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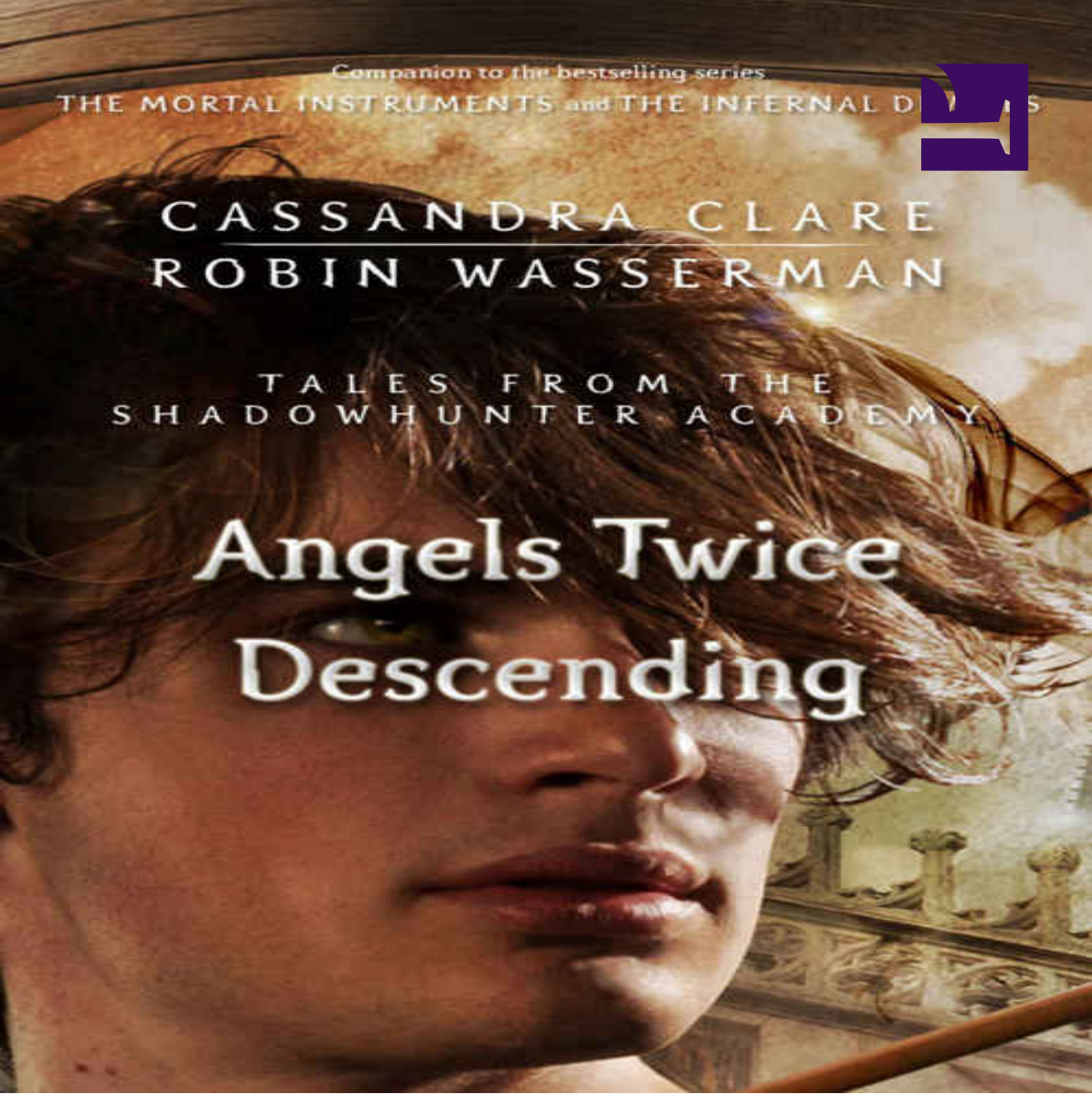

CASSANDRA CLARE
ROBIN WASSERMAN

TALES FROM THE SHADOWHUNTER ACADEMY

Angels Twice Descending

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“I think we should have a funeral,” George Lovelace said, voice trembling on the last word. “A proper one.”

Simon Lewis paused in his labors and peered up at his roommate. George was the kind of guy Simon had once loathed on sight, assuming anyone with that bronze glow, those six-pack abs, that maddeningly sexy (at least, according to every girl and more than a few of the guys Simon had checked with) Scottish brogue, must have a brain the size of a rat turd and a personality about as appealing. But George turned Simon’s assumptions on their head on a daily basis. As he was doing right at this moment, wiping away something that looked suspiciously like a tear.

"Are you . . . *crying*?" Simon asked, incredulous.

"Of course not." George gave his eyes another furious wipe. "Well, in my defense," he added, sounding only slightly abashed, "death is a terrible thing."

"It's a dead rat," Simon pointed out. "A dead rat in *your shoe*, I might add." Simon and George had discovered that the key to a happy roommate relationship was clear division of labor. So George was in charge of disposing of all creatures—rats, lizards, cockroaches, the occasional odd-shaped mishmash of the three whose ancestor had, presumably, once insulted a warlock—found in the closets or beneath the beds. Simon handled all those that had crawled inside items of clothing and—he shuddered to remember the moment they realized this labor

needed assigning—under pillows. “Also, for the record, only one of us has actually *been* a rat—and you’ll note he’s not the one crying.”

“It could be the last dead rat we ever find!” George sniffled. “Think about it, Si. *This* could be the last shared dead rat of our entire lives.”

Simon sighed. As Ascension Day approached, the day they would officially stop being students and start being Shadowhunters, George had been mournfully noting every last time they did anything. Now, as the moon rose over their last night at the Academy, he’d apparently lost his mind. A little nostalgia made sense to Simon: That morning, at their last-ever calisthenics session, Delaney Scarsbury had called him a spaghetti-armed, four-eyed, bow-legged demon-snack-in-waiting for the last time,

and Simon had almost said *thank you*. And that night's final bowl of "meat-flavored" custard had admittedly gotten them all a little choked up.

But losing it over a rat with stiffening limbs and athlete's foot? That was taking things too far.

Using the torn-off cover from his old demonology textbook, Simon managed to scoop the rat out of the shoe without touching it. He dropped it into one of the plastic bags he'd had Isabelle bring him specifically for this purpose, tied the bag tightly, then—humming taps—dropped it into the trash.

"RIP, Jon Cartwright the Thirty-Fourth," George said solemnly.

They named all their rats Jon Cartwright—a fact that drove the original

Jon Cartwright nuts. Simon smiled at the thought of it, their gallingly cocky classmate's forehead flush with anger, that vein in his disgustingly muscled neck starting to throb. Maybe George was right.

Maybe, someday, they would even miss the rats.

* * *

Simon had never put much effort into imagining his graduation day, much less the night before. Like prom and homecoming, these seemed like rituals meant for a very different kind of teenager—the school-spirited, letter-jacketed jocks and cheerleaders he knew mostly from bad movies. No keg parties for him, no weepy farewells or ill-advised hookups fueled by nostalgia and cheap beer. Two years ago, if he'd bothered to think

about it at all, Simon would have assumed he'd spend that night like he'd spent most of his nights in Brooklyn, hanging with Eric and the guys in Java Jones, guzzling coffee and brainstorming names for the band. (*Dead Sneaker Rat,* Simon mused out of habit. *Or maybe Rodent Funeral.*)

Of course, that was back when he'd assumed high school would lead to college, which would lead to rock stardom . . . or at least a moderately cool job at a moderately cool record label. Before he knew there was such a thing as demons, before he knew there was a race of superpowered, angel-blooded warriors eternally pledged to battle them—and definitely before he'd volunteered himself up to be one of them.

So instead of Java Jones, he was in the Academy's student lounge, squinting

through candlelight, sneezing from two centuries' worth of dust, and dodging the intimidating glares of noble Shadowhunters past whose portraits lined the room, their expressions seeming to say, *How could you possibly imagine* you *could be one of* us*?* Instead of Eric, Matt, and Kirk, who he'd known since kindergarten, he was with friends he'd met only a couple of years before, one of whom nurtured an intense affection for rats and another who shared his name with them. Instead of speculating about their futures in rock and roll, they were readying themselves for a life battling multidimensional evils. Assuming, that is, they survived graduation.

Which wasn't exactly a safe assumption to make.

“What do you think it will be like?” Marisol Garza asked now, nestled beneath Jon Cartwright’s beefy arm and looking like she was almost happy to be there. “The ceremony, I mean. What do you think we’ll have to do?”

Jon, like Julie Beauvale and Beatriz Mendoza, descended from a long line of Shadowhunters. For them, tomorrow was just another day, his official farewell to student life. Time to stop training and start battling.

But for George, Marisol, Simon, Sunil Sadasivan, and a handful of other mundane students, tomorrow loomed as the day they Ascended.

No one was quite sure what it meant: Ascension. Much less what it entailed. They’d been told very little: That they would drink from the Mortal Cup. That they would, like

the first of the warrior race, Jonathan Shadowhunter, sip the blood of an angel. That they would, if they were lucky, be transformed on the spot into real, full-blooded Shadowhunters. That they would say goodbye to their mundane lives forever and pledge themselves to a fearless life of service to humanity.

Or if they were very unlucky, they would die an immediate and presumably gruesome death.

It didn't exactly make for a festive evening.

"I'm just wondering what's in the Cup," Simon said. "You don't think it's actual blood, do you?"

"Isn't that your specialty, Lewis?" Jon sneered.

George sighed wistfully. “The last time Jon makes a stupid vampire joke.”

“I wouldn’t count on it,” Simon muttered.

Marisol whacked Jon’s shoulder. “Shut up, idiot,” she said. But she said it rather too lovingly for Simon’s taste.

“I bet it’s water,” Beatriz said, always the peacemaker. “Water that you’re supposed to pretend is blood, or that the Cup turns into blood, or something like that.”

“It doesn’t matter what’s in the Cup,” Julie said in her best obnoxiously knowing way, even though she clearly didn’t know any better than the rest of them. “The Cup’s magic. You could probably drink ketchup out of it and it would still work.”

“I hope it’s coffee, then,” Simon said with a wistful sigh of his own. The Academy was a caffeine-free zone. “I would be a much better

Shadowhunter if I got to Ascend well-caffeinated.”

“Sunil said he heard that it’s water from Lake Lyn,” Beatriz said skeptically. Simon hoped she was right to be skeptical; his last encounter with Lake Lyn’s water had been unsettling, to say the least. And given that some unknown percentage of mundanes died upon Ascending, it seemed to him like the Cup didn’t need any additional help on the occasionally fatal front.

“Where is Sunil, anyway?” Simon asked. They hadn’t exactly made a plan to meet up tonight, but the Academy offered limited recreational options—at least if you didn’t enjoy spending your free time accidentally getting locked in the dungeons or stalking the giant magical slug rumored to slither through the corridors in the predawn hours.

Most nights for the last couple of months, Simon and his friends had ended up here, talking about their futures, and he'd expected they would spend this last night the same way.

