

To Sing the Tune Without the Words

Spoiler für City of Glass

Von Elster

*hope is the thing with feathers
that perches in the soul
and sings the tune without the words
and never stops -at all-*

(Emily Dickinson)

The institute was not a place Magnus particularly liked to visit. It was dark, gloomy and kind of goth at the best of days. The long unused corridors with their vacant rooms and their dim lightening gave off a sense of emptiness that pressed down on him as soon as he overstepped the threshold. A house that could never be filled with life. And it weren't exactly the best of days, too.

Magnus found Alec alone in the training room under the roof. He seemed absorbed by some sort of meditative exercise that involved slow motions and being shirtless. Magnus approved.

Two steps closer and he found himself thrown to the floor and straddled by the shadowhunter. Blue eyes blinked down at him with a hint of surprise. "Magnus," Alec stated and shifted to a less threatening position. "Sorry. Thought you were Jace or Izzy."

Magnus grinned. "So you didn't want to jump my bones?"

"They sneak," he explained with a solemn stare as he lifted of and sat down beside Magnus. "It's a... thing. For training."

Magnus sat up and watched him. He was never quite sure if flirtation even reached Alec. When he was like this, sober and distanced, smokescreen perfectly in place, you could only guess what was going on inside him. They were silent for a while, before Alec decided to speak or maybe he had needed the time to find the words.

"It's strange being back home," he said, staring at his hands. "Different. We're back and he is not."

Magnus laid a comforting hand on his arm and Alec paused and looked up at him for a moment, startled.

"There's still his room and all his stuff waiting for him and he's—" He stopped and

looked down at Magnus' hand. "You know, I was supposed to protect him. That's what older brothers are for."

"You thought he was safe," Magnus said.

Alec looked up with unforgiving blue eyes. "Yeah, I was stupid. Jace didn't trust him."

"It's not your fault."

The look in his eyes changed minutely. A fraction softer, sadder. "I know. Doesn't exactly make me feel any better."

Magnus couldn't think of anything to say to that and eventually he just nodded. "Want to get out of here? For a few hours? Do some adolescent stuff?"

Alec looked reluctant for a moment, then stood up. "Yeah." He offered a hand to help Magnus up, then let go and stepped back quickly. "I'll just change..." He sniffed. "Shower. Give me five minutes."

Magnus lifted an eyebrow. "Should I come after you then?"

Alec slowed on his way out of the training room and snorted as he turned around. "So not happening. Not everyone needs half an hour just to wash his hair."

"Not everyone has such fabulous hair," Magnus teased.

"No," Alec agreed with his strange sincerity and it was probably terribly vain, but Magnus loved him that bit more because of it.

They made their way down one of those corridors and down the stairs. "You were in a hurry to leave Idris?" Alec asked, his slender hand on the railing. Magnus had travelled back to New York four days ago, while the Lightwoods had only returned yesterday. The warlock shrugged. "Some got the idea to suggest me for that clave seat. Had to vanish before it spread."

"What, you don't want the fame?" Alec threw him an amused look.

"God no. It's all talk and politics. And in Idris. Brooklyn kind of grew on me and it has enough troublesome shadowhunters for my taste."

"So it's not because of me?"

"You kind of grew on me, too," Magnus said surprised.

Alec threw him a confused glance, then looked away quickly. "That's not what I meant. You vanishing."

"No. How did you get that idea?"

They had reached the right floor and Alec stopped. "I'm sorry. I said you could meet my parents, but it's really... I don't know, they don't need that now."

Magnus stared at him. "That's what you're angsty about?"

"No," Alec said testily. He met Magnus' eyes. "Or not the only thing," he allowed. "I have some things to worry about."

Magnus thought about kissing or hugging him, but he had the distinct feeling that would not be appreciated at the institute. He resolved to do it later. "It's okay. Bad timing," he said.

Alec nodded thankfully. "They saw us kiss, it's just... we don't have to deal with it now, right?"

It threw Magnus, when Alec allowed himself to show insecurity. He was so much younger than he acted. "Yeah, it's okay. Really", he reassured. "Just come out of here for a few hours and act your age."

"No ulterior motives?" Alec asked with one of his rare shy smiles.

Magnus smiled back. "Kids your age are supposed to make out a lot."

Alec didn't answer. It was peculiar. Magnus wondered if he was just slow at repartee or if he ignored flirting as a principal. They stopped in front of a door. "That's my room. Give me five minutes."

"Go on, I'll wait," Magnus said and watched Alec disappear into his room. What a strange and beautiful person.

