

THE MORTAL INSTRUMENTS

Book One

City of Bones

Also by Cassandra Clare

THE MORTAL INSTRUMENTS

City of Ashes

City of Glass

City of Fallen Angels

City of Lost Souls

THE INFERNAL DEVICES

Clockwork Angel

Clockwork Prince

Clockwork Princess

THE MORTAL INSTRUMENTS

Book One

City of Bones

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Clary Fray is drawn into this bizarre world when her mother disappears
and Clary herself is almost killed by a monster.

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For my grandfather



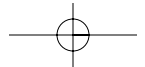
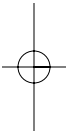
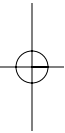
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*I have not slept.
Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasm, or a hideous dream:
The Genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council; and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.*
—William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar



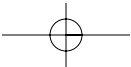
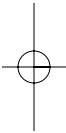
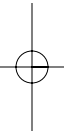


Part One

Dark Descent



*I sung of Chaos and Eternal Night,
Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
The dark descent, and up to reascend . . .
—John Milton, Paradise Lost*



1

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“You’ve got to be kidding me,” the bouncer said, folding his arms across his massive chest. He stared down at the boy in the red zip-up jacket and shook his shaved head. “You can’t bring that thing in here.”

The fifty or so teenagers in line outside the Pandemonium Club leaned forward to eavesdrop. It was a long wait to get into the all-ages club, especially on a Sunday, and not much generally happened in line. The bouncers were fierce and would come down instantly on anyone who looked like they were going to start trouble. Fifteen-year-old Clary Fray, standing in line with her best friend, Simon, leaned forward along with everyone else, hoping for some excitement.

“Aw, come on.” The kid hoisted the thing up over his head. It

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looked like a wooden beam, pointed at one end. "It's part of my costume."

The bouncer raised an eyebrow. "Which is what?"

The boy grinned. He was normal-enough-looking, Clary thought, for Pandemonium. He had electric blue dyed hair that stuck up around his head like the tentacles of a startled octopus, but no elaborate facial tattoos or big metal bars through his ears or lips. "I'm a vampire hunter." He pushed down on the wooden thing. It bent as easily as a blade of grass bending sideways. "It's fake. Foam rubber. See?"

The boy's wide eyes were way too bright a green, Clary noticed: the color of antifreeze, spring grass. Colored contact lenses, probably. The bouncer shrugged, abruptly bored. "Whatever. Go on in."

The boy slid past him, quick as an eel. Clary liked the lilt to his shoulders, the way he tossed his hair as he went. There was a word for him that her mother would have used—*insouciant*.

"You thought he was cute," said Simon, sounding resigned. "Didn't you?"

Clary dug her elbow into his ribs, but didn't answer.

Inside, the club was full of dry-ice smoke. Colored lights played over the dance floor, turning it into a multicolored fairyland of blues and acid greens, hot pinks and golds.

The boy in the red jacket stroked the long razor-sharp blade in his hands, an idle smile playing over his lips. It had been so easy—a little bit of a glamour on the blade, to make it look harmless. Another glamour on his eyes, and the moment the bouncer had looked straight at him, he was in. Of course, he could probably have gotten by without all that trouble, but it

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was part of the fun—fooling the mundies, doing it all out in the open right in front of them, getting off on the blank looks on their sheeplike faces.

Not that the humans didn't have their uses. The boy's green eyes scanned the dance floor, where slender limbs clad in scraps of silk and black leather appeared and disappeared inside the revolving columns of smoke as the mundies danced. Girls tossed their long hair, boys swung their leather-clad hips, and bare skin glittered with sweat. Vitality just *poured* off them, waves of energy that filled him with a drunken dizziness. His lip curled. They didn't know how lucky they were. They didn't know what it was like to eke out life in a dead world, where the sun hung limp in the sky like a burned cinder. Their lives burned as brightly as candle flames—and were as easy to snuff out.

His hand tightened on the blade he carried, and he had begun to step out onto the dance floor when a girl broke away from the mass of dancers and began walking toward him. He stared at her. She was beautiful, for a human—long hair nearly the precise color of black ink, charcoaled eyes. Floor-length white gown, the kind women used to wear when this world was younger. Lace sleeves belled out around her slim arms. Around her neck was a thick silver chain, on which hung a dark red pendant the size of a baby's fist. He only had to narrow his eyes to know that it was real—real and precious. His mouth started to water as she neared him. Vital energy pulsed from her like blood from an open wound. She smiled, passing him, beckoning with her eyes. He turned to follow her, tasting the phantom sizzle of her death on his lips.

It was always easy. He could already feel the power of her evaporating life coursing through his veins like fire. Humans

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were so stupid. They had something so precious, and they barely safeguarded it at all. They threw away their lives for money, for packets of powder, for a stranger's charming smile. The girl was a pale ghost retreating through the colored smoke. She reached the wall and turned, bunching her skirt up in her hands, lifting it as she grinned at him. Under the skirt, she was wearing thigh-high boots.

He sauntered up to her, his skin prickling with her nearness. Up close she wasn't so perfect: He could see the mascara smudged under her eyes, the sweat sticking her hair to her neck. He could smell her mortality, the sweet rot of corruption. *Got you*, he thought.

A cool smile curled her lips. She moved to the side, and he could see that she was leaning against a closed door. NO ADMITTANCE—STORAGE was scrawled across it in red paint. She reached behind her for the knob, turned it, slid inside. He caught a glimpse of stacked boxes, tangled wiring. A storage room. He glanced behind him—no one was looking. So much the better if she wanted privacy.

He slipped into the room after her, unaware that he was being followed.

"So," Simon said, "pretty good music, eh?"

Clary didn't reply. They were dancing, or what passed for it—a lot of swaying back and forth with occasional lunges toward the floor as if one of them had dropped a contact lens—in a space between a group of teenage boys in metallic corsets, and a young Asian couple who were making out passionately, their colored hair extensions tangled together like vines. A boy with a lip piercing and a teddy bear backpack was handing out free tablets

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of herbal ecstasy, his parachute pants flapping in the breeze from the wind machine. Clary wasn't paying much attention to their immediate surroundings—her eyes were on the blue-haired boy who'd talked his way into the club. He was prowling through the crowd as if he were looking for something. There was something about the way he moved that reminded her of something . . .

"I, for one," Simon went on, "am enjoying myself immensely."

This seemed unlikely. Simon, as always, stuck out at the club like a sore thumb, in jeans and an old T-shirt that said *MADE IN BROOKLYN* across the front. His freshly scrubbed hair was dark brown instead of green or pink, and his glasses perched crookedly on the end of his nose. He looked less as if he were contemplating the powers of darkness and more as if he were on his way to chess club.