Marisol, who knew Sunil the best, shrugged. "Maybe he's 'considering his options.'" She curled her fingers around the phrase. This was how Dean Penhallow had advised students on the mundane track to spend their final evening, assuring them there was no shame in backing out at the last moment.

"Humiliation. Lifelong embarrassment over your mundie cowardice and guilt for wasting all of our very valuable time," Scarsbury had growled at them, and then, when the dean shot him a disapproving look, "But yeah, sure, no shame."

“Well, shouldn’t he be ‘considering’?” Julie asked. “Shouldn’t you all be? It’s not like going to doctor school and taking the Hypocritical oath or something. You don’t get to change your mind.”

“First of all, it’s the Hippocratic oath,” Marisol said.

“And it’s called *medical* school,” Jon put in, looking rather proud of himself. Marisol had been schooling him on mundane life. Against his will, or so Jon had led them to believe.

“Second of all,” Marisol added, “why would you think any of us would be likely to change our minds? Are *you* planning to change your mind about being a Shadowhunter?”

Julie looked affronted by the idea. “I *am* a Shadowhunter. You might as well have asked

if I'm planning to change my mind about being alive."

"So what makes you think it's any different for us?" Marisol said fiercely. She was the youngest of them by two years and the smallest by several inches, but Simon sometimes thought that she was the bravest. She was certainly the one he'd bet on in a fight. (Marisol fought well—she also, when necessary, fought dirty.)

"She didn't mean anything by it," Beatriz said gently.

"I really didn't," Julie said quickly.

Simon knew it was true. Julie couldn't help sounding like a mundane-hating snob sometimes, any more than Jon could help sounding like—well, like an asshole sometimes. That's who they were, and Simon realized that, inexplicably, he wouldn't have it

any other way. For better or worse, these were his friends. In two years they'd faced so much together: demons, faeries, Delaney Scarsbury, the dining hall "food." It was almost like a family, Simon reflected. You didn't necessarily like them all the time, but you knew, push come to shove, you'd defend them to the death.

Though he very much hoped it wouldn't come to that.

"Come on, aren't you a little nervous?" Jon asked. "Who can remember the last time anyone Ascended? It sounds utterly ridiculous when you think about it: One drink from a cup and—poof—*Lewis* is a Shadowhunter?"

"It doesn't sound ridiculous to me," Julie said softly, and they all fell silent. Julie's mother had been Turned during the Dark

War. One drink from Sebastian's Infernal Cup, and she'd become Endarkened. A shell of a person, nothing more than a hollow vessel for Sebastian's evil commands.

They all knew what one drink from a cup could do.

George cleared his throat. He couldn't stand a somber mood for more than thirty seconds—it was one of the things Simon would miss most about living with him. "Well, I for one am entirely ready to claim my birthright," he said cheerfully. "Do you think I'll become unbearably arrogant on first sip, or will it take a little time to catch up with Jon?"

"It's not arrogance if it's accurate," Jon said, grinning, and just like that, the night righted itself again.

Simon tried to pay attention to his friends' banter and did his best not to think about Jon's question, about whether or not he was nervous—whether he should be spending this night in sober consideration of his "options."

What options? How, after two years at the Academy, after all his training and study, after he'd sworn over and over again that he wanted to be a Shadowhunter, could he just walk away? How could he disappoint Clary and Isabelle like that . . . and if he did, how could they ever love him again?

He tried not to think about how it would be even harder for them to love him—or at least for him to appreciate it—if something went wrong in the ceremony, and he ended up dead.

He tried not to think about all the *other* people who loved him, the ones who, according to Shadowhunter Law, he was supposed to pledge never to see again. His mother. His sister.

Marisol and Sunil didn't have anyone waiting for them back home, something that had always seemed unbearably sad to Simon. But maybe it was easier, walking away when you were leaving nothing behind. Then there was George, the lucky one—his adopted parents were Shadowhunters themselves, even if they'd never picked up a sword. He would still be able to go home for regular Sunday dinners; he wouldn't even have to pick a new name.

George had been teasing him lately, saying that Simon shouldn't have much trouble picking a new name, either. "'Lightwood' has

quite a ring to it, don't you think?" he liked to say. Simon was getting very good at feigning deafness.

Secretly, though, a blush rising to his cheeks, he would think: *Lightwood . . . maybe*. Someday. If he dared let himself hope.

In the meantime, though, he had to come up with a new name of his own, a name for his new Shadowhunter self—which was approximately as unfathomable as everything else about this process.

"Um, can I come in?" A scrawny, spectacled girl of around thirteen stood in the doorway. Simon thought her name was Milla, but he wasn't sure—the Academy's new class was so large, and so inclined to goggle at Simon from a distance, that he hadn't gotten to know many of them. This

one had the eager but confused look of a mundane, one who, even after all these months, couldn't quite believe she was really here.

"It's public property," Julie said, a haughty—or rather, even haughtier-than-usual—note entering her voice. Julie loved lording it over the new kids.

The girl crept toward them skittishly. Simon found himself wondering how someone like her had ended up at the Academy—then caught himself. He knew better than to judge by appearances. Especially given how he'd looked when he showed up two years before, so skinny he could only fit into girl-size gear. *You're thinking like a Shadowhunter,* he chided himself.

Funny how that almost never sounded like a good thing.

“He told me to give this to you,” the girl whispered, handing a folded paper to Marisol, and then quickly backing away. Marisol, Simon gathered, was somewhat of a hero to the younger mundanes.

“Who did?” Marisol asked, but the girl was already gone. Marisol shrugged and opened the note, her face falling as she read the message.

“What?” Simon asked, concerned.

Marisol shook her head.

Jon took her hand, and Simon expected her to slap him, but instead she squeezed tight. “It’s from Sunil,” she said in a tight, angry voice. She passed the note to Simon. “I guess he ‘considered his options.’”

I can’t do it, the note read. *I know it probably makes me a coward, but I can’t drink from that Cup. I don’t want to die. I’m sorry.*

Say good-bye to everyone for me? And good luck.

They passed the note around one by one, as if needing to see the words in black and white before they could really believe it. Sunil had run away.

“We can’t blame him,” Beatriz said finally. “Everyone has to make his own choice.”

“I can blame him,” Marisol said, scowling. “He’s making us all look bad.”

Simon didn’t think that was why she was really angry, not exactly. He was angry too—not because he thought Sunil was a coward, or had betrayed them. Simon was angry because he’d put so much effort into trying not to think about what could happen, or how this was his last chance to walk away, and now Sunil had made that impossible.

Simon stood up. “Think I need to get some air.”

“Want company, mate?” George asked.

Simon shook his head, knowing George wouldn’t be offended. It was another thing that made them such good roommates—each knew when to leave the other alone.

“See you guys in the morning,” Simon said. Julie and Beatriz smiled and waved good night, and even Jon gave him a sardonic salute. But Marisol wouldn’t even look at him, and Simon wondered whether she thought he’d be the next to run.

He wanted to reassure her there was no chance of that. He wanted to swear that, in the morning, he’d be there beside the rest of them in the Council Hall, ready to take the Cup to his lips without reservation. But swearing was a serious thing for

Shadowhunters. You never promised unless you were absolutely sure.

So Simon just said a final good night and left his friends behind.

* * *

Simon wondered whether, in the history of time, anyone had ever said, “I need to get some air,” and actually meant it. Surely it was only ever used as code for “I need to be somewhere else.” Which Simon did. The problem was, nowhere felt like the right place to be—so, for lack of a better idea, he decided his dorm room would have to do. At least there he could be alone.

This, at least, was the plan.

But when he stepped into the room, he found a girl sitting on his bed. A petite,

redheaded girl whose face lit up at the sight of him.

Of all the strange things that had happened to Simon in the last couple of years, the strangest had to be that this—beautiful girls eagerly awaiting him in his bedroom—no longer seemed particularly strange at all.

“Clary,” he said as he encompassed her in a fierce hug. It was all he needed to say, because that’s the thing about a best friend. She knew exactly when he most needed to see her and how grateful and relieved he was—without his having to say a thing.

Clary grinned at him and slipped her stele back into her pocket. The Portal she’d created was still shimmering in the decrepit stone wall, by far the brightest thing in the room. “Surprised?”

“Wanted to get one last look at me before I go all buff and demon-fightery?” Simon teased.

“Simon, you do know that Ascending isn’t going to be like getting bitten by a radioactive spider or something, right?”

“So you’re saying I won’t be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound? And I don’t get my own Batmobile? I want my money back.”

“Seriously, though, Simon—”

“Seriously, Clary. I know what Ascension means.”

The words sat heavily between them, and as always, Clary heard what he didn’t say: That this was too big to talk about seriously. That joking was, for the moment, the best he could do.

"Besides, Lewis, I'd say you're buff enough already." She poked his biceps, which, he couldn't help but notice, were very close to bulging. "Any more and you'll have to buy new clothes."

"Never!" he said indignantly, and smoothed out his T-shirt, which had a baker's dozen holes in the soft cotton and read I'M COSPLAYING AS MYSELF in letters nearly too faded to read. "Did you, uh, did you happen to bring Isabelle with you?" He tried to keep the hope out of his voice.

Hard to believe that two years ago, he'd come to the Academy in part to escape Clary and Isabelle, the way they'd looked at him like they loved him more than anyone else in the world—but also like he'd drowned their puppy in a bathtub. They'd loved some other version of him, the one he could no longer

remember, and that version had loved them, too. He didn't doubt it; he just couldn't feel it. They'd been strangers to him. Terrifyingly beautiful strangers who wanted him to be someone he wasn't.

It felt like another life. Simon didn't know if he'd ever get all of his memories back—but somehow, despite that, he'd found his way back to Clary and Isabelle. He'd found a best friend who felt like his other half, who would someday soon be his *parabatai*. And he'd found Isabelle Lightwood, a miracle in human form, who said "I love you" whenever she saw him and, incomprehensibly, seemed to mean it.

"She wanted to come," Clary said, "but she had to go deal with this rogue faerie thing in Chinatown, something about soup dumplings and a guy with a goat head. I didn't ask

too many questions and—" She smiled knowingly at Simon. "I lost you at 'soup dumplings,' didn't I?"

Simon's stomach growled loudly enough to answer for him.

"Well, maybe we can grab you some on the way," Clary said. "Or at least a couple slices of pizza and a latte."

"Don't toy with me, Fray." Simon was very touchy these days on the subject of pizza, or the lack thereof. He suspected that any day now his stomach might resign in protest. "On the way where?"

"Oh, I forgot to explain—that's why I'm here, Simon." Clary took his hand. "I've come to take you home."

* * *

Simon stood on the sidewalk staring up at his mother's brownstone, his stomach churning. Traveling by way of Portal always made him feel a bit like puking up his lower intestine, but this time he didn't think he could blame the interdimensional magic. Not entirely, at least.

"You sure this is a good idea?" he said. "It's late."

"It's eleven p.m., Simon," Clary said. "You know she's still awake. And even if she's not, you know—"

"I know." His mother would want to see him. So would his sister, who, according to Clary, was home for the weekend because *someone*—presumably a well-meaning, redheaded someone with his sister's cell number—had told her Simon was stopping in for a visit.

He sagged against Clary for a moment, and, small as she was, she bore his weight. “I don’t know how to do it,” he said. “I don’t know how to say good-bye to them.”

