

## Metal and Magic

### Chapter 31

Harry was brushing his teeth in the bathroom when his phone lit up with a midnight call. He spat mint foam in the sink, checked the number, and grimaced. Natasha was out on a mission, and if she was calling him in the middle of it, then it definitely wasn't good. "Shit," he muttered, then answered it on speaker and set the phone on the counter.

There was silence on the other end, broken only by the crackle of a poor connection. Then Natasha spoke in a whisper. "Harry. I need a favor."

He wiped his mouth on a towel, flipped off the light, and moved into the bedroom. "I'd gathered as much. What's going on?"

There was a muffled grunt, then a hiss. "You know how sometimes I disappear for a week? I'm running into a bit of a problem with that." That was her way of saying, through an open connection, that her mission had gone poorly.

Harry could hear the wind howling and whistling through cracks, and maybe the low hum of a diesel engine. There was also a sound that he couldn't quite place. He tried to focus on her voice.

"Your connection is really poor," he said. "Where are you?"

She hesitated, then answered. "About fifty miles outside of Omsk. You know it?"

He didn't. "Not really," he said, and let the question hang.

"Siberia," she said flatly.

That explained the wind. "What kind of favor are we talking about?"

There was a shuffle, then he heard Natasha's breath go tight. "I'm being hunted by at least a dozen FSB, and maybe a couple of Spetsnaz, but they're wearing civvies. They're not subtle."

Harry was instantly more awake. "Are you inside or outside?"

"I'm in a cabin. It's some kind of old hunting lodge," she said. There was a hollow thunk, as if she'd just crouched down on wooden floorboards. "It's a bit derelict, but I have cover. For now."

"How bad is it?"

She snorted. "If I say 'very,' will you hurry up?"

“Send me a picture of any open space inside, and I’ll get to you.”

She fired off a curse in Russian. “Can you not just apparate to me directly?”

He was already throwing on some clothes. “No. I need to visualize the space I’m apparating to. Just give me ten square feet of empty space, and I’ll get there.”

She sighed. “Fine. I’ll get you a picture. Make it quick. I’m down to my last few magazines.” Harry heard the sharp whip-crack of gunfire. The phone rattled with it, and then the call dropped.

He felt his heartbeat speed up as he waited for a text. It came ninety seconds later. It was a blank text with just an image attachment from an unknown number. Harry opened it. The screen showed a rough interior. The walls and floors were made of discolored pine boards, and empty vodka bottles were scattered across the floor. It wasn’t much, but it was all he needed.

He tried to imagine how Natasha looked, crouched there, trying to keep her hands steady as she took the picture. He wondered if she was hurt. Not wanting to waste any more time, he twisted and vanished from the mansion.

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“Come on out, girl! We promise we won’t hurt you!”

The voice was heavily accented, with a thread of professional calm that Natasha didn’t like. She hunkered in the corner of the cabin, her handgun pointed at the left-hand window. There was the sound of a dozen boots crunching over the ground, snapping the dried branches that littered the area. She heard the click of a lighter, then laughter, and then the slap of someone’s palm on a comrade’s back.

She pressed her back to the wall and steadied her breathing. She counted the footsteps. They’d spread out. There were maybe two or three at the front, and the rest spread out in a loose crescent shape behind them. Someone called out in bad English. “You American bitch, why don’t you come play? We just want to talk!”

Natasha peeked up and fired twice through the window. There was a yelp, a thud, and then one of the men howled in pain. “Fucking hell, she got me! Shoot her, shoot her now!” Bullets thundered against the cabin’s brittle walls. Glass rained from the window, and splinters flew through the air. Natasha threw herself flat on the floor. Above her, planks buckled and then disintegrated.

She waited for a lull, then took a breath and rolled onto her back, gun ready. She craned her head up just enough to see the back door. A shadow shifted in the gap beneath it. They were

planning to rush her, pin her down, and finish the job up close. It was the old Spetsnaz routine ... overwhelm the enemy, then mop up. She grinned wickedly. Let them try.

Another voice shouted, "We have you surrounded! Last chance, Romanoff!"

They'd used her name. That meant this was a black-bag job. It might even have been sanctioned. Fury needed to know about this right away. Suddenly, a hand gripped her shoulder, and she nearly shot Harry in the throat.

He appeared in a wild swirl of displaced air, stumbled, then fell on his ass next to her. His face was pale, and he was sweating. "Jesus," he whispered. "There are a lot of them out there. Making friends again, I see."

"About time," she whispered. "You look like shit."

He gave her a pained grin. "Apparating into Siberia isn't as easy as you might think. I had to go through over a dozen apparition points."

She peered out the window, sighted movement, and fired. She heard a solid thunk and a gurgling scream. Someone swore and started shooting again. The cabin's entire left side exploded into dust.