"Mmm-hmm." Clary knew perfectly well that he came to Pandemonium with her only because she liked it, that he thought it was boring. She wasn't even sure why it was that she liked it—the clothes, the music made it like a dream, someone else's life, not her boring real life at all. But she was always too shy to talk to anyone but Simon.

The blue-haired boy was making his way off the dance floor. He looked a little lost, as if he hadn't found whom he was looking for. Clary wondered what would happen if she went up and introduced herself, offered to show him around. Maybe he'd just stare at her. Or maybe he was shy too. Maybe he'd be grateful and pleased, and try not to show it, the way boys did—but she'd know. Maybe—

The blue-haired boy straightened up suddenly, snapping to attention, like a hunting dog on point. Clary followed the line of his gaze, and saw the girl in the white dress.

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Oh, well, Clary thought, trying not to feel like a deflated party balloon. *I guess that's that*. The girl was gorgeous, the kind of girl Clary would have liked to draw—tall and ribbon-slim, with a long spill of black hair. Even at this distance Clary could see the red pendant around her throat. It pulsed under the lights of the dance floor like a separate, disembodied heart.

"I feel," Simon went on, "that this evening DJ Bat is doing a singularly exceptional job. Don't you agree?"

Clary rolled her eyes and didn't answer; Simon hated trance music. Her attention was on the girl in the white dress. Through the darkness, smoke, and artificial fog, her pale dress shone out like a beacon. No wonder the blue-haired boy was following her as if he were under a spell, too distracted to notice anything else around him—even the two dark shapes hard on his heels, weaving after him through the crowd.

Clary slowed her dancing and stared. She could just make out that the shapes were boys, tall and wearing black clothes. She couldn't have said how she knew that they were following the other boy, but she did. She could see it in the way they paced him, their careful watchfulness, the slinking grace of their movements. A small flower of apprehension began to open inside her chest.

"Meanwhile," Simon added, "I wanted to tell you that lately I've been cross-dressing. Also, I'm sleeping with your mom. I thought you should know."

The girl had reached the wall, and was opening a door marked NO ADMITTANCE. She beckoned the blue-haired boy after her, and they slipped through the door. It wasn't anything Clary hadn't seen before, a couple sneaking off to the dark corners of the club to make out—but that made it even weirder that they were being followed.

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She raised herself up on tiptoe, trying to see over the crowd. The two guys had stopped at the door and seemed to be conferring with each other. One of them was blond, the other dark-haired. The blond one reached into his jacket and drew out something long and sharp that flashed under the strobing lights. A knife. "Simon!" Clary shouted, and seized his arm.

"What?" Simon looked alarmed. "I'm not really sleeping with your mom, you know. I was just trying to get your attention. Not that your mom isn't a very attractive woman, for her age."

"Do you see those guys?" She pointed wildly, almost hitting a curvy black girl who was dancing nearby. The girl shot her an evil look. "Sorry—sorry!" Clary turned back to Simon. "Do you see those two guys over there? By that door?"

Simon squinted, then shrugged. "I don't see anything."

"There are two of them. They were following the guy with the blue hair—"

"The one you thought was cute?"

"Yes, but that's not the point. The blond one pulled a knife."

"Are you *sure*?" Simon stared harder, shaking his head. "I still don't see anyone."

"I'm sure."

Suddenly all business, Simon squared his shoulders. "I'll get one of the security guards. You stay here." He strode away, pushing through the crowd.

Clary turned just in time to see the blond boy slip through the NO ADMITTANCE door, his friend right on his heels. She looked around; Simon was still trying to shove his way across the dance floor, but he wasn't making much progress. Even if she yelled now, no one would hear her, and by the time Simon got

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back, something terrible might *already* have happened. Biting hard on her lower lip, Clary started to wriggle through the crowd.

“What’s your name?”

She turned and smiled. What faint light there was in the storage room spilled down through high barred windows smeared with dirt. Piles of electrical cables, along with broken bits of mirrored disco balls and discarded paint cans littered the floor.

“Isabelle.”

“That’s a nice name.” He walked toward her, stepping carefully among the wires in case any of them were live. In the faint light she looked half-transparent, bleached of color, wrapped in white like an angel. It would be a pleasure to make her fall. . . . “I haven’t seen you here before.”

“You’re asking me if I come here often?” She giggled, covering her mouth with her hand. There was some sort of bracelet around her wrist, just under the cuff of her dress—then, as he neared her, he saw that it wasn’t a bracelet at all but a pattern inked into her skin, a matrix of swirling lines.

He froze. “You—”

He didn’t finish. She moved with lightning swiftness, striking out at him with her open hand, a blow to his chest that would have sent him down gasping if he’d been a human being. He staggered back, and now there was something in her hand, a coiling whip that glinted gold as she brought it down, curling around his ankles, jerking him off his feet. He hit the ground, writhing, the hated metal biting deep into his skin. She laughed, standing over him, and dizzily he thought that he should have *known*. No

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human girl would wear a dress like the one Isabelle wore. She'd worn it to cover her skin—all of her skin.

Isabelle yanked hard on the whip, securing it. Her smile glittered like poisonous water. "He's all yours, boys."

A low laugh sounded behind him, and now there were hands on him, hauling him upright, throwing him against one of the concrete pillars. He could feel the damp stone under his back. His hands were pulled behind him, his wrists bound with wire. As he struggled, someone walked around the side of the pillar into his view: a boy, as young as Isabelle and just as pretty. His tawny eyes glittered like chips of amber. "So," the boy said. "Are there any more with you?"

The blue-haired boy could feel blood welling up under the too-tight metal, making his wrists slippery. "Any other what?"

"Come on now." The tawny-eyed boy held up his hands, and his dark sleeves slipped down, showing the runes inked all over his wrists, the backs of his hands, his palms. "You know what I am."

Far back inside his skull, the shackled boy's second set of teeth began to grind.

"*Shadowhunter*," he hissed.

The other boy grinned all over his face. "Got you," he said.

Clary pushed the door to the storage room open, and stepped inside. For a moment she thought it was deserted. The only windows were high up and barred; faint street noise came through them, the sound of honking cars and squealing brakes. The room smelled like old paint, and a heavy layer of dust covered the floor, marked by smeared shoe prints.

There's no one in here, she realized, looking around in

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bewilderment. It was cold in the room, despite the August heat outside. Her back was icy with sweat. She took a step forward, tangling her feet in electrical wires. She bent down to free her sneaker from the cables—and heard voices. A girl's laugh, a boy answering sharply. When she straightened up, she saw them.

