. I'm here because you need me. I'm dead; this is just a remnant of myself, an imprint in your mind stored in a pocket dimension."

Magnus quirks an eyebrow. "Tom Riddle, much?"

"That woman has a fantastic mind, for a mundane," Ragnor says, and waves a hand dismissively. "You're distracting from the topic at hand."

"If this is a spell, how did you get into Alec's head?"
"Magnus." A small smile crosses Ragnor's face. "I think you know the answer to that."

"He's part of the...problem."

"Yes."

"Because of the Clave's mission, but—"

"No." The softness disappears from Ragnor's eyes, and the corners of his mouth turn down, expression tightening into seriousness. "That is a part of it, yes, but that's not why he's been having strange dreams."

Magnus rolls his eyes at his friend. "No, Ragnor, you were the reason he's been having strange dreams."

"A sacrifice and an Indonesian prayer?" Ragnor raises his eyebrows. "Traumatising people is not my style."

Magnus' brow furrows. He'd assumed that that dream Alec had had, what seems like so long ago, now, was just that—a dream. Does that mean it's something more sinister? A premonition, or a vision, or—

Or, Alec is a vessel, a carrier—and he's being lured into a trap meant for Magnus. Someone is using Alec to get to him. Someone who wants his magic, or his power, or his influence within the Downworld.

Valentine.

"Yes," Ragnor says, inclining his head. "Valentine."

"But how?" Magnus demands. "That's not possible. This loft is warded. Nothing could get through the wards like that. The only person who's ever broken into my loft is—" His eyes widen, horror crashing through him, and he stares at Ragnor, frozen. "Shit. Do you mean to tell me that Valentine is utilising the power of angels and greater demons?"

The grim look on Ragnor's face says more than words ever could. Magnus swallows around the lump in his throat. If Valentine is using such dark magic, now, then he's not only growing in power more than either the Downworld or the Clave suspect, but he's getting ready to make a move. He's collecting powerful Downworlders, and then he's going to burn the world to the ground and leave ruthless destruction in his wake.

Then he's going to resurrect an unrecognisable world founded on hatred and division and evil, and an innate desire to control, to dominate, to ruin. He's going to tear the Shadow World in two—and the collateral damage will be every single mundane anywhere near the nuclear bomb of disaster and ruin he's sure to set off.

"Oh, god," Magnus breathes, and sinks down into the armchair Ragnor had been occupying earlier, legs feeling weak beneath him. "What do I do? You can't stop angels and greater demons. Not together. Not like that. This is...dark magic."

"You can stop greater demons," Ragnor says, flatly. "Shadowhunters can banish them back to hell.
You can obliterate them."

"But angels—"

"Angels intend to do good," Ragnor says, firmly. "Angels need to be set free, not stopped."

"Nobody knows where Valentine is. He moves all the time. His hideout in New York disappeared after the Shadowhunters rescued all those children. We have nothing to go on. And Alec can't help. The Clave isn't letting them go on unsanctioned missions relating to Valentine, and if he came forward with this information—"

"Wait." There's unending patience in Ragnor's eyes. "You can't rush into hasty decisions. Valentine wants you, so don't let him get you. If you start exposing yourself in an attempt to defeat Valentine, all you're going to do is set the Clave on your arse. And Alec's."

"So, what, I sit on my hands and watch while Valentine destroys my city?" Magnus feels his eyes flash. "Bullshit."

"No. You make sure the Downworld is protected, and you make sure your boyfriend knows that his dreams are a ploy to push you towards Valentine for fear of the Clave, and you do not get anywhere near Valentine, under any circumstances. He wouldn't be putting this much effort into getting you if it weren't important. You're integral to his plan. He cannot get to you. It's imperative."

"I can't do nothing," Magnus says, mind already racing as he tries to think over the multitude of books spanning centuries in his library, flicking through the pages of his memories in an attempt to recall something that will help. He rises, unfolding from the chair and moving towards the tall walls filled with books of spells and lore and history. "There has to be something—"

"Do you really think Camille is here by accident?" Ragnor asks, raising an eyebrow. "Do you really think it's a coincidence that she's chosen now to beg you to lift her exile?"

Magnus' eyes snap to Ragnor, thoughts hitting a wall and crashing to a halt as he turns. "What?"

"Whatever vile plan Valentine is concocting, he needs you. Desperately. He's pooling all his resources into getting you. He has been for months. The demon attacks, the foresaken hybrids, now Camille? He's trying to get your attention."

"Clearly," Magnus says, mouth twisting down in displeasure, "he didn't get the message when I threw him into a wall. How many times do I need to throw him on his ass before he understands that I will have no part in his heinous bullshit?"

"You know the answer to that." Ragnor shakes his head. "Magnus, you need to be careful. I don't care what Valentine does. You can't let him get to you. This is too big."

"What can he possibly need me for that no other warlock in the world will do?" He runs his tongue along his teeth, pursing his lips in deliberation. "It doesn't make sense. He's been driving the Downworld to desperation for more than two decades. There are plenty of warlocks who'd join him, if he played his cards right."

"Not many high warlocks," Ragnor says.

Magnus scoffs. "You've been dead too long. I could name six off the top of my head."
Ragnar doesn't reply, and Magnus turns to look at him from where his gaze had flitted back to the shelves. There's an eerie sort of glow permeating the air from beneath his skin; Ragnor is looking down at his hands, turning them over slowly.

"I'm running out of time. It takes power a dead man doesn't have to keep this pocket dimension open for long," he says, eyes flickering up to meet Magnus'. "You have to tell Alec what's going on. You can't keep this from him. He's being used, and if he doesn't know what's going on, he'll make terrible choices."

"No," Magnus agrees. "I wouldn't keep this from him. He deserves to know. But there has to be something I can do. I can't—"

"You can," Ragnor says, firmly. "You have to tackle the Clave before you can take down Valentine. Persuade them that you're not a criminal."

"Alec's been trying, for months, but—"

"Not even you can fight a war on two fronts, my friend," Ragnor says, with a small smile. "You have time. Nobody is threatening you right now. Sort your shit out before you plunge into anything."

And the light explodes out of Ragnor, spreading across the room and blinding Magnus, and he lifts an arm to shield his eyes from the glare.

When he blinks, everything is gone.

***

Magnus wakes to the sensation of Alec's chest rising and falling steadily against his side. Breaths wash slowly across his neck, and Magnus can't help but smile when he sees that he and Alec have curled up against each other, heads tucked together and arms sprawled lazily across each other.

The Chairman is curled up between their knees, fast asleep, and Magnus feels his entire being soften when he sees Alec's fingers laying close by, as though he'd fallen asleep mid-stroke. For someone who slaughters things for a living, he's one of the most gentle men Magnus has ever met.

He's surprised, frankly. He didn't realise the Clave allowed men to be gentle. Gentle has always appeared to be the role of women, in the Clave's mind.

Although, perhaps he's a little behind. Even Maryse Lightwood has stuck it to that stereotype.

Unable to stop himself, Magnus tilts his head to brush his lips across the pale expanse of Alec's cheek. Alec grumbles a little in his sleep and tightens his grip on Magnus, as though concerned that Magnus is going to move away, and take his body heat with him.

Magnus shifts his arm to snap his fingers. The folded tourmaline blanket from the back of an armchair spreads out in the air in a shower of blue sparks and settles around them.

Alec lifts his head groggily, eyes half-lidded and heavy with sleep, and blinks. "What—?"

"Go back to sleep," Magnus tells him, lips tipping up in fond amusement. "It's the middle of the night."
"Why're you awake, then?" he asks, frowning as he lifts a hand to rub at his eyes.

"No reason," Magnus says, wrapping his fingers around Alec's wrist when the rubbing appears to get a little too fierce; instead, he kisses Alec's knuckles and folds his fingers around Alec's, tucking them beneath the blanket. "I'll tell you in the morning," he amends, seeing Alec's doubtful expression. "Promise."

"Okay."

Silence falls over them, enveloping them in its warmth, and Magnus lets his eyes close. He was right, last night—he feels like Camille can't hurt him anymore. Here, now, when he remembers Camille, yesterday, the words don't shred him as much as they did.

He supposes that it's true, what they say: time heals all wounds.

They've been quiet for long enough that Magnus thinks Alec has fallen asleep again, until a voice murmurs, "Magnus?"

He doesn't open his eyes, but shifts his head slightly. "Yeah?"

"Do you think we can win this? Get out of this kill order from the Clave, and defeat Valentine, and just...all of it?"

At that, Magnus does open his eyes, to find Alec looking down between them, eyes focused on the necklaces Magnus hadn't taken off before they'd sat down to watch the film. His eyelashes are lowered, shielding his gaze from Magnus' sight, but it doesn't matter. Magnus knows what he'd see.

"I do," he says, and, for the first time in a long while, he finds that he believes it. "I know we can. It's not going to be easy, but we can do this. The Shadowhunters and the Downworlders need each other, and we need each other to defeat Valentine. Nobody's going to defeat him on their own. We will win this. But we'll do it together."

He grips Alec's hand tightly, watching him intently as he speaks, and it's only after a long, tense moment that Alec looks up, uncertainty clear in his eyes.

"What about you?"

"What about me?"

"The kill order. I'm supposed to murder you. I can't- I can't stop thinking about it. I can't pretend forever."

"We'll figure it out," Magnus says, firmly.

Something about Ragnor's information has ignited a fire inside him, lit him with a determination he's been lacking since he watched Maryse Lightwood slaughter his best friend in cold blood. Valentine can go fuck himself. The Clave can shove their bullshit up their asses. Magnus refuses to let his world and his people burn in this war. They're going to win. And nothing - not Valentine, not Camille, and certainly not some cowardly demand to make Alec do his superiors' dirty work - is going to stop them.
He's the High Warlock of Brooklyn for a reason. The Nephilim, on both sides, have forgotten that for too long.

"Alexander, trust me," Magnus says, bringing their foreheads together. "We will win this. If you and I can go from despising each other to this, everything else is a piece of cake."

He feels Alec smile at that. "You're gonna have to tell me whatever Ragnor showed you, in the morning."

Magnus blinks in surprise. "Pardon?"

"Something must have put you in this determined mood. Am I wrong?"

"No," Magnus admits, a little reluctantly. "I will tell you. In the morning."

"In the morning," Alec repeats softly, tangling their fingers together.

The feeling of Alec's fingers interlaced with his reminds Magnus that, when he thought he had everything to lose the first time the Clave drove him into hiding, he was wrong. He didn't. He'd already lost too much of what was dear to him to have everything left.

Now, though, this is at stake. Alexander, and what they have, but more than that, he can't lose everything Alec represents. Alec, and his siblings, and all their treacherous, Clave-defying opinions.

Because these young Shadowhunters, and the Downworlders dear to them, represent hope. And hope is what keeps people holding on, he knows. Hope for a better world, for a better future, for the freedom to be themselves, proudly and unashamedly.

Hope is what they're fighting for.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry this is late (although it is still Thursday) but I hope you enjoyed it! Let me know what you thought in the comments.

If you like, come follow me on Tumblr or yell at me using #fwwfic or @LucysRebelHeart on twitter!

Much love,
Lu <3
"I'm a little disturbed," Isabelle murmurs, as she and Lydia walk down a darkened alley on patrol.

The moon is full, seated in the sky above them on a throne of clouds, shrouded in shadows and casting glimmering milky light down on them. It catches on Lydia's hair, turning blonde into waves of silver in the nighttime.

Wind washes through the alleyway, and goosebumps rise across the exposed skin of Isabelle's neck. From the end of the tall, worn out buildings stretching up beside them, Isabelle can hear the rustle of the trees and the rush of the mundane world, cars honking and taxis prowling down the roads, mundanes rushing about with their faces lit by their cellphones, totally unaware of the demonic monsters lurking mere metres away from them.

Lydia glances across at her. "I presume this is not because you're on a night patrol."

"It is, actually," Isabelle says. "More specifically, because I'm covering Alec's night patrol."

She can sense Lydia's bewilderment, but she doesn't offer up any more clues. She likes being mysterious. She can't help it. "Shadowhunters at this Institute always seem to cover each other's patrols. You have a good system going."

(Isabelle hopes Lydia had told Alec that. It's his system.)

"Not Alec's," she says, a wry smile twisting at her lips. "Alec is well known for never missing a patrol. Even Raj switches sometimes, but not Alec. It's a running joke."

"Where is Alec?" Lydia asks, a frown creasing her forehead. "He's the Head of the Institute, he should really be a little more transparent."

"He's not technically in charge yet," Isabelle says, nudging Lydia with her arm. "Otherwise you
wouldn't still be here."

Lydia makes an odd sort of noise in the back of her throat, but before Isabelle can question her, she's speaking again. "Does that mean you know where he is?"

"Oh, I can guess," she says, smiling. "It's why I'm disturbed. My brother has apparently acquired a life."

"That's mean," Lydia says, but her lips are twitching.

"I know. I love him really. But this is...new, for him."

"Isabelle," Lydia says, with a little laugh, as they round the corner of the alleyway, both peering down the street before the step out, scanning the sidewalks for signs of demons. "I've got no idea what you're talking about."

"Mmm. Good. You told me not to tell you about illegal things so you didn't have to report me."

"Yeah, and then Meliorn split the beans about you and your brothers committing high treason to free Clave prisoners. Oh, and Jace told me about the friendship you all apparently have with Magnus Bane. And then—"

"Alright, alright." Isabelle grins at her. "I get it. Shut up."

"So?" Lydia arches an eyebrow. "What is Alec doing?"

"You just answered that question yourself," Isabelle says, and, spotting the distinctive yellow eyes of an Iblis demon lurking in the bushes, breaks into a run. "If you want me to tell you, you'll have to keep up, Branwell!"

Hearing Lydia curse behind her, she smirks to herself, even as she's clattering after the demon, who's hissing and spitting at her. She always has enjoyed the chase. It's exciting. It's fun. It's a rush of adrenaline and endorphins and wild attraction, and it's enough to make her forget all the shit in the world, just for a moment.

She thinks that maybe Alec and Magnus enjoyed the chase, too.

But she hopes they enjoy the future more.

***

A sleep-rumpled Magnus Bane, hair fluffy and bare toes curled in protest against the cool floor of his kitchen as he pushes down the plunger on a cafetière full of strong coffee, is possibly the most heart-stopping thing Alec has ever had the privilege of baring witness to.

He's talking, telling Alec about everything Ragnor had said in his dream last night, and Alec follows his every word, both of them shrouded in the sunlight of a warm morning at the time of year when spring turns into summer. It paints gold across Magnus' bare skin - his face, his neck, his forearms where he's pushed up the sleeves of his henley - and ribbons over his hands, catching on his rings and making them glint, rainbows jumping along the walls.

"When you say dark magic," Alec says, as Magnus turns, placing the cafetière on the island and waving a hand to make the slices of toast sitting in his toaster fly out and settle in a pile on a plate, a pot of jam landing beside them. "How dark?"
Magnus shakes his head, seating himself gracefully on the stool across from Alec. "Beyond dark. I've done dark things, but this? This is sacrilegious. To use an angel for evil..."

Frustrated, Alec exhales through his nose. He snatches up a piece of toast and crams half of it in his mouth, fury washing through him. The Clave has been monitoring all missions related to Valentine for months, and has ordered that they all need approving—not that many have been approved.

"Breathe, Alexander," Magnus reminds him, a small smile twisting at his lips. "Choking on toast isn't going to help."

"Sorry," Alec mumbles, and Magnus' smile turns into something fond. It makes Alec's heart flutter, but he can't let himself think about it now. He has to push aside his feelings for this miraculous man. This is too important. "It's just– We need to do something. The Clave has been refusing to grant permission for missions even slightly related to Valentine."

Magnus tilts his head a little. "What's changed? You were allowed to go on missions when I met you. In fact, I seem to recall that you were battling the Circle when you crashed onto my doorstep. And when you were all ordered to arrest Raphael and Meliorn."

Alec winces a little. "We were."

"That wasn't meant to be a guilt-trip," Magnus says. "But something must have changed. The Clave must know something."

"If Valentine is summoning greater demons, they'll have heard about it," Alec says, grimly. "They have all sorts of tracking. Heads of Institutes are supposed to be alerted whenever a greater demon is located, but Lydia hasn't passed anything onto me."

Magnus finishes pouring himself a mug of coffee, and swirls sugar into it with a lazy swish of his finger that distracts Alec entirely. There's a pause as Magnus takes a sip, clearly considering, before he looks up at Alec over his mug.

"Perhaps there's a reason Lydia hasn't passed anything onto you," Magnus says, carefully. "Perhaps she has received something."

Alec shakes his head. "Look, I know you have no reason to trust her, but I do. She's not the Clave. A soldier of the Clave and the Clave itself are different, right? Passive enforcers versus active enforcers?"

Magnus groans. "Stop using my own words against me. She's a Clave official. What if that's exactly what she is? The Clave? An active enforcer? She's the one who told you that you've got to be the one to murder me in cold blood, isn't she?"

"She's also the one who's leading the investigation into getting me out of that," Alec points out. "Me, and you. I trust her."

"And I trust you." A sigh escapes him. "I feel like my hands are tied. The Downworld is restless, and Valentine is brewing up shit, and Iris Rouse is going to start kicking up a fuss if nobody investigates Madzie—"

"I tried," Alec interjects, because he had. He'd gone back to the Institute, after that evening with Magnus, and spent hours searching through the Clave's files on the whole nefarious affair. "I got somewhere, but as soon as I sent out a request to the Clave for an evidential and potential recovery mission, it was denied."
Magnus' shoulders tighten, and he takes a long swig of his coffee, rubbing at his goatee absently with his other hand. Alec understands the weight on Magnus' shoulders. The desire to do the right thing, to help, to make the world a better place—only to be blocked at every opportunity. The desperation to look after those he cares about, but seemingly unable to do a thing.

"Hey." Alec reaches out across the island, pushing his own coffee out of the way, and covers Magnus' hand. "Like Ragnor said. One thing at a time. Right?"

"Yeah." Magnus smiles, turning his hand up beneath Alec's so their palms press together. Fingers interlace, sliding between each other's, and Magnus lifts their joined hands to brush his lips across Alec's knuckles. "One thing at a time."

***

Stepping back into the Institute feels unbearably cold, after the butterscotch warmth of Magnus' loft. It's all stone, Shadowhunters who don't give a shit about whether or not Valentine commits mass genocide rushing about, hollering to each other and pretending to be virtuous. Boots clop noisily as people dash past him and out of the door, shouts ringing through the building and reverberating off the walls as they chase after demons across the city, coordinating missions and sliding weapons into their belts, all determined to believe that they're on the moral high ground all the while ignoring the war brewing on the horizon.

Or, rather, ignoring the people that war will worst affect.

Alec feels sick at the realisation that, not so long ago, he was one of those people. He thought he was doing the right thing. It never occurred to him that he could be so wrong. Isabelle and Jace's opinions seemed so obviously biased—Isabelle was dating a Seelie, and Jace had all sorts of dalliances with Downworlders, platonic and sexual and Raziel only knew.

He hadn't realised that he'd had cause and effect the wrong way round.

The staccato click of heels snipping against unyielding floors draws Alec out of his thoughts. He glances up from where he'd been staring across the length of the Ops Centre, and sees his mother approaching him, Max lingering behind her, looking bored out of his mind.

Normally, Alec would smile, and get Max's attention; he'd find him something better to do than skulk around. But he's a little distracted by his mother.

Maryse Lightwood, whatever else she might be, is a proud woman. She was never a woman who hides behind things—the only thing she ever represses are her emotions. He remembers being Max's age, and seeing his mother return home from a hunt with a bruise the size of his head splattered across her face from a run-in with a Drevak demon. She'd worn it for weeks, utterly unashamed. Isabelle had come down one evening, when members of the Clave were due to arrive for important political negotiations, with their mother's box of make-up in her hands.

"I don't need to cover it up," Maryse had said, with a smile in Isabelle's direction. "We're warriors. Soldiers. We wear our battle scars with pride."

Maryse, for all her faults, had been the one to teach Isabelle that, whatever men from the Clave who hadn't moved past the nineteenth century tried to tell her, she could be whoever and whatever she wanted to be.

Of course, Maryse's advice had turned around to bite her in the ass, with Isabelle's teenage rebellion and foray into the Downworld. But, her differences with Isabelle aside, Maryse had, for all Alec's
life, been the epitome of standing strong in her own beliefs, and standing by her own actions.

By the Angel, she hadn't even denied being in the fucking Circle.

But now, as she strides across the floor towards him, Alec can't help the way his lips part. She looks like she’s drawn a canvas across her own face, holding a painting between herself and the outside world, from her make-up to the carefully placed strands of hair to the dress that's pressed a little too perfectly for a standard day at the Institute.

And he might presume that Clave representatives were due at the Institute in a matter of hours, except he can see how bloodshot her eyes are.

He stares at her, brow furrowed in concern, and forces himself not to speak until he can do so quietly enough to stop the rest of the Institute hearing them.

"Mom," he says, "what—?"

"I'm sorry we didn't let you know we were due back," Maryse says, briskly, cutting him off smoothly. "I wasn't sure we'd be granted permission to return. The Clave is compiling and sorting through huge stacks of evidence that could help with a large problem. It's been all hands on deck."

Alec glances down at his little brother, who appears entirely disinterested in the conversation at hand. "What was so urgent that you had to come back for?"

Maryse's smile, when it comes, seems genuine, but placed atop layers of injury. "It's not every day my son is named Head of an Institute." Her eyes shine with pride, but Alec has the distinct urge to rip it all away to see what's lingering beneath. "I'm sure Lydia already told you that she'd recommended you, but I wanted to be the one to deliver the official news. Congratulations, Alec."

Alec's lips tug up, and he feels his heart thud once against his ribs, powerful and heavy and utterly ecstatic. He's wanted this for so, so long—for as long as he can remember. But it's a dream that lay dormant, stagnating and rotting beneath piles of self-hatred and repression and loneliness.

He remembers that day, when he was fourteen years old, when he'd first realised that he felt things about other boys, other men, that he was supposed to feel about girls. He remembers realising, later, that he felt that way about Jace. He remembers realising that he couldn't feel that way about girls, at all.

He remembers feeling his dreams die in the pit of his stomach. His dreams of running an Institute with someone he loved at his side, and getting to pass it onto people who held the Lightwood name after him.

He remembers realising that he couldn't have both.

But he does. Right now, he does. He has Magnus, and he has this. And, even if it seems doomed to failure - even if he knows, deep down, that this is temporary, that he can't keep both forever - he's going to revel in it for now.

Because tomorrow it might all be ripped away.

"Thanks," he says, smiling weakly as he pushes away his thoughts before they can consume him. He can't think about it now. There's too much. There's too much to deal with already. This is secondary. Valentine comes first. Valentine, and the Downworld, and whatever shit he's trying to pull with Magnus. His personal dilemma can be dealt with later.
"I still don't understand why Dad didn't come," Max says, from Maryse's side. "He told me he was proud of Alec, so why didn't he come and tell him?"

Maryse's smile fades, and Alec sees the light extinguish from behind her eyes.

Oh.

"Mom—"

"Max," she says, talking over Alec before he can say anything, "will you give us a moment?"

Max rolls his eyes. "I'm never gonna do this to kids when I'm an adult."

Alec smiles and ruffles Max's hair as he passes him, before turning his attention to his mother.

"Mom," he says, and takes her arm to lead her away from the busy Ops Centre and down a corridor towards his office. He shakes his head. "How long has this been going on for?"

Maryse tilts her head up and arches an eyebrow, steel written into every line of her face, challenge flashing in her eyes. It's infuriated Alec for all of his adult life, and then some—her inability to relinquish control, her refusal to soften, even for her own children. God knows he understands the importance of strength in a leader, but she's not just their commander. She's their mother. And she hasn't acted like it since they were young.

"What?" she asks, sharply. "How long has what been going on, Alec?"

"Dad." His gaze doesn't waver as he looks back at her. "That day, when Clary came back from Idris and Max told Jace you'd been fighting with Dad—was that when you found out?"

Maryse purses her lips, irritation passing through her eyes, but Alec sees her throat bob and her shoulders fold in a little, defensive and...miserable. "Speak plainly. I don't have time for riddles. You've clearly been spending too much time negotiating with Downworlders."

"Stop," Alec says, harshly. "Stop deflecting. Dad has been cheating on you. Hasn't he?"

For a moment, Maryse looks so irate, so filled with fire and rage and indignation that Alec thinks she might actually slap him. Maryse has never been violent - not to them - but she's always had a temper, and for a second that seems to stretch, suspended in an eternity, Alec thinks he must be so off-base that she's going to snap at his insolence.

But she doesn't.

She swallows heavily, and he sees tears glisten in her eyes, and a sob hitches in her throat, and he's got his arms around her shoulders before he lets another broken sound of heartbreak slip from between her lips.

He feels her press her face into his shoulder, shuddering a little against him, and he wonders, trying to remember the last time he hugged his mother. Then he wonders when she last let herself fall apart; when she last let all the emotions she keeps so well hidden spill over into reality.

"He doesn't deserve you," Alec murmurs, and he means it. Robert has spent so much time in Idris that he's missed most of Alec's childhood. At least Maryse tried. "Mom, you don't have to go back."

"I do," she says, and clings on a little tighter. "The Clave—"

"Screw them," he says, and feels her laugh a little. He pulls back, and lifts a hand to wipe away the
tears clinging to her skin beneath her eyes. "No, I mean it. I want you here. If I'm in charge, I have the right to tell the Clave that I need all essential personnel."

She sighs, catching his hand and squeezing it lightly. "Alec, I appreciate it, but what possible reason could you have?"

He raises an eyebrow. "You've been gone too long. The Downworld here is breaking apart. We've signed deals with the werewolves and the vampires, and I want to set Isabelle and Lydia about negotiating something with the fae, and I want to get in contact with Catarina Loss, but Valentine is recruiting too. He's brewing something big."

"Alec." Maryse shakes her head, smiling sadly. "You're never going to get the Downworld to cooperate. They're too volatile. They'll switch sides the moment Valentine fools them into trusting him. You know what they're like. They need controlling, but we can't enter into contracts with them like—"

"This isn't up for discussion," he says, firmly. "You know as well as I do that if Valentine takes the Downworld, this war is lost."

"I also know that you have an incomplete mission," Maryse says, and Alec feels her words turn the blood in his veins to ice, "and so does the Clave."

"Warlock Bane," he manages to get out, voice level. "I fail to see how this is of the utmost importance when Valentine is on the brink of—"

"Alec." Maryse lowers her voice, and glances over her shoulder as though fearful that someone is listening in. There's urgency burning bright in her eyes, and fear, but it's overshadowed by determination. "I'm not supposed to tell you this, but the Clave has intelligence from a source we've evaluated to be reliable."

He frowns at her. "What sort of information?"

"Information that could be paramount to winning this war." She inhales deeply through her nose. "The Clave believes that Warlock Bane is central to Valentine's plan. That he's in league with Valentine. There's something Valentine needs from him, some weapon they're building, and if we don't stop it, we might as well surrender."

Horror floods through him. No. Raziel, if the Clave knows about Valentine's need for Magnus, then they'll only increase the manpower they put towards finding him and executing him. They'll only increase the pressure on the New York Institute to locate him. They'll up the odds. They'll come for Alec's family if he doesn't comply.

"No." Alec shakes his head vehemently. "No High Warlock would be in league with Valentine. That's—"

"The High Warlocks of Los Angeles, Paris, Moscow, and Addis Ababa are all suspected of working with him," Maryse hisses, eyes widening a little. "Downworlders aren't logical, you know that. They're volatile, they're impulsive, and they don't give a damn about the greater good. They'll do whatever it takes to save their own skin and not show a hint of remorse about the people who've suffered because of it."

It takes everything in Alec not to scream. He closes his eyes for a moment and inhales deeply, curling his fingers into his palm and digging in his nails to ground himself, Magnus' face flashing in his mind. He has to keep it together. Too much is at stake.
"What are you saying?"

Maryse presses her lips together. "I'm saying, you need to let go of these- these negotiations with the Downworld. You need to take what we've already got and out everything - everything - into finding this warlock. You need to hunt him down. You need to find everything he cares about, and you need to burn it all to the ground. Possessions, places, prize objects he's hidden away for safe-keeping—you have to draw him out. And you have to end him, before he ends all of us. Before he ends everything we care about."

Nausea curdles in Alec's stomach, and he has to swallow back the acidic taste of bile to stop himself throwing up. That dream - that awful, awful dream - flashes in his mind, the spray of blood across the altar and Magnus' head severing from his body by Alec's blade, and he feels himself physically flinch.

"I can't," he tells her, quietly. He lets his eyes open, and sees her eyebrows drawing together in confusion. "I've tried. But I can't."

"I understand that it seems like a daunting task, when nobody has found him for two decades," she says, and reaches up to cup his cheek. "But if you're determined to have me stay, I'll help. The Clave has cause to believe that he's in New York State. We can find him. We can end this. And imagine what it'll do for our family name if we put an end to the Clave's most wanted criminal."

He can't look at her. He can't. Not when she's telling him to drive a blade through the heart of the man who means more to him than he knows how to express. The thought of hurting Magnus at all makes him feel physically sick. The thought of killing him—it's enough to make him want to jump off a building.

And that his mother is endorsing it, that his mother sees it as a way of restoring their family name after the shame she and Robert inflicted by their dalliances with the Circle—he doesn't even know how to stomach the words, the concept, let alone the reality.

The reality is that he doesn't have a choice. Not when they'll come for his family if he refuses.

But he can't kill Magnus. He just can't. Not just because of what Magnus means to him—he can't kill an innocent man in cold blood. It would ruin him. He'd never be able to live with himself if he did.

"What's wrong?" she asks, lifting her other hand so she's cradling his face, peering up at him with genuine concern in her eyes. "Alec?"

"Lydia gave me this mission months ago," he says, quietly. "I'm not any more capable of doing it now than I was then. In fact, I'm less capable."

She shakes her head, bewilderment on her face, lips parting and eyebrows drawing together. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I can't do it," he tells her, pulling away. "I'm going to put through a request that you stay here, but I'm not changing my priorities. Getting the Downworld on our side is going to be more beneficial than putting all our efforts towards a cause that may or may not help and probably won't succeed."

"Alec—"

"Even if we do find him," Alec says, thinking of the raw, writhing mass of sheer power that lingers beneath Magnus' skin, ready to be let loose at the merest flick of a finger, "there's no guarantee that we'd succeed in killing him. In fact, he'd more likely kill all of us."
Maryse shakes her head. "Alec—"

"I'm sorry, mother."

And, with that, he moves away, stumbling down the corridor, ears ringing and head revolting against the mere thought of harming Magnus, stomach churning until he feels physically sick. He has to find Isabelle. He has to talk to her.

He doesn't know who else to turn to.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! I really hope you enjoyed the chapter, and let me know what you thought in the comments <3

If you fancy it, come follow me on Tumblr! You can also tweet at me: @LucysRebelHeart, or use #fwwfic

Much love, and congratulations to Australia for their vote!
Lu <3
The last thing Alec expects, when he shoves open the training room door in a blind rush of desperation to find his sister, is to see his siblings and Lydia seated in a half circle on the floor, listening to Simon with rapt attention.

He pauses by the door, breathing heavily as he tries to reconcile the image in front of him with the fact that Jace likes Simon about as much as he does, and that Lydia would sooner cut off her own hand than gossip with a vampire.

Isabelle is the first one to notice him, glancing across with a soft look on her face, arm tossed around Max's shoulders. "Hey, big brother. Emergency?"

"What? No, I– What's going on?"

Lydia's mouth curls up at one corner in a smirk, and Jace mirrors her expression. He pats the hard floor beside him and says, "We're having a gossip. Come braid my hair."

Isabelle rolls her eyes. "You're such a dick," she tells him, and turns her attention back to Alec. "Simon and Raphael are an item, and their declaration was so sweet even Jace got misty eyes hearing about it."

As Alec crosses the floor to sit down between his brothers somewhat hesitantly, Jace scoffs at the accusation. "As if. Besides, he--" Jace waves a hand at Alec "–wins the title of sappiest loser, not Simon."

Bickering breaks out among Alec's friends and siblings, and he covers his face, letting it wash over him. He doesn't know what to do. People keep telling him that he can say no, that the Clave can't turn him into a murderer, that he can begin a revolution and change people's minds—but he doesn't know how to. He doesn't know where to start with such a monumental task.

"Hey," he says, quietly, and then a little louder, "Hey."

They all pause in their debate, looking over at him with eyebrows raised.

He's quiet for a beat, running the tip of his tongue along his lips. "How do you know when you're in love with someone?"
Jace and Isabelle exchange a fleeting glance, before Jace says, "How do you know you love me?"

"You're my parabatai. That's a stupid question."

There's infinite kindness in Jace eyes when he says, softly, "No, but you knew you loved me before we became parabatai. How did you know?"

For a moment, fear rockets through Alec. For a fleeting, bone-chilling moment, he thinks that Jace knows. Knows how Alec used to feel about him. Knows that Alec used to look at him, think about him, in ways entirely inappropriate for a parabatai.

But then he realises that whatever Jace is, he's not cruel. Even if he did know, he wouldn't insinuate something like that with Lydia and Simon and Max in the room.

"I realised I felt the same way about you as I did about Izzy," Alec says, gaze unwavering as he looks over at Jace. "I didn't want anything bad to happen to you. Some asshole of a kid had waltzed into our lives, totally ignored anybody's attempts to befriend him, and generally been a complete dick, but then you told me about your father— Valentine, Alec thinks, not his father, but Jace doesn't contradict him --and that sob-story about the falcon, and I didn't ever want to see you look like that again."

"That's what love is, Alec." Isabelle isn't quite smiling, not with her lips, but her eyes are shining. "You know it is."

"But—" Alec glances over at Simon. "You love Clary. She's not related to you, she's your friend, but you love her. But not the same way you love R—"

"I'm not sure I want to hear those words out of your mouth before I've said them to him," Simon says, frowning a little, but it's in good humour. "I'm attracted to Raphael. I'm not attracted to Clary. Anymore." He shrugs. "She doesn't make my heart skip and my pulse race and my skin tingle."

"Are you going to tell us what this is really about?" Isabelle asks, tilting her head slightly to one side. "Because I think you know what being in love is. You're stalling. Or looking for an escape. What happened?"

"The Clave has decided that finding and murdering Bane is paramount in our efforts against Valentine. Mom wants to help me do it."

Lydia closes her eyes. Alec wonders how much she knows about his relationship with Magnus. Ne wonders how much she'd inferred, how much she's guessing, how much Isabelle has told her. He wonders whether they've told each other how they feel, yet.

"I'm sorry, Alec, I—"

"It's not your fault," he says, simply, shaking his head. "If it weren't me, it would be someone else. But I don't know what to do. There's—"

He exhales through his nose in frustration, and curls his fingers into his palm, digging into the marks he made earlier, talking to his mother. The desire to punch something over and over again until his knuckles bleed and bruise is overwhelming. He wants to fire arrows until it makes the skin of his hands raw and cracked. He wants to spar with Jace until every muscle in his body is screaming in protest. Anything to make his fucking brain shut up.

Because all he can see, every time he breathes an easy, painless breath, are the images from his dream. Magnus, dead. Magnus' blood covering his hands, sprayed across the floor, dripping from his seraph
blade like wine at communion. His siblings staring at him in horror for what he's done, for who he's become. Magnus' friends hunting him down in a rightful rage fuelled by grief.

The alternative—the alternative is to sacrifice his siblings. His family. He knows he could never live with himself if he let anyone lay a finger on them without doing his utmost and beyond to protect them. And Magnus would never look at him again.

He remembers sitting in Magnus' kitchen, what feels like so long ago, having made Magnus French toast and bought him a latte after a morning patrol, too concerned by Magnus' magic depletion to stay well away, as he knew he should.

He remembers rubbing at his hands, digging his thumb into the fragile flesh of his palm and turning pale skin red while he agonised. He'd agonised over his feelings for Magnus, and what the fuck he was doing, in a warlock's apartment, bringing coffee and making nice and talking about his family. He'd wanted to be there, so badly, but he wanted to stop...feeling.

He remembers Magnus' fingers skimming the back of his hand, soft and warm and gentle, his own hands stilling beneath the touch. Concern had been written into Magnus' eyes - a warlock who had no reason to give a fuck about his wellbeing - when he'd asked Alec whether he was okay.

He can practically feel the phantom touch of Magnus' skin against his. Magnus' skin is always well cared for, despite how much he uses his hands in his work, smooth where Alec's is rough with scars and callouses and injuries.

Exhaling slowly, he lets his hands relax, imagining Magnus' thumb brushing against his knuckles instead.

"He's got so much to deal with already," he says, calmer, "and now this, too. I don't know what to do. I don't know how to stop it. Not without the Clave using you to make me do what they want me to."

"I don't know, either," Isabelle says, "but we're going to do it. We broke Downworld prisoners out of a high security prison, and he wasn't even there in person."

Alec and Jace glance at each other and then pointedly towards Lydia, eyes wide, but Isabelle scoffs, waving a hand dismissively.

"She knows, you cowards." She grins a little. "We ran into Meliorn. He was a little bit unsubtle about our dealings. My point is—" she glances over at the door to the training room, clearly checking that it's shut, and nobody is lingering outside "—we have people on our side. We're on your side, Alec. And what you're trying to do, allying with the Downworld? It's worth something. And not just as an effort to beat Valentine."

"Hey."

Jace's voice cuts into the quiet that falls following Isabelle's words, and Alec glances over to see him watching Max, a pointed half-smile on his face. Hair is tumbling over his forehead, gold on gold, and Alec remembers, almost hysterically, Clary's comment, when Jace had tried to flirt with her with the help of his hair, that he should invest in a headband.

"This doesn't get out of this room, right, buddy?"

Max rolls his eyes. "Who wants to know about Simon's sordid love affair?"

Alec has to bite down hard on the inside of his cheek to stop himself snorting with laughter at that.
He knows Max isn't stupid. They're Shadowhunters. They have to grow up fast. And Max has kept his secret about knowing Magnus for weeks without breathing a word to anyone. His little brother might not be so little anymore.

"Firstly," Simon says, holding up a finger and glaring at Max, "I object to that description of my otherworldly romance. Secondly, you're ten, what kind of ten-year-old knows what sordid means?"

"As of two weeks ago, I'm eleven," Max says, "and clearly you didn't have Alec as a brother going round telling Jace off for his sordid encounters with disreputable Downworld females." Max does a gross imitation of seventeen-year-old Alec's voice, and Alec narrows his eyes, shaking his head. He did not sound like that.

"You were six, how the hell do you remember that?" Alec demands, while the rest of the room laughs at Max's impression—which, Alec is loathe to admit, is probably a little bit too accurate for comfort.

"You said it a lot," Max says.

"To be fair," Jace says, smirking, "I did have a lot of sordid encounters."

"Alright, Captain America." Simon is grinning. "We get it. Ya filthy, filthy animal."

"If that's another movie reference, I don't get it," Jace says, entirely straight-faced, while Isabelle howls with laughter, Max sniggering.

"If Jace is Captain America," Max says, tilting his head to one side, "does that make Alec Bucky or Iron Man?"

"I wouldn't wear that stupid bandana," Alec says quickly, before Isabelle can open her mouth to answer, because he does not like the way her eyes light up at Max's question.

Whatever comment Isabelle wanted to make melts away at that, and she shares at him in slack-jawed astonishment. "Since when do you know anything about pop culture?"

Alec shrugs. "Mag—" He stops. "Someone had a DVD sitting on their shelf."

"Huh." Isabelle smiles. "You know what I think about your problem, big brother?"

"No, but I expect you're going to tell me."

"Damn straight." She smirks, and lifts one shoulder diplomatically. "Or not, in your case. I think you should keep doing what you're doing. I think you should let Lydia and Raj do their thing, and buy yourselves as much time as you can before you're forced to use what they've got. And right now? I think you should remind yourself of why you care at all."

He turns his head a little in question, raising an eyebrow. "What?"

"Take your man out to dinner tomorrow, tell him how you feel, and for once in your life, let go. Do something fun. Do something that's not weighed down by politics. Just catch a break. You deserve it."

Alec glances around at the people assembled around him before he returns his gaze to his sister. "I don't deserve it any more than the rest of you do."

"I think the rest of us are managing the work-life balance thing okay," she says, lips tilting up
teasingly. "It's the first time you've had a life. We can forgive you for struggling a bit."

"Okay, you can shut up," Alec says, without heat, pointing a finger at her, and Jace and Max both laugh.

From beside Isabelle, Lydia smiles at him. The way Isabelle's hand slides over hers, fingers brushing and teasing before sliding away so their shoulders can press together, doesn't escape Alec's notice.

"If it's any consolation, I'm learning about that having a life thing, too."

Alec lets himself smile, and he feels the weights dragging on his heart lighten, just a little. They're right. He's got people on his side. He's not alone in this. Neither is Magnus. They've got each other, and their friends and families. And, alright, Clary's summoning back to Idris was a little suspect, and he's still not totally sure where he stands with Raj, or Magnus, and there's too much shit going on for him to think about all at once without having a stroke, but—

He thinks it might be okay. Sometimes you have to lose the battle to win the war. But for the the first time in too long, he's got hope.

***

Magnus' feet ache by the time he gets home.

He feels like he's spent all day, since Alec left this morning, rushing around like a madman. Not only did he have too many clients to count, but Luke called him in to help a young werewolf who'd managed to get himself buggered by one of the fae.

While Magnus can admit that practical jokes can have wonderfully hilarious results - and Lilith knows the Downworld needs a reason to let loose and laugh, sometimes - he's also fairly certain that certain fae can't tell the difference between a harmless joke and attempted murder.

Even Meliorn had been pissed about it, when he'd heard.

"You better have some goddamn whiskey in here," a voice says from his sofa as Magnus opens his front door with a heavy wave of his hand, muscled weighed down by exhaustion.

A smile tugs at him lips. He kicks off his boots, snaps his fingers to hang up his jacket, and walks straight over to his drinks cabinet. "My dear Catarina, the day my loft is not well-stocked with all manner of inebriating substances is the day I die." He pauses between pouring two generous shots and corrects himself. "The day after. Once you and Raphael have had the chance to drink yourselves into a stupor on my fine liquor."

Catarina rolls her eyes lazily, accepting the proffered drink with a grin. "Don't flatter yourself."

Collapsing dramatically onto the sofa opposite her, Magnus arches an eyebrow teasingly. "You can afford this liquid gold on your current salary?"

She scoffs, taking a swig and exhaling in satisfaction. "Shut your mouth, Bane. I don't have to put up with mangy werewolves and the oldest children in the world snipping at each other all day about who smells the worst. Don't insult my job."

Magnus pauses, glass halfway to his lips. "By oldest children in the world, are you referring to the Night Children or the Seelies?"

"That depends. Have Raphael and Simon confessed their love yet?"
"You know about that?"

"I know about everything," she says, and Magnus shrugs—because she's probably right. She is the Donna to his Harvey Specter. "So?"

"Honestly?" He tips his head back, finishing his whiskey. "I haven't asked. I don't live for disappointment."

"Hm. What about you and Alec? Maybe the oldest children title should go to the warlocks. After all, I seem to recall you denying how much you like him for months, even though it was perfectly obvious—"

"Stop," Magnus says, shaking his head. He sinks down lower so he can rest his head on the back of the sofa and groans, rubbing a hand across his eyes. "Alexander and I... God, Cat, I don't know."

"Magnus," he can hear the smile in her voice, but he doesn't shift his gaze to look at her. He knows her well enough to know that she's pulling that infuriating, half-amused and half-disparaging look that she always wears when she's decided he's being unendingly dense. "Raphael told me about what happened with Camille."

"Oh, yeah, that shit-show. My life is made up of so many I lose track."

"You're deflecting your feelings with sarcasm, which means that you're upset about Camille, hopelessly in love with this boy, and something else is on your mind. Which one would you like to talk about?"

Magnus sighs. "Ragnar thinks I'm some intrinsically important part of Valentine's evil master plan."

"Mmmhm," Catarina says, twirling a finger in the air to make her glass refill. "How much have you drunk today, exactly? Did you get hit in the back of the head? Your boyfriend into some weird—"

"He's not my boyfriend, and I hate you," he mumbles, closing his eyes, and launches into everything he knows about Ragnar appearing in his dreams. His recount is disjointed, completely non-chronological, but he's tired, and Catarina seems to understand. She always does.

"And I thought Ragnar was just being unnecessarily pompous with that Latin crap at the end of his will." She shakes her head. "Is it just you he's tapped into?"

"I told you, he went to Alec too."

"Yeah, because of you. Alec was less than two years old when Ragnar died. I don't think he would have been on Ragnar's radar."

"I don't know, Cat." He glances over at her. "It can't just be me. He loved you and Raphael just as much. And it's not really him, it's just some kind of post-mortem impression."

She hums, running the tip of her finger around her glass slowly. There's something Magnus can't quite place that flits across her face as she follows the progress of her finger with her eyes, and he can't help the twisting feeling in his stomach. It's never good when he can't tell what Catarina's thinking. They've known each other far too long for secrecy.

"I think Ragnar's wrong," she says, quietly, not looking up. "Not about Valentine—that I can believe, with how bizarrely fixated he's been on you. But I don't think you can just sit on your hands and wait. That's never been your style. Whatever this impression Ragnar has left is, exactly, its ultimate goal is clearly to protect people he loved."
He frowns. "But—"

"Magnus." She swings her legs off the sofa and places her feet flat on the floor. Bare toes curl into the throw rug, and she leans her elbows on her knees, pinning him with a serious look. "I know how much you miss Ragnor, and I know how much history you two had. He was like your father and your older brother all in one." She smiles faintly with one corner of her mouth. "The Sirius Black to your Harry Potter, as he used to say. I still think that was a dig at your hair, by the way."

"Blasphemy," Magnus says, with a little less drama and indignation than he would usually inject into the protest.

"My point is," she says, "however much you want this to be Ragnor, it isn't. It's him frozen in one moment. It's a part of him, but it's not all of him. It's the Ragnor of one day in one moment in time. It would be like taking a snapshot of you today and letting that be the you that lives eternally. People are more than that."

"I know, but—"

"You trusted Ragnor more than you trusted anybody else in the world. But Ragnor isn't here anymore. So trust me." Her gaze doesn't waver, and Magnus feels like she's stripped away every barrier erected around his soul. Alec might see right to his heart like there's nothing there, but Catarina has always seen this. Her voice is gentle when she continues. "I'm not saying you should charge in and try to burn the Circle to the ground in the morning. That would be suicidal. But Ragnor was right that Camille, Valentine, and your boyfriend's mission to kill you haven't all happened together like this as a coincidence. Something big is going on. And it's going to bite you in the ass if you don't take precautions."

"Are you saying I should shut myself up in here and never step outside?" He shakes his head. "Bullshit, Catarina."

"I'm saying you need to have a plan b. If something goes wrong, if the Clave starts threatening Alec for not hunting you down, if someone starts trying to get you to join Valentine by threatening people you love, you need to be prepared. Because it's going to happen. You need to know exactly what you're going to do."

Magnus throws his hands up, startling the Chairman, who's curled up at the other end of the sofa. "What am I supposed to do? I'm one person and I'm being attacked from all sides. I'm not invincible. I know I like to pretend I am, but we both know I'm not."

"And Alec is trying to help you with one side, so let him. Ditching the kill order by tearing apart their claims isn't a bad idea. In turn—" she smiles, tilting her head to one side "—help him."

He opens his mouth to question her, but something clicks in his head. "With Valentine?"

Her smile transforms into a smirk over the rim of her glass. "Precisely."

"You think I should join Valentine."

"Bingo, sweetheart."

"And—"

"And burn that bunch of genocidal shitheads to the ground."

"He's got an impossible army," Magnus says, the gears in his brain turning rapidly, a plethora of
ideas flitting through his mind in an indefinite crescendo, "but from the inside—as an ally rather than an enemy—"

"You wouldn't be guessing at what he's got, you'd know."

"And Alec?" Magnus purses his lips. "I'd have to wait until Valentine starts making a move to do this, otherwise it would look too suspicious. But that could be months. The Clave won't lay off Alec for that long."

Catarina raises an eyebrow. "So—"

"So there's my reason for joining Valentine," Magnus says, brows drawing together, "if I admit to him that I care about a Shadowhunter."

"Love makes people do strange things. Like a vehement genocide-hater suddenly joining the Shadowhunter equivalent of Hitler."

She's right, Magnus knows. But—

"Cat, even if this works - which is a very big if - I can't do this without exposing myself to the Clave. I'd be walking away from Valentine's smouldering ashes only to meet the same end in twenty-four hours."

"Magnus, come on," she says, sitting back and spreading her arms out along the back of the sofa. "What better reason is Alec ever going to find for why the Clave should let you go than the fact that you stamped out their single biggest threat?"

She smiles, victory and satisfaction shining in her eyes.

"If you kill Valentine, you've got leverage against the Clave."

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Their conversation deviates off into meaningless chatter and complaining about their respective days after another few minutes. Magnus wrinkles his nose at Catarina's tales of bodily fluids and getting up close and personal with terribly unappealing people, and Catarina rolls her eyes at the appropriate moments and huffs in despair with him at the utter stupidity of his most infuriating clients.

It's late by the time they find the sense of mind to order pizza to make themselves feel better, and when it arrives and Magnus disappears into the kitchen to get them both a less alcoholic drink, Catarina is half asleep on the sofa, peering into the pizza boxes with heavily linden eyes.

He waves at her to start without him when his phone rings, and he picks up without checking the ID.

"High Warlock of Brooklyn."

There's a pause. "Do you always answer your phone like that when you don't know who's calling?"

Magnus feels his heart turn over and his face light up at the voice, and he curses himself, because for goodness' sake, he's not a teenager. He needs to pull himself together and act like the smooth, powerful, put-together badass he is.

"Alexander," he says, and catches his reflection in his window, the darkness outside providing an unfortunately perfect mirror to let himself know that he still looks like a lovesick fool. "I wasn't expecting you to call. Is everything okay?"
"I mean, the Clave seems to have an inkling that Valentine needs you as part of his...take over the world thing, and they're insisting that slaughtering you in your sleep is more important than trying to get the Downworld working with us against Valentine, but that wasn't why I called."

Magnus sighs. "The Clave can shove it up their ass."

"That's basically what Isabelle said," Alec tells him with a little laugh. "And I told my mother that their priorities are wrong and I can't do it. I misled her about why, but—"

Magnus imagines Alec is probably doing that dismissive little hand-wave he does when he can't quite find the words he's looking for, and he bites down on his lip in an attempt to quell the smile threatening to break across his face. Again.

"But I didn't call about any of that. It's not really anything new. I just... I don't know."

"You're allowed to call just because you want to, angel," Magnus says, and glances over to Catarina when he hears a gagging noise. He holds up his middle finger, and she grins at him. "Good day? Bad day?"

"It was okay," Alec says. "We ran into some of Valentine's stupid demon hybrids on patrol tonight and got our asses kicked, but we'll live."

"Are you all okay?"

"Yeah." Alec inhales. "What about you?"

"Me?" Magnus smiles in Catarina's direction. "I'm catching up with Catarina. We both had long days. We drank the whiskey."

"Honestly," Alec says, and if he means to sound chastising, the effect is diminished somewhat by the laughter in his voice. "Didn't we agree that that's probably not healthy?"

"Neither is searching out demons, Alec," Magnus points out, smirking, "and yet, you do it anyway."

"Drinking isn't your job, Magnus!" Catarina shouts from the sofa, and it must be loud enough for Alec to hear, because he snickers on the other end of the line. "Flawed logic! Too much whiskey!"

"Shut up, you've had twice as much as me!" he shouts back, rolling his eyes.

"I'm not the one denying it!"

"I'm not denying it, I'm just—"

"Wow," Alec comments. "I think you two could give me and my siblings a run for our money."

"Shadowhunter," Catarina says, shooting a stream of magic out from her fingertips so that her voice carries into the microphone on Magnus' phone, "we were doing this two centuries before you were born. If you want the crown for pettiest arguments, you've got to challenge us. Not vice versa."

Alec is quiet for a moment, and Magnus waits, lips turned up in amusement, to see how Alec is going to react to an inebriated Catarina Loss. His three best friends were always the deciding factor on people he dated. Winning over Ragnor, with all his grumpy British sarcasm and silly sensibilities, and Catarina, whose perceptiveness and backhanded comments have turned off plenty of Magnus' less worthy suitors, and Raphael, who could probably scare off a shark with a single look, was never a mean feat. Even with Ragnor dead...Alec has his work cut out.
Although, he's done well with Raphael.

"How did she hear me?" Alec asks, slowly. "Am I on speaker?"

"No," Cat says, "I'm a warlock. Magnus isn't the only one who does magic, sweetheart."

"Stop calling my boyfriend pet names, Catarina," Magnus says, rolling his eyes and snapping his fingers to ward off her eavesdropping magic. "Let me finish my conversation in peace. And don't eat all the pizza!"

Once he's ascertained that Catarina will, in fact, leave him something to eat if he turns his back, Magnus returns his attention to Alec, feeling the stupid fluttering feeling return to his stomach.

"Sorry," he says. "You were saying, before we got interrupted?"

"I, uhm." Alec sounds oddly uncertain as he clears his throat, and Magnus wonders whether Alec has now been suitably terrified to ensure that he'll never speak to Magnus again. "I can't remember. I..."

"She's not usually quite that insane, I promise," he assures him. "She's just a bit drunk. As am I, to be frank."

"It's not that, I just... Boyfriend?"

Magnus opens his mouth to reply, and then promptly shuts it again. Shit. He hadn't meant to say that. Maybe he's more drunk than he thought.

Heart pounding, he says in attempted dismissal, "Slip of the tongue?"

"Am I?" Alec asks, softly.

"Are you my boyfriend?"

"Yeah."

Magnus hesitates only a moment. "Do you want to be?"

"Do you want me to be?"

"Yes," Magnus admits, quietly, nerves tugging at his heart, because god, he can't remember the last time he had this conversation with someone. The conversation about being exclusive. The conversation about making a commitment, and promising to make an effort.

The conversation about a relationship meaning something.

"Yes," Alec repeats, without preamble.

It takes Magnus a moment to realise what he means. A smile spreads across his face, so wide it makes his cheeks ache. "Yes?"

"Yes."

"Cat is going to rip into me for being so pathetically sappy," Magnus murmurs, glancing over his shoulder, smile unwavering. "But I don't care."

"Can I take you out to dinner, tomorrow?" Alec asks. "Steak?"
"You know the way to my heart," Magnus tells him, laughing. "Sure. Text me the address."

"Okay," Alec says, and Magnus thinks he might be smiling just as widely as Magnus is. "Goodnight, Magnus."

"Goodnight, Alexander."

*I love you goes unsaid,* but, whatever Alec feels, Magnus can't stop himself thinking it.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, the Suits reference in this is blatant, and yes, for anyone who might be interested, my next planned WIP is (very loosely) based on it ;)

I hope you enjoyed the chapter, and I have a feeling you might like next week's!

If you fancy it, *come talk to me on Tumblr!*

Much love,
Lu <3
"Hi."

Isabelle glances up from where she's carefully cleaning viscous ichor off her whip from an exceptionally smooth demon decapitation on a mission earlier. Lingering in the doorway is Lydia, teeth sunk into her lower lip and fingers trailing absently along the hairline fissure in the wood of the door from where she'd missed a moving target the first time she'd ever practised throwing knives and instead nearly murdered her tutor. It hadn't been deliberate.

Although Hodge was exceptionally irritating, sometimes.

"Hi," she echoes, and mentally curses the world, and fate, and the Angel Raziel, and whoever else is responsible for Lydia walking in on her at one of the few moments in her life when she's a bit of a mess.

She'd rushed from a messy, violent mission to a demon dissection in the lab, with Alec hovering anxiously in the corner, pacing and distracting her while she was taking samples and trying to work out what the fuck Valentine had been feeding the damn things to turn them into such formidable - and oddly intelligent - foes.

While Isabelle is the first person to say that she looks fantastic in a lab coat, and even more fantastic in her current attire of a tank top, leggings and boots, she is also a realistic person. Her hair is a disaster, she's dripping with more than just sweat, and she still smells of partially decomposed demon innards.

It's really not attractive.

"Everything okay?" she asks Lydia, reaching for a thin knife so she can dig a particularly stubborn piece of what she suspects is flesh out of a groove in her weapon. Whoever told mundane film directors that being a warrior is at all glamorous clearly never was one.

"Everything's fine," Lydia says, smiling briskly and letting Isabelle know that there's definitely
something playing on her mind.

"But?"

Lydia swallows visibly, casting her eyes down, and pushes off from the door to walk towards Isabelle. She sits down on the bench beside Isabelle, looking straight ahead, and exhales.

"I just got my next posting from the Clave. They don't want me back in Idris for long. They considered my time here a success, and once I've debriefed for a day, they're sending me along to intervene in another Institute. One that's actually failing. I've looked at the files, they need serious leadership changes."

Isabelle has stopped cleaning her whip, eyes unseeing where they're fixed on her unmoving hands.

"Where?"

"Paris."

That makes Isabelle jerk her head up. Her eyes snap across to Lydia's, but Lydia doesn't look back. She keeps looking straight ahead. The only sign that she feels a hint of the discontent - the turbulent regret and panic - that Isabelle does is the way she's chewing at her lower lip.

"Paris?" Isabelle repeats, voice hollow. "That's—"

"A long way away." Lydia's lips pull up into a smile that doesn't reach her eyes. "I know. But it's a beautiful city, and I've never been to Europe, and the Institute does need help. This is what I'm good at. Restructuring chains of command, weeding out people who are causing problems and finding ways to help them, identifying people who are doing good and encouraging them to do more, finding more efficient ways of working... I didn't get where I am without—" She stops herself, shaking her head. "Yeah. Paris."

"When do you have to go?"

"I have two months," Lydia says, "to monitor everything, to ensure that Alec is fit for the job, to make sure that things are well, and then I return to Idris for a debrief."

"And then onto Paris."

"And then onto Paris," Lydia agrees.

"And you can't stay?"

"I don't really see how. Not without losing my job."

"Well." Isabelle smiles, a little sadly, and wishes, desperately, that Lydia would look at her. "I suppose it's best that you go to Paris, in that case."

Lydia doesn't reply.

"Lydia," Isabelle murmurs. She'd reach out to brush Lydia's hair over her shoulder so she can see her face properly, even just in profile, but her hands still stink. She's washed them twice since she stuck them in a demon and rooted around in its internal organs, but they still smell. The putrid stench
"I don't want to leave," Lydia says, quietly, like its a shameful confession, like she's whispering her sins to a priest. "I've felt more at home here than I have anywhere else. I've felt accepted. I've done things. I've appointed a man who has the makings of one of the best leaders I've ever known. I've been on missions, I've made friends, I— Even working with Raj on Alec's case has been...good. But mostly...mostly it's been because of Alec. And you."

Finally, Lydia looks up, turning to face Isabelle with a small smile. It's saturated with melancholy, but it's genuine. It makes Isabelle's heart twist, aching in her chest, and when she sees Lydia's eyes shine with unshed tears, she feels like someone has plunged a knife between her ribs.

"Lydia," Isabelle whispers, shaking her head. "I was horrible to you."

"Because you thought I was being horrible to you," Lydia says. "And then you were incredibly good to me."

"We'll miss you, if you go," Isabelle says. "I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you, too. Isabelle, I—" Lydia is watching her with desperate intensity, searching her eyes, and whatever it is she's trying to find, Isabelle would give it to her in a heartbeat, if only she knew what it was. "I just– I have to tell you—"

"Lydia?" Isabelle whispers, smiling suddenly, because she understands, now. She's leant closer, eyes fixated on Lydia's, fingers trailing over the back of Lydia's hand.

Lydia looks nervous. "Yeah?"

"Shut up," Isabelle says, and leans in to kiss her.

For a moment, Lydia remains frozen. But it takes her a mere handful of seconds to tip her head slightly so better align their lips, the hand Isabelle isn't covering raises to press along the length of Isabelle's cheek. The kiss is soft, slow, Isabelle's lips barely moving as her hair slips forwards until it brushes against Lydia's.

They break apart with a soft sound, and Lydia exhales shakily, a shy smile on her face. Isabelle smiles back; Lydia reaches out to tuck Isabelle's hair behind her ears, and Isabelle feels her heart skip.

"You've just made me want to stay more," Lydia says, but she doesn't look too put out.

"I don't want you to give up your dreams," Isabelle replies, honestly, "but if you're only here for another month, then I want to cut to the chase. Flirting with you has been fun. But I want to do this, too."

"You won't hear any complaints from me."

"Even though I smell like demon gut?" Isabelle asks, lifting an eyebrow in amusement.

"Even then," Lydia says, and glances towards the door. She'd closed it behind her when she came in, but Isabelle knows they're both aware that they could be walked in on and caught all too easily. Most Shadowhunters wouldn't appreciate walking in on two women kissing in the weapons room, even
though they'd probably roll their eyes and laugh if they caught a man and a woman doing the same thing.

"Well," Isabelle says, "I could do with a shower, and we could both do with an hour's break after today, before evening patrol."

"Iz, I like you, but if you're asking me if I'd like to have sex in the shower—"

"I'm not," Isabelle says with a laugh. "I'm asking if you'd like to make out and talk and put on some music before we go kick demon butt. After I've showered. Because I'm pretty sure I don't smell very attractive at the moment."

Lydia smiles. "I won't lie and say I hadn't noticed, but I don't particularly care. Although I won't complain about a freshly showered you to kiss."

Isabelle grins, rising to her feet and holding out a hand for Lydia to take. "Let's go, then."

And Lydia takes her hand.

***

The bright, radiant look on Magnus' face hasn't faltered since he opened his front door to Alec two hours ago.

He's sitting across the table from Alec, plates cleared of food between them, gesturing with one hand while he talks, decked out in such beautiful shades of red and black that Alec isn't sure he'd be able to look away if Valentine walked through the door flanked by an army of foresaken.

The lighting in the restaurant - which, yes, Alec did pick out himself, thank you - is dim, the soft yellow of the candlelight flickering on the table catching on Magnus' jewellery and reflecting in his pupils. One hand is wrapped around the stem of his wineglass, fingers dancing up and down in time with the lilt of his sentences.

Alec has his chin resting in one hand, the other arm folded across the table, and he finds himself gazing across at Magnus, a small smile on his lips as he hums and nods along to his story about the first steakhouse he'd ever been to.

Alec can't remember the last time he saw Magnus look so...carefree. He's not sure he's ever seen him look quite like this. And it lights something warm and glowing in his chest to know that he's the reason for it.

Magnus falters a little. "Are you alright?"

"Mmhmm. Please don't stop talking," Alec says, smile not disappearing.

Something about that seems to catch Magnus by surprise. He blinks, expression going blank, and takes a moment to respond. "What?"

"I like listening to you talk when you're happy."

Magnus' expression softens, a smile tugging at his lips. "Oh yeah? Who says I'm happy? Maybe I'm having a miserable time. Maybe I can't wait to get out of here and tell the Chairman all about my
horrible date."

"That smile says otherwise," Alec says, "and if you were having a crap time, you'd find an excuse to leave."

"Guilty." Magnus drops his hand to the table, fingers stretching slightly towards Alec. "I'm having a wonderful time. Only because of the steak, of course. And the wine."

"Should I leave?" Alec asks, reaching for his jacket obligingly, trying not to smirk. "Let you have some alone time with that glass?"

"Shut your mouth, Shadowhunter." Magnus is laughing as he reaches out to grab Alec's hand, eyes shining with mirth. Magnus' fingers play along veins and tendons, mapping out roads across his skin. "Do you want to head back?"

"Mmm." Alec catches Magnus' shifting fingertips in his and squeezes gently. "To the Institute, or to yours?"

"To mine," Magnus says, "if you'd like to. Or to the Institute, if you need to be getting back."

Alec shakes his head, grateful, for once, for Isabelle's insistence that he stay away for at least twelve hours. She thinks he has no social life. Alec would very much like to protest against the accusation—but he knows it's true. His social life has only ever consisted of work and family.

"No. I don't." He reaches into his pocket, pulling out his wallet. "Pay and go?"

"Put it away," Magnus says, flicking his fingers dismissively. "You're not paying. I spend my life overcharging your people extortionate amounts because I find the majority of you immensely irritating at best."

"Not for the last twenty years," Alec says, glancing down at the bill to check how much he needs to leave for a tip.

Magnus rolls his eyes with a truly impressive amount of drama. "Alexander—"

"Magnus." Determination sets in Alec's face. "I asked you out, so I'm paying. If you want to pay, you'll just have to take me out again. And you did pay for our drinks at—"

"Drinks, not an expensive two course meal."

"Too late," Alec says, snatching up the bill and passing it, along with his cash, to their waiter as he passes, looking a little perplexed at Alec's apparent enthusiasm to hand over an admittedly extortionate amount of dollars.

Magnus scowls at him. "I can't believe you just made me have such a cliché argument about who pays on a date."

Alec's lips twitch up, and, before he can take another breath, they're both cracking up, laughing themselves breathless at the ridiculousness of the last few minutes, until Magnus is wiping tears from the corners of his eyes.

"Oh, god," Magnus says, still laughing a little. "Let's go before I embarrass myself any more. I have
a reputation to uphold."

Alec quirks an eyebrow at him. "We're in a mundane restaurant."

"I fail to see your point, Alexander."

Rather than respond, Alec slips his hand into Magnus' as they both stand, moving away from their table. It's a little shy, a little uncertain, because he's never done this. He's never taken a man's hand in a public setting. He's never been...out.

And, by the Angel, it feels wonderful. It's freeing, and beautiful, and breath-taking, like he's a bird trapped in a cage and someone has just opened the door to let him fly out for the first time.

But it's also just a little bit terrifying.

Anyone could see him. The likelihood of anyone he knows seeing him is, admittedly, so slim it's practically an impossibility—but there are still people. Mundanes, who, while perhaps less judgemental than their Nephilim counterparts, especially in New York, are not all tolerant of people like him, or of couples like him and Magnus.

He feels eyes on them while Magnus is wrapping his scarf loosely around his neck with one hand, and swivels his head to search for the source.

Two men are sitting in the opposite corner of the restaurant, across from each other, clearly business acquaintances rather than friends or lovers. They're stoic, stiff, dressed in sharp suits and stifling ties that lack the elegance and flair of the ones Magnus might wear.

The man facing towards their side of the room is watching them while his acquaintance talks. His hands are folded on the table, jaw set, eyes narrow as he follows Magnus' every movement. Alec isn't entirely sure what he's thinking. It makes him uncomfortable nonetheless.

Warm fingers curl firmly around his, drawing him out of his thoughts as he returns his attention to Magnus. He can feel the cool press of rings against his skin, contrasting with the rest of Magnus' touch, and he sinks into it. Somewhere, it's become so familiar it's comforting.

"Ignore him," Magnus says quietly, tilting his chin up a fraction to skim his lips across Alec's cheek fleetingly. "Don't let him ruin our evening. I'm used to it."

"I'm not," Alec says immediately, and then frowns when the meaning of Magnus' words sink in. "And being used to it doesn't mean it's okay."

"No," Magnus says, holding open the door for Alec to step through first as they leave, "but it means I don't really care, so he can't win. I win. Besides which, I'm fairly sure he was staring at me, not us."

Alec exhales, shifting as they walk so that he's a little closer to Magnus, their arms brushing, fingers interlaced. "Sorry. I didn't mean to put a damper on things."

"Don't worry. Now I just have an excuse to make you smile as much as is humanly possible before you decide you have to go back home."

The sudden weight on Alec's heart drops off instantly at Magnus' words, and he grins as he looks across at him. "Yeah?"
"Oh, absolutely," Magnus says, grinning right back, mischief dancing in his pupils as he drops his glamour for just a moment, and winks before pulling it back up.

Alec wonders whether Magnus knows that his cheeks are aching already from smiling all night—then he wonders whether Magnus' are, too.

***

Darkness is beginning to fall outside by the time they reach Magnus' loft, despite the time of year. It's warm enough that Magnus discards his jacket the moment they walk through the door, tossing it carelessly on a chair, and he moves his hands up to unbutton his shirt to partway down his chest.

Alec follows the movement from afar with his eyes, bronze skin revealed with each slip of a button. He shakes the flimsy material, pushes his sleeves up his forearms, and drags his fingers through his hair, messing it up a little.

Apparently noticing Alec's abrupt silence, Magnus turns, raising an eyebrow at him from across the room, a smirk curling at his lips when he sees the look on Alec's face.

"Are you quite alright, Alexander?"

"You're beautiful," Alec tells him, the words hanging heavy between them with the weight of meaning, of feeling, and the yellow-green of Magnus' eyes turns to liquid, gentle and fond.

Eyes never leaving his, Magnus steps towards him, crossing the distance between them in three languid strides. For a moment, head titled up just a little, he gazes up at Alec, silent and unblinking. Alec feels like he could drown in those eyes, ethereal, otherworldly irises and fierce, piercing pupils.

Magnus lifts a hand and lays it along the length of Alec's cheek, touch delicate, deliberate, dragging his thumb along the sharp line of his cheekbone and then back down, slowly, to brush across his mouth.

Alec's lips part, heart thudding as Magnus touches him so intimately, carefully, as though he's precious—something to be revered.

Nobody has ever looked at him like this. Nobody has ever touched him like this. Nobody has ever made him feel like this, like he could combust from the inside out, blood hot and rushing and bubbling beneath his skin. He's desperate to just each out and touch; to follow the lines of Magnus' face in just the same way.

"You have no idea," Magnus whispers, "how much effort it took not to lean over that damn table and kiss you tonight."


Magnus' free hand rests on his chest, sliding up to his shoulder as he leans up to kiss him. Fingers trail to the hair at the nape of his neck as Alec's lips part beneath Magnus', his arms folding around his boyfriend's torso.

Boyfriend. By the Angel.
It takes moments for the kiss to catch fire, hands wandering and lips sliding together, breaths coming in short aborted gasps between them.

Magnus presses closer, until their chests are flush together, hips a mere inch apart, feet brushing with every minute shift. He can feel his heart and Magnus' hammering against his chest, thudding in chaotic allegro as Magnus' teeth scrape lightly against his lower lip, tongue flickering out teasingly as he kisses Alec deeper, tilting his head.

A moan catches in the back of Alec's throat when Magnus' mouth drags down to his jawline, pressing warm sloppy kisses into the vulnerable skin just underneath. The scratch of Magnus' goatee against his neck makes him tilt his head back, overwhelming sensations flashing behind his eyelids like forks of lightning.

Magnus descends down his neck, fingers twisting in the fabric of Alec's t-shirt as he nips and kisses down the tight tendon, pausing to lavish at the fleshy, vulnerable point above his collarbone.

"Magnus," Alec gasps, eyelids slitting so he can see Magnus' dark hair.

"Too much?" Magnus murmurs, the words washing across his ear and making him shiver.

"No," Alec says, trembling a little—it's the most all-consuming thing he's ever experienced, Magnus pressed up against him and his mouth on his skin, and all they're doing is kissing.

Magnus tugs on Alec's earlobe with his teeth, gently, and Alec lets out a weak laugh; he feels Magnus smile, pressing his nose into Alec's cheek and giving them both a moment to breathe.

"Come on," Magnus says, reaching down to take his hand. He tugs Alec towards the sofa, warmth and joy and careless excitement making his eyes shine. It's breathtaking. Alec never wants to stop looking at him.

They collapse onto the soft cushions. A glance passes between them, hot and lingering and desiring, and then they're leaning in, lips meeting.

It's slower this time, but deeper, hotter, more tantalising. Alec can feel it through his entire body, right down to his toes. It makes him dizzy, drunk on the delirious pleasure of kissing Magnus, warm fingers on his jaw and stubble scratching lightly at his chin all that's grounding him to reality.

When Alec pulls away, it's with a singular determination. He tilts his head, twisting his body to get at the right angle to kiss down Magnus' neck. He's sure it's messy, uncoordinated, unpractised, but he doesn't care, Magnus is so fucking beautiful, goddamnit, and his necklaces only serve to draw attention to the warm bronze skin of his throat.

Something base in Alec wonders whether Magnus would ever let somebody leave a hickey there, or whether he thinks they're trashy.

Maybe he'll ask, one day.

Maybe he'll know what he himself thinks about them, one day.

He's a little distracted by the way Magnus throws his head back and moans, long and loud and utterly uninhibited as he reaches up a hand to tangle his fingers in Alec's hand, fingertips pressing
"Oh, Lilith," Magnus gasps when Alec tries sucking just lightly—not hard enough to leave a mark, but enough to feel. He doesn't trust himself to try the teeth thing Magnus had done. Not yet. "I'd forgotten how good this feels."

"Making out?" Alec asks, chest rising and falling heavily as he pauses, looking up at Magnus as best he can without moving too much.

"Making out with someone I like as much as I like you," Magnus says, breathless as he tips his chin to kiss Alec's forehead.

"I don't exactly have a benchmark," Alec says, and drops a kiss against Magnus' pulse point that makes his eyelids flutter. "But this is good."

Magnus' lips turn up in amusement. "Good?"

"Really good."

Humming, Magnus draws him back in for a kiss, two fingers under his chin to pull him up. The angle isn't ideal, beside each other on a couch, turned so they're half facing each other, but Alec doesn't really give a shit.

"Magnus," he rasps, between kisses that are stealing away his ability to think, or string together a vaguely coherent selection of words that somewhat resemble a sentence. "Can I—?"

"Mmm?" Magnus asks against his lips, not pulling back to give him a chance to respond, lost in his exploration of Alec's mouth.

"Can I move, so that—" He makes a vague gesture, words failing him.

"Mmhm," Magnus agrees, one hand shifting to his waist to help him move. He makes a valiant effort not to break their kiss as Alec manoeuvres so that he's got one knee on either side of Magnus' thighs, but it doesn't entirely work. Their lips slip so they end up kissing at each other's cheeks; it makes laughter bubble up Alec's throat, because it's so messy, so uncoordinated, but it's so good. It feels good, it feels fun, it feels easy.

They lose themselves in a kiss, unhurried and lazy, a little calmer. When they pull apart, they're both smiling. Magnus has his hands draped around Alec's waist, and he's running his fingers along the skin of his back below his t-shirt. He's not venturing up far, nor is he making any move to cop a feel—not that Alec would complain if he did.

"Okay?" Magnus whispers, radiant as he gazes up at him, lips kiss-swollen, glossy lip balm smeared, hair in disarray.

"Very okay," Alec says.

Unbidden, his eyes dip down to the open v of Magnus' shirt. He remembers seeing Magnus take off his shirt, once, with his back turned towards him. He remembers getting just a fleeting glimpse of a broad expanse of skin, before he'd turned away quickly, cheeks burning with embarrassment.

He doesn't feel embarrassed now. Nervous, yes, but in a good way. Butterflies and anticipation and
perhaps a hint of silly anxieties, a fleeting impression of self-consciousness and mild concern about
fucking up, but it's not bad. It's not overpowering. He's far too taken by Magnus to pay any of it
much attention.

Reaching out, he dips a finger into the hollow at the centre of Magnus' collarbone. He drags it lightly
down Magnus' sternum, until he reaches the button of the shirt, and then pauses, glancing up.

Magnus is watching him, eyes on his face, a small smile pulling at the corners of his lips. Alec
doesn't quite know what it is he can see on Magnus' face, but whatever it is, it makes his heart flutter
and his stomach squirm pleasantly.

"Can I unbutton it?" Alec asks, blinking down at Magnus earnestly.

"Only if you're sure you can handle the sight of my naked torso," Magnus says, smirking. "It has
been known to send men mad."

"Just men?" Alec asks, mouth twisting into a lopsided grin. "And here I was thinking you were the
eighth wonder of the world."

Magnus arches an eyebrow. "Please. I'm the first wonder of the world. Stone Henge? I'm much
prettier."

"I guess I'm about to find out," Alec says, and his heart is hammering, adrenaline and endorphins
saturating his blood, but he feels euphoric, drunk on Magnus, on Magnus' touch, the sight of Magnus
before him.

He slips the first button out of the hole, fingers skimming down the smooth, silky fabric to the next,
and the next, working it open with dexterous fingers until he reaches the bottom. With a nod of
consent from Magnus, he pushes it open, Magnus leaning forward so he can take it all the way off—
and he takes a moment to just look.

There's so much skin, he thinks, thoughts scattering in his mind even as he tries to grapple for them,
to put words to Magnus Bane. Soft skin is layered over long expanses of iron-hard muscle, and fuck,
Alec wants to follow every line and plane of Magnus' torso with his hands and then his mouth.

In a moment of hysteria, he wonders what his fifteen year old self would have done if he'd seen this.
He thinks he probably would have suffered cardiac arrest.

"You can touch." Magnus' voice is soft as he breaks the silence, patience and kindness in his eyes
behind the heat and the lust that Alec is sure is reflected in his own face.

"You're right," Alec says, looking up at him, and realising too late that it's probably a little rude to
just stare at someone's body like that. Not that Magnus seems to mind. "Stone Henge is boring."

Magnus laughs, bright and clear, and he presses his smile into a kiss. He traps Alec's hands loosely
between his, thumbs skating over his knuckles before bringing them towards his chest, so Alec's
fingertips are just touching his clavicle.

Their kiss is slow, sweet, hot but not scorching, deep but not fierce. Alec lets his hands flatten against
Magnus' chest, fingers splaying out across warm skin. He slides his palms straight down, over
Magnus' pecs to his waistband but not further, feeling muscles tighten beneath his hands.
He feels Magnus' hands slip up underneath the back of his t-shirt, fingers sliding over the skin of his lower back and nails scratching lightly against his skin. It makes him pull back from their kiss a hairsbreadth, breathing heavily, gaping when Magnus leans down to kiss along his neck. After a moment, he realises that Magnus is following the shape of his deflect rune, and he groans, one hand reaching up to tangle in Magnus' hair.

"Wait," Alec says, pulling away a little further and leaning back.

Concern flashes in Magnus' eyes. "You okay?"

"Yeah, just let me—"

He sits up and lowers his hands to yank his t-shirt up. Magnus seems to catch on, flashing him a grin, and helps him pull it up over his head. He tosses it somewhere behind Alec with a dismissive flourish, and offers him such a breathtaking smile of reassurance that Alec finds himself unable to breathe.

"Stop looking at me like that," Alec says, burying his face in Magnus' neck and mouthing lightly at his skin to distract himself.

He feels the reverberation of Magnus' laughter against his chest, and fingers slide into his hair, tugging just lightly. "Like what?"

"Like that."

"What," Magnus asks, voice turning low as he murmurs in Alec's ear, "like you're the most beautiful man I've ever set eyes on?"

Alec stills, turning his head so he can look at Magnus, and feels, abruptly, very self-conscious, uncertainty filling him. "What?"

Magnus smiles softly, and brushes his thumb against the corner of his mouth. "You heard me."

"You can't be serious."

"Perfectly," Magnus says, and kisses him gently. "You're beautiful. And it's a tragedy that nobody has told you that before."

"I didn't think men were allowed to be beautiful," Alec admits quietly, fingers shifting a little where they're braced on Magnus' bare chest. He glances down, and then immediately regrets it, because there's no way he can concentrate with the sight of that much gorgeous torso in front of him. "Until I met you."

"Oh, Alexander," Magnus says in a sigh, and sets their foreheads together, eyes fluttering closed. "Do you remember when I told you that the Clave is poisoned?"

Alec huffs out a little laugh. "Yeah. I didn't believe a word you said. I do now."

Magnus lays his hand along the length of Alec's cheek, tilting his head to press a soft, lingering kiss to him lips. "I hope you know how much you mean to me, angel," he whispers.

"If it's half as much as you mean to me, I'm the luckiest man alive."
They kiss again, and the weight of emotion turns it hot, deep and involved and fiery, hands wandering as they press closer, teeth nipping lightly and fingers digging into muscle greedily, moans swallowed in each other's mouths and gasps lost in the air between them.

Unintentionally, Alec shifts where he's sprawled across Magnus' lap, and their crotches press together sharply through their jeans, ripping a loud moan from Alec's throat and making Magnus break their kiss, tossing his head back.

They stare at each other for a moment, eyes half-lidded with hazy pleasure, before they're falling into each other, mouths colliding and hands roaming across each other, pressing closer, panting, kisses turning scorching, otherworldly.

"Alec," Magnus breaths between kisses, "how far do you want this to go?"

"I don't know," Alec says, "but I don't want to stop, if you don't."

Magnus jerks his head back out of Alec's reach and presses the flat of his hand against Alec's chest, holding him back. He looks serious when he says, "Do you want to get off?"

"I...don't think I'm ready to bare all."

"Alright," Magnus says, nodding. He picks up Alec's hand in the one not pressed to his chest, and kisses his knuckles. "That's more than okay. But you didn't answer my question."

Confusion crosses Alec's face. "Didn't I?"

Magnus' lips twitch up, and he shifts pointedly beneath Alec. "No."

"Oh." Alec feels his eyes light up. "Oh."

The smile Magnus gives him is so fond it makes Alec feel like his heart is going to break through the barrier of his ribcage beat right out of his chest. "Is that a yes? Because if so, let me substitute jeans for sweatpants before we do anything else."

"That's a fuck yes," Alec says, leaning back in to kiss him again, and then pauses, pulling back a little. "If you want to, that is."

Magnus laughs, and snaps his fingers, sweatpants covering their lower halves in place of hard denim. "Darling, of course I want to. Have you seen yourself?"

"Stop it," Alec says, but he's smiling, and Magnus laughs right before their lips meet again, stealing any remaining breath from Alec's lungs.

He feels fingers hook into the front pockets on his sweatpants, and Magnus tugs him forwards slightly on his thighs, making Alec groan as their hips align. He gasps against Magnus' lips when fingers trail up the grooves of his abs to his pecs and tease across his nipples.

"Oh Raziel," Alec breaths, mouth slipping from Magnus' to drag across his cheek when they shift against each other minutely once, and then again, more purposefully. "Fuck."

"Alexander," Magnus says, kissing Alec's slack lips teasingly, "I assure you, Raziel has nothing to
Alec laughs weakly, and cups Magnus' face in his hands when he kisses him again, pressing his hips down to meet Magnus’, tentatively at first and then more surely as they find a rhythm that works.

Hands run up his thighs, gliding up his quads and then curling round to the backs of his legs, below his ass, encouraging him closer but not pushing. Alec is more than happy to oblige—especially with the way it makes their chests press together, and fuck, if Magnus' torso isn't a god-given work of art.

"Oh," Alec moans, when their careful movements begin to transition into rocking, grinding movements that make him feel like he's being ripped apart in the best way. And then again: "Oh. Oh my fucking god."

"I know," Magnus says, breathing the words right into his ear, hot breath washing across sensitive skin and making Alec shudder. "I've got you."

"Magnus," Alec whispers, and drops his head to Magnus shoulder to kiss as his neck sloppily, shaking from how fucking good it feels.

He feels Magnus' fingers tracing up from the back of his thighs to his hips, caressing his sides before sliding back, teasing at the curves of his ass. Alec arches back into the touch, and Magnus pushes his hands into the back pockets of Alec's sweatpants, pulling Alec into him.

"Lilith, you're gorgeous," Magnus breathes, moving one hand from his ass to stroke his hair back from his face reverently.

Alec feels wrecked. He stares at Magnus with wide eyes, pupils surely blown to three times their normal size, chest rising and falling heavily as they continue to rock against each other. Magnus' hand on his ass helps guide his movements, not that Alec needs any encouragement—he's never felt so overwhelmingly good.

"Oh fuck," Alec groans, when they press together particularly well just as Magnus' hand is teasing its way up his chest. "I didn't- I didn't realise anything could feel like this."

Magnus smiles at him, breathless and sweaty and the most beautiful sight Alec has ever seen. "Better than jerking off in the shower, right?"

"Yeah. So much better." He swallows. "You're so beautiful, Magnus."

In lieu of replying, Magnus tilts his chin up to kiss him. What starts off soft and caring quickly catches fire, searching hands only throwing gasoline on the flames. It's hard, biting, too much tongue and an overuse of teeth, clashing in all sorts of awkward ways, but Alec doesn't care, because it feels so good.

"Alexander," Magnus gasps against Alec's neck, grinding his hips up harder. Alec's eyes roll back in his head, eyelids fluttering. "Mm."

