

Companion to the bestselling series
THE MORTAL INSTRUMENTS and THE INFERNAL DEVICES

CASSANDRA CLARE
SARAH REES BRENNAN

THE BANE CHRONICLES

What to Buy the Shadowhunter Who Has Everything

(And Who You're Not Officially Dating Anyway)

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Magnus woke up with the slow golden light of midday filtering through his window, and his cat sleeping on his head.

Chairman Meow sometimes expressed his affection in this unfortunate way. Magnus gently but very firmly disentangled the cat from his hair, tiny claws doing even more damage as the Chairman was dislodged with a long sad cry of feline discomfort.

Then the cat jumped onto the pillow, apparently fully recovered from his ordeal, and leaped from the bed. He hit the floor with a soft thump and dashed with a rallying cry to the food bowl.

Magnus rolled over in bed so that he was lying across the mattress sideways. The window overlooking his bed was stained glass. Diamonds of gold and green drifted over his sheets, resting warmly against his bare skin. He lifted his head from the pillow he was clutching and then realized what he was doing: searching the air for a trace of the smell of coffee.

It had happened a few times in the last several weeks, Magnus stumbling out into the kitchen toward the rich scent of coffee, pulling on a robe from his wide and varied selection, and finding Alec there. Magnus had bought a coffeemaker because Alec had consistently seemed mildly distressed by Magnus's magicking-slash-slightly-stealing cups of coffee and tea from The Mudd Truck. The machine was extra bother, but Magnus was glad he had bought it. Alec had to know the coffeemaker was for him and his delicate moral sensibilities, and Alec seemed to feel a sense of comfort around the machine that he felt about nothing else, making coffee without asking if he could, bringing Magnus a cup when he was working. Everywhere else in Magnus's loft Alec was still careful, touching things as if he had no right to them, as if he were a guest.

And of course he was a guest. It was only that Magnus had an irrational desire for Alec to feel at home in his loft, as if that would mean something, as if that would give Magnus a claim on Alec or indicate that Alec wanted a claim on him. Magnus supposed that was it. He badly wanted Alec to want to be here, and to be happy when he was here.

He could not kidnap the Lightwoods' eldest born and keep him as a decoration about the house, however. Alec had fallen asleep twice—on the sofa, not the bed. Once after a long slow night of kissing; and once when Alec had come over for a brief coffee, clearly exhausted after a long day of demon-hunting, and he had slid into unconsciousness almost instantly. Magnus had also taken to leaving his front door open, since nobody was going to rob the High Warlock of Brooklyn, and Alec would sometimes come by in the early mornings.

Every time Alec had dropped by—or in the mornings after Alec had fallen asleep there—Magnus had woken to the sounds and smells of Alec's making him coffee, even though Alec knew that Magnus could magic coffee out of the air. Alec had done it only a few times, had been there for only a handful of mornings. It was not something Magnus should be getting used to.

Of course Alec wasn't here today, because it was his birthday, and he was going to be with his family. And Magnus wasn't exactly the kind of boyfriend you could bring to family outings. In fact, speaking of family outings, the Lightwoods didn't even know Alec had a boyfriend—much less one that was also a warlock—and Magnus had no idea if they ever would. It wasn't something he pushed Alec about. He could tell by Alec's carefulness that it was too early.

There was no reason for Magnus to slide out of bed, amble out through the living space into the kitchen space, and picture Alec kneeling at the counter, making coffee and wearing an ugly sweater, his face intent on the simple task. Alec was even conscientious about coffee. *And he wears truly awful sweaters*, Magnus thought, and was dismayed when the thought brought with it a rush of affection.

It was not the Lightwoods' fault. They obviously provided Alec's sister, Isabelle, and Jace

Wayland with plenty of money to dress themselves in flattering outfits. Magnus suspected that Alec's mother bought his clothes, or Alec bought them himself on the basis of pure practicality—*Oh, look, how nice; gray won't show the ichor too much*—and then he wore the ugly functional clothes on and on without even seeming to notice that age was fraying them, or wear and tear causing holes.

Against his will, Magnus found a smile curving his lips as he rummaged around for his big blue coffee cup that said BETTER THAN GANDALF across the front in sparkly letters. He was besotted; he was officially revolted by himself.

He might have been besotted, but he had other things to think of besides Alec today. A mundane company had hired him to summon up a cecaelia demon. For the amount of money they were paying, and considering that cecaelia demons were lesser demons who could scarcely cause all that much fuss, Magnus had agreed to not ask questions. He sipped his coffee and contemplated his demon-summoning outfit for the day. Demon summoning was not something Magnus did often, on account of it being technically extremely illegal. Magnus did not have enormous respect for the Law, but if he was breaking it he wanted to look good doing it.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the buzzer. He had not left his door open for Alec today, and he raised his eyebrows at the sound. Ms. Connor was twenty minutes early.

Magnus deeply disliked people who were early to business meetings. It was just as bad as being late, since it put everyone out, and even worse, people who were early always acted terribly superior about their bad timekeeping skills. They acted as though it were morally more righteous to get up early than to stay up late, even if you got the same amount of work done in the exact same amount of time. Magnus found it to be one of the great injustices of life.

It was possible that he was a bit cranky about not getting to finish his coffee before he had to deal with work.

He buzzed in the company representative. Ms. Connor turned out to be a woman in her midthirties whose looks bore out her Irish name. She had thick red hair done up in a twist, and the kind of impenetrable white skin that Magnus was prepared to bet never tanned. She was wearing a boxy but expensive-looking blue suit, and she looked extremely askance at Magnus's outfit.

This was Magnus's home, she had arrived early, and Magnus felt entirely within his rights to be dressed in nothing but black silk pajama bottoms decorated with a pattern of tigers and flamingos dancing. He did realize that the pants were sliding down his hips a fraction, and pulled them up. He saw Ms. Connor's disapproving gaze slip down his bare chest and fasten on the smooth brown skin where a belly button should have been. Devil's mark, his stepfather had called it, but he'd said the same thing about Magnus's eyes. Magnus was long past caring whether mundanes judged him.

"Caroline Connor," said the woman. She did not offer a hand. "CFO and vice president of marketing for Sigblad Enterprises."

"Magnus Bane," said Magnus. "High Warlock of Brooklyn and Scrabble champion."

"You come highly recommended. I have heard you are an extremely powerful wizard."

"Warlock," said Magnus, "actually."

"I expected you to be . . ."

She paused like someone hovering over a selection of chocolates, all of which she was extremely doubtful about. Magnus wondered which she would choose, which marker of a trustworthy magic user she had been imagining or hoping for—elderly, bearded, white. Magnus had encountered many people in the market for a sage. He had very little time for it.