It was as if they had sprung into existence between one blink of her eyes and the next. There was the girl in her long white dress, her black hair hanging down her back like damp seaweed. The two boys were with her—the tall one with black hair like hers, and the smaller, fair one, whose hair gleamed like brass in the dim light coming through the windows high above. The fair boy was standing with his hands in his pockets, facing the punk kid, who was tied to a pillar with what looked like piano wire, his hands stretched behind him, his legs bound at the ankles. His face was pulled tight with pain and fear.

Heart hammering in her chest, Clary ducked behind the nearest concrete pillar and peered around it. She watched as the fair-haired boy paced back and forth, his arms now crossed over his chest. "So," he said. "You still haven't told me if there are any other of your kind with you."

Your kind? Clary wondered what he was talking about. Maybe she'd stumbled into some kind of gang war.

"I don't know what you're talking about." The blue-haired boy's tone was pained but surly.

"He means other demons," said the dark-haired boy, speaking for the first time. "You do know what a demon is, don't you?"

The boy tied to the pillar turned his face away, his mouth working.

"Demons," drawled the blond boy, tracing the word on the

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air with his finger. “Religiously defined as hell’s denizens, the servants of Satan, but understood here, for the purposes of the Clave, to be any malevolent spirit whose origin is outside our own home dimension—”

“That’s enough, Jace,” said the girl.

“Isabelle’s right,” agreed the taller boy. “Nobody here needs a lesson in semantics—or demonology.”

They’re crazy, Clary thought. Actually crazy.

Jace raised his head and smiled. There was something fierce about the gesture, something that reminded Clary of documentaries she’d watched about lions on the Discovery Channel, the way the big cats would raise their heads and sniff the air for prey. “Isabelle and Alec think I talk too much,” he said, confidently. “Do *you* think I talk too much?”

The blue-haired boy didn’t reply. His mouth was still working. “I could give you information,” he said. “I know where Valentine is.”

Jace glanced back at Alec, who shrugged. “Valentine’s in the ground,” Jace said. “The thing’s just toying with us.”

Isabelle tossed her hair. “Kill it, Jace,” she said. “It’s not going to tell us anything.”

Jace raised his hand, and Clary saw dim light spark off the knife he was holding. It was oddly translucent, the blade clear as crystal, sharp as a shard of glass, the hilt set with red stones.

The bound boy gasped. “Valentine is back!” he protested, dragging at the bonds that held his hands behind his back. “All the Infernal Worlds know it—I know it—I can tell you where he is—”

Rage flared suddenly in Jace’s icy eyes. “By the Angel, every time we capture one of you bastards, you claim you know

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where Valentine is. Well, we know where he is too. He's in hell. And you—" Jace turned the knife in his grasp, the edge sparking like a line of fire. "You can *join him there*."

Clary could take no more. She stepped out from behind the pillar. "Stop!" she cried. "You can't do this."

Jace whirled, so startled that the knife flew from his hand and clattered against the concrete floor. Isabelle and Alec turned along with him, wearing identical expressions of astonishment. The blue-haired boy hung in his bonds, stunned and gaping.

It was Alec who spoke first. "What's this?" he demanded, looking from Clary to his companions, as if they might know what she was doing there.

"It's a girl," Jace said, recovering his composure. "Surely you've seen girls before, Alec. Your sister Isabelle is one." He took a step closer to Clary, squinting as if he couldn't quite believe what he was seeing. "A mundie girl," he said, half to himself. "And she can see us."

"Of course I can see you," Clary said. "I'm not blind, you know."

"Oh, but you are," said Jace, bending to pick up his knife. "You just don't know it." He straightened up. "You'd better get out of here, if you know what's good for you."

"I'm not going anywhere," Clary said. "If I do, you'll kill him." She pointed at the boy with the blue hair.

"That's true," admitted Jace, twirling the knife between his fingers. "What do you care if I kill him or not?"

"Be-because—," Clary spluttered. "You can't just go around killing people."

"You're right," said Jace. "You can't go around killing *people*."

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He pointed at the boy with blue hair, whose eyes were slitted. Clary wondered if he'd fainted. "That's not a person, little girl. It may look like a person and talk like a person and maybe even bleed like a person. But it's a monster."

"Jace," said Isabelle warningly. "That's enough."

"You're crazy," Clary said, backing away from him. "I've called the police, you know. They'll be here any second."

"She's lying," said Alec, but there was doubt on his face. "Jace, do you—"

He never got to finish his sentence. At that moment the blue-haired boy, with a high, yowling cry, tore free of the restraints binding him to the pillar, and flung himself on Jace.

They fell to the ground and rolled together, the blue-haired boy tearing at Jace with hands that glittered as if tipped with metal. Clary backed up, wanting to run, but her feet caught on a loop of wiring and she went down, knocking the breath out of her chest. She could hear Isabelle shrieking. Rolling over, Clary saw the blue-haired boy sitting on Jace's chest. Blood gleamed at the tips of his razorlike claws.

Isabelle and Alec were running toward them, Isabelle brandishing a whip in her hand. The blue-haired boy slashed at Jace with claws extended. Jace threw an arm up to protect himself, and the claws raked it, splattering blood. The blue-haired boy lunged again—and Isabelle's whip came down across his back. He shrieked and fell to the side.

Swift as a flick of Isabelle's whip, Jace rolled over. There was a blade gleaming in his hand. He sank the knife into the blue-haired boy's chest. Blackish liquid exploded around the hilt. The boy arched off the floor, gurgling and twisting. With a grimace Jace stood up. His black shirt was blacker now in some

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places, wet with blood. He looked down at the twitching form at his feet, reached down, and yanked out the knife. The hilt was slick with black fluid.

The blue-haired boy's eyes flickered open. His eyes, fixed on Jace, seemed to burn. Between his teeth, he hissed, "*So be it. The Forsaken will take you all.*"

Jace seemed to snarl. The boy's eyes rolled back. His body began to jerk and twitch as he crumpled, folding in on himself, growing smaller and smaller until he vanished entirely.

Clary scrambled to her feet, kicking free of the electrical wiring. She began to back away. None of them was paying attention to her. Alec had reached Jace and was holding his arm, pulling at the sleeve, probably trying to get a good look at the wound. Clary turned to run—and found her way blocked by Isabelle, whip in hand. The gold length of it was stained with dark fluid. She flicked it toward Clary, and the end wrapped itself around her wrist and jerked tight. Clary gasped with pain and surprise.

"Stupid little mundie," Isabelle said between her teeth. "You could have gotten Jace killed."

"He's crazy," Clary said, trying to pull her wrist back. The whip bit deeper into her skin. "You're all crazy. What do you think you are, vigilante killers? The police—"

"The police aren't usually interested unless you can produce a body," said Jace. Cradling his arm, he picked his way across the cable-strewn floor toward Clary. Alec followed behind him, face screwed into a scowl.

