

THE LAST HOURS

SHORT STORIES

CASSANDRA
CLARE

THE LAST HOURS SHORT STORIES

*Stories posted by Cassandra Clare in a
monthly basis on Tumblr*

A fan-made work

INDIA

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Dedication



To Cassie,

*Thank you so much for making such wonderful and awesome
characters and your amazing world full of magic and
acceptance.*

—a fan from India

James Herondale and The Devil Tavern



Flash Fiction – May 2019



London, 1900

James shouldn't have been out on his own so late. A Shadowhunter walking city streets after dark was essentially on patrol whether he intended to be or not—and James was only fourteen, had not come anywhere near finishing his training, was wearing no runes suitable for fighting, and had only a single seraph blade tucked into his belt.

Worse, he had no real reason to be out at all. Since Matthew, Christopher, and now Thomas had returned to London with their families, he'd found he had a surfeit of energy, a sense of something important about to happen, though he could not have said what. He lay in bed trying to sleep and his thoughts flitted like agitated birds. He thought of conversations he wanted to have with his friends, he thought of Grace, he thought of his upcoming parabatai ceremony, he thought about his visions of shadow lands and blasted trees. He went through complex knife-fighting maneuvers in his head. Finally he gave up, threw on street clothes, and went for a walk. His parents would not be happy if they found out he'd gone, but he felt sure he'd be fine, remaining only a few blocks from the Institute at most.

What was on his mind as he walked was his friends, and how frustrating it was to try to have something as simple as a private conversation among them. He hadn't appreciated, he thought wryly, how easy that had been at the Academy, and how annoying it would be in London. His own home was the London Institute, and strange Shadowhunters were forever coming and going there. Matthew's house, the Consul's residence, had the same problem. (Besides which, Charles was usually there, regarding them all with a beady eye.) Thomas's house was far away in Golder's Green. Christopher's house in Bedford Square was tricky too. Aunt Cecily had just had a little boy, and Uncle Gabriel was constantly bursting in to warn them not to wake the baby.

"What we need is a gentlemen's club," Matthew would say. But they were too young to join a gentlemen's club. "We'll start our own, then," Matthew would mutter.

Lost in thought, James did not notice he had wandered down a narrow alley with no one else around, and did not notice until it was far too late the three Kuri demons that came scuttling over the awning of a

chemist's and, on realizing James could see them, came straight at him. He dispatched one, wounded another, and chased the third off, but not before one of them got a fang into James's arm and scored a line from elbow to wrist.

James stood in the alley, clutching his arm and swearing. Excellently done, James old boy. It felt like a hot wire was being jammed into his arm. There was nothing for it but to return home and wake at least one family member. He couldn't get back in his own window; he'd have to come through the front door. And he'd have to clean the wound at the washstand upstairs, at which point he would inevitably face the music.

Or would he? The streets were quiet at this hour, but as he made his way down Fleet Street, he came upon a pub still raucous with activity. With some interest, he noticed it was glamoured to be hidden from mundanes. It was called the Devil Tavern, according to the sign, which featured a man pulling the nose of a capering demon.

When he entered, conversation briefly stopped so the pub's denizens could get a proper gander at the newcomer. James noted immediately that the place was full of Downworlders, which made sense. A gigantic gray-haired man, obviously a werewolf, was pulling a pint of foamy blood for an elderly-looking vampire at the bar, but stopped when James entered. There was a brief murmur at the appearance of a kid, obviously too young to be here by himself, in their pub, and then they noticed James's Marks and there was a second, more unfriendly murmur.

Possibly this had been a mistake, but James thought turning and fleeing was probably only asking for more trouble, so he gathered his courage and approached the hulking figure tending the bar.

"Hello," he began. "I'm terribly sorry, but I've sustained a bit of an injury, and I wondered if you might have a basin and some water I could make use of."

The werewolf peered down at him, still holding the pint of blood. After a moment he said, in a surprisingly mild voice, "We don't get many Shadowhunters in here, lad. We don't get many children, either. And it's vanishingly rare we get the combination of the two."

James stood his ground. "I don't want to make any trouble. I just need a place to deal with this wound and then I'll be on my way."

The werewolf took note of the angry red line along James's arm. "What got you?"

"Kuri demon," James said. When the bartender looked blank, he added, "Like a spider the size of a medicine ball. Little bigger, actually."

The bartender grunted. "Better you than me." He peered closer at James. "Wait, I recognize you. You're Will's boy, aren't you?"

James blinked in surprise. "You know my father?"

"Oi! Ernie!" the elderly vampire interjected, slapping his hand on the bar with a bang.

"What? Oh." The bartender, apparently named Ernie, put the pint of blood down in front of the vampire, who rolled his eyes and turned away to speak with his companions.

"Did know him," Ernie went on. "Haven't seen him for years, but he used to come in here all the time. Good man. Shadowhunters are bad for business, mostly, but your dad was a charmer, he was. Put everyone at ease. Had a real knack for it."

James wasn't sure how to respond. "I like him, personally," he ventured.

Ernie roared with laughter. "Of course you do," he said. "Look, there are some rooms upstairs, from way back when we let rooms. Long before my time, mind you. There's a washstand up there you can use. Don't have to go home and tell your father you got banged up. I know how it is."

James was not sure that Ernie did know how it was, but he thanked him and followed his directions up the stairs. He found an interconnected set of rooms with various bits of furniture, all covered in cloths yellowed with age.

He washed his wound in the washstand and set about Marking himself for healing and to dull the pain. Several of the rooms here were tiny and unwelcoming, but one of them had clearly been a parlour of some kind, with tall windows overlooking the street and a pleasantly tiled fireplace at one end. James could tell it could be a nice room if only it was cleaned up a bit and the right furniture put about.

He returned downstairs and thanked Ernie, who told him to send Will over to have a drink on him one of these days. James hesitated, wanting to ask Ernie about the room. It was brazen, and he'd already leaned on Ernie's hospitality more than was respectable, but now he was

in London, his friends were in London, he was in love, and everything was different. So he leaned over and said, “Look, Ernie, can I ask you something about that room upstairs? The big one?”

* * *

“Et voila,” James said, making a wide gesture at the Devil Tavern’s upstairs parlor. It was a few days later, and he’d gathered his friends for a mission he’d refused to explain. Matthew, Christopher, and Thomas had been dubious of James’s taking them through the ground floor of a Downworlder pub but followed gamely. Ernie gave James a nod of greeting as they passed the bar, and Thomas and Christopher exchanged a nonplussed look.

Now they stood in the larger room, which on a sunny afternoon turned out to get decent light falling in sheets through its tall, narrow windows. Dramatically James whipped a yellow cloth off of a large, comfortable-looking armchair and gestured to it.

Matthew figured it out first. “James, you old dog!” he said with a laugh. “You’ve made us a club.”

“What, now?” Christopher said politely.

“The owner says if we clean it up, we can use it whenever we want,” James said. “As long as we order drinks while we’re here.”

“I think,” said Thomas, “that that is a more than fair exchange.”

“We can store the things we don’t want in the bedroom behind,” James added. “There are some more chairs and things we might want to bring in here, too.”

“And everything will need a vigorous dusting,” Matthew added. “But marvelous. This is marvelous.”

A slow smile was growing on Thomas’s face, too. “I’ll bring some books in, I think. Books make a place homier. I daresay, I wasn’t sure at first about this business of relocating to London,” he added.

“Oh, we’ll be proper Londoners now, with a private room above a pub and a pint waiting whenever we need one.” Matthew rubbed his hands together. “James, it’s a pleasure to see you in your element. You were

always a bit at loose ends at the Academy, but here in the city you are our guide and our leader.”

James waited for Christopher and Thomas to protest at Matthew calling him their leader, but they only looked pleased.

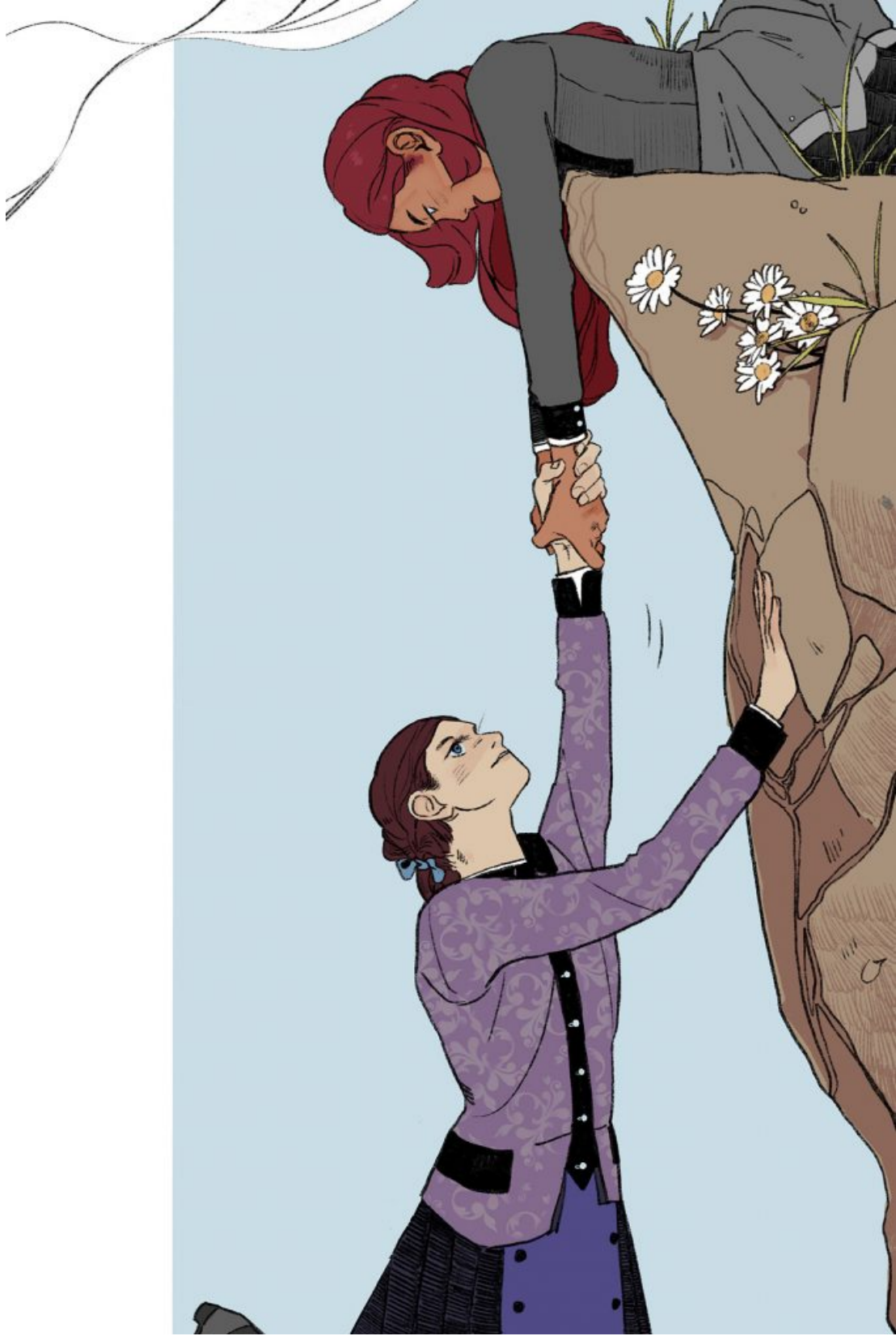
“I’m glad you’re here,” James said. “I’m glad we’re all here together.”

James felt something settling in him, something that had been restless since he’d first arrived at the Academy and now was, in surprise, finding itself at home.

Days Past: Lucie Herondale and Cordelia Carstairs



Flash Fiction – June 2019



Paris, 1897

Cordelia always thought of the year that her family lived outside Paris as the last year they were truly happy. The next year Alastair would go to Shadowhunter Academy and become an altogether harder and more impenetrable person. Her father's health declined again once they returned to England. And as if overnight, something in Cordelia would change, and her mother would begin to speak about Cordelia's future, and how she could secure it.

But in that year, living in their small but comfortable house in Fontainebleau, all was well. And she got to see Lucie and James more that year than any other time. She would have preferred to be let loose with them in the heart of Paris, of course, but she did enjoy showing Lucie around the arcaded houses of the town, the chateau of mundane royalty, the Grand Canal along which families sat and picnicked. Lucie was ten and looked younger, but she was rather a daredevil. So of course, Lucie wanted to explore the Fontainebleau Forest, and led the way there, chattering of how this had once been a much larger, ancient forest, a hunting ground for kings of old, and how she had once met a helpful changeling boy in Brocelind Forest.