Still, he had to admit that this was perhaps not the most professional he had ever been.

"Did you expect me to be, perhaps," he suggested gently, "wearing a shirt?"

Ms. Connor lifted her shoulders in a slight shrug.

“Everybody told me that you make eccentric fashion choices, and I’m sure that’s a very fashionable hairstyle,” she said. “But frankly, it looks like a cat has been sleeping on your head.”



Magnus offered Caroline Connor a coffee, which she declined. All she would accept was a glass of water. Magnus was becoming more and more suspicious of her.

When Magnus emerged from his room wearing maroon leather pants and a glittering cowl-neck sweater, which had come with a jaunty little matching scarf, Caroline looked at him with a cool distance that suggested she did not find it to be a huge improvement on his pajama pants. Magnus had already accepted the fact that there would never be an eternal friendship between them, and did not find himself heartbroken.

“So, Caroline,” he said.

“I prefer ‘Ms. Connor,’” said Ms. Connor, perched on the very edge of Magnus’s gold velvet sofa. She was looking around at the furniture as disapprovingly as she had looked at Magnus’s bare chest, as if she thought that a few interesting prints and a lamp with bells were somewhat equivalent to Roman orgies.

“Ms. Connor,” Magnus amended easily. The customer was always right, and that would be Magnus’s policy until the job was completed, at which point he would decline to ever be employed by this company again.

She produced a file from her briefcase, a contract in a dark green binder, which she passed over to Magnus to flip through. Magnus had signed two other contracts in the past week, one graven into a tree trunk in the depths of a German forest under the light of a new moon, and one in his own blood. Mundanes were so quaint.

Magnus scanned through it. Summon minor demon, mysterious purpose, obscene sums of money. Check, check, and check. He signed it with a flourish and handed it back.

“Well,” said Ms. Connor, folding her hands in her lap. “I would like to see the demon now, if you please.”

“It takes a little while to set up the pentagram and the summoning circle,” Magnus said. “You might want to get comfortable.”

Ms. Connor looked startled and displeased. “I have a lunch meeting,” she noted. “Is there no way to expedite the process?”

“Er, no. This is dark magic, Ms. Connor,” said Magnus. “It is not quite the same as ordering a pizza.”

Ms. Connor’s mouth flattened like a piece of paper being folded in half. “Would it be possible for me to come back in a few hours?”

Magnus’s conviction that people who arrived early to meetings had no respect for other people’s time was being confirmed. On the other hand, he did not really wish for this woman to remain in his house for any longer than necessary.

“Off you go,” Magnus said, keeping his voice urbane and charming. “When you return, there will be a cecaelia demon in place for you to do with as you wish.”

“Casa Bane,” Magnus muttered as Ms. Connor left, his voice not quite low enough to be sure she wouldn’t hear him. “Hot- and cold-running demons, at your service.”

He didn’t have time to sit around being annoyed. There was work to be done. Magnus set about arranging his circle of black candles. Inside the circle he scratched a pentagram, using a rowan stick

freshly cut by faerie hands. The whole process took a couple of hours before he was ready to begin his chant.

“Iam tibi impero et praecipio, maligne spiritus! I summon you, by the power of bell, book, and candle. I summon you from the airy void, from the darkest depths. I summon you, Elyaas who swims in the midnight seas of eternally drowning souls, Elyaas who lurks in the shadows that surround Pandemonium, Elyaas who bathes in tears and plays with the bones of lost sailors.”

Magnus drawled the words, tapping his nails on his cup and examining his chipped green nail polish. He took pride in his work, but this was not his favorite part of his job, not his favorite client, and not the day for it.

The golden wood of his floor began to smoke, and the smoke rising had the smell of sulfur. But the smoke rose in sullen wisps. Magnus felt a resistance as he pulled the demon dimension closer to him, like a fisherman drawing on a line and getting a fish who put up a fight.

It was too early in the afternoon for this. Magnus spoke in a louder voice, feeling the power rise in him as he spoke, as if his blood were catching on fire and sending sparks from the center of his being out into the space between worlds.

“As the destroyer of Marbas, I summon you. I summon you as the demon’s child who can make your seas dry to desert. I summon you by my own power, and by the power of my blood, and you know who my father is, Elyaas. You will not, you dare not, disobey.”

The smoke rose higher and higher, became a veil, and beyond the veil for an instant Magnus glimpsed another world. Then the smoke became too thick to see through. Magnus had to wait until it dwindled and coalesced into a shape—not quite the shape of a man.

Magnus had summoned many disgusting demons in his life. The amphisbaena demon had the wings and the trunk of a vast chicken. Mundane stories claimed it had the head and tail of a snake, but that was not in fact true. Amphisbaena demons were covered in tentacles, with one very large tentacle containing an eye, and a mouth with snapping fangs. Magnus could see how the confusion had arisen.

The amphisbaena demons were the worst, but cecaelia demons were not Magnus’s favorites either. They were not aesthetically pleasing, and they left slime all over the floor.

Elyaas’s shape was more blob than anything else. His head was something like a man’s, but with his green eyes set close together in the center of his face, and a triangular slit serving as both nose and mouth. He had no arms. His torso was abruptly truncated, and his lower parts resembled those of a squid, the tentacles thick and short. And from head to stubby tentacles, he was coated in greenish-black slime, as if he had arisen from a fetid swamp and was sweating out putrefaction from every pore.

“Who summons Elyaas?” he asked in a voice that sounded like a normal, rather jolly, man’s voice, with the slight suggestion that it was being heard underwater. It was possible that this was simply because he had a mouthful of slime. Magnus saw the demon’s tongue—like a human’s but green and ending in a thick point—flicker between his sharp slime-stained teeth as he spoke.

“I do,” said Magnus. *“But I rather believe we covered that when I was summoning you and you proved recalcitrant.”*

He spoke cheerfully, but the blue-white flame of the candles responded to his mood and contracted, forming a cage of light around Elyaas that made him yelp. His slime had no effect upon their fire whatsoever.

“Oh, come on!” Elyaas grumbled. *“Don’t be like that! I was on my way. I was held up by some personal business.”*

Magnus rolled his eyes. *“What were you doing, demon?”*

Elyaas looked shifty, insofar as you could tell under the slime. “I had a thing. So how have you been, Magnus?”

“What?” Magnus asked.

“You know, since the last time you summoned me. How have you been keeping?”

“What?” Magnus asked again.

“You don’t remember me?” said the tentacle demon.

“I summon a lot of demons,” Magnus said weakly.

There was a long pause. Magnus stared into the bottom of his coffee cup and desperately willed more coffee to appear. This was something a lot of mundanes did too, but Magnus had one up on those suckers. His mug did slowly fill again, until it was brimming with rich dark liquid. He sipped and looked at Elyaas, who was shifting uncomfortably from tentacle to tentacle.

