

## Chapter 36

Sylvia threw her leg over his waist and straddled him, her slick, cum-filled pussy hovering just above his half-hard cock. She grinned down at him, her eyes dark with fresh hunger.

“Greedy, aren’t you?” Harry asked, his hands sliding up her thighs to grip her ass, squeezing the soft, full cheeks.

“Shut up and get hard for me,” she teased, reaching between them to wrap her fingers around his shaft. She stroked him slowly at first, spreading the mix of their previous cum along every thick inch, feeling him swell and stiffen fast in her grip. Harry groaned low, his hips twitching up. Sylvia smirked as she positioned the fat, leaking head of his cock right at her dripping entrance and sank down in one smooth, greedy motion.

“Fuuuuck,” she moaned loudly as his thick cock stretched her open again, sliding deep into her warm, velvety pussy. The wet squelch of her cum-stuffed cunt swallowing every inch filled the room. She bottomed out with a gasp, her ass settling flush against his balls. Harry’s fingers dug into her hips, holding her there as her walls fluttered and clenched around him.

“Fuck, you feel so fucking tight,” he growled, bucking up sharply. Sylvia’s head tipped back, a needy whine escaping her lips. She started riding him right away, rolling her hips in slow, deep circles at first, grinding her swollen clit against his pelvis with every swirl. The slick, filthy sounds of her soaked pussy working his cock were loud and obscene, wet squelches and soft schlicks as she moved.

Her tits bounced gently with the motion. Harry reached up, cupping them both, his thumbs rubbing over her hard nipples. “Ride me just like that,” he said, his voice rough. Sylvia planted her hands on his chest for leverage and picked up the pace, lifting and dropping her ass in steady bounces. Her round ass rippled each time it slapped down against him, her pussy gripping his shaft tightly on every stroke and swallowing him whole on the way down.

“Fuck, Harry... your cock feels so good,” she panted, leaning forward so her tits hung in his face. He latched onto one nipple, sucking hard while his tongue flicked over the stiff peak. Sylvia moaned louder, grinding down harder, her clit rubbing frantically against him. Juices and leftover cum leaked out around his thick base, coating his balls and making everything messier and slicker.

She straightened up again, her hands braced on his chest and really started fucking him. Her hips rose and fell faster, slamming down with wet, heavy slaps. The bed creaked under them. Harry’s hands gripped her ass tighter, spreading her cheeks a little as he thrust up to meet her, driving his cock even deeper. Each powerful stroke nudged against her cervix, making her cry out.

“Yes! Right there. Oh shit,” Sylvia gasped. Her pussy was drenched, creamy white froth from their mixed cum building at the base of his shaft and smearing across her inner thighs with every bounce. She rode him harder, her tits jiggling wildly, and her moans turning into constant, breathy cries. The room filled with the sounds of raw sex: the constant wet squelching of her cunt, the slap of skin on skin, and their shared heavy breathing.

Harry watched her with hungry eyes, mesmerized by the sight of his thick cock disappearing into her pink, stretched pussy over and over. “Look at you taking every inch like that,” he groaned, one hand sliding up to pinch and tug her nipple. Sylvia whimpered, her walls clamping down tighter around him. She leaned back slightly, changing the angle so his cock dragged perfectly against that sensitive spot inside her with every thrust.

Her pace grew frantic. She was bouncing fast now, her ass cheeks clapping loudly against his thighs. Sweat glistened on her skin, making her tits shine as they bounced. Harry’s balls tightened, heavy and full beneath her. He rubbed her clit with his thumb in tight, slick circles, feeling how swollen and slippery it was.

Sylvia’s breathing hitched, her moans getting higher and more desperate. The pressure built slowly inside her, coiling tighter with every deep grind and bounce.

“I’m getting close,” she whimpered, her hips faltering as she chased her climax. Harry thrust up harder, meeting her rhythm perfectly, his thick cock stretching her walls again and again.

“Don’t hold back,” he urged, his voice strained. “Let it build. I want to feel you cum for a long time.”

She rode him through the rising wave, her pussy fluttering and clenching erratically around his shaft. The slick sounds grew louder and wetter. Her thighs trembled as she shook, her eyes wide as it hit her hard.