"Mind, that's a secret," she said, darting a glance over her shoulder at Cordelia, and looking rather fey herself. "Never tell."

Cordelia agreed, pleased to have a secret with Lucie. They roamed across a star-like crossroads into lanes of beech trees and service trees. The forest was known for its massive boulders in strange shapes—this one like an elephant, this one with a nubby surface like a crocodile, this one like the head of an old man with a large nose. Cordelia took Lucie to see some of her favorites, to scramble to the tops, to look down from the edges of cliffs into gorges below.

Lucie ran along the top of the verdant cliffs with abandon, ankle deep in daisies with her hair flying in the wind. She reached over the edge to pluck a wildflower, the delicate violet and pink cup of its petals startling against the dark gray rock. She tucked it behind one ear, and bounded away again, Cordelia running to catch up.

They were careful; they were Shadowhunters; but they were still children who could easily set a foot wrong, and eventually, Lucie did.

Laughing at something Cordelia had said, she stepped back into open air and, overbalancing, began to tumble from the edge of a high cliff. Cordelia had time to see Lucie's smile change to abrupt horror before she lunged toward her friend, catching the skirt of her dress. She felt the material rip in her hands, but it gave Lucie the time to twist about and get her arm onto flat ground, and gave Cordelia the time to grab Lucie around the wrist, and hold fast for dear life.

Their eyes met. "It's all right," Lucie said slowly. "I've got my foot on a —"

With a crumbling noise, whatever Lucie's foot was on came free and Lucie jerked back, bouncing roughly against the ground. Cordelia was lying on her belly on the broken earth, hanging part-way off the cliff, her hand around Lucie's wrist. Lucie turned her arm with great care, eyes locked on Cordelia, and grasped Cordelia's wrist as well. They were stable, for the moment.

But not yet safe. Cordelia made to pull Lucie up, and the earth buckled beneath her. Lucie gave a yelp; her free hand pressed against the bare rock face to steady herself. She breathed very loud and very hard.

Cordelia commanded her voice to be steady. "Don't move," she said. "Someone will come for us. I shall not let you fall."

A little scared gasp broke from Lucie's lips. After an instant, Cordelia realized it was a laugh.

"Oh," Lucie replied, "I am only fretting about how we shall pass the time until then."

Cordelia had always thought Lucie must weigh nothing, but with so much of her weight in Cordelia's hands, Cordelia was suddenly vividly aware of how much there was to lose, how critically important it was to hold on. The blue sky seemed to tip dizzily around and under them, blueness attempting to swallow Lucie up. Their breathing was thunder in Cordelia's ears.

And there they waited. Cordelia wanted to call for help, but she dared not, afraid that diverting any energy to shout would weaken her grip. Lucie had no such qualms, and called for help a few times. There was no answer. The forest was silent, save for the wind rustling the trees above them.

Lucie and Cordelia looked at each other in dismay.

“You are always writing stories,” said Cordelia, after a long moment. “Could you tell me one?”

“I haven’t told my stories to anyone outside my family,” Lucie said. She sounded shy, and Cordelia opened her mouth to say that was quite all right, that she understood perfectly, when Lucie went on. “Since it is you, though, Cordelia, I think I could.”

Lucie related a rousing tale of a pirate with eyes green as the sea. Cordelia became so engaged with the story, she was even able to laugh a little. When she did, Lucie’s eyes lit up.

The story had to end. Silence followed. There was a breath of cold in the warm summer air, telling of the evening and the coming dark. The muscles in Cordelia’s arms were burning.

“Cordelia, are you not growing tired?” Lucie asked in a small voice.

“I am not in the least tired,” Cordelia answered stoutly. “I can hold on forever.”

Neither of them could later remember how long they waited. It felt like hours. Cordelia had time to realize that this was now her entire life, that the sensation of suffering and terror would simply go on and on without end, and she had begun to think of how should reconcile herself to this new truth when, all at once, she was enveloped in new warmth, and new strength. She squinted upward to see someone—James, it was James—grab hold of Lucie’s arm along with her. With a great heave, James hauled his sister back up to safety. Cordelia liked to think that she still had enough strength to help, a little. She held onto Lucie, in any event, and would not let go until they were both lying full length in the grass next to the cliff.

James looked down at them, arms folded. Limp with relief, Cordelia gazed at him. She had seldom seen him without his reading glasses before. She found herself shocked by the peculiar depths of his eyes, but shocked in a pleasant fashion. She wondered if James was going to scold them. Instead he just said, “You’re all right. Take your time.”

“James,” said Lucie. “Cordelia held onto me for hours. Hours upon hours.”

Cordelia said, “Days. It was days we were out here.”

Lucie let out a small, slightly frantic giggle. “It’s been weeks, James, what kept you?”

They explained how Lucie had fallen. “Lucie, I wish you had been satisfied by tearing through the daisies up here,” said James, with an exasperated sigh. “Generally speaking, cliffs are best enjoyed further from the edge.”

“I like daisies,” said Cordelia, before Lucie and James could start bickering in earnest. “I never understood why people called ‘Margaret’ might have the pretty nickname ‘Daisy.’ It does not sound any more like ‘Margaret’ than ‘Cordelia’ does.”

She looked over to find James blinking at her. Later she realized that Daisy was a nickname for Margaret because the French for daisy was marguerite, and Cordelia felt an awful fool. James clearly knew at the time, but he was too kind to say so.

Instead, he said, “Why shouldn’t we call you Daisy, if you like it?”

Cordelia felt warm all over at the thought of the Herondales having a pet name for her.

“Yes!” said Lucie eagerly, sitting bolt upright in the grass. Lucie seemed so undaunted, barely escaping yet unaffected by danger. “We ought to have a nickname for you!”

Daisy. It was a carefree name, a joyful one. Unable to think of what to say, Cordelia took Lucie’s hand and squeezed it. Then she winced, the ache in her arm returning with the motion.

Lucie gave her a pensive look. “Days,” she said. “Weeks, you held on, Daisy.”

Cordelia grinned, delighted to have entered Lucie’s mythology in a heroic manner. “I’d have held on for months, if that was what it took.”

“James,” Lucie said, though she didn’t look over at him. “Did you know Cordelia’s going to be my parabatai?”

“I am?” Cordelia said with amusement.

Lucie looked horrified, like she’d suddenly woken from a dream. “I’m sorry, that was the shock speaking. I would never presume—”

“Lucie!” Cordelia said. She tightened her grip on her friend’s hand, pleased to do so in safety, and looked up at James. “Of course we’re going to be parabatai.”

Christopher Lightwood and Henry Branwell



Flash Fiction – July 2019



One of Christopher Lightwood's earliest memories was of his mother, Cecily Lightwood, being rushed to the infirmary after a fight with a pack of Raum demons. Christopher and his older sister Anna were at the London Institute at the time, being looked after by their aunt Tessa and uncle Will while their parents were out on patrol. Tessa whisked Christopher away quickly, but not before he saw the worried look on Will's face as he went to summon the Silent Brothers.

Later, Christopher sat by his mother's bedside as she recovered from the Raum poison. She drifted in and out of consciousness, waking and smiling when she saw him and then falling back into sleep. Uncle Will waved his arms about a great deal, despairing that his sister was entirely too brave for her own good. Christopher's father, Gabriel Lightwood, reminded Will that courage against all odds was what made them Shadowhunters, wasn't it? This caused Will to splutter. But Christopher could tell that his father had been truly frightened, and was deeply relieved that Cecily was recovering. Christopher leaned against his father.

"Is hunting demons scary?" He asked.

Gabriel sighed, and drew Christopher closer. "It can be scary, but a world overrun by demons is much scarier."

That made sense, but Christopher continued his line of questioning. "Fighting them with swords and daggers, that is scary. But what if there are other ways to fight them?"

His father looked puzzled. "Like with ranged weapons? Bows and arrows?"

Christopher couldn't explain the ideas that were rushing through his head. He didn't have the language for them yet. Instead he just smiled. "Not exactly," he said. "But don't worry. I'll figure it out."

When Christopher was eight, his father and his uncle Gideon shut themselves in the study and talked in loud important voices about Christopher's aunt Tatiana, and Tatiana's boy Jesse. Christopher understood that Jesse was a cousin who he had never met, and that Jesse was sick.

Only a short while later, they received word that Jesse had died. Christopher's father tried to visit aunt Tatiana, but she would not see

him. When Gabriel came home, Cecily put her arms around him, and he cried. Christopher was shocked, less by his father's tears than by the fact that they'd had a cousin who they'd never been allowed to meet, and now never could meet. Thoughts kept running around in Christopher's mind. This is all wrong. If we had met him, we might have been able to help him. To save him. But when he said this out loud to his mother, Cecily only smiled sadly. "You are a brave and daring boy," she said. "The world needs more minds like yours, Christopher. But you cannot take on the responsibility for saving every life. That is too heavy a load for one person to bear. The Silent Brothers were with Jesse before he died, and they are the wisest among us. Surely they would have saved him if he could have been saved."

Christopher thought, But the Silent Brothers only hold certain kinds of wisdom. What if there was a different kind that could have saved Jesse? But he held his tongue.

Then, when Christopher was ten, Anna was bitten by a demon, and the wound became infected. The whole family was frenzied with worry for a day and a night over Christopher's older sister. ...

The fever was the problem that lasted, the problem that loomed in his mind demanding a solution. Far too often in his life, Christopher found himself thinking the same thoughts he had the day Jesse died. This is all wrong. Something must be done about this.

Christopher had many cousins. Matthew wasn't a cousin, but their parents were friends and they were as good as family: that was always understood. Christopher had called Matthew's father uncle Henry since he could talk, and had always been impressed by the intriguing chair Henry got about in. Then one day Christopher got into Henry's laboratory, which he found even more intriguing than the chair. Henry had left out his notes for an experiment, and Christopher promptly tried to perform said experiment.

You never forget your first explosion.

"Oh, well done, most well thought out," said uncle Henry, but then aunt Charlotte had 'a word' with him. It was actually many words. Christopher didn't see why people were so inaccurate.

After the many words, uncle Henry said that Christopher was too young to be causing explosions, and the laboratory was a dangerous

place, and Christopher wasn't allowed to touch anything in it without permission. Nor was Matthew, but Matthew didn't want to. Matthew was interested in talking about mystifying things, like how Uncle Henry should 'eat more' and put a stop to a brilliant experiment for a foolish reason like 'everything is on fire.'

Christopher was impelled by true scientific curiosity. He thought over the problem, and gave himself permission to touch whatever he wanted in the laboratory. Sometimes Uncle Henry locked things up away from Christopher, so Christopher was forced to break into cabinets.

It was all quite vexing, but scientific progress was an avalanche that must not be stopped. Christopher read Marie Curie's papers on radium, the element that could destroy tumors. He read John Snow's essay on how cholera might spread through a public water pump. He attempted to write his own piece, on Henry Fairchild's invention of the Portal. These were the people who were looking at the world inventively, seeking the root cause of the problems that plagued humanity.

"Who do you think is the Shadowhunter who has saved the most lives, boy?" the Inquisitor asked him, when the Inquisitor was visiting the Consul at her London home, and Christopher emerged from the laboratory to have a snack. "I suppose you think it's your papa."

"No," said Christopher after a moment's thought. "I would say my Uncle Henry."

The Inquisitor appeared thunderstruck.

"I performed an analysis," Christopher said peacefully. "If Uncle Henry had not invented the Portal, there is a strong possibility that our numbers would be less by a third. I believe you yourself would have died nine years ago, during the Dantalion attack on the York Institute. Since Portals will exist long after uncle Henry is dead, I expect he will end up having saved more lives than any other Shadowhunter, including Jonathan Shadowhunter. Unless I can invent something which will be as useful. Which naturally I aspire to do."

Christopher returned to the laboratory thinking about demons. How they walked between worlds, how stabbing them was a temporary solution at best, since they could always re-form in their own home worlds and return to wreak more havoc. How no one else seemed to be looking towards the root of these problems. Well, almost no one.

“Does it ever bother you?” Christopher asked Henry tentatively, a few hours later. “The way our people are? What they value, and what they... don’t?”

Henry laughed. “Does it matter if it bothers me? It doesn’t change the fact there is work to be done.”

“I know what I value,” Henry said firmly. “I do not think we are as separated from the ways of the Nephilim as you think. We are all warriors, charged by the Angel to keep the world safe in our different ways. We won’t win if any one of us fights alone. What do you want the most?”

“This was what I felt most called to do,” said Henry. “I always thought it was right to use my mind, the best weapon I have, for the cause I believe in. It is a joy to see you reach for the weapon I reached for.”

“So I should join you in all your experiments, then,” Christopher said triumphantly.