Simon’s mother thought he was away at military school. He’d felt guilty lying to her, but he’d known there wasn’t any other choice; he knew, all too well, what happened when he risked telling his mother too much truth. But this—this was something else. He was forbidden by Shadowhunter Law to tell her about his Ascension, about his new life. The Law also forbade him from contacting her after he became a Shadowhunter, and though there was nothing saying he couldn’t be here in Brooklyn to say good-bye to her forever, the Law forbade him from explaining why.

Sed lex, dura lex.

The Law is hard, but it is the Law.

Lex sucks, Simon thought.

"You want me to go in with you?" Clary asked.

He did, more than anything—but something told him this was one of those things he needed to do on his own.

Simon shook his head. "But thanks. For bringing me here, for knowing I needed it, for—well, for everything."

"Simon . . ."

Clary looked hesitant, and Clary never looked hesitant.

"What is it?"

She sighed. "Everything that's happened to you, Simon, everything . . ." She paused, just long enough for him to think through how much that everything encompassed: getting turned into a rat and then a vampire;

finding Isabelle; saving the world a handful of times, at least so he'd been told; getting locked in a cage and tormented by all manner of supernatural creature; killing demons; facing an angel; losing his memories; and now standing at the threshold of the only home he'd ever known, preparing himself to leave it behind forever. "I can't help thinking it's all because of me," Clary said softly. "That I'm the reason. And . . ."

He stopped her before she could get any further, because he couldn't stand for her to think she needed to apologize. "You're right," he said. "You are the reason. For everything." Simon gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead. "That's why I'm saying thank you."

* * *

“Are you sure you don’t want me to heat that up for you?” Simon’s mother asked as he shoveled another heaping spoonful of cold ziti into his mouth.

“Mmff? What? No, it’s fine.”

It was more than fine. It was tangy tomato and fresh garlic and hot pepper and gooey cheese, and better than leftover pasta from the corner pizza place had any right to be. It tasted like actual *food*, which already put it head and shoulders above what he’d been eating for the last several months. But it wasn’t just that. Takeout from Giuseppi’s was a tradition for Simon and his mother—after his father died and his sister went away to school, after it was just the two of them knocking around an apartment that felt cavernous with just the two of them left in it, they’d lost the habit of having daily meals

with each other. It was easier to just grab food whenever they thought of it, on the way in or out of the apartment, his mother heating up TV dinners after work, Simon picking up some pho or a sandwich on his way to band practice. It was, maybe, easier not to face the empty chairs at the table every night. But they made it a rule to eat together at least one night each week, slurping down Giuseppi's spaghetti and drenching garlic knots in spicy sauce.

These cold leftovers tasted like home, like family, and Simon hated to think of his mother sitting in the empty apartment, week after week, eating them on her own.

Children are supposed to grow up and leave, he told himself. He wasn't doing anything wrong; he wasn't doing anything he wasn't meant to do.

But there was a part of him that wondered. Children were supposed to leave home, maybe. But not forever. Not like this.

“Your sister tried to wait up for you,” his mother said, “but apparently she’s been up for a week straight studying for exams. She was passed out on the couch by nine.”

“Maybe we should wake her up,” Simon suggested.

She shook her head. “Let the poor girl sleep. She’ll see you in the morning.”

He hadn’t *exactly* told his mother he was staying over. But he had let her believe it, which he supposed amounted to about the same thing: yet another lie.

She settled into the chair beside him and stabbed a ziti onto her fork. “Don’t tell my diet,” she stage-whispered, then popped it into her mouth.

"Mom, the reason I'm here . . . I wanted to talk to you about something."

"That's funny, I've actually—I've been wanting to talk to you about something too."

"Oh? Great! Uh, you go first."

His mother sighed. "You remember Ellen Klein? Your Hebrew school teacher?"

"How could I forget?" Simon said wryly. Mrs. Klein had been the bane of his existence from second grade through fifth. Every Tuesday after school, they'd fought a silent war, all because, in an unfortunate playground incident, Simon had accidentally dislodged her wig and sent it flying into a pigeon's nest. She'd spent the next three years determined to ruin his life.

"You know she was just a nice old lady trying to get you to pay attention," his mother said now with a knowing smile.

"Nice old ladies don't throw your Pokémon cards in the trash," Simon pointed out.

"They do when you're trading them for kiddish wine at the back of the sanctuary," she said.

"I would never!"

"A mother always knows, Simon."

"Okay. Fine. But that was a very rare Mew. The only Pokémon that—"

"*Anyway*. Ellen Klein's daughter just got married to her girlfriend, a lovely woman, you'd like her—we all like her. But . . ."

Simon rolled his eyes. "But let me guess: Mrs. Klein is a raging homophobe."

"No, it's not that—the girlfriend's Catholic. Ellen had a fit, wouldn't go to the wedding, and now she's wearing mourning clothes and telling everyone that her daughter might as well be dead."

Simon opened his mouth to crow about how he'd been right all along, that Mrs. Klein was indeed a horrible shrew, but his mother held up a finger to stop him.

A mother, apparently, always knows.

"Yes, yes, it's horrible, but I'm not telling you so you can feel vindicated. I'm telling you . . ." She knitted her fingers together, looking suddenly nervous. "I had the strangest feeling when I heard the story, Simon, like I knew she would regret it—because *I* regretted it. Isn't that strange?" She let out a nervous little giggle, but there was no humor in it. "Feeling guilty for something you haven't even done? I can't say why, Simon, but I feel like I've betrayed you in some terrible way I can't remember."

"Of course you haven't, Mom. That's ridiculous."

"Of course it's ridiculous. I would *never*. A parent should have unconditional love for her child." Her eyes were glossy with unshed tears. "You know that's how I love you, Simon, don't you? Unconditionally?"

"Of course I know that."

He said it like he meant it—he did mean it. But, of course, it was just another lie. Because in that other life, the one that had been wiped clean from both their minds, she *had* betrayed him. He'd told her the truth, that he'd been turned into a vampire, and she had thrown him out of the house. She had told him he was no longer her son. That her son was dead. She'd proven, to both of them, the conditions of her love.

He couldn't remember it happening, but on some level deeper than conscious thought, he remembered the feeling of

it—the pain, the betrayal, the loss. It had never occurred to him she might remember, too.

"This is silly." She brushed away a tear, gave herself a little shake. "I don't know why I'm getting so emotional over this. I just . . . I just had this *feeling* that I needed to tell you that, and then you showed up here like it was meant to be, and . . ."

"Mom." Simon pulled his mother out of her chair and into a tight hug. She seemed so small to him suddenly, and he thought how hard she'd worked all these years to protect him, and how he would do anything to protect her in return. He was a different person now than he'd been two years before, a different Simon than the one who'd confessed to his mother and been turned out of the house—maybe his mother was different too.

Maybe making that choice once was enough to ensure she would never make it again; maybe it was time to stop holding it against her, this betrayal neither of them could quite remember. “Mom, I know. And I love you, too.”

She pulled away then, just far enough to meet his gaze. “What about you? What did you have to tell me?”

Oh, nothing much, I’m just joining a supernatural cult of demon-fighters who’ve forbidden me to ever see you again, love ya.

It didn’t have quite the right ring to it.

“I’ll tell you in the morning,” he said. “You look exhausted.”

She smiled, exhaustion painted across her face. “In the morning,” she echoed. “Welcome home, Simon.”

"Thanks, Mom," he said, and miraculously managed to do so without getting choked up. He waited for her to disappear behind her bedroom door, waited for her soft snores to begin. Then he scribbled a note apologizing for having to leave so abruptly. Without saying good-bye.

His sister snored, too—though, like their mother, she denied it. He could, if he stayed very silent, hear her all the way in the kitchen. He could wake her up, if he wanted, and he could probably even tell her the truth, or some version of it. Rebecca could be trusted—not just to keep his secrets, but to understand them. He could do what he'd come here to do, what he was *supposed* to do, say good-bye to her and tell her to love and protect their mother enough for both of them.

"No." He'd spoken softly, but the word seemed to echo in the empty kitchen.

The Law was hard, but it was also riven with loopholes. Hadn't Clary taught him that? There were Shadowhunters who found a way to keep their mundane loved ones in their lives—Simon himself was proof. Maybe that was why Clary had brought him here tonight—not to say good-bye, but to realize that he couldn't. Wouldn't.

This isn't forever, Simon promised his mother and sister as he slipped out the door. He promised himself it wasn't cowardly, leaving without saying anything. It was a silent promise—that this wasn't the end. That he'd find a way. And despite the fact that there was no one to appreciate his flawless Schwarzenegger accent, he swore his oath aloud: "I'll be back."

* * *

Clary had said to give her a call when he was ready to head back to the Academy, but he wasn't ready yet. It was strange: In another day, there'd be nothing keeping him from returning to New York for good. After his Ascension, he'd be a Shadowhunter for real. No more school, no more training missions, no more long days and nights in Idris missing his morning coffee. He hadn't given much thought to what would happen next, but he knew he'd come home to the city and stay in the Institute, at least temporarily. There was no reason to feel so homesick for New York when he was *this close* to being back for good.

Except he wasn't quite sure who he'd be when he came back. When he Ascended. *If*

he Ascended, if nothing terrible happened when he took his drink from the Mortal Cup.

What would it mean to become a Shadowhunter, really? He'd be stronger and swifter, he knew that much. He'd be able to bear runes on his skin, see through glamours without a warlock's help. He knew plenty about what he'd be able to do—but he didn't know anything about how it would feel. About who he'd be when he was a Shadowhunter. It's not that he thought one drink from a magic cup would instantly turn him into an egomaniacal, preternaturally handsome, wildly reckless snob like . . . well, like almost all the Shadowhunters he knew and loved. Nor did he expect that turning into a Shadowhunter would make him automatically disdain D&D, *Star Trek*, and all technology and pop culture invented after the

nineteenth century. But who could know for sure?

And it wasn't just the confusing transformation from human to angel-warrior. He'd been assured that, in all likelihood, if he survived Ascension, he would get back all his memories. All those memories of the original Simon, the "real" Simon, the one he'd worked so hard to persuade people would be gone forever, would come flooding back into his brain. He supposed this should make him happy, but Simon found he felt rather territorial of his brain as it was now. What if that Simon—the Simon who'd saved the world, the Simon whom Isabelle had first fallen in love with—didn't much like this Simon that he'd become? What if he drank from the Cup and lost himself all over again?

It gave him a headache, thinking of himself as so many different people.

He wanted one last night in the city as just this one: Simon Lewis, myopic, manga-loving mundane.

Also, he still wanted some of those soup dumplings.

Simon wandered down Flatbush, soaking in the familiar noises of New York at night, sirens and construction drills and road-rage honking, along with the slightly less familiar sounds of glamoured faerie hounds barking at the pigeons. He crossed the Manhattan Bridge, metal rattling beneath his feet as the subway roared past, the lights of the Financial District glittering through the fog. Even before he'd known anything about demons and Downworlders, Simon thought, he had always known New York was full of magic.

Maybe that was why it had been so easy for him to accept the truth about the Shadow World: In his city, anything was possible.