“Well,” said Elyaas. “This is awkward.”

“It’s nothing personal,” said Magnus.

“Maybe if I jogged your memory,” Elyaas suggested helpfully. “You summoned me when you were searching for a demon who cursed a Shadowhunter? Bill Herondale?”

“Will Herondale,” said Magnus.

Elyaas snapped his tentacles as if they were fingers. “I knew it was something like that.”

“You know,” Magnus said, enlightened, “I think I do remember. I’m sorry about that. I realized right away that you weren’t the demon I was looking for. You looked kind of blue in one of the drawings, but obviously you are not blue, and I was wasting your time. You were pretty understanding about it.”

“Think nothing of it.” Elyaas waved a tentacle. “These things happen. And I can look blue. You know, in the right light.”

“Lighting’s important, it’s true,” said Magnus.

“So whatever happened with Bill Herondale and that curse a blue demon put on him?” The cecaelia demon’s interest seemed genuine.

“*Will Herondale*,” Magnus said again. “It’s actually rather a long story.”

“You know, sometimes we demons pretend we’re cursing people and we don’t really do it,” said Elyaas chattily. “Like, just for kicks? It’s kind of a thing with us. Did you know that?”

“You could have mentioned it a century or two ago,” Magnus observed frostily.

Elyaas shook his head, smiling a slime-bedecked smile. “The old pretend-to-curse. It’s a classic. Very funny.” He appeared to notice Magnus’s unimpressed expression for the first time. “Not from your perspective, of course.”

“It wasn’t funny for Bill Herondale!” said Magnus. “Oh, damn it. Now you’ve got me doing it.”

Magnus’s phone buzzed on the counter where he had left it. Magnus made a dive for it, and was delighted when he saw that it was Catarina. He had been expecting her call.

Then he realized the demon was looking at him curiously.

“Sorry,” Magnus said. “Mind if I take this?”

Elyaas waved a tentacle. “Oh no, go right ahead.”

Magnus pressed the answer button on the phone and walked toward the window, away from the demon and the sulfur fumes.

“Hello, Catarina!” said Magnus. “I am so pleased that you finally called me back.”

He might have laid a slight pointed emphasis on the “finally.”

“I only did because you said it was urgent,” said his friend Catarina, who was a nurse first and a warlock second. Magnus did not think she’d had a date in fifteen years. Before that she’d had a fiancé

whom she had kept meaning to marry, but she'd never found the time, and eventually he'd died of old age, still hoping that one day she would set a date.

"It is urgent," said Magnus. "You know that I've been, ah, spending time with one of the Nephilim at the New York Institute."

"A Lightwood, right?" Catarina asked.

"Alexander Lightwood," said Magnus, and he was mildly horrified to hear how his own voice softened on the name.

"I wouldn't have thought you'd have time, with all the other things going on."

It was true. The night when Magnus had met Alec, he had just wanted to throw a party, have some fun, act the part of a warlock filled with *joie de vivre* until he could feel it. He remembered how in the past, every few years, he used to feel a restless craving for love, and would start to search for the possibility of love in beautiful strangers. Somehow this time around it hadn't happened. He had spent the eighties in a strange cloud of misery, thinking of Camille, the vampire he had loved more than a century before. He had not loved anyone, not really loved them and had them love him back, since Etta in the fifties. Etta had been dead for years and years, and had left him before she'd died. Since then there had been affairs, of course, lovers who'd let him down or whom he'd let down, faces he now barely remembered, glimpses of brightness that had flickered and gone out even as he'd approached.

He hadn't stopped wanting love. He had simply, somehow, stopped looking.

He wondered if you could be exhausted without knowing it, if hope could be lost not all at once but could slip away gradually, day by day, and vanish before you ever realized.

Then Clary Fray had appeared at his party, the girl whose mother had been hiding Clary's Shadowhunter heritage from her all her life. Clary had been brought to Magnus so that he could ensorcel her memory and cloud her sight, over and over again as she'd been growing up, and Magnus had done it. It was not a terribly kind thing to do to a girl, but her mother had been so afraid for her, and it had not felt like Magnus's place to refuse. Yet Magnus had not been able to stop himself from taking a personal interest. Seeing a child grow up, year after year, had been new to him, as had feeling the weight of her memories in his hands. He had started to feel a little responsible, had wanted to know what would become of her and had begun to want the best for her.

Magnus had been interested in Clary, the little redheaded scrap who had grown into a—slightly bigger little redheaded scrap, but had not thought he would be terribly interested in the companions she had found for herself. Not the nondescript mundane boy; not golden-eyed Jace Wayland, who reminded Magnus of too much of a past that he would rather forget; and certainly not either of the Lightwood siblings, the dark boy and girl whose parents Magnus had good reason to dislike.

It made no sense that his eyes had been drawn to Alec, over and over again. Alec had hung to the back of their little group, had made no effort to attract the eye. He had striking coloring, the rare combination of black hair and blue eyes that had always been Magnus's favorite, and Magnus supposed that was why he had looked in Alec's direction at first. Strange to see the coloring that had so distinguished Will and his sister, so many miles and years gone by, and on someone with an entirely different last name . . .

Then Alec had smiled at one of Magnus's jokes, and the smile had lit a lamp in his solemn face, making his blue eyes brilliant, and briefly taking Magnus's breath away. And when Magnus's attention had been held, he'd seen a flicker of returned interest in Alec's eyes, a mixture of guilt, intrigue, and pleasure at Magnus's attention. Shadowhunters were old-fashioned about such matters, which was to say bigoted and hidebound, as they were about everything. Magnus had been

approached by male Shadowhunters before, of course, but always in a hole-and-corner way, always as if they were doing Magnus some huge favor and as if Magnus's touch, though desired, might sully them. (Magnus had always turned them down.) It had been a shock to see such feelings open and innocent on a beautiful boy's face.

When Magnus had winked at Alec and told him to call him, it had been a reckless impulse, little more than a whim. He had certainly not expected the Shadowhunter on his doorstep a few days later, asking for a date. Nor had he expected the date to go so spectacularly bizarrely, or expected to like Alec quite so much afterward.

"Alec took me by surprise," said Magnus to Catarina at last, which was a massive understatement and so true that it felt like revealing too much.

"Well, it seems like a mad idea to me, but those usually work out for you," said Catarina. "What's the problem?"

That was the million-dollar question. Magnus resolved to sound casual about it. This was not something that he should be worrying about as much as he was, and he wanted advice but did not want to let anyone, not even Catarina, see how much it mattered.