“Yes,” Henry said. Then he hesitated, and for a moment Christopher thought he might deliver a lecture about being careful and preventing explosions. But Henry didn’t. Instead he just said, “Yes, we should.”

From then on, Christopher regarded science as not only that which he loved but as his Shadowhunter duty. Perhaps nobody else would ever think it, but he knew he was dedicated as an Iron Sister, a Silent Brother, a warrior stepping forward to face a field of demons.

When he was tired, or people were unreasonable, or his little brother wailed outside his door, Christopher remembered the smile on the face of the Shadowhunter he respected most, and Henry saying “Come, Christopher. Take up your best weapon, and fight your best fight.”

Fairytale of London – Part I



Flash Fiction – August 2019

(Note: *The complete story is set to be published as an extra story in the first print editions of the English “**Chain of Gold**” book.)*



London, March 9, 1879

Today will be the happiest day the two of you will ever have together.

Will Herondale sat in the window of his new bedroom and looked out at a London frozen under a chilly winter sky. Snow dusted the tops of houses reaching away toward the pale ribbon of the Thames, giving the view the feeling of a fairytale.

Though at the moment, Will was not feeling very friendly toward *fairy-tales*.

He ought to be happy, he knew that much — after all, it was his wedding day. And he had been happy, since the moment he'd woken up, even through having Henry, Gabriel and Gideon troop into his room and bother him with advice and jokes while he was getting dressed, all the way up to the end of the ceremony. That was when it had happened. That was why he was sitting on a window seat staring at winter-bitten London instead of downstairs by the fire kissing his wife. His brand-new wife.

Tessa.

Everything had started out perfectly well. It wasn't strictly a Shadowhunter wedding, because Tessa wasn't strictly a Shadowhunter. But Will had decided to wear wedding gear anyway, because he was going to be the head of the London Institute, and his children would be Shadowhunters, and Tessa would run the Institute by his side and be part of all of his Shadowhunter life and they should begin as they meant to go on, in his opinion.

Henry, wielding a stele from his Bath chair, helped Will with the runes of love and luck he'd decorated his hands and arms with before he put his shirt and gear jacket on. Gideon and Gabriel joked about what a terrible bargain Tessa was getting in Will, and how they would happily take his place, though the Lightwood brothers were both engaged, and Henry was delightedly married with a small and loudly screaming son, Charles Buford, currently taking up much of his parents' time and attention.

And Will smiled and laughed, and looked in the mirror to make sure his hair didn't look disgraceful and he thought of Jem, and his heart ached.

It was tradition for Shadowhunters to have a *suggenes*, someone who walked alongside them up the aisle to the marriage ceremony. Usually a sibling or a close friend — and if you had a *parabatai*, the choice for *suggenes* was made for you. But Will's *parabatai* was a Silent Brother now, and Silent Brothers could not be *suggenes*. So that place beside Will would remain empty as he walked the floor of the cathedral.

Or at least it would look empty to everyone else. To Will, it would be filled with the memory of Jem: Jem's smile, Jem's hand on his arm, Jem's unwavering loyalty.

In the mirror, he saw a Will Herondale, nineteen years old, who looked composed and calm: inside his soul breathed grief and love. Until this last year, he had never thought that the heart could hold a full measure of sorrow and happiness at the same time, and yet as he grieved Jem and loved Tessa, he felt both in equal parts. He knew she did, too, and it was a comfort to the two of them to be together and share what few others had ever felt, for though Will believed profound grief and profound joy could happen at the same time, as equal love did, he could not believe it was common.

"Don't forget the cane, Will," said Henry, snapping Will out of his reverie, and he handed Will the dragon-headed cane that had been Jem's. Will carried it, the jade head smooth under his fingers, as they made their way downstairs and into the heart of the church.

Will came in through the back and moved swiftly to the altar, decorated with heaps of white flowers that had come from Idris. They filled the room with a scent that reminded him of Herondale Manor in the Idris countryside, a great pile of golden stone where he and Tessa would now spend summer months. His heart lifted at the thought.

It lifted further as he leaned Jem's cane against the altar and turned to face the room: he had been afraid that the Enclave of London, in their prejudice and bigotry, would avoid the wedding: feelings about the fact that Tessa was half-warlock ranged from indifference to outright coldness. But the pews were filled, and he saw beaming faces throughout: Henry beside Charlotte, who had left baby Charles in the care of Bridget, her hat trembling with a mass of flowers; the recently married Baybrooks, the Highsmiths and Bridgestocks, Sophie moving to make room for Gideon and Gabriel, and even Tatiana Blackthorn,

holding the blanket-wrapped bundle of her son, Jesse, and wearing an oddly familiar pink dress.

Will glanced toward the back of the church...

Matthew and James' Parabatai Ceremony



Flash Fiction – September 2019



The City of Bones, 1900

On the morning of his parabatai ceremony, Matthew Fairchild walked through Highgate Cemetery, past the tall stone tombs and long grass wet with dew, until he reached the entrance leading down into the Silent City. He tried not to be nervous.

“I was exceedingly apprehensive on the day of my wedding ceremony,” Henry had told him at breakfast. “You know how poorly I thought of myself when I was young—I believed your mother couldn’t possibly love me as I loved her. And you know how absentminded I can be. I repeated the words over and over, and I was so sure I would get them wrong that when the time came, I just blurted them all out at once. All went swimmingly in the end, save for the small matter of the scorched flowers. But that’s another tale.”

“Thank you for the advice, Papa,” Matthew said, leaning affectionately against his father’s Bath chair. “But I must point out that I’m not marrying James. Though I would be a vision in bridal lace.”

Henry grinned up at him. “Why would you be wearing the dress?”

“You can’t think I would permit James to do it,” said Matthew. “He has no sense of style.”

To his surprise, the ceremony was packed densely with guests. Family and friends would be expected, but Matthew understood that most of the people were here for the spectacle, or for political advantage. The Consul’s son, and the son of the head of the Institute, whose mother was a warlock.

The crowd was so thick, Matthew could barely see the skulls set in the walls. Brother Zachariah was waiting in the center of the chamber where the ceremony would be performed, a figure of profound stillness in his parchment-colored hood and cloak.

James called Brother Zachariah “Uncle Jem” and adored him. Today eldritch fire for the ceremony woke strange shadows on his face, and Matthew was a little afraid. The whole London Enclave was assembled here to see the ceremony performed. Matthew had absolute faith in James, but if something went wrong, the Council might never let them try again. James’s parentage had so far had no effect on his ability to receive Marks or otherwise be an active Shadowhunter, but the parabatai

ceremony was a stranger, more transcendent bit of magic, and nobody knew for sure that it would turn out as expected.

Several members of the Enclave had taken Matthew aside and warned him in an avuncular fashion not to make any rash decisions, so Matthew had pleaded with his mother to set a date for their parabatai ceremony as soon as possible.

Matthew gave a particularly dark look to Mr. Bridgestock, recently made Inquisitor. Awful Bridgestock, whose first name was Maurice and it served him right, had said Matthew was a very promising young warrior, and that he shouldn't blight his bright future. Matthew told him he knew what he was doing, that his family was supportive, and he assumed the Clave would stand behind the ceremony as well.

"I have nothing but respect for your family," Bridgestock had said, "but they often...ignore the opinions of others. Sometimes to their detriment."

Matthew would have liked to give Bridgestock a piece of his mind, but of course he could not. Instead he smiled, and told Bridgestock that he appreciated the advice but that he was firm in his decision.

He tried to push his way through the crowd and find James. Instead his ear was caught by the whisper of his own name.

"I simply can't believe Fairchild is being such a fool," a boy called Albert Breakspear said to his companion, Bertram Pounceby. "I saw that fellow turn into a shadow at the Academy, you know. Horribly ghastly thing to witness."

Pounceby sniggered. "I can't believe the Clave gave their approval. The parabatai ceremony is meant to be an honor, for the best among us. Not for ruffians who got expelled from school."

"It's all politics," scoffed Breakspear. "Son of the head of the London Institute, son of the Consul—it doesn't matter how much of an embarrassment they are, strings will be pulled and they'll get what they want."

"I bet it won't even work," said Pounceby. "There is no way the Angel will accept them as parabatai. Can you imagine if Herondale turns into a shadow when Fairchild tries to put the parabatai rune on him?"

"Don't be so sure you're on the side of the Angel," Matthew said mildly. "I know what you lot got up to in school."

Both boys spun around. Matthew gave them his most charming smile.

“Didn’t realize I was standing behind you?” he asked. “What an awkward situation for you.”

“Rather,” James agreed, in his quiet voice, and Matthew startled. He hadn’t realized James was even nearby, but there he was: hair a wreck, book tucked under his arm, face slightly paler than usual. He must have heard everything.

Matthew seized James by the elbow and dragged him around a corner so they could be alone among the skulls. He felt the tension running along James’s body. When he released James, he saw the tightness around his mouth, and feared he was very upset.

“We can call the ceremony off,” James said.

“I don’t want to call the ceremony off!” Matthew said. “Do you—do you want to call the ceremony off?”

James blinked his golden eyes like an owl. “Of course not. But if I do turn into a shadow... I know how it would reflect on you.”

“I shouldn’t care if you did, but I see no reason why you should become a shadow,” Matthew said firmly. “You never have when other Marks were put on you. I shall not be threatening you in any way. Unless you do change your mind, of course, in which case I shall chase after you, belaboring you with my fists.”

James grinned, his face brightening, and Matthew beamed back at him.

“If you’re going to belabor me with your fists, I don’t know if I want you going where I goest.”

“Too bad,” Matthew said. “Whither thou goest, I shall go. Just try and stop me.”

* * *

They stood in two separate rings of fire, ready to be joined. Brother Zachariah conducted the ceremony before the eyes of the Enclave and everyone James and Matthew loved.

“Entreat me not to leave thee, or return from following after thee. For whither thou goest,” Matthew promised, “I will go.”

Their voices mingled like the colors of the dancing flames, and Matthew remembered trying so hard to befriend James at the Academy. He’d begged James’s father to take him to London, saying he and James were going to be parabatai, the greatest and most audacious lie Matthew had ever told. Now his lie had become truth.

“And where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

James and Matthew had both chosen their fathers as witnesses, and Will stepped forward first. He looked at his son, and Matthew too, sweeping them up in a fierce and tender gaze. Henry wheeled himself to join them, red hair and silver chair catching the light. He smiled up at Matthew and James with an absolute approval that Matthew was very grateful to have.

“Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Angel do so to me, and more also,” James said, calling on Raziel in his clearest voice, “If aught but death part thee and me.”

Matthew thought of the Angel. He had always been mostly dismissive of the honor-death-and-glory bits of being of a Shadowhunter. He supposed he believed in Raziel, but he never gave the fellow much thought. He believed there was more to life than blood and fire. There was beauty, there was art, there was color. Perhaps Raziel knew his heart wasn’t in the fighting. Perhaps Raziel didn’t approve.

They stepped through the flames.

Did those flames burn higher than they had at other ceremonies? For just a moment, did the hearts of the fire burn black instead of blue? It was his imagination, Matthew decided. They were through, after all, and James’s hand stayed flesh in Matthew’s own, stayed steady as he drew the parabatai rune on the inside of Matthew’s left wrist.

James wanted his Mark on his shoulder, because, he had said, he knew Matthew would always be at his back in battle. Matthew had rolled his eyes, but felt a surge of affection; James’s sincerity was one of his best features, even if it did get him into trouble. When Matthew finished inscribing the rune on James’s shoulder blade, when it was complete, he

gave a great sigh of relief. He felt the assembled audience sigh too. It was done, and it had been fine.

The flames shot to the ceiling and the dark hollow eyes of skulls watched them in the place of their ancestors, and they were sure of each other forever. When souls were knit, nobody could tear them apart.

The Breakspears and Pouncebys didn't matter at all. Only James and Matthew's families, their friends. When they stepped out of the fiery circles, Will was there to catch them both in an embrace. Lucie came forward to congratulate them, her ringlets rebelliously escaping from her ribbons and her blue eyes wide. Matthew had to glance away from how pretty she looked; it was almost too much for him. Now Tessa was hugging James, and Matthew's mother was reaching down to touch his father's hand where it rested on the arm of his chair.

Thy people will be my people, Matthew thought, and promised himself to love the Herondales as his own. Beneath the hood, he glimpsed a slight smile on Brother Zachariah's rune-sealed mouth, and Matthew smiled back at him. Matthew was suddenly certain he would love Jem too, that he would love everything James loved. Other people might go through the world uncertain and alone, but not Matthew: now wherever he wandered, whenever he called out, there would be an answer. He would never walk anywhere *alone*.