Sylvia cried out sharply as the orgasm crashed over her, her walls spasming violently around his cock in long, rhythmic pulses.

“Ahh fuck... Harry!”

Her whole body shook, her tits heaving, but she kept moving, grinding down deep and slow through the intense contractions. Each squeeze milked his cock as fresh juices gushed around him, soaking his groin. The climax rolled on and on, wave after wave making her whimper and moan, her pussy fluttering endlessly while she rocked through every aftershock.

Harry groaned at the feeling, fighting to hold back as her cunt squeezed him like a vice. He kept thrusting up gently, drawing her pleasure out until she was panting and trembling, barely able to keep her rhythm.

But Sylvia wasn't done. After a few shaky breaths, she started riding him again, slower at first but building back up with determined rolls of her hips. The messy, cum-slick sounds continued, soft squelches turning into louder slaps as she picked up speed. Her pussy stayed incredibly sensitive, every drag of his thick cock sending sparks through her.

"You feel so fucking good," Harry praised, gripping her waist as he helped guide her bounces. "Keep using my cock like that."

She leaned forward, bracing on his chest again, and fucked him with renewed energy. Her ass bounced rapidly, her tits swaying hypnotically. The wet slapping filled the room once more. Another orgasm started building in her, even stronger this time. Sylvia's moans grew louder, more broken. She rubbed her clit frantically while slamming down on him.

"I'm gonna cum again. Fuck, it's so intense," she gasped. Harry thrust up harder, hitting that perfect spot deep inside her over and over. The pressure mounted, her pussy tightening like a fist around him. When it broke, Sylvia screamed in pleasure, her third orgasm ripping through her even harder than the first two. Her walls convulsed in powerful, prolonged spasms, milking his cock relentlessly as she ground down hard, her hips rolling in shaky circles. Wave after wave shook her body, her juices squirting slightly around his shaft with the intensity. She kept riding through it, drawing out every last pulse until tears pricked her eyes from the overwhelming pleasure.

Harry's control finally snapped. "Sylvia... shit, I'm cumming," he groaned, his voice rough. He slammed up deep into her, holding her hips down as his thick cock pulsed and swelled. Thick, hot ropes of cum flooded her already overflowing pussy, spurt after spurt filling her to the brim. Sylvia moaned long and low, grinding down in slow, measured circles to milk him through his long, shuddering orgasm. Her walls clenched rhythmically around every throb, squeezing out every drop while his cock jerked inside her.

They stayed locked together like that, rocking and grinding. Sylvia's pussy continued to flutter and spasm softly around him as they both came down, their bodies slick with sweat and cum. She leaned down, kissing him deeply, their breaths mingling as the pleasure slowly ebbed.

They lay tangled together on the bed afterward, their bodies still flushed and slick from their latest round of intense fucking. Sylvia stayed on top of Harry, her hips still rocking slowly against him as they both rode the aftershocks of their orgasms. His thick cock remained buried deep inside her, pulsing as the last spurts of his cum filled her tight pussy. She ground down once more, milking every drop, her walls clenching around him in rhythmic spasms.

A low, satisfied moan escaped her lips as she relished the orgasms that had rippled through her. Her full breasts pressed against his chest, her nipples hard and sensitive from where he'd sucked and bitten them earlier.

Harry's hands gripped her ass firmly, his fingers digging into the soft flesh as he held her in place. "Fuck, Sylvia," he breathed against her neck, his voice rough. "You feel so damn good. So wet and full of me."

He thrust up lazily, pushing his cum deeper, drawing a gasp from her. She leaned down again, capturing his mouth in a messy kiss, their tongues sliding together while her hips gave one final slow circle.

They stayed like that for a long while, connected and breathing each other in. Eventually she lifted off him with a wet pop, a thick trail of their mixed fluids leaking down her thigh. Harry watched it with dark eyes, reaching out to smear it across her skin possessively before pulling her down beside him. They curled together, naked and spent, her head on his chest and one leg thrown over his. His hand stroked lazily down her back, cupping her ass again, while her fingers traced patterns over his abs and occasionally brushed his softening cock.

The room was quiet except for their slowing breaths. Golden light filtered in through the windows, warming their skin. Harry felt content in a way he rarely did lately. The bond between them hummed softly, carrying echoes of pleasure and comfort. Sylvia's earlier guilt had faded into the background, at least for now, drowned out by the raw physical connection they'd shared twice in quick succession.

