

The Moon Rabbit

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The Moon Rabbit

by [Thealmostrhetoricalquestion](#)

Summary

Some are born immortal, some achieve immortality, and some have immortality thrust upon them when they touch something in a museum that they *really* shouldn't touch.

Magnus reached up to tweak Alec's collar when he got close enough. "Saved the day again, Mr Lightwood?"

Alec felt some of the tension of the past few days seep out of him, and his mouth twitched into a smile. "As always, Mr Bane."

Notes

A gift for Nathalys, an all-round lovely human who kindly donated to the Fandom Trumps Hate cause, prompting some Immortal Alec and all the repercussions that follow. I really love the idea of fighting back against hate with creativity, and I hope this story is everything you hoped it would be!

If I had to Timeline this, I think Post-Season Two is probably appropriate? Magnus is still High Warlock, still has his magic, and Alec is Head of the Institute. No Valentine. I've tagged it Canon Divergence just in case but it's as close to canon up to that point as possible! Flashbacks are in italics!

Rated T for Mild Language, alcohol mentions and just generally less soft themes.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Gold in Our Mouths

Chapter Summary

“I think,” Alec said, to the wall with an unfettered portrait pinned to it, “that I’m getting old and bitter. But not old, ‘cause I can’t do that anymore. I also think I’m gonna throw up.”

Chapter Notes

Alcohol/drunkenness mentioned, so just warning for that. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Alec found the roaring twenties in a bottle of something gold and an hour of music that felt like a cotton bud rubbed just right in the deep of his ear. Wasn’t fair to call it gold really, Alec thought, squinting at the shivering liquid that filled the bottom quarter of his glass. It felt like fire in his throat. It had all the colours he’d been missing for years, all the burn of mortality that he wished he didn’t miss. It would be easier if he didn’t miss it, he told himself.

Immortal. He was immortal now. Time wouldn’t kill him, although Magnus had been quick to impress on him that a well-placed weapon would. He wasn’t impervious to harm, just age. He wouldn’t get wrinkles or grey hair, and his bones wouldn’t grow brittle, his teeth yellow, his eyes cloudy. He was this version of Alexander Lightwood forever.

Alec didn’t drink often. He didn’t like the bitter taste or the manufactured sweetness, although Magnus had taken to experimenting with his drinks to try and find something that might agree with Alec’s palate. Either he had a very refined one, or absolutely no taste at all, because so far nothing agreed with him. But this amber stuff, gold stuff as his hazy mind insisted - it tasted okay after you swallowed enough of it.

He was down to Magnus’s last bottle, and that was fine, he said, because this was a goodbye bottle, a goodbye to the Alec that liked a drink. He just *needed* to drink tonight because it was cold and lonely in the loft without Magnus there, and the alcohol felt warm enough that he almost didn’t mind the loneliness.

The needle skipped along the scratched record he’d found under Magnus’s bed earlier, amongst a pile of other records and a bedraggled feather boa. He’d blown the dust off and left it on the floor because he wasn’t even going to attempt to wrangle a Hoover around in this state, and he wasn’t even sure Magnus had a Hoover to wrangle. The music was exuberant,

coy and sultry, a combination Alec didn't think anyone could pull off, no matter what colour was in their glass. Except Magnus. Magnus could pull off most things.

Like Alec's clothes, he thought with a goofy grin. He could pull off Alec's clothes any time.

Although, that hadn't been happening all that often lately. His smile dulled a second later. There was one thing Magnus couldn't do: he couldn't pull off happy when he was actually anything but. That was something that had come as a surprise to Alec, because the Magnus he knew hid his vulnerabilities between flares of blue and silver, behind sparkling jewellery and lace-ridden clothing. He exposed his skin and his power like it was nothing, as a distraction from the fact that his heart was far from visible. He was an actor, a showman, when it came to what he was feeling.

Maybe Alec just knew Magnus well enough now to know that he wasn't as happy as he was pretending to be. Or maybe he didn't know Magnus at all. How could he, when Magnus had been alive for years and years and was so used to locking everything away that the notion of revealing anything about his past made him stiff and tense. They were better at it these days. Alec understood more now, but he didn't know if he *knew* Magnus. He didn't know if anyone did.

"I think," Alec said, to the wall with an unfettered portrait pinned to it, "that I'm getting old and bitter. But not old, 'cause I can't do that anymore. I also think I'm gonna throw up."

The portrait was suddenly empty, the fur-cloak-clad man vanishing with dignity to meet others with an equal amount of dignity, others that hopefully wouldn't vomit all over his oil canvas world. Magnus had strange magic, Alec thought, before he passed out. Strange and beautiful magic.

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White light ricocheted off the smooth surface of the display case. Beams of light rebounded off the marble walls, glancing off the panes of glass covering weathered texts and ancient artefacts. Thin white stripes recoiled off the gleaming floor.

Alec lowered his witchlight and stepped closer to the display case. He was in the left wing of the museum, having systematically worked his way through the rest of the silent building, until this was the only room left. The museum was buried in a glamoured area of China, the name of which was unknown, where the streets ran thick with rich magic, and the cold walls told the history of a world that Mundanes were not privy to.

The sky was black outside. Some of that inky darkness crept in through the skylights above, bleeding shadows over the walls. If Alec tipped his head back, he could see a sliver of the moon's shining face, just visible past the corner of an old building that towered above the museum.

Magnus could re-open a portal for them whenever he wanted to, but realistically, Alec knew they couldn't afford to wait. They had an agreed-upon time. Jace paced the length of the room behind Alec, his footsteps echoing off the thick stone walls as he scoured the display cases for

a very specific artefact. Their noises were supposed to be muffled by the magic of runes, but that didn't seem to make any difference in this place.

Alec should have been searching too, but instead, his gaze was drawn to the display case, the one right in the middle of the room.

A silver plaque adorned the plinth beneath the case, but the words were written in characters that Alec didn't understand. After a cursory glance, he fit his fingers in the crease above the little silver clasp that held the case shut.

He should have known better. He did know better, but there was something about the contents of the case that entranced him. He stepped closer, until the toes of his shoes were pressed against the wooden stand. It felt a little like standing in a dense fog and hearing a voice in the distance, and knowing that was the only way to escape the encroaching softness.

The display case swung open easily. It shouldn't have. Alec felt a little light-headed as his hand ghosted forward, almost of its own accord. Moonlight filtered in through the skylight and brushed against the tips of Alec's hair, dyeing it silver. If anyone were to look, they would see an ageless being, bathed in a silver glow - smooth skin and white hair and a wealth of youthful curiosity in his eyes.

Jace cursed behind him; the moment was gone. There was no ageless being. There was just Alec, leaning forward to remove the contents of the case.

Inside, there was a mortar and pestle.

It was obviously ancient; the wood was chipped and worn, like the rough bark of an old tree. The tip of the handle had started to splinter and the inside of the mortar was worn thin, small scrapes made all around the edges. Alec ran his fingers over the ragged surface and breathed steadily. He felt rooted, at peace. There was something about this moment that had him pressing closer, something that urged him not to leave.

"I can't find it," Jace said, storming over on light feet, witchlight swinging wildly with each sweep of his arm. "Whatever this thing is, it's not in this museum. Why do you think—"

He stopped abruptly, taking in the strange, sluggish look on Alec's face, the open display case and the mortar and pestle nestled in his hands. Alec tugged it closer, just in case Jace got any funny ideas, and there was a faint, almost inaudible sloshing sound. With a frown, Alec glanced down, but all he could see was moonlight.

Moonlight that looked like liquid, filling the mortar and pestle. Alec tipped the bowl to the side, and the liquid moved to accommodate it.

"Alec," Jace said, sounding uncharacteristically nervous. Alec didn't look up. "Alec, put it back in the case."

"Why?" Alec asked. There was something different about his voice - usually deep, it now had a strange lilt to it, a vastness that sent a shudder through the room.

“This place was glamoured for a reason,” Jace said, still sounding cautious, although his words were coming from somewhere far away, beyond the fog. “The things in here aren’t normal, everyday museum objects. You know that. C’mon, Alec. Magnus specifically told us not to touch anything until we found what we were looking for.”

Amber eyes pierced the fog that had settled over him. Cat eyes. Beautiful. He thought of Magnus, at home, working on his own spells and rituals as he waited for the moment when they would need his portal. Probably making a drink so as not to betray his anxiousness, the way his hands shook lightly. Alec knew he would have come with them, but he was—

It didn't matter. Or it did matter, of course it did, because it was Magnus, but the fog was descending again, and he clutched the mortar and pestle closer. He thought he could hear laughter, soft and kind and knowing, and the thump of large, furred feet.

Jace stepped closer, hands outstretched, and as he reached for the mortar and pestle, Alec staggered back and collided with the display case. The case fell to the ground with a loud bang, and the glass cracked, but did not shatter. Lights flickered to life in the ceiling, and an alarm began to wail.

Jace reached for Alec again, his quiet worry morphing into a panicked yell, and Alec gripped the mortar and pestle tightly, but not tight enough.

The moonlight spilled all down him.

*

Alec woke on the carpet with a crick in his neck. Morning brought a light that was too bright and sour, and the friendly taste of the yellow potion that Magnus had left on the floor, not far from where his left arm had flopped during the night.

He heard noises in the kitchen and stumbled in that direction, following the clatter of pots and pans hitting the stove and the rattle of the spice rack as salt was pulled from the metal confines. Magnus was fluttering about, his strong arms raised above him as things flew all over the place, his magic wild and untamed. He was a contradiction: graceful movement and loving motions and a sense of power that couldn’t be measured. Alec paused in the kitchen and watched. He had an eternity of this, now, and the thought left him breathless, his chest constricting.

“You’re up early, considering my finest bottle of whiskey is suspiciously empty,” Magnus said, not looking at him. “I found it lying on the floor, lonely and abandoned.”

Lonely and abandoned. Alec didn't want to identify with an empty bottle of alcohol. He nodded jerkily, stepping inside the kitchen. His headache had dimmed as the yellow potion kicked in, and the light from the window wasn’t too bright anymore. His mouth was disgusting, but Magnus hadn’t kissed him in three days, so Alec didn't think it mattered much what he tasted like.

“I didn't make it to the bed,” Alec said, heading for the fridge and pulling out a carton of orange juice. “I think we should move it closer to the bar, if this is going to keep happening.”

It was meant to be a joke, but his tone was bitter. The noise behind him didn't cease or stop, but Alec knew Magnus had paused anyway.

"If what keeps happening? If you keep getting blackout drunk with nobody here to look after you if something goes wrong?" Airy voice, unaffected, but somehow tight with tension at the same time. "I'm not one to judge, darling, being an advocate for happy hour myself, but there's a difference between indulging alone and doing *that* alone."

Alec snorted, taking a gulp of cold orange and jamming the lid back on the carton. "You can't berate me for doing something alone when you're *never here* to do it with me."

"You'd like me to get blackout drunk with you instead?"

"I'd like you," Alec snapped, turning around to glare at Magnus, "to be here. Full stop, okay? Not with conditions, not to *do* things for me or with me. Just be here."

Magnus stared at him, his eyes narrow, his face blank. Alec tipped his chin up and put the carton down, not intending to back down. He thought Magnus might storm out, might disappear through a portal in a flash of violet. He thought they might argue. He thought he might have to apologise when all he wanted to say was that he missed Magnus. He thought a lot of things, but he didn't think Magnus would sag against the counter, his expression creased and full of pain.

"Alexander, I'm not trying to leave you alone," Magnus said quietly. Alec hated when he looked like that, sounded like that, so he stepped closer until they were pressed together, and his hands felt at home on Magnus's shoulders, resting against his wrinkled blue suit. The wrinkles were enough of a clue that nothing was quite right.

"It's not like I want you to stay inside the loft and never leave," Alec said, trying for a smile. "I'm not trying to control what you do, or tell you not to leave, or anything creepy. It's not - it's not that. It's just that it feels like a fight, with you being gone all the time and neither of us talking."

"It's not an argument," Magnus reassured him, brushing one hand over Alec's lightly. The touch helped more than anything. Words were useful for clearing the air, for letting Alec know where he stood, but touch was something that had always been missing in his life, and having it now just reaffirmed that he was wanted, welcome.

"I know you're not being controlling, Alec. I find it hard to believe that anyone *could* succeed at controlling me when I can just turn them into a goat and steal their fortune, but of all the people I'd believe capable of trying? You are at the very bottom of the list. In fact, you're not even on the list, darling."

Alec smiled properly, ducking his head slightly.

"You understand that I have to do this, though, don't you?" Magnus asked, breaking the silence.

"Yeah," Alec said, with a soft sigh. "You're looking for a cure."

Magnus shook his head immediately and cupped Alec's chin with warm, familiar hands.

"I'm looking for options," he corrected gently. When Alec's eyebrows went up, Magnus gave a fond, exasperated little laugh before growing serious again. "It's not something that needs to be cured. I don't have an illness, and there's nothing wrong with me. But you weren't born with this. Alec, immortality isn't something small. It doesn't just happen. It's not something to simply be accepted or - or brushed over."

Alec's mouth twisted. "You think I don't know that? I didn't ask for this, you know."

"Exactly!" Magnus's voice rose slightly, and he pushed away, pacing up and down the kitchen with a look of frustration. "You didn't ask for this at all. You didn't seek it out. You were on a mission, and something went wrong, and the choice was taken from you. Alexander, *please* don't ask me to be happy about something that you had no say over, especially something as big as this."

Alec swallowed against the sudden thickness in his throat. He knew what Magnus was saying, and he even agreed, but all he could hear was *don't ask me to be happy*. Stupidly, it hurt. His hands twitched at his sides, but he pushed aside the urge to cross them over his chest, a defensive tick that Magnus had learned to watch out for.

"I'm not asking you to be happy," Alec said, quieter than he wanted to sound. "I'm asking you to stay."

Magnus stopped abruptly in the kitchen and sighed. His eyes were distant, fixed on their usual mugs sitting side by side on the counter, but it was obvious he was somewhere else.

"You don't have to," Alec said, because he was filled with a sudden fear that Magnus was only off hunting for options because he really, really didn't want this. Maybe he only wanted Alec as long as he knew there was an expiration date on what they had?

Or maybe, Alec thought wryly, that was a fucking horrible thought that was unfair to both of them, and his insecurities were getting the better of him. He stifled a groan. This whole situation was playing with them both, and he hated it. He shook his head, sighing. He didn't really think that. Magnus loved him, and Alec loved him back. It was just a lot to deal with at the moment, and neither him nor Magnus were dealing with it well.

"You don't have to," Alec said again, stronger this time. "I'm not going to force you to stay here if you want to keep looking for a way to fix this. Like you said, I didn't go looking for this, so it's not like I'm going to say *no* to something that might fix it."

Magnus's face was curiously blank.

"It's happened, though," Alec continued. "I don't think it's going to change just because we want it to. Immortality isn't exactly what I had in mind for the future either, but if it's what I've got, then we need to think about where to go from here. But I won't make you stay."

The blank look was gone. Magnus moved closer again, clearly agitated. He gave a frustrated sigh and eventually moved until he was close enough to kiss. They didn't, but that was more

because Alec was aware of how badly his mouth tasted right now, and because kissing, he had discovered, didn't solve as much as Alec hoped it might. Didn't mean he didn't want to, though.

“One more trip,” Magnus said, brushing a hand over Alec's arm. “Just one more. I have somewhere in mind that I think might have answers. If I don't find an answer to all of this there, then... we do as you say, and we move on. With everything.”

Alec felt his pulse stutter. He swallowed the lump that rose suddenly in his throat. He didn't know what that meant. Move on with their lives, together? Move on with their relationship? Or move on separately? He could ask, but he wasn't sure that he wanted the answer. Later, perhaps, when he felt like he could handle what Magnus might say in response.

This was the part where touch wasn't enough, where words were needed too. He didn't have them, though, so he settled for a small condition instead.

“One more trip,” Alec agreed, “but I'm coming with you this time.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much! Let me know what you thought! <3

Rummaging Through the Countryside

Chapter Summary

“Why couldn’t we just portal to where we need to go?” Alec asked, as Magnus tugged him over to the right Platform.

Chapter Notes

There's a panic attack in this chapter, but not too graphic. Steer clear anyway if those make you uncomfortable.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He found Magnus at the train station at exactly fifteen minutes past ten. Not just any old train station, either. This one lacked the rattle of subway cars and the dank, dingy air of the underground.

Alec’s feet were a little sore. He had been called to the Institute early that morning to settle a dispute between a member of the fae and a Shadowhunter on patrol that had occurred a few hours ago, and he’d done so much frustrated pacing that even his Shadowhunter-trained feet were protesting.

He’d made sure to bump into Izzy and Jace before he left to let them know where he was going. He was still Head of the Institute, settling a bit more heavily into his role now, and technically, he wasn’t supposed to leave the Institute without someone in charge and a large pile of completed paperwork. Izzy would do *more* than fine without him though, and would probably destroy him if he suggested otherwise, and at the very least, there were extenuating circumstances.

Nobody knew how to act around him. The other Shadowhunter’s skirted the issue, giving him odd looks: nobody barring Jace, Izzy and Magnus knew the specifics, but it didn’t take a genius to know that something was wrong. The truth was bound to come out soon.

Jace was stone-faced when Alec saw him, and he knew that was Jace’s way of coping, by shoving everything down and pretending not to care, but it still hurt to see. He understood it, but that didn’t mean he had to like the blankness, the rough exterior, the wall that seemed to exist between them now. Izzy was different. Her eyes were fire and water all at once, rage and grief. Alec didn’t know how to deal with that, either, so he had just clapped Jace on the shoulder, kissed Izzy’s forehead and left this morning, his hands shaking inside his coat pockets.

Magnus was waiting for him beside a pillar. A portal had appeared in Alec's office and popped him into place in an alleyway outside the station, and Alec had rushed through the crowds to get to Magnus. He cut a splendid figure amongst the bustle of people with places to be. Like a rock in a river, people parted smoothly around him. Hair carefully coiffed, expensive wool coat thrown over one arm, Magnus watched with eyes that were warm but a little wary as Alec strolled closer.

The wariness was a new addition over the last five days, ever since the trip to the museum, and things were still a little strained between them, but otherwise Magnus was exactly the same as ever, the one constant in Alec's life despite how much things kept changing. Alec hoped he always would be. He didn't like how closed-off Magnus seemed to be becoming, but he knew that things were stressful right now. It wasn't permanent. He wouldn't let it be permanent.

Magnus reached up to tweak Alec's collar when he got close enough. "Saved the day again, Mr Lightwood?"

Alec's mouth twitched into a smile. "As always, Mr Bane."

"Never a dull day with you Shadowhunter's, is there? This is why I stayed away from you all for as long as I did."

"That, and the charming good looks," Alec added.

Magnus winked. "Don't forget the modesty."

Alec found himself laughing. He hadn't done much of that recently, too caught up in worries, the fear and uncertainties. Magnus didn't laugh, but his eyes lost their hard edge and grew fond instead. He pressed a kiss to Alec's mouth, and Alec closed his eyes, savouring the moment, the slightly sticky softness of glossy lips. Magnus was wearing something strawberry-flavoured today. He drew back with a smile in place and rested a hand on Magnus's hip.

The brick wall was rough and cold against his back when he leaned against it, lazily following the progress of several harried people across the station, tickets clutched in vice-like grips and bags flying.

Smog filled the air. King's Cross was filthy and busy. Alec had been twice before, but never in the morning, when the crowds rushed in, and always when he was younger and half-asleep, not concerned with the slow, toneless lives of Mundanes.

"Why couldn't we just portal to where we need to go?" Alec asked, as Magnus tugged him over to the right Platform.

"Simple, darling. The place we're heading for is warded, and I don't know exactly how far the wards extend. A portal wouldn't appear there. Nothing stops trains from rummaging through the countryside though, and there's a stop close to the town that we want. Much simpler to portal here and take the train." Magnus aimed a grin at Alec. "Not to mention, there's something very romantic about a train journey, isn't there?"