Lucie Herondale and Jessamine Lovelace



Flash Fiction - October 2019



London, 1897

“There are many kinds of ghosts,” Jessamine said, “but they tend to fall into three categories. You have mostly known ghosts like me, who are kind and beautiful and have wonderful personalities.”

Lucie almost snorted, but luckily Jessamine didn't seem to notice. They were in the courtyard of the Institute, where Lucie was playing, and avoiding her family. Woolsey Scott was coming over for tea, and they were busy straightening up and putting away the silver — like all werewolves, he was allergic. Lucie didn't mind Woolsey Scott, except that like most of the adults who visited the Institute he was tremendously boring, and also when he looked at her, she felt that he was judging her for her untidiness and her ink-stained fingers. She had snuck off to play in the garden, and when nobody had come to fetch her, she decided she was safe.

Perhaps they assumed the coming rain would drive her back inside. The sky was thick with leaden clouds, and while the rain held off for now, the air contained that particular scent that meant it was inevitable.

She had made up a game to go with a story she had been composing recently. It was about a well-brought up young girl who was forced to become a pirate queen to save her kidnapped parents, and discovered she had quite a knack for it. She ran around the garden, weaving between bushes, imagining the she was a pirate queen whose sailors had whipped up a mutiny. The key was to look deeply distressed, extremely tragic, then spin around fast, stabbing out with the stick she was using as a sword.

She had stopped to decide whether the pirate queen should sport a silver mask or a black one when Jessamine, the Institute's resident ghost, came floating down from an upper window like a torn page falling in a breeze....

Lucie had known Jessamine her whole life, and understood that Jessamine had been friends with her parents when she was alive, though none of them had ever told her the full story. Lucie thought of Jessamine mostly as part of the furniture, a drifting presence that seemed content to wander through the halls of the Institute and occasionally criticize the place's new modern décor and Lucie's father's choice of clothes.

“Hullo, Jessamine,” Lucie said now. She was disappointed; she had been enjoying her game. She hoped she would remember all the details of the pirate queen and the mutiny so she could write them down when she was back inside.

“Lucie,” Jessamine said, “I think it is time to speak with you about ghosts.”

“Now?” said Lucie in dismay.

Jessamine looked up at the sky. “It is the right weather for ghosts,” she said. “Now, listen.

“Some ghosts stay among the living because unfinished business holds them here. Some stay to protect those they love. And some stay because of hatred, malice, bitterness.” She ruffled Lucie’s hair; it felt like being brushed by a breeze. “You must learn to ignore that kind of ghost. Turn away from them. They feed off your fear. Without your fear they can do nothing to you.”

“I’ll remember,” Lucie murmured.

Jessamine cocked her head at Lucie. “Mind that you do,” she said, and vanished as suddenly as she’d appeared.

Lucie assumed that Jessamine had become a ghost in order to protect those she loved, but she was very strange regardless. A little more doubtful, she returned to her game. In the distance was a noise that might have been thunder or might have just been the bustle of London.

Her game took her out of the Institute’s courtyard and down the road a bit. The street was almost empty, but at one-point Lucie whirled around to confront the boatswain who had pretended loyalty to her, while actually working for the mutinous first mate, and almost stabbed an actual person. She gasped, and took a step back. “I’m so sorry!” she cried. “I didn’t know you were there.”

The woman who stood before her wore a dark gray Victorian dress that gave her the look of an old-fashioned schoolteacher. In her gloved hand was a battered black valise. Her face was thin and pale and peaked, her hair straggling.

Lucie waited awkwardly, uncertain what to say. She should have remained on the Institute’s grounds, where glamour would have ensured no unexpected encounters with mundane humans. The woman considered her, and Lucie wondered if perhaps she wasn’t a mundane

after all. But she had no runes, so she wasn't a Shadowhunter. Could she be a Downworlder? She showed no outward signs of being a faerie or warlock or werewolf, and though she was pale, she was out in daylight, so she couldn't be a vampire.

"I must ask something of you, little girl." The woman's voice was rough, as though she hadn't spoken in a long time. "Are your parents looking for a governess? I am an excellent governess."

She held out a paper—her credentials, perhaps, but Lucie's attention was arrested by the woman's hand.

It was no longer gloved. Now it was skeletal, the bone white as snow. Dark red blood was dripping from the ends of her fingers, soaking into the paper.

Lucie took a step back, breath catching in her throat. "You're a ghost," she said, almost without meaning to. But a ghost had never walked up to her on the street like this, certainly not one with skeletal hands. She looked back up at the ghost's face. It was gaunt, slightly distorted, and it frightened her. "You can't trick me," Lucie said, trying to sound brave. "I can see you for what you are."

"What a clever little girl," The ghost's raspy voice took on an unpleasant tone. "I don't like clever little girls. I used to look after six of them. They played tricks on me and taunted me. One night I went up to their room and stabbed them, one at a time, all through their clever little hearts."

Lucie's blood ran cold. The ghost reached out, as if it were going to touch Lucie's own heart, and she turned and ran full tilt in the direction of her home. She remembered what Jessamine had said, but how could she not be afraid? She could feel the presence of the ghost behind her, a prickling at the back of her neck. Lucie had just reached the gate when she stumbled over a loose stone and fell, scraping her knee on the path.

The ghost glided forward, reaching as though to help her up. "You could be my new pupil...."

Lucie scrambled away. "Stop! Get back!"

To her surprise, the ghost sprang away, looking startled. Perhaps little girls didn't ordinarily yell at it. Lucie was about to scream for help, but help had already arrived.

Jessamine descended from the sky and stood between Lucie and the woman. But this was Jessamine as Lucie had never seen her: an avenging angel, looming above both Lucie and the ghost-woman, icy fury on her face. Lucie gasped in shock as Jessamine raised her hands, as if she were about to perform some terrifying incantation.

“No,” the ghost-woman moaned, her mouth yawning open horribly, showing a cavern of blackness. “I did not know this one was guarded. I did not know...”

“You will flee from here,” Jessamine commanded, and even her voice was different, deep and wild, like the crashing of waves. “You will leave this place, foul spirit!”

The ghost cowered for a moment, then vanished into nothingness.

Lucie lay on the garden path, staring up at Jessamine, who had shrunk down to her usual size. “Stop gaping, Lucie, it’ll give you wrinkles. Come on, up with you.” She had returned to her normal mien, pretty and dignified and distant.

“Thank you,” said Lucie faintly.

“Mind how you go,” Jessamine said sternly. “And heed what I’ve told you. There is more than one kind of ghost.” And she drifted up again and vanished.

The lesson stayed with Lucie for a long time. She never blamed Jessamine for not knowing there was a fourth kind of spirit. Even if Jessamine had known, she could not have prepared Lucie for the fact that meeting him would change her life forever.

A Lightwood Christmas Carol – Part I



Flash Fiction – November 2019



London, 1889

Will Herondale was full of Christmas spirit, and Gideon Lightwood found it very *annoying*.

It wasn't just Will, actually; he and his wife Tessa had both been raised in mundane circumstances until they were nearly adults, and so their memories of Christmas were of fond family memories and childhood delights. They came alive with it when the city of London did, as it did every year.

Gideon's memories of Christmas were mostly about overcrowded streets, overrich food, and over-inebriated mundane carolers who needed to be saved from London's more dangerous elements as they caroused all night, believing all trouble and wickedness was gone from the world right up until they were eaten by Kapre demons disguised as Christmas trees. Just for example.

Born and raised a Shadowhunter, Gideon, of course, did not celebrate Christmas, and had always borne London's obsession with the holiday with bemused indifference. He had resided in Idris for most of his adult life, where the winter had a kind of Alpine profundity, and there was nary a Christmas wreath or cracker to be found. Winter in Idris felt more solemn than Christmas, so much older than Christmas. It was a strange facet of Idris: where most Shadowhunters ended up celebrating the holidays of their local mundanes, at least the ones that spilled out into street decorations and public festivals, Idris had no holidays at all. Gideon never wondered about this; it seemed obvious to him that Shadowhunters didn't take days off. It was the blessing and the curse of being one, after all. You were a Shadowhunter all the time.

No wonder some couldn't bear it, and left for a mundane life. Like Will Herondale's father Edmund, in fact.

Perhaps that was why Will's Christmas spirit annoyed him so. He'd come to like Will Herondale, and consider him a good friend. He hoped that when their children were older, they too would become friends, if Thomas was all right by then. And he knew Will deliberately presented himself as silly and rather daft, but that he was a sharp and observant Institute head, and a more-than-capable fighter of demons.

But when Will insisted on taking them all to see the window displays at Selfridge's, he could not help but worry that perhaps Will had a fundamentally unserious mind after all.

"Oxford Street? Days before Christmas? Are you *mad*?"

"It will be a *lark*!" Will said, with the slight lilt into his Welsh accent that meant he was a little too excited for his own good. "I'll take James, you take Thomas, we'll have a stroll. Have a drink at the Devil on the way back, what?" He clapped Gideon on the back.

It had been a long time since Gideon was last in England. As one of the Consul's most trusted advisors, Gideon not only lived in Idris but rarely found opportunity to leave. He also remained so that his son Thomas could breathe the healthy air of Brocelind Forest, and not the air of this filthy, foggy city.

This filthy, foggy city, his father's voice echoed in his mind, and Gideon was too weary to silence his father's voice as he usually did whenever Benedict crept in. More than ten years dead, yet he had not shut up.

His brother Gabriel lived in Idris, too, and for less obvious reasons. Perhaps it was not only the bad air; perhaps they both were happier with a good distance between them and Benedict Lightwood's house. And the knowledge that its current resident would barely speak with either of them.

But now Gideon had come to London, with Thomas, just the two of them, leaving Sophie and the girls behind. He needed advice about Thomas, people with whom he could discuss the problem discreetly. He needed to talk to Will and Tessa Herondale, and he needed to talk to a very specific Silent Brother who was often found in their vicinity.

Just now he was wondering if that had been a good idea. "A good bracing walk" was exactly the kind of English nonsense he'd half-expected Will to suggest for Thomas, but "a good bracing walk down the most crowded shopping street in London three days before Christmas" was a level of nonsense he had not been prepared for. "I can't take Thomas through that crowd," he said to Will. "He'll get knocked around."

"He isn't going to get knocked around," said Will scornfully. "He'll be fine."

“Besides,” said Gideon, “we’ll get looks. Mundane fathers don’t usually walk their babies in prams, you know.”

“I shall carry my son upon my shoulders,” said Will, “and you carry yours on yours, and Angel protect anyone who complains about it. Fresh London air would do all of us some good. And the windows are meant to be a spectacle, this year.”

“Fresh London air,” said Gideon dryly, “is *thick* as molasses and the color of *pea soup*.” But he acquiesced.

He had left Thomas in the nursery, where Tessa kept a watch over him and James. A full year older than James, Thomas wasn’t always good at understanding what James could and couldn’t do or understand. Tessa had been concerned that James would end up hurt. Gideon, though, was more concerned about Thomas, who was still smaller than James, despite the difference in their ages. He was paler than James, too, and less sturdy. He had only recently recovered from the latest of his terrible fevers, which had brought a Silent Brother, unfamiliar to them, to their house in Alicante to examine him. After a time, the Silent Brother declared that Thomas would recover, and left without any further conversation.

But Gideon wanted answers. As he picked up Thomas now, he couldn’t help but think about how the boy was hardly any weight at all. He was the smallest of all “the boys,” as Gideon thought of them – of James, and his brother’s son Christopher, and Charlotte’s son Matthew. He had been born early, and small. They had been terrified the first time he caught fever, convinced it was the end.

Thomas hadn’t died, but he hadn’t fully recovered either. He remained delicate, weak of constitution, quick to illness. Sophie had fought harder than anyone to drink from the Mortal Cup and become a Shadowhunter, but now she was forced to fight a far worse battle against death by their son’s bedside. Over and over again.

Sighing, he took his son to fetch their coats for their bracing Christmas walk.

* * *

As expected, Oxford Street was a madhouse of pedestrian shoppers, carriages, gawkers, and menacing groups of roaming carolers. Gideon would just as soon have glamoured them all invisible from mundane eyes (although one of the groups of carolers were obviously werewolves, who had exchanged Acknowledging Looks with Gideon), but Will of course wished to bask in the experience.

James also seemed mostly intrigued by the noise and lights, giggling and yelping at the merry scene around them. A London boy from birth, thought Gideon, and then thought, well, but I was a London boy from birth, and this is too much commotion for my liking. For his own part, Thomas was quiet, watching with wide eyes, clutching onto his father's shoulders. Gideon wasn't sure how weakened Thomas still was from the last fever and how much he was overwhelmed by the crowds. In some ways, when he wasn't sick, Thomas could be guilt-inducingly easy to care of; he rarely made a fuss, just looked out into the world with those large hazel eyes, as if aware of his own helplessness and hoping not to be noticed.