Clary glanced at the spot where the boy had disappeared from, and said nothing. There wasn't even a smear of blood there—nothing to show that the boy had ever existed.

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"They return to their home dimensions when they die," said Jace. "In case you were wondering."

"Jace," Alec hissed. "Be careful."

Jace drew his arm away. A ghoulish freckling of blood marked his face. He still reminded her of a lion, with his wide-spaced, light-colored eyes, and that tawny gold hair. "She can see us, Alec," he said. "She already knows too much."

"So what do you want me to do with her?" Isabelle demanded.

"Let her go," Jace said quietly. Isabelle shot him a surprised, almost angry look, but didn't argue. The whip slithered away, freeing Clary's arm. She rubbed her sore wrist and wondered how the hell she was going to get out of there.

"Maybe we should bring her back with us," Alec said. "I bet Hodge would like to talk to her."

"No way are we bringing her to the Institute," said Isabelle. "She's a *mundie*."

"Or is she?" said Jace softly. His quiet tone was worse than Isabelle's snapping or Alec's anger. "Have you had dealings with demons, little girl? Walked with warlocks, talked with the Night Children? Have you—"

"My name is not 'little girl,'" Clary interrupted. "And I have no idea what you're talking about." *Don't you?* said a voice in the back of her head. *You saw that boy vanish into thin air. Jace isn't crazy—you just wish he was.* "I don't believe in—in demons, or whatever you—"

"Clary?" It was Simon's voice. She whirled around. He was standing by the storage room door. One of the burly bouncers who'd been stamping hands at the front door was next to him. "Are you okay?" He peered at her through the gloom. "Why are you in here by yourself? What happened to the guys—you know, the ones with the knives?"

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Clary stared at him, then looked behind her, where Jace, Isabelle, and Alec stood, Jace still in his bloody shirt with the knife in his hand. He grinned at her and dropped a half-apologetic, half-mocking shrug. Clearly he wasn't surprised that neither Simon nor the bouncer could see them.

Somehow neither was Clary. Slowly she turned back to Simon, knowing how she must look to him, standing alone in a damp storage room, her feet tangled in bright plastic wiring cables. "I thought they went in here," she said lamely. "But I guess they didn't. I'm sorry." She glanced from Simon, whose expression was changing from worried to embarrassed, to the bouncer, who just looked annoyed. "It was a mistake."

Behind her, Isabelle giggled.

"I don't believe it," Simon said stubbornly as Clary, standing at the curb, tried desperately to hail a cab. Street cleaners had come down Orchard while they were inside the club, and the street was glossed black with oily water.

"I know," she agreed. "You'd think there'd be *some* cabs. Where is everyone going at midnight on a Sunday?" She turned back to him, shrugging. "You think we'd have better luck on Houston?"

"Not the cabs," Simon said. "You—I don't believe you. I don't believe those guys with the knives just disappeared."

Clary sighed. "Maybe there weren't any guys with knives, Simon. Maybe I just imagined the whole thing."

"No way." Simon raised his hand over his head, but the oncoming taxis whizzed by him, spraying dirty water. "I saw your face when I came into that storage room. You looked seriously freaked out, like you'd seen a ghost."

Clary thought of Jace with his lion-cat eyes. She glanced

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down at her wrist, braceleted by a thin red line where Isabelle's whip had curled. *No, not a ghost, she thought. Something even weirder than that.*

"It was just a mistake," she said wearily. She wondered why she wasn't telling him the truth. Except, of course, that he'd think she was crazy. And there was something about what had happened—something about the black blood bubbling up around Jace's knife, something about his voice when he'd said *Have you talked with the Night Children?* that she wanted to keep to herself.

"Well, it was a hell of an embarrassing mistake," Simon said. He glanced back at the club, where a thin line still snaked out the door and halfway down the block. "I doubt they'll ever let us back into Pandemonium."

"What do you care? You hate Pandemonium." Clary raised her hand again as a yellow shape sped toward them through the fog. This time, though, the taxi screeched to a halt at their corner, the driver laying into his horn as if he needed to get their attention.

"Finally we get lucky." Simon yanked the taxi door open and slid onto the plastic-covered backseat. Clary followed, inhaling the familiar New York cab smell of old cigarette smoke, leather, and hair spray. "We're going to Brooklyn," Simon said to the cabbie, and then he turned to Clary. "Look, you know you can tell me anything, right?"

Clary hesitated a moment, then nodded. "Sure, Simon," she said. "I know I can."

She slammed the cab door shut behind her, and the taxi took off into the night.

2

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The dark prince sat astride his black steed, his sable cape flowing behind him. A golden circlet bound his blond locks, his handsome face was cold with the rage of battle, and . . .

“And his arm looked like an eggplant,” Clary muttered to herself in exasperation. The drawing just wasn’t working. With a sigh she tore yet another sheet from her sketchpad, crumpled it up, and tossed it against the orange wall of her bedroom. Already the floor was littered with discarded balls of paper, a sure sign that her creative juices weren’t flowing the way she’d hoped. She wished for the thousandth time that she could be a bit more like her mother. Everything Jocelyn Fray drew, painted, or sketched was beautiful, and seemingly effortless.

Clary pulled her headphones out—cutting off Stepping

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Razor in midsong—and rubbed her aching temples. It was only then that she became aware that the loud, piercing sound of a ringing telephone was echoing through the apartment. Tossing the sketchpad onto the bed, she jumped to her feet and ran into the living room, where the retro-red phone sat on a table near the front door.

“Is this Clarissa Fray?” The voice on the other end of the phone sounded familiar, though not immediately identifiable.

Clary twirled the phone cord nervously around her finger. “Yeees?”

“Hi, I’m one of the knife-carrying hooligans you met last night in Pandemonium? I’m afraid I made a bad impression and was hoping you’d give me a chance to make it up to—”

“SIMON!” Clary held the phone away from her ear as he cracked up laughing. “That is so not funny!”

“Sure it is. You just don’t see the humor.”

“Jerk.” Clary sighed, leaning up against the wall. “You wouldn’t be laughing if you’d been here when I got home last night.”

“Why not?”

“My mom. She wasn’t happy that we were late. She freaked out. It was messy.”

“What? It’s not our fault there was traffic!” Simon protested. He was the youngest of two children and had a finely honed sense of familial injustice.

“Yeah, well, she doesn’t see it that way. I disappointed her, I let her down, I made her worry, blah blah blah. I am the *bane* of her *existence*,” Clary said, mimicking her mother’s precise phrasing with only a slight twinge of guilt.

“So, are you grounded?” Simon asked, a little too loudly.