Alec shrugged, but didn't deny it. He hadn't spent a lot of time on trains, but they always featured in books and films, and Magnus looked vaguely excited, so he wasn't about to disagree.

The train was a little late. Magnus clicked his tongue as they stood underneath the large clock on the wall, waiting. When it did arrive, Alec listened to the screech of oncoming wheels as Magnus fiddled with his collar.

They boarded the carriage right at the end, and Magnus cast a wave of blue over their table to keep people from bothering them. Alec sat the right way round and didn't look out the window, closing his eyes instead and feeling the bone-deep tiredness creep back in the way it had been recently. Magnus sat with their destination at his back and unfolded his newspaper, which Alec hadn't seen because he'd hidden it under his coat, like the paranoid pain in the ass he was.

Magnus caught Alec's accusing eye and smirked at him without heat. "You know exactly why I keep these hidden from you. You always steal the puzzle page and I have to waste energy erasing your ridiculous answers."

The paranoid part was probably warranted, Alec admitted to himself with a faint grin. He touched their ankles together under the table.

The journey went smoothly enough. Countryside streaked by the windows in abstract blurs of green and brown, tinged with a sickly yellow, as the cold hands of August tangled its fingers in the weeds and teased out all their insecurities. Nothing was growing even though it should have been, and the world outside was dying slowly as it crept closer to Fall, and maybe that was why Alec hated this time of year, or maybe it was just because the oncoming cold made his bones ache and reminded him of how chilly it used to get in his bedroom at the Institute, when there was no loft full of hand-woven rugs and throws, no Magnus to keep him warm.

Magnus fussed over the puzzle page and passed Alec the funnies when it became evident that he was going to start getting restless if he didn't have something to do soon. He didn't like doing nothing. Sometimes he did, if it was him and Magnus in the loft, or at the park, just existing together. This was maddening though, to have somewhere in mind and not be there already.

Ink blackened Magnus's bottom lip from where he nibbled thoughtfully on his pen. Alec didn't think ink would taste very nice, but he still found himself wanting to lick it off.

He was used to thoughts like that, now. Before he knew that they were allowed, for the most part, he pushed them down and kept the panic in one part of his body; usually in his hands, where he could wrestle viciously with his own consciousness and channel anything remotely different into work. It came out in restlessness, in bitten nails and spasms of the fingers. He shot arrows until his hands bled because that kept him safe, that kept the truth from spilling out over breakfast, kept him locked out of his own traitorous mind.

Even now, something in him quietly rebelled as he watched Magnus. He wanted to reach out and see whether the stubble on Magnus's jaw was as rough as it looked or as smooth as the hair on top of his head. He already knew, but he still wanted to touch, and the part that had

kept the rest of him pushed down for so long still had things to say, not that Alec listened much anymore.

It wasn't just Magnus that he thought about, either, not at first. Not now, even, not all the time, because he was still curious and he still had eyeballs that occasionally caught on people that he liked the look of. Usually when that happened, Magnus caught him looking and that smirk would appear, and Alec would flush and prepare himself for a night of teasing. Magnus was still the only person he wanted to look at, though.

Before, though, there were men behind checkouts that were fit and had some quality or other that drew Alec's eye - their hair or the way their clothes fit or their hands, often. Their voice, sometimes, but if it wasn't teasing or elegant at the roots then Alec usually wasn't too bothered about it. There were men in banks and men in clubs and a few around the Institute that Alec wouldn't touch with a ten-foot-pole, but would glance at when he knew nobody was watching.

Before he knew that these thoughts were okay, he was a fucking catastrophe. A disaster, really, just bumbling along here and there, trying not to look where he didn't think he should be looking.

Izzy still called him a disaster these days, whenever he muttered under his breath about Magnus's pants being too tight to ignore and *why does he have to wear that blazer with nothing underneath it when he knows what it does to Alec?* Now, she found it hilarious, rather than a bit sad.

"Alec," Magnus said, thwacking him gently on the arm with the newspaper. "Come back to Earth, if it's not too much trouble. We're here."

Alec blinked himself back into the world where he was quite okay with wanting to be close to Magnus's mouth, and felt better for it. The countryside had stopped moving, planting them quite firmly in a gloomy section of it, where gorse ran free and the bare trees that were scattered around loomed over them like mournful giants. There was no summer here.

They clambered out of the train with their bags, magically extended on the inside thanks to Magnus and his obsession with having the right outfit for the right occasion, just in case. Sparse flecks of rain turned the drab, cold concrete of the platform an even darker grey. Alec frowned at his surroundings, the chill in the air sending shivers down his back. Leaves scuttled across the empty station, swept along by the wind.

"Well, this looks cheerful," Alec said.

Magnus rolled his eyes. "Practically a honeymoon destination. There's a village not far from here, but I can feel foreign magic in the air and I don't feel like untangling it. We'll have to walk."

"What exactly is in this village?" Alec asked, shifting closer to the station wall to examine a noticeboard.

Magnus shot him a dirty look and slapped Alec's hand away from one of the damp, rumpled flyers.

"Stop fondling the leaflets, they look like they've been there for longer than I've been alive, which is saying something. You'll catch a disease, and then I won't be able to frolic with you in the fields."

Alec snorted, watching Magnus head for the aforementioned fields. He couldn't imagine Magnus frolicking anywhere, and *he* sure as hell didn't feel like the frolicking kind.

"You didn't actually answer me," Alec said. Magnus always walked a bit quicker than he did, despite Alec being an inch or so taller. Not much, not a substantial amount, but Alec still felt he should be able to walk faster than Magnus, if there was any justice in the world. Magnus had everything going for him: he could afford to let Alec have this.

His knobbly knees quaked with jealousy as he quickened his stride to catch up.

"I was going through some of Ragnor's things," Magnus said, pain flashing over his face as he thought of his fallen friend, "and I found references to something that I thought might help. Ragnor travelled as much as I did, perhaps more, and he liked England, specifically Scotland. It's miserable and grumpy, just like him."

Magnus smiled wistfully for a bit. Alec drifted closer and left him to his thoughts. He hadn't been there for Magnus as much as he wanted to be after Ragnor died, and he didn't know how to bring it all up now without sounding unbearably awkward and treading on feelings.

They said no more except the occasional curse word as they trundled over the wet fields, avoiding cowpats and nettles and accidentally getting each others clothes caught on the fences they had to hop over. Even Magnus couldn't look put together by the time they reached the village, although a quick burst of magic took care of most of the mud.

The village was just a cluster of little houses, a bed and breakfast, a dingy park and a couple of pubs. A library, a corner shop and a post office were all packed into one road. Nobody was about, not even some Mundane caught in the sudden downpour on his way home, and everything was closed apart from the bed and breakfast, which they rang the rusted bell of, soaked and disgruntled.

"This wasn't quite what I expected," Magnus admitted, wrinkling his nose slightly as a figure became visible through the frosted glass. Alec snorted, wiping the rain out of his eyes.

A haggard woman with the face of a shrew opened the door, narrowed her eyes at them, and grunted. When she shuffled back, Alec decided to take that as an invitation, and stepped in out of the rain, tugging Magnus half-inside with him.

"Afternoon," Alec said, keeping his voice low out of respect for the dead that must have been lingering behind the closed doors along the hall, if the smell was anything to go by. "Are you in charge here?"

The woman nodded reluctantly.

“Pleasure, madam. There should be a booking under Bane,” Magnus said, over Alec’s shoulder.

Another grunt was his only answer as soft slippers moved to check the guest book by the door. They were a bit crammed in, and Magnus pressed himself against Alec’s back, still half on the doorstep, dripping with water as the rain poured down.

“Darling, if you don't move further in, I’ll make you wash this suit by hand.”

Alec grinned at the empty threat, indulging himself in the feeling of hot breath on the back of his neck for a moment, and the long line of Magnus’s body pressed against his, before he heaved a theatrical sigh and pasted himself against the wall so Magnus could march past him. Magnus shot him an unimpressed look as he swept past, but there was a spark of amusement there too.

He headed straight for the woman, who turned her narrow, dead gaze to him.

“Allison Lane, yes? I’m a friend of Catarina’s, and we spoke on the phone. My name is Magnus Bane, High Warlock of Brooklyn.”

Alec’s eyebrows went up, and he instantly stood up straighter, alert. Allison Lane didn't seem perturbed by the title.

“We’re here on delicate business, so if you would be so kind as to give us any and all records of your guests from the last week. Make that the last month, actually, just to be certain.”

Alec moved to shut the door with a snap, throwing them into faint silence. The rain still hammered down outside, but it was distant and unimportant. He eyed Allison Lane, but there was nothing unusual about her that he could tell. She could have been a Vampire, or a Werewolf, but her slow, uneven gait and the prominent wrinkles said otherwise. If she was a Warlock, her Mark was hidden. She wasn’t a Shadowhunter, and the Seelie might have been secretive, but they were also very conspicuous.

“Also, if you have any milk, I haven't had any coffee yet, and I’d love some,” Alec added, when the silence stretched on too long. Magnus’s exasperated eyebrow reached a height that Alec wasn’t unfamiliar with, but still spoke of danger. Alec sidled through the hallway, bag dragging against the floral, faded wallpaper and leaving wet streaks behind. He cringed, but there wasn’t much else he could do in a hallway as small as this.

Allison Lane gave them both dubious, disinterested looks before heaving the guest book up off the table and shoving it into Magnus’s arms. Magnus stumbled backwards in surprise and grit his teeth, rearranging himself with as much dignity as possible while Alec watched with shameless amusement.

“T’ain’t nothin’ but locals ‘round here these days, if you’re lucky,” Allison Lane said, her voice thick and musty with age and the frequent touch of gin. “Got three people stayin’ here now, plus you two fellows, but ain’t nobody coming down this far into the valleys without good reason. Not for a bit, now. You’ll find everything you need ta’ know in there, though.”

Alec and Magnus shared a look, and Alec felt a flicker of curiosity in his chest as he watched Allison Lane fiddle with the rope keeping her robe closed. She was nervous, maybe even afraid, and she'd hidden it well with apathy and a gruff word or two.

Allison Lane cast a thin look at the guest book, then slid two keys off a hook on the wall. "Room Seven. If you clog or break anythin', that comes outta your pocket. Staff's downstairs if you need us."

Alec watched her descend towards what had to be a secret lair beside the stairway with a bemused look. Magnus's eyebrows were sloping furiously, his frown intense as he jerked his head towards the stairs and started his way up them.

"Well this should be a fun," Alec muttered, with a pained grimace at a cross-stitched cat that sat on the wall, framed in pine. He stuffed his hands in his pockets, feeling the familiar cold metal of his Steele against his thumb, and trudged after Magnus, each carpeted step creaking beneath his wet shoes until they reached room seven. The door opened after a few fumbled attempts.

All in all, it wasn't as bad as it could have been. There was some mould plastered to the corners of the room and a few cobwebs here and there, and the window was so grimy you couldn't see out of it, but the sheets smelled clean and the curtains weren't even moth-eaten. A kettle was propped up on a table at the other end of the room, squashed in next to a chair, and there was a tray full of sugar packets and teabags. No milk, though.

Magnus's mouth turned down, but he settled on the bed nonetheless, one leg folded under the other as he put the guest book down near the pillow. Alec waited. Sure enough, blue light flooded his palms after less than a minute, and Alec laughed as he locked the door.

"I knew you wouldn't be able to resist," Alec said, throwing his jacket on the other bed and shaking out his wet hair.

"Honestly darling, if you'd expected anything else I would have been forced to question how well you know me," Magnus said, shrugging unapologetically. He closed his eyes in concentration, and Alec put one hand on the wall as blue light coated the room, the floor shaking slightly beneath their feet.

The curtains became long, dramatic red drapes, framing a glistening window. The two beds morphed into one King-sized bed. The bed-covers became plush duvets and silk sheets. The walls gleamed, clean and freshly-painted, and the carpet cleaned itself. The air smelled sweet, like fresh linen, and the tea-station morphed into a small bar.

"They may have to bump up their rating," Alec said, glancing around. "Five stars when you stay in the Bane suite. Minus ten stars for the corpse smell everywhere else."

"Alexander," Magnus protested, laughing. Alec ducked into the bathroom, grinning. Magnus's magic hadn't reached this far yet, but he had no doubt that it would once he saw the state of it.

“Only one towel, so we’ll have to flip for it,” Alec said, poking his head back round the door to grin at the bedraggled, wet figure on the bed. Magnus rolled his eyes, his shoulders loosening as he bent to examine the guestbook.

“Or we could conjure another one, if we needed to,” Magnus said, his voice a tad distracted. “I’m not showering here, though. I expect I’d come out of there more dirty than I was when I went in.”

Alec glanced at the marks smeared on the glass cubicle and conceded the point.

“I’m going to tell Jace that we got here in one piece.”

Magnus rolled his eyes. “I expect he trusts you to manage a train trip safely, but feel free to indulge.”

Not recently, Alec thought grimly. Recently, Jace didn't seem to trust him with anything, but considering the fact that he was immortal now, that wasn't really surprising.

Magnus left him to his quiet contemplation, flipping through the guestbook with a frown. Alec withdrew his stele and concentrated. The rune he used was new - or old, but newly discovered by Clary, who kept drawing them without realising what they did. The whole reason they had gone to the museum in the first place was to find an artefact, something that would allow Clary to get a handle on her rune-drawing abilities, the parts of her that the pure angel blood brought out. It was just a rumour, that something existed to help her control it, but they had grown good at chasing rumours.

The rune burned blood red in the air. It faded after a moment and the space in front of Alec turned a little more opaque, like a mirror. He heard Magnus make a small, confused noise behind him.

“Find anything?” Alec asked, as the mirror turned black and then began to change.

“Something strange,” Magnus said, his brow furrowed. Alec turned to look at him properly, settling on the bed so that Jace would be able to see both of them. Magnus was lovely with his eyes all crinkled in confusion like that.

“Alec,” Jace said, his rough voice interrupting whatever Magnus had been about to say. “You made it alright, then?”

“Miraculously,” Magnus said.

Alec spoke before Jace could retort. “We made it fine. We’re at the Mundane hotel. We spoke to Allison Lane, the woman in charge. Magnus is looking through the guest books to find... something, I don't know what. What *are* you looking for?”

Magnus tapped a page thoughtfully. “I was looking for the name of a traveller. He passes through here every few months with ancient, magical books, keeps a stock of them here somewhere, according to Ragnor’s notes. I thought if I could find his name, and the last time he was here, I could use his signature to trace him.”

“You can do that?” Jace asked, peering at them both. There was noise behind him, and he scowled before moving, the picture wobbling as he stepped out into a quiet, empty corridor. “You can trace someone with just their signature?”

“I’m the High Warlock of Brooklyn,” Magnus said drily, flicking one finger so that sparks flew off the end of it. “There’s not much that I can’t do.”

Alec didn't bother to hide his grin. “Did you find the name?”

“Not yet,” Magnus said, tapping the page again. “I found something else, instead. Something that may be worth looking into.”

“You’re supposed to be looking for a way to help Alec,” Jace said suddenly, sounding impatient. Alec shot him a sharp look, his hand tightening into a fist where it rested on his thigh.

Magnus levelled a cool look at Jace through the mirror.

“Allison Lane runs this bed and breakfast. She was a friend of both Ragnor’s and Catarina’s. She’s not a Downworlder, nor is she a Shadowhunter, but she was given the Sight by a demon who thought it would be amusing to play with a Mundane’s sanity before stealing her life.” Magnus’s voice was calm and careful, but there was no denying the power behind his words as the room grew cold and silent. “Ragnor and Catarina found her in this village years ago, half-dead, and they saved her life before healing her mind. She still has the Sight. She’s seen many terrible things since that day, and Ragnor’s notes said that she was one of the strongest people he had ever known. Catarina agreed, when I asked her.”

Jace was silent for a moment, before he asked, in a strained voice, “What does that have to do with anything?”

Alec thought he knew the answer. “She was afraid. When we met her downstairs, she was nervous and afraid, and she was hiding it, but not well enough. She said some strange things and then disappeared downstairs.”

Magnus nodded. “She hasn’t taken care of this bed and breakfast, either. Nor her appearance. Something’s wrong.”

“Something bad, if it can make someone so strong so afraid,” Alec added. “That’s what you meant, right?”

Magnus nodded once. Alec frowned. He met Jace’s gaze and held it steadily.

Jace’s serious face faltered for a moment, and he gave up the stoic appearance in favour of passing one hand over his face, clearly weary and upset.

“Jace? Something wrong?” Alec asked, shifting forward on the bed and frowning at him in worry.

“You know what’s wrong,” Jace snapped.

The silence that followed fell like a thick, breathing presence. Alec took a shuddering breath and was grateful when Magnus's hand crept towards his, fingers clutching at his knuckles. Jace kept his head bowed ever so slightly.

"Everything's wrong," Jace murmured. "Alec, you're..."

He couldn't finish the sentence. Alec thought wryly that he knew how Jace felt. He could barely say *immortal* either.

Jace's head thunked against the wall behind him. "We should never have gone to that museum. This is my fault."

"You don't mean that," Alec said gently. "We were trying to help Clary. You would have gone on your own if I hadn't gone with you, and who knows what would have happened if I hadn't been there to watch your back. Knowing our luck, there would have been an army of demons waiting for you."

"That's my point. You only went because I went. You shouldn't have been there at all," Jace said, grinding his teeth slightly in frustration. He still wouldn't look at Alec. "I dragged you with me. This is my fault."

"It is *not* your fault. I know I don't show it very well, but I don't hate Clary, and I wanted to help her too. There isn't anywhere you could drag me that I wouldn't want to go," Alec said firmly. "We're Parabatai, Jace. If you're going, I'm going with you, understand?"

Except that wasn't quite true anymore, and Alec could read that in Jace's eyes when he finally looked up. Abruptly, the air in the room vanished. It had hit him over and over again, that he was going to have to live while the people he loved died, that he was going to have to watch them all leave them while he remained like this, but it had never hit him quite like this.

Alec had always followed Jace. He had always been one step behind the people he needed to protect, watching their back. He followed Izzy and Jace and his parents, and he ran after Max all the time, and he chased Magnus now like he was the only way forward. He had slipped, sometimes, when following them came up against the Clave and the laws that were embedded in his skin like runes, but he always righted himself.

At some point, though, Jace was going to go where Alec couldn't follow him. Izzy and Max and his parents and his friends: they were all going to go where Alec couldn't follow them, and the reality of that entombed him for a moment.

Magnus was there, suddenly. Closer. His hands were like anchors, one on Alec's cheek and one on his wrist, grounding him to the room, to the moment. He could hear Jace's voice coming through the mirror, low and urgent, speaking fast as he tried to call Alec back, but he could also hear his own breathing and the pounding of his heart, and he felt like he was falling through wide, open air.

"Alexander, darling. You have to breathe. With me, come on."

The hand on his cheek moved down to press firmly against his chest, where his heart was begging to burst free. His wrist was drawn up, his own hand pressed against the wet fabric of Magnus's shirt. He could feel the deep, exaggerated movement of Magnus's chest as he breathed slowly.

"In through the nose, out through the mouth. Count with me, love."

Alec counted.

It took five long minutes before he was breathing steadily, before the noise in his own head died down and his pulse settled. When he could hear again, he zeroed in on Jace's voice. He was in the middle of a bland mission report, detailing every inch of every move that had been made during a routine patrol. Alec sighed, sagging against Magnus's shoulder, and breathed carefully, listening.

"You never put that much effort into your reports when I'm the one asking you to write them," Alec said.

Jace stopped speaking and snorted a laugh. He sounded relieved. "You're not usually swooning when you ask."

"I'll have to remember that in the future," Alec said, heaving himself upright and pressing a chaste kiss to Magnus's cheek in thanks.

"I'll happily offer my services if you need someone to swoon on," Magnus offered, mouth twitching. Alec could see the worry in his eyes, but Jace could probably only see the suggestive way his wiggled his eyebrows.