Will waited until after they had already joined the crowds at the windows of Selfridge's and Will had made a number of nonsensical exclamations of delight of the "By Jove!" variety. He had held James right up to the glass to examine the scenes in detail, which seemed to revolve around some blond children ice skating on a river. Gideon had pointed things out to Thomas, who had smiled.

Only once they had stopped to purchase some hot cider from a man hawking it down a side street did Will say, "I heard about Tatiana's son Jesse. Dreadful business. Have you spoken to her?"

Gideon shook his head. "I haven't spoken to Tatiana in nearly ten years, or been back to the house."

Will made a sympathetic noise.

"I don't think it's a coincidence," said Gideon.

"What?" Will said.

"A coincidence," said Gideon. "That both her and I have children who are—sickly."

"Gideon," said Will reasonably, "forgive me for saying so, but that is a load of codswallop." Gideon blinked at him. "For one thing, you have your beautiful daughters, neither of whom were more than usually ill

when they were babies. For another, all of what happened to your father was his own doing, and happened long after you were born, and neither you or Gabriel were sickly.”

Gideon shook his head. Will was so kind, so eager to spare him the consequences of his family’s sins. “You don’t know the extent of it,” he said. “The extent of Benedict’s experiments with dark magic. They were ongoing, from as long as I can remember. The demon pox just sticks in the memory, because it is rather lurid.”

“And also, we were there,” said Will, “when he turned into a giant worm.”

“Also that,” said Gideon grimly. “But two sickly sons, small and frail—I cannot say with certainty that it is a coincidence, that it has nothing to do with the depredations of my father. I cannot risk the possibility.” He looked at Will imploringly. “It took Jesse years to become ill,” he said, “and Thomas has been ill so much already.”

There was a profound silence. Quietly, Will said, “You sound as if you mean to do something.”

“I do,” said Gideon with a sigh. “I must look at my father’s papers, his records of what he called his “work”. They are at Chiswick, and I must go and ask Tatiana for them.”

“Will she see you?” said Will.

Gideon shook his head again. “I don’t know. I hoped her anger would cool, over time, and her resentment. I hoped the fact that the Clave gifted her with all my father’s wealth and possessions would help her find peace.”

“Well,” said Will, “if you go, you absolutely must leave Thomas with us.”

“You wouldn’t want him to meet his aunt?” Gideon said innocently.

Will looked at him seriously. “I wouldn’t want him, or any of my children, on the grounds of that house!”

Gideon was taken aback. “Why? What’s she done to it?”

Will said darkly, “It’s what she hasn’t done.”

* * *

Gideon could see Will's point. Tatiana hadn't done anything to the house. Nothing to change, or clean, or preserve it in any way. Rather than restoring it or redecorating it to her own tastes, Tatiana had simply allowed it to rot, blackening and collapsing in on itself, a ghastly monument to Benedict Lightwood's ruination. The windows were clouded, as though fog were seething indoors; the maze, a black and twisted wreckage. When he opened the front gate, the hinges screamed like a tortured soul.

It did not bode well for the emotional state of its resident.

When Benedict Lightwood died in disgrace from the late stages of demon pox, and the full history of his infamy was revealed to the Clave, Gideon laid low. He didn't want to answer questions, or hear false sympathy for the damage done to his family name. He shouldn't have cared. He'd known the truth of his father already. Yet it stung his pride, when he shouldn't have had any pride left in his besmirched name.

The houses and the fortune were taken away from Benedict's children by order of the Clave. Gideon could still remember when he had found out that Tatiana had brought a complaint against him and against Gabriel for the "murder" of their father. The Clave had first confiscated their possessions, and finally laid out the situation: Tatiana Blackthorn had petitioned the Clave for Benedict's fortune to be given to her, as well as the Lightwood's ancestral house in Chiswick. She was a Blackthorn now, not the bearer of a tainted name. She made many accusations against her brothers in the process. The Clave said they understood that Gideon and Gabriel had had no choice but to slay the monster their father had become, yet if they were to speak of technical truth only, Tatiana might be considered correct. The Clave was inclined to give Tatiana the full Lightwood inheritance, in hopes of settling the matter.

"I will fight this," Charlotte had told Gideon, her small hands tight upon his sleeve and her mouth set.

"Charlotte, don't," Gideon begged. "You have so many other battles to fight. Gabriel and I don't need any of that tainted money. This doesn't matter."

The money hadn't mattered, then.

Gabriel and Gideon discussed the matter, and decided not to contest her claims. Their sister was a widow. She could live in the former

Lightwood manor at Chiswick in England, and at Blackthorn Manor in Idris, and welcome. Gideon hoped she and her son would be happy. As it was, Gideon's memories of the house were, at best, ambivalent.

Now he waited at the front door, its paint mostly peeled off, with deep gouges here and there, as though some wild animal had tried to get in. Maybe Tatiana locked herself out at some point. After a time, it swung open, but waiting behind it was not his sister but a ten-year-old boy, looking somber. He had the midnight black hair of the father he'd never met, but he was tall for his age, willow-thin, with green eyes.

Gideon blinked. "You must be Jesse."

The boy narrowed his eyes. "Yes," said the boy. "Jesse Blackthorn. Who are you?"

Jesse, his nephew, after all this time. Gideon had asked so many times to see Jesse when he was a child. He and Gabriel had tried to go to Tatiana when she had the child, but she turned them both away.

Gideon took a deep breath. "Well," he said. "I'm your Uncle Gideon, as it happens. I am very glad to make your acquaintance at last." He smiled. "I was always hoping for it."

Jesse's expression did not improve. "Mama says you are a very wicked man."

"Your mother and I," Gideon said with a sigh, "have had a very... complicated history. But family should know one another, and fellow Shadowhunters, as well."

The boy continued to stare at Gideon, but his face softened a bit. "I have never met any other Shadowhunters," he said. "Other than Mama."

Gideon had thought about this moment many times, but now found himself struggling for words. "You are...you see...I wanted to tell you. We have heard that your mother doesn't want you to take Marks. You should know...we are family first, always. And if you don't wish to take Marks, the rest of your family will support you in that decision. With the—the other Shadowhunters." He wasn't sure if Jesse even knew the word Clave.

Jesse looked alarmed. "No! I will. I want to! I'm a Shadowhunter."

"So is your mother," murmured Gideon. He felt a slight twinge of possibility there. Tatiana could have disappeared like Edmund Herondale, abandoned Downworld entirely, lived as a mundane.

Shadowhunters did, sometimes; though Edmund had done it for love, Tatiana might do it out of hatred. That she had not gave Gideon hope, although, he was sure, foolish hope.

He knelt down, to be closer to the boy. He hesitated, then reached out for Jesse's shoulder. Jesse stepped back, casually avoiding the touch, and Gideon let it go. "You are one of us," he said quietly.

"Jesse!" Tatiana's voice came from the top of the entrance stairs. "Get away from that man!"

As if prodded with a needle, Jesse leapt away from Gideon's reach and retreated without a further word into the shadowed recesses of the house.

Gideon stared in horror as his sister Tatiana drifted down the stairs. She wore a pink gown more than ten years old. It was stained with blood he well knew was more than ten years old as well. Her face was drawn and pinched, as though her scowl had been etched there, unchanged for years.

Oh, Tatiana. Gideon was flooded with a strange amalgamation of sympathy and revulsion. *This is long past grief. This is madness.*

His little sister's green eyes rested on him, cold as if he were a stranger. Her smile was a knife.

"As you can see, Gideon," she said. "I dress for company. You never know who might drop by."

Her voice, too, was changed: rough and creaking with disuse.

"Have you come to apologize?" Tatiana went on. "You will not find *exoneration*, for the things you have done. Their blood is on your hands. My father. My husband. Your hands, and your brother's hands."

And how was that? Gideon wanted to ask her. He had not killed her husband. Their father had done that, transformed by disease into a dreadful demonic creature.

But Gideon felt the shame and the guilt, as well as the grief, as he knew she intended him to. He had been the first to cut ties with his father, and with his father's legacy. Benedict had taught them all to stick together, no matter what the cost, and Gideon had walked away. His brother had stayed, until he saw proof of their father's corruption he couldn't deny.

His sister remained even now.

“I am sorry you blame us,” said Gideon. “Gabriel and I have only ever wished for your good. Have you—have you read our letters?”

“I never was fond of reading,” murmured Tatiana.

She inclined her head, and after a moment Gideon realized this was the closest she would get to inviting him in. He stepped across the threshold nervously and, when Tatiana did not immediately shout at him, he continued inside.

Tatiana led him to what had once been their father’s office, a sculpture in dust and rot. He averted his eyes from the torn wallpaper, catching a glimpse of writing on the wall that read WITHOUT PITY.

“Thank you for seeing me,” Gideon said as he took a seat across the desk from her. “How is Jesse?”

“He is very delicate,” said Tatiana. “Nephilim like yourself wish to put Marks on him, because they are intent on killing my boy as they have killed everyone else I love. You sit on the Council, do you not? Then you are his enemy. You may not see him.”

“I would not force Marks on the boy,” protested Gideon. “He’s my nephew. Tatiana, if he is that ill, perhaps he should see the Silent Brothers? One of them is a close friend, and could come to Jesse at our house. And Jesse could know his cousins.”

“Mind your own house, Gideon,” Tatiana snapped. “Nobody expects your son to live to Jesse’s age, do they?”

Gideon fell silent.

“I expect you want Jesse to marry one of your penniless daughters,” Tatiana went on.

Now Gideon was more confused than offended. “His first cousins? Tatiana, they are all very young children—”

“Father planned alliances for us, when we were children.” Tatiana shrugged. “How ashamed he would be of you. How is your grubby *servant*?”

Gideon would have struck any man who spoke of Sophie so. He felt the rage and violence he’d known as a child storm within him, but he’d desperately taught himself control. He exercised every bit of that control now. This was for Thomas.

“My *wife* Sophia is very well.”

His sister nodded, almost pleasantly, but the smile quickly became a grimace. “Enough pleasantries, then. You came to Chiswick for a reason, did you not? Out with it. I know what it is already. Your son is like to die, and you want money for filthy Downworlder remedies. You’re here as a beggar, cap in hand. So beg me.”

It was strange: Tatiana’s obvious, undeniable insanity made her insults and imprecations undeniably easier to bear. What was she even saying? What Downworlder remedies? How could remedies be filthy?

Had Benedict destroyed Tatiana as well? Or would she always have been like this? Their mother had killed herself because their father passed on a demon’s disease to her. Their father had died of the same sickness, in disgrace and horror. Will Herondale could dismiss it all as nonsense, but could it be a coincidence that Tatiana’s son, and his son, were both sickly? Or was it some weakness in their very blood, some punishment from the Angel who had seen what the Lightwoods truly were and passed his judgment upon them?

“I need no money,” Gideon said. “As you well know, the Silent Brothers are the best of doctors, and their services are always freely available to me. As they are to you,” he added with emphasis.

“What, then?” Tatiana said. Her head cocked slightly.

“Father’s papers,” Gideon said in a rush of expelled breath. “His journals. I think that the cause of my son’s illness might be found there.” He found he didn’t want to say Thomas’s name in front of his sister, as though she might decide to conjure with it.

“A man you betrayed?” Tatiana spat. “You have no right to them.”

Gideon bowed his head to his sister. He had been prepared for this. “I know,” he lied. “I agree. But I need them, for the sake of my child. You have Jesse. Whatever our differences, you must understand that we could both love our children, at least. You must help me, Tatiana. I beg you.”

He’d thought Tatiana would smile, or laugh cruelly, but she only gazed at him with the impassive, mindless stare of a dangerous snake.

“And what will you do for me?” she said. “If I do help?”

Gideon could guess. Get the Clave to leave her alone, to let her do as she wished with Jesse, for one thing. But in Tatiana’s madness, who knew what she would come up with.

“Anything,” he said hoarsely.

He lifted his head and looked at her, at his mother's green eyes in his sister's pitiless face. Tatiana, who would always break her toys rather than share them. There was something missing in her, as there had been in their father.

Now she did smile. "I have just the task in mind," she said.

Gideon braced himself.

"On the other side of the road from this estate," Tatiana said, "is a mundane merchant. This man has a dog, of an unusual size and vicious temperament. Quite often he lets the dog run free in the neighborhood, and of course he comes straight here to make mischief."

There was a long pause. Gideon blinked. "The dog?"

"He is always making trouble on my property," Tatiana snarled. "Digging up my garden. Killing the songbirds."

Gideon was utterly positively sure that Tatiana did not keep a garden. He had seen the state of the grounds on his way in, left to crumble as a monument to disaster no less than the house itself.

There were definitely no songbirds.

