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BLACKWELL

Hell has a new master.



Alexandrea Weis
with Lucas Astor



Blackwell

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To the wonderful woman who made this book possible, Italia Gandolfo. To the Jedi Master, Luke Astor, for trusting me with his baby. To the tireless Liana Gardner for all her hard work, and to my friend, Mary Ting, for pointing me in the right direction.

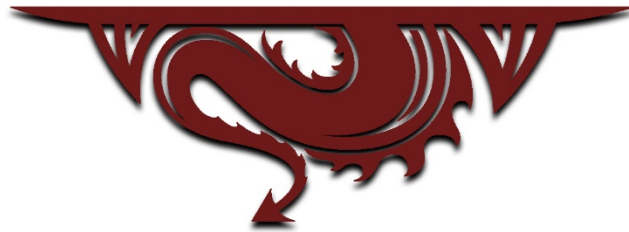
*Thank you for believing in me.
- Alexandra Weis*

To Italia Gandolfo, for her tireless dedication and determination. To Alexandra Weis, for loving twisted stories as much as I do and helping bring Magnus Blackwell so eloquently into the world. To Liana Gardner for being an earth angel, and to the epic Mister Sam Shearon who brought Magnus to life with his incredible original cover illustration of the man himself.

*Thank you all for making this possible.
— Lucas Astor*



Chapter One



A Fortunate Meeting

1886

The crunch of leaves beneath Jacob O'Connor's freshly polished shoes filled the crisp fall air. In a rush to cross the green of Harvard Yard, he dodged fellow students while struggling to pull his long black coat around his shoulders. Ahead, he eyed the red-bricked walls and white-trimmed windows of Massachusetts Hall.

When he reached the white-painted door, Jacob ran a nervous hand through his wavy black hair. "Hell of a first impression, O'Connor," he muttered, reaching for the brass doorknob. "You're already late, and classes haven't even started."

"You're not late," a deep voice spoke out.

A pair of inquisitive green eyes greeted Jacob. In a fitted long black coat and white ascot tie, the eavesdropper leaned against the red-bricked building. A lit cigarette dangled in his hand; he casually flicked away the ash.

"They haven't even begun serving drinks yet," the handsome man offered as he pushed away from the building. "Are you another of the freshman architects here for the reception?"

"I'm Jacob O'Connor." Jacob puffed out his chest, trying not to falter while the well-dressed man inspected his worn black coat and hand-me-down black shoes.

"I've heard about you. You're the sponsor from Fogle, Hardwick, and Hillman in Boston."

Jacob was painfully aware of how ratty his second-hand clothes must have appeared to the sharply dressed man. "Yes, Mr. Fogle was my mentor and got me into the Harvard

Architecture Program.”

The gentleman’s cigarette went to the ground. “Yes, you received a full scholarship. You’re the man the rest of us have to live up to.”

“I am?” Jacob questioned, his voice cracking with nerves.

“Word is you are very talented.” The toe of the man’s shiny black shoe rubbed out his cigarette.

Jacob warily glanced around the yard. “Not talented. Perhaps just determined.”

The stranger’s green eyes gave him a thorough going over while the wind lifted his dirty-blond hair. “Sometimes being determined is a talent, O’Connor.” He pointed to his chest. “I, on the other hand, am neither determined nor talented. I’m here because my old man insists I get an education.”

From the cut of his suit to his regal attitude, Jacob figured he was another of the rich and spoiled upperclassmen he had run into continuously since settling into his dorm a few days ago. For Jacob, the campus of Harvard was teeming with affluent men whose only purpose in life was to spend their family’s money.

“I heard you’re an orphan. Is it true?”

Jacob nervously cleared his throat. “Ah, yes, it’s true.”

The rude man added a cocky grin. “And were saved from a life on the streets by your mentor.”

Jacob’s anger stirred. “I may not have been born into a life of privilege, sir, but I can assure you I deserve to be here just like any other student.”

A raucous, maniacal laugh took Jacob by surprise. He didn’t know people could laugh like that.

“I’m not the enemy, dear boy.” His inquisitor drew closer. “I’d like to be your friend.”

“Why?” Jacob snapped, suspicious of his intentions.

“Because unlike the rest of the rabble on this campus, I admire determination and talent.” He held out a tapered hand. “I’m Magnus Blackwell.”

Jacob knew the name. Everyone in New England had heard of the Blackwell family. They were practically New England royalty. Their wealth had been acquired through shipping and banking, but had switched to steel production with the construction of the First Transcontinental Railroad. Their exploits and finances had been a particular interest to Jacob’s mentor, Martin Fogle. He had been trying to land their accounts for years.