"I think we were in the middle of a heartfelt moment," Jace said. "I know there's a bed there, and you're both young, hot-blooded males, but try and wait until I'm gone before you put the stamina rune to use."

"First time I've been called young in a century," Magnus said, fanning his face with a hand theatrically. "I think I need a drink to cool me down."

He slipped off the bed with one last squeeze of Alec's hand and Alec watched him go, feeling faintly exhausted.

"Alec," Jace said quietly, catching his attention and holding it. "You're okay, right? I didn't mean to be an ass."

"You never *mean* to be an ass. It just happens to be rooted in your genes at this point." Alec stopped grinning and shrugged. "I'm okay. Just keeps catching me by surprise. Sorry about that."

"No apologies, darling," Magnus called, from over near the transformed mini-bar. He was examining a cocktail umbrella intently. "Not for things we can't help."

Alec felt his cheeks growing hot, and shook his head. Embarrassment was beginning to kick in and he reached for the guest book to stave it off, examining the page that Magnus had left

it on. He could feel Jace's eyes on him and ignored them in favour of taking the drink that Magnus offered him. The heat of the glass surprised him, and he glanced up to see a cocktail glass full of hot coffee.

Jace gave a short laugh. "Classy."

"I always am, little Shadowhunter. Would you like an umbrella with that, love?" Magnus teased, waving one at Alec. "They don't have any in black, I'm afraid."

"I'll pass, but thanks." Alec took a gulp of coffee and sighed happily. "What were you going to say before?"

Magnus sat down again, eyeing him shrewdly for a moment, and then flipped the book around to show Alec and the mirror.

"The town is clearly mostly abandoned. It's the middle of the day on a weekday, but almost everything is shut. Nobody's outside. All the windows are dark, too."

Alec nodded slowly; he'd noticed that, on the way in, but he'd chalked it up to the village being so small and remote.

"Allison said there were just locals around here now, if we were lucky," Alec said, after another gulp of coffee. "Kind of implies that there were more people visiting before, and now they've stopped."

"Not stopped, as far as I can tell," Magnus said, gesturing at one of the pages. "This is from three weeks ago. This page, and the pages before that, are full of names and bookings. People were coming in from all over England to stay here. Towards the end of that week, there are no leaving times. With every other entry in the entire book, it's signed on the way in and the way out, to show that you've vacated the property, but at least twenty people in that week never signed out."

Jace raised an eyebrow. "What else?"

Alec reached over and flipped to the page, showing two weeks ago, and his eyebrows went up. Jace hummed as the view changed.

"Barely anybody checks in at all," Magnus said. "Three people in the past week, all of whom are apparently still here. The week before that, five guests in total, all of whom never checked out. And then before that it's countless names and a slow decline in people checking out."

"Missing people," Alec said, tapping his fingers thoughtfully against his glass, hearing the clink of nails in the thoughtful silence. "People that were coming in by the dozen to a tiny, remote village where apparently not much happened. The village can't have looked like this before, if it was drawing that many people in, so something's happened in a short space of time to make it look abandoned like this. And something must have happened to draw people in out of nowhere in the first place."

Jace groaned. It was a very unprofessional sound. Alec raised an eyebrow at the mirror.

“It used to be a lovely place,” Magnus said. “Very relaxing, if Ragnor was to be believed.”

The clock near the bedside lamp ticked slowly as Alec digested that.

“Why do you always manage to find trouble?” Jace asked.

“Oh, pot? Meet kettle.” Alec raised an eyebrow when Jace just looked like he was waiting for an explanation. “Seriously? Jace, you managed to find the biggest cause of trouble that we’ve seen in our entire lives. Small, red hair, has no concept of safety, self-preservation, or doing as she’s told?”

Magnus laughed as he flipped through the pages, and Jace swore at him, *very* unprofessionally.

“You weren’t supposed to be investigating anything,” Jace said, neatly side-stepping the accusation. “You were just supposed to find something useful and then come home safely.”

They both paused, staring first at each other, and then at Jace, who looked highly disgruntled.

“I’m getting quite tired of the implication that I might not be able to handle a situation without Shadowhunter help,” Magnus said mildly. He shut the guest book and strolled off to examine the bathroom while Alec said his goodbyes.

“We can send more Shadowhunter’s to cover this one,” Jace said firmly, glaring at Alec.

“We’re already here,” Alec said, over the mutinous noise that escaped the bathroom. “I get that you’re worried, but I’m just as capable as you, and Magnus is better than both of us combined. You trust me, don’t you?”

Jace sent Alec a dry look that told him exactly what he thought of that question.

“I’ll be careful,” Alec promised him. “If something goes wrong, you’ll be able to feel it. Magnus said that Catarina Loss is handling Brooklyn until he gets back, so she can help you if you need anything, but we’re going to be fine. I’m actually insulted that you don’t think I can handle this.”

A grunt was his only response, almost eclipsed by the sound of Magnus banging around in the bathroom, sifting through the half-empty complimentary bottles of body-wash and essential oils.

“This place has essential oils and a *wheat-bag*, of all things, but it doesn’t have a decent cleaner or any limescale remover,” Magnus said, sending a disparaging look at the rings around the plughole in the sink. “Something is definitely wrong here.”

Jace grimaced. “Yeah, good luck with that. Keep in touch. Maryse is poking about, so I think she knows something’s wrong, and Izzy will want to know you’re okay too.”

Alec nodded, filing away the information about his mother to dwell on later. “Send us any records you have of this village, okay? There’s a library here that we might have to break into

if it doesn't open soon, so maybe put a few paperwork requests in for memory-altering spells in as well, in case it comes to that."

"Try not to break anything," Jace paused. "Unless it's the bed. Then I give you full permission, as long as I don't have to see it, to live a little."

"Bye Jace," Alec said flatly, and the image of his smirking brother winked out of existence, the rune fading into view briefly before disappearing altogether.

"Well, that was an adventure," Magnus said, throwing himself onto the bed. Alec bounced a bit with the added weight, almost spilling his coffee on the cream quilt. Magnus waved a hand and the glass floated over to sit on the nearby cabinet.

"It could have gone worse," Alec pointed out, shifting the guest book so he could lay down sideways on the bed. His feet hung off one end and his head dangled off the other. It wasn't something he would let himself do in front of anyone else, because technically he was on a job and the mission was important, but Magnus just laughed softly and sat up to run a hand through Alec's hair.

"A panic attack is bad enough, sweet thing," Magnus chided. "Don't go tempting fate by telling her it wasn't that bad. How are you feeling?"

Alec leaned into the touch, the feeling of fingers against his scalp soothing and welcome. "Tired, but I've been worse. I wasn't expecting that."

Magnus hummed, removing his hand to sit back, sinking further into the pillows. He tucked his legs under him, his feet landing somewhere near Alec's hip.

"I don't think anyone expects a panic attack," Magnus said, nudging Alec with his toes. "You did well, though. I think I can guess what brought it on, but if you want to talk about it, I'm happy to listen."

Alec fidgeted. "Yeah, I don't know. I want to talk about it, but I don't know what to say. I guess it just keeps surprising me, creeping up on me, the fact that I... that I'm immortal? And that if there really isn't anything we can do about it, which I'm pretty sure there isn't, then that means I have to watch everyone die."

He said it bluntly because he didn't know how else to say things. He had lied to Magnus once before, and that had gone terribly wrong, and had gone against everything inside of him. The truth was always better, and it was how Alec operated. He said what was on his mind, on the tip of his tongue, and sometimes that wasn't always a good thing; sometimes what was on the tip of his tongue were stuttering half-words and hurtful things. It was something that he was never quite sure whether he liked about himself or not.

The only reason he kept his words inside was when he was sure that they might mean the end of something he desperately wanted to keep.

"Alexander," Magnus said, his voice cracked in two. Just his name. There was nothing else to say, really.

Alec rolled his head to the side to look into cats eyes. Magnus was always careful with his glamour. Alec had told him time and time again that he found his eyes beautiful, the honest version and the glamourous version because both were a part of Magnus, but Magnus still hid them more often than not.

They burned bright now, untouchable, full of sorrow, *em*>sad. Alec tried on a smile.

“This is a horrible situation,” Magnus said quietly, his eyes blinking back to dark brown. “It’s why I’ve been doing it alone, rather than asking you to come with me. I don’t want you to be faced with reality every time we come up against something that dashes your hopes. I wouldn’t wish this on anyone, especially you.”

Especially you. Alec didn’t know what that meant. Yeah, it was a horrible situation, there was no doubting that, but Alec didn’t see how Magnus could possibly think it would be better if he wasn’t around. He turned it over in his mind until Magnus dug his toes into Alec’s side, and he jerked away, coughing out a surprised, reluctant laugh.

“Where do you, oh seasoned Shadowhunter, suggest that we start then?” Magnus asked, into the silence that Alec had let grow unintentionally. He should have said something in agreement really, should have said *likewise, Magnus, now get your feet away from me*, since that was what was probably expected, but he hadn’t and now Magnus was looking at him oddly.

“I can go home if you want,” Alec offered, after a beat. He tried to sound casual and knew instantly that he had utterly failed. Magnus watched him, head tipped to the side.

Alec sat up with a huff and ran his fingers through his hair, which had done some gravity-defying dramatics since the rain hit it earlier. A quick spell doused him in dry warmth, faint steam curling off his wrinkled clothes, something he’d neglected to do earlier, and he sent a grateful look at Magnus, who waved him away.

“I don’t want you to go home, Alexander,” Magnus said quietly. “I want you with me, always. I just don’t want you to get hurt because you’re with me, be it physically or emotionally.”

Alec looked at him sharply.

Magnus raised an eyebrow at Alec as though daring him to say that the panic attack hadn’t hurt.

“That would have happened anyway,” Alec pointed out. “I still would have come across something like this at home, and it would have made me feel the same way.”

Magnus gave him a sad smile. “I suppose that’s true. I assume that explains the whiskey, too?”

Alec shrugged, feeling sheepish. “Not the best way I’ve handled it so far.”

“An understandable way, though, seeing as I haven’t been there to help you find other ways,” Magnus said. He knelt up on the bed and shuffled forward in a way that shouldn’t have been

graceful, and when he reached Alec he fell into him, kissing him so fiercely that Alec ended up gasping into his mouth. He gripped Magnus's waist tightly and clung on, kissing back, tasting strawberry and feeling warmth coil in his chest when Magnus tugged his hair.

"I guess I could stay here with you, then," Alec said, breathing hard as he drew back. "If only to keep you company."

Magnus didn't go far, chuckling against his jaw and then his neck as his soft, hot mouth travelled south. The sound always made Alec's stomach curl pleasantly. He always felt like he had won something, earned something, whenever Magnus laughed.

"How very generous of you, Lightwood. Now, you forgot to answer me. Where are we starting?"

It was hard to think with Magnus kissing him like that, but he pushed through the fog in his mind, grinning. "Why wait for Jace? Small towns like this always keep everything on record, right? Seems to me like there's a library that needs breaking into."

Magnus's answering laughter said it all.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the response on the last chapter! I hope you enjoy this one too, let me know what you thought! <3

The Waking of Alexander Lightwood

Chapter Summary

“People have been looking for meaning in the stars for as long as there were stars to see,” Magnus said.

Chapter Notes

Ho Hum, here we go! This is the last chapter that includes flashbacks. I hope you've enjoyed so far, and I hope you enjoy this one too!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was morning when Alec awoke, blinking slowly into awareness. At the Institute, he woke with a jerk every morning, always alert, always ready to fight. It was the price of being a Shadowhunter, a lesson he had learned young. Never let your guard down, even in sleep. This couldn't be the Institute. He recognised Magnus's loft immediately and felt warm, relaxing with a soft sigh. This was the only place where he woke up without a burst of adrenaline. There was always the hint of perfume that mingled with the fabric softener on the pillowcases, and the particular light from the lamp could only be found here, Alec was sure.

He was growing used to waking up in Magnus's bed - their bed, in his mind, although he didn't live in the loft, and he hadn't said the word 'their' out loud yet - and being here brought him a sense of great comfort. Safety. He felt safe, here, no matter what happened. He wondered if he would feel safe wherever Magnus was, or if the friendly walls and touchy-feely plants had anything to do with it.

Alec stretched, the bones in his back cracking nicely. He yawned, and sat up to find Izzy staring at him blankly from a few feet away. It was only his Shadowhunter training that kept him from yelling out loud, but he did curse under his breath, pulling the sheets a little closer to him.

Izzy rolled her eyes at the motion. “You're not naked, Alec, and even if you were, I've probably seen it all before.”

Alec wrinkled his nose. “I don't think you meant that to sound as creepy or suggestive as it did.”

Izzy waved a hand dismissively; it flopped through the air like a limp balloon. “About time you woke up. You've been out for a couple of days. We've been taking it in turns to watch

you.”

“This conversation isn’t getting any less creepy,” Alec said, eyeing her. “What happened?”

Izzy shook her head, her dark hair spilling over her shoulders as her expression grew serious. “You were messing around with an artefact in the museum, and you spilled something all over yourself. It knocked you out and set off an alarm. Luckily, Magnus opened a portal only a minute later, as planned, and Jace dragged you back through it before anyone could find you both.”

Alec swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood. He expected to feel groggy, a little sluggish, but instead he felt light and more awake than he had felt in a while. His bones didn't ache the way they usually did in the mornings, a side-effect of a life spent fighting. He felt as though he had been asleep for most of his life, and was only now opening his eyes.

Izzy hovered nearby, ready to catch him, but he flashed her a grin and she exhaled in relief. There were dark smudges beneath her eyes that had nothing to do with eyeliner, and she was holding herself differently. Concern wedged itself neatly in the hollows between Alec’s ribs.

“A couple of days, huh?” Alec reached out and pulled her close, tucking her into a hug. “Have you slept at all?”

“Someone’s got a big opinion of himself,” Izzy teased. She relaxed against him, sighing against his shoulder. Alec felt her shake her head. “I slept some. Jace has barely left your side. Magnus has been impossible, though.”

Alec tensed and drew back, staring at her sharply. “What do you mean? What’s wrong with him?”

“He hasn’t sat down in three days, that’s what’s wrong,” Jace said, stepping into view in the doorway. Alec turned to look at him, and Jace grinned widely, striding forward to yank him into a hug. It was tighter than normal, and Alec could feel the faintest brush of relief through their bond.

A couple of days was a long time, considering nothing had really happened to make him unconscious in the first place. It had to have been a big deal, if Magnus was worried enough for people to notice.

“What exactly did I spill on me?” Alec asked. He ran his fingers lightly over his chest, but someone had changed his clothes, obviously, swapping out his gear for flannel pants and a loose black shirt. He thought it might have been Magnus's, made bigger, and the thought steadied him. Whatever had stained his clothes had to have been bad though, especially considering the fact that there shouldn’t have been anything to spill in the first place.

Izzy and Jace exchanged a look.

“We don't exactly know,” Izzy said, with an elegant shrug of one shoulder. “Magnus spent the whole time either standing beside you with this... look in his eyes, or turning his kitchen into a hazard-zone. Every time I’ve asked, he’s distracted me with something else.”

"You might want to go and see him," Jace said, and he stepped aside so that Alec could pass by him.

The kitchen was indeed a hazard-zone. Books and herbs and scraps of parchment littered every available surface. Candles flickered in the semi-dark, and there were the beginnings of spells and runes etched into the ground. Magnus stood in the middle of the mess, absentmindedly eating an apple and devouring the contents of an aged, leather-bound book.

At least he was eating, although Alec doubted his willingness to do so extended to full, hot meals. His magic seemed to be taking care of his appearance, as always, and not for the first time, Alec wished that Magnus wouldn't cover everything up. It made it much harder to know when he needed help.

"Magnus," Alec said, stepping further into the room, his tone laden with caution.

Magnus snapped his gaze up at the sound of Alec's voice. His eyes were golden slits. The remains of the apple vanished in a flash of blue, and Alec found himself rounding the table before Magnus could do more than utter his name, his voice wrecked with relief.

He held Magnus close. This was where his safety was - not the Institute, not the loft and its friendly walls. Magnus was warm and firm, and holding him felt like holding a piece of home. Magnus fell against him slightly, hands sliding up to grasp bits of Alec's shirt and pull him impossibly closer.

"I'm almost certain that small, innocent Shadowhunters are taught not to touch things that don't belong to them."

"We were there to steal something, Magnus," Alec said, a slight grin forming at the heavy sigh that followed. "Would have been hard to steal it if we weren't allowed to touch it."

"In the future, I will provide a large net," Magnus said. His voice was a little muffled against Alec's shirt, where Magnus had bent his head to make himself smaller, like he wanted to fit himself inside of Alec's skin and stay there. "And besides, you definitely didn't touch what you were supposed to be stealing."

"It wasn't there, not that we could see. Are you alright?" Alec asked.

"I'm supposed to be asking you that, darling." Magnus chuckled and drew back, although only far enough to kiss him. It wasn't the long, romantic, sweep-you-off-your-feet kiss that Alec had been hoping for, but it was better. It was steady and soft, quick as anything, and then Magnus drew back properly and surveyed him with a critical eye.

"What was actually wrong with me?" Alec asked, spreading his arms when Magnus continued to stare up and down. "Do you want me to spin?"

Magnus put on a charming smile. "I'd never say no to a show, Alexander."

"There will be no shows that I don't have centre-stage in, and I'm pretty sure neither of you wants that, for reasons I don't pretend to understand," Jace said, as he strolled into the

kitchen with his hands in his pockets and Izzy at his heels.

“Yes, I’m sure it must be devastatingly hard to fathom why some decent souls don’t want to witness the over-rated performance of a hot-headed blond,” Magnus said, flicking his fingers. The mess on his table began to clear itself up, pages ruffling and herbs stuffing themselves back into their little vials. Light poured in through the kitchen windows, and the air seemed to feel a thousand times lighter. The light caught on Alec’s skin, and he remembered a different kind of light filling him up.

“Moonlight,” Alec murmured, remembering. Magnus threw a sharp, almost panicked look his way.

“What was that?” Jace asked, stepping closer.

“In the bowl,” Alec said, his voice halting and hesitant. “There was moonlight in the bowl, and that’s what I spilled all over me. I swear it was. But that’s not possible, is it?”

"Moonlight?" Izzy looked baffled, but not like she didn't believe him. "Physical moonlight? I suppose that's not the strangest thing we've ever come across before."

“Say it was moonlight. Why did it knock you out? How did it get there?” Jace asked. “What the hell did it do?”

Izzy clenched her fists at her side, lips pursed.

There was a pause in which they all stared at Magnus, and then Magnus sighed, leaning heavily against the counter.

“I’m afraid it’s very possible, Alexander. And I don’t think any of you are going to like the answers I have.”

“We’re not waiting any longer,” Alec decided, when the rain reached a light drizzle and the wind died down. He had spent the past few minutes fiddling with his gear, hiding his Witchlight in his pocket and shouldering his bow and quiver. Magnus had watched appreciatively when Alec strapped the holster into place to hold his Seraph daggers, and Alec had almost gotten distracted again when he started purring compliments.

Magnus followed him out of the bed and breakfast, muttering complaints all the while until Alec rolled his eyes and told him to conjure an umbrella.

“My magic is not a trifling thing,” Magnus said, taking the umbrella he had just conjured and shaking it open with a mock-sowl. “It’s not something that I use for indulgent, personal pleasures.”

Alec quirked an eyebrow at him. He didn’t have to speak for his thoughts to be plainly clear.

*“It’s not something I use *only* for indulgent, personal pleasures,” Magnus corrected, ignoring his answering smirk.*

Alec put his hands in his pockets and continued to stroll down the street. “Uh-huh. Sure.”

“You’re not very subtle with your blatant disbelief, Alexander.”

“I wasn’t trying to be,” Alec said. “Where’s the library?”

“Just down there,” Magnus said, pointing, before he stopped to eye Alec’s jacket with distaste. “Now, don’t misunderstand, I’m a fan of the rugged, tight-leather look, darling. A big fan. But it’s raining and the sun doesn’t seem to have realised that this place exists, so you must be cold.”