Conveniently, the bridge dumped him off in the heart of Chinatown. As he popped into his favorite hole-in-the-wall and scarfed a to-go order of dumplings, Simon's mind strayed to Isabelle, wondering if she was close by, slashing evildoers with her electrum whip. It boggled his mind—if you thought about it, he was basically dating a superhero.

Of course, the thing about dating a superhero was that you couldn't exactly ask them to take a break from saving the world just because you were in the mood for a last-minute date. So Simon kept walking, soaking in the rhythm of the midnight city, letting his mind wander as aimlessly as his feet. At least, he thought he was wandering aimlessly, until he

found himself on a familiar block of Avenue D, passing a bodega where the milk was always sour but the guy behind the counter would give you free coffee with your morning doughnut, if you knew enough to ask.

Wait, how did I know that? Simon thought. The answer came to him on the heels of the question. He knew that because, in some other forgotten life, he had lived here. He and Jordan Kyle had shared an apartment in the crumbling redbrick building on the corner. A vampire and a werewolf living together—it sounded like the beginning of a bad joke, but the only bad joke was that Simon had practically forgotten it ever happened.

And Jordan was dead.

It hit him now almost as hard as it had when he first heard: Jordan was dead. And

not just Jordan. Raphael was dead. Isabelle's brother Max, dead. Clary's brother Sebastian, dead. Julie's sister. Beatriz's grandfather and father and brother, Julian Blackthorn's father, Emma Carstairs's parents—all of them dead, and those were only the ones Simon had been told about. How many other people he had cared about, or people the people he loved had cared about, had been lost to one Shadowhunter war or another? He was still a teenager—he wasn't supposed to know this many people who had died.

And me, he thought suddenly. *Don't forget that one.*

Because it was true, wasn't it? Before life as a vampire, there'd been death. Cold and bloodless and underground.

Then, later, there'd been the forgetting, and that was a kind of death too.

Simon wasn't even a Shadowhunter yet, and already, this life had taken so much from him.

"Simon. I thought you'd be here."

Simon turned around and was reminded that for all the losses, there'd also been some very significant gains. "Isabelle," he breathed, and then, for quite a while, his lips were too occupied to speak.

* * *

They went back to Magnus and Alec's apartment. The couple had taken their new baby on vacation to Bali, which meant Simon and Isabelle could have the place to themselves.

"You sure it's okay for us to be here?" Simon asked, looking nervously around the apartment. The last time he'd seen it, the decorating ethos had been part–Studio 54,

part-bordello: lots of disco balls, velvet curtains, and some appallingly placed mirrors. Now the living room looked like something puked up by a Babies“R”Us—blankets and diapers and mobiles and stuffed bunnies everywhere you looked.

He still couldn’t believe *Magnus Bane* was someone’s dad.

“I’m sure,” Isabelle said, stripping off her dress in one smooth motion to reveal the unending stretches of smooth, pale skin that lay beneath. “But if you want to leave . . .”

“No,” Simon said, struggling for enough breath to speak. “Definitely. No. Here’s good. Very good.”

“Well, then.” Isabelle swept a family of stuffed kittens off the couch, then stretched across like a very satisfied and very

dangerous cat. She looked pointedly at Simon's shirt, which was still on his body.

"Well. Then." Simon stood above her, unsure what to do next.

"Simon."

"Yes?"

"I'm looking pointedly at your shirt."

"Uh-huh."

"Which is still on your body."

"Oh. Right." He took care of that. Dropped down beside her on the couch.

"Simon."

"Yes? Oh. Right." Simon leaned toward her and pulled her close for a kiss, which she indulged for about thirty seconds before extricating herself.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"You tell me," she said. "I, your incredibly sexy girlfriend that you never get to see, am

prostrating myself before you half-naked, and you seem like you'd rather be watching a baseball game."

"I hate baseball."

"Exactly." Isabelle sat up—though, mercifully, she didn't put any clothes back on. Not yet. "You know you can talk to me about anything, right?"

Simon nodded.

"So if, hypothetically, you were feeling a little nervous about this whole Ascension thing tomorrow, and wondering whether you still wanted to go through with it, you could talk to me about that."

"Hypothetically," Simon said.

"Just picking a topic at random," Isabelle said. "We could also talk about *Avatar: The Last Airplane*, if you want."

"It's the Air*bender*," Simon said, suppressing a grin, "and I love you even if you are nerd-clueless."

"And I love you, even if you are a mundane," she said. "Even if you stay a mundane. You know that, right?"

"I . . ." It was easy for her to say, and he thought she probably even meant it. But that didn't make it true. "You think you would? *Really?*"

Isabelle let out her breath in an irritated puff. "Simon Lewis, are you forgetting that you were a mundane when I started dating you? A rather scrawny mundane with terrible fashion sense, I should point out. And then you were a *vampire*, and I still dated you. Then you were a mundane again, but this time with freaking amnesia. And still, inexplicably, I fell in love with you all over

again. What could possibly make you think I have any standards left when it comes to you?”

“Uh, thank you, I think?”

“?Thank you’ is the correct response. And also ‘I love you, too, Isabelle, and I would love you even if you lost your memory or grew a mustache or something.’”

“Well, obviously.” Simon tugged at her chin. “Though I’d draw the line at a beard.”

“Goes without saying.” Then she looked serious again. “You do believe me, right? You can’t be doing this for me.”

“I’m not doing it for you,” Simon said, and that was true. He may have gone to the Academy, in part, because of Isabelle—but he’d stayed for himself. When he Ascended, it wouldn’t be because he needed to prove something to her. “But . . . if I did back out,

which I would never do, but if I did, wouldn't that make me a coward? You'd date a mundane, maybe. But I know you, Izzy. You couldn't date a coward."

"And you, Simon Lewis, couldn't *be* a coward. Not if you tried. It's not cowardly to make a choice about what you want your life to be. Choosing what's right for you, maybe that's the bravest thing you can do. If you choose to be a Shadowhunter, I will love you for it. But if you choose to stay a mundane, I'll love you for that, too."

"What if I just choose not to drink from the Mortal Cup because I'm afraid it will kill me?" Simon asked. It was a relief to finally say it out loud. "What if it had nothing to do with how I want to spend the rest of my life? What if it's just being scared?"

"Well, then, you're an idiot. Because the Mortal Cup could never hurt you. It will know what I do, which is that you'd make an amazing Shadowhunter. The blood of the Angel could *never* hurt you," she said, intensity blazing in her eyes. "It's not possible."

"You really believe that?"

"I really do."

"So the fact that we're here, and you're, you know—"

"Partially disrobed and wondering why we're still making small talk?"

"—has nothing to do with the fact that you think this might be our last night together?"

This earned him another exasperated sigh. "Simon, do you know how many times I've been almost certain one of us wouldn't survive the next twenty-four hours?"

"Um, several?"

"Several," she confirmed. "And on not one of those occasions have we ever had any sort of desperate, angsty farewell sex."

"Wait—we haven't?"

Over the last several months, Simon and Isabelle had gotten very close. Closer, he thought, than they'd ever been before, not that he could quite remember. At least conversationally. As for the other kind of close—talking on the phone and writing each other letters wasn't exactly conducive to losing your virginity.

Then there was the excruciating fact that Simon wasn't certain he still had a virginity to lose.

All this time he'd been too embarrassed to ask.

"Are you kidding me?" Isabelle asked.

Simon could feel his cheeks burning.

"You're *not* kidding me!"

"Please don't be mad," Simon said.

Isabelle laughed. "I'm not mad. If we'd had sex, and you'd *forgotten*—which, by the way, I assure you would not be possible, demon amnesia or no demon amnesia—maybe I'd be mad."

"So we really never . . . ?"

"We really never," Isabelle confirmed. "I know you don't remember, but things were a little hectic around here, what with the war and all the people trying to kill us and such. And like I said, I don't believe in 'farewell sex.'"

Simon felt like the whole night—possibly the most important night of his young and sorrowfully inexperienced life—was hanging in the balance, and he was very afraid of

saying the wrong thing. “So, uh, what kind of sex do you believe in?”

“I think it should be a beginning of something,” Isabelle said. “Like, say, hypothetically, if your entire life were going to change tomorrow, if it were going to be the first day of the rest of your life, I’d want to be a part of that.”

“The rest of my life.”

“Yep.”

“Hypothetically.”

“Hypothetically.” She took off his glasses then and kissed him hard on the lips, then very softly on the neck. Exactly where a vampire would sink its fangs in, some part of him thought. Most of him, though, was thinking, *This is actually going to happen*.

This is going to happen tonight.

"Also, most of all, I believe in doing it because I want to do it," Isabelle said plainly. "Just like anything else. And I want to. Assuming you do."

"You have no idea how much," Simon said honestly, and thanked God that Shadowhunting blood didn't bestow telepathy. "I should just warn you, I don't, I mean, I haven't, I mean, this would be the first time I, so—"

"You'll be a natural." She kissed his neck again, then his throat. Then his chest. "I promise."

Simon thought about all the opportunities here for humiliation, how he had absolutely no idea what he was doing, and how usually when he had no idea what he was doing, he screwed things up. Riding a horse, wielding a sword, leaping from a tree—all these things

people kept saying would come naturally to him usually came with bumps, bruises, and, more than once, a face full of manure.

But he had tried none of those things with Isabelle by his side. Or in his arms.

As it turned out, that made all the difference.

* * *

“Good morning!” Simon sang, stepping out of the Portal and into his bedroom at the Academy—just in time to catch Julie slipping out the door.

“Er, good morning,” George mumbled, tucked beneath the covers. “Wasn’t sure you’d be back.”

“Did I just see—?”

"A gentleman doesn't kiss and tell." George grinned. "Speaking of which, should I ask where you've been all night?"

"You should not," Simon said firmly. As he crossed the room to his closet to find something clean to wear, he tried his best to keep a silly, moony, heartsick smile off his face.

"You're *skipping*," George said accusingly.

"Am not."

"And you were *humming*," George added.

"I most definitely was not."

"Would this be a good time to tell you that Jon Cartwright the Thirty-Fifth seems to have done his business in your T-shirt drawer?"

But this morning nothing could dampen Simon's mood. Not when he could still feel the ghost of Isabelle's touch. His skin buzzed

with it. His lips felt swollen. His heart felt swollen. “I can always get new T-shirts,” Simon said cheerfully. He thought that from this point forward, he might say everything cheerfully.

“I think this place has officially driven you round the bend.” George sighed then, sounding a bit heartsick himself. “You know, I’m really going to miss it here.”

“You’re not going to cry again, are you? I think there may be another sentient slime mold growing in the back of my sock drawer, if you want to get really choked up.”

“Does one wear socks to get transformed into a half-angel superhuman fighting machine?” George mused.

“Not with sandals,” Simon said promptly. He hadn’t dated Isabelle all these months

without learning something about proper footwear. “Never with sandals.”

