

the past and present and deep regret

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/30163548) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/30163548>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/M , M/M
Fandom:	The Mortal Instruments Series - Cassandra Clare
Relationships:	Alec Lightwood & Robert Lightwood , Robert Lightwood & Michael Wayland , Robert Lightwood/Michael Wayland , Maryse Lightwood/Robert Lightwood , Magnus Bane/Alec Lightwood
Characters:	Robert Lightwood , Alec Lightwood
Additional Tags:	Lightwood Family , Father-Son Relationship , Parabatai , Spoilers For Book 6: City of Heavenly Fire , Spoilers for Book: Tales from the Shadowhunter Academy , Angst
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-03-20 Words: 1,696 Chapters: 1/1

the past and present and deep regret

by [deelphi](#)

Summary

Alec always was an observant child, never keen to be in the center of attention, content to let Isabelle and Jace overshadow him with their strong and bold personalities. But no, that isn't quite true. Alexander has a strong personality too, simply not in the way his sister and parabatai do. In Alec's quietness, Robert has always thought his eldest is much more like him than Maryse. Except braver, always braver, certain of who and what he is even in the midst of his fear. Robert looks at him now, and thinks of him as a young teenager, and wonders how he had made this man.

You're a coward, Valentine's voice echoes, firm with no doubt to its authenticity, a fact that had proved itself true over and over again.

Robert Lightwood's perspective of his conversation with Alec at Jocelyn and Luke's wedding.

Notes

Disclaimer: I am not affiliated with Cassie or any of her works, and anything you recognize will be direct quotes from her books *City of Heavenly Fire* and *The Evil We Love*.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The tent is filled with guests, Nephilim and Downworlder, mingling freely and cheerfully, and Robert thinks wryly that he never imagined he would be at a shadowhunter and werewolf wedding - or that he would be at *Jocelyn and Lucian's* wedding - nor that he would be so unconcerned by the fact a vampire is drinking blood out of a sleek metal flute mere feet from him. His eyes roam over the crowd, noting Maryse – looking elegant and beautiful, as always, in a fitting silvery dress – talking to Jocelyn; Jace dancing with Clary in the middle of the floor; and Alec standing on the edge watching.

He always was an observant child, never keen to be in the center of attention, content to let Isabelle and Jace overshadow him with their strong and bold personalities. But no, that isn't quite true. Alexander has a strong personality too, simply not in the way his sister and parabatai do. In Alec's quietness, Robert has always thought his eldest is much more like him than Maryse. Except braver, always braver, certain of who and what he is even in the midst of his fear. Robert looks at him now, and thinks of him as a young teenager, and wonders how he had made this man.

You're a coward, Valentine's voice echoes, firm with no doubt to its authenticity, a fact that had proved itself true over and over again.

Robert closes his eyes. Of course he's a coward. He was a coward then and he's a coward now, still having not learned his lesson but merely repeating the heartache on his own child. He thinks of Alec's bravery, of that kiss in the Accord's Hall in front of the entire Shadow World, not caring who saw him and of what they thought, and he knows that Michael would have been proud of Robert's son.

The shame buries just a little bit deeper.

Taking a deep breath to steel himself, Robert steps towards Alec, who is still observing the crowd with a glass of champagne in his hand, and searches his mind hopelessly for something to say. It will be the first conversation they have had in months – hopefully civil – and he has no idea how to start.

"It was a lovely ceremony, I thought," he settles on the small talk.

Alec turns. His face shadows, slightly, at the sight of Robert, and Robert tries not to let it bother him.

"Hi," Alec says shortly. His eyes dart to where Maryse and Jocelyn stand. "It was nice of you to come," he adds, sounding reluctant. "Pretend to be civil with Mom, all of that – really nice."

Unable to help it, Robert flinches. He deserves whatever Alexander has to throw at him, but it still stings. And he cannot help the excuses and explanations that bubble up in his throat.

"We're not pretending to be civil. I still love your mother; we care about each other. We just – can't be married. We should have ended it sooner. We thought we were doing the right thing. Our intentions were good."

“Road to Hell,” Alec says succinctly, and looks down at his glass.

Robert has made so many mistakes, committed so many sins, and it’s almost ironic that this – his futile attempt to keep his marriage for the sake of his children – turned out to be another one. *Road to Hell*, Alec says, but Robert’s road to Hell began a long time before his marriage with Maryse began to fail. If it had ever *not*, that is, built on pretence and fear and desperate desire.

Michael’s face blooms up in his mind, vivid, as if he had seen it only yesterday and not two decades ago, with the knowing look he had when Robert announced his marriage to Maryse.

“Sometimes,” he says, thinking of both Michael and Maryse, “you choose whom you want to be with when you’re too young, and you change, and they don’t change with you.”

“If that’s meant to be a dig at me and Magnus, you can shove it,” Alec hisses, rounding on him.