Harry ducked lower, his eyes wide. "Boy, you really pissed them off."

Natasha tossed her hair and scowled. "I tend to do that."

Harry snorted. "So, what's the plan?"

She reached into her black duffel and pulled out a chunky slab of C4. The putty was already wired to her signal transmitter. "We lure them inside, blow the place, then mop up any survivors."

Harry bit back a laugh. "And people call me reckless."

She wrenched open a loose floorboard, then jammed the C4 under it. "Keep their attention, will you?"

He crawled to the kitchen doorway, stuck his wand through the jagged hole in the wall, and fired a few curses. There was a blue shimmer, and one of the men screamed as his thigh was slashed open. Natasha heard the rustle as they dragged the wounded man back.

Natasha risked a look through the front window. The nearest man was huddled behind a fallen tree, pointing his gun at the cabin. She sighted him, squeezed the trigger, and he folded instantly.

Then the back door caved in. A bald man in a black coat ducked in, his rifle at the ready. Natasha shot him twice in the chest, then Harry stunned his backup as he tripped through the doorway.

There was a lull. "They're regrouping," Harry said. "It's time to get out of here." He said this just as a few more shots peppered the cabin wall.

She finished setting up the C4, then pulled Harry close. "When I yell, separate us behind the cabin, by the trees."

He nodded, then saw a cut on her head. "You're bleeding."

She touched her forehead. "It's just a graze."

She grabbed the detonator as Harry wrapped an arm around her waist. Natasha screamed loudly, sounding like she had been shot. Harry twisted on the spot, and they vanished in a pop of displaced air.

They landed in ankle-deep mud behind the battered hunting lodge, protected from view by a thick crop of trees. They were instantly swarmed by the relentless mosquitoes that bred in the stagnant pools surrounding the tree line. Harry hissed and swatted at his cheek, feeling the sting.

Harry drew his wand, muttered a quick anti-insect charm, and watched the mosquitoes drop in a fine, twitching rain. "That's why I stick to cities," he said, dusting mosquito carcasses off his arm. Natasha snorted and pressed her palm to her bleeding forehead.

From their position in the trees, they could see the lodge being advanced on. The Spetsnaz squad had fanned out, creeping low with raised rifles, assuming Natasha was still inside and wounded. She watched them, counting the heads. There were at least eight left she could see, clustered on the front porch. One of the men barked something in Russian and motioned the others forward. The point man sprinted for the door, leaping up the steps two at a time.

Natasha kept her hand steady, gripping the detonator and waiting for the perfect moment. She waited until the men behind her were bunched together, moving as a single unit, before she clicked the button.

The explosion was larger than Harry expected. The entire front quarter of the cabin vaporized in a burst of orange light and debris. The blast wave tore through the squad, tossing bodies backward as if they weighed nothing. Harry could feel the heat on his face, even from fifty meters away, as the shockwave snapped every branch in a ten-yard radius. The concussion sent a rain of splinters and smoking wreckage arcing over the field. Glass, burning timbers, and

even a ragged sheaf of curtains rode the pressure wave, and it all scattered over the muddy clearing.

The two of them crouched low, watching the chaos unfold with professional detachment. Harry whistled quietly, impressed. "You know how to make an exit, Natasha."

Natasha's eyes glimmered. "It's all about timing." She took inventory of the carnage. At least half of the men were dead outright, their bodies torn to shreds by the blast. The rest writhed and howled on the ground, their skin blackened and torn.

Natasha let out a deep breath. She grabbed Harry and kissed him hard, letting her tongue slide into his mouth. He responded instantly, wrapping his arms around her and yanking her close. His hands slid down to her waist, and when she felt him squeeze her ass, she grinned against his mouth and let herself get lost in it for a moment or two.

Then they broke apart, and Natasha wiped a smear of dirt from Harry's cheek. "As fun as this is, we need to go before backup arrives. I have a car stashed two miles north, across the ridge. You think you can manage a sprint?"

"You bet," Harry said, letting go of her shapely bottom. "Lead the way."

They darted through the trees, keeping low and shifting direction every few seconds. Harry glanced back once, saw the lodge collapsing in on itself, and listened to the distant shouts as their backup finally arrived. Gunfire erupted, and Harry guessed that they were blindly shooting into the woods, hoping to hit Natasha. There was little chance of that happening, but he knew that those men were not going to let this go.

The path Natasha picked was not really a path at all. It was just a winding track through fallen trees and tangled roots, broken by occasional tracts of marsh and unfrozen ice. She ran like she'd been born in the forest, ducking branches and vaulting over rotten logs with inhuman grace. Harry lagged behind, and he promised to get himself into better physical shape. He wiped sweat from his brow, swore at the mud sucking his boots down, and pressed on.