They got dressed for the ceremony—choosing, after some deliberation, their most Simon-like and George-like outfits. Which meant, for George, jeans and a rugby shirt; for Simon, a faded tee that he’d had made back when the band was called Guinea Pig Death Posse. (This, fortunately, had been lying on the floor for a week, so was rat crap free.) Then, without much talking, they started packing up their belongings. The Academy wasn’t much for big celebrations—probably a good thing, Simon mused, since at the last all-school party, one of the first-years had misfired his flaming crossbow and accidentally set the roof on fire. There would be no graduation ceremony, no mugging for cameras with proud parents, no

yearbook signings or tossing of mortarboard caps. Just the Ascension ritual, whatever that meant, and that would be it. The end of the Academy; the beginning of the rest of their lives.

"It's not like we'll never see each other again," George said suddenly, in a tone that suggested he'd been worrying about exactly that.

Simon was going back to New York, and George was going to the London Institute, where, they said, a Lovelace was always welcome. But what was an ocean of distance when you could Portal? Or at least e-mail?

"Of course not," Simon said.

"But it won't be the same," George pointed out.

"No, I guess it won't."

George busied himself with neatly tucking his socks into a suitcase compartment, which Simon found alarming, since it was the first time in two years George had done anything neatly. “You’re my best friend, you know,” George said without looking up. Then, quickly, as if to forestall argument, “Don’t worry, I know I’m not *your* best friend, Si. You’ve got Clary. And Isabelle. And your bandmate mate. I get it. I just thought you should know.”

On some level, Simon had already known this. He’d never bothered to think much about it—he didn’t think much about George, period, because that was the beauty of George. Simon never had to *think* about him, to puzzle out what he would do or how he would react. He was just steady, dependable George, always there, always full of cheer

and eager to spread it around. Now Simon did think about him, about how well George knew him, and vice versa—not just in the big ways: their dead-of-night fears about washing out of the Academy, Simon's hapless pining for Isabelle, George's even more hapless, if more halfhearted, pining for most girls who crossed his path. They knew each other in the little ways—that George was allergic to cashews, that Simon was allergic to Latin homework, that George had a paralyzing fear of large birds—and somehow, that seemed to matter even more. Over the past two years, they'd developed a roommate shorthand, almost a silent language. Not exactly like a *parabatai*, Simon thought, and not exactly like a best friend. But not something *less than*. Not something he ever wanted to leave behind for good.

“You’re right, George. I do have more than enough best friends.”

George’s face fell, so slightly that only someone who knew him as well as Simon would have noticed.

“But there’s something else I’ve never had,” Simon added. “At least until now.”

“What’s that?”

“A brother.” The word felt right. Not someone you chose—someone the fates assigned you, someone who, under any other circumstances, might never have given you a second look, nor you him. Someone you would die for and kill for without a second thought, because he was family. Judging from George’s radiant smile, the word sounded right to him, too.

“Are we going to have to hug now or something?” George said.

"I think that may be inescapable."

* * *

The Council Hall was intimidatingly beautiful, morning light streaming in through a window in its high domed ceiling. It reminded Simon of pictures he'd seen of the Pantheon, but this place felt more ancient than even ancient Rome. This felt timeless.

The Academy students huddled together in small clumps, all of them looking too nervous and distracted to do much more than comment blandly on the weather. (Which, as always in Idris, was perfect.) Marisol gave Simon a bright smile and a sharp nod when she saw him enter the chamber, as if to say, *I never doubted you . . . almost*.

Simon and George were the last to arrive, and shortly after they did, everyone took their places for the ceremony. The seven mundanes were arranged in alphabetical order in the front of the chamber. There were meant to be ten of them, but apparently Sunil wasn't the only one who'd reconsidered at the last moment. Leilana Jay, a very tall, very pale girl from Memphis, and Boris Kashkoff, an Eastern European with ropy muscles and ruddy cheeks, had both slipped away sometime in the night. No one spoke of them, not the teachers, not the students. It was like they never existed, Simon thought—and then imagined Sunil, Leilana, and Boris out there in the world somewhere, living alone with their knowledge of the Shadow World, aware of evil but without the will or ability to fight it.

There's more than one way to fight evil in this world, Simon thought, and it was Clary's voice in his head, and it was Isabelle's, and his mother's, and his own. *Don't do this because you think you have to. Do it because you want to.*

Only *if you want to.*

The Academy's Shadowhunter students—Simon never thought of them as the "elites" anymore, just as he no longer thought of himself and the other mundanes as the "dregs"—sat in the first two rows of the audience. The students weren't two tiers anymore; they were one body. One unit. Even Jon Cartwright looked proud of, and a little nervous for, the mundanes at the front of the chamber—and when Simon caught him locking eyes with Marisol and pressing two fingers to his lips and then his chest, it

seemed almost right. (Or, at least, not a total crime against nature, which was a start.) There were no family members in the audience—those mundanes with living relatives (and there were depressingly few of them) had, of course, already severed ties. George's parents, who were Shadowhunters by blood if not by choice, could have attended, but he'd asked them not to. "Just in case I explode, mate," he'd confided to Simon. "Don't get me wrong, the Lovelaces are hardy folk, but I don't think they'd enjoy a faceful of liquefied George."

Nonetheless, the room was almost full. This was the first class of Academy mundanes to Ascend in decades, and more than a few Shadowhunters had wanted to see it for themselves. Most of them were strangers to Simon, but not all. Crowded in

behind the rows of students were Clary, Jace, and Isabelle, and Magnus and Alec—who had made a surprise return from Bali for the occasion—tag-teaming their squirming blue baby. All of them—even the baby—were intensely fixed on Simon, as if they could get him through the Ascension with sheer force of will.

This, Simon realized, was what Ascending meant. This was what being a Shadowhunter meant. Not just risking his life, not just carving runes and fighting demons and occasionally saving the world. Not just joining the Clave and agreeing to follow its draconian rules. It meant joining his *friends*. It meant being a part of something bigger than himself, something as wonderful as it was terrifying. Yes, his life was much less safe than it had been two years ago—but it was

also much more full. Like the Council Hall, it was crowded with all the people he loved, people who loved him.

You might almost call them a family.

* * *

And then it began.

One by one the mundanes were summoned to the dais, where their professors stood in a somber line, waiting to shake their hands and wish them luck.

One by one the mundanes approached the double circles traced on the dais and knelt in their center, surrounded by runes. Two Silent Brothers stood by just in case something went wrong. Each time a mundane took position, they bent over the runes and scratched in a new one to symbolize that student's name. Then they returned to the edges of the

dais again, statue-still in parchment robes, watching. Waiting.

Simon waited too as one by one his friends brought their lips to the Mortal Cup. As a blinding flare of blue light encompassed them, then faded away.

One by one.

Gen Almodovar. Thomas Daltrey. Marisol Garza.

Each student drank.

Each student survived.

The wait was interminable.

Except that when the Consul called his name, it felt much too soon.

Simon's feet were cement blocks. He forced himself toward the dais, one step at a time, his heartbeat pulsing like a subwoofer, making his whole body tremble. The professors shook his hand, even Delaney Scarsbury,

who murmured, “Always knew you had it in you, Lewis.” A blatant lie. Catarina Loss gripped his hand tightly and pulled him close, her brilliant white hair sweeping his shoulder as her lips brushed his ear. “Finish what you started, Daylighter. You have the power to change these people for the better. Don’t waste it.”

Like most things Catarina said to him, it didn’t quite make sense, but some part of him still understood it completely.

Simon knelt at the center of the circles and reminded himself to breathe.

The Consul stood over him, her traditional red robe brushing the floor. He kept his eyes on the runes, but he could sense Clary out there rooting for him; he could hear the echo of George’s laughter; he could feel the ghost of Izzy’s warm touch on his skin. At the

center of these circles, surrounded by runes, waiting for the blood of the divine to run through his veins and change him in some unfathomable way, Simon felt profoundly alone—and yet, at the same time, less alone than he'd ever been in his life.

His family was here, holding him up.

They would not let him fall.

"Do you swear, Simon Lewis, to forsake the mundane world and follow the path of the Shadowhunter?" Consul Penhallow asked. Simon had met the Consul before, when she'd delivered a lecture at the Academy, and again at her daughter's wedding to Helen Blackthorn. On both occasions she had seemed like your basic mom: brisk, efficient, nice enough, and none too surprising. But now she seemed fearsome and powerful, less an individual than the walking

repository of millennia of Shadowhunter tradition. “Will you take into yourself the blood of the Angel Raziel and honor that blood? Do you swear to serve the Clave, to follow the Law as set forth by the Covenant, and to obey the word of the Council? Will you defend that which is human and mortal, knowing that for your service, there will be no recompense and no thanks but honor?”

For Shadowhunters, swearing was a matter of life and death. If he made this promise, there was no turning back to the life he’d once had, to Simon Lewis, mundane nerd, aspiring rock star. There were no more options to consider. There was only his oath, and a lifetime’s effort to fulfill it.

Simon knew if he looked up he could meet Isabelle’s eyes, or Clary’s, and draw strength from them. He could silently ask them if this

was the right path, and they would reassure him.

But this choice couldn't belong to them. It had to be his, and his alone.

He closed his eyes.

"I swear." His voice did not shake.

"Can you be a shield for the weak, a light in the dark, a truth among falsehoods, a tower in the flood, an eye to see when all others are blind?"

Simon imagined all the history behind these words, all the Consuls before Jia Penhallow stretching back for decades and centuries, holding this same Cup before one mundane after another. So many mortals, volunteering to join the fight. They had always seemed so brave to Simon, risking their lives—sacrificing their futures to a greater cause—not because they'd been *born* into a

great battle between good and evil, but because they had *chosen* not to live on the sidelines, letting others fight for them.

It occurred to him, if they were brave for making the choice, maybe he was too.

But it didn't feel like bravery, not now.

It simply felt like taking the next step forward. That simple.

That inevitable.

"I can," Simon answered.

"And when you are dead, will you give up your body to the Nephilim to be burned, that your ashes may be used to build the City of Bones?"

Even the thought of this didn't frighten him. It seemed suddenly like an honor, that his body would live on in usefulness after death, that from this time forward, the

Shadowhunter world would have a claim on him, for eternity.

"I will," Simon said.

"Then drink."

Simon took the Cup into his hands. It was even heavier than it looked and curiously warm to the touch. Whatever was inside it didn't look much like blood, fortunately, but it didn't look like anything else he recognized either. If he didn't know better, Simon would have said the Cup was full of light. As he peered down at it, the strange liquid almost seemed to pulse with a soft glow, as if to say, *Go ahead, drink me*.

He couldn't remember the first time he'd seen the Mortal Cup—that was one of the memories still lost to him—but he knew the role it had played in his life, knew that if it weren't for the Cup, he and Clary might

never have discovered the existence of Shadowhunters in the first place. It had all begun with the Mortal Cup; it seemed fitting that it should all end here too.

Not *end*, Simon thought quickly. Hopefully not *end*.

It was said that the younger you were, the less likely drinking from the Cup was to kill you. Simon was, subjectively, nineteen, but he'd recently learned that by Shadowhunter rules, he was only eighteen. The months he'd spent as a vampire apparently didn't count. He could only hope the Cup understood that.

"Drink," the Consul repeated quietly, a note of humanity creeping into her voice.

Simon raised the Cup to his lips.

He drank.

* * *

He is tangled in Isabelle's arms, he is curtained by Isabelle's hair, he is touching Isabelle's body, he is lost in Isabelle, in her smell and her taste and the silk of her skin.

