

The Act of Falling – Jace PoV ***A City of Fallen Angels Extra***

Jace will never forget the look on Clary's face after he says it. Shock at first, blanching into pain.

He has hurt her before. Never because he wanted to, though he has lashed out in his own blindness—like the time she walked in on him kissing Aline and he said every awful thing he could think of, as if the words themselves might have the power to make her disappear, to send her back where she was safe.

He has always cared more about her safety than anything else. If he didn't, none of this would be happening. Jace wonders if she can see the terror in his eyes, the shards of all those dozens of dreams in which he stabbed her or choked her or drowned her and looked down at his hands afterward, wet with her blood.

She backs up a step. There is something in her face, but it isn't fear. It's infinitely worse. She turns, almost tripping in her haste to get away, and rushes out of the club.

For a moment he stands and looks after her. This is exactly what he wanted, a part of his mind screams at him. To drive her away. To keep her safe, away from him.

But the rest of his mind is watching the door slam behind her and seeing the final ruin of all his dreams. It was one thing to push it to this point. It is another to let go forever. Because he knows Clary, and if she goes now, she will not ever come back.

Come back.

Somehow he is outside the club. The rain is pelting down like gunfire. He sees everything in a single sweep, the way he always has, the way he was trained to do. The white van at the curb, the slant of the street as it curves back toward Greenpoint, the dark opening of an alley behind the bar, and Clary at the corner, about to cross the street and walk out of his life forever.

She yanks her arm out of his when he reaches for her, but when he puts his hand against her back, she lets him guide her into the alley. His hand slides across her back to her arm as she whirls to face him—and he can see everything around them again: the wet brick wall behind them, the barred windows, the discarded musical equipment soaking in puddles of rainwater. And Clary is lifting her face, small and pale; her mascara runs in glittery streaks beneath her eyes. Her hair looks dark, pasted to her head. She feels both fragile and dangerous in his grasp, a glass explosive.

She jerks her arm away from his. "If you're planning to apologize, don't bother. I don't want to hear it." He tries to protest, to tell her he only wanted to help Simon, but she is shaking her head, her words like stinging missiles. "And you couldn't tell me? Couldn't text me a single line letting me know where you were? Oh, wait. You couldn't, because you still have my goddamned phone. Give it to me."

He reaches to hand the phone back to her, but he is barely aware of his movements. He wants to say, *No, no, no, I couldn't tell you. I can't tell you. I can't say I'm afraid of hurting you even though I don't want to. I can't say I'm afraid of becoming my father. Your faith in me is the best thing in my life and I can't bear to destroy it.*

Instead, he blurts out other words. "Forgive me—"

Her face goes white, her lipstick starkly bright against her skin. "I don't even know what you think I'm supposed to forgive you for. Not loving me anymore?"

She moves away from him and blindly stumbles, and he can't stop himself: he reaches for her. She is delicate and shivering in his arms and they are both soaking wet and he can't stop. Her

mouth is part open, and he brings his own lips down against hers, tasting lipstick and sweet ginger and Clary.

I love you. He can't say it, so he tries to tell her with the pressure of his lips and his body and his hands. *I love you, I love you.* His hands are around her waist, lifting her, and he had forgotten: she isn't fragile; she is strong. His fingers are digging into her shoulders, her mouth fierce against his, and his heart is pounding like it's trying to get free of his body as he sets her down on a broken speaker.

Stop, his mind is telling him. *Stop, stop, stop.* He forces his hands away from her and places them on the wall, on either side of her head. Only that brings his body closer to hers, and that is a mistake. He can see the pulse slamming in her throat; her lipstick is gone now, and he can't look away from the carnation-pink of her mouth, flushed from kissing, as she breathes, "Why can't you talk to me? Why can't you look at me?"

His heart is pounding as if it wants to leave his body and take up independent residence somewhere else. "Because I love you."

It is the truth, and an inadequate truth at that, but he feels it punch through him with the force of a lie. Her face softens, her eyes widening. Her hands are against him, small and delicate and careful, and he leans into her, breathing the scent of her under the smell of rainwater. "I don't care," he hears himself say. "I'm sick of trying to pretend I can live without you. Don't you understand that? Can't you see it's killing me?"

He is drowning, and it's too late. He reaches for her like an addict reaching hopelessly for the drug he has sworn not to touch again, having decided it is better to burn up in one final blaze than live forever without it.

And the gray world blazes up around him with color as they come together, bodies slamming hard against the wall behind them. The water soaking her dress has made it as slick under his fingers as motor oil. He catches and pulls at her, desire reshaping their bodies with every touch. Her breathing is ragged in his ears, her eyelids half-closed and fluttering. He is touching her skin everywhere he can: her throat; the back of her neck; her collarbones, hard under his fingertips; her arms, smooth and slippery. Her hands are on him, too, no shyer than his own, and every touch seems to burn away the rain and the cold.

She is gripping his shoulders when she raises her legs and wraps them around his waist, and he makes a noise he didn't even know he could make. It is too late to go back now. His hands clench involuntarily, and he feels the fabric of her tights rop under his fingers, and he is touching her bare skin. And their kisses taste like rain. And if he wasn't falling before, he is falling now.

He thinks of the Fall, of angels tumbling forever in fire, and of Icarus, who flew too close to the sun. He had thought of the agony of the Fall, the terror of it, but never that it might be joyful. Lucifer had not wanted to fall, but neither had he wanted to serve. As Jace gathers Clary close against him, closer than he ever thought they could be, he wonders if it is only in the act of falling that one can be truly free.