He kissed the top of her head, inhaling the scent of her hair mixed with sex. She nuzzled closer, pressing a soft kiss to his collarbone. "That was... exactly what I needed," she murmured, her voice husky. "Thank you."

Harry chuckled. "Happy to be of service. Any time you want me to fuck the doubts out of you, just say the word." His fingers dipped lower, teasing between her legs where she was still slick and open from him. She shivered but didn't pull away, letting him play gently.

They lay there for a long while, trading lazy touches and quiet words. No rush, just the simple joy of being close after everything they'd unpacked earlier. Sylvia's body relaxed fully against his, the tension from returning to Asgard easing in the safety of his arms.

Eventually she sighed and lifted her head. "We should get up. I can't keep hiding away while Jane's dealing with that parasite. She needs us."

Harry nodded, giving her ass one last affectionate squeeze. "Yeah. You're right." He kissed her deeply, savoring the taste of her, before they finally separated. They cleaned up together in the bathroom, the cool water refreshing against their heated skin, before coming out and putting their clothes on.

“Ready?” He asked with a smile.

Sylvia nodded and he took her hand as she led them out.

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The healing chambers were quieter than Harry expected.

He had half-imagined something clinical and cold, like a hospital ward dropped into a fantasy realm, but the room they were led into was warm and bathed in a soft golden light that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at once. The walls were pale stone, the air carried something faintly herbal, and half a dozen healers in white moved around Jane’s bed.

Jane herself lay on a raised bed in the center of the room, her eyes closed and her skin glowing faintly from the Aether trying to settle inside her, albeit without much success.

Thor stood at the foot of the bed with his arms crossed across his chest and his jaw set, and although he was putting on a stoic front, Harry could tell how scared he truly was just by looking at him. Sif stood beside him, and they both glanced up when Harry and Sylvia walked in. Thor gave them a nod, and Sif’s nod was a bit stiffer, directed mostly at Sylvia. Harry acknowledged both of them and turned his attention to the nearest healer.

“How is she?” he asked.

The healer, a woman with silver-streaked hair, looked up from the instruments she was reading. “Mostly stable. The Aether remains contained within her, and your barriers are holding for now. It appears to be searching for weaknesses in the containment, probing it constantly.”

“The Aether’s not stupid,” Harry said. “It’s been doing this for millennia.”

“Indeed.” The healer’s voice carried a hint of worry. “We have slowed its progress with our own methods, and combined with your barriers, Jane Foster’s vital signs are stable, but stable is not the same as improving, and I will not pretend otherwise.”

Harry nodded. “I need to get closer.”

The healer stepped aside without protest. Harry moved to the edge of the platform, looked down at Jane for a moment, and pulled a chair over and sat.

“Doing good?” He asked with a smile.

“Feels like I’ve got an angry ancient entity squatting in my ribcage. Not the best roommate.”

Harry grinned at her. “We’ll evict it soon enough. Hang in there.”

He placed his hand over her sternum the way he had done back in the warehouse, and the tattoo on his forearm warmed immediately. He closed his eyes and felt her out.

The inside of Jane's body, filtered through his senses, was a battlefield. His golden containment spread across the Aether like a net cast over something that moved continuously, always finding new angles and always testing edges. The Ancient One's advice came back to him clearly.

Don't fight it. Understand it. Learn its language before you try to speak. He stopped approaching it like a spell to be countered and started listening instead, and soon realized the Aether had a rhythm. It pulsed, not randomly but with a pattern he couldn't quite decode yet, like a heartbeat operating just slightly outside the human frequency, ancient and alien and consistent in a way that told him it wasn't random at all.

Sylvia settled quietly into a chair near the wall without speaking, though Harry could feel her attention through their bond.

The healers continued working in the background, murmuring to each other, adjusting instruments and checking readings. Occasionally one of them would approach Jane and do something that sent a faint ripple through the Aether, which Harry accounted for each time without opening his eyes.

He lost track of time somewhere in the middle of it, but that was fine because at some point he became aware that he was actually getting somewhere. Not extraction, not anything close to that, but understanding.