He is onstage, the music pounding, the floor shaking, the audience cheering, his heart beating beating beating in time with the drumbeat.

He is laughing with Clary, dancing with Clary, eating with Clary, running through the streets of Brooklyn with Clary, they are children together, they are one half of a whole, they hold hands and squeeze tight and pledge never to let go.

He is going cold, stiff, the life draining out of him, he is below, in the dark, clawing his way to the light, fingernails scraping dirt, mouth filled with dirt, eyes clogged with dirt, he is straining, reaching,

dragging himself up toward the sky, and when he reaches it, he opens his mouth wide but does not breathe, for he no longer needs to breathe, only to feed. And he is so very hungry.

He is sinking his teeth into the neck of an angel's child, he is drinking the light.

He is bearing a Mark, and it burns.

He is raising his face to meet the gaze of an angel, he is flayed by the fury of angel fire, and yet still, impudent and bloodless, he lives.

He is in a cage.

He is in hell.

He is bent over the broken body of a beautiful girl, he is praying to whatever god that will listen, please let her live, anything to let her live.

He is giving away that which is most precious to him, and he is doing so willingly, so that his friends will survive.

He is, again, with Isabelle, always with Isabelle, the holy flame of their love encompassing them both, and there is pain, and there is exquisite joy, and his veins burn with angel fire and he is the Simon he once was and the Simon he then became and the Simon he now will be, he endures and he is reborn, he is blood and flesh and a spark of the divine.

He is Nephilim.

* * *

Simon didn't see the flash of light he'd expected—he saw only the flood of memories, a tidal wave that threatened to drown him in the past. It wasn't simply a lifetime that

passed before his eyes; it was an eternity, all the versions of himself that ever could have been, that ever would be. And then it was over. His mind stilled. His soul quieted. And his memories—the parts of himself he'd feared were lost forever—had come home.

He'd spent two years trying to convince himself that it was okay if he never remembered, that he could live with piecing together the fragments of his past, relying on others to tell him about the person he'd once been. But it had never felt right. The empty hole in his memory was like a missing limb; he'd learned to compensate, but he'd never stopped feeling the absence or its pain.

Now, finally, he was whole again.

He was more than whole, he realized, as the Consul said proudly, "You are Nephilim now. I name you Simon Shadowhunter, of

the blood of Jonathan Shadowhunter, child of the Nephilim." It was a placeholder name, until he chose a new one for himself. Moments before, that had seemed unthinkable, but now it simply felt true. He was the same person he'd always been . . . and yet. He wasn't Simon Lewis anymore. He was someone new.

"Arise."

He felt . . . he didn't know how he felt, except stunned. Filled with joy and confusion and what felt like a flickering light, growing brighter by the second.

He felt strong.

He felt ready.

He felt like his abs were still pretty much only a two-pack, but he supposed even a magic cup could get you only so far.

The Consul cleared her throat. “Arise,” she said again. Then she lowered her voice to a whisper. “That means you stand up and give someone else a turn.”

Simon was still trying to shake off his joyous daze as he made his way back to the others. George was next, and as they passed each other, he gave Simon a surreptitious high five.

Simon wondered what George would see inside the light, if it would be as wondrous. He wondered whether, after the ceremony was over, they would compare notes—or if this was the kind of thing you were supposed to keep to yourself. He supposed there was probably some kind of Shadowhunter protocol to follow—the Shadowhunters had a protocol for everything.

We, he corrected himself wryly. *We have a protocol for everything*.

This would take some getting used to.

George was on his knees inside the circles, the Mortal Cup in his hands. It was strange, being a Shadowhunter while George was still a mundane, as if there was now an invisible divide between them. *This is the farthest apart we'll ever be,* Simon thought, and silently urged his roommate to hurry up and drink.

The Consul said the traditional words. George swore his oath of loyalty to the Shadowhunters without hesitation, drew in a deep breath, then jauntily raised the Mortal Cup as if giving a toast. *"Slàinte!"* he shouted, and as his friends broke into indulgent laughter, he took a slug.

Simon was still laughing when the screaming began.

The room fell dead silent, but inside Simon's mind, there was a siren of pain. An inhuman, unearthly scream.

George's scream.

On the dais, George and the Consul were engulfed in an impossible flash of blinding darkness. When it faded away, the Consul was on her feet, the Silent Brothers already by her side, all of them peering down at something horrible, something with the shape of a person, but not its face and not its skin. Something with black veins bulging through cracking flesh, something with the Mortal Cup still clenched in its rigid fist, some withered, writhing, crumbling creature with George's hair and George's sneakers, but in place of George's smile, a tortured,

toothless rictus leaking something too black to be blood. *Not George,* Simon thought furiously as the thing stopped jerking and trembling and fell still. And somehow, in Simon's head, George screamed and screamed.

The chamber was a storm of motion—responsible adults hustling students out of the room, gasps and cries and shrieks—but Simon barely registered any of it. He was moving forward, toward the thing that couldn't be George, pressing toward the dais with Shadowhunter strength and Shadowhunter speed. Simon was going to save his roommate, because he was a Shadowhunter now, and that's what Shadowhunters do.

He didn't notice Catarina Loss come up behind him, not until her hands were on his shoulders, her grip light enough that he

should have been able to break free—but he couldn't move.

"Let go of me!" Simon raged. The Silent Brothers were kneeling by the thing now, the body, but they weren't *doing* anything for it. They weren't helping. They were just staring fixedly at the spiderweb of inky veins spreading across flesh. "I have to help him!"

"No." Catarina's hand feathered across his forehead and the screaming in his mind fell silent. She was still holding on; he still couldn't move. He was a Shadowhunter, but she was a warlock. He was helpless. "It's too late."

Simon couldn't watch the black veins eat up skin or the hollow eyes melt into the skull. He focused on the sneakers. George's sneakers. One was untied, as it often was. Just that morning George had tripped over the laces,

and Simon had caught him from falling. “The last time you’ll save me,” George had said with another of his wistful sighs, and Simon had shot back, “Not likely.”

The veins were popping, with a sound like Rice Krispies in milk. The body was starting to ooze.

Now Simon was holding on to Catarina too. He held tight.

“What’s the point?” he said in despair, because what was the point of dying like this, not in battle, not for a good cause, not to save a fellow warrior or the world, but for *nothing*? And what was the point of living as a Shadowhunter, what was the point of skill and bravery and superhuman powers, when you couldn’t do anything but stand by and *watch*?

"Sometimes there is no point," Catarina said gently. "There only is what is."

What is, Simon thought, the wave of rage and frustration and horror nearly consuming him. He would not let himself be consumed; he would not waste this moment, if this was all he had. He'd spent two years making himself strong—he would be strong for George, now, in the only way left to him. He would bear witness.

Simon summoned his will. *What is*.

He forced himself not to look away.

What is: George. Brave and kind and *good*. George, dead. George, gone.

And though he didn't know what the Law had to say about dying by the Mortal Cup, whether the Clave would consider George one of their own and give him Shadowhunter burial rights, he didn't care. He knew what

George was, what he was meant to be, and what he deserved.

"*Ave atque vale*, George Lovelace, child of Nephilim," he whispered. "Forever and ever, my brother, hail and farewell."

* * *

Simon grazed a finger over the small stone plaque, tracing the engraved letters: GEORGE LOVELACE.

"It's pretty, isn't it?" Isabelle said from behind him.

"Simple," Clary added. "He would have liked that, don't you think?"

Simon thought that George would have preferred to be interred in the City of Bones, like the Shadowhunter he was. (More to the point, he would have preferred not to be dead at all.) The Clave had refused him. He

died in the act of Ascension, which in their eyes marked him as unworthy. Simon was trying very hard not to be angry about this.

He spent a lot of time these days trying not to be angry.

“It was nice of the London Institute to offer a place for him, don’t you think?” Isabelle said. Simon could hear in her voice how hard she was trying, how worried she was for him.

They told me a Lovelace is always welcome at the London Institute, George had said when he heard about his placement.

After his death the Institute made good on their word.

There had been a funeral, which Simon had endured. There had been a variety of reunions, big and small, with his friends from the Academy, Simon and the others telling stories and trading memories and trying not

to think about that last day. Jon almost always cried.

Then there had been everything else: Life as a Shadowhunter, mercifully busy with training and experimenting with his newfound physical grace and energy, along with fighting off the occasional demon or rogue vampire. There had been long days with Clary, reveling in the fact that he could now remember every second of their friendship, preparing for their *parabatai* ceremony, which was only days away. There had been numerous training bouts with Jace, usually ending with Simon flat on his back while Jace stood over him, gloating about his superior skill, because that was Jace's way of showing affection. There had been evenings babysitting Magnus and Alec's son, snuggling the little blue boy to his chest and

singing him to sleep, and feeling, for a few precious minutes, almost at peace.

There had been Isabelle, who loved him, which made every day glow.

There had been so much to make life worth living, and so Simon had lived, and time had passed—and George was still dead.

He'd asked Clary to Portal him here, to London, for reasons he didn't quite understand. He'd said good-bye to George so many times now, but somehow none of it felt quite final—it didn't feel right.

"I'll take you there," Clary had said. "But I'm coming with you."

Isabelle had insisted too, and Simon was glad of it.

A soft breeze blew through the Institute's garden, rustling the leaves and carrying the faint scent of orchids. Simon thought that

George would be glad, at least, to spend eternity in a place where there was no threat of sheep.

Simon rose to his feet, flanked by Clary and Isabelle. Each of them slipped her hand into his, and they stood silently, bound together. Now that Simon had regained his past, he could remember all the times he'd almost lost one of them—as he could remember now, vividly, all the people he *had* lost. To battle, to murder, to sickness. Being a Shadowhunter, he knew, meant being on an intimate basis with death.

But then, so did being human.

Someday he would lose Clary and Isabelle, or they would lose him. Nothing could stop that. So what was the point? he'd asked Catarina, but he knew better than that. The point wasn't that you tried to live forever; the

point was that you *lived*, and did everything you could to live well. The point was the choices you made and the people you loved.

Simon gasped.

“Simon?” Clary said in alarm. “What is it?”

But Simon couldn’t speak; he could only gape at the gravestone, where the air was shimmering, and translucent light was shaping itself into two figures. One was a girl about his age; she had long blond hair, blue eyes, and the old-timey petticoats of a BBC duchess. The other was George, and he was smiling at Simon. The girl’s hand was on his shoulder, and there was something kind about the gesture, something warm and familiar.

“George,” Simon whispered. Then he blinked, and the figures were gone.

“Simon, *what* are you staring at?” Isabelle asked in the tight, irritated tone she used only when she was trying not to be afraid.

“Nothing.” What was he supposed to say? That he’d seen George’s ghost rise from the mist? That he’d seen not just George, which would have almost made sense, but some beautiful old-fashioned stranger? He knew Shadowhunters could see ghosts when those ghosts wanted to be seen, but he also knew that grieving people often saw what they wanted to see.

Simon didn’t know what to think. But he knew what he *wanted* to think.