After shaking his hand, Jacob took a step back. “I’ve heard of you.”

Magnus rested his wide shoulder against the white-painted door. “It’s all lies. Everything everyone says about me is a lie. If you want the truth, just ask.”

Intrigued, Jacob focused his dark brown eyes on the man’s chiseled features. “Are you as rich as they say?”

Magnus stretched for the doorknob. “Richer.”

Jacob raised his dark brows. “Is that possible?”

“With my family, most definitely.” Magnus opened the door for him. “Do you have any other questions you’d like to ask me, O’Connor?”

“I’m sure I can come up with a few more,” Jacob returned with a diminutive grin.

Magnus curled his lips into a half-smile. “Wonderful. It will give us something to talk about during this tedious orientation reception we are being forced to attend.”

“You might find my questions just as tedious, Mr. Blackwell.”

“Somehow, I doubt you could ever be boring, O’Connor.” With a flourish, Magnus Blackwell waved Jacob in the door. “From now on, you must call me Magnus.”

“And you must call me Jacob.”

“I think I prefer O’Connor. Makes you sound more mysterious.”

“Mysterious? Me?” Jacob chuckled as he moved toward the door.

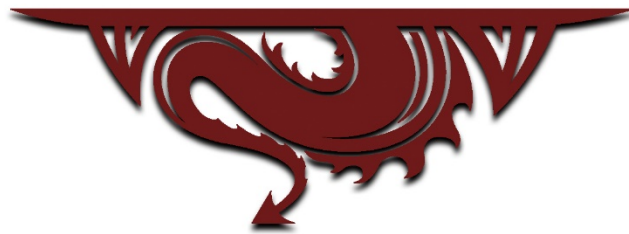
Magnus put his arm across the doorway, barring Jacob’s entry. “Mystery is all we have, dear boy. Without it, we would be open books at the mercy of those who would rip out our pages and scatter our secrets to the winds. Always strive to keep your secrets hidden.”

Jacob nodded. “Yes, Magnus.”

“And I thought this was going to be another boring party.” Magnus clamped his hand over Jacob’s right shoulder. “What do you say we tackle this college adventure together, O’Connor. Let’s take Harvard by storm.”



Chapter Two



The Problem with Women

Walls decorated with black-and-white photographs of buildings, and a row of windows that overlooked a cement walkway frequented by students rushing to class on Harvard campus, did little to offset the stuffy feeling of the classroom.

At the head of the room, an older professor with spectacles, thinning gray hair, and a customary black robe made notations on a chalkboard. He added asterisks to his drawing of the facade of a Greek Revival structure, complete with pediment and columns.

Seated around a circular table with several other young men, Magnus and Jacob wore the school uniform of black coats, white shirts, and black ties. While Jacob avidly took notes, his textbook open in front of him, Magnus sat back in his chair, looking utterly bored.

“Reaction against the dominance of the Neoclassical movement came in the 1820s with Augustus Pugin,” the professor lectured in a monotone voice. “He provided a theoretical push for the return of Gothic Revival seen in many structures designed in the middle part of the current century.”

Magnus leaned over to Jacob. “When do we get to draw buildings instead of talking about them?”

“Magnus, please,” Jacob urged, hiding his head from their professor.

“This professor is putting me to sleep,” Magnus insisted in a soft grumble.

Jacob glared at him. “Shhh.”

“Thus was coined the term ‘architectural realism,’” their professor extolled from the front of the class. “And many proponents of the movement have brought a renovation to the notion of style during our time.”

Magnus took a quick glance out the window, and then patted Jacob on the shoulder. "I'll leave you in charge of the notetaking, O'Connor, for both of us."

Jacob stared at Magnus, the apprehension swimming in his brown eyes. "What are you going to do?" he whispered.

Magnus just gave him a sly grin and then stood from his chair, wobbling slightly. "I'm sorry, Professor Talbert," he proclaimed in an unsteady tone. "I'm not feeling very well at the moment. I must excuse myself." Magnus placed his hand over his mouth, pretending to hold something back.

Jacob took in his performance with a profound sense of disbelief.

"Very well. Go, Mr. Blackwell." Professor Talbert sounded more annoyed than concerned.

Magnus collected his unopened textbook on Architectural Theory from the table and shoved the few blank sheets of paper he had in front of him toward Jacob.