"He's made a disaster of the greenhouse," she went on. "He knocks over fruit trees, he throws rocks through windows."

"The dog," Gideon said again, to clarify.

Tatiana fixed her piercing gaze on him. "Kill the dog," she said. "Bring me the proof you have done this, and you will have your papers."

There was a very long silence.

Gideon said, "What?"

A Lightwood Christmas Carol – Part 2



Flash Fiction – December 2019



“So,” Gideon said to Will the next night as they patrolled together in Mayfair, “the whole thing was a wash. I’m not murdering some poor bastard’s dog.”

Patrol with Will was normally a relaxing experience for Gideon. They enjoyed each other’s company, and demons had become so scarce in London that almost all of the time it was only a night stroll with a friend. Will even periodically recommended that they investigate for any suspicious activity in some local public house known to him.

Tonight, of course, there would be no ordering a quick round as a cover story for interrogating, i.e. merrily chatting up, the barstaff; Will was far too full of Christmas spirit. He had insisted on taking them by Trafalgar Square and spent many minutes in admiration of its temporary giant tree, and had stopped—twice!—to admire groups of carolers and applaud them. *Gideon was bearing up well*, he thought, *considering*. He even got into the spirit a very tiny amount, which is to say he was willing to eat some of the roast chestnuts Will bought.

Now Tatiana (and the dog news) had deflated Will’s mood, and Gideon felt a little badly about it. Will was frowning thoughtfully. “Why not just offer her money?” he said.

Gideon sighed. “Because Tatiana has plenty of money, all of our family money. And Gabriel and I have only our salaries as Shadowhunters. She doesn’t need money.”

Will looked scornful. “Everybody likes more money.”

“Normally I would agree with you,” Gideon said, shaking his head, “but you did not see Tatiana’s state of mind. She cannot be approached in the way you would approach a rational person. I must do this task for her, but of course I cannot. Hurt a dog, of all things. I would never. Disgusting.”

Will stood looking past him for a long moment, and eventually Gideon said, “Will?”

“We will take care of it,” Will suddenly said. His gaze snapped back to Gideon’s face, and he was smiling. “We will give Tatiana what she wants, and we will not hurt any animals in the process.”

“We?” said Gideon, raising his eyebrows.

“Well, it’s my plan,” Will said reasonably. “So obviously I’ll be along.”

Despite himself, a smile played at the edges of Gideon's mouth. That was the one thing he had over Tatiana, after all. He wasn't alone.

* * *

The front door of Chiswick House swung open with somewhat more speed than it had two days prior, and Tatiana's suspicious face appeared. She was wearing the same dress she had been wearing before, to Gideon's dismay. In her left hand she carried the cleaned skull of some unidentifiable small mammal; Gideon didn't wish to inquire why.

Tatiana's glare quickly moved from Gideon to Will, who was bopping up and down nervously behind him. Will had insisted on coming, against Gideon's better judgment, and only now did he realize the possibility that Tatiana might not even see him if Will was along.

Will, for his part, did his best. "Hullo, Tatiana my love," he said. "Many greetings of the season! How excellently you've kept up the place."

Tatiana blinked at him, startled out of whatever she had been about to shout. Gideon knew that Will had three good nips of brandy in him, and reckoned that was probably the best way to handle the situation. Meet the unexpected with the unexpected.

"Why have you brought my nemesis to my house?" Tatiana said, in the same tone she might have used if she were asking why Gideon had failed to return a book he'd borrowed.

"Crikey," said Will. "Nemesis? Tatiana, I bear you no ill will. Have I ever, even once, interfered with your life? With your going about your business?"

"Yes," said Tatiana. "Twice. Once when you murdered my husband, and once when you murdered my father."

Will made a choked noise. "I murdered your father because he murdered your husband! And I didn't murder him, he'd changed into some kind of great serpent."

"A worm, Will," said Gideon quietly. "He was a giant worm. Not a serpent."

“As I remember,” said Will, “it were a great wyrm, from the depths of the Abyss, that we dispatched.”

“It was not,” said Gideon.

“It was my father,” ground out Tatiana, “and I wish to know, Gideon, why you have brought him here? I asked you to perform a task for me.”

“And I have performed it,” Gideon said briskly. “Mr. Herondale was good enough to come along, to help protect me from this most vicious of dogs that you described.”

“It’s actually quite vicious,” Will agreed.

“If you’ll just let us come in,” Gideon said.

Tatiana squinted at both of them as if trying to see through a possible glamour. “Well, come in, then. But you won’t get tea.”

“Tatiana,” Will said with an understanding chuckle. “There’s obviously no way I would ever consume any food or drink at your house.”

This was going rather well, Gideon thought.

Ensnared back in his father’s office, with no tea offered nor taken, Tatiana said, “Well?”

Gideon reached into his jacket and lay a dog’s collar, a weathered length of leather cord, down on the desktop with a flourish.

Tatiana looked at it and then up at him. “What is this?”

“It is the dog’s collar,” Gideon said. “A trophy of our dispatching it.”

She looked at it again. “This tells me nothing. You could simply have taken the collar off of that dog.”

“Madam,” said Will, “if I may? No man could possibly have taken the collar off of that dog. I would advise no man to put their hand within several feet of that dog’s neck, if they wish to retain said hand. Now that that collar is off, no man could ever put it back on.” He spoke in serious tones.

“I need something more,” Tatiana said. “If you killed the dog, you must know where it is. Go back and bring me the dog’s tail, or something.”

“Tatiana,” Gideon began, but Will interrupted.

“If I may again,” he said, “the dog resides on the far side of the very tall and very pointy iron fence that stands between the dog’s property and the road. Climbing over that fence at all is a feat that I would advise only the most well-trained of Shadowhunters to attempt once, and I

would recommend they do it empty-handed, rather than carrying some random bit of dog. I'm afraid that the collar will have to suffice."

Tatiana sat back and shook her head, dissatisfaction wrinkling her mouth. "Proof that you have dispatched the dog," she said, "and not merely that you have encountered it."

Gideon waited for Will to jump in again, but Will was silent. He seemed unsure how to proceed. Finally, he said, "Tatiana, give him the papers. Because it's Christmas."

"What?" said Gideon in disbelief.

Tatiana looked at Will with loathing. "Mundane holidays are meaningless to me."

"I should have guessed, yes," muttered Will.

"Please," said Gideon, at the end of his rope. "My son—he's...he's like your son." Tatiana stared at him in silence for a moment, so he pressed on. "He's...he's very small, and he's often ill, and we worry about his survival. We worry about when we will put Marks on him. Like you do, with your son."

Tatiana continued to watch Gideon in silence with a lizard-like stare.

"I know we do not see eye-to-eye on our family history," he said doggedly, and ignored Will's quiet hmph! from beside him. "But we are family nevertheless, and we may both have...inherited something. From our father. Something we've now passed to our sons. I must look through the papers to see if there is any clue there."

She stared for a long and agonizing moment, and then she said, "Get out of my house."

"Tatiana," he began.

"How dare you compare your son and mine!" she said, her voice rising in volume. "Anyone could guess where the weakness in your son originates, and it is obviously with your decision to mix your blood with the most mundane you could find!" Her voice had risen to a shout.

"Sophie is an Ascended Shadowhunter!" Will shouted back, staunchly, and Gideon realized he was happy that Will was there.

"I don't care!" Tatiana shouted. "My son is of the blood of two of the oldest of the Shadowhunter families. He is not weak like your son. Go back to your weakness, Gideon. Get out of my sight, get out of my house, and do not darken my door again. I have not missed your company, nor

your brother's, and I am relieved that my child will not grow up under the corrupting influence of either of you."

Gideon made to stand up, but Will said "Tatiana, if I may yet again," and he sat back down. Tatiana glowered at him. "I think," Will went on, in a newly serious tone, "that if you and I could step outside into the hallway for a moment and talk in private—just for a moment. Give me three minutes, that is all. And after that, we will depart and we promise never to return. Right, Gideon?"

Gideon did not much wish to promise never to return to the house he'd grown up in, so he only said, "Whatever you wish."

Tatiana examined Will's face carefully, and then said, "You have two minutes, starting from this moment." She rose from her seat and made for the door.

"Will, what are you—" Gideon began.

Will put the tip of his finger to his lips to quiet Gideon. "Trust me," he said. "I believe that I can create a Christmas miracle."

Helplessly Gideon watched his sister and his friend depart and close the door behind them. The seconds ticked by. Two minutes passed, then another two, then three more.

Then Tatiana came back into the room, followed by Will. Gideon tried to read Will's expression, but it was neutral, nonchalant.

In Tatiana's hands were two notebooks, packed with loose papers supplementing their own contents. Their covers, and the loose pages, were densely smeared with soot. "The papers of Benedict Lightwood," she said. "You do not deserve them. And I am not gifting them to you. They are part of the house, and the house is mine, and they are also mine. You shall have them to peruse or copy at your leisure for the term of one week, and if they are not returned by that date, in their original condition, may the Angel have mercy on your souls. Both of you," she added in Will's direction.

Will threw up his hands in surrender. "I really just came for the dog-wrestling."

Wondering, Gideon took the papers from her. He turned to look at Will, who murmured to him, "A Christmas miracle," with a small smile.

* * *

“Come now,” Gideon said in the carriage on the way back from Chiswick, “what did you say to Tatiana to make her concede?”

It was snowing, that rare snow with very little wind, so flakes fell in a picturesque fluttering, rather than battering at the carriage like they might have as they made their way through Hammersmith, back in the direction of Central London. Will leaned back in his seat and gazed out the window.

“Well, if you must know,” he said, “I delivered an extremely well-considered speech, touching on the topics of the importance of family, the virtue of forgiveness, the need for all Shadowhunters to be allied in the fight against demons, the smallness of the sacrifice being asked of her, the pointlessness of revenge, and, of course, the giving nature of the season.”

“Oh?”

“Yes,” said Will eagerly. “And then, I counted banknotes totalling two hundred British pounds sterling directly into her hand.”

“Will!” said Gideon, shocked.

“I told you,” Will said airily. “Everyone likes money. Even mad revenge-seeking sisters, with the dried blood of their husbands on their frocks, like money.”

Gideon was flummoxed. It was an enormous sum. “You didn’t have to do that, Will,” he said. “She doesn’t deserve the money.”

“What she doesn’t deserve,” Will said hotly, “is the moral victory. It was money well-spent to be gone from that house.”

Gideon opened the journals, marveling at Will Herondale. His financial standing was better than Gideon’s own, surely, but two hundred pounds was an enormous amount of money, well more than Will could throw away on a lark. And yet he’d not hesitated to wield that money for Gideon’s sake, had in fact, Gideon now realized, brought the money with him on purpose.

So strange, Gideon thought with a sidelong look at Will, who continued harrumphing to himself quietly in victory. At this moment this boy he’d despised as a child was more his family than his own actual

sister. And he found he was able to accept that. A Christmas miracle indeed.

“I really had better return these to Tatiana in a week,” he said, examining the journals again before he started reading. “Or she’s like to set a demon on me.”

Will chuckled. “Ha. Maybe she would at that.”

Gideon paused. “She might, you know. All jokes aside. It’s a legitimate possibility.”

“It is,” agreed Will, a little more grimly.

Minutes passed, during which Gideon skimmed the papers, frowning. After a time he found himself back at the beginning, and he wrinkled his brow, bemused.

Will turned back from where he had been watching the Bath Road go by. “What is it?” he said.

“There’s nothing here,” Gideon said, frustrated. “Plenty of terrible things, of course. My father was a...a...” He struggled for the right word.

“Monster?” suggested Will.

“Pervert,” said Gideon carefully. He shuffled through the pages until he found one that was only an elaborate diagram his father had made up in pencil and showed it to Will.

Will blinked at it. “Jiminy,” he said.

“But there’s nothing here that would cause weakness or fragility in his descendants,” Gideon went on. “No curses, no hexes, no demon poisons....”

“Only the pox, then,” Will said dryly.

“Yes, but that isn’t hereditary,” Gideon said. “We looked into that years ago for our own sakes.” He shuffled the papers. “All that trouble, and for nothing. Thomas remains frail and I remain unable to do anything for him.”

There was a silence and then Will said, “Gideon, it is Christmastime, and Christmas is a time to tell the truth. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“If you say so,” Gideon said, waving his hand. From his experience Christmas a time to sing in the street and eat a goose, but who knew what strange traditions Will had from his mundane childhood. “In any event, I’d agree you should tell the truth whatever the time of year.”

“Gideon,” Will said, clapping his hand on Gideon’s shoulder. “There is nothing wrong whatsoever with Thomas.”

Gideon sighed. “That’s very kind of you to say, Will, but—”

“But nothing. Thomas is just small. Sometimes children are small. He’s not cursed or hexed.”