"I'm glad you asked. Here's the thing," said Magnus. "It's Alec's birthday today. He's eighteen. And I'd like to get him a present, because the celebration of one's birth is a traditional time for the giving of gifts, and it indicates your affection for them. But—and at this point I'd like to say that I wish you had returned my call sooner—I don't really have any idea what to get him, and I would appreciate some advice. The thing is, he doesn't really seem to care about material goods, including clothes, which I don't understand, though I find it strangely charming. He is impossible to buy for. The only new things I ever see him with are weapons, and nunchakus are not a romantic gift. Also, I wondered if you thought that getting a present at all might make me seem too keen and chase him off. I've been seeing him for only a little while, and his parents don't even know he likes boys, let alone likes degenerate warlocks, and so I want to be subtle. Maybe getting a gift at all would be a mistake. It's possible that he will think I am being too intense. And as you know, Catarina, I am not intense. I am *laissez-faire*. I am a jaded sophisticate. I don't want him to get the wrong idea about me or think the present means more than it should. Maybe just a token gift. What do you think?"

Magnus took a deep breath. That had come out a little less cool, calm, well-reasoned, and sophisticated than he had been hoping for.

"Magnus," said Catarina, "I have lives to save."

Then she hung up on him.

Magnus stared at the phone in disbelief. He would never have thought Catarina would do this to him. It seemed like wanton cruelty. He had not sounded that bad on the telephone.

"Is Alec your lover?" asked Elyaas the tentacle demon.

Magnus stared. He was not ready for anyone to say "lover" to him with an oozing note of slime beneath the word. He felt he would never be ready.

"You should get him a mixed tape," said Elyaas. "Kids love mixed tapes. They're the cool 'in' thing right now."

"Was the last time you were summoned the eighties?" Magnus asked.

"It might have been," Elyaas said defensively.

"Things have changed."

"Do people still listen to Fleetwood Mac?" asked the tentacle demon. There was a plaintive note in his voice. "I love the Mac."

Magnus ignored the demon, who had softly begun to sing a slimy song to himself. Magnus was

contemplating his own dark fate. He had to accept it. There was no way around it. There was no one else he could turn to.

He was going to have to call Ragnor Fell and ask for advice about his love life.



Ragnor was spending a lot of time lately in Idris, the Shadowhunters' city of glass, where phones, television, and the Internet did not work, and where Magnus imagined the Angel's chosen ones had to resort to pornographic woodcuts when they wanted to unwind after a long day's demon-hunting. Ragnor had used his magic to install a single telephone, but he could not be expected to hang around it all the livelong day. So Magnus was deeply thankful when Ragnor's phone actually rang and the warlock actually picked up.

"Ragnor, thank goodness," he said.

"What is it?" asked Ragnor. "Is it Valentine? I'm in London, and Tessa's in the Amazon and there's no way to contact her. All right. Let me wrap this up fast. You call Catarina, and I will be with you in ___"

"Ah," said Magnus. "There's no need for that. Though thank you for your immediate leaping to my rescue, my sweet emerald prince."

There was a pause. Then Ragnor said, in a much less intent and much more grumpy voice, "Why are you bothering me, then?"

"Well, I'd like some advice," said Magnus. "So I turned to you, as one of my oldest and dearest friends, as a fellow warlock and a trusted comrade, as the former High Warlock of London in whom I have implicit confidence."

"Flattery from you makes me nervous," said Ragnor. "It means you want something. Doubtless something awful. I am not becoming a pirate with you again, Magnus. I don't care how much you pay me."

"I wasn't going to suggest it. My question for you is of a more . . . personal nature. Don't hang up. Catarina was already extremely unsympathetic."

There was a long silence. Magnus fiddled with his window catch, gazing out at the line of warehouses-turned-apartments. Lace curtains were fluttering in a summer breeze in an open window across the street. He tried to ignore the reflection of the demon in his own window.

"Wait," said Ragnor, and he started to snigger. "Is this about your Nephilim *boyfriend*?"

"Our relationship is as yet undefined," said Magnus with dignity. Then he clutched the phone and hissed, "And how do you know private details about my personal life with Alexander?"

"Ooooh, *Alexander*," Ragnor said in a singsong voice. "I know all about it. Raphael called and told me."

"Raphael Santiago," said Magnus, thinking darkly of the current leader of the New York vampire clan, "has a black ungrateful heart, and one day he will be punished for this treachery."

"Raphael calls me every month," said Ragnor. "Raphael knows that it is important to preserve good relations and maintain regular communication between the different Downworlder factions. I might add, Raphael always remembers important occasions in my life."

"I forgot your birthday one time sixty years ago!" said Magnus. "You need to let that go."

"It was fifty-eight years ago, for the record. And Raphael knows we need to maintain a united front against the Nephilim and not, for instance, sneak around with their underage sons," Ragnor continued.

"Alec is eighteen!"

"Whatever," said Ragnor. "Raphael would never date a Shadowhunter."

“Of course, why would he, when you two are in loooove?” Magnus asked. ““Oooh, Raphael is always so professional.’ ‘Oooh, Raphael brought up the most interesting points in that meeting you forgot to attend.’ ‘Oooh, Raphael and I are planning a June wedding.’ Besides, Raphael would never date a Shadowhunter because Raphael has a policy of never doing anything that is awesome.”

“Stamina runes are not the only things that matter in life,” said Ragnor.

“So says someone who is wasting his life,” Magnus told him. “And anyway, it’s not like . . . Alec is . . .”

“If you tell me about your gooey feelings for one of the Nephilim, I will go double green and be sick,” said Ragnor. “I’m warning you now.”

Double green sounded interesting, but Magnus did not have time to waste. “Fine. Just advise me on this one practical matter,” said Magnus. “Should I buy him a birthday present, and if so, what should it be?”

“I just remembered that I have some very important business to attend to,” said Ragnor.

“No,” said Magnus. “Wait. Don’t do this. I trusted you!”

“I’m sorry, Magnus, but you’re breaking up.”

“Maybe a cashmere sweater? What do you think about a sweater?”

“Oops, tunnel,” said Ragnor, and a dial tone echoed in Magnus’s ear.

Magnus did not know why all of his immortal friends had to be so callous and horrible. Ragnor’s important business was probably getting together to write a burn book with Raphael. Magnus could see them now, sharing a bench and scribbling happily away about Magnus’s stupid hair.

Magnus was drawn from this dark private vision by the actual dark vision currently happening in his loft. Elyaas was generating more and more slime. It was steadily filling the pentagram. The cecaelia demon was wallowing in the stuff.

“I think you should buy him a scented candle,” Elyaas proposed, his voice stickier by the minute. He waved his tentacles enthusiastically to illustrate his point. “They come in many exciting scents, like bilberry and orange blossom. It will bring him serenity and he’ll think about you when he goes to sleep. Everybody likes scented candles.”