He wanted a beautiful Shadowhunter spirit from the past, maybe even a long-dead Lovelace, to take George away with her, to wherever it was spirits went. He wanted to believe that George had been welcomed into

the arms of his ancestors, where some part of him would live on.

Not likely, Simon reminded himself. George was adopted, not a Lovelace by blood. And for Shadowhunters—presumably even the dead ones who haunted British gardens—everything came down to blood.

"Simon—" Isabelle pressed her lips to his cheek. "I know how much you . . . I know he was like your brother. I wish I could have known him better."

Clary squeezed his hand. "Me too."

Both of them, Simon was reminded, had also lost a brother.

And both of them cared about more than just bloodlines. Both understood that family could be a matter of choice—a matter of love. So did Alec and Magnus, who'd taken someone else's child into their home and

their hearts. So did the Lightwoods, who'd adopted Jace when he had no one else.

And so did Simon, who was now a Shadowhunter himself. Who could change what it meant to be a Shadowhunter just by making new choices. Better choices.

He understood now why he'd felt the need to come here, almost as if he'd been summoned. Not to say good-bye to George but to find a way to hold on to a piece of him.

"I think I know what I want my Shadowhunter name to be," he said.

"Simon Lovelace," Clary said, as always, knowing his mind as well as he did. "It has a certain ring to it."

Isabelle's lips quirked. "A sexy ring."

Simon laughed and blinked away a tear. For one blurry-eyed moment, he thought he saw George grinning through the mist again,

and then he was gone. George Lovelace was gone.

But Simon Lovelace was still here, and it was time to make that count.

“I’m ready,” he told Clary and Isabelle, the two wonders who had changed his life, the two warriors who would risk anything and everything for those they loved, the two girls who had become his heroes and his family. “Let’s go home.”

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Emma took her witchlight out of her pocket and lit it—and almost screamed out loud. Jules's shirt was soaked with blood and worse, the healing runes she'd drawn had vanished from his skin. They weren't working.

"Jules," she said. "I have to call the Silent Brothers. They can help you. I *have* to."

His eyes screwed shut with pain. "You can't," he said. "You know we can't call the Silent Brothers. They report directly to the Clave."

"So we'll lie to them. Say it was a routine demon patrol. I'm calling," she said, and reached for her phone.

"No!" Julian said, forcefully enough to stop her. "Silent Brothers know when you're

lying! They can see inside your head, Emma. They'll find out about the investigation. About Mark—"

"You're not going to bleed to death in the backseat of a car for Mark!"

"No," he said, looking at her. His eyes were eerily blue-green, the only bright color in the dark interior of the car. "You're going to fix me."

Emma could feel it when Jules was hurt, like a splinter lodged under her skin. The physical pain didn't bother her; it was the terror, the only terror worse than her fear of the ocean. The fear of Jules being hurt, of him dying. She would give up anything, sustain any wound, to prevent those things from happening.

“Okay,” she said. Her voice sounded dry and thin to her own ears. “Okay.” She took a deep breath. “Hang on.”

She unzipped her jacket, threw it aside. Shoved the console between the seats aside, put her witchlight on the floorboard. Then she reached for Jules. The next few seconds were a blur of Jules’s blood on her hands and his harsh breathing as she pulled him partly upright, wedging him against the back door. He didn’t make a sound as she moved him, but she could see him biting his lip, the blood on his mouth and chin, and she felt as if her bones were popping inside her skin.

“Your gear,” she said through gritted teeth. “I have to cut it off.”

He nodded, letting his head fall back. She drew a dagger from her belt, but the gear was

too tough for the blade. She said a silent prayer and reached back for Cortana.

Cortana went through the gear like a knife through melted butter. It fell away in pieces and Emma drew them free, then sliced down the front of his T-shirt and pulled it apart as if she were opening a jacket.

Emma had seen blood before, often, but this felt different. It was Julian's, and there seemed to be a lot of it. It was smeared up and down his chest and rib cage; she could see where the arrow had gone in and where the skin had torn where he'd yanked it out.

"Why did you pull the arrow out?" she demanded, pulling her sweater over her head. She had a tank top on under it. She patted his chest and side with the sweater, absorbing as much of the blood as she could.

Jules's breath was coming in hard pants. "Because when someone—shoots you with an arrow—" he gasped, "your immediate response is not—'Thanks for the arrow, I think I'll keep it for a while.'"

"Good to know your sense of humor is intact."

"Is it still bleeding?" Julian demanded. His eyes were shut.

She dabbed at the cut with her sweater. The blood had slowed, but the cut looked puffy and swollen. The rest of him, though—it had been a while since she'd seen him with his shirt off. There was more muscle than she remembered. Lean muscle pulled tight over his ribs, his stomach flat and lightly ridged. Cameron was much more muscular, but Julian's spare lines were as elegant as a greyhound's. "You're too skinny,"

she said. “Too much coffee, not enough pancakes.”

“I hope they put that on my tombstone.” He gasped as she shifted forward, and she realized abruptly that she was squarely in Julian’s lap, her knees around his hips. It was a bizarrely intimate position.

“I—am I hurting you?” she asked.

He swallowed visibly. “It’s fine. Try with the *iratze* again.”

“Fine,” she said. “Grab the panic bar.”

“The what?” He opened his eyes and peered at her.

“The plastic handle! Up there, above the window!” She pointed. “It’s for holding on to when the car is going around curves.”

“Are you sure? I always thought it was for hanging things on. Like dry cleaning.”

"Julian, *now is not the time to be pedantic*. Grab the bar or I swear—"

"All right!" He reached up, grabbed hold of it, and winced. "I'm ready."

She nodded and set Cortana aside, reaching for her stele. Maybe her previous *iratzes* had been too fast, too sloppy. She'd always focused on the physical aspects of Shadowhunting, not the more mental and artistic ones: seeing through glamours, drawing runes.

She set the tip of it to the skin of his shoulder and drew, carefully and slowly. She had to brace herself with her left hand against his shoulder. She tried to press as lightly as she could, but she could feel him tense under her fingers. The skin on his shoulder was smooth and hot under her touch, and she wanted to get closer to him,

to put her hand over the wound on his side and heal it with the sheer force of her will. To touch her lips to the lines of pain beside his eyes and—

Stop. She had finished the *iratze*. She sat back, her hand clamped around the stele. Julian sat up a little straighter, the ragged remnants of his shirt hanging off his shoulders. He took a deep breath, glancing down at himself—and the *iratze* faded back into his skin, like black ice melting, spreading, being absorbed by the sea.

He looked up at Emma. She could see her own reflection in his eyes: she looked wrecked, panicked, with blood on her neck and her white tank top. “It hurts less,” he said in a low voice.

The wound on his side pulsed again; blood slid down the side of his rib cage, staining his

leather belt and the waistband of his jeans. She put her hands on his bare skin, panic rising up inside her. His skin felt hot, too hot. Fever hot.

"I have to call," she whispered. "I don't care if the whole world comes down around us, Jules, the most important thing is that you *live*."

"Please," he said, desperation clear in his voice. "Whatever is happening, we'll fix it, because we're *parabatai*. We're forever. I said that to you once, do you remember?"

She nodded warily, hand on the phone.

"And the strength of a rune your *parabatai* gives you is special. Emma, you can do it. You can heal me. We're *parabatai* and that means the things we can do together are . . . extraordinary."

There was blood on her jeans now, blood on her hands and her tank top, and he was still bleeding, the wound still open, an incongruous tear in the smooth skin all around it.

“Try,” Jules said in a dry whisper. “For me, try?”

His voice went up on the question and in it she heard the voice of the boy he had been once, and she remembered him smaller, skinnier, younger, back pressed against one of the marble columns in the Hall of Accords in Alicante as his father advanced on him with his blade unsheathed.

And she remembered what Julian had done, then. Done to protect her, to protect all of them, because he always would do everything to protect them.

She took her hand off the phone and gripped the stele, so tightly she felt it dig into

her damp palm. “Look at me, Jules,” she said in a low voice, and he met her eyes with his. She placed the stele against his skin, and for a moment she held still, just breathing, breathing and remembering.

Julian. A presence in her life for as long as she could remember, splashing water at each other in the ocean, digging in the sand together, him putting his hand over hers and them marveling at the difference in the shape and length of their fingers. Julian singing, terribly and off-key, while he drove, his fingers in her hair carefully freeing a trapped leaf, his hands catching her in the training room when she fell, and fell, and fell. The first time after their *parabatai* ceremony when she’d smashed her hand into a wall in rage at not being able to get a sword maneuver right, and he’d come up to her,

taken her still-shaking body in his arms and said, “Emma, Emma, don’t hurt yourself. When you do, I feel it, too.”

Something in her chest seemed to split and crack; she marveled that it wasn’t audible. Energy raced along her veins, and the stele jerked in her hand before it seemed to move on its own, tracing the graceful outline of a healing rune across Julian’s chest. She heard him gasp, his eyes flying open. His hand slid down her back and he pressed her against him, his teeth gritted.

“Don’t *stop*,” he said.

Emma couldn’t have stopped if she’d wanted to. The stele seemed to be moving of its own accord; she was blinded with memories, a kaleidoscope of them, all of them Julian. Sun in her eyes and Julian asleep on the beach in an old T-shirt and her not wanting

to wake him, but he'd woken anyway when the sun went down and looked for her immediately, not smiling till his eyes found her and he knew she was there. Falling asleep talking and waking up with their hands interlocked; they'd been children in the dark together once but now they were something else, something intimate and powerful, something Emma felt she was touching only the very edge of as she finished the rune and the stele fell from her nerveless fingers.

"Oh," she said softly. The rune seemed lit from within by a soft glow.

About the Authors

Cassandra Clare is the author of the #1 *New York Times*, *USA TODAY*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Publishers Weekly* bestselling Mortal Instruments series and the Infernal Devices trilogy, and coauthor of the Bane Chronicles with Sarah Rees Brennan and Maureen Johnson. She also wrote *The Shadowhunter's Codex* with her husband, Joshua Lewis. Her books have more than 35 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.

Robin Wasserman's teen novels include the Seven Deadly Sins series, the Cold Awakening trilogy, *Hacking Harvard*, and *The Book of Blood and Shadow*. She is also the author of the middle grade series Chasing Yesterday. She lives in Brooklyn, New York. Visit her at RobinWasserman.com or follow her on Twitter at @RobinWasserman.