“I thought you didn’t use your magic for personal pleasures.”

“This is hardly a pleasure,” Magnus said, with a winning smile. “I told you I’m a fan of this particular jacket. Just for that, though, you can get your own umbrella.”

He swept off in the direction of the library, his long coat swirling around his calves. Alec sighed and sped up.

“You’re an incredibly powerful Warlock, the High Warlock, in fact, and you could kick anyone’s ass, including mine,” Alec said, when Magnus slowed down to let him catch up. “I love you and I love your magic.”

Magnus let out a delighted laugh as the double doors to the library came into view. “Did you practice that placation in the mirror?”

Alec scowled at him, but there was no heat behind it. Magnus kissed the corner of his mouth.

“My magic loves you too,” he said, his voice low and soft, and Alec’s stomach flipped as Magnus drew away, laughter sitting heavily in the curve of his mouth.

“Magnus, we’re on a mission,” Alec protested, but he couldn’t make himself sound serious. Magnus nodded solemnly, obviously still slightly amused, and then moved to examine the doors while Alec scanned the street.

“They’re locked, obviously,” Magnus said, after a thoughtful hum. “The strange thing is, there are more wards all over the building which mean it’s nearly impossible to get through. It’s the same as the wards that blocked my portals.”

Alec moved to watch as Magnus rubbed his hands together. He hadn’t been lying when he said that he loved Magnus’s magic. Magnus sent a cascade of blue light over the doors, swamping the faded paint with bright, pulsing colour. Some of it wriggled through the lock and squirmed around, and the other tendrils caressed the hinges, but there was nothing but a few resigned clicks. The doors didn’t budge.

Magnus hummed again as the magic retreated, the light dying out.

“Are you admitting defeat?” Alec asked, moving forward on soundless feet to jiggle the handle curiously. “That doesn’t happen often. I’ll have to make a note in my diary.”

Magnus jabbed at him gently with the umbrella.

"I could try some runes," Alec said, reaching into his pocket for his Stele. The tip glowed as he raised it, the unlocking rune floating easily to the forefront of his mind. He didn't see how it was going to make a difference, if Magnus's magic couldn't undo this, but he tried anyway. The rune faded out of existence after a few moments, and the doors remained firmly shut.

"Break a window?" Alec suggested.

Magnus scoffed and tucked the umbrella under his arm while he stalked around the side of the building. Alec cast another careful look about, but the sky was growing more and more grey by the minute, and everybody was probably indoors, revelling in the warmth of their fireplaces. Magnus had said that the village seemed abandoned, and Alec had to agree, but there had to be people here somewhere. He rubbed his chapped hands together and raised them to his lips, blowing on them to keep the chill at bay.

A clatter and a call from where Magnus had disappeared had Alec moving pretty quickly. He half-expected to find him at with a blade at his throat, knowing their luck, but instead the shattered remains of a window greeted him, sat high up in the brick.

"I didn't mean it literally," Alec said.

"Locking spells don't work as well on windows," Magnus said, a smug look on his face. "Less substance to work with, less there for the magic to cling to. And much more easily broken than a door or a safe. Come along."

Alec eyed the distance from the window to the floor, and then glanced back at the street. "After you."

"So gallant."

"I can keep an eye on your back, and you're more dangerous at the front," Alec explained, even though he knew perfectly well that Magnus knew that.

Magnus winked. "Don't be so sure about that, love. You're not as well acquainted with my rear, unfortunately. You have no idea what I've got hidden away back there."

Alec gave him a deadpan glare, ruined slightly by the heat in his cheeks. Magnus tossed the umbrella at Alec, who caught it neatly and winced as broken glass cracked and groaned under Magnus's shoes. A few conjured crates later, and Magnus could easily reach the window.

If it were anyone else, Alec might have insisted on going first. He was a Shadowhunter, and he was *himself*, and he didn't like sending people into closed, dark libraries first when they didn't know what was inside, but this was Magnus. As much as that made Alec extra inclined to protect him, he knew that Magnus could handle himself, and anything that implied the opposite would get the person in question swiftly knocked out. As much as he wanted to demand that he go first, Alec trusted him. And he had Magnus's back, in turn.

And a pretty fine view, too, he thought, as he watched Magnus's ass wriggle a bit as he squirmed through the window, his coat pulled tight around him where it was caught on the frame.

"If only Brooklyn could see their High Warlock now," Alec said, still keeping a careful eye on the street.

"You could help me, Alexander," Magnus said impatiently, his voice echoing from inside the library.

"I could," Alec agreed, and he reached up to poke Magnus's ass with the umbrella, earning himself an indignant, furious sound. He dodged a kick, and when he looked back up, Magnus had slithered to safety. Another glance around at the wet world proved they were unobserved.

It only took a few seconds to heave himself in after Magnus, although his bow almost got caught on the window-frame. He found Magnus standing there in the darkness amidst the bookshelves, looking irate and brushing off his sleeves.

"You're no longer allowed to be helpful," Magnus said, his voice echoing off the walls.

"You would have done worse if it was the other way round," Alec said, grinning as he leaned the umbrella up against the wall. "And I like it when you act as average as the rest of us."

"You're far from average, darling."

Alec unhooked his bow and readied an arrow, not pulling it taut but making sure he was ready. The air was a bit stale and there was dust all around. It was too silent for Alec's liking.

Magnus summoned two orbs of white light. One settled on Alec's shoulder, and the other hovered near Magnus's hand. Alec had his Witchlight, but that was easier to use if he had both hands free, and he couldn't fire an arrow if he was holding a Witchlight. Well, he *could*, and he *had*, much to his own pride, but the shot had been slower to come than usual.

"I suppose we should split up," Alec said. He was reluctant to suggest it, but it would save time, and it wasn't as if they could go far inside a small library. They were both more than capable of handling themselves if anything did go wrong, which it likely wouldn't.

Still, there was something unnerving about the stillness of the place.

Magnus nodded, his sphere of light bobbing as he moved between the stacks. Alec watched the light for a moment, and then aimed his gaze at the rows of books. He didn't know what he was looking for, but it wasn't paperbacks or magazines. It wasn't a recipe book dedicated to Italian cuisine. He frowned as he paced the shelves, pointing his arrow into the dark corners of the library, intent on finding whatever it was that was here to find. There had to have been a reason why the library had been warded, after all.

He rounded a corner near the children's section, which was darker than the rest of the library and smelled more musty than usual. He sneezed into his sleeve when dust rose up around

him, when his shoe scuffed the rug. He stepped forward, frowning at the thick darkness, and almost broke his neck as the ground rushed up to meet him.

He stared, dazed, at the hole in the ground. One leg dangled inside it, the twinge in his ankle telling him that he'd done a little damage, but not enough to be too concerned. The hole was more of a gaping maw, and now that he knew it was there, he didn't understand how he hadn't noticed it before. He could feel a cool wind blow softly up out of the hole, which was big enough for a Mundane car to fit through. It went down in a steep incline, plunging into even thicker darkness.

"It's been carved out of the floor," Alec muttered, trailing one hand over the edge closest to him. The sphere of light floated further down, illuminating the edges. His bow was still gripped tightly in one hand.

It had been no accident, no mistake, no natural disaster that made a hole in the ground.

"Alec, I think I found something," Magnus whispered, his face looming out of the shadows as he crept closer. His hand was aloft, throwing a silver sheen over everything, and his eyes were fixed firmly on a leaflet that floated in front of him.

"Yeah. I think I might win that game," Alec said, huffing out a wry laugh. He lifted himself up, wincing as the muscles in his ankle pulled slightly.

Magnus looked up slowly, uncomprehending, and then followed Alec's gaze to the floor. His eyes widened at the sight, and he immediately looked at Alec, who waved off his concern.

"I'm fine, don't worry. Hurt my ankle slightly, but I can fix it. What do you think this is?"

"A hole in the ground," Magnus said.

Alec shot him a look, which went ignored as the leaflet floated towards him. Alec took it while Magnus bent to examine the hole, lip caught between his teeth as he cast several wordless spells over the dark space.

"It's a passageway," Magnus said, after a moment. "There's air coming through it, which means there's something at the other end. It leads somewhere, and I think that leaflet might tell us where."

"The shack of wonders," Alec read aloud, his voice colliding with the brick walls, echoing wildly. "Your wildest dreams and all you require lie Hidden here."

He ran a finger over the capitalised H, his bow safely over his shoulder again. He didn't feel safe around the passageway, but it was more of an unnerving feeling than anything else.

"It's an advertisement, to get people to come here," Magnus said, standing up to move closer. He didn't stop moving until Alec had nowhere to go. They were pressed close together now, in the dark behind a shelf, near the passageway in the floor. "There's powerful persuasive magic on the paper, although it's faded now. It must have been what drew people here, but it

doesn't actually mention what happens in this shack, just that it was discovered recently by the village and loved by all, whatever that may mean."

Alec narrowed his eyes at Magnus. "Nothing about the word shack convinces me that it could be loved by anyone. I've never been in a shack I've loved. Why are you standing so close?"

Not that he minded, but there was an urgency to Magnus's eyes that had him tensing. Magnus put a finger to Alec's lip, shutting him up abruptly, and then he started to whisper.

"When I cast the spell on the passageway, it revealed something. There's something down there, Alexander, and whatever it is, it's alive."

*

"People have been looking for meaning in the stars for as long as there were stars to see," Magnus said. "It's a deeply human thing. We see something far bigger than us, far more important, and we instantly try to bring it down to our level. We create what we can understand out of what makes us ache. That's how myths and legends are born."

Magnus had never seemed more otherworldly than he did in that moment. Alec caught his breath and leaned forward on the couch, intrigued and eager to hear the rest of the story. Except it wasn't a story, not like it might once have been.

It was Alec's beginning.

"In Western cultures, people looked up at the moon and saw the face of a man upon the surface, carved out of crater and shadow. That's how the man in the moon was born. But Chinese Legends told of a different story."

Magnus's fingers danced in the air. He frowned in concentration, and a deep green rabbit emerged from a cloud of mist, which bloomed from his palm. Alec watched in wonder as the rabbit darted forward through thin air. It stood up on its hind legs and withdrew a dark shadow from nowhere, thumping one of its large, furred feet soundlessly. Alec recognised the familiar shape of a mortar and pestle immediately. The rabbit hunched over, and began to grind the two together.

"What is that?" Jace asked. He was leaning against the door, arms crossed over his chest, shoulders bunched uncomfortably. The room had been thrown into darkness, the lights extinguished as Magnus reluctantly told them the truth.

"I think it's a rabbit," Isabelle said, in a stage-whisper. Jace scowled at her.

"It's the Jade Rabbit," Magnus said, ignoring them. His eyes were focused intently on Alec, and for once, Alec didn't shy away from the intensity of that stare. "Also known as the Moon Rabbit. In Chinese Legends, the Jade Rabbit was the companion of Chang'e, the Moon Goddess. It was the Jade Rabbit's job to mix the Elixir of Immortality."

A stillness descended on the room.

"It had many names. 'Yue tu' or 'Yu tu', meaning the moon rabbit, or the Jade Rabbit. It was essentially just a picture of a rabbit on the moon, a form of pareidolia, but as I said, people have been creating stories out of mere markings for longer than I have been alive." Magnus paused to wink, but his heart didn't seem to be in it. "And that is quite a long time."

"Magnus," Alec said, as his heart picked up speed. "Why are you telling me all of this? What's... what's going on?"

Magnus sighed. "The moon rabbit can be seen every year, on August 15th. It was August 15th when you went to the museum, and found a mortar and pestle in the display case there. The substance inside it that you spilled on your skin was pure moonlight, which is why your darling sister couldn't identify it, even with her incredible skills. I could, with my magic. It was pure moonlight, but it was also an elixir. An elixir of immortality."

The stillness grew. Not just inside the room, but also inside Alec. If his body was a clock, ticking forward in time, then it had grown still over the past few days. Now, as Magnus's words breached the confused fog of his mind, he felt the last of the cogs click into place. Motion ceased, and the hands ticked their last. The pendulum stopped swinging.

"But it's just a story," Jace said sharply, straightening up. "You said it yourself, it's a story that humans created. There's no truth to it."

"Demons and angels are also stories that humans supposedly created," Magnus said wryly. "Haven't you said it before yourself, that all the Legends are true?"

Jace's expression darkened.

Magnus spread his hands. "Legends exist for so long for a reason; they have a grain of truth to them. It's possible that the belief of humanity gave it truth, and it's also possible that there was already truth to it."

"So you're saying," Izzy said slowly, with a hollow, disbelieving laugh, "that Alec's, what... immortal?"

Magnus hesitated, before he nodded once. A deathly silence fell over the room. Jace and Isabelle swivelled their heads to stare at him. Alec's heart was dancing in his chest. In the air before him, the moon rabbit danced too, his elixir coming to life.

"I spilled the elixir of immortality on myself, and now I'm immortal," Alec said. His voice was flat and emotionless, and he could feel Jace and Izzy exchange looks behind him, but his attention was on Magnus. Magnus, who would never lie to him.

Alec stared at him, and Magnus stared back, his expression intent and worried and full of... wonder.

Thank you so much! Let me know what you think! <3

A Desperate Edge

Chapter Summary

“Dangerous?” Alec asked. That was the most important question.

“With our luck?” Magnus smiled winningly at him. “Almost certainly.”

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much for the response on the last chapter, I love hearing from you guys! <3
Have some conflict, which I'm terrible at writing, but I gave it my best shot!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Passageways full of unknown somethings weren't usually considered tempting by the general populace, but Shadowhunters were known for stepping into the unknown with a careless amount of disregard for their own safety. Or maybe just an overwhelming concern for the safety of others.

It was dark beneath the library, but not dank or disgusting. Alec would have expected a passageway beneath a library to be damp and musty, all earthen walls and scuttling bugs and the hiss of stale air through the cracks in the ground. Instead, white witchlight led him through a cool stone corridor, Magnus easily keeping pace at his side. Their footsteps echoed off the walls, and Alec kept a tight grip on the weight in his hand, eyes alert for movement in the shadows.

“You know, your sister and I discussed which Hogwarts House you would be in once,” Magnus said airily, seemingly apropos of nothing.

“I know,” Alec said, with a wry grin. “I was there, but I’m not surprised you don’t remember. I watched you both drink your weight in cocktails and giggle in the corner while you made that decision. You said I was the most Hufflepuff Gryffindor you’d ever seen.”

“I actually think you’re a hat-stall, but you’re not going out of your way to convince me that you aren’t a Gryffindor by exhibiting ridiculous amounts of reckless bravery.”

“This isn’t bravery,” Alec said, rolling his eyes. “This is just what we have to do. We found a passageway in a strange town where something weird’s going on, so we’re going to investigate it. That’s our job. And you were right behind me.”

“Naturally,” Magnus said, running a finger along the wall, leaving behind a trail of faint blue. “Behind you is the best place to be, in my humble opinion. It has the best view. Although the front isn’t too bad either.”

Alec gave a rough laugh that echoed off the walls. Magnus was avoiding a proper conversation about all of this, but Alec knew he was saving all his vitriol for when they reached the end, if there was something foul to be found there. Even if he didn't *say* ‘I told you so,’ he would have no problem expressing it in other ways.

“Is this odd to you?” Alec asked, raising his hand higher so that the witchlight bounced off the walls. There were runes above them, carved into the stone. Magnus’s magical spheres of light hovered beside him, one above each shoulder, giving him an unearthly glow.

“Well it’s certainly not the strangest thing I’ve ever seen,” Magnus said, head tipped back to admire the decor. “But I admit it’s unusual. Although what counts as usual in an underground passageway beneath a library is subject to opinion, I guess.”

Alec flashed him a small smile, still squinting up at the runes. He didn't recognise them, or at least not from this far away.

“I think we’re near the end,” Magnus said, sending small flares of magic up the passageway.

“You said something was alive down here. Can you still feel it?”

“Yes, but it’s odd,” Magnus said, tipping his head to the side as a door rose up in front of them. They drew to a stop a few steps away. It was colder here.

“What’s odd?”

“Whatever it is, it feels... like a mass,” Magnus said slowly. “Not just one living thing, but not multiple living things either. It’s hard to explain.”

“Dangerous?” Alec asked. That was the most important question.

“With our luck?” Magnus smiled winningly at him. “Almost certainly. It’s stationary though, so either it hasn’t sensed us, or it isn’t interested. Or perhaps it’s waiting for door-to-door service.”

“Maybe,” Alec said, although he wasn’t convinced. “Demons aren’t usually patient. It would have attacked by now.”

They stared silently at the door. Alec waited patiently as Magnus sent his magic billowing softly around them. Some of the tendrils kept pausing, brushing over Alec fondly and curiously, like cat tails, and he grinned to himself as he waited. His fingers itched. His ankle was fully healed, thanks to an Iratze, and now he felt like running. There was *something* down here.

He unhooked his bow, feeling uneasy.

“Nothing dangerous, as far as I can tell,” Magnus said eventually, as the magic faded. “It seems to be unlocked.”

“Well, I guess there’s only one way to find out what’s going on,” Alec said. Magnus brushed a quick kiss over his mouth, startling him, and then strode forwards and pushed open the doors.

*

“I always wanted to be a monster-hunter when I was younger,” Alec mused, picking up a silver crystal and turning it over in his hands. “Not a Shadowhunter. I didn’t want to kill demons. I wanted to hunt monsters and unmask them, you know. There was this television, a really old one in the Institute that mom didn’t know we had, and I watched this Mundane cartoon called Scooby Doo on there sometimes when everyone was busy.”

He heard a fond snort from behind a rusted statue, as though Magnus found him endearing.

“This sounds like a sob story, but it isn’t.” Alec tossed the crystal up in the air and caught it again. “I just really wanted to hunt monsters.”

“And then,” Magnus said, his voice ghoulishly cold, pitched low and haunting as it echoed out of the shadows, “you became the monster instead.”

“You’re not funny,” Alec said, rolling his eyes as he laughed. Magnus slunk out of the shadows with a smug smirk in place and threw another glance around the room. Alec followed his gaze, but there wasn’t much to see. Cobwebbed creepy-crawlies aside, there was nothing here alive besides them.

“This place, though,” Alec said, putting the crystal down. “It reminds me of the haunted places in the cartoon, like the old mansions and cabins they’d have to investigate. Those were all fake. This place feels like that. It doesn’t *feel* supernatural.”

“I agree,” Magnus said, frowning at the shack they’d found themselves in. The door to the passageway was still open, cool air drifting down the corridor. The walls were all wooden and so was the floor, earth seeping up through the cracks in the slats. It was a shack that creaked and ached, and the wind that howled on the other side of the walls told Alec that this shack must have been outside rather than underground, but he didn’t see how that was possible.

“I should have learned by now not to ask this question, but what could be so dangerous about this place?” Magnus asked, glancing around. His fingers skimmed the walls as he walked. Trinkets were everywhere, like a hoard of lost things, some dusty and some shining dully under their lights. It was like a treasure trove of a particularly old and blind dragon, one that could no longer tell the difference between what was worthless and what wasn’t.

“What about the thing you felt with your magic?” Alec asked. “The alive thing.”

“It’s as if it’s all over the place, a mass, like I told you. But there’s nothing here.”

Alec touched the crystal again briefly, sighing. “Nothing but useless junk.”

Magnus chuckled as he placed his hand on a nearby locket, old and tarnished, the brass links in the chain coming loose in a few places. It sat beside a small wooden rocking-horse, an ornament covered in dust. “One man’s junk is another man’s treasure, Alexander.”

There might have been more to the sentence, but Alec didn't find out. Magnus’s mouth went slack, and he grew a sickly sort of colour as he snatched his hand back from the locket as though burned. Alec felt his chest tighten as the floor shook underneath his feet. For a moment, the heat of crazed, hectic fire filled the air, stifling the air in their lungs. Alec breathed carefully around it, trying not to panic, trying to force his mind to work. He could hear the vicious bellow of roaring flames. There was ash in his lungs.