“I need you to shut up,” said Magnus. “I have to think.”

He threw himself onto his sofa. Magnus should have expected that Raphael, filthy traitor and total priss that he was, would have reported back to Ragnor.



Magnus remembered the night when he took Alec to Taki’s. Usually they went to places frequented by mundanes. The haunts of Downworld, crawling with faeries, werewolves, warlocks, and vampires who might pass on word to his parents, clearly made Alec nervous. Magnus did not think Alec understood how much Downworld preferred to keep apart from Shadowhunter business.

The café was bustling, and the center of attention was a peri and a werewolf having some kind of territorial dispute. Nobody paid Alec and Magnus any attention at all, except Kaelie, the little blond waitress, who had smiled when they’d come in and who’d been very attentive.

“Do you know her?” asked Magnus.

“A little,” said Alec. “She’s part nixie. She likes Jace.”

She wasn’t the only one who liked Jace, Magnus knew that. He didn’t see what all the fuss was about, personally. Other than the fact that Jace had a face like an angel’s and abs for days.

Magnus started to tell Alec a story about a nixie nightclub he’d been to once. Alec was laughing, and then Raphael Santiago came in the door of the café with his most faithful vampire followers, Lily

and Elliott. Raphael spotted Magnus and Alec, and then his thin arched eyebrows hit his hairline.

“Nope, nope, nope, and also no,” Raphael said, and he actually took several steps back toward the door. “Turn around, everybody. I do not wish to know this. I refuse to be aware of this.”

“One of the Nephilim,” said Lily, bad girl that she was, and she drummed on the table of their booth with shining blue fingernails. “My, my.”

“Hi?” said Alec.

“Wait a minute,” said Raphael. “Are you Alexander Lightwood?”

Alec looked more panicked by the minute. “Yes?” he said, as if he were uncertain on the subject. Magnus thought he might be considering changing his name to Horace Whipplepool and fleeing the country.

“Aren’t you twelve?” Raphael demanded. “I distinctly recall you being twelve.”

“Uh, that was a while ago,” said Alec.

He looked even more freaked out. Magnus supposed it must have been unsettling to be accused of being twelve by someone who looked like a boy of fifteen.

Magnus might have found the situation funny at another time, but he looked at Alec. Alec’s shoulders were tense.

He knew Alec well enough by now to know what he was feeling, the conflicting impulses that warred in him. He was conscientious, the kind of person who believed that the others around him were so much more important than he was, who already believed that he was letting everybody down. And he was honest, the kind of person who was naturally open about all he felt and all he wanted. Alec’s virtues had made a trap for him: these two good qualities had collided painfully. He felt he could not be honest without disappointing everybody he loved. It was a hideous conundrum for him. It was as if the world had been designed to make him unhappy.

“Leave him alone,” Magnus said, and reached for Alec’s hand over the table. For a moment Alec’s fingers relaxed under Magnus’s, began to curl around them, holding his hand back. Then he glanced at the vampires and snatched his hand away.

Magnus had known a lot of men and women over the years who’d been afraid of who they were and what they wanted. He had loved many of them, and had hurt for them all. He had loved the times in the mundane world when people had had to be a little less afraid. He loved this time in the world, when he could reach out in a public place and take Alec’s hand.

It did not make Magnus feel any more kindly toward the Shadowhunters to see one of their Angel-touched warriors made afraid by something like this. If they had to believe they were so much better than everyone else, they should at least be able to make their own children feel good about who they were.

Elliott leaned against Alec’s seat, shaking his head so his thin dreadlocks whipped about his face. “What would your parents think?” he asked with mock solemnity.

It was funny to the vampires. But it wasn’t funny to Alec.

“Elliott,” said Magnus. “You’re boring. And I don’t want to hear that you’ve been telling any tedious tales around the place. Do you understand me?”

He played with a teaspoon, blue sparks traveling from his fingers to the spoon and back again. Elliott’s eyes said that Magnus would not be able to kill him with a spoon. Magnus’s eyes invited Elliott to test him.

Raphael ran out of patience, which admittedly was like a desert running out of water.

“*Dios*,” snapped Raphael, and the other two vampires flinched. “I am not interested in your sordid encounters or constantly deranged life choices, and I am certainly not interested in prying into the

affairs of Nephilim. I meant what I said. I don't want to know about this. And I won't know about this. This never happened. I saw nothing. Let's go."

So now Raphael had gone running off to report to Ragnor. That was vampires for you: always going for the jugular, both literally and metaphorically. They were messing up his love life as well as being inconsiderate party guests who had got blood in Magnus's stereo system at his last party and turned Clary's idiot friend Stanley into a rat, which was just bad manners. Magnus was never inviting any vampires to his parties ever again. It was going to be all werewolves and faeries all the time, even if it was hell getting fur and faerie dust out of the sofa.

Magnus and Alec sat in brief silence after the vampires departed, and then something else happened. The fight between the peri and the werewolf got out of hand. The werewolf's face changed, snarling, and the peri turned the table upside down. A crash rang out.

Magnus started slightly at the sound, and Alec acted. He leaped to his feet, palming a throwing knife with one hand, his other hand going to a weapon in his belt. He moved faster than any other being in the room—werewolf, vampire, or faerie—could have moved.

And he moved automatically in front of the booth where Magnus was sitting, placed his body between Magnus and the threat without even thinking about it. Magnus had seen how Alec acted with his fellow Shadowhunters, with his sister and his *parabatai*, closer than a brother. He guarded their backs, watched out for them, behaved at all times as if their lives were more precious than his own.

Magnus was the High Warlock of Brooklyn, and for centuries had been powerful beyond the dreams of not only mundanes but most of Downworld. Magnus certainly did not need protection, and nobody had ever even thought to offer it, certainly not a Shadowhunter. The best one could hope for from Shadowhunters, if you were a Downworlder, was to be left alone. Nobody had tried to protect him, that he could remember, since he was very young. He had never wanted anybody to do so, not since he'd been a child who'd had to run to the cold mercy of the Silent Brothers' sanctuary. That had been long ago in a country far away, and Magnus had never wanted to be so weak ever again. Yet seeing Alec spring to defend him caused Magnus to feel a pang in the center of his chest, at once sweet and painful.

And the customers in Taki's café shrank back from Alec, from angelic power revealed in a sudden blaze of fury. In that moment nobody doubted that he could lay waste to them all.

The peri and the werewolf slunk to opposite corners of the café, and then hastily made their retreat from the building. Alec subsided into the booth opposite Magnus, and sent him an embarrassed smile.

It was strange and startling and terribly endearing, like Alec himself.