The sound of Magnus moaning his name like that, lustful and pleasure-driven, only serves to make Alec hotter, the fire in his stomach growing to an inferno that makes him desperate, chasing that overwhelming, addictive feeling.

Alec spreads his legs wider as the tension in his stomach builds, tighter and tighter and tighter, until
he feels like he's a moment away from snapping.

Lips cover his own, but the kiss is sloppy, breathless, both of them too high on sheer pleasure to focus enough to kiss.

Alec groans into Magnus' mouth, jaw going slack as everything inside him goes so impossibly tight it's almost painful, and he rocks his hips once, twice, three times, grinding a little harder each time, and then everything goes white as he tosses his head back and gasps, shuddering in Magnus' arms.

"I've got you," Magnus is whispering, pressing kisses to Alec's shoulders even while he, himself, is trembling, shaking, hips jerking up, searching, prolonging the blinding heat of Alec's release until Magnus' head drops forwards and he groans low in his throat, finally stilling.

Alec has his arms wrapped around Magnus' neck, Magnus' around his waist, and neither of them move for a long, heavy moment as tremors wrack through them. Both need a moment to recover before anything else.

Magnus moves first, tilting his chin up just enough to press a soft, lingering kiss to Alec's cheek, and then another to the corner of his mouth. His palms splay out across the bare skin of his back and stroke up and down gently.

"Okay?" Magnus whispers, unglamoured eyes warm and caring and so full of emotion that Alec feels like he could cry.

"Yeah," Alec tells him, smiling. "Really, really okay."

So okay he wants to tell Magnus he loves him. It's on the tip of his tongue, the words screaming through his mind in enormous capital letters and flashing like neon signs up on the billboards in Times Square, itching to break loose and flow into the space between them.

But he doesn't let them out. He forces them back, swallows around them, snaps them behind a bolted door and leans back against it. Now isn't the right time. What just transpired between felt sacred, beautiful, like nothing Alec ever realised mere mortal men could experience, and saying it now, for the first time—it would feel cheap. Even if it's not.

"I'm glad," Magnus says, returning Alec's smile instantly, something akin to relief crossing his face, as though he thought there was any chance under the sun that Alec wouldn't be okay after having his entire world rocked. "Here—"

Magnus clicks his fingers, blue sparks leaping into the air, and Alec feels himself abruptly clean.

"Handy," he says, quirking a teasing eyebrow at him. He meets Magnus for a soft kiss, hands shifting to his jaw, and hums happily. "I think I just became a teenager."

Magnus snorts. "You're twenty-two."

"And yet." Alec is grinning. "I'm regressing to a horny teenager."

"You are dating me," Magnus tells him, kissing his nose. "It's hard not to."

Alec makes a humming noise of agreement, and presses in close to Magnus, tucking his nose into Magnus' neck and letting his eyes close with a sigh as warm arms hold him so tightly he feels like
nothing could ever break him apart.

He holds Magnus back just as fiercely.

"Do you want anything?" Magnus asks quietly against his hair. "A drink, or—"

"Just you," Alec says, and, huh, who knew that sex - if what they just did counts as sex, he thinks, absently - could dissolve the brain-to-mouth filter that's stopped him admitting those soft, heartfelt things in the deepest layers of his heart for the last twenty-two years?

A smile is pressed against his neck, and Alec feels a flare of warmth in his chest, knowing he managed to evoke such a reaction from Magnus Bane, High Warlock of Brooklyn, son of a Prince of Hell, well-known among Shadowhunters for being, as his name suggests, the Great Destruction.

Here, now, Alec wonders how anybody could ever think something so utterly ridiculous. Magnus might be a powerhouse, capable of immense displays of magic that could bring New York to its knees, but he's got the gentlest soul Alec has ever known.

"Hey, Magnus?" Alec asks, voice quiet as he speaks against his skin.

Magnus hums. "Yeah?"

"What did you do with my jeans?"

"I think they're on the floor with your shirt. At least, that was my intention."

Alec snorts. "That distracted?"

"You're not the only one abruptly reverting to a teenager."

They're quiet again, just curled in each other's arms, when Magnus says, "What time do you have to go home?"

"I have to be back at the Institute for six, for patrol," Alec says, glancing up at him. "But Isabelle threatened to castrate me if I didn't go out and let go a bit, or something."

Magnus' laughs softly. "I have to get up for a client at seven. Do you want to stay?"

"Only if I'm not going to bother you."

"Alexander." Magnus' smile turns small, fond, as he runs a knuckle along Alec's cheek. "If I had my way, I'd never let you leave."

Chapter End Notes
Sorry this chapter is a little later than usual -- as always, let me know what you thought, and I really hope you enjoyed it!

If you fancy it, come talk to me on Tumblr!

Much love,
Lu <3
Chapter Summary

In which Alec and Maryse have a chat, Maia sasses a Seelie, and Magnus gets a visit.

Chapter Notes

Vulture: all the not-so-nice things...
You can live tweet using #fwwfic

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At six o'clock, twenty minutes before his designated morning patrol, Alec strides through the Institute to the ops centre, scanning through the report Raj had emailed him ten minutes ago about having come across some rather unusual demonic readings while on a mission in Staten Island.

Just as he's wondering whether this is evidence of the greater demons Magnus thinks Valentine has been summoning to do dark, heinous magic, someone calls his name sharply.

He glances up from his phone to see his mother standing in the doorway to the ops centre with her hands fist on her hips, lips pressed into a thin line and jaw clenched tight in disapproval. She follows his progression down the hallway with a freezing gaze.

"Morning," Alec says, a little unused to having his mother around in the Institute all the time after she's spent so many months in Alicante. He quirks an eyebrow. "Is something wrong? Jace too drunk to get home? Please tell me he didn't pass out at the bar again, Maia will kill him."

Maryse narrows her eyes. "I don't know what's been going on around here in my absence, but it ends now."

Alec stares at her, eyebrows furrowed. "I'm sorry?"

"This fraternising with the enemy," she hisses. "It has to end."

"The enemy?" Alec asks, letting out a laugh of disbelief. "What on earth are you talking about? Nobody here has been in contact with anyone related to Valentine since the Clave banned all missions to do with the Circle without prior approval."

"I am not," she says, "talking about Valentine. I am talking about the Downworld."

For just a moment, blind panic races through him. Panic that she knows where he's been. There's no way she could possibly know, unless she's had him followed, but he's always so careful to ensure that he isn't. He doesn't know where his colleagues think he goes, but neither does he particularly care. None of them are bound to disclose their location when they're not needed for work.

"I'm hearing about Downworld parties and Downworld bars, and Jace and Isabelle invited that
vampire into the Institute last night, and—"

"Simon?" Alec asks, and lets out a short laugh of sheer disbelief. "Mother, Simon is about as evil as a puppy. Mildly irritating in large doses, maybe, but not bad. And certainly not the enemy. You know what I think about the Downworld. I think we need them, now more than ever. And I'm sorry, but I'm in charge, here. If you don't like it, report me."

Maryse exhales, shoulders drooping a little, and she shakes her head. "You know I would never do that, Alec. I just think you're making a mistake. You're young. You're naïve. You're too eager to see good in people."

"No," Alec tells her, shaking his head. "I've grown up more in the last six months than I have in my entire life. I've seen first hand that what the Clave thinks about Downworlders is wrong."

For several long seconds, Maryse merely looks at him, maternal fondness and exasperation clashing in her eyes. Then she sighs, and seems to deem the argument lost.

Instead, she says, "Where were you, last night? I've never known you to sneak out."

"I didn't sneak out."

"So where were you?"

"Am I fifteen?" He raises his eyebrows. "I didn't know I needed to give you my location at every hour of every day."

A smile tugs at her lips, eyes shining. "Okay," she says, and pats his cheek. "You tell me when you're ready."

And she walks past him, smile still fixed on her face and slowly morphing into a grin, and Alec stares at her, wondering what the hell his mother thinks she knows, and why the hell it's making her look like that.

***

"I'm sorry," Magnus says, holding up a hand, palm forwards. "You were approached by who?"

Seated at a table at the back of the Jade Wolf, which is deserted save for the Downworld Council and Maia, who'd insisted on sitting in on the meeting, Meliorn's lips curl into a lazy smile at Magnus' question.

"I think you heard me well enough, Bane," he says, tossing his head to flick his hair back, revealing one pointed ear tip. "We were approached by the Shadowhunters Lydia Branwell and Isabelle Lightwood."

"Isabelle, I can understand," Luke says, drumming his fingers against the table, a frown marring his handsome face. "She's always been on our side. Even more so after she found out about Clary and I. And then when she had her—" he waves a hand at Meliorn a little awkwardly "—thing with you."

Meliorn laughs. "Lucian, I was not the first Downworlder Isabelle had a relationship with."

The fae knight glances sideways at Maia, and Magnus sees the faintest touch of colour rise across the tops of her cheeks. She averts her gaze, abruptly showing more interest in the scratched surface of the table than it really warrants.
Luke rolls his eyes. "Not my point. Isabelle has always been in favour of healing the divide between our people. This Lydia Branwell woman hasn't. She's a Clave official. What's her deal?"

Magnus hums in thought. "I met her," he reminds Luke, "at my party. She was polite. Sincere. Clearly a little dubious, though."

"She recommended Lightwood to take over the Institute," Raphael says, "knowing about his views. She wouldn't have done that if her thinking were allied with the Clave's."

"No," Magnus agrees, "and Alexander trusts her. I trust Alexander. Therefore I trust her."


"They do say that love is blind," Meliorn says. "What makes you so sure? As a leader?"

"What Raphael said," Magnus says, nodding to his friend and ignoring Meliorn's wording, and his insinuations. "And the fact that I do not allow my abilities as a leader to be compromised by my personal relationships. Alec is a Shadowhunter. He also wants to unite our worlds. If this mission comes from him, I trust it. Especially if Isabelle is involved. She won't let Lydia cross any unsavoury lines."

"You think we should grant them audience with the Seelie Court?" Meliorn asks. "Despite the risks?"

"With respect, Meliorn," Maia says, in a tone suggesting somewhat minimal respect while she looks him up and down, "what risks do you suppose are associated with letting a Downworld sympathiser and a disillusioned Clave official negotiate with you?"

"They could return to the Clave with all sorts of information," Meliorn says. "This would be the first time a Shadowhunter has entered the Seelie Court for business for years."

"And there it is," Maia says, sitting back in her chair and clapping her hands together. "You're afraid of what uniting our worlds might mean for the Seelies."

Luke glances over at her warningly. "Maia—"

"No. Tell me I'm wrong."

"I can't," Meliorn says. "But you have not covered the entirety of the matter in your summary of events."

Raphael and Magnus' eyes meet across the table, and Magnus wonders whether part of Meliorn's hesitation stems from a more personal standpoint. His relationship with Isabelle was well-known among the Downworld. Loathed by the Seelie Queen and drawing mixed reactions of horror and amusement and support from other Downworlders, it had been the talking point of many social circles for some weeks.

Magnus wonders whether Meliorn is afraid to face someone he once loved - or, at least, cared about - across a negotiating table, with all that history between them that would have the potential to turn sour.

He considers facing Alec in that situation. It makes him shudder.

"We will speak with them," Meliorn says, eventually. "That is all. If they impress the queen—"
"That's settled, then," Luke says, before anyone can interject and start the whole topic up again. "Raphael, did you have something to say?"

"Yes." Raphael pulls open his suit jacket and slides a slender envelope out of his pocket. He holds it out towards Magnus. "When will you next see Lightwood?"

Magnus blinks at him. "I don't know."

"When you do, give him this," Raphael says. "It's important. I want my clan's tentative acquaintance with the New York Institute to become an official alliance. Like the pack has."

Magnus takes the envelope, and nods. "Alright."

Following the exchange with a frown on her face, Maia looks up at Raphael. "Why not give it to him yourself?"

Raphael exhales through his nose. "I would. But with Maryse Lightwood now stationed back in New York, I'm wary of making a private phone call to the Institute without prior Nephilim consent, let alone a physical visit."

At once, Magnus' phone feels heavy in his pocket, the weight of his two unanswered texts feeling unnecessarily heavy. He knows, deep down, that not replying to a text for five hours is normal—but, like Raphael, with Maryse back in New York, his mind can't help but flit to the worst case scenarios.

"Yeah," he says, quietly, as he waves a finger to transport the folder back to his office desk. "I know what you mean."

***

"Someone got laid," Jace comments as he struts into the weapons room, running his fingers along the smooth wood of the training staffs lined up in the rack before he picks one, pulling it out and twirling it around between his hands.

Alec looks up from where he's tapping at his tablet, analysing some of the data gathered from a mission team earlier in the day, and frowns distractedly at his parabatai.

"What?"

"I said, someone got laid," Jace repeats, catching his eye and smirking.

Alec stares at him. "How the hell—"

"Okay, Alec, unlike Izzy, I know that Jessica Hawkblue never existed," Jace says, grinning at him, and Alec flushes red at the reminder of the girlfriend he'd invented when he was sixteen to try to distract Isabelle and Jace's unrelenting questioning about when he'd get a girlfriend.

Although, he remembers, Isabelle never actually used the word girlfriend. She always found gender neutral ways of teasing him mercilessly. He didn't notice at the time, but he realises it with hindsight. He also suspects that Isabelle knew that Jessica Hawkblue didn't exist the moment the words came out of his mouth, but he's not going to argue the point.

"So?" Alec asks, shoulders hunching a little, defences going up.

"You've never had sex," Jace says bluntly, "and don't try to tell me you could have had a one night stand, because I know you haven't. I just do. I also remember what it's like to——"
"Alright, alright, enough!" Alec snaps irritably, a flush of mixed anger and embarrassment spreading across his cheeks. "We get it, I was a twenty-two year old virgin and I've suddenly reverted to being the sixteen year old I never was, happy?"

Jace smiles at him. "Yeah, Alec, I'm happy. For you. Twenty-two year old you. There's nothing teenage-special about consensual sex with someone you love."

That makes Alec pause, the annoyance falling away a little. "Oh." He clears his throat. "Thanks."

"No problem," Jace says, and taps him lightly on the shoulder with his staff before heading over to the punching back. "Loosen up a bit, though! Sex is meant to be fun!"

Alec throws a weapons belt at his head.

***

It's been a while since Magnus last picked up a coffee from his favourite little mundane shop.

Java Jones café has been his favourite place for coffee in all of New York since it first opened in the nineties. Possibly, some of his fondness is a sense of nostalgia at the memory of a pretty mundane barista he'd spent a good three months adoring from afar, but the coffee is exceptional.

He pushes the door open, the bell giving a little tinkle as he steps over the threshold, and the sweet aroma of freshly baked pastries assaults him. The smell draws him towards the counter, where he can see prices and calorie counts written on the glass against each product in swirling, looping handwriting.

"Magnus!"

Magnus looks up, smiling as he spots one of the baristas, who's been working in the café for nearly as long as Magnus has been frequenting it. He'd even invited Magnus to his wedding.

"Hello, stranger," Magnus says, leaning against the counter and shooting him a lazy grin.

"We were taking bets on whether you'd finally up and moved to Hawaii," Tom says, coming to stand behind the checkout till. "We haven't seen you for months."

"I'm sorry," Magnus says, lips twitching as he tries not to laugh. "How about I give myself diabetes and you take ten minutes off to have a coffee with me to make up for it?"

Tom shakes his head. "Flirt."

"Oh, no." Magnus does laugh, this time. "I'm a taken man."

"Tell me what you want, pay up, and then you've got ten minutes to tell me all about whoever this lady or gentleman is," Tom says, and Magnus agrees. He's missed this place.

***

Magnus is still smiling when he walks out an hour later, the taste of coffee and a fresh buttery croissant still lingering on his tongue.

A bird soars overhead, wings spread wide as it dives down towards a tree, tweeting and cawing loudly. Absently, Magnus wonders what Alec is doing. He hasn't got any more clients for the day, but he has plenty of work to be getting on with. He can't really afford to distract himself for another whole night—but he wants to.
Instead, he settles for a text, sending Alec a shot of New York lit up by evening summer sunlight and a "thinking of you x". He hates himself for it, but his heart rises up higher than any bird in the sky when Alec sends back a photograph of what Magnus presumes must be his desk and "ditto <3" back.

It's not until he's almost at his loft that his good mood plummets.

Standing on the steps leading up to the door into the foyer, dressed in her customary blood red dress that hugs every inch of her body, is Camille. She's smirking as she follows his progression along the street with her eyes, one hand resting on her tip, sharp black stilettos emphasising her towering long figure.

Unlike last time, Magnus isn't just struck by repulsed horror. It spreads through him, making his heart thud and his stomach twist, but it's overshadowed by anger. Raphael had told the Downworld Council, and Alec, about Camille's escape. He's told them about what it must mean.

Camille is working with Valentine.

Which means she's working to manipulate his boyfriend, to force Magnus onto Valentine's side, to push him into a corner. And he won't fucking let her. He's going to tear her into tiny little pieces before he lets her get the better of him again.

"Magnus, darling," Camille says, smiling as he stops in the sun, where she can't reach him from her carefully positioned spot in the shade. He doesn't even want to think about how she got here before sundown.

"Camille."

"Oh, don't look so sour," she snaps, and her expression morphs into a flirtatious smirk. "I can hear your heart beating. I always did make it go a little faster than it should, didn't I?"

"What do you want?" Magnus asks, ignoring her.

"I just came here to let you know that this has to end, Magnus," she drawls, flicking invisible dirt out from beneath her long fingernails.

"What has to end?"

"Your little dalliance with that mortal," she says, looking up at him from beneath her lashes with faux innocence. "Surely you know who I mean? That pretty one who'll be all wrinkly and disgusting in thirty years. The one who seemed very fond of you when we met last."

Magnus doesn't give her an inch. His expression remains impassive, unreadable, not letting a flicker of emotion through. Anything he lets show will only be used against him. He knows how Camille's mind games work, and he refuses to give her the satisfaction of victory this time.

He wonders whether his newfound strength against the woman who walked all over his heart in those deadly heels is coming from having let it all out with Alec, like he used to with Ragnor. Unloading on Ragnor always used to help. Catarina, while he loves her dearly, is too much a medic. She wants to fix things that can't be fixed. She's always too angry on his behalf, too determined to murder Camille, too eager to offer solutions - which almost always include Camille's unfortunate demise - to make him feel the same weightless relief he did with Ragnor.

Alec, like Ragnor, didn't do any of that. He'd just taken what Magnus had shed and helped him shoulder all that weight.
In the present, Camille tilts her head to one side, eyes shining with malicious mirth. "Or perhaps you've forgotten about him already," she whispers, lips curling up. "You never do love others as much as they love you, do you? You're not very good at giving away your heart. Because deep down, you know I'm right. You know we're not built for love. And the only person you can ever rely on is me."

"You wouldn't know how to recognise love if it slapped you across the face," Magnus snarls, a war raging inside him at her insinuations. It takes everything he has not to say anything else.

"And you wouldn't know what to do with it even if someone presented it to you on a silver platter," Camille retorts, rolling her eyes. "Your little Shadowhunter will abandon you, you know. He won't stand by you when push comes to shove. Because you never give enough."

"You don't know anything about him," Magnus says through gritted teeth, although Camille's words send his thoughts into a tailspin. Because that's exactly what he's afraid of. That's what he's always been afraid of. That, when it comes to it, when the Clave is threatening Alec's family, threatening to derune them and torture them if he doesn't give Magnus up, Alec will carry out the mission he's been denying for so many months.

"Oh, I think I do," Camille murmurs, still smiling that horrible, victorious smirk. "I think I know rather a lot more than you do. Because I know you. And I have to warn you, Magnus, the Clave are onto you. They know what Valentine wants. They know how you're involved. The witch hunt will only get more urgent as they discover more."

Magnus stares at her. "What on earth are you talking about?"

Camille grins. "Come now, Magnus. How do you think I broke out of the Dumort?"

"You're working with Valentine."

"Oh my goodness." Camille throws her head back, laughter rising up out of her throat, eyes glimmering like the blade of a dagger in sunlight. "Magnus, my love, Valentine wants to slaughter us. I would have to be a fool."

"Then...you're working with the Clave?" Magnus gapes at her incredulously. "Are you insane?"

"No. I'm showing you what the Shadowhunters are like. I'm showing you what your boyfriend will do to you, when he realises it's you or his family, his own people. I'm showing you what the Clave will do when they think the High Warlock of Brooklyn, a filthy, disgusting Downworlder, has corrupted one of their precious soldiers."

Magnus' eyes flash. "Are you threatening me?"

"You'll be perfectly safe," Camille says, waving a hand dismissively. "The moment the Clave lay a hand on you, Valentine Morgenstern will bitch a fit. It'll be war."

"And that doesn't bother you?" Magnus snaps. "All the innocent people who are going to die in this war? All the mundanes? The Downworlders who've had their power stripped by the Clave for the last thirty years who won't be able to defend themselves?"

Camille shrugs delicately, slender shoulders lifting with a grace that Magnus finds unbelievably irritating. "No, not really."

"Why are you doing this?" Magnus demands. "What possible reason do you have for starting a war and making my boyfriend turn on me?"
"I'm not causing any of those things. I'm just the catalyst. Speeding up the process. And as for why... Well." She flashes him a coquettish smile. "I do like to cause trouble."

The sun has shifted just slightly during the course of their conversion, enough for the backs of Magnus' knuckles to be shaded. Camille stretches out a fingertip and brushes her cool skin against him, a wicked smile on her face that promises horror and evil and heart wrenching devastation.

"Don't look so upset, Magnus." Camille pouts at him as he stands still, sick to the stomach, watching her with disgust. "Really, I'm doing you a favour."

The tidal wave of fury brewing beneath Magnus' skin crests, crashing down and racing through every barrier erected to hold it back.

A snarl rips its way out his throat as magic surges up inside him and spills, thudding against Camille and throwing her back against the concrete of the building. She's laughing as he stalks towards her, cat eyes flashing with murderous rage. Power is fizzing at his fingertips, licking against his skin as he leans into her space, shrouding her in fiery red. It pins her back against the wall, wrapping around her throat and tightening until her laugh turns croaky, impenetrable skin creaking against the force of Magnus' magic.

"You can't kill me," Camille rasps, chuckling breathlessly even as she slides a foot up the wall, feet dangling free in the air. "Not now I'm a Clave informant."

"You bitch," Magnus spits. "You're informing on the Clave to protect yourself against Valentine. You think they'll shield you if you keep feeding them information about me."

"Well done," Camille says, voice scratching and low as air forces its way up her constricted windpipe. "The fact that it'll open your eyes to the inevitable demise of your relationship with that cabbage-brained pretty boy is just a bonus."

"How dare you?" There's a crack behind them as Magnus' magic lashes out, darting off him like electricity and crackling like lightning before he manages to reign it back in with a deep, laboured breath. "You will leave Alexander the alone, or I will rip you to pieces. Clave informant or not." He curls his fingers to slide her up the wall a little further in emphasis. "Do I make myself clear?"

"I don't plan on laying a finger on him, Magnus, darling," she whispers. "He'll ruin himself all on his own. Unless you stop seeing him."

Magnus' fingers slacken a little, and Camille slips until her feet can just reach the floor. "You're trying to manipulate me. That's bullshit. We need to fight this together, not—"

"You keep telling yourself that," she drawls, apparently uncaring of the fact that Magnus' magic is still burning and crackling the skin at her throat. It'll be as good as new by the morning, anyway. "You're the one who's going to have to live with it when he's forced to turn on you or condemn his family, and the Clave will destroy him either way for colluding with you. It's your choice."

Heart hammering against his ribs, Magnus lets her go, curling his fingers into fists at his sides so that Camille can't see them trembling. He won't let her win. He won't let her see how much she's managed to rattle him, just like she always does. He won't. He won't.

He won't.

"Get out," Magnus says quietly, enunciating each word clearly, injecting as much venom as he can into each syllable.
A smirk spreads across Camille's face, and Magnus sees it in her eyes. Victory. She's won, and she knows it. She's managed to get the better of him. She's played on his weaknesses, pushed the right buttons, and now—now he's going to do exactly what she wants him to.

Because he doesn't have a fucking choice.

"Nice to see you, Magnus," she says, pressing a kiss to his cheek before she slips away, lifting an obsidian black umbrella Magnus is sure is infused with dark magic over her head before strutting down the street, heels clicking against the pavement, rubbing more salt in the wounds of Magnus' mangled heart with each emphatic step.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! I really hope you enjoyed the chapter, and let me know what you thought in the comments <3

If you fancy it, come follow me on Tumblr! You can also tweet at me: @LucysRebelHeart, or use #fwwfic

Huge, huge congratulations to Australia for officially legalising same sex marriage!

Much love,
Lu <3
Duck (Tame)

Chapter Summary

In which Garrobane are badass, a greater demon has some things to say, and Magnus and Alec have a chat...

Chapter Notes

(In which I specify the type of duck because I'm running out of birds)

Tame duck: symbolic of aggressiveness when faced with an unknown enemy and vulnerability, but, conversely, can also be symbolic of marital bliss and honesty.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

At four hundred and some years old, Magnus should really know better than to take potentially deadly jobs when he's in emotional turmoil. Especially when said turmoil has been inflicted by Camille.

And yet, half an hour after his run-in with Camille, he steps through the thick sludge of what could be an abandoned sewer or just a particularly filthy tunnel. One arm lifts to his nose to mask the rancid stench of death and decay. Is this place infested with demons with worse hygiene than usual, or is he going to stumble upon unspeakably vile experiments being conducted by Valentine?

He's still not entirely sure who gave him this call, but a mundane had approached Luke at his day job at the police station, complaining about a horrible smell behind her house. She'd told him it smelt like a dead body. Luke told Magnus her description was like demons and magic.

"What the hell is that?" Luke asks from behind Magnus, shining his torchlight on the wall, illuminating a thick red sludge. It's the colour of blood, but too thick to belong to any living creature Magnus knows of—and its defying gravity, sliding up the crumbling wall of the tunnel instead of down.

Magnus flicks out a finger, magic reaching out to touch it—and his magic recoils like an elastic band, hissing inside him and making him feel faintly nauseous.

"Don't touch it," Magnus says, voice slightly muffled by his sleeve. "My magic hates it. Which is saying something, considering I'm half demon."

He catches Luke's frown out of the corner of his eye, but, blessedly, Luke doesn't say anything. It's not something said in self-deprecation, after all—it's fact. Magnus just doesn't tend to make a habit of drawing attention to it.

Instead, Luke says, "What's your best guess?"

Magnus shakes his head. "I really don't know. Residue of some kind. From dark magic, perhaps, or
from something demonic. A ritual or a summoning. But I think we're going to find something a lot more awful than that at the end of this tunnel."

"I don't get it," Luke says, as they continue on, the soles of their shoes making horrible splurging noises in the watery goo lining the floor. "This place isn't on any maps at the police station, or any of the pack's maps."

"It's probably built by the Shadowhunters," Magnus says, and he's referring to the Clave, but he supposes it could have been erected by Valentine. Or, rather, a warlock employed by Valentine.

"Maybe we should ask Alec if he knows about it," Luke says. "Or Raphael. Could be a vampire thing."

Something situated firmly in the centre of Magnus' chest twists painfully at the mention of Alec's name. "If Raphael knew about it, so would we. The Downworld has been much more transparent with each other since Valentine's rise to power. Even the Seelies."

"I can't imagine the Seelies ever being less transparent than they are now," Luke mutters, and Magnus smiles a little despite himself. For all his wisdom, he forgets, sometimes, that Luke has only been part of the Downworld for as long as Isabelle Lightwood has been alive.

"Meliorn is possibly one of the most cooperative Seelies I have ever met," Magnus says, and Luke shoots him a look of sheer incredulity.

A faint breeze wafts through the tunnel. Something Magnus can't quite place makes a shiver run down his spine, the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end, and he stops, throwing out an arm to halt Luke's progress, too.

"What is it?" Luke asks, and Magnus sees the green of his wolf's eyes flash in the darkness.

"I think—"

"Well, well, well."

Valentine Morgenstern's voice echoes through the tunnel, the faint sound of footsteps reaching them. He appears out of the shadows, a twisted smirk on his face, eyes alight with amusement as they flicker between Magnus and Luke.

"Magnus Bane and Lucian Greymark. What an unlikely pair you two make."

Magnus arches an eyebrow at him. "Apparently you're a little behind on the times, Shadowhunter. I seem to recall that Luke has been part of my people for longer than he was a part of your hideous bunch of testosterone-rulled shitheads."

Anger flashes in Valentine's eyes, and he fixes his gaze on Magnus. "You'd do well not to make an enemy of me, Magnus. We could be valuable to each other."

"No, we couldn't," Magnus tells him flatly. "I made an enemy of you the moment you made your intentions for the genocide of my people clear. And, for you? It's High Warlock Bane, thank you. Or High Warlock of Brooklyn. Whichever you feel rolls off the tongue better."

Valentine rolls his eyes. "You preach about not being called Warlock Bane, you complain about species titles, and yet you demand to be known by one? Such illogical fickleness is exactly why you people need...controlling."

Valentine laughs in delight. "Oh, you're defending your friend? How sweet. He'll screw you over eventually, Lucian. Just like he screws over everyone. Just like he screwed over his little green friend."

Magic licks at Magnus' fingertips, rage blinding him for a moment. "Watch your tongue."

"What was his name?" Valentine muses, glancing skyward. "Oh, yes, I remember. Ragnor Fell. You didn't do very well by him, now did you?"

"You had your minions murder him," Magnus snarls.

"You're supposed to be the most powerful warlock in all of Northern America," Valentine whispers, stepping closer as a slow, wolfish grin spreads across his face. "And you couldn't even save your oldest friend?"

"Morgenstern, this is the wrong day to taunt me," Magnus says, voice sharp as it rings through the dark tunnel, the floor glistening with whatever disgusting demonic bodily fluids and magically crafted liquids Valentine has washed across it.

"Even though I'm bringing you a visitor?" Valentine asks, raising an eyebrow. "I rather thought you'd be pleased to see him."

For a sick, horrible moment, Magnus expects to see Alec hauled out of the shadows, hands bound and gagged, bruised and battered and bleeding and sagging with exhaustion. His stomach lurches in fear, before he remembers.

Valentine doesn't know about Alec. Nobody knows. Nobody outside of the Downworld society he frequents. Nobody but people he trusts to keep his secret, either out of the goodness of their hearts or out of respect or out of fear. It doesn't really matter which. Only that they do.

Instead, a tall man in a dark grey suit steps out. The chiselled cut of his jawline and the malicious brightness in his eyes makes Magnus flinch, the look horribly reminiscent of someone else that Magnus never wants to see again.

"Magnus Bane," Azazel says, lips turning up at the corners. "Nephew."

Magnus pushes Luke back pointedly, ignoring his strangled noise of protest as swirling, scorching balls of crackling fire leaping to his palms.

"No," Magnus says. "We're not family."

Azazel blinks. "Aren't we? I seem to recall your father being Asmodeus. One of the Princes of Hell. Which, incidentally, is a title that also belongs to me."

"You're a demon."

"Well, yes. And so are you."

Magnus inhales deeply, every muscle in his body tensing. If he lets his magic go now, he's going to bring the whole goddamn tunnel down and bury them all alive. While he wouldn't be too bothered by sacrificing himself to destroy Valentine and Azazel, he's not sure Luke deserves to be collateral damage.
"The difference," Magnus says, coolly, "is that I don't feed off other people's misery. I don't dedicate my life to inflicting pain."

A sly smile makes its way across Azazel's face. "Not deliberately, perhaps."

Fire shoots out of Magnus' palms, snarling through the air and hitting Azazel square in the chest. It wipes the smirk from his lips, and he bars his teeth at Magnus.

Behind him, Magnus can hear the painful cracking of bones and the soft human sounds of warning turn into threatening growls as Luke shifts into his wolf form. Hackles rise as Luke comes to stand beside Magnus, hunched and threatening as he stares down Valentine and Azazel.

Azazel laughs. "Oh, you foolish puppy."

With a lazy flick of his wrist, Azazel sends a near-invisible wave of devastating power towards them. Magnus drops to one knee, turning his side forwards as he raises his forearm. The force of Azazel's magic crashing against his shield nearly bowls him over, but for Luke crouched behind him.

"You're going to bring this place to the ground," Magnus hears Valentine snap. "This isn't the time for making a point, Azazel."

The demon rolls his eyes. "Nephilim, you might be able to chain angels, but you do not control a Prince of Hell. Which you damn well know. Otherwise you wouldn't need this pathetic excuse for a warlock."

"I resent that statement," Magnus calls, waving his fingers teasingly as sparks fly from them. "See, I think I'm a fairly good warlock. I can do, say, this."

Azazel turns towards him just as Magnus fashions a burning stream of fiery scarlet into the shape of an arrow, and sends it shooting through the air.

Azazel's eyes go comically wide as he follows its progress towards him; he lifts his gaze to meet Magnus' right as it embeds itself in his chest, making him freeze.

"Really, Magnus," Azazel growls, "that was very inconsiderate."

"Get down!" Magnus shouts to Luke, and then they're being thrown to the ground as Azazel's explodes, pieces scattering through the tunnel before the disintegrate in the air.

The tunnel shakes ominously as ashes drop to the floor, and Magnus glances up in time to see Valentine disappearing through a side tunnel. There must be a portal set up down there, Magnus thinks. Otherwise he'd never dare go deeper into this network when it could cave in at any moment.

"We need to go," Magnus says, clambering to his feet and shoving at Luke's flank. "Run!"

Adrenaline carries them back the way they came, Magnus' magic floating in front of them to illuminate the ever-growing darkness of the tunnels. They can hear rocks crumbling behind them, blocking any way back. Not that Magnus imagines he would ever want to come back to this stinking, god-forsaken place. His magic hates everything about it so much he's beginning to feel like his lunch is going to make a reappearance.

Magnus throws out a hand to cast a glamour as they break out into the street, panting, and Luke begins to transfigure back into his human form. Behind them, the entrance to the tunnel appears to be stable, but Magnus taps a reminder into his phone to get someone to have a look at it, anyway. He doesn't want any wandering mundanes to come to any undue harm because a warlock and a demon
had a little tiff.

"Well." Luke shakes his head. "That was...unproductive."

"No, it wasn't," Magnus says. "We know for sure that Valentine is using Greater Demons and angels, now. And what Azazel said, about why he needed me..." Magnus purses his lips. "That meant something, too. And all that sludge on the walls and on the floor, that was—"

"That must have been some byproduct of his experiments," Luke says, nodding. "But we didn't take any samples. We've got no way of identifying it."

"We might do," Magnus says. "My magic reacted to it. I can ask around. See if any other warlocks have had similar reactions to anything. Although things like that are often innate to the individual warlock."

Luke quirks an eyebrow. "Like, Alaric has some weird aversion to teriyaki and I'd die for it?"

A laugh forces its way up Magnus' throat, unbidden, and a smile flashes across his face. "Exactly like that."

"Alright. What can I do to help?"

Magnus presses his lips together in consideration for a moment, because there are a million things Luke could do, but they need to prioritise, and they need to delegate. Luke is the alpha of New York's most powerful pack. He's not going to be utilising his full potential running errand jobs.

"How do you feel about negotiating with the Seelies?" Magnus asks.

Luke pulls a face. "Giving me the crap jobs, I see."

"I'm serious. Isabelle and Lydia are trying to get the Seelies to form an allegiance with the Shadowhunters, but we need them to be more transparent with us."

"That word isn't in their vocabulary," Luke says, snorting. "We'd have a better chance convincing the Clave that you're a shining hero."

"Thank you for that vote of confidence, Lucian," Magnus says crisply, and Luke grins at him. "If Valentine has been pulling angels and demons as powerful as Azazel into his ranks, it's going to leave a mark. The Seelies will know about it. And if they don't, they'll have ways to monitor it that they just haven't bothered to use yet because they think it's another irrelevant mortal war."

"Can't the warlocks sense it?" Luke asks. "Especially a demon like Azazel, and angels—I would have thought the Shadowhunters would pick up on some of it, too."

"The Clave can't tell an ass from a face."

He waves a dismissive hand, blue sparks trailing through the air. Luke's eyes don't follow the little shimmer of magic like Alec's always do; Magnus hasn't really thought about Alec's odd little moments of fascination until now. It's sweet. He misses it.

"And the warlocks?" Luke prompts.

"We're fairly solitary creatures in ways the Seelies aren't. And the Seelies are old. Older than most warlocks. I'll ask around, but we'll have more luck if we can persuade the Seelies that Valentine is a genuine threat to them, too."
"Alright. I'll go. But next time, we're sending Raphael."

Magnus tries valiantly not to laugh at that, but he can't help the way his lips twitch up into a grin. "Only if you want to start the war sooner."

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"Magnus!" Catarina sounds horrified on the other end of the line as Magnus rushes around his loft, phone discarded on his bed on speaker, picking up clothes and books and potions as he flits around. "This is a terrible idea!"

"What choice do I have, Cat?"

Magnus picks up a vial of a half-finished potion intended to lift the drinker from a magically induced coma, and frowns. He shouldn't leave that on its own unfinished. That was a mistake he made when he was twenty-three, and he can still remember burning most of his admittedly meagre possessions just to get rid of the smell.

"What choice—?" Catarina makes a frustrated noise in the back of her throat. "Magnus, you're rushing off to pledge your allegiance to Valentine because of some bullshit threat from Camille!"

"It wasn't bullshit. She threatened Alec. She has the motive and she has the means to carry out that threat whenever she likes. What am I supposed to do? I can't let her, or the Clave, touch him."

"And you think Alec would want you to blindside him and just run straight into the arms of the enemy?"

There's a rapid knock on Magnus' door. He glances over, wondering whether he forgot to cancel a client before going on that investigation with Luke, and snaps his fingers to make sure the Chairman doesn't sprint out of the door. He hasn't got time to wait for him to come back.

"With all due respect, Catarina, this was your plan anyway. I have to go."

Ignoring Catarina's continued protests, he hangs up, and darts over to the door to yank it open, fully prepared to tell whichever unfortunate client it is that they'll have to suffer without the unrivalled brilliance of his services today.

But it's not a client standing on the other side of the door.

Alec raises his eyebrows a little when he takes in Magnus' dishevelled appearance, mouth opening and then closing again.

"What are you doing here?" Magnus asks, a little bluntly.


"So why do you need me?"

"Why—?" Alec's expression turns to one of utter bewilderment. "Am I missing something? Have I done something wrong?"

Magnus exhales. "No, just..."

"What? Magnus, we're...partners. We're pooling resources and knowledge on Valentine and the Clave's order on you, and we're working to mend broken bridges between our people, and besides
any of that, you're my boyfriend. I don't understand. Why wouldn't I be here?"

"I know, I know, but--" He sucks in a sharp breath. "Oh, come in. I'm not talking out here."

Alec crosses over the threshold, arms folded as he waits for Magnus to shut the door. On anyone else, Magnus would think that the gesture is an indication of anger; on Alec, it's painfully clear that it's born of concern.

"The source your mother told you about," Magnus says, "the one feeding the Clave information. It's Camille."

Alec's eyes go wide. "What?"

"She approached me earlier today. She's—" He swallows, steadying himself before he lets the word loose between them, because he knows, he knows, that this is going to ruin everything they've managed to build between them. This is going to change Alec's opinion on everything relating to him entirely. "She's going to tell the Clave about my relationship with you, unless I stop seeing you."

For a mere handful of seconds, Alec is entirely silent, expression unchanging as he watches Magnus intently, gaze flickering across Magnus' face, searching.

Then he says, "Let her."

Magnus blinks at him, entirely taken aback. "I'm sorry?"

"I said, let her. So the Clave are going to find out about you, and about us. Lydia and Raj have building a solid case for you for months. And—"

Abruptly, Alec cuts himself off. His lips part, and his gaze flits from Magnus himself to the state of his apartment behind, clothes and potions and glass jars of ingredients strewn everywhere. It's a mess, chaos erupting from every corner.

"What is all this?" Alec asks, gesturing to the scene behind them. "What are you doing?"

"Leaving."


The words strike pain deep into Magnus' heart. He closes his eyes, as though not seeing Alec might erase some of the hurt his care and concern unfailingly manage to inflict, and inhales deeply in an attempt to calm himself.

"Where are you going?"

"To Valentine."

"What?"

It's the first time Magnus has ever heard Alec shout - really shout, not just raise his voice to be heard over the sound of battle - and it makes him wince. There's fear in Alec's voice, fear written across his face, fear clear in every tensed, defensive line of his body.

"It was Catarina's idea," Magnus tells him, quietly but unwaveringly, dropping his gaze to his own hands as he twists a ring around his index finger. "Go to Valentine, battle the Circle from the inside, and use the defeat as leverage against the Clave."
"No." Alec takes a step towards him and reaches down to grasp his hands, stopping Magnus' fidgeting. "No. You don't have to do this. There are other ways."

"There really aren't," Magnus says, shaking his head. He wants to pull away, wants to rip his hands out of Alec's deceptively gentle grip, but he doesn't. He can't bear to. Not yet.

"But the case, Lydia and Raj—"

"I appreciate it," Magnus says, "but whatever the nuances, I've broken at least a hundred Clave laws. They won't care about the intricacies and details. Not now. My best chance is to take down their biggest threat."

"Magnus," Alec whispers, and the heartbreak in his voice makes Magnus look up, staring into the hazel eyes he's come to love so fucking much. "You can't."

"I don't have a choice, darling."

"You do," Alec insists, and squeezes his hands in emphasis. "You always have a choice. We can fight this together. Like Ragnor said—let me help you. Let me—"

"It's different with Camille involved," Magnus tells him, bringing a hand up to brush Alec's hair out of his eyes. He lets his palm linger on Alec's cheek, resting lightly on his jawline. "She'll use this against us. She'll use everything against us. It's not passive anymore. It's active. And if the Clave thinks I'm going to be involved in Valentine's plan, if they've decided that killing me is their top priority, they're not going to pull any punches. I have to do this."

Alec shakes his head vehemently. "You're not on your own, Magnus. You don't have to fight all your battles alone."

"I can't let Camille get to you, Alexander," Magnus tells him, gripping at Alec's hand in earnest. "She'll expose our relationship, and then the Clave will come for you. They'll use your family. They'll hurt the people you love to get to me. I can't let that happen."

"Goddamnit, Magnus!"

Alec draws away, yanking himself from Magnus' touch and leaving Magnus feeling cold. He stalks away, lifting his hands to drag his fingers through his hair, tugging in frustration as he paces up and down in front of Magnus.

"Alec—"

"Valentine wants to eliminate every Downworlder in existence," Alec snaps, turning to face him. "Have you forgotten that?"

"He needs me," Magnus reminds him. "I don't know why, but he does. He's not going to kill me when he still needs me for something."

"And you think whatever this is is going to be good? Nice? Easy?" His jaw clenches, eyes flashing with barely contained rage. "It's going to be heinous. It's going to be horrible. It's going to be utterly immoral."

"I know, but—"

"Valentine is going to kill you!"
The words explode out of Alec like hot, scorching lava spewing from a volcano. His fingers have curled into his palms at his sides, fists clenched so tightly his knuckles have gone noticeably whiter against his already pale skin.

The ferocity behind the words takes Magnus by surprise. The deep-seated care and the fear radiating off of him make him rock back on his heels. He knew that Alec cared, but he didn't realise how much.

"I'm the High Warlock of Brooklyn," he manages, but it only seems to make Alec angrier.

"And you're not invincible. For fuck's sake, Magnus, you don't have to sacrifice yourself."

"I am not sacrificing myself," Magnus snaps at him, and draws himself up to his full height, fixing Alec with a glare. "I'm not invincible, but I am a hell of a lot more powerful than Valentine Morgenstern."

"You told me he's using angels and greater demons," Alec says, voice quivering with fury. "Not even you're more powerful than all the forces of heaven and hell together."

"What do you want me to do then, Alexander?" Magnus demands, lifting his eyebrows. "Do you want me to sit here idly and let Camille expose the fact that I've been corrupting one of the Clave's precious soldiers? That I've been exposing the Head of the New York Institute to all my disgusting warlock diseases? That one of their own, one of their supposed loyal supporters, has been protecting the most wanted criminal in the Downworld? Hm? Do you want me to throw my life away without a fight just because you can't cope with a risk?"

"I want you to fight this in a way that isn't some stupid, borderline suicidal mission," Alec growls. "This is my life on the line! It's me who's going to die if I risk a trial by the Clave now and they find me guilty. You don't get to choose! And it's just as well, because if I let Camille do this you would hate me. You would despise me for letting the Clave hurt the people you love."

Letting out a laugh that's bordering on hysterical, Alec throws his hands up in irate exasperation. "Do you think I just don't give a fuck about you? Is that really what you think, Magnus? Huh? That I just won't care about whether or not you're dead, as long as my family is fine? You think I only care about you when nothing else is at stake? You think this is conditional?"

"Alexander, they're your family. I'm just—"

"You're just what, exactly?"

He's shouting again, hands gesticulating his frustration, and Magnus feels a little helpless in the face of this passion. He doesn't know what to think, what to make of it. He doesn't really understand what Alec is trying to imply—whether he's trying to imply anything, or whether he's just talking out of his ass in his anger.

"Go on," Alec says, dark eyes flashing. "Finish that sentence."

"Fine," Magnus snarls, holding his ground. He won't back down. He's not going to let Alec win this fight. "Fine, I'll finish it. I'm just your warlock boyfriend. I'm your experiment, your walk out of the comfort and security of the revolting world you were raised in. I've known you for six months. This relationship was always going to end in tragedy."

"Then why the hell did you bother with it? Why did you bother with any of this?"
"Because I wanted to be selfish!"

"Then keep being selfish, for fuck's sake!"

"I can't! Don't you see?" Magnus shakes his head, breathing heavily. "It was foolish to think that I could hide behind the loyalty of my people forever. It was even more foolish to expose myself unnecessarily by associating with the Clave's own. Passing the odd Shadowhunter in a bar is one thing, but this, us—it was naïveté, nothing more. And it has to end."

All the burning rage and the righteous fury and the indignant passion seems to bleed out of Alec as Magnus speaks. He stares, suddenly frozen, lips parted and jaw going slack as shock passes through his eyes.

"What?" he asks, voice barely a whisper.

Magnus shakes his head. "I'm sorry, Alexander. But I've been in hiding for two decades. I'm being hunted. You make me forget that. You make me forget anything except you, and how it feels to be with you. And I can't do that. It's not safe. For either of us."

"Magnus." Alec takes half a step forwards, reaching out to touch him, but seems to think better of it partway through—he drops his hand, faltering in his step. "Please don't do this."

"I have to," Magnus tells him, and, however much his heart hurts, however agonising it is to see that look on Alec's face, to know that he's the reason Alec looks so heartbroken, he knows that it's true. He does have to. "This has to end, and I have to go to Valentine, because otherwise Camille is going to turn me over to the Clave to die and ruin everything you love. And I couldn't bear that. We have to battle our own demons."

"You're not battling your own demons," Alec says. "You're battling every demon you possibly can and taking the weight of the world when you don't need to."

Magnus smiles just a little, sadly. "Who does that remind you of?"

"Please."

"I'm not changing my mind, Alexander. I'm sorry." Magnus goes to catch his hand, but stops himself. He shouldn't. "You should go, now."

"Are you kicking me out?"

"If that's the only way you'll stop trying to stop me, then yes," Magnus tells him. "I'm sorry, darling."

Alec's eyes shine with unshed tears as he watches Magnus, shaking his head just once, and the sight makes Magnus' throat tighten.

"I wish you knew how much you mean to people," Alec says, and pauses before he continues. "I wish you knew how much you mean to me."

With that, he turns, hauling open Magnus' front door and slamming it with such force it makes the ground tremble. Magnus stands stock still in his loft, staring at the spot Alexander disappeared from, and, alone, he feels tears slide down his cheeks.
Firstly, I'm so sorry this is so late.

Secondly, please don't kill me yet! As Matt Daddario said, Malec is a ship that's only going up. We'll be exploring both sides of this a little next week, especially regarding Magnus -- because, as I'm sure some of you have noticed, it's a little frantic and irrational in places, in a way that Magnus is characteristically not.

However, and I know I've said this before, it's really important to remember who Magnus is dealing with here - Camille. She's always capable of throwing him into a spin, and she's played on all of his weak spots, and she was once his abuser.

Anyway, I really hope you enjoyed the chapter (at least the Garrobane, if not the end lol!) and I promise, this is not the beginning of angsty, hate-filled horror. I don't subscribe to that.

If you like, come talk to me on Tumblr!

Much love,
Lu <3
Isabelle remembers the first time she realised that her big brother was gay.

She remembers stepping into the training room one day, her newly gifted whip - a present from Jace and Alec for her fifteenth birthday, which she knew the moment she unwrapped it would be something she'd treasure for her entire life - wrapped harmlessly in its bracelet form around her wrist.

The disconcerting sounds of raucous shouting between her parents had driven her from her bedroom earlier in the morning than she would ever normally venture on a Saturday morning, and she'd crept past their tutor towards the training room, more than eager to hit something. Hard.

She'd heard the sounds of Jace and Alec inside, laughing and quipping back and forth, Jace more lightly than Alec, as they sparred, staffs making loud, dull *thwacks* each time they connected.

Leaning against the door after she'd stepped inside, she stopped, observing her brothers, Jace's parabatai rune on clear display where it had been branded permanently onto his torso eighteen months ago. Jace had an unfortunate habit of training shirtless. She was fairly sure he only did it to show off the muscle he'd managed to cultivate, rather than for any practical reason.

"Come on, Alec," Jace said, as he landed a hit to Alec's ribs, making Alec grunt. "Put some effort in."

Alec had spun, stretching up onto the balls of his feet and reaching his staff above his head before he brought it down with both hands, aiming a direct hit to Jace's thighs. For a boy so lanky, so seemingly unsure in his own body, so desperate to fade into the background in general life, his movements were the very definition of grace and elegance in battle, Isabelle thought.

They'd continued, sweat dripping down their skin, Alec's tank saturated and Jace's skin creating its own foul-smelling rivers as they sparred. Neither of them noticed Isabelle standing by the doorway, but she didn't mind. Parabatai got like this, sometimes, especially in the midst of fighting—so caught up in each other that the world outside them seemed to disappear.

Until the sun had risen just enough to shine through the tall stain glass window at the end of the room, and Jace had leapt up to avoid a blow from Alec, and the light had caught on his skin and his hair, highlighting him in liquid gold.
Isabelle remembers the way Alec had seemed to still mid-swing, fingers slacking and muscles losing their coordination, eyes catching on his parabatai. It had been enough for Jace to take advantage of his momentary fumble. Enough for Jace to whack him smartly around the knees, toppling him to the ground and pushing the end of his staff into Alec's chest.

It wasn't the first time Isabelle had noticed Alec's infatuation with Jace. It wasn't the first time she'd realised what it meant—that he was attracted to men.

"I win," Jace had said, smirking, before offering Alec a hand to help him up.

As Alec had clasped Jace's hand and pulled himself up, Isabelle had seen the way he forced his eyes away from Jace's torso, a dead, blank look appearing on his face. She'd seen it before. It was the look of repression—it was the look he wore as armour, erecting barriers between himself, the thoughts he wasn't allowed to have, and the outside world.

She hated that look.

The door to the training room had opened, and a young women had stepped through, long blond hair cascading down her back in waves. She was from Idris, eighteen, and had been sent to New York for a six month placement.

Jace was obsessed with her. Privately, Isabelle was fairly sure they'd had sex, but she didn't voice her thoughts to anyone. It wasn't any of her business. And, regardless, Jace kept up his infuriating slew of compliments and his apparently unending need to impress every women he came across.

Jace had dropped Alec's hand when she stepped through, tossing Alec his staff as he waltzed over to her, running his fingers through his hair and plastering a seductive smirk across his face.

Alec watched Jace cross the floor with emptiness in his eyes. Sometimes, Isabelle looked at him and felt like she was watching a black hole, a swirling mass of self-hatred and self-destructive behaviours eclipsing everything bright and light that could exist in the world.

The girl whispered something to Jace, and he smiled at her before snatching up his t-shirt and walking out, tugging Isabelle's ponytail as he passed her.

"Your parabatai thinks he's the shit, huh?" the girl said to Alec, smiling at him as her eyes flickered up and down him. She was nice, Isabelle had decided fairly quickly, and clever, although a little lacking in physical strength.

Alec shrugged. "He likes to pretend he does."

Isabelle could see how taken aback the comment made the girl, but she wasn't fazed, instead tilting her head to the side as she regarded Alec. "I haven't really had the chance to get to know you, yet. You're the only person here who's actually my age. Fancy grabbing a drink? Tonight?"

Alec had looked at her, then, properly, that same lack of emotion in his eyes, and shook his head minutely. "I have a patrol tonight," he'd said, and dropped the staffs in the rack on his way out of the door.

The girl followed him with her eyes, clearly mystified, and then glanced over at Isabelle. "Did I just get rejected?"

Isabelle's lips curled at one corner in amusement. "Yep."

"First time for everything. He have a girlfriend?"
Isabelle shrugged. "Not that I know of."

And she'd realised, then, that though she'd always assumed Alec looked so utterly depressed, so self-loathing, because he was in love with Jace, it was more than that. It wasn't just that he was in love with Jace, his parabatai—it was that he was in love with Jace, a man, and he would only ever be in love with a man.

He would only ever love someone forbidden. He knew that he was never going to be able to fall in love and love openly, freely, easily. If he loved, he'd have to fight for it.

And there was nothing any of them could do about it.

***

The last few years have been good to Alec, Isabelle knows. He's moved past Jace. He's found happiness in his heart for Jace and Clary's relationship. He's been a little more at ease with himself.

But none so much as he has since meeting Magnus.

Isabelle doesn't think she's ever been more grateful for someone than she has for Magnus. She loves him for everything he's done for her brother. He's ignited a passion in Alec that she's never seen before. He's been the catalyst for change that has given Alec purpose beyond the narrow-minded monotony of routine patrols and missions to keep the Downworld in their supposed place.

Magnus Bane has wiped the remains of that awful, dead look from her brother's eyes, and he's replaced it with fire. Alec has never looked so good, so quietly confident in himself, than he has these past few months.

Love suits him.

Which is why, when she steps into the ops centre to see him lacing up his boots with deft fingers, she stops in her tracks, horror washing across her face.

"Hermano," she says, rushing forwards and laying a hand on his forearm, searching his eyes. "What happened?"

He glances at her, straightening up, and shakes his head. "Nothing I shouldn't have expected."

She narrows her eyes. "Alec," she says sharply. "Don't give me bullshit. Tell me. What happened?"

Alec lets out a bitter, biting laugh. "You mean besides the fact that my mother wants me to murder someone who means the world to me, stop the most beneficial negotiations this Institute has been involved in for years, and marry a woman? Nothing, Izzy. I'm fine."

"Alec." She softens her voice, and Alec drops his eyes to the weapons belt laying on the table, turning to adjust the clasp. "Something else has happened. Those things have been true for months. Has the Clave found out? Are they threatening you?"

"No," he says, and exhales. "No. Everything's fine."

"Alec—"

"He just shut me out, Izzy," he whispers, and turns to her with anguish in his eyes. It's better than the deadness. At least he's letting himself feel. She doesn't think there's anything worse than his teenage habit of trapping everything behind iron bars. "He just started making all this crazy decisions without
even telling me."

Isabelle stares at him in concerned confusion, and takes his hand in hers, pulling him into the corner where people won't keep glancing at them and interrupting them—where there's less of a risk of being overheard.

"What are you talking about?" Isabelle asks, although she knows he means Magnus—she just can't imagine what Magnus, who always seems like such a level-headed person, could possibly have done.

"Someone has been feeding the Clave information about him," Alec says, quietly, "and informing the Clave that Valentine needs him. And— it's a long story, but he knows her. Well. She gave him some ultimatum. Threatened to expose our relationship to the Clave if he didn't end it. And he just— I went to see him, Luke had told me they'd had a run-in with Valentine, I wanted to know that he was okay, and he was packing. Isabelle, he's going to Valentine."

"What?" Isabelle demands, eyes going wide, and it takes a concerted effort not to let herself shout. "Why the hell does he think that's a good idea?"

"He thinks if he can take the Circle down from the inside, it'll give him leverage against the Clave."

Alec shakes his head miserably. "And he's right, it would. But Valentine is going to kill him. We don't know what exactly Valentine needs him for, but Valentine despises Downworlders even more than the Clave. He'll use him and torture him and then he's going to slaughter him and I- I can't let him die, Izzy. I love him. And he's so determined to throw away his own life. He thinks he has to protect everyone. He's sacrificing himself so I don't have to choose between him and you when the Clave finds out."

Isabelle's heart breaks at the tortured, conflicted expression in Alec's face. She remembers swearing to herself, more than once, that she'd do anything to protect Alec and Magnus; that she'd lay down her life for her brother's happiness, just as he would for her.

But now, she doesn't know what she can possibly do. It seems so impossibly hopeless. What can she do against the forces of the Clave, Valentine, heaven and hell combined in a cocktail of dark, filthy magic that epitomises everything Valentine claims he wants to destroy?

"Oh, Alec," she says, and feels tears sting at her eyes. "I'm so sorry."

"I love him," Alec repeats, brokenly, and Isabelle wonders whether it's the first time he's ever said it out loud.

"Have you told him that?" she asks, softly.

Alec shakes his head. "He seems to think that I won't care about what happens to him, as long as my family is safe. How can he not know how much I care about him?"

"He's not psychic, big brother," she reminds him, gently. "If you love him, you have to tell him."

"But he can't feel the same way."

Unimpressed, Isabelle arches an eyebrow. "And why, exactly, is that?"

"Because he's who he is, and I'm just me. You don't expect to stare at the Great Wall of China and have it love you back."

"You idiot," Isabelle says, shaking her head fondly. "Magic and immortality aside, he's as much a
human being as you and I. He's not a god. He's just a man. We both know that he's got a perfectly enormous capacity for love."

Alec looks heartbreakingly uncertain, and Isabelle wants, desperately, to stab everyone who's ever made him feel so self-doubting. Their parents, and the Clave, and every person who's ever enforced the racist, heteronormative social norms of their world and the bullshit, unattainable expectations that Alec is expected to live by.

"But me?"

"Yes," she says. "You."

"You think I should tell him? Even though he just dumped me?"

Isabelle smiles gently. "Especially if he just dumped you."

***

Alec barely has time to think about his sister's words, or the cold spread of horror through his veins at the words - *he just dumped me* - like creeping, scaly fingers running across him.

There's a furious outbreak of noise from the other end of the Ops Centre, and Alec and Isabelle turn simultaneously, alarmed. Alec doesn't make a habit of tolerating this sort of cacophony in his Institute, and he certainly isn't going to start today.

He stalks over, anger and bewilderment spreading through him in equal measures, and pushes past the slack-jawed onlookers, able to see over many of their heads with ease.

In the centre of the circle, Maryse is standing face to face with Raphael and Simon. Raphael is snarling, blinding rage and sheer hatred simmering in his eyes and exploding as syllables tumble from his lips, spitting and hissing like hot coal. He is, Alec realises abruptly, swearing at Maryse in rather vivid Spanish.

He's angled himself slightly in front of Simon, who's watching the two with wide eyes, one hand outstretched towards Raphael, fingers just brushing the back of his jacket.

Alec wonders whether Simon knows—whether he knows that Maryse murdered a man Raphael considered family. He wonders how he didn't see, before, all those months ago when he'd arrested Raphael along with all the other Downworlders at that godforsaken meeting, that there's more than the usual hatred of a Shadowhunter in Raphael Santiago's heart where Maryse is concerned.

"I will not," Maryse says, fingers curled into her palms, jaw clenched, voice trembling with poorly contained rage, "permit the free movement of Downworlders in this Institute. It goes against every rule we have created to keep order."

"You mean to keep us in our place," Raphael sneers. "You've been allowed to get away with this for too long, Shadowhunter. We're fighting back. And there's nothing you can do to stop us. The Downworld is powerful and the Clave needs us."

Maryse's laugh is nearing hysterical. "The Clave needs you? By the Angel, you people wonder why we have to control you! What kind of delusions are you under?"

"There's no delusion."

"I don't care what the hell kind of behaviour you've been getting away with recently, vampire—" she
spits the word like it's disgusting, like merely saying it makes her feel filthy "—but it ends now. With me. Get the hell out of this Institute and take the Daylighter with you. And don't you dare come back here without explicit invitation."

Raphael tips his chin up. "No."

Maryse's eyes flash, and Alec remembers how she'd slapped Raphael across the face, leaving the imprint of a silver ring burnt into his flesh. She'd had a similar look then—but it's tenfold in its intensity, now.

"You reprehensible little—"

"That is enough!"

Alec hasn't reached the front of the congregation yet, but it doesn't matter. At his roar, silence falls, and every head swivels to stare at him. He doesn't know what sort of furious insanity is brewing in his eyes, but some of his colleagues watch him with fear as he moves to stand between his mother and the two men.

"Raphael Santiago is a respected leader in this city, and if he's here, clearly, Mother, someone has allowed him to be. Downworlders can't physically enter Institutes alone. Remember?"

Maryse opens her mouth. "But—"

"No." He cuts her off sharply. "I'm running this Institute. Not you. And if you don't like the way I'm doing it, take it up with the Clave. Have me replaced. But I will not stop in my attempts to make alliances with the Downworld. Is that clear?"

Maryse's lips press into a thin, angry line. "Perfectly."

Alec doesn't look away from her as he says, "Raphael, I think you know where my office is."

"I do. It won't take long." Raphael jerks his chin at Maryse. "Stay the hell away from us."

Alec lowers his voice and leans close to his mother as Simon follows Raphael away from the scene, Shadowhunters moving to let them through.

"This is no different to Maia Roberts coming here when she had to. This is no different to our meeting with Luke. I am going to help unite this Institute with the Downworld. If you want to be on the right side of history, if you want to be a part of how we do it, I value your experience. But I don't value your bigotry."

***

Having given Alec some intricate, official-looking document that had frankly terrified Simon - politics really aren't his thing, thank you - and spent several minutes discussing their alliance, Raphael had dragged Simon out of the Institute.

Simon still hadn't managed to find any answers about Clary. He'd been searching for Isabelle, but he'd found Jace, instead—nobody had heard a word from her since she'd been called back to Idris for her exams earlier than anticipated.

"I hate going there," Raphael mutters, glancing skyward at the dark overhaul of nighttime as they jog down the steps of the Institute. "And I hate seeing her face."
"Same," Simon says honestly, "so you've got my sympathy. I can't imagine seeing...that every time you have to look at her."

"I don't understand how she's managed to breed such reasonable offspring," Raphael says offhandedly, and Simon has to bite down on his tongue to hold in his snort at the word choice. "Although, reasonable, it's all relative, where Shadowhunters are involved."

"Hey, Raphael? I think maybe you should pay a quick visit to Magnus."

Raphael glances over at him in clear surprise, brow furrowing a little, and says, "Why?"

"I was eavesdropping on Isabelle and Alec while you were busy wrecking Maryse. Alec said he got dumped."

"What?" Raphael stops dead, staring at Simon in sheer astonishment. "You must have misheard. Magnus is infatuated with that ridiculously tall boy. I've never seen him so...invested. Not in a healthy way, at least."

Simon shrugs. "That's what Alec said. I wasn't listening, until I heard that. Then I started listening. But it didn't help very much. I didn't get any context."

"Moron," Raphael says, sighing, and it takes Simon a moment to realise that he means Magnus, not him. "Always pushing away the good things and clinging onto the bad. Alright. Brooklyn it is."

***

Magnus jolts in surprise at the sound of his front door being thrown open so hard the handle cracks against the plaster. A frown crosses his face. There are only two people in the world who can walk into his loft unannounced, and he's fairly sure that Catarina—

"What in the name of Lilith is going on?" Raphael demands, as Simon hastily shuts the door behind him, casting a guilty look at the cracked plaster and shifting to stand in front of it as though he thinks Magnus is going to accuse him of having caused the damage.

Magnus raises an eyebrow. "I don't know, Raphael, you tell me. I was having a perfectly fine evening before I was so rudely interrupted."

"Bullshit," Raphael snaps, and he stalks forward to pluck the book out of Magnus' hand and toss it onto the sofa.

It's really rather unfair, Magnus thinks. Raphael could at least be appreciative of the fact that he's channelling his heartbreak into something productive - if admittedly, as Alec had pointed out, unfortunately borderline suicidal - rather than drowning it in whiskey.

Although the mere thought of Alec makes him rather eager to throw himself into the enemy's jaws right this second, just for a bit of light relief from the emotional torment raging inside him.

"Is it?" Magnus asks, arching an eyebrow. "Funny, I seem to recall you not being here for the majority of my perfectly fine evening, so I'd appreciate it if you'd keep your judginess to yourself."

"Judginess is not a word," Raphael says, rolling his eyes, "and you broke up with your boyfriend, so don't try to bluff your way out of this. I've just had to have a conversation with Maryse Lightwood. At least be honest."

Raphael seems to deflate as he speaks, and it only serves to make Magnus' heart hurt more. He
would do anything - anything in the world - to go back in time and fix that awful, awful day. He'd sacrifice everything he has to bring Ragnor back and erase that terrible look from Raphael's face.

Behind him, Magnus sees worry bright in Simon's eyes, and he takes a half step forwards, reaching out to touch Raphael's elbow lightly. Raphael doesn't flinch away. The way his shoulders relax imperceptibly speaks volumes to his feelings for Simon.

"It couldn't continue," Magnus says. "Camille is using it to threaten us. She's threatening to expose our relationship to the Clave if we don't end it."

Raphael looks at him blankly. "And what on earth is to stop her exposing your relationship to the Clave just because you break up?"

Magnus opens his mouth—and then abruptly closes it again. Because, fuck, he's done exactly what he knows he never should. He's trusted Camille. He's trusted her to keep her word. He's let her manipulate him.

And in doing so, he's ruined the best thing to happen to him for more than a century.

"But- Valentine—"

"Magnus, come on." Raphael shakes his head, and moves to fold his arms across his chest. "I like Catarina's plan about Valentine, although I don't think you sound go in alone. But you can't give into Camille. You can't give her power. Certainly not over your heart."

Magnus turns, closing his eyes. "Oh, god, I'm such an idiot."

"No, you're trying to fight a war on two fronts and suddenly being attacked by someone who nearly killed you before," Raphael says sharply. "You don't have to be infallible all the time. You're allowed to make mistakes. And you're allowed to need help, sometimes. We both know you can't battle the Clave and Valentine and Camille all on your own. Let us help you. Let Alec help you."

"I was, I was, I just— She threw me. I panicked."

"I know." Raphael's voice is soft. "She ruined you. That doesn't lend towards you making logical decisions when she's threatening not just you, but also someone you love. I understand. And if you explain, Alec will understand, too. He's on our side, Magnus. He's on your side."

Magnus shakes his head. "He won't want to talk to me. Not after our argument, and after I broke up with him. And there's no reason not to go to Valentine, now I've—"

"Yes, goddamnit, there is."

When Magnus glances back at Raphael, his friend is staring at him with cold rage in his eyes, indignation written into the downward turn of his lips.

"If Camille is going to tell the Clave about my location, they're still going to come to execute me," Magnus says, softly. "I still have to go."

"No. You don't have to go until there's a Shadowhunter knocking on your door screaming for your blood. And I don't care whether that's tomorrow or next year. Until then, you buy yourself some time. Prepare a little before you walk straight into the clutches of a man who wants to kill you. Make a plan. Gather some intelligence. And make up with your fucking boyfriend. I'm not dealing with a miserable you for the next five years."
Alec starts awake at the sound of a rapid succession of knocks on his door. His eyes shoot open, hand going immediately to the seraph blade tucked behind the headboard of his bed, and he sits up straight, the glow of the blade lighting up the room.

Sheets pool around his hips, the night air cool against his bare torso despite how warm it's been outside for the last month. It's never warm in the Institute. The only time the Institute ever exudes the warmth of home is when they light the fire in the living room tucked away behind the kitchen in the frozen months of winter.

"Alec?" Another knock. "Alec?"

Sleep bleeds out of him and he relaxes at the sound of Max's voice, and he puts his seraph blade down, reaching over to flick on the lamp by his bed.

He stands, scrubbing at his eyes as he pads across the floor to the door. He misses the sensation of fluffy rugs beneath his bare feet, wants to curl his toes into it and feel like he's living somewhere, not just occupying space.

Or maybe he just misses Magnus. He saw him a mere few hours ago, but the thought of his name is enough to make his heart twist and hurt and shatter all over again.

Alec pushes away the thoughts, and instead pulls open his bedroom door to reveal Max standing on the other side, wearing a hoodie Isabelle bought him for Christmas and a pair of shorts. He looks distinctly non-sleepy, considering it's gone two o'clock in the morning.

"Hey," Alec says, frowning at him a little. "What's going on?"

"I couldn't sleep," Max says, and Alec nearly smiles—would have smiled, if his chest didn't feel so tight with the lingering pain of what had happened at Magnus' loft.

"Come on, then," he says, gesturing Max inside with a jerk of his chin. He clicks the door shut and flops down on his bed, Max crawling onto the other side and sighing.

Alec wonders whether there'll ever be a time when they don't let themselves do this. Once his mother stopped tolerating them climbing into her and Robert's bed - which was past the age of five - they'd just started going to each other's. Alec still curls up on Jace's floor, sometimes, when he just can't shut his brain off. Or, if he's fancying a little more luxury, Isabelle's. Sometimes they fall asleep in each other's beds after spending hours talking. Sometimes it's so cold they huddle together for warmth.

And it might feel like it's been a while since Max wanted to combat the vast loneliness of the Institute by finding comfort in Alec's room, but, apparently, it's still on the table.

"Everything okay?" Alec asks, reaching down to tug the sheets around their legs as he lays his head on his pillow, turning sideways so he can see his brother.

"Yeah," Max says, quietly, eyes following his fingers as he picks absently at the fraying edge of Alec's sheets.

He wonders, fleetingly, what Magnus would say if he saw the state of them—and then immediately regrets it for the stabbing, shooting sensation that rockets through him.

"Really yeah or pretend yeah?"
Max shrugs. "Both, I guess. There's nothing wrong, but I feel like there's so much going on that I don't know about."

"There is," Alec says, as gently as he can. "And I know you want to know everything, but you've never been on a mission, and you're not fully trained yet. But we - Jace and Izzy and I - would never keep something genuinely important from you, the intricacies of politics aside."

Max's mouth twists downwards at that, and he glances up at Alec. "Really."

"Yes," Alec says, a frown taking over his face and he racks his brains in an attempt to come up with something he hasn't told Max that he should have, "really."

"So being in love with someone isn't important?" Max asks, raising his eyebrows. Alec opens his mouth to reply—and then stops, abruptly, words failing him.

"Pardon?"

"You," Max says. "You're in love with someone. I was there when you had that conversation about how you know whether or not you're in love with someone, remember?"

"Of course, but—"

"You were talking about Magnus," Max says, "weren't you?"

"Shh!" Alec's eyes go wide. "Max, be careful! What if someone hears you say that?"

Max rolls his eyes. "They won't. The only person anywhere near us is Jace, and he's snoring like a warthog."

For a moment that seems to stretch out, Alec just looks at his brother, wondering when he grew up from the tiny, ugly little baby that Alec held at eleven years old and swore to protect with his life. He wonders why it's taken him this long to realise it.

"Yes," Alec tells him, exhaling. "Yes, that's who I was talking about. But you can't tell anyone, Max."

"I know." Max rolls his eyes again. "I'm not stupid. I won't tell anyone. I'm just... I don't understand why you didn't tell me. When you took me to him to be healed."

"Because we weren't dating, then," Alec says, "and we're not now, either."

"What?" Max's eyes go abruptly wide. "Why? What happened?"

Alec shrugs a little. "He broke up with me. Politics."

"That's bullshit. You don't break up with someone you love just because of politics."

"It's a little bit more complicated than tax returns and Downworld territories," Alec says, smiling sadly. "He made his choice. I respect it, because I respect him. I respect that he wants space. I'm not going to stop...trying, I'm not going to stop caring, but it is what it is. I can't make his decisions for him."

"That's boring, but whatever," Max says. "But if you love him, you should tell him, even if he broke up with you. Especially if he broke up with you because of politics, not you."
"You know, that's exactly what Isabelle said."

"I take it back. You should never speak to him again."

Alec laughs, and Max grins, and, for just a moment as Alec wraps his arm loosely around Max’s shoulders and ruffles his hair only to get shoved lightly in the face in return, everything feels right with the world.

Everything except the gaping, painful hole in his chest where Magnus Bane used to be.

Chapter End Notes

Just- just stay with me, lol. Have faith.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter (especially those of you who are as masochistic as me and love a bit of angst) and let me know what you thought!

There might not be an update next week, because I want to get some Christmas things out (I'm posting some short Christmas prompts on my Tumblr -- you can find them in the writing tag) so FWW will be back in two weeks, most likely!

Merry Christmas (or happy holidays, if you don't celebrate) and much love,
Lu <3
Catbird

Chapter Summary

In which Chairman Meow is totally trying to play matchmaker, Alec and Magnus have a brief moment of misunderstanding, and communication is the writer's kink...

Chapter Notes

I referred to myself in the third person in the chapter summary, I hate myself, do excuse me while I go rethink my life...

Anyway! The catbird: yes, obviously, a token to Chairman Meow (fun fact, catbirds are a group of songbirds, named as such because their calls apparently sound like a cat) and also a symbol of changing perspectives... Which isn't a reference to Malec's relationship, I'm afraid...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even in the darkening hours of the evening, it's warm outside Magnus' apartment. Alec leans against the outside wall, tilting his head back as he watches the soft wisps of cloud floating overhead, the shadows of birds flitting through the dusk drawing his gaze.

He texted Magnus hours ago to tell him that he'd like to talk—and Magnus had agreed, letting him know what time he was finishing up his meetings and clients for the day.

According to that text, Magnus should have been home an hour ago. Alec is still sitting on his ass alone, waiting, but he finds that he doesn't really mind. He knows Magnus wouldn't be standing him up unless something had happened—he trusts Magnus; trusts that he isn't that immature.

Besides which, it's giving him time to get his thoughts in order. He loves Magnus. Has for a while. And he doesn't want to lose him. He especially doesn't want him to go to fucking Valentine. Not now. Not until he has absolutely no other choice. Not until the Clave is facing him down and holding a blade to his throat.

Because only then, Alec thinks, would Valentine ever really buy that Magnus' allegiances have changed. The man isn't stupid.

Well. He is. But not in that way.

"I don't think you're supposed to be out here, buddy," Alec says, smiling as a familiar furry head nudges at his hand in a clear demand attention. "You here to keep me company?"

Chairman Meows looks up at him as though he's completely stupid, and leaps lightly onto his thigh, paws pressing into the material of his pants before the cat settles, ignoring Alec in favour of licking at his paws and cleaning his face. He doesn't seem to mind Alec stroking lightly between his ears.
His gaze flickers up, and he sees a tall, broad form striding down the street. The figure is filled with the confidence, the self-assurance, the easy grace, that Alec is so familiar with, and so very attracted to.

But something deep in his eyes looks tired, resigned.

Magnus’ eyes meet his, and Alec sees the moment Magnus registers what's in front of him, expression switching from blank to surprised to guarded, eyes flashing from soft glamoured brown to the swirling molten gold of his cat eyes.

"Hey," Alec says softly. He picks the Chairman up carefully in one hand, thankful when the cat doesn't seem at all bothered and merely uses Alec's bicep as a footrest while he continues licking at his paw, and scrambles to his feet somewhat inelegantly. "I can go, if you like. I, um." Fucking hell, what's wrong with him? "We can...talk some other time."

"No." Magnus shakes his head. "You waited all this time. Come in."

Alec follows Magnus up to his loft obediently, the Chairman curled in his arms. Magnus makes no move to take his cat back. Neither does he blink when Alec kisses the top of Chairman Meow's head before setting him down in the safety of the loft.

Something in Alec expects Magnus to head over to his drinks cabinet and pour himself a whiskey, but he doesn't. Instead, he magics off his boots, drops his jacket on an armchair, and collapses onto the sofa, letting his head fall back against the cushions with a sigh. Tension bleeds out of his shoulders visibly. Alec is hit by the crippling need to go over there and pull him into a hug.

"Did something happen?" Alec asks, a little hesitantly.

"I know a mundane women who's had two warlock children," Magnus says, eyes closed as he speaks.

Alec stays standing in the hallway, desperate to join him but uncertain. He doesn't want to overstep any boundaries. They're not dating anymore. He doesn't have the privilege of being close to Magnus anymore. He doesn't know whether Magnus would welcome his presence, or merely despise it.

"They're twins," Magnus continues, "which is particularly unusual, for warlocks. A girl and a boy. She came looking for someone to help her when she realised that they weren't ordinary mundanes. She was desperate to do right by them. She's lovely. They've just turned four. The boy is sick." He pauses a little. "Really sick."

"Oh, god," Alec says, genuinely upset at the thought. "That's horrible. Can you help him?"

"I tried," Magnus says. "I don't know how much good it did. I've got no idea what it is and I've never seen anything like it. There isn't much that can make a warlock this sick."

"You can only do your best," Alec tells him, taking a half step towards him. "And that's all that you ever do."

"My best isn't good enough. Not this time."

There's silence between them, and Alec can't help wondering whether Magnus is really talking about his client, or whether he's talking about something else entirely.

"Anyway," Magnus sits up, plastering a small, business-polite smile across his face as he turns to look at Alec. He gestures to a chair across from him. "Take a seat."
Alec sits, eyes darting across to the Chairman, who's curled up on his own armchair as though sleeping, yet watching them with large, suspicious eyes.

"What can I do for you?" Magnus asks, snapping his fingers. A chequebook appears on the sofa beside him, and Alec frowns. What the hell is going on?

"I—" Alec tries to drag his eyes away from the chequebook, but it seems so bizarre that he can't. "I just—"

Magnus arches an eyebrow. "I presumed you needed to talk about business. Ask for a favour. Discuss something that concerns the Downworld."

"What?" Alec pulls a face at him. "No, Magnus. If I wanted to talk business I would have called you."

Magnus' carefully constructed expression falters, shards of vulnerability and uncertainty appearing beneath the mask of civil pleasantries and forced charm. But there's strength, defiance, in the way his fingers drum across the top of his chequebook and the lift of his chin.

"Then why are you here?" Magnus asks, carefully neutral.

Alec huffs out a laugh of disbelief. "Because you told me last night that we're done and you're going to entrust your life into the hands of Valentine, because you want to protect the Downworld and my family and, apparently, everyone in the world except yourself."

Irritation flashes across Magnus' face. "I can look after myself, Shadowhunter."

"I know." Alec softens his voice, forces himself to remain calm even as desperation and fear and love clash and war in his heart until his chest hurts. "I know you can, Magnus, but you don't have to. Even the most powerful warlock in America is allowed to want help, sometimes. And whatever Camille threatened, whatever she's going to do, to me or to the Downworld, nothing you can do will stop her. Certainly not just breaking up with me."

Magnus exhales. "I know. Raphael pointed that out to me last night. The only way to stop her is to fight Valentine, because then her services to the Clave are rendered invalid and the Downworld Council will be able to get to her. But I still don't understand why you're here. I broke up with you."

"I was worried about you, for Raziel's sake!"

The words explode out of him in a rush of fear and care and anger, and they seem to shock Magnus into silence. He stares across at Alec with wide eyes, lips slightly parted.

Restless, Alec stands up and crosses the distance between them, dropping to his knees on the soft rug in front of Magnus.

He's suddenly and abruptly uncaring of the consequences. He can't hold any of this inside himself any longer. He has to say it. He's spent the last twenty-two years repressing the very essence of who he is, beyond merely his sexuality, and Magnus might be the one person in the world he feels he can be truly and entirely and honestly himself around.

So he's not going to suppress this any longer. He's got nothing to lose. Magnus has already broken up with him—there's nothing worse that can come of this now.

"Magnus," he says, and reaches out to catch one of Magnus' hands, shifting to tangle their fingers together. A soft, strangled noise comes from the back of Magnus' throat; it makes Alec's heart clench.
"My job comes with the inescapable risk of early death. But I have never been so terrified as I was when you told me you were going to Valentine with no plan and no back-up and limited intel. And all because Camille threatened to get to you, to get to the Downworld, by using me."

"I get it," Magnus says, an edge to his voice, as though he's used to having to throw up defences and find excuses to protect himself. Alec wants to soothe it away. "She threw me. She always throws me. I don't have many weaknesses, but she's one of them. I was trusting her without even realising it, and I get it, I was being stupid, and I completely overreacted, and I was being illogical and I was letting my emotions rule me, and I'm so sorry, but—"

"I understand," Alec says, and, for just a moment, he thinks the words make Magnus' eyes go misty-soft. But then Magnus blinks, and Alec thinks he must have been mistaken. "I do. She makes you vulnerable because you have a horrible history. There are some people in the world who just do. I understand, although maybe we should have talked instead of shouting at each other. I'm sorry for that. But you... What you said..."

Magnus' lips twist unhappily. "Which bit?"

"You told me I'd despise you for letting the Clave hurt the people I love if you didn't do this," Alec says, and he tightens his grip on Magnus' hand involuntarily as he shakes his head.

"You would." Magnus' voice is quiet. "And I hate that I don't have any control over this. I hate that I can't protect you and your family in the way I want to."

"You really don't know, do you?" Alec asks, heart breaking. "Do you really think I'd be okay with my family being protected if it meant putting you in danger?"

"They're your family, Alec. Anybody would want to protect their family."

"You said that yesterday. And then you said you were just my warlock boyfriend." He feels his lips curl in disgust at the words. "If you really think that, I've been doing something very, very wrong."

Magnus rolls his eyes. "You know I didn't mean it like that. I was upset and I was being self-deprecating and I was tossing out words that were designed to hurt in anger, and I'm sorry. For all of it. I know you care about me. But your family is so important to you."

"I'm sorry too. But Magnus, all the people I love are important to me."

"Exactly," Magnus says, nodding, as though Alec is just reaffirming his logic, adding evidence to whatever pile he thinks he already has, and Alec wants to scream at him. "And your relationship with me is endangering them."

"Yeah, maybe," Alec says, shrugging as he lets out a slightly hysterical little laugh.

A frown flits across Magnus' face. "Then why—?"

"Because I love you!"

Alec searches Magnus’ eyes desperately as they go wide, pupils blowing and his jaw slackening and his lips parting. Every inch of him is frozen, the very picture of shock. By the Angel, how could Magnus possibly not know?

"I love you, Magnus," Alec says again, more softly. He feels like a weight has been cut off his heart as he says the words again, meaning them perhaps more than anything he's ever said before. "I love you, and I would fight the entire Clave with my bare hands if it meant keeping you safe."
"Alexander," Magnus whispers, and this time, there's no mistaking the tears that spring to his eyes. Fingers clutch at Alec's. "Say it again."

Alec can barely breath, chest aching and painful and heart saturated with feeling, but he pours it into the words as he lets them loose between them, throat going tight. "I love you."

"Oh, god," Magnus breathes, and he slides off the sofa to fall to his knees in front of Alec, wrapping his arms around his shoulders and burying his face in his neck as he says, "I love you too."

And Alec closes his arms around Magnus' waist, sinking into the embrace and mirroring Magnus' position, tucking his nose against the throbbing, fluttering pulse in his neck, breaths heavy and aching.

"Did you really not know?" Alec asks, the words barely disturbing the air as he murmurs them into Magnus' skin.

Magnus shakes his head. "I hoped. But I didn't let myself believe."

"I should have told you."

"Me too," Magnus says, kissing his neck, and, between one blink and the next, Alec's world goes blurry. He closes his eyes and presses closer.

They stay like that for a long, silent moment, wrapped in each other's arms on the floor, kneeling together, heartbeats thudding in synch, pressed close enough for Alec to feel the thump-thump of Magnus' heart against his chest.

"Promise me," Alec says lowly, "that you won't go to Valentine without a plan. Please. And promise me that we'll talk, in the future, not just...yell at each other."

"I promise I will do my best," Magnus says.

"I suppose that's all I can ask for."

Magnus pulls back from his embrace so he can look Alec in the eye, and smiles a little, hands lingering on his forearms. "I think it might be, angel."