They heard the shouts behind them grow fainter as they faded deeper into the woods. Natasha didn't slow down, but she did start zigzagging more. She would double back at odd intervals and stop now and then to listen for pursuit. Harry realized she was listening for tails and trying to shake anyone who might be tracking them. Harry kept quiet and let her do her thing.

At one point, a flare shot up behind them, burning bright in the sky before slowly falling back toward the Earth. They both dropped to the ground instantly, flattening themselves against the wet earth. Harry turned his head and rested it on a soft patch of moss, breathing heavily from the run. He could see Natasha's face six inches from his.

“Drone,” she whispered, and Harry realized she’d spotted a drone circling in the sky above the burning cabin.

Natasha got to her feet, pulling Harry up and steering him off the main game trail. They moved as silently as possible, trying their best to avoid patches of thin, dried branches on the ground.

Every hundred yards or so, Natasha would stop, crouch, and scan the woods with experienced eyes. Once, she signaled for Harry to freeze, and they waited for a solid minute. A pair of Spetsnaz operatives jogged past, less than ten yards away. One was whispering into a walkie-talkie, and the other kept scanning the treetops with his rifle. Harry pulled out his wand and wiggled it at Natasha. She shook her head, and he understood. She didn’t want him giving their position away. They didn’t see Harry or Natasha, and within seconds, they were gone. Natasha gave it another few minutes before they started off again.

They crested the first ridge and looked back. Though they couldn’t see the destroyed cabin, they could see the dark smoke swirling through the bright blue sky. They skidded down the far side of the ridge and cut through a narrow gully. It was darker at the bottom, and the going was treacherous. Ice slicked every stone, and the roots snagged at their boots. Once, Harry slipped and slid on his ass for a few feet before Natasha caught his arm and yanked him upright.

“Careful,” she whispered. “There’s a river up ahead, and it’s not frozen through. I hope you don’t mind getting wet.”

He nodded, sucking in lungfuls of air. “When we make it to the car, what then?”

“We drive,” Natasha said. “We get as far from Omsk as possible. I’ll contact Fury and tell him the mission was compromised from the beginning. He’ll arrange a pickup.” She said it with absolute certainty, like there was never any question of it working.

“What if they have checkpoints?” Harry asked.

“They will. But this isn’t the first time a mission’s gone sour. Just keep up.”

They reached the river a few minutes later. It was a narrow, fast-moving channel, lined with slick, mossy rocks. Natasha signaled for Harry to cross first.

He carefully and quietly made it down the bank, his arms outstretched for balance. As he entered the water, Harry gasped. The water was freezing. Still, he continued onward with Natasha right behind him. At one point, Harry slipped on a smooth rock and fell waist-deep into the water. He shot back up, gasping from the icy cold water.

They hauled themselves up the bank with Natasha giggling at his misadventure. “You should see your face,” she chuckled as Harry waved his wand and dried them both.

Within seconds, she was already moving, her eyes fixed on the woods ahead. They continued for another mile, always uphill and never in a straight line. Harry was visibly tired, and Natasha wasn't much better. Thankfully, their trek only lasted another twenty minutes before they found Natasha's stashed vehicle. It was an old, ragged Russian brand that would blend in well with all the others on the road. She motioned for him to get his ass in the car. A few minutes later, they were tearing down the back roads, trying to get as far away as they could.

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They made it to Pavlodar just before midnight, and the battered Lada rattled along wide, cracked avenues lined with low, concrete towers and the occasional blinking neon sign. Natasha's driving was aggressive but careful. Harry slumped in the passenger seat, casting glances at every shadow and every car that tailed them for more than a block.

It had taken them longer than usual to reach Kazakhstan, but that was mainly because they kept to the back roads as much as possible. Even so, they had gone through several checkpoints. Luckily, the guards were no match for Harry's magic, and all it took was a swipe of his wand before their eyes went glassy and they waved them through.

They found the hotel Fury had picked for them. It was an ugly slab of Soviet architecture with a faded blue sign. The lobby was empty except for a hunched old woman behind the counter and a threadbare carpet that smelled of cigarettes. Natasha cut across the lobby, and Harry followed with her duffel slung over his shoulder. The clerk didn't look up as Natasha gave her the fake name and slid an envelope across the desk.

The elevator was barely big enough for both of them and the duffel bag. It creaked its way to the fifth floor and jerked to a stop. Its doors opened into a narrow, dimly lit hallway. Their room was at the far end, overlooking the courtyard and the glow of the city beyond. Harry opened the door and glanced in. After waving his wand and finding no one hiding inside, he waved Natasha in. She immediately checked the windows and the bathroom, then gave him a tight nod.