Magnus then dragged Alec outside, pushed him up against the brick wall of Taki's under the sparking upside-down sign, and kissed him. Alec's blue eyes that had blazed with angelic fury were tender suddenly, and darker with passion. Magnus felt Alec's strong lithe body strain against Magnus's, felt his gentle hands slide up Magnus's back. Alec kissed him back with shattering enthusiasm, and Magnus thought, *Yes, this one, this one fits, after all the stumbling around and searching, and here it is.*

"What was that for?" Alec asked a long time later, eyes shining.

Alec was young. Magnus had never been old, had never known how the world reacted to you when you were old, and had not been allowed to be really young for long either. Being immortal meant being apart from such concerns. All the mortals Magnus had loved had seemed younger and older than him, both at once. But Magnus was keenly aware that this was Alec's first time dating, doing anything at all. He had been Alec's first kiss. Magnus wanted to be good to him, not burden him with the weight of feelings that Alec might not return.

“Nothing,” Magnus lied.



Thinking about that night at Taki’s, Magnus realized what the perfect present for Alec would be. He also realized that he had no idea how to give it to him.

In the only piece of luck in a terrible day filled with slime and cruel friends, at that very moment the buzzer rang.

Magnus crossed the floor in three easy strides and boomed into the intercom: “WHO DARES DISTURB THE HIGH WARLOCK AT WORK?”

There was a pause.

“Seriously, if you are Jehovah’s Witnesses . . .”

“Ah, no,” said a girl’s voice, light, self-confident, and with the slight, odd inflection of Idris. “This is Isabelle Lightwood. Mind if I come up?”

“Not at all,” said Magnus, and he pressed the button to let her in.



Isabelle Lightwood walked straight for the coffee machine and got herself a cup without asking if she could have any. She was that kind of girl, Magnus thought, the kind who took what she wanted and assumed you would be delighted that she’d taken a fancy to it. She studiously ignored Elyaas as she went: she had taken one look at him when she’d come into Magnus’s apartment and apparently decided that asking questions about the presence of the tentacle demon would be impolite and probably boring.

She looked like Alec, had his high cheekbones, porcelain-pale skin, and black hair, though she wore hers long and carefully styled. Her eyes were different, though, glossy and black, like lacquered ebony: both beautiful and indestructible. She seemed as if she could be as cold as her mother, as if she might be as prone to corruption as so many of her ancestors had been. Magnus had known a lot of Lightwoods, and he had not been terribly impressed by most of them. Not until one.

Isabelle hopped up onto the counter, stretching out her long legs. She was wearing tailored jeans and boots with spike heels, and a deep red silk tank top that matched the ruby necklace at her throat, which Magnus had bought for the price of a London town house more than a hundred years before. Magnus rather liked seeing her wear it. It felt like watching Will’s niece, brash, laughing, cheroot-smoking Anna Lightwood—one of the few Lightwoods he had liked—wearing it a hundred years before. It charmed him, made him feel as if he had mattered in that space of time, to those people. He wondered how horrified the Lightwoods would be if they knew that the necklace had once been a dissolute warlock’s love gift to a murderous vampire.

Probably not as horrified as they would be if they learned Magnus was dating their son.

He met Isabelle’s bold black eyes, and thought that she might not be horrified to learn where her necklace had come from. He thought she might get a bit of a kick out of it. Maybe someday he would tell her.

“So it’s Alec’s birthday today,” Isabelle announced.

“I’m aware,” said Magnus.

He said nothing more. He didn’t know what Alec had told Isabelle, knew how painfully Alec loved her and wanted to shield her, not to let her down, as he wanted not to let any of them down and passionately feared he would. Secrecy did not sit well with Magnus, who had winked at Alec the first night he’d met him, when Alec had been simply a deliriously good-looking boy glancing at Magnus

with shy interest. But it was all more complicated now, when he knew how Alec could be hurt, when Magnus knew how much it would matter to him if Alec were hurt.

“I know you two are . . . seeing each other,” said Isabelle, picking her words carefully but still meeting Magnus’s eyes dead-on. “I don’t care. I mean, it doesn’t matter to me. At all.”

She flung the words defiantly at Magnus. There was no need to be defiant with him, but he understood why she was, understood that she must have practiced the defiant words that she might have to say to her parents one day, if she stood by her brother.

She would stand by him. She loved her brother, then.

“That’s good to know,” said Magnus.

He had known Isabelle Lightwood was beautiful, and had thought she seemed strong, and funny—had known that she was someone he would not mind having a drink with or having at a party. He had not known that there were depths of loyalty and love in her.

He was not adept at reading Shadowhunter hearts, behind their smooth angelically arrogant facades. He thought that might be why Alec had surprised him so much, had wrong-footed him so that Magnus had stumbled into feelings he had not planned to have. Alec had no facade at all.

Isabelle nodded, as if she understood what Magnus was telling her. “I thought—it seemed important to tell someone that, on his birthday,” she said. “I can’t tell anyone else, even though I would. It’s not like my parents or the Clave would listen to me.” Isabelle curled her lip as she spoke of both her parents and the Clave. Magnus was liking her more and more. “He can’t tell anyone. And you won’t tell anyone, right?”

“It is not my secret to tell,” said Magnus.

He might not enjoy sneaking around, but he would not tell anybody’s secret. Least of all would he risk causing Alec pain or fear.

“You really like him, right?” Isabelle asked. “My brother?”

“Oh, did you mean Alec?” Magnus retorted. “I thought you meant my cat.”

Isabelle laughed and kicked at one of Magnus’s cabinet doors with one spike heel, careless and radiant. “Come on, though,” she said. “You do.”

“Are we going to talk about boys?” Magnus inquired. “I didn’t realize, and I am honestly not prepared. Can’t you come over another time, when I’m in my jammies? We could do homemade facials and braid each other’s hair, and then and only then will I tell you that I think your brother is totally dreamy.”

Isabelle looked pleased, if a little mystified. “Most people go for Jace. Or me,” she added blithely.

Alec had said as much to Magnus once, seeming stunned that Magnus might hope to see him instead of Jace.

Magnus was not planning on talking about why he preferred Alec. The heart had its reasons, and they were seldom all that reasonable. You might as well have asked why Clary hadn’t created a hilarious love triangle by getting a crush on Alec, since he was—in Magnus’s admittedly biased opinion—extremely handsome, and had been consistently sullen in her direction, which some girls liked. You liked the people you liked.

For all that, Magnus had many reasons. Nephilim were guarded, Nephilim were arrogant, Nephilim were to be avoided. Even the Shadowhunters Magnus had met and liked had been, every one, a trouble sundae with dark secret cherries on top.

Alec was not like any Shadowhunter Magnus had met before.

“May I see your whip?” asked Magnus.