"As I was saying," the Professor continued, as Magnus hurried toward the classroom door. "The Realist movement can be drawn from several other movements. One being Art Nouveau in the United Kingdom, exemplified by the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh."

Jacob was stunned that Magnus could get away with such a lie. Frustrated, he casually gazed out the window. Seconds later, Jacob spotted Magnus jogging along the path. His friend slowed when he caught up with a statuesque blonde in a green dress.

Distracted from the lecture and wondering if the pretty woman prompted Magnus's sudden departure, Jacob observed as Magnus struck up a conversation with her.

Smiling, Magnus relieved the young female student of her books and waved her down the path.

Jacob kept his eyes on the couple until they walked out of sight. Then he shook his head, disgusted by Magnus's luck. With a heaving sigh, he returned to his notes.



Magnus trotted down the straight oak staircase as the afternoon light filtered through the leaded glass of his front door. Muttering when his feet hit the first floor, he imagined the tongue-lashing he would give to whoever was banging on his door.

In the entrance hall, he hurried across the pine floors to the door. Checking the belt on his red robe, he put his lit cigarette in his mouth and took in a deep pull of smoke as he combed his hands through his disheveled hair. Letting out the smoke through his nose, he yanked the door open.

He was shocked to find Jacob standing in his doorway. His friend was holding up a pile of papers.

"Today's notes from theory class," Jacob sounded angry.

"And you brought them here? Now?" Magnus threw his cigarette out on the porch.

Jacob went after the smoking bud, stomping it out with his foot. He came back to the door and shoved the papers at Magnus.

"Professor Talbert asked where you were. That's three classes in a row you've missed this week, Magnus. I can't keep covering for you," Jacob added as he marched in the doorway.

Magnus took the papers from him and shut the door. “What did you tell him?” he probed in an anxious tone.

“You were sick, what else?”

A creaking noise from the staircase announced the arrival of the reason for Magnus’s absence. Dressed only in her white petticoat skirt and top, the same statuesque blonde Magnus had left class for proudly strutted down the steps, a playful grin on her lips.

When her bare feet touched the pine floor, she sashayed over to Magnus. Making sure she got his attention, she kissed his lips and then reached out to rub his ass.

The pretty woman seemed to delight in the various shades of Jacob’s red cheeks. With a smug smile, she turned away. While ambling down the hallway to the side of the staircase, she accented the sway of her hips.

Magnus tried not to laugh. “As you can see, I had a previous engagement.”

“Is that what you call it?”

“I call it fucking. You should try it sometime, O’Connor.” Magnus put the papers in his hand down on the first step.

“I prefer to wait until I’ve found a woman I can love,” Jacob professed.

Magnus appeared heartily amused by his comment. “Have you ever been with a woman, O’Connor?”

“If you must know, yes. Two women. Neither of whom I loved.”

“Thank God for that.” Magnus rolled his eyes. “Otherwise, you would have been married with a house full of brats by now.”

“You make love sound like a bad thing.”

“Isn’t it? Most women do not care for us; they tolerate us for wealth, protection, vanity, what have you, but love, never.”

“You’re a pessimist, Magnus.”

Magnus slipped his hands into the side pockets of his robe, appearing pensive. “No, I’m a realist. As you should be. A woman is the only creature who can take away your will as well as your soul.”

“But a woman can also save your soul,” Jacob argued. “Love is what brings us back from the brink.”

“I’ll have to take your word, dear boy. I plan on never becoming a victim of that disease.”

Magnus showed Jacob to the door just as the blonde returned. She offered Magnus a leering grin, and then jogged up the stairs. Both men admired her firm ass beneath her petticoat while she made her way up the steps.

“I need to get back to my previous engagement,” Magnus advised, returning his eyes to Jacob. “But I will pick you up tomorrow to go to the club.”

Embarrassed again, Jacob dropped his eyes to the floor. “Ah, yes. I’ll be ready.”

After Magnus had opened the door for him, Jacob rushed out to the porch.

“I hope you have a hearty constitution, O’Connor,” Magnus remarked, leaning against the doorway. “My father can be hard to take at times.”

Jacob backed away from the door. “I’m sure it will be fine, Magnus.”

Shaking his head, Magnus watched as his friend turned toward the porch steps. “You have

no idea how wrong you are.”

After Jacob had given him a wave good-bye, Magnus shut the door and secured the lock. Gazing back up the stairs, he grinned while thinking about who was waiting for him in bed.

With a short chuckle, he jogged up the steps, ready to get back to his eager blonde.