Alec inhales slowly, eyes flitting down to Magnus' lips involuntarily. "There might be one more thing I could ask for."

Magnus' lips quirk up temptingly. "Oh?"

"Yeah." Alec licks his lower lip, and fixes his eyes on Magnus'. By the Angel, he never wants to be without those fucking eyes. "Can I kiss you?"

"No," Magnus says, and leans forward to kiss him, sealing their lips together with a hand on Alec's cheek.

Something aching and beautiful unfurls in Alec's chest, and he presses closer, lifting a hand to Magnus' neck, tilting his head to kiss him better. It's so beautiful it hurts.

"Are you busy tonight?" Alec asks when they break apart just a hairsbreadth, just enough to breathe, because the kiss might have been soft, slow, an expression of love rather than desire, but Alec is breathless, struggling to take in enough air to breathe.

"Yes," Magnus tells him, leaning in to kiss the corner of his lips, "but you can stay anyway. If you
want to. My cat likes having you around."

Alec smiles against Magnus' cheek. "What about my boyfriend? Does he like having me around?"

He feels Magnus' heart thud in double-time for a moment, before it calms. "I don't know. Maybe you should ask him."

Alec huffs out a laugh, tilting his head up to brush his lips against Magnus' hairline. "I thought I was."

"Mmm. Yeah. He likes having you around. Especially if you make him coffee. You're pretty good at that."

"How about I make you dinner as well as coffee? Have you eaten today?"

Magnus shrugs, quirking an all-too-knowing eyebrow at him. "Have you?"

"Fair," Alec says, grinning a little. "So. Stir fry?"

"That sounds amazing," Magnus says, "but I don't actually have any food in my house. Except granola bars. I think. Oh, and cat food, of course."

Alec rolls his eyes fondly. "I'll go and buy some, then."

"Haven't you got things that you're supposed to be doing?"

Alec scoffs. "Do you have any idea how pleased my mother was when I asked her to do some reports for me? I think she's bored out of her mind. Or she thinks I'm up to something that she'll actually approve of. She keeps giving me funny looks."

"Hm. Let's not talk about your mother, darling. I don't have much love for her."

"I know," Alec says quickly. "So. Stir fry? Anything else you want me to get?"

"In my bed for frolicking and cuddles?" Magnus suggests, raising an eyebrow.

Alec laughs, easing himself out of Magnus' loose grip to stand. His sto match twists pleasantly at how wonderfully easy it is to slip back into this. Honesty is healing. "Maybe later."

Magnus' smile doesn't slip from his face as he gazes up at him and says, "I love you."

The words make Alec's heart turn over. "I love you too."

***

The sound of sizzling chicken coated in spices and drowning in bronzed vegetables drifts towards Magnus from the kitchen as he opens his office door. Alec is stirring food around a frying pan, moving around Magnus' kitchen with a bizarre sort of ease. It reminds Magnus of the morning, long ago, when he'd awoken to the smell of French toast and coffee, Alec having returned to his loft to check on him after a total magic depletion.

He didn't think he'd ever get to see this. He'd pushed Alec away, and he hadn't expected to get him back. He certainly hadn't expected Alec to come to him, fighting for Magnus, determined to get this back—because Alec loves him.

Just the thought is enough to make his heart turn over.
The buzzer sounds again. Magnus tears his eyes away from Alec, forcing himself to focus, and strides over to haul the door open.

"Bonjour, Jade," he says, to the mundane woman standing beyond the threshold, a little boy in her arms and a little girl clutching at her hand, wide-eyed and frightened. The girl has wings curling out of her back, small, sleek black with shimmers of bright turquoise. The boy's wings are limp, bare, and, as Magnus watches, another feather flutters to the floor.

"Entrez, s'il vous plaît," he says, gesturing them in.

"Merci, Magnus," Jade says, ushering her daughter in. Magnus can see the tension drain out of the woman's shoulders as he shuts the door behind them, exhaustion taking its place as her posture seems to slump.

Magnus tells them to make themselves comfortable while he gathers some things from his office. Alexander's words, earlier, have given him a renewed sense of vigour. He's going to help this boy. No matter how long it takes, no matter how hard it is, he's going to help him.

His best? Psh. He's the best there is. He can do better than whatever pitiful best he'd practised earlier.

"Magnus!" he hears Jade gasp, horror and fear clear in her voice.

He darts out of his office, rushing back into his living room to see Jade and her daughter staring across the room with wide, terrified eyes from their position on the sofa. Jade is clutching her son close, knuckles turning white.

Magnus follows their gaze to see Alexander standing in the doorway to the kitchen, eyes nearly as wide as theirs. He has his hands up, palms forwards in surrender.

To Magnus, he looks about as threatening as a Labrador. His feet are bare against the kitchen tiles, the sleeves of his t-shirt pushed up to his elbows, hair in gorgeous disarray with remnants of vegetables he's clearly just been chopping visible on his fingertips.

To Jade and her daughter, of course, he looks like a killer.

Alec turns his gaze to Magnus pleadingly. "I didn't do anything. I didn't mean to—"

"I know you didn't," Magnus tells him, because he doesn't need an explanation to know that Alexander would never hurt innocent, defenceless people, and moves towards Jade. "You don't have to be frightened. Alec won't hurt you."

"He's a Shadowhunter," Jade protests, the words thick with her accent. "You're the one who told me to be wary of Shadowhunters. You're the one who told me they're not to be trusted. Especially around my children."

"As a general rule, they're not," Magnus says gently. "But Alec is. He runs the New York Institute. He's my lover. I promise, you can trust him. In fact, if you ever run into trouble with Shadowhunters, you tell them that the only one you'll talk to is him."

"If he hurts my children—"

They're interrupted by the Chairman, who purrs loudly enough to cut Jade off, rubbing himself against Alec's leg. Magnus smiles a little.

"Mama," the little girl says, eyes lighting up. "Kitty."
And, before Jade has a chance to stop her, she's bounding up and running towards the Chairman, hands outstretched. She drops down by him, apparently uncaring of the impossibly tall Shadowhunter towering above her a mere few inches away, and strokes gently between the Chairman's ears. The Chairman turns away from Alexander to sniff suspiciously at the girl, before permitting her to fuss over him. Above them, Alec's look of panic is slowly shifting into one of fondness.

Huh. Magnus hadn't realised that Alec liked kids.

"He won't hurt her?" Jade asks, looking at Magnus uncertainly as Alec crouches down beside the little girl, smiling until the corners of his eyes crinkle, and asks her what her name is. He doesn't go to touch her, nor does he stare at her wings, but he drops his hand to scratch beneath the Chairman's chin with her.

"No," Magnus assures her, the sight of Alec making the little warlock girl giggle warming his heart. Change is founded on the tiny, inconsequential moments—like a once-indoctrinated Shadowhunter sharing such an ordinary moment with a little girl who has wings sprouting from her back and magic lurking beneath her skin. "No, he won't."

***

Watching Magnus heal the little boy reminds Alec, painfully, of watching Magnus heal Max. He finishes cooking while Magnus works, attempting to entertain the girl with silly conversation and the cat, all the while wondering how they're ever going to bridge the gap between the Shadowhunters and the Downworlders if even a mundane holds such fear of Shadowhunters hurting her warlock children.

A ragged gasp comes from the boy, and Alec glances over to see that some colour has returned to his face. Tears are running down the mundane woman's face, and she throws her arms around Magnus, stumbling over words of thanks in French.

Magnus embraces her gently, the curve of his hand around her back saturated with kindness that seemed to Alec, all those months ago, so at odds with the raw, ruthless power they can wield. He says something to her, lowly, and she sobs out a laugh, before releasing him to turn back to her son.

The woman calls her daughter over a moment later. Alec decides to keep his distance while Magnus shows them out. He doesn't particularly want a repeat of earlier. He's never been so horrified as he was then, when a mother had stared at him in abject horror because she truly believed he would hurt her children.

But, as he sees Magnus opening the door out of the corner of his eye, there's a blur of colour, and something barrels into his legs. He glances down at the little girl with her arms wrapped around his legs; a smile tugs at his lips.

"Au revoir, Marianne," he tells her, touching her hair gently, and she shoots him a shy smile, before running back out to her mother.

"Merci, Monsieur," Jade says from the doorway, watching him with a guarded expression in her eyes.

He inclines his head. "Bonne nuit, Madame."

***

A comfortable silence falls between them as they sit across the while marble island in Magnus'
kitchen, stir fry served up in china wear that Alec is sure is worth more than his entire month's salary. Not that that would be particularly difficult—Shadowhunter salaries are notoriously terrible.

"That was nice," Magnus says, and, for a moment, Alec thinks he's complimenting the food again - and, frankly, the moan Magnus had let out when he'd tasted it had been more than enough to let Alec know that it was satisfactory. But then Magnus adds, "What you did earlier, with Jade's daughter."

"All I did was talk to her," Alec says, shrugging a little. "I didn't think she should have had to sit there and watch a stranger heal her sick brother. She was only a little girl. I hated it, and I'm an adult and knew you."

"Like I said, it was good of you," Magnus says, smiling across at him. "Especially after Jade's reaction to you."

Alec shrugs again. "I wanted her to know that I would never hurt a child. Ever."

"You have to forgive her." Magnus' smile has dropped away, and he looks infinitely sad. "She's been through a lot, with two warlock children. I have the utmost respect for her for keeping them and for seeking out help rather than just abandoning them."

"I don't blame her. I understand that my people haven't really been very kind to Downworlders. Particularly warlock children." He nods lightly at Magnus. "Case in point. Although it's really sad that not very much has changed since then. It's even sadder that I'd never really thought about it from the Downworld's perspective."

Magnus sets his fork down and reaches across the table, bypassing their wine glasses and the candle Alec had set in the middle of the countertop in a fit of sappy romanticisms to reach for Alec's hand. Without thought, Alec stretches his fingers out to curl them around Magnus'. The touch feels like the candlelight flickering between them: soft, fluttering, warm, reassuring.

It feels like the comfort of home, Alec realises, abruptly. It feels like tossing an arm around Jace's shoulders or pressing his cheek to Isabelle's hair or crouching down to wrap Max in a hug.

"I know that everything is on the verge of imploding," Magnus says, running his thumb along Alec's knuckle, "but, just for tonight, can we pretend that everything is normal? Can we pretend to be a normal couple without the fate of the world hanging over us?"

"Yeah," Alec agrees, nodding. He squeezes Magnus' hand lightly. "Yeah, that sounds wonderful."

Magnus smiles at him, and brings his hand up to press a kiss to the back of it. If Alec were standing, it would have made his knees weak.

They don't say anything more, but Magnus snaps his fingers to make some soft music that Alec doesn't recognise bleed through the loft. Neither of them relinquish their hold on the other as they continue eating in silence.

***

Magnus is laughing against Alec's mouth as they stumble through Magnus' open bedroom door, bashing into the frame as they try to manoeuvre their way towards the bed - or, at least, Magnus has presumed that that's their intended destination - without breaking contact with each other.

"Ow," Alec says, but he's smiling against Magnus' lips, chest shaking against Magnus'. "Door frames are hard. Who knew?"
"Really graceful people who bash into them?" Magnus suggests as he tries to kiss at Alec's neck, only half succeeding.

"Shut up," Alec breathes, lips seeking out Magnus' as they tumble onto the soft mattress, pillows falling everywhere at the impact.

Magnus hovers over Alec as they kiss, slow and lazy and languid as he runs his fingers through Alec's hair, one of Alec's hands cupped around the back of his neck and the other running up and down his back, holding him close.

"Can we get rid of some clothes?" Magnus asks, whispering the words hotly against Alec's ear.

"We can get rid of all of them," Alec says, and Magnus pulls back to look at him. Alec nods in confirmation.

It feels like a sacred ritual, hands tracing reverent patterns into skin as they peel layers off of each other, taking the time to take in bare skin and muscle and scars. Magnus feels like he's uncovering something divine; he feels like more than divinity, with the way Alec is touching him, gazing at him, as though he's the single most precious thing in the universe.

With his hands skimming Alec's hips, Magnus can relate.

Magnus latches his mouth onto Alec's collarbone, descending across his chest and the defined lines of his torso, fingers teasing in the scattered dark hair, goatee snagging at his skin. Alec throws his head back and gasps at the sensation, and Magnus can't help but smile.

"Ready?" Magnus asks, hooking his fingers into the waistband of Alec's boxers on either side of his hips, pushing himself up on one elbow.

The look Alec sends Magnus is one of such unreserved trust that Magnus has to reign in his gut instinct to smother the man in kisses. His chest tightens, and he realises that this is what he's been missing for the last century. This feeling of requited, unconditional love that feels on the cusp of transcending friendship and family.

Which seems ridiculous, when they've known each other for less than a year.

And hated each other for at least the first month of their acquaintance.

"Yeah," Alec says, and lifts his hips up to help Magnus.

Magnus flings Alec's underwear across the room dramatically, making Alec's lips twitch, and leans forward to cover his boyfriend's lips with his own. His fingers curl in Alec's hair once again as they kiss, Magnus' rings catching as he sifts his fingers through unkempt strands.

"Can I?" Alec breathes, tracing a finger along the waistband of Magnus' briefs as Magnus ducks his head to kiss along Alec's jaw.

"Mmhm."

When they're entirely bare to each other, they break apart, pausing as their breaths mingle between them, taking a moment to just look, to take each other in. There's a light flush staining the tops of Alec's cheeks pink. Magnus doesn't know whether it's from exertion or mild nerves—he suspects it's a combination of both. He hopes it's mostly the former.

"I love you," he tells Alec, because he does, because Alec deserves to hear it, because he can't keep
the words inside himself anymore. Alec's expression softens as he reaches up to cup Magnus' cheek in his palm.

"I love you too."

"What do you want?" Magnus asks, searching Alec's eyes with his own. His eyes are un glamoured - have been all evening - but Alec doesn't seem to care. He never has before, but sometimes, Magnus has found, it's not until a person's most vulnerable moments that they reveal their true thoughts about that which marks him as part demonic.

"I don't know," Alec says, painfully sincere. "What do you want?"

"To make you feel good, and to feel good because of it."

Alec rolls his eyes, one corner of his lips tugging up into a disparaging smile at Magnus' attempt at saying whatever the hell you like, because I want to do everything in the world with you slightly more diplomatically. "That's not an answer."

"Hm."

Magnus bends forwards, lowering himself on his forearms so his chest is almost pressed against Alec's, necklaces dangling across Alec's pecs. He whispers in his ear, words hot enough to make Alec shudder, until one particular suggestion makes Alec moan, eyelashes fluttering.

"That," Alec rasps, tilting his head to brush his lips across Magnus' shoulder. "Please."

"It would be my pleasure, darling."

Magnus reaches up to unclasp his necklaces, but the soft touch of a hand stops him. Alec is watching him with hot, hazy eyes, gaze flickering appreciatively across his bare chest.

"Don't," Alec says, thumb rubbing absently against Magnus' skin, "unless they're uncomfortable."

"I didn't know you were a jewellery man," Magnus says, shifting to remove the rings from one hand but leaving the rest of his adornments in place.

"I'm not," Alec says, the words brutal with honesty. "But you look beautiful like this." He shrugs a little, then, one corner of his mouth curling up sheepishly. "Although you always look beautiful."

"Alexander," Magnus says, fingers brushing along Alec's sides, a smile overtaking his face. "You're sweet."

Alec squirms at a brush of Magnus' fingers, and Magnus arches an eyebrow at him. Is Alexander ticklish? he wonders, catching Alec's eye mischievously as he digs his fingers into Alec's ribs. It extracts a long peel of laughter from Alec, who shoves at his hands in protest.

"Magnus," he huffs out, between laughs. "S-stop it!"

Magnus grins devilishly at him. "But you look so lovely when you laugh. And you sound so happy."

"You don't have to ti-tickle me for me to be—"

Alec is cut off as he curls in on himself in an attempt to escape the relentless assault of Magnus' fingers, both of them laughing as they roll around on the sheets. Alec battles against Magnus somewhat futilely until he manages to hook a leg around Magnus' and roll them over, pinning Magnus' wrists to the sheets by his head, shaking with laughter. Magnus is strong enough to break
out of his grip, but he's content to lay there for the moment.

Breathless, Magnus smirks up at him. "You were saying?"

Alec rolls his eyes, but Magnus sees the warmth of a smile in those hazel irises that he loves so much. "I was saying, you don't have to tickle me for me to be happy around you."

"You say the sweetest things," Magnus says, craning his neck forwards to plant a messy kiss on Alec's lips. He misses, landing it on the corner of his mouth instead, but neither of them care. "I do believe I had a goal, though."

Alec raises his eyebrows. "What if I like this more?"

"Hm. Well, limiting my use of my hands won't do you any favours, darling."

"Kinky," Magnus says with a grin, and takes advantage of the way that catches Alec off guard by surging up and rolling them back over so that Alec is flat on his back, gazing up at Magnus, bodies pressed close together.

Whatever witty, sexy, or adorable words Magnus had had on the tip of his tongue disappear under that look, as though Alec thinks he could find ever answer to every question ever asked in the depths of Magnus' eyes.

Instead of speaking, he leans down, cupping Alec's face between his hands reverently, and kisses him, soft and slow, as though there isn't a war looming on the horizon, as though there aren't threats hanging over their heads and ultimatums to be met, as though they have all the time in the world.

And as though the only thing they'd ever want to spend it on is each other.

Magnus makes his way down Alec's body, pressing lingering kisses to every bit of skin he can reach, fingers trailing blazing paths of fire across ridges of muscles and lines of tendons. Neck, pecs, torso, hips, letting his tongue dip into Alec's belly button—that makes Alec's lips quirk and his eyes go soft as he jumps slightly.

Magnus breathes words into the vulnerable skin of Alec's inner thighs, eyes holding his. Alec reaches a hand down to brush through Magnus' hair with such care that it catches him off guard, and just for a fleeting, fumbling moment, Magnus feels like it's his first time being naked with another person—not Alec's.

"You have to tell me what feels good," Magnus whispers, pressing his cheek against Alec's thigh. "People are all different."

Alec nods. "I will."

Magnus dips his head down, and Alec's lips part, eyes going wide and breaths coming deeper, heavier, as he stares down at Magnus between his legs. The hand lingering in his hair drags through, pushing strands back from Magnus' forehead, and Magnus is filled to the brim with overwhelming affection.

It's not exactly a marathon, and Magnus lets his eyes follow Alec's every minute change in expression as he tosses his head back, gasping out encouragements. His fingers tighten a little in Magnus' hair, and he curses, and his back arches up off the bed, his entire body pulling taut like a bowstring before everything explodes, and he goes lax, limbs melting into the mattress.
Magnus wants to stamp that picture into his mind for eternity. Alec, blissed out, entirely relaxed and at ease, comfortable in himself and in his own body, giving into the base desires that he's repressed for so very long. He looks beautiful, long body stretched out on Magnus' deep vermillion sheets, dark runes standing out starkly against his pale skin, lashes fluttering against his cheeks, hair a sweaty, sex-ruined mess.

Alec is breathless as he opens his eyes, and his fingers begin to card through Magnus' hair slowly as he seems to come back to himself, as his mind returns to his body, coherent thought reseating itself visibly in his eyes.

"Okay?" Magnus asks, as he lifts himself up to drape himself carefully over the length of Alec's body, necklaces dangling down on his chest.

"Uh, yeah," Alec says, in a duh sort of voice, one corner of his lips turning up. "Wasn't that obvious?"

"It's obvious now," Magnus says, kissing his nose, because Alec might not realise it - there's no reason he should, certainly not now - but getting off doesn't constitute good sex. Getting off doesn't even constitute consensual sex.

This is what makes good sex. Trust, communication, affection, and fun. Magnus wants to curse whoever promoted the idea that sex has to be silent and smouldering to be hot. That's just boring.

"I'm not sure I know how to do that," Alec says, running a hand up Magnus' arm, fingers lingering on the swell of his bicep, "but do you want me to lend a hand? Literally?"

"Yes," Magnus says, "but only if you want to, too."

Alec smiles. "Yeah. I want to."

He tips them over until Magnus is splayed out comfortably among the pillows, and, once he's worked out what sort of thing Magnus likes, he settles, leaning down to kiss Magnus a little messily.

It isn't the most elegant affair Magnus has ever experienced between the sheets, but, as these things go, it makes his heart sing like few other times have.

When his eyes slip shut and he breaks his mouth away from Alec's to gasp as sensations crest inside him, blue sparks out of both hands, waves of energy catapulting across the room, radiating out and knocking a photo frame to the floor with a crash, the glass shattering upon impact.

Magnus wrenches his eyes open, horror flitting through him for an awful, agonising fraction of a second as he realises how much magic he just shot across the room, and how it had to have passed right over Alec, and—

Alec is staring down at him, propped up on his forearm, the other hand sticky and curled to one side. He's watching Magnus with wide, awe-filled eyes, and, in the seconds of silence that stretch out, he merely presses his lips to Magnus' forehead.

"Is that a common side effect?" Alec asks, pulling back to look at him.

Magnus lets out a slightly weak laugh, and waves a hand to clean things up a little—including the photo, because it's a particularly excellent photograph of Ragnor and Raphael, and it's one of the only photos he has of the two of them together, both actually smiling.

"No," he says. "Not in warlocks over the age of forty. Are you okay?"
"Perfectly," Alec says, and he rolls over, so they're laying face-to-face, breaths mingling and legs tangled. "It just felt like... I don't know. It felt warm." He was looking down at Magnus' hands, but then he glances up at Magnus from beneath his eyelashes. "Your magic has always felt warm."

"It feels different to different people," Magnus tells him, leaning forward to press a fleeting kiss to Alec's forehead. "Some people hate it. Some people are apathetic. Some people like it."

"I like it," Alec says, and he's telling the truth, Magnus knows—he's not just saying it because he thinks he should. Alec never does things like that. Honesty - so much that it's brutal, sometimes - might be one of the things Magnus loves most about Alec.

Amongst, of course, a plethora of other undeniably wonderful attributes. And, sappy and in love as he is, he's come to love Alec's less-than-wonderful attributes just as much.

Absently, Magnus conjures a spray of magic into his open palm, letting it flutter like a lit candle between them.

Tentatively, Alec reaches out a hand, straightening his knuckles to touch the blue flame with just a fingertip. At first, he merely brushes across it, before, apparently, realising that it's entirely harmless; he follows the lines and shapes of it, dipping his fingers in and curling around the tips, following every flicker.

While Alec watches Magnus' magic, enraptured and entranced, Magnus watches him, eyes never leaving his face. He looks enthralled, every single determined point of his attention focused in on the tiny little display of magic held in Magnus' hand.

"What does it feel like to you?" Alec asks, voice a mere murmur. He doesn't take his eyes off of the blue flame.

"I don't feel it like you do," Magnus says, shaking his head. "It's not a physical sensation. It's more like an emotion. I feel it against my skin like you feel your hair. It's just a part of me. But inside me, sometimes, it's like- it's like the sea being held back by a dam. And there are weaknesses in the dam, and sometimes those weaknesses are hit just a little too hard, and things come flooding out. Sometimes it's just a momentary little leak. Other times it's like the dam has been ripped apart entirely."

Alec is watching him, now, looking at him with those intense, unmoving eyes, giving Magnus his undivided attention as he speaks.

"Do you ever just want to let it all go?"

"Yes," Magnus says, honestly—and he knows he's never admitted that before to anyone except another warlock. "Sometimes it feels like a lot of effort to hold it in. Not most of the time. Most of the time, I control it, not vice versa. Most of the time, the dam is just there. It's easy. But sometimes it's hard."

They're quiet for a moment, both gazing down at the magic flickering in Magnus' palm. Then, gently, Alec covers it with his own hand, and Magnus extinguishes the flame so he can hold Alec's hand, interlacing their fingers and smiling over at him warmly.

"I love you," he says, legs shifting beneath the sheets, knee bumping against Alec's.

"I love you too," Alec tells him, and, Lilith, Magnus knows he's never, ever going to get tired of hearing those words from this beautiful, incredible man.
They fall asleep like that, hands intertwined and legs tangled, curled towards each other, warmth radiating between them.

And, for the first night in a long time, neither of them dream of anything but bliss.

Chapter End Notes

Awww look, it's FLUFF!

I really hope you enjoyed the calm before the storm (oops, did I say that...?) and I'd love to know what you thought in the comments!

Unfortunately, the time has finally come, admittedly later than I thought it would, for me to have to drop down from my once-a-week updates. I'm going to be posting once a fortnight from now on, still on Thursdays. I'm participating in the SH Big Bang organised by the awesome team over at SHAUMondays on tumblr, and I'm not going to be producing my best work if I'm struggling to put too much content out.

I really hope you enjoyed the chapter, and if you like come follow me on Tumblr

Much love you guys, and I hope you enjoyed the chapter! Lu <3
Penguin

Chapter Summary

In which Clary returns, a visitor accompanies her, and Alec twists the truth.

Chapter Notes

Penguin: layers and depths of feeling

(A penguin totally, 100% counts, it’s a bird, shush, you over there)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

For just a single, blissful week, Alec feels like he's on top of the world.

He's in love, and he's loved back, and walking into Magnus' loft every free evening, sending him sneaky texts when he can't, or when Magnus can't accommodate him, feels like the most liberating thing he could ever experience.

He feels giddy every time he thinks about it; every time he lets his mind wander to Magnus. He's sure the entire Institute has noticed, even if they've no way of guessing the source of his good mood.

Loving Magnus, even if it's not quite as openly as he'd like, makes his stomach churn with butterflies of the best kind. It gives him something to elevate his mood every time he's stuck in a meeting, every time he receives a setback, every time he has to listen to people spout bullshit and hold his tongue.

And then Clary Fray returns.

Jace can't stop fidgeting as they stand in the long corridor that sits beneath the Ops Centre. Alec doesn't know who keeps scraping their chair on the floor above them, but whoever it is, he's going to have to track them down and put them on weapons cleaning for a weak. There won't be a floor to scrape by the end of the goddamn day, if they keep it up.

Also, it's beyond irritating. Being the boss means he can dish out minor consequences for immense sources of irritation that he had to grit his teeth and ignore before. It's wonderful.

"For Raziel's sake, stand still," Alec says, rolling his eyes at his parabatai. "If she'd failed her exams, we'd have heard about it, and they wouldn't be letting her come back here. Relax."

"Besides which," Isabelle adds, when Jace opens his mouth to protest, "your girlfriend is more than capable of looking after herself. Quit your hyper masculine boyfriend crap. It's boring."

Jace huffs. "I'm just worried about her. Is that so bad?"

"No," Alec says, a small smile tugging at his lips, "but you are a little bit pathetic."

Jace raises his eyebrows, glancing over at Maryse, standing stoically the other side of Isabelle as she
pretends not to listen, before he speaks, lowering his voice. "And you're not?"

Alec stares stoically straight ahead of them, where they’re expecting the portal to materialise any moment. "Nope."

Through his peripheries, he's sure he sees a smile flit across Maryse's face. By the time he's tilted his head surreptitiously to check whether his eyes are deceiving him, she's stone-faced again, expression entirely impassive.

Their bickering is cut short by a flash of swirling blue that bursts into existence before them. Jace swallows, Adam's apple bobbing, posture tensing as he leans forward in unconscious anticipation.

A long, boot-clad leg appears through the portal, and the lanky form of Clary follows, bright red hair a little windswept as several figures step through behind her.

The portal snaps shut behind her, and, for a moment, Alec is smiling right along with everyone else. Alright, Clary is hardly his favourite person in the world, but he loves her for what she's done for Jace, and he'd never wish her any ill-will. She's mostly harmless, if a little infuriating most of the time. She's back, and she's passed her exams, and she and Jace can stop being hauled apart for long periods of time while she trains in Idris, and Alec and Isabelle can stop having to hear Jace whinge about how difficult long distance relationships are.

And then Alec takes in her face, and his expression drops.

Clary isn't staring at Jace. She's staring at him. Her lower lips trembles as she holds his gaze, and, before Alec's astounded eyes, tears run down her cheeks, black mascara and foundation streaking across her pale skin.

"Clary," Jace says, voice hollow as he rushes towards her and cups her face in his hands, apparently uncaring of the crap he's sure to get on his hands.

To be fair, Alec thinks, absently, he probably wouldn't care about the possible side effects of a bit of make-up if Magnus walked through a portal looking as wrecked and distraught as Clary does. He wouldn't have a care in the world except concern for Magnus' wellbeing.

And, as it is, there isn't much room his head for anything but worry for Clary.

"Hey, hey, come here. I've got you," Jace says, pulling her into a tight hug as a sob escapes from between her lips. She buries her face in Jace's shoulder, trembling in his arms, and Jace throws Alec a wide-eyed look.

Part of Alec wants his mother to step forward and demand to know what in the world is going on, in that powerful, terrifying way she does, in a tone of voice that books absolutely no room for bullshit—which is about all the Clave is good at, Alec has firmly decided. Absolute and total bullshit.

But she isn't saying anything. And Alec knows why. She's not the Head of the New York Institute anymore. He is. It's not her job to look after the Shadowhunters who make their home here. It's his.

Clary Fray isn't her responsibility—she's his.

Alec tilts his chin up, eyes roaming across the three Shadowhunters standing behind Clary with stoic, unmoving expressions. He draws himself up to his - rather considerable - full height as he levels them all with a cool look, before settling his eyes on the Inquisitor.

"Would any of you care to explain exactly what is going on, here?" Alec asks, arching an eyebrow.
"Of course, Mr Lightwood," Inquisitor Herondale says, not sparing even a momentary glance for her grandson and his girlfriend, the latter of whom is still crying more violently than Alec has ever seen from her—and he'd watched her cry when she'd woken up at the Institute hours after her mother's death.

Isabelle has moved to stand by Clary and Jace, a warm hand resting between Clary's shoulder blades where's she's still clinging to Jace, no longer crying but still clearly upset. Isabelle is pinning the Inquisitor with a stare that could bring an army to its knees, lips pressed together firmly.

"Miss Fray provided us with some very useful information," Inquisitor Herondale says, "and she's in no trouble, so there's really no need for this excessive display of emotion."

"And how is the cold hearted bitch persona working out for you these days, Imogen?" Maryse asks, quirking an eyebrow, and—

Well. That's where Isabelle gets it from, he supposes.

The Inquisitor ignores her, clearly dismissing her as merely another Shadowhunter unworthy of her time, instead keeping her attention on Alec. "It has come to our attention that some in this Institute have been harbouring a terrorist."

"There are no terrorist suspects even thought to be located in New York," Alec says flatly. "Oh, except that one you keep banning us from investigating. A little odd, that, I must say."

"We've had other priorities," she says, waving a hand. "Priorities that will, in fact, help us take down Valentine. The warlock—"

"I heard all about your insane plans," Alec says, rolling his eyes. "I also happen to know that your informant is none other than Camille Belcourt, who's been banned from New York by the local Downworld leaders. Charged with poisoning her clan with drug-infused blood last century, suspected of a string of mundane murders across three different centuries, once investigated for links to a mundane terrorist group, convicted by the Clave in eighteen thirty-two for possession of illegal substances and illicit gambling—need I go on?"

"We're aware," is all the Inquisitor says.

"Interesting company the Clave is keeping, these days. Interesting also that your association with her has conveniently prevented the Downworld leaders from enforcing her sentence. A matter which Raphael Santiago apparently attempted to bring to your attention three days ago, only to be categorically told that a known criminal is now under the protection of the Clave. Which I found rather odd, considering your preoccupation with one Magnus Bane."

"Miss Belcourt's past is irrelevant," the Inquisitor says. "She has provided us with useful information about people who are a genuine threat to our existence, not a minor annoyance. Information only furthered by Miss Fray, here."

Clary looks up at him from Jace's shoulder and shakes her head. "Alec, I—"

"Oh, do be quiet," the Inquisitor snaps. "Unlike you, I have it on good authority that Mr Lightwood is a professional. Although we'll be having words about your foolish obsession with this Downworld alliance nonsense. You're young, I expected you to have some oddities when I agreed to appoint you. I'm sure we'll manage to whip you into shape."

"Inquisitor Herondale," Alec says, entirely at the end of his patience, "what in the name of Raziel has Camille told you?"
The Inquisitor smiles, all teeth and no kindness, cruelty and satisfaction shining in her eyes. "She has warned us that the warlock criminal Bane is in New York," she says. "And Miss Fray, here, only managed to confirm what we thought all along. Someone in this Institute has been helping to shelter him. Perhaps—" Her eyes swivel to Isabelle, Jace, and Clary "—several someones."

To Alec's shock, Maryse is the first to speak, while he's rendered entirely mute, heart hammering against his ribs. *They can't find Magnus. They can't. I won't let them.*

"That's utterly preposterous," Maryse snaps. "You're blinded by your determination to see Valentine slaughtered, Imogen. You see enemies where there are none."

"If that's true," Inquisitor Herondale says, while Alec's mind reels, terror pulsing through him, "then there's a very easy way to check."

"If you're going to try tracking him, don't bother," Alec manages. "I've tried. Nothing."

"Of course not," she says. "Honestly, Lightwood, do you think I was born yesterday? No. We'll be interrogating the inhabitants of this Institute."

Alec tips his chin up. "No. I will not allow you to interrogate the Shadowhunters in my Institute without due cause, and council approval."

"Oh, I think you will, Mr Lightwood," she says. "Who are you going to complain to?"

"The Consul. Jia Penhallow."

Inquisitor Herondale chuckles. "Oh, I'm afraid the Consul won't be helping you today. No. We'll be starting our interrogations right away, down here. Beginning, of course, with the Downworld sympathiser we'd all like to be rid of."

She swivels her gaze from Alec back to the trio, Jace and Isabelle still comforting the sniffling Clary. Her eyes fix on Isabelle, hatred clear in the piercing depths of her irises. Isabelle stares back with just the same amount of loathing, her chest rising and falling heavily, nostrils flaring.

"Your sister."

***

For a long, heavy moment, Alec can't do more than let his eyes flicker from Isabelle to the Inquisitor, back and forth over and over again as the words play over in his head. He feels nothing. The words have no meaning to him.

*Your sister.*

*Interrogations.*

*Downworld sympathiser.*

*Your sister.*

*Your sister.*

*Your sister.*

He doesn't hear Lydia clattering down the steps, Raj hot on her heels as the door slams open and she demands to know what the hell is going on. He doesn't see the Shadowhunters accompanying.
Inquisitor Herondale go to hold Lydia back when she attempts to step forward. He doesn't see the fury in her eyes or the frustration in the tight grip of her fists and the solid clench of her jaw. He doesn't see Raj get slapped across the face when he demands that they get their hands off of Lydia.

All he can see is Isabelle, defiant even in the face of torture, with her shoulders drawn back as she stands tall, daring the Inquisitor into action with her eyes.

He's failed her. She's his sister, she's his family, she's one of three - four - people he would do absolutely anything in the world for. And yet, he's standing with his hands tied while the Clave take her away to be interrogated about something he's done.

This is all his fault. And he could stop it, right now. He could step forward and tells the Inquisitor that he knows where Magnus Bane is. He could assemble a team, and lead them to a loft he has easy access to in Brooklyn. He could prep a group of Shadowhunters, play on Magnus' weaknesses, carry out the mission he's been tasked with—or, at least, give someone else the information that will allow them to do it.

But he won't. He never will. Because Magnus is the fourth person he'd burn down the world for. Magnus, in the space of less than a year, has come to mean just as much to him as his siblings do. There's no threat the Clave could throw at him that would make him complete that disgusting mission and bring his dream from all those months ago to fruition.

"Try me by the fucking soul sword, for all I care," Isabelle says, voice level, calm, appearing utterly unbothered as her eyes don't stray from the Inquisitor's. "I've always been transparent in what I think."

The Inquisitor smiles. "Oh, my dear girl, the soul sword will be waiting for you when we trial you for treason. Now, you're going to face the repercussions for beliefs your parents should have beaten out of you years ago."

At that, Maryse unfreezes. When she moves to stand in front of Isabelle, the rage burning in her eyes isn't that of a Shadowhunter, or a Clave loyalist, or an ex-Circle member—it's that of a mother.

"No."

The Inquisitor's smile doesn't waver. "Maryse, you embarrass yourself."

At a wave of Inquisitor Herondale's hand, two Shadowhunters shove Maryse away from her daughter, and a third wraps his hand around Isabelle's upper arm.

"Leave her alone!" Lydia shouts from across the room, where she's wrestling against the hold of two beefy men, kicking and attempting to use their own grips to her advantage. One of them snarls at her, slamming her back so her head cracks against the wall; Lydia snarls right back. "This is illegal!"

"Not," the Inquisitor says, "when we have probable cause to arrest her. You know the Law as well as I do, Branwell."

Lydia's lip curls. "I swear by the Angel, when I'm done with you—"

"Lydia." Isabelle's voice is gentle. "Don't. It won't help."

"For fuck's sake, Isabelle—"

"Please. For me." Isabelle turns her head to meet Alec's eye. "Stay strong, big brother," she says, and they haul her out of the room, leaving them reeling in shock.
Alec is trembling by the time he gets back to his office.

He sinks down into his chair, hands shaking as he pulls out his phone and scrolls straight to his text thread with Magnus, staring down at the last texts they’d sent each other. *I love you*, Magnus had said, and, *I love you too*, Alec had replied.

What he wouldn't give to just hit the fucking call button and hear the soothing lilt of Magnus' voice, feel the weight begin to slip away at the sound of Magnus’ care, find comfort in the way his tongue rolls over the syllables of his name like they're something precious.

*Alexander.*

"Hey."

There's a light knock on the close door, Raj's voice floating through. Alec hauls in a deep, steadying breath as he tries to compose himself. He's a leader. He can't be seen to fall apart like this. This is all his responsibility. He has to learn how to fucking deal with it. If he can't, he shouldn't the in charge of the Institute.

"Yeah," he says, clearing his throat when the word comes out a little too roughly. He clicks his phone screen off when Raj walks in, pushing the door shut behind him.

"I just wanted to ask if I can do anything to help," Raj says, lingering by the door. "I know we don't exactly see eye to eye on this topic, but Isabelle doesn't deserve this."

"No. She doesn't."

They're quiet for a moment. Alec knows what Raj is thinking - that he should just fucking turn Magnus in, that Magnus isn't worth all this, that Magnus can't possibly mean as much to him as his sister.

"I don't know what to do, Raj," Alec rasps, fear and desperation running through him. "I don't know what to do."

Hesitantly, Raj makes his way over to the desk. He pauses, and then rounds the corner and reaches out a tentative hand to touch Alec's shoulder. "Alec—"

"Don't," Alec says sharply. "Don't tell me that Isabelle is my sister. *I know*. I know she doesn't deserve this, and I know this is completely out of order, but Magnus doesn't deserve to be slaughtered."

"I wasn't going to." Raj shakes his head a little. "The Clave is wrong. You're a good man, Alec. And nobody who deserves to die could make you this happy."

Touched by the sentiment, Alec smiles a little, sadly. "Thanks, Raj."

Raj taps Alec's phone lightly. "You need to call him. You need to tell him what's happened, and you need to decide what you're going to do. Together. You can't blindside him."

Alec raises his eyebrows. "When did you become our resident relationship expert?"

"Because I wish I'd just told Cameron the truth," Raj says. "It wasn't my fault, but maybe if I had, maybe if he'd been prepared, he would still be alive." He shrugs a little. "Don't live with the same
regrets I have, man."

With that, Raj smiles at him tightly, and heads back out, boots thudding heavily against the stone floors as he walks away.

***

"Alexander."

Just as he knew he would, Alec feels the tension and the dread and the feeling of utter, crippling loneliness bleed out of him the moment Magnus answers his phone, the four syllables of his name dripping off of his tongue like honey. They wrap Alec in a sense of comfort, of safety and warmth and care. He feels like he could cry at what a relief it is to hear Magnus' voice.

"Magnus," he says, and his voice cracks as he glances back over towards the Institute.

It wasn't easy, sneaking out around the guards from Idris who have been instructed to monitor everyone who comes in and out of the Institute. Inquisitor Herondale appears to be serious about finding whoever is harbouring Magnus, and bringing about his end one and for all.

The moment Jace had found the sense of mind to disentangle himself from Clary, catch onto what Alec was doing, and promptly come up with a way to distract the guards for long enough to let Alec slip out, Alec had darted out and headed as far away as he could, as fast as he could.

He'd made it several hundred metres away, up the road and across to a small park shrouded in the darkness of nighttime, before desperation had gotten the best of him, and he'd had to call Magnus before he lost his fucking mind.

"What's wrong?" Magnus asks, the tone of his voice switching from pleasantly surprised to deeply concerned in a moment. "Where are you?"

"No! No, no, you cannot come to me. You can't track me."

"Alec—"

"No, Magnus, promise me," Alec says, clutching his phone tightly as he peers down at the lights of the Institute through the trees. He wonders whether anybody has realised that he's disappeared, or whether they merely think he's shut himself away somewhere.

"Are you safe?"

"I'm fine."

There's a pause. "Alright, then," Magnus says, sounding a little reluctant. "I promise. But not if I find out you're in danger. Then, promise be damned." Alec nearly smiles at that. "Now, tell me what's going on."

"The Inquisitor is here," Alec says, and then the story tumbles out in a jumbled mess of incoherent phrases, words tripping over each other and chronology flipping on its head to tell Magnus what's going on.

"Take a breath, darling," Magnus tells him, firmly. "You're no good to anyone, least of all your sister, if you suffocate yourself panicking. Breathe. Slowly."

Alec does, inhaling deeply, slowly, cool air rushing into his lungs.
"Alright." Magnus has his business voice on. "How much time can you give me?"

"I don't know," Alec says. "Isabelle will be able to stall, but I don't know for how long. She'll evade their questions, but they'll torture her if she doesn't give you up. And she won't."

"Can you give me an hour?"

"Yeah," Alec says, determination filling him. He doesn't know how, but he will. If that's all Magnus is asking for, he'll find a way. "Yeah, I can do that."

"Okay. Here's what we're going to do..."

***

When Alec slips back into the Institute, he's immediately assaulted by the reality of what's occurring. The Clave is interrogating his sister. They're going to torture her, because they think she has information.

And it's all his fault.

"Alec." Lydia appears in front of him, eyes wide and filled with fear. "We have to tell the Inquisitor the truth. I know how you feel about him, but this is your sister."

Never before has Alec had the urge to snarl at Lydia Branwell. But here, now, he does.

"I am not," he says, emphatically, "choosing between my sister and the man I love."

"Alec—"

"Enough," he tells her, because he knows that Lydia and Isabelle have their thing going on, and he knows that Lydia doesn't really give a toss about Magnus, and he knows that she's new to overcoming the Clave-enforced hatred of Downworlders.

He knows that she won't understand.

"We have a plan," Alec says, glancing up to where Jace and Clary appear to be arguing hotly with a stoic Shadowhunter guarding the entrance down to where the Inquisitor is interrogating Isabelle. "I'm not going to let the Clave win this."

***

"Stop."

Alec's voice rings clearly through the room, and the Inquisitor freezes with her hand halfway towards Isabelle's throat. Rage is thrumming through him, cool and deadly, and he's desperate to pick up his bow and shoot every person in this goddamn room.

But he won't. Because that won't help anybody.

"Mr Lightwood," the Inquisitor says, straightening up from leaning over Isabelle where she's strapped into a chair, "we had this discussion. This warlock has been a thorn in our side for centuries, and a wanted criminal for decades, and now he's threatening the very existence of our world. If he upsets the precarious balance we keep, then—"

"I know." Alec interrupts her sharply. If he has to hear another word like that about Magnus, he's going to kill someone, logic be damned. "I know how important the Clave considers this. Which is
why I'd like to come forward."

The Inquisitor whips round to look at him, eyebrows raised. "I beg your pardon?"

"You thought the person you were looking for who had this information was my sister. Or perhaps my parabatai. Or maybe Clary Fray." Alec shakes his head, smiling tightly. "You were wrong. The person you're looking for is me."

"No!" Isabelle is shaking her head vehemently, struggling against the thick leather ties strapping her arms down. "Alec, stop!"

"Isabelle, shut up," he tells her, not breaking eye contact with the Inquisitor, who's watching him with hungry eyes, victory and malice shining deep in her pupils. "In a hour, they'll use the soul sword on you, and the truth will come out anyway. I'd rather confess."

Alec hasn't noticed his mother standing in the corner of the room, her arms folded tightly across her chest, lips pressed together in a thin line as she watches the proceedings. But then she steps forward, brow furrowed and confusion flashing across her face as she regards him carefully. Alec glances over at her. He doesn't know what she's doing in here, or what she's going to say. He doesn't know where he stands with his mother anymore.

"My apologises for the interruption, Inquisitor," Maryse says, without an ounce of sorrow or regret in her voice, "but I don't quite understand."

The Inquisitor raises her eyebrows. "Hence why we're all waiting for Mr Lightwood's doubtless thrilling explanation. He has had this mission for several months. It's hardly a stretch to presume that he has managed to gather some intelligence. Although clearly there's some twist in here. I can't wait to hear such a fascinating tale."

Her voice drips with sarcasm, but Maryse doesn't appear to hear her. She doesn't appear to be aware of anything except Alec, and she's staring at him like she's never seen him before, as she studies every inch of his face. She takes a slow step towards him, as though she's entirely detached from reality, floating towards him rather than moving with the solid deliberation every Lightwood has.

"Alec," she says, "you've spent the last three weeks telling me that you can't possibly attempt to hunt Bane, and now—"

"I lied," he tells her, bluntly. There's no point in hiding it any longer. Not if this is it.

Maryse's eyes go wide. "You've been building a personal relationship with him."

Alec looks hear dead in the eye. "Yes."

"Oh, you genius boy," she whispers, and reaches up to cup his cheek in her hand and kiss his forehead. "You gained his trust to get close to him so we could take him down from the inside."

Alec feels his blood run cold. She's misunderstood. But he's not going to correct her. This is what he and Magnus agreed, after all. This is the lie they decided to tell. This is the façade they're erecting to keep everyone involved as safe as they can.

This is the compromise they're making for love. For each other.
"Why didn't you come forward with this information immediately?" the Inquisitor asks, narrowing her eyes at Alec.

"Because I didn't lie about my belief in building bridges between our people and the Downworlders. And if they get wind of the fact that I sold out one of their most respected leaders, any alliances are done." He tips his chin up, looking the Inquisitor dead in the eye as he lies through his teeth. "I had some phone calls to make. I had some...stories to invent."

"I see." The Inquisitor's lips are curling up into a wolfish, predatory sort of smile that makes Alec feel sick. "And now?"

Alec hauls in a deep breath. Maryse has dropped her hand, but she's standing close by him, as though she's trying to shield her son from the Clave officials lining their Institute. It's odd, he thinks. He's not sure his mother has tried to protect him from anything since he was a little boy. Why now?

In the chair, still strapped down, Isabelle's eyes are shining with tears, but she's stopped shaking her head. She's realised. She's caught on to what he's doing—to what he and Magnus are doing, to keep as many people as they can safe.

Sometimes, Alec thinks everything would be so much easier if he just grabbed Magnus' hand and they ran far, far away, to somewhere nobody would know them, to somewhere the Clave couldn't touch.

Of course, there's really no such place that exists. And he couldn't do that to either of them, anyway. They have too much else they love.

"Now," Alec says, tearing his gaze from his sister to look back to the Inquisitor, "I'd like to lead you to Magnus Bane."

Chapter End Notes

Dun dun duuuunn!!

I am sure you are all completely and totally shocked that this moment has finally come after 40 chapters of build up lol, not.

I really hope you enjoyed this chapter! Let me know what you thought in the comments (please be nice even if you’re critiquing) and if you like, you can come follow me on Tumblr or find me on Twitter @LucysRebelHeart or via #fwwfic

Much love,
Lu <3
In which Alec leads the Inquisitor to Brooklyn, Magnus isn’t overly fond of being threatened, and there’s some doubt on all sides.

Updating once a fortnight seems like an insanely long wait? This is definitely going to have to change after the SH Big Bang—if anyone else is participating, let me know, let’s have a chat about it!

A la the Sankofa back in chapter 8, the thunderbird is mythical, rather than a realised biological species. It’s found in the mythology of several Native American tribes, but I’ve taken the symbolism from the Algonquian mythology. Thunderbirds are representative of creation and the power of great storms, with the power of lightning at their disposal.

AKA yes, Magnus finally gets to kick some Shadowhunter butt.

As they tumble through the portal and out onto Magnus' street, Alec feels his heart hammering wildly against his ribcage. He knows why he's doing this, and he knows that it's what he and Magnus agreed—but it still feels like a betrayal of the ultimate kind. It's only the image of Isabelle strapped to that godforsaken chair that stops him backing out.

At his elbow, the Inquisitor tips up her chin, surveying the length of the street with her nose slightly wrinkled. It's warm, a soft breeze blowing through the light of the afternoon, but she's dressed as though preparing for midwinter.

She's also loaded to the brim with weapons. Seraph blades and throwing stars are spilling from the belt around her hips, knives and daggers stashed surreptitiously under her clothes. Alec finds himself glancing over their location, memorising where to hit and where to snatch if everything goes terribly wrong.

"I'd have expected something a little more ostentatious," she says, "but no matter. Lightwood, after you."

Under her breath, Lydia mutters, "It's plenty ostentatious inside."

Alec chooses to ignore her. He knows why she's turned so abruptly bitter about Magnus. He understands. He doesn't like it, and he's not going to feed into it, or rise to it.

He reaches over his shoulder to glamour his bow and arrows in an attempt to keep up the pretence
that Magnus has no idea they're coming, and motions for the group of thirteen Shadowhunters, including his mother and sister, to stay put while he jogs up the steps.

"Alec," Magnus says through the buzzer, feigning nonchalance. "Come up."

Every creak of the rickety old wooden stairs beneath his feet makes him feel sick to the stomach, as he leads his coworkers up to his boyfriend's loft in preparation for what they believe to be his execution. He doesn't want to do this. He doesn't want to pretend. He wants to curl up with Magnus and be told that it's fine, it's okay, nothing bad is going to happen. He wants to take Magnus' hand and take him far, far away.

As they reach Magnus' front door, Alec tenses a little, and turns to look over his shoulder at the Inquisitor.

She rolls her eyes at him, and, with pointed emphasis, she pulls out a glowing seraph blade and brings it slamming down on the handle of Magnus' front door, shouldering the door open. It pings back with a loud crack, surely leaving a dent in the plaster.

In the distance, coming from the kitchen, Alec hears a distinctive yowl.

"Bane," Imogen thunders, striding in with blades raised, Shadowhunters swarming in like an army of ants behind her.

Alec lingers near the back, pulling out his bow and nocking an arrow against the drawstring, heart rising up his throat. He feels like he's going to choke. His chest hurts, and blood is roaring in his ears, and if he sees Magnus come out and someone hurts him he's going to—

"It's over, warlock," Imogen growls, as Shadowhunters shove open doors hard enough to leave significant damage. Alec winces as a tall, burly man rips the door to Magnus' study right off its hinges. "Come out. Face us like the man you claim to be. Or are you just as cowardly as the demon scum we all know you're bred from?"

A woman reaches for a vase that Alec knows was a gift from Ragnor centuries ago. She tosses it up in the air once, catching it cleaning in her hand, and shrugs before moving to throw it over her shoulder.

Immediately, a river of silvery blue shoots out, wrapping around the vase and depositing it carefully back on the table.

"Oh, I don't think so," Magnus says coldly.

Alec's head whips around to stare at Magnus, standing before the open double doors of his bedroom. He's wearing a long black coat that billows out behind him, eyes lined with dark kohl and cat eyes flashing with fire and fury as he stares down the Shadowhunters who've invaded his home. Red sparks are flickering at his fingertips, itching to be let loose, desperate to defend and attack.

Alec isn't sure he's ever seen Magnus look so dangerous. Or so beautiful.

"You've been fooled, Bane," Imogen sneers. "You've been bettered."

Magnus doesn't spare Alec so much as a disgusted glance. "Oh, I assure you, I was well aware of the true nature of our little rendezvous. Didn't stop me enjoying the pretence."

Magnus smirks. Imogen's expression falters.
"This can go one of two ways, darling," Magnus drawls, flicking his fingers casually at two Shadowhunters who rush at him with their teeth bared and their weapons drawn. They drop to their knees, gasping and choking and clutching at their throats. Magnus pays them absolutely no heed. "Either you can get out of my apartment and the Downworld can join you in moving forward with the real issue facing our world, or you try to kill me, and I have to spend an evening cleaning your blood off of my nice carpets. Your choice, Imogen."

The Inquisitor laughs. "Oh, you might have had that power once, you filthy warlock, but I assure you, those times are over. The Clave has developed."


"Enough of this talk," Imogen says, brandishing her seraph blades and holding them crossed in front of her face. "I do believe we have some business to attend to, if you're so determined to make this difficult."

Between one blink at the next, there's a dagger embedded in the wall a mere hairbreadth from Magnus' shoulder. Imogen doesn't appear to have moved an inch, but the wicked smirk on her face says that, yes, she threw it.

Alec wants to gut her. Or watch while Magnus does it.

Magnus laughs. "How sweet."

And then chaos erupts.

Weapons fly at Magnus, daggers and blades and stars and the crack of an electrum whip that appears to inflict damage on the carpet and little else.

And, woven through the midst of all of it, the angry, furious rage of Magnus' magic in scalding, burning scarlet. It wraps around weapons and Shadowhunters alike, making flesh hiss and burn when it touches them and drawing screams from those conditioned to resist all sorts of physical torture.

Magnus barely moves, arms spread wide and fingers splayed, palms forwards as magic crackles from his hands like forks of lightening, lashing down on his unwelcome visitors and making them scream.

Alec ducks as a heavy, gold-rimmed mirror drops off the wall, snaking an arm around Isabelle and rolling them both to the side before it can catapult onto their heads. Isabelle is panting, dropping with sweat as she pushes herself up on one arm. There's a thick gash running down her arm, oozing blood; Alec can't help wondering whether it's from a piece of flying debris in the midst of such uncontrollable destruction, or whether it's from Magnus' magic.

"Stop it," Isabelle says sharply, smacking his shoulder lightly. Her eyes flash. "I know what you're thinking."

"What if I'm wrong, Iz?" Alec whispers, glancing over at where Magnus is curling his fingers and choking the life out of a blonde woman. "What if he really is the master manipulator the Clave claims he is? What if all this time—?"

"Stop it. Right now." Isabelle shakes her head vehemently. "You love him. He loves you. Enough."

"But—"
"No!" Isabelle shakes him lightly. "Where the hell are you getting this from?"

"I—" Alec looks back over at Magnus hopelessly. He knows the answer, but he can't make himself say it. Because it would be so much easier if it were all a lie. If Magnus really were out for world domination and destruction; if he really had been lying to Alec for months; if Alec really could, in all good conscience, kill him, and know he'd done the world a favour.

Across the room, the woman drops to the floor, eyes rolling back in her head as she falls unconscious from oxygen deprivation. Magnus' eyes flicker up, glimmering and overflowing with the power pouring from him like a tidal wave breaking through a sea wall. His gaze meets Alec's.

For just a moment frozen in time, the world melts away, and Alec's entire view, everything he's aware of, his entire consciousness, narrows to Magnus—to the man he loves more than he knows how to express.

*I love you*, he thinks, even as he's rising to his feet. *I love you, I love you, I love you.*

His fingers drag along the smooth shaft of an arrow as he straightens up, ignoring Isabelle demanding to know what the hell he's doing. It slides out of his quiver with practised ease, every ridge and tip familiar to him. Without conscious thought, he lifts his bow and rests the arrow against it, fingertips going to pull back the drawstring, and—

"No!"

Isabelle launches herself forward, whip shooting out and lashing towards Magnus' wrist.

Simultaneously, Magnus and Alec turn to stare at her with wide eyes, horrified and shocked. Of all the people Alec ever expected to turn against Magnus at the last moment, Isabelle had never been on the list.

"Not her," Isabelle says sharply as her whip drops to the ground.

Magnus' fingers splay out wide, and, across the room, a woman with long, plaited blond hair drops to the ground on her hands and knees, coughing and rubbing at her throat. The ridges of Lydia's trachea stand out prominently against delicate skin peppered with forming bruises.

"Isabelle," Magnus says, an odd softness to his voice. "I'm not going to stand idle when someone attacks me just because—"

"I don't care," Isabelle tells him fiercely, squaring her shoulders. "Not her. She's tried to—"

"I know what she's done," Magnus says. Crimson sparks are licking along his fingers like flames, and the few remaining conscious Shadowhunters are writhing where he's pinned them to the walls, strapping them up like animals ready for slaughter.

It's horribly reminiscent of all the old paintings from hundreds of years ago that Alec has seen of Shadowhunters strapping up Downworlders before they were slaughtered for supposed crimes against the Clave.

Of course, Downworlders didn't get a trial, then. Not even the sham of a trial they're offered now. If a Shadowhunter claimed a crime, the suspect was condemned.

Magnus is undeniable proof of the fact that what could happen four hundred years ago in a small Indonesian village can still happen in the modern sprawl of New York.
"Then stop," Isabelle says, tipping her chin up. There's a war raging in her eyes, conflict written across her face, and it makes Alec's heart twist. This is all his fault. All the people in this room who are hurting—he's responsible for all of it. He just had to fall in love with Magnus Bane. Not that he regrets it—not for a moment. "Stop."

Magnus raises his eyebrows, glancing over at the Inquisitor. "This doesn't stop on your terms until my blood has been spilt across the floor and my heart is in Imogen's hands. You know that as well as I do. I'm sorry, darling."

Magnus twirls his fingers, magic lifting Lydia to her feet and propping her against the wall, holding her there firmly.

"I'm sorry," Magnus tells Isabelle again, but his eyes flicker back to Alec's before Isabelle, too, is slammed back against a wall, strapped down by magic.

Alec's heart leaps into his throat, and he stares over at Magnus, the weight of a thousand moments passing between them in a fraction of a second. He knows that this was what it was supposed to come to. This was the plan. This very showdown. Him and Magnus, facing each other as lovers, as mortal enemies, as men.

And yet, standing in the midst of Magnus' wrecked and ruined apartment, Alec doesn't feel prepared, or clever, or like they've got this in hand at all.

***

Magnus swallows around the sudden fear and uncertainty that's encompassed him as he and Alec face each other, standing on floors stained red and among Shadowhunters covered in bruises inflicted by Magnus' magic.

Alec loves some of these people. His mother, and his sister, and perhaps Lydia. Alexander's parabatai might not be here, but other people he'd lay down his life for are—and Magnus just fought them, pinned them against walls, inflicted harm upon some of them.

As they stare at each other, the rest of the world muted to them, Magnus can't help but be fearful. Alec isn't lowering his bow. Isn't aiming it anywhere but right at his heart. He's drawn the string back, and all he'd have to do is let go, and Magnus would be ended. Dead. Finished.

And Alexander's entire family would be safe.

In that moment, Magnus thinks Alec's going to do it. Thinks he's going to let go, complete his mission—protect his family.

He's knows they're supposed to be acting, knows what they agreed, what they planned, that this, with Alec ready to kill him, is precisely what they wanted to happen, but Magnus can't tell whether acting has shifted to sincerity.

Because Alec isn't supposed to shoot that arrow at his heart. He's supposed to shoot it at his shoulder—and Magnus is supposed to move out of the way.

"Alec," he hears Isabelle say sharply, reprimanding him, but it's like he's listening to her through water. The syllables wash over him, fuzzy and muffled and barely impacting him. "What the hell are you doing?"

"His duty," the Inquisitor sneers, from where Magnus has shackled her to a cabinet. "Foolish girl. Your brother understands things you could never begin to."
Alec's gaze doesn't slip away from Magnus' as he tightens his grip on his bowstring and flexes his fingers, tipping his chin up with a newfound resolve that hardens his hazel eyes and turns them to ice.

"You're right, Inquisitor Herondale," he says, "I do."

The words turn Magnus cold.

***

Alec has his bow lifted, an arrow pressing against the drawstring and aiming right at Magnus' heart. If he lets it fly, he won't miss. And a direct hit like that—if it landed, if Magnus didn't manage to defend himself with his magic, it would kill him.

Angry red shrouds Magnus' hands, swirling restlessly as he remains perfectly still. The other Shadowhunters in the room are struggling against the magical bonds, hissing as magic sizzles against their flesh, but neither Magnus nor Alec pay them any attention.

"Shoot him!" Maryse snaps, arching up from the wall and barring her teeth. "For goodness' sake, Alec, shoot him! He can't keep up this and defend himself! Shoot him!"

Alec ignores her, bow poised in readiness to fire straight at the heart of the man who's splashed colour into his world and into his heart—the man he loves more than he realised it was possible to love another person.

"Please don't make me do this," Magnus says, softly, eyes pleading with Alec as his fingers flex and shift, magic following them in preparation to throw up a shield or shoot fire at Alec or maybe just explode the whole damn building. "I love you, but I can't let you do this."

"Magnus," Alec whispers, heart breaking and shattering and bleeding in his chest, pain radiating from every jagged crack as tears sting at his eyes. He blinks them away furiously. "How can you still not know? After everything, how can you not know?"

Magnus stares at him, the words clearly catching him a little off-guard. Alec swallows.

"I love you," Alec tells him, and he's not sure he's ever meant anything more in his life. His voice shakes as he continues, uncaring of the people around him. "I love you, and no matter what is at stake, my livelihood or my family or the whole goddamn world, I would never do anything to hurt you."

He tilts his bow just a touch to the side and lets the arrow slice through the air, embedding itself in the leg of the Shadowhunter hanging on the wall behind Magnus.

Magnus' eyes go wide, but he doesn't waste a moment. He whirls, shooting a wave of magic from his outstretched palm to the Shadowhunter Alec just shot. He drops, abruptly unconscious, and Magnus turns to look over his shoulder at Alec, standing with his bow by his side, cheeks wet with tears. A portal shimmers into existence with a powerful wave of Magnus' hand, but he doesn't avert his gaze for a second—not even as every Shadowhunter, bar Isabelle and Lydia, sags, eyelids drooping and bodies going limp as Magnus alters their memories, just like he did to the guards watching the Downworld prisoners all those months ago.

"Everything's going to be fine," he says, voice low, tender, as though they're the only two people in the world, as though there isn't a battle waging around them and blood staining Magnus' floors and a war on the horizon that they're supposed to be on different sides of. "They won't remember any of this."
"I'm going to find you. I'm not going to let you fight this on your own."

"Alexander—"

Stubborn as ever, Alec interrupts him with a firm shake of his head. "No. We agreed. Together."

Magnus smiles faintly. "Together."

And he steps through the portal, leaving Alec behind in the destructive, bloody aftermath of battle as the portal closes up and Magnus' magical ropes disappear, and all that remains is the silence of loneliness.

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Magnus tumbles out of the portal, only just able to right himself before he falls on his ass at the volatile reaction his magic has to the stench permeating the air. It's the same smell he and Luke stumbled across in that tunnel.

The rancid scent is that of Valentine's experiments, according to the High Warlock of London. It's the clash of angels and greater demons, blood of the pure and the sinners clashing and evoking revulsion in warlocks and fae—both of whom can sense its wrongness.

He looks around, wondering where, exactly, he's landed. He's spent the last week and a half pinpointing Valentine's most likely locations, calling in on favours he's spent centuries collecting to do so.

His first guess is an underground location on the outskirts of New York State, not altogether unlike the tunnel he and Luke had explored. It's wider, and clearly more inhabited—he can see discarded boots and weapons leaning against a rocky outcrop to his left, and a warlock must be here, too, because the place is lit with magic and scarred by the remnants of a long-extinguished line of warlock fire.

It's cold, but the ground is dusty. And, despite the smell, Magnus can't see any of that vile, viscous residue there'd been in the tunnel in New York City. It's a small blessing.

"Well, well, well."

Magnus looks up at the drawling sound of a Shadowhunter with a Circle rune branded into his neck. He's flanked by four others, and they're smirking at him. Magnus supposes he doesn't exactly look his best, having just emerged from a battle in which he was severely outnumbered, if not at all out-powered.

"Bind his hands," the Shadowhunter barks at his lackeys. "Valentine won't want him doing his vile magic tricks while he discovers his fate."

Shadowhunters crowd in on him, four approaching him slowly, as though he's a frightened, dangerous animal who could lash out and attack at any moment and needs soothing before they can cage him.

Oh, hell no.

Magnus brings his hands together with a thunderous clap, and all four Shadowhunters are thrown backwards as the chasm around them rumbles and trembles as though being hit by an earthquake. They crumple to the ground, two unconscious, the other two rolling onto their sides and coughing, clutching at their heads and groaning lowly.
The Shadowhunter who appears to be a leader narrows his eyes at Magnus. "You really don't want to play it this way, warlock."

Magnus' lips twist in a humourless smirk. "I was rather under the impression that Valentine wanted me for something. I assure you, he'll be getting fuck all if he insists on ordering his cowardly minions to behave like animals. I'm quite aware that Shadowhunters in general are barely more civilised than Neanderthals, but I didn't realise the Circle had regressed to apes."

The Shadowhunter growls at him - and, really, Magnus thinks, it's only serving to reassert his point - and draws a seraph blade from his belt. It lights up, glowing white as he brandishes it at Magnus with wide, feral eyes.

Magnus rolls his eyes. "Really?" he says, and twirls a hand, shooting vines of magic from the tips of two fingers. They wrap around the blade, the clash of warlock and angelic magic causing dark, curling smoke to rise into the air with an eerie hiss. A jerk of his hand, and the blade clatters to the floor, sliding towards Magnus' feet.

He kicks it away. The Shadowhunter stares at him, pupils constricting in fear.

"Pangborn!"

From the shadows, a bald figure emerges, arms spread wide and fingers splayed, palms forwards.

"Is that really any way to treat our guest?"

Magnus' eyes fix on Valentine Morgenstern with sheer, unending hatred. The man is a genocidal maniac, desperate to inflict unending suffering and willing to work with the likes of Azazel and commit the most atrocious of acts - chaining and torturing angels, for the love of Lilith, not to mention the hundreds of people dead at his hands - and Magnus is supposed to pretend to be on his side.

He doesn't know how he's going to manage it, when every inch of him itches to throttle Valentine where he stands.

"Magnus Bane," Valentine says, a smile turning up the corners of his lips. "To what do we owe the pleasure?"

Magnus presses his lips together in disgust. "I came to take you up on your offer."

Valentine arches his eyebrows. "Really, now? The look on your face suggests otherwise."

Taking a deep breath, Magnus tilts his chin up, drawing himself to his full height. He's the tallest person in the room, and the most powerful, and he's certain that they can all feel it—even those trailing in through the archway behind Valentine, coming to witness events unfold.

"I want to burn the Clave to the ground," he says—because, after all, the best lies are rooted in truth. "They've crossed unimaginable lines. They've threatened people I care about. I refuse to sit idly by and watch such an abominable institution continue to exist unchallenged for a moment longer."

"Hm." Valentine takes a step closer, and tilts his head to one side. "And who, precisely, is it that the Clave have been foolish enough to threaten?"

"Someone I love," Magnus says, casting his eyes to the ground as Valentine begins to circle him, playing at embarrassment. "Someone I would lay down my life for."
"Someone you would compromise your morals for? Someone you would join your mortal enemy for?"

Magnus swallows. "For what they're going to do, yes."

Valentine laughs in delight. "Tell me, Magnus, tell me. Who is this person?"

"A Shadowhunter," Magnus says, and Valentine stills. "I found a Shadowhunter dying on the street outside my home, six months ago. We...formed a bond, over time. But, of course—"

"Of course, the Clave cannot abide one of their own being corrupted by a warlock," Valentine says, a smile born of maliciousness curling at his lips. "Yes. And they would destroy him, rip him and everything he cares about apart as punishment for his betrayal."

Just like you would, you asshole.

"They tried to. Which is why I'm here."

"And what do your fellow Downworld leaders think of your betrayal?"

"Those who know don't consider it a betrayal," Magnus tells him, honestly. Because it's not. Not that Valentine needs to know that.

"I see."

Valentine comes full circle and stands before him, looking Magnus up and down with disdain clear in his eyes. The sight of a thousand repressed comments of hatred and bigotry are clear in his eyes, written into the sharp lines around his mouth, and the sight fills Magnus with nausea. He wants to spit in this revolting man's face.

"Well, High Warlock Bane—" Valentine smirks, clearly remembering what Magnus had said to him "—in that case, I think it's time we introduced you to what, exactly, we're preparing out here."

Chapter End Notes

I really really hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! I had a ton of fun with writing this one, so let me know what you thought in the comments.

You can also come talk to me on Tumblr or drop me a line on Twitter. You can also grab my attention with #fwwfic on Twitter!

Thank you so so much for all your comments last chapter, and I’ll try to do better with the replies this week <3

Much love,
Lu <3
In which nobody remembers, Alec visits Magnus’ loft, and Magnus makes a friend.

The goldfinch: abundance, positivity, and inspired energy. (I’ll admit this link is slightly tenuous, but it’s aimed at a particular scene in the middle.)

None of them remember what transpired in Magnus' loft.

None of them remember what Magnus and Alec said to each other. None of them remember any of it.

Just like Magnus had said they wouldn't.

For some reason, that only makes it hurt more.

He's silent, turning his stele over between his fingers absently, Magnus' face playing over in his face when Alec had held that bow up, arrow aiming right at him. Still, still, Magnus had wavered in his faith, uncertain that Alec would follow through on their plan.

Alec doesn't understand. He doesn't understand how someone like Magnus, so confident and secure in his power and his appearance and his worth and expertise as the High Warlock of Brooklyn, the most powerful warlock in North America, can sometimes be hit by such insecurities about his worth as Magnus Bane, a man who deserves to be loved.

"If the warlock runs off to Valentine, we're done," the Inquisitor says, pursing her lips together.

Alec's eyes flick up, fingers stilling on his stele. He's entirely out of energy, drained in every way it's possible for a person to be drained, but he can't let that pass without comment.

"Maybe you should have thought of that before you decided to order his execution, Inquisitor."

The Inquisitor stares at him. "That thing—"

"I'm done here."

Alec shoves his chair back, rising to his feet and turning.
"Lightwood—"

"I'm done," he says again, not looking back at the assembly of people around the table. "And I'm not sitting down at this table again until I hear a reasonable policy about the Downworld that won't lead to the entire world imploding at the hands of Valentine."

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Alec isn't entirely sure why he's going to Magnus' loft. He doesn't have a key. Magnus isn't going to be there to let him in. Nobody's going to be there. It's going to be empty, and destroyed by the battle that had raged there a mere few hours ago, and all it's going to do it remind him of the fact that Magnus is gone, and Alec has no way to find him.

The narrow, rickety stairs creak under his feet as he walks up, shoulders slumped and one hand resting lightly on his seraph blade. Part of him genuinely expects a demon - or maybe just a Shadowhunter - to leap out at him and slit his throat.

He makes it to the front door, and, almost immediately, hears claws scratching at the wood, and a series of plaintive meows reach him.

"I know," Alec says, sighing as he stands outside like an idiot. "I know, Chairman."

The Chairman meows again, mournfully, and Alec lets his head thump against the wood. He wonders whether Magnus has set up some kind of magical feed to make sure his cat doesn't starve. He goes away on business all the time—he must have some kind of system.

Footsteps sound down below, and Alec turns just as the sole of a shoe presses into the first stair, making the bowed, ruined wood whine in protest.


"What are you doing here?"

"I—" Alec glances back at the front door. "I don't really know. Do you...?"

"Of course I know what happened. Magnus told me about your plan. I take it he's not conveniently dead?"

"No!" Alec can't help his horror at the mere thought. "No. Absolutely not. Well. Not that I know of. He went to Valentine, so—"

"I know." Raphael continues up the stairs, stopping one below Alec and narrowing his eyes a little. "You want to find him, don't you?"

"Yes."

"If you do, tell me. I'm coming."

"Yeah." Alec nods. "Yeah, okay."

"Good. Now we've got that cleared up, open the door and let's see what sort of mess you Shadowhunters left in here."

"I don't have a key."

Raphael rolls his eyes. "Shadowhunter, you're dating a warlock, not an accountant. You don't need a key. I mean, you can have a key—" Raphael produces a small silver object from his pocket and
waves it in front of Alec's face too quickly for Alec to be able to tell what it is, but he can have a fairly well educated guess "—but you don't need one. Not if Magnus hasn't locked his door the mundane way."

What seems like so very long ago, Alec had gone to buy Magnus a coffee from Starbucks and make him French toast, the morning after he'd walked him back home and left him recovering from a total magic depletion. He hadn't needed a key to get in then. At the time, he'd presumed it was because he'd never locked the door on his way out.

Perhaps not entirely.

Alec reaches down to the handle, twisting, and—

Oh. The door swings open, the familiar hiss and warmth of Magnus' wards easing away as they let him through, despite the fact that Magnus isn't here. And— Well. Alec isn't going to deny that it makes him feel more than a little...lovesick.

"Dios," Raphael says, looking around with his eyebrows half raised. "What a mess."

Alec bends down to pick up a fallen photograph. The glass of the frame has shattered, and it falls to the floor with a tinkle like wind charms as Alec lifts it, but the photograph itself is in perfect condition.

He's not sure he's ever really seen it before. There are rather a lot of photos dotted around Magnus' apartment, some more obviously than others. Lots are tucked away in corners.

"Who's this?" Alec asks, glancing over at Raphael and tilting the frame towards him. Magnus is standing with his arm slung around the shoulders of a beautiful dark-skinned woman wearing the kind of smirk that suggests she could definitely give Magnus a hard time.

"Catarina," Raphael says, barely glancing at it. "In the seventies. Ragnor took that photo. I refused to be in it. Of course, Magnus just snatched the camera and took one of us, because he's an asshole."

Alec smiles a little, and sets the frame on a table. He doesn't say anything in response, but catches sight of Raphael's wistful expression as he passes him to head into the kitchen and grab a bucket so he can start clearing up a little. After all, he and his colleagues made this mess.

"Hey, you," Alec says, as the Chairman appears at his heels and follows him into the kitchen, meowing pitifully. "Let's sort this place out and then find Magnus, hm?"

The Chairman meows again, head-butting his leg, and Alec smiles faintly.

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"I suppose you want to know why you're really here," Valentine muses, as Magnus twirls magic lazily between his fingers where he's sprawled out on the ground, leaning against the wall.

"Not particularly," Magnus drawls.

He's seen enough in the last day to last him a lifetime. Some of Valentine's experiments would be enough to turn a weaker man's stomach. Certainly, the horrifically detailed notes regarding what he'd done to an angel had been enough to make Magnus want to slit his throat.

"You see," Valentine says, picking up a knife from a long wooden table and tossing it over lazily in
his hand, "I knew I needed a warlock. I just wasn't sure which type of warlock."

"We're people, not food," Magnus says, cat eyes flashing pointedly and making several of Valentine's soldiers shift uncomfortably where they're standing in the doorway. "We're individuals. You can't categorise us."

"Ah." Valentine points his knife at Magnus and smiles tightly. It's casual, but Magnus can see the revulsion in his eyes. "See, that's where you're wrong. I can. You're powerful because you're old and you're clever and you've worked for it, yes, but you're also powerful because of your father."

Magnus stills. "Excuse me?"


Magnus presses his lips together firmly. There'd been a time when he tried hard to keep that under careful wraps, but it's been common knowledge since the turn of the nineteenth century. That doesn't mean he enjoys being reminded of the despicable being who donated half of Magnus' DNA. Nature may be superseded by nurture, Ragnor had said, long ago, when Magnus was a young man in the mundane sense of the word, and had made the grievous mistake of summoning his father before he was really ready to.

"I do. I fail to see what that has to do with anything."

"Well." Valentine flips the knife over again, watching Magnus as the wickedly sharp tip catches the flickering magical light that's illuminating the place. "I tried utilising some lesser warlocks, but they didn't quite have the desired effect."

Magnus lifts his chin, sitting up straight so he's closer to Valentine, staring him straight in the eye as he says, "Who's here that you're not telling me about, Morgenstern? Who are you hiding?"

That seems to throw Valentine a little. He blinks, genuine surprise flashing across his face before he schools his expression back into that revolting little smirk that Magnus wants to scorch off the face of the planet.

"Would you like a list, Bane? More people that I can count."

"The warlock," Magnus growls, rising to his feet in a single swift motion, sparks crackling at his fingers as he leans into Valentine's personal space. "You're holding another warlock here. I'm not stupid. You were using Iris Rouse, but she's serving exile."

Valentine's lips twist. "Follow me."

***

Magnus can feel his magic reacting to the heinousness of Valentine's experiments as he follows the Shadowhunter down a long, ragged tunnel that becomes more poorly lit and narrower with each step they take. And it's cold. He shivers a little as he snaps his fingers to conjure a flame into the palm of his hand.

The look of disgust and the uncomfortable shift of Valentine's shoulders doesn't go unnoticed.

At the end of the tunnel, Valentine waves a clumsy hand to send away the three Shadowhunters standing before a bolted door. Magnus has to clamp down on his fury when he realises that the door
is bolted on the outside—whover Valentine has been keeping as his pet warlock in Iris' absence is a prisoner here, in every cruel, barbaric sense of the word.

Valentine draws back the bolt slowly, and raps lightly on the wood. "Hello, little one. I've brought you a visitor."

He pushes open the door, letting it swing inwards, and gestures carelessly, encouraging Magnus inside. Magnus shoots him a suspicious look before stepping forward.

He freezes when he turns his gaze to the interior of the room. It's not the cell-like place of Downworld torture that Magnus expected—instead, it looks like he imagines most young children's bedrooms do, with a space-themed mobile hanging from the ceiling, a dresser covered in toys, and a bed covered with far too many blankets of alarmingly bright colours.

In one corner, a little girl stands with her hands pressing against her skirt nervously. She observes Magnus silently, eyes flickering over him, pupils constricting with clear trepidation. There's a scarf tied snugly around her neck, and, as they stand watching each other, Magnus in shock and the little girl in fear, she lifts one hand to fiddle with it, tugging it further up her throat.

"Hello," Magnus says, ducking his head a little. His glamour is down, but he blinks twice to draw attention to his eyes. "You're Madzie, aren't you?"

She doesn't respond, following him silently with her eyes as he takes several slow steps towards her. Still a metre or two away, he drops down onto one knee to put himself closer to her height, and offers her a small smile, furrowing his eyebrows slightly.

"Are you wearing this because you want to, or because you've been told to?" Magnus asks, gesturing to his own neck as he nods at her scarf.

Madzie's eyes shift to look over his shoulder, where Magnus is sure Valentine is still standing, before returning to Magnus' face.

"You can take it off, if you want to," he tells her. "You don't have to hide."

She looks at Valentine again.

"Okay. You can leave it on. That's fine too. Sometimes it's easier to leave it on, right? People don't stare?" He looks at her pointedly and raises his eyebrows. "Lots of people don't like my eyes."

"You're a warlock," she states, and he smiles kindly at her.

"I am. My name is Magnus."

"Do you know Nana?"

"I do. She wanted someone to look for you."

Madzie is quiet again, and extends a hand to one side. A stuffed polar bear shoots towards her from the bed, and she hugs it tightly. Her eyes stay fixed firmly on Magnus, as though waiting for a reaction.

Magnus clenches his jaw and tilts his head towards the door, not far enough to look at the man he wants to murder, but enough that it's clear his words are for Valentine, not Madzie.

"It wasn't Iris who set the New York Institute alight, was it?" he asks.
"No," Valentine says, a smile clear in his voice. It makes Magnus sick. "It wasn't."

"That's why Iris went so quietly." He closes his eyes. "She was protecting Madzie."

"Yes."

"You—" He presses his lips together tightly and curls his fingers into his palms, hard, to stop his magic exploding out of him in a blaze of sheer rage. "You bastard."

"Madzie has been very useful to us. She's powerful, for a child. But not quite powerful enough."

"Useful? Powerful?" Magnus barks out a sharp laugh, straightening up and turning to face Valentine. "You mean she's young, vulnerable, and easy to manipulate?"

Valentine shrugs. "If you want to see it that way. She's working for the greater good. I don't see anything wrong with that."

"That's the same line the Clave uses," Magnus tells him, impossibly satisfied when that makes the smile drop off Valentine's face to be replaced with a glare, the vein in his forehead pulsing as he clenches his jaw.

_Racists._ They're all the same. It's a hairsbreadth that separates Valentine and the Clave.

Magnus turns his back to Valentine in favour of the little girl in the room. He doesn't want to think about all the awful, horrific things she must have been subjected to in this place. Not just magical acts of inhumane cruelty that Valentine has conditioned her into believing are okay, but tests, experiments, trials.

Lilith, Magnus wants to summon his father just so he can watch him squash Valentine like a bug. Although, he'd rather have the satisfaction of doing it himself.

Pulling off his jacket and tossing it onto the foot of Madzie's bed, he folds himself into a cross-legged position on the floor. At least the rug in Madzie's room is fairly comfortable, he thinks, if a little gaudy.

He closes his eyes, laying his hands palms-up on his knees. Magic curls up from his palms like steam, twisting and twirling in the air, shades of blue shimmering in wispy clouds of gentle power.

"What the hell are you doing?" Valentine spits, but Magnus ignores him. He's realised, over the last day, that Valentine is absolutely fucking terrified of him—especially when he's doing magic. It'd be amusing, if it weren't so pathetic.

It takes a minute or two, but eventually, eyes still closed, Magnus senses Madzie nearing him. The rustle of her skirt reaches his ears as she sits down opposite him, knees just brushing against his shins.

He smiles a little, and slits his eyes open when he feels tentative magic twine through his. Soft purple floats up from Madzie's hands. She's staring at him with wide, wondrous eyes, and Magnus wonders whether Iris ever did this with her. He wonders whether Iris ever did anything healthy and productive regarding what it means to be a warlock with this poor girl at all.

As they sit there, sharing their magic - externally, because while Magnus feels protective of her, sharing magic through physical contact is an intimate, familial sort of ritual - Madzie lifts a hand to tug off her scarf, looking to Magnus uncertainly.
He just smiles softly at her, tilting his index finger to send a spark of magic to tickle her neck just below the gill on her left side. She giggles.

"Magnus?" she says.

"Yes, sweet pea?"

"Your eyes are pretty."

"Coming from you," he says, with a silly, over-exaggerated wink, "that's a pretty big compliment."

The silliness is worth it, for the look on her face.

***

"I don't see what the purpose of this is," Lydia mutters, as she and Isabelle stand in the corner of the Seelie Court, heads bowed as they wait for the courtiers and knights and diplomats to assemble.

Around them are all the mystical signs of life that mundanes think of when they imagine a fantasy world. Fae zip around the clearing, the ethereal magic of the Seelies making them sparkle in the light of the day—not that Isabelle is entirely sure how things such as day and night work, in the Seelie Court. It has always been something of a mystery to her, how she could arrive in Meliorn's arms at dusk and leave at dawn and appear back at the Institute having been gone for a mere hour or two.

"You've changed your tune," Isabelle says briskly, and perhaps a little coldly. "Two days ago, you were all for alliances with the Downworld."

"Yes, well." Lydia presses her lips together firmly. "Two days ago, the Inquisitor hadn't waltzed into the Institute and tried to torture you."

"Is that really what this is all about?" Isabelle asks, raising her eyebrows in surprise. "Me?"

Lydia glances over at her from her she'd been starting steadfastly at the ground. Her eyes scan across Isabelle's face, flitting from her eyes to her lips to the faint bruise lingering on her jaw from where she'd got physical with one of Imogen's handymen.

"Alec's being selfish," Lydia says, looking back to the ground. "His relationship with Magnus is putting everyone he claims to care about so much in terrible danger, and yesterday only serves to expose that. I don't know how Magnus got away, but that was all...far too close to utter disaster."

Shaking her head, Isabelle reaches out and wraps her fingers loosely around Lydia's wrist. "There isn't a selfish bone in my brother's body. He's spent the last six months denying himself things with Magnus for precisely this reason. This isn't selfish. This is honest. Everyone else in the world is allowed to be honest about who they love. Why shouldn't he?"

It's not strictly true, she knows. She and Lydia could be honest about their relationship, and they wouldn’t be punished for it, not officially, but their reputations would be tainted. Most people she knows would be horrified at the concept of two women being romantically involved.