As quickly as it came on, it faded. The heat died down and Alec shuddered out a breath. There was sweat on his brow and his arms, cooling on his skin.

“What the hell,” Alec said, striding forward to grip Magnus’s arm, “was *that*? Are you alright?”

Magnus coughed and then shook himself, his eyes alight. He patted Alec’s hand clumsily, which scared Alec more than anything that had happened so far. Magnus was rarely clumsy. Every movement he made was packed with grace and purpose. Alec knew that sometimes he put Magnus up on a pedestal, viewed him a little too highly, and forgot that he was human, beneath it all. Everyone got shocked, and clumsy, and startled. But it was a hand around Alec’s heart, squeezing, everytime he saw it happen to Magnus.

“I’m quite fine, love. That was the first time I’d touched any of the trinkets here, though, and my magic must have triggered a response from the wards that are already in place, that’s all. Harmless, I think, just put there to scare anyone off.”

Alec couldn’t have looked soothed enough, because Magnus brushed a hand over his arm, soothing. “I promise Alexander. I’m fine. Are you?”

Alec eyed him, but nodded slowly. “I’m alright if you are. Just, what the hell is this place? Why are there wards everywhere?”

Magnus hummed and drew back, turning on his heel slowly to survey the wooden walls.

“Prior to two weeks ago, people were turning up in hoards,” Magnus said, his voice all business as he took in every inch of the shack. “Something was drawing them to this town, and they were leaving happy, and coming back with more people at their heels. And then it all just stopped, and now nobody’s coming here at all. People are afraid, and disappearing.”

“We’ve only seen one person,” Alec pointed out. “It’s possible that more people have disappeared and we just don't know about it, because they had no need to stay at the Bed and Breakfast.”

Magnus grimaced. “Yes, I had thought of that. We can’t be sure there’s anyone in the town at all. I don’t quite trust my magic to tell us the truth, not with the magic already in place. I don’t

know what to make of any of this.”

Alec sighed. He glanced uneasily at the trinkets all around, the hidden, lost things, and then jerked his head at the passageway door. Magnus nodded, but as they stepped towards the doors, they slammed shut with a deafening bang, scattering dust into the air.

Alec jerked to a stop. “I have a feeling that this place doesn’t want us to leave.”

Behind them, there was the scrape of wood and then a gust of cold air. They whipped around, arrows up and magic unfurling, just as a door, previously concealed behind a ream of tattered cloth, fell off its hinges. A hint of green and brown greeted them, soggy grass, mud, and a grey sky.

“Or perhaps it does, but only on its terms,” Magnus said, raising an eyebrow.

Outside, fresh air slapped Alec in the face, blowing away the lingering scent of soot and ash. He felt like he was covered in dust and spiderwebs, and he shuddered a little as they made their way up the steep bank that surrounded the shack and onto a dirt road.

It must have rained again while they were inside, leaving the grass freshly sodden and drooping. Clean, cool air whipped all around them in a frenzy. Magnus stopped at the top and breathed sharply for a few moments, before his breaths deepened and slowed, and he blinked at his surroundings. Alec watched him, worried. If he looked down into the pit they had just climbed out of, he could see a brown, wrecked roof and a crumpled shack.

“I thought it felt off when we went in,” Magnus said, gazing ruefully at the fields, mouth pulled down. “I spent most of my time when I was younger doing magic that should have been impossible for my age, and it almost was, but I was so afraid all the time that I forced it to be possible. I was afraid that I would have to go back to my father, that I would become more demon than I was human. I was afraid that I would drive someone else that I loved to do something dreadful.”

Alec choked on a breath and stepped forward to lace his hand with Magnus’s. Magnus looked up at him, his eyes amber again.

“When you’re afraid like that, afraid of yourself, it taints the magic, makes it different. Gives it a ruthless, desperate edge. I learned to calm it, to calm my fear and claim what I was. I learned to be proud of how I was born, in a sense. I have my moments, but there’s nothing wrong with being a Warlock, and I do wear it wonderfully well, after all.”

“But?” Alec ventured gently, guessing there was more.

Magnus looked behind them. “But I can still remember how it felt, that fear that lived inside me. And I didn’t need to remember it in there. That desperate edge is all over that place. Whoever used magic in there, whoever put the wards up, whatever it is we’re dealing with: they were desperately afraid.”

Alec looked at the shack again. It looked so unassuming, just a hunk of wood out in the middle of nowhere.

“So let’s get this straight,” Alec said, gripping Magnus’s hand tighter. “People have gone missing, lured out here to a shack by desperate magic. We have no idea where they’ve gone, or if the life you felt down there has something to do with them, but all you know is that there *is* something alive in there and people are definitely missing. There’s magic everywhere. But we have no idea who’s behind any of it, where the people are, what’s down there, or how to fix any of this.”

Magnus’s mouth twitched. “An excellent, depressing summary, darling.”

“I try.” Alec blew out a breath. “I hate to say it, but I think we might need back-up after all.”

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They reached the bed and breakfast in silence. Allison Lane poked her head out of the door downstairs as they passed, but remained silent and watchful, her face gaunt. Their room felt leaps and bounds more inviting than the shack they’d just left behind. Alec turned on all the lamps and filled the room with yellow light, closing the curtains to block out the rain and rapidly darkening sky while Magnus cast spells all over the room. The air smelled sweeter and cleaner as the protective wards sank into place. They wouldn’t hold forever, not without draining Magnus, but while they slept it would be a welcome comfort.

“Isabelle informed me that they were catching the next train out, and they would be here by morning,” Magnus said, when Alec wandered out of the shower in his boxers. It had been cramped and disgusting in the little glass cubicle, just as Magnus warned him, but at least the dusty, cobweb-covered feeling was gone from his skin.

“Did she also say *I told you so*?” Alec asked, towelling his hair.

“No, but Jace passed on a similar sentiment, although it contained more expletives.”

Alec snorted, sitting down to pull on some dry clothes. He found a pair of Magnus’s sweatpants, which always rucked up around his ankles, and one of his shirts, and put it all on while Magnus watched appreciatively from the mini-bar.

“I’ve mulled things over, and I’m at a bit of a loss,” Magnus said, sounding sort of delighted by the turn of events. “That doesn’t happen often, so you can imagine my excitement.”

“I don’t think missing people are supposed to be exciting,” Alec said, but he was grinning as he lay down on the bed, discarding his towel somewhere to the right. Magnus clinked glasses and bottles together as he made himself a drink.

“Whiskey?”

Alec glowered at him. “Thanks, but no thanks. Is that joke going to become a thing?”

“Every couple needs an inside joke or two,” Magnus said, the amusement plain in his voice. Alec resisted the urge to chuck a pillow at his pretty, smiling mouth, if only because the pillow would vanish before it hit target and he’d have to fight for the other ones.

“So, we are a couple then?” Alec said unthinkingly. The air seemed to grow marginally colder for a brief moment, and he shuddered. He felt regret sink in when Magnus spoke next, his words marred with confusion.

“Is there any particular reason why we wouldn’t be?”

Alec couldn't think of anything to say, so the silence continued. It was horrible, a tense thing that felt a lot like the cobwebs he had just scrubbed off. He couldn't see Magnus from his position on the bed, but he could hear him moving around.

"Biscuit told me I'm supposed to 'DTR,' which is a horrendous acronym, in my opinion, but I get the gist."

“Define the relationship,” Alec said, cringing at the ceiling. Clary had said that to him too, in one of her determined-to-be-helpful moments. “I guess I’m just wondering... since everything that’s happened, if you’ve... if you've maybe changed your mind?”

His voice tilted up at the end, like he was unsure of himself and his words, which was fair. The question echoed around his skull and the silent room. He wished immediately that he could take it back.

“Alexander,” Magnus said lowly. “What do you mean by that?”

Sirens were going off inside Alec’s head, but he plunged onward. Communication, he thought desperately. That’s what everyone with an opinion on their relationship kept banging on about. They said he had to communicate if he wanted this to work, and he agreed, but it was still difficult to put into practice when everything inside him was screaming for him not to break the tender, fragile strings that connected them.

“It’s not...” Alec faltered. “I guess I just didn't think...”

Magnus’s voice was odd, thick. “You didn't think what? That we would still be together? You thought I’d... what, stop wanting you? Stop *loving* you? That I’d simply abandon you, change my mind about being together? Disregarding the fact that none of that makes any sense, given that I’m immortal too, is that really the sort of person that you think I am, Alexander?”

Alec shot up in bed and whirled to face Magnus, whose face was dark and serious. The thickness in his voice hadn't been anger, it had been *hurt*. He could feel his own panic etched onto his face.

“That’s not what I meant,” Alec said, but it sounded weak even to his own ears. He shook his head and tried again. “Seriously, Magnus, that’s not what I meant. It’s just that neither of us were talking before and I was too afraid to ask because I didn't want to know the answer, and you just didn't seem... happy about this.”

“Of course I wasn’t happy about this!” Magnus snapped incredulously.

Alec jerked back like he'd been hit. Even Magnus looked surprised by the force of his own words, shocked silent.

"Right."

The room felt too quiet.

"Right," Alec said again, stiffly. "I think I'm going to sleep, now."

Magnus winced. "Alexander."

"Don't," Alec said, swinging his feet over the side of the bed. "I'll be in one of the other rooms. Goodnight."

Magnus's sigh brushed over him as the door slipped shut between them.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you! I hope you enjoyed it! <3

An Echo of Before

Chapter Summary

Magnus lifted a hand and pressed two fingers lightly against Alec's lips, startling him into silence. They did this sometimes, when Magnus could sense that Alec's own words were hurting him, when he needed a way out.

Chapter Notes

I'm trying desperately to upload but either AO3 hates me or my sodding WiFi does! I can't even get on my emails! Next Chapters will be up very very soon once I've *kicked the router in the non-existent teeth*.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

An arrow hit the ground with a soft thud. It buried itself in the grass, a sure sign that Alec's mind was elsewhere. His hands felt raw from shooting for what felt like hours, and could possibly have *been* hours. The sky was pale, the early morning air crisp and unforgiving as it scratched its way down Alec's throat with every shuddering inhale.

He'd thrown off his jacket, leaving him in just a t-shirt as he aimed and fired. The soft twang of the string as the arrows flew through the air was comforting, an old home. He could feel his breathing steadying the longer he stood there, back tense, shoulders relaxed, eyes sharp.

Light footsteps drifted through the garden, growing closer. Alec rolled his shoulders, jaw tight as he brought the bow back up. He hadn't seen Magnus yet this morning, not since their cold argument last night. Whatever Magnus had to say, Alec wasn't sure he wanted to hear it.

"I'll be in soon," Alec said tightly, eyes straight ahead. "Let me know when the others arrive."

His first clue that it wasn't Magnus was the rough, heavy punch to the back of his shoulder. He stumbled, thrown off, and whirled around in the next breath, planting his feet and aiming his arrow at empty air.

"That was sloppy, Alec," Isabelle said, from where she was crouched a few feet away, having darted to the side before Alec could shoot her. Her smug smirk sent a wave of relief and fondness through Alec. He shouldered his bow and barely had his arms up before she was rushing towards him, pulling him into a hug.

“Nice punch,” Alec said.

“I know.”

Alec huffed a laugh into her hair.

“Magnus said you were out here brooding,” Izzy told him, as she drew back. She’d borrowed one of his jackets, thrown over a stretchy black dress. A thin scarf wound around her neck. If she felt the cold at all, she didn’t show it, but Alec shivered just looking at her, despite the sweat on his skin.

“I’m not *brooding*,” Alec said. “I’m practising. Training.”

Izzy arched an eyebrow at the mess of arrows littering the garden. “Obviously you need it, because I think those arrows were supposed to be shot *at* something, rather than treated like grass seed. What’s going on?”

Alec grunted, putting his bow over his shoulder. “It’s been a rough few days.”

Izzy’s dark eyes were concerned, her gaze trickling over him. “I take it you don’t mean the… changes you’ve been going through.”

“Do you have to make it sound like that?”

“Yes.” Izzy wound an arm through his elbow and led him towards a low wall, where he sat with a sigh. “Talk to me. Jace is up there with Magnus, so we have a few minutes. And Magnus looked pretty upset when we got here, as much as Magnus will let himself look upset in front of people he doesn’t trust.”

“Magnus trusts you,” Alec refuted, frowning.

“Maybe with life-and-death stuff, but not normal things. Not things that make him vulnerable. I think you’re the only one he trusts with those parts of him, you and his old friends.” Izzy sighed. “Don’t waste that, Alec. You’ve both come a long way since your awkward cat-and-mouse game in the beginning. That was fun to watch, don’t get me wrong, but I think I like this better. I like seeing you happy, both of you. This?” She gestured at the arrows with her free hand. “This isn’t happy. What happened while you were here?”

“Of course I wasn’t happy about this!”

Alec winced. Happiness seemed to be a theme lately.

“Things have been tense, since the museum,” Alec admitted. “Since I became - immortal.”

Izzy stiffened, but kept silent.

“He’s been really distant,” Alec said, “and maybe I have too, I don’t know. He was barely there for days after he told us about the rabbit on the moon, or whatever that Legend was. He was looking for a way to fix this, but he kept coming up blank, I think. I don’t know. We didn’t really talk about it all, not properly, and before you say anything, I did try. At first. But

you don't exactly turn immortal everyday, and there's no manual for this, so I didn't know what to say. Neither of us did."

Izzy patted his arm gently. Alec stared at the ground, at the clump of leaves beneath his left boot.

"I don't know what happened," Alec said. "I just know that it didn't feel like we were together. Not just physically, but as a couple. I mentioned it, stupidly, last night, and he was hurt that I'd thought we were heading towards a break-up. And then I said it was because he didn't seem happy about any of this, and..."

"I said that I wasn't," Magnus said, from a few feet away. Alec looked up sharply, eyes narrowed, and Izzy slipped out of Alec's grip and pointed at the low wall.

"Sit," Izzy said. "Talk. I'm going to talk to Jace, and when you've fixed this, come upstairs and we'll work out how to fix whatever's going on in this town, okay?"

Magnus looked faintly amused at the order, but even he didn't argue with Izzy. Izzy kissed Alec's cheek before striding off, but when she got to Magnus, she paused and briefly gripped one of his hands. Alec couldn't see her face, but whatever expression was there made Magnus's stiff look soften. He patted her hand, and they watched her walk back inside the Bed and Breakfast.

"I could see you through the window," Magnus said. "A little unfair, considering you know what your archery skills does to me."

Alec cast a look at the arrows in the grass and arched an eyebrow at Magnus, who chuckled wryly.

"Even you can't be perfect all the time, darling."

"I don't miss."

Magnus hummed. He focused his magic on the ground, and the arrows began to gather themselves up, swaddled in a net of blue. They tucked themselves inside Alec's abandoned quiver, and he pulled off his bow and propped it up against the wall, beside his leg. Magnus stepped closer and lowered himself onto the wall beside Alec.

The garden was quiet. The only sound came from the birds in the tree above, birds that trilled and sung quiet songs in their nests. It was wrong, to sit like this with Magnus and not enjoy it.

"Good morning," Alec said, staring sullenly at the ground.

Magnus actually laughed, but it sounded sad. "Depends on your definition of good. I'd like - if you don't mind, I'd like to explain what I meant, last night."

"Please do." Alec shifted a little, ignoring the way his heart-rate picked up a little. He'd been so anxious lately, and he hated that. It was better now that he could see Magnus, who looked out at the garden, avoiding his gaze. "Just before you do, I want to say that I didn't want to

argue. I don't like fighting with you. That's why I didn't say anything in the first place. I didn't think you were happy about me being immortal, so I didn't say anything because I didn't want to start a fight if it was going to mean the end of us. I didn't want an answer, about whether you still wanted to be with me."

Magnus lifted a hand and pressed two fingers lightly against Alec's lips, startling him into silence. They did this sometimes, when Magnus could sense that Alec's own words were hurting him, when he needed a way out. It was an echo of before, of the first time, that would ripple through time for as long as they lived, if Alec had anything to say about it. Alec's mouth curled up in a smile, and Magnus echoed that too, letting his hand drift to the side.

"Alexander, there are two reasons why I'm not happy about this." He shifted forward urgently before Alec could let the hurt settle, and his voice was insistent, demanding to be heard. "The first is that this wasn't something you chose, and I will not abide by anything that strips you of your free will. This is a monumental change, a choice that will change your life, and it was made *for* you. Forgive me, love, but I can't be pleased about that. You would be unhappy, wouldn't you, if something made me mortal without my consent? Or if this had happened to Jace, or Isabelle, or Max?"

Alec's stomach clenched, and he jolted back. He couldn't breathe around the thought of *Max* stuck as he was, a child with an old soul, living forever while everyone around him faded into nothing. He let loose some sort of mangled gasp, surprising both of them with the force of. Magnus slid closer on the wall and cradled his face, pressing a gentle kiss to his cheek, murmuring until Alec could breathe again. When he could, they fell silent, but Magnus stayed where he was.

"Sorry," Alec said, and then hurriedly, before Magnus could interrupt him, "I just - I didn't think of it like that."

"There's another reason, too," Magnus said, his gaze dark. "It's not that I wasn't happy about you being Immortal. It's that I couldn't *allow* myself to feel happy about this, Alexander."

Alec shifted, covering Magnus's hands with his own. "What do you mean?"

"When I realised what this was, what had changed about you," Magnus murmured, lowering his eyes. "I felt *indescribably* happy. Giddy with it, almost. I stood in the kitchen for a minute and I saw our future together, and I *couldn't* see all of it because it was never-ending. It was just us, together, the way I never imagined I'd get to experience. You being immortal meant I got to keep you, and love you, for always."

His voice was reverent, peeling away the still silence that filled the garden. They were the right words, the words Alec had wanted to hear since Magnus first sent a rabbit of jade and smoke bounding around the room, since he told Alec the truth of what he'd become.

Alec took a breath and then another and another, and he moved in to kiss Magnus with everything he has, but Magnus drew back at the last second, hesitating.

"I couldn't keep letting myself feel that, Alec," Magnus said, his voice shaking. "Not when it was hurting you and everyone else around you! The guilt almost broke me a few moments

later, when I thought of Izzy and Jace at your bedside, waiting for you to wake up. I knew I wouldn't look for a way to remove the immortality, to undo this chain of events, if I kept feeling so happy about it. So no, I'm not happy about this, because I can't be."

Alec swallowed, brushing a thumb over Magnus's cheek. Magnus closed his eyes briefly, as though he couldn't stand the tenderness in the action, but Alec couldn't imagine being anything but tender with this man.

"Magnus," Alec said, shaking his head gently. "I need you to be happy about this. If it doesn't change, if there's no way out - even if there is - I need you to be happy about it. I'm sorry if that's selfish. There's nobody else I'd rather spend the rest of forever with than you. That's my silver lining in all of this, that I get to be with you. So be happy about it, because a part of me is too."

Magnus's eyes fluttered open. The awe there, the wonder from before that Alec knew he hadn't imagined - it was back, and it was glaringly bright.

"Your answer, regarding whether I want to be with you or not," Magnus said quietly, breaking off before gathering himself again. "The answer is as it's always been, and always will be."

Hesitation didn't intrude on their next kiss, and Alec settled into Magnus's arms as birdsong lit up the sky around them.

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Raphael gave Alec a dismissive once-over before returning to his nail-file. The door to the room shut tight behind them, and the air grew warm as the wards and protective runes snapped into place. Alec shot an accusing look at his sister, where she leaned against the bedpost.

"You didn't ask," Izzy said, shrugging, when Alec gestured at Raphael pointedly. "You were busy brooding. Sorry, *practising*."

Her tone was mocking, but the bright look in her eye suggested she knew a little about what had just transpired in the garden. Things weren't completely fixed yet. There were still apologies to make, conversations to be had, things to talk about, but for the first time in a while, Alec felt like he could confidently say they were on the right track.