The Hastings Gentleman’s Club was considered the most prestigious club in Boston for men from the upper class. The waiting list to get in could take years, but for the bluebloods of the city, like the Blackwells, there was no waiting list.

In the mandatory full tuxedo required by club members, Magnus and Jacob entered the fancy black leather doors of the establishment. They traveled through the crowded meeting and smoking rooms until they came to the private bar.

Dark paneled walls, red leather chairs, and burgundy carpets gave the barroom a definitively masculine feel. At the end of the room was an ornately carved fireplace with a small dark oak bar next to it. Full-length portraits of esteemed club members, who also happened to be some of the most influential men in the country, hung on the walls.

At the arched entrance, Magnus eyed the room. “There he is.”

Magnus and Jacob crossed the burgundy carpet to an older man sitting near the fireplace in a high-back chair and smoking a cigar.

“Father,” Magnus greeted with a polite bow.

Reynolds Blackwell was an older version of his son. With a tall, agile body, he had fair hair, intrusive green eyes, and his face had Magnus’s carved features—even his fiendish grin. His jawline was a little softer, his belly slightly rounder, and his hands not quite as tapered as his son’s. Even down to the impatient way he flicked the ash off his cigar, there was no mistaking who had fathered Magnus Blackwell.

Reynolds Blackwell stood from his chair. While he put out his cigar in a brass ashtray on the table next to him, Reynolds mumbled, “Magnus. Good of you to come.”

Magnus waved his hand to Jacob. “Father, I would like to introduce Jacob O’Connor. He is studying architecture with me at school.”

Jacob stepped forward and extended his white-gloved hand.

Reynolds glared at his son while shaking Jacob’s hand. “I am surprised my son brought you, Mr. O’Connor. He never introduces me to any of his friends. Makes me think he doesn’t have any.” Reynolds snapped his fingers at two empty red leather chairs not far from his.

Jacob went to one of the nearby chairs. Out of nowhere, an attendant dressed all in white appeared at his side and pushed one of the chairs closer for Magnus.

Jacob waited for the attendant to get another chair. As he stood by, anxiously darting his eyes around the room, Jacob’s chair was pushed into place next to Magnus.

Magnus flipped his long coat tails behind him and had a seat. “I never introduced you to any of my friends because I knew you would not approve.”

“You’re right.” Reynolds directed his eyes to Jacob, who was clumsily attempting to mimic Magnus’s gesture as he took his chair. “What of your family, Mr. O’Connor?”

“He’s an orphan,” Magnus blurted out before Jacob could speak. “Without a penny to his name.”

“Then why are you with him?” Reynolds Blackwell shot back.

“Because he is the kind of rabble you never wanted me to associate with, Father.”

Reynolds ignored his son’s taunting. “Tell me, Mr. O’Connor, how did you find the means to attend Harvard?”

Jacob gulped as he felt the man’s piercing green eyes boring into him. “Ah, Mr. Martin Fogle of Fogle, Hardwick, and Hillman was my mentor.” Jacob silently cursed as his voice cracked. “He took me in and educated me when I was a boy. He got me a scholarship to Harvard.”

“I know Martin Fogle,” Reynolds curtly replied. “He’s been trying to land my construction accounts for years. He’s a wily prick, but a good architect. Are you like him?”

Jacob’s stomach did a nervous flip. “Like him? What do you mean?”

Magnus casually removed a spot of lint from his pressed, black jacket. “Jacob is a gifted architect and not a wily prick, Father.”

“Then what the hell is he doing with a bum like you?” his father roared.

A tense moment of silence passed, and Jacob warily glanced from father to son, convinced the two men were going to come to blows at any moment.

“You summoned me, and I invited him to come. He’s never seen the inside of The Hastings,” Magnus eventually answered, his voice never giving any hint as to the frustration stewing in his eyes.

Reynolds tapped his long fingers on the arm of his chair. “I am not sending you to Harvard to befriend charity cases, Magnus. I sent you to get an education.”

“And so I am,” Magnus insisted with a cocky smirk. “I’m expanding my horizons every day. You are the one who always pushed me to be well-rounded—just like you.”

Jacob observed as the older man’s eyes flooded with indignation.

Drumming his fingers on the arm of the chair, Reynolds nodded to Jacob. “Mr. O’Connor, can you give my son a moment alone with me?”

Relieved to get away, Jacob stood from his chair. “Of course, Mr. Blackwell. I’ll wait at the bar.”