Isabelle blinked, but to do her justice, she did not demur. She un-looped the electrum whip and

tangled its silvery-gold length around her hands for a moment, like a child playing cat's cradle.

Magnus took the whip carefully, laid across his palms like a snake, and he carried it to his closet door, which he opened. He drew out a special potion, one that he had paid an exorbitant price for and that he had been saving for something special. Shadowhunters had their runes to protect them. Warlocks had magic. Magnus had always liked his magic better than theirs. Only a Shadowhunter could bear runes, but he could give magic to anyone. He tipped the potion—faerie dust and blood taken in one of the old rituals, hematite and hellebore and more besides—onto the whip.

In the last extremity this weapon will not fail you; in the darkest hour this weapon will bring your enemy low.

Magnus carried the whip back to Isabelle when he was done.

“What did you do to it?” Isabelle asked.

“I gave it a little extra kick,” said Magnus.

Isabelle regarded him with narrowed eyes. “And why would you do that?”

“Why did you come to tell me that you knew about me and Alec?” asked Magnus. “It’s his birthday. That means the people who care about him want to give him what he wishes for most. In your case, acceptance. In mine, I know that the most important thing to him in the world is that you be safe.”

Isabelle nodded, and their eyes met. Magnus had said far too much, and he worried that Isabelle could see more.

She launched herself off the counter, toward Magnus’s small alabaster-topped coffee table, and scrawled on his notepad. “Here’s my number.”

“May I ask why you’re giving it to me?”

“Well, wow, Magnus. I knew you were hundreds of years old and all, but I hoped you were keeping up with modern technology.” Isabelle held out her phone to illustrate her point, and wagged it about. “So that you can call me, or text me. If you ever need Shadowhunter help.”

“Me need Shadowhunter help?” Magnus inquired, incredulous. “Over the—you’re right, hundreds of years—let me tell you that I’ve found it is almost invariably the other way around. I presume you’ll be wanting my number in return, and I’m also prepared to bet, based on nothing more than a passing acquaintance with your circle of friends, that you are going to get into trouble and need my expert magical assistance rather a lot.”

“Yeah, maybe,” said Isabelle with a rakish grin. “I’ve been known to be a troublemaker. But I didn’t give you my number because I want magical help, and okay, I understand that the High Warlock of Brooklyn probably doesn’t need an assist from a bunch of underage Nephilim. I was thinking that, if you’re going to be important to my brother, we should be able to get in touch. And I was thinking that you might want to have it if—if you need to contact me about Alec. Or if I need to contact you.”

Magnus understood what the girl meant. His number was easy enough to get—the Institute had it—but in giving him her own, Isabelle was offering the free exchange of information about Alec’s safety. The Nephilim led dangerous lives, chasing after demons, stalking the Downworld for lawbreakers, their rune-Marked, angel-swift bodies the last line of defense for the mundane world. The second time Magnus had ever seen Alec, he had been dying of demon poison.

Alec could die at any time, in any of the battles to come. Isabelle would be the only one of the Shadowhunters who knew for sure that there was anything between Magnus and Alec. She would be the only one who knew that if Alec died, Magnus would be someone who needed to be told.

“All right,” he said slowly. “Thank you, Isabelle.”

Isabelle winked. “No need to thank me. I’ll be driving you mad before long.”

“I’ll be expecting it,” said Magnus as she clattered out on her high, weaponized heels. He admired

anyone who made beauty and utility work together.

“By the way, that demon is dripping slime all over your floor,” said Isabelle, poking her head back around the door.

“Hi,” said Elyaas, and he waved a tentacle at her.

Isabelle regarded him with disdain, then raised an eyebrow in Magnus’s direction. “Just thought I’d point it out,” she said, and closed the door.



“I don’t undersssstand the point of your present,” said Elyaas. “He isn’t even going to know about it? You should have just gone with flowers. Red rossses are very romantic. Or perhaps tulips if you think that roses say you just want him for ssssex.”

Magnus lay upon his golden sofa and contemplated the ceiling. The sun was low in the sky, a flash of golden paint inscribed with a careless hand over the New York skyline. The demon’s shape had become more and more gelatinous as the day had progressed, until he seemed like nothing more than a lurking pile of slime. Possibly Caroline Connor would never come back. Possibly Elyaas was going to live with Magnus now. Magnus had always thought Raphael Santiago was the worst possible roommate he could ever have. Possibly he was about to be proven wrong.

He wished, with a profundity of longing that surprised him, that Alec were here.

Magnus remembered a town in Peru whose Quechua name meant “quiet place.” He recalled even more vividly being obscenely drunk and unhappy over his heartbreak of that time, and the maudlin thoughts that had recurred to him over the years, like an unwanted guest slipping in through his doors: that there was no peace for such as he, no quiet place, and there never would be.

Except he found himself remembering lying in bed with Alec—all of their clothes on, lounging on the bed on a lazy afternoon, Alec laughing, head thrown back, the marks Magnus had left on his throat very plain to see.

Time was something that moved in fits and starts for Magnus, dissipating like mist or dragging like chains, but when Alec was here, Magnus’s time seemed to fall into an easy rhythm with Alec’s, like two heartbeats falling into sync. He felt anchored by Alec, and his whole self felt restless and mutinous when Alec was not there, because he knew how different it would be when Alec *was* there, how the tumultuous world would quiet at the sound of Alec’s voice.

It was part of the dichotomy of Alec that had caught Magnus unaware and left him fascinated—that Alec seemed old for his age, serious and responsible, and yet that he approached the world with a tender wonder that made all things new. Alec was a warrior who brought Magnus peace.

Magnus lay on the sofa and admitted it to himself. He knew why he had been acting demented and pestering his friends over a birthday present. He knew why, on an ordinary unpleasant workday, his every thought had been punctuated with a thought of Alec, with insistent longing for him. This was love, new and bright and terrifying.

He had been through a hundred heartbreaks, but he found himself afraid when he thought of Alexander Lightwood breaking his heart. He did not know how this boy with the messy black hair and the worried blue eyes, with his steady hands and his rare sweet smile that was less rare in Magnus’s presence, had acquired such power over him. Alec hadn’t tried to get it, had never seemed to realize that he had it or tried to do anything with it.

Maybe he didn’t want it. Perhaps Magnus was being a fool, as he had been so many times before. He was Alec’s first experience, not a boyfriend. Alec was still nursing his first crush, on his best friend, and Magnus was a cautious experimentation, a step away from the safety that golden and much-

beloved Jace represented. Jace, who looked like an angel: Jace, who, like an angel, like God himself, would never love Alec back.

Magnus might simply be a walk on the wild side, a rebellion by one of Idris's most careful sons before Alec retreated back into secrecy, circumspection. Magnus remembered Camille, who had never taken him seriously, who had never loved him at all. How much more likely was a Shadowhunter to feel that way?