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Clary could hear a low rumble of voices behind him; people talking over each other.

"I don't know yet," she said. "My mom went out this morning with Luke, and they're not back yet. Where are you, anyway? Eric's?"

"Yeah. We just finished up practice." A cymbal clashed behind Simon. Clary winced. "Eric's doing a poetry reading over at Java Jones tonight," Simon went on, naming a coffee shop around the corner from Clary's that sometimes had live music at night. "The whole band's going to go to show their support. Want to come?"

"Yeah, all right." Clary paused, tugging on the phone cord anxiously. "Wait, no."

"Shut up, guys, will you?" Simon yelled, the faintness of his voice making Clary suspect that he was holding the phone away from his mouth. He was back a second later, sounding troubled. "Was that a yes or a no?"

"I don't know." Clary bit her lip. "My mom's still mad at me about last night. I'm not sure I want to piss her off by asking for any favors. If I'm going to get in trouble, I don't want it to be on account of Eric's lousy poetry."

"Come on, it's not so bad," Simon said. Eric was his next-door neighbor, and the two had known each other most of their lives. They weren't close the way Simon and Clary were, but they had formed a rock band together at the start of sophomore year, along with Eric's friends Matt and Kirk. They practiced together faithfully in Eric's parents' garage every week. "Besides, it's not a favor," Simon added, "it's a poetry slam around the block from your house. It's not like I'm inviting you to some orgy in Hoboken. Your mom can come along if she wants."

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“ORGY IN HOBOKEN!” Clary heard someone, probably Eric, yell. Another cymbal crashed. She imagined her mother listening to Eric read his poetry, and she shuddered inwardly.

“I don’t know. If all of you show up here, I think she’ll freak.”

“Then I’ll come alone. I’ll pick you up and we can walk over there together, meet the rest of them there. Your mom won’t mind. She loves me.”

Clary had to laugh. “Sign of her questionable taste, if you ask me.”

“Nobody did.” Simon clicked off, amid shouts from his bandmates.

Clary hung up the phone and glanced around the living room. Evidence of her mother’s artistic tendencies was everywhere, from the handmade velvet throw pillows piled on the dark red sofa to the walls hung with Jocelyn’s paintings, carefully framed—landscapes, mostly: the winding streets of downtown Manhattan lit with golden light; scenes of Prospect Park in winter, the gray ponds edged with lacelike films of white ice.

On the mantel over the fireplace was a framed photo of Clary’s father. A thoughtful-looking fair man in military dress, his eyes bore the telltale traces of laugh lines at the corners. He’d been a decorated soldier serving overseas. Jocelyn had some of his medals in a small box by her bed. Not that the medals had done anyone any good when Jonathan Clark had crashed his car into a tree just outside Albany and died before his daughter was even born.

Jocelyn had gone back to using her maiden name after he died. She never talked about Clary’s father, but she kept the box engraved with his initials, J. C., next to her bed. Along with the medals were one or two photos, a wedding ring, and a single

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lock of blond hair. Sometimes Jocelyn took the box out and opened it and held the lock of hair very gently in her hands before putting it back and carefully locking the box up again.

The sound of the key turning in the front door roused Clary out of her reverie. Hastily she threw herself down on the couch and tried to look as if she were immersed in one of the paperbacks her mother had left stacked on the end table. Jocelyn recognized reading as a sacred pastime and usually wouldn't interrupt Clary in the middle of a book, even to yell at her.

The door opened with a thump. It was Luke, his arms full of what looked like big square pieces of pasteboard. When he set them down, Clary saw that they were cardboard boxes, folded flat. He straightened up and turned to her with a smile.

"Hey, Un—hey, Luke," she said. He'd asked her to stop calling him Uncle Luke about a year ago, claiming that it made him feel old, and anyway reminded him of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Besides, he'd reminded her gently, he wasn't really her uncle, just a close friend of her mother's who'd known her all her life. "Where's Mom?"

"Parking the truck," he said, straightening his lanky frame with a groan. He was dressed in his usual uniform: old jeans, a flannel shirt, and a bent pair of gold-rimmed spectacles that sat askew on the bridge of his nose. "Remind me again why this building has no service elevator?"

"Because it's old, and has *character*," Clary said immediately. Luke grinned. "What are the boxes for?" she asked.

His grin vanished. "Your mother wanted to pack up some things," he said, avoiding her gaze.

"What things?" Clary asked.

He gave an airy wave. "Extra stuff lying around the house.

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Getting in the way. You know she never throws anything out. So what are you up to? Studying?” He plucked the book out of her hand and read out loud: “*The world still teems with those motley beings whom a more sober philosophy has discarded. Fairies and goblins, ghosts and demons, still hover about—*” He lowered the book and looked at her over his glasses. “Is this for school?”

“*The Golden Bough*? No. School’s not for two weeks.” Clary took the book back from him. “It’s my mom’s.”

“I had a feeling.”

She dropped it back on the table. “Luke?”

“Uh-huh?” The book already forgotten, he was rummaging in the tool kit next to the hearth. “Ah, here it is.” He pulled out an orange plastic tape gun and gazed at it with deep satisfaction.

“What would you do if you saw something nobody else could see?”

The tape gun fell out of Luke’s hand, and hit the tiled hearth. He knelt to pick it up, not looking at her. “You mean if I were the only witness to a crime, that sort of thing?”

“No. I mean, if there were other people around, but you were the only one who could see something. As if it were invisible to everyone but you.”

He hesitated, still kneeling, the dented tape gun gripped in his hand.

“I know it sounds crazy,” Clary ventured nervously, “but . . .”

He turned around. His eyes, very blue behind the glasses, rested on her with a look of firm affection. “Clary, you’re an artist, like your mother. That means you see the world in ways that other people don’t. It’s your gift, to see the beauty and the horror in ordinary things. It doesn’t make you crazy—just different. There’s nothing wrong with being different.”

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Clary pulled her legs up, and rested her chin on her knees. In her mind's eye she saw the storage room, Isabelle's gold whip, the blue-haired boy convulsing in his death spasms, and Jace's tawny eyes. *Beauty and horror*. She said, "If my dad had lived, do you think he'd have been an artist too?"

Luke looked taken aback. Before he could answer her, the door swung open and Clary's mother stalked into the room, her boot heels clacking on the polished wooden floor. She handed Luke a set of jingling car keys and turned to look at her daughter.

Jocelyn Fray was a slim, compact woman, her hair a few shades darker than Clary's and twice as long. At the moment it was twisted up in a dark red knot, stuck through with a graphite pen to hold it in place. She wore paint-spattered overalls over a lavender T-shirt, and brown hiking boots whose soles were caked with oil paint.

