

Metal and Magic

Chapter 6

“Judging by the look on your face, I’m guessing the bossman wasn’t pleased,” Natasha commented as Clint stepped into the room. After a long night of keeping tabs on their targets, they returned to the small house they were staying in to get some sleep. SHIELD owned the house, and it was often used to house agents who were working in the city. Clint ran his palms down his face tiredly. He had dark bags under his eyes.

“Good guess. He’s very annoyed that we can’t figure out how this Harry guy keeps disappearing. Fury’s starting to believe that he might be a metahuman,” Clint told her, groaning as he plopped down next to her on the couch. Natasha turned to him.

“I hadn’t considered that,” she responded while thinking deeply on the subject.

“Consider everything! Assume nothing!” Clint barked in his best Nicolas Fury impression. Natasha snorted in amusement.

“What were his orders?” she asked, taking another sip of her tea. She usually drank extra strong coffee, but as she was about to hit the hay, she didn’t want the energy boost.

“Same as before,” Clint said while closing his eyes. His head was leaning back against the top of the couch cushion. “Keep following ... report everything,” he answered tiredly.

“Alright,” Natasha said, patting his thigh consolingly while getting to her feet. “Get some rest. Our backup will contact us if they find anything,” she said. Clint didn’t verbally respond. He was too tired. He simply nodded his head while Natasha sauntered off to her room. Little did they know that a sneaky wizard was nearby, magically listening to their conversations.

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Harry remained hidden between two bushes in the backyard of the house. He wasn’t worried about being spotted since he was sporting a Disillusionment Charm. He wasn’t taking any chances with these people. He hadn’t been able to figure out who they worked for, but he now knew how badly their boss wanted information on him. He knew the male was named Clint, and the hot redhead was named Natasha. This small, nondescript home was their temporary base of operations, which meant he now had a way of keeping an eye on them.

It did ease his worries, knowing that they appeared to mean him no harm ... physically, at least. Of course, that could always change, so he needed to keep his guard up. With the duo going to bed, Harry had no reason to stick around. He disappeared from the backyard and went about his day.

Now that he was a legal citizen, which, of course, had been obtained illegally, Harry decided to start the next chapter of his life ... home ownership. He was tired of jumping from room to room. He wanted a place to call his own. Harry reappeared in his room and went through the manila folder that Tony had given him. He already had his new driver's license safely stowed in his wallet, but he wanted to see what else there was. He opened up the folder and dumped the contents onto the bed. He picked up his new birth certificate and studied it. He didn't know what they were supposed to look like, but it looked legit. Next, he looked over his new social security card before placing it in his wallet. The last thing in the folder was a note from Tony reminding him that now that he was in the system, the pesky IRS would be wondering where he got his five million dollars from. Harry hadn't thought of that. He made a mental note to talk to Tony about it. Harry sighed and vanished the note. Until he got that figured out, he would have to avoid any large purchases, especially a new house.

Catching a whiff of his stinky scent, Harry gathered up some clean clothes and went into the bathroom. He desperately needed a shower.

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It was late afternoon, and Harry returned home with a sack of fresh fruits he bought from a farmer's market. He set the sack on the table and checked the Tracking Charms. Both dots were located very close to Tony's house. 'They're waiting for me to come back,' Harry told himself. He was glad they didn't know where he was currently staying. Harry planned to move again the next day to keep them guessing.

"Well ... Since they're kind enough to wait, it would be a shame to disappoint them," Harry stated with a chuckle. He needed to talk to Tony anyway. After leaving the house, the first thing he did was use his new identity to rent a car. He had very little experience driving, and he figured the only way he would learn was to get out there and do it.

Navigating the highways and streets was a little confusing, but Harry did so with a huge smile on his face. After several wrong turns from reading the map wrong, Harry eventually pulled up to Tony's gate. He rolled down the window and started jabbing at buttons on the com box.

"Welcome back, sir," Harry heard the familiar British-sounding voice.

"Good evening, Jarvis," Harry replied. "Is Tony in?"

"He is. I'll inform him of your arrival, sir," Jarvis said, and the gate swung open automatically.

"Thanks, Jarvis," Harry said happily.

"Of course, sir," Jarvis responded as Harry pulled down the long, curved driveway. By the time he neared the front door, it opened and Tony came out to meet him. Harry exited the car as Tony walked around it, studying it with a less-than-impressed look.

"I knew you had no sense of style, but this is too much," Tony sighed and shook his head at the sight of Harry's rental. "Did you borrow it from your grandma?"