Not so tainted as Alec’s will be, of course. Nor as tainted as her own would have been, had anyone ever found out about her months dating Maia.

"Because loving who he does hurts other people he loves."

"Maybe," Isabelle acknowledges. "But it’s not his fault, and none of us are holding it against him."
Not when he's doing everything it's humanly possible to do to make our world better."

Lydia exhales heavily, and turns her hand to curl her fingers loosely around Isabelle's. A smile covers her face, faintly. "You're right," she says, and Isabelle is tempted to say, well, obviously. "I just... It scared me so much, seeing you dragged into that cell."

"I assure you, Alec was just as scared," Isabelle tells her, voice soft. "He'd burn down the world for the people he loves. Just because that now includes Magnus doesn't mean people like me and Jace are suddenly excluded."

"How are you so wise?" Lydia asks, shaking her head a little, lips twitching up. "It's frustrating."

"Mmm. I hope I'm wise enough to negotiate with Seelies," she says, catching sight of Meliorn as he walks in. He's beautiful, she thinks, but the urge to go over and kiss him has diminished. Not entirely, perhaps, but enough. Enough for her to smile at him, and feel nothing unpleasant when he smiles back, faintly.

"You are," Lydia assures her, and squeezes her hand just lightly before letting go as the Seelie Queen beckons them over, steel in her eyes.

***

"Alexander."

*The voice is soft, quiet, and he's not entirely sure it's even real. It sounds like the whisper of a ghost, a breath in the quiet of the nighttime, like phantom fingers brushing across his cheek and then promptly disappearing, vanishing into nothingness like there was nothing there to begin with.*

"Alexander."

*He's dreaming. He has to be. Surrounding him is nothing but the thick blanket of silence that can only ever be delivered by the dark hours. His eyes are closed, but he can feel the roughness of the Institute's sheets. He's in bed. He was asleep. He's dreaming.*

"Alexander."

*The syllables come out longer this time, drawn out as though he's being called to. It's a figment of his imagination, of course. The only person who calls him Alexander is his mother, and she certainly wouldn't be calling to him at night.*

"Alexander."

*Why does the voice make him want to open his eyes? It makes him feel...warm. Soothed. Surrounded by something more comforting than the harsh sheets on his bed. There's something...*

Magnus.

"Magnus?"

*He sits bolt upright, eyes flying open as sheets pool around his hips, cool air biting at his bare chest and making him shiver.*

"Alexander," Magnus says, and it's him, it's so clearly him, but Alec can't see him. He's not in view. It's like he's projecting his voice into Alec's bedroom through a speaker.

"Magnus, where are you?"
"I'm exactly where I have been for the last twenty-four hours. But I needed to speak to you."

"What?" Alec lifts a hand to rub at his eyes, blinking blearily as his mind tries to catch up.

"Camille is going to destroy everything you have ever loved."

That wakes Alec up.

Eyes wide, heart racing, he says, "I'm sorry?"

"You're trying to do the valiant thing, sweetheart, but it's not going to work. Valentine wants to rip the world apart. Camille wants to inflict as much hurt on anyone who's ever wronged her as she possibly can. And the Clave will have no mercy for a traitor."

Alec stares. There's nothing to stare at, precisely, so he settles for furrowing his brow and staring into space. "What are you talking about? Magnus—"

"No. You know what you're destined for, Alexander. You know where this is going. We both do. We've always known. Even if we don't like it."

"I've no idea what you're talking about."

"Don't you?" Magnus asks, voice eerily steely.

Abruptly, Magnus appears before him, spread out on the ground, limp and bleeding. Glassy eyes stare up at the ceiling, unseeing, rings dulled and sprayed with sticky scarlet where they lay on fingers splayed across an unmoving chest.

Alec jolts in horror. His lips part and he glances down, certain he's going to find his hands shaking. Instead, he finds his hands covered in blood, stained red. A dagger is clasped loosely in his right hand.

He drops it as though it burned him, staring at Magnus' corpse in sheer horror, fear spreading through him from his heart outwards, paralysingly cold.

This can't be happening. It just can't. It's not possible. None of this is possible. Magnus can't be here, and he can't be dead, and Alec can't have killed him because he loves him, he—

"Of course you do," Magnus' voice whispers, echoing around his room and absolutely not coming from the dead body lying prone on his floor, thick blood oozing from a gaping wound in his chest and surrounding him in a sea of red. "But you're a Shadowhunter. And your family is under threat. I have to die. Deep in your heart, that's what you know. I have to die for everyone else you love to live."

"No," Alec says, vision going blurry.

He pushes the sheets away from him, rising on trembling legs to cross to where Magnus' body is. He drops to his knees, only soaking himself in more of Magnus' blood, and presses one dripping hand against his boyfriend's cheek. The skin is bruised, marred with ugly splotches of colour where it's normally unblemished, and he's cold to the touch. It makes Alec feel sick.

"No, no," he says again, leaning over Magnus to press their foreheads together. "Magnus, no, I—"

"This is the only place we can ever end, darling," Magnus says. A sob hitches in Alec's throat. His fingers curl into the front of Magnus' shirt, and he presses closer, uncaring of the blood. This can't
be real. "This is all the awaits us." Breath curls around his ear, and it doesn't smell like Magnus, doesn't smell of coffee or peppermint toothpaste or the granola bars he eats obsessively when he's too busy to spare ten minutes for a sandwich.

"Death?" Alec whispers.

"Tragedy."

***

Alec wakes with a gasp, heart hammering so hard against his ribs he can't breathe. The room is spinning and his head feels like he's gone three rounds with a hoard of Ravener demons alone, and he can't fucking breathe—

He makes a strangled noise in the back of his throat as his stomach lurches alarmingly. Between one second and the next, the reflexes of a Shadowhunter take over and he's on his feet, stumbling towards the bathroom. He's barely slapped a hand against the light switch before he's hunched over the toilet and throwing up the pitiful meal Isabelle forced down him last night when she and Lydia had returned triumphant from a successful first negotiation with the Seelies.

The hands he has braced on the toilet seat are trembling. In fact, he realises, he's trembling all over. Sweat is running down his neck and his back, and it's making him shiver as it evaporates, sending him into fits of hot and cold.

After making sure he's not going to vomit all over the floor, he goes to run the tap and splash water on his face. The shock of the cold calms him somewhat; he glances up at himself in the mirror. He looks awful.

But Magnus is...

Well. He might not be fine, but Alec hasn't killed him.

And...he feels like he'd know, if something terrible had happened. He'd just...he'd know.

Still, it doesn't stop him venturing back into his bedroom, sinking down onto his mattress, and picking up his phone to call Magnus' number.

It feels foolish, listening to it ring while he's sure Magnus isn't going to answer. Why would he? He's pretending to collude with Valentine. He's pretending to participate in Valentine’s evil master plan. He's protecting himself—and Alec. He hasn't got time for social calls. His phone is probably sitting in his apartment with only Chairman Meow to hear it.

Which is why Alec nearly jumps out of his skin when a painfully familiar and very much real voice says, "Alexander?"

"Magnus?" Alec breathes the word in disbelief, and he doesn't even feel that painful, clenching paranoia that someone might have overheard him. Instead, he's overwhelmed by relief so powerful he has to close his eyes.

"Did you butt dial me?" Magnus asks, sounding amused. "I'll have you know that I did not bring a phone charger, nor do I have the electrical capacity to use one. My phone ringing was very alarming."

It's such a relief to hear Magnus’ voice in his ear, light and playful and just tinged with sarcasm, that Alec lets out a weak laugh.
"I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd pick up."

"Is everything alright?" Magnus asks, and Alec can imagine him sitting up a little straighter as concern bleeds into his voice. "Nothing terrible has happened, has it? I know the Nephilim don't believe in sleep, but I thought I could make it through a day before I had to—"

"No, no, nothing like that. I just...I really wanted to hear your voice."

He'd have settled with Magnus' voicemail message. The real thing sounds so good Alec thinks he might cry.

"What's going on?" Magnus asks, voice impossibly soft.

"It's nothing. Don't worry about it. You've got enough to think about."

"Darling," Magnus says, and, by the Angel, Alec is really going to cry in a second. He can feel his throat going tight already. Nobody in the world has ever spoken to him like Magnus does. "You can tell me. You can tell me anything."

"I know I can. It's nothing."

"Here's how this goes, my love. You don't have to tell me everything, or anything - although of course you can, if you want to - but you don't get to lie to me. I won't make you talk about it just because you admit that there is an it."

Magnus doesn't sound angry, or even put-out, merely factual, and it's a fair thing to say. Alec exhales.

"Yeah. Okay. You're right. It's not nothing. I— Do you remember when I had that dream about- about killing you?"

Alec remembers the whole night vividly. It was all rather a lot for such a short space of time. He wonders whether Magnus has as many strange feelings about the whole affair as Alec does.

He didn’t love Magnus back then. But there’d been something. Something he only recognises with hindsight as care. Deep, unselfish care.

"I do."

"I...had another one."

"Angel, I'm fine. Much more fine than I thought I'd be. So fine that I feel perfectly at ease having this conversation where Valentine could very well hear me. Whatever he wants me for, he's serious about it. Nothing is going to happen to me while I'm playing the game. And nobody - nobody - is going to get to force you into hurting me."

"I know," Alec says, feeling oddly small. He doesn't like feeling small. It's not something he feels very often, this sort of vulnerability, but if he's going to let himself feel like this around anyone, it's going to be around Magnus. "I just... It was horrible."

"Alexander," Magnus says, four syllables saturated with so much meaning Alec’s heart hurts. "I'm sorry I can't be there."

"No, it's okay. I'm okay." He swallows. "I love you."

"I love you too, darling."
"I—" He pauses. "Can anyone else hear me?"

"Certainly not on my end. My phone is silenced. Although Catarina has a nasty habit of working her way around that to eavesdrop on me."

Alec cracks a smile. "I noticed. I'm going to find you, Magnus. I know you can't tell me where you are, and I know I can't bring an army in, and to be honest I don't know what I'm going to do or how I'm going to do it yet, but I'm gonna work it out. Because I also know what you can't fight Valentine's entire army on your own. Not with all the power he's got on his side."

Magnus sniffs haughtily. "I think I could have a fair go at it."

Alec lets out a little laugh. "I know you could. But I love you too much to take that chance. And also, I can't stand the thought of sitting on the sidelines while other people are out risking themselves. I want to help."

"I know," Magnus tells him. "It's one of my favourite things about you. Your drive to do good."

Alec flushes a little and rolls his eyes. "Stop it."

He can hear the grin in Magnus' voice when he speaks. "Never. It's late—are you going to be okay if I let you go, so you can get some sleep?"

"Yeah." A small smile tips Alec's lips up. "Yeah, I am. Thank you."

"Don't mention it. I love you."

"I love you too," Alec says.

He sets his phone back on his bedside table, exhaling. He yanks the sheets up, wrinkling his nose a little when he feels that a corner is slightly damp from his sweating marathon, and settles down, letting his eyes slip shut.

_It's gonna be fine_, he tells himself, and, with Magnus' voice still ringing in his ears, it's hard not to believe it.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Thank you so much for reading! As always, I hope you enjoyed this one, and let me know what you thought in the comments :)

You came come talk to me on [my Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com) or @LucysRebelHeart on Twitter (use #fwwfic or @ me)

Happy belated Valentine’s Day to you all! I hope all the couples had fun, and I hope all the singles enjoyed their Netflix binge/solo chocolate scoff. I can relate.

Much love,
Lu <3
Chapter Summary

In which Alec meets Catarina, Magnus and Valentine chat, and Magnus considers freedom.

Chapter Notes

The grosbeak: boldness. That’s it.

Just a heads up, there’s a reference all the way back to a fairly small detail in chapter 12 in this chapter, so if you can’t remember what happened in the aftermath of the Downworld rescue, you might want to flick back to chapter 12 and read the very end - just Magnus’ fire message to Alec.

"If you think you're sneaking up on me with any success, Morgenstern, you are painfully mistaken."

Magnus opens his eyes to fix Valentine with a smile, yellow-green irises flashing in the dim light of the Circle’s cavernous hideout.

"Us filthy warlocks--" a smirk slides over his lips "--are rather good at picking up on when somebody who would really like to see our intestines splattered across the floor is approaching."

For a moment, while a hint of red flickers at Magnus' fingertips, Valentine watches him, frozen, with wariness flickering in his eyes. He doesn't move, doesn't reach for the seraph blade slid neatly into his belt—it makes Magnus wonder why, exactly, he was trying to ambush Magnus in his sleep at all.

"Here's the thing," Magnus says, smile dropping away as he rises to his feet so that he's nose-to-nose with Valentine, tilting his chin up and fixing the man with a glare. "I've now been here for more than twenty-four hours, and you have yet to tell me what in the name of Lilith you want from me. So here's how it's going to be."

"Warlock——"

"Enough!" The lights flicker, and Valentine winces visibly. "You're going to tell me everything, right now, or I am walking out of that door to find someone else who'll help me. Because every day longer I spend in this miserable hellhole with you is another day the people I love are in danger. It's your choice, Shadowhunter."

***

The Downworld council was never a section of the Shadow World that Alec expected to be privy to. Certainly not the sight of Luke and Meliorn standing toe to toe, shouting at each other, while Raphael sits drumming his fingers on the table in stony silence.
Alec catches Raphael's eye and clears his throat. "Luke—"

"Zip it, Shadowhunter," Luke growls, not breaking his gaze from Meliorn's for a moment. "I was part of the goddamn Circle, Meliorn, I know Valentine. He was my fucking parabatai, and I'm telling you, whatever he wants Magnus for is going to end our world, whether your righteous ass wants to admit it or not. The Seelies need to put their money where their mouth is. The Seelie Queen needs to act like a part of the Downworld."

"Perhaps the warlock should have considered the danger before he ran off with the enemy for a Shadowhunter!" Meliorn spits back, and Alec flinches.

"Oh, drop the crap," Luke snaps, waving a hand in irritation. "That wasn't just for Alec and you know it. That was for all of us. Magnus knew that we'd be sitting on our hands until Valentine is out there lighting the fires of our own goddamn destruction if he didn't do something. He knew he was our best shot. The world's best shot at Valentine, and the Downworld's best shot at the Clave."

Meliorn sniffs. "I find it hard to believe that—"

"Excuse my language, gentlemen, but what irrelevant bullshit are you blathering on about?" asks a rich, unimpressed voice from the doorway. "The werewolf is right, so sit your goddamn asses down and shut it. Let's get onto something more productive."

Alec's eyebrows shoot up, because he recognises that voice. He turns in his chair to face the doorway, and, sure enough, a tall, beautiful woman dressed in dark blue scrubs whom he's seen in many of Magnus' pictures is striding towards them, face set with determination.

"Catarina Loss, for those of you who don't know me." Her eyes flicker to Luke and Alec. "I'm filling in for Magnus. I despise politics, but I'm also upsettingly good at it, and Magnus has gone gallivanting off for some fun with a genocidal maniac, so needs must."

Alec's lips curl up in amusement. "Alec Lightwood," he says, inclining his head.

She smiles at him. "I know. And Luke Garroway, I presume?"

"Yes, ma'am," Luke says, blinking once.

"Alec." Catarina turns to him. "What's the Inquisitor pushing for?"

"She's obsessed with Magnus," Alec tells her, "but the Clave isn't having it after he escaped. They've picked up more indicators of Greater Demon activity in the States, and they're more worried about Valentine. But Imogen is staying put in New York, and she's going to start sending my people out with or without the Clave's approval soon."

"Then sitting here talking about it is pointless," Catarina says briskly. "Where are the negotiations between the Seelies and Isabelle Lightwood at, Meliorn?"

Meliorn glares at her. "We are making progress. Slowly. The Seelie Queen is—"

"A raving mad, hypocritical bitch determined to hold onto her mysterious ability to demand respect without lifting a damn finger to help anyone but herself," Catarina says, rolling her eyes. "Yes. I thought that was what you'd say. In which case, Alec, you can take Isabelle with you."

Alec arches an eyebrow at her. "Take Isabelle with me where, exactly?"

"To Magnus," she says. "Obviously. Valentine isn't going to sit around for long now he's got his
hands on the one person he's wanted since the beginning. He's going to pull whatever strings he can
to manipulate Magnus. Meanwhile, Camille is going to be doing the same to the Clave, until she
brings them round to Imogen's thinking. We haven't got time to sit around and chat."

"So I take a team into Valentine's hideout, and then what?" Alec shakes his head. "We've got no
intel."

"Yes, you do," she says. She snaps her fingers, purple sparks darting through the air, and a narrow
folder slaps onto the table in front of him. "Magnus generated this from what he and Luke found in
that tunnel. Information on Valentine's experiments, some predictions about how he's been using
Greater Demons and angels in his sadistic plans, and estimates of his Nephilim man power."

Alec raises his eyebrows as he flips through the pages, and glances up at her. "You want this to be a
full-out takedown mission."

"Take no prisoners," she says, nodding. "Yes. By the end of this, Valentine and the Circle are going
to be dust."

"Okay."

"I can get a team together. We can help Magnus take Valentine down. There's just one problem."

Catarina exhaled heavily through her nose, and lifts her gaze to the sky. "Isn't there always a problem
with you people. Let's have it, Nephilim."

"Nobody knows where Magnus is. Nobody knows where Valentine is, either. All we know is that
Valentine's suspected location is New York State."

"Good god, Lightwood," Catarina says, clearly astounded. "Use that brain of yours. You must have
one, or Magnus wouldn't spare you the time of day."

Alec frowns at her. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Magnus gave you a letter. With a rune on the back of it. A rune unsanctioned by the Clave, given to
him by a friend."

"Do you mean—" Alec stares at her, remembering the letter that had burnt into existence in his
bedroom all those months ago, right at the beginning, right as their hatred of each other had turned
into respect, right as the seeds of their friendship were planted. "Clary made that rune? It's a tracking
rune?"

Catarina turns to look at Raphael, a half-smile of mixed disbelief and exasperation on her face. "Are
we sure we want to strike alliances with the Clave? Are they all like this?"

"Hey," Alec says, but he smiles a little. "It was a long time ago."

Catarina sighs. "Mortals. Your sense of time is terribly inaccurate. Yes, it's a tracking rune. You'll be
able to find Magnus with it, as long as you've got something that was his."

"I have," Alec says, thinking of the necklace he's got sitting atop the very letter Catarina is referring
to.

"Then this can go ahead?" Catarina asks, fixing him with a piercing look. All jokes have evaporated
from her face. "You can get a team together?"

"Yes," Alec says, glancing around the table once before he returns his eyes to Catarina. "If Magnus
and the rest of the Downworld is going to use this as leverage against the Clave - which I think is a fantastic idea - then we need a mixed team. Not just Shadowhunters."

"As though we were ever going to let you screw this up on your own," Luke says, grinning across the table. "Raphael and I are coming. So is Maia. I might get some more wolves."

"And I've got at least four vampires who are coming, if only so we can use it as a bargaining chip in petitioning for Camille to get her head ripped off," Raphael says, flashing Alec a smile that's all teeth and no mercy.

"And you?" Catarina asks. "We need to know which Shadowhunters are being trusted with Magnus' life."

"My sister and my parabatai," Alec says immediately. "They both know about Magnus. Clary, if she wants to, because she deserves the chance to watch Valentine’s fall. Raj, maybe, but we're going to need someone to hold the Clave back between us going and returning."

"Branwell?" Meliorn asks, raising his eyebrows.

"No. If I want anyone calling the shots where the Clave is concerned, it's her. She knows them inside out."

And something in him doesn’t always entirely trust her judgement. Lydia has good intentions, he knows, but sometimes she seems to miss the mark a little in the heat of a battle where every call can save or destroy a life.

"Alright." Catarina folds her hands together and tilts her chin up. "That's settled. You're moving tomorrow. Does that give you enough time?"


"Excellent," Catarina says, rising from the table. She flicks her fingers in the air, and a business card floats down in front of Alec's face. "My phone number, in case Magnus does something stupid. Which he's frustratingly prone to doing when people he loves are in the middle of a battle."

She shoots them a final smile that's sharp enough to cut through any bullshit they try, and then she turns, sweeping out of the bar with an air of finality.

"I love her," Luke says, breaking the silence, a grin spreading across his face.

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"You’re completely insane," Magnus tells him, shaking his head. "That’s essentially equivalent to suicide, I do hope you know that."

"No," Valentine says, "summoning him without you is the equivalent to suicide."

Magnus fixes him with a cold stare. "What exactly do you expect to accomplish by summoning Asmodeus?"

"Other demons have not been suitably powerful," Valentine says. "Moloch’s attack on the New York Institute was disappointing."
“So instead you’re shackling angels and attempting to control princes of Hell?”

“The angel was useful to us, but served its purpose. We extracted what we needed and then...let it leave.”

Magnus raises one eyebrow, lips pressed into a thin line. “You mean the angel died?”

Valentine shrugs. “It’s irrelevant now. Asmodeus is the last piece I need to take down the Clave. If I can convince him to do my bidding–”

Magnus scoffs. “That’s never going to be anything more than a fantasy, Shadowhunter. You know nothing of my father. You have no idea what he’s capable of. Your kind are notorious for underestimating anything but yourselves. He’s not just a Greater Demon, he is a Prince of Hell. A fallen angel. He’d smite you all out of boredom without having to lift a finger.”

“Which is why you must ensure that doesn’t happen,” Valentine says, lips curling up into a cruel smirk that makes Magnus’ insides twist with revulsion. “You don’t have an option, Bane. Asmodeus will be summoned. At whatever cost.”

Magnus narrows his eyes. “What are you planning?”

“The Clave’s total annihilation, and the cleansing of the remaining Shadowhunter ranks, and-”

“Genocide, yes,” Magnus says, waving a hand impatiently. “What aren’t you telling me about the summoning?”

“I’ve heard...stories,” Valentine says, eyes shifting to the rough surface of the wall as he walks slowly towards a flickering light embedded in a rocky outcrop. “About the sorts of things your father might want to take. Not the usual demonic prices. Memories, days, a treasured or valuable possession.”

Magnus stands up straighter, heart suddenly thudding as his eyes widen. “Morgenstern—”

“Your father thrives on pain and power. He’s got no shortage of it. But in the past, he has been known to ask for sacrifices to take back with him to Edom, to have as his playthings.”

His chest has gone tight, horror constricting his lungs and making his breaths come shallowly. “I am not sacrificing Madzie.”

Valentine looks over at him, one corner of his mouth curled upwards in a ruthless grimace. “Oh, aren’t you? I have some intelligence from a dear friend of yours that I might have a bargaining chip to make you do whatever I damn well tell you to.”

His blood runs cold. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Oh,” Valentine pretends to look surprised. “Did you really think that blonde vampire bitch was answering to the Clave?” He laughs. “Oh, no. She’s playing the double agent brilliantly.”

Magnus isn’t particularly surprised by the news - it’s never going to be news to him that Camille is playing everyone she claims to be in league with to maximise her chances of self-preservation in whatever heinous ways she sees fit.

“Whatever Camille told you—”

“No,” Valentine’s eyes go hard. “No, this time you’re not going to push me around, warlock. This
Magnus’ eyes flash a sharp, brilliant gold a mere moment before Valentine slams into the wall behind him. His head cracks against it and a ragged gasp tears up his throat as Magnus moves towards him.

“Think very carefully about your next words, Valentine Morgenstern,” Magnus whispers, breathing the words across Valentine’s face. “Your guards all appear to be too scared to come and save you.”

“Let me go,” Valentine snarls, “or you can consider this alliance over and I’ll feed you to the Clave.”

Magnus smiles coldly. “Oh, I think we both know that’s not true. You’ve been trying to recruit me for far too long.” He splays his fingers out sharply, and Valentine drops to the dusty ground at his feet with a thud. “I’ll do your summoning, Shadowhunter. But I will not involve Madzie. Those are my terms. You accept whatever Asmodeus wants or I banish him. No child is going to be used as a bargaining tool. Is that understood?”

Valentine’s lip curls from where he’s crumpled on the floor, glaring up at Magnus with a hatred that Magnus feels in return tenfold. He despises this man with his entire being. And he’s going to take extreme pleasure in burning him to the fucking ground.

Unfortunately, he has to bide his time. He needs witnesses to corroborate his story if the Clave is ever going to accept it as a bargaining chip for his freedom.

Freedom.

The word sounds like bliss, even in the privacy of his own mind. Like the soft winds of autumn gushing through his hair, like the first flakes of snow settling against his skin in December, like the first snowdrops emerging in spring, glistening with just-melted morning frost.

It sounds like the prelude to a gorgeous, scorching hot summer beneath an Indian sun blazing overhead. The first step towards moving through New York City - his city - without having to look over his shoulder at every turn.

He’s going to get his freedom. And if the Clave doesn’t give it—

Well. There wouldn’t really be much point in telling Alexander to be the seed to begin a revolution if he weren’t willing to do just the same, now would there?

***

“Hey.”

There’s a knock on Alec’s bedroom door, light and unassuming and strangely contrasting the owner of the voice.

Alec frowns, dropping an arrow that he’s examining for imperfections to his bed, and rises up to open the door.

“Can we come in?” Jace asks, jerking his head lightly at Isabelle, who has a serious expression on her face.

“What’s wrong?” Alec asks, beckoning them in and shutting the door behind them. After a moment of deliberation, he draws a neat silencing rune on the door, just in case.

Isabelle flops down onto his bed with an elegance that reminds him of Magnus. It’s bittersweet, the
feeling of missing him. He knows that this is essential, for the world and for Magnus. But it’s hard to endure.

“Nothing,” Jace says, with a pointed roll of his eyes as he picks up a book on Alec’s desk and spins it around between his thumb and forefinger, crossing his legs in a gesture of sheer laziness. “Stop being such a worrier.”

Alec glares at him. “I am not a worrier.”

“You are,” Isabelle tells him, “but it’s okay. We’re here because we want to talk about tomorrow.”

Alec raises his eyebrows. He’d found the time to corner every Shadowhunter he wants to be involved in this mission since his meeting with the Downworld Council. He’d threatened them all with bodily harm if they breathed a word of it to another living soul—not that any of them had taken it at all seriously.

“What about tomorrow?”

“Nothing bad,” Isabelle is quick is reassure him, “but—”

“What do you want us to do if everything goes wrong?” Jace asks, golden eyes fixed on Alec intensely. He’s stopped flicking the book around, every cell of his being focused in like he only ever is when he’s being serious.

Alec blinks at him. “Which bit?”

“We cope with missions going wrong all the time,” Isabelle says. “We can adapt. We can change tactics. But if we fail—” She glances at Jace.

“What are you and Magnus going to do if we don’t take down Valentine and he can’t use it as leverage? What are we going to say? We went on an unsanctioned mission with half the Downworld and consorted with a Clave-wanted criminal?”

Alec shakes his head, leaning back against the door with his arms folded, jaw set in resolution. “We won’t fail.”

Jace’s eyes soften minutely. He tilts his head slightly to the side and sets the book down with a gentle thud. “I know you have faith in Magnus, and in us,” Jace says, “and it’s such an improvement from the pessimistic dick you were a year ago that I can’t complain. But this is high risk.”

Alec arches an eyebrow at him. “Pessimistic dick?”


For a moment, Alec’s eyes flicker between them. His sister, ever-defiant with the fires of revolution blazing in her eyes, and his brother, his parabatai, steadfastly determined to defy Clave-imposed social norms at every opportunity. The two people in the world who’ve been there for him, always, even when their politics and their ideals and their opinions on which goddamn jam to buy miss each other by the width of the Grand Canyon.

Two people Alec would do absolutely anything to protect.

Anything, except stand by if the Clave lays their hands on Magnus.
“Don’t worry about it,” Alec says, offering the two of them a tight smile. “We’ve got it covered.”

Jace and Isabelle frown at him, eyebrows furrowing and mouths turning down in exactly the same way—they might not be related by blood, but the fact that they’ve been brought up together is so very obvious.

“Alec—”

“I mean it,” Alec says, cutting Isabelle off before she can try to tell him off. “We’ve got it covered. Don’t worry.”

Jace presses his lips into a thin line. “If you’re gonna do something that’s going to get you locked in the City of Bones, I’m personally going to kill you.”

Alec shrugs. “I’ll haunt your bathroom and make wailing noises while you’re in the shower for the rest of your life.”

Isabelle chokes on an inhale, pressing her hand against her mouth as she laughs, while Jace stares at him in mild horror.

Alec’s lips quirk as he looks across at Jace, and gives him a small shrug. “There’s no need to think about this anyway. It’s hypothetical. We’re not going to need to cover our asses. It’s going to be fine.”

He’s not sure whether his confidence comes from himself, or the quiet, steady certainty behind Magnus’ voice when he’s spoken those same words over the phone last night, but, either way, he believes it.

And judging by the smiles radiating from his siblings’ eyes, they do too.

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“You’re a fool.”

Magnus glances up at the sound of Ragnor’s voice.

He’s not in Valentine’s hideout anymore—he’s in his apartment. It’s dark, milky moonlight meandering through the windows and painting misty stripes across the floor and across their skin. There aren’t any other lights to illuminate the place, save for a fire crackling behind the grate in the living room and a glittering ball of emerald green dancing beside Ragnor’s shoulder.

“I resent that,” Magnus says, swinging his legs where he’s perched on the island, facing Ragnor, who’s leaning against the sink with his arms folded across his chest.

One eyebrow quirks, the thin line of his mouth clearly showing Magnus just how unimpressed Ragnor is. Not that that’s a particularly unusual occurrence in their friendship.

“Go on, then,” Magnus says with an exaggeratedly loud sigh. “Tell me why I’m such a fool. I know you want to.”

Ragnor’s lips twitch, but he remains otherwise impassive. “You haven’t thought for a moment about what you’re going to do if this doesn’t work.”

Magnus waves a hand dismissively. “That’s not going to happen. And that’s easy. I’m going to whisk Alec off to Antarctica and set up a new life as a penguin whisperer.”
“You wouldn’t survive two minutes,” Ragnor says. “You hate being cold and you’d miss the people.”

“My proclivity for people has diminished just a smidge over the past two decades, my dear cabbage,” Magnus says. “Being hunted will do that.”

“Yes. So will being sentenced to death.”

“Ragnor.” Magnus shakes his head, a fond smile flitting across his face. “You meant the world to me, my friend, and I valued your advice and your wisdom more than that of another living soul. Or a dead soul, for that matter. But you’re not here anymore.”

“I left this spell to give you something when you needed me,” he says, with a sincerity and an emotion rarely expressed by Ragnor. It makes Magnus’ heart hurt.

“And I did need you,” Magnus tells him, hit by the urge to reassure this memory of his friend, despite Ragnor Fell being very much dead. “But now I need to trust myself.”

“Don’t forget what you’re fighting for, Magnus,” Ragnor says, a gentle, melancholy smile curling at his lips.

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Magnus wakes with a start, Alexander’s face flashing in his mind’s eye as his heart hammers against his chest.

It’s not his dream-visit from Ragnor that’s making him uneasy. There’s something else. Something is brewing here that’s sending his magic into a frenzy, twisting and hissing and curdling inside him, fizzing beneath his fingers like the vibrant hum of electricity.

With a frown marring his face and sparks itching to break free from his fingertips, Magnus rises from his carefully chosen spot on the floor, tossing the blankets aside. He can’t hear anything, but he can feel something, something heinously evil that makes his gut feel like it’s about to turn inside out.

He heads down the cavernous corridor, following the sensation lingering in the air like smoke. The tips of his fingers rub together in small circles.

A putrid smell reaches him; he lifts one hand to press against his nose and mouth, trying not to gag. It’s that same awful stench from the tunnel he and Luke had stumbled across—the same smell Valentine has denied knowing anything about.

Magnus has always had a fairly good bullshit detector.

He can hear voices floating down from the end of the corridor, which he can see pools into a large circular room. A long table has been shoved to one side, chemicals and flasks and books strewn across its surface amongst shattered glass and split solutions.

Five Circle members are standing by the doorway, their backs to Magnus, wings spread out wide and overlapping as through creating a net around something that Magnus can’t quite see from his secluded spot behind a stalagmite.

At the sound of Valentine’s voice snarling out a threat, Magnus inches out slowly, peering around and stepping forward, craning his neck to see past the thick feathered wings of the Shadowhunters.

If Valentine has Madzie in there, Magnus is going to murder him right here, right now, consequences
be fucking damned.

But it’s not Madzie he sees shackled before Valentine, thick iron chains hanging down from the ceiling to hold up a body so limp it makes Magnus feel sick.

It’s an angel.

His eyes go wide as he takes in the rest of the creature’s appearance. It’s maimed and mangled, cheeks hollowed and grey where the Angel Raziel is always drawn in melted gold and shimmering sunlight, a divine being on earth too brilliant for the eyes of mere creatures of the earth. He can see the sites of Valentine’s injections, the veins in the creature’s forearm a dark, throbbing purple, standing out against its skin. There are more feathers scattered across the floor like a filthy blanket of snow than there are remaining on the angel’s wings.

The wings aren’t like a Shadowhunter’s: the Shadowhunters’ wings are practical, tactical, an evolutionary advantage and a gift from heaven to assist in their work combating demons. These wings are clearly for show: divine, magical, majestic, Magnus suspects, in their full glory.

Nonetheless, at once, Magnus feels both the vile, vindictive desire to see Valentine similarly chained and ruined, and the horrified, sickening realisation that this is akin to what Alec’s wings might look like if the Clave were to charge him with treason and derune him.

None of the Shadowhunters appear to have noticed him, standing stock-still mere metres behind them in plain view while he watches Valentine spit insults at the angel. He’s too sickened by the sight before him to move.

But, as he looks on, transfixed by the sacrilegious atrocities being committed by a man he hates like he’s hated few people in his long life, the angel’s eyes flicker up, over Valentine’s head, to meet Magnus’.

Magnus blinks, feeling the slitted pupils of his eyes dilate in shock. The angel looks at him blankly for a moment, before Magnus feels a strange rush of sensation that makes goosebumps rise across his skin.

Their gazes lock, holding for what feels like an eternity frozen into a split second, heavy with meaning that Magnus can’t quite translate into English but can feel, deep in his soul. For just a moment, he feels the true power of the creature humiliated by a madman desperate for power.

The angel drops his gaze, and the feeling dissipates, evaporating into the surroundings and disappearing into the air.

Magnus stares for several seconds longer, torn despite the fact that he knows he can’t do anything. He can’t help a divine creature. And he can’t blow his cover. Not yet.

So, hardly able to tear his eyes away, Magnus steps back, retreating into the Shadowhunters to bide his time for just a few more hours.

Just a few more hours—and then he’s going to burn this place to the ground.
Yes. Shit is about to go down. Like, properly.

This is very much a lead in chapter before the next update, but I hope you enjoyed it anyway! Let me know what you thought in the comments!

If you fancy it, come follow me on Tumblr or talk to me on Twitter (@LucysRebelHeart or using #fwwfic)

Much love,
Lu <3
Chapter Summary

In which Alec finds an old letter, Maryse has terrible timing, and Magnus gets a bit of deja vu.

Chapter Notes

The parrot: I'm sure this won't surprise anyone, but this gorgeous bird is a symbol of a lack of individuality - 'parroting'. Who are we talking about? The Clave, of course...

If anyone is on Twitter, it's #fwwfic or @LucysRebelHeart to grab my attention!

Alec extracts Magnus’ letter and necklace from deep within his closet, hidden beneath a pile of sweatshirts and jeans, with the care usually afforded to ancient artefacts of immense historical importance.

Jace, Isabelle and Clary are all watching him from where they’re sprawled out on his bed, decked out in gear, weapons strapped to every inch of their bodies. It’s been a while since Alec had so much weight hanging from the belt at his hips. It’s been even longer since he looked at this letter.

He remembers receiving it, returning from a mission and witnessing it burn into existence on his desk, filled with oddly generous words and sweet turns of phrase that had thrown his thoughts into utter disarray. He remembers Magnus folding his fingers around this necklace when Alec had offered to return it to him. He remembers the strange kindness Magnus had exuded, and how much it had thrown him.

“I wish I’d been there,” Clary murmurs from her spot between Jace’s legs, her eyes fixated on the necklace dangling from Alec’s fingertips. “I feel like I missed something important.”

Alec glances over at her. “Clary, you made this possible. This is your rune, right?” He holds up the paper, before remembering that it’s been enchanted so that nobody else can see its contents. Instead, he picks up his stele and etches it sloppily onto a sheet of paper discarded on his desk.

“Yeah,” Clary says, brow furrowing. “Yeah, that’s mine. I don’t know how Magnus got it.”

“It doesn’t matter now,” Alec says, turning his attention to Magnus’ necklace instead. “Ready?”

Isabelle glances at her phone. “Luke and Raphael are both standing by to meet us. Do it before Imogen comes looking for us for shirking our duties.”

Alec lowers his stele to Magnus’ necklace, tracing the lines and dips of the rune carefully, precisely, along the delicate metal.

It burns hot when he finishes the rune with a flick. It’s not hot enough to make him drop it; instead he
clutches it tighter, closing his eyes and furrowing his brow as he tries to concentrate, focus in on the lingering flashes, the odd sensation of familiarity that comes with tracking someone you know.

He hears the bed creak as someone rises. The noise breaks his concentration, and he slits his eyes to glare at whoever has disturbed him already. But Jace is facing him with his palms outstretched, a second rune burning into his palm.

“Let me help,” Jace says, and, when Alec nods, clasps their hands together tightly around the necklace.

The world fades to that single point of contact, his palms against Jace’s, the necklace between them, the energy of runes burning through their veins as Magnus flashes through his mind like a bright neon sign. It’s like trying to chase a particularly elusive ghost.

And then—

Yes.

Alec’s eyes fly open. Jace’s pupils have blown wide, and a grin is curling at the corner of his lips as he stares right back at Alec.

“What the hell is going on here?” Maryse demands.

Alec arches an eyebrow at her coolly, and, too late, he realises that it’s definitely an expression he’s picked up from Magnus.

The thought makes him grip the necklace, his only lifeline to Magnus, tighter.

“I’m completing my mission, Mother,” he says, and, well. It’s a lie. But it’s not entirely a lie.

“Bullshit,” Maryse snaps. “I’ve put up with this for long enough. I’ve had Branwell covering your asses since I got here, and I’ve had enough. Tell me what’s going on right now, or you’ll find the
Inquisitor up here."

For a long, hard moment, Maryse glares at Alec, and Alec glares right back. Breaths come heavily, fury filling him as he fixes the woman he’s supposed to call his mother with the most threatening expression he can muster. He’s spent so long trying to follow the rules, to make her proud of him, because she’s his mother, goddamnit, and he loves her.

But he loves Magnus too.

“Alright,” he says, jaw clenched tight and shoulders tense. “I’ll tell you. I’m going to find Magnus and get him the fuck out of Valentine Morgenstern's clutches, and I'm going to burn that demonic piece of scum to the fucking ground.”

They all know exactly who he's talking about—and they all know it's most certainly not Magnus.

Apparently, even Maryse.

He expects her to explode. He expects raging and fury and unending disbelief. He expects a lecture, he expects Maryse to shout and swear and curse at him, throw out as many racist remarks as she can dream up.

She doesn’t even look surprised. All that covers her face is resignation, as though—

Well. As though she suspected something like this all along.

"Alec, you can’t,” she says, voice strangely soft despite its somewhat strangled quality. “The Circle is too powerful. And you're supposed to be killing Bane, not rescuing him! The Clave—"

"Fuck the Clave," Alec snarls. "Magnus is not some damsel in distress, he's being manipulated, he’s fighting the world’s war alone, he’s going to be murdered by the Clave if we don’t go, and I don't give a flying fuck about the Clave, or what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm not supposed to be doing shit. What has the Clave ever done for me, or anyone like me, or anyone I care about?"

Behind Maryse, Lydia's lips part, and she stares at him in astonishment. Clearly, Lydia realises exactly what he means. What has the Clave ever done for anyone who's gay? Anyone who loves outside of the norm? Anyone who dares love a Downworlder?

"Alec." Maryse shakes her head. “Your desire for change is admirable, if misguided, but why do you care so much? He's just a warlock. The High Warlock, yes, an incredibly powerful and advantageous ally to have, arguably, and I'm sure whatever acquaintance or friendship you have is —”

"He is not just a warlock," Alec tells her, fiercely, with all the fire and rage of a man hopelessly and irrevocably in love. "Not to me. I love him. I love him with every fibre of my being, and I am never going to let anybody hurt him. After all the times he's saved my life, after all the things he's taught me and shown me, after all of the shit he's put up with and helped me work through, the least I can do is choose him over the fucking Clave. And make no mistake, Mother, I will choose him. So either come with us, or get out of our way."

Finally, finally, disbelief spreads across Maryse’s face. She lets out a high-pitched laugh that borders on hysterical and stares at him, shaking her head.

“You what?”

“I love him,” Alec tells her, steel underlying the quietness of his voice.
Maryse appears at a loss for words, gaping, still shaking her head. “You’re insane. He’s manipulating you. I know that warlock, Alec. He’s—”

“It’s funny how many Shadowhunters have told me that,” Alec says, coldly. “I’ve yet to see evidence of any of it.”

“Alec—” Her gaze darts out into the hallway. “I’m warning you. Don’t. Don’t try this. And don’t drag your family into it.”

“Alec hasn’t dragged anyone into anything,” Lydia says quietly. “We’re all helping him because it’s the right thing to do. We trust him.”

“The fact that you’re more preoccupied by your propaganda induced Downworld-hatred really tells us all we need to know,” Isabelle adds, voice freezing.

Alec can imagine those two being a force to be reckoned with, negotiating with the Seelies.

“You’re naive if you think I didn’t know something was going on,” Maryse says, ignoring Isabelle and Lydia in favour of fixing her eyes on Alec. “But this is too far.”

Alec raises his eyebrows. “Which bit? Loving a man, or loving a Downworlder?”

“Goddamnit!” Maryse slams the heel of her palm down against Alec’s desk, making the photograph of Jace and Max messing around in the snow years ago wobble precariously. “This isn’t about what I think, this is about your duty to your family! If you do this, we’re all going to suffer.”

“What about our duties as Shadowhunters, Mother? What about our duties as people? What about your duty as a mother to tell us to follow what we believe, to do good?” He narrows his eyes at her. “What about our duty to uphold your precious Clave law?”

“What?” Maryse laughs. “In what possible capacity is going to rescue a known terrorist upholding the Law?”

Alec tilts his chin up, drawing himself up to his full height as he says, quietly, “Magnus is not a terrorist. He has not broken laws that should lead to his death. We live in the twenty-first century. If we’re supposed to afford Valentine a trial, then we’re damn well supposed to let Magnus have one.”

“Mom.” Jace’s gaze cuts across the room where he’s standing behind Clary, their hands clasped together tightly. “We’re going. There’s nothing you can do to stop us. You raised us to follow what’s right. Let us do it.”

“This isn’t right. This is madness. That warlock has been feeding you lies.”

“Magnus saved my life!” Alec hollers, throwing his hands up in emphasis. “He saved my life, he saved Max’s life, I’ve watched him save the lives of children and those the Clave won’t offer shit to. He’s not an immoral demonic hedonist only ever out for himself. He’s a good man. And if it weren’t for him, you’d have two children, not four.”

The call to her often-buried mothering instincts has made Maryse turn sheet white. She’s staring at Alec in what can only be described as horror, eyes wide and lips slightly parted, chest still as the words shock her immobile.

Alec doesn’t let his gaze stray away from hers for even a moment. He knows she’s remembering. All those months ago, when he was shot out of the sky, presumed dying, and returned to the Institute with the tale of an unknown warlock. When Max had been fatally injured by the Greater Demon
Moloch, and Alec had snatched him away from Maryse to be healed elsewhere.

He wants it to sink it. He wants her to know exactly to whom she owes so much.

“Mom,” Isabelle says, more softly that Alec is capable of at that moment. “Let us go. We’re petitioning the Clave. We’re doing this the right way. The legal way. You just have to let us go.”

Maryse hesitates, looking between the five of them, but her gaze keeps coming back to Alec, back to the son she would have lost if it weren’t for a man she despises. A man she’s tried to kill. A man whose best friend she slaughtered in cold blood.

Faintly, Alec hears shouts from downstairs, quickly following by the thundering of footsteps coming up the stairs in a hurry.

They know. Somehow, the Inquisitor has found out. They can’t wait any longer.

“We have to go,” Alec says, glancing over at Jace upon reflex. “Now.”

Guards appear at the top of the staircase, looking up and down the corridor before spotting the congregation in Alec’s bedroom.

Maryse doesn’t move from her position blocking the doorway. She looks torn, conflicted, unable to decide where her loyalties lie. Her children or the Inquisitor. Her family or the Clave. Justice or law.

Just as Alec is about to shove past her and make a break for it, consequences be damned, a voice rings out from across the hallway.

“Mom!”

In the doorway to Jace’s room, Max is staring at Maryse with wide, frightened eyes, hands clutching at his stomach.

Alec feels fear jolt through him at the expression on his little brother’s face. Without preamble, Maryse darts forward, dropping to her knees to examine Max just as—

Max winks at them.

“Go!” Jace shouts, recovering his shock first and shoving open Alec’s bedroom window with his elbow. “We have to go now!”

Isabelle shimmies through first, fingers grasping a low-hanging tree branch to slow her fall before she hits the ground. Clary slashes through her wing rune just before she lands beside her, and Jace follows suit.

Alec spares a moment to glance back at Lydia. “You can come. They’re going to know that you were in on this.”

“Well.” Lydia smiles faintly. “Don’t take too long, then. I’m not as good at talking as Isabelle is.”

After a split second of hesitation, Alec inclines his head minutely. “Thank you,” he tells her, and drops out of the window, wings appearing in a sharp flash of white to soften his fall.

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They touch down on the ground a few hundred metres from where Alec located Magnus through Clary’s tracking rune. They’re on the outskirts on New York, tucked away in a corner of the world
that’s been glamoured away, out of the sight of mundanes.

Alec doesn’t know what it is, but there’s something distinctly off about the place. It makes his skin crawl and the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. He remembers Magnus saying his magic had reacted to Valentine’s experiments—maybe this is the equivalent.

“Where now?” Jace asks, voice low as they linger behind a short derelict building, shrouded by the falling darkness.

“There must be an entrance close by,” Isabelle says. “But it’s going to be guarded.”

Beside her, Raphael rolls his eyes and glances at Luke. “Shadowhunters do like stating the obvious.”

Jace narrows his eyes. “Watch it, Santiago.”

Raphael scoffs. “Or what? You’ll bleach my hair the same terrible shade of blonde as yours?”

“I am a natural blonde, thank you very much.”

“Shut up,” Maia says from several feet away, where she’s peering around the side of the building and scanning across the decrepit, deserted landscape before them with a sharp gaze. “I know where the entrance is.”

Luke moves to her side. “Where?”

“There.” She points in the opposite direction to the one Alec had been expecting to lead them someone. “Next to that dusty old dumpster. I think there’s a tunnel entrance there. Small, but there.”

Alec frowns. “Why do you say that?”

“Look closer. Those marks on the ground. That’s warlock magic.”

“You’re right.” Alec inclines his head. “Jace, Izzy, Maia, you scout ahead. I’ll cover us behind from the air.”

He doesn’t wait for a confirmation beyond a sharp nod from Luke before rising into the air, sliding an arrow from his quiver to knock it against his bowstring.

Maia is proven correct mere seconds later. Two Shadowhunters with the Circle rune branded into their necks shout at the sight of their approaching group, seraph blades illuminating the steadily darkening evening.

Alec lets his first arrow fly. It lands to the right of a Shadowhunter’s sternum with a satisfying thunk, and he drops to the ground with a choked gurgle. The sharp crack of Isabelle’s whip takes out the second Shadowhunter, and Alec drops down onto the ground, tucking his wings into his sides.

“We need to move,” Luke says gruffly, looking past Alec into the distance. “I can see more coming this way. Unless we want to have a full on battle waging out here.”

Raphael follows Luke’s gaze. “No, but we don’t want that many disillusioned fascists following us, either. I say we split.”

“Agreed,” Alec says, and gestures to Jace, Simon, Maia, and the three vampires with Raphael. “You stay, we’ll go. If you need backup—” Rather than use words, he presses his hand to where he and Jace both knows his parabatai rune is etched into his skin beneath his gear.
Jace nods. “Good luck.”

Alec clasps his shoulder briefly, and then motions for the rest of the group to follow him down the tunnel tucked neatly out of sight behind the dumpster that Luke has shoved aside.

It’s even more dimly lit inside as they descend down into Valentine’s lair, and the rancid stench of death permeates Alec’s nose and makes his nostrils burn. The place is lit by swirling, glowing purple balls suspended in midair—he’s seen Magnus make them, except his are blue. Valentine has clearly recruited more warlocks than just Magnus.

They round a corner, weapons held aloft in front of them, Luke and Raphael prowling along quietly behind them. There’s a brief snarl that makes Alec, Isabelle and Clary start, but, as they turn, they realise that it’s just Luke transforming. In his wolf form, he flashes them what Alec can only interpret as a grin.

“Here,” Isabelle whispers, pulling her witchlight out and holding it high above their heads. Milky white light floods the tunnel, revealing a set of wooden steps. “Where do you suppose that goes?”

Alec shrugs. “I can’t really pinpoint Magnus any more accurately than this. The entire place is sort of hazy. Like it’s warded. If nothing else, it could be a good vantage point.”

“Or a death trap,” Raphael says. “You and I go up, Lightwood. The rest of you carry on.”

Isabelle looks worried. “Alec...”

“Let’s go,” Alec says to Raphael. He squeezes Isabelle’s hand briefly as he passes her, and then follows Raphael up the stairs, shouldering his bow in favour of a seraph blade.

The temperature seems to plummet as they walk up. They’re closed in on all sides, nothing up or down but more stairs, thick, craggy rock stretching up either side of them.

“Oh, fuck,” Raphael murmurs, and Alec’s stomach twists.

“What?”

He jogs up the last few stairs, following Raphael out onto the landing they’ve found themselves on, and—

“Shit.”

They’ve come out onto what appears to be some kind of balcony overlooking an enormous, approximately circular room. Down below, half of Valentine’s forces seem to be assembled, all standing around a perfectly drawn pentagram. Kneeling in the dust, brow furrowed in concentration, is Magnus, chalk in one hand, spell book open by his side as he works.

He doesn’t appear to have noticed the additions to the room standing on what Alec can only presume Valentine uses as a balcony from which to lecture his followers. But the rest of the occupants of the room have, and murder shines in their eyes.

“Well well well,” sneers a voice from behind Alec and Raphael. “Look what we have here. Intruders.”

Alec whirls around, lifting his seraph blade up in front of him as his other hand moves to draw a second blade from his belt. He crosses them over each other, flexing his knees in preparation of attack as his eyes follow the other Shadowhunter’s every shift with sharp eyes.
But the Circle member merely grins. “Oh, I just knew Valentine was making a mistake with that filthy, stinking warlock down there. Never work with animals or children.” He tilts his head to one side, and flashes Alec and Raphael a wolffish smile that’s all teeth. “Or Downworlders. Although—” he shrugs “—same thing, really.”

Alec snarls at him, and through his peripheries, he can see Raphael stiffening. “I used to think that killing blatantly hateful Circle members when they attacked us was equivalent to murder. I’m glad to say that I’ve seen the light. When you try to kill me, I will feel absolutely no remorse when I throw you over the fucking balcony.”

The man laughs, throwing his head back. It puts his Circle rune on clear display. “You’re funny,” he says, grinning as he meets Alec’s gaze again. “I like you. Shame I’ll have to kill you.”

With that, he lunges, just as three more Shadowhunters spill out from the staircase. They don’t spare Alec a glance—they descend on Raphael with a shout, and it’s all Alec can do to throw a blade roughly towards them before he’s lifting the second to ward off his own attacker.

“Oh, I’m going to enjoy this,” the man snarls, their blades clashing together with a metallic clang that sets Alec’s teeth on edge.

His biceps burn as he fights not to let the man gain the upper hand. “Me beating you?” Alec wishes he hadn’t glamoured his wings to go up that narrow staircase. He wants to be able to propel himself upwards and kick this guy in his stupid face. “Funny. I didn’t realise you were all masochists as well as bigots.”

He lifts his knee, and the man doubles over as it makes heavy contact with his stomach. Alec brings his seraph blade down in an arc—

But he’s too slow. The Circle member hooks his foot around Alec’s leg and shoves hard at his chest, sending Alec stumbling backwards before landing a kick to his ribs.

Alec feels his eyes go wide with horror as he realises that he’s in free-fall, tumbling down towards the ground in a moment of awful déjà vu, wings glamoured away and stele rolling across the floor of the balcony he’s just been kicked off.

“Alec!” he hears Raphael scream, the ground approaching so quickly the rest of the world is invisible, before he’s hit with a wave of energy so powerful his eyes water and his head spins, and the entire world goes momentarily black.

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Magnus’ head jerks up sharply at the cry he hears from the balcony up above.

He’s been so focused on drawing the pentagram, so intent on ensuring that it’s perfect, impossible for Asmodeus to break through, utterly infallible, that he’s blocked out the rest of the world. He’d heard the commotion, but commotion in this godforsaken place is so common that it’s not worth getting excited about.

Until he hears, unmistakably, Raphael Santiago screaming his boyfriend’s name.

In all the years Magnus has known him, he can count the number of times he’s heard Raphael scream on one hand.

He’s on his feet without conscious thought, cat eyes flashing brighter as he takes in the scene.
Alec and Raphael are on Valentine’s balcony, Raphael with his fingers embedded in a man’s chest as he reaches in to squeeze the life out of him - literally - and Alec teetering right on the edge, seraph blade held loosely in one hand.

A Circle member lands a kick on Alec’s ribs, and Alec topples backwards, tumbling head over heels towards the ground from twenty metres up.

Fear lurches through Magnus, and magic shoots from his hands without conscious thought. Swaths of blue dart out towards Alec like ribbons, wrapping around him as Magnus’ magic reacts to the overwhelming need to protect Alec Lightwood upon pure reflex.

Alec slows in the air, held safely in the circle of swirling energy. A throwing star bounces off the impenetrable barrier of Magnus’ magic, dropping harmlessly to the floor with a dull clank.

Magnus lowers Alec slowly, not letting him go until he seems to have regathered his wits. Across the room, with all the metres separating them, Alec turns through a hundred and eighty degrees, eyes wide and face pale, to face Magnus.

Their eyes meet, and it takes every ounce of Magnus’ self-control not to rush over there and wrap Alec in his arms. He’s healed Alec from a potentially deadly fall once already. He never, ever wants to do it again.

Alec swallows visibly, eyes roaming across Magnus as though to make sure he’s really there, unharmed and in one piece. Magnus can understand the sentiment. It’s been a mere handful of days, but like this, with the stakes so high, it might as well have been a year.

“Oh, dear me,” says a voice seeping through the air from Magnus’ left. “It looks like Camille Belcourt was being truthful when she said you’d have something up your sleeve, Magnus.”

Fucking hell, what Magnus wouldn’t give to just reach across and rip Valentine’s vocal cords out.

Instead, he turns his head to glare at him, not bothering to conceal any of the absolute, unadulterated loathing he feels for such a pitiful excuse for a man.

“Alec Belcourt has even less truthfulness in her that you do, Morgenstern,” he spits.

“Hm.” Valentine raises his eyebrows. “That’s rather ironic, considering the situation you appear to have been caught red-handed in. You never were planning on doing this summoning, were you?”

Magnus scoffs. “Not if I could help it. You don’t seem to be aware of the differences between summoning an Eidolon demon and summoning a Prince of Hell. I assure you, if he finds you so much as a minor annoyance, you’ll find your intestines make a rather nice mural on the wall.”

Valentine’s lips quirk up. “The great Magnus Bane, thwarted by his daddy issues.” He shakes his head and sighs. “Pathetic.”

“I assure you, if you say that again, you won’t have to wait for a Prince of Hell to gut you.”

Alec’s voice rings out clearly, steady despite his recent near-death experience. Magnus hadn’t noticed him moving closer, but he’s little more than six feet away. Close enough for Magnus to be able to see the sweat covering him in a thin sheen and the purple bruising beneath his eyes, but too far away for Magnus to reach out and soothe away the tension.

Valentine smirks. “You’re a disgrace to the name of Shadowhunters. What kind of sick fuck finds a male Downworlder a good bedmate? You’re the problem that needs eradicating.”
Alec’s eyes turn to ice. He tilts his chin up, straightening in his shoulders to emphasise the many extra inches he has on Valentine. “You just try. I swear to Raziel—”

“I suggest you shut your mouth,” Valentine says, sounding truly bored, “or I’ll just have someone kill you now. As it is...”

Valentine snaps his fingers, and several Circle members shove forward more of Alec’s team—captured and bound by a silvery sort of magic that Magnus can’t immediately place. Then he remembers the angel chained and shackled down the tunnels leading off from across the room, and his blood goes cold. He can’t even begin to imagine how Valentine has harvested divine power from an angel—and, frankly, he doesn’t want to.

There’s a flash, and Alec is being yanked backwards, that same silvery magic wrapping around his wrists and pulling him backwards towards Isabelle, Luke, Clary and Raphael. His heels dig into the dirt as he struggles against the bindings, but Alec, however strong he might be, is no match against Valentine’s warped use of the power of heaven.

“Alec!” Magnus cries out when the bindings tighten around him enough to pierce his skin and make blood bloom across his wrists. Alec hisses in pain, but he doesn’t stop struggling, even when he’s bound up against the rest of his team.

The rest of his team.

True, Magnus doesn’t know much about how Alec would organise a mission, not being privy to that part of his life due to his rather permanent ban from the Institute, but he’s fairly certain that Alec doesn’t run much more than a patrol without his parabatai.

He doesn’t have time to contemplate it further. Valentine is turning back to him, ignoring his prisoners and smirking at Magnus.

“Now that that minor inconvenience is sorted, let’s get back to business, shall we?” Valentine says. “You’re going to summon Asmodeus, or I am going to kill every single one of those prisoners.”

Magnus glances over at them. “Bullshit. I know you’re not going to kill Clary. And you’re not going to kill people I love when you want something from me.”

Valentine raises his eyebrows. “Do you want to take that chance? I think I’d rather enjoy watching your face as I make you watch your boyfriend being murdered. Slowly.”

Alec shakes his head minutely, eyes screaming at Magnus not to do it, not to give in—

But Magnus knows more about demon summonings than Alec does. And he’s made his pentagram as perfect as he possibly can for this precise eventuality. He refuses to let Valentine hurt any of the people who’ve come to help him. If this is the price, so be it.

He tips his chin up. “Fine,” he says, ignoring Alec’s struggled half-shout of protest and staring at Valentine. “I’ll summon my father, if that’s what you really want. But don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Chapter End Notes

Made it! I really hope you enjoyed this chapter - after all the many times I've said shit is about to go down, it finally, really is, haha.
If you like, come follow me on Tumblr!

Much love,
Lu <3
Phoenix

Chapter Summary

In which Asmodeus is summoned, things don’t quite go to plan, and Magnus does some magic.

Chapter Notes

The phoenix: immortality, divine power, resurrection.

AKA Magnus gets to fuck shit up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Magic crackles around the chamber like forks of lightning as Magnus chants, hands raised towards the ceiling and unglamoured eyes flashing brighter with every syllable he utters. Power races through him, thick and heady and seductive, and he knows, as it swirls around him, whispering in his ear and hissing against his cheek, how easy it would be to give into the darkness and let go.

This is how most of Asmodeus’ children die, after all. Attempting to summon their father, and becoming so infatuated by the swirling, writhing mass of power that lingers in Edom that they loose all sense of self.

“Magnusssss...”

The whisper makes the hairs on the back of Magnus’ neck stand on end. He fights back a shiver and draws his hands closer together. Overheard, thunder claps, and he vaguely registers seeing the Shadowhunters jump, eyes flitting about nervously. He pays them little heed.

“Show yourself!” Magnus roars, palms cracking together in a blinding flash of red.

His irises turn black for just a moment - he feels them change as his father materialises before him in the centre of the pentagram, with his back to Magnus. He’s dressed smartly in a crisp charcoal suit, hair perfectly coifed with a thick ring adorning his left index finger.

He turns. Their eyes meet, black boring into black, blood calling to blood, their demonic sides stretching and snarling as something buried deep within Magnus tugs at him, urging him to let go and embrace it, let the Edom-powered demon that slumbers inside him take over.

Magnus blinks slowly. In his peripheries, he can see Alec, staring in slack-jawed astonishment, desperation and horror and paralysing terror clear on his face. He can only hope the terror is due to his father, not himself.

Then the black fades away, eclipsed by yellow-green.

Asmodeus smiles.
“Well,” he says, voice curling elegantly around the word. “Magnus. My favourite son.”

Red is still fizzing at Magnus’ fingertips. He can’t quite control it. Never can, around his father, but certainly not now. Not with everything that’s at stake. He knows that his pentagram is absolutely impenetrable to any normal demon, but he also knows that his father is a Prince of Hell. He can escape anything, given enough time.

Magnus needs to get rid of him. Fast.

But—

“Demon,” Valentine says, sounding almost breathless as he steps forward from amongst the Circle’s ranks. “I—”

Asmodeus turns to look at Valentine slowly. He turns his head, but his eyes don’t leave Magnus until the last possible moment. They flick up and down Valentine with disdain. “Address me as such again, mortal, and it’ll be the last thing you do. Feel fortunate that I’m in a particularly excellent mood today.”

Magnus feels sick, just like he did the first time he ever summoned his father. Because he might have spent four centuries trying to do good, to be a good person and a good man, it’s here, now, that he remembers why people think he’s evil. Because, undeniably, there are things beyond power that he and Asmodeus share.

Magnus is sure he’s used similar intonation and sarcasm when addressing particularly rude clients.

“I apologise,” Valentine says hastily, bowing his head and holding his hands up, palms forward. “I merely—”

“You bore me, Valentine Morningstar,” Asmodeus says, rolling his eyes back in his head. “Your namesake would be disgusted.”

Valentine looks momentarily furious. “I am a Shadowhunter, the noblest race on Earth. I will not—”

He gasps and chokes as tendrils of smoke appear in the air and wrap around his throat, squeezing tightly. Red blooms beneath his skin as the magic cuts into his trachea, blocking his airway and making his body sag.

The smoke releases him abruptly as Magnus curls the fingers of one hand, tightening his control on Asmodeus’ abilities beyond the parameters of the pentagram. Valentine’s knees buckle and he drops to the floor, coughing and clutching at his throat.

Asmodeus glances across at Magnus. “You’re lowering yourself to defending such a worthless piece of human scum? You disappoint me, Magnus.”

“There’s some personal gain involved,” Magnus says. He loathes the white-teeth smile that spreads across Asmodeus’ face in response.

“I see,” Asmodeus says smoothly. “I’m afraid, Magnus, I’m rather disinterested in your politics. I am, however, interested in that.”

His eyes flash black as they fixate on someone to Magnus’ right, and Magnus’ heart sinks. He doesn’t have to look to know who Asmodeus is talking about.

“That’s irrelevant,” Magnus tells him, voice just as even despite the magic crackling warningly at his
“Yes,” Valentine says angrily. “It is. You haven’t been summoned for the warlock. You’ve been summoned to help me.”

Asmodeus throws his head back and laughs, long and hard, eyes shining with mirth as he looks at Valentine as though he’s an amusing but irritating puppy. “To help you what, exactly?”

“To help me destroy the Clave.”

Asmodeus shrugs. “Alright.”

Valentine’s eyes go wide. “Alright?”

“That’s what I said. I don’t like repeating myself. Of course, I’ll want something in return.”

Valentine’s lips curl up. “Of course. I pride myself on knowing how people work. I have readied a warlock girl—”

“Girl?” Asmodeus narrows his eyes, but Magnus can tell that his curiosity has been unexpectedly piqued. “Tell me more.”

“She’s a young warlock,” Valentine says. “Five or six. I’ve utilised her, trained her. She’s powerful. She could be an asset to you. She—”

“No,” Asmodeus says, interesting shutting off abruptly. “I’m not interested. I am plenty powerful enough, Shadowhunter. You clearly underestimate me, as your kind all do. Arrogant bastards.” He sneers. “No, I want something that will cause pain. Maximum pain. Something I can feed from and enjoy for years to come. Who will the loss of this girl hurt, Valentine Morningstar?”

Valentine’s throat bobs visibly. “She was well-loved by the woman who was raising her. And Bane—”

“No,” Asmodeus says, interesting shutting off abruptly. “I’m not interested. I am plenty powerful enough, Shadowhunter. You clearly underestimate me, as your kind all do. Arrogant bastards.” He sneers. “No, I want something that will cause pain. Maximum pain. Something I can feed from and enjoy for years to come. Who will the loss of this girl hurt, Valentine Morningstar?”

Valentine’s throat bobs visibly. “She was well-loved by the woman who was raising her. And Bane—”

“Magnus’ bleeding heart will weep for any lonely child,” Asmodeus says dismissively, waving a hand. Magnus’ nails dig into his palm, the words stinging as though Asmodeus had slapped him across the face. “That is hardly excessive pain and suffering. No.” His eyes swivel back to Magnus. They flicker momentarily to Alec, and then his lips curl at one corner, tugging back in a wolffish sneer. “I think I know the perfect sacrifice.”

“Don’t,” Magnus warns him. “You’re bound, Father. Don’t try me. I last summoned you two hundred years ago. Things have changed.”

“Not the most important thing,” Asmodeus whispers, slithering up to the very edge of the pentagram so that he’s mere inches from Magnus. They stand at precisely the same height, and, as Magnus stares into the eyes that are practically mirror images of his own, he sees the curve of his cheekbones and the sharp line of his jaw in Asmodeus’ face.

He knows Alec will be able to see it, too. Perhaps Alec won’t be able to stomach looking at him, after this. Perhaps none of them will. Not even Raphael.

“And what’s that?” Magnus asks, raising his eyebrows in challenge, refusing to let his insecurities show.

“Your desire to save people. Your love for people.”
Asmodeus spits the words like it hurts to say them; as though they taste of poison in his mouth. It fills Magnus with a grim sense of satisfaction. Because that's what separates them. Magnus loves. Asmodeus can’t.

“Gentlemen—”

A snarl erupts from Asmodeus as he turns to Valentine, eyes turning black again as his hand shoots out and Valentine flies across the room. He hits the wall, hard, and crumples to a heap on the floor, barely moving. Only the shallow rise and fall of his chest lets Magnus know that, unfortunately, he’s not dead.

“If another Shadowhunter interrupts me,” Asmodeus says, voice ringing out clearly, “I will drag them to the depths of the most rotten place in Hell and chain them there for all eternity.”

At the sidelines, Circle members shift uneasily, exchanging glances of poorly concealed fear. On the ground, Valentine remains unmoving, out cold.

“Now.” Asmodeus smiles, a cruel thing born of the sadistic desire to see the world’s inhabitants suffer. “Which of your little companions shall I pick first, Magnus, hm?”

Magnus glances at Valentine on the ground, and says, “None. We won’t be needing your services today, thank you.”

“Oh?” Asmodeus raises an eyebrow in amusement. “You’ve chained me here and forced me to listen to this mortal’s inane drivel for the last ten minutes. I’d like a reward for my efforts.”

“You’ve got a job to do, warlock,” barks out a woman from the back. “Just because Valentine is out, don’t think that means we won’t hold you to your end of the bargain.”

Magnus whirls on her, magic flickering at his fingertips and crackling out towards her like sparks on a bonfire. Unlike Valentine, who cowers at a mere flicker of his magic, she stares back at him unblinkingly, a snarl curling at her lips as she reaches down for a seraph blade.

“Bargain?” he demands. “What did I gain from this, precisely? I agreed to summon a Prince of Hell. I’ve fulfilled my end of this bargain. In return, you believe you can sacrifice children, angels, my friends, and not expect me to retaliate? I am not your bitch, however hard you might have tried to make me such for the last few days. I’m the High Warlock of Brooklyn.”

He doesn’t mean to extinguish the lights, but, as his eyes flash bright yellow and his pupils turn to slits, the place goes abruptly dark.

There’s a moment of utter silence. The hairs on the back of Magnus’ neck stand on end, and a shiver runs down his spine. He flicks his fingers, about to ignite a spark, but—

“See, Magnus, that was all very impressive,” his father says, voice echoing across the chamber in a decidedly different direction to the pentagram. “The impenetrable pentagram, the nice little speech, the carefully placed not your bitch—there was only one area you fell short in, really.”

The lights flicker on—only this time, rather than swirling balls of purple that generate daylight, the only illumination is a deep eerie red.

“You let your anger rule you,” Asmodeus whispers, “and it gave me the chance to just slip through the cracks.”

Dread fills Magnus as he turns to face the voice. Across the room, Asmodeus stands free from the
boundaries of the pentagram, one hand fisted in the back of Alec’s jacket and the other trailing a sizzling line of black magic that’s mere millimetres from Alexander’s throat.

“Checkmate, son,” Asmodeus says, grinning.

Magnus narrows his eyes, magic sparking from his fingertips. Fear rips at his heart and curls in his stomach and makes him feel sick. “Let him go.”

Asmodeus laughs in delight. “Oh, Magnus. Magnus, Magnus, Magnus. You never really did get the point of pain, did you?”

Alec is cringing away from the magic as it tightens around his throat, but he doesn’t make a sound, no matter how much Magnus knows it must hurt—like being seared by a branding iron. Magnus can’t tear his eyes away. It’s going to leave rosy burn marks on his skin. It’s going to be a tangible, eternally visible reminder of what Magnus has let happen.

“See—”

With an unforgiving tug, Asmodeus tightens the magic right across Alec’s throat and flings him to the floor like a dog on a leash. Isabelle screams her brother’s name. The palms of his hands hit the floor, the impact jarring his whole body, and he coughs before lifting his head to stare as Asmodeus with sheer hatred.

“——I wasn’t paying the least bit of attention to that worthless piece of human filth,” Asmodeus says, not sparing Valentine so much as a glance. Some of the Circle members bristle, but Magnus can barely see them, too intent on his father’s proximity to so many people he loves. “I was trying to work out which of these delightful specimens would cause you the most pain if I were to rip out their hearts.”

Alec is pushing himself up, fingertips sliding towards his weapons belt, but Asmodeus doesn’t have to look at him to know. With a flick of his hand, Asmodeus knocks Alec flat on his back, hard enough to make his head crack against the floor. He grunts in pain at the impact.

“Alec!” Magnus cries, before he can stop himself.

“I’m fine,” Alec gasps, and Asmodeus laughs.

“How sweet,” he says. “Such a shame I’ll have to put an end to this strange little rendezvous.”

“Don’t you dare,” Magnus breathes, nostrils flaring. “I’m not afraid of you. Not anymore. If you think I’m going to let you——”

A laugh erupts from Asmodeus’ throat. “My dear boy, do you really think I’d be that unoriginal in recruiting my favourite son? No. I think I’ll use a subtly different method of persuasion with each fragile mortal. And as for that immortal one, well.” He smiles frigidly, appearing at Raphael’s side and grasping his chin between thumb and forefinger. “You’re rather fond of him, aren’t you? Almost like a son to you, no?” He tilts his head to one side. “Certainly, you care enough to come with me to Edom to save him. I think I’ll chain him there until you come to give yourself up and willingly take his place.”

Raphael yanks his head from Asmodeus’ grasp and bars his fangs. “You just try, demon.”

“Tut tut.” Feigning hurt, Asmodeus places a hand over his heart. “Such rude words from one old enough to know better.”
He circles behind Raphael and stops in front of Isabelle. Lust shines unmistakably in his eyes as he reaches out to drag the back of a finger down her cheek. Isabelle doesn’t flinch.

“Hm,” he says, following the curve of Isabelle’s neck and cleavage with his eyes. “I think I know exactly what sort of persuasion will help with this one, Magnus. I’m sure you don’t want this delightful young thing to suffer the same fate as your mother, now do you?”

“Don’t you dare talk about my mother,” Magnus snarls, feeling his grip on control slackening with every passing second. His heart is pounding, and he can see the murder he feels inside himself reflected in Alexander’s eyes. Power is swirling beneath his skin, and it’s not like the chaotic rage of Camille setting him off—it wants to kill.

Asmodeus winks at Isabelle. She spits at him.

“Ugh.” Asmodeus’ eyes flash dark with fury. “You little—”

“Leave her alone,” Clary snaps. “Leave them all alone. You can have me, you can—”


“It’s always me you people want. Valentine, the Clave, you won’t be any different once you find out what I can do.”

Asmodeus laughs. “Little girl, I am well aware of what you can do. And, another time, I assure you I wouldn’t hesitate. But my agenda is a little different today. I want Magnus. I’ve wanted him for four hundred years. Today, I will have him.”

Without warning, he lunges down and yanks Alec up by his collar and tosses him halfway across the room.

“Alec!” Magnus shouts, shooting out a web of magic to soften the impact—

But Asmodeus is there, flicking it aside with ease. Alec’s wings shoot out wide, slowing his fall, and he lands awkwardly on his feet, steadying himself against the wall before he turns back to face Asmodeus.

“Don’t,” Magnus says, because he knows that look in Alec’s eyes. “Alec, don’t.”

“You expect me to stand there and do nothing?” Alec snarls. “Hell no, Magnus. We agreed. Together.”

And before Magnus has the chance to get out another word of warning - because however good Alec might be, he cannot take on a Prince of Hell without any knowledge of his weaknesses - Asmodeus is shooting magic at Alec, and Alec is engaged in battle, seraph blade blazing.

“I like this one,” Asmodeus says, as he gains the upper hand after a moment and pins Alec up against the rough surface of the wall by his throat. His seraph blade clatters to the ground and his eyes roll back in his head. “He’s got some fire. It’s a shame he’ll only last another moment. Anybody like to say anything before I make him loose his mind?” He pauses momentarily. “No? Well, then.”

Time seems to slow.

Asmodeus’ lips curl into a self-satisfied smirk, and his eyes turn milky white, pupils and irises blending into his sclera. Smoky grey bleeds into Alec’s chest; almost instantaneously, a scream breaks out from Alec’s throat.
The sound shoots through Magnus like a bullet cutting through to his heart. His eyes water and his fingers curl into his palms, nails digging into his skin as rage builds inside him like magma brewing beneath a volcano, ready to explode out of him.

Nobody on earth is allowed to hurt the people he loves. Especially not his father. And fuck if he doesn’t love Alexander Lightwood with everything he has.

The smoke becomes denser, and Alec thrashes against the wall, and Isabelle is crying out her brother’s name. Asmodeus grins, bright and gleeful and utterly malevolent, and something in Magnus snaps.

And then the world turns red.

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Alec tumbles to the ground, fingers grappling to clutch as his throat as he chokes, shivering from head to toe. It can’t have been more than a handful of seconds that Asmodeus’ smoke was in contact with him, but it had filled him with such indescribable agony that it felt like hours.

He looks up. Before him, Magnus is standing in front of Asmodeus, both arms raised as magic pours out of his hands in rivers of scarlet red. An odd wailing sound is coming from Asmodeus’ mouth, eyes wide as he stares at Magnus. His irises have turned back to Magnus’ yellow-green, but his scleras are shot with forks of red.

Magnus is gritting his teeth, tension laced into every inch of his body, arms straining against his jacket and sweat beading on his skin as wind whips through the chamber at the clashing of magic between father and son. The world flashes red and yellow as Magnus forces Asmodeus back towards the pentagram. His magic is targeting a specific point, sliding in through Asmodeus’ mouth and nostrils as though Magnus is trying to suffocate him.

“Alec!”

Isabelle appears at his side, the shout barely audible due to the roaring winds created as a byproduct of the sheer power rushing through the cavernous room. The air smells of burning charcoal, and the temperature is rising with each passing second as Magnus snarls and growls his effort.

Alec’s heart lurches in his chest when Asmodeus manages to gain back some ground with a crash of magic that spills over Magnus like a tidal wave and knocks him to the ground, gasping and coughing.

But it’s only a moment before he’s staggering to his feet, magic shooting at Asmodeus in retaliation.

“I’m fine,” Alec says, voice a little raspy. Luke is shielding Clary, Raphael and the other wolves standing before the gathered Circle members and snarling at any who dare move. “We have to help him, Iz, we—”

“We can’t, Alec,” she tells him, helping him up. There’s fear in her eyes. “If we get any closer to magic that powerful...”

Alec shoots her a sharp look. “Magnus would never hurt us.”

“Not deliberately, maybe, but...” She bites her lip. “I’m not sure he’s entirely in control.”

Alec’s eyes cut behind her to where Asmodeus in suspended in mid-air, reeling and snarling and spitting as Magnus’ magic wraps around him like a hundred pythons slithering over their victim.
before going in for the kill.

“He looks in control to me,” Alec says, quietly. “But—”

“You can’t escape me forever, Magnus!” Asmodeus hollers, as Magnus forces him over the boundary of the pentagram with an audible grunt of effort, teeth barred with the strain. His boots skid on the floor, before he flexes his knees and tilts his weight to anchor himself. “I’m going to claim you, one day. You’re going to join me!”

“I will never join you,” Magnus says, voice low but laden with hatred beyond anything Alec has ever heard from him.

Then Magnus throws his arms up, red dissipating to be replaced with golden-yellow. Asmodeus crashes to the floor; it opens up beneath him with a roar, a black hole encased in Magnus’ pentagram. The wind gains speed, whipping through the chamber and flinging debris at their face until Alec has to drop to his knees to keep from being bowled over, one arm tight around Isabelle’ waist.

An inhuman scream fills the chamber as Asmodeus is sucked in, thrashing and flailing and snarling. Magnus drops his hands to his sides, and the hole closes over with no evidence of it ever having existed. The winds die down; a hush falls over the room. Magnus’ shoulders slump visibly. He takes a half step, sways in place, and stutters to his knees, bracing himself with one hand on the ground, face going slack.

Alec stumbles to his feet, fully intent on rushing over to him. His wrists and lungs and neck are smarting, from being bound and from Asmodeus’ magic, but he doesn’t care. He has to get to Magnus.

“You filthy son of a bitch.”

Alec’s eyes snap behind Magnus, where Valentine is trembling from head to toe with clear rage, hatred and revulsion and insanity brewing in a cocktail of danger behind his eyes. There’s a seraph blade clutched in his hand, knuckles white with the strength of his grip.

“You swore,” Valentine spits. “You swore to raise Asmodeus, to get him to give me what I want, to help me take down the Clave, to—”

Magnus shakes his head. “No. I promised to raise him. That was it.”

“You bastard.”

The warrior in Alec, always crouched low and on the alert for potential threats, sees Valentine’s muscles tense and flex in preparation for a throw perhaps a tenth of a second before Magnus does.

As Magnus widens his stance and begins to raise a hand, Alec reaches back to pull out an arrow.
Fitting it against the string of his bow is more innate than second nature; it’s embedded in Valentine’s chest before the leader of the Circle has had time to finish the arc of his throw.

The seraph blade clatters to the floor harmlessly as Valentine falls like a stone, choking, blood bubbling at his lips and painting his chin in crimson. His knees hit the floor with a crack, patellas shattering upon impact. When his eyes meet Alec’s, they’re wide with shock.

“Kill him,” he says, whispering the words around a mouthful of blood. “Kill them all.”

He collapses face-forwards on the ground, dust and dirt and debris flying up around him before settling. The room is still. Nobody moves, all staring at where Valentine lays dead. They’re hardly breathing. Alec’s holding his bow loosely by his side, words running through his mind.

Valentine is dead. I killed him.

And he didn’t even think about it. He shot Valentine on pure reflex. Not because he was evil, or because he wanted to burn down the world and build hell on earth, despite all those things being true. He shot him purely because he’d been readying himself to hurt Magnus.

It could have been anyone. He would have shot anyone going for Magnus like that.

He’s sure he should feel something other than hollow at the realisation that Valentine is dead, that he killed him, and that he’d do anything in the world for Magnus—but he doesn’t.

A growl comes from among the ranks of the Circle, who’ve begun to shift away from their defensive positions against the wall. They’re approaching slowly, eyes fixated on Alec, hatred in their eyes.

“Traitor,” a woman spits. “Filthy traitor. That’s what you get with your kind.”

Alec lifts his chin. “I could say the same about you.”

Where the hell are the others? They left Jace, Simon, Maia and the other vampires at the entrance what feels like hours ago. He can feel Jace through his parabatai rune, can feel that he’s not hurt—so where is he?

The woman barks out a harsh laugh. “You’re going to die, Lightwood,” she says. “We’re going to kill you.”

The Circle aren’t afraid anymore. Alec can see it in their eyes. They know they outnumber the intruders. And after Magnus’ intense display of raw power, the tiredness in the line of his shoulders must be obvious, even to them.

Magnus can defend himself, Alec knows. Magnus can save himself. But the rest of them, against all these Shadowhunters hell-bent on avenging their fallen leader? And, already tired, can Magnus?

This is where they die.

A crack sounds behind Alec, and he sees Isabelle flexing her fingers against the handle of her whip through his peripheries. Three wolves stand alongside her, hackles raised and lips pulled back as they snarl low in their throats, Raphael and Clary beside them.

A man chuckles lowly as the Circle continue their slow advance, closing in on them from all sides.

“How brave,” he says, “for such worthless wastes of skin. Some demons, a treacherous daughter, a faggot, and a slut.”
Alec’s eyes narrow, and his fingers tighten on the arrow that’s resting against his bow. “Don’t you dare.”

“What are you going to do?” he taunts. “Shoot me?”

“Yes,” Alec says, and lets the arrow fly.

The man cries out as he stumbles, and the sound seems to prompt the rest of the Circle into actions. They spring forwards, weapons raised, and Alec has a mere moment to draw another arrow before they’re on them.

As he shoots, hitting dead-centre every time, he glances across at Magnus, locked in battle with magic swirling around him. His power is tangible, but so is his exhaustion. Summoning Asmodeus, containing him, fighting him, banishing him—it’s clearly taken a toll on him.

“Fuck!”

Alec grits his teeth against a scream as a throwing star grazes his side, hot, sticky blood dribbling along his skin. He presses a hand against his hip and rises up into the air, wings beating hard before anyone can take advantage of his injury.

“You’re done,” someone says, and a body barrels into him from the side.

They tumble through the air, clutching and clawing and punching at each other until they hit the side of the room, still suspended several metres up. Alec’s eyes water at the impact, but he lunges forward to strike the man across the face. The man reels back, and Alec lands a hard kick to his ribs.

It’s the same man who threw him over the balcony earlier, he realises. And he’s intent on one thing: Alec’s death.

“I’m going to kill you,” the man hisses, lip split and blood dribbling down his chin. “Your warlock won’t be able to save you this time.”

Alec lifts an arm to block the hit aimed at his face, and throws the man backwards with a sharp, powerful beat of his wings. “I really wouldn’t be so sure about that.”

The man rights himself in the air and laughs. “Look down. You’re finished. All of you.”

Alec glances below, and his stomach lurches. Isabelle and Clary are being forced to their knees like criminals being readied for an execution, the wolves are being backed into a corner by two dozen Circle members, and, alone, Raphael is staring down four grinning Shadowhunters with their weapons raised.

And Magnus— Magnus has magic swirling around him, picking off men and women as they come for him, but they’re getting closer. Too close. Dangerously close. Magnus won’t be able to hold them off for much longer.

There are just too many of them.

“We’re not dead yet,” Alec snaps, and pulls a short dagger from his belt as he propels himself forwards and lunges for the man’s shoulder.

The blade stabs straight through the thick muscle of his shoulder, and the man grunts in pain. Before Alec can yank it out and land a second hit, the man is shooting upwards with a swift beat of his wings.
Alec follows, but he can feel himself tiring, and every use of his wings is pulling at his injured side, making it bleed more. He knows he loosing too much blood to sustain this for long, but he grits his teeth as he forces himself up higher, because he doesn’t have a choice—

Something wraps tightly around his ankle, forcing him to a halt in midair. He strains, wings beating rapidly, but he’s too tired to break free of the person grabbing him from below.

“It’s over!” the man above him hollers, glee in his eyes. “You’ve lost! Valentine might be dead at your filthy hands, but we can make the warlock summon Asmodeus again. We’re still going to take over the Clave. You’re finished. All of you. But especially you.”