People always told Clary that she looked like her mother, but she couldn't see it herself. The only thing that was similar about them was their figures: They were both slender, with small chests and narrow hips. She knew she wasn't beautiful like her mother was. To be beautiful you had to be willowy and tall. When you were as short as Clary was, just over five feet, you were cute. Not pretty or beautiful, but cute. Throw in carrot hair and a face full of freckles, and she was a Raggedy Ann to her mother's Barbie doll.

Jocelyn even had a graceful way of walking that made people turn their heads to watch her go by. Clary, by contrast, was always tripping over her feet. The only time people turned to watch her go by was when she hurtled past them as she fell downstairs.

"Thanks for bringing the boxes up," Clary's mother said to

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Luke, and smiled at him. He didn't return the smile. Clary's stomach did an uneasy flip. Clearly there was something going on. "Sorry it took me so long to find a space. There must be a million people at the park today—"

"Mom?" Clary interrupted. "What are the boxes for?"

Jocelyn bit her lip. Luke flicked his eyes toward Clary, mutely urging Jocelyn forward. With a nervous twitch of her wrist, Jocelyn pushed a dangling lock of hair behind her ear and went to join her daughter on the couch.

Up close Clary could see how tired her mother looked. There were dark half-moons under her eyes, and her lids were pearly with sleeplessness.

"Is this about last night?" Clary asked.

"No," her mother said quickly, and then hesitated. "Maybe a little. You shouldn't have done what you did last night. You know better."

"And I already apologized. What is this about? If you're grounding me, get it over with."

"I'm not," said her mother, "grounding you." Her voice was as taut as a wire. She glanced at Luke, who shook his head.

"Just tell her, Jocelyn," he said.

"Could you not talk about me like I'm not here?" Clary said angrily. "And what do you mean, tell me? Tell me what?"

Jocelyn expelled a sigh. "We're going on vacation."

Luke's expression went blank, like a canvas wiped clean of paint.

Clary shook her head. "That's what this is about? You're going on vacation?" She sank back against the cushions. "I don't get it. Why the big production?"

"I don't think you understand. I meant we're all going on

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vacation. The three of us—you, me, and Luke. We're going to the farmhouse."

"Oh." Clary glanced at Luke, but he had his arms crossed over his chest and was staring out the window, his jaw pulled tight. She wondered what was upsetting him. He loved the old farmhouse in upstate New York—he'd bought and restored it himself ten years before, and he went there whenever he could. "For how long?"

"For the rest of the summer," said Jocelyn. "I brought the boxes in case you want to pack up any books, painting supplies—"

"For the *rest of the summer*?" Clary sat upright with indignation. "I can't do that, Mom. I have plans—Simon and I were going to have a back-to-school party, and I've got a bunch of meetings with my art group, and ten more classes at Tisch—"

"I'm sorry about Tisch. But the other things can be canceled. Simon will understand, and so will your art group."

Clary heard the implacability in her mother's tone and realized she was serious. "But I paid for those art classes! I saved up all year! You promised." She whirled, turning to Luke. "Tell her! Tell her it isn't fair!"

Luke didn't look away from the window, though a muscle jumped in his cheek. "She's your mother. It's her decision to make."

"I don't get it." Clary turned back to her mother. "Why?"

"I have to get away, Clary," Jocelyn said, the corners of her mouth trembling. "I need the peace, the quiet, to paint. And money is tight right now—"

"So sell some more of Dad's stocks," Clary said angrily. "That's what you usually do, isn't it?"

Jocelyn recoiled. "That's hardly fair."

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"Look, go if you want to go. I don't care. I'll stay here without you. I can work; I can get a job at Starbucks or something. Simon said they're always hiring. I'm old enough to take care of myself—"

"No!" The sharpness in Jocelyn's voice made Clary jump. "I'll pay you back for the art classes, Clary. But you are coming with us. It isn't optional. You're too young to stay here on your own. Something could happen."

"Like what? What could happen?" Clary demanded.

There was a crash. She turned in surprise to find that Luke had knocked over one of the framed pictures leaning against the wall. Looking distinctly upset, he set it back. When he straightened, his mouth was set in a grim line. "I'm leaving."

Jocelyn bit her lip. "Wait." She hurried after him into the entryway, catching up just as he seized the doorknob. Twisting around on the sofa, Clary could just overhear her mother's urgent whisper. "... Bane," Jocelyn was saying. "I've been calling him and calling him for the past three weeks. His voice mail says he's in Tanzania. What am I supposed to do?"

"Jocelyn." Luke shook his head. "You can't keep going to him forever."

"But Clary—"

"Isn't Jonathan," Luke hissed. "You've never been the same since it happened, but Clary *isn't Jonathan*."

What does my father have to do with this? Clary thought, bewildered.

"I can't just keep her at home, not let her go out. She won't put up with it."

"Of course she won't!" Luke sounded really angry. "She's not a pet, she's a teenager. Almost an adult."

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"If we were out of the city . . ."

"Talk to her, Jocelyn." Luke's voice was firm. "I mean it." He reached for the doorknob.

The door flew open. Jocelyn gave a little scream.

"Jesus!" Luke exclaimed.

"Actually, it's just me," said Simon. "Although I've been told the resemblance is startling." He waved at Clary from the doorway. "You ready?"

Jocelyn took her hand away from her mouth. "Simon, were you eavesdropping?"

Simon blinked. "No, I just got here." He looked from Jocelyn's pale face to Luke's grim one. "Is something wrong? Should I go?"

"Don't bother," Luke said. "I think we're done here." He pushed past Simon, thudding down the stairs at a rapid pace. Downstairs, the front door slammed shut.

Simon hovered in the doorway, looking uncertain. "I can come back later," he said. "Really. It wouldn't be a problem."

"That might—," Jocelyn began, but Clary was already on her feet.

"Forget it, Simon. We're leaving," she said, grabbing her messenger bag from a hook near the door. She slung it over her shoulder, glaring at her mother. "See you later, Mom."

Jocelyn bit her lip. "Clary, don't you think we should talk about this?"

"We'll have plenty of time to talk while we're on 'vacation,'" Clary said venomously, and had the satisfaction of seeing her mother flinch. "Don't wait up," she added, and, grabbing Simon's arm, she half-dragged him out the front door.

He dug his heels in, looking apologetically over his

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shoulder at Clary's mother, who stood small and forlorn in the entryway, her hands knitted tightly together. "Bye, Mrs. Fray!" he called. "Have a nice evening!"

"Oh, shut *up*, Simon," Clary snapped, and slammed the door behind them, cutting off her mother's reply.