His gloomy thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the buzzer.

Caroline Connor offered no explanation for her lateness. Indeed, she breezed by Magnus as if he were the doorman, and began immediately to explain her problem to the demon.

"I am part of Pandemonium Enterprises, which caters to a certain subsection of the wealthy."

"Those who have used their money and influence to purchase knowledge of the Shadow World," said Magnus. "I'm aware of your organization. It's been around quite a long time."

Ms. Connor inclined her head. "My particular area is in providing entertainment for our customers in a nautical environment. While there are other cruises in New York Harbor, we provide our customers with a gourmet meal served on a yacht with a view of the more magical denizens of the city—nixies, kelpies, mermaids, various and sundry water sprites. We make it a very exclusive experience."

"Sounds classy," gurgled Elyaas.

"However, we do not want to make it a very exclusive experience in which rebellious mermaids drag our wealthy customers to the bottom of the river," said Ms. Connor. "Unfortunately some of the mermaids do not like being stared at, and this has been occurring. I simply want you to use your infernal powers to dispatch this threat to my company's economic growth."

"Wait a second. You want to *curse* the *mermaids*?" Magnus demanded.

"I could curse some mermaids," Elyaas said agreeably. "Sure."

Magnus glared at him.

Elyaas shrugged his tentacles. "I'm a demon," he said. "I'll curse a mermaid. I'll curse a cocker spaniel. I don't care about anything."

"I cannot believe that I have spent a whole day watching slime rise for no reason at all. If you had told me that the problem was angry mermaids, I could have fixed it without summoning demons to curse them," said Magnus. "I have several contacts in the mermaid community, and failing that, there are always the Shadowhunters."

"Oh, yeah. Magnus is dating a Shadowhunter," Elyaas put in.

"That's personal information I'd thank you not to repeat," Magnus said. "And we're not officially dating!"

"My orders were to summon a demon," Ms. Connor said crisply. "But if you can solve the problem in a more efficient way, warlock, I am all for it. I'd prefer not to curse the mermaids; the customers like looking at them. Perhaps some monetary recompense can be arranged. Do we need to amend your contract, warlock, or are the same terms agreeable to you?"

Magnus felt somewhat tempted to argue for a pay raise, but he was already charging them a satisfyingly outrageous sum of money, and he did want to avoid having a curse fall upon all the mermaids of New York. That seemed like it could get really complicated really fast.

He agreed to sign the amended contract, he and Ms. Connor shook hands, and she departed. Magnus hoped that he would never have to see her again. Another day, another dollar. (Well, another huge pile of dollars. Magnus's special skills did not come cheap.)

Elyaas was looking extremely sulky around the tentacles about being denied the opportunity to

cause chaos in Magnus's city.

"Thank you for being totally useless all day," said Magnus.

"Good luck with one of the Angel's chosen, demon's son," said Elyaas, his voice sudden considerably sharper and less slimy. "You think he will ever do anything but despise you, in his heart of hearts? He knows where you belong. We all know it too. Your father will have you in the end. Someday your life here will seem like a dream, like a stupid child's game. Someday the Great Dark One will come and drag you down and down, with usssss . . ."

His sibilant voice trailed off into a shriek as every candle flame streaked higher and higher, until they licked the ceiling. Then he vanished, with his last cry hanging on the air.

"Should have bought a sssscented candle. . . ."

Magnus proceeded to open every window in the loft. The lingering smell of sulfur and slime had barely begun to clear when the phone in his pocket rang. Magnus pulled it out, not without difficulty—his pants were tight because he felt a responsibility to the world to be gorgeous, but it meant there was not a lot of room in the pocket region—and his heart missed a beat when he saw who the call was from.

"Hey," said Alec when Magnus answered, his voice deep and diffident.

"Why are you calling?" Magnus asked, assailed by a sudden fear that his birthday present had been immediately discovered in some way and the Lightwoods were shipping Alec to Idris because of spells cast on whips by heedless warlocks, which Alec could not explain.

"Um, I can call another time," said Alec, sounding worried. "I'm sure you have better things to do —"

He didn't say it in the way some of Magnus's past lovers would have said it, accusing or demanding reassurance. He said it quite naturally, as if he accepted that was the way of the world, that he would not be anyone's top priority. It made Magnus want to reassure him ten times as much as he would have, had Alec seemed to even slightly expect it.

"Of course I don't, Alexander," he said. "I was just surprised to hear from you. I imagined that you would be with your family on the big day."

"Oh," said Alec, and he sounded shy and pleased. "I didn't expect you to remember."

"It might have crossed my mind once or twice during the day," said Magnus. "So have you been having a wonderful Shadowhunting time? Did someone give you a giant axe in a cake? Where are you, off to celebrate?"

"Er," said Alec. "I'm kind of . . . outside your apartment?"

The buzzer rang. Magnus pressed the button to let him enter, speechless for a moment because he had wanted Alec there, so badly, and here he was. It felt more like magic than anything he could do.

Then Alec was there, standing in the open doorway.

"I wanted to see you," said Alec with devastating simplicity. "Is this okay? I can go away if you're busy or anything."

It must have been raining a little outside. There were sparkling drops of water in Alec's messy black hair. He was wearing a hoodie that Magnus thought he might have found in a Dumpster, and sloppy jeans, and his whole face was lit up just because he was looking at Magnus.

"I think," said Magnus, pulling Alec in by the strings on his awful gray hoodie, "that I could be persuaded to clear my schedule."

Then Alec was kissing him, and Alec's kisses were uninhibited and utterly sincere, all of his lanky warrior's body focused on what it wanted, all of his open heart in it as well. For a long wild euphoric moment Magnus believed that Alec did not want anything more than to be with him, that they would

not be parted. Not for a long, long time.

“Happy birthday, Alexander,” Magnus murmured.

“Thanks for remembering,” Alec whispered back.

Cassandra Clare is the author of the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Publishers Weekly* bestselling *Mortal Instruments* series and *Infernal Devices* trilogy. Her books have more than twenty-two million copies in print worldwide and have been translated into more than thirty-five languages. Cassandra lives in western Massachusetts. Visit her at CassandraClare.com Learn more about the world of the Shadowhunters at Shadowhunters.com

NY Times bestseller Sarah Rees Brennan is the author of the critically acclaimed *Unspoken*, a romantic Gothic mystery. The first book of her *Demon's Lexicon* series received three starred reviews and was an ALA Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults. *Unspoken* and *Team Human*, a novel cowritten with Justine Larbalestier, are both YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults picks and TAYSHAS picks. She lives in Ireland. Visit her at SarahReesBrennan.com

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