

Metal and Magic

Chapter 4

Coulson nodded to his coworkers as he hastily walked the short distance to Fury's office. He knocked on the door and waited exactly two seconds before he heard, "Enter."

"So, what do you got?" Fury asked, staring him down with his one good eye.

"These are the cleanest shots we got from the footage," Coulson reported, handing over a small stack of printed images taken from the recorded video of the payment drop-off. Coulson waited while Fury looked through them. The last one made his eye widen.

"I don't believe it," Fury said, grabbing a magnifying glass and studying the black-and-white face in the photo.

"We ran it through the system. There's a ninety-eight percent match with our mystery man," Coulson told him.

"So this guy evaded our agent in Afghanistan, found Stark in a cave out in the middle of nowhere, destroyed the Ten Rings operation, rescued Stark, somehow smuggled him back to America undetected, and then gave Barton and Romanoff the slip?" Fury asked, getting more annoyed with every spoken word.

"Seems like it," was all Coulson could say. Apparently, that wasn't very helpful. Fury shot to his feet and banged his fisted hand on the desk.

"This guy's playing us for a fool, and I don't like it! Please tell me we at least have some clue where he's at," Fury heatedly stated. Coulson shook his head.

"Barton and Romanoff are on the hunt. They're good," he reminded Fury. "They'll find something."

"Damnit, Coulson! This guy's running around Los Angeles unchecked. Hell, he might be halfway back to Afghanistan for all we know!"

"We've put out an APB at all ports of entry, and we're monitoring everyone involved. If he slips up, we'll catch him," Coulson assured him. Fury wasn't so sure.

"Our mystery man is obviously a professional. The first thing you do after a major operation is lay low. We might not hear from him again for a long time," Fury sighed and sat back down.

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A shapely, thong-covered ass pressed against Harry's face and jiggled all around. The drunken louts around him cheered as the sexy stripper's ass motorboated his face. Her hand reached behind her, and she gripped the back of Harry's head by the hair. Pulling his face in deeper, she began twerking before flipping onto her back and spreading her legs. She shook her round tits at him and patiently waited for payment. Harry hooked his finger into the front of her panties and pulled it up just enough for him to stuff a hundred-dollar bill down it. She smirked and shoved him away from the stage with her high-heeled foot. Harry stumbled back and was caught by another drunken party-goer who sat him back down in his chair.

"Good on you, mate!" one of them cheered and patted his back while the others laughed. Harry had come across a group of fellow Englishmen who had come to Los Angeles for a business meeting. One thing led to another, and before Harry knew it, they were in a strip club, downing shots and beers like they were going out of style. A good-looking waitress came up to their table with a tray and sat it down. Instantly, four hands snatched up the full shot glasses, and they tipped them back. All of them exhaled loudly as the liquid burned their throats. The waitress cleared her throat as Harry slammed the glass back on the tray. He looked at the pretty girl.

"Oh, sorry ... Here you go, love ... and a little extra for your troubles," he said, handing her a few bills. She smiled prettily at him and winked before sauntering away with her wide hips bouncing back and forth. Harry kept his eyes firmly placed on the woman's backside as she walked away, and he didn't notice someone coming up from behind until they patted him on the shoulder.

"At least you're spending my money wisely," a familiar voice said, full of approval. Harry turned his head and saw Tony Stark looking down at him with a smirk.

"How the hell did you find me?" Harry drunkenly asked and took a swig from his beer.

"You're still using the same phone that you used to call Pepper, dumbass," Tony explained with amusement. Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out the phone.

"You can track this thing?" Harry asked, wiggling the phone in his hand. Unfortunately, he wiggled too hard, and it slipped from his grip and fell to the ground with a plasticky crunch.

"Easily," Tony said as a different waitress brought him a chair while Harry fished around the ground for his phone. "You and I need to have a talk ... but first, how about a refreshment?" Tony smiled at the waitress.

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"Sir! You need to see this," Coulson exclaimed as he barged into Fury's office unannounced. Fury knew Coulson only did this when he got exciting information. Coulson sat a laptop down in front of him and played the video. "It's a segment from the morning news," Coulson explained further.

The clip began with a man in a suit and a pretty blonde woman sitting in front of a news desk. "With Tony Stark's return, we're all glad to see he's back to his old tricks," the pretty blonde said with an amused smile. The man chuckled.