Alec is struggling desperately, yanking and pulling with all his might, but there are two people on him now, and they’re both bigger and heavier than him. He’s stuck. This is it. This is how it’s going to end.

“You’re never going to win,” he says, voice hoarse from the strain.

The man above him smiles as he pulls out a seraph blade. It lights up in his hand, shining white among the red-stained silver, and Alec wonders how the world got to this point—the point where the primary use of a seraph blade is for the murder of Shadowhunters and Downworlders, not demons.

“You’re not going to live to see the ending either way,” the man whispers, lifting the blade over his head, and then he brings it down across Alec’s back in a smooth, hard arc that’s going to cut through his wings and spinal cord and heart in one fell swoop.

But it doesn’t.

A roar sounds through the chamber, and the weight drops from Alec’s legs, making him shoot up several metres, clean out of the path of the blade.

He looks down below, eyes scanning the ground for what in hell is going on. He can see Jace, finally appeared, standing with Isabelle and Clary, his arms around them protectively, can see Simon and Maia and Luke and Raphael grouped together with the others, eyes wide and pressed close together, and—

And in the middle of the chaos, Magnus.

His arms are spread wide, eyes flashing from yellow to black to red and back again. Not because his irises are changing colour, Alec realises, but because the reflection of his magic is making them appear so.

Magic is flooding out of him in volumes Alec has never seen. It’s surging through the chamber like a tidal wave, lapping up the sides of the walls and knocking Circle members off their feet. It crashes as it hits the floor and surges up high, snatching people from where they’re hovering in the sky.

Alec’s eyes widen in horror as it races towards him. He propels himself backwards, aiming for the little protection the balcony might be able to offer. It trickles across his feet, hot and burning, and he hisses. But when it recedes, so does the pain.

The whole room is stained red, fiery magic washing across every Circle member who tries to flee and escape. He sees Jace grabbing several and shoving them towards the burning tsunami of Magnus’ magic, but he doesn’t really need to: Magnus is catching them as they come, and the crack of a whip lets Alec know that the rest of his team aren’t letting Magnus do this alone.

It won’t hurt him, Alec knows. Magnus’ magic has never hurt him. Not when they thought they
hated each other, and not that time he lost control of it for a moment. Nevertheless, he stays crouched in the relative safety offered by the edge of the balcony, watching his boyfriend tear apart a threat to civilisation.

After a moment, he straightens out of his crouch as uses his vantage point to help from above, letting the arrows fly.

Minutes pass; the Circle weakens as they destroy the remaining members without mercy. Alec can’t think of a reason he should exercise sympathy for those who want to murder his people in cold blood.

Alec frowns as he begins to sense that something is wrong. There are few people left, few Circle members who haven’t been shrouded in the deadly heat of Magnus’ spell—but his magic isn’t dissipating.

Taking a leap of faith, Alec launches himself off the side of the balcony, ignoring the painful jolt in his side, and lands beside Jace, Isabelle and Clary, who are watching on with awe-filled shock on their faces, weapons lowered to their sides.

“Lightwood!” Raphael hollers over the sound of Magnus’ spell. “Lightwood!”

“What?” Alec shouts back, turning away from his parabatai to where the rest of his team are gathered a few metres away.

“He needs help!”

Alec stares at him. “Help? Raphael, look. The Circle are practically gone!”

Raphael rolls his eyes. “God save us from Nephilim education.”

Luke shoots Raphael a pointed look, clearly communicating that now is not the time for those sorts of sarcastic quips, and calls over to Alec. “Banishing Asmodeus exhausted him.”

“I know. I could tell.”

“This—” Luke gestures at the swirling magic that’s circling around Magnus in tornado-like spirals “—was a reflex, because we were all about to die. It’s a defence. Like plunging your hands into a fire to save someone you love.”

“You mean he can’t control it?”

“He could,” Raphael says, “normally. But not after using this much magic already. He’s going to kill himself.”

Luke frowns at Raphael. “That might be an exaggeration. He’s more likely to make the whole place collapse.”

Raphael throws his hands up. “It’s not an exaggeration, but it doesn’t matter! This is like Indonesia, Alec! That time he was a child. He had no control. This time he’s exhausted, and his control is slipping with every second we stand here bickering about semantics.”

“But...” Alec glances at the Shadowhunters on his team. “I can’t get to him. I don’t have a fireproof rune activated, and even if I did, it wouldn’t defend me against that.”

Magnus’ spell is scorching the ground as it licks across the room to snag the last few Circle members.
It’s gaining in power. Sweat is coating Magnus’ skin and his arms are trembling with the exertion of controlling it.

Alec doesn’t know what’s going to happen once Magnus is so exhausted that he can’t hold it anymore. But he doesn’t want to find out like this. He remembers Magnus’ words from months ago, when he’d told Alec the story of what had really happened in Indonesia.

*Ragnor talked me through it, and managed to calm me down enough to help me control it. If it weren’t for him, I might have killed myself in that storm, too.*

“Come here,” Clary says suddenly, extracting herself from under Jace’s arm and reaching out for Alec. She drags him forward by his jacket. “Does anybody have a stele?”

“Here,” Isabelle says, sliding a long hairpin out of her updo and flicking it sharply. It shimmers into the familiar lines of a stele.

Clary takes it and shoves Alec’s sleeve up, lowering its tip to his skin. Part of Alec wants to protest, to demand to know what she’s doing—the part of him that hated her when she first turned up at the Institute.

But the rest of him trusts her. He trusts her with his parabatai’s heart, for Raziel’s sake. He can damn well trust her to put one of her runes on him. After all, it was her rune that enabled them to track Magnus here in the first place. Without her, they couldn’t have done any of this.

“Go,” Clary says, pulling back the stele once she’s finished etching the rune into his skin. She shoves him lightly.

Beside them, he can feel the heat of Magnus’ magic blazing, burning up the room and turning everything it touches to charcoal as his control melts away. If Clary’s rune doesn’t work, Alec is fairly sure he’ll be roasted alive.

But it’s Magnus. And, however powerful he might be, however infallible he might seem most of the time, however unlikely it seems, Magnus needs his help. He’s not invulnerable. He needs Alec to take a leap of faith.

So Alec goes.

Chapter End Notes

Writing “Magnus does some magic” in the chapter summary made me giggle to myself. I’m that much of a dork.

I really hope you enjoyed this chapter! I had such a blast writing this one - Magnus doing magic and battle!malec is super fun to play with. Let me know what you thought!

If you like, *Come follow me on Tumblr* or you can find me on *Twitter*.

Much love, and see you all in two weeks!
Lu <3
Osprey

Chapter Summary

In which Alec goes to Magnus, Simon and Raphael see an angel, and the Shadowhunters finally find Madzie.

Chapter Notes

Ho boy I am running out of birds lol.

The osprey: a bird of prey, so, of course, all the bad-assery, but also communication, emotional awareness, and, notably, respect.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He can see Magnus at the centre of the magic, clearly weakening by the moment even as he’s hanging onto every last thread of control he can muster. He’s gritting his teeth with the effort, biceps bulging and muscles straining and sweat running down him in rivulets. The effort is clearly physical as much as it is mental. Magnus grunts a little, knees beginning to buckle beneath him, and, after a moment, they hit the floor with a soft thud.

“Magnus!” he shouts, lifting a hand to shield his eyes from the bright blaze of the magic. It’s warm, bordering on hot, but it doesn’t hurt—Clary’s rune is working. “Magnus!”

Magnus’ eyes swivel to meet his, widening as he takes Alec in, and he shakes his head frantically. “You can’t be here! You have to get out! All of you!”

A pulse of magic rocks through the room, more powerful than the rest, and Alec widens his stance and throws out his arms to stop himself being knocked over. Magnus lets out a roaring cry of desperation as he pulls it back under control.

Alec lowers his arms. “We’re not leaving you. I’m not leaving you.”

“You have to go,” Magnus says pleadingly. “I can’t let anything happen to you.”

“I’m wearing one of Clary’s runes. I’ll be fine. Magnus—”

Magnus is shaking visibly with effort as gazes over at Alec desperately. “I’m not in control of this, Alexander. I’m going to bring this place down, and you can’t be here when I do. It’s going to destroy everything.”

Alec clenches his teeth together and shakes his head vehemently. “I’m not going anywhere without you! Together, remember?”

When Magnus laughs, it’s somewhere between tearful and hysterical. “That didn’t mean die together.”
“Don’t be ridiculous,” Alec says, a little more harshly than he’d intended. “I’m not Ragnor, and I could never be him, but he helped you control it once when you were a child. You’re an adult now. You don’t need a warlock, you just need someone who cares. I care. I love you.”

“Fuck,” Magnus says, closing his eyes. His arms and fingers are trembling with the strain, and he grunts as he shifts in place, spine bowing. “Fuck.”

Alec moves closer. He doesn’t want to startle Magnus, or throw him off, but he needs to get to him. He can feel the magic licking at him, but with the protection of Clary’s rune, it doesn’t even feel hot like it had when it touched him earlier. It feels like Magnus’ magic always does. Warm, ticklish, gentle, with an underlying current of restless energy.

“Tell me how to help,” Alec whispers as he reaches Magnus and drops to his knees in front of him.

One of Magnus’ hands shifts forwards. Magic is still spilling from his palm in churning rivers of red and black and gold, but Alec doesn’t hesitate. Their fingers slide together, and the touch feels like coming home. He hasn’t touched Magnus for days; with the stakes so high, it’s felt like lifetimes.

Magnus is watching their joined hands with something strange flickering across his face. He swallows, Adam’s apple bobbing, and looks up at Alec with a strange sort of vulnerability in his eyes. The desire to protect this man, who seems to need protecting from nothing, is strong enough to choke Alec.

“I can’t control this on my own.”

“I know,” Alec tells him, squeezing his hand and reaching out to brush bloodied fingers across his cheek. “It’s okay. I’m here.”

Magnus shakes his head. “I hate needing help.”

“I know that too,” Alec says, spreading his fingers out along Magnus’ cheek. “But you sent a Prince of Hell back to Edom and destroyed the Circle. Nobody’s going to think less of you for this.”

A wounded noise makes its way up Magnus’ throat, and it shoots daggers through Alec’s heart. Magnus’ eyes shine as he looks at Alec, and Alec doesn’t know whether it’s the heat of the magic making Magnus’ eyes sting or Alec’s words, but, either way, he tangles their fingers together and holds his gaze steadily.

“Tell me how to help,” he says.

Magnus glances down at their hands. “I need your strength. Can I—?”

“Yes,” Alec says, squeezing his hand again. Touching Magnus feels feels at once choking in its intensity and the easiest he’s breathed for days in its relief. “Always. Take it.”

With a deep breath, Magnus closes his eyes, tightens his grip on Alec’s hand, and begins to pull, tugging strength from somewhere deep inside Alec in a way that’s beginning to feel familiar.

Once, when Magnus was saving his life, Alec had spat at him and said that he’d never let a warlock take his strength. He’d had it all wrong, then. All of it. Right down to the words. Magnus isn’t taking; Alec is offering, sharing, giving.

And he’d do it a thousand times. He’d do it until it kills him. Because Magnus means the world to him.
Alec closes his eyes, too, kneeling in the dirt and the filth with Magnus. As strength flows between them, he feels the heat begin to fade away, and the winds begin to die down, and the flashing colours he can see even with his eyes closed begin to melt away. Alec’s entire world narrows to the point of contact between their hands.

Only when it’s quiet does Alec open his eyes to see Magnus staring at him with wide eyes. A tiny little smile pulls at Alec’s lips.

“Alexander,” Magnus whispers, and his eyelashes flutter, gaze unfocused as his eyes roam over Alec's face. “I'm gonna pass out.”

Alec frowns as Magnus starts to sag, slumping forwards into his chest. He wraps the hand not held in Magnus’ own around his boyfriend’s waist. The steady beat of Magnus’ heart against his is reassuring, and, by the Angel, having Magnus in his arms has never felt so good.

“I've got you,” Alec murmurs, and he holds Magnus tighter. “I've got you.”

Magnus’ eyes flutter open and he smiles up at him. “I know you have. We’ve got each other.”

Alec leans forward to press his forehead against Magnus’. “Yeah. You’ve probably saved my life five times today.”

“Hm. More like seven.”

Magnus closes his eyes again as he shifts so that his head is tucked comfortably on Alec’s shoulder. It makes Alec’s heart ache in his chest. In response, he shifts his wings and wraps them around Magnus, feathers crinkling softly against Magnus’ clothes. Magnus hums - dare Alec think contentedly.

Alec scoffs. “Oh yeah? How do you figure that?”

“The balcony,” Magnus says. “My father, three times. The Circle twice. And just now when I managed not to let my magic kill you all.”

“We need to work on your counting,” Alec tells him, shaking his head even as he’s grinning, heart fluttering wildly at how utterly relieved he is to have Magnus in his arms, taking the absolute piss out of him and more than ready to give him a hard time—and just as willing to take it.

“I could count a millennium before you were born,” Magnus says, opening one eye to squint at him.

“Bull. You’re not that old,” Alec says, lips twitching.

“What a charmer.” Magnus rolls his eyes.

They’re quiet for a moment. Alec doesn’t know whether the others are still behind them—he supposes they are. They’re probably talking about what to do next. If he concentrates, he can hear Jace and Luke debating something, Jace attempting to be diplomatic and Luke with no patience left after the battle.

He should get up and get involved. Nobody could trust Jace to make any kind of remotely important decision on his own. He can barely cope with the responsibility of ordering take-out for dinner without explicit instructions. There’s no way he should be allowed to make a decision that could impact the fate of their world.

But Luke and Raphael and Isabelle all know what they’re doing. For once in his life, Alec wants to
let someone else make the decisions—just for a few minutes. Just so he can sit here with Magnus. Just so he can feel Magnus’ heartbeat against his. Just for a little bit.

“Do we have to move?” Magnus mumbles, making Alec jump. He’d thought Magnus was on the verge of falling asleep.

“Eventually,” Alec says, reaching up with one hand to run his fingers through the hair at the nape of Magnus’ neck. He scratches lightly with the pads of his fingers, and Magnus sighs, pressing closer. The hand not still clasped in Alec’s slides under his jacket and settles against his hip. Alec’s heart turns over.

He doesn’t say that the position is quite uncomfortable for his knees, or that he might be bleeding out through his side and should probably get an iratze, because he doesn’t give a flying fuck at the moment. He just wants to be with Magnus. Wants to live this moment for a little longer. Because they’re safe, and they’re okay, and his entire body hurts and his side is killing him but he’s got Magnus against him, can feel his pulse beneath his fingers, and for the moment he can’t feel the pain of anything.

“That’s a shame,” Magnus says. “It’d be nice if we could just stay here for a while.”

“You can’t,” Raphael says, sharply but not altogether unkindly. “You might have devastated Valentine’s army, Magnus, but he’s going to have had other people posted around the world. We haven’t killed all of them. And once they hear what’s happened here—”

“Oh, I know,” Magnus says, lifting his head to glare at Raphael over Alec’s shoulder. “Don’t be such a killjoy. Go kiss your boyfriend and leave me to kiss mine.”

“You’re not kissing, you’re cuddling,” Raphael says irritably. “It’s almost worse. And there’s going to be plenty of time for that later.”

Alec notices that he doesn’t deny Magnus’ comment about his boyfriend.

Magnus mumbles something inaudible under his breath, flashes Raphael his middle finger, and collapses back against Alec with a melodramatic sigh that makes Alec press a smile into his neck.

Raphael rolls his eyes. “Magnus, move.”

“Make me.”

Raphael exhales, casting his eyes skyward. Alec sees him counting to ten in Spanish silently.

“Lightwood,” Raphael says, not looking at him, “please extract yourself from your absolutely insufferable boyfriend and move towards the door so that he’ll get off his arse and leave.”

“Don’t you dare,” Magnus says, pinning Alec’s legs to the floor with his shin. Considering he’s suffered a total magic depletion, he’s retained a surprising amount of his usual strength. Alec can’t move.

Raphael’s eyes roll so hard Alec is surprised he doesn’t get lightheaded.

“Raphael?” Simon says, reaching out to clasp Raphael’s arm gently as he approaches. “Jace found a girl in one of the rooms earlier. A warlock. She—”

“Fuck!”
Magnus’ eyes fly open and he jerks up straight where he’s sprawled across Alec. Raphael’s eyebrows shoot up.


“She won’t talk,” Simon says, “but she doesn’t seem scared, per se.”

“Of course she doesn’t. That doesn’t mean she isn’t,” Magnus says.

Alec moves his wings to let Magnus get up. He stumbles a little as he tries to go from his knees to his feet; Alec reaches out a hand to steady him.

“Okay?” he asks, watching Magnus with concern.

“Yeah,” Magnus says. “I’ll be fine. Just– Why am I bloody? I didn’t get hit, where the hell is this from?”

Magnus is staring down at his shirt in confusion, picking up the hem and peering at his skin, brow furrowed.

“I did,” Alec says, realising that he must still be bleeding. “Shit, I’m sorry.”

Magnus pins him with a fierce glare. “No. Simon, where’s Jace?”

“With Clary, in the little girl’s room. What did you say her name is? Madzie?”

“That’s right,” Magnus says, and pokes Alec lightly. “You’re coming with me and getting an iratze off your parabatai as soon as we find him. No distractions.”

Alec smiles a little. “Raziel, I’ve missed you.”

“Stop flirting. Let’s go.”

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As they walk down the corridor, Magnus leans on Alec a little more heavily than an entirely healthy person would. He’s sure it’s not noticeable to any onlookers - it just looks like he’s pressing close to Alec after the battle - but the small frown Alec shoots him lets Magnus know that it hasn’t escaped Alec’s notice.

A wing curls around Magnus’ back, following the line of Alec’s arm. Magnus smiles.

“Finally fulfilling my promise,” Alec says. “We found Madzie.”

Magnus is too tired to respond beyond a nod, but it seems to satisfy Alec. The more alert part of Magnus’ brain thinks that Alec is only talking to make sure Magnus isn’t going completely loopy.

Gently, Alec pushes open the door, and gestures Magnus in ahead of him. He relinquishes his hold on Magnus’ waist, but Magnus can feel sharp eyes on his back as he ventures slowly into Madzie’s room.

Inside, Madzie is sitting on the floor, facing the wall. She’s clutching her stuffed polar bear to her chest and is glaring at an invisible spot in front of her. Jace and Clary are sitting together on the end of her bed, fingers loosely tangled, looking more than a little helpless.

“Hello, sweet pea,” Magnus says.
The reaction is instant. Madzie whirls around, eyes going wide and magic sparking at her fingertips in what Alec presumes is excitement. It’s incredibly endearing.

“Magnus!” she says, and rushes forwards to fling herself at Magnus’ legs.

Magnus stumbles a little; Alec reaches out a hand to steady him, perhaps unnecessarily, as Magnus gives the girl a gentle hug. There’s a soft smile on his face. It makes Alec wonder why, to the best of his knowledge, Magnus has never settled down like that, with a husband or a wife and children. He knows warlocks are infertile, but he knows as well as anyone that family doesn’t have to be built on blood.

“Are you alright?” Magnus asks her, pulling back far enough to look her up and down properly.

Madzie nods. “What happened? Where are all the bad people?”

While Jace takes Clary’s stele and silently activates Alec’s healing rune for him, Alec’s heart breaks at the childish innocence in her voice.

“They’re gone,” Magnus tells her simply. “You’re safe. You don’t have to stay here any longer.”

Madzie looks away. “I did bad things.”

“Hey.” Magnus kneels down in front of her, hands draped over his knees and eyes intent on Madzie. “I know what they made you do. None of that was your fault. Okay?”

In lieu of replying, Madzie glances up at Alec, revealed to her eyes by Magnus kneeling down. She blinks, twice, and then goes pale. Her expression turns to one of unadulterated horror.

“Magnus,” she says, taking a half step backwards. Her eyes stay fixed on Alec as though she can’t make herself look away.

“It’s okay,” Magnus tells her. “This is Alec. He won’t hurt you. He’s my boyfriend. He helped make all the bad people go away. You can trust him.”

Madzie shakes her head vehemently. “He- He’s the one- They made me. I didn’t want to.”

Clary and Jace have both leant forwards and are watching the scene unfold with furrowed brows. Jace’s eyes flicker back to Alec’s, and he quirks an eyebrow. Alec shrugs. He doesn’t know what Madzie could be referring to.

“What did they make you do?” Magnus asks. “Can you tell me?”

Madzie glances back at Alec nervously, before returning her gaze to Magnus. “There was an angel. They used the angel to make dreams. And she told me I had to send the dreams. To him.”

The words knock the breath out of Alec, and he rocks back on his heels, stunned. How could this little girl possibly have got through Magnus’ wards, the Institute’s wards, and sent him such barbaric dreams on behalf of Valentine? And why would Valentine have wanted to send him such dreams, anyway?

“She?” Magnus queries, something dark flashing in his eyes. “Not Valentine?”

Madzie shakes her head. “She told me Valentine couldn’t know. She told me nobody could know.”

“Do you know her name?”
Madzie shakes her head again.

Magnus snaps his fingers - Alec wants to chastise him for it, but he manages to refrain - and holds up a square photograph that Alec recognises as one from Magnus’ box of memories. “Was it her?”

Madzie peers at the photograph, squints, and nods.

“Camille?” Alec queries, brow furrowing in confusion.

“Camille.” Magnus banishes the photograph with a wave of his hand that seems considerably heavier than normal. He stands, turning to Alec. Madzie follows his every movement with wide eyes.

“No more magic,” Alec tells him firmly, and ignores Jace’s snort from where he’s still sitting on the bed. Clary hits him. There’s upsettingly little force behind it. “Why would Camille have sent me those dreams?”

“Because she lives to fuck with people, and she wanted to fuck with our relationship,” Magnus says lowly. “And, I would guess, because she struck some kind of deal with Valentine as well as the Clave. Maybe she thought breaking us up would force me to Valentine. Maybe she thought if she got in your head, she could get you to turn on me.”

“Never,” Alec tells him.

Magnus smiles faintly and reaches up to brush Alec’s jaw with a knuckle. “I know, darling. I know.”

***

Simon’s never seen an angel before.

Not a real one, at least. He’s seen Jace, who is convinced that he’s an angel, and Clary, whom he used to think was an angel, and Raphael, who most definitely isn’t an angel but who Simon thinks he might just love anyway, but he’s never seen an actual, biological, heavenly angel.

He hadn’t expected it to be such a heart-wrenching sight.

The hairs on the back of his neck stand on end as he walks into the room beside Raphael, the evidence of Valentine’s heinous crimes and experiments cluttering the space around them. In the centre of the room, chained to the ceiling, is a man dressed in tattered robes with wings that were surely once majestic hanging limply at his sides. He’s slouched, head lolling onto his chest and eyelashes almost brushing his cheekbones.

Raphael purses his lips and steps forwards, phone in hand, towards the angel shackled like an animal in the middle of the room. He snaps a photo of the angel’s forearm where purplish veins are raised against hauntingly pale skin.

At the sound of Raphael locking his phone, the angel’s eyes shoot open. It stares at Raphael with swirling golden irises, lips parted in what Simon can only interpret as a silent scream.

Simon flinches. Raphael doesn’t.

“Simon,” Raphael says calmly, “I’m going to undo the left shackle, you’re going to undo the right one.”

He doesn’t wait for Simon’s confirmation. He slings a heavy table across the room, jumps up, and digs his bare fingers into the metal, prying the shackles apart with practised ease.
The angel slumps to the ground in insubstantial heap as it’s released. Everything in Simon wants to reach down, to help it up, to do something, but the desire must show in his eyes: Raphael’s hand slides into his, halting him before he moves.

“No,” Raphael says. “Let it go.”

Simon wants to ask what Raphael means, what he’s talking about, because quite clearly that creature is going nowhere, but then the angel moves. Its head tips back towards the ceiling, eyes wide and palms spread open. Before their eyes, it lights up, white spreading through the room until it’s blinding, until Simon and Raphael have to turn their faces towards each other to avoid having their retinas burnt out.

A bizarre shudder runs down Simon’s spine, quickly followed by a feeling of such intense nausea that it makes him dizzy. He reaches out to clutch at Raphael for balance, stomach swooping and chest tightening and anxiety flooding through him until he feels like he might just rather have blood poisoning again.

Behind closed eyelids, Simon sees the light begin to diminish, and, with it, the sensations of sickness. When he looks, there’s no evidence of the angel ever having existed. The shackles dangle from the ceiling, metal warped where he and Raphael tore into it, but not so much as a scrap of cloth remains of the angel itself.

He turns to stare at Raphael in astonishment, hands loose on his forearms where they’d been gripping at each other.

“What the hell was that?”

“That was an angel dying,” Raphael tells him, chafing a hand against his arm. He’s frowning at Simon in clear concern. “Do you feel okay?”

Simon shivers. “Yeah. Now. I didn’t, when that whole light thing happened. I’d rather have blood poisoning than feel that again.”

Raphael rolls his eyes, lips quirking infinitesimally. There’s something beyond satisfying about having a boyfriend who smiles just marginally more often than Maryse Lightwood, Simon thinks, because every time he gets such a minute reaction, he feels like he’s going to combust with giddy happiness at the thought that he made Raphael look like that.

“Simon, you were vomiting all over the Dumort for three days straight when you had blood poisoning. And that was only after Isabelle saw you and reported you and we bullied you into coming back to the Dumort instead of being a stubborn asshole and sitting in an alleyway on your own for the conceivable future.”

“Oh, yeah.” Simon shrugs. “I guess that was pretty bad.”

“Dios,” Raphael says with a sigh. “If I hadn’t pulled you out of a dumpster that night we probably wouldn’t be here, you know.”

Simon raises his eyebrows. “Firstly, Isabelle and Maia pulled me out of the dumpster. You stood there with your arms folded insulting me. Secondly, what does that mean?”

Apparently, Raphael finds something particularly interesting on the ceiling, because that’s what he looks at when he says, “It was while you were vomiting your guts up and ruining my house that I realised why I found you so irritating.”
“Really? Why?”

“Because I liked you, idiota,” Raphael snaps, rolling his eyes again. “It was going to take me hours to clean up, the entire Dumort stunk to high heaven for a week, but I was more worried about you.”

“Aw.” Simon grins at him. “See, I knew you were a sweetheart. You’re a caring soul deep down.”

“Caring about your silence, yes,” Raphael responds dryly.

“You don’t mean that.”

Raphael arches an eyebrow at him. Simon kisses his cheek, delighting in the surprised smile it evokes, and then darts out of the room before Raphael can say anything else horribly rude and ruin the mood.

***

Both Alec and Raphael protest vehemently when Magnus suggests that the quickest route home is for him to make them a portal back to the city. He rolls his eyes, but, when he stumbles mid-step and gets a worried glare from Alec, he supposes that they might be right. He wants to protest when Alec lets go of his hand to slide an arm around his waist, but he doesn’t have the energy—also, he’s not especially eager to face-plant.

“We could fly,” Isabelle suggests.

One of the vampires shoots her a distinctly unimpressed look. “We don’t turn into bats, sister.”

Isabelle shrugs. “There are four of us. We could fly you back.”

“Oh, good god,” Raphael says, pinching his nose. “When you need us to testify, Alec, call. In the meantime, I do not want to hear, see or smell another Shadowhunter.”

A jerk of his head, and the vampires shoot off into the night, clearly more than done with the antics of the Shadowhunters. Simon remains for a moment, looking sheepish, and then follows his clan with a brief apology.

Luke is smiling in amusement, Madzie asleep in his arms. “We appreciate the offer, but we’ll make our own way home. I’ll drop Madzie off with Catarina tomorrow, Magnus. Alec, if you need anything, you know where to find me. Goodnight.”

He kisses Clary’s hair and follows his pack into the night.

Jace, Clary and Isabelle exchange glances.

“We’re going to fly back,” Clary says, eyes flickering between Alec and Magnus. “Unless...”

“Go on,” Alec says. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Alright.” Jace reaches out to clasp Alec’s shoulder. “I’ll text you to let you know what’s going on at the Institute, but whatever it is, we’ll hold fort until you’re back. Just don’t take too long. Okay?”

“Thank you,” Alec says, inclining his head.

Once Alec’s family have flown off into the night, Magnus lets himself sag against his side, head falling onto Alec’s shoulder. A heavy sigh of exhaustion leaves him. He casts his eyes up to the sky overhead, stars glittering in the blackness.
“Hey.” Alec turns his head to look at Magnus as best he can, and wraps his arm tighter around Magnus’ waist. “You okay?”

“Mmmh. I really want a steak. And a glass of wine. Oh, god, and a bath. A long, hot bath. With lots of bubbles. Then I want to sleep for...” He pauses, deliberating. “Seventeen hours.”

Alec laughs. “Seventeen?”

“Seventeen.”

“Okay.” Alec kisses the side of his head, lingering for a moment to breathe him in. “Seventeen hours it is. Got it.”

Magnus closes his eyes. “Alexander?”

“Mm. Yeah?”

“You know what I really want?”

“A bath?” Alec asks, lips quirking upwards.

“No— Well, yes. Sort of. I want a bath, and then I want to pet the Chairman and have a cup of tea, and then I want to crawl into bed with you and pretend there’s nothing bad in the world.”

“I want that too,” Alec says. “I missed you so much. But we have to go home, first. We can’t stand in this dump all night. The mundanes will come sniffing and think we’re high. Well. They’ll think you’re high. And they’ll think I’m an alien and faint.”

Magnus snorts. “I think you’re high.”

“Shut up.”

Magnus lifts his head. “Take me home. I’m too tired to move.”

Alec raises his eyebrows. “You want me to fly you home?”

“Yes, I know, I’ve lost all sense of dignity, but Isabelle was right. It’s the quickest way. And I really want that bath.”

Alec smiles softly at him. “Alright. Come here, then.”

They readjust their grips, Alec tightening his hold on Magnus and pulling him flush against his side, and, with a swift beat of his wings, they rise up into the sky, the smouldering remains of Valentine’s base disappearing into nothingness behind them.

***

There’s someone standing on the rickety old stairs leading up to Magnus’ loft when they step into the foyer. Alec’s arm is still wound around Magnus’ waist from when they touched down outside, and he stops, stock-still, horror and fear pulsing through him as a hundred worst-case scenarios flash through his mind like a relay of all his nightmares in the last six months back to back.

The Silent Brother turns, robes swishing on the bowed wood, and tilts his head back just enough to make his face visible from beneath his hood. Alec’s grip on Magnus tightens.

“Stop squeezing me,” Magnus protests, patting at Alec’s hand and frowning.
Alec feels like he’s going to suffocate. “Magnus,” he chokes.

“Didn’t I ever tell you about Jem?” Magnus asks.

*Magnus knew me when I was a Shadowhunter,* Brother Zachariah says. *I owe him my life many times over.*

Alec’s gaze flickers between them, the band of anxiety around his chest easing. “Why are you here?”

*Because I know what happened. And I know what’s happening at the Institute.*

“I hate to cut this short,” Magnus says, “but I’m going inside to collapse for a few hours. You boys carry on with your little natter inside.”

He doesn’t wave his hand to open the door, relying on an old-fashioned shove instead, and Alec watches him head straight towards the bedroom on slightly unsteady feet. The door clicks shut, sealing Magnus inside. Alec gets the message. He forces himself not to follow; he knows that’s not what Magnus wants.

*Sit down, Alec Lightwood,* Brother Zachariah says, making Alec jump. *Your wound needs attention.*

“It’s fine. My parabatai activated my healing rune.”

*The last time you were injured by a weapon of the Circle you nearly died because the arrow was poisoned. So was that blade. Sit down.*

Alec sits.

While Brother Zachariah lifts Alec’s shirt to examine what Alec knows is most likely a rather mangled wound, Alec shoots off a text to Catarina. He remembers Magnus’ last magic depletion. He remembers walking Magnus home. It hadn’t been like this. He’d been exhausted, yes, and a little unsteady at times, but something seems off. He can’t quite tell what.

*The Consul is at the Institute,* Brother Zachariah says. *Imogen Herondale has been removed from her position.*


*Lydia Branwell made rather a convincing case to the Consul about her obsession with hunting Magnus Bane above anything else. The Consul has ordered a trial immediately upon the return of those who partook in the unsanctioned mission.*

“Then I need to go back.”

Absolutely not.

“Brother Zachariah, if the Consul has ordered a trial and I’m not a part of it, Magnus’ chances at freedom are gone.”

*The Consul has demanded that Magnus testify too. Under oath and spell. If you return prematurely, they will order you to bring Magnus before he’s ready. If you go back to the Institute, you must go with Magnus, and he must be prepared.*

Brother Zachariah prods at Alec’s side, testing his work. Alec hisses, and Brother Zachariah sends him what Alec thinks is supposed to be an apologetic look.
I’ve healed this as best I can without any other supplies. It’s clean. It should heal over. Stay with Magnus. A magical altercation of that magnitude will have made Magnus a little unwell.

“He’ll be okay by the morning, won’t he?” Alec asks, shooting a concerned look towards Magnus’ bedroom door. Nothing but silence can be heard from within, and Alec isn’t sure whether to be concerned that Magnus must be dead or glad that he must be asleep.

Possibly he’s worrying just slightly unnecessarily.

“Of course he will,” says a brisk voice from the doorway that sends relief rushing through Alec like a tidal wave. “He’s the High Warlock of Brooklyn.”

Catarina Loss strides through the loft with ease, dropping a string of magic from her fingertips to greet the Chairman, who’s appeared out of what seems rather like nowhere to investigate the newcomer.

“Brother,” Catarina says, nodding at Brother Zachariah before turning her gaze to Alec. “Magnus will be fine.”

“I know he’s about as far from weak as it’s possible to be, it’s just—”

“It can be alarming, I know.” She sounds kind as she kicks off her boots and twitches a finger to hang up her jacket. “Think of it like this. If you’re on a hard mission for a few hours, you’ll be exhausted, a bit delirious, and want to sleep for a century. If you push yourself harder than you’re capable of because you don’t have a choice, you’ll throw up, feel shit, and regret your every life choice for a day while praying for the release of sleep. Or death. Magnus did the second one.”

“That’s not reassuring,” Alec tells her, although it is. Because at least he understands now. Magnus isn’t going to spontaneously die on him, or show signs of Valentine having subjected him to some deadly experiment.

“Mm. If you’d like to shout at him about it, please do. It’s reckless. Although I suppose there were extenuating circumstances.” She tilts her head to one side, lips twitching upwards. “Nice shouting. I recommend nice shouting. Minimal arguing. Maybe some kissing. Definitely some hugs.”

Alec smiles. “Noted. Are you gonna check on him?”

Catarina scrunches her nose and shrugs. “Honestly, I don’t need to. He and I would both rather I didn’t walk in on him sprawled out and half naked again. I’d be able to tell if anything were seriously wrong. His magic would be playing up. I’m going to stay out here and pester his cat instead.”

That makes Alec pause. “Are you staying?”

Catarina’s expression softens, and Alec is reminded that, for all her sarcasm and quips and quick wit, Catarina is Magnus’ oldest surviving friend. She loves Magnus just as much as Alec does—if not more, although Alec doesn’t quite know how that would be possible for a human being. She cares. Immensely so.

“Yes,” she says. “I’ll stay until he wakes up. He’ll probably throw his guts up and then spend the rest of the day complaining and pretending to be dying, which means he’s fine. But it’s best to be safe.”

Alec decides he doesn’t want to know the details about why Catarina thinks Magnus is going to be sick, and instead turns to Brother Zachariah, wincing as his newly healed side twinges. “And you?”

I’ll return to the Institute and update you in the morning, Brother Zachariah says. For now,
Leaving Catarina fussing over Chairman Meow in the living room with her feet up on the sofa and a ridiculously strong coffee next to her, Alec slips away to Magnus’ bedroom. Although Catarina had patiently reassured him several times that Magnus is probably passed out and fine, he can’t stop the churning feeling of worry in his gut.

Also, Brother Zachariah was right about the blade he’d been injured with being poisoned—every muscle in his body is aching and painful, and he feels more than a little light-headed. He’s fairly sure he’s not dying - Brother Zachariah would have noticed - but he’s also fairly desperate to get somewhere horizontal. The burns around his throat from Asmodeus’ magic are stinging too, despite the healing runes and Brother Zachariah’s help.

He inches the door open as quietly as he can, and peers through. It’s dark inside, but the light spilling through from the rest of the loft is enough for Alec to see the slow, steady rise and fall of Magnus’ chest.

The tight band constricting his lungs loosens at the sight. He pushes the door shut behind him and pads across the floor towards the bed. He hesitates momentarily, taking a moment to stare at Magnus, still fully dressed, boots on and jacket laying in a crumpled heap on the floor. He bends down to pick it up, hangs it neatly on the back of a chair, and eases Magnus’ boots off his feet. Magnus doesn’t so much as stir.

He eases himself onto the mattress beside Magnus, side smarting in protest at the movement. He ignores it as he lays out, exhaling in pleasure at how nice Magnus’ bed feels, how soft the sheets are against his skin, how indescribably wonderful it feels to have another person - to have Magnus - beside him, warm and vital.

Tilting his chin forwards, he brushes a kiss against Magnus’ forehead before curling up beside him, letting his breathing synch to Magnus’. He doesn’t reach out to touch, or cuddle against him—he just watches, letting the rhythmic sound of Magnus’ breaths lull him to sleep.

Later, when Catarina peers in, that’s how she finds them: Alec with his wings folded neatly around himself, body following the line of Magnus’ but not quite touching. It’s a sweet scene, if a little bizarre, after so many decades - centuries - worth of Shadowhunters trying to kill Magnus, or take advantage of him.

She twitches a finger to move the duvet to cover them both, and, smiling, she backs out, leaving the two lovers to sleep off the exhaustion of the last days together. She could leave, she knows. Magnus will be okay. Frankly, he’ll be far more than okay—she suspects that Alec will be determined to make sure of that.

But she won’t. Not yet. For now, she’ll watch over them.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was tough to write, I’m not going to lie. I’ve tweaked it so many times. I
really really hope you guys enjoyed how it’s turned out!

Thank you so so much to everyone who left me a comment last chapter, and to all of you who’ve sent me messages on Tumblr - it really is absolutely lovely to receive them, and you’re all such wonderful people <3

If you like, you can come talk to me on Tumblr or on Twitter (where you can also use #fwwfic to yell at me).

All the love to you!
Lu <3
Hummingbird

Chapter Summary

In which Isabelle, Jace and Clary debrief, there are visitors at the Institute, and Magnus finally gets his bath.

Chapter Notes

This is such a beautiful bird so I’m reverting to my old ways and being all bird-nerd today. The hummingbird is also known as the Lovebird (which is BEAUTIFUL) and is known for being symbolic of life and prosperity. It’s also symbolic of energy, passion, vitality and loyalty.

Exhaustion is drilling its way through Isabelle’s very soul as she, Jace and Clary make their way through the Institute. All she wants to do is curl up in bed and go to sleep, but she knows she can’t. Not yet. First, she has to finish this. They won two battles tonight, but there are more to come.

“Stop!”

A loud voice rings out from the end of the corridor, and she, Jace and Clary freeze in their tracks, spinning to face the voice. A Shadowhunter, presumably one from Idris, stands alone, eyes wide and a dagger held aloft.

Jace takes a step forwards. “Where’s Maryse? Where’s the Inquisitor?”

The man’s eyes dart back to Isabelle and Clary, before returning to Jace. “Where’s Alec Lightwood?”

“Not here,” Jace says calmly. “Where’s Maryse? She’s Acting Head of the Institute in the absence of both Alec and Isabelle.”

“She’s in the Ops Centre,” the man says. He’s lowered his dagger, but he still looks strangely afraid. Isabelle wonders what lies the Inquisitor has been feeding her soldiers over the twelve hours they’ve been gone. “With the Consul.”

Clary perks up. “The Consul?”

“Is Aline here?” Isabelle asks, with a similar note of hope in her voice. The Inquisitor is motivated by bigotry born of loss and fear, and it’s not something any amount of logic will ever be able to overcome. The Consul, on the other hand, is well known - and frequently insulted - for her comparatively liberal views. Isabelle has a sneaking suspicion that it’s due to the amount of time she’s spent outside the United States.

“Yes,” the man says. “Lydia Branwell made a case. Told the Consul everything. The Consul has
ordered a trial.”

Jace spares a moment to thank the man, and then the three of them brush past, heading straight to the Ops Centre. They know they haven’t got time to waste.

Maryse looks up from where she’s sitting at a table beside the Consul, both speaking quietly and urgently, frowns marring their faces. Aline is sitting opposite them, along with a young blonde woman Isabelle doesn’t know—but she knows she’s not imagining the pointed tips of her ears.

“Isabelle,” someone says, and then arms are around her, tight and warm and secure, and Isabelle stumbles a little beneath the embrace.

“Hey.”

Isabelle squeezes Lydia once before letting her go. She glances back at the rest of the room pointedly, and, after flashing Isabelle a small, private smile, Lydia goes to hug Clary and Jace.

Maryse is the next to stand up and hug them—even Clary. She doesn’t ask about Alec. Isabelle wonders whether that’s because she knows, or because she doesn’t want to. Jace tells her that he’s okay anyway, a faint glint of challenge in his eyes. Maryse doesn’t rise to it.

“Consul.” Isabelle’s fingers brush against the back of Lydia’s hand as she passes her to sit beside Aline at the long meeting table.

“Miss Lightwood.” Jia Penhallow tilts her chin up, surveying Isabelle coolly. “I should be sending the three of you straight to the City of Bones to spend a night in the cells. But I won’t. I understand there have been some...untoward activities going on.”

Isabelle swallows. “It’s complicated.”

“So I hear,” Jia says dryly. “Your brother has been partaking in illegal activity.”

“So has the Inquisitor,” Jace says sharply. “And Magnus Bane was never offered a trial. He was sentenced without evidence and without a hearing at a time of unrest and rumour and hatred.”

Jia lifts a hand to stop Jace, the quirk of her lips tiredly amused. “I know, Mr Herondale. Which is why I’m not having you all strung up in chains, and why I haven’t sent out a search party to hunt down Mr Bane and Mr Lightwood.”

Appropriately chastened, Jace looks a little sheepish. Clary takes his hand, and the two of them sit down at the end of the table, on the other side of Aline and the young woman.

“Alec’s okay, too?” Raj asks, making Isabelle jump: she hadn’t noticed him come into the room.

“Fine,” Jace says. “And Magnus and the other Downworlders. And we found the warlock girl who was reported missing—Madzie.”

“Oh?” Jia arches an eyebrow. “Hm. Someone also summoned a Prince of Hell, our computers tell us.”

“Magnus did,” Isabelle says, aware as she does that summoning a demon is very much against the law without prior Clave or Conclave approval, let alone summoning a Prince of Hell. “But there were extenuating circumstances.”

“Which will be weighed up at trial,” the Consul says easily. “What of Valentine?”
“My father is dead,” Clary says, with grim satisfaction in her voice. “Alec shot him.”

“I’ll send out a team to recover the body.”

Jia gestures to a Shadowhunter standing by a computer, passes them a tablet and a piece of folded paper, and asks Isabelle for the location coordinates.

Isabelle hesitates. “Valentine doesn’t deserve a burial or a ritual or—”

“No, Miss Lightwood, Valentine deserves to burn to ensure that no amount of dark, illegal magic will ever bring him back.”

Isabelle gives Jia the location.

“Consul,” Maryse says, speaking for the first time, “while I understand that gathering information about what has occurred in recent months is paramount, can some of this wait until morning?”

The Consul inclines her head. “Of course. I want the three of you to know that the Clave owes you, and everyone else on that mission, and enormous debt. The agreement to give Magnus Bane a trial was not unanimous, but there was more than a slim majority, after the story Miss Branwell told us. The best chance you have of ensuring a similar outcome at the trial is by telling the truth.”

She glances at Aline and the young woman as she speaks; both have remained quiet during the conversation, which Isabelle knows is rather uncharacteristic of Aline. Something in Jia’s expression makes Isabelle think that if someone were to look beneath the table, Aline and the young woman might be holding hands.

Later, when all this is over, when she and Lydia have talked, when Magnus has secured his freedom and her brother is happy, she’ll ask Aline all about this.

“We’ll send word out to Idris to say that the party has returned,” Aline says, rising up out of her seat. Aline doesn’t look at the other woman, but the young woman seems to understand Aline without words needing to be said.

“Thank you, Aline. Helen.” Jia nods. “If Malachi attempts to tell me that I should be sending out a party to drag Bane to the Institute immediately, remind him that his job hangs in the balance without adding insubordination to the mix.”

“Uh.” Clary sounds hesitant. “Consul, I don’t think that’s going to be a problem.”

Every head in the room turns to frown at her. Jia raises her eyebrows in question. Clary looks a little uncertain, but her voice doesn’t waver when she speaks.

“Malachi was there tonight,” she says. “With the Circle. He’s dead.”

Isabelle and Jace exchange a glance. Isabelle hadn’t noticed Malachi there among the hundreds of Circle members, but she supposes they’ll find out fairly quickly if Clary’s wrong. Somehow, she doubts she is.

“Well.” Jia looks distinctly unhappy and more than a little unsettled. “Perhaps this whole ordeal is going to bring up a few more trials than just Magnus Bane’s.”

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Once Jia has ordered them out of the Ops Centre and to bed, and once Maryse has looked them over
with a critical gaze and hugged them all again in an unusual show of affection, Isabelle texts Lydia.

A knock sounds on her bedroom door a handful of minutes later. Isabelle glances up from where she’s activating her healing rune again, and calls out, “Come in!”

Lydia shuts the door behind her, slight hesitation on her face. Then Isabelle smiles tiredly at her, and it seems to evaporate away.

“I was worried about you,” Lydia confesses. “I think this has been the longest twelve hours of my life.”

Isabelle reaches out to take her hand and pull her down onto the bed beside her. “We’re all fine.” Then she smirks. “Especially me.”

Lydia rolls her eyes and lets out a short, sharp laugh.

“Thank you,” Isabelle says. “For holding fort. And for keeping Mom and Raj in check.”

“Actually, they were both weirdly helpful. Especially Maryse. Raj is always quite happy to leap to Alec’s defence. That wasn’t a surprise.”

They both grin at that.

“Having said that–” Lydia slides down to rest her head on the pillow next to Isabelle’s, so that they’re facing each other “–he does seem to have eyes for some Aldertree.”

Isabelle chokes. “Well, good for him. Although I’d rather not talk about Raj.”

“No?”

“No really.” She smiles. “We need to talk about you going to Paris, sometime, but for now, think the Institute can cope without you for a few hours?”

Lydia reaches out to brush her fingers against Isabelle’s arm. “I think it can.”

***

When Alec is woken by the signs of mid-morning sunlight beginning to edge through the blinds in Magnus’ bedroom, he groans quietly, throwing an arms across his face. His entire body aches, some parts more than others, and with the sore throbbing of his side he doubts he’ll be shooting an arrow at full capacity for a couple of weeks.

A soft sound from beside him makes him look over at Magnus. He seems to have fallen into an easier sleep, shoulders relaxed where they had been tensed and taut when Alec had fallen asleep with him last night.

Or, rather, early this morning. A quick glance at Magnus’ clock tells him that he’s had eight hours of sleep, which is considerably more than he’s used to. He doesn’t think he’s slept this late in years.

But, clearly, Magnus isn’t ready to be awake and functioning yet. So, with a gentle kiss to Magnus’ forehead, Alec eases himself out of bed and out of Magnus’ bedroom in search of some coffee and Catarina.

“Good morning.” Catarina’s voice rings out, startling him as he enters the kitchen. “Coffee?”

“Thanks,” he says, taking the mug she’s offering him while he recovers his surprise. “Magnus is still
asleep.”

“I’m not surprised,” Catarina says, shaking her head and leaning back against the counter. “Raphael
told me how much energy he expended yesterday. I haven’t seen Magnus do that for a long, long
time.”

Guilt twists in Alec’s stomach. It clearly shows on his face, because Catarina fixes him with a
sympathetic look.

“Alec, don’t. This is who Magnus is. And as much as I like to tell him off for it, he’s not going to
change, nor would I want him to. He protects people with everything he has. And if that’s not
enough, with everything he doesn’t.”

“I know,” Alec says quietly, and takes a sip of coffee. “I hate seeing people I love hurt. I always feel
like... I don’t know. Like I should have done better. Been better. Protected them better.”

Catarina lays a hand on his arm. “There’s no protecting Magnus when he’s determined to do
something like this. All you can do is what you did. Fight with him and then fight to be there for him
in the aftermath.”

They’re quiet for a moment, just standing together in Magnus’ kitchen in the glow of the morning
summer sunshine. Everything in Alec wants Magnus to walk through the door, bronze skin
highlighted by gold. Everything in him knows that it’s not going to happen. Not yet.

“Can I ask you something?” Alec asks, glancing at her.

“Of course.”

“When Magnus told you about me...what did you think?”

Catarina’s lips twist into an amused sort of smile, and she fixes Alec with a slightly chastising look.
“What I thought then doesn’t really matter. I didn’t think much at all. I was worried, of course,
mostly because Magnus is famous for not always picking the people who are good for him,
and you’re a Shadowhunter.” She swigs her coffee. “What I think now is much more important. And
I think you and Magnus are good for each other.”

Alec blinks. “Really?”

“Really.”

***

Fuck.

What the hell has he done to himself?

Magnus wants to groan in protest as consciousness begins to return to his body, but he can’t quite
find the energy. Every limb seems to have the weight of lead, and moving so much as a finger
requires effort he can’t produce.

There’s the faint murmur of voices around him, and he can feel the softness of his bed and his sheets
around him, and something else, something he can’t quite remember but recognises. The words wash
over him, like he’s listening through water, and there’s a faint sort of ringing in his ears
accompanying a sudden dizziness that brings with it a rush of nausea...
“He's going to—”

“Here, I've got it.”

There's a tub under his chin when Magnus' eyes peel back and he jackknives up and his stomach throws up its pitiful contents, the clenching making him shudder and convulse. A cool, soothing hand rubs up and down his back, and it’s almost enough to make him forget how undignified and disgusting this is.

This. Magic depletion. Valentine. His father. He’d forgotten. The unpleasant wake up call has reminded him.

When he feels his stomach settle, he leans back into the touch, coughing and gasping, and his eyes fall closed again. Something cool and damp drags across his face, gently wiping away the sweat and cooling his overheated skin, and he feels lips touch his temple, just brushing against his hairline.

Alexander.

His eyes snap open, and he tilts his head to look at Alec, who’s sitting beside him, cross-legged on the bed, wings held aloft. He smiles a little when their eyes meet.

“Hey.”

“You're here,” Magnus says dumbly, and he blames the fact that tears sting in his eyes at that particular revelation on his recent magic depletion. It’s got nothing to do with the fact that he can count the number of people who’ve ever stayed with him during this particular brand of his vileness on one hand.

“Of course I'm here, you stupid man,” Alec says, lowering the hand that's holding the damp flannel to brush the underside of Magnus' jaw with his knuckles. “Where else would I be?”

Magnus lets out a weak laugh. “I don't know, darling. At the Institute, doing your job?”

Alec snorts. “Fuck that. You're more important. Besides, this is my other job. You're my boyfriend. I'm supposed to be here for you when you need me.”

Alec’s eyes flicker beyond Magnus as he speaks, and Magnus turns his head to see Catarina, a smile on her lips as she watches them from beside the bed.

“Welcome back to the land of the living, Magnus,” Catarina says, and leans down to kiss his forehead.

Magnus shifts a little in place, pleased to note that he feels about a thousand times better than he did before he turned his stomach inside out.

“How bad?” he asks her.

“Quite,” she says, kindly but without preamble. Catarina’s brisk, empathetic straightforwardness is something Magnus has always loved about her; it’s also the reason he suspects she and Alec will get along just fine.

Magnus tries not to look guiltily across at Alec at that revelation, but, from Catarina and Alec’s synchronised eye rolls, he doesn’t succeed.

“You’ll be fine,” she says, and Magnus thinks that it's probably more for Alec’s benefit than his
own. “I’m going to head home now. If you need anything, just call, okay?”


Catarina smiles. “You’re more than welcome, Magnus.”

With one last squeeze of his shoulder, Catarina slips out of the room, pulling the door gently to behind her. Magnus makes a mental note to send her some flowers. Or a spa day. Or send her to one of those ridiculous mundane gym classes she likes so much.

There’s silence for a moment.

Faintly, Magnus can hear the sound of Chairman Meow enthusiastically greeting Catarina; she gives in for a moment, but then, judging by the disgruntled *mmmrow* the Chairman emits, she takes her leave.

In the bedroom, there’s nothing save the sound of breaths coming softly in the stillness. Alec is a warm, solid presence beside him, one hand still resting lightly between Magnus’ shoulder blades. This isn’t a side of himself that many people have ever been privy to. Normally, a lover seeing him like this would send Magnus - and them, usually - running for the hills.

But Alec doesn’t seem like he’s going anywhere. And Magnus can’t imagine anywhere he’d rather be.

He turns his head, twisting his body to face Alec. Briefly, he notices that he’s still wearing the same clothes he’s been in since he first travelled to Valentine - he can’t imagine how much he stinks - and that Alec must have taken his shoes off for him while he was asleep, but something else catches his attention.

Alec’s brow furrows as Magnus lifts his fingers to his boyfriend’s throat. He skims his fingertips along the lines of healing burn marks scorched into Alec’s skin, silvery but raw and red at the edges. Regret and guilt and anger clinch at Magnus’ stomach. He knows that what his father did to Alec wasn’t his fault, of course he does, but at the same time...

He’d summoned Asmodeus. He’d failed to control him. And there’s never any mistaking the fact that they’re biologically related.

“Hey.” Alec catches at his fingers. He draws Magnus’ hand away firmly, and then shifts on the bed so they’re facing each other. “Don’t.”

“Ale...”

“Magnus, it wasn’t your fault.”

“I know,” Magnus tells him truthfully. “I do. But just like you blame yourself every time anything happens to anyone you love, I feel like I should have done better. And the fact that it was my father who did this to you...”

“We can’t blame ourselves for the mistakes of our parents,” Alec says gently, pointedly, as though Magnus might have forgotten that Alec’s mother had murdered Ragnor in cold blood.

Well. Perhaps he had, a little. It’s certainly not something that looking at Alec reminds him of. Quite the opposite.

“I’ve known who your father is for the entire time I’ve known you,” Alec points out, when Magnus
doesn’t say anything. “I don’t care. Just because you share DNA doesn’t mean you share anything else.”

Magnus snorts. “I assure you, my borderline alcoholism and adeptness at magic that wants to kill don’t come from my mother.”

Alec shrugs. “I’m grouchy and stubborn and repressed and most people don’t like me because I’m a bit of an unsociable dick. We all have our faults. But you don’t murder people and you’re not an alcoholic. Not that the two are comparable.”

That, the little frown that appears between Alec’s brows as he speaks, makes Magnus smile. He reaches up again, this time to slide a palm along Alec’s cheek. Everything in him twists and aches in the best way when Alec leans into the touch and closes his eyes, letting out a small little sound of contentment. A surge of affection so powerful it’s overwhelming rockets through him; it’s all he can do just to fucking breathe.

Alec turns his head to press the softest, sweetest kiss against Magnus’ palm, and Magnus feels his heart shatter in his chest, that tidal wave of adoration breaking and soaking him through.

“God, I love you,” he whispers, and Alec looks up at him from beneath his lashes.

“I love you too,” he says, simply, easily, as though it’s the most straightforward thing in the world.

And perhaps, for Alec, it is. Perhaps that’s the kind of man he’s fallen in love with.

Perhaps that’s one of the many things that makes this time so very different.

“I’m going to heal these,” Magnus says, dropping his eyes to Alec’s neck. “I’m not going to let you walk around with scars from my father for the rest of your life. It’s not fair.”


Magnus huffs. “I should have known that introducing you two would be a bad idea.”

“Too late.” Alec smiles. “How do you feel about that bath you were practically salivating over last night?”

“That depends.” Magnus brushes his thumb against the curve of Alec’s cheekbone, a grin flitting across his lips. “Is my handsome boyfriend going to join me?”

Just the faintest touch of pink splatters across Alec’s cheeks. “Uh. You want me to get in a bath with you?”

Magnus arches an eyebrow. “Only if you want to, of course. But in theory, yes.”

“I’m filthy. And you’re filthy.”

“So we wash and get all that practical crap out of the way, and then refill the bath with clean water and doze for an hour. And kiss. Kissing is essential.”


***
As the bath fills the old-fashioned way (because, even after a solid twelve hours of sleep, Alec is adamant that he mustn’t do any magic—it’s sweet, if slightly frustrating) Magnus turns to Alec and lifts his hands to the front of his shirt. He runs the flats of his hands down Alec’s chest.

“May I?” he asks, because he hasn’t done this, hasn’t undressed Alec, enough times to feel that he knows his non-verbal cues well enough to determine whether or not he’s being given consent.

Alec’s pupils have dilated, but there’s nothing lustful about the look he gives Magnus. “Yeah. Ditto?”

“Ditto.”

They don’t rush. Why, Magnus doesn’t quite know, because the battle is far from over, but for the first time since he met Alec, he feels like they’re safe. They have time. There are still things hanging over them, but not the same things. This trial is something they’ll face together. There’s no lingering thought in Magnus’ mind that Alec might change his mind; that the Clave might be able to convince Alec to turn.

So they take their time, unbuttoning shirts and pulling off t-shirts, sliding soft cotton and filthy cloth over marred skin, the marks of war littered across them both. Magnus shivers when Alec dips his head to brush his lips against a large bruise splattered across Magnus’ shoulder. There’s no intention behind it, no heat or desire—it’s saturated with love, with care, but nothing else.

“Alec,” Magnus says, appalled, when he pulls Alec’s t-shirt off. It slides past his wings like they’re holograms—one of several facets of Nephilim wings that nobody has never really understood, but accepts.

Magnus reaches out towards the marred flesh on Alec’s side, a wounded noise catching in the back of his throat. Goosebumps rise across Alec’s pale skin as Magnus’ fingertips skim his skin, and he jumps when Magnus reaches a ticklish spot.

“It’s fine,” Alec says, inching away from Magnus’ touch, clearly wary of being tickled again. At any other time, Magnus would find it amusing. “Brother Zachariah looked at it. It’ll heal. I get injured all the time.”

Magnus sighs. “I know. I’m never going to like it. But I know.”

“I’m never going to like you exhausting yourself like this,” Alec replies, “but I know it happens.”

It’s a fair comparison, Magnus supposes. He can’t argue with it. Both their jobs have hazards.

Stripped down to their underwear, Magnus notices the fraying edges of trepidation on Alec’s face; he pauses, hands halfway to his boyfriend’s briefs, and catches his gaze. Magnus is abruptly aware that they’ve seen each other naked precisely once, caught up in a haze of lust and love and laughter. This is very different. He rests his hands on Alec’s hips.

“You can say no,” Magnus reminds him, although he knows that Alec is fully aware of that. “You’re not obliged.”

“I want to,” Alec says easily. “I just... I can’t help feeling a little bit self-conscious. Is that normal?”

Magnus shrugs. “There’s nothing wrong with it, if that’s what you mean. Although I assure you, you don’t need to be. You’re beautiful. And don’t even think about running away those wings of yours. They’re as filthy as the rest of us.”
When they’re bare to each other, Alec leans in to kiss him, once, and then takes his hand. Alec’s reluctance to let go makes climbing into the bath a little more difficult than it should be; Magnus is grinning by the time they make it in without having injured themselves any more.

The water is just shy of too hot, and it makes Magnus moan as he immerses himself in it properly. Alec dunks his head, and Magnus tips his back slowly to let the water run through his hair.

“Don’t splash me,” Magnus warns him, closing his eyes. “I really don’t like water.”

“Noted,” Alec says, and Magnus can’t help but be grateful that he doesn’t ask why, merely accepting it as another part of Magnus to respect.

They take turns washing each other’s hair and backs, seating themselves between each other’s legs in turn. It’s possibly the most intimate thing Magnus has experienced with Alec. Sex holds nothing on this, on the sensation of Alec’s fingers running through his hair and gently massaging his scalp, and then being granted the opportunity to return the favour. They’re both so vulnerable like this, placing their trust entirely into the other’s hands.

“Turn around,” Magnus murmurs when Alec is done. Alec obliges; Magnus rests his hands on Alec’s back, below his wings. “Can I help with these?”

Alec turns his head to look Magnus in the eye. He licks his lips, thinking, gazes locking and holding with a strange sort of intensity.

“Alec, how much do you know about Nephilim wings?” Alec asks, after several seconds of silence.

It’s not at all what Magnus expected. He expected an acceptance or a rejection. He’s momentarily taken aback, and blinks at Alec in blank surprise. It doesn’t sound like an accusation, or a test; Magnus doesn’t quite understand what Alec is asking him.

“About wing care? I’m not an expert, but it seemed fairly instinctual, last time, when I...”

“Groomed me,” Alec supplies, lips twitching. “You can say it. But that’s not what I meant. We’re very private about our wings. When you groomed my wings like that, last time— The only people who’ve ever done that for me are my siblings and my mother. I’ve never wrapped my wings around anyone besides them. But even then, it’s not...the same. They’re my family, by blood. Jace is my parabatai. You’re my boyfriend.”

Magnus tilts his head to the side. “What are you saying?”

“Nothing bad, I just want you to know exactly what it means when I say yes. I just...I want to make sure you know how much it means. That I want you like this.”

Magnus heart threatens to flip right over in his chest. In lieu of actually exploding from the swell of sheer affection surging within him, Magnus slides his hands around to Alec’s front to hug him from behind, and presses a firm kiss to his lips.

“I love you,” Magnus whispers.

“I love you too,” Alec says, squeezing his hands.

Before Alec can say anything to stop him, Magnus snaps his fingers to refresh the water in the bath; Alec shoots him a chastising look.
“Stop it,” he says, but it’s without heat.

“No more,” Magnus promises him, kissing the back of his neck.

He cups his palms in the now-clean water and trails handfuls of it along Alec’s wings, soaking the feathers. They look cleaner almost immediately.

Magnus bites the inside of his cheek when Alec lets out a little choking noise as Magnus’ fingers slide through the feathers, straightening primarirs and secondaries and gently massaging in soap. He chooses not to comment, continuing in his task with careful meticulousness until the faint blue-silver sheen that overlays the greyish white of Alec’s wings begins to return.

They sit like that for several long minutes. Alec’s entire body is sagging as Magnus continues, and Magnus feels his own heartbeat slow to the rhythmic movements of his hands. It’s calming, soothing, for both of them.

“Magnus,” Alec says, something strained in his voice, and Magnus pauses.

“Yes?”

Alec shudders as Magnus’ fingers rub lightly at a spot nearer to the insides of Alec’s wings, not far from where they meet his back.

“I—” Alec stops, taking a deep breath. “That part of our wings is...”

Magnus arches an eyebrow. “An erogenous zone?”

Alec looks just faintly embarrassed. “Yes.”

“Want me to leave it alone?”

Alec shivers at the faint brush of Magnus’ fingers as he withdraws them, and, god, much as Magnus wants to go back to bed after he’s had a hot drink and something to eat, he also wants to lay Alec out flat on his bed, wings still fully on display, and worship every goddamn inch of him.

“That might be a good idea.”

“Alright.”

Magnus rests his hands further along Alec’s wings, sliding his fingers through the feathers in a gesture he hopes is as comforting to Alec as it is to him. If the little sigh and the easy slump of Alec’s shoulders is any indication, he pitches it right.

They spend what feels like a blissful eternity in the bath. Magnus’ fingers twitch to refresh the water as it begins to turn cool. Alec shoots him a disapproving look, but doesn’t say anything. Instead, he reaches out to pull Magnus close, so that Magnus rests against his chest, sprawled between Alec’s legs.

“Magnus,” Alec murmurs, running his fingers through Magnus’ damp hair. “I think we should get out now. You keep dozing off.”

Magnus sighs, tilting his head into Alec’s touch. “But you’re comfortable.”

They clamber out, Magnus feeling significantly better than he did, and Alec reaches over to grab at Magnus’ towels so they can dry off—although they end up drying each other, rather than themselves.
“Want some food?” Alec asks, after he has - regretfully - covered his lovely torso with a t-shirt. “I can make something.”

Magnus tells Alec that that would be wonderful, receives a kiss to his cheek in reply, and gazes after his boyfriend with what he’s sure is a lovesick smile. He tries to remember the last time someone made him a home-cooked meal. Ragnar used to, eternally frustrated by the obsession the modern world had with fast food and take-outs and cafes. But the last time a girlfriend or boyfriend did?

Alec is sliding bacon and fried eggs and toast onto plates when Magnus walks into the kitchen, and he shoots Magnus a smile when he notices him sitting at the marble-topped island.

“You look like you feel better,” Alec says as he sets down a plate in front of Magnus. “Coffee or wine?”

“I think we deserve a glass of wine,” Magnus says. “And I do feel better.”

In lieu of a verbal response, Alec squeezes Magnus’ shoulder as he passes him to grab a bottle of wine from the cupboard.

Sitting across from Alec, eating cooked breakfast at lunchtime with a glass of wine, Alec’s wingsruned away for practicality and both still with damp hair, feels so...domestic. It feels like something Magnus wants, desperately. He wants this, them, this ease and simplicity and closeness. He wants it forever. He wants Alec forever.

He wonders whether Alec will ever want that, too. Wonders whether it’s ever going to be possible, with both of them being who they are. A relationship between the High Warlock of Brooklyn and the Head of the New York Institute is never going to be easy. It would be so much easier for Alec to find a Shadowhunter to love.

Yet, here they are.

“What’s going on at the Institute?” Magnus asks, because, however much he’d like to stay right here and pretend that nothing can hurt them, he knows full well that the hardest bit is yet to come.

“Imogen has been removed from her position. The Consul is there. She’s ordering that you be put on trial. As soon as I return to the Institute, they’re going to expect me to bring them you, too.”

“Well.” Magnus takes a sip of wine. “I suppose we’d better be prepared for that, then.”

“Yeah.” Alec’s brow furrows. “Magnus, I know you have no reason to trust the Clave, but Jia Penhallow isn’t... She’s better. She’s not perfect, but she’s willing to listen. She’s the reason an army hasn’t tried to knock down your door since we returned. Isabelle and Jace and the others are working on things, working on a plan and who should testify and what’s most important, but the Clave is going to dig into everything. They’re going to put you on trial for everything. And I think the only way you’re going to win is if you tell the truth.”

Magnus arches an eyebrow. “Darling, the truth is that I’ve broken more Clave laws than I can count.”

“Maybe, but the truth is also that you were key in bringing down the biggest threat that existed to the Shadow World. If you start lying, they’re going to catch you out. There’s too much. It’s too complicated.”

Magnus half-wishes he hadn’t started this conversation, but, much as it pains him to admit it, Alec is probably right. He can’t keep up with a web of lies that intricate. And the Clave would see through
the holes in his stories far too quickly. Maybe it’s better to poke holes in the Clave’s own misconceptions.

“You’re right,” Magnus says. “But can we talk about this tomorrow? I just...I want a day to pretend.”

“Of course.” Alec slides a hand across the distance between them and covers the one Magnus isn’t holding a fork in. “I don’t know whether I’ve said it yet, but thank you. For everything you did yesterday.”

Magnus smiles at him. “You’re welcome, Alexander.”

In a gesture so sweet it cracks Magnus’ heart in two, Alec lifts the hand he’s holding to press a kiss to the knuckles. Magnus tries not to let Alec see how ridiculously much the gesture affects him. He’s not sure he’s entirely successful.

“You mean the world to me,” Magnus whispers, almost desperately. He brushes his thumb against Alec’s cheek before lowering their hands back to the table, but he doesn’t relinquish his hold.

Alec smiles reassuringly. “It’s a good thing I’m not going anywhere, then, isn’t it?”

Chapter End Notes

I really got into this chapter, so I hope you all enjoyed it! The end is FINALLY in sight - I don’t want to give an official chapter count just yet, but it’s starting to round up.

Next chapter, I’m going to put out a Twitter poll (for which I will leave the link in my note at the end) about which of three fic ideas you’d be most interested in, because I’m eager to write another multi-chap, but I’m having trouble deciding which one!

Also, a plea to someone - my beta reading is MIA for a week, and I would really, really appreciate some eyes on chapter 54 — would anyone be willing to lend a hand? I would be grateful for genuine critique and feedback! Let me know in the comments if you’re interested!

If you fancy it, you can come talk to me on Tumblr or on Twitter. You can also yell at me using #fwwfic on either!

Let me know what you thought in the comments, and much love, you wonderful people!

Lu <3
The feeling of Alec’s hand pressed against his is all that calms Magnus the following morning. They approach the Institute early, the world around them light and warm and just beginning to awaken from its slumber—not that New York is ever truly asleep. As Magnus casts his gaze upwards, taking in the majesty of a building that houses so many people who want him dead, he’s very aware of the fact that he hasn’t been inside the New York Institute for decades. He’s even more aware that this is Alexander’s home. This is where his family and his friends and his colleagues live. This is the moment the two parts of Alec’s life are going to clash and collide in a burning blaze of anger and confusion and passion. This is where Magnus’ fate is to be decided.

Alec squeezes his hand as they climb the stone steps that lead up to the heavy oak doors that Magnus is barred from walking through. Just the sight makes Magnus’ magic restless with nerves, fizzing under his skin.

“It’s okay,” Alec says, and Magnus doesn’t know whether he can pick up on Magnus’ distress because he can feel his magic or because he can read him well. Either way, the words manage to loosen the tight band of apprehension minutely. “You’re here under the Consul’s orders. And the Consul might not exactly like Downworlders, but she obeys the law to the letter with far less prejudice than any of her predecessors. Nobody is going to try anything against Jia. They wouldn’t dare.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” Magnus says, exhaling.

Alec’s grip on his hand tightens, and he pulls Magnus to a stop two steps from the doors. When he looks over, Alec is wearing a serious expression, brow furrowed as he gazes at Magnus with an intensity that’s breathtaking.

“Nothing bad is going to happen to you,” Alec tells him, and Magnus smiles at the sweetness of Alec’s reassurance. “Whatever they say, we’re not resting until you’re given your freedom.”
“I appreciate that.” Magnus sighs. “Come on. Let’s go. There’s no use delaying the inevitable.”

Together, they climb up the last steps, and Alec opens the door.

Inside, the long, elegant entryway is deserted. Magnus can hear people talking, but it’s far off, away from the smooth stone floors and the elegant wooden planes of the hallway.

“Alec.”

The voice rings through the corridor sharply, and it sends cold, spidery fingers crawling across Magnus’ back. Goosebumps rise across his skin as he turns, Alec’s hand still grasped in his, to face the woman who haunted his dreams for a decade.

Maryse Lightwood looks almost entirely contrary to everything Magnus remembers. There’s that same unyielding chill, that same hard, impenetrable exoskeleton, but the inside is bleeding through the cracks gained from another twenty years of battering. She looks tired, resigned, unsure, and, to Magnus’ shock, scared.

“Mother.”

Alec doesn’t let go of Magnus’ hand. When Magnus glances across at him, he’s staring Maryse down with resolute defiance in his eyes; it sends a thrill of affection through Magnus’ heart.

Maryse has her lips pursed as she looks between them. Magnus can’t read the expression on her face as her eyes linger on him, but he can’t help wondering what she’s thinking. He wonders whether she even remembers. If she does, he wonders whether she regrets it.

She sighs heavily through her nose, tight with disapproval and frustration. “If you think I wasn’t fully aware that you had something going on, Alec, you’re wrong. I knew. But this...”


“Alec...” She looks genuinely sorrowful, and for just a split second, a momentary lapse in judgement, Magnus feels pity for her. “I’m sorry.”

Magnus stills all over. Beside him, Alec does the same.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Maryse says. “Isabelle and Jace and Clary explained what happened.”

“I’m okay thanks to Magnus,” Alec says pointedly.

“Yes.” Her gaze drifts over for a moment, before refocusing on her son. “Yes, I suppose you are. Twice over.”

“At least.”

“Well.” Maryse can’t quite seem to look Magnus in the eye. “Tell us that at trial. Jace wanted to see you, Alec.”

With that, she turns on her heel and makes her way back down the corridor, heading towards the sound of voices that Magnus can hear.

Alec sighs. “I should find Jace, see what he wants.” He lifts a hand to Magnus’ neck. “Are you gonna be okay?”

Sliding fingers over Alec’s forearm, Magnus smiles at him. “Yeah, Alexander. I’ll be okay. Go.”
After several minutes of searching, Alec stumbles across Jace in the meeting room. He’s pacing, hair tousled and agitation clear in the way he’s clenching his jaw and glancing around through the glass door.

“Hey,” Alec says, pushing open the door. “Mom said you wanted to see me.”

Jace breathes a visible sigh of relief, and pulls Alec into a hug the moment he steps over the threshold. Surprise rockets through Alec, because Jace isn’t particularly prone to unprompted clinging, but he hugs him back nevertheless.

“Are you alright?” Alec asks when Jace steps back, looking a little sheepish and, more importantly, calmer.

“I was worried,” Jace says. “Look, Alec, we have to talk about the trial.”

Alec raises an eyebrow, unimpressed. “If you wanted to talk about the trial, you should have asked for Magnus, too. It’s his trial, not mine.”

“Magnus can say whatever he wants to,” Jace says. “Absolutely anything. I want him to get his freedom. But not at your expense.”

“Excuse me?” Alec snaps, taking a half step back as he wonders whether he heard Jace right. Jace has been a staunch supporter of his relationship with Magnus, right from the beginning—right from when it was a mere acquaintance.

Immediately, regret flashes across Jace’s face and he shakes his head. “No, I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Then how did you mean it, exactly?” Alec asks, arms folded and chin tipped up.

“I meant...” Jace exhales. “I meant you can’t testify. You can’t allow them to interrogate you under the Soul Sword.”

Unspeaking, Alec stares him down, stoic and still. His testimony is intrinsic to their plan of defence against the Clave’s accusations. Without it, half of their argument can be dismissed as hearsay and branded inadmissible. Unless Jace has an excellent reason for claiming this now, Alec isn’t going to be speaking to him for the next two weeks.

“Alec, with all you've done in the last few months, with how many times you've broken the Law, they could strip your runes if they ask the right questions. You can't.”

As much as Alec wants to be angry, he isn’t. Not with the look in Jace’s eyes, all desperation and fear and care. Too many people have abandoned Jace in his life. Too many people have left him, abandoned him when things have been tough, disappeared and forced him to fend for himself. Alec has never left Jace. Not in twelve years. And he’s not planning on doing it any time soon.

“Jace,” Alec says, as gently as he can. “I haven't got a choice. You know what’s going to happen if I don’t.”

Jace isn’t looking at him. He clenches his jaw. “You wouldn't be a Shadowhunter anymore. You’d be a mundane. Our parabatai bond would break.”

“I know.” Alec reaches out to grip at Jace's shoulder. “But I have to.”
“Alec—”

“Jace, I love you with all my heart. You're my parabatai. You're my brother. But I love Magnus, too. And if I don’t do this, they’re going to execute him, and they’re going to make me watch while they do it. They’ll torture him, and then they’ll kill him. I can’t let them. I can’t. Tell me you wouldn't do it for Clary.”

Jace shakes his head furiously, glancing back up at Alec. “That's not fair. I couldn't choose between you and Clary.”

“I'm not choosing between you and Magnus. I don't need to. I’m not going to die. Even if they do condemn everything with no care for context, the worst they’ll do is strip me of my runes. If our parabatai bond breaks, I don't need an angelic rune to know that I love you. I’ll still be alive. And so will you. And so will Magnus.”

“You hope,” Jace mutters, but he exhales. “You're right. I would do the same thing for Clary. I just...”

“I know,” Alec tells him, because he does. “I know. But it’s going to be okay. If we get Magnus his freedom, it’ll be fine. Everything I’ve done that goes against the law—”

“Don’t say it’ll be moot, because there’s no way of knowing that.” Jace exhales heavily. “I’m sorry, Alec. It’s just— You’re my parabatai. I’m scared for you.”

“And yet, you’re the one who encouraged me to follow my heart. You and Isabelle. You were the one who told me to say fuck it to the kill order and carry on seeing Magnus anyway.”

“Yeah.” Jace smiles. “Because he made you happy.”

Alec arches an eyebrow at him. “We weren’t together then.”

“But he made you happy anyway. And he...he drives you. I’ve never seen you so focused on making our laws and customs better, rather than just making us better at following them. You’ve always had drive, but with Magnus, you’ve got focus. And you’ve got passion. I can feel it.”

“Come here.”

Alec reaches out for Jace a mere moment before Jace shifts forwards to accept the embrace. They’re in synch, moving together beyond the rush of battle, out of more than the angelic bond branded on their skin. They’re brothers.

“I don’t say it enough,” Jace mumbles, “but I love you. I’m happy for you, Alec.”

Alec smiles, ruffling Jace’s hair lightly. “Ditto, Jace.”

***

Magnus thinks that, perhaps, he lied to Alec.

He’s not okay. He’d gone on a vague search for a Shadowhunter in the Institute he knew, foolishly thinking that it wouldn’t be overly difficult to find one. He knows a fair few, after all.

He’d underestimated how many Shadowhunters would be assembled in the Institute for his trial. Every time he passes a runed, leather-clad person, he feels the judgement, the suspicion, and the disapproval radiating from them and sliding through his very being.
It’s incredibly uncomfortable. He’s more than used to people turning their noses up at him, and he’s not afraid of these Shadowhunters, in and of themselves but...

Well. They hold his fate in their hands. And, en masse, the favour doesn’t seem to be swinging his way. He feels like they’ve made their minds up before he’s so much as spoken, and part of him wonders why on earth he agreed with anyone that this was a good idea. He’s never going to win his freedom.

“You can’t be here,” says a sharp voice that Magnus doesn’t recognise as he glances into the open door of a meeting room in which four Shadowhunters are conversing in low tones.

Magnus raises an eyebrow. “I’m not coming in, I’m passing by.”

The Shadowhunter in question has smooth brown skin with a poorly styled mop of black hair and a scowl that doesn’t quite have the charm, or the effectiveness, of Alec’s. He rolls his eyes and brushes past the other Shadowhunters, stalking ahead of Magnus and down the corridor.

“Follow me,” he says, not glancing in Magnus’ direction.

“Are you taking me to your nice little prison?” Magnus asks, falling into step beside the Shadowhunter. Judging by the way he presses his lips together and turns his face away, it’s much to the Shadowhunter’s chagrin.

“Alec would shoot me if I did,” the Shadowhunter says, and then mutters, “Angel knows why.”

“Oh, I think you know why.”

The Shadowhunter - who Magnus suspects, from Alec’s anecdotes, might be Raj - shoves open a door with a little more force than necessary, rounds a corner sharply, and flings open another door. With an irritable flick of his hand, he gestures Magnus inside.

Magnus glances around at what is clearly someone’s office. It’s fairly spacious, with a tall stain glass window situated in the stone wall directly behind the large oak desk, a fireplace topped with trinkets and candles, and a small meeting table at the other end of the room. The desk is neater than Magnus’ own, but the stacks of paper are a little haphazard, a pen has been left uncapped, and a book is open, face-down in front of the chair, as though the room’s occupant had hurried out in a rush.

The photograph sitting beside a copy of the Gray Book makes Magnus pause. It’s of Jace, Isabelle and Max, perhaps four or five years ago. They’re grinning, Jace and Isabelle with their arms around each other, and beside them Max, getting a piggy-back from—

“Is this Alec’s office?” Magnus asks, turning to stare at maybe-Raj in surprise.

Maybe-Raj doesn’t blink. “Yes.”

“Am I allowed to be in here?”

Maybe-Raj shrugs. “It’s Alec’s office. Alec’s already risked the world and then some, I don’t think he’s going to care about this.”

Magnus leans against Alec’s desk, fingers curling around the edges, warm smooth with age. “Alec isn’t the only one who’s taken risks.”

“Alec risked his family. He risked his career, his livelihood, his life.”
“I risked all of those things too.”

Maybe-Raj snorts. “Please. You don’t have a family. Your career would be boosted by a battle with
the Clave. Your livelihood was fucked the moment you became a criminal. It’s not going to get
worse.”


“My opinion doesn’t matter?” Maybe-Raj sneers.

“No, not really. To Alec, perhaps, but not to me. When you’re as old as I am, you choose the people
whose opinions matter to you, and tend to disregard the rest. Especially when said opinions don’t
take into account even half the facts.”

With an exhale, Maybe-Raj’s sneer falls away, and he drops his gaze to the floor. “Alec is a good
man,” he says. “We’ve had our differences about this—about you, Magnus’ brain supplies “—but I
trust his judgement.”

“So do I.” Magnus smiles just slightly. “You don’t have to watch me. I’ll amuse myself looking at
photos of teenage Alec. I won’t do anything to get you in trouble. Pinky-promise.”

Maybe-Raj rolls his eyes again. “Fine. Just...stay here.”

He stalks out of the room with much the same brusque, disdainful attitude he seems to wear to do
everything, and Magnus shakes his head. *Shadowhunters.*

***

In the Hotel Dumort, everything is silent.

It’s daytime; Simon isn’t really sure why the fact that his fellow vampires are all asleep is such a
revelation. It shouldn’t be. But being a Daylighter, being able to walk in the sunlight, has made him
keep to his human sleep schedule. Even though the rest of his community think he’s intrinsically
weird for it.

The remnants of what used to be a bar, back when the hotel was actually a hotel, serve for a good
place to lounge around and lose himself to his thoughts. Simon isn’t really sure how long he’s been
sitting in the same spot, on a tall barstool that’s probably seriously unhygienic, but it’s as good a
place as any.

He thinks that the flare-up of his depression might just be exacerbated by the fact that he really has
nothing to do. He’s dropped out of college. Clary is back in New York full-time, but she’s a
Shadowhunter; their lives don’t really overlap like they used to. He can’t socialise with any of his old
friends—they all think he’s off living the good life in London, anyway. He can’t even see his family.

And he’s made peace with that. Three years is enough time to have resigned himself to the fact that
he’s a vampire now. He’s not a mundane. Life is never going to be as beautifully, wonderfully
simple as it was.

It sucks. Fucking hell, it’s absolute shit. But it is what it is. He’s dealing with it. He’s not alone. Not
entirely. He’s still got Clary, and he’s got Isabelle, and Maia, and Luke, and Magnus, and he thinks
even Alec and Jace might be starting to come around, and—

“Lewis.”
“And he’s got Raphael.”

“What are you doing?”

Simon turns on his barstool, narrowly missing knocking over the glass of coffee-blood mix he’d made himself (Magnus had taught him how to make it on the one occasion they’d properly met, before recently; he’s eternally grateful), and faces Raphael.

Raphael looks like shit, with dark bags under his eyes and his hair sticking up in several directions and his cheeks pallid and greying. It doesn’t take a genius to guess why.

“Just thinking,” Simon says, watching Raphael as he sprawls out on a black leather sofa with a lazy, Magnus-esque grace. He throws an arm across his eyes and huffs. “Do you want me to go and...leave you to your thoughts?”

“No, I want you to come here,” Raphael says, waving a hand towards the other end of the sofa.

Simon doesn’t need to be told twice, situating himself against the opposite arm of the sofa in a flash.

“Are you okay?” he asks, brushing a hand lightly against Raphael’s calf.

“No,” Raphael exhales through gritted teeth. “I want to be at Magnus’ trial.”


“Yeah.” Raphael drops his arm, the tension bleeding out of him abruptly to leave him slumped and boneless. “I can’t do anything about it. Even if I could be there in the daytime, the Clave wouldn’t allow it. Luke is petitioning them to let the Downworld Council trial Camille instead of the Clave, but he’s not allowed to testify at Magnus’ trial.”

“Maybe we can change that,” Simon says quietly, carefully, knowing how Raphael feels about his youthful optimism. “One day.”

“Maybe you can,” Raphael says. “You’ve got the heart for it. I haven’t.”

Seeing his opening, Simon says, “Raphael, I wanted to talk to you about something. To do with my...depression.”

Raphael’s eyes snap to Simon’s, and he seems immediately more alert, fixing him with an unblinking stare that’s a little terrifying in its intensity.

“Anything,” Raphael vows, and that word, the rough ferocity behind it, steals every unnecessary breath in Simon’s lungs for a moment.