"Stuff it, jackass. I rented the cheapest one on the lot," Harry shot back, looking at the car. It certainly wouldn't impress the chicks, but he didn't want to spend a fortune on something he wouldn't end up owning.

"So, what do I owe the pleasure?" Tony asked, waving him inside. He gave the car one last look of pity before closing the door behind them.

"It's about the note you left in the folder. The IRS," Harry reminded him. "Is there any way around that?"

"Avoiding the IRS?" Tony snorted. "If you figure that out, let me know," he chuckled.

"I'd like to put the money in the bank, but I'm guessing that would suddenly raise a lot of red flags," Harry explained.

"Definitely," Tony agreed. "However, there are ways to get that money into the bank without drawing too much attention to it. A personal business loan or investment from me would be one of them."

"I don't want anyone snooping too hard. The feds would probably try to get me for defrauding an investor the moment I buy a house or car," Harry countered.

"The feds don't usually look into it when it's a private loan. That's more of a civil matter. It would be another story if the loan came from Stark Industries, which is a publicly traded company," Tony told him. "So how bout it?" Tony smirked. "You want a good old loan from your best bud to start a business?"

Harry snorted. "You expect me to work like some nine-to-five Nancy?" he asked, horrified at the thought. Harry couldn't picture himself working some boring job for the rest of his life. He was used to danger and adventure and didn't plan on changing any time soon.

"Eventually, you'll need to start some kind of phony shell company to hide your ill-gotten gains. Otherwise, the feds are going to come knocking," Tony wisely explained.

"Hmm," Harry eloquently responded, rubbing his chin in thought.

"By the way ..." Tony interrupted his thoughts. "What was that stuff you left this morning? It cured my hangover instantly," he asked while picking up the empty bottle from his coffee table and sniffing it.

"I made it," Harry told him. "It's an old family recipe. There must have been some heavy drinkers somewhere on my family tree," he easily lied. The Hangover Cure was an easy potion to make. The ingredients were very common in the Muggle world, but the potion needed a magical catalyst to activate the ingredients.

"What's it made of?" Tony asked, obviously very interested.

"Just common variety ingredients. Nothing fancy," Harry told him.

"All natural?" Tony raised an eyebrow.

"I suppose. There's no crazy chemicals or anything like that," Harry said, wondering why he was so interested. Then again, Hangover Cures were common in the magical world, but they probably seemed like a miracle cure to normal people.

"How easy would it be to scale up production?"

"By how much?" Harry asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Industrial level," Tony clarified.

Harry thought about it for a moment. All of the ingredients were cheap and readily available in the muggle world. Hell, he had seen most of them at the farmer's market earlier in the day. The only problem is the catalyst. Harry used a copper cauldron with runes etched on the outside and inside. The outer set of runes absorbed ambient magic and redirected it into the potion through the inner set. For an industrial production level, he'd need much larger cauldrons, which meant he would need to find them and carve the runes himself. It was certainly achievable.

"Fairly easy, I'd wager," Harry said. "But that's assuming I have the space and equipment. I have neither," he reminded Tony.

"You know ... That would be a good company to start. A hangover cure would be classified as a supplement instead of a food or drug. That would cut through a ton of red tape," Tony said in deep thought. "I tell you what, give me a few bottles of that stuff for testing, and I might consider investing."

"You and your wild schemes," Harry sighed and shook his head. "How many bottles do you need?"

"Twenty would be good. I need a few to analyze, and I want to hand out the rest to see how effective it works on a variety of different people. If the test results are positive, we could make some serious dough," Tony said with a shit-eating grin.

"I'll take your word for it," Harry said, rolling his eyes. He was all for it if it meant he wouldn't have the tax men breathing down his neck.

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"There's a car pulling up to Stark's gate," Clint's voice was heard through Natasha's earpiece. "I can't see who it is, but the gate is opening. You're in a better position ... Can you identify them?" he asked her.

"Hold on," she replied quietly, moving further to her left. She lifted her high-powered binoculars to her eyes and peered through. She suddenly became very excited when she spotted Harry getting out of the car. "It's our boy," she said, stopping herself from sounding too excited.

"Run his plates," she said, and then read out the numbers and letters of his license plate. She watched Tony Stark greet him at the door and lead him inside. Oh, how she wished they could have bugged Stark's house.

"It's a rental car ...," said Clint. "... owned by Intrepid Car Rental and rented by Harry Potter. He paid in cash, and a valid California driver's license was logged into the system. That's very strange considering he wasn't in the system the last time we checked. I'm calling it in," he added and then went quiet. Natasha continued to watch the front door for a moment before coming to a decision.