"Jesus, woman, don't rip my arm off," Simon protested as Clary hauled him downstairs after her, her green Skechers slapping against the wooden stairs with every angry step. She glanced up, half-expecting to see her mother glaring down from the landing, but the apartment door stayed shut.

"Sorry," Clary muttered, letting go of his wrist. She paused at the foot of the stairs, her messenger bag banging against her hip.

Clary's brownstone, like most in Park Slope, had once been the single residence of a wealthy family. Shades of its former grandeur were still evident in the curving staircase, the chipped marble entryway floor, and the wide single-paned skylight overhead. Now the house was split into separate apartments, and Clary and her mother shared the three-floor building with a downstairs tenant, an elderly woman who ran a psychic's shop out of her apartment. She hardly ever came out of it, though customer visits were infrequent. A gold plaque fixed to the door proclaimed her to be MADAME DOROTHEA, SEERESS AND PROPHETESS.

The thick sweet scent of incense spilled from the half-open door into the foyer. Clary could hear a low murmur of voices.

"Nice to see she's doing a booming business," Simon said. "It's hard to get steady prophet work these days."

"Do you have to be sarcastic about everything?" Clary snapped.

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Simon blinked, clearly taken aback. "I thought you liked it when I was witty and ironic."

Clary was about to reply when the door to Madame Dorothea's swung fully open and a man stepped out. He was tall, with brown skin, gold-green eyes like a cat's, and tangled black hair. He grinned at her blindingly, showing sharp white teeth.

A wave of dizziness came over her, the strong sensation that she was going to faint.

Simon glanced at her uneasily. "Are you all right? You look like you're going to pass out."

She blinked at him. "What? No, I'm fine."

He didn't seem to want to let it drop. "You look like you just saw a ghost."

She shook her head. The memory of having seen something teased her, but when she tried to concentrate, it slid away like water. "Nothing. I thought I saw Dorothea's cat, but I guess it was just a trick of the light." Simon stared at her. "I haven't eaten anything since yesterday," she added defensively. "I guess I'm a little out of it."

He slid a comforting arm around her shoulders. "Come on, I'll buy you some food."

"I just can't believe she's being like this," Clary said for the fourth time, chasing a stray bit of guacamole around her plate with the tip of a nacho. They were at a neighborhood Mexican joint, a hole in the wall called Nacho Mama. "Like grounding me every other week wasn't bad enough. Now I'm going to be exiled for the rest of the summer."

"Well, you know, your mom gets like this sometimes,"

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Simon said. "Like when she breathes in or out." He grinned at her around his veggie burrito.

"Oh, sure, act like it's funny," she said. "You're not the one getting dragged off to the middle of nowhere for God knows how long—"

"Clary." Simon interrupted her tirade. "I'm not the one you're mad at. Besides, it isn't going to be permanent."

"How do you know that?"

"Well, because I know your mom," Simon said, after a pause. "I mean, you and I have been friends for what, ten years now? I know she gets like this sometimes. She'll think better of it."

Clary picked a hot pepper off her plate and nibbled the edge meditatively. "Do you, though?" she said. "Know her, I mean? I sometimes wonder if anyone does."

Simon blinked at her. "You lost me there."

Clary sucked in air to cool her burning mouth. "I mean, she never talks about herself. I don't know anything about her early life, or her family, or much about how she met my dad. She doesn't even have wedding photos. It's like her life started when she had me. That's what she always says when I ask her about it."

"Aw." Simon made a face at her. "That's sweet."

"No, it isn't. It's weird. It's weird that I don't know anything about my grandparents. I mean, I know my dad's parents weren't very nice to her, but could they have been *that* bad? What kind of people don't want to even meet their granddaughter?"

"Maybe she hates them. Maybe they were abusive or something," Simon suggested. "She does have those scars."

Clary stared at him. "She has what?"

He swallowed a mouthful of burrito. "Those little thin

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scars. All over her back and her arms. I *have* seen your mother in a bathing suit, you know.”

“I never noticed any scars,” Clary said decidedly. “I think you’re imagining things.”

He stared at her, and seemed about to say something when her cell phone, buried in her messenger bag, began an insistent blaring. Clary fished it out, gazed at the numbers blinking on the screen, and scowled. “It’s my mom.”

“I could tell from the look on your face. You going to talk to her?”

“Not right now,” Clary said, feeling the familiar bite of guilt in her stomach as the phone stopped ringing and voice mail picked up. “I don’t want to fight with her.”

“You can always stay at my house,” Simon said. “For as long as you want.”

“Well, we’ll see if she calms down first.” Clary punched the voice mail button on her phone. Her mother’s voice sounded tense, but she was clearly trying for lightness: “Baby, I’m sorry if I sprang the vacation plan on you. Come on home and we’ll talk.” Clary hung the phone up before the message ended, feeling even guiltier and still angry at the same time. “She wants to talk about it.”

“Do you want to talk to her?”

“I don’t know.” Clary rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes. “Are you still going to the poetry reading?”

“I promised I would.”

Clary stood up, pushing her chair back. “Then I’ll go with you. I’ll call her when it’s over.” The strap of her messenger bag slid down her arm. Simon pushed it back up absently, his fingers lingering at the bare skin of her shoulder.

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The air outside was spongy with moisture, the humidity frizzing Clary's hair and sticking Simon's blue T-shirt to his back. "So, what's up with the band?" she asked. "Anything new? There was a lot of yelling in the background when I talked to you earlier."

Simon's face lit up. "Things are great," he said. "Matt says he knows someone who could get us a gig at the Scrap Bar. We're talking about names again too."

"Oh, yeah?" Clary hid a smile. Simon's band never actually produced any music. Mostly they sat around in Simon's living room, fighting about potential names and band logos. She sometimes wondered if any of them could actually play an instrument. "What's on the table?"

"We're choosing between Sea Vegetable Conspiracy and Rock Solid Panda."

Clary shook her head. "Those are both terrible."

"Eric suggested Lawn Chair Crisis."

"Maybe Eric should stick to gaming."

"But then we'd have to find a new drummer."

"Oh, is *that* what Eric does? I thought he just mooched money off you and went around telling girls at school that he was in a band in order to impress them."

"Not at all," Simon said breezily. "Eric has turned over a new leaf. He has a girlfriend. They've been going out for three months."

"Practically married," Clary said, stepping around a couple pushing a toddler in a stroller: a little girl with yellow plastic clips in her hair who was clutching a pixie doll with gold-streaked sapphire wings. Out of the corner of her eye Clary thought she saw the wings flutter. She turned her head hastily.

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"Which means," Simon continued, "that I am the last member of the band *not* to have a girlfriend. Which, you know, is the whole point of being in a band. To get girls."