“I don’t have anything to do.” Simon hesitates momentarily, but, seeing the receptive look on Raphael’s face, continues. “I feel aimless. I don’t know what most vampires do with their lives, but I...I need something. Something more than composing music that nobody ever listens to. That’s a hobby.”

“What were you doing before?”

“I was about to go to college.”

For a long moment, Raphael just looks at him, clearly contemplating what Simon has said. Then he sits up, slowly, and reaches for Simon’s hand.
“Do you still want to go to college?”

“Yes,” Simon admits, “but I can’t. And what would be the point? I can’t become a mundane. I can’t use a music degree to get a job teaching at a school or whatever the hell I thought I was going to do with it.”

“What would be the point in not going?” Raphael counters. “Simon, if you really want to go to college, we can make it happen. Luke, Magnus, you and I, we can work something out. It might not be exactly what it would have been, but we can try. If it’s important to you.”

“It might be nice,” Simon admits. “If only until I work out what else to do.”

“You can do whatever you like,” Raphael says softly. “You’re not constrained, like the rest of us. You can exist in the daytime. You can do whatever you like.”

“Can I do you?” Simon asks, a grin spreading across his face as he attempts to lighten the mood before he implodes with the sincerity of Raphael’s words.

Raphael shoots him an unimpressed, deadpan look. “No. I don’t like sex.”

“I know.”

Simon leans forward to brush a soft kiss to the narrow line of his mouth. When he pulls back, Raphael’s lips have parted a little, everything about his expression softer at the edges.

“But you like that,” Simon says, with a cheeky wink.

Raphael rolls his eyes, but he still looks blurrier where the lines of his face were sharp enough to cut. He mutters something under his breath in Spanish, and then pulls Simon forwards, onto his chest, so that they’re reclining together on the couch.

“Let’s just shut up for a bit,” Raphael says, already closing his eyes.

Simon smiles. Maybe this vampire thing isn’t so bad. Maybe he’ll be okay, eventually. Properly okay.

Maybe they both will.

***

“This is weird.”

Magnus glances up from where he’s examining a photograph sitting on the mantelpiece situated above the fireplace. The Alec captured in the picture frame, alongside his mother and Isabelle, is probably fifteen years younger than the one standing in the doorway, smiling.

“What? Your boyfriend looking at pictures of you as an adorable seven year old?” Magnus asks, setting the photograph down but not moving over to Alec.

Alec shakes his head, lips twitched up, smiling from the corners of his eyes. “No. My boyfriend being in my office, after we’ve spent so long hiding.”

“Speaking of, are they ready yet?”

“Not yet.”
Alec steps into the room and shuts the door behind him, before crossing the space between them in three long strides to stand in front of Magnus, close enough for the warmth of his breath to brush tantalisingly against Magnus’ skin.

“Should I be worried?”

Magnus reaches out to curl his fingers loosely into the lapels of Alec’s jacket. He doesn’t think he’s ever seen Alec in a smart jacket before. It’s a good look. Although he’s not totally convinced about pairing it with combat boots.

“No,” Arms slide around his waist, holding him close, and for just a moment Magnus can’t breathe at how good it feels to be held like this, with such ease and familiarity. “The Clave can never do anything quickly. They’ll spend about an hour assembling, and then they’ll spend an hour arguing among themselves about why they’re even having this trial, and then Jia will get them to shut up and she’ll call you in. A Silent Brother will probably be overseeing the whole thing. I’ll testify under the Soul Sword, but obviously you won’t.”

Magnus hums. “Who’s prosecuting me?”

Alec’s lips quirk upwards, but he answers Magnus’ question. “Normally, it would be the Inquisitor. But as Imogen has been removed, I’m going to guess it’ll be another senior representative. The Consul has to remain neutral.”

For a moment, Magnus is quiet. He glances down, away from Alec’s all-too-knowing gaze, instead focusing on the shoulder of Alec’s jacket. He swallows, willing his abruptly thudding heart to calm the fuck down before Alec notices that he’s having a minor freak-out.

Of course, Alec has become rather well-versed in Magnus’ personal brand of bullshit. He sees right through it.

“Hey.” Alec’s fingers splay out against his back. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Magnus looks back up at him. “I’m just...well.” He lets out a self-deprecating laugh. “I suppose I might be a little nervous.”

“Me too,” Alec says, gaze not breaking from Magnus’ own. “But whatever happens in there, we’re facing it together, right?”

“Of course.”

He doesn’t say anything else, but he wants to. There are worries nagging at the back of his mind, making his chest feel tight with anxiety, and he should say something, he knows he should, but he’s not sure he can. Not now, not to Alec, not here.

The warm pressure of Alec’s hand disappears from the small of his back, and the backs of his fingers brush against Magnus’ check. Magnus blinks, the touch snapping him out of his daze.

“Are you sure there isn’t anything else?”

Magnus exhales. “It’s just– There are things I haven’t told you. Terrible things.”

“Magnus,” Alec says, pressing his palm along the length of his jaw. “There is nothing you can say on that stand that will ever make me love you any less.”

“I appreciate the sentiment, but I don’t think that’s true, angel.”
“It is,” Alec says. “I love you. You mean everything to me. I wish I could make you understand that. I know that probably sounds ridiculous, because I didn’t even know you this time last year, but it’s true.”

Magnus stares up at him for a long, heavy moment. The sincerity radiating from Alec’s eyes is enough to render him mute, but then, by now, he knows it shouldn’t be a surprise. Honesty is perhaps the most integral part of Alec’s being.

He breaks away from Alec’s hold and walks towards the window. Outside, it’s warm, the grass and trees that surround the Institute from this side illuminated by sunshine. Birds hop along the benches, and mundanes are busy dashing through the streets of the city, sunglasses pulled down over their eyes as they laugh into their phones and with their friends, their lovers, their families. Two women are giggling beside a park bench, arms loosely around each other; when they lean in to kiss, the matching silver bands on their left hands catch the light.

“I need to tell you something,” Magnus says, watching as one of the women calls to a little boy examining a dandelion growing through a crack in the sidewalk. “I’ve only ever told four people about this.”

Alec doesn’t come closer, doesn’t try to reach out, clearly recognising Magnus’ need for space while he talks, but Magnus can feel Alec’s gaze on his back. The concern radiating off of him is palpable, and, in some strange way, comforting.

“Camille?”

“She was one. Ragnor was the first person I ever told. Then Catarina. And Raphael.”

The little boy has picked the dandelion, and is tottering back over to his parents. He presents it proudly to one of the women, and she smiles, dipping down to say something and press a kiss to his forehead. When she straightens up, she turns to her wife and tucks the flower through her hair, grinning. The other woman rolls her eyes fondly.

“Do you remember what I told you about how I met Ragnor? The storm in Indonesia, and being chased by Shadowhunters?”

“Of course I do.”

Magnus hears Alec moving behind him, and the chiming sing of a stele etching a rune into the wood of the door meets his ears.

“You told me that you had been made an orphan,” Alec says, when Magnus stays quiet, “and you told me that you’d just discovered your magic, and couldn’t control it after the first time you used it.”

Outside by the park bench, the little boy has taken to investigating a bee crawling along another flower, zipping between purple petals. He’s following it with his finger.

“When I was born, my parents thought I was normal,” Magnus says, watching the little boy be enraptured by something as commonplace as an insect with the sort of fascination only children have. “My warlock mark didn’t develop until I was older. My eyes were always a strange colour, but not like this.”

Behind him, Alec doesn’t say a word. Magnus can no longer see him in his peripheries, so he must have moved away from the door. He doesn’t dare shift his gaze away from the mundane family to try to see Alec’s reflection in the glass.
“But when they started to change, my mother and step-father realised what I was. They realised who I was, and how I’d been conceived, and what that meant I could do. They tried, for a while. They tried to pretend it didn’t matter. But it did. Especially to my step-father. He despised everything I stood for.”

Magnus hears his own voice tremble just enough to be noticeable. Everything in him wants to turn around and go to Alec, but he doesn’t. He can’t. He can’t predict how Alec will react, and if he turns now, he’s never going to finish this. So, rather than lose himself in the past, or in his present fears, he forces his eyes to remain focused on the two women and their son, and continues.

“I found my mother dead by her own hand. I didn’t understand, I didn’t know why, but my step-father walked in. He blamed me. He called me a monster. He told me it was my fault, that I’d killed her, that I was an abomination. And he was right. He dragged me outside and started trying to throw me in the river that ran past our home, and I— I felt all this power brewing inside me, so I lashed out. I burned him to the ground, and I was so horrified and so frightened of myself that I just ran away.”

He falls silent just as the boy outside lets out a scream and leaps back in alarm at the sight of a wasp. His mothers rush to his side, one crouching down in front of him while the other moves behind him and tucks an arm around his shoulders, at once soothing and protective.

“I’m sorry.” Magnus lifts a hand to his cheek when he realises that his face is wet with tears. “I didn’t want you to see this. But if they know, somehow, if Camille has told them, they’ll bring it up during the trial, and I couldn’t let you hear something so awful and ugly and—”

“Alec.”

Alec’s voice sounds closer, and it’s saturated with pain and worry and care, so much that it makes Magnus’ chest tighten painfully. He closes his eyes. A wounded sound makes its way up his throat, unbidden.

“Hey.” Hands slide up over his shoulders, thumbs pressing into the muscle and fingers grounding. “Hey, I’m here.”

Something deep inside Magnus shatters.

He spins on his heel and stares up at Alec, riddled with vulnerabilities that he hasn’t felt for so, so long. Alec stares right back, gaze warm and hands gentle, and it’s almost enough to make Magnus forget everything that’s agonising, everything that’s tearing at his heart and clawing at his chest.

“He wasn’t right,” Alec says, eyes boring into Magnus’ with a devastating intensity. “You were a child. That was not your fault.”

“Wasn’t it?” Magnus asks, voice barely a whisper. He hates the insecurity in his voice, and even more he hates the way it cracks, but he can’t help it. “It wasn’t a mistake. I was in control.”

“No.” Alec shakes his head vehemently. “You were still a child. You were traumatised.”

That’s almost enough to make Magnus smile, because—

“That’s what Ragnor always said. Traumatised. But that doesn’t make it okay. It’s not—I’m never going to make peace with this. Camille, yes, but this, it’s... I’m always going to hate what happened.”

“Oh course you are.” Alec reaches up to cradle Magnus’ cheek in his palm. “But what you did as a terrified child doesn’t make you a bad person.”
“I know,” Magnus says, offering Alec a watery smile. “I know.”

“And nothing about you, or what you did, is awful or ugly.”

Alec’s thumb brushes against Magnus’ cheekbone, back and forth in rhythmic movements. Magnus swallow, and Alec lifts his other hand to Magnus’ face, the pads of his fingertips reaching out to wipe away the tears lingering on Magnus’ skin.

“It’s okay,” Alec tells him. “It’s okay.”

“I had to tell you.”

“Magnus, you can tell me anything. I meant it. Nothing you say at trial is going to make any difference to how I feel about you.”

Magnus can’t bear to look at Alec for another moment. The intensity of his gaze is too much. Instead, he reaches out, sliding his arms around Alec, and lets himself melt into the sensation of being held, of holding back, of being surrounded by just as much love as he feels in return.

With their faces tucked into each other’s shoulders, Magnus closes his eyes, remembering the first time he hugged Alexander. In his home, after he’d told Alec about the part the Lightwoods had played in the Circle, and in Ragnor’s death, and after Alec had tried to tell him that he didn’t think about Downworlders, or about Magnus, what he once had.

It hadn’t felt like this, then. But he remembers the way Alec had frozen and then gone boneless, the way Magnus had lingered far longer than he’d intended to, and the way the entire world had seemed to slow and narrow to them, there, in a single moment. He remembers how uncertain Alec had looked when Magnus had pulled back—and he remembers the blatant shock that had covered Alec’s face when Magnus had brushed a fleeting kiss to his cheek when they bid each other goodnight.

That was the moment, Magnus supposes. The moment he first felt for Alec something that transcended acquaintances, or tentative friends, or whatever in the world he’d been trying to tell himself they were. Not that he realised it then, of course.

But that was it. Alec’s reaction to everything that had been said that night—that had been it.

“Okay?”

Alec’s voice snaps Magnus out of his reminiscing. He opens his eyes, hauling himself from his reverie, and then pulls back from Alec’s embrace. Perhaps Alec is as loathe to let go as Magnus is, Magnus considers, as their hands linger on each other’s arms.

“Yeah.” Magnus smiles, small but honest. “Yeah, I’m okay.”

“We can do this.” Alec’s hand slips down his arm, over his wrist, and their fingers slide together, Magnus’ rings pressing into Alec’s skin. “We can get through this.”

“I have every faith in us, Alexander.”

Magnus leans up to kiss Alec’s cheek, and, with their hands still clasped, he finds himself believing his own words. He has faith in them. And he has faith that they’ll fight for his freedom—which he supposes, somewhere between this hug and that first one, what seems like such a long time ago, has become, to some extent, their freedom.
I really hope you enjoyed this one! Just to clarify, my comment and the end of last chapter did not in any way mean that this fic is close to being done - it’s not. We’re going to be hitting 60 chapters.

If you fancy it, visit me on Twitter or on Tumblr or using #fwwfic. I’m absolutely up for fic discussion, show discussion, fluffy animal discussion - all welcome!

(Quick shameless self-promo: if you’re following/are interested in my celeb!Magnus&cop!Alec AU, it would be amazing if you could vote on which title you want to see next here (I’ll write both eventually, this is just about which one is gonna come first!)

Let me know what you thought of this one down in the comments!

Much love,
Lu <3
Kiwi

Chapter Summary

In which the trial begins, the identity of the prosecutor is unwelcome, and someone makes a surprise testimony.

Chapter Notes

Kiwis are symbolic of family and loyalty.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Magnus is fiddling with his ear cuff.

He’s sitting across the long wooden table set out in the hall, too far away for Alec to catch his eye. It’s been a long time since the New York Institute played host to something like this. In fact, Alec doesn’t think he remembers a criminal trial being held here at all. Not with stakes like this. Not even with stakes of lifelong imprisonment. Minor misdemeanours, a scandalous case involving a high ranking Clave official being caught in a rather compromising position with a young female apprentice, but nothing more.

Banners have been draped from the high rafters and juts of the architecture, depicting the Clave, the Shadowhunters, and the divine glory of the blessing bestowed on them by the Angel Raziel. On the dais at the head of the table, the Consul sits in a tall-backed chair, drumming her fingers against its arm as she reads through the evidence that’s been submitted.

Closer to Alec, Lydia sits, brow furrowed as she taps out on a tablet hurriedly, a thick stack of papers beside her. She’s most familiar with the intricacies of Magnus’ case, with all her research, and the best qualified in the Institute to defend him.

At the other end of the table, a single slender folder has been set squarely before an empty chair. Normally, Alec knows, it would be occupied by the Inquisitor. He’s yet to find out who Magnus’ prosecutor is to be. Lydia has assured him that it doesn’t matter.

“Consul.”

Jia looks up, fixing her eyes on Lydia. She arches an eyebrow.

“I can’t find anything in our laws preventing Downworlders testifying in support of other Downworlders. So, with respect to the prosecution, their insistence that my witnesses be struck off is baseless.”

Jia glances around at the other Clave officials. Blank faces look back at her.

“As the prosecution has yet to deign us with his presence, and no one else can think of any objections, I agree, Miss Branwell. The law the prosecution cited does specifically refer to
Shadowhunters as the party on trial.”

Alec’s gaze flits back over to Magnus. He’s staring down at the table, on Lydia’s other side but flanked by four guards, as though the Clave officials are concerned that he might rise out of his seat and decide that it’d be fun to blow the Institute to smithereens.

Everything in Alec wants to go over there and catch Magnus’ fidgeting hands in his own. He wants to run his thumbs along the tendons of Magnus’ skin, press his lips to Magnus’ knuckles, kiss the vulnerable skin of the insides of his wrists, tell him that he’s not alone in this. Not anymore.

Magnus looks up abruptly. He smiles at Alec in a way that is undoubtedly intended to be reassuring, and Alec curses himself. Maybe he’s freaking out too. And clearly it’s visible on his face.

“It’s nice of you to join us, Councilman.”

Jia’s voice is dry with sarcasm, and it hauls Magnus and Alec from their staring.

As he takes in the man strolling into the hall, Alec feels all the colour drain from his face, and he balks. Nausea floods through him, and he grips the edge of the table so hard his knuckles go white. Across the table, he sees his mother’s lips part and then press together firmly; beside him, Isabelle is clenching her jaw, and Jace’s eyes are alight with golden fire.

“My apologies, Jia,” Robert says, flashing a breezy smile at the room. “I was a little caught up.”

“That’s Consul to you, Lightwood.” Jia’s tone turns cold. “Sit. We’ve waited long enough.”

Something brushes against Alec’s ankle, bringing with it a familiar sensation of tingling warmth. His eyes find Magnus’ across the table; Magnus is frowning, and he tilts his chin, clearly conveying a silent, are you okay?

Alec inclines his head, although he’s not. Judging by the way Magnus’ lips tighten, he doesn’t entirely believe Alec’s assurance.

Before they can silently communicate anything else, one of the Shadowhunters standing guard by Magnus slams a hand against the back of Magnus’ chair. Magnus doesn’t flinch, and turns to stare at the Shadowhunter, one eyebrow cocked.

“You’re not allowed to use magic in here,” the guard snarls. “Undo whatever you just did.”

Magnus rolls his eyes. “I didn’t do anything. There’s nothing to undo.”

“Bullshit.” The guard’s nostrils flare. “I saw it.”

“It was the equivalent of poking someone. I can’t undo movement.”

“Enough.” Jia rises from her seat and takes a moment to look around at the occupants of the room. “Mr Bane, you should not be using magic in here. Now—” she turns to Robert “—shall we?”

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Alec doesn’t think he takes a single breath throughout his father’s opening speech. Nobody is allowed to comment, not even the Consul, and he can feel the desire to stand up and punch Robert in the face increasing with every scathing word he bites out. He hasn’t seen his father for months; for him to have the nerve to show his face here, after what he’s done to Maryse, to their family, makes Alec livid. The fact that he’s attempting to have Magnus executed makes Alec want to leap over the
Isabelle sets a hand on Alec’s forearm when Robert sits down to several nods of agreement and support from the Clave officials gathered to decide Magnus’ fate. Beside them, Lydia stands, and moves to take Robert’s place.

Her speech gains a polite smattering of tight smiles, but little else.

The Consul glances down her list of people intended to testify, and then lifts her eyes to Alec. “Alec Lightwood,” she says. “Please place your hands on the Soul Sword.”

Heart pounding, Alec stands to make his way to the dais, where Brother Zachariah stands with the Soul Sword held aloft. Involuntarily, his gaze flits over to Magnus, who shoots him a smile of reassurance. Alec smiles back. He can do this.

*Place your hands on the Soul Sword, Brother Zachariah says, and face the room.*

The moment his skin makes contact, Alec sucks in a breath, power radiating through him and bearing down on his shoulders. He swallows heavily, palms already beginning to sweat as he glances back at the Consul, whose expression remains impassive. He’s never testified under the Soul Sword before, but he’s heard the stories. He’s heard about how painful it is. How it feels like the truth is being forcibly sucked out of you, even if you’re not trying to lie.

He’d carefully avoided telling Magnus that it would hurt. Now, he wishes he hadn’t. He hadn’t anticipated being unable to control his reaction.

“Please state your name,” the Consul says.

“Alec Lightwood,” Alec says, the words heavy on his tongue and scratching at his throat.

“Lightwood,” Jia says, motioning to Robert. “You may proceed.”

Without preamble, Robert strides towards the dais. He appears entirely unbothered by the fact that he’s interrogating his eldest child. For perhaps the first time in his life, Alec feels a flash of genuine, untempered hatred for his father.

“I have your written testimony here,” Robert says, waving several pieces of paper in the air. “But I’d like to see how some of this holds up. Perhaps you could start by reminding us of the nature of your relationship with the warlock.”

*He has a name, Alec wants to spit, but the Soul Sword squashes the words down inside him, and he chokes as the truth is hauled from him.*

“We’re in a relationship.”

“Romantic? Sexual?”

“Both.”

Robert’s face twists with poorly concealed disgust. “And could you describe to us how this came to be, exactly?”

Lydia rises from her seat. “This is irrelevant. Alec is not the person on trial.”

“There is a point to my questions, as will become apparent,” Robert says, and the Consul waves Alec on.
“Magnus saved my life,” he says. “I was shot in flight during a Clave-sanctioned mission regarding Valentine’s capture of twenty-three children six months ago. Magnus found me, and healed me. I would have died.”

“And since then,” Robert says, pacing up and down, gesturing with his hands. “Your relationship developed? Naturally?”

“Yes.”

“But you didn’t trust the warlock, to begin with?”

Alec fights against the word clawing its way up his throat, but he loses. “No.”

“What changed your mind?”

Sweat is beading along his hairline, and he throws Lydia a desperate glance as he says, “He helped us complete an illegal mission to free wrongly imprisoned Downworlders. He was kind to me.”

Robert raises his eyebrows, and a murmur runs through the room. Alec doesn’t dare look at Magnus.

“You conveniently left that out of your testimony,” he says. “So Bane knowingly assisted in a highly illegal mission, and you expect us to let him go?”

“I said wrongly imprisoned Downworlders,” Alec snaps. “This is about a hell of a lot more than black and white.”

“See, there’s something I found difficult with your testimony.” Robert turns to face the room. “Alec was never raised to trust Downworlders. He admitted that he didn’t trust the warlock, even when he’d saved his life. And yet, here we have, from his own mouth, the fact that he’s in a relationship with him. An explanation, Alec?”

“I fought the prejudice that’s been forced into me from before I could talk. I saw past the title. My opinions changed.”

“Perhaps,” Robert acknowledges, “or, perhaps, you’ve been duped. Perhaps you’re under the influence of the warlock’s magic. We all know who the father of this creature is!” He spins on his heel to point a finger at Magnus. “We all know what he’s capable of! And I find it difficult to believe that in the space of a few months, my son has turned into this! Dating not only a man, but a Downworlder!”

“Consul!” Lydia is out of her seat again, and she has her teeth barred. “Not only is this accusation based on an inflammatory appeal to bigotry, but it’s baseless and false. In evidence is the medical report by Brother Zachariah following Alec Lightwood’s healing by Mr Bane to show that he was not under any magical influence. Unless Mr Lightwood can produce evidence to back up his claims, he’s testifying based on nothing, and this amounts to nothing more than fabricated hearsay, at best.”

“I’m talking about the period after this, Miss Branwell.”

Lydia flips through her folder for a moment, unfazed, and produces a thin sheet of paper, which she crosses the room to present to the Consul.

“Signed this morning, a psychiatric evaluation by Brother Zachariah of Alec Lightwood two nights ago.”

The Consul takes the paper, while Alec turns to Brother Zachariah, eyes wide. “You did a psych
evaluation without my consent?”

Brother Zachariah inclines his head. Then, to Alec only, he says, No, but they don’t need to know that. There isn’t a false word on that paper. I just didn’t need to examine you to know that.

“This checks out, Lightwood,” Jia says.

Robert’s nostrils flare. “Then perhaps someone should offer some explanation as to how my son has turned into a Downworlder-loving fa—”

“I do not want to hear that word in this trial,” Jia says, eyes flashing. “I agree with Miss Branwell. Unless Alec Lightwood’s sexuality is to be the subject of this trial, rather than Magnus Bane’s illegalities, move on. There are no Shadowhunter laws outlawing same-sex relationships. Much as I know many would like there to be. Move on.”

Robert grits his teeth. He inhales slowly through his nose, sends the Consul a cold, even smile, and turns back to Alec to continue his questioning.

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By the time Robert sits down, Alec can feel himself trembling beneath the weight of the sword in his hands. Every aspect of his testimony has been questioned, he feels like he’s repeated himself a thousand times, and he’s mentally and physically exhausted.

“Miss Branwell,” the Consul says. “Your turn.”

“Alec.” Lydia tilts her chin up. “Was any part of your written testimony a lie?”

“No.”

“And you believe Mr Bane’s sentence should be lifted why?”

“Because I believed him when he said he was innocent of the crimes he’s been accused of. And those he’s pleaded guilty for are based on prejudice. A Shadowhunter wouldn’t be de-runed for his crimes. And he destroyed the Circle. He played a key role in taking down the biggest threat to world peace. He was sentenced to death at a time of social unrest and immense fear, without trial. A Shadowhunter in his position would be heralded a hero and be pardoned without trial.”

Lydia hums. “Could you take a sentence to describe Mr Bane?”

“Magnus is the best man I’ve ever known,” Alec says, quietly, and the words aren’t difficult. They’re light.

“That’s all, Consul,” Lydia says.

***

Robert spends the next two hours trying to pick holes in all their testimonies. Ultimately, Lydia hauls them through it, letting Robert run his mouth before she puts him down. Alec wraps an arm around Isabelle when she slumps back down in her seat, and grips Jace’s hand after Lydia finishes with him.

“Alright.” The Consul claps her hands together. “A fifteen minute break, and then I’d like to hear from Mr Bane, before we dismiss non-essential personnel to go through evidence. You’re all free to leave, for now.”

Alec rises from his seat on slightly unsteady legs, the intensity of his interrogation leaving him
beyond tired. He spares a glance at Magnus, still blocked in by the guards, and follows Isabelle out.

“Consul,” he says, as he passes her on his walk down the hallway. “With respect, does Magnus really need to be guarded?”

The Consul purses her lips. “If he tries anything, it’s on your head.” Over her shoulder, she shouts to the guards, “You can let Bane go!”

Immediately, Magnus rises from his seat, apparently uncaring of the people who turn to stare at him, and rushes towards Alec.

“Are you alright?” Magnus asks, words tumbling out as he lifts his hands to cup Alec’s face. “Lilith, I wanted to rip that thing out of your hands.”

“I’m okay,” Alec says, nodding. “Promise.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees his mother watching them. Her lips are pressed tightly together, but, when Magnus tilts Alec’s head down to press a kiss to his forehead, her expression softens to one of sadness.

“Show me where the kitchen is,” Magnus says, thumbs brushing Alec’s temples. “We’ll get some food in you. You’ll feel better.”

Although, he supposes he might be, if this trial goes south. He’s just ceased to give a fuck.

“It’s this way,” he says, sliding his fingers through Magnus’. “Let’s go.”

***

The Institute’s kitchen is unremarkable. It’s empty when they walk in, and Alec lifts his stele to burn a locking rune into the wood. It won’t keep out anyone overly determined, but it’s a deterrent.

Magnus takes in the rest of the room. It’s well-kept, neat, although a little minimalist, with a small, practical wooden table set in the middle, adorned with a bowl of fruit.

“Don’t you have anything sugary in here?” Magnus asks, opening the cupboards as Alec sits on the countertop, sliding a knife out of the block and inspecting it without curiosity.

“Next cupboard. Isabelle’s supply.”

“Ah. Much better.”

Magnus pulls down a packet of biscuits and a half-empty bottle of lemonade - it’s sugar free, but it’ll do - and drops them on the table in offering. Alec reaches for the biscuits immediately, and watches Magnus sit down while he munches on one.

“Your father,” Magnus says, determined to talk about something other than the potential for his life to be over by the end of the day. “Do you want to talk about it?”
Alec inhales sharply through his nose, and Magnus experiences a flash of regret for bringing it up. Then Alec sighs, shoulders slumping, and shakes his head.

“There’s not much to talk about.” He’s taken the lemonade, and is in the process of uncapping it with rather more force than is required. “He cheated on my mother, he abandoned our family for the best part of a year, and now he has the nerve to show his face at your trial and insinuate that he knows me, as his son.” Alec snorts. “Bullshit.”

“He’s still your dad,” Magnus says quietly, because he knows that however much Alec might want to pretend otherwise, it takes a lot to entirely sever all emotional ties between parent and child. He’s something of an expert at it. “It’s okay if it’s complicated.”

“It’s not complicated.” Fire flashes in Alec’s eyes. “He betrayed his wife, spat on his marriage vows and neglected his family. It’s the most uncomplicated thing there is.”

“But?” Magnus prompts, taking a biscuit and offering another to Alec.

Taking the food, Alec drops his gaze and breaks the biscuit in half. “But it still hurt. When he said... What he said. What he was going to say.”

Magnus doesn’t respond. There’s nothing he can say to this to make it better. Nothing at all. A broken relationship between father and son about something like this isn’t something he can fix. Instead, he reaches across the table to cover Alec’s hand with his, and runs his thumb against Alec’s. In response, Alec’s thumb lifts to Magnus’; they both smile as they recognise the gesture from that they shared so early in their acquaintance.

“For what it’s worth,” Magnus says, “you’re a better man than your father, and he doesn’t deserve your worry. And it will get easier.”

“Yeah.” A faint smile crosses Alec’s face. “You’re probably right.”

Sliding both hands forwards, Magnus picks up both of Alec’s to press his lips softly to his knuckles. The smile on Alec’s face widens, and a faint pink hue bleeds across his cheeks, like the warm rose of a sunset spilling out across an ocean.

“Feel better?” Magnus asks.

Alec nods. “Thank you.”

“Always, my love.”

***

When Magnus steps onto the dais and Brother Zachariah extends his hands, Alec feels like his heart is going to break free from his chest with the force of its beats. He has to press his hands flat against the table to stop them trembling.

Mystical, smokey magic spills from Brother Zachariah’s fingertips, a rune burning bright on the back of his hand. Magnus’ lips quirk; Alec wonders what Brother Zachariah is saying. He’ll ask Magnus about how they know each other, one day. But not today.

“Ready?” the Consul asks Brother Zachariah.

Yes.
With Magnus under the influence of runic magic, Robert steps forward. There’s no Soul Sword for Downworlders—it’s part of the reason that they’re rarely treated in the way Nephilim are at trial. Magnus is under sworn oath, bound to his promise by the magic of a Silent Brother, but he’s still not trusted by the occupants of the room. They’ll know if he lies, but they can’t compel him to tell the truth. Although, the torturous nature of the magic that’s about to flood his body is, Alec thinks, incentive enough to tell the truth about approximately everything in the world.

The Consul sits forwards in her chair as Robert stands before Magnus. Robert levels him with a cool look of unconcealed disgust and unadulterated hatred; Magnus doesn’t flinch, and instead holds his gaze with his chin tipped up. With his lips curled into a sneer, Robert looks away.

“State your name for the room,” Robert says, voice cutting through the thick silence that’s descended over the room, lingering like a thick blanket of fog. “And your species.”

“Magnus Bane. I’m a warlock.”

“Magnus Bane,” Robert repeats, throwing his hands out wide as he turns to the Clave officials seated at the long meeting table. His eyes glint with loathing. “Son of Asmodeus, the most powerful Prince of Hell.”

“Ask a question or make a point,” Lydia snaps from her seat. “We have evidence for stating facts we already know.”

“I am making a point,” Robert says. “We all know that Downworlders are slaves to their impulses. They’re untrustworthy, reckless, and they need careful controlling to prevent chaos. This warlock is spawned from one of the most powerful demons in our world. He’s not just predisposed to be impulsive, he’s predisposed to be evil.”

“Do you have any evidence of anything you just said?” Lydia demands. “Have you ever studied demon-warlock inheritance and genetics? Do you have an expert on hand to verify this?”

It’s a fair point, Alec knows, but he also knows that it won’t make a difference. The vast majority of the officials in the room will agree with every word Robert has just spoken. They won’t care about Lydia’s semantics.

“I have here a list of offences, all of which, when committed by a Downworlder, are sufficient for the death sentence.”

Robert slaps a folder down on the table, and the pages are circulated amongst the Clave officials. Murmurs break out around the room. Alec glances across at Lydia. She’s sheet white and looks faintly nauseated.

“We’ll work our way backwards through history, shall we?”

Robert grins, and Alec’s stomach twists in fear. Surely Robert can’t know about everything that occurred in Indonesia? Magnus had said that he’d only ever told a handful of people. That information can’t have spread to Robert.

If it has...

“Twenty years ago, you murdered four Shadowhunters.” Robert’s voice rings out through the room. “You murdered four Shadowhunters in cold blood, and have spent the subsequent two decades in hiding, undoubtedly involved in some illicit activities. Do you deny this?”

“I deny that they died in cold blood,” Magnus says, and, to Alec’s shock, his eyes swivel directly to
Maryse. “Perhaps you should ask your wife what it is I mean by that.”

Maryse has gone stiff, her eyes trained on the table, and she looks, dare Alec think, ashamed. All eyes in the room flicker to her; she remains ramrod straight.

“Speak,” the Consul says.

“It was an act of grief,” Maryse says. She glances at Alec for a split second, and then adds, “Perhaps of self-defence. The Circle—We were undertaking a mission to remove one of the Downworlders teaching at the Shadowhunter Academy. Ragnor Fell.”

“Self-defence?” Robert questions immediately, narrowing his eyes at her.

It wasn’t self-defence. Alec is sure of that. If it were, Magnus would have told him so when he told the story all those months ago. He wouldn’t have been so torn up by the experience, simultaneously unregretful and guilt-ridden. So why is Maryse lying about it? Why is she lying for Magnus, when the removal of even slightly problematic Downworlders - of Downworlders in general - has seemed like her sole purpose for existing over Alec’s lifetime?

“Perhaps.” Maryse shrugs. “I slit Fell’s throat, but I wanted to make sure I’d completed the job. I went back at him with a seraph blade, and Bane stepped in. I turned my blade on him. The others were cornering him from behind.”

Robert is staring at her, something beyond mere confusion on his face. He looks utterly bewildered, and, quite frankly, Alec can sympathise. Across the room, Magnus’ mouth is agape.

“Well.” The Consul breaks the silence. “I’d like that in a written, sworn testimony, Maryse, and I’d like it added to evidence. Robert, move on.”

He does. Robert slides through all the same cases and issues Alec brought up that night, and Magnus tells him exactly what he’d told Alec. The exploded townhouse, the mundane cult summoning a Greater Demon, the truth of which had been distorted by a vindictive ex-lover, the demon summonings and illegal dark magic. Lydia produces pages and pages of evidence backing each claim Magnus makes.

Robert pauses on the topic of dark magic. “This trial is not a trial of the law, warlock. This is a trial of you. You cannot plead innocence because you believe the law is wrong.”

“Actually,” Lydia says, “he can. There’s precedent. Rather a lot of it.”

“Most of these are Shadowhunters being trialled,” one of the Clave officials points out, as he flips through Lydia’s folder.

“And?” Lydia arches an eyebrow at him. “Show me where in the law we’re told to try Shadowhunters and Downworlders differently. Just because we do doesn’t mean we have to, or should.”

“I agree,” the Consul says. “But, Mr Bane, you cannot claim biases in the law without further proof and evidence. Unless Miss Branwell has anything else in that folder, or you have an expert for us, I think we can all agree that there are no circumstances under which demon summonings and illegal displays of magic are acceptable.”

Robert continues his questioning, and the band of anxiety constricting Alec’s chest becomes suffocating.
It’s not until Robert mentions Indonesia that Magnus’ courage seems to waver. Alec can see the panic in his eyes as Robert describes the storm and the destruction in heavy, emotive language, spinning a tale of tragedy that clearly throws Magnus into a whirlwind of awful memories.

There’s a cruel smirk of satisfaction on Robert’s face as he says, “What can you tell us about this?” Magnus doesn’t respond immediately. The magic swirling from Brother Zachariah’s hands tightens around him, and Magnus chokes on it. Horror constricts Alec’s lungs, and he curls his hands into fists in an effort to quell the desire to leap over the table and get Magnus the fuck out of here.

“It’s true,” Magnus gasps, clearly struggling to breathe. The brutality of the magic makes Alec sick. Torturing an answer out of a person... “It’s true! What you said is true!”

The magic recedes. Alec takes a breath.

“Hm.” Robert tilts his head to one side. “And what about the events leading up to this disaster?”

The smoky magic thickens at Magnus’ hesitation, surrounding him in a cloud of grey-white magic that smells like sulphur and makes Alec’s eyes water. It slides up Magnus’ nostrils and between his lips when he opens his mouth to suck in a breath.

“Answer!” Robert shouts. “Answer!”

“My parents,” Magnus says, and Alec can’t see his face through the magic, but he can hear the agony in his voice. “My mother died, she—”

“How?” Robert demands. “How did she die?”

“She—” Magnus falters, voice cracking, and Alec half-rises from his seat. Isabelle and Jace both reach out to grip at his arms. “She committed suicide.”

Robert doesn’t miss a beat. “Why?”

“Because of me! Because she hated what I was! Because she was raped and I was the result!”

“Even your own mother couldn’t stand the sight of you?” Robert lets out a half-laugh, and turns to face the room. “Well, what are we supposed to think?”

“People aren’t sentenced to death for their families committing suicide!” Lydia barks out.

“Ah, but I’m interested in what happened next. Inform us, warlock.”

Robert looks positively gleeful; Alec doubts he knew all of this. He knew there’d be something, he’d noticed the gaps in the Clave’s account of the Indonesia incident, but he hadn’t known what it would be. This is probably more than he could have hoped for.

Magnus’ chest is rising and falling heavily, his hands trembling as his eyes cut across to Brother Zachariah. The pleading look he gives the Silent Brother fractures Alec’s emotional resolve to be strong, but Zachariah remains motionless, the magic thickening again, ready to choke and torture the truth out of a good man.

Alec’s going to be sick.

Robert raises his voice. “What happened after your mother killed herself?”

“I found her,” Magnus chokes out, “I found her, and then my step-father found us, and— I can’t.”
“Enough!” Alec breaks free of his siblings’ grips, jerking up out of his seat as he slams his hands down on the table. “This is ridiculous, this is irrelevant!”

The Consul arches an eyebrow. “Is it, Mr Lightwood? There is no denying that the disaster in Indonesia was just that. The murder of thousands of mundanes is an abominable crime.”

“So is torturing an innocent man! And it wasn’t murder, it was–”

“Alec, stop,” Lydia says. “You’re not on trial, and you’re not speaking under oath, and you’re going to get yourself thrown out.”

The Consul inclines her head towards Lydia, and gestures at Robert to continue. “Please answer the question, Mr Bane.”

“My step-father blamed me,” Magnus says, sounding abruptly resigned. “Like you just did. We had an altercation. I ran. I was out of control, and I was a child, and I ended up being chased and tormented by Shadowhunters. Rather like I am now. And then I lost all control. It was another warlock who talked me down.”

Alec is still quivering with rage, but Magnus seems to have reigned himself in. He’s stopped trembling, and his voice is steady. The thick magic has receded. He’s dropped his glamour, and he’s staring at Robert with unadulterated hatred. Something about his expression turns Robert momentarily mute—for long enough to allow Lydia to speak again.

“I would like to point out,” Lydia says, “that in our records, Mr Bane’s story about the Shadowhunters is corroborated, but his age is not mentioned. By written account at the time of both a Silent Brother and the warlock Ragnor Fell, he was indeed a child, being chased for something he couldn’t control. Hunted instead of helped.”

“I think we can all understand the significance of this,” the Consul says. “Lightwood, unless you have any other burning points, I think we’ve heard enough.”

When Lydia rises from her seat to stand before Magnus, he looks oddly wary. Everything in Alec is desperate for this to be over, for Magnus to be released from that heinous magic, but he knows that Magnus has to finish.

“Could you confirm,” Lydia says, “that you were responsible for the destruction of the Circle, as Alec said?”

“I wasn’t solely responsible,” Magnus says, “but I played a part that was not insignificant, yes.”

“Why? Why did you help?”

“Because I despised Valentine and the Circle more than I despise the Clave, despite the death sentence you’re attempting to inflict on me.”

“And you believe your sentence should be revoked. Why?”

“Because the purpose of sentencing people to death is to remove threats to society. Of which I am not. I’ve never attacked a person unprovoked, or purposefully put others in danger unless absolutely unavoidable. I’ve spent the last twenty years living under your noses, and New York hasn’t exploded, or seen a string of mundane deaths at warlock hands, or increased demon presence. On the contrary, I think you’d see a greater number of Downworld issues at your desks if I were to be removed from my position. I am not a threat to society. Not unless you make me into one.”
That’s enough, Brother Zachariah says in all their heads, lowering his hands the moment Magnus finishes. Magic dissipates from the air as he lowers his hands, and Magnus sags visibly for a mere moment, before he straightens up and stares defiantly at the Shadowhunters watching him. Alec is simultaneously unimaginably relieved and indescribably proud.

“Recess,” the Consul says, plucking her stele from the pocket of her robes and twirling it aimlessly in the air for emphasis. “Then, Miss Branwell, Mr Lightwood, you’ll be back in here to present your evidence. Then a decision will be debated. The rest of you are excused.”

Alec forces himself not to run straight over to Magnus. He murmurs something to Isabelle and Jace, catches Magnus’ eye and offers him an apologetic smile, and squeezes Isabelle’s arm in thanks as she makes her way over to his boyfriend, eyes bright as she leans in to wrap him in a hug that Magnus accepts with surprising ease. The sight makes something deep inside Alec glow, bright and warm and fond.

He pulls out his phone, navigating through to his contacts, and, with an oddly light heart, goes to change Magnus’ contact name to something a little more appropriate, now that they don’t have to hide.

[From: Alec Lightwood]

You did amazingly. I love you. I'll come find you in a few and we can go somewhere nice - wherever you like. There’s something I need to take care of first.

He gets a response almost immediately.

[From: Magnus Bane]

You do what you need to. I’ll see you in a bit. And I love you too x

He can’t help but smile, glancing over at where Magnus is standing with Isabelle, pointedly ignoring the other Shadowhunters in the room. Magnus looks up, meeting Alec’s gaze over Isabelle’s shoulder, and drops him a lopsided, unguarded smile and a wink that has Alec’s chest tightening. He’s so lucky. By the Angel, he’s so, so fucking lucky.

However much he wants to be over there, he knows that Magnus is okay. He’s tough. Even if he’s feeling shaky, Isabelle and Brother Zachariah will be there for him. And Alec will go to him later. First, there’s someone he needs to find.

Chapter End Notes

A huge, huge thanks to Alicia, Angeline, Kimmy and Amanda for being my beta team for this chapter while my regular beta ran off to have fun. You were absolute gems, thank you so so much!

Angeline: AO3

Tumblr

Alicia: AO3
Kimmy:

Amanda: (Apologies, your AO3 pseud didn’t show up - send me a link, I’ll add it in)

As always, you can come talk to me on Tumblr or on Twitter

Thank you so much for reading, and let me know what you thought! (I could have dragged this trial out for chapters, but I think it’s best settled like this...)

Much love,
Lu <3
Oriole

Chapter Summary

In which Alec has a chat, Magnus visits Isabelle’s lab, and the writer has a plea...

Chapter Notes

The oriole! I’d never heard of this, but it’s such a beautiful bird! Apparently, the name stems from a word meaning “the little golden one” which is just the cutest. It may signify all things positive!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Maryse looks weary where she’s leaning against the countertop in the kitchen, eyes half-closed and mouth turned down at the corners. Despite everything, despite all their differences, despite everything she’s said to him and everything he’s sure she thinks about him, Alec feels his heart twist. She’s still his mother. He still loves her. No matter how much he sometimes wishes he didn’t.

The doors clicks shut behind him after Alec has shot a glare at a lingering Shadowhunter. Maryse starts. Tension bleeds into her shoulders where they had been slumped, and an odd array of expressions flit across her face.

“Alec,” she says, straightening. Her mouth twists. “What are you doing here?”

“I—” Alec doesn’t know where to begin, so he shakes his head at her and shrugs. “I had to talk to you. After the last couple of days, I just— I don’t understand.”

Maryse inhales deeply. “You’re my son. You were raised to believe that family is the most important thing in the world, although it seems you’ve forgotten that. Those ideals didn’t appear out of thin air.”

Alec bristles. “I haven’t forgotten, Mother. I did everything for this family, all my life. I hid all my life. I pretended to be someone I wasn’t. I toed the line. I played by the rules. And even after I met Magnus, I was torturing myself trying to find a way to be myself without compromising our family. I would do anything to protect us.”

Maryse barks out a harsh laugh that makes Alec flinch. “Anything? You’ve admitted to breaking a dozen laws today. Collusion, protecting a criminal, associating with a criminal, freeing prisoners, directly disobeying orders, illegal missions—do I need to go on?”

Alec tips his chin up. “You can throw that at me as much as you like. It won’t change anything.”

“No.” The sneer falls from Maryse’s lips, and she seems to collect herself. “No, I know. That’s why I said what I said.”

“You mean, that’s why you’re perjuring yourself for a man you despise? A man you want to kill? A
man you tried to kill?"

“Yes. That’s exactly why. I don’t know whether you’re blinded by love or enthralled by an illicit romance or just choosing to ignore reality, but the only way I can protect you is by protecting him.”

Heart aching with the weight of exhaustion and an overload of emotion, Alec closes the distance between them in several long steps, and reaches out to grip his mother’s shoulder.

“Or maybe you’re the one who isn’t seeing things clearly,” Alec says softly. “Magnus saved my life when he didn’t even know me. He saved Max’s life without asking for payment because he cares about people. He’s been good to me.”

“I couldn’t get it out of my head,” Maryse says, and Alec’s brow furrows in confusion. “Everything you said before you all ran off to rescue Bane. It kept playing in my mind. I knew something was going on with you, but I thought you were going to tell me you were seeing a mundane girl, not Magnus Bane.” She laughs weakly. “By the Angel, Alec, I nearly had a heart attack.”

“I love him,” Alec tells her. “Nothing is ever going to change that. I would burn down the world to keep him safe, and I’m so sick of hiding it. I won’t hide it anymore. If I have my runes stripped for loving him, then so be it.”

Horror spreads across Maryse’s face. “You can’t throw your life away for a Downworlder!”

“It wouldn’t be for him. It would be for me. Because the Clave hates everything about who I really am. It doesn’t matter that I’m a good leader or a good fighter or a good tactician. I’m gay and I want to unite Shadowhunters and Downworlders. Those two things cancel out anything else. So if I can’t be me, then there’s really not much point in being here at all.”

For a moment, they’re silent. Maryse watches him with an unreadable expression, and Alec folds his hands together, thumb rubbing at his purlicue. Neither of them yield. Alec won’t give Maryse an inch. He has to make her understand how serious he is.

“I don’t like this,” Maryse says at last. “I don’t like what you’re going to do to our family. And I think you’re either being incredibly selfish or incredibly naive.”

Alec drew himself up taller and joined his hands behind his back. His jaw tightened. “You don’t know the first thing about Magnus.”

“Oh, no, I think that’s you.” Her mouth twists into something ugly, filled with bitterness. “But either way, I stand by what I did.”

“I know you don’t want to hear this, but thank you. It helped. Dad was gaining the advantage before you spoke up.”

“Your father doesn’t see this situation clearly,” Maryse says. “I believe that you think you love him. And I know that his execution would destroy you. Robert thinks he needs to be decapitated as soon as possible.”

“And you?” Alec arches an eyebrow. “If I didn’t love Magnus, if he had nothing to do with our family, what would you think?”

Maryse opens her mouth to speak - to announce her support of Magnus’ death, Alec presumes - but then she closes it. Hesitates. Takes a moment. And, then, slowly, she shakes her head, gaze not breaking from his.
He saved your life. And Max’s. And...” Here, she pauses, conflict warring in her eyes. “If I were to be put on trial like that, what I did as part of the Circle would sound just as bad."

Surprise ricochets through Alec. He’s certain it shows on his face. Until he’d met Luke, he hadn’t ever heard his parents speak about their involvement with the Circle. They’d kept it a carefully guarded secret. To hear such a confession from his mother is both unnerving and incredible.

“Everyone makes mistakes,” he points out. “Magnus’ don’t make him deserving of death. Neither do yours.”

“Perhaps,” Maryse says, and Alec can’t help but wonder which pronouncement she disagrees with.

“I’m going to find Magnus, now. I just wanted to talk to you.”

“Wait, Alec—”

He turns back to face her. “Yeah?”

“I love you. You know that, don’t you?”

“Yeah, Mom. Of course I do.”

He offers her a smile, and, without waiting for a response, heads out in search of Magnus.

***

“Do you ever wonder what our lives would be like if none of this had ever happened?”

Clary glances over at Simon. They’re both laid out in Clary’s room at the Institute, sprawled atop the duvet on her bed. They’ve been staring at the ceiling for the last hour, having testified at Magnus’ trial to corroborate Magnus and Alec’s stories where necessary.

Clary had taken Simon upstairs when he’d become so impassioned about the ludicrousness of refusing to allow Raphael to testify at a time he could actually get to the Institute. His ranting had been turning a few heads. Although, Simon had noticed that the mere presence of a Downworlder in the Institute turned heads. Even before he’d been a Daylighter, he’d felt unwelcome here.

Admittedly, it’s tangibly obvious that the leadership has changed. Maybe not with the entire class of the Clave assembled there, but normally, with Alec in charge, Simon feels... Well. Not safe, but at least like he’d be helped, eventually, if someone tried to attack him for breathing too loudly.

“Sometimes,” Clary says. “I’d be at art school. You’d still be playing in a band. But I’d never have met Jace and Izzy. And you’d never have met Raphael or Maia. Why?”

“Something Raphael said. That I could still do all of that, if I wanted to. I could- I could go to college. I could do normal stuff like a normal guy. Except the whole, you know, immortal blood-drinker thing.”

The warmth of Clary’s hand covers his, and Simon turns his head to look at her. She’s smiling, and, much as has always been the case, it makes him smile back at her.

“You can do anything you like, Simon,” Clary says.

Simon grins. “So I can sleep with Jace?”

Clary’s face scrunches up in revulsion and she sits up. “What the hell? No! Absolutely not!”
“Well, I kind of feel like I’m missing out. Everyone else has slept with him.”

“Name three people.”

“You, Maia, three vampires at the Dumort - Jessie, Sara, Anna - Kaelie the waitress, Lindsey with the glasses here, Meliorn—”

“Meliorn?” Clary asks, eyebrows shooting up.

Simon shrugs. “Apparently. Personally, I’m suspecting a threesome was involved, but there is the fact that Jace has always been too straight. Could be overcompensating.”

Clary laughs. “Nah, that was Alec.”

“Oh, man.” Simon chuckles. “Classic grumpy humourless straight guy archetype. Except the salt. He was always salty.”

“I remember seeing Alec and Magnus when Magnus took him to meet Luke, months ago. First time I saw them together, and they weren’t even together. They didn’t seem to like each other, but Alec seemed...different. So did Magnus. They don’t make any sense at all, together, but they also make absolutely perfect sense.”

Simon smiles faintly. “Words of wisdom, Fray.”

“Shut up.” She lobbs a pillow at him. “You know what I mean.”

Simon thinks about the way Alec and Magnus look at each other, despite everything working against them, like they’d burn down the world to protect each other because they don’t need the fucking world to be sickeningly in love, and he meets Clary’s gaze as another face flashes through his mind.

“Yeah,” he says. “Yeah, I do.”

***

It takes Alec several panicky moments to find Magnus. Once he’s searched the hall and the kitchen and the Ops Centre, he stands in the middle of two corridors, looking around at the people passing and hoping to see two gorgeous brown eyes with stars shimmering in their depths.

“They’re in Isabelle’s lab,” says a voice from behind him.

Alec whirls around. Raj stands tall with his hands clasped behind his back, an impenetrable expression on his face. As their eyes meet, he shifts to fold his arms across his chest and tips his chin up.

“Isabelle’s lab?” Alec repeats, brow furrowing. “Why?”

Raj shrugs. “People got bold when you left. Started trying to give Bane shit. He wasn’t having it on any level, but Isabelle told him that if he kept talking back they were going to end up sentencing him, so they collectively told them to fuck off and Isabelle and Jace went to the lab with him.”

“Shit.” Alec scrubs at his face with the heels of his hands. “I shouldn’t have left.”

“He’s fine,” Raj says sharply. “Just pissed off.”

“Where’s Lydia?”
“Talking to the Consul.”

“And Robert?”

Raj’s lips twist. “Don’t worry. He’s not here. Doesn’t want to be seen supporting a disgraced family. Not when he’s top of the list to be named the next Inquisitor.”

Alec merely shakes his head. There isn’t enough energy left in him to be surprised, let alone feel anything more complex about the news. Everything feels a little numb, as though he’s watching the world play out from afar rather than through his own two eyes.

He just wants to see Magnus.

“Thanks for telling me,” Alec says, and he’s talking about Robert, but he hopes Raj understands that he means Magnus.

Isabelle’s lab smells marginally less awful than it normally does, when Alec pushes open the door. It’s not locked, but nobody dares venture into Isabelle’s lab when she’s working: they know better than that. They’ve all been on the receiving end of colourful Spanish phrases that would make a certain creed blush.

“I don’t care who you are, get the fuck out of here,” Isabelle snaps from where she and the others must be gathered around the corner.

Thankfully, Alec thinks, that means they’re not in the morgue. They must be looking at technology, instead. He expects Magnus will like the things Isabelle gets to do with their weaponry. He’ll like the magical side of it, and the scientific side of it, and be fascinated by how they weave together.

“Really?” Alec asks, shutting the door behind him. “Can I say hi to my boyfriend first?”

He plays it off lightly, lets his voice ring with casual humour, but if he doesn’t get to hug Magnus right the fuck now, he won’t be held responsible for his actions. The distance between them, after that horrendous interrogation, is beginning to feel like a physical ache in his stomach.

“You’ll have to ask him,” Isabelle says.

Before Alec can formulate a witty response to Isabelle’s jibe, a blur of dark colour appears from around the corner, and the hard length of a body crashes into him. He inhales sharply as the familiar sensation of Magnus against him, around him, in the circle of his hold overwhelms him. He tightens his grip around Magnus’ shoulders. For the first time since that morning, he feels like he can breathe.

“Hi,” Magnus murmurs into his ear, sounding amused even as they clutch at each other.

“Hi.” Alec sounds less amused and more breathless. “By the Angel, I should have done this before I went to talk to my mother.”

Magnus smiles into the sensitive skin of his neck and presses closer, one hand trapped between their chests, laying against Alec’s heart where it’s tripping double-time against his ribcage. “I forgive you. How is Maryse?”

“Oh, well.” Alec clears his throat. “She doesn’t think you’ve bewitched me, per se, but she does think I’m enthralled by an illicit romance, or something. But she’s still happy to perjure herself for you, so I’ll take it as a step in the right direction.”

“She’s perjuring herself because you love me?”
“More or less. I don’t really know what her aim is. I don’t think she does, either.”

Magnus sighs. “Oh well. It could be worse.”

“Mm. I’m proud of you, you know?”

That makes Magnus pull back enough to look Alec in the eye; Alec almost wishes he hadn’t said anything. He tightens his grip on Magnus’ arms, unwilling to let him slide too far away. The press of Magnus’ rings against his pecs through the thin cotton of his t-shirt assures him that Magnus isn’t going anywhere.

“Proud of me?” Magnus raises an eyebrow, belying the surprise that flickers through his eyes.

“Yeah. For getting through that. They scrutinised all those horrible things, and you still got through it without losing your dignity. Or decapitating my dad.”

Magnus’ lips twitch up. “I have to say, I was tempted.”

Alec grins. “Me too. I, um. I hope you don’t think—”

Warmth disappears from Alec’s chest as Magnus lifts a hand to hover a finger in front of his lips, cutting him off before he can finish voicing the thoughts that have been swirling around in the back of his mind since he first took Magnus to the Institute this morning.

Because it was one thing for Magnus to be able to forget that Alec’s parents had murdered his friends and tried to murder him and rallied for the annihilation of Downworlders before he had to look them in the eye. Now, when he can see Alec stand beside Robert and Maryse, can see from where he’s inherited his dark hair and his straight nose and his eyes—

Well. Alec wouldn’t have been surprised if it were enough to throw Magnus off.

“I don’t,” Magnus says, shaking his head. “I never would. Not after everything we’ve been through.”

“I didn’t mean that as an accusation. I just— I would understand. If you did.”

“And I would understand if the sight of my father and I casting the same kind of demonic magic while trying to destroy each other made you run in the opposite direction. But it didn’t. And this didn’t.”

“It’s different,” Alec says, casting his gaze down between them as Magnus drops his hand to Alec’s neck. “Whatever they do, I– Family is always going to mean everything to me.”

Magnus drags a thumb against the pulse point thudding below Alec’s jaw. “If you think I don’t know that by now, I’ve been doing something wrong.”

“No, I know, I just– Sometimes I can’t stomach the thought of what they did. I can’t imagine what it’s like for you.”

“I’m never going to be your mother’s best friend,” Magnus says, gently, “and for all I care your father can rot in hell. But I also understand the importance of forgiveness. I’m never going to forget anything your mother did, and I’m never going to forgive her for murdering my oldest friend, but if it’s important to you, the rest... Maybe. If she wants my forgiveness. If she earns it.”

Alec’s lips curl. “Not at the moment.”
“No. But neither of us can see the future. And neither past nor future nor present are going to stop me loving you.”

Alec smiles faintly, and leans forward to brush his lips against Magnus’. It’s soft, slow, but it makes him tingle, right to the depths of his soul, and he shudders as Magnus’ tilts his head to kiss him deeper.

“I love you too,” he breathes against Magnus’ lips.

Silence descends as they linger. Their foreheads are touching, hands solid against each other’s skin as they breathe the same air, close enough to feel the thud of heartbeats that aren’t their own.

“My siblings are right around the corner,” Alec murmurs. “Want to go somewhere else?”

A hum. “As long as it’s somewhere just us.”

“We can’t go out of the Institute, but we can go upstairs.”

“Alexander.” Magnus’ eyes twinkle with mischief as he pulls back, reaching for Alec’s hand to interlock their fingers. “Are you suggesting what I think you are?”

Alec rolls his eyes, but he clasps Magnus’ hand tightly in his. The contrast between cool rings and warm skin settles every restless, writhing feeling in him and calms every whirling thought in his head. It’s a sensation that’s beginning to feel as familiar as the silkiness of Isabelle’s hair or the callouses on Jace’s palms.

“No,” Alec says, making Magnus laugh. “You know full well what I mean.”

Magnus kisses his cheek. “Lead the way.”

***

There’s something thrilling about dashing up the stairs with their hands clasped, smothering laughter as Alec drags Magnus along the corridors to his bedroom.

They hesitate for a moment at the door, and, tucked away from the multitude of Shadowhunters downstairs, Alec leans back against the solid wooden door and pulls Magnus in for a kiss. They part with hazy eyes and soft smiles, and it kindles something glimmering and glowing in the pit of Magnus’ stomach.

“Stop stalling,” Magnus whispers as he pulls back from Alec’s mouth, and taps the tip of his index finger against the bow of Alec’s top lip.

Alec kisses it, and Magnus feels himself melt. “I’m not. You’re just irresistible.”

Thankfully, Alec turns to open the door, so Magnus has a moment to school his features back into an expression that looks a little less stripped bare and vulnerable and utterly, utterly lovestruck.

Then Alec glances over his shoulder to look at him, the warmth of love tugging the corners of his mouth upwards, and the unending depth of adoration clear in his eyes makes Magnus think that perhaps he can let go. Perhaps he can be stripped bare and vulnerable and lovestruck. Perhaps he can be everything he tries to shut away without setting himself up for crippling heartbreak.

Inside, the room so undoubtedly belongs to Alec that it makes Magnus smile. A desk is positioned at one end, covered in papers and a stele and an archer’s bracer. Unlike Alec’s desk downstairs, it’s
haphazard and disorganised and clearly not used for work anymore. A photograph of Alec and his siblings sits on the nightstand by his bed, which has been hastily made, duvet still rumpled from whenever Alec last slept in it. Alec’s bow leans against the wall, beneath the windowsill; a half-full quiver is situated beside it. And—

Magnus walks towards Alec’s bed, a glint of gold catching his eye. His fingers skim across the delicate jewellery laid out on a thick sheet of paper adorned with his own handwriting. It’s a letter he remembers all too well.

He remembers sitting on his bed, Chairman Meow at his feet, wondering what he was doing, writing such a message to a Shadowhunter. But the memory of Alec’s face that night, helping Raphael and caught in panic and calming at something as simple as a cat—that had assured Magnus that it was a letter that had to be sent.

“I didn’t think you’d keep this,” Magnus says.

“I stared at it in every spare moment I had for days,” Alec replies from where he’s standing behind Magnus, watching but not approaching. “I was very confused.”

“So was I.”

“Do you want it back? The necklace, I mean.”

“No. Keep it. My first gift to you.”

He turns in time to see a delightful hint of pink rise up Alec’s neck.

“I never got you anything.”

“Oh, yes you did. You gave me a letter first, in fact. And then you got me flowers, and a very sweet note. Both of which I still have. Raphael made me throw out the flowers. They may have been a little past their prime.”

Alec smiles, but says, “Flowers aren’t permanent, though.”

“Maybe. But the thought is.”

Abruptly, the smile drops from Alec’s face, and he reaches for Magnus, pulling him close and tucking his face into his neck as though it’s the only place on earth where he can breathe. He’s holding Magnus tightly enough to break a weaker man.

“Hey.” Magnus cards his fingers through Alec’s thick hair, taken aback by Alec’s sudden shift in mood. “What’s the matter?”

“I’m scared. I can say I’m not until I’m blue in the face, but I am. For you.”

“So am I,” Magnus says, and brings his other hand to join the first, massaging gently against Alec’s scalp. It’s for his own benefit as much as it is for Alec’s.

“What if I was wrong? What if this was the wrong thing to do?”

“You didn’t make me do this. This wasn’t your idea at all. And even if it had been, it would have been my choice to agree to it. But it wasn’t the wrong thing to do.”

“What if they say...”
Magnus feels Alec swallow, apparently unable to even finish the thought.

“Then we’ll deal with it.” Magnus kisses his temple, lingering with his lips pressed against Alec’s skin for a long, heavy moment. “We’ll deal with it.”

“I won’t let them hurt you.”

Magnus smiles through his heartache, and can’t help but be thankful that Alec’s face is still pressed into his neck so he can’t see the tears that spring to Magnus’ eyes.

“I’m not sure that’s entirely within your power, angel.”

“I don’t care.”

Alec pulls back, and the way he looks at Magnus, with eyes full of blazing passion and fiery righteousness hot enough to burn down an army, makes Magnus’ breath catch.

Magnus lifts a hand to Alec’s jaw and pulls him close, whispering, “I know,” just before their lips touch.

The kiss was intended to be brief, nearing chaste, a caress of reassurance and a confirmation of intimacy. But they part, separating by mere millimetres, and Alec’s breath washes hot and tantalising across his face, making his skin tingle and his blood turn hot, and Magnus is leaning back in without further consideration.

Their mouths meet harder this time, and Alec’s hands tighten in the back of his shirt, pressing Magnus closer until their chests are flush and their thighs are brushing. The hand Magnus has on Alec’s jaw curls around the nape of his neck; he feels goosebumps rise beneath his fingertips.

Desperation builds between them, and Alec gasps into his mouth when Magnus’ fingers delve into his hair, tugging lightly to angle Alec’s head so he can kiss him better, hotter, slow and deep and so good it makes Magnus’ toes curl, and—

“Magnus.”

Alec sounds wrecked as he pulls back to haul in air, eyes half-lidded and gaze heavy with desire. The touch of his palms against Magnus’ back is warm, certain, but clumsy, absent-minded, as though his thoughts are elsewhere.

“Alexander,” Magnus whispers, dragging a thumb along his cheek. “Shit.”

“Shit,” Alec agrees, and Magnus laughs throatily. “We shouldn’t. Not now, not here. I don’t want to think about what would happen if someone walked in on us making out.”

Magnus’ lips curl up, and he strokes his thumb against Alec’s cheek again, and again, back and forth over the smooth skin, the touch delicate, soothing, rather than laden with lust. He feels Alec’s racing heartbeat begin to slow.

“You’re right,” Magnus says. “I don’t want to give them any more reason to hate me.”

He’s smiling as he says it, not because it’s funny but precisely because it’s not. In response, Alec catches his wrist and turns his head to press a kiss to Magnus’ palm.

“When this is all over,” Alec murmurs, lips brushing Magnus’ skin, “I want you to show me everything two people can do.”
“Oh, my darling.” Magnus’ smile widens, morphing into something sincere. “That would require a considerable amount of time. Not that I don’t love the thought of exploring all the possibilities of the not-quite-human anatomy with you.”

Alec’s eyes flutter closed momentarily, and Magnus smirks at the faint sound he makes in the back of his throat.

“Well,” Alec says, visibly pulling himself together as he smooths his hands across the broad planes of Magnus’ back, “we’ll have as much time as we like, once you’ve told the Clave where they can shove it.”

“Certainly not in the same place you or I will be shoving it.”

Alec stares at him in sheer confusion for a split second, and then his face crumples, nose scrunching up and eyebrows furrowing, and he shoves lightly at Magnus’ chest.

“Really?” he says, rolling his eyes. “I thought I was talking to my boyfriend, not Jace.”

Magnus laughs, and the crinkles at the corners of Alec’s eyes betray his amusement.

Magnus reaches both hands out, the sunlight shining through Alec’s window glinting off his rings and casting golden rivers and silver streams across the room.

“Come here.”

Wordlessly, Alec closes the distance and clasps Magnus’ hands, letting himself be pulled in until they’re nose to nose, hair brushing, so close the features on Alec’s face seem blurry.

“I love you,” Magnus tells him, because he does, because they’re laughing despite everything, because he could say it a thousand times a day and it wouldn’t be enough.

Alec doesn’t say it back. Instead, he lifts a hand to cup Magnus’ face and presses a soft, lingering kiss to his lips, bringing their joined hands up between their chests.

And Magnus thinks that, perhaps, the sensation of their hearts beating in tandem says more than words ever could.

Chapter End Notes

I saw how fluffy this chapter was and thought an early update might be nice, after this week’s news.

HOWEVER. IMPORTANT. IF YOU LOVE THIS SHOW, DON’T LET IT DIE. I understand that a handful of the people reading this fic are here because of a book series, and that’s fine, but the vast majority of us LOVE this show. We might love it for specific reasons, some might love the show itself, others might love characters, but you shouldn’t spend your life reading this 200k+ mess of a fic if you didn’t love the source material.

So please, let’s SAVE IT!! Tweet, contact Netflix, contact Hulu, sign the petition, fill out Netflix request forms, vote on the Hulu website - make noise. Be loud. We’re a very loud fandom. There’s no better moment to shout at the top of your lungs. There’s a good
post full of links and things you can do HERE

When we make enough noise to get a win for this show, I might post something special in celebration. But until then, BE LOUD!

Much love,
Lu <3
Chapter Summary

In which the verdict is delivered, chaos erupts, and Magnus gains a surprising ally.

Chapter Notes

Our bird for this chapter is one I have been holding off on using since I first started writing this damn thing. The robin is symbolic of all things new: new beginnings, new life, new outlooks. It's also one of my favourite birds, because, really, have you seen them?!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Every eye in the hall is on Magnus as he walks through the thick double doors and up onto the dais to stand between Brother Zachariah and the Consul. Outside, the sun is just beginning to dip down, and it casts a warm glow across the room that turns gold where it touches Magnus’ skin.

Alec sits down beside Isabelle, heart pounding as silence descends. His father is arguing with a woman Alec doesn’t recognise in the corner of the room, hissing quietly and gesturing shortly with his hands. He wonders whether she’s a colleague or the woman Robert cheated on Maryse with. He wonders whether it matters, after everything Robert insinuated during Magnus’ trial.

Perhaps he should care that he’s been publicly disowned by his father. But he doesn’t.

He disowned Robert first.

“Rise,” the Consul says.

The occupants of the room stand, chairs scraping against the floor as she lifts the scroll of parchment up. At this distance, the words are far too small for Alec to make out. He wishes he’d had the foresight to apply a far-sighted rune.

Cool fingers slide between his. He grips Isabelle’s hand tightly, and, across the table, Lydia offers him a smile. He searches the faces of those Shadowhunters he knows voted on this, but their faces
remain impassive. He wonders whether any of them care.

“Magnus Bane,” Jia says, voice ringing out through the silence of the hall, “you pleaded guilty to arson, to manslaughter, to breaking our laws on the use of magic on a multitude of accounts, but requested a pardon.”

Magnus tips his chin up, back ramrod straight. The only sign he’s just as terrified as Alec is is the way he runs his rings around his fingers, first one way and then the other, over and over and over. God, he wants to go over there. He wants to go over and wrap his arms around Magnus and jump through a portal to somewhere the Clave can’t touch them.

Isabelle squeezes his hand; he exhales.

“Upon a majority, the Clave has granted your pardon,” Jia says, “in return for your services to the Clave in defeating the Circle.”

Magnus rolls his eyes at the latter half of Jia’s sentence, and Alec feels his heart restart.

It’s over. They won. Magnus won.

Neither of them have to hide anymore.

And Magnus is free to fulfil his every dream without having to look over his shoulder.

“Raziel,” Alec breathes, abruptly glad that he’s seated as he feels himself go weak with relief.

Magnus, on the other hand, has never looked stronger. He stands tall on the dais, the brown of his glamoured eyes suffused with the heat of ecstasy, shoulders back in victory. At his sides, his fingers are loose, twitching minutely with what Alec has come to recognise as a sign of Magnus suppressing himself from performing an abrupt display of magic.

“And my son?” Maryse says, from where she’s sitting several seats down.
Jia raises her eyebrows. “I was unaware that your son had been on trial, Maryse.”

Maryse’s lip curls. “You know full well what I mean.”

His testimony. Everything he’d admitted. Frankly, he’ll be lucky to keep the Institute, let alone get away from this unscarred. Someone will bring it to trial, and he’ll already have admitted his guilt, and —

“Alec is protected by the same law that you were, when you testified against Valentine,” Jia says. Her eyes flicker across to Alec; he holds his breath. “And if someone who’s heard the hearsay wishes to bring him to trial, they’ll be disappointed.”

Maryse frowns. “What does that mean, Consul?”

“That’s classified, I’m afraid. But rest assured, Alec, your honesty counted towards your character, not against it.”

Alec inclines his head in thanks, but he doesn’t speak. He doesn’t want this to drag out. He wants to run over to Magnus and kiss him for all to see. He wants to drag him through the halls of the Institute and out into the blazing sunlight and watch its rays make his skin shimmer. He wants to go on a date and not have to worry about who might be watching.

“We’re done here,” Jia says. “Adjourned.”

The world seems to slow.

For a single, shining, glittering moment, the world seems alight with perfection. Alec begins to rise out of his seat, eyes catching Magnus’ from across the room. A smile breaks out across Magnus’ face, bright enough to eclipse the sun and steal the breath from Alec’s lungs.

Beside him, Jace stiffens, body twisting and muscles tensing in readiness to fight. Confusion floods through Alec, quickly followed by dread, and he starts to turn, casting his gaze about for the source of his parabatai’s distress. There’s a man with his eyes fixed on Magnus, staring at him with the kind of hatred that could begin wars, and he’s shifting, reaching for something beneath his shirt, and—
“No!”

Alec’s cry rings out across the room a split second before the Shadowhunter lets the knife fly. There’s a rush of colour and a stomach-curdling thunk as the sharp tip of the blade embeds itself to the hilt in muscle, and pin-drop silence as the occupants of the room stare in horror at the sight of blood beginning to drip to the floor.

There’s shock on Magnus’ face as he stares down at the weapon. Alec’s heart hammers against his chest, nausea filling him with every sharp, irregular beat, but he’s frozen in place, unable to tear his eyes aware from what he’s seeing.

The muffled thud of knees hitting the unyielding stone floor seems to restart time.

Broken out of his horrified trance, Alec shoves his chair back hard from the table and begins to dart around it.

“Put him in a cell!” he barks, pointing at the Shadowhunter who dared make an attempt on Magnus’ life.

He doesn’t care that the Consul is here. This is his damn Institute, and nobody gets to take the law into their own hands under his watch. Not like that.

Ignoring the struggle that begins to unfold around the man, Alec pushes past people as they try to block his path, uncaring of who he might offend. Someone he loves is bleeding.

“Mom,” he says, dropping to his knees beside her as he draws a stele out of his belt and activates her healing and stamina runes in an attempt to stop the blood oozing around from the wound where the blade in embedded in her shoulder. “What the hell?”

Maryse looks up at him, face pale but set with determination. “Would you rather it went through Magnus’ heart?”

The raucous swell of voices behind them saves Alec from responding. He looks up to see Jace and Isabelle snapping at a group of Shadowhunters from Idris, all attempting to hold Magnus back. Magnus isn’t struggling, but his eyes are flashing gold with anger.
“Let him through!” Alec shouts, and turns his gaze on the Consul when he’s ignored. “Consul—”

“Enough.”

The flick of Magnus’ hand is sharp with irritation, and the momentary confusion at the tugs the Shadowhunters feel on their weapons belts enables Magnus to slip through. He clatters down the steps of the dais and drops down opposite Alec, fingers already shrouded in blue.

Abruptly, Alec remembers who this is to Magnus. He remembers that this is the woman who killed Magnus’ best and oldest friend. He remembers that Magnus has every reason to want Maryse to bleed out on the floor.

But, of course, in his panic he’s forgotten the obvious: that while Magnus might be a little vindictive, upon occasion, he’s not cruel.

Magnus doesn’t say a word as he lowers his hands towards Maryse’s shoulder, magic enveloping the wound until Alec can’t see it clearly. But he can see the blood his own hands are covered in when he pulls them back from where he’d been pressing around the wound, and he can see the way Maryse’s face has gone gaunt, her eyelids fluttering, and her growing lack of consciousness is obvious from the fact that she hasn’t yet protested at magic coming into contact with her.

Voice strangled, he says, “Magnus—Please—”

“I know,” Magnus tells him calmly. “It’s okay. I’ve got it. I’m going to pull the knife out now. Activate her healing rune again.”

Magnus’ fingers wrap around the leathered hilt of the blade, and he pulls it out slowly, cleanly. It clatters to the floor beside them, and Alec’s fingers tremble as he lowers his stele to his mother’s skin.

The magic begins to dissipate, and Alec uses the tip of the blade to rip away the sleeve of Maryse’s shirt so he can watch the wound knit itself back together, fading slowly until it turns into an angry red mesh of slightly raised skin.

Alec looks up at Magnus.
“Thank you,” he says. “Raziel, Magnus, thank you.”

Magnus’ lips turn up at the corners. It’s a tight smile, overlaying the complicated emotions Alec knows are brewing beneath the surface, and he’s once again struck by how entirely good Magnus is.

“I just need to add Isabelle and Jace, and I’ll have saved all the Lightwoods from near-death experiences.”

Alec laughs weakly. “Don’t worry. I’m sure Jace will manage to get himself stabbed in the face bothering a demon nest soon.”

“That’d upset him,” Maryse mumbles, eyelids peeling back slowly. She begins to push herself up on one elbow, and Magnus stands, taking several steps back as Alec helps her up.

“You okay?” Alec asks her, glancing up to ask Magnus the same question, silently.

Magnus nods. Alec doesn’t entirely believe him.

“Fine,” Maryse says, and Alec doesn’t really believe her, either. “Shit. I won’t be able to move my arm for a week, but I’m fine.”

“I don’t get it.” Alec shifts back to give her space. “Why did you do it?”

Maryse raises her eyebrows at him. “Why do you think?”

Alec just stares at her helplessly and shakes his head.

“I saw your face. I heard you. I’ve been hearing you all day. Maybe for the first time in a long while.”
“Mom—”

“I hear you, Alec. Not just about—about Magnus—” she seems to force the name out, as though it’s something dirty that she’s always been taught not to say in polite company “—but about everything else.”

“Everything else?” Alec’s face twists in bewilderment. “What everything else?”

“Everything I didn’t see when I was your age but should have. Everything you’ve clearly been hiding for far too many years.” She smiles sadly. “Now isn’t the time, but whatever I might think about your...relationship, I’m not stupid. I know it would break you if anything happened to him.”

Unbidden, his gaze travels beyond his mother to Magnus, who is watching on with a conflicted expression on his face. In his mind’s eye, he sees the blade sliding home, hitting its intended target. He pictures the glamour on Magnus’ eyes fritzing out as he drops to the floor, blood pooling around him. Choking, blood bubbling at his lips, the ever-present beat of his heart slowing to nothing—

He shudders at the mere thought.

“Hey!” Jace’s voice cuts through his thoughts. “Is she okay?”

Concerned golden eyes look down at them, and Alec offers Jace a smile of reassurance. “Yeah. She’s fine.”

“Thank Raziel,” Jace says, reaching a hand down to help Maryse to her feet.

“Thank Magnus,” Alec says pointedly, but Jace ignores him.

“You should get checked in the infirmary,” Jace tells her, and, without waiting for a response, starts to drag Maryse gently through the people milling about, some arguing, others looking on in varying states of surprise and shock and disinterest.

At the back of the hall, Robert is watching the proceedings with a detached expression that Alec very much wants to punch off his face. He doesn’t think he can remember hating anybody quite as much
as he hates his father.

It’s probably because he also loves him.

“Well. That wasn’t quite what I expected.”

Magnus’ voice is quiet, but just the sound of it calms Alec’s racing heart, his tumultuous thoughts and raging emotions beginning to still and settle and sink into the warm, lilting tones that always manage to bring him peace.

Alec reaches for Magnus’ hands, clasping them both in his in both a search for and an offering of comfort.

“Me neither. By the Angel, Magnus, I— You’re pardoned. It’s over. You don’t have to keep...looking over your shoulder.”

The years of wisdom show in the lines by Magnus eyes as he smiles faintly. “I am pardoned,” he agrees, but there’s a hint of sarcasm in his voice when he continues, “But I think your mother’s heroic sacrifice proved that it’s never over, angel.”

“I’m sorry,” Alec says, because he doesn’t know how else he can respond to that. “Do you want to go somewhere? Do something? Or just go home? I—”

“Alexander.”

Magnus’ voice holds such weariness, such melancholy sadness, such overwhelming fondness that it strikes painfully in Alec’s heart, making his chest tighten and his desire to protect and care spark. But he doesn’t speak, not yet—not when it’s clear that Magnus has something he needs to say. Not when Magnus is looking at him like that, world-wise and longing and achingly beautiful.

“You mean the world to me, and I love you, but after everything that’s happened today, I need some space. I need to be on my own for a while. I need to process.”

It’s not what Alec expects, after his months of knowing Magnus. He would have to be an idiot not to
have noticed the way Magnus craves company, desires meaningful connections that he’s sometimes struggled to find so has filled with spontaneous, fleeting things. He’d expected Magnus to want company, to want someone to pull him out of that downward spiral his thoughts sometimes begin to slip into.

But if this is what Magnus needs, Alec is damn well going to give it to him.

“Oh. Yeah. Okay. I can do that. Do you- do you want me to go? Or—”

Magnus smiles at him with a gentle kindness that makes Alec’s heart lurch. “You can walk me out.”

They unlink hands, but Magnus reaches out to twine their fingers loosely back together as they navigate through the Shadowhunters. The Consul catches Alec’s eye from where she’s listening to Robert - or, at least, pretending to - and inclines her head. Alec returns the gesture.

Magnus doesn’t let go of Alec’s hand until they reach the double doors that lead into the outside world. He flings them open and tilts his face up towards the sun as he crosses the threshold, eyelashes fluttering as his eyes slip shut, glimmering lines of light painting his face in gold and bronze and copper.

Enraptured by the sight of him, Alec lingers back as he lets the doors swing shut behind them. He wonders whether Magnus realises how absolutely enchanting he is, how incredibly, dizzyingly lovely it is to have the privilege to see him like this, natural and stripped back and without the towering fortress that usually protects him.

He wonders whether Magnus knows just how in love with him Alec really is.

Magnus inhales deeply, and opens his eyes as he exhales, spinning slowly round to face Alec. A smile blooms across his face, devastating in its honesty, and extends a hand out. Alec is helpless under the weight of that gaze. He jogs down the steps and reaches out to grasp Magnus’ hand, heart fluttering wildly in his chest like a bird longing to be set free.

And, as Magnus reels him in, pulls him close and reaches up with his free hand to pull his face closer and kiss him, set free it is. Days, weeks, months worth of stress and tension and fear bleed out of him at the touch of Magnus’ lips to his, warmer than the sun beating down on them and igniting something sacrilegiously divine in his gut.
They break apart slowly. Their lips part, still brushing, noses pressed against cheeks and foreheads together, close enough to feel the flutter of the other’s eyelashes as hot, slow breaths mingle together. Where their hands are clasped, Alec runs his thumb over Magnus’ rings, and Magnus caresses his cheek with his fingers in response. Alec’s other hand is curled lightly in the front of Magnus’ shirt, and he’s loathe to let go.

“I love you,” Magnus murmurs, lips skimming across Alec’s as he speaks.

“I love you too,” Alec says, the words no more than a breath between them.

“I have to go, now,” Magnus says, after a heartbeat, and begins to pull back. His fingers drag against Alec’s cheek as he withdraws, taking half a step back but not yet moving either of his hands.

Alec squeezes his hand. “Let me know when you’re ready.”

One corner of Magnus’ mouth curls up. “I will, my love.”

Finally, the touch of Magnus’ fingers against his cheek falls away, and Magnus’ hand slips out of his grasp. A final smile flits across Magnus’ face before he turns, shooting both arms out wide as a portal shimmers into existence. He doesn’t look back as he steps through and disappears.

The portal closes, revealing a robin hopping about on the grass. Alec stands there, unmoving for several minutes, watching the robin with his mind elsewhere. He stays unmoving even after the robin flys off and there’s nothing to see but the soft shifting of the grass in the warm summer breeze.

***

Sometimes, Magnus can’t help but feel stifled.

In the Institute, around all those Shadowhunters who wanted very much to see one of those ridiculous tapestries made of his head being chopped off and presented to Idris on a spike, all he’d wanted to do was run away. Flee the building, disappear to Antarctica, go back to his comfortable life of hiding, relying on the corruption and poor management of the Clave, and his own magic and allies, to keep himself safe.
Breaking outside, taking his first breath of sunshine as a free man, he felt the shackles fall off his wrists. The weight of them had become so familiar to him that he noticed their absence more than their presence.

He could breathe, at last. He was free to exist without turning to look over his shoulder with every step.

But, however much he loved Alec, he’d needed to get out. He’d needed time to process. He’d needed...

Well. He’d needed to be around his own people and his own family for a moment. And after that, he needs to be alone. Truly, entirely alone. To sleep, to explode something, to have a shower, to cry—he isn’t sure which yet, as he steps through the portal and lands in front of the Hotel Dumort.

He doesn’t need to knock, but he does, as he pushes the door open slowly, magic flickering at his fingertips. It seems polite. Even if the place is filled with vampires who don’t really remember the concept of manners.

“Magnus!”

The bright sound of Simon’s voice is the first thing that meets his ears, and Magnus can’t help but smile at his enthusiasm. Simon is the epitome of a happy person; he supposes that’s why Simon’s struggle with depression had caught some of the people in his life off-guard.


“Yeah, I’m good!” He hops down from where he’s standing on an upturned stool with what Magnus presumes is a blown lightbulb in his hand, and crosses the few metres between them. “I guess the trial must have gone okay, then?”

“As well as we could reasonably have hoped for,” Magnus admits. “I’m not sure what’s going to happen now, but...I’m not on their death list anymore.”

“Can’t you just...do your high warlock stuff without worrying about the Clave?”
“Alec’s my boyfriend,” Magnus reminds him.

Simon shrugs. “Well, yeah, but Alec’s a good guy where people he loves are concerned. If you say you don’t want to get involved in anything to do with the Clave, he won’t ask you to be.”

“But I might want to be. You know, a hundred years ago, I had a very healthy working relationship with the Clave. Right up until the seventies, when some bitchy Inquisitor decided they needed to start rounding up problematic Downworlders who’d flown under the radar.” He scowls. “Never trust men whose suits don’t fit.”

Simon grins a little. “You sound like Raphael.”

“I think you’ll find he sounds like me, young vampire. I came first.”

“Alright, but, like, do you want to go back to working with the Clave? Like you used to?”

Magnus takes a moment to deliberate, tilting his head a little to the side as he ponders the question. He’d never been the Clave’s toy warlock, and he’d always delighted in charging the Nephilim frankly outrageous sums of money for his services, but when he found Shadowhunters he could abide, like he had in London, they’d managed to do good things together. Sometimes he’d wanted to tie them all together and toss them in a river, of course, but he doubts he’d want to do something quite so drastic to the Shadowhunters of the New York Institute.