"I'm taking the car. I'll go up the street a bit and wait on the side of the road. You keep watch," she told him. Clint chuckled.

"The old damsel in distress routine?" he amusedly asked. Natasha smiled to herself.

"It works every time," she said confidently.

"Go ahead. I'll keep you informed," he told her. That was all she needed to hear.

Natasha booked it straight for the car at top speed. She had no idea how long he would be in there. The car was parked on the side of the road behind a large bramble of bushes. She went into the trunk and stowed her equipment. Grabbing her bag, she went into it and pulled out a form-fitting, low-cut t-shirt and a pair of skin-tight jeans. She changed clothes as fast as possible before wearing a pair of sneakers. After grabbing her makeup bag, she climbed into the driver's seat and turned on the car. Natasha raced into position and turned off the ignition. She flipped down the sun visor and used the attached mirror to fix her makeup. Happy with the rushed results, she fixed her hair and exited the car. She waited another twenty minutes before Clint informed her he was leaving the property.

"I'm going silent," she said, pulling the earpiece from her ear. She didn't want it getting spotted, after all. After waiting another five minutes, she spotted Harry's car coming toward her. He

slowed down and moved toward the middle of the road, intent on safely passing her. Natasha waved him down before he could pass. Harry slowed and pulled up next to her. He rolled down his passenger side window, and Natasha leaned down and in to talk to him.

"Having trouble, miss?" he asked her in a British accent. Natasha smiled prettily at him and nodded.

"My car stalled, and it won't start. I'd call for help, but I forgot my phone at home. Is it possible that I could trouble you for a ride?" she asked, making her eyes wide and inviting. "I don't live too far away," she added. Harry smiled kindly at her and nodded.

"I suppose I could be troubled," he joked. "I wouldn't want you walking alone out here. It's getting late."

Natasha flashed him a bright smile. "Great!" she happily exclaimed and opened the door. She climbed in and shut the door behind her before putting on her seat belt. "When I get home, I'll call my friend to help me fix it," she explained. "Thanks for the help."

"My pleasure, miss ...?"

"Natalie," Natasha lied with a smile while holding her hand out. "Natalie Rushman." Harry shook her hand.

"Harry Potter. Pleasure to meet you," he said kindly. Natasha had to admit, he was quite handsome. His hair was boyishly messy, which she found both amusing and appealing. His eyes were a brilliant shade of green that she had never seen on anyone before.

"The pleasure's mine," she smiled cutely, which earned another smile from him. He began driving down the road. She could immediately tell he was either a new driver or out of practice. Natasha sat up straight with her back slightly bowed. She wanted to accentuate her breasts without making it obvious. Hopefully, he would take the bait and ask to see her again. Unfortunately, he didn't even look at them.

"So, where are we going?" he asked, keeping his eyes on the road.

"Follow this road, and I'll tell you where to turn off," she told him. "Do you live around here?" she asked, fishing for information.

"No, I was here to see a friend. I definitely can't afford one of these seaside homes," he chuckled.

'So, he considers Stark a friend ... Interesting,' Natasha thought.

"I love your accent. Did you just move here?"

"Not too long ago," Harry answered. "I figured I could use a change of scenery, and sunny California was the perfect place. What about you? Have you always lived here?"

"I'm originally from back east, but I moved here recently. I don't have many friends just yet, but hopefully that will change soon," she said, shooting him a look to see if he took the hint.

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'This so-called Natalie Rushman is awfully chatty,' Harry thought after fifteen minutes in the car with her. She asked a lot of questions, and Harry had lies for each one. He noticed that she was angling her body so he could get a good look at her cleavage. While he would never complain about receiving such a gift, he obviously knew she was trying to capture his attention. It probably would have worked had he not known she was a government stooge constantly spying on him. Even so, she was much more pleasant to talk to than Tony, and, of course, much better to look at.

Natalie, who, after spying on her, he knew was named Natasha, was a very beautiful young woman. She had almond-shaped eyes, full, pouty lips, and a heart-shaped face. Her dark auburn hair lay over her shoulders and ended a few inches down her back. Her figure was even better. While slender, she was also curvy with wide hips and a nice set of breasts. All in all, she was very attractive.

"... and a really big wave crashed over me, knocking me from my board. When I climbed back on, I heard hooting and hollering from all around. I looked down and saw that my bikini top had been ripped clean off. I never did find it. I promised myself I would never go surfing again after that," she finished her story. Harry had a feeling it was complete bullshit, but he chuckled anyway.