"I *was* practising," Alec insisted.

Raphael scoffed, but at least he had the decency to do it quietly. He wasn't even using the nail-file, which Alec suspected was just there as a prop, but rather twirling it around his fingers as he watched Magnus with a thoughtful gaze.

"Very touching scene outside," Raphael said idly. "I take it the drama and uncertainty surrounding your passionate affair is over?"

“Were you peeping again, Raphael? You know they have rules about that sort of thing now, and it's never turned out well for you before.” Magnus aimed a charming smile at him as he brushed through the room, sweeping things up with his magic and putting them back down again. It was like a weight had been lifted from his chest, and Alec could see it in every movement, every smile or tilt of the head. He was lighter now. They both were.

“The window overlooks the garden, and Cat is downstairs, talking to the owner.” Raphael shrugged. “It’s not as if there was anything else to do. Shadowhunters are more boring than you’ve led me to believe.”

“I feel like that’s supposed to be offensive,” Jace said, as he slipped out of the tiny bathroom, Stele in hand. “Coming from you, though, Vampire, it’s just comforting to know we’ve disappointed you.”

“Jace,” Alec said, but his heart wasn’t in it, and Raphael and Jace continued to regard each other as though they were something disgusting smeared into the carpet. Alec felt his patience thinning as the glares and cocky smirks only grew. “Fine, whatever. Just don’t break anything during your dick-slinging contest.”

Izzy’s delighted laugh rang out across the room, and Alec left them to it as he joined Magnus by the bar. It felt easier to touch a hand briefly between Magnus's shoulder-blades, resting his palm there and kissing his cheek as Magnus turned.

“Catarina’s here too?” Alec asked.

“She created a portal for the three of them this morning, to get them to King’s Cross. She didn’t say who she’d left in charge of Brooklyn, so I expect magical tornadoes and a full-out war will have broken out by the time we return.”

“Better make it quick then,” Alec said, flashing him a warm grin. “The Institute is unmanned too.”

Izzy coughed slightly. Alec jerked his head towards her, eyebrow raised.

“It’s not unmanned,” Izzy said quietly, almost like she didn’t want him to hear.

“It’s not?”

She and Jace shared a look. Alec narrowed his eyes suspiciously at them.

“What’s going on?”

Jace sighed, and then scrubbed a hand over his head, giving in eventually. “Maryse is there, so it's running as fine as ever. Robert’s still in Idris, but Maryse is back, probably for the foreseeable future, I’d say.”

Mom coming home wasn't that big of a deal, although it was a bit odd, considering she and Max had only just left. Still, there was something about the way he said it that made Alec nervous, but when he glanced over sharply, but Jace and Izzy were looking away.

"You said she'd been poking about," Alec said slowly. "I assumed that meant letters."

"It did at first."

"Oh, no, don't tell us all at once, Shadowhunter," Raphael drawled, when Jace neglected to continue. "That's far too much information in one go. Spread it out, ramp up the tension a little. It's not as if this situation isn't stressful enough for everyone involved."

"Retract the claws a little, Raphael," Magnus said, practically purring with amusement.

Izzy drew closer, her chin tipped up as she met Alec's gaze squarely. "Mom knows, Alec. She knows about you being immortal. We're not sure how, not yet, but she knows, and she only let us go and get you because we refused to tell her where you'd gone, and because we assured her that you were here searching for a way to fix it, and you needed some help."

Alec felt the blood leave his face. His body went cold as a storm of thoughts hit him, and only Magnus's hand on his shoulder kept him from falling over.

It had been a lot, these past few days. A lot to deal with, a lot to cope with, and he really wasn't coping as well as he kept telling himself he was. He was one blow away from falling over like a felled tree.

"If Mom knows, then that means the Clave know too," Alec said heavily.

"Not necessarily," Izzy argued, but her tone was weaker than usual, her mouth scrunched up. She knew he was right.

"I think someone might have tattled," Jace said. "But she might not have told the Clave, and if that's the case, then whoever told her will be damned sure to keep their mouth shut, if she had anything to say about it."

"Why would the Clave knowing be a problem?" Raphael said silkily. "As far as I understand it, the Clave are understanding and kind, aren't they? They *value* everyone equally, don't they? That is what you keep telling us, during your little meetings, during your attempts to smooth things over, to make the Downworlders' voices heard."

"Raphael," Magnus said lightly.

"I'm just saying," Raphael said, his gaze flicking to Magnus, "that he doesn't have a need to be afraid, surely. Immortality isn't a sin, is it?" Raphael let the question sit for a while before he hummed, mock-thoughtfully, his eyes glittering with dark amusement. "Or perhaps it is. Perhaps it taints the Shadowhunter blood, makes him a little more Downworlder-esque. Maybe he's worried that they'll reject him. Maybe he's worried that they will treat him the way they've treated us for centuries."

"Raphael," Magnus snapped. His eyes were alight with warning, but there was no magic on his hands. Alec doubted very strongly that Magnus would *ever* let harm come to Raphael, or any of his Downworlders, especially not by his own hands. Raphael didn't deserve that,

anyway, although Jace and Izzy looked livid, and Alec couldn't deny that he sort of wanted to put an arrow in him.

But Raphael wasn't cruel. And he wasn't wrong.

"My dear, darling Raphael," Magnus said, sighing as he rubbed at his temple. "Alexander is one man. He's not the Clave. He's not a Downworlder, either. He's a Shadowhunter, and a good man, and whatever reservations he may once have had for Downworlders, if he ever had any, are long gone. If you've come to help us, then you're more than welcome to put your brilliant mind to use, but if you've come to deliver an updated version of the shovel talk, then I suggest you take another train trip, and we'll talk at home."

"The shovel talk?" Jace raised an eyebrow. He still looked pissed, but now he was curious as well. Alec was curious too, but his mind was racing, clouded with confusion and fear from Raphael's words and Izzy's news, and he couldn't make his mouth work to ask any questions. He had no idea what he was supposed to do about any of this. He was used to being in control, and now it was all slipping away from him.

Besides, Magnus and Raphael were paying attention to only each other. Magnus waited patiently for an answer while Raphael stared at him with a cool, narrow gaze.

"Fine." Raphael snorted, tapping his nail-file against his thigh. "I'll stay. It was hard enough getting here as it is, what with the sun on its way up. Catarina had to do some very clever magic to work around it. It's lucky this place is so dark and dreary, really, but you could at least put up some black-out curtains."

"I'll put that on my list," Magnus said, with an indulgent smile. "And I'm sure that's the only reason you're staying."

Raphael purposely turned away from the proud tilt of his mouth. "Catarina is coming up the stairs, and she appears to be accompanied by someone."

Two Seraph blades made an appearance at the announcement, and Alec reached slowly for his bow. Too slowly. He felt like he was moving through thick syrup, his arms weighed down. The fog that had clouded his mind was growing denser as the seconds passed. He couldn't make his mouth form words, couldn't reach out for Magnus even though he desperately wanted to. Words went round and round in his head, jumbled and terrifying.

The Clave. Mom. Raphael. Magnus. Immortal. The Clave. Mom. Raphael. Magnus. Immortal. The Clave. Mom. Raphael. Magnus. Immortal.

It wasn't just panic or fear making him feel like this. Behind it all, behind the worry and the words and Raphael's taunts in his head, there was another sound. One that he'd heard before.

He saw, through the fog, as Catarina opened the door, her mouth moving urgently as she pulled Allison Lane into the room. He saw the door shut and the blades go down. He didn't know if he was holding his bow, if his arm had ever reached it. Magnus's hand was still there, a weight on his arm, but he could barely feel it.

The sound grew louder.

Alec slumped to the floor, his knees giving out as he dropped like a puppet, strings cut, eyes shut.

The Moon Rabbit thumped its furred feet, and moonlight filled Alec's mind.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much!! <3

Quite as Deeply

Chapter Summary

"I know the stories of all of my immortal children, and I watch their pain and heartache and I try to lessen the weight of it all, to remind them that their lives are gifts, rather than burdens. But it is not always possible. He may not have had the most pain, but of all the immortal creatures in this world, Magnus Bane has had the most heartache."

Chapter Notes

Frantically trying to play catch-up when my internet allows. Please forgive the lateness!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He was in the sky, the night sky. Brilliant white light obscured everything, and he blinked rapidly as it softened to silver. Moonlight. It didn't hurt his eyes, exactly, but it was coarse and pervasive, invading his sight. He couldn't look away.

"It was my last truly free act."

The voice echoed out of the moonlight. A sweet, ancient, familiar voice, one that Alec had heard laughing. Behind it, there came the thump of furred feet.

"I heard you before, in the museum," Alec said, listening to the way his words grew and bloomed across the night sky. "What is this? Where am I? I thought I fainted."

"You did not collapse of your own accord. You are in a dream, a trance," the voice said.

"There is only so much I can do when the sun is awake, but we are connected, in a sense. I can reach you. Your friends and family are safe, I promise. They are waiting for you to wake up."

It was hard to feel agitated in such a peaceful, vast space, but Alec managed it. He pictured Magnus casting spell after spell, Izzy shaking him, Jace trying frantically to get him to wake up.

"So wake me up," Alec demanded.

"First, you *must* understand," the voice said. "It was my last truly free act."

Alec couldn't understand, not like this. His hands felt empty and the air was cold. He shivered, deciding to listen. "What do you mean? What act? What are you talking about?"

A hand cupped his face, but somehow he didn't jolt, as though a small part of him had known it was coming. The hand was made of moonlight too, and Alec couldn't distinguish a true shape. He was sure it was a hand, though; soft fingertips pressed against his cheekbone.

"I changed your soul, Alexander Lightwood. Not for you. I didn't do it entirely for you. I made it so that you would live For Always. It is my gift, my power, to be able to ensure the long-lasting of lives."

"You..." Alec's chest tightened. "You're the moon goddess that Magnus was talking about?"

"In a sense," said the voice. "A fraction of her, but I speak with all of her. Just think of me as one beam of light, if you wish."

Alec laughed a little helplessly. "I'm not sure that's as reassuring as you think it is, but thanks. Could you just - explain? Please?"

A soft sigh brushed over him, ruffling his hair. "Of course. I do owe you an explanation."

Alec waited, holding his breath.

"I changed your soul to bring you to this awful place."

Alec didn't speak, waiting for more.

"The town you rest in was peaceful, slow. Nothing much occurred there beyond the usual pace of life, but there is not a place on this green earth, nor others, untouched by magic. It was beneath the ground in this town, buried in the soil, sleeping, put there by a demon many years ago who played with the Sight of its victims before it killed them. The dark secretions of magic left behind dug deep and festered and grew even darker, and it became a powerful lure."

Alec knew of the dangers of demon magic. He had spent his life training to fight demons, his nose buried in books at the end of the day when his arms ached from sparring. He knew the power buried in most demons, and what damage it could do.

"A lure," Alec repeated slowly. "I don't think I'm going to like where this is going."

"The people of this town had never wanted anything beyond the normal aches of humanity. Yet now, suddenly, as the demon's magic grew, they craved immortality. To live forever, to never die or grow old, to only end if harm came to them. A desperate, foolish dream, especially in the wrong hands. The magic in the earth twisted their greed, and they fed off each other until they sought only their own endurance."

"Are you saying that the people did this to themselves? People in the town?" Alec couldn't help the disgust in his voice. "Just normal Mundanes?"

"The magic aided them but, yes, essentially," the moon goddess said, her voice mournful and quiet. "It began with one or two, tainting their mind. Those few began to lure others in. They decided to use me to achieve their desires."

“How? You’re a *Goddess*. It’s not as if you’d be easily accessible.”

“My presence is stronger in certain places. Places where moon dances and rituals occurred in days of old, places where strong magic is used often these days, places where the night is especially dark, and in need of a little light. It was strong there, beneath where the shack now stands. The magic tainted the people, and my presence was called upon again and again.”

“So they wanted immortality, and they used you to get it?” Alec’s mouth was set in a grim line. “With all the power behind them, I assume you had to give it to them.”

That type of greed, that type of corruption, living forever... Well, it wasn’t something Alec wanted to think about.

“In a sense,” said the moon goddess, and Alec could feel the light all around them grow heavy with sorrow, like liquid on his skin.

“What does that mean?”

“Immortality is a curious thing,” said the moon goddess softly. “It means to live forever, to never die. Yet, in the purest sense, *everyone* has a drop of immortality within them from the moment they first draw breath. People live on in memories, in stories and signatures and photographs, in moments that do not fade. Their past is permanent, even when their bodies and minds are not.”

Alec furrowed his brow. “I suppose so.”

The moon goddess hummed and it sounded like harp-strings. “An object is... different, but not by much. It’s a shell, something that doesn’t fade unless damaged. Immortality cannot stop harm from befalling a person, but it does allow them to live forever, in the same way that an object, a trinket, can live forever until it, too, is damaged or destroyed.”

Silence in the night sky was exactly the same as silence anywhere else, as it turned out. Still tense and slow. Alec let the implications settle, and he thought of a crystal and a locket and an ornament, and was filled with the urge to scrub his hands until his skin was red and raw.

“A trinket,” Alec repeated faintly. “The shack, the one full of things and objects, all that stuff.”

“I believe you referred to that stuff as useless junk,” the moon goddess said. Alec couldn’t tell if she was amused or not, but he felt vaguely sick. Laughter wouldn’t come.

“Those are all the missing people,” Alec said. “Everything in that shack. You turned living people into *things*.”

“Please, Alec, you must understand. I had no choice,” the moon goddess said urgently. “My power is only strongest on August 15th, but they began this far before then. I did not have the strength to fight them completely. I could not give them the elixir of immortality even if I wanted to, but I could not refuse the powerful, tainted magic, either. I had to compromise.”

“That’s one hell of a compromise,” Alec said, laughing. His laugh was hollow, and it echoed around the bright, empty space they were in. He thought he could see stars, smears of silver against a dazzling black night, but he couldn’t be sure. The white light of the moon filled his vision too much for him to be certain of anything.

“This is better, I assure you,” the moon goddess said. “Either the dark magic would have continued to sit in their minds, eating away at their humanity, and they would have lived forever as immortal beings, crazed and pained, or something would have fixed it after I had made them immortal, and they would be stuck with their new existence. True immortality is not as easily reversed as this.”

The moon goddess remained patiently silent as he digested her words. Her hand was still on his cheek, resting there with all the weight of a feather, and yet it anchored him. Without it, he thought, he would be nothing but stardust.

“Where do I come in?” Alec asked. “You said that you changed my soul, that you were the one that made *me* immortal. You wouldn’t make them immortal, and I don’t think you just go around handing it out. Why did you do it to me?”

The moon goddess smiled warmly. Alec couldn’t see it, but he could feel it all around him, as the silver light turned briefly to gold and the air grew warmer.

“I knew of your love, Alexander Lightwood,” the moon goddess said gently. “I also knew of the one you loved.”

Alec’s eyebrows went up in surprise. “Magnus.”

“I know the stories of all of my immortal children, and I watch their pain and heartache and I try to lessen the weight of it all, to remind them that their lives are gifts, rather than burdens. But it’s not always possible. He may not have had the most pain, but of all the immortal creatures in this world, Magnus Bane has had the most heartache.”

Alec’s own heart ached at that. He could feel it threatening to crack.

“And yet he is the most easy to love, the most bright, the most wonderfully young,” the moon goddess continued, her voice soft with awe. “He doesn’t feel it, I know. He feels tired and bruised, as though he must keep himself locked away at all times to avoid pain. Yet he *helps*, regardless of this. He saves people, no matter who they are. His power comes not just from his magic, but from his heart and his mind, from the soul that he pours into every loving action.”

“I have watched him grow,” said the moon goddess. “He has loved many people, in different ways. In all the years he’s been alive, I have never seen him love quite as deeply as he loves you.”

The cracks in Alec’s heart sealed over, and he breathed in, breathed out. Magnus had said as much, several times, although maybe not in those words. Part of Alec didn’t believe it still. It was hard to believe that someone who had been alive for so long, who must have known so many people and loved so many souls, could find something so special in someone like him.

"I love him too," Alec managed to say. There was nothing else to say that would mean as much, and that was all that was needed.

"I know," said the moon goddess, soothing, "or I would not have changed you. I would not have made you immortal if you didn't share the love you do. I wanted to end his heartache, and I wanted your help. I knew he would stop at nothing to give you a choice to undo this, and I knew that would lead him to the town where you could help those people. I compromised because I was determined not to let it be the end for those souls. My last truly free act was to give you a chance to change what I had been forced to do. My last truly free act was to trust in the love of both of you."

*

Alec's head cracked to the side. The carpet was scratchy beneath his cheek, and noises came from above him. Alec sucked in a breath and jerked back against the floor, shoulders rolling, to find Izzy poised above him, her hand raised and her dark eyes very determined.

"Iz!" he yelled, jerking up his arm before she could slap him again. "I'm awake, I promise."

Izzy eyed him before nodding shortly and helping him upright. Magnus was there, his mouth pursed tightly and his hands clenched tightly together, and Jace was crouched nearby, holding his Stele like a weapon. He stood when Alec stood.

"You were glowing," Izzy said briskly. "Sorry, Alec, but you wouldn't wake up, and it's not every day that you glow silver in your sleep."

"It's fine," Alec said, rubbing his cheek. It stung, but he could barely feel it over the buzz in his veins. "I met the moon goddess."

The silence that filled the room was the kind that often lurked in waiting rooms. Hesitant and afraid.

"Slap him again, Izzy," Jace suggested.

Alec shot him a glare. "I'm serious. I know it sounds crazy, but we hunt demons. You don't get much crazier than that."

"Alexander, nobody's calling you crazy," Magnus said, placing a soothing hand on his cheek. Alec shuddered. It was exactly where the feather-light hand had been in his dream. "You did fall though, and you may have hit your head. Do you mind if I check?"

Alec gave a jerky nod, and Magnus hummed lightly, light at his fingertips.

"Check and see if there's a brain in there, while you're at it," Raphael said, from where he was standing on the other side of the room. A blackout blind had been conjured to keep the sunlight out, and he was lounging in a darker patch of shadow with a curious glint in his eyes.

"I swear," Jace said, but he cut himself off when Magnus drew back, sparks fading from his hands.

“Children, please,” Magnus said. “There appears to be no damage.”

“I suppose you really did meet the moon goddess then,” Izzy said, looking vaguely impressed, despite the fact that Alec hadn’t done anything. Besides fall on the floor.

“It explains the glowing, at least,” Jace reluctantly admitted, pocketing his Steele and surveying Alec critically. “Was she hot?”

Alec decided, for the sake of Jace’s health, to ignore him.

“What exactly happened?” Magnus asked, flicking a few sparks Jace’s way in warning. Izzy laughed as she collapsed on the bed, tugging Alec with her, and Magnus came too until they were sitting in a line, Alec sandwiched between them. Jace stayed where he was, but his eyes were intent, encouraging.

“Wasn’t there someone else here?” Alec said, frowning. “Catarina?”

“She took Allison Lane down to the staff room while you were glowing,” Raphael explained. “Magic unnerves her. That, and glowing unconscious men.”

“Not to mention vampires,” Izzy added, grinning at Raphael. Raphael didn’t say anything, but his eye-roll seemed almost fond. Alec didn’t like that. He knew there was nothing between them, but he didn’t like Raphael’s attitude, or the strange way he watched the world, or how he talked in circles and riddles.

“You were explaining about the moon goddess,” Magnus prompted him. Alec stopped staring suspiciously and shook himself.

“It was strange,” Alec said. “I didn’t notice while I was there, but she was... weak. She said she had stolen me into a dream and that you were all waiting for me to wake up. When I asked her to wake me up, she said she had to explain things first. She said that was the one who had changed my soul and she... she explained about the missing people.”

Izzy and Jace snapped to attention. Magnus held his wrist, his grip loose but still desperate, somehow. Alec wondered how scared he had been when Alec hadn’t woken up. He would have been a mess, if it was Magnus. He slipped their hands around until he could raise them and kiss Magnus’s knuckles.