He strolled down the corridor to the next room on the other side, because the door was open and Magnus was never one to withstand curiosity. It was quite obviously Max' room, with colourful books and comics on the shelves and the odd toy in between. Magnus leaned on the door frame and watched Maryse, who sat on the bed, one of the older, more battered books in her hands. He would have liked to say something consoling, but he had learned ages ago that there wasn't a thing like the right words. And anyway, shadowhunters didn't discuss their dead. He cleared his throat and she looked up.

"Magnus Bane."

"Yeah sorry, I kind of let myself in."

She shook her head. "It's okay." And then, a little hesitant: "You're welcome."

When you were the High Warlock of Brooklyn and older than every house you got into, being welcome was not necessarily something you bothered with. But it was nice. "Thank you", he said genuinely.

She looked at him for a long moment and Magnus was struck with how much she resembled her son, then she smiled the shortest of smiles. "I should have known when you refused to be paid for healing him. Never heard of a warlock doing anything pro bono."

"We are living in a material world", Magnus said nonchalantly. Then in a more serious tone: "But we do. Just not usually for shadowhunters, not in this century."

"And what makes you different? Or Alec?"

Magnus shrugged. "Things change."

They thought of the new clave, the new bond between downworlders and shadowhunters. So much hope, but so many years of mistrust to work through.

"I hope so", Maryse said. "Maybe they change enough for you two."

"You're not really happy with this", Magnus observed.

She looked at the book in her hands. "I just lost a child. I'm not losing another about something like this, but I'm worried."

"I get that."

"Really?" She looked up at him with that piercing glare that seemed to run in the family. "Do you have any children?"

Magnus remained silent for a while, then surrendered. "Not recently." He hadn't seen a child grow up for ages. Then there had been Clary, and look how that hadn't affected him at all. "You become that old and you learn not to set yourself up for that kind of heartbreak."

She gave him the first genuine smile he had seen of her, a sad and understanding, utterly motherly smile. "But for other kinds?"

Magnus looked down. Shiny black boots on a gloomy wooden floor. This house was so depressing. "I guess I'll never be old or wise enough for that", he said eventually.

"I guess", she agreed.

They watched each other and Magnus thought that he quite liked Maryse. She was harsh like frozen snow but honest and not unkind.

"You know, I have to kill you if you hurt him." She said it very matter-of-factly, without threat or gravity.

Magnus had enough experience with Alec to suspect that it was some kind of half serious joke. He was spared an answer by the boy himself, who was sneaky and right

behind him. "No one kills Magnus", he said in the same tone as his mother. "Mom, I'll go out."

Maryse gave them a short smile and Magnus followed Alec through the dimly lit corridor. He smelled of shampoo and wetness.

"You take the world's shortest showers", Magnus marvelled, "and is that your nice shirt? I feel so loved."

They stepped out of the institute and into the light of the setting sun. It was true. The not-outwashed one without holes. It was as close to fussing about his clothes as Alec would ever get.

"Your... feather-thing is very nice, too", he said awkwardly.

Magnus let out a delighted laugh. "It's a boa. You like it? I wasn't sure about the green, but it matches my eyes quite nicely."

"It does." It was endearing to watch him, when he was so completely out of his depth, but he seemed comfortable enough, as they walked down the street. Alec with his swift graceful stride and Magnus easily matching his pace with his long legs.

Magnus wondered if leaving the institute was as relieving for the shadowhunter as it was for him. Then again, warlocks perceived the world differently. And the institute was Alec's home, so he didn't know anything else.

Magnus was interrupted in his musings as they reached the corner and Alec stopped, unsure what way to go. "Where are we going?"

"Wherever you like", the warlock said with a wide hand gesture and a smile as if he wanted to give the whole Big Apple as a present to him. If Alec were more susceptible to presents, Magnus would. "What do you do for fun?"

Alec shrugged and put his hands into his pockets.

"Do you dance?" Magnus knew for a fact that Alec didn't. He hadn't moved near the dance floor at the celebration in Alicante, anyway.

But Alec shrugged again. "Never really tried."

"Oh, that's just sad. But you're up for it, aren't you? I know a nice club." He grabbed Alec's arm and went left. Alec let himself be dragged along willingly.

"Should I believe that?" he asked amused. "Just one club and then a nice one?"

"Please, I invented clubbing!" Magnus huffed and then lounged into a story about the 40ies and the Copacabana.

The club really was a nice club. In Magnus' books, anyway. The drinks were overpriced and the bouncers picky enough to guarantee breathing space even on a Saturday night, which it was not. The music was loud enough to drown out the conversations around you, but you didn't have to shout at each other, if you stood close. So yeah. Nice.