Well. Except Maryse.

“I’d like to work with the New York Conclave,” Magnus says, slowly. “Not always, but...sometimes. I’d like to do everything I’m supposed to be able to do as High Warlock of Brooklyn. And if Alec is serious about his Downworld relations thing, I want to be a part of that. As long as my presence in the Institute won’t affect his standing with the Clave.”

Simon glances over his shoulder, eyes flitting around nervously, and lowers his voice, leaning in towards Magnus. “Yeah, about that. I’m not sure Raphael is that positive about it. And I... Well. It’s basically all about people getting along, right? That’s kind of my thing. And I’ve had to learn a lot about all this Downworld-Shadowhunter politics stuff, and—”

“Yes.”
Simon blinks. “Pardon?”

“Yes, I’m certain you can be involved, if you’d like to be.”

“Oh.” His eyes seem to light up, and he doesn’t bother attempting to hide the grin that breaks out across his face. Magnus likes Simon for how unashamed he is, most of the time. “Thanks. That’s... Yeah. Thanks.”

Magnus inclines his head. “You’re welcome. May I trouble you to know where Raphael is?”

“Sorry, yeah, he’s out back. Someone called him about Camille. I think it was Izzy. Apparently the Clave contacted Luke to say the Downworld Council could have her, as long as she’s not allowed to go free. Looks like they’re finally worried about those mundane murders now she’s stopped being valuable to them.”

Magnus snorts. “She was only ever playing for herself. She was never an ally to them.” He straightens his jacket and begins to move off to find Raphael. “Thank you, Simon.”

“Sure. Oh, and Magnus?”

Magnus turns back and raises an eyebrow. “Mm?”

“I don’t think Alec gives a shit about his standing with the Clave when it comes to you.” Simon offers him a small smile, as though he hasn’t just scattered Magnus’ thoughts and set them whirring incessantly. “See you around.”

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“So, we get to sentence Camille.”

Raphael doesn’t jump, although his back is turned towards the door Magnus is leaning against. He probably heard Magnus talking to Simon out front. Instead, he slams two shot glasses on the counter
he’s standing by, fills one with plasma and the other with whiskey, and slides one along the wooden surface towards Magnus.

“Thank you,” Magnus says, and they both knock their shots back in synch.

Only once he’s set his glass down and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand does Raphael turn to look at Magnus. His eyes flicker up and down, clearly inspecting Magnus’ physical wellbeing after a day surrounded by people who wanted to kill him three days ago.

“I wanted to be there,” Raphael says furiously, grinding his teeth together. “I wanted—”

“Lydia presented your written testimony as evidence. If you’d been there, all that would have happened was an interrogation at the hands of a Lightwood.”

Raphael waves a hand in sharp dismissal. It’s so clearly a movement picked up from Magnus and refined by Ragnor’s lack of flamboyance and whimsical flourishes that it makes Magnus’ heart ache.

“Not because of that. Because I wanted to be there for you.”

Magnus smiles at him, even as everything in him twists and hurts and his throat tightens and the world goes blurry. Fuck.

“You are,” Magnus says, reaching out to touch the underside of Raphael’s jaw with his knuckles. “You’re here for me now.”

“It’s not the same. Isabelle told me what happened. Someone tried to shoot you, and of all people Maryse Lightwood —”

“I know, Raphael. But I wouldn’t have wanted you to have to put yourself through that. Her.”

Raphael shrugs. “She saved your life.”

“Maybe. She still took Ragnor’s.”
“Those fucking shades of grey again, I suppose.”

“I’d avoid using that phrase for a couple of decades, darling,” Magnus says, and Raphael rolls his eyes. “Come here.”

It takes only a slight extension of Magnus’ arms for Raphael to surge forward and hug him tightly. Magnus splay his fingers out on Raphael’s back and Raphael mutters something that sounds suspiciously like a Spanish swear word into the fabric of Magnus’ jacket. If the mood were lighter, Magnus would pretend to tell him off.

“Do you remember that night not long after I was turned, when Ragnor was in Brooklyn staying with you, and I got drunk off my ass on plasma?”

Magnus chuckles. “How could I ever forget? Even I found it fiddly trying to magic those vomit stains out of my carpet.”

“You came to find me, and you were laying into me for being irresponsible, and when we got back to your loft I was expecting Ragnor to play good cop.”

“Oh, yes.” Magnus grins wickedly at the memory. “Why you ever thought that, I have no idea. There was never a good cop bad cop with Ragnor and I where you were concerned.”

Raphael snorts. “No, there was crazy uncle and grumpy uncle.”

“I object to those descriptions,” Magnus says, but it’s without heat. “Why do you mention it?”

“No reason. I was just...thinking about him. This evening.”

“Any particular reason?”

“I was telling Simon about him.”
“Ah.” Magnus pulls back from their embrace, smile softening into something fond. “I’m glad Simon’s made such a difference to you. It’s nice to hear you talking about Ragnor.”

“I should probably have dealt with this twenty years ago.”

“Perhaps. But I know as well as anyone that grief works in different ways.”

Raphael’s expression turns grim. “Speaking of Camille.”

“Ah.” Magnus flutters his fingers carelessly through the air, trailing blue sparks in his wake. “Yes. Her. Is it terrible of me to say that I’d really just like to hand her over to the Clave?”

“Not at all,” Raphael assures him. “In fact, Luke and I agree with you. But we’ll have to convince Meliorn, too. And I thought there might be something you’d want to ask her about first.”

Magnus arches an eyebrow at him. “There is absolutely nothing I have to say to her.”

“What about Alec’s dreams?”

Magnus pauses. He’d almost forgotten about Alec’s strange nighttime experiences, with everything else going on.

“What about them?”

“Well, Madzie said she’d been told to send them by Camille, and that she wasn’t supposed to tell Valentine. So if they weren’t a ploy by Valentine to get Alec to turn on you so you’d join him, what were they?”

“And that eternal question of how a little girl managed to get through my wards.” Magnus presses his lips together. “You’re right. We should ask Camille about that.”

“You don’t have to be there.”
“Oh, I want to be. Someone has been threatening my boyfriend, and I’ll be damned if I don’t get to the bottom of it.”

Chapter End Notes

This is not the beginning of more angst. Just before anyone starts worrying. It's all good. Magnus just needs a bit of breathing room.

I really really hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, and keep harrassing all the right people to get our damn show back!! We're close, I can feel it, but we need to keep at it and not let up.

See you in two weeks, lovelies! Much love,
Lu <3
Cormorant

Chapter Summary

In which Alec has some visitors (some welcome and some less so), Jace is a good brother, and Magnus' pets want to cheer him up.

Chapter Notes

Cormorant - a bird filled with patience, suggesting that you may be able to achieve what others have not.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alec is in the midst of going through patrol reports in his office - because even with the trial of the decade, demons never cease - when a knock sounds on his office door. A breath of frustration escapes through his nose. If it’s Raj come to tell him that he has to say farewell to the Clave representatives, he might just resign.

“Come in,” he says, tiredly rubbing the heel of his palm against his eyes.

If Magnus were here, he’d circle Alec’s wrist with his fingers in that gentle way he does and draw his hand away from his face with a chastising look. But Magnus isn’t here. Magnus is...

Well. Angel knows what Magnus is doing. Alec hopes he’s alright.

He glances up to look at whoever is disturbing him, and blinks in surprise when a dozen Shadowhunters file into the room. An elderly woman shuts the door with gnarled fingers, and the man to her right gestures to one of the chairs in the office–she rolls her eyes at him and remains standing, wrinkled fingers clasped in front of her with a dignified sort of power. A silver wedding band circles her finger, dulled by age and wear. If Alec is ever fortunate enough to reach her age, it’s exactly what he’d want his wedding ring to look like: bearing the scars of a love that endured the ages.

“Is there something I can do for you?” Alec asks, eyes flickering across the array of people.

They’re all Shadowhunters, but possibly the most mis-matched bunch of Nephilim he’s ever seen together. They’re clearly from all different corners of the globe, stretching from his age to the elderly woman who must be at least eighty-five, men and women of all different creeds.

“We wanted to thank you,” says a woman standing at the front of the group. She looks perhaps forty years old, and has a thick scar running down the dark skin of her face. It’s not unusual for the Nephilim to be scarred, so Alec isn’t surprised he didn’t particularly notice her at the trial.
Alec lifts his eyebrows. “Thank me?”

“For bringing this trial to realisation,” she says. “My name is Tia. I’m the Head of the Addis Ababa Institute. Where I’m from, the Clave doesn’t have the same power over the Downworld. There’s far too much else for the Nephilim of my Institute to be preoccupied with. We’re a lot fonder of Downworlders than the West.”

Just behind her, a tall man with skin so pale it’s almost translucent, and thick, ash blonde hair inclines his head. “I’m from Helsinki. Our friends in Western Europe have long been trying to convince us that allowing so many vampires into our country is bound to end in disaster. Their assumptions are baseless, of course. We have rules and laws. But we also exercise tolerance.”

“I’m from Mexico,” one of the older men near the back says. “I have a similar experience with the Downworld to you, but I’ve spent all sixty years of my service to the Clave keeping my private and public life separate. I pretended to be infertile to avoid being coerced into marrying a woman. My partner’s son is your age. I don’t want him to have to hide like his father and I did. People like you speaking out so unashamedly is what will let that happen.”

“And my daughter was sitting through Magnus’ trial in a situation not dissimilar to yours,” another man says softly, and Alec starts in surprise when he realises that it’s Aline’s father. “I have my misgivings, but I also want her to be happy. If a half-fae woman is to be her happiness, what kind of father would I be to begrudge her that?” He smiles ruefully. “It took a while to convince my wife to support her.”

Alec stares round at the Shadowhunters telling him such personal stories with parted lips and wide eyes as he’s stunned into silence. These people... These people are all on his side. Magnus’ side. These are the people who voted to let Magnus live.

And not because of what Magnus did for the Clave in destroying the Circle. But because they empathise.

“I don’t understand,” Alec says, a little weakly. “This—This didn’t change anything. I’m not changing laws, or—”

“You’re setting precedent,” Tia says, a smile creasing the smooth lines of her face. “And this kind of high profile trial is the sort of thing that makes Idris talk. You’re not alone, Alec Lightwood. There are many people in the world like you.”

“Of course I know that. But—”

“Tia doesn’t just mean gay,” the man from Helsinki says. “She means there are others who’ve dared love Downworlders. She means there are people rooting for you. More than just us.”

“How are you all here?” Alec asks. “Were you all in Idris when the Consul called for people to judge?”

“Oh, no.” Tia smiles. “Clary Fairchild felt very guilty about leading the Clave to your lover. She contacted us to make sure you’d have support.”

Clary. Clary had done this. God, Alec needed to send her a gift basket. Or hug her.

“And of course, it took more votes than ours to get Magnus freed,” Tia says, “but we helped. You might
just be setting the ball rolling for some real change here in America, Alec. And we hope that might transfer through to Idris. American Nephilim customs tend to hold the most sway there.”

“Western Europe is divided on the issue of Downworlders, and still filled with anti-Downworlder laws, but at least they’ve been talking about it, since Valentine first rose,” the elderly woman by the door says. English, Alec thinks, as she speaks. “This continent needs to catch up.”

“We’ll do our best, ma’am,” he tells her, through his shock.

“Good.” She grins at him. “It’d be nice to have my marriage recognised by my own bloody people before I die.”

Alec feels his eyes go wide with horror. “Raziel. I’m sorry. How—how long have you been married?”

“Fifty-six years,” she says, grin softening to a smile filled with wisdom that Alec so often sees in Magnus’ eyes. “To a werewolf who saved me from drowning back in nineteen fifty-eight. We spent four years worrying about the Clave. Then I married him anyway. He was a lawyer before he was turned. Told them where they could shove it when they came knocking to have him killed and my marks stripped.”

“I’m sorry,” Alec says again, because he doesn’t know how else he can respond to such a story.

“Oh, no.” She shakes her head. “No, young man, we’ve lived our life. Made the best of it. But we want the younger generations to have what we couldn’t. Wouldn’t you like to be married in gold?”

Alec chokes. “I don’t—Magnus and I aren’t—”

She fixes him with a piercing stare. “Shadowhunters fall in love only once. But that aside, you’d never be allowed to marry any man you loved. Not in gold. Not yet.”

“Rose, leave the poor boy alone,” the young man beside her says. Alec wonders whether he’s her family.

Rose rolls her eyes. “No. He should hear this. You’re not alone, Alec Lightwood. So don’t give up now because you think you’ve got everything you can. Don’t stop fighting because you’re exhausted. Pass the baton to someone else if you have to. But don’t give up. Don’t let anyone beat the fight out of you.”

“I won’t,” Alec vows, meeting the gazes of all the people assembled in his office.

But his mind is fixated on what Rose said. Shadowhunters fall in love only once.

It isn’t entirely so simple, of course. Shadowhunters only fall in love, truly, once. Usually because they don’t have time for much else. But even that handful who make it to the age of refined grey and wrinkles seem to have had just one love. One love that eclipsed all else.

And Alec wonders, for the first time, whether Magnus is to be his eclipse.

Perhaps he already is.

***
“Aline.”

The dark-haired girl spins on her heel, silky strands flying around her before falling against her skin to frame her face. Her cheeks flush faintly when she realises that she’s been caught, but the sheepish quirk of her lips assures Isabelle that she’s not too worried. Not when she sees who it is.

Isabelle smiles at her and darts her eyes across to the pretty blonde girl who has her fingers threaded through Aline’s.

“Long time no see, Aline,” Isabelle says pointedly, and Aline laughs.

“Isabelle,” she says warmly. “I meant to find Alec after the trial, but he looked like he wanted some time to himself. How are you?”

“I’m good,” Isabelle says, smile falling a little.

It’s not a lie, but it’s not quite the truth, either. She’s ecstatic that Magnus won, of course, although she knows that his - and Alec’s - battles are far from over. And she’s happy with whatever dalliance she and Lydia are partaking in, despite its definitive expiry date.

She’s just not quite sure what she wants in life. She feels like she’s drifting. She’s happy in her job, but in love, Isabelle seems to be drifting through lovers. Through fleeting relationships that burn hot and bright and wild, but ultimately fizzle out just as rapidly. Seeing Alec and Magnus, and Jace and Clary, and even Simon with Raphael, makes her ache for something more.

Something like what she’s sure she’s staring at now.

“I’m glad,” Aline says, but the soft lilt of her voice lets Isabelle know that Aline sees through her words. “Helen, this is Isabelle Lightwood. First girl I ever kissed.” Aline flashes her a grin. “Isabelle, this is Helen. My girlfriend.”

Isabelle extends a hand to Helen. “It’s lovely to meet you.”

“Ditto,” Helen says sincerely, shaking Isabelle’s proffered hand. “I’ve heard rather a lot about the Lightwoods.”

“We are rather infamous.”

“More by the day,” Helen agrees with a wry smile.

“Well don’t we head up to my room?” Isabelle suggests. “I’d love to catch up. If you two aren’t in the middle of sneaking off.”

Helen looks faintly embarrassed. Aline grins wickedly.

“We weren’t,” Aline says. She glances over at Helen, who nods, and then says, “We’d love to come up. My dad will probably think I’m off to have a lesbian orgy if he sees us.”

“You sound rather proud of that,” Helen says, nudging Aline lightly with her elbow. Her lips are curled up with fond amusement. “Shameless.”
“What can I say?”

“You can say it’s a lesbian-bisexual party,” Isabelle says, flashing the two women a wink.

“Mm. I like that idea,” Helen agrees.

Aline groans. “Raziel, you two are going to gang up on me all evening.”

“Never, babe,” Helen says, and leans in to press a kiss to Aline’s cheek.

What breaks Isabelle’s heart is the little flicker her eyes do, up and down the corridor, as she pulls away.

***

It’s not customary for people to stride into the Head of the Institute’s office like they own the place. When Maryse had occupied the position, she’d frequently snapped at people who dared knock more than once. She’d heard them the first time, thank you.

The loud, obnoxious sound of his door being shoved open and thick-soled shoes thumping across the floor at twenty-three minutes past ten makes Alec start. He snaps his gaze up, hand flying to the blade strapped to the underside of his desk upon pure instinct at the intrusion.

His racing heart doesn’t calm when he sees that his father is the person who’s so rudely stormed into his office without so much as a knock of warning.

“What can I help you?” Alec asks coldly, as Robert makes a show of inspecting the photographs lining the mantelpiece hanging over the unlit fireplace with disdain that makes his nose wrinkle.

Robert sets down a photograph of Isabelle and Max with more force than necessary, and spins on his heel to face Alec. He surveys him with a detached, clinical coolness, as though he’s stripping Alec naked to reveal every vulnerable part of him and announce it defective. It makes Alec feel unbearably small.

Unbidden, he thinks of being young, of sitting in this same office with crayons spread out on the floor around him and listening to his father conduct important Clave work. He’d used to dream of sitting in the very chair he now occupies. He’d thought his father the coolest man alive. Robert was everything he dreamt of being. A powerful warrior, a skilled tactician, and a respected leader, valued for his insight and known for his diplomatic prowess.

He remembers the first time he’d been given a sword - his father’s weapon of choice. Hodge had trained him in using all manner of weapons: swords and staffs and throwing stars and knives and maces and an array of blades larger than the stars in the night sky. When it had come to the broadsword, however, Robert had insisted he come to oversee Alec’s training.

At nine years old, Alec had been beyond ecstatic to have his father take an interest in his development as a warrior. He’d raved to Hodge about it for hours. With hindsight, Hodge’s stilted responses had probably been because he’d known exactly what would happen.

Alec was not a natural with a sword. That had doubtless been apparent to Robert within five minutes. And by the time Robert had lost patience, Alec had been close to tears—not that a display of emotion had done him any favours.
“Pull yourself together, Alec,” Robert had barked. “Hodge clearly isn’t hard enough on you. We’re men. We don’t cry. I expect you to put in extra time to fix that...performance. Lightwood men have always been proficient swordsmen. I wouldn’t want you to be a disappointment.”

Maryse and Hodge had both been pleased when Alec discovered, entirely by chance, his natural inclination towards archery. But Alec would never forget the tight-lipped look of disappointment on Robert’s face when Alec had told him.

For a moment now, Alec feels like that desperate little nine year old boy. Desperate to please his parents, desperate to do them proud and win their favour, and even more desperate to ensure that his father saw him as an equal: as a man.

Until Alec realises that he’s sitting behind his father’s old desk. He’s running the Institute. He’s building a successful career. He’s dating someone he adores, and who adores him in return. He’s happy. He’s won.

Robert hasn’t.

Alec has become everything that nine year old boy ever wanted to, without stooping to his father’s level.

“Are you mad?” Robert demands, jaw clenching. “Have you lost your mind?”

Alec arches an eyebrow. “No. And if you’re going to spew crap like you did at trial, you can get the hell out of my office right now. I have nothing to say to you.”

Robert’s eyes flash with rage. It’s not like Maryse’s anger, cool and icy and deadly, or Jace and Isabelle, filled with fire and fuelled by passion, or even Clary’s uncontrollable ricochet of emotion. It’s dark and black and ugly, warped by bitterness and hatred.

“I have plenty to say to you, Alexander,” Robert says, and Alec feels his expression darken.

“Don’t call me that.”

Robert scoffs. “You’re my son. I named you. I can call you what I damn well please.”

Alec leans across the desk, holding Robert’s gaze, and says again, “Do not call me that.”

Something about the low tone of his voice makes Robert hesitate. He doesn’t apologise, but he doesn’t push, either.

“I assume there’s some...political purpose to your affair with this warlock,” Robert says, taking several long, lazy steps across the rug to sit at the meeting table. He drops down into the chair and spreads his legs distastefully.

“No.” Alec lifts his gaze, determined not to let his father’s presumptuous body language deter him. He’s not a child anymore. He won’t be intimidated. “You heard me at trial.”

Robert rolls his eyes. “Romantic and sexual. Sure. What are you trying to prove here? Some point about being a homosexual? Fine. I got that. Are you trying to push your ridiculous Downworlder agenda? Because I’ve spent all fucking week listening to the Scandinavians bleat on about that, and
I’m sick of it.”

“I’m not trying to prove anything,” Alec tells him, voice as even as he can make it. “It’s really quite simple.”

Robert arches an eyebrow. “He’s a warlock. And a he. When I left New York, my son liked neither of those things.”

“I’ve been gay as long as I’ve known what love is.” The hand Alec has resting on the table stays relaxed, but he clenches the one hidden beneath his desk into a fist, nails digging hard into his palm. “And as for my views on Downworlders... What I was taught as a child sickens me. I’m glad to say I’ve seen the light.”

“The light?” Robert lets out a laugh. “You mean you’ve been seduced by some hedonistic demon-spawn, been promised the world, and in your youthful naïveté you’ve bought into the lies of the first thing that tries to get into your pants.”

Alec’s nostrils flare, and red flashes across his vision. “You know nothing about me. Or my relationship. I love Magnus. He loves me. You’re so caught up in your prejudices you just can’t see that.”

Still lounging in the chair, loose and sprawled and disdainful where Alec is coiled and tense and furious, Robert rolls his eyes. “You know nothing about Magnus Bane. I’ve known that warlock for a long time. Trust me, he’s only interested in the pleasurable parts of life. Money. Power. Sex.

You’re an attractive man and you’re a Shadowhunter. Seducing ticks two boxes in one. I’m sure he’ll keep you around to fuck for a few years, but he’ll throw you aside when he gets tired of you. Or when he finds a younger, prettier upgrade. You’re a thrill. You’re not a treasure. Get your head out of your ass - or his ass - and think rationally. He wants to screw you. He’ll do anything to get what he wants.”

Alec shakes his head, chest rising and falling heavily as his breaths become ragged, tearing at his lungs until it hurts. “You’re wrong.”

His father ignores him. “Raziel, you’ve just got him out of a death sentence! A good fuck and a get out of jail free card all in one. He probably can’t believe his luck! He’s a Downworlder, Alec. Seduction is as much a part of their arsenal as a seraph blade is ours. My son used to know that. Apparently, Bane’s charms have made you lose your damn mind. He doesn’t love you. He just loves what you can do for him. Warm his bed and fill his desire for corruption.”

Nausea rockets through Alec. He feels lightheaded and sweaty and unbalanced as Robert keeps talking. He’s wrong. Alec knows he’s wrong. Magnus loves him. Magnus is nothing like what Robert described. Those are all the things Alec used to think. All the things that were proven wrong from the day they first met. Magnus is generous and kind and compassionate and, yes, he can be rude and vindictive and short of temper at times, but he’s also got the gentlest soul Alec has ever known.

A sharp stinging pain shoots through Alec’s hand, and something warm and sticky runs over his fingertips. Blood. He presses down harder on the wound, focusing his mind on the pain of it. Pain is real. Pain is grounding. Pain is what he knows. He was in pain when Magnus saved his life.

He can anchor himself on pain.
“You’ve got no right to cast judgement on love,” Alec chokes out. “You’ve shown exactly what love means to you. Fuck all. You cheated on the woman you swore your life to. You ripped your vows into pieces and set them alight.”

The pulse in Robert’s forehead pulses, and Alec realises, with grim satisfaction, that Robert isn’t nearly so in control as he’s been pretending.

“That’s different.”

“Of course it’s different! That’s an affair! That’s one of the most despicable things a man can do to his wife! Magnus is not a goddamn affair!” Alec stands up, slamming his hand down on the top of his desk hard enough to make the photograph of his siblings rattle precariously. “Get the hell out of my office. Go back to Idris. I don’t want to see you here again.”

Robert looks wary, suddenly. “Alec—”

“Enough! That’s enough! Get out!”

“You’re making a mistake,” Robert says as he rises and moves towards the door. “You’re going to regret it. You’re going to regret all of this.”

“I said, get out. Now. Or I’ll call security and have you thrown in the cells for a night.”

Robert shakes his head. “Emotions make us weak. All you’re doing now is proving that correct.”

And he walks out, leaving Alec reeling with shock and nausea and horror. He sinks back into his chair as the door shuts, head dropping into his hands, and he lets tears slide down his cheeks.

***

Jace finds him in the early hours of the morning. There’s a half-finished glass of brandy on his desk, a bottle sitting beside it that’s significantly emptier than it had been three hours before, and Alec has barely moved from his position.

“Alec,” Jace says, inching the door further open. “Alec—”

“Just go, Jace. I’m not in the mood. Whatever it is, I’ll deal with it in the morning.”

Jace shakes his head in disbelief. “I’m here for you, you fucking idiot. I’m your parabatai. I can feel how upset you are.”

Alec’s shoulders slump. “Dad came in for a visit.”

“Ah. How did that go?”

“Worse than I’d expected.” Alec laughs, but it’s bitter, humourless, and betrays his state of mind entirely too well. “I think I’d rather he call me a fag in court again.”

“I think you’ve had enough brandy,” Jace says, walking over to take the bottle and glass away. “Come on. Bed. Now. Unless you’re going to call Magnus. That’s acceptable too.”

“Magnus wanted space.”
Jace frowns. “Space, or space?"

“I don’t fucking know.” Alec drops his head into his hands and presses his knuckles against his temples. “Space. After the trial. He said he wanted to be on his own.”

Jace raises his eyebrows in disbelief. “Was that it?”

“No. I walked him out and kissed him and he said he loved me, but then he left.”

“Okay, so you’re just being a miserable drunk and letting what Robert said get to your head? Come on, Alec. You’re better than that.”

“I’m not letting it get to my head,” Alec retorts. “Maybe I am. Fuck it, I know he was talking shit, but it hurt.”


Alec glares at Jace. “Of course Magnus didn’t hurt me. What the hell are you talking about?”

Jace’s lips quirk. “Alright, Romeo. Bed. Then you call your man in the morning.”

Grumpily, Alec follows Jace out of his office and up the stairs, wondering how, just this morning, he’d been tangled up in bed with Magnus, worried about what the day would bring but thinking that if this was it, if this was his lot in life, he’d be satisfied with that. Running the Institute and loving Magnus. That would be so much more than enough.

Jace pushes him none too gently into bed, and waits for him to shuck off his shoes, jacket and pants before he pats Alec consolingly on the shoulder and leaves him to sleep it off.

And, of course, Alec is grateful that Jace hauled him out of his pity party, but he knows what he needs. He needs the beautiful bronze-skinned man with magic flickering at his fingertips and kindness shining in his eyes. He needs Magnus. But Magnus is all the way in Brooklyn.

So Alec resigns himself to a sleepless night alone.

***

The damp press of a nose against his hand and a low, affectionate growl greets Magnus when he walks through his front door, after spending far longer than he’d intended to at the Dumort. It’s possible that he’d been observing Raphael and Simon together with amused interest. If anyone other than Catarina or Alec asked, he’d deny it.

“Well, hello,” Magnus says, reaching down to scratch between his hellhound’s ears. “What are you doing here, hm? Wanted some fuss? Chairman will get jealous, you know.”

Right on cue, there’s a patter of tiny paws and the scratch of claws against his floors, and his cat skids into view with a plaintive meow, letting Magnus know that he very much disapproves of the appearance of this enormous, undignified creature in his home, thank you very much.

“It’s like having children,” Magnus says with a sigh, patting Padfoot’s head once more before reaching down to pick up the Chairman. The Chairman purrs in satisfaction and rubs his head against
Magnus’ chin. “Not that I’d know, I suppose.”

He buries his face in the softness of the Chairman’s fur as he wanders into the kitchen. A wave of his hand sets a steaming cup of tea on his nightstand, and, with Padfoot following closely at his heels, Magnus escorts his household of pets into the bedroom.

Immediately, his heart clenches. He hadn’t made the bed this morning, caught up in his trepidation about the trial, and the sheets are as rumpled as they were when he got up, pillows in disarray. He knows that the moment he collapses onto the mattress, he’s going to be assaulted by the lingering smell of Alec’s cheap shampoo and woody aftershave.

After the trial, space was all his mind could fixate on. Magnus is far from claustrophobic, but that was exactly how he’d felt in that Institute. And Alexander means far too much to him to push away his need for some privacy in a misguided attempt to spare his feelings.

But, Lilith, part of him wishes his could turn back time and change his mind.

It’s only a small part. The rest of him knows that this is best.

On impulse, Magnus reaches for his phone and taps out a quick text as he sinks down onto the bed, the Chairman slipping out of his hold to curl up in his lap. It’s not a message to begin a conversation, but one to communicate that Magnus is thinking of Alec. And to ensure that there are no sudden doubts about exactly what Magnus meant when he referred to space.

[From: Magnus Bane, 02:03]

Sweet dreams, Alexander <3

[From: Magnus Bane, 02:03]

Shit. Sorry. I didn’t realise how late it is. Hope I didn’t wake you

[From: Alexander, 02:04]

You didn’t. Night, Magnus

Magnus smiles as he shuts off his phone, feeling lighter than he has for decades.

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorry this chapter is a little bit late! Next chapter in two weeks, on Thursday, like normal!

I hope you enjoyed this one - it sets up some bits and pieces in this last arc of the story.

As always, you can find me on Tumblr @notcrypticbutcoy and on Twitter @LucysRebelHeart
Much love,
Lu <3
When Alec walks into the kitchen to find something to eat after morning patrol, Maryse is sitting at the table, tablet open, pen scratching against a pad of paper beside her. The toast she’s made herself is sitting untouched.

She glances up at the sound of footsteps, and sends Alec a careful, measured smile. “Good morning, Alec.”

“Morning.” Alec clears his throat. “Are our guests still here?”

“No. They left shortly after you went out on patrol. Helen and Aline are spending the morning in New York with Isabelle and Lydia, but the rest have left.”

The tank top she’s wearing leaves her arms on display, and Alec can’t help the way his eyes are drawn to the plain white bandage wrapped around her shoulder from where she was stabbed at Magnus’ trial. Stabbed because she stepped in front of a blade meant for Magnus.

“Stop it,” Maryse says shortly. “Forget about it.”

Alec stares at her. “How can I possibly forget about that? Someone tried to kill Magnus. And I still don’t understand why you, of all people, stopped it happening.”

Maryse shakes her head. “You won’t understand unless you have children. There are exceptions, your father clearly being one, but for the vast majority of people, there is nothing comparable to having children. You’d give anything for their happiness. I spent so long trying to make you and Isabelle into who I wanted you to be, rather than nurturing who you are. I had my reasons, but I forgot to be your mother, instead of your commander.”

Unbidden, Alec feels tears sting at his eyes. His throat tightens. “Mom.”

“I just want you to be happy, Alec. I didn’t want my children to repeat my mistakes, and I wanted to atone for my own, but I tried to do that through my children rather than through myself. Especially you. The world is tough, and more than anything you need someone to stand with you.”

Hesitation fills Alec. He’s unwilling to let himself hope - hope that Maryse is saying what he thinks she is - but at the same time, her words make something warm spark in his chest.

“Even if that someone is a guy?” Alec asks, tip chipped up defensively. “And a Downworlder?”

Maryse smiles sadly. “It’s not what I would have wanted for you. Either of them. But I suppose I can’t do much about the first one. And if it’s a Downworlder you’ve fallen in love with, I’ll have to come to terms with that. I want to support you against all the crap you’re going to face, not contribute to it. You’re my son. It’s time I put that first.”
“Fuck.” Alec lifts a hand to press his knuckles against his eyes as tears threaten to spill over. “Shit, sorry, I just—”

He’s not watching Maryse, too determined to get himself under control, but he hears the scrape of a chair against the floor, and before he can glance up, arms are wrapping around him, pulling him down into an embrace that became unfamiliar to him years ago.

But, Raziel, being hugged by his mother like this reminds him of being young. It reminds him of times long ago, before he knew Jace and before Max was born, before he was the eldest son and before the weight of expectation sat heavily on his shoulders. Back when he was just Alec, just Isabelle’s big brother, just a child, told off for trying to fly before he was allowed to and chastised for getting into trouble in the Institute.

There’s another embrace that makes him feel home, now. But this one makes him feel safe, nonetheless. It’s family, it’s childhood, it’s safety and care and forgotten tenderness, as Maryse pulls back and sweeps his hair back from his forehead with a smile, eyes shining in the morning sunlight.

“Watching all of you in these past few days and weeks,” Maryse murmurs. “It’s reminded me of everything I’m supposed to do for my children. It’s reminded me of everything I wanted to be for you when I first held you, when I wasn’t much older than you.”

Alec can’t speak. If he speaks, he’s going to cry again, and he’s fairly certain that nobody but Magnus and Isabelle and Jace have seen him cry since he was a little boy. Instead, he blinks rapidly, swallows, and holds her gaze.

“I wanted you to be better than we were. I wanted you to avoid our mistakes. I didn’t leave any room for the fact that you might be wiser than we were.” She pats his cheek. “Perhaps your stances on the Downworld will prove more fruitful than ours.”

Alec can’t help himself. “Whose? Valentine’s or the Clave’s?”

She smiles wryly. “There isn’t a huge amount of difference, is there?”

“Mom?”

“Mm?”

“Will you lay off Izzy a bit?”

Maryse inhales deeply. “I think I owe all of you an apology. Isabelle perhaps the most. But all of you.”

He smiles faintly. “Thanks. For this. And for what you did for Magnus.”

She inclines her head. “I’m going to try, Alec. I’m not going to make any promises, but I’ll try.”

“I can take that,” Alec says.

***

Magnus calls Alec as he strolls through the streets of New York, unglamoured - save for his eyes, of course - and utterly free to exist without having to look over his shoulder for fear of a rune-covered being stalking along behind him.

The sun is beating down on him as he lifts his phone to his ear, sipping at an iced americano that
he’d stopped off to grab between jobs. He’s got his sunglasses pulled down over his eyes, thin shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, brown ankles peeking out from between cuffed jeans and a pair of loafers.

He rolls his shoulders back and tips his face up as he crosses the road, heading towards Central Park. God, the world is beautiful.

“Hey.”

Alec’s voice rings clear through the line, and a smile breaks out across Magnus’ face.

“Hello, darling.”

“You sound happy.”

“Mm. I am. Freedom feels really rather wonderful. How’s everything at the Institute?”

“Kind of...normal. Which is weird. It’s not like the demons take a holiday just because there’s a big trial, but... I don’t know. It seems strange to be going on a patrol and doing reports and going through paperwork and sightings and analytics after everything that happened.”

“I bet. I’ve spent all day with clients. That seems strange, too.” He inhales deeply. “There’s one more thing we need to deal with. But it’s not urgent, so I was wondering whether you’d like to go out with me tonight.”

“What do we need to deal with?” Alec asks, immediately, and Magnus rolls his eyes fondly.

“You focused on the wrong part of that, Alexander.”

“Magnus.”

“Your dreams. We never quite put our finger on who was sending them. But I have a theory. I just don’t know why.”

“I thought Madzie said that Camille ordered it.”

“But not for Valentine. And obviously not for the Clave. So who? And Madzie couldn’t have got through my wards on her own.”

There’s a momentary pause while Alec thinks. Then: “You’re talking about Asmodeus.”

“I am.”

“Do you mean you want to summon him again?”

“I’ll be properly prepared this time. There won’t be a genocidal maniac threatening the man I love to distract me.”

Wind blows through the city right as Alec sighs in what sounds like exasperation. Magnus takes a sip of his coffee, waiting for Alec to let out all his grievances about the plan.

“Is it really a good idea to summon a Prince of Hell right after you’ve been pardoned by the Clave?”

Magnus snorts. “Please. Like the Clave is going to know. What do you think I am, an amateur?”

“We do have technology to detect the presence of Greater Demons, you know. It’s not the seventies
Magnus’ lips quirk at that, momentarily wondering how Alec would have fared during such a wonderfully mad decade.

“Darling, I’m the High Warlock of Brooklyn. I’ve even got it on a mug. I can summon Father dearest without setting off all your little alarms.”

Alec huffs. “Angel knows why I’m so attracted to you.”

Magnus smirks. “I think we both know exactly why.”

“You’re insufferable.”

“So you don’t want to go out with me tonight?” He grins. “How disappointing. Maybe I’ll take Simon out to dinner instead.”

“Now you’re just being cruel.”

“I’ll see you at the loft at seven?”

“Um.” He hears tapping over the line, and imagines the little furrow that’s doubtless appeared between Alec’s eyebrows as he peers at the screen of his laptop. “Seven is good. Unless Jace sets anything else on fire.”

Magnus arches an eyebrow. “Anything else?”

“We were on a stakeout late this morning, trying to take out a nest of Shax demons, and Jace thought the best way to get started would be to wake the mother by shouting, hey, ugly! across the street. It wasn’t pretty. Pun not intended.”

Magnus laughs. “As long as his idiocy didn’t get my boyfriend damaged, I’ll just laugh at him.”

Alec sounds distinctly vindictive when he says, “No, but it got him damaged.”

“Karma,” Magnus says. “I’ll see you later.”

***

The wards around Magnus’ apartment seem to yawn as Alec nears, as though rising from a deep slumber. They press around him, nudging and prodding with disinterest, only sparking against his runes, before they ease to let him through, enveloping him in their protective embrace.

Before he so much as lifts a hand to knock, he has to pause: take a breath, close his eyes, swallow. He’s been through these wards so many times. As Magnus’ mortal enemy, as his mildly irritating acquaintance, as his friend, as his lover—but he’s never felt that. The wards are so very clearly a basic embodiment of Magnus’ magical essence, but he doesn’t control them consciously. That was—

God.

Steeling himself, Alec raps on the painted black wood. He hears clattering from inside, and a muffled curse, and the distinct sound of the Chairman yelping in displeasure, and then the door is swinging open and Magnus is standing in front of him, and he’s out of breath and his hair is a disaster and he looks a little stressed and by the fucking Angel he’s the most stupidly, ridiculously, unfairly beautiful person Alec has ever send in his life.
And, of course, because he’s Alec, his first instinct, after everything, is to blurt out, “Fuck, I love you.”

Magnus blinks owlishly at him, the deep brown of his irises appearing startled between slow blinks, and he peers up at Alec as though he might very well have lost his mind. “What?”

Alec supposes he should go with it, now.


“Alexander, I am a complete mess. Not, I’m-having-a-slightly-less-than-perfect-hair-day mess, a complete mess. My job finished late and I was rushing and I am a mess.”

Alec smiles. “And I love you.”

Magnus gapes at him for a moment, and then huffs derisively and waves Alec in. “You’re clearly mad. Someone’s bewitched you.”

“Yeah.” Alec can’t help the grin that spreads across his face as he reaches back to shut the door behind him. “Yeah, you.”

If possible, Magnus looks even more bewildered. “Right. Do I need to call a Silent Brother to do a psych assessment? No, don’t give me that look, I’m completely serious. Did you get hit over the head? Since when do you make puns?”

Magnus actually has the fucking audacity to wrinkle his nose, and, Raziel, he should be illegal. Alec wants to say fuck it to this date thing and spend the rest of the night right goddamn here.

“I’m maybe a bit delirious,” Alec admits. “I’m highly strung. That’s what Isabelle keeps saying. I may have slightly broken. It’s been a weird day. Days. God.” He feels himself start to run out of steam, crashing right as the overwhelmingly relieving sight of Magnus had shot him up among the clouds, like a kid on a sugar high. He rubs his knuckles against his temple. “Sorry. I’m sorry. I’m behaving like a lunatic.”

Magnus’ lips twitch. He looks calmer. “A little,” he agrees. “But it’s okay. Look, I need to sort out this disaster, so why don’t you sit your decidedly gorgeous ass down on my bed and talk to me, hm?”

“No.” Alec follows him into the bedroom, only momentarily thrown by the fact that it looks a little like a bomb has exploded in the middle of it. A bomb made of towels and clothes and jewellery. “Me?” Magnus looks genuinely confused.

“The trial, and the last few days, and—”

“Alexander.” Magnus sets down the eyeliner pencil he’d been toying with and spins on the chair in
front of the mirror to pin Alec with a fond sort of look that’s horribly disarming. “While I love you -
and I really do, in case you’ve managed to forget, shut up in that ghastly Institute - sometimes there
doesn’t need to be a big conversation. I’m happy. I’m free. Nothing terrible has happened. I don’t
want to talk about your mother saving my life, because I don’t think anyone involved is sure what to
do with that little anecdote. I just want to go back to living.”

Alec had opened his mouth to comment on the numerous things he felt deserved attention, but
Magnus’ last sentence makes him stop. “What does that mean?”

Magnus tilts his head and smiles with gentle reproach. “It’s difficult to enjoy life while you’re so
preoccupied with clinging to it.”

“Oh. Yeah.”

“Mm.” Magnus doesn’t avert his gaze. “So. How do you feel about Chinese?”

“Is that a real question?” Alec asks, arching an eyebrow. “We’re getting Chinese?”

Magnus grins. “Wait and see.”

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*Getting Chinese,* as it turns out, is rather predictably an enormous understatement. Magnus, in true
Magnus style, has chosen to take Alec to probably the most expensive Chinese restaurant in the
known universe, where they’re sitting in prime location to watch the chefs cook with a flair that
almost rivals Magnus’.

“I can’t believe I’m letting you do this,” Alec says, laughing as he tosses his menu down on the table.
“We’ve been out to a restaurant once. Why am I trusting you to choose my food for me?”

Magnus grins at him over the rim of his shimmering, spotless wine glass, filled with deep burgundy
liquid that runs in perfect legs down the sides of the crystal. A part of Alec appreciates how
absolutely gorgeous Magnus looks, lit by candlelight and exuding happiness, twirling a wine glass
lazily through his fingers. Another part of him wants to ignore his wine and order a damn beer.

“Because I have exquisite taste and I know you don’t like spinach.”

When the waiter arrives with their food, several minutes later, Alec bites the bullet and orders a beer.
Magnus spares a moment to pretend to be scandalised, before being genuinely scandalised when
Alec snatches his wine glass out of his hand.

“Excuse you! I was drinking that!”

Alec tips the remainder of his wine into Magnus’ glass. “I don’t like it. I’m not fancy enough.”

Magnus stares at him, before breaking out into a grin that’s undeniably saturated with fondness. “I’m
not under any illusions of you being fancy, sweetheart. Although I’m sure you could be, if you had a
touch more experience with the finer things in life.”


This time, Magnus outright laughs at him, nudging his knee against Alec’s under the small table.
“Now that sounds like a challenge,” he says, with a gleam in his eye that Alec doesn’t like one bit.
“Find a wine that you like.”
“That sounds like a waste of money.”

Magnus snorts. “Darling, when you’re several centuries old, you have money to burn. And no money spent on you would ever be a waste.”

Something about what Magnus has just said makes Alec pause, right in the middle of their wonderful date, chopsticks halfway to his mouth. Magnus seems to notice: he raises his eyebrows at Alec in question.

“You know I earn, like, nothing, don’t you?” Alec asks. “I mean, more, now I’m Head of the Institute, but basically nothing. The Clave doesn’t expect us to pay for housing like mundanes do, and we don’t exactly lead lifestyles that require much disposable income. Most of what we buy can go under the Institute’s budget.”

“Oh, I know. It’s one of the many reasons I so enjoy overcharging the Clave for my services.”

“Right. Just as long as we’re clear. I can’t jet you off to the Caribbean for the weekend, or pay for a fancy five star hotel in Paris.”

“Alec.” Magnus sets down his chopsticks and reaches across the table, flicking the candle between them aside with a subtle wave of his fingers, and grasps Alec’s hand in his. “I know. We both know that there are a myriad of things that are going to make this relationship challenging, but money? Money is a normal thing for couples to fight about. So let’s take advantage of the perspective we’re afforded by not being mundane, and choose to fight about the other things.”

Alec smiles faintly. “We could, you know, not fight at all. That’d be nice.”

“With our track record?” Magnus snorts, and Alec has to agree with him, really. They’re both far too stubborn and opinionated and passionate to never fight about anything. “I find that unlikely.”

“But we, um. We seem to be okay at the talking thing.”

“Yes. We do.”

A soft expression crosses Magnus’ face, but it’s tinted by something else. Something old and world-weary that Alec knows he’ll never understand, no matter how hard he tries. And if he were to verbalise that thought, he’s quite sure that Magnus would tell him that’s a good thing.

Magnus presses a kiss to Alec’s knuckles, and they go back to their food, conversation dissolving into something lighter. And, despite himself, Alec’s mind flits back to what Rose had said, about the Nephilim. About only falling in love once.

Magnus is twirling food around his chopsticks while he reaches for his wine with the other hand, and Alec’s gaze drops to his fingers. Rings adorn them every goddamn day, but one in particular is noticeably bare. It always is.

Alec wonders whether it’s deliberate. Whether Magnus is waiting. Or whether he simply doesn’t ever want to.

But he pushes the thoughts away. They’re for another time, much, much later. For now, he wants to enjoy their first taste of freedom. He wants to revel in being able to hold Magnus’ hand in public without fearing the consequences of being seen. He wants to fall evermore in love with the man he owes so much to.

They walk home, talking and laughing in the warmth of the summer evening, fingers laced together
and hands swinging between them. It’s carefree and easy, and every time Alec looks across at Magnus, beautiful and painted with streaks of moonlight, he feels his heart stutter at the realisation that this is his life. Holding hands with a man he loves, going out on a date after a long day at the Institute, getting to have all this—this is his life.

Magnus kisses Alec when they reach the door to the loft. It’s soft, fingers resting against his neck, right over his fluttering pulse, but Alec is breathing heavily when they part, and he has to take a moment. Has to look somewhere else.

Magnus sweeps his hair back from his forehead tenderly, and smiles at him. “Are you going back to the Institute now? Or do you have time to come in?”

“I have time,” Alec breathes. “Magnus, I— What you said, after you testified—”

Magnus makes an inchoate sound in the back of his throat. “In your bedroom?”

“Yeah.”

“Alexander, are you propositioning me?” Magnus asks, pulling back to grin at Alec.

“Yes?”

“Well, get your pretty little ass inside, then,” he says, and drags Alec into the loft.

The moment the door is closed, Alec finds himself pressed up against it as Magnus kisses him breathless, lips dragging against each other, mouths open and panting as the heat in the loft seems to rocket up with every passing second.

“Bedroom?” Magnus asks, breathless, lips beginning to go red and swollen, eyes glazed over and heavy-lidded.

“Bedroom,” Alec agrees, ducking his head to kiss Magnus again. Magnus laughs against his lips as Alec begins to walk them backwards, stumbling towards the bedroom and trying not to bash into anything. Alec had the bruise from his last lust-drunk run-in with Magnus’ doorframe for a week.

Magnus falls back onto the bed, and latches his hands onto the front of Alec’s shirt to pull him down with him. They fall together in a tangle of limbs, smiling and giggling like schoolchildren as they press messy, open-mouthed kisses anywhere they can reach, far too happy to do anything more coordinated.

After several minutes of wrestling (which, of course, consists mostly of kissing) Magnus rolls over on top, pinning Alec down with his hands above his head, fingers circled around his wrists. Alec’s breaths come heavily as he stares up at Magnus, smiling brightly and absolutely fucking desperate to lean up and kiss that damn smirk off his stupid, beautiful face.

“No struggling?” Magnus asks, hot breath washing tantalisingly across his lips. “No trying to flip me over and win?”

“No.” Alec casts an appreciative glance at the way Magnus’ biceps are bulging against his shirt sleeves at this angle. “I’m good here, actually.”

Magnus’ smirk morphs into a grin, and Alec wraps his legs loosely around Magnus’ waist to reel him in and kiss him.

“Mm– Magnus,” Alec says against his mouth, and Magnus pulls back instantly, brows drawn
together in consternation. Alec’s legs drop back down to the mattress.

“Shit, sorry,” Magnus says, releasing Alec’s wrists from where they’d been gently pinned to the array of pillows he’s laying on.

Alec shakes his head, too turned on to be embarrassed by exactly how much he’d enjoyed that gesture.

“No, I just– Raziel, come back here.”

He curls a hand around the back of Magnus’ neck and draws him in for a long, deep kiss that’s all tongue and teeth and moans. The sight of Magnus hovering above him, balanced on his forearms with his cat eyes on display, slit pupils blown with desire, is enough to send any other thought flying from his mind.

“I want you,” Alec rasps out against Magnus’ lips when they’re forced to come up for air. As though the heavy arousal Alec is making no effort to hide isn’t clue enough.

“I want you too,” Magnus tells him, and tilts his hips forwards until their thighs and chests press together. Alec gasps, eyelashes fluttering as his hips jerk. “The only question is, how?”

“Fuck. You know what I want to do.”

Magnus pulls back from where he’d been kissing a determined trail down Alec’s neck, and looks at him seriously, despite the twinkle of mischief in his eyes. “Yes, you want to do me.”

Unashamed, Alec replies, “Or vice versa. I really don’t have a preference.”

Magnus smiles at him, soft and small and saturated with affection so intense it makes Alec’s heart thud harder. He trails the tip of his index finger across Alec’s lips, dipping between them when they part, before continuing down, until he reaches the centre of Alec’s chest.

“Neither do I,” Magnus says, “beyond our mutual comfort.”

“Right. Right. Yeah. Okay.” Remembering the sleepy, sated conversation they’d had about this last time, Alec clears his throat. “Can we go back to kissing now?”

“Alexander, it would be my pleasure. Pun absolutely intended.”

Alec runs his hands up Magnus’ back as their lips meet, feeling over warm, silken skin layered over iron-hard muscle. They break apart momentarily, just long enough for Magnus to yank his shirt off and help Alec wriggle out of his.

“Ow,” Alec says, frowning when one of Magnus’ necklaces knocks against his nose. “Those things are dangerous.”

Magnus arches an eyebrow at him, lips twitching upwards. “I’d take them off, but you keep telling me you like them.”

“God, I do,” Alec says, leaning up for another kiss. “I really, really do.”

Alec loses himself in Magnus’ touch. It’s so easy to sink into the sensation of Magnus’ body moving against his, Magnus’ forearms bracketing his head, Magnus’ lips trailing over his skin until he’s mouthing down near Alec’s waistband, and Alec can’t help the broken moan that slips out. When he looks up at Alec from beneath his lashes, fingers tucking into his jeans to brush the band of his briefs,
Magnus’ eyes are saturated with lust.

“What do you want?” Magnus asks, voice husky and an octave lower than normal. It makes Alec shiver.

“Everything,” he says, because it might not be entirely helpful, but it’s true. And he’s too mind-blown by the sight of Magnus Bane between his legs with his mouth in such close proximity to his crotch to think about much else.

Magnus kisses his quivering stomach muscles, just below his navel, and runs both hands down Alec’s thighs soothingly. “Pick something. Anything. Think of it like a platter filled with every dish in the world in infinite quantities, which you’ve got your entire life to sample.”

It’s so ridiculous that Alec laughs, a little breathlessly. Magnus smiles up at him with a knowing expression, ringed hands still resting on Alec’s thighs, thumbs brushing back and forth across the sensitive skin.

“I want us both to be naked, and I just want to...touch you. I’ve never– I’ve spent so long not even looking at men, I want...”

Magnus kisses his abs again, a little further to the left this time, and goes to undo the button on Alec’s jeans. When he’s relieved Alec of what’s left of his clothing, Alec digs his knees lightly into Magnus’ sides and rolls them over, delighting in the surprised, heated look that flashes in Magnus’ eyes when he’s pressed back into the pillows by the weight of Alec’s body.

“That was smooth,” Magnus says, glancing down the length of Alec’s body appreciatively before focusing in on his face. “Very smooth.”

Alec rolls his eyes, but he’s grinning, and he’s probably a little bit too proud of himself. “The smoothness was a total fluke. Can I undress you, now?”

A ringed hand runs up his abs and comes to rest against his pec. “Please do.”

He takes his time making his way down Magnus’ body, unhurried and lazy and leisurely. For the first time, he feels totally relaxed—like he’s got all the time in the world. Because, he supposes, for the first time, he has. He has time to kiss across Magnus’ pecs, and tangle his fingers in those damn necklaces, and delight in the moan Magnus lets out when he thumbs across his nipples, and follow the grooves of Magnus’ abs with his tongue.

As he peels Magnus’ jeans down his legs, he follows with his mouth, until his name is spilling from Magnus’ mouth in a low, raspy voice that makes his stomach squirm in satisfied pleasure. Because he made Magnus sound like that.

“You’re so fucking beautiful,” Alec says, like he hasn’t said it a million times, as he makes his way back up Magnus’ body. He kisses Magnus once, twice, soft and lax and messy, lips dragging together with little finesse, but it’s perfect.

“Fucking hell, Alec.” Magnus tangles his ringed fingers in Alec’s hair, rubbing absently at his scalp. “You’re going to kill me.”

“It’s payback,” Alec tells him, between kisses. “For all the times you sent me into crisis because you’re so damn hot.”

“You say that like it’s not completely mutual.”
That makes Alec pause. “Seriosly?”

Magnus makes a spectacular show of rolling his eyes—Alec is fairly sure he manages to use his entire body in the movement. “Yes, seriously. I was having sexual fantasies about a Shadowhunter. Ridiculous!”

“You—” Alec feels his cheeks go pinker, flustered despite the fact that he’s had numerous sexual fantasies about Magnus. “God, shut up before you embarrass me.”

“Uh uh.” Magnus stops Alec as he leans back in by pressing a finger against his lips. “There’s no such thing as embarrassing yourself.”

“You know what I mean.”

“And yet, I still mean it.”

Alec looks at him for a moment, laying on golden sheets with kiss-swollen lips and flushed cheeks and sweat beginning to linger along his hairline, and then sighs. “You’re so stupidly perfect. It’s really unfair.”

“Oh, darling.” Magnus laughs. “We both know that’s not true.”

“You are to me.”

He’s aware of the stubborn, determined note in his voice, but he doesn’t particularly care. It’s important that Magnus knows. Even if it makes him sound sappy.

The humour in Magnus’ eyes softens, and the hand resting in Alec’s hair presses forward gently. “Kiss me.”

And Alec does.

They take their time with it, exploring and touching, making each other moan with lips and teeth and tongue, bodies pressing together and hands roaming. Alec clutches at Magnus’ ass when their hips roll together, and considers, momentarily, that being able to touch is so much better than trying desperately not to notice.

Magnus swears colourfully when Alec settles with his head between his legs; a minute or two later, he’s garbling curses in languages Alec can’t distinguish, and the look on his face makes Alec stare at him in awe. Fingers run through his hair over and over and over as Magnus tosses his head back on a moan.


Alec is fairly sure he’s still pretty shit at this, in the grand scheme of things, but Magnus is nothing if not encouraging, and it’s a skill Alec is quite eager to work on. Besides which, even with Alec’s lack of finesse, Magnus seems to be enjoying himself.

Eventually, Alec finds himself with his knee lifted up and hooked around Magnus’ hip, gasping at the movements of Magnus’ hand and mouth between his legs. He’s shuddering all over, clutching at Magnus’ hair and trying desperately not to move his hips.

“Magnus,” he says, a broken plea, throwing his head back at the utterly overwhelming sensations coursing through his body. He didn’t know that anything could feel like this—that anything could be so good it makes tears spring to his eyes.
“Shh.” Magnus slides a hand up his side, slowing the rest of his movements and lifting his head, crawling back up so he can look Alec in the eye. “I’ve got you.”

“God,” Alec says, and presses his face into Magnus’ shoulder.

“Do you need a moment?”

“Just a sec.” He takes a deep breath, and then smiles up at Magnus ruefully. “I’m pathetic, right?”

“No!” Magnus tries to look admonishing, but he breaks out into a smile, apparently, like Alec, too absolutely and wonderfully happy to do anything else. “No, you’re not.”

“I’m pretty sure crying while your boyfriend has his mouth on your dick counts as pathetic.”

“Except you’re laughing, not crying,” Magnus points out, and it’s true. “Alexander, there’s no expectation, this is just supposed to be fun. Especially because we love each other.”

“I know.” He brushes his fingers against Magnus’ cheek. “I love you too.”

They kiss again, slower this time, but deeper, with intent, but also with everything Alec feels for Magnus. Because Magnus is right—this is about fun, and about pleasure, but for them, now, it’s also about love.

As they roll over again, Magnus presses a wrapper into Alec’s hand. There’s a moment of stuttering and fumbling and awkwardness, and Alec is hit by a cold wave of realisation that it’s so obvious that he’s never done this before.

But Magnus doesn’t seem to care. He smiles as he leans in to kiss Alec again, soft and slow and languid as they both stop in a moment of burning bliss that makes Alec shudder with sensation.

“Oh Okay?” Magnus asks quietly, curling his fingers around Alec’s ear and dragging his thumb across Alec’s cheek.

Alec lets out a weak laugh. “I’m a bit more than okay, Magnus.”

Magnus’ face breaks out into a smile, bright and pleasure-ridden and otherworldly, and he kisses Alec’s nose.

“Slow,” Magnus reminds him, as Alec braces a hand either side of Magnus on the bed.

Alec nods. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

They move together slowly, breaths hot between them and fingertips blazing trails of heat. Magnus lets his head fall back, the length of his neck exposed as he arches against the bed, and Alec stares at him with heavy-lidded eyes. It’s beautiful and it’s scorching and it’s utterly consuming.

And, Raziel, Alec doesn’t think he’ll ever get over the way Magnus’ hips stutter and his eyes flutter closed and he makes a broken, gasping attempt at Alec’s name as ecstasy rockets through him. It’s with that imagine burned in his mind that Alec feels the sensations crest, and, with Magnus’ legs wrapped tight around his waist and his toes curling and the fingers of one hand laced through Magnus’, he closes his eyes and lets the waves of pleasure consume him.
I’m sorry this chapter is a bit late, but I hope you enjoyed it nonetheless! I keep saying we’re nearing the end, and we are, but it’s not /the end/ yet — a few loose ends to wrap up first :)

If you like, you can come talk to me on Tumblr or on Twitter, and you can Tweet at me using #fwwfic

Much love,
Lu <3
The magpie is symbolic of unpredictable events and behaviour. According to the Romans, it can also suggest high intellect, perception, and reasoning.

If you’re on Twitter, you can tweet with #fwwfic

It takes Alec a moment longer to come back to himself than it does Magnus.

Alec’s lips are still parted, lashes almost touching his cheeks and tremors wracking his body as Magnus feels the foggy haze begin to disperse. He runs his fingers through Alec’s hair tenderly, eyes trained intently on his face as Alec goes boneless above him with a soft exhale.

Alec’s eyes flutter open, and he blinks twice, a flush high on his cheekbones, before he smiles, tenderness and love and satisfaction shining clearly in the hazel irises Magnus adores so much. The sight makes Magnus breathless.

“Isn’t that the prettiest sight I’ve ever seen?” Magnus murmurs, brushing his knuckles against Alec’s cheek, feeling his lips turn upwards.

“I doubt it,” Alec says, “because I know you look in a mirror multiple times a day.”

A startled laugh escapes Magnus, and he rolls them over onto their sides and then over again, so that Alec is splayed out on his back. Alec melts into the softness of the pillows, a sigh escaping from between his lips.

“Alexander, are you flirting with me?”

Alec grins, winding his arms around Magnus’ neck. His fingers find the short shaved hair at the nape of Magnus’ neck. “Maybe.”

“Hm. You know you’ve already got me in bed, right?”

Alec’s grin turns bashful, but he makes no effort to school his features. “Funnily enough, I do.”

Magnus leans down to kiss him, soft and slow and easy, and Alec hums into it.

“You okay?” Magnus asks, when he pulls back.

“Oh, I’m very okay.” He shifts beneath Magnus and wrinkles his nose slightly. “But I’d be more okay after a trip to the bathroom.”

Magnus snaps his fingers, letting blue sparks shower down on them and then scatter themselves across Alec’s cheekbones. It’s an unnecessary flourish, but he likes seeing Alec’s reaction to his magic. Likes the way it catches Alec’s attention and makes him pause, with that little flash of wonder in his eyes.
Alec’s lips quirk. “Handy.”

“Mm.” Magnus dips his head to kiss him again. “Very.”

They lose themselves in soft, lazy kisses and gentle touches that carry none of the heat of mere moments before, but all of the care. Magnus can’t remember the last time sex felt like it does with Alec. Fun, and pleasurable, and easy, but also saturated with adoration and feeling and emotion that can’t be captured by words.

Eventually, kisses and caresses peter out into cuddling. Magnus finds himself with his arm around Alec’s shoulders, Alec’s head pillowed on his chest. Alec is fiddling with his necklaces, quiet, eyes focused on the beads but mind clearly elsewhere.

Magnus cards a hand through his hair, satisfied, for the moment, to lay with him in silence. He doesn’t want to ruin the wonderful, contended mood by pressing for Alec to bring up whatever it is he’s thinking about. It might be nothing.

Alec is tracing patterns - patterns Magnus is fairly certain are runes - on his pecs when he says, “My dad came to see me yesterday.”

The news strikes worry deep into Magnus heart, but he doesn’t show it. Not yet. He merely runs his fingers through Alec’s hair again, rhythmically, and hums in acknowledgement, giving Alec the space to continue if he wants to.

“He stormed into my office like it was still his,” Alec says, with his eyes fixed on the swirls and strokes of his fingers on Magnus’ chest. “He wanted to talk about the trial. Or— Well, about everything he said about me at the trial. About my relationship with you.”

“Mmhm,” Magnus says, letting Alec know that he’s listening, but not wanting to interrupt his flow.

“Nothing he said was very complimentary, as you can imagine. He told me everything about Downworlders that I used to be told as a child. He told me that you were just keeping me around as someone you could fuck and use as a proverbial fuck you to the Clave. Everything he said was degrading and crass and... Raziel, it made me feel awful. It made me feel like a kid again, when he used to make us all feel like nothing we did was ever good enough. Like we were always disappointing him. I drank brandy. Lots. Jace made me stop.”

It’s not pleasant, the idea that Magnus is keeping Alec as a naive bedmate he can take advantage of. The mere thought makes Magnus feel faintly sick, and unimaginably angry. He loves Alec. He loves Alec, he’s coming to realise, like he’s loved few others. He’d tear down the entire world with his bare hands, mortal and magic-less, to keep Alec safe and happy.

But it’s also the sort of thing Magnus is more than used to hearing. Especially from Shadowhunters. And while Robert Lightwood’s words set indignation pulsing through him, they’ve cleared ignited something else in Alec. Something far more damaging. Because whatever else, Robert is Alexander’s father, and Magnus knows as well as anyone that hurtful words aren’t enough to make a son stop loving his dad—rather the opposite, in fact.

When it becomes apparent that Alec isn’t going to say anything else, Magnus reaches out with the hand not carding through Alec’s hair to slide his fingers through Alec’s. He turns Alec’s palm over to expose the red lines he’d noticed earlier, but had presumed were from training, or a fight with a demon. Now, Magnus suspects Alec had been pulling bowstrings far harder and for far longer than he should have been for other reasons.
“Is that why you did this?” Magnus asks softly.

For the first time since they settled like this, Alec glances up at him. Guilt and shame flash in his eyes; Magnus wants to destroy everyone who’s been a part of putting it there.

“Yes,” Alec says, admitting it like it’s some kind of shameful secret. He casts his eyes down to their hands. “I should have used an iratze, but I just...didn’t.”

“Alexander.” Magnus squeezes his hand gently. “You don’t have to be ashamed. Certainly not around me. I understand that sometimes it’s easy to hope that physical pain will be enough to distract you from the pain in your heart.”

The laugh Alec lets out is bitter. “It didn’t help.”

Magnus smiles sadly. There are so very many things he wants to say on the subject, but it’s not the time. Not now.

“It rarely does, my love.”

A noise of frustration escapes from the back of his throat. “I can’t stop thinking about it. I should be happy, because my mother more or less gave us her blessing—” he doesn’t pause for long enough to let Magnus react to that, but Magnus feels hope thud heavy in his heart “—but I just can’t get that conversation out of my head. And now I’m ruining this moment with you, and it’s just— He just taints everything.”

“Hey, no.” Magnus frowns down at Alec, hoping his facial expression carries in his voice, because Alec isn’t looking at him. “You’re not ruining anything at all. We had a wonderful time together, and I’m sure we will again, but there’s no point in bottling up your feelings. I’m your boyfriend. Your partner. I love you, and I’m here for you. Just as I hope you would be for me.”

“Of course I would.” Alec says, sounding offended at the mere suggestion that there might be a universe in which he wouldn’t be. He frowns up at Magnus. “I’m always gonna be here for you.”

Magnus smiles through the tight, blissful ache in his chest that those words create. “Then don’t be so surprised that I’m here for you, too. Always.”

Alec exhales. “I just want to be with you. Why is that so goddamn difficult?”

“I don’t know,” Magnus says, although he does. “Alexander, I don’t know whether your father is ever going to change his mind about this, but I do know that the only person who can ever be responsible for your happiness is yourself. You have to surround yourself with people who make you happy. And if someone stops making you happy, then it’s time to take yourself away from them. I know you can’t avoid your father for your entire life, and I’m sure you don’t want to, but it’s up to you to do what makes you happy. Whatever that might be.”

“If that’s some backhanded way of saying you’ll understand if I dump you for a Shadowhunter, then you’re being stupid,” Alec tells him shortly, and Magnus laughs.

“It wasn’t,” he says, but he doesn’t admit that what Alec said is true, too. He would understand. Even if he’d be devastated.

“I’m serious.” Alec pushes himself up so he’s on one elbow, looking down at Magnus below him. “You make me happy. Being with you makes me happy. My father has never made me happy. So screw what he thinks.”
“I love you,” Magnus tells him, reaching up to lay his palm along Alec’s jaw. Alec nuzzles into the touch, and a surge of affection wells in Magnus chest until it threatens to burst.

“I love you too,” Alec says. “Lots.”

Magnus’ lips twitch, and he feels the corners of his eyes crinkle. “Lots and Lots.”

And Magnus kisses him, and it feels like coming home.

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“You can come with me, if you’d like to.”

Alec shakes his head. It’s early - too early, in Alec’s opinion - and they dragged themselves out of bed at the chime of Magnus’ alarm to munch on toast and drink copious amounts of coffee a mere half an hour ago. Alec would have appreciated some more time to cuddle with Magnus.

“I would like to, but I can’t. And I don’t think I should. The Clave are letting the Downworld Council sentence Camille, and if I’m there, it’ll seem like Shadowhunter involvement.”

Magnus purses his lips. “But it’s not. It’s personal involvement. Camille got through my wards, in the loft and at the Institute, and she put things in your head. Or, rather, made a child do those things. You have a right to hear this.”

“Magnus, it’s fine,” Alec tells honestly. “I need to get back to the Institute anyway. I’m sure you’re going to tell me everything anyway.”

“Fine,” Magnus says with a reluctant sigh, but he looks unhappy about relenting. “I’ll call you as soon as we’re done.”

Alec smiles fondly at him. “Alright. I’ll see you later?”

That makes Magnus perk up visibly, shoulders drawing back and eyebrows raising and lips losing their tightness. “You will?”

“Well. If you want me to. I’ve...sort of got used to seeing you every day.”

The look that crosses Magnus face makes Alec’s heart twist, pleased and uncharacteristically shy about it.

“I haven’t,” Magnus confesses, “but I’d like to. I’ll see you later. Although don’t expect me to be up to much entertaining. I’ve got a lot to catch up on after my...absence.”

Alec reaches out to twine his fingers through Magnus’, and squeezes his hand. “As long as I get to spend time with you.”

They bid each other goodbye with a kiss at the door, Magnus stepping through a portal to the Dumort and Alec insisting that he doesn’t need one to the Institute, and Alec is sure it feels like the beginning of something wonderfully permanent.

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The sound of a portal whirring open makes Simon turn to glance over his shoulder from where he’d been focusing intently on his laptop, scrolling through music degrees he could enrol in for the coming year. He’s obviously unsurprised to see Magnus step through gracefully and snap his fingers the moment both boots hit the ground to close the portal behind him like it’s a door, not a churning
mass of immense magical power that made Simon vomit the first half a dozen times he went through one.

Magnus has always slightly terrified Simon. In a good way. But probably only because Magnus seems to like him. Simon thinks he’d rather be boiled alive than get on Magnus’ bad side.

“Hi,” Simon says, waving slightly awkwardly.

Magnus appraises him warmly. “Good morning, Simon. University surfing?”

“Uh– Yeah.” He shuts the lid of his laptop hastily, and scratches at the back of his neck. “I know it’s probably a bad idea, I know it can’t really happen, but—”

“Tell him he’s being stupid,” Raphael’s voice says, floating through the room from seemingly nowhere. It makes Simon jump. “Please. I’ve done it a hundred times and it doesn’t seem to have worked.”

Simon scowls into space. “Calling someone stupid is not conducive to a productive conversation.”

“I love that word. Conducive,” Magnus says, unhelpfully, and moves to sit next to Simon at the old bar. “I might say it a little more gently, but Raphael is right. If you want to go to college, go. Don’t let this stop you.”

Simon rolls his eyes. “Yeah, I’m not sure I can really have a normal college experience when I’ve got to nip out every time the biology kids are doing a dissection.”

Magnus drums his fingers against the top of the bar, appraising Simon with an unblinking intensity that’s very close to being uncomfortable.

“I’ve picked up a few degrees, over the years,” he says, because of course he has, as though anyone could be any more accomplished and perfect, and Raphael snorts from whichever dark, dusty corner he’s lurking in. “I went to college like a mundane. It wasn’t always easy, especially when I got absolutely pissed in London in the seventies and magically stopped a car running into a friend and had to come up with a feasible cover story. It helped that she was as drunk as I was. But I still did it. Many times.”

Simon sighs. “You guys are all way better at this than me. You’re all...”

“Old?” Magnus asks, lips quirking upwards in amusement.

“I was going to say seasoned. I’m...not.”

“Ah, well.” Magnus flicks his fingers dismissively. It’s fascinatingly similar to the little sharp wave of his hand that Raphael does. “You’ve got all the time in the world to pluck up the courage. I’m sure you’ll get there.”

“This conversation is exceptionally dull,” someone says from behind them, “and really not relevant to the case at hand.”

Magnus rolls his eyes at Simon, before spinning on the stool to face Meliorn. He plasters a bright smile across his face, and Simon has to choke down his laughter. Meliorn looks, as always, somewhere between disapproving, bored, and revolted.

“Meliorn, my darling Seelie knight,” Magnus says, with over-exaggerated zeal. He jumps off the barstool and waves a hand to pull up chairs around a meeting table. “It’s lovely to see you.”
Not a single muscle in Meliorn’s face twitches. “I would say the same, but unfortunately, I cannot lie.”

Magnus’ smile doesn’t falter. “Ah, well. At least I know where we stand. Any sign of Luke or Maia?”

“Lucian was called to the Institute this morning. Maia Roberts has been sent to fill in. She’ll arrive shortly.”

“Fabulous,” Magnus says. “I’ll be right back.”

As he passes Simon, the smile drops right off his face, and Simon hears him mutter, “With some vodka.”


***

The sight of Camille Belcourt with her wrists shackled together behind her back, bound by the magic of the Seelies and being held accountable for her actions for the first time in centuries, fills Magnus with a grim, satisfying sense of vindictiveness. He’s spent so many years running from his past with Camille. So many years shutting himself off from people who want to love him because of what she did. So many years blaming himself for things that happened.

Conquering Camille emotionally is liberation at its finest. Perhaps even more so than being granted his freedom by the Clave.

Camille snarls at Maia as she’s led towards a chair seated in front of the table the Downworld Council is assembled at. She looks like a rogue. Her hair is wild, unlike the usual tamed, glossy waterfall of chestnut brown, her make-up is smeared and ruined, and her eyes are darting around like a wild animal who’s been caged.

Unbidden, Magnus feels a pang of pity for her. It’s not sympathy, because she’s evil and heinous and awful, but the sight of such a formidable woman being reduced to this is almost sad.

Well. Camille did always say he had a bleeding heart.

“Just sit down,” Maia says impatiently. Camille bares her teeth, fangs protruding past her lower lip, and Maia rolls her eyes. “Fine. Don’t. Be melodramatic. We don’t care.”

Magnus shoots her a thumbs up as she moves to sit down at the empty spot beside him. From his other side, Simon smiles over at her, and Maia flashes him a grin.

It’s really rather nice, Magnus thinks. These two young Downworlders, both going to college and studying all those fascinating mundane things, and yet still eager to help keep the peace among their own people. The new generation gives him hope.

“Miss Belcourt,” Meliorn says, in a voice that reminds Magnus that the Seelie Knight is decidedly not a part of the new generation. “The Night Children found you guilty of a myriad of crimes, committed over the last century, and suggested a sentence of exile from the continent of America. We’re here to vote on this. And question you on a…different topic.”

Camille’s gaze flashes across to Magnus, and she tilts her eyebrows until her eyes are wide. Vulnerability and fear oozes from her; twenty years ago, Magnus would have fallen for it. He’d have given in.
Not anymore.

“Magnus,” she says, and goes to reach out for him. Her movement is restricted by the shackles, and she whimpers. “Please. Help me.”

Magnus shrugs. “I’ve reviewed the evidence. I’m afraid I don’t think that’s possible, in light of everything you’ve done. Not that I needed to read the report to know.”

Hatred fills her expression for a moment, dark and stormy and destructive, before she forces it away and shakes her head, matted brown hair brushing her pale cheeks.

“I thought I could trust you,” she says, sounding tearful.

“Yes, well.” Magnus exchanges a look with Raphael across the table. “Clearly, that’s a mistake we’ve both made.”

“Bane, get on with it,” Meliorn says. “I’m losing my mind with this inane drivel. I have more important matters to attend to. I’d like to get back to court some time this century.”

Simon looks a little shocked. Maia and Raphael both break out into fits of suspiciously cheerful coughing.

Magnus inclines his head towards Meliorn, a deliberately demure smile on his lips, before fixing his attention back on Camille. He folds his hands together and leans forwards across the table.

“You instructed Iris’ charge to send a Shadowhunter dreams,” he states, because they know this much for certain. And he has his suspicions about who’s really the mastermind behind Alec’s dreams—he just doesn’t understand why.

Camille pretends to consider this. “I might have done. Shadowhunters and children all look the same to be. You’ll have to be more specific.”

“The eldest Lightwood child,” Magnus says. “And Madzie. The little girl Valentine captured to use. I thought he was using her for those dreams, but apparently that wasn’t anything to do with Valentine. He just wanted her to burn things down.”

“Ah, yes, the girl.” A smile spreads across Camille’s lips, wide and white and wolfish. “She was very useful. And remarkably easy to persuade.”

Beneath the table, Magnus’ fingers curl into a fist; he forces himself not to let Camille see his fury at her words. Anyone who has the audacity to take pleasure in manipulating a child deserves to rot in hell, as far as he’s concerned.

“And?” Magnus asks coolly. “Why? Who told you to?”

Her smile doesn’t drop. “Come now, Magnus. I think you know the answer to that.”

“Who?”

“You tell me, darling.”

Magnus’ hand slams down on the table, making it rattle against the floor. His thighs smash against the edge of it as he shoots up out of his seat, the glamour dropping away from his eyes as he snarls, “I said, who?”

There’s a moment of pin-drop silence, in which Magnus wonders whether he just made everything
worse. Camille is watching him with a slack jaw and wide eyes, clearly taken aback by the ferocity in his voice.

“Your father,” she says, at last. “Asmodeus. Asmodeus offered me protection, if I found a way to send the Shadowhunter his dreams.”

Asmodeus. Of course.

“Why did he need Madzie? Why not do whatever he damn well pleased?”

“Because he couldn’t get through the wards at your loft without leaving behind a trace, and the Institute would detect Greater Demon activity. He needed a warlock to do it. And one that nobody would mistrust.”

“And why did you go to Asmodeus?”

Camille laughs. “Well, I was hardly going to trust Shadowhunters to protect me, now was I? Even as a double agent, I couldn’t trust either of them. I spread myself wide.”

Magnus isn’t surprised. But—

“But why? Why does my father give the slightest crap about Alexander?”

“Ooh, Alexander,” Camille says mockingly. She lets out a tinkling laugh. Magnus grinds his teeth together and exercises intense self-control to stop himself slamming her against a wall. “I don’t know. You’ll have to ask him yourself. But I suspect it was for the entertainment. After all, your father feeds on suffering. And there’s been really rather a lot of that in your little dalliance with that pretty Nephilim, hasn’t there?”

Magnus’ nostrils flare, but he inhales deeply and turns to look at Raphael. “I’m done. I’ve heard enough. Thank you.”

“You have to vote, Bane,” Meliorn drawls, sounding immensely bored. “Sit down.”

“Is there a choice?” Magnus asks. “Set her free or exile her? I think you know my vote.”

“No,” Raphael says. “No, none of the vampires wanted to free her. The choice is death, exile, or hand her over to the Clave.”

Magnus looks at Camille warily as he says, “What are the Clave going to do with her?”

“That depends,” Maia says.

“On?”


Magnus turns to frown at Raphael. “What?”

“Camille is, technically, still part of my clan. We fall under the jurisdiction of the New York Conclave. They have the power to sentence her. Of course, it could be overturned in Idris, but there’s no reason it would be. The Clave don’t care what happens to Camille, as long as she stops murdering mundanes and making them look bad.”

Camille has her chin tipped up, and she’s grinning broadly, the light of sadistic victory in her eyes. She’s watching him, and she thinks she’s won. Because Magnus doesn’t trust Shadowhunters, or the
Clave, and she knows he’d rather exile his worst enemy than turn them over to the Clave. Camille knows him. Camille knows his ideologies. His weaknesses. His lines.

But, of course, she doesn’t. Not anymore. She knew the bitter, broken part of him that had tried desperately to love her more than a century ago. She doesn’t know the man he is his today.

So Magnus doesn’t look away from her as he says, clearly, “If we exile her, we risk a repeat of what happened here. She gets bargaining power. She has a way to negotiate and make contacts and friends. And the death sentence is abhorrent. I vote to turn her over to the Clave.”

And he watches, with grim satisfaction, as the gleeful colour drains from Camille’s face, quickly turning to shock—and perhaps a hint of fear.

“I agree,” Raphael says smoothly. “Meliorn?”

“We do not fraternise with the Nephilim. Exile.”

“Maia?”


“Well then, that seems settled,” Raphael says. “My apologies, Meliorn.”

Meliorn sniffs. “We don’t particularly care for the fate of a single vampire. I’ll pick my battles with this council.”

“I think that’s probably wise,” Maia agrees, mischief sparkling in her eyes. “Now, can I take her somewhere unpleasant?”

“Please do.” Raphael stands. “I’m going back to sleep, now. Uncivilised time for a meeting.”

“You sound like Ragnor,” Magnus says fondly, smiling over at him.

Raphael scowls. “Idiota.”

“Grumpy,” Simon says, rolling his eyes affectionately. “Nobody wants to be around your sleep-deprived ass, Santiago. Go away.”

Magnus smiles at the two of them as Simon ushers Raphael off, Raphael muttering under his breath and Simon chatting cheerfully. His heart is racing, thudding hard against his chest, unable to quite believe what he voted to do.

But he trusts the leadership at the Institute. He trusts Alec. And he trusts that Alec will use the intimate knowledge he has of Camille to make a better decision, rather than one fuelled by a personal vendetta.

“That was an interesting decision, Bane.”

Magnus turns to Meliorn and offers him a small smile, allowing himself to let go just a touch now that Camille has left.

“I like to surprise people.”

Meliorn doesn’t smile. “Alec Lightwood has really changed your mind, hasn’t he?”

Magnus shrugs. “Yes. He has. And I’ve changed his. But it wasn’t just Alec. It was Isabelle and Jace
and Clary, too. This new generation...they’re different. They give me hope.”

“I thought a year ago as you do now,” Meliorn says, a wistful expression flitting across his face. “Isabelle was unlike any Nephilim I’d ever known. Not that I’ve deigned to know many, I’ll confess. She seemed so different. She made me believe in a new world. But, when push came to shove, she still obeyed the Clave. She put her orders first. She captured me, despite knowing it was unjust.”

“But she also freed you,” Magnus feels compelled to point out. “With my help. You’re welcome, by the way.”

Meliorn’s mouth twists unhappily. “I’m grateful. But I have to warn you, Bane. Don’t be naïve.”

“We passed that point a long time ago,” Magnus tells him, gently. “I’m done second-guessing Alec. I’ve had enough of worrying that he might turn round and condemn me. I know he won’t. Not after everything we’ve been through.”

“I hope you’re right,” Meliorn says, “for your sake. You’re a good man, Magnus.”

Magnus blinks in surprise at the oddly touching words. “Thank you.”

“I wish you and your lover well,” he says, and, inclining his head, he takes his leave, sweeping out of the door without a backward glance.

Alone, Magnus pulls out his phone. A photo Chairman Meow cuddled on Catarina’s chest makes him smile, but when he unlocks it, it’s Alexander smiling broadly, hair ruffled and posture relaxed, that makes the tightness around Magnus’ chest loosen.

[From: Magnus Bane, 10:50]
I have things to tell you, although you might find out some of it before I see you. Do you have a free hour today?

[From: Alexander <3, 10:50]
Not at the same times as you do. But I can give you twenty minutes if you come by the Institute. Any time.

Magnus hesitates in the face of that invitation.

[From: Magnus Bane, 10:52]
Is that a good idea? Me in the Institute?

Alec’s response makes a smile twitch at Magnus’ lips.

[From: Alexander <3, 10:53]
I’m in charge. If anybody has a problem with my boyfriend visiting me, they can pack their bags and leave.

[From: Magnus Bane, 10:53]
I’ll see you at 1, then. I love you x

[From: Alexander <3, 10:53]
I love you too x

There’s a moment of silence, in which Magnus closes his messaging app and inhales, before another notification flashes up on the screen.

[From: Alexander <3, 10:56]

I just got the report. I’ve got this. Don’t worry.

And Magnus smiles, any remaining tension melting away at those words.

[From: Magnus Bane, 10:57]

I know. I never doubted you

Chapter End Notes

Stay tuned for more on Camille, Asmodeus, and malec being utter saps :)

Let me know what you thought of this one! All and any creative ideas about how Robert should suffer are encouraged... ;) the more out-there the better!

If you like, you can Come talk to me on Tumblr or on Twitter because apparently we have to live there until someone grows a pair and saves our damn show. #fwwfic to yell at me!

All the love,
Lu <3
Walking up to the Institute in broad daylight in the twenty-first century really doesn’t feel natural to Magnus. Self-conscious isn’t something he’s been since he was fifty, but that’s exactly the sensation prickling at his skin as he strolls up the path towards the tall, glamoured double doors with a forced air of casualness.

It’s hot, summer sun beating down on his back, and he’d banished his jacket back home halfway through the morning after sweating all the way through a meeting with the High Warlock of Tokyo. He’s rather relieved to be in short sleeves now.

He bypasses the front doors and veers down the side of the building, towards the small door tucked away behind strings of trailing plants. He hasn’t been through it for at least twenty years, but he always preferred seeking permission to enter quietly, rather than making a great scene at the front door.

He raps sharply on the door, which has been propped open by a broken seraph blade - of course - and peers round, wondering whether he’d be shot if he were to merely walk in without waiting for some Nephilim child to verbalise their consent.

“Hey!”

An angry, shocked shout reaches Magnus’ ears, and he sighs. Probably best to stay put, then.

The man who had been standing by a computer dashes over to the door, crashing over monitors and darting around tables like he’s starring in a James Bond movie. He stops suddenly in front of Magnus, blocking the door. Not that Magnus was trying to get through it.

“What are you doing here, warlock?” the Nephilim demands. His hand is resting on his seraph blade, as though he thinks the wrong sort of breath might be grounds for prompt and efficient murder by brutal stabbing.
Now that Magnus looks at him, the Shadowhunter is younger than he first appeared. He’s certainly younger than Alec—younger than Clary, too. Fifteen? Sixteen? He’s not old enough to have stubble on his jawline or fine lines on his face or bulky muscle.

“I’m here to see Alec,” Magnus tells him calmly, while another Shadowhunter notices what’s going on and begins heading towards them with brisk urgency.

“You’re not permitted to be here,” the second Shadowhunter says—a woman in her thirties with light brown hair. “Leave.”

Magnus arches an eyebrow at her. “I assure you, I am. As granted by the Head of the Institute.”

Her lip curls. “I’m sure. But as Alec is in a meeting, I’m afraid I’ll have to make the call for him.”

