The Lightning That Strikes Relentless

by Imagined

Summary

hiraeth (n): longing for a home you can't return to, or was never yours.

"You realize you're trapped, don't you?" he presses instead. "There's nowhere to go. You've lost, Freya. Don't burn your bridges."

She closes her eyes. "If I have lost, then at least so have you. And Loki will be dead. And Thor will have to mourn for him with you. I like the sound of that. No, I don't see why I should tell you."

Tony goes to confront Freya in order to save Loki's life. In the meanwhile Loki faces some old demons, trapped in his own mind.

Notes

Hey there! We're very close near the ending now! Next part will be the last :) Title is inspired by Snow Patrol's song The Lightning Strike (or alternativaly, What If The Storm Ends):

Painted in flames
All peeling thunder
Be the lightning in me
That strikes relentless
What if this storm ends?
And I don’t see you
As you are now
Ever again

See the end of the work for more notes

“All are ready?" says Strange. His face is strangely pensive, but his hands are steady. Tony looks him straight in the eyes, and likes how unperturbed Strange looks back at him. This man is not afraid of him, does not mind how otherworldly Tony has become in a matter of hours. This is a man whose world has been turned upside down too often for him to mind it, and Tony’s admiration grows.

“Never been more ready,” he answers easily, and closes the faceplate of his suit.

Strange smiles. “The portal will be opened in two hours, in front of the Compound,” he reminds him, and Tony nods.

Tony steps into the Mirror Dimension, and the world shatters.

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The dwarfs sleep in the night. They don’t know houses, nor trees. The dwarfs are tough and do not need shelter, like many other species do. The only reason they have any shelter at all is when they are forging. They have delved in the ground to create working spaces that are easier to protect, but those do not exist in Alfheim. Loki knows this, and has informed Birger of the lovely fact as well.

“All make it very easy,” Birger says with a hum.

“Do not underestimate the dwarfs,” Loki tells him seriously. “They do not have magic, but that does not mean they can’t harm you. They make magic, often better than the elves, even.”

Birger laughs him off. “Do not worry! They will never even notice we were here. I can’t wait to see the look on their faces when they are missing their precious gems!”

~*~

The world is the same when Tony steps into the Mirror Dimension. He is in the Avengers Compound, but it is empty. The bed where he knows Loki is lying is empty, white sheets unwrinkled. He stares at it for a moment, then turns around.

He has agreed with the rest of the team to be there for two hours. He hopes it’s enough to find and beat some answers out of Freya, and he hopes it’s not too long so he will be hurt. It’s a relief that nothing he does will affect the real world, but he still feels vulnerable. Nothing in here is real, and Tony is just a tiny bit freaked out by the fact that, in essence, it’s just him and Freya here.

He flies around with his suit, trying to get a read on Freya’s location. His suit’s readings aren’t as pure as they normally are, though; the Mirror Dimension is clearly messing with them. But well, everything is still working as it should for the most part, so Tony is satisfied it’s holding up well enough.

He’s been flying around for about ten minutes when he spots Freya. He’s reached New York by
now. There are fewer people around than there would be normally. No one responds to Freya’s spells, and they just go through them. Tony sees her explode a building and then it immediately returns to normal.

Well. He can see how that would frustrate her.

Tony shoots her down before Freya spots him, and lands on his knees as she falls to the ground. “You!” she growls when she gets up. “Where am I? What is this trickery? Is this Loki’s doing?”

“Sorry, sweetheart,” he says, “Playtime is over. You’re going to answer me. Now. “

Freya lets out an inhuman scream and crashes another building. Just as it is about to plummet on top of Tony, the buildingfixes itself. Tony eyes it uncertainly: he’s not sure falling buildings won’t actually hurt him, but he is not very eager to try.

Just as Freya’s hands start to glow green, Tony shoots her down again. She still manages to release her spell and Tony flies up just in time to evade it. Freya has obviously been throwing spells around long before Tony showed up, and she is exhausted, Tony sees. But rage gives her energy, and makes her possibly even more dangerous.

Tony makes sure to keep avoiding her spells and wear her out. His suit is faster than Freya is, though, and she misses him. A few times, she almost hits him, but Tony is on his game. He has to be, if he wants to save Loki.

When he sees an opening, he takes it, and dives in, pinning Freya under him.

“What is it that you really want?” he snarls at her, opening his faceplate as he holds her hands steady to the ground, in a way that no spell will hit him. “Tell me. Rule Asgard? Have power? Tear everything you’ve built up to now apart?”

“Yes,” she hisses.