"This was captured around four in the morning on Rodeo Drive," the news anchor said. The scene then changed to a slightly shaky camera pointed at a car slowly driving down the street at night. The windows of the fancy buildings on either side of the street were lit up. As the car drove forward, it became clear that it was a stretched limousine with four people hanging out of the sunroof. As the limo got closer, it was evident that Tony Stark was one of the passengers. In the middle were two beautiful, busty blondes, and on the other side of them was their mystery man.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," Fury said as he leaned in closer.

Both Tony and their target were whooping and hollering with delight while the girls laughed and hung all over them. The males each had a bottle of champagne, and when they saw that they were being filmed, they popped the corks with a raucous cheer from the girls. The cameraman was forced to back away as a fat stream of bubbly champagne nearly hit him. The limo drove by with Tony chanting U.S.A ... U.S.A ... while the other guy was chugging from his champagne bottle. The clip then ended.

"The footage was taken by a baker preparing to open a coffee shop," Coulson said.

"I want all eyes on Stark. I want to know who that guy is and what his connection is to Stark," Fury demanded. Coulson nodded and left the room. Fury watched the footage again and again.

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"Ohhh ..." Harry weakly groaned as he opened his eyes. His head was pounding, and his mouth tasted like he had been drinking from the sewers. When his vision stopped being so blurry, he discovered he was in an unfamiliar room.

"Mmm," a female voice hummed, and something tightened its grip on his chest. Harry tilted his head down and saw a tangled mop of blonde hair resting on his chest. He could tell she was still asleep from her slow, steady breathing. Harry ran his hand down the unknown girl's back. He felt nothing but soft, smooth skin. When his hand came to rest on her bare bottom, there was no doubt that she was completely naked under the sheet. Judging by the way her soft body felt against him, he also deduced that he was equally naked. The light coming through the window burned his brain, so Harry closed his eyes and willed his hangover to go away. It, of course, did not.

He tried his best to remember what had happened the previous night. He remembered meeting his fellow countrymen in a sandwich shop late in the afternoon and then going to the strip club

with them. After that, his memory became much hazier, and his hangover certainly wasn't helping. 'My trousers,' his brain finally devised a good idea.

He looked over the side of the bed and saw a scattering of clothes. A little pink dress was lying by his shirt. A pair of high heels was over by the door, and his trousers were by the bed and close to reaching distance. Harry groaned again. He didn't want to move but had no other choice. As best as he could, he tried to slip out from under the girl's naked body without waking her. Thankfully, after a minute or two of finagling, he slid out of her grasp and climbed out of bed. "Ugg," Harry grunted as he wobbled unsteadily on his feet. Suddenly standing up made him realize just how badly he needed to relieve his bladder. He stumbled to the nearest door and opened it. It was a large, empty walk-in closet. He closed the door and tried the next one. Happy to see it was a bathroom, he quickly entered. Once he was done, Harry rinsed his mouth at the sink and returned to the room.

Harry walked straight to his trousers but stopped when he got a look at the girl in bed. She was older than him ... maybe early to mid-twenties. Her hair was bleach blonde, and she was quite pretty, though she looked a bit rough, which was understandable. Harry plucked the wadded-up panties that were resting on top of his trousers and tossed them onto her dress. Going into the pocket of his trousers, Harry was relieved to see that his small bag was still there. Harry kept a small, pull-string sack in his pocket, the inside of which had been magically expanded. The only things he kept in there were the bare essentials for a night out on the town... a wad of emergency cash and several hangover cures. He opened up the bag and pulled one out. He popped the cork and greedily drank it down. Harry closed his eyes and waited until the sour feeling in his stomach lessened. Unfortunately, a hangover cure didn't completely fix one's hangover. It just lessened the worst parts so that it was manageable. Starting to feel slightly better, Harry looked around for his boxers but couldn't find them. With no choice but to go commando, he sighed and pulled on his trousers. He put on his socks, shoes, and shirt and looked back at the bed. His bed partner was still out cold. He was about to leave the room when he remembered something.

Harry checked his pockets but couldn't find his wand. He looked around on the floor but didn't see it. "Brilliant," Harry muttered to himself. He stood up straight and concentrated. The Elder Wand suddenly appeared in his hand. Only the wand's true master could summon it from wherever it happened to be. Harry was unsure if Dumbledore could ever call upon it. He stowed the wand away and quietly left the room.

'This house is massive,' Harry thought as he walked through the hall. He passed door after door, unsure of exactly where he was going. It didn't take long before he heard violent retching. Harry followed the horrible noise until he entered the massive living room and found some unlucky soul on all fours, vomiting into a very large potted plant. After one last heave, the man straightened onto his knees. His eyes had large bags under them and were very bloodshot, but there was no doubt who it was. Harry then remembered a little more of what had happened last night. Tony looked at him. "Make yourself at home," he said before vomiting into the houseplant again. Harry chuckled and took him at his word.