The Aether was responding to him differently than it had at the start, less like it was fighting him and more like it was acknowledging his presence, still hostile and still impatient, but more aware of him.

He pushed a little further, curious now.

The response was immediate. The Aether surged violently, and for a fraction of a second the net of his golden containment buckled where he had overreached. A thin pulse of red light shot upward from Jane's chest like a distress flare, bright and sharp and fully visible to everyone in the room, and Harry was already moving before it had traveled more than a foot. He closed his fist around it, his magic compressing hard around the pulse as it crackled against his grip like something alive. He held it for a few seconds before it collapsed inward, absorbed back into the containment, and he reapplied the barriers immediately, layering them thicker over the area that had slipped.

The entire room had gone silent. Thor had taken a step forward, one of the healers had frozen mid-movement, Sif's hand was on her weapon, and Sylvia was watching him with urgency, although she tried to remain composed.

"I'm alright," Harry said. "She's alright. I slipped for a second, but it's patched."

Nobody entirely relaxed, but they resumed what they were doing. The silver-haired healer came forward and ran a series of checks on Jane that Harry watched with half his attention, the other half still monitoring the containment.

"The readings are stable again," she confirmed, though her voice made it clear she found the whole situation deeply uncomfortable.

"Good." Harry sat back. "Give me a few minutes."

He was still sitting there, quietly working through what he had felt during that surge, when the doors to the healing chambers opened and Odin walked in.

He didn't announce himself and didn't need to. His presence filled the room the moment he crossed the threshold, and the healers gave him a collective bow of deference. Thor straightened, Sif went fully upright, and Odin's eye moved over Jane first, then to the healers, and then to Harry, where it stayed for a moment before he walked forward.

"The situation," he said.

"Contained," Harry said. "But not resolved. Your healers have been excellent and we've been working together to slow the Aether's progress."

"But not stop it."

"Not stop it," Harry confirmed.

Odin studied Jane with an expression that was hard to read. It wasn't entirely cold, but it wasn't warm either. He moved to the opposite side of the platform, extended one hand over her, and golden light flickered at his fingertips as he began his own examination.

The healers shifted slightly to accommodate him without being asked, and Harry watched with genuine attention because he had to give the old man this much: he knew what he was doing. The power Odin brought to the table was old and substantial, different from Harry's cosmic authority and more like raw force shaped by millennia of experience and wielded with precision that didn't need to prove anything.

The Aether noticed. Harry felt it shift its attention, probe the new presence the way it had probed him, but where Harry's containment had caused it to test for weaknesses, Odin's approach seemed to make it go still, like prey recognizing a predator.

They worked like that for a long while, Odin on one side and Harry on the other, with the healers moving around them both, running instruments and adding their own interventions. At one point Odin said something to Harry in a low voice about

the structure of the containment and Harry answered honestly, and from there they worked with a silent understanding between them.

Harry went back to trying to decode the Aether's pattern, deeper this time and more careful, the mistake of the earlier surge keeping him honest. He could feel the rhythm more clearly now, that alien heartbeat operating on a frequency that matched nothing Asgardian or terrestrial, and he followed it as far as he could without pushing again.

Eventually, the silver-haired healer exhaled quietly, and Harry opened his eyes. She was looking at Odin. "Allfather, we have to be honest about where we stand."

Odin straightened but he said nothing, just waited.

"We cannot extract the Aether from Jane Foster without killing her," she said clearly, without any hesitation.

Nobody spoke for a moment.

Thor's jaw had gone tight. Sif looked at the floor.

"What Harry Potter has done in containing it," the healer continued, "is beyond what any of us are capable of independently, and without that containment she would have been consumed entirely well before now. But the containment is exactly that and nothing more. It is not a cure, and it will not hold indefinitely."

Odin's eye moved to Harry who was quiet for a moment, looking at Jane but thinking about the pattern, the alien heartbeat, and the thing the Ancient One had pointed him toward about learning to speak a language before trying to use it.

"The Aether," he said finally. "How did it become this?"

Odin turned to look at him.

"I know what it is at the end of the chain," Harry said. "I know it's the Reality Stone and I know it's been in this form longer than most civilizations have existed, but the stone naturally exists as a solid and someone made it into this." He gestured at the faint red luminescence beneath Jane's skin. "This fluid, this ever-changing sludge that moves and thinks and chooses its host. How?"