“Well, I don’t,” Tony says. “They’re not going to let you. Frey loves you because you’re his sister, but you’ve gone down a path that he is not going to follow. No one will. Even if you manage to take Asgard, to rebuild it and become its Queen, if you manage to kill Thor and Loki, then what? Believe me, there’s not going to be anything left. You can have necklaces to protect you from everyone. But even when you had them, you still feared other people. That’s not going to stop. They’re only going to come after if you continue. And you’re going to be left with nothing.”

He looks into her eyes, as she stills. “You’re going to have everything and nothing, and that’s not a great position to be in,” he gets out. “If you even manage to succeed. And that’s not sure.”

Freya fights his grip, but only slightly. “There’s nothing else to do,” she says, still biting but calmer than she was before. “People have never respected the rulers of Alfheim. They will if they see how I take Asgard!”

“Why don’t they respect you?” Tony retorts. “You have peace. You’ve had peace for centuries. Don’t you know how much those Asgardians are longing for peace right now? Everyone else in the Nine Realms? If anything, they respect the hell out of you for maintaining what they couldn’t have. No one wants war when they’ve seen it, Freya. You know that, or you wouldn’t have given up the necklaces.”

“I don’t care.”

“Well then,” Tony mutters to himself. “Freya. There’s nothing done yet that is not salvageable. But
I need to know how to counter the potion you had on your knife."

There’s a glitter in her eyes that Tony doesn’t like. Slowly, a smile spreads on her pale face. "Loki is dying, then? Well, that’s one out of two brothers. And the most infuriating one as well."

Tony almost punches her for that, on the spot.

"You realize you’re trapped, don’t you?" he presses instead. "There’s nowhere to go. You’ve lost, Freya. Don’t burn your bridges."

She closes her eyes. "If I have lost, then at least so have you. And Loki will be dead. And Thor will have to mourn for him with you. I like the sound of that. No, I don’t see why I should tell you."

Tony does punch her now, and as soon as her hands are free, Freya blasts him away with a spell.

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Dwarfs snore. It’s a fact of life, Loki knows, as he’s been around enough dwarfs to see – or hear, actually – the evidence every time any dwarf sleeps.

When a group of dwarfs is sleeping, the cacophony intensifies. Loki nearly winces hearing them. Dwarfs are not subtly, that is definitely true, but they have other talents. The gems will be protected, one way or another. But Loki will not back down; he is having too much fun with Birger to even consider it.

"Do you want to be the lookout or take the gems?" Birger asks him, smirking.

Loki raises his eyebrows. He’s sneakier than Birger, mainly, and Birger can fit in more easily as lookout, being an elf and all. "I’ll take them. You just be ready to get us out."

Birger actually giggles. "Can you imagine the looks on their faces? We can hide the gems in Frey’s Palace after. How humiliated they’ll be."

Loki grins. He doesn’t care much for the gems, but he likes creating a bit of chaos. "Just keep an eye out," he says, and then disappears to the circle of dwarfs. They’re all sound asleep, and he tiptoes around them, silent as the night. Not that their snoring wouldn’t cover up any sound he made.

He observes the camp for a moment. The dwarfs make up a circle, nearly piled on top of each other. But the gems glow softly in the middle of them, shining through the bag they’re kept in. There’s a sign on the bag, though, a magic one. Loki recognizes it vaguely, as it has something to do with safekeeping. His father sometimes uses similar signs.

With a breeze of magic Loki manages to teleport the bag to him. Opening it will be impossible until he overrides the sign, though. "Birger," he whispers, looking around. The forest is dark and he can’t see his friend anywhere.

"Birger," he hisses a bit louder, and then the elf appears from a bush. "Where were you?"

Birger waves away his question. "Nowhere," he says vaguely, then nodding towards the bag. "Those the gems?"

Loki nods. "If we figure out the sign, it can be opened safely and chaos will be created. Plan succeeded."

There’s a strange look in Birger’s eyes, and Loki narrows his eyes at him. There’s something going
on. Before he can say anything else, though, Birger rips the bag out of Loki’s hands. Loki instantly
hits Birger, taking back the bag with gems. A dozen dwarfs jump up, and with one last look at him,
Birger teleports away. Loki doesn’t have the time to do anything as the dwarfs focus their eyes on
Loki. The nearest one catches Loki by his collar before he gets the chance to teleport as well, and
cuffs him with some kind of place-binder.

“I can explain?” Loki tries.

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Tony coughs he hits the ground. He’s hit his ribs painfully, and he doesn’t doubt that at least one is
cracked.

