

claim back the boy you left behind

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by [bluexshift](#)

Summary

Stefan Ironheart was just like other Shadowhunter boys his age, except for when he wasn't. They didn't cling to a childhood journal, didn't enjoy the library more than sparring, and they definitely didn't harbour childhood crushes on one Alec Lightwood.

Maybe he wasn't like them at all, really.

Notes

I saw chattering about an idea like this on Twitter AGES ago and couldn't shake the thought - I'm sorry that it was so long ago I don't remember who you are!

I'm on Twitter more frequently than Tumblr these days, at [@aglightwoodbane](#). Hmu!

Title is from "Doncamatic" by Gorillaz feat. Daley because that's what I was listening to when it came time to title this and I am, how you say... unoriginal. Shrug emoji.

Stefan Ironhart first realised he liked boys when he was 7 years old.

At the time, the realisation didn't hold the weight it would come to later on in life. All he knew was that his parents had taken him along to some conference in the New York Institute - New York was way way noisier than Alicante and he wasn't sure how he felt about it - and that there were no other kids there his age. There was Max Lightwood, who was 3, and he was too small for the rough and tumble mock battles that Stefan enjoyed. There was Jace and Izzy, who seemed too preoccupied with whatever 12 and 13 year olds did to bother with him much more than just being nice. Stefan had almost resigned himself to just looking up runes for class all day, had 14 year old Alec Lightwood not swooped in and saved his day from complete boredom.

"I'll play with you," Alec had said, and he played with Stefan all day. Alec let him be Jonathan Shadowhunter every time, and he cycled through every greater demon Stefan had ever heard of and more, letting Stefan defeat him in glorious combat again and again and again.

Alec was nice, Stefan thought. He was funny, and he didn't treat him like a child, and he actually listened to what Stefan had to say and asked questions and Stefan /liked/ him.

"Thank you Alec," he said, after a man with light brown hair and a strange red rune on his neck had stuck his head round the door and told Alec that Stefan's parents were ready to leave.

"What for, buddy?"

"For being nice. You're really nice, and I like you. I wish I could marry you and then we could play all the time," he said, completely honestly. He wasn't young or oblivious enough not to notice Alec's sharp intake of breath. He frowned, as Alec knelt down to his level.

"I like you too Stefan, and I'm happy to be your friend. But boys aren't allowed to marry other boys," Alec told him gently. "Girls aren't allowed to marry girls either."

"Oh. That's dumb. Why?"

Alec shrugged. "It is dumb, but the Clave says so. And we're good Shadowhunters first, right?"

Stefan nodded vigorously. "I'm going to be the best Shadowhunter ever!"

Alec nodded back, and Stefan thought he looked very wise when he did that. "You killed so many demons today, I bet you will be. C'mon young man, let's get you back."

Tucked up in bed that night, Stefan couldn't sleep. Alec had seemed so sad when he had said that boys weren't allowed to marry boys. But... he didn't say that they *can't*. And Stefan *really* wanted to marry Alec. He was way prettier than any of the girls he knew, and even some of the adult girls too, but... the way Alec talked about it, he probably couldn't tell

anyone without them being mean to him. He wondered if anyone had been mean to Alec, and vowed to tell anyone he ever saw doing it off.

Slipping out of bed as quietly as he could, Stefan rummaged under his bed for the journal his grandfather had bought him to scribble in, so he didn't do it on his homework. Rifling through the pages, he found the one he wanted; at the top, in shaky capital letters, was titled "Missions". He grabbed one of his battered felt tips – green, his favourite colour – and added two more missions underneath "Become the best Shadowhunter ever" and "Get a pet dragon".

Make the Clave let boys marry boys.

Marry Alec so we can be best friends forever.

He never forgot about Alec, not really, but it was five years before Stefan would see him again. At 12, he had more understanding of *why* the Clave wouldn't let boys marry boys and girls marry girls, but he thought it no less dumb than he did when he was 7. He was also well aware of why he rolled his eyes every time his friends talked about which of their classmates they had a crush on this month, why he had no interest in Emily or Savannah or Ying Yue, why he stammered sometimes around handsome Mr Underhill whenever he said hello to Stefan's parents.