Harry dropped Natasha's duffel bag onto a chair and slumped down onto the edge of the bed. For a moment, they just quietly stared at each other. They had been running on adrenaline for hours, and neither was quite ready to put their guard down.

Eventually, Harry stood and began the process of warding the room. He moved from wall to wall, muttering charms and tapping the plaster with his wand. He layered magical alarms over every entry point. At the window, he pulled the thick curtain closed, hiding their room from the outside world.

He finished his sweep just as Natasha started stripping off her shirt. Harry tried not to stare, but it was impossible. The room was lit by a single lamp, and her curvy body cast long shadows across the walls. She peeled away her top, revealing a torso marked with fresh bruises. Harry stopped her, waved his wand at her bruises, and healed them instantly. Natasha smiled prettily

and pecked him on the lips in thanks. Natasha then unhooked her bra with a flick of her wrist and let it fall. Her breasts were large, round, and perfect, and her nipples were already hard from the chilly night air. Harry felt his mouth go dry.

Natasha caught him staring and smirked. She unzipped her pants, wiggled her hips, and slid them down her legs. She stood there in nothing but a pair of tiny black panties. Never breaking eye contact with Harry, she hooked her thumbs under the waistband and tugged them free. Her pussy was clean-shaven and soft, and the taut lips were already glistening slightly. She stood there, totally nude, and let Harry take in the sight.

“You can join me ...,” she said. “... or you can keep working.”

She turned and padded into the bathroom. Harry heard the water turn on, and the ancient pipes groaned in the walls. He yanked off his shirt in a single move. He kicked off his shoes and stepped out of his jeans. He followed Natasha into the bathroom, his cock already stiffening as he crossed the threshold.

The bathroom was damp and full of steam. Natasha was already in the shower, working shampoo into her red hair. She saw Harry in the mirror and grinned, then motioned for him to join. He stepped into the shower and found the water scalding hot.

Natasha turned and pressed herself against his chest. Her breasts were warm and heavy against him. She grabbed the bar of soap and lathered up her hands, then placed them flat on his chest and started rubbing. She worked down his torso, caressing the outline of his abs. She then slipped her soapy hands around his waist and over his ass. Harry tried not to shiver, but he did anyway.

She turned her back to him, pressed her ass against his groin, and reached up to soap her arms and shoulders. Harry couldn't help himself. He cupped her breasts from behind and kneaded them gently. Natasha let out a low, throaty moan and leaned into his touch. He rolled her nipples between his fingers until they were rock hard, and then trailed one hand down her stomach and over her mound. She spread her legs a little and arched her back into him, giving him full access to her damp slit and engorged clit.

He found her pussy and cupped it, feeling the smoothness of her mound and the heat of her slit. He started rubbing slow, soapy circles, working his way between her lips and her clit. Natasha's breathing grew ragged, and she reached back with one hand to grab his cock. Her grip was firm and sure, and she stroked him in rhythm with his own movements.

Their hands began moving faster and faster, until Natasha's knees started to buckle. She groaned and ground herself against his hand, and she let out a cute whimper as she came. Harry felt her juices mix with the soapy water, and it made his own need almost unbearable. He jerked his hips forward, sliding his cock up and between her cheeks, and Natasha squeezed him tightly.

“Don’t stop,” she gasped, her voice shaking with urgency.

Harry pumped his hand against her clit, while Natasha twisted her arm and jacked him with expert skill. That pushed him over the edge, and he came in a sudden rush, spurting hot white cum all over her ass and lower back. Natasha shuddered and squirted against his fingers. They stood there together, breathing heavily, as the shower water washed it all away.

Natasha turned around, her hair dripping and her pupils wide. She grabbed Harry’s face and kissed him hungrily before letting go and laughing. “Thanks ... I needed that,” she said. Then she shut off the water and stepped out of the shower, leaving him there with his heart racing.

She toweled off, pulled her hair back into a sloppy bun, and did a quick check of her body in the mirror. She didn’t bother to cover up. She just walked around the room naked as she checked her phone and loaded a fresh clip into her sidearm.

Harry followed her into the room, dried them with his wand, and sat on the edge of the bed. He watched her for a minute, admiring the way her gorgeous body moved.

She tossed his clothes at him. “Get dressed,” she said. “You don’t want to be caught naked if our room gets stormed.”

Harry nodded and began getting dressed. “Do you think they’ll come after you again?”

Natasha shrugged. “Eventually, but if they do, I’ll be ready.”

Harry got into bed while Natasha put some clothes on. Once dressed, she crawled into bed and cuddled up with him. Harry kissed the side of her head, and Natasha practically purred. She turned her head and kissed him deeply before lying her head back onto his chest. Harry had been awake for far too long, and within minutes, he was out like a light.