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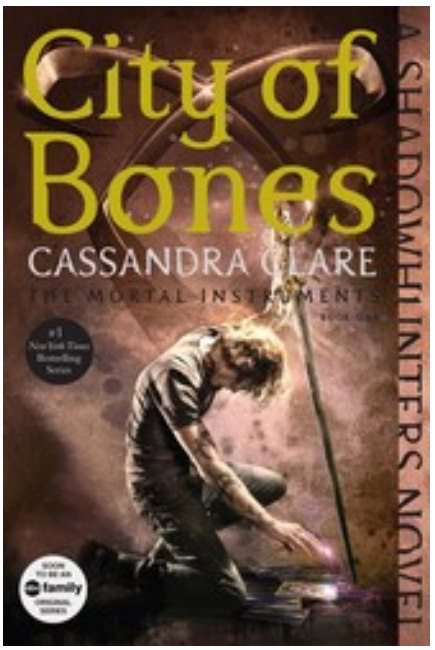

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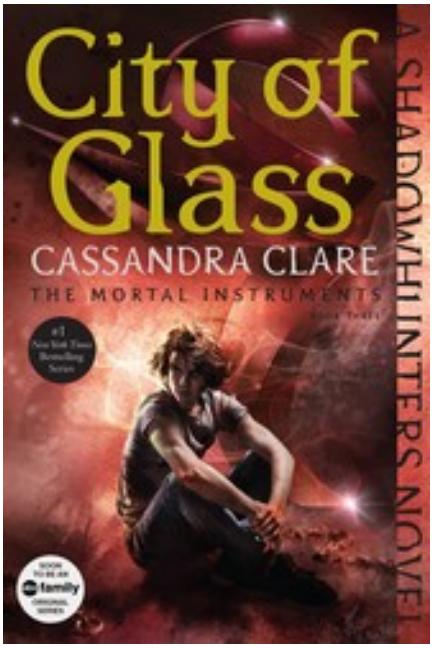

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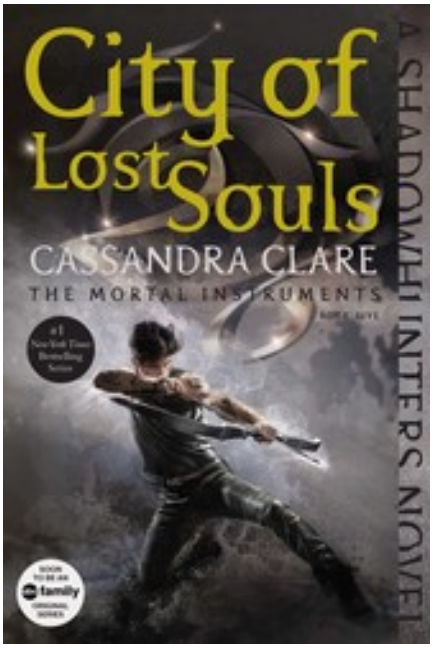

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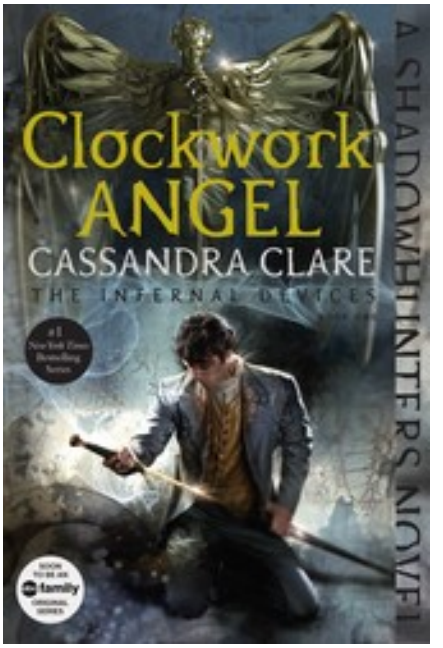

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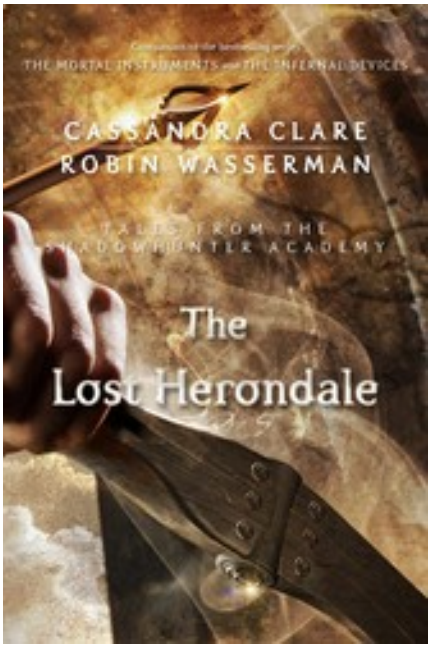

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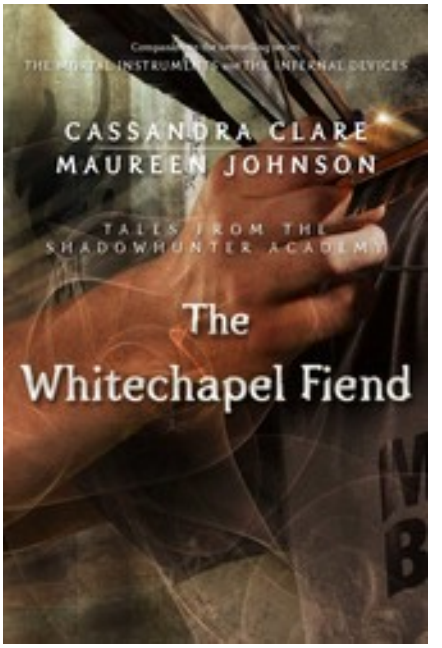

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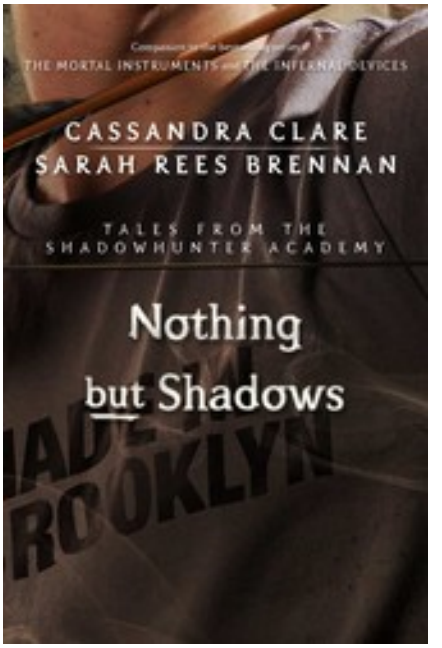

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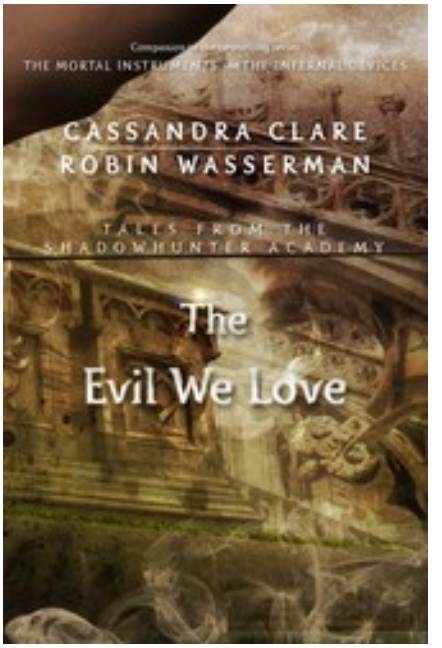

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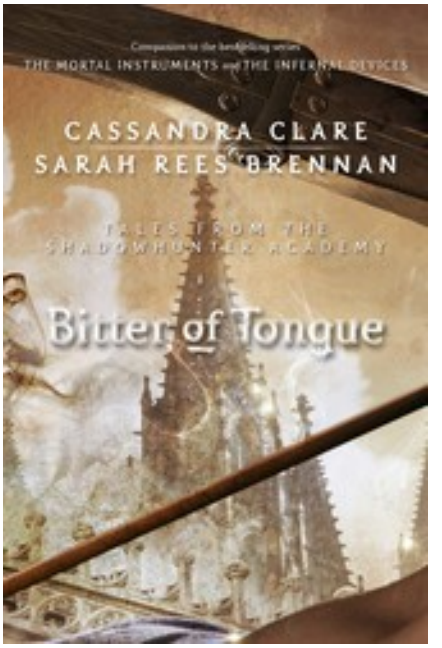

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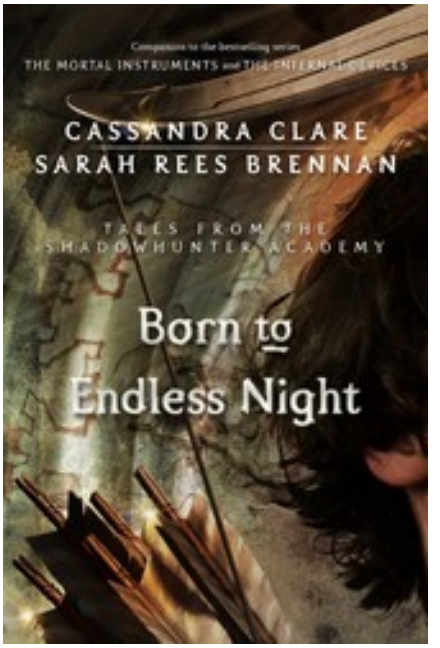

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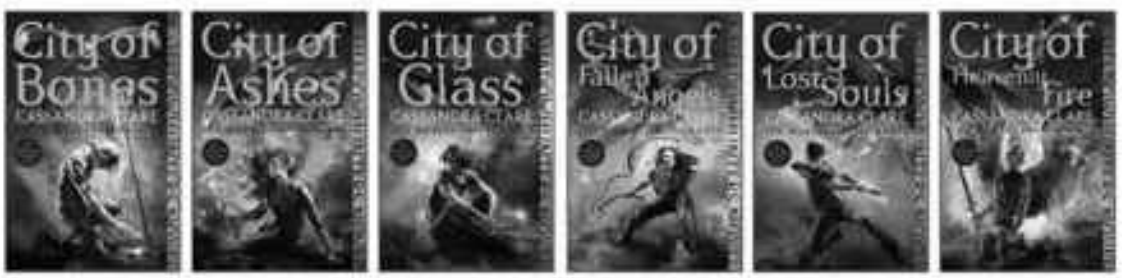

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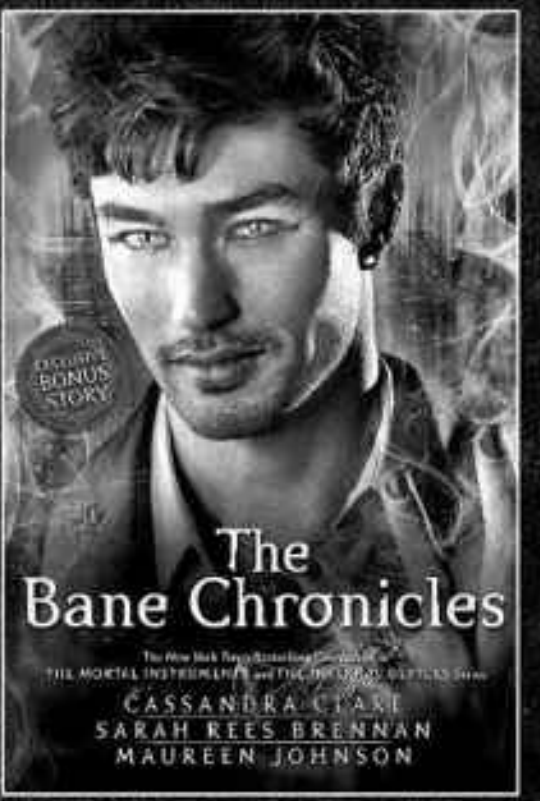

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