He was gay. And the world he lived in wouldn't let him be.

Well, tough. Stefan still had his childhood journal, and while he'd crossed out the first two of his "missions", ridiculous as they were, the other two didn't seem as such.

His older sister, Amelie, had turned 18 three months back, and was one month into her first Institute posting – New York of all places, funnily enough. He wondered if Alec was still there, if he'd even have the time of day for Stefan anymore given he was a proper grown up now. He supposed he'd find out soon enough, given he was standing with his parents about to portal there to visit Amelia. He wondered if he could persuade her to take him out into the city for a bagel.

He took his mother's hand slyly as they stepped into the portal, knowing if his dad saw he'd be reprimanded.

"Mr Ironhart, Mrs Ironhart," he heard a familiar yet strange voice greet them. "And Stefan too. It's a pleasure to welcome you to New York."

He shook the portal dizziness from his head, to see his father step forward and shake hands with...

"Thank you, Mr Lightwood. Forgive me, but... are your parents unavailable?"

"They're currently spending a lot of time in Mumbai, with my youngest brother. I'm Acting Head in their absence," Alec said, far more diplomatically than Stefan would have expect

given his father had just been incredibly rude to him.

That was probably Stefan's only coherent thought – Alec was *handsome*. He'd gotten tall, taller than even his dad, and he was standing at ease which made him appear even taller. And he was big too – he looked strong and tough. Stefan was in love again.

“Amelie's doing well in field misions, and we're pleased with her progress,” Alec told Stefan's parents, as they all followed him through the Institute's wooden corridors. “She's an adept tactician, so once her probationary period is up we're considering her for a handler position.”

Stefan's dad said something in response, and so did his mother, and they were having a conversation that Stefan wasn't really that interested in. He just... he just wanted to keep looking at Alec. It didn't seem like his parents noticed where his attention was, anyway. They didn't notice much, truth be told; sentimental attachments to material possessions were discouraged and yet he still had that old journal, didn't he? He remembered wanting to marry Alec as a naïve seven-year-old, and looking at Alec now, Stefan found he couldn't disagree with his younger self's ambitions in the slightest.

Stefan was pulled from his reverie by his sister's cry of joy; he tore his awestruck gaze away from Alec to grin at her wrapping their mother in a tight hug. What Stefan failed to notice was the way Alec noticed his stare, and the way his shoulders sagged when his quick, emotionally-intuitive mind worked out what was going on.

His whole family went out for bagels, after all. It was the first time he thought about telling them.

Stefan had never been one for gossip, really. Perhaps it was a natural trait, or perhaps it was self-preservation; he held stock in the theory that those who minded their own business were often treated the same way in return. He had no doubts that he had been the topic of idle speculation once or twice. He was, after all, seventeen, and fiercely devoted to his studies. He spent far more time in the Academy's library than scrapping with the other boys (who definitely hadn't yet earned the title of men, no matter their age). He much preferred chatting with Ragnor Fell whenever he came to guest lecture, although he found it difficult to get over Ragnor's eschewal of a title – to Stefan, he should have been Professor, but he was an interesting man in both his refusal of the title and his stories.

So, all things considered, he'd never indulged in speculative chitchat. Until he overheard his parents talking in the kitchen, one September morning.

“...always knew something was wrong with that Lightwood kid. Angel, look at his parents, it's no wonder he turned out.. *weird*,” his father was saying.

“Come on, Michael, it's not weird. It's just... different. New. And you know how different it is where the mundanes are, over there it's normal for...”

“For what?” Stefan piped up, walking into the kitchen. “I mean, good morning father, mother. For what?”

“Maybe you’ll understand what I’m saying, Stef,” said his dad. “Man to man, after all.”