"I thought it was all about the music." A man with a cane cut across her path, heading for Berkeley Street. She glanced away, afraid that if she looked at anyone for too long they would sprout wings, extra arms, or long forked tongues like snakes. "Who cares if you have a girlfriend, anyway?"

"I care," Simon said gloomily. "Pretty soon the only people left without a girlfriend will be me and Wendell the school janitor. And he smells like Windex."

"At least you know he's still available."

Simon glared. "Not funny, Fray."

"There's always Sheila 'The Thong' Barbarino," Clary suggested. Clary had sat behind her in math class in ninth grade. Every time Sheila had dropped her pencil—which had been often—Clary had been treated to the sight of Sheila's underwear riding up above the waistband of her super-low-rise jeans.

"That is who Eric's been dating for the past three months," Simon said. "His advice, meanwhile, was that I ought to just decide which girl in school had the most rockin' bod and ask her out on the first day of classes."

"Eric is a sexist pig," Clary said, suddenly not wanting to know which girl in school Simon thought had the most rockin' bod. "Maybe you should call the band The Sexist Pigs."

"It has a ring to it." Simon seemed unfazed. Clary made a face at him, her messenger bag vibrating as her phone blared. She fished it out of the zip pocket. "Is it your mom again?" he asked.

Clary nodded. She could see her mother in her mind's eye,

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small and alone in the doorway of their apartment. Guilt unfurled in her chest.

She glanced up at Simon, who was looking at her, his eyes dark with concern. His face was so familiar she could have traced its lines in her sleep. She thought of the lonely weeks that stretched ahead without him, and shoved the phone back into her bag. "Come on," she said. "We're going to be late for the show."

3

SHADOWHUNTER

By the time they got to Java Jones, Eric was already onstage, swaying back and forth in front of the microphone with his eyes squinched shut. He'd dyed the tips of his hair pink for the occasion. Behind him, Matt, looking stoned, was beating irregularly on a djembe.

"This is going to suck so hard," Clary predicted. She grabbed Simon's sleeve and tugged him toward the doorway. "If we make a run for it, we can still get away."

He shook his head determinedly. "I'm nothing if not a man of my word." He squared his shoulders. "I'll get the coffee if you find us a seat. What do you want?"

"Just coffee. Black—*like my soul*."

Simon headed off toward the coffee bar, muttering under

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his breath something to the effect that it was a far, far better thing he did now than he had ever done before. Clary went to find them a seat.

The coffee shop was crowded for a Monday; most of the threadbare-looking couches and armchairs were taken up with teenagers enjoying a free weeknight. The smell of coffee and clove cigarettes was overwhelming. Finally Clary found an unoccupied love seat in a darkened corner toward the back. The only other person nearby was a blond girl in an orange tank top, absorbed in playing with her iPod. *Good*, Clary thought, *Eric won't be able to find us back here after the show to ask how his poetry was.*

The blond girl leaned over the side of her chair and tapped Clary on the shoulder. "Excuse me." Clary looked up in surprise. "Is that your boyfriend?" the girl asked.

Clary followed the line of the girl's gaze, already prepared to say, *No, I don't know him*, when she realized the girl meant Simon. He was headed toward them, face scrunched up in concentration as he tried not to drop either of his Styrofoam cups. "Uh, no," Clary said. "He's a friend of mine."

The girl beamed. "He's *cute*. Does he have a girlfriend?"

Clary hesitated a second too long before replying. "No."

The girl looked suspicious. "Is he gay?"

Clary was spared responding to this by Simon's return. The blond girl sat back hastily as he set the cups on the table and threw himself down next to Clary. "I hate it when they run out of mugs. Those things are hot." He blew on his fingers and scowled. Clary tried to hide a smile as she watched him. Normally she never thought about whether Simon was good-looking or not. He had pretty dark eyes, she supposed, and he'd

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filled out well over the past year or so. With the right haircut—

“You’re staring at me,” Simon said. “Why are you staring at me? Have I got something on my face?”

I should tell him, she thought, though some part of her was strangely reluctant. *I’d be a bad friend if I didn’t*. “Don’t look now, but that blond girl over there thinks you’re cute,” she whispered.

Simon’s eyes flicked sideways to stare at the girl, who was industriously studying an issue of *Shonen Jump*. “The girl in the orange top?” Clary nodded. Simon looked dubious. “What makes you think so?”

Tell him. Go on, tell him. Clary opened her mouth to reply, and was interrupted by a burst of feedback. She winced and covered her ears as Eric, onstage, wrestled with his microphone.

“Sorry about that, guys!” he yelled. “All right. I’m Eric, and this is my homeboy Matt on the drums. My first poem is called ‘Untitled.’” He screwed up his face as if in pain, and wailed into the mike. “*Come, my faux juggernaut, my nefarious loins! Slather every protuberance with arid zeal!*”

Simon slid down in his seat. “Please don’t tell anyone I know him.”

Clary giggled. “Who uses the word ‘loins?’”

“Eric,” Simon said grimly. “All his poems have loins in them.”

“*Turgid is my torment!*” Eric wailed. “*Agony swells within!*”

“You bet it does,” Clary said. She slid down in the seat next to Simon. “Anyway, about that girl who thinks you’re cute—”

“Never mind that for a second,” Simon said. Clary blinked at him in surprise. “There’s something I wanted to talk to you about.”

“Furious Mole is not a good name for a band,” Clary said immediately.

"Not that," Simon said. "It's about what we were talking about before. About me not having a girlfriend."

"Oh." Clary lifted one shoulder in a shrug. "Oh, I don't know. Ask Jaida Jones out," she suggested, naming one of the few girls at St. Xavier's she actually liked. "She's nice, and she likes you."

"I don't want to ask Jaida Jones out."

"Why not?" Clary found herself seized with a sudden, unspecific resentment. "You don't like smart girls? Still seeking a *rockin' bod*?"

"Neither," said Simon, who seemed agitated. "I don't want to ask her out because it wouldn't really be fair to her if I did. . . ."

He trailed off. Clary leaned forward. From the corner of her eye she could see the blond girl leaning forward too, plainly eavesdropping. "Why not?"

"Because I like someone else," Simon said.

"Okay." Simon looked faintly greenish, the way he had once when he'd broken his ankle playing soccer in the park and had had to limp home on it. She wondered what on earth about liking someone could possibly have him wound up to such a pitch of anxiety. "You're not gay, are you?"

Simon's greenish color deepened. "If I were, I would dress better."

"So, who is it, then?" Clary asked. She was about to add that if he were in love with Sheila Barbarino, Eric would kick his ass, when she heard someone cough loudly behind her. It was a derisive sort of cough, the kind of noise someone might make who was trying not to laugh out loud.

She turned around.

Sitting on a faded green sofa a few feet away from her was