He left Tony and tried to ignore the disgusting noises as he went in search of the kitchen. Harry found it and began rummaging through the obnoxiously large and expensive refrigerator. He found a bottle of water with a fancy name and cracked it open. He was halfway done when Tony came shuffling into the kitchen like a zombie. "I'll never drink again," he groaned.

"We both know that's a lie," Harry retorted, and Tony snatched the water bottle from his grasp before it could reach his lips again. Tony drank the remaining half down in one go.

"Let me rephrase it," Tony said with a scratchy, tired voice. "I'll never mix hard liquor, beer, and champagne again."

"That's probably a good idea," Harry said. Judging by how he felt when he woke, Harry guessed that he had drunk all three of those as well. His stomach was still churning. Tony groaned pitifully and steadied himself against the marble countertop.

"Weren't we supposed to have a talk last night?" Tony asked, slightly swaying from side to side. Harry shrugged.

"I can't even remember how you found me, so maybe we did have a talk last night," Harry said.

"Your phone ... remember?" Tony reminded him. He then pushed himself from the counter and went into the fridge. He came out with a large bottle of orange juice. "I tracked you through the phone's GPS."

It sounded vaguely familiar to him. "My phone?" Harry asked, checking his pocket. "Where the hell did it go, anyway? And where's my money?" He had over five thousand dollars in cash in his pocket last night.

"I think you accidentally dropped the phone into the toilet at the strip club," Tony chuckled and drank some juice. "And as for your money ... It tends to go fast when you're paying for everyone's lap dances and buying bottles of champagne at five hundred dollars a pop."

Harry groaned and rubbed his temple. "I think I'm the one who needs to stop drinking."

"It's not all bad news," Tony smirked. "We were both put on the club's VIP list for life. Those two strippers even came home with us to celebrate."

"Such a joyous occasion," Harry sarcastically said.

"Where did you leave yours, anyway?" Tony asked.

"She's still sleeping. I don't even know her name," Harry admitted. Tony sniffled and wiped a fake tear from his eye.

“So proud,” he stated, his voice full of fake emotion. “Don’t worry about her. Pepper will have them taken home whenever they wake up.” Harry nodded. He guessed this type of thing was a common occurrence in the Stark household.

“Now that you have me here,” Harry began. “What did you want to talk about?”

“How did you find me?” Tony asked.

“I where you were attacked, so I went after the closest military base for intel. Their information isn’t as secure as they believe,” Harry smirked. “After that, I was able to piece things together to get an idea of the general area. Once I knew where to look, it was somewhat easy to spot the massive pile of weapons outside that cave,” Harry gave him an explanation full of half-truths. Tony suddenly looked more serious.

“That’s another thing I wanted to talk about. Those weapons ...” he started.

“All were labeled Stark Industries,” Harry told him. “At least they were before I blew them up.”

“That’s what I was afraid of,” Tony said, leaning against the counter. “The explosive that injured me was from my company as well.”

“I’m guessing you didn’t sell them to the people who kidnapped you, so it looks like you have a bit of a problem,” Harry said. Tony nodded.

“There’s either a traitor in my company or a leak in the supply chain.”

“Someone high up the ladder. How else would the Ten Rings know the time and place to attack you?” Harry had been thinking about this since rescuing Tony. “If I were you, I would keep a tight lid on any sensitive information until you find the rat.” Tony nodded as he went over everything in his head.

“And what about Yinsen?” Tony suddenly asked.

“Who?” Harry asked, looking confused.

“Ho Yinsen. He was with me in the cave. You know ... The other guy you rescued?” Tony explained.

“What about him?” Harry asked.

“Two people are way harder to rescue than one for a single person,” Tony said. “Why’d you rescue him? You weren’t getting paid for it,” Harry shrugged.

"He was there," was all Harry would say. "Consider it a freebie."

"Speaking of single person ... How the hell did you get us back to LA? I hacked into every transportation database and found nothing," Tony asked, astounded. "As far as they know, you never entered the country." Harry just smiled.

"I'm really good at what I do," he slyly stated. "Hacking databases, tracking my phone ... Is anything safe around you?"

"Nope," Tony chuckled. "I was never good with boundaries. I even hacked into the government servers to find any information on you," he admitted.