Odin was quiet for a long moment, and when he spoke, his voice was measured, as if choosing which parts of a much larger story to tell.

"You know of the Dark Elves."

"Broadly," Harry said.

Odin looked at him for a moment, then at Jane who stared back with fear in her eyes, and then back at Harry. "The Dark Elves are the oldest civilization in existence, and I do not mean old the way Asgard is old. I mean older than Asgard, older than

Midgard, older than most of what you would call creation itself. They did not grow up in this universe." He paused. "They thrived in the Ginnungagap."

Harry knew the word, barely, from something half-remembered.

"The primordial void," Odin said. "The infinite darkness that existed before this universe was born, before light, before matter as we understand it, before any of the physical laws that govern the Nine Realms came into being. There was the Ginnungagap, cold and dark and infinite, and the Dark Elves lived in it and evolved in it and built their civilization within it across eons that have no name."

Everyone listened intently.

"Because they evolved in a universe composed entirely of dark matter and dark energy, what you or I would call magic is not what they call magic. It is not sorcery the way Asgard practices sorcery, and it is not the bending of existing natural laws. It is the command of the natural state of pre-light reality, the physics of a universe that existed before ours came into being. To us, it looks like sorcery. To them, they are simply doing what is natural, the way breathing is natural."

Harry stared at the red glow beneath Jane's skin and said nothing.

"And the Aether," Odin continued, "is the work of their greatest practitioner. Malekith. Creator of their current form, master of the darkness that came before everything else. Millennia ago, Malekith took the Reality Stone in its natural state, a solid gem, immutable as the Infinity Stones in their resting forms tend to be, and he used that dark matter sorcery to do what no one had done before or since."

"He liquefied it," Harry said.

"He transformed it entirely," Odin said. "He dissolved its natural structure and rebuilt it as something fluid and living and capable of seeking a host, something that could move through the world and choose and bond and persist. He made it into the Aether, and the Aether is not simply the Reality Stone in a different physical form. It is the Reality Stone as Malekith remade it. His work. His creation in every meaningful sense."

Harry was already ahead of him.

"Which means it isn't just his creation in a technical sense," Harry said. "He forged it. He established a bond with it in the act of making it, the way a blacksmith leaves something of himself in the blade. The Aether and Malekith are linked at a fundamental level."

Odin looked at him for a moment with something that might have been faint approval. "Yes. A profound bond. The Aether was made by Malekith from Malekith's own understanding of dark matter physics, and in a very real sense it carries him within it."

Harry turned that over in his mind, comparing it with everything he knew about the Aether's behavior, the rhythm he had been trying to decode, the way it moved and probed and tested the edges of his containment with what felt less and less like instinct and more and more like intelligence.

"It's magic older than everything else," he said, half to himself, standing slowly and rolling his shoulders. "Older than Asgard, older than this universe's laws, and it doesn't respond to anything from within this universe the way it should because it isn't from within this universe. It's operating on physics that predate everything that currently exists." He paused. "I have a theory."

"Tell us," Thor said immediately.

Harry glanced at him, then at the floor, then back up at the room. "I need to think for a moment, and I'd like to do that alone if everyone will excuse me for a little while."

He could feel Sylvia's eyes on his back as he walked out.

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He was gone for just under three hours.

When he came back, everyone was still there, and the room was quiet. They had all been working hard at something that refused to yield. Odin and the healers had clearly spent the time cycling through whatever remaining approaches hadn't already been discarded, and Harry could see from their faces that none of those approaches had produced anything useful either.

"Stop," Harry said from the doorway.

Everyone looked at him.

"Stop what you're doing," he said, crossing the room and glancing briefly at Jane's readings before turning to face them all. His expression was calm, but there was something in his eyes that hadn't been there before.

"Where did you go?" Thor asked.

"Think of it like a school lesson and leave it at that," Harry said.

The room was briefly puzzled by this, Thor frowning and the healers exchanging confused glances. Odin watched him with that single eye that always seemed to be doing considerably more than just looking.

On the far side of the room, Sylvia looked curious, but her expression changed after a moment. Her eyes widened slightly and she looked at Harry. A silent conversation took place between them as she gazed at him questioningly, and Harry nodded once. She gave him a nod in return and looked away.