“I’m fine,” he promised lowly, aware that they had an audience and not quite caring. “I wasn’t hurt or anything. Just let me explain.”

And then after, we can talk. He tried to say it with his eyes, to get Magnus to understand. There was a spark of relief there amongst the brown, a grateful love.

“Explain away, darling,” Magnus said, squeezing his hand. “You know how much I love listening to your voice. We’re all ears.”

“How sweet,” Raphael drawled.

“Can somebody please gag him?” Alec asked.

*

"It makes sense," Magnus said, as he crossed his legs underneath him on the bed. Izzy and Jace were in the next room, and Alec could hear the occasional thump and laugh through the wall as they argued together and threw cushions around. Raphael had vanished downstairs to talk to Catarina and Allison, or perhaps just to bully the nearest defenceless creature. It had been exhausting, explaining his dream and the moon goddess's words with little interruptions every five seconds.

Alec flopped on the bed, tucking his face near Magnus's thigh and sighing.

"Does it? That's nice. Maybe you can explain it to me then."

Magnus laughed lightly, his hand drifting down to card his fingers through Alec's hair. Alec grunted out a soft sigh as he felt light, heavenly pressure on his skin.

"I love your hands," Alec muttered.

Magnus laughed again. "They love you in return, or so I've been led to believe."

Alec hadn't told him *everything* that the moon goddess had said. He'd explained the demon magic, and the weight of the townspeople's greed, and the fact that the moon goddess had been forced to use her own power to give them a twisted version of what they wanted.

"It really does make a lot of sense," Magnus mused. "It explains the mass of life I felt in the shack. Not to mention that immortality is hard to reverse, as we've discovered recently. Almost impossible, in fact. It makes sense that she would choose to do this, instead, rather than turning an entire town immortal. Although you said that she couldn't do that anyway."

"But she might've had to, on the fifteenth, if they had still been around to demand it," Alec pointed out. "Which was why she did what she did and then focused on fixing it."

Magnus sighed. "It's awful. All the evil in the world, and the vast majority of it we do to ourselves."

"I didn't tell you everything," Alec said suddenly, before he could lose his nerve. He felt Magnus stiffen. "I didn't want Jace and Izzy to hear this part."

"What part?" Magnus asked quietly.

Alec tugged him until they were both lying down, facing each other. It was never hard to look at Magnus, except when it was.

"She only made me immortal because we love each other, she said," Alec told him, watching his expression carefully. "She picked me because she'd been watching you your whole life, like she watches all the immortal beings on earth, and she saw you fall in love with me, and she said she knew you'd try and fix it, and it would lead us here, where we could help."

Magnus remained very still. His eyes went very wide and his mouth grew tight, and Alec waited for the stiff response. "I'm not sure if that makes me feel better or worse, Alexander."

"I know," Alec said, voice low. "I wasn't sure how you'd feel either, that's why I wanted to tell you here, without people butting in. I know what you'll do with this information, see."

Magnus raised an eyebrow. "Oh, do you?"

"I do," Alec said, shifting closer. "You'll take it and turn it into something that it isn't. You'll use it as proof that this was your fault, when it really wasn't."

"You just told me that she wouldn't have done it if I didn't love you," Magnus said, his voice fraught with tension.

"I said she wouldn't have done it if we didn't love each other," Alec corrected him, moving in to stop his next protest with a kiss. They kissed quietly, for long moments, breathing each other in, until Alec drew back to look at him. "It wouldn't have happened unless I loved you back, just as much. So if you're going to blame yourself, you also have to blame me too, and I know how much you dislike doing that."

He grinned at Magnus, who rolled his eyes.

"I believe the term is loathe, Alexander. I loathe to blame you unless you've done something particularly stupid," Magnus countered, but he sounded fond.

"Which I never do," Alec pointed out reasonably.

"Which you never do, of course," Magnus agreed, laughter sitting on his lower lip, heavy and loving. Alec let the moment settle around them before he sighed, shifting a bit to press his cheek to the pillow.

"There's still a lot that I don't understand."

"I'm with you there," Magnus said, his forehead creasing. "I'm especially curious about the wards in place. They don't seem like the work of a weakened moon goddess. The answers will come, I expect. I suppose the question remains, how to go about fixing all of this?"

A light-bulb flickered to life in Alec's mind.

"I think I have an idea," Alec said. "We need to talk to Allison Lane."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much! Please let me know what you think! We're coming to the end now!
<3

Skeletons and Shadows

Chapter Summary

“Moon magic is powerful, and it seeps into the ground just as much as dark, demon magic does,” Catarina explained quickly, sweeping her hair back. There were sparks at her fingers, softer than Magnus’s, more like embers. “It is creative in nature, and demon magic is destructive, and the combination does exactly what it says on the tin.”

Chapter Notes

Oh God I finally got back into my account. I think it was an email thing. This is so late, I'm so terribly sorry! Technically, this is the last chapter, and the next one is a sort of epilogue, tying off loose ends etc, which I will post later this evening! Thank you so much for sticking with it, and I'm sorry if there are any clumpy scenes, I'm a bit awful when it comes to writing action. Here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The library was the same as ever. Alec peered through the glass and then retreated, rubbing his arms as goose-flesh pimpled his skin. Inside, it looked cold and dark, dim but soft with dust. The broken window was still broken, the shattered pieces littering the ground, but they didn't need to use it this time.

“In your own time, my dear,” Magnus said, laying a comforting hand on Allison Lane’s shoulder. She stood, hunched over in front of the main doors to the library and stared doggedly ahead. Her bedraggled robe had been replaced with thick woollen clothes to keep the pervading chill out, and she had dragged a brush through her hair. She still looked gaunt and far too thin, but Alec thought some of the darkness had gone out of her eyes.

“You’ll get there, and we’re here to help,” Catarina assured her, standing a little ways behind.

“Oh, I’ll get there,” Allison said firmly, her words ending in a soft snort. “This bastard needs ta’ die for good.”

Magnus uttered an amused sound, sharing a glance with Catarina. They had waited until nightfall before coming this close to the building, not least because Raphael couldn't go out in the day, but also because they were hoping that the moon might lend them a little strength. The sun was gone, the stars were out, and the moon was a sliver of bone-white in the sky. Alec thought he could feel Chang'e watching him, approving.

Raphael stood closer to Alec than was normal for him. Alec kept glancing at him, waiting for him to say what he clearly wanted to say, but there was just silence. Alec could be patient when he needed to be, but Raphael irritated him when he was like this, and he had no intentions of spending more time around him than necessary.

“What,” Alec said, flatly enough that it wasn't really a question.

Raphael rolled his eyes, patting down the lapel of his suit. “There’s no need to be rude, Shadowhunter. Catarina told me I should apologise.”

“Do you usually listen to what Catarina says?”

“Have you met the woman?”

Alec had indeed met the woman, but only for brief moments. Sometimes he wanted to see Madzie, and Catarina often came hand-in-hand with that, and sometimes he came back to the loft to find her laughing at Magnus, holding a drink by the neck of the bottle, her eyes glittering with humour. She was clever, fierce, kind. Madzie adored her, and she was one of Magnus’s dearest friends.

She was also vaguely terrifying, which was the only reason Alec laughed when Raphael asked his question.

“Yeah, I have,” Alec said, still grinning slightly. “Go on then. I’m listening.”

Raphael narrowed his eyes into slits just as Allison began to mutter, her hands shaping symbols in the air. Alec found himself entranced. Wards were complicated, and it shouldn’t have been possible for a Mundane to use them, to adjust them, let alone create incredibly extensive, complex wards out of nothing in order to protect an entire town. It’s why Alec hadn’t even considered her at first.

Yet here she was, unpeeling the layers of magic that she’d placed over the Library. The wards were hers, the ones that kept people from using, the ones that blanketed every surface of the town.

“Fascinating,” Raphael murmured, watching the process with a strange glint in his eyes. “Perhaps she has a little strange blood in her. Vampires have their own skills, but none quite as obviously magical as this. Warlocks are the flashiest, but all Downworlders have magic inside them. Even if there are those that believe otherwise.”

The thing with Raphael was that he didn’t need to say things pointedly to get his point across. His words cut right to the quick of the matter, even when he pretended to be cryptic and vague. Alec sort of admired that. He could count on Raphael to give it to him straight, even if he didn't say it outright.

“You think I look down on Downworlders,” Alec said, making sure to keep his voice low. Magnus and Catarina were lending strength to Allison, urging her on with encouraging words, but Alec wondered if Magnus could hear their conversation anyway.

"I know that you did," Raphael said matter-of-factly. "Perhaps that's changed, but until very recently, you viewed us as lesser. All Shadowhunters are raised to see us as soulless beings that need your guidance, your interference. Your work with the Cabinet is... admirable." His curled lip said otherwise. "It's very little, coming very late, but it's a start. I can see change coming, somewhere down the line, and you may even lead it, but that doesn't suddenly mean that the Downworld is enamoured with you. This sudden immortality - what's happened to you. It doesn't make you one of us."

Alec didn't know if he was supposed to be offended by that or not. He didn't want to be anything other than a Shadowhunter, and he wouldn't deny that he had once thought less of Downworlders. It came with growing up in a place of arrogance, of self-assurance that they were better than others. Denying that he had once thought the same would ruin all the hard work he'd put into *changing* how he thought. It would ruin any future possibility of changing further.

But the fact remained that he wasn't what he once was.

Shadowhunters weren't immortal. Alec privately thought that was a good thing, having seen the corruption and the darkness that grew when Shadowhunters got stuck in their ways. He still believed in most of their laws, and he didn't think there was much point in breaking them if other ways could be found, if it didn't help in the long run. But some laws were wrong, and some of the people enforcing them were definitely wrong. If the people in charge never died, if they remained where they were, refusing to budge, then change would never come. Their damaging influence would never fade. Death, he thought, was natural for people like him. It was the worlds' way of evolving.

What did that make him?

"I know that," Alec said. "I wouldn't want to be a Downworlder, but if I was, it wouldn't be the end of the world. I like who I am. That doesn't mean I think less of you."

"I don't care what you think of me," Raphael said, with a sharp slice of his hand through the air. "You make Magnus happy."

Alec started in surprise at the sudden shift in topic. Magnus didn't appear to have heard, busy whispering to Allison as shards of blue fell down from the library and vanished before they hit the ground.

"Yeah," Alec said slowly. "Yeah, I hope so. I try to, anyway."

"You do. Trust me, you do."

"What's this got to do with what we were talking about?"

Raphael rolled his eyes, sighing sharply through his nose. "I see you with Magnus, and I see him with you. He is disgustingly affectionate, quite obviously in love, and *happier* for it. You make him happy, and I can see that, although I sometimes wish I didn't have to. Catarina can see it, too. As his friends, we support his idiotic decisions. But just because we can see it doesn't mean that the rest of the Downworlders can."

“Oh.” Alec took a breath, cutting him a sideways glance. “Oh. This is a warning *for* me, not warning me off.”

“Idiot,” Raphael muttered. “The shovel talk is a ridiculous, idiotic idea. Magnus is older than I am, and while I hope you never hurt him, it is not anyone's job to warn you away.”

Alec felt his mouth twitch. He'd always taken that approach with Jace and Izzy; he trusted them to come to him if there was a problem, and he wasn't going to be nice to anyone they liked if he didn't like them, but he also wasn't going to be an ass on purpose. He wouldn't resort to threats or intimidation. It was childish, foolish.

“Not everyone will not take kindly to their High Warlock being *permanently* off the market,” Raphael said, drawing him out of his contemplation. “Our minds work differently where mortals are concerned - we see your lives pass in the blink of an eye. Waiting for you to leave, for Magnus to grieve your loss and then come to his senses is a natural way of thinking for many Downworlders. Magnus knows this, although he has never indulged any such thoughts when brought to his attention. But he has helped us for many, many years, and they will think that he deserves better than a Shadowhunter.”

“Magnus deserves better than anyone could ever offer him,” Alec said, watching distractedly as the wards fell once and for all. Blue lit up the night and then faded, and Allison Lane slumped against Magnus. He held her close while Catarina swept forward, surveying the area.

“I didn't tell you so that you could get all disgusting,” Raphael said, wrinkling his nose. “I told you so that you would be prepared. You will have to fight to make them see.”

Or they could butt out, Alec thought, but he didn't say it. Downworlders, all of them, were important to Magnus. He cared for them all, cared for their opinions and well-being. They were important to Alec too. He wanted to foster change, to help mend the mistakes between Shadowhunters and Downworlders. He didn't think he could do it all on his own, but he wasn't on his own, thankfully.

“Thanks,” Alec said, meaning it. “Thanks for telling me. I'll do my best.”

He meant that. There wasn't much else he could say. He wasn't going to give Magnus up if he could help it. If Magnus wanted him, then Alec would be there. It was good to know what everyone around him thought, although the bitchy part of him wanted to tell them all to fuck off, quite plainly, but if it helped, if it made things easier for Magnus, if it let him keep the easy love of his people and Alec's, too, then he'd keep quiet and he'd work on it. He'd always planned to, anyway.

“Raphael left out quite an important part of all that,” Catarina said, surprising him as she came towards them. “There *are* those that support you. Me and him, and others. Magnus is insufferable when he's miserable, so I don't see anything wrong with you and him, so long as it keeps him out of my living room at four in the morning, eating cheese in his underwear.”

Magnus hissed something garbled and threatening as he stalked up, catching the tail end of that sentence. “It was *fancy* cheese, Cat. Don't leave out the important details when weaving

a story.”

Alec scoffed, grinning. Magnus shot him a betrayed look, but the conversation didn’t go much further. Inside the library, something rumbled. A deep, satisfied sound. Alec slid a Seraph blade out from its holster.

“I suppose it’s too much to hope that that was your stomach,” Magnus said, eyeing Raphael. Raphael shoved him with his shoulder as he stormed past, and Magnus’s laughter followed him up the steps.

“Where’s Allison?” Catarina asked, after she had thoroughly rolled her eyes at their antics.

“I portaled her back to the Bed and Breakfast.” Magnus tapped one of his rings thoughtfully. “She was weak from harnessing the magic, especially considering it didn’t belong to her. But she was also stronger. Far stronger than before.”

The magic that had tainted the minds of the Mundanes came from the same Demon that had almost killed Allison Lane, many years ago. The ground where the shack stood now was the same ground that the Demon had died on when Ragnor and Catarina disposed of it. Its dark, powerful magic had bled into the ground, grisly with intent. Allison Lane had been the only one to recognise the edge of the magic that played with the minds of people she knew and cared for. When it had come for her too, she had drawn it into her and changed it, but Alec still didn’t understand how.

Magnus had a theory, that Ragnor had left a little something behind when he helped to heal her. Something that would allow her to protect herself, and the town, if nothing else. Ragnor was kind like that, Magnus said, and powerful enough to help from even beyond the grave.

“Relief can do that to you,” Catarina said, her sad eyes fixed in the direction they had come. “She must have been waiting for help for a while. I only wish I had checked in sooner.”

Magnus patted her on the arm, smiling softly, his eyes full of understanding. A shared grief, a shared hope to do better. Alec didn’t want to interrupt them, but Jace and Izzy were probably on the other side of the wards by now, where the shack was, and the rumbling was starting again.

“Hate to wreck the moment, but I think Raphael’s got a death wish,” Alec said, peering over their shoulders just as Raphael disappeared inside the library. He amended, quickly, at their droll looks, “A secondary death wish. C’mon.”

*

The shack offered little in the way of light. Magnus sent his spheres all around, and Alec held the Witchlight aloft, but there was still hardly anything to see.

The shack creaked ominously around them. Alec was very careful where he put his feet, stepping only on the soil and not on any fallen trinkets, or objects. The last thing he wanted to

do was break a person with his feet.

"I don't suppose the Moon Goddess told you how to change the Mundanes back into Mundanes, did she?" Jace had said, back in the Bed and Breakfast. They'd converged in the staff room while Alec patiently asked Allison Lane a few questions, only to find that Catarina had already done a remarkable job of coaxing the recent events out of her.

"She neglected to mention that," Alec had replied, deadpan. "She did say that this was the better option, though, since Human Immortality is usually irreversible. So there has to be a way, or she wouldn't have done it."

He'd been trying not to think about that, about the damning statement of his permanent change.

"Well, that makes things a bit more interesting, doesn't it?" Izzy had said brightly. "Luckily for us, we have two magic-users right here."

"And a vampire," Raphael added, a little snippily.

"And a vampire," Jace had said flatly. "Oh, how could we forget the vampire?"

The ground was where the demon's blood and magic had laid dormant for years, festering until it was ready to creep into the minds of Mundanes. Alec could see soil under the floorboards, poking up through the gaps in the slats. Floorboards that hadn't been there when the demon was killed. The shack hadn't sprung up out of nowhere. Demon magic was persuasive, seductive, lethal. It couldn't *create* things, only wreck them. If it could create, Alec doubted that buildings would be high on the list.

"Where did this place come from?" Raphael asked, voicing Alec's thoughts. "It looks like wood, but it doesn't feel natural."

"Someone must have built it for the purpose of luring people in," Catarina said, but she was frowning. "Whoever it was could have aged it, to make it look like something that was just found, but even for authenticity purposes, that doesn't make much sense either."

The shack offered little in the way of light. Magnus sent his spheres all around, and Alec held the Witchlight aloft, but there was still hardly anything to see. Just the objects piled high, faintly glittering hoards of souls.

"I can still feel the lives," Magnus said, brushing closer to the nearest mound of objects. Some were on little rickety tables, but most of them sat in small mountains on the ground. "One mass of life, almost. There are *so many* trapped here."

"This shack doesn't make sense," Catarina said again, sounding a little more insistent. She turned to Alec and fixed him with a firm look in the gloom. "There's something about this place that doesn't make sense. What exactly did Chang'e say? Why was it connected to her?"

"She said her magic is stronger in some places, like here," Alec said, thinking back. "She said it was because of moon dances and rituals that used to happen all over the world. They made

her more present.”

“Moon dances and rituals,” Catarina muttered, casting her eyes about. “Magnus...”

“Yes, I believe you may be onto something, my dear,” Magnus said without turning around. He was crouched beside the nearest pile of treasures, his fingers ghosting over the steep sides, never quite touching. Alec could just make out the shape of an hourglass with the sand all slumped to one side, a mahogany box, and the chain of a pocket-watch.

“It’s not wood, is it?” Raphael said, withdrawing from the wall.

Alec heard a scuffle from outside the shack. The wind was howling again, thrashing through the night sky, but through the noise of creaking wood and whipped grass, he heard Izzy and Jace’s voices.

“Alec? Alec, are you there?”

“We’re inside,” Alec shouted, moving a bit closer to one of the ragged-looking windows. There was no glass, but boards hung loose over the frame and tattered cloth obscured the view. “Can you see a way in?”

There were a few muffled noises, and a thump, before Jace swore.

“That’s a no, then.”

“Alexander, darling,” Magnus said, something sharp in his voice that drew Alec’s attention immediately. “Would you move away from the wall?”

Magnus was standing firmly in the middle, flanked by Catarina and Raphael, who both looked grim. Alec didn’t waste a moment backing away from the wall, although he did unhook his bow and notch an arrow, waiting. He felt steady, in control, the way he always did before a fight, but his pulse was still hammering in his throat.

“Want to tell me what’s going on?”

“Moon magic is powerful, and it seeps into the ground just as much as dark, demon magic does,” Catarina explained quickly, sweeping her hair back. There were sparks at her fingers, softer than Magnus’s, more like embers. “It is creative in nature, and demon magic is destructive, and the combination does exactly what it says on the tin.”

“So it created something destructive, is what you’re saying,” Alec guessed.

“It’s not a shack,” Raphael said quietly, his teeth bared. “It’s a skeleton.”

The ground, which had been still, began to quake. Alec felt energy thrum through his body, starting at his toes and zipping wildly through his skin like little shocks of static. They moved as one, all four of them, backs facing each other as their circle turned, surveying the room. There were more shadows than before.