Jacob felt all the tension in his muscles ease as soon as he bellied up to the bar. He was starting to understand why Magnus never liked being around his father. The man was intimidating as hell. Behind him, Jacob could hear their strained, lowered voices.

A bartender all in white appeared before him. “What can I get for you, sir?”

Studying the array of bottles lined up behind the bar, Jacob spotted a favorite whiskey. “Whiskey and soda, please.”

The bartender turned away and selected an old-fashioned glass from a shelf.

Jacob was glad for the distraction as the bartender prepared his drink. His fingertips ran back and forth along the smooth surface of the bar. He felt torn by the encounter with Reynolds Blackwell. In many ways, he didn’t envy Magnus and his relationship with his father, but then again, he had a father. He had grown up with someone to emulate. The closest Jacob had come to a father was the mild-mannered Martin Fogle. The ambitious architect had been patient and kind, but showed little interest in the boy who shadowed him.

“Time to go,” Magnus growled as he came alongside Jacob at the bar.

Jacob noticed the quivering of muscles in Magnus’s cheeks, and assumed the meeting was over.

“I should say good-bye to your father,” Jacob suggested.

“I would advise against that, dear boy.” Magnus’s voice was laced with rage. “Let’s get out of here.”

Before Jacob could get in another word, Magnus bolted from the bar. Sighing at the prospect of a long carriage ride back to Cambridge with a pissed off Magnus, Jacob trudged forward. He suddenly wished he’d stayed on campus and spent the evening in the library with a good book.



Magnus said very little on the long carriage ride back to Harvard. Except for the occasional grunt, he just stared out the window and kept his eyes on the passing scenery. Jacob, on the other hand, kept looking at Magnus and waiting for his outrage to erupt.

“The smug son of a bitch,” Magnus finally vented as he yanked off his white gloves.

Happy to hear him speak, Jacob chuckled. “You or your father?”

Magnus cracked a brief grin, sharing in Jacob’s amusement. “I hoped, with you, he would be different.”

Jacob was relieved to hear his friend’s fury subsiding, and eased back against the carriage bench. “He’s your father, Magnus. He wants only the best for you.”

“He has never given a damn about anyone,” Magnus snapped. “His cruelty chased my mother out of our home. She spent most of her life in the cottage across from the manor. They hardly spoke to each other before she died.”

“Just be grateful you have a father,” Jacob proposed. “If you lose him, you will be like me, an orphan alone in the world.”

“That could be a good thing.” Magnus snickered and dropped his gloves to the side of the bench.

Jacob was astounded. It was a wonder the two men had not killed each other before now. “Why did he summon you to the club? Is it because of your extracurricular activities?” he queried while the carriage briefly paused on the road.

“That was an excuse. We haven’t seen each other in two years,” Magnus disclosed. “Before applying to Harvard, I did an internship at Collier and Keene, an architectural firm here in Boston. He’s remained at our family home, Altmover Manor on Mount Desert Island in Maine.”

“You have a family home?” Jacob asked, surprised by the news.

Magnus briefly nodded as the carriage lurched ahead. “In many ways, it reminds me of my father. It’s perpetually cold, big, empty, and reflects the lifeless heart of Reynolds Blackwell. One day, I’ll bring you there.”

“What does Altmover stand for?”

“Our ancestral homeland in Ireland. Or so my grandfather claimed. I’ve never seen it.”

“Irish? You?” Jacob laughed with exuberance, delighted by the admission. “I thought you

were born of English nobility. Glad to find out you are from the same stock as me.”

“We have much in common, O’Connor. That’s why I like being around you. You remind me of me.”

“I don’t think we are anything alike, Magnus.”

“Just wait. I am sure you will see it one day. We are both driven.”

Jacob was taken aback by the statement. He had never considered himself driven. To him, getting ahead was the only way to raise himself up from his circumstances.

“What drives you, Magnus?”

Magnus snorted. “That’s simple. To be anything other than what my father wants.”

“Find a new hobby, my friend.” Hoping to ease his ire, Jacob patted his shoulder. “Harboring such a need for revenge isn’t healthy.”

“It is to me, dear boy,” Magnus griped in a haunting voice. “It is what I live for.”

Jacob clucked with concern. “Such hatred will only end up shortening your life.”

“Or it will give me the determination to live forever,” Magnus countered.

“No one lives forever.”

Magnus veered his eyes to the window and the tightly packed homes lining the busy street. “We shall see, O’Connor. I bet one of us will beat the odds.”