“He gets sick,” Gideon pressed. “All the time.”

Will laughed. “Do you have any idea how sick Cecily was as an infant? She was colicky, and then she had fevers...she cried more than she slept, those first few years.”

“And then what?”

Will threw up his hands. “And then nothing! She grew! She fell ill less and less often. That is the way of children. And we did not have terrifying mute telepathic doctors to take care of us. Does Thomas eat? Does he exert himself when he does feel well?”

“Yes,” Gideon admitted.

“Well then,” said Will, leaning back as if his point was made. “Put your mind aside from your supposed cursed family. Tatiana’s son is sickly—does that surprise you, now you’ve seen the house? Now you’ve seen Tatiana? No, of course not.” He looked at Gideon intently. “Thomas’s only trouble,” he said firmly, “is that he is an adorable wee thing.”

Gideon stared at Will. Then he broke into laughter. Will laughed too, his usual hearty chuckle, and Gideon found himself feeling better. He was still worried about Thomas—he would be for a few years, he knew, until the boy had passed the time of worrisome childhood ailments and could be protected with runes—but he felt better nonetheless. He had thought of many ways he might feel on the way back from his sister’s house, but “better” had not been one of them.

“Christmas miracle,” Will whispered gleefully.

Well, thought Gideon. *Some kind of miracle, anyway.*

The Anniversary Party – Part I



Flash Fiction – January 2020



France, 1899

Cordelia did not like Menton very much. She should have, in theory. Menton was a pretty seaside town, a jumble of pink and yellow buildings along a small harbor, mostly slips for sailboats and some fishing boats. The air was warm and Mediterranean, the fish was exceptionally fresh, she could see Italy from her bedroom window across the far side of the harbor. What was there not to like?

They had come for her father's health—why else did they go anywhere, after all—and Cordelia could understand why Menton had a reputation as a healing destination for the sick and the elderly. Indeed, her father's health had rebounded since their arrival a few weeks earlier and he was in a period of good spirits, willing to dance with her in the parlor and even managing to drag a smile out of Alastair on occasion. Alastair had entered a turbulent adolescence, as Cordelia overheard her mother say to her father. Cordelia hoped that when she was Alastair's age she would maintain her composure a little better than he was managing.

But Menton's charms quickly faded for her. Its popularity with the sick and the elderly meant that the town's population had a large proportion of both, and while Cordelia wished them all well, they did not offer her much in the way of companions or even adults interested in conversation with a girl for whom French was her third language, and not very strong. The beach turned out to be made not of sand but of large round pebbles—Cordelia had never heard of such a thing, a beach made of rocks, very uncomfortable on bare feet, not pleasant to lie on, and offering no opportunity for building castles or digging trenches.

Worst of all, her parents continued to be as antisocial as ever, making no efforts to reach out to the local Shadowhunter community (the closest Institute being in Marseilles). And so Cordelia was alone. Sometimes she was alone with Alastair, but he mostly ignored her, and even so they were both duly sick of each other's sole company after a week.

The only source of relief was the knowledge that this, too, would pass—the Carstairs family moved constantly, obsessively, for the sake of her father's health. Cordelia could never understand the logic of it, except that she agreed that it was worth doing anything if it meant her father's

wellbeing. In this case, it was a bit of a relief. She knew they would not stay in Menton more than a few months.

This was, she felt, why she was so alone. Her family never stayed anywhere long enough for her to meet anyone her age, much less make friends. Her only real friends in the world were Lucie and James Herondale, and only because, Cordelia knew, Will and Tessa Herondale had always worked very hard to make sure that their children saw the younger Carstairs. It was still a rare treat to see them, as the Herondales ran the London Institute, and thus were usually in London, and occasionally in Idris, while Cordelia and her family were all over the map.

And here again, the Herondales came to her rescue, this time in the form of a letter her father read aloud at the breakfast table.

“Good morning, Elias and Sona,” – I say, how would he know what time of day we’d read it, the man is mad as a hatter—”

“We are reading it in the morning, though,” Cordelia said. Her father gave her an indulgent smile and went on.

“It is a capital day here in London, and I hope it will be a capital day in Paris six weeks hence, when Tessa and I will celebrate our eighteenth wedding anniversary. As it is not the custom of any known culture to make a to-do out of the eighteenth wedding anniversary, we have decided to throw an enormous party.”

“A ball!” cried Cordelia, but a worry poked at her. Would her parents attend such a thing? Her father was frowning at the letter, but possibly he was simply trying to make the words out better without his glasses.

“It’s not a ball,” said Alastair, who had stopped halfway down the stairway to listen.

“A ball, if you will,” her father read on. “Well done, Cordelia.”

Cordelia stuck out her tongue at Alastair.

“We would love if you and your darling children would join us...if you would do us the pleasure of responding...,’ et cetera, et cetera...” Her father scanned the letter. “And then it has the date and the address and all that.”

“It started out strong, but it ended in something of an anticlimax,” Alastair said.

“Can we go?” Cordelia said eagerly. “Can we please? I would so like to see Lucie and James. And maybe I’d meet some of the people Lucie talks about in her letters!”

“I would like to see anyone at all other than you lot,” said Alastair mildly. “No offense intended.”

“Alastair!” Sona scolded, but Cordelia was not about to let Alastair distract from the main point. She redoubled her efforts in the direction of her father.

“Papa, can we go, please? You’ve recovered so well, surely a trip of only a few days would be possible. Don’t you want Shadowhunter society to see how well you are?”

“Hm,” her father said. He looked at her mother, who looked back. They exchanged a series of incomprehensible looks with one another.

“If you think it would be a good idea,” Sona said to Elias. Cordelia’s father gave Cordelia a long look. Cordelia tried to catch Alastair’s eye, but he’d turned away and was looking with disgust into the middle distance, a typical expression for him these days.

“I think we could manage a train trip and a few days in Paris,” her father allowed. “I do adore Paris.”

Cordelia threw her arms around him. “Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

* * *

Cordelia spent the next weeks in a state of constant dread. She didn’t dare remind her parents of the upcoming trip, lest they remember that they had intended to cancel and not attend after all. It had happened before, but never before for an event in which Cordelia had a strong investment.

But when the event was a few days away, her father brought up the timetable of the Calais-Méditerranée Express train at breakfast. Tickets were bought, bags packed, and still Cordelia could barely believe it when she found herself the evening before the party, pulling into the Gare du Nord in an elegant blue train car, clutching her hands in her lap in anticipation: Paris, at last she was in Paris! She would see her future parabatai, and her brother, and the cream of Shadowhunter society, and she would do so in Paris.

The next day found her gazing into the full-length mirror in their rooms at the Hôtel Continental on the Rue de Rivoli and wondering that she was even the same girl who had been miserably pining away a few days before. Her mother had helped her select her dress, a frothy lemon confection of lace and silk. She wasn't entirely sure it suited her, but it was very elegant.

Even Alastair regarded her with something in the neighborhood of admiration when he came in to fetch his gloves. "You look surprisingly mature," he told her. Cordelia thought that was probably equivalent to a full swoon, for Alastair. For his part, he was clearly aiming at "mature" as well, having put on a brown sack coat with only one of its buttons buttoned, and having dared to apply a dab of pomade to his black hair, which, Cordelia had to admit, did make it shine compellingly.

"You look like you'll be trying to impress someone at the party," Cordelia teased him. "Anyone in particular?"

"Everyone," Alastair sniffed. "Everyone that is anyone."

Cordelia rolled her eyes.

Her father was in high spirits as they entered the carriage a short time later, joking and laughing. Her mother was quiet, watching her husband with a smile and a considering expression, and that is how they were for the entire ride to the Paris Institute.

* * *

She had been practicing her French, and when the imposing figure of Madame Bellefleur greeted them at the Institute door with a paragraph of rapid-fire enthusiasm and questions, she understood them: welcome, how was their journey, isn't it frightfully chilly tonight. She began to think of a reply, and found that her entire speaking ability in the French language had departed her brain in exactly that moment.

Her father's French was fluid and expert, and Cordelia felt a little rush of pride as he said, "Madame Bellefleur, dear! You are looking as lovely as ever, Odile. But what has become of you, that you've fallen so far to be working the door?"

Madame Bellefleur laughed, a hearty chuckle that made Cordelia like her immediately. “I sent the maid off to enjoy herself. I like answering the door, Elias — it may be the Herondales’ party, but it’s my Institute.”

Inside, Cordelia slipped away from her parents as soon as it was feasible and went to look for her friends. It took her all of five minutes to become hopelessly lost. Unlike any Institute she had been in before, this one was laid out as a labyrinthine series of interconnected salons. Each looked much like the last, and was crowded with adults, none of whom Cordelia knew, and most of whom were speaking in rapid French. She had not spotted a single Herondale, and the clatter and chatter of the party guests was beginning to make her feel less like a young sophisticate at the ball and more like a little girl who had lost her mother at the market.

Out of nowhere came a whirlwind of petticoats, which turned out happily to be Lucie Herondale, throwing herself into Cordelia’s arms with great force and a squeal of delight. “Cordelia, Cordelia, you must come, Christopher is going to teach us how to eat fire!”

“I’m sorry?” Cordelia said politely, but Lucie was already pulling her toward the door to the next salon. “Who is Christopher?”

“Christopher Lightwood, of course. My cousin. He saw a man eating fire in Covent Garden and he said he’d worked out how to do it. He’s very scientific, Christopher.” Lucie’s progress was stopped short, and Cordelia looked up to see a tall, slender older girl, with dark hair braided atop her head and a striking look. She was wearing a lacy blue dress without much enthusiasm. She raised her eyebrows and stared Lucie down. “And this is his sister Anna,” Lucie said, as though she’d planned the encounter.

“Christopher will not be eating any fire,” said Anna, “or indeed anything other than the canapes tonight.”

Lucie said, “Anna, this is Cordelia Carstairs; she’s going to be my parabatai.” Cordelia felt a rush of affection for her friend—she felt so alone so much of the time, but she wasn’t, not really. She was going to have a parabatai; neither she nor Lucie would ever fully be alone again. Or that’s how she had come to understand it would feel.

Anna, however, merely arched an eyebrow. “Not if Christopher burns the Institute down, she won’t.” She turned her piercing gaze onto

Cordelia. “Carstairs?” she said curiously. “What Carstairs?”

Cordelia knew what that was about. She gave Anna a smile. “Jem Carstairs is my second cousin. I only know him a very little bit, unfortunately.” Jem, who had been Lucie’s father’s parabatai, had a long and tragic story that ended with his having become a Silent Brother. He was Brother Zachariah now.

Would he be here? It was strange to imagine among the sparkling, laughing conversation, the clinking of glasses, a parchment-robed silent figure drifting about. But why wouldn’t he be? Lucie spoke of him all the time. Cordelia felt a little frisson of nerve at the thought of meeting him again—eagerness but also worry.

“Any Carstairs is welcome,” Anna smiled back airily. “And obviously any parabatai of Lucie’s is essentially a member of the family. Speaking of which.” She turned back to Lucie. “Don’t encourage Christopher, Lucie. You know how he is.”

“It wasn’t my idea!” Lucie protested. “It’s Matthew who set him on it. You know how he is.”

“I don’t,” said Cordelia mildly.

Lucie gave her a look of wide-eyed horror. “Oh, dear, what kind of host am I? Here is my best friend in the world, and I haven’t even introduced you to everyone! Anna, we must go.” She reached for Cordelia’s hand again.

“It was lovely to meet you,” Cordelia said to Anna.

Anna tipped her glass in Cordelia’s direction with a small smile. “Likewise.”

“All right,” Lucie narrated as she pulled Cordelia into yet another salon. “Matthew is Matthew Fairchild, he’s the consul’s son but don’t worry, he’s all right and not a bit stuck-up about it, and anyway Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Henry ran the London Institute when my Papa was young—he lived there, you know—and they’re over there, actually, hullo Aunt Charlotte!” Lucie waved a hand madly.

Cordelia looked over and quickly spotted Charlotte Fairchild—even someone as socially deprived as she was recognized the Consul—who was in the middle of saying something very serious to a group of equally serious-looking people, and didn’t notice Lucie’s wave. It was funny; Charlotte was tiny, bird-like, and towered over by the men around her,

but she had a presence that dominated the room regardless. It was an admirable way to be, Cordelia thought.

Next to Charlotte was a red-headed man in a Bath chair, who did see Lucie wave, and waved back madly himself with a grin. Henry Fairchild. He was too far away for them to speak, but Lucie pointed at Cordelia and raised her eyebrows. Henry raised his hands and exclaimed in pleasure, and Cordelia waved too, a little less madly than the others.