“Demon magic is self-serving, above all else,” Magnus said, his voice close but little more than a whisper. “It wants to keep itself safe. It created this, with the help of the moon magic it stole from centuries of old dances and rituals. It’s been waking up for a while.”

“What are the shadows?” Alec tightened his grip on his bow. “Bits of demon?”

“Bits of demon magic,” Raphael rasped.

“I told you, it’s self-serving,” Magnus said. “This, the shadows, it’s all to keep itself safe. When it has enough souls, enough immortality in its grasp, it can become immortal itself. At least, that’s the theory.”

The ground trembled violently. The tables began to rattle, the walls shaking, the roof threatening to bend and break. Mountains of souls started to crumble, treasures cascading onto the ground, but Catarina’s magic was there, forming shells of gold light to hold them in place. It blanketed the tables, trapped the treasures in their place.

“I think your theory is correct,” Raphael hissed. “How do we fight a shack?”

Alec’s eyes caught on a flash of red, up in the corner of the shack. He shivered, and then aimed an arrow at the shadows. They were writhing, and inside the squirming mass, there were eyes. Blood red eyes.

Blue light enveloped Magnus from head to toe, and he laughed softly. “You tear it down.”

Alec let the arrow fly.

The shadows let out a piercing shriek, and all hell broke loose.

The floor undulated, wooden boards cracking in half. Raphael shot out of sight, darting here and there as more shadows poured out of the ground. He ripped them to smoke, his angry snarls lost in the cacophony. Catarina stumbled, the floorboards throwing her into the nearest wall. She slammed into it and cried out, before her magic burst forth and hacked at the walls, forming a shield around her as she staggered to her feet.

Alec lost sight of everyone just a few seconds later.

He could vaguely hear the yells of Izzy and Jace outside, hammering on the walls. He saw flashes of light from Magnus’s hand as he burned the shadows the drew close. He saw gold, where Catarina was, and a blur that was Raphael, but mostly he was too busy trying not to fall over.

He was a Shadowhunter. He was steady on his feet. But usually, the floor wasn’t trying to fight him.

He whipped out another arrow and let it fly. It snagged on a shadow and it disappeared. His Witchlight was on the floor somewhere, its glow fading, so he grabbed a Seraph Blade with his free hand and jabbed it through the nearest set of red eyes. Screeches filled the night, and the walls kept shaking, the shack roaring as it did its best to collapse in on them.

“Break the walls!” Alec shouted, hoping Izzy and Jace could hear him. “Wreck whatever you can reach!”

He didn’t really want the roof to come down on top of them, but this was the only way forward. His mind hummed as he wrenched the nearest boards free from their place, nails scattering to the floor. Raphael was stronger than most, and he left deep gouges in the walls whenever he moved. Magnus’s fire wasn’t catching, but the energy from his fireballs blasted holes in the walls left and right.

A shadow, larger than the others, descended suddenly on Alec with a shrill scream, and he ducked and rolled. The snap of his bowstring, and the shadow faded into wisps.

“I need you,” Magnus said, appearing out of nowhere and hauling him up. His face was pale and set, his spine rigid. Alec gave him his hand without hesitation, his blade held aloft, and Magnus turned to face the room.

Shadows were everywhere. Catarina blasted them with gold, and Raphael teared at the walls. Jace had taken out a good chunk, but he couldn’t get in, and Alec heard Izzy’s whip make contact with one of the supports, tugging. The floor continued to shake, the soil churning beneath them.

“Ready whenever you are,” Alec panted, stabbing at a shadow that came too close. “No rush or anything.”

Magnus held one hand up, and it seemed to Alec as though the world fell silent. Moonlight fell through a hole in the roof as Catarina tore her way through rough wood.

The fire in Magnus’s hand turned silver, a bright white, and then it bellowed forth.

Crazed, hectic fire filled the shack, stifling the air in their lungs, but it wasn’t hot. It felt cool, soothing, like a breath of fresh air. Like cream on a wound. He watched distantly as the fire drenched the room in silver, eating up wood and shadow and floorboards. He felt almost removed from it all. All he knew was Magnus’s hand in his, the touch of warm skin, the tight, familiar grip. Alec breathed carefully. He could hear the vicious bellow of roaring flames, but he could also hear a soft laugh and the thump of furred feet, and even as his muscles trembled, he knew that it would be the skeleton of something dark and ugly that crumbled in the end, and not them.

*

Moonlight ate up the path in front of them.

“I knew you wouldn’t be hurt, or I wouldn’t have done it,” Magnus said, for the thousandth time. Raphael huffed as he stalked further ahead, his nose turned up. “I wouldn’t burn you to a crisp, Raphael. You irritate me to no end, sometimes, but you’re still dear to me.”

“You didn’t know that your fire was going to do that, did you?” Raphael said waspishly. He glared at Izzy when she drifted closer, laughing, but he didn’t continue the argument. He did roll his eyes when she murmured something to him, but Alec thought it seemed fond.

They were moving slowly. Nobody had enough energy for a portal, and the village wasn't far.

The shack lay in ruins behind them, at the bottom of the steep bank. The passageway under the library had collapsed the moment the white fire finished its job, and the last of the wooden skeleton that housed demonic magic had been devoured. There was nothing but dust and dirt, a few broken tables and crumbling stone, a few banners of ripped cloth now.

Alec put one foot in front of the other and focused on breathing. He was exhausted, his skin streaked with dirt and sweat, but he felt lighter than ever inside. Something had lifted inside of him. The moon goddess was quiet now, but her light lit the path in front of them, and Alec could almost feel her hand on his cheek again.

He could definitely feel Magnus's hand on his, which was the most important part.

"He was right about one thing," Catarina said softly, from where she walked beside Magnus. "You didn't know that your magic would do that, did you?"

"It wasn't my usual fire, no," Magnus said, with a dazzling smile. He was tired, too, if the look in his eyes was anything to go by, but Alec thought he could sense the same lightness in him that he could feel. "I can't say it was unwelcome though."

Catarina cut her gaze to Alec and hummed, amused. "I'd have to agree. Seems as though you have a little Warlock flair inside you after all, Shadowhunter."

"How crass," Magnus said, teasing. Alec elbowed him, and Jace snorted from his other side, so Alec elbowed him too.

"What happens to all the Mundanes?" Jace asked, shoving his hands in his pockets. They were bleeding from tearing at the walls, and Alec made a mental note to do an Iratze before they slept.

"They're safe, for tonight," Catarina said. "I've placed them in a magical pocket. Tomorrow, I'll return and cleanse the area. An old moon dance, a ritual. Something like that should work."

"And you think that'll reverse it?" Jace asked.

Catarina smiled, beckoning him to walk a little faster with her. "I have a little faith. Come, leave them to talk."

Alec snorted at the lack of subtlety, but didn't complain as Jace wrapped him in a brief, one-armed hug and jogged away to join the others. He watched Izzy laugh, her head tipped back, and found himself smiling. He was still exhausted, but it was a good night.

"They're right, you know," Magnus said, tucking his arm through Alec's and pressing closer as they ambled past gorse and heather. "I didn't know my magic would do that when I asked for your strength. I suppose Chang'e really does watch over her immortal children, doesn't she?"

Alec thought there was a hint of ruefulness to his smile. “She does. I think she always has. You know...”

Magnus turned his head. There was a streak of dirt on his cheek, and he had never looked more beautiful.

“We never did find that traveler,” Alec began, tentative. “The one in Ragnor’s notes. The who was supposed to have answers on immortality, a possible cure.”

“We did get a little side-tracked,” Magnus agreed. They came to a stop, and Magnus turned to look at him properly, and Alec had spent the whole time he had known Magnus trying to figure out what his eyes said when his voice couldn’t speak, but he didn’t need to know Magnus to recognise the expression in them now.

“I suppose the question remains whether you want to keep searching for him,” Magnus said idly, as though the answer didn’t matter.

The answer did matter, very much, and Alec already knew what it was going to be. He just wanted to be sure of one thing first.

“And you’ll be there, no matter what my answer is?”

Magnus inhaled sharply, and then swallowed. He nodded, his eyes soft, and raised Alec’s knuckles to his mouth to kiss them.

“Of course. I’ll be there as long as you want me there, Alexander.”

Alec felt his mouth twitch. “Is forever a bit too long?”

He had been wrong, when he thought Magnus was at his most beautiful earlier. This, here, was Magnus at his most beautiful. His eyes shining, a little giddy and shaken with relief, with happiness. Alec wanted to keep him like that forever. And he could, he realised, with a delirious sort of wonder.

“I think, as long as we find a way to stop your snoring, that forever sounds perfect,” Magnus said, and he started laughing when Alec grumbled, glowering at him with betrayal in his eyes.

“I don’t snore,” Alec muttered. “Come here.”

They kissed on the middle of the path. Alec heard Jace wolf-whistle, but ignored it, flipping him off to a chorus of laughter as he sunk into Magnus’s hands and mouth and heat. They kissed until the footsteps of their friends sounded fainter, and then Alec drew back and rested his forehead against Magnus’s.

“I love you,” Magnus said, before Alec could. “All of you.”

“All of me loves you too.”

There was a rustle to the side, and before Alec could tense, a shape hopped out of the bushes. He drew back even further, a little bewildered. Magnus uttered a soft sound. They stayed quite still as the shape lingered for a moment in the moonlight.

“I think that’s a pretty good sign,” Alec murmured.

The shape darted over the path and into the bushes, its tail twitching. Alec watched it go, feeling lost and light and found all at once. Magnus squeezed his hand as a lump rose in his throat.

In the light of the moon, with the greenery all around it, the rabbit had a distinct jade sheen.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much! I hope you enjoyed it! <3

Gold in Our Hands

Chapter Summary

Returning to the Institute felt like slipping out of one dream and falling directly into another.

Chapter Notes

A little bit of an epilogue.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Returning to the Institute felt like slipping out of one dream and falling directly into another. Like dozing, waking up abruptly, and dropping off again before the waking world could make sense.

He dealt with all the paperwork that had piled up in his absence, gave out short, sharp orders to those that asked for him, and made the rounds. Things were fine. Nothing had exploded, nobody had died while he was away, no wars had broken out, and everything was pretty much exactly the way it was when he left.

Not that he had *expected* to find the place in flames when he returned, but it was still a relief to know that he hadn't failed as Head of the Institute just yet.

"So, is it true then?"

Alec didn't bother turning at the sound of a fellow Shadowhunter's voice. Jim, he thought it was, if the vaguely British accent was anything to go by. He clicked through the database blinking on the screen in front of him and mentally cycled slowly through his potential responses before bringing out his flattest tone.

"Is what true?" Alec clicked again, watching the bright flashes of information fill the screen. "You'll have to be more specific than that."

Jim coughed. It sounded like he muttered something, and then there was a sharp sound, like he'd been elbowed. Alec suppressed a sigh.

"Get to the point."

"Is it true about you being Immortal now?" Jim blurted out.

Alec had to admire the bluntness, even if it had taken him six years to get to the question. A shard of him seized up under his ribs, uncomfortable with the question, worried about the possible hurdles in the future.

His mom knew. There were rumours all around, whispers that didn't quite follow Alec down the corridors. Denying them would just give them strength, and confirming them would cause a whole heap of trouble that Alec wasn't prepared for just yet. He'd only just decided not to fight the Immortality, not to look for another way out. He'd wanted it the whole time, wanted to say *yes* and *fuck it* and just stay with Magnus in their loft, or wherever they ended up, for the rest of their long lives. That's what he'd wanted, in the beginning, when Magnus kept vanishing to find a way to fix it, but he understood why they'd come the long way round to the decision.

That didn't mean he was blind to the downsides. Part of him was still terrified that he was making a mistake. He still dreaded the day he had to let go of someone he cared about. But he would have dreaded that anyway.

"Would that be a problem, if it were true?" Alec turned, fixing Jim with an even stare. His face gave nothing away.

Jim visibly floundered for a moment, and his friend, Jameson, averted his gaze. He looked like he was waiting for the floor to swallow him up, and Alec felt a stab of sympathy for the guy. He was Jace's Parabatai, after all. He knew *exactly* how Jameson felt.

"Uh, well," Jim started, but Alec cut smoothly over the top of him.

"If so, you'll have to lodge a formal complaint with the Head of the Institute. It'll go to the Clave, next, because the Head of the Institute takes complaints like that seriously. It's up to the Clave what they do with the information. I imagine there will be an investigation, possibly involving the Inquisitor, and then at the end of it all, I'm sure they'll want to know why you're wasting their time with something as trivial as a Shadowhunter's lifespan when there are demons to be killed."

Jim flushed a ruddy colour, ducking his head slightly. "Jesus, I was just *asking*."

Jameson coughed when Alec's eyebrows went up. It had been Izzy's idea, to put a pin in confirming anything, and to... persuade anyone asking questions to keep their suspicions to themselves. Alec was fair. He wouldn't stop anyone from lodging a complaint, but he sure as hell wasn't making it easy on them, not until he had a plan in place. Magnus had promised to help him with one later. He suspected Izzy and Jace would help too, eventually, when they stopped being torn over Alec's decision. Neither of them had taken it particularly well, but Alec hadn't expected them too. He was just going to give them time. He had lots to give, now.

"So, is there a complaint? You'll have to put it in writing."

Jim sighed, glancing up as he rubbed the back of his neck. "No, no complaint. Glad to see you're on fine form, boss. Nothing's changed, I see." Jameson coughed again, firmer this time, and Jim added, "The holiday must have done you good."

“Yeah,” Alec said, grinning wryly. “The holiday.”

*

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Magnus Bane threw the best parties. Alec couldn't say he enjoyed them, exactly, because the room was always rife with politics and drama, people gossiping in corners and getting drunk all over their couch. There were *layers* to Magnus's parties that gave him a headache.

But he did enjoy the way Magnus came to life when he was planning one, buzzing from idea to idea, unable to settle on a theme, flitting here and there as he conjured up confetti and streamers and dainty champagne flutes. He enjoyed the way Magnus lit up when he was faced with the end result, when he saw people gossiping in corners and getting drunk all over their couch, enjoying themselves because of Magnus.

It was nice, so he'd put up with it and have fun even when mostly he just wanted to stand in the corner, scowling, or go to bed and hide under the covers until Magnus joined him. Which was a far more pleasant activity than a party, in Alec's humble opinion.

That's why he moved with some trepidation up the stairs to the loft, only to breathe a sigh of warm relief when he opened the door. This was a much better kind of party.

The loft had been transformed, but not by much. Everything was still recognisable, but the surfaces gleamed and there were golden lights on the walls and hanging from the ceiling. The record player, the one that Alec had fumbled with when he was drunk and morosely prepared to face a life without Magnus in it, played a soft jazz number. It oozed and crooned, sultry and coy and exuberant. The clink of glasses and muted laughter filled the air, and Alec grinned as he wedged the door shut, relaxing.

There was a text on his phone from Catarina that he'd opened on the stairs, a picture message of Allison Lane, looking much brighter and more fierce than Alec had thought possible. She was herding people down the corridor of the bed and breakfast, rather frazzled people that looked as if they'd just had a very long nap and been rudely awoken.

Moon magic isn't a match for me, the text underneath read.

It was the cherry on top of an already good day.

Maryse was waiting for him inside as Alec dropped his eyes and jacket on the nearest chair, inhaling the scent of hot Chinese food. She was the first to reach him, her hair falling down around her face, her severe expression tempered by the concern in her eyes. He could see the rest of his family littered around the room but his eyes remained on his mother, who looked him up and down and then wrapped her arms around him.

She'd always been sparing with her hugs, although less so with him and Jace, but she made them count when they came around. Alec fell against her, his heart calming as she soothed a hand over his back. Any worries he'd had about talking to her evaporated. When she drew away, she eyed him critically.

“Still the same,” Alec murmured.

“I know,” Maryse said. “Isabelle told me everything, rather than the bits and pieces I got from the Shadowhunter who sent me a message. I was shocked, and I may not have expressed it brilliantly at first, but I know that you’re you, Alec.”

Alec smiled at her, pleased.

Her mouth twisted, almost wistful. “Somehow, I still expected you to be taller.”

“God forbid,” Jace said, ambling past with a plate of snacks, his mouth stuffed full of bread. “I don’t think the rest of us would cope if we had to crane our necks any further to see him.”

“Don’t talk with your mouth full,” Maryse said, just stern enough that Jace stifled his guffaw as he walked away. Her eyes were still soft, though, and Alec grinned even as he shook his head helplessly.

“You can train him to fight demons, but you won’t ever be able to train table manners into him.”

“There’s always hope,” Maryse said. She touched his shoulder gently, seemingly at a loss for what to do. “Alec. Are we happy about this?”

Alec hesitated. “I think so.” He snuck a look at Magnus, who stood near the record player, lazily turning his finger in the air as Isabelle spun in front of him, showing off her deep blue dress with a wicked smirk. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m happy about this.”

Maryse stood to the side, following his gaze until she was looking at Magnus too. Alec couldn’t tell what she was thinking when she said, “I see.”

“You don’t have to be happy,” Alec said, hands in his pockets. “I wouldn’t ask that of you. I won’t ask that of anyone. I know... I know it might take some time to adjust to, and - and who knows what’ll happen in the future, but, for now? I know nothing’s certain, or set in stone, but I’m happy about this.”

Maryse turned back to him. The music ballooned and burst, a tune that felt like Alec had found something, whether it was the roaring twenties, that happy-drunk feeling he’d been missing, or a breath of relief that came with loving someone so deeply that you had to live For Always, just to be with them.

“Good.” Maryse nodded. “That’s all I’ve ever wanted for you. All of you.”

Alec leaned in to kiss her cheek briefly, and he watched as she strode towards Luke, who stood up straighter when she drew near, forgetting his conversation with Clary. Clary looked fondly outraged and being abruptly forgotten, and threw a droll look at Simon when he started snickering into her shoulder. Alec would pretend not to know Simon’s name in a bit, but he was sort of glad to see both of them there.

“I believe Luke wants to talk to you, when you have a chance,” Magnus said, sidling up to him and resting his chin on Alec’s shoulder. He was holding a glass of gold stuff with one

elegant hand, and Alec snagged it from him and took a sip, feeling the pleasant burn. When he let go, it floated in the air, just as he'd known it would.

"He does? What for?"

"He knows a little something about making the change from Shadowhunter to Downworlder, and I know it's not the same, and I know you're still a Shadowhunter, and nothing could take that from you, but he may be able to help regardless."

Alec hummed, shifting back into Magnus's embrace. Izzy was dancing with Max, now, who was losing his reluctant, grouchy look as she twirled him and dipped him. Jace egged him on between flirting a little obviously with Maia, both of them lounging on the couch nearby. Maryse and Luke were close, and Simon was laughing at Clary, who had froth coming out of her nose from an accidentally inhaled beer. If Magnus's earlier texts were to be believed, Raphael and Catarina would be here soon, and Madzie would be with them.

"You know something?" Alec asked, as Magnus wrapped his arms around Alec's waist from behind. "I don't think I'm going to need the help."

"How delightfully sappy of you, darling." Magnus pressed a kiss to his neck, and spun him around so suddenly that he almost lost his footing. "We have the rest of our lives to need help for trifling matters, such as sudden Immortality. Dance with me, for now."

Alec laughed, and let Magnus lead him into the rest of his life.

Chapter End Notes

I just want to say a big, huge thank you to anyone who read this, kudosed, commented, enjoyed it. You're all amazing, I love reading your responses and seeing people like this story just makes my day. I know not everything from the prompt was included, Nathalysao3, but I'm really hopeful that you'll like the end anyway. I think I got the main points? I hope! Anyway, enough rambling. Just a big thank you, basically!! <3

End Notes

Thank you L and B for the Beta-ing!

(If this seems at all familiar to anyone, something messed up recently when I posted and combined another fic with parts of this one, which led to a very confused Dumbledore appearing in this, and I had to panic-delete it after I realised. No Dumbledore's here, though, thankfully.)

Complete!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!