"Found nothing?" Harry asked, already knowing the answer.

"Not a scrap," Tony sighed.

"I'm not surprised," Harry responded. Technically, he didn't even exist here, and that was a bit of a problem for him. "So ... You're pretty good at hacking, huh?"

"The best in the biz," Tony bragged.

"Let's say I wanted a new identity. Is that something you're capable of?" Harry broached the subject.

"Child's play," Tony waved it away. "I already have backdoor access to all the necessary databases, and because we're a weapons manufacturer for the US government, we use the same equipment that the government uses to produce ID cards and driver's licenses to make our employee's identification and access cards. Forging a social security card and birth certificate can be done by an amateur. What really matters is if your information is in the system. I don't have the necessary printers to make a passport, but you could get that yourself once you have everything else," Tony quickly explained. "Why?" he asked with a raised eyebrow. "Looking to get lost in the crowd?"

"Let's just say I'm far from home with no way of going back," Harry told him.

"Is that why you went after the reward?" Tony asked. "Looking to start again?"

"Precisely," Harry nodded.

"You're not a crazed killer running from the law, are you?" Tony studied him.

"No more than you are," Harry shook his head. "As far as I know, no one's looking for me, and if they are, I don't want to be found," he truthfully told him. Tony rubbed his stubbled chin in thought.

"I suppose that's something I can handle ... But it's going to cost you," Tony finally said.

"How much?" Harry asked. It wasn't like Tony needed the money.

"You're a resourceful guy," he commented. "How about a future favor?" Tony tossed it out there. Harry thought about it for a second and decided it was a fair trade.

"Deal," Harry nodded. Tony smiled and rubbed his hands together greedily.

"Excellent," he said, sounding like a supervillain. "You'll just need to provide the relevant information so I can put it in the system."

"I'd call you, but apparently, my phone's at the bottom of a piss-filled toilet," Harry reminded him.

"You have five million of my hard-earned cash. I think you can afford a replacement," Tony said while pulling a notepad and pen from the kitchen drawer. He wrote down his number and handed it to him.

"This is my personal number," he said in a grandiose fashion, as if it should truly mean something to Harry.

"Glory, Glory, Hallelujah," Harry sang in a deadpan voice while stuffing the paper into his pocket.

"Ungrateful prick," Tony mumbled before drinking more of his juice. "Kids these days don't know how lucky they have it. Just call when you want to take care of your little problem."

Before Harry could reply, the front door opened, and he heard a familiar female voice. "Tony?" she called out.

"That's Pepper," Tony said, putting his bottle of juice on the counter. Harry followed him back to the living room. "Hey, Pepper."

"Tony ... You look awful. Another long night?" she asked, though it was likely she already knew the answer.

"I was celebrating my newfound friendship!" he smiled through the pounding headache and smacked Harry on the back. Harry rolled his eyes and stepped up to Pepper. She looked the same as she did on the television.

"Harry Potter," he introduced himself, hoping she wouldn't recognize his voice.

"Pepper Potts. A pleasure to make your acquaintance," she smiled at him, holding out her hand. Harry shook it.

"The pleasure is mine," he smiled back.

"One big happy family," Tony chimed in. Pepper let go of his hand and walked over to Tony.

"You two smell like a liquor store bathroom, and you don't look much better," she accurately described them.

"Now that's not very nice," Tony said, dropping down onto the sofa with a grunt.

"Neither is the fact that you missed another meeting. I couldn't even lie about the reason why because you two hooligans were all over the morning news," she said, looking none-too-pleased.

"We were?" Tony asked, sounding like he didn't care one bit. Pepper nodded.

"It was quite the spectacle. Anyway, I assume those two hookers will need a ride home?" she asked with a knowing look.

"They're strippers, and they will unless you want those poor girls to walk all the way back home," Tony said, then shook his head sadly. "That's cold-blooded, Pepper ... Even for you."

Pepper snorted and turned to Harry. "What about you? Do you need a ride?" she asked him as Harry chuckled. He shook his head.

"I can make my own way back, but thanks anyway," he assured her. "I'll call, Tony. Pepper, it was nice meeting you," Harry said, making his way to the door. Before leaving, Harry called out to Tony. "Tell whatever her name is that I had a great time," he said. Again, Pepper snorted.

"And don't forget to clean the vomit out of that big houseplant by the hall," he added before stepping through the door.

The last thing he heard was Pepper's horrified screech. "Not my Philodendron Pink Princess!"

Harry chuckled and left to find a safe place to apparate away.