Nevertheless, Alec stood out among the scantily dressed and glittering party goers like Wednesday Adams in summer camp with his long sleeved black shirt and his ratty jeans. His position was strategically with his back to the wall and the exit in clear sight. He gave off a strong sensation of fight-or-flight and watched the movement on the dance floor like he expected a demon to emerge any second.

"Relax", Magnus advised as he stood beside him, close enough for their shoulders to brush, and gave him one of the drinks he was carrying.

Alec gave him a less than thankful, slightly panicked look and swallowed down half of his drink. "I'm okay."

"Okay", Magnus said with a smile and refrained from sounding too sceptic.

"I've been to clubs before."

"Okay."

"Just mostly for hunting", Alec admitted after a moment. "I was not required to dance."

"You don't have to. But it's easy, really."

The shadowhunter relaxed minutely and sipped his drink. "It looks complicated", he observed after a while.

"No, it's not", Magnus laughed. "Just random. It's not martial arts."

"That's kind of the problem", Alec said unsmiling. "It's all about avoiding excess motion, you know? Control. And this here is just..." he trailed off.

"... for fun", Magnus continued gravely.

Alec nodded unhappily, in his usual ignorance of sarcasm. "Yeah", he agreed.

"I like it when you say 'control'", Magnus grinned. "It makes dancing sound kinky."

"It had nothing to do with dancing", came the mumbled reply from behind Alec's drink.

"Don't rain on my fantasies!" Magnus smiled his sunniest smile, then took a last sip of his own cocktail before he let it vanish. "Come on, drink up! We have a dance floor to conquer!" He threw his boa over one shoulder in a perfect arc that was either down to magic or to a lifetime of being flamboyant. Sometimes it was hard to tell one from the other, even for Magnus himself.

Alec followed Magnus like a convict to the executioner. Well, at least he didn't look like he would reach for a knife any moment, which was a small achievement.

They found a spot among the writhing people, Magnus glittering, tall and like a fish in the sea, and Alec very still and obviously uncomfortable with being bumped into by the other dancers.

"And now?" he asked and Magnus couldn't help being amused by the almost petulant tone.

"Basically, you imagine them all to be naked", he confided and, as Alec glared at him, "or maybe that's just what I do. Move to the music, it's not rocket science."

To what length you had to go to get that kid to unwind! But eventually Alec did as he was told and after a few awkward minutes it looked almost like dancing, too. Magnus gave him his most radiant smile and Alec rolled his eyes, but couldn't help smiling back a little.

Two hours and five drinks later, Alec was the hottest thing on the dance floor. Damn, that boy could move! The crowd had cleared some space in the middle and many stood around and watched, occasionally applauding. Alec had lost his inhibitions together with his shirt and he had done a front aerial, which was more than impressive for someone who claimed he couldn't dance. And he had laughed. Magnus was quite happy with the progression of things. Especially, when a cheerful, half naked and slightly sweaty Alec threw himself at him and kissed him on the mouth.

"Your hair is *so shiny*!" Alec said with drunken earnestness.

"Aw, compliments get you anything." Magnus grinned down at him.

Alec grinned back, which was amazing and made Magnus hug him a bit tighter.

"Really? You promised making out."

"Aren't we?" To prove his point Magnus grabbed him behind the neck and kissed him soundly.

"We were dancing", Alec pointed out when the kiss ended.

"And you love it!"

"Maybe", he admitted with a self-conscious smile. "Can I come home with you?"

Magnus wasn't sure if it was politeness or real doubt. Or maybe Alec had discovered

his coy side together with his groove. "Of course", he answered lightly. "I'd be heartbroken if you didn't."

On the way to the exit he retrieved Alec's shirt out of thin air with a lazy move of his wrist and handed it over with a little bow.

Alec moaned and grabbed it unceremoniously. "I'm hot", he complained.

"I noticed", Magnus leered, as he watched him put it back on.

Outside blew a cool wind. "It's almost cold enough for coats", Magnus commented idly.

Alec gave him a bemused glance.

"I like coats", Magnus explained with a shrug. "I have some very spiffy ones."

They walked side by side down the street, their hands brushing occasionally. Alec smiled, but didn't comment and Magnus fell silent beside him. He felt truly light-hearted for the first time in decades. It was in the wind and the city lights, when you knew how to look.

"Thank you", said Alec after a while, calm and almost sober. "It was a nice evening."

Magnus looked at him and debated telling him that he worried too much, that he was too careful, too controlled. But then it was Alec, concerned, clear-headed and grown up too fast. He probably knew. So Magnus just smiled a warm smile and reached for his hand. "Anytime."

It was in the sound of car horns and the roaming werewolves in the streets, in the tingling sensation of the fading binding rune. It was magic, the world shifting, unfolding. Changing for a slightly brighter future.