Surprise eclipses Robert for a moment because he hadn’t meant to direct that statement at Alec and Magnus at all – and then his words register, and he realizes how it might be taken by his son who is in a relationship with an immortal. Embittered guilt swells in Robert’s chest. Even without any intent, he cannot help but say the worst possible thing and push his loved ones even further away.

“You gave up your right to have any jurisdiction over me and my relationships when you made it clear that as far as you were concerned, a gay shadowhunter wasn’t really a shadowhunter.” Alec places his champagne flute down on the speaker, turning away from him. “I’m not interested –”

“Alec.” The tiredness seeps into Robert’s voice, the regret, and he just aches with it. It much be audible even to his son because Alec does stop and look at him, his expression guarded. “I did, I said – unforgivable things. I know that. But I’ve always been proud of you, and I’m no less proud now.”

“I don’t believe you.”

Of course he doesn’t. Robert’s never given him a reason to. And he knows that no matter what he says now, Alec will think it’s only excuses and lies. But he has to try to explain, for Alec to know that this is far from Robert’s issue with him and a lot more to do with Robert’s issues with himself.

“When I was your age, younger, I had a parabatai –”

“Yes, Michael Wayland,” Alec cuts him off, shortly, and Robert feels the stab of hurt at the carelessness Alec pronounces the name, the bitterness in his voice. “I know. It’s why you took Jace in. I always thought you two must not have been particularly close. You didn’t seem to miss him much, or mind much that he was dead.”

Oh, but he did and he does. Robert thinks he’s missed Michael every day of his life, before and after he had him, that piece of him he found and lost. He just has a lot of practice in

shielding that grief.

“I didn’t believe he was dead,” he says, thinking of the stunned and hopeless grasping for Michael’s life force inside him when he heard the news, though he hadn’t felt it there for years anyway. “I know that must seem hard to imagine. Our bond had been severed by the sentence of exile passed down by the Clave.” Or Michael’s real death by Valentine’s hands in Fairchild Manor. “But even before that, we had grown apart. There was a time, though, when we were close, the best of friends; there was a time when he told me he loved me.”

A stunned, disbelieving realization creeps onto Alec’s face. “Michael Wayland was *in* love with you?”

It’s the first time anyone’s ever said aloud, other than Michael himself, and Robert feels it like a blow – as much of a blow as it was back then, perhaps more, after so many years of dwelling and hiding.

“I was – not kind to him about it,” he confirms, knowing that’s quite an understatement. “I told him never to say those words to me again. I was afraid, and I left him alone with his thoughts and feelings and fears, and we were never close again as we had been. I took Jace in to make up, in some small measure, for what I had done, but I know there is no making up for it.”

Robert looks at his son and takes in his astonishment. Alec looks like Maryse, always has, even when he could see himself in him, even when he saw all his own flaws in a reverse of ways and hated it, and yet Robert does see himself now more prominent than ever. He sees himself and all he could have been, and all he could never have been, because he doesn’t have Alexander’s courage and honesty and that deep conviction in his beliefs and in himself and in those he loves. He wishes he did. Yet he’s so profoundly glad that, if *he* couldn’t, at least his son does.

“You think that I am ashamed of you, but I am ashamed of myself,” he says, perhaps more honest than he has ever been about anything in his life. “I look at you, and I see the mirror of my own unkindness to someone who never deserved it. We find in our children our own selves again, who might be made better than we are. Alec, you are so much a better man than I ever was, or ever will be.”

Alec appears to be frozen, staring at Robert with wide blue eyes and a disbelief that seems deeper than a confession about a man he had never known. He wonders if it really is that hard to believe that Robert doesn’t hate his son for being brave enough to love a man, a warlock, when the entire world is against him – the entire world and his own father. Thinking of it that way, maybe it is hard to believe. Robert knows that faith becomes much more difficult when you realize the limits of your parents’ love. After a moment, tense and suspenseful, unsure of what Alec will do now that he knows this secret, Robert is startled when Alec touches his arm lightly, the first time he’s touched him in months. He hadn’t even noticed the physical distance between them until now and it feels like something has caved his insides and stuffed them all at once.

“Thank you. For telling me the truth.”

Robert swallows. He doesn't even know what the truth is himself, except this one, except that once upon a time he was loved by a man who knew him as deep as his soul and that he had been cruel and unkind in the face of that love, and he never had the chance to find out what the truth about himself was. He hopes, deeply, that Alec will always be honest and truthful with himself, and knows he will.

End Notes

So. Was Robert in love with Michael? In my opinion, yes, but I think he was so deep in his fear that he won't even allow himself to consider it. Either way, whether he loved Michael like that or not, he made mistakes in their relationship and those mistakes later carried onto his relationship with Alec. That was his tragedy but it's also really, really human. In this, I hope I've been able to humanize Robert and his mistakes because I think he is such a relatable character in the worst of ways.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!