Harry turned to the others. "Malekith transformed the Reality Stone into the Aether, and that much we already knew, but what that transformation actually means is the key to everything. He didn't simply change a solid stone into a liquid. He rebuilt it using the physics of the Ginnungagap, dark matter physics from before this universe existed, which means the Aether isn't governed by anything from within this universe's current state. It operates on rules that predate this universe's existence entirely, and that's why nothing we've been trying has worked. We've been approaching it with the wrong toolkit."

He paused to let that land.

"Learning to talk with the Aether, which is what the Ancient One told me I needed to do, doesn't mean what I initially thought it meant and it doesn't mean establishing some kind of magical rapport with it. It means learning to manipulate dark matter, because that is the Aether's native language, that is what it responds to, and that is precisely why my containment works where other approaches don't." He looked at Odin for a moment. "I have some ability to influence dark matter, and that's why I was able to contain the Aether in the first place. I can touch what the Aether is actually made of. That's what the Ancient One was pointing me toward when she said I needed to learn its language."

Odin looked at him contemplatively.

"I'm by no means a master of it," he said. "I've barely touched the surface of that ability, and I'm not going to pretend otherwise. But I know enough now to know what needs to happen next." He looked at Odin directly. "The information you gave me about Malekith and the origin of the Dark Elves was what I needed to work this out, and I'm genuinely grateful for it."

Odin inclined his head slightly, just barely.

"I should be able to get the Aether out of her," he said.

The energy in the room shifted immediately. Thor took a half step forward and one of the healers looked up sharply, and even Sif, who had been maintaining a carefully neutral expression for the better part of an hour, let something hopeful cross her face briefly.

"But something needs to happen first," Harry continued.

"What?" Thor asked.

"Getting the Aether out requires its hold on Jane to weaken first," Harry said. "The bond it forms with a host isn't just magical in any conventional sense. It has threaded itself into her at the level of dark matter physics, and my containment is keeping it from expanding, but I cannot simply pull it out of her without something loosening that grip beforehand. It would be like trying to remove a root system

without disturbing the ground it's embedded in, and the ground in this case is fundamental physics."

Odin's expression was measured and careful. "I and the finest healers on Asgard have been working on this problem since her arrival, Harry Potter, and we do not know how to weaken that hold. I will also point out that none of us could have contained the Aether the way you have done."

"No," Harry agreed simply, without any false modesty. "But I have an idea about how to weaken it." He paused, turning the thought over one last time before committing to it out loud. "The Aether's hold on Jane would weaken if she were exposed to an environment that is already dense with dark matter, somewhere that the laws of physics are altered at a fundamental level, a place where the Ginnungagap's physics are still active and governing the local reality. If the Aether detects that environment around it, its grip will loosen as it shifts to respond to the native state of its own construction, the way a fish loosens when you put it back in water."

He watched the realization dawn on them.

It hit Odin first. His single eye narrowed slightly, and his expression became very controlled. Thor realized a moment after that and stared at Harry with an expression hovering somewhere between hope and alarm.

"Tell me," one of the healers said quietly, "that you are not proposing what I think you are proposing."

"We need to take Jane to Svartalfheim," Harry confirmed. "The realm of the Dark Elves. It's been corroded by dark matter since before this universe had its current form and the physics there are permanently altered. If we bring Jane to Svartalfheim, the Aether's hold on her will weaken and I'll be able to extract it."

The debate that followed was immediate and, for a few minutes, fairly loud.

Thor was deeply and vocally in favor, which surprised no one given that he was both the most desperate to help Jane and historically the least troubled by plans that came with obvious dangers attached. The silver-haired healer countered with considerable force that taking a critically ill mortal to a dead realm was not what anyone would describe as a sound strategy. One of the fellow healers backed her up on those medical concerns, pointing out that Svartalfheim's environment could just as easily accelerate the Aether's effects as weaken them if Harry's theory was wrong. Odin said nothing, which was somehow worse than if he had been loud about it.

Harry let it run for a few minutes.

"We're not announcing ourselves to the Dark Elves," he said, when the volume had peaked and started coming down. "We're not planning to knock on the front door and request hospitality. We go in, we give the Aether enough exposure to that

environment for it to loosen its grip, I pull it out of Jane, and we leave. Clean and quick.”