"I'm sorry I missed that," he joked, which made her snort in amusement.

"I'm sure," she said knowingly. "I do love the beach, though, and I try to go as much as possible. How about you? Do you like the beach?" she asked, pointing to a place down the road. "That blue house over there."

"Yeah, the beach is great," Harry said, even though he hadn't been to the beach since coming to LA. "What's not to like about it?"

"Maybe we can go sometime? You and me," she added, looking at him. Harry thought about it for a second.

While it was probably smart to keep his distance from these people, he knew they wouldn't leave him alone until they found what they were looking for. For Harry's part, he wanted to know

who they were and why they were bothering him. 'Keep your friends close and your enemies closer,' he reminded himself.

"Sure. That sounds like fun," he said, giving her a friendly smile. Natasha beamed with delight. Harry pulled into the driveway of the same house where he had been spying on them.

"Great! Here's my number," she said before stopping to look around. "Do you have a pen or something to write with?"

"I don't think so," Harry said. "I just rented this car."

"Give me your phone. I'll program my number in," she said, holding out her hand. Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out his Stark Industries phone. He handed it to her and watched carefully. He didn't want her doing anything fishy with it. She added herself to the contacts under the name Natalie. She then pressed the button to call her phone. After a few seconds, she hung up. "Now I have your number as well," she smiled sexily at him and opened the door.

"Thanks for the ride, Harry," she said as she got out. "I really appreciate it."

"You're welcome, Natalie," he replied, using her fake name.

"Give me a call!" she chirped and waved goodbye as Harry threw the car into reverse.

"I will," he promised. As she walked to the door of her house, she gave him one last look before entering. Her ass looked amazing in those tight jeans, and Harry wasn't sure if she was exaggeratedly bouncing her hips or if she naturally walked that sexily. Either way, it was certainly an attention-grabber. Harry shook his head and pulled out of the driveway.

After dropping Natasha off, Harry went straight back home. He carried his equipment into the backyard and set up the small copper cauldron. He then dug into Voldemort's bag and pulled out enough ingredients to make a full pot of Hangover Potion. While the cauldron was small, each dose was small enough that he would get around fifty doses from the batch. Once he got going, it didn't take him long to finish. It was a simple potion, after all. He snuffed the fire, placed the lid on the cauldron, and let it cool while he went inside.

Already planning on moving, Harry packed up his stuff and took it to the car. He would look for a new place to stay in the morning. In the meantime, it was getting late, and his stomach was starting to growl.

While eating a microwave dinner he didn't particularly like, Harry flipped through the dozens of TV stations looking for something to watch when he came upon the evening news. At the bottom of the screen in large, bold text was "BREAKING NEWS!"

“... the object was seen streaking through the sky at blinding speeds. Airspace around LAX has been restricted, and all flights coming into Los Angeles have been redirected. We’ve reached out to the Air Force but haven’t heard back. Again, what appeared to be a missile was seen over the skies of Los Angeles, but some aren’t so sure it was a missile. Several witnesses got a good look at the unidentified object, and this is what they have to say ...”

The scene cut to a reporter out on the street. He was holding a microphone while an older man stood near.

“Sir, you said that this object flew past you ... is that correct?” the reporter asked, holding the mic to the man’s face.

“I was in my car, stuck in traffic, when that thing roared past. Let me tell you, it wasn’t no missile,” he said confidently.

“Well, what do you think it was?” the reporter asked.

“I didn’t get a good look because it flew by so fast, but it looked like a metal man ... You know ... a flying suit of armor. It had fire coming out the bottom of its feet. The damn thing burnt the paint on my hood! I wanna know who’s gonna pay for that!”

The suit of armor thing immediately jogged a memory in Harry’s brain. The other day, Tony was working on a large metal boot when he went to visit. As a genius weapon manufacturer, he had all the knowledge, skill, and machinery to make something like that. After reconsidering it, Harry thought that maybe the man on the news was just a crackpot, but then he showed the reporter the scorch mark on the hood of his car. Something definitely burned it. His next thought was, ‘Tony’s going to get himself killed.’

He decided to have a talk with the drunken billionaire when he delivered the hangover cure doses the following day. Harry didn’t plan on talking him out of whatever crazy scheme he had planned, but he would tell him to be careful. Harry didn’t want to have to waste time tracking him down and rescuing his sorry ass again. After all, he had an upcoming date with a sneaky redhead to look forward to.