“Is that Matthew with them?” Cordelia said. “The tallish one with his father’s hair?”

Lucie snorted. “Oh no! Matthew would be so offended. That’s his older brother Charles. He’s, well....”

“What?” said Cordelia.

“He’s a little dull.” Lucie had the good manners to look ashamed at her admission. “He’s very interested in politics and Shadowhunter business and all that, and he treats us all like children.”

“We are children.”

“Yes, so is he!” Lucie said impatiently. “But you wouldn’t know it from the way he acts.” She sighed. “He’s an all right sort, though. Next salon!”

With rapid speed Lucie took her through the remainder of the people Lucie considered it important for Cordelia to know. Her Aunt Cecily and her Uncle Gabriel—Gabriel also turned out to be among the group surrounding Charlotte—who were Anna and Christopher’s parents. Her Aunt Sophie, who had worked at the Institute as a mundane and then Ascended and married Gabriel’s brother Gideon.

Gideon, Lucie explained, was not here, because Thomas—oh, it was a shame that Cordelia was not going to meet Thomas, and also Thomas would never have allowed Christopher to get within a mile of fire to eat it, if he had anything to say about it, but anyway Thomas had broken his leg and Gideon had stayed home with him.

“Also there are the older girls,” Lucie said darkly. “Barbara and Eugenia. But they’re not much like us. They’re not even here; they had something else tonight. Can you believe it?”

Cordelia wasn’t sure whether she was supposed to believe it or not believe it, having never met either girl, so she only shook her head understandingly.

“Lucie!” A woman with heaps of curly scarlet hair was advancing on them at speed. “I need someone to help me put out the silver. Congratulations, girl, you’re hired.”

“Bridget,” Lucie protested. “Bridget was my nursemaid, when I was young enough to have a nursemaid,” she explained to Cordelia.

“And now your repayment of my kindness to you continues,” Bridget said sharply, “with the putting out of the silver. Come along.”

“I can help,” offered Cordelia.

Bridget looked offended. “I’ll not have a guest doing work at a party. This one here is hosting the thing.” She dragged off Lucie, who gave Cordelia a beseeching look of apology as she vanished into the crowd.

This left Cordelia back to meandering a bit aimlessly. Perhaps, she thought, she would go back and speak more with Anna, who had been so kind. Perhaps she would seek out her own family and see how they were making out.

Where were her family, though? After a few minutes’ wandering she spotted her mother, who seemed to be unusually in her element, animatedly telling some story to a captivated audience. But she couldn’t find her father, or Alastair, anywhere. It was a large party, surely, but she would have expected her father to be with her mother, or if not, captivating his own audience. Cordelia had been able to tell that he was the second-most excited to go to the party after herself. So where was he?

Perhaps, she thought, he had slipped away to the library. She wanted to get a look at the Institute’s library herself, anyway. She managed enough French to ask directions from one of the waitstaff. It was down an iron spiral staircase, and Cordelia allowed herself to feel like a princess descending a tower.

The library had a tremendously high ceiling, which gave it an airy feel, but on the ground it was crowded with ancient, heavy oaken bookshelves, all of which were piled so densely with books that they were bent over by the weight, and it was astonishing that they had not already collapsed. Cordelia loved the place immediately. It was crumbling, in the most beautiful way possible. The light was warm and orange, and dust motes floated in it. It smelled pleasantly of must and old paper, and here and there were chairs of cracked, heavily aged and stained red leather.

Down at the other end of the room there was indeed a figure seated on the windowsill, curled up with a book, but it was obviously not her father. As she got closer, the dark-haired figure raised its head to peer at her, and she realized: it was James Herondale.

The Anniversary Party – Part 2



Flash Fiction – February 2020



“Hello,” said James Herondale. He peered up at Cordelia owlishly, as though he’d just come out of a reverie and wasn’t quite returned to the fully waking world.

“By the Angel, I’m awfully sorry.” Cordelia couldn’t help feeling she had interrupted something. She had met James before, of course—Will Herondale had been nothing if not diligent about making sure that his children and the Carstairs children knew one another—but she would not have described him as a friend, necessarily. He was a bit unknowable, in his odd way.

“No need to apologize,” James said mildly, “it’s me who’s skiving off this party to read.” He sat up rather suddenly, as if he’d only just realized he had been splayed casually across the windowsill and he should seek some kind of propriety.

“Most people don’t skive off parties,” Cordelia said, amused. “It’s usually lessons and chores, that sort of thing. Do you not like parties?”

“I like parties just fine,” James said, a bit defensively.

Cordelia crossed her arms and said sternly, “Well, I am in the library because I wanted to see the Paris Institute library, but also because almost the whole party are strangers to me. But they’re your friends, aren’t they? Wouldn’t you want to be with your friends? Matthew, and Thomas and the rest?”

James gave Cordelia a long look. When he spoke, his voice was quiet. “They are my friends, I suppose, but really they’re more like relatives. I’ve always felt out of place among them.”

The thought of James being out of place anywhere struck Cordelia as funny. Compared to herself, he was self-assured, charismatic, effortlessly interesting. Compared to her awkward discomfort inside her own body, he was graceful and strikingly handsome—

Good Lord, Cordelia thought, where had that come from?

It was true, though. Among the pillars and medieval arches of the library he looked as at home as a marble statue, an oil painting of a classical youth at study. How could someone who matched his environment so perfectly be uncomfortable?

“I always feel out of place too,” she offered. “But I thought it was just because my family is always traveling so much. I’ve never stayed in one place long enough to make friends.” She looked down at the ground. “Maybe it’s more complicated than that.”

James said, “We’re friends, aren’t we?”

Cordelia gave a little laugh. “Well, yes. We are. But how often do we see each other? Once a year, maybe twice, if we’re lucky?”

He shrugged. “I don’t see most of the people at this party more than that, anyway. We’re always in London and they’re usually in Idris. Although we’re meant to go to Idris this summer, so perhaps I’ll see them a bit more. And of course, we’ll all be at the Academy this fall.” He sighed. “Maybe I’ll start to think of them as real friends at some point. I just feel so different than them. Like...like everyone else is looking out at the world, at other people, but I am always looking inward, instead.”

Since to Cordelia James appeared to glow from within slightly, this struck her as an odd facet of his personality, but she supposed that the shy and retiring came in all shapes and sizes. “All man’s miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone,” she quoted. “My father always says that.”

“Your father sounds very wise,” said James.

“Actually,” said Cordelia, “I think Blaise Pascal said that, and my father was only quoting him. You’d get along with my father,” she went on, surprised to find herself saying it out loud. But it was true; both her father and James had the same sense of the world being a bit too much for them, of preferring solitude, of seeking refuge in books. “I should go find him,” she said. “Again, I’m so sorry for interrupting your reading.”

James put the book down on the side table next to the window. “Again, please don’t apologize, I’m always happy for the opportunity to talk with you.” Cordelia found herself blushing, a bit, but James didn’t appear to notice. He stood up and said, smiling, “I shall escort you in your endeavor.”

On the way out of the library they fell silent, and Cordelia began to feel a bit awkward. It was usually so easy to speak with James, and yet she was unaccountably tongue-tied. Finally, desperate for a conversational gambit, she blurted, “Did you know that the original Paris Institute

library burned down in 1574 when someone opened a Pyxis containing a Dragonidae demon?”

James raised his eyebrows. “I did not know that, Miss Carstairs,” he said, and Cordelia burst into giggles.

The smile was wiped quickly off her face, however, by the arrival of Alastair, who looked grim. “There you are,” he said, but he sounded more relieved than angry. He had a tired look in his eyes. “Father’s not well,” he said. “He’s asking for you.”

“Oh!” said Cordelia. She felt a brief, uncharitable flash of annoyance — her father’s sickness had spoiled so many parties, even Cordelia’s first rune-day. She turned to James. “I should go to him.”

“Of course,” said James. “I’m so sorry to hear he’s not well.”

“There’s an old monk’s chamber down that hall,” Alastair said, gesturing. “Father said he wanted to be someplace cool and dark.” He shook his head, agitated. “Sorry, Cordelia.”

Cordelia wasn’t sure what he meant—perhaps that it was usually her that Elias asked for when he wasn’t well, and not Alastair? She hoped it didn’t hurt Alastair’s feelings. She assumed it was because Elias believed girls made better nurses than boys, though she wasn’t sure that was true.

She left James and her brother there, looking askance at one another, and went down the hall until she found a short little heavy wooden door set in the wall. It swung open at her tentative push, and inside she found only a bit of dim light and a sparsely furnished room, with a small platform bed in the corner on which her father sat, his arm over his eyes.

“Papa,” she said, “I’m here.”

He groaned. “Cordelia, my love. It came on so suddenly.”

Cordelia felt a wash of guilt at having resented her father. “I know. I’m here, Papa.”

She went over to the bed and sat down next to him. The room was suffused with the strong smell, herbaceous and strongly bitter, that she associated with his episodes—the medicine that the Silent Brothers gave him to keep his health under control, she assumed.

“I’m sorry to ruin your party, Cordelia,” her father said after a moment. His voice was throaty, his words slow, as though it pained him to speak.

“No,” said Cordelia gently. “I’m sorry you’re not feeling well. I know you had looked forward to the party as well.”

He looked up from his arm and gazed at her fondly. “I already feel better now that you’re here.” He reached out and took her small hand in his larger one. “You’ve always been my best charm for getting well.”

Cordelia rubbed his hand anxiously. “What can I do, Papa? Is there anything you need?” She glanced around the room, looking for anything that might be helpful. Her eye fell on one of the room’s few decorations, a small shelf with a selection of cloth and leather-bound books arranged haphazardly across it. “I could read to you,” she said. That was what she would want if she were feeling ill, after all. To be read to would be the greatest act of love she could receive, so it only made sense to offer it here.

“Yes, that would be very nice.” Her father closed his eyes and smiled, as if in anticipation.

Cordelia went to examine the shelf. Doubtfully she said, “Well, in English we have either the 1817 classic *How to Avoid Werewolves*—”

“You mean, socially?”

“I’m not sure,” said Cordelia. “Your other option is the classic travelogue of the Shadowhunter Hezekiah Featherstone, *Demons With Whom I Have Had Relationships*.”

“Should you really be reading that second one?” her father rumbled.

“Papa!” said Cordelia, scandalized. “I don’t think they are romantic relationships.”

“Well then,” said Elias, settling back on the bed, and Cordelia thought he did already sound like he was feeling a bit better, “surprise me.”

* * *

James thought, it wasn’t Cordelia’s fault that he had been left alone with her older brother. It was only an unfortunate side-effect of the situation.

Though only a couple of years apart in age, James had always thought of Alastair as impossibly older than him, and Alastair, for his part, had

treated James as impossibly younger. James supposed this was a natural result of being an older sibling. Certainly he could not imagine taking anyone fully seriously who was only his little sister's age. In this circumstance, however, it left him unsure what to say to Alastair, or whether to wait for Alastair to speak, or whether to simply bolt from the room at top speed and assume Alastair was too slow to catch him.

Alastair ended the mystery by saying, in an odd tone, "My apologies for all this. My father is often unwell."

"It's all right," James said, feeling strange to be reassuring an older boy. Tentatively he said, "Your father is a hero, after all."

"What?" said Alastair, thrown off guard.

"Your father," James said. "He killed the demon Yanluo."

"Not by himself," said Alastair.

"No," said James, "but still. My father says an experience like that can leave scars. It's a kind of sacrifice that heroes make, taking those scars so others don't have to."

He had meant it kindly, but was dismayed by the way Alastair's face shut down. He became a blank, and when he looked at James, it was clear that he had ceased to regard James as being present in the room, or indeed, existing at all. "Quite," he said. Without further comment he headed down the hallway toward the library.

"I'll see you at the Academy," James offered, one final try. "This fall. I'll be starting."

Alastair turned back, and in the same oddly neutral tone, he said, "That's right. I suppose you will."

After Alastair departed, James stayed where he was for a while, alone in the narrow, whitewashed corridor of the Institute. There was a party shaking the very rafters of the building, and yet here there was only silence. James thought of Cordelia, comforting her ill father, of Alastair stomping off for the sake of stomping off, obviously with no destination in mind.

His father had always made such an effort to get the two families together, the Herondales and the Carstairs. He had told so many stories about them, and was always encouraging their spending time together. And James had always been fond of the Carstairs, especially Cordelia. But now he thought, it's odd, really, how little I know them as people.

He thought of the cousins, the parents' friends, the Enclave members celebrating above. Other than his own family, he knew so little about any of them as people. And while he felt safe here, in the quiet, in the dark, he could tell that the world would not let him remain there for much longer. He would be out in the world, and he would need friends, and family, to help get him through.

Perhaps at the Academy, this fall.

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