“Are any of the other Lightwoods here?” Magnus asks, thinking that, if only he could catch the attention of Isabelle or Jace - or, Lilith, even Clary or Raj - he’d probably be alright.

“No. They’re out on patrol. Maryse is in the meeting. I’m going to ask you once more to leave, warlock, or we’ll have to remove you.”

Magnus’ nostrils flare at that, and he lets magic crackle at his fingertips. “I would very much like to see you try,” he says, glamour dropping to let his cat eyes flash.

There’s a faint zing, and he glances to the left to see that the boy has taken out his seraph blade, eyes wide and terrified. It reminds Magnus painfully of the way Max had looked at him when he’d realised that a warlock had healed him, with a wild sort of fear.

“Woah!” A third Shadowhunter appears at the woman’s shoulder, his eyes wide and his hands outstretched. “Mo, put the weapon away.”

The boy looks exceptionally reluctant, but he does as he’s told.

“What on earth is going on here?”

“I’m here to see Alec,” Magnus says again, resigning himself to the fact that this was a terrible, terrible idea. He’s not going to be sentenced to death for existing anymore, but he’s still a warlock, and it’s very clear that they all know exactly which warlock he is—and they don’t trust him.

“Right.” The man frowns. “Okay. He’s in a meeting. Does he know you’re coming?”

“Yes. But I’m ten minutes early.”

“Oh.” His expression clears. “Alright, well, follow me—”

“No!” The woman looks absolutely horrified, and she throws out an arm to block Magnus’ way. “No, Underhill, this is preposterous! I absolutely cannot stand here while you let Magnus fucking Bane into the Institute! He’s probably here to burn it down!”

Magnus rolls his eyes. “I’m really not.”

He’s ignored - because of course he is - but, to his surprise, Underhill’s faces twists with disbelief, and he shakes his head at his colleague.

“No, Leanne he’s here to see Alec.”

“Oh, of course he is,” Leanne sneers. “What for, exactly?”
If possible, Underhill’s incredulity becomes more pronounced, and he says, voice heavy with sarcasm, “I don’t know, maybe to say hello to his boyfriend?”

Magnus’ eyebrows shoot up. Well. Perhaps there are other Shadowhunters on their side.

Leanne looks like she’s about to be sick. “But—”

“Dear Raziel, his boyfriend is not a dirty phrase.”

“I don’t care. I don’t think the warlock should be here.”

Underhill seems to have lost his patience. “Alright, well as I’m head of security, and I think he has every right to be here, that’s irrelevant.”

“You’re biased,” Leanne snaps.

“What, because I’m gay?” Underhill hisses the word venomously, quietly, and glances around as though concerned that someone else might have overheard.

As a general rule, Magnus has no love for Shadowhunters, but the sight is slightly heartbreaking. It elicits a hint of sympathy from Magnus, as he remembers how terrified Alec had been to admit that, even to Magnus, that night in Magnus’ bedroom.

“I really wish I’d never told you that,” Underhill is muttering. “You’ve reminded me why I keep it a secret.”

Something makes Magnus look past the arguing Shadowhunters and across the room spread out behind them. A tall figure walks through an open door, and relief spreads through Magnus when he sees Alec talking to Luke. Alec’s eyes dart up, and he smiles broadly when he spots Magnus; his expression darkens when he takes in the rest of the scene.

“What the hell is going on here?” Alec barks, glaring down at the three Shadowhunters.

“Magnus wanted to come and see you. Leanne wasn’t so sure he should be allowed.”

He doesn’t mention the boy, Magnus notes.

Alec shakes his head. “Magnus is welcome in this Institute whenever he damn well pleases. If you have a problem with that, I’ve heard that the weather on Wrangle Island is particularly shit at this time of year.”

Underhill’s lips twitch. Leanne goes pale. Alec smiles coldly at her, claps Underhill on the shoulder in silent thanks, and turns a much warmer expression on Magnus.

“My office?” he asks.

“Lead the way,” Magnus says, although he knows exactly where it is, having first been in this Institute a couple of centuries before Alec was born.

Alec waves Magnus in with a tight smile, and shuts the door firmly behind them. He exhales, shoulders slumping the moment they’re alone, and takes a moment, one hand resting against the door, turned away from Magnus.

“I’m sorry,” Alec says, but he doesn’t turn around. “I should have realised that would happen.”

Magnus smiles faintly. He remembers what it’s like to be young and idealistic and to sometimes
forget the reality of the world. When they first met, Alec seemed precisely the opposite of that—
stoic, cold, emotions kept tightly under wraps, and far, far too aware of the harsh realities of the
world, and the people that inhabit it.

A part of Magnus adores this determination in Alec that’s finally being channelled into something
more than just killing demons and upholding the status quo. Another, smaller part of him - a part
that’s riddled with insecurity and paranoia - can’t help fearing that, somehow, he’s pulled cotton
wool over Alec’s eyes.

“It’s alright,” Magnus says, although it isn’t. But they both know that. There’s nothing Alec can do
to change what happened. Beyond meeting Magnus at the door and escorting him, they couldn’t
have avoided that interaction.

“It’s not.” Alec lets his forehead fall against the wood of the door, and Magnus wishes he’d let it fall
against Magnus’ shoulder, instead. “It’s not.”

“The blonde guy was on our side,” Magnus feels compelled to point out.

“What? Oh, yeah, Underhill. It’s funny, actually, he came to thank me the other day, for...coming
out. Apparently he’s had a boyfriend for years, or husband, I don’t know, but never really told
anyone.”

Magnus’ brow furrows. “Another Shadowhunter?”

“I don’t think so. He didn’t say, but reading between the lines, I think a mundane.”

“Oh.” Magnus isn’t stupid. He knows the position that puts Alec in with the Clave. “What are you
going to do?”

“Nothing. I don’t know that he’s a mundane.”

“That’s good of you,” Magnus says, but, really, it’s basic decency. It’s just so rare to find in a
Shadowhunter. Especially one in Alec’s position.

At last, Alec draws away from the door. He clears his throat and offers Magnus another smile that
doesn’t quite reach his eyes.

“Anyway. You wanted to talk to me. About business.”

“Yes. Well.” Magnus strolls towards Alec’s desk and, after a brief survey of everything strewn
across it, sits down in Alec’s chair. “I suppose you know all about it, now.”

“Camille.”

“Yes.” Magnus presses his fingertips together and tucks his hands beneath his chin, peering up at
Alec. “And the fact that her fate lays in your hands.”

Alec chews on the inside of his cheek. “Magnus, I— If the Council voted to hand responsibility over
to me, I have to do it. I can’t...allow myself to be prejudiced by my relationship with you. I can talk
to you as a Downworld leader about this, but not as my boyfriend.”

meant what I said. I trust you. I don’t want to get involved. That’s why I voted to hand her to the
Clave. But...we have a lot of history.”
Alec looks deeply hesitant. “Magnus...”

“Let me finish. We have a lot of history, and while I certainly don’t harbour any lingering feelings for her, I also feel like I’ve finally pulled back all the power I let her have for so long. I don’t feel like she can push my buttons and manipulate me anymore. So I don’t want to know.”

“You... What?” A frown creased Alec’s face. “I don’t understand.”

“I don’t want to know what you decide to do with her. Not now, at least. I’m sure I’ll hear, eventually, and if I don’t, I’m sure I’ll want to know at some point, but right now I want to wash my hands of her.”

“By denying that anything’s happening?”

Magnus lets out a little laugh at Alec’s frank tone. “No. By building back my trust in my own judgement by focusing on the fact that I put her fate into the hands of people who I know will deliver justice, rather than trying to sort through my own biases and history and try to deliver justice myself.”

This time, it’s understanding that floods Alec’s eyes. The corners of his mouth soften, and his expression turns warm, and generous, and something else, something pleased, that Magnus doesn’t quite know how to name.

In three long strides, Alec crosses the room and comes to stand in front of Magnus. Magnus spreads his knees a little, and Alec steps forward to stand between his legs. He brushes a thumb against Magnus’ cheek.

“I don’t know whether this is weird,” Alec says, “but I’m proud of you. For everything you’ve done in the last few days. With Valentine, and with Asmodeus, and the Clave, and my father, and now Camille... That’s a lot for a person to take.”

Oh. That’s what it is, flitting across Alec’s face. Pride. Pride in Magnus.

Nobody’s really worn that look since Ragnor died. Nobody but Catarina, upon occasion.

Magnus catches Alec’s hand in his own, cheeks feeling a little warm, and tangles their fingers together. “We’ve both been through a lot. I barely recognise you as the man I first met. And yet, somehow, you’re so very much the same. I’m proud of you, too. I’m proud to be with you.”

Alec smiles bashfully. “I want you to be,” he confesses, like it’s a guilty secret, like the words are too shameful to be spoken aloud.

It breaks Magnus’ heart. Alec is so used to things being expected of him, he’s unfamiliar with someone being proud of him for making good choices and for being a good man. That kind of affection is foreign to him.

Magnus supposes they both have their demons.

“I am,” Magnus whispers, bringing Alec’s hand up to kiss his knuckles. “I really am. But I want to make sure you understand something.”

“Yeah?”

The word comes out as little more than a breath, and with Alec looking at him like that, like his entire world is right in front of him, it’s difficult to concentrate on what he needs to say.
“You don’t owe anyone anything,” Magnus says. “Not your parents, not the Clave, not the Downworld, and certainly not me.”

“What?” Alec’s eyes roam across his face in confusion. “What are you talking about?”

“People are pulling you in a hundred different directions. People who want to put you back in their nice heterosexual box. People who want you to uphold the status quo. People who want you to go back to being the perfect little soldier. People who want you to be a revolutionary. Gay Shadowhunters and wronged Downworlders who want you to change the world. You don’t owe any of them anything.”

“I know.”

“Please, Alexander, only ever do what you think is right. Don’t let other people sway you into things you feel obligated to do. And don’t think that you have to make some point just because you’re dating me.”

Alec looks at him for a long, hard moment. Then he nods. “I understand what you’re saying. I won’t. Although sometimes I feel a little bit lost.”

“That’s okay,” Magnus assures him. “There’s nothing wrong with asking for help, my darling. And whatever you want to do, I’m here to support you.”

A smile flits across Alec’s face, and he leans in to kiss Magnus. It’s soft, slow, simple, but they linger for a moment, breathing each other in; when they pull back, they don’t go far. Magnus kisses Alec’s nose, and Alec’s entire face seems to crinkle at the sensation. Magnus laughs, and can’t resist doing it again, and then he’s pressing kisses to every inch of Alec’s face, craning up to reach from where he’s sitting down, and Alec is laughing, shoving at him half-heartedly with one hand yet pulling him closer with the other, and—

There’s a knock.

Alec sighs. He pulls back further, but he doesn’t take his hands away, one resting on Magnus’ shoulder and the other clasped in Magnus’. The gesture warms Magnus’ heart. Despite not knowing who’s on the other side of the door, Alec is shameless in his display of affection.

“Yeah?” he says.

“Hey.” Jace sticks his head around the door, and has the grace to look apologetic when he sees Magnus. Then he takes in the scene, and he grins a little. “I hope you know that you’re becoming a real damn exception where my brother is concerned.”

Magnus raises his eyebrows as Alec’s cheeks flush pink. “Oh?”

“Mmhm.” Jace smirks at Alec. Alec scowls back. “You’re allowed to disrupt his schedule, you’re allowed to sit in his chair, you’re allowed to call him Alexander, you’re allowed to make him smile in public... Anyone else did that, they’d be on the receiving end of I-hate-people-and-I-am-grumpy Alec.”

“I hate you,” Alec says emphatically, and Magnus laughs.

Jace grins. “Love you too, man. Look, I’m happy you’re finally sneaking kisses at work, but you’re needed. Demon briefing.”

“I’ve got a meeting,” Alec protests, and, when he sees the look on Jace’s face, adds, “No, not with
Magnus. With Lydia. She’s meant to be transferring to Paris next week. We’re meeting about it in ten minutes.”

“It’s gonna have to wait. All hands on deck. Big whirling mass of dark energy spewing demons in the middle of an alley.”

Magnus raises his eyebrows. “Do you know what it is?”

“Nope,” Jace says, popping the p audaciously. “Makes it more fun.”

Alec rolls his eyes and lets out a long-suffering sigh. Magnus pats his thigh consolingly, between the straps of his thigh holster, and sees Jace’s eyes track the movement.

“Want me to take a look?” Magnus asks Alec. “See if I can shed some light?”

“That’d be great. We’ll clean up the demons, then I’ll give you a call when it’s a bit more under control.”

“Alright.” Magnus slides the hand on Alec’s thigh up to his chest as he stands, and presses a swift kiss to his lips. “Good luck. I’ll see you later.”

“Yeah. Bye,” Alec says, blinking, looking a little dazed. It makes Magnus smile, that Alec can get flustered over something like a goodbye kiss.

“Be careful, darling. I love you.”

“I love you too,” Alec says.

Magnus drops another kiss on his cheek, and then files past him. Jace is watching him with a slightly mystified expression.

“Wait, Magnus.” Jace catches his arm. Magnus quirks at eyebrow at him and pulls his arm away pointedly. There are few people who are allowed to touch him like that. Jace isn’t one of them. Yet.

“Did Alec tell you?”

Magnus frowns and looks at Alec over his shoulder. Alec shrugs.

“Tell me what?”

“About Robert’s...visit.”

“Ah.” Magnus’ lips turn down. “Yes, he did. Why?”

“No, that’s cool,” Jace says. “Just making sure. Alec bottles things up—”

“No,” Magnus says sarcastically, dropping his boyfriend a wink. Alec glares at him.

“—and he was pretty torn up about it, so I wanted to make sure.”

It’s perhaps a little bit invasive, but it’s also nice. Caring. And it’s reassuring to know that Alec has other people looking out for him in the same ways Magnus tries to.

“Well, now we’ve cleared that up, I’m heading off. If I shout, it’s because Leanne still has her stele up her ass.”

Jace snickers. Alec’s lips twitch, but he sounds serious when he says, “Wrangle Island. I meant it.”
It’s been too long since Isabelle’s had a hard, decent fight with demons.

The thrill of slashing her whip through hoards and hoards of demons catapulting into the alleyway through whatever inter-dimensional wormhole some sadist has whipped up is comparable to nothing else. She can ignore every in the world that’s bothering her—

—her mother at the Institute, her mother apologising to her, Robert calling Alec such heinous things, Max going back to Idris with Robert, Lydia transferring, Lydia, Lydia, Lydia—

—and she can focus. Her mind centres on the battle, on hitting the mark on each moronic demon that screams at her, on ichor splashing across the floor and spraying across her clothes and demons hissing and howling as they explode in flashes of fire.

Alec and Jace are there, Alec hovering in the air with his wings spread wide as he shoots from above, Jace close to the ground, stabbing at demons with his seraph blade and manoeuvring through the air around Alec, the two of them in synch like only parabatai can be. Jace is shouting at Alec to turn, and Alec is shoving an arrow through the neck of a demon about to sever Jace’s jugular with his hands, bow forgotten.

They’re not alone. Isabelle can feel the whoosh of Clary’s wingbeats behind her, the familiar zing of runes being scorched into the palm of Clary’s hand a reassuring soundtrack to the battle.

Raj is across the alleyway, tossing throwing stars with deadly accuracy from his vantage point atop a building, three Shadowhunters below him on the ground clearing up what remains. One has a bleeding wing tucked close into her back, and her partner is close by, defending her weakened side.

“Iz!”

Someone shoves her backwards, and Isabelle is tumbling head over heels through the air, before she’s yanked to a halt and rights herself with a quick flap of her wings. Breathless, whip slack in her grasp, she turns over her shoulder to see Clary frowning at her.

“C’mon, Izzy, focus!” Clary’s hair has escaped the braids in her hair, and it frames her face in fiery strands. “You nearly got killed!”

“Sorry. I must have been distracted.”

Clary’s frown deepens, but they’re in the middle of a battle. They don’t have time for a heart-to-heart.

Along the alleyway, Jace and Alec have fought their way closer to the portal. Alec flies up higher, peering down at it from above, and rotates backwards hastily when a Ravener demon leaps into his face.

There’s a rush of wind from the end of the alleyway, and Isabelle looks away from the demon she’s decapitating for just long enough to see a portal swirl into life. Magnus steps through, casual and unruffled, and surveys the scene with magic brimming at his fingertips. In the air, Alec’s eyes soften, but his mouth tightens.

“I wasn’t expecting battle, darling.”

Alec pulls back the string of his bow to shoot the demon Jace is struggling with, and says, “Occupational hazard. Can you close it?”
Magnus’ sleeves are already rolled up his forearms due to the warmth of the day, but he moves to push them higher and sighs. “I do hope you know how very expensive I am, Mr Lightwood.”

Alec grins. “Oh I do, Mr Bane.”

“Stop flirting!” Jace shouts. “Magnus, close the damn thing!”

Magnus rolls his eyes. “No manners, you Herondales.”

Demon spit covering her arm hauls Isabelle’s attention back to the battle. She blocks out the noise of the three men bickering, and flicks her arm out to slash her whip through another demon before it can take a chunk out of her wing.

The last time she fought demons like this was with Lydia at her back. Lydia, who’s leaving for Paris in less than two weeks, who she might never see again, who she—

White-hot pain ricochets through her torso, and she lets out a strangled half-scream of pain that dies in her throat. Two hands grab under her armpits, holding her aloft in the air despite the weakening of her own wingbeats. Dizzy, she looks down at herself, and pulls aside her jacket with a trembling hand. Three thick claws are embedded in her stomach. Red is quickly staining her top. The sight makes her feel slightly sick—other people’s blood doesn’t bother her in the slightest, but she’s never been a fan of too much of her own.

“Isabelle!” she hears Alec holler. There’s a clatter, and a blast of blue that colours the alleyway like the sea for a moment, and then someone is landing on the floor beside her with a thud, and—

When did she get on the floor?

“She needs help,” Clary says, from Isabelle’s left. “I don’t know what demon those things are from—”

“They’re poisonous, so an iratze won’t help much,” Alec says with certainty. He’s on her other side, on his knees, blood soaking into his pants. Her blood. Shit. “Izzy, you’re gonna be okay, just hang on. Magnus—”

“I can’t,” Magnus says, appearing at Alec’s shoulder. “I can stem the bleeding, but I can’t fix her. I don’t have enough energy left. That portal was open from a realm in hell. Not easy to close.”

“Use me,” Alec says, holding out his hand. “Jace is calling for the Silent Brothers, just stabilise her until we can take her back—”

Isabelle’s eyelids feel suddenly heavy. She stays awake long enough to see Magnus’ fingers fold around Alec’s, and then the world goes black.

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When she wakes, it’s to pain radiating through her torso and clouding her head, and her eldest brother’s lanky form slumped in a chair that’s significantly too small for his frame.

She blinks several times. The too-white walls of the infirmary stare back at her, and she groans faintly, lifting a hand to her forehead. Fuck. Everything hurts. Even her fingers hurt. She supposes that’s what she gets for losing focus and ending up with poisonous demon claws in her spleen.

“Hey, Iz,” Jace says, from where he’s sitting at the foot of her bed. “How are you feeling?”
“Like shit,” she says, struggling into a more upright position.

Jace gets up to give her a hand. He holds her with the same gentleness she remembers from the time she’d tumbled from the rafters of the training room with her wings runed away, and he’d found her in there alone. He’d barely been with them for a month, and Isabelle remembers it distinctly as the moment she realised that Jace did care, rather a lot—he just didn’t know how to express it, because he’d never been allowed to before.

“What’s the verdict?” she asks.

“You’ll be fine. Magnus stopped you losing too much blood, and Brother Zachariah patched you up. He’ll be back tomorrow to check on you.”

Isabelle frowns over at Alec, asleep in the chair. “How long was I out?”

“A few hours. Magnus is passed out upstairs in Alec’s room.”

She raises her eyebrows. “And Alec is here?”

Jace grins. “He was a little bit conflicted, but you did nearly die. Magnus told him to stop being stupid and stay with you. Alec went up to check on him about an hour ago.”

“They’re both besotted,” Isabelle says, a little scornfully, but she’s beyond pleased that Alec has found someone like Magnus.

Jace nods over to the other side of Isabelle’s bed, where Lydia is curled up in a chair with an intricate braid framing her face. “She was pretty worried about you, too. Rushed in practically as soon as we brought you in and refused to leave. Clary and Mom are waiting outside.”

Of course, Alec chooses that moment to wake. He blinks, and then his eyes widen as he realises that Isabelle is conscious.

“Izzy!” He leans forwards in his chair. “Raziel, are you okay?”

“Fine,” Isabelle assures him. “Sore, but fine.”

*Sore* is an understatement, and she’s sure Alec knows that. Beyond a purse of his lips, however, Alec chooses not to comment.

“You’re gonna have a wicked scar,” he says instead. “The poison stopped them healing it completely, unfortunately.”

Isabelle shrugged. “S’okay. I’ll be more badass than you two, now.”

Alec smiles at her, that proud, lopsided smile that’s reserved for family and is so quintessentially her big brother.

“You were already more badass than us,” he says.

A quip is ready on the tip of her tongue, but movement catches her eye. She glances over to see Lydia sitting forward in her chair, watching Isabelle with something conflicted flickering across her face.

Jace clears his throat. “I’m going to find Clary. She’ll want to know that you’re up.”

“Yeah.” Alec is rising, Jace already halfway across the infirmary. “Yeah, I should check in on
Magnus. Call if you need anything, okay?"

Isabelle rolls her eyes at them. “You’re not subtle. Either of you. Just leave, dear Raziel.”

They’re both snickering as they leave, pulling the door shut behind them. Isabelle falls back against the pillows with a sigh, and lets her eyes close. Her body feels heavy with the exhaustion that comes from fighting poison, but there’s something else weighing on her mind.

“Hey,” Lydia says, quietly.

Isabelle smiles faintly as fingers skim across hers. “Hey.”

“I was worried about you. When they came back, Alec and Jace were really freaked out, and Clary was crying, and there was so much blood—”

She opens her eyes. Lydia is watching her intently, brow furrowed.

“It was probably worse than it looked. I’ll be fine.”

“I know. It’s just— It made me think.”

There it is.

“About?”

“About you. About...us. Whatever this is.”

Isabelle exhales harshly through her nose, and turns to look at Lydia with a piercing stare. She likes Lydia, so damn much, but sometimes she really, really hates her.

“And what is this, Lydia?” she demands, more harshly than she’d intended to. “What is this to you?”

Lydia hesitates. “I— I don’t know. I really, really like you, Isabelle.”

“I know.” Isabelle forces herself to soften her voice. “And I feel the same way. It’s just...”

“Paris.”

“Yeah, Paris. And then wherever it is you’re sent next, and after that, and after that. You won’t be able to come back here. And if you do, it won’t be for long. You’ll move again.”

Lydia sighs. “I might stop moving so much if I get promoted.”

“When you get promoted, you’ll spend all your time in Idris. I can’t spend my life there. I hate Idris.” She smiles sadly. “And there’s the next problem. Your career.”

Lydia frowns at her, but Isabelle catches the guilt in her eyes, and knows it’s a facade. Not that she wants Lydia to feel guilty about it, because by the Angel, she understands.

“Lydia, we both know that dating a woman will harm your career.”

“IT hasn’t harmed Alec’s.”

“Not yet,” Isabelle agrees, “but he doesn’t work for the power-houses in Idris.”

“You know, don’t you?”
Isabelle takes her hand and squeezes gently. “That you don’t want to come out?”

“That I’ll probably never want to come out.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I know. And I’m not saying that we should break things off and call it quits, because I like you too much, but...”

“But we have to be realistic.”

“Yes.”

Lydia hangs her head, shoulders curling in, and presses her free hand to her forehead. “Fuck the Clave.”

That makes Isabelle laugh. “Fuck the Clave.”

“I know we’re not the first people to be in this position, but... By the Angel, it’s shit.”

Affectionately, Isabelle tangles her fingers through Lydia’s braid, fiddling with the fine strands of blonde and wondering at the thought of being able to touch her like this in public. When she’d dated Maia, for those few weeks, it had been so absolutely shameless in its burning passion. They’d made out without a care in the world, touched each other in public without so much as a worried glance. She’d kissed Maia outside of the Institute and she hadn’t cared, because she’d dated Downworlders already, and as far as her parents were concerned, dating girls was just as bad, but no worse. She’d already committed the ultimate sin.

Kissing Lydia behind closed doors, taking the subway to mundane places miles away—it’s not the same. It’s harder. She’s happy for Helen and Aline, telling their friends and family even if they’re still acting with discretion around the wider population of Shadowhunters, but she also envies them. Because she knows, deep down, that Lydia won’t ever want to do that.

And that’s okay. For now, that’s okay. But if Lydia is halfway across the world at all times anyway, Isabelle can’t help but worry that one day it won’t be.

“We’ll take it one day at a time,” Isabelle says, and Lydia smiles faintly at her.

“One day at a time.”

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Alec raps lightly on his own bedroom door before he grips the handle to open it, not wanting to startle Magnus by appearing.

“It’s me,” he says, as he looks round—and then promptly shuts up, because Magnus is asleep.

The door closes with a faint click behind him, and he leans back against it. He spends a moment taking in the sight of Magnus sprawled out on his bed. His limbs are splayed inelegantly, belt dropped on a chair but shoes still on, face half-pressed into Alec’s pillow. He looks peaceful. But also deeply out of place. Alec’s room is so bare, so impersonal, because—

Well. Because so many of this things have migrated to Magnus’ loft, he realises. His closet is half as full as it was two months ago. He’s missing half a dozen books. His spare phone charger is here, rather than his primary one. The Kindle Jace bought him for Christmas three years ago is sitting on Magnus’ coffee table. Even his favourite leather jacket, bought by Isabelle and usually residing on the back of his chair when he’s not wearing it, is at Magnus’.
Alec shakes the thoughts out of his head. It’s not the time to read into whether or not he’s moving himself into Magnus’ loft without permission. He’s certain that Magnus would have said something if Alec were invading, not continued to offer him more closet space. Certainly not cleared a space in his bathroom cupboard for Alec’s razor.

He bends down at the foot of the bed to ease Magnus’ shoes off. His toes curl slightly, and a soft noise makes its way up his throat, and Alec can’t help but smile when Magnus frowns, eyes still closed.

“Alexander?”

“Sorry,” Alec says. “I was trying to be helpful.”

“Mm. Don’t you have—” he flicks his fingers “—Shadowhunting to do?”

“It’s half past eleven,” Alec points out. “At night.”

“No rest for the wicked.”

“There is for this wicked. Isabelle woke up. She should be okay. Lydia’s with her.”

Magnus huffs out a laugh as he rolls onto his back to peer up at Alec with slitted golden eyes. “I’m sure she’ll be very okay, then.”

“Unnecessary,” Alec says, wrinkling his nose. “I really didn’t need to think about that.”

“You could shut up and come here, and I’ll give you something else to think about,” Magnus suggests, entirely too innocently.

“Oh yeah?” Alec arches an eyebrow, pressing one knee into the mattress and leaning forwards. “And what kind of something would that be?”

“This kind.”

And Magnus curls his fingers into the front of Alec’s shirt to pull him down into a kiss. Alec goes willingly, bracing himself over Magnus on his forearms, and grins when he’s rolled over and finds himself flat on his back.

“I don’t think I’m distracted yet,” he murmurs, although he knows the way his eyes keep dropping to Magnus’ impossibly tempting lips makes the lie transparent. “Still thinking about that disgusting image you put in my head, like a horrible person.”

Magnus gasps in mock offence. “Take that back!”

Alec wants to say _make me_, wants to smirk and flirt and be as coy and calculating as Magnus always manages to be. But he’s not like that. Not when Magnus is balanced over him, necklaces dangling on Alec’s chest and knees bracketing his hips and ringed fingers dipping into the grooves of his abs. Not now, when having Magnus under him like this still feels more like a dream than a reality, after everything.

So instead, he cranes his neck up and mumbles, “Okay,” and kisses Magnus like his life depends on it.

Chapter End Notes
I have a question for you all this week: who prefers tumblr and who prefers twitter (for fandom use) and who prefers something else?

Thank you so much for reading, and let me know what you thought! You can talk to me on Tumblr or on Twitter and you call yell at me with #fwwfic

I hope you’re all having a wonderful week! If you’re not, catch yourself a forty minute break and watch a favourite TV episode...

Much love,
Lu <3
Something to Say

Chapter Summary

I’m back, I have some things I (don’t) want to say, and I bring with me cookies.

Kidding. I bring Malec.

Hi, guys.

As you can see, this is not a new chapter, but I do have a FWW extra that I’m posting as an apology to you all, which you can find HERE.

I tried to write this message four weeks ago, I tried to post this and reply to your messages and give you all a quick update, but I couldn’t. I am so, so sorry for disappearing without a word, but I hope you’ll read this (and I’m sorry it got so very long) and I hope you’ll understand by the end.

Firstly, this is not me going on permanent hiatus. This was a temporary pause. FWW is nearly finished, and I will absolutely, 100% be finishing it as soon as I feel I can produce something I’m happy with. You have my word. I said a few times that writing wasn’t really happening for me, but I didn’t say that I haven’t written anything for more than a month. I’ve just started writing again, so I’m hoping that I’ll get back into it properly soon.

I had to take a step back because my family was hit by a bereavement. It wasn’t unexpected (although - you’ll know what I mean if you’ve been there - at the same time it shocked me numb) but I’m sure you can understand why I wasn’t writing things that I wanted to publish. Certainly, the ending of FWW wasn’t going to get written while I was in that frame of mind. I think, perhaps, I’m slowly slipping back into normality, but it’s going to take me some time.

Some of you might have noticed that I disappeared from Tumblr and Twitter. I’m taking a step back from social media, just for a bit. I’ll still check in, I’ll still see things if you contact me, but - pardon my frankness - I just cannot stand scrolling through that cesspit of self-righteous fakeness from people who seem to consider themselves morally superior to others. It’s exhausting, and it’s sad. It costs you absolutely nothing to be kind to other people. It costs you nothing to consider that perhaps people’s intentions are good, and that that should be worth something. It costs nothing for you to think that maybe people deserve to be educated and treated with respect and listened to rather than be branded heinous demons who should delete themselves from the face of the planet and die just because they made a mistake, or, dare I even suggest it, disagreed with you.

It’s awful, and I can’t bear to see any more of it. Especially not now. Most people are trying to be good people. Most people are not aiming to be ‘problematic’. Most people have good days and bad days, do good things and bad things, have changing and evolving opinions, have loves and hates and do not have to agree with you to be good people. Most people’s bad things are not absolutely unforgivable.
Forgiveness is a choice. It should not be something that is dependent on anything other than yourself. You do not have to forgive someone just because they apologise. Equally, you do not have to spend your life spreading vitriol about someone because they said something bad, some time ago. People change. That’s okay. Change should be acknowledged, and respected, and understood, and forgiveness is a part of that.

Try to understand people. And remember that you have to own your own happiness. It cannot ever be dependent on somebody else. If it brings you peace to forgive someone, then forgive them. I find it really hard to believe that it makes anyone happy to continue passionately resenting someone, hating them loudly on the internet, bringing up upsetting events and making yourself relieve unending negativity just for the sake of—what? Getting the last word?

It’s not mature and it’s not clever to see the world in such solid shades of black and white. The world is not like that. The world is - please forgive me for this phrase - almost always shades of grey. Casting issues into black and white is dangerous. It’s how people like Donald Trump get power in the world. Most things are subjective, and I find it honestly quite frightening when people act like they are objectively Right and Good, and anyone who disagrees with them is Wrong and Bad.

Just, please, think about what you’re saying. Think about whether you feel happy when you’re on social media, dragging up angst and drama and talking about whatever someone said three years ago. I know as well as anyone that negativity is a part of life, and sometimes we have to confront it head-on. But if you do it in a constructive way, you make your part of the world that bit brighter. The world would be a much better place if we handled negativity and upsetting, offensive, angering things with the view to end with a lighter world, not a darker one. You don’t get a lighter world by being cruel, by refusing to try to understand, by refusing to listen, or by refusing to ever consider forgiveness.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that everyone should be angelic all the time. That would be extremely hypocritical. Sometimes, you’ve just got to vent your feelings. That’s fine. But yell into the void, not into someone’s face. There is a difference between politely disagreeing with someone or calling something out or getting into a heated debated, and treating people with no respect or basic human decency. You don’t have to be lovely all the time, just be decent.

Here’s a parting thought. Things do not have to be perfect to be liked. People do not have to be perfect to be loved. People certainly do not have to be perfect to deserve a basic level of respect and decency. You can critique an imperfect thing and still like it. You can critique an imperfect person and still love them. You can certainly critique an imperfect person, and their opinions or beliefs, and still treat them like a human being.

It honestly just makes me really sad to see people tearing each other down. This step back is, like I said, because I really believe that we have to own our own happiness. My social medias aren’t making me happy at the moment. To the people in this fandom who know I love them - my friends, my mutuals, all the people who pop up in my inbox and have a nice chat with me, everyone who leaves me lovely comments on AO3 - you know who you are, I hope you have a wonderful week, and if you want to talk, don’t be put off by any of this. To those of you who try to be positive, who are kind, who are constructively critical, who are generous and compassionate and empathetic — you’re the reason I’m still here.

So that’s what’s going on on my end at the moment. Everything going on in my personal life has smacked things into perspective for me, and I really need(ed) to take a step back and reevaluate. I hope you all understand, and I’m genuinely beyond grateful for all the support this fic has received. It really does mean the world.
I want to take this opportunity to say a massive thank you to my beta, Alex, who knows I love him and doesn’t want credit but deserves all the love in the world.

And to you, if you’ve made it to the end and you read all my rambling—thank you. When I send everyone who reads this fic love at the end of each chapter, I do, genuinely and from the bottom of my heart, mean it. I need a little bit of time right now, but please know that I’m not going anywhere.

Please, do me a favour—hold your loved ones close tonight.

I’m really nervous to post this, but. Here goes.

All the love,
Lu <3

(If you made it to the end and forgot why you opened this, you can find some new FWW-’verse Malec HERE)
Cowbird

Chapter Summary

In which Malec go to Edom, they’re both overly competitive, and Asmodeus makes his agenda known.

Chapter Notes

Surprise! I’m back!

I want to say thank you to all of you who left me such supportive comments on my note before I put FWW on temporary hiatus - I have read all of them, and it really meant a lot to me, so thank you. Really.

This update has been a very long time coming, I know, but I really didn’t want to write a shitty ending for this fic. I’m finally a bit happier with what I’m writing, so I hope this chapter doesn’t disappoint! (Although, confession, this is actually the last chapter I wrote Before, so maybe I should save my judgement for a bit...)

Anyway! It feels really lovely to finally be posting a new chapter, and I really hope you enjoy this one :)

This chapter’s bird: the cowbird. Symbolic of the parent and child relationship, and resolving old issues. I make no mention of how issues are resolved...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Are you sure about this?”

Magnus looks up from where he’s shaking salt around the intricate pentagram he’s spent the last half an hour drawing in a dark, secluded alleyway that’s been warded. Alec had created a suitably pungent distraction to ward off any nosy mundanes.

“Which bit, precisely?” Magnus asks, arching an eyebrow at him and sitting back on his haunches. “The bit where I’m opening a portal to Edom? The bit where I’m trying to bargain with my father in his own realm? Or the bit where I’ve stupidly agreed to you going with me?”

Alec presses his lips together. “Magnus, we talked about this. I’m not letting you go to Edom on your own.”

Magnus sighs. He stands up, brushing off his knees, and walks around the circle to rest his hands on Alec’s shoulders.

“I know. I just don’t think I managed to get across to you how utterly stupid this is.”

Alec shrugs, one corner of his mouth turning up. “You’re doing it too. Doesn’t that make you equally stupid?”
Magnus swats him on the shoulder, muttering something that sounds distinctly like *I’m the fucking High Warlock of Brooklyn* under his breath, and flicks his fingers towards the artwork sprawled across the floor. Alec chooses not to dignify him with a response.

“Last chance to change your mind,” Magnus says, not looking away from the lines of the pentagram, which are beginning to turn red, like metal in a furnace.

“Not a chance.”

***

Portal travel has never been something that Magnus struggled with. It’s a fact that makes him fairly unique. His ease with abrupt, particle-dismantling travel probably has something to do with the fact that he invented it.

Even Magnus, however, stumbles when he feels himself land on the dry, dusty ground of Edom. Bones crunch underfoot as he rights himself and turns just in time to catch Alec by the shoulders as he appears, wide-eyed and disorientated, and he grips onto Magnus’ biceps to stop himself tumbling to the ground.

“You okay?” Magnus asks, as Alec is beginning to look like he might be sick.

“Yeah,” Alec says, after a moment. “Fuck. That’s embarrassing.”

Magnus smiles as Alec loosens his grip and begins to straighten, swallowing. The colour returns to his face slowly.


“Why weren’t you affected?”

“I’m more accustomed to this place than you are,” Magnus says, and chooses to leave it at that. He doesn’t particularly want to regale Alexander with stories of the time he’s spent in his father’s realm. They’re not cheery, and now isn’t the time.

The two of them begin to make their way through the wasteland, picking out paths over decaying demon bodies and piles of human bones scattered across the ground. There’s a faint stench of death that permeates the air, but it’s not quite strong enough to make either of them gag. It’s reminiscent of the smell of Valentine’s experiments.

After the third time Alec almost steps in a puddle of suspicious smelling gunk, he wrinkles his nose and slashes his stele through his wing rune. His wings appear out of his back, and he rises into the air behind Magnus.

There’s a screeching sound from somewhere along the horizon, and they both turn. Magic springs to Magnus’ palms, and Alec holds his bow aloft, and they track the progress of a winged demon as it flaps across the sky towards them.

Alec lets an arrow fly, and the demon hisses at him as thick black ichor squirts from its chest and sprays across the ground. The demon drops, and, rather than disappearing as it does in Alec’s world, it lays still on the ground, twitching and convulsing and oozing until it goes still.

“There are more,” Alec says from his vantage point in the air. “Lots more.”

“They live in hoards in this realm,” Magnus tells him, fingers shifting restlessly as he eyes the hazy
figures in the air.

“Of how many?”

“Only a hundred or so.”

Alec turns in the air to shoot him one of those looks, eyebrows raised and face set in mixed irritation and disdainful disbelief. “Are you serious?”

“Yes, darling.”

“Don’t darling me,” Alec says, sounding distinctly huffy. “We should have brought backup.”

Before Magnus has a chance to think up a suitable response, three demons have caught up to them. Sizzling stripes of red rip from his hands; they curl around the throats of the demons, and he pulls his arms back to yank them out of the sky. Their wings flap uselessly, heads straining against the power of Magnus’ magic, but they’re dead before they hit the ground.

Alec is watching him with his bow slightly lowered. “Have I ever told you that I find your magic really, really hot?”

Magnus rolls his eyes, but a smile tugs at his lips. “I’m not sure this is the time to flirt, Alexander.”

“Mm, you’re right. You’ve killed three demons already. I need to catch up.”

Magnus shakes his head. “You’re turning this into a competition?”

“Why not?” Alec shrugs, following a demon with his eyes, arrow trained on it but not releasing yet. The demon is gaining speed quickly, nearing them, and Magnus’ heart rate picks up as he wonders why the fuck Alec isn’t shooting the damn thing. He has a perfect shot. It’s not like he needs to avoid hitting anything in the middle of Edom.

Magnus doesn’t like to be an interfering boyfriend, but he’s readying himself to shoot the demon out of the air himself when it gets close enough for him to count the teeth in its mouth as it makes a rough shrieking sound.

Just as the demon gets within touching distance and Magnus has his hands lifted, Alec lets go of the arrow. It slices clean through the demon’s neck, ripping through the flesh and embedding itself neatly into the abdomen of the demon behind it. They fall one after the other. Magnus feels his eyes, unglammed, flash.

Alec turns to smirk at him. “Even.”

“You’re completely insane,” Magnus tells him, “but it’s on.”

The world turns into a blaze of magic and arrows and spraying ichor as they battle the demons, picking them off one by one. Alec remains in the air, manoeuvring through the air with ease as demons begin to come at them from all directions. He slaps one to the ground with a swift beat of his wing, and kicks another straight in the face, and Magnus turns them both into burning torches.

“Shit,” Alec says, as a demon manages to knock him off-balance in the air.

Magnus glances up, still shooting waves of magic from his hands, and sees that in the split second it’s taken Alec to right himself, the gap between him and the demons has closed, and they’ve got too close for him to use his bow.
A demon rips a hole through Alec’s jacket, and Magnus’ heart lurches as he sees red begin to bloom against his t-shirt. Alec, however, seems unfazed. Magnus expects him to go for the seraph blade in his thigh holster, or one of the plethora of knives shoved in his weapons belt, but he doesn’t.

Instead, Alec yanks an arrow from the quiver strapped across his back, and plunges it straight into the eye of the demon that attacked him. He rips it out crudely, ichor spurting everywhere, and kicks the demon to the ground before going for another.

Magnus has always thought that there’s a certain grace to the way Shadowhunters fight, and Alec has certainly never been the exception. The bow is an unusual choice of weapon for the Nephilim, but it suits Alec to the ground. There is, however, something incredibly attractive about seeing Alec getting so crass and dirty in battle, yanking and stabbing and shoving without preamble.

A demon tries to drop down on Magnus from above, but Magnus hits it with a blast of magic, rolling away neatly to avoid being squashed by it as it tumbles to the ground. He shoots his arms out wide and hauls them straight together, squeezing his fingers slowly into fists to force the air out of the two demons in front of him.

As the number of demons on the ground begins to dwindle, Magnus glances up, and finds Alec poised directly above him, shooting demons down below with deadly accuracy, having cleared the skies, for the moment.

The last demon drops, and Alec touches down on the ground beside Magnus. They both survey the damage in silence. Dead bodies surround them, bleeding black ichor, mangled and shredded and decidedly dead. Magnus supposes Alec isn’t really used to the sight of dead demons after a battle, as they so conveniently disappear where he’s from.

“Are you alright?”

Alec’s hand goes to his chest, where the demon had caught him, and he nods. “Yeah. Fine.”

Magnus turns to Alec and unzips his jacket, brushing aside his hand with a slight shake of his head and an admonishing look.

“You’re a terrible liar,” Magnus tells him. “Don’t ever think you could cheat on me and manage to hide it. I’d smell it on you in a minute.”

Alec rolls his eyes. “In no possible future would I ever have any desire to cheat on you. Or anyone, for that matter, but certainly not you.”

Magnus smiles fondly. “I know. I was just joking.”

He pulls Alec’s t-shirt up to inspect the damage, and purses his lips. It’s not too deep, not infected with poison, and won’t have done any severe damage, but the wound is still bleeding.

“Stop, it’s fine,” Alec says, reaching for his stele. “I can use an iratze. It’ll be good as new in a minute.”

Magnus exhales his unhappiness, but relents.

“Also,” Alec adds, shooting Magnus a grin as he lowers his stele to his arm, “I won.”

Magnus scoffs. “You absolutely did not.”

“See, we still need to work on your counting.”
“And I could still count long before you were even born.”

Alec is grinning at him, bright and easy and happy, as though they’re not in the midst of Edom with ichor sprayed across their clothes and demons decaying at their feet. Magnus can do nothing but grin right back. He doesn’t care what that says about him.

“So,” Alec says, once he’s done scorching his own flesh with that heinous instrument. “Where now?”

Magnus points across the dusty wasteland towards a crumbling, ruined castle in the distance, situated beneath three circling, screaming demons at least five times the size of those they’ve just battled.

“There.”

***

Dragon demons are flying overhead as they approach the castle. They pay Magnus and Alec no mind as Magnus steps towards a rotted wooden door that’s falling off its hinges. He flicks his fingers, red swirling towards the warped, rusted lock. Alec doesn’t class himself as a magic expert by any stretch of the imagination, but he’s fairly sure that Magnus’ magic is usually blue, unless he’s fighting.

Magnus glances over his shoulder at Alec, and Alec frowns as the glamour on Magnus’ eyes flickers like a dying candle, pupils shifting rapidly and irises flitting between deep brown and bright gold and —red.

“What is it?” Magnus asks, pausing with the flat of his palm braced on the door.

“Your eyes. Your glamour.”

Magnus lifts a hand to brush against the corner of one eye, and he inhales deeply, closing his eyes. “It’s this place. It interferes with my magic.”

“Interferes how?”

“Howver my father wants it to.”

Magnus turns away and pushes the door open, hiding his flickering eyes from Alec’s gaze. Alec decides not to press the issue, not right now, and follows Magnus inside.

Inside, they’re unprotected from the elements. The ceiling has tumbled down in places, exposing the castle to the demons trilling out their cries overhead. Thick, dead vines are wrapped around broken stone columns, and ahead, a tall throne sits atop a dais, covered in cobwebs and tinged grey with age and dust.

Between one step and the next, Alec finds his way blocked by a large, snarling hellhound. Drool is oozing from its mouth, eyes black as it stares up at Alec, and it lashes its spiked tail threateningly.

“Magnus,” Alec says, cautiously, as the hellhound continues to advance, and Alec begins to retreat more rapidly.

He doesn’t dare take his eyes off the enormous dog, but he hears Magnus murmuring under his breath, harsh and quiet, in a language Alec doesn’t know, and—

“Sit,” Magnus thunders. The strength of his voice makes the ground beneath Alec’s feet tremble, and
the hellhound whimpers. It turns away from Alec, bows its head to Magnus, and folds itself into a sitting position like an oversized Labrador. It reminds Alec almost fondly of Padfoot.

“What the hell,” Alec says, looking up at Magnus. “How?”

Magnus shrugs. “With practise. Come, we need to find—”

“My, perhaps?”

The interruption snaps their gazes to the side. Alec recognises Asmodeus from when Magnus had summoned him at Valentine’s demand. He recognises the bored, haughty posture, the lazy smirk that curls at his lips, the way his eyes flash the very same gold as Magnus’, hints of green turning them luminous where he’s lurking in the shadows beneath a broken archway.

“Magnus,” Asmodeus says, spreading his palms wide, a cane clutched in one hand. “You’ve come to join me, at last.”

“You’re deluded.” Magnus tilts his chin up, staring down his father, but Alec doesn’t miss the dip of his Adam’s apple.

Asmodeus leans heavily on his cane as he takes three steps forward. The reddish light of Edom casts eerie shadows across his face; Alec can’t help noticing how familiar the structure of his face is. While Asmodeus looks intently at Magnus, Alec stares at him. It didn’t seem so obvious last time, when he’d had a Prince of Hell strangling him and threatening to rape his sister and chain his boyfriend in hell, but it’s so very clear, now, that this is Magnus’ father.

“You’ve always made me proud, Magnus,” Asmodeus says. “Of all the warlocks I’ve sired, you have the most...potential.”

Magnus’ lip curls in disgust. “Potential.”

“Mm. Potential to rule beside me. To lord over this realm.”

“I would rather die,” Magnus says shortly, and Asmodeus chuckles.

“Magnus, Magnus.” He flicks his cane, and the hellhound that’s been sitting obediently near Magnus’ feet rises, as though in a trance, to stand beside the empty throne. “You managed to inflict damage on a Prince of Hell. Most of your siblings died within seconds of summoning me.”

“What a legacy I’ve created for myself,” Magnus snaps.

Smoke bleeds in through the archway, wrapping itself around Asmodeus like a quilt. It reminds Alec horribly of the magic Asmodeus had used to strangle him. He brushes his fingers against his throat, and shivers.

The smoke thickens, shrouding Asmodeus for a moment, and, when he speaks again, Magnus and Alec spin on their heels to find him sprawled across the throne, fingers resting lightly atop the hellhound’s head.

“You always did fail to see the bigger picture,” Asmodeus says. “I blame that stupid little horned thing.”

Alec sees Magnus bristle, jaw clenching and fingers tightening into fists. “Don’t you dare talk about Ragnor. Don’t you dare. He saved my life. You, on the other hand—”
Asmodeus rolls his eyes. “Well, after you got utterly bored by those monks in Spain, I really needed to step in.”

Magnus lets out a short, bitter laugh. “You’d inflicted the damage far before you took me to Edom. Whispering in my ear every night...”

“I made you stronger.”

“Ragnor made me stronger.”

For the first time, Asmodeus’ eyes flicker behind Magnus, to where Alec is standing at his shoulder. He casts a clinical gaze over Alec, and then returns his attention to his son.

“I wonder what your lover thinks, Magnus,” Asmodeus whispers, leaning forward and smirking. “What does he think about his precious warlock standing beside his father, in the land that is his birthright? What does he think about this?”

With a hiss of words in a demonic language that Alec has no hope of understanding, scarlet fills Asmodeus’ irises, like blood blooming out of a wound and spreading through water. Magnus inhales sharply, jerking his head to one side, but he’s too slow. Alec sees. His eyes are the same bright red as Asmodeus’.

“Or this.”

Asmodeus snarls, standing up from his throne and walking down the steps with a stiff, rushed gait. He grips his cane tightly in one hand and reaches out to grasp at Magnus’ chin roughly, forcing their eyes to meet, red into red. They’re the same height, have the same sharp bone structure, the same flare in their nostrils as they breathe raggedly, the same curl to their lips.

“What does your precious Nephilim think, Magnus, hm?” Asmodeus tilts his head to the side. “What does he think about a demon sharing his bed at night? He’ll never understand the power you wield. He’ll never understand this part of you. Never appreciate it for what it is. He’ll scorn it. Despise it. Resent it. Because that’s what they all do.” Asmodeus leans closer as he whispers, and Alec hates the way it makes Magnus cringe, hatred and discomfort and fear crowding for room on his face. “They never love you. Not like you crave. That’s why you must come here. Why you must rule beside me. Where you belong. Where—”

“That’s enough,” Alec snaps, stomach churning at the look on Magnus’ face.

Asmodeus’ gaze flicks to him. He releases Magnus abruptly, and takes a step towards Alec, surveying him for a second time, tapping the fingers of one hand against the length of his cane. Alec wonders whether he’s going to hit him with it. He wonders whether he’d react quickly enough to avoid it.

“You’re unusual, for one of the Nephilim. You’re all so stuffy. Terribly dull, really. Not that you’re an exception in that sense. And yet...here you are.”

Alec swallows the fear clawing at his insides and stands taller, trying to ignore the way his heart is pounding against his ribcage and snagging the words out of his throat.

“And?” he asks, voice cool, belying the terror he feels.

“Hm.” A small smile tilts at one side of Asmodeus’ mouth. “Fascinating.”

“Stop,” Magnus says, but Asmodeus ignores him.
“Your mind is a fascinating place, little child of the angels.”

Asmodeus cuts his gaze across to Magnus with a smirk, and Alec wonders whether he knows. How he knows, if he does. Little child of the angels. Little angel. It’s what Magnus used to call him.

“Stop,” Magnus says again, voice stronger and magic crackling at his fingertips.

“You have no power over me here, son,” Asmodeus says, eyes still boring into Alec’s. He’s positioned himself between them, and Alec doesn’t know how it happened. Or when. “We both know that. In the mortal realm, perhaps. Here? You’re as good as powerless. I can take it all away from you in a heartbeat.”

“Alec—”

“Why haven’t you run?” Asmodeus murmurs. “They all run. All you mortals. From me. From Magnus. Especially from the both of us together.” He smirks. “I’m sure the similarities haven’t escaped you. I know they haven’t. I watched your strange little mortal mind clock them. You missed a few.”

“I don’t care,” Alec snaps.

Asmodeus raises his eyebrows. “You don’t care?”

“Why did you employ a child to send me dreams?”

“Ah, I wondered when we’d get to this little snag. A strange blonde vampire asked for my protection. I knew who she was, of course. I was happy to oblige. I’m a demon. I make deals. But I needed something in return.”

“Me,” Magnus states. “But why go after Alec? Especially... The first time, we barely knew each other.”

Asmodeus rolls his eyes. “Because all your ties to the mortal world are keeping you from coming here willingly. I’m a patient man. But...” He trails off, fixing Alec with an odd sort of look. “Sometimes I’m gifted with a clear line of sight into the future. And even I cannot wait an eternity.”

Alec pulls a face. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

Asmodeus is quiet for a long, heavy moment, watching Alec with those eyes that are so very like Magnus’. He doesn’t speak, the room silent save for the faint screech of the demons above the castle.

There’s a crack, and Alec finds himself forced to the ground, he knees hitting the floor hard. Tears sting at his eyes and he inhales sharply as Asmodeus turns on his heel to walk back up to his throne, and Magnus shouts out his name.

“Oh no, Magnus,” Asmodeus says, coolly. “I don’t think so.”

He snaps his fingers, and the very dead vines wrapped around the archway he’d come through spring to life, growing and stretching across the floor to wrap around Magnus. Magic shoots from Magnus’ fingertips, but it seems to have no effect on them.

“There’s no point in struggling. It will only make this take longer.”

“I swear,” Magnus snarls, wrestling futilely against the vines, “if you hurt him again, I will destroy you. I will break you apart and scatter the pieces in every corner of the world and burn them to
“Hurting him would be really rather pointless,” Asmodeus drawls, sitting down on his throne, one leg flung carelessly over the arm, the other foot planted on the floor, leaving his legs spread with an arrogance that makes Alec want to shoot him through the head. Maybe twice. “You’d never forgive me.”

“I’ll never forgive you for what you did to him the first time,” Magnus spits.

“With hindsight, that was a tad foolish,” Asmodeus agrees. “But I was caught unawares. Now, however...” He smiles. “Now, it’s time to hurt you, Magnus, darling.”

“No.”

Alec lifts his head to glare at Asmodeus with as much hatred as he can muster. He tries desperately to move his limbs, to get up off the floor and shoot arrows into every inch of his body, to punch him until his knuckles are bleeding and slam him against the wall until he’s incapable of laying a finger on Magnus, but he can’t.

“I won’t let you,” Alec growls instead.

Asmodeus laughs. “Oh, you foolish child. You couldn’t stop me if you wanted to. Besides, it’s not me who’s going to hurt Magnus. It’s you.”

Alec stops struggling as he stares at Asmodeus in shock, jaw slackening into disbelief. He lets out an astonished laugh that rings with slight hysteria.

“You’ve got to be joking. There’s nothing you can threaten me with that will make me hurt Magnus.”

Asmodeus grins, feral and merciless and sadistic. “You’re not going to have a choice, little angel.”

Through his peripheries, Alec sees horror wash across Magnus’ face.

“No,” Magnus says, thrashing against the vines pulling tight around his body, pinning his arms to his torso. Magic is spewing from him, but it’s powerless. “No! Don’t you dare!”

Alec looks over at Magnus. “Magnus, what is he talking about? What the hell is going on here?”

“You can’t,” Magnus says, and it sounds like he’s pleading with his father. “You can’t.”

“I can,” Asmodeus says, not taking his eyes off Alec. “And you’ll thank me for it, one day. Really, you should bring all your lovers to Edom. I’d soon prove to you that nobody in that dull dimension you call home is worth your time. None of them understand you.”

“Don’t,” Magnus whispers, going lax as Asmodeus begins drumming his fingers, smoke beginning to form in the air beside him. “Please. Father. Don’t.”

“I thought you had more faith than that, son.”

Magnus shakes his head, and Alec is shocked to see tears stinging at his eyes. “Nobody can have that much faith. It’s impossible. Nobody could possibly be expected to—”

“Which is why none of them deserve you,” Asmodeus says sharply. “You just have to see that for yourself. You have to hear it. Someone needs to spell it out for you.” He flicks his fingers. “Do you love my son, Nephilim?”
“Of course I do,” Alec says, looking over at Magnus as he says it. Magnus’ irises are red, just like Asmodeus’, but they’re still Magnus’ eyes. He’s still Magnus. Still Alec’s boyfriend. His partner. The man he loves with all his being, and would do anything in the world for. He repeats himself, voice dropping to a whisper: “Of course I do.”

“Well, we’re about to find out the truth, aren’t we?” Asmodeus grins, glee making his eyes shine.


“Yes,” Magnus says, face contorted with sorrow that Alec doesn’t understand, because he hasn’t got a fucking clue what’s happening. “Yes, of course I know that, darling, but—”

“Nobody can love all of another person,” Asmodeus says. “It’s a lie. You can tolerate all of another person. You can look past the things you despise with your entire being. You can turn a blind eye to someone’s infuriating qualities. You can decide to love the bits you like anyway. But would they still love you if they could hear how much you hate them?”

Alec wrinkles his nose. “Love is about acceptance. Respect. Care. It’s not about...any of that.”

“I suppose we’re about to find out whether or not you really love Magnus then, aren’t we?”

Alec shakes his head. “What the hell are you talking about?”

Asmodeus grins. “Oh, you’re going to tell me exactly what you think. No filters. No chance for a nicely timed white lie. No kind avoidances. You’re going to tell me the truth.”

“I’ve already told you the truth.”

“Darling,” Asmodeus purrs, “you don’t know the meaning of the word truth. Your adorable little Soul Sword pulls out what you think is the truth. I’m a Prince of Hell. I extract the real truth. The truth that might even escape you.”

Oh.

Oh, by the Angel.

“Why are you doing this?” Magnus asks, tiredly.

“Aside from the wonderful helping of pain I’m sure I’ll get to feed off of?” Asmodeus shrugs. “If I don’t expose your lover to his own thoughts, he’ll never realise them. And then I’m cursed to an eternity watching you chained to the world, when you should be here.”

Guardedly, Magnus looks at Alec and then back at his father. “I don’t know what that means.”

“Hm. I suppose that’s just as well, really. Your fragile heart never could take anything surprising.”

Then Asmodeus snaps his fingers, and smoke shoots across the room, straight to Alec.

Chapter End Notes

I had a four month hiatus and now I bring angst... sorry not sorry?!
I’m not going to go back to an update schedule, because I don’t want to put pressure on myself to update to deadlines, because that’s going to be the fast track to me having to take another break. So I’m not sure when I’ll update - hopefully in a few weeks - but you can follow me on Tumblr and/or Twitter for updates.

Thank you so, so much for everyone who’s stuck around through all this! I really hope this chapter lived up to your expectations, after so very long.

All the love, (and happy New Year! All the best to you in 2019!)
Lu <3
Buzzard

Chapter Summary

In which Asmodeus does his demon thing, Magnus strikes a bargain, and Alec seeks an unlikely ally.

Chapter Notes

Guys. Seriously. Your comments last chapter had me laughing, crying, grinning like an absolute sadist, and generally feeling on top of the world. I always love hearing from you, but the response last chapter was crazy. So thank you! And especially thank you to everyone who gave me nice well-wishes - that was really sweet <3

This chapter! ANGST. Kidding. Well. Maybe.

The buzzard: death, destruction, and rebirth. It’s metaphorical. Nobody dies... Today, at least ;)

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

From the previous chapter:

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It’s not like it was before. It doesn’t hurt. Not exactly. It’s bitingly cold, and it floods through every cell in his body, and Alec feels himself begin to shiver. He can hear himself making odd, choking noises, can hear Magnus shouting his name and spitting profanities at Asmodeus, but it’s muffled. The world looks blurry. He feels disconnected. Separate. Floating above the clouds and drowning beneath the oceans all at once.
He’s not even sure he can feel his body. He can feel the ground beneath his knees, hard and unforgiving, can feel the throb in his bones where he was forced down. He can feel the smoke tickling at his throat, where Asmodeus attacked him before. But it’s faint. It’s muted.

“Come on, Nephilim, look at my son,” he hears Asmodeus hiss.

His head turns towards Magnus, and his eyes lock onto those blood red irises, but he’s sure he didn’t make his body move. It feels involuntary; it feels like his body has become a puppet, and someone is pulling on the strings.

Blatant terror is splashed across Magnus’ face, saturating his expression. There are tears glistening in his eyes, and his hands are trembling, and he’s stopped struggling against Asmodeus’ restraints. He looks defeated. Heartbroken.

Alec would do anything to wipe away that look. Anything in the world. He wants to make it go. He wants to throw off Asmodeus’ spell and rip away those vines with his bare hands.

“I’m so sorry,” Magnus says, and Alec wants to ask him why? And what for? But he can’t. Because Asmodeus has control of his every movement.

“This is good for you,” Asmodeus says shortly, like an ill-mannered parent informing their child that a beating is what keeps children on the straight and narrow. “You need a reality check, Magnus.”

“This is cruel,” Magnus spits. “You’re cruel. I can’t imagine why you think I’d forgive you for this.”

Asmodeus shrugs. “I don’t. But I think you’ll realise that here is better than there.”

“No. Never.”

“Hm.” Asmodeus smiles. “We’ll see, won’t we?”

Magnus looks at Alec for a long, heavy moment, and then he closes his eyes. Turns his head away. Hides himself from Alec—or, perhaps, hides Alec from himself, as though the sight is physically painful; as though shielding himself from the scene might offer him some protection.

Alec doesn’t understand what the hell’s going on.

“Come now, Nephilim,” Asmodeus says. “I think it’s time to get to the main show, don’t you?”

Alec can’t speak.

“Do you love Magnus Bane, Lightwood?”

_Of fucking course I do. I adore Magnus_, Alec thinks, and he realises he’s said it aloud when Magnus makes a strangled noise in the back of his throat. Asmodeus presses his lips together.

“Yes, of course,” Asmodeus allows, some strange sort of glee shining in his eyes. “Do you even know your lover’s name, child of the angels? His real name?”

There’s a bewildered string of indignant words brewing in Alec’s mind, because what the fuck is Asmodeus on about? But when he goes to speak, to his horror, something else comes out.

“No. He’s never told me.”

_What the hell._
Internally, Alec feels shock rocket through him, followed by sheer incredulity, because that’s just not true. It’s so blatantly a lie. Of course he knows Magnus’ fucking name. But the spell has surrendered control of his body to Asmodeus. His mind is disconnected from the rest of him, and he feels like he’s trapped in a cage, screaming and shouting while someone else possesses his body. Maybe that’s the point. Maybe Asmodeus is going to make him lie. Cast doubts in Magnus’ mind. Play on his insecurities.

But then Alec remembers what Asmodeus said. About the truth. About truths he doesn’t even realise are true. Understanding hits him like a freight train.

Asmodeus is referring to Magnus’ first name. His original name. The name he was given at birth.

“How can you trust someone who won’t even tell you his name? How can you love a man who lies every second you’re together?”

_It’s not a lie, Alec wants to say. It’s not a lie because Magnus Bane is the only name that matters. Magnus Bane means more than a name that hasn’t been used since the 1600s. But, of course, that’s not what he says._

“But I’ve never asked,” Alec says, “and I trust that he’ll tell me one day. Or tell me why he won’t.”

Asmodeus raises an eyebrow. “Blind faith? Isn’t that a rather tenuous foundation of a relationship?”

“It’s not the foundation of our relationship. I don’t care about his name. Magnus Bane is the only name of any importance.”

Asmodeus rocks back on his heels and folds his hands together, surveying Alec with a careful sort of coldness. It’s really not difficult to believe that this is a Greater Demon capable of destruction that would put any other being to shame. There’s something undeniably evil about the look in his eyes.

“Once upon a time,” Asmodeus says, “you hated my son. Feared him. You thought he was out to cut the wings off your back and hang them on his walls as trophies. You know of his parentage, you’d heard stories of his past, and you thought he was evil incarnate.”

“Yes,” Alec says, despite his mind screaming for him to lie.

It seems like so long ago. It doesn’t seem relevant anymore. He was a different person. A boy, trained to follow orders and under the delusion of adulthood. He’s a man now. Capable of independent thought and free choice. And he’s chosen Magnus. He will always choose Magnus.

That’s what he wants to say. But he can’t. He can’t even turn his head to look at Magnus properly. He can only dart his eyes across, the only point of control he’s retained, and see the heartbreak written into every line of his body.

Because, Alec realises, Asmodeus is trying to prove to Magnus that Alec doesn’t love him. Not really. Not fully. Not the way he so craves for someone to love him: heart and soul, from his lightest, easiest moments to the darkest depths of bitterness and depression born of centuries of heartache.

Except Alec _does_. What can Asmodeus possibly ask him that will make Magnus feel that there’s nothing left between them worth pursuing? And, more than that, that Edom is the best place he can go? Even after everything they’ve been through, Alec has never felt as certain of anything as he does of Magnus.

“How can you really say you don’t still feel that fear, just sometimes?”
“I do,” Alec says, and everything in him lurches and revolts in protest. What the fuck? “But not of
him. For him.”

Asmodeus’ eyes narrow. “Explain.”

“His worst enemy is himself. I know because I know I’m the same. Sometimes I’m scared of what he
might do to himself, but I’m not scared of Magnus. I never could be. I’m not even scared that he’ll
break my heart, because it would be worth it.”

Across the room, Magnus makes a strange noise. When Alec cuts his gaze across, Magnus is still
turned away, still tensed, but there’s something about the tight grip of his fingers on Asmodeus’
restraints that makes Alec think that maybe he said something right.

Asmodeus, on the other hand, looks ready to light a fire under Alec’s ass and watch him burn alive.
His nostrils are flaring, blood-red eyes narrowed and blazing with frustration. Apparently, he hasn’t
got the answers he wants. It makes Alec feel giddy with vindictive satisfaction.

Asmodeus marches across the room and grabs Magnus’ chin in his hand, turning it towards Alec and
saying sharply, “What about this? This mark? The mark of a demon? Scum? The very creature you
were put on the earth to destroy?”

Magnus is a warlock, Alec wants to point out. He’s not a demon. Demons don’t love. Not really.
Not like we do. They don’t know how to love. Their love is rooted in selfishness.

“He’s none of those things, and I don’t care about his mark,” is what comes out. “He could just as
easily hate me for my runes and my wings. But he doesn’t.”

Do you? Alec thinks suddenly, but of course he can’t say it. He finds himself gazing at Magnus,
wondering, for one horrible second, what he’d say to that question if he were compelled to tell the
truth like this.

“No,” Magnus whispers, flinching when Asmodeus strokes a finger down the length of his cheek, as
though he heard Alec’s unspoken question. “Never.”

And Alec can’t believe he doubted Magnus for even a moment.

“It doesn’t repulse you?” Asmodeus demands, curling his fingers around the back of Magnus’ neck
and staring Alec down. “That his eyes are like mine? That your lover shares half my DNA?”

“No,” Alec says, voice ringing clear with certainty. “I don’t care who Magnus’ father is. I only care
who he is. And I love him.”

Tears slide down Magnus’ cheeks as he closes his eyes. Every cell in Alec’s body battles against the
forces holding him still, desperate to get over there and throw Asmodeus across the room and take
Magnus home, goddamnit. He needs to get him away from this fucking awful place, where his own
father refers to him in ways that play on all his deepest insecurities.

Alec doesn’t realise that he’s crying too until he tastes salt on his lips.

“Tell me something about my son that you hate.”

Asmodeus spits the word, eyes flashing black for a split second.

“I hate that he puts himself in danger,” Alec says, staring over at Magnus as Magnus stares right
back, neither able to look away. But not because of any demonic power—merely because of each
other. “I hate that he’ll exhaust himself. I hate that sometimes he shuts me out. I hate how many times
he’s had his heart broken. I hate that he doesn’t know how much he means to people. I hate that he’s
immortal and I’m not.”

*What?*

God, where the hell had that come from? Alec’s never even thought about that before. There have
always been far too many other things looming right on the horizon to worry about something so far
off. And something that might not even matter. Because while he’s decided, in his heart if not in his
mind, that Magnus is it for him, he has no idea whether or not Magnus feels the same way. For all he
knows, Magnus might be ready to leave by Christmas.

“Oh.” Asmodeus grins victoriously. “Yes, that is a conundrum. One Magnus has rather a poor
history of dealing with. Where did you go last time you had a mortal lover die, darling?”

Magnus’ eyes flash with hatred as he glares down his father. “Fuck you.”

“Oh, yes, that’s right, isn’t it? You came here. Came here to avoid dealing with your heartbreak. She
never loved you properly either, stupid little bitch.”

“Don’t you dare,” Magnus spits. “Adrienne was—”

“Oh, don’t make me listen to the wounded whining of your bleeding heart,” Asmodeus says, waving
a dismissive hand. “She was just as bad as all the others. Just as bad as this one. I’m sure he’s none
too pleased about all your past lovers, either, hm? All those people who shared Magnus’ bed? Held
his heart? Felt his love? Indulged in his body?”

“Of course I’m not *pleased* about it,” Alec snaps. “But everyone has history.”

“You don’t,” Asmodeus points out, and Alec feels himself flush dully with embarrassment. “But let’s
slide back onto this fascinating point. You hate that my son is immortal?”

“No,” Alec says. “I hate that he’s immortal and I’m mortal.”

Something strange flashes across Asmodeus’ face, something that’s akin to wariness and not quite
disbelief, but not far from either. Alec doesn’t understand.

“I fail to see the difference. Explain.”

And, yes, there’s a definite note of caution in his voice.

“When I die, if we’re still together by then,” Alec says, “he’ll be alone. Again. When I’m old, I’ll be
a burden. We won’t be equals. And I’m not stupid. I know that losing people you love hurts. I don’t
ever want to be the reason Magnus is in pain. I—”

He gasps on an inhale, and realises that it’s because he was crying while he spoke. That slow,
inevitable crying that no amount of willpower could ever hold back. It’s raw emotion being ripped
from a place Alec didn’t even know existed, until now. Until it’s being hauled out into the open by
Asmodeus for his own sick games. They’ve never talked about this, he and Magnus, and he hates
that it’s being paraded around for the entertainment of a Prince of Hell. But he doesn’t hate what he
just said. He meant every word—even if he didn’t realise it until he spoke.

“You could never be a burden to me,” Magnus says, from across the room, and Alec wants to reply
so badly. Wants to tell Magnus that it’s inevitable, that old age is cruel and ugly and undignified, that
it’s the antithesis of Magnus’ vitality and independence and freedom. But he can’t.
"Enough." Asmodeus twitches a finger, and Magnus falls silent. "The love of humanity isn’t worth your time, Magnus. But, Nephilim, tell me. Are you saying what I think you are?"

Alec doesn’t have a clue what Asmodeus is talking about, but, apparently, the spell, or his subconscious, or whatever it is, does.

"Yes."

Asmodeus reels back. His jaw clenches and rage flashes through his eyes. He throws an arm out, and the wall to his left crumbles as he turns his back on Alec and lets out a snarl that makes the ground tremble. Overhead, the circling demons squawk indignantly as thunder claps and the skies darken to a bitter, churning black.

"I cannot be too late," Asmodeus spits, turning on his heel to fix Alec with the sort of look that promises death and destruction and immeasurable pain. The memory of Asmodeus’ smoky magic wrapping around his neck and stealing the breath from his lungs sends a shiver down Alec’s spine, the phantom sensation against his skin sending a part of his mind reeling back to that awful, horrible day.

"Enough," Magnus says, from the corner of the room. He’s still trapped by the vines, but calm seems to have washed over him. "You’ve got what you wanted."

"No," Asmodeus thunders, straightening to his full height and tossing his cane across the room. It cracks against the remains of the wall he’d destroyed, and splits in half as it falls to the floor. "I haven’t."

"You wanted me," Magnus says, voice level. "Take a look around the room."

Internally, Alec screams. Screams at Magnus that this is ridiculous, that he can’t be serious, that this is precisely the opposite of what they came here for, but Asmodeus’ spell renders him useless.

Fuck. Fuck this. Fuck everything. He should have refused. Should have made Magnus listen. Should have argued more, forced Magnus to understand that they didn’t need to do this. He should have done something, anything, to stop this lunacy.

"You have me," Magnus continues, ignorant to Alec’s agony, "and there’s nothing I can do about it. So let Alec go."

"And why would I do that? I could keep him here as my pet. He’s rather amusing. Or I could kill him, and feed off your pain for a millennium."

"You could," Magnus agrees, "but if you do that, I won’t stay willingly."

No. No, no, no.

Asmodeus appears to have forgotten that Alec is even there. He crosses the room and stops in front of Magnus, eyes roaming across his face, searching for a hint of deception. Magnus looks right back at him, unblinking.

"Very well," Asmodeus says at last, rocking back on his heels. "If this is the price of keeping you where you belong, so be it."

He snaps his fingers, sharp and to the point where Magnus can never resist an extra flourish, and a swirling red portal opens beside him. It’s blurred by the tinted translucence of the portal, but Alec can see home, New York, Magnus’ loft. There’s the sofa he kissed Magnus on, the doors to the bedroom
he nearly died in, the kitchen he bolted from when things got too deep to quickly. There’s home, Magnus’ home, the only place in the world he feels truly safe in. He’d give anything to jump right through that portal—but only if Magnus comes too.

“Take a look at the world,” Asmodeus murmurs, as the wind begins to pick up the longer the portal is held open. “This is what you’re leaving behind.”

“It’s worth it,” Magnus says, without a hint of hesitation. He doesn’t look at Alec. “I won’t let you trap him here.”

A smile quirks at one corner of Asmodeus’ mouth, and, with a flick of his hand, Alec feels the spell lift off him like clouds parting to reveal the bright heat of the sun.

He scrambles to his feet, swaying and then stumbling slightly as he tries to rush over to Magnus, to stop this, because it’s ludicrous, it’s stupid, Magnus cannot possibly stay in Edom. He has to go back home with Alec. He can’t stay here. He can’t.

“Magnus—”

“Don’t, Alec,” Magnus says, with that infuriating veil of calm. He keeps his gaze fixed on his father. “Don’t make this harder.”

“You can’t stay here! You have to—”

“Have to what? Fight him?” Magnus arches an eyebrow. “I can’t. This is the only way.”

“No.” Alec sets his jaw stubbornly. He sees Asmodeus roll his eyes, but he doesn’t care. “No. There has to be a way. There’s always a way. We’ve always beaten the odds before.”

“And perhaps they’ve finally caught up with us.”

Alec clenches his jaw. “Damnit, Magnus, I am not fucking leaving you!”

Magnus closes his eyes, and, when he reopens them, he’s looking over at Alec with such unguarded affection that it steals every infuriated word brewing on Alec’s lips.

“Alexander,” he says gently. “You have to go. You don’t belong here.”

“Neither do you!”

“Yes.” Magnus’ eyes cut across to Asmodeus’ for a split second, like meeting like. “Yes, my love, I do.”

Alec shakes his head furiously. “What was it? What was it I said that made you—”

All pretence and bravado drops from Magnus’ face immediately, and he jerks his head sharply to the side. “No. No, Alec, nothing. You– You are—” Magnus swallows, Adam’s apple bobbing. “Come here.”

Warily, Alec passes Asmodeus, who turns away with a roll of his eyes, and lets Magnus cup his face in his hands and pull him close, so their foreheads are pressed together. He clings on, curling his fingers into the fabric of Magnus’ jacket, terrified to let go. Terrified that if he does, Magnus will disappear.

“You have to go, my Alexander. You have to go back to the world.”
Alec’s jaw clenches, and he swallows around the emotion gripping at his throat. “I don’t want the world. I want my world. I want you.”

“Alexander.” Magnus’ voice cracks. “You can’t.”

“Bullshit.”

“I love you,” Magnus murmurs, “and I will always be here for you.”

Magnus kisses him hard, for just a moment, and then he’s pushing against Alec’s chest hard enough to send him toppling backwards, and—

“No!” Alec shouts, eyes going wide as he realises that he’s going to fall through the portal. “Magnus, no!”

It’s too late. For just a second, he feels his stomach fall through his body as he drops like a stone through nothingness. A silent scream is ripped from his lungs, eyes wide, and then—

He lands hard on the rug in Magnus’ living room. Through the portal, for just a moment, he sees Magnus watching him, a sad, soft smile turning his lips up. Then Asmodeus steps in front, his back to the portal, and, with a sharp swipe of his hand, the portal closes, and Alec is left alone, staring at the spot from which his link to Magnus disappeared with a sinking horror settling in his chest.

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I didn’t tell him that I love him too, is the first thing Alec thinks, knocked on his ass and pushing himself half up on one elbow. And then, ow, fuck, because he landed awkwardly on something hard, and it’s digging painfully into his wing.

It’s his bow, he realises, as he sits up, and he stares at it for a moment. How the fuck? He can’t remember what he did with it before Asmodeus hit him with the spell, but he’s pretty certain he didn’t have it on him when Magnus chucked him through a portal against his will.

Alec activates his iratze with one hand and slides his phone out of his pocket with the other. He scrolls down to Catarina’s number with unsteady fingers, and lets it ring out on speaker just as Chairman Meow runs out from the bedroom and demands his attention with a series of adorably obnoxious meows.

“What the hell have you two been doing?” Catarina demands, the moment the line connects.

“We went to Edom.”

“Why on earth did you go to Edom?”

“It’s a long story,” Alec says, “but Asmodeus trapped us, and Magnus bargained to escape, except his plan was trading himself for me, and—”

“Slow down,” Catarina says, firmly but kindly, and Alec feels his rising panic subside a little. Magnus can’t be trapped in Edom forevermore. He just can’t. “Tell me everything. From the beginning.”

When Alec is done, Catarina is silent for a long, heavy moment, and Alec can’t help the way fear consumes him. Fear that she’ll say it’s hopeless: that she can’t help, that Magnus is stuck there, that it is what it is.
“Leave this to me,” she says at last, and interrupts him before he can protest. “No, I mean it. As brilliant a leader and a fighter I’m sure you are, this isn’t your area.”

“The fuck it isn’t,” Alec retorts. “I’m a Shadowhunter. I’m designed to hunt demons. Asmodeus is a demon and my boyfriend is trapped in Edom. I would rather die than sit on my hands while someone else saves him.”

“Alec,” Catarina says, sounding amused. “You forget who we’re talking about.”

“He’s trapped. By Asmodeus. It doesn’t matter who we’re talking about.”

“And yet, Asmodeus was walking around Edom injured from his last run-in with Magnus, no?”

Alec recalls Asmodeus’ cane, and deliberates for only a moment before remembering that he also tossed it against the wall so hard it cracked.

“But—”

“Trust me,” Catarina says softly. “I love Magnus too. I would never try to stop you helping if I thought he needed it more than he needed you to be safe.”

Alec feels his jaw flex as he grinds his teeth together; the world turns blurry between one blink and the next, and emotion squeezes his throat so tightly he has to take a moment just to breathe through it. He feels like a child when he says, “What if I need him to be safe?”

“I know you do. I trust you, Alec Lightwood. Trust me. I’ve got this. I need you to get in touch with someone for me. And I need you to ask her to open a channel to Edom.”

“A channel? Not a portal?”

“A channel. She’ll know what it means. But you might not like who it is.”

“Who is it?” Alec asks, watching as Chairman Meow jumps up on the sofa and curls up on top of one of Magnus’ waistcoats, which has been discarded in a heap beside Alec’s jacket.

“Iris Rouse.”

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When Alec has finished speaking, his gathered audience stare at him with slack jaws in the basement of the Hotel Dumort. Raphael and Meliorn have their eyebrows raised, Simon and Maia are outright gaping at him, and Clary and Luke look mystified.

“Let me get this straight,” Luke says, recovering himself first. “Magnus is trapped in Edom by a Prince of Hell. We’re not helping him, we’re just going to take a trip to visit an exiled criminal and ask her to do some warlock thing that none of us have even heard of, let alone understand?”

Alec feels his stomach twist. “That’s what Catarina said we need to do. I trust her.”

“Cat is right,” Raphael says immediately, uncrossing his arms from across his chest. “I’m just trying to fit into my perception of you that you’re willing to negotiate with Iris Rouse.”

“I don’t like it,” Alec admits, “but I don’t know what else to do, and... Well. This is Magnus.”

“Oh, I think this is brilliant,” Maia says, grinning. “I just wish I could take a trip back in time and
play this conversation to the stuck up, miserable guy you were when we first met.”

“Thank you, Maia.” Alec rolls his eyes, but can’t help the quirk of his lips. “Look, Iris wasn’t sentenced by the Clave. She was sentenced by the Downworld. I can’t do this without Downworld approval. Well,” he amends, seeing the look on Simon’s face, “I can, and I will, but I don’t want to.”

“Nobody’s going to stop you,” Luke says, shooting Meliorn a pointed glare when he opens his mouth. Meliorn shuts up. Even Alec is impressed. “Everyone here owes Magnus ten times over, and —”

“And most of us love him enough to do it even if we didn’t.” Raphael swallows, and Simon pats his elbow comfortingly. “I’m doing this with you, Lightwood.”

“I wouldn’t dream of saying no,” Alec tells him, because he knows that Magnus is family, not merely a friend, to Raphael.

“I have a question.” Clary raises her hand from where she’s sitting on a box that Alec suspects contains packets of blood. “Why am I here? I’m not a Downworld Council person.”

Alec smiles faintly. “No, but you are the only person I know of who can open a portal without the Clave being able to detect it. And as all of this is very, very illegal, that might come in handy.”

It only takes them a few minutes to work out the logistics. Meliorn hides the alleyway from the sight of the mundanes, and Clary draws a rune in the air to churn a portal into existence that will, according to Catarina, land them right where Iris is.

It’s fucking freezing on the other side, is the first thing Alec thinks when he steps through, Raphael close behind. He barely hears the whir of the portal shutting over the ragged breath he hauls in at the sharp temperature change. Maia had informed them that it would be nighttime in Iceland, where Iris had been sentenced to exile, but it’s still light.

“This is the first time I’ve ever been out of America, not counting Idris,” Alec says, glancing around at the rocky landscape they’ve found themselves in. “And it’s to consort with a known criminal. Why, I’m still not sure.”

Raphael’s face doesn’t shift as he dusts off his jacket. “Because Iris owes Magnus. And you. She’ll keep it quiet.”

Alec wrinkles his nose. “Aren’t there other warlocks who aren’t criminals who’ll protect Magnus out of loyalty?”

“Probably,” Raphael admits, “But Iris is who we need. She’s very adept at inter-dimensional travel. That’s how she picked the right demons for the right women.”

The words make Alec’s stomach churn with revulsion. “That just makes me want to do this less. We’re trusting her with Magnus’ life.”

“Lightwood.” Raphael spins on his heels to look at him, expression nearly as chilly as the air. But perhaps the fear Alec is battling so hard to keep down shows on his face, because Raphael’s eyes soften. “Catarina knows what she’s talking about. And Magnus... He’s strong.”

“I know,” Alec says, glancing away. “But in Edom, Asmodeus is stronger.”

“That’s why he has us,” Raphael says. “Catarina, and you, and me.”
“Why isn’t Catarina here?”

“Because Catarina can’t open a portal to Edom. That’s why we need Iris.” Raphael pauses. “Between you and me, I’m fairly sure this isn’t the first time Magnus has got himself into a tizzy in Edom. Catarina is being far too calm about it. They’ve done this before. Or Magnus has, and he’s told her about it.”

Alec blanches. Was that meant to make him feel better? Because it didn’t. Not at all.

“He hasn’t been to Edom since I’ve known him,” Raphael adds, “but—”

A cool voice interrupts them. “I was told I had visitors. I didn’t expect...this.”

Alec glances away from Raphael. Iris Rouse is crossing the empty land they portalled to, hair flying around her in the wind as she fixes them with an odd, piercing expression. Her gaze flickers over Raphael with disinterest, but lingers on Alec.


“Yes,” Alec says, “and so did Magnus Bane. And we—”

“I know what you want me to do, Shadowhunter,” Iris says dismissively. “I just don’t understand why a Clave soldier is willing to consort with a convicted criminal.”

Alec shrugs. “It doesn’t matter why.”

Iris raises her eyebrows. “Much as I’m sure you two would like to disagree, I do hold the power here. You’re asking me for a favour. I’m acquiescing, because you saved my Madzie. I want to know why.”

“Because I love him,” Alec says, without hesitation. “I love him more than I love anything in the world, and I need him to come home and be safe.”

Surprise washes across Iris’ face, soft and unexpected, and she takes half a step back at Alec’s words as she appraises him from several metres away. Something in his expression must make her believe him, because she inclines her head half an inch, and turns her back towards them.

“Very well, Shadowhunter,” she says. “Let’s bring him home.”

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Kisses!! ;)

Thank you so much for reading, and let me know what you thought! You can chat to me on social media on Tumblr, on Twitter, or using #fwwfic

I’m not sure when the next update will be - I’m gonna say a few weeks, but don’t hold me to that!

Much love,
Lu <3
Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!