“The news out of New York is that Alec Lightwood, who was going to marry Lydia Branwell, left her at the aisle and kissed Magnus Bane in front of everyone. I’m trying to explain to your father that just because he doesn’t understand it, doesn’t mean it’s wrong,” his mother told him, gently. His world turned upside down in that short moment. Alec really was like him, like he’d always thought he was, and he’d *done something about it*. He’d kissed another man in front of high ranking Clave officials. He had been brave, braver than Stefan could imagine, but the look in his mother’s eyes was... understanding, if he had to describe it. Could she...?

“It is wrong, Hanna! Men shouldn’t go around kissing other men – maybe the mundanes can do what they want, but we’re *Shadowhunters*. We’re supposed to be better than them.”

“You’re right,” said Stefan, clenching his fists. His dad began to nod, pleased to have his point validated. “We’re supposed to be better... *and we’re not*.”

He met his dad’s eyes then, force of his voice barely contained. It was time for him to be brave like Alec Lightwood.

His father began to splutter, but Stefan cut him off, holding his head high. “If mundanes and Downworlders can grasp something so simple, so human, then why can’t we? We’re half-human, and besides, we have bigger, more important problems. Demons are a damn sight more important than men who kiss men and women who kiss women, don’t you think?”

“I don’t-“

“Mr Lightwood has effectively been leading that Institute since he was 19. I think his ability as a Shadowhunter is more important than who he dates, right?”

“I- I mean, yes, but-“ his father began, but Stefan pressed on, a steamroller finally having found his steam.

“I would hope that I in turn will be judged as a Shadowhunter based solely on *my* skill, not because-“ he faltered, swallowing around the words. He’d never said them before, never written them, for as long as he’d known but-

His mother sought out his hand then, and he unclenched his fist as she slipped hers into his, and he felt as if he were borrowing her strength.

“I hope that I am only judged on my skill, not because I’m gay.”

There. He said it.

It was both incredibly groundbreaking and severely underwhelming.

“I have to get ready for class,” he said to the stunned silence, squeezing his mother’s hand as he made his excuses to head back upstairs. He had plenty of time to get ready, having taken easily to the Nephilim’s predilection to waking with the sun, but his revelation had brought some memories to the forefront of his mind.

He couldn’t deny that he thought about Alec, but in truth those thoughts weren’t really about him, just masquerading wearing his face for Stefan to project hopes and fantasies on to. It felt safer, that way, thinking about someone untouchable rather than anyone he knew.

He pulled out his battered old journal, one he hadn’t written in in nearly eight years but still stubbornly clung to, a representative of a more innocent, free way of thinking. Stefan had long broken all those felt tips he’d written it in, but reading back felt like he’d been transported through time, and if he concentrated hard enough the biro he was holding could become the very same green marker he’d loved at seven.

But then, he’d have to go through the growing up and coming out all over again. And he’d *finally* made it.

Stefan was interrupted by a soft knock on his door that could only be his mother. She’d grown gentler since retiring from field work, and he was grateful for it in moments like these.

“Come in,” he called out, voice remarkably level, and offered her a tight-lipped smile once she did so.

She returned the smile but came closer, running her fingers through his hair and pressing a kiss to his forehead. He closed his eyes, relishing the comfort more than he’d ever admit.

“How long have you known?” she asked, softly.

“As long as I can really remember,” and for him that was the honest truth. He chuckled lowly. “How long have *you* known?” he asked in return.

“I think since you were about 14, I figured it out. It didn’t change anything for me then and it doesn’t now, my boy.”

“Dad-“

“Will come around, if that’s a battle you want to fight. I understand completely if you don’t, but I will be fighting with you every step of the way, okay?”

“Yeah. Thanks, mom.”

“I’ll let you ‘get ready’,” she said with the smile only a mother who knew her kid was bullshitting her could smile, leaving his room and closing the door behind her.

Stefan felt more lighthearted than he could ever remember feeling, and it was with glee that he crossed off “Marry Alec Lightwood” from his list of missions. Stefan could rewrite his

goals now, and while Alec Lightwood may be off limits for him, it was thanks to him that the limits for Stefan, and all the other nephilim like him, were wide open.

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