“And if Malekith detects you?” Sif asked flatly.

“Then I deal with Malekith,” Harry said. “Assuming he still lives, which we don’t know yet.”

“We have to assume the worst. He commands an army of beings who existed before this universe,” she said. “His sorcery operates on physics that none of us here fully understand.”

“He commands an army of beings who existed before this universe, and I am the Master of Death,” Harry said, keeping his voice level. “We can compare hands later. Right now, there isn’t another option. The Aether isn’t going to weaken here because Asgard is the wrong environment for what needs to happen. Svartalfheim is the right one.”

More silence, and everyone agreed that the argument was over and the only thing left was the decision.

Odin had been looking at Jane with whatever he was privately weighing, and nobody rushed him.

“It appears that the decision may already be in the process of being made,” he said, which was as close to agreement as any of them were likely to get from him.

Harry and Thor exchanged a glance as the latter nodded firmly.

And then Heimdall’s voice came.

“The ancient enemy has stirred. Its eyes are on Asgard.”

The room went cold.

Odin straightened immediately, looking like he had been dreading this news for a very long time and was not entirely surprised by it.

“No one leaves Asgard,” he said quietly, and turned toward the door.

“Odin.” Harry stepped forward.

The Allfather stopped.

“Malekith must have sensed the Aether when my containment slipped earlier and that pulse fired,” Harry said. “That’s why his eyes are on Asgard right now. He felt it and he’s tracking it, and if we stay here, we hand him a reason to come to Asgard with everything he has. But if the Aether isn’t here when he arrives, there’s no reason for him to bring that fight to Asgard’s doorstep at all.”

Odin turned back to look at him.

"I'm taking this to his territory," Harry said. "His home ground, his physics, his environment, but also my timing and not his. If we move now, we take the initiative. If we stay and wait, we give it to him freely, and I don't think either of us wants to do that."

Odin remained very still for a very long time.

"If Malekith takes the Aether," the Allfather said, his voice dark and heavy, filled with centuries of knowing exactly what he was talking about, "he will use the Convergence to plunge every realm, every universe, everything that exists, into a state of eternal darkness. There will be nothing after it. No dawn. No recovery. Nothing at all."

Harry met his gaze firmly. "That won't happen. I will do everything in my power to make sure of it, and I mean that."

Odin looked at him with a very familiar gaze, one that Harry had seen numerous times while growing up. It was the same kind of look Dumbledore had, one that was trying to see past the surface of a person to whatever was underneath. Harry didn't look away, and he felt the Hallows settle quietly in his awareness, not presenting themselves, just present, the way they always were. The Master of Death stood in front of the Allfather, and neither of them were blinking.

Finally, Odin turned away and said nothing further.

He didn't say yes. But he didn't say no either. The door remained open.

Thor turned to Sif and said simply, "Meet us with the others by the bridge."

Sif gave him one long look filled with resolve and resignation and walked out of the door at a sedate pace.

Thor turned to Jane and gently took her arm, carefully helping her upright. She steadied more quickly than any of them expected.

"Can you walk?" he asked her quietly.

"I can walk," she said, nodding.

Harry straightened and looked at Sylvia, who was already on her feet with her expression set. He held her gaze for a moment and she gave him a small, private nod.

"Harry Potter."

Harry turned to Odin who stood with his hands behind his back.

"The Nine Realms have faced dark times before," Odin said. "We have faced them with armies, with gods, with everything Asgard could bring to bear across thousands of years. Do not make me regret placing my trust in one Midgardian mortal."

Harry looked at him for a moment.

“Not truly a mortal, Allfather,” he said, and with a nod, he walked out with Sylvia alongside him.

Behind them, Odin stood with the rest of the healers in the chamber for a long moment, the sound of their footsteps fading down the corridor.

“Heimdall,” he said. “The moment they are clear of Asgard, close it down. Full lockdown. Every gate sealed.” He paused. “And send a contingent of Einherjar with them.”

“Understood, Allfather.”

Odin nodded to himself, and with a parting glance at the group of unhappy healers who bowed low when he looked at them, he turned around and walked away.

To be continued...