Freya is on him in seconds. If Tony had any doubts she is crazy, they are definitely gone now. Her
eyes are wild and her hair tangled. There is a blush in her cheeks that are usually seen on people who
have had a bit too much to drink.

Her hands are on fire, and for a second Tony is reminded of Killian. Then he forces himself back
into the present and kicks her off him with his mechanized leg.

His suit may be a bit worse for the wear, but nothing is damaged, luckily. Getting back to the
Compound without his suit in time would be a real downer.

Tony tries shooting Freya, but she manages to shield herself before the hit lands. He figures that she
will have to drop it soon enough, and keeps shooting at her. He still has some time to make it back to
the Compound: but he has to make it back.

Freya crashes another building as she gives up her shield, and Tony manages to shoot her down.
Nothing you do is permanent here,” he tells her. “Only what happens to us. Do you really think
you can win here, Freya? You can’t.”

And then, just as Tony gets ready to shoot her another time, Freya sags down, breathing heavily. Her
dress is torn, and not the colour it originally was, Tony suspects. She is streaked with grime, looking
at the sky above her with a solemn face. “My plan would have worked,” she says, bitter. “Just
because there may be resistance, doesn’t mean I couldn’t rebuild Asgard.”

“It’s not yours to rebuild,” Tony says, landing near her. His faceplate goes up again, so he can look
directly at her. “You have the elves behind you. They love you as their Queen. Why give that up for
more? You don’t need the necklace to protect you from them if you have their love.”

Freya remains silent, but Tony presses on. “I said it before, there’s a way out of this predicament.
You just have to help me cure Loki.”

Only elven magic will be able to undo it and I killed your friend.”

“I can do it,” Tony says, hope flaring in his heart. “Tell me how, and I can do it.”

But Freya shakes her head. “You’ve been poisoned yourself. Any magic you use will hurt you.”

“I can deal with a little pain.”

“It’s not a little,” Freya sighs, and meets Tony’s gaze. “It will take a lot of magic to purge the
poison from his system. It’s not particularly hard, but it is taxing. With your injury, that much magic
will kill you.”
Tony closes his eyes for a second. “So either Loki dies, or I die trying to save him?”

The silence is answer enough.

“I can’t accept that,” Tony says eventually. He has fifteen minutes to get back to the Compound, so he has to make a decision. “There has to be another way.”

Freya shakes her head. “There isn’t.”

Thirteen minutes. He has to leave, or he will miss the portal. He looks at Freya one more time. “If Loki dies, you better be prepared to be stuck here for a long time.”

He flies away, heart pounding. He has an answer, but he’s not sure if he likes it. But if Tony is anything, it’s persistent, and so he will do his best to make this work. For Loki.

But also because he can’t see himself without Loki, after this.

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Loki holds his hands behind his head, trying not to look annoyed. It probably won’t help his case, as the dwarfs inspect him.

“Tell us why you want the gems,” the leader asks gruffly. It’s not the first time he asked, and Loki suspects it won’t be the last. The dwarf has dark eyes and an even darker look on his face, but Loki won’t answer.

The dwarf hits him again, and Loki spits out the blood. He imagines his face will be bruised after this, but there’s little he can say to explain it.

“I can make a deal,” he says, mind working quickly.

The dwarf huffs. “I do not want a deal with a thief and a liar. Why would I trust you?”

“Why wouldn’t you take a chance to gain something?” Loki counters. “Beating me up here is hardly gaining you anything. Just tell me what you want, and I will bring it to you.”

The dwarf grins maliciously. “You are a smart one, but you will not be able to handle pain much longer. No, I think this is fine.”

“A bet, then,” Loki says desperately. “Do whatever you want to me for one hour. If I break, you can have my life. If I don’t, you will let me go.”

“I can take your life either way,” the dwarf says, looking at him with narrowed eyes.

“But you don’t think I can take it anyway. Try me.”

The dwarf smiles wryly. “You’re a smart one, aren’t you? Trying to talk your way out of problems? What would you do if you didn’t have your words, I wonder? Alright. I’ll take your bet. Just because I like your spirit. We will do with you as we will, for one hour. Then you’re free to go, in life or in death.”

Loki almost regrets the deal when they start sewing his mouth shut.

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The portal appears just as he lands. Strange raises his eyebrows at him, but Tony just steps out of the
Mirror Dimension, back into the room he left. He doesn’t answer any of the looks the Avengers send him, but just drops down next to Loki’s bed, where his god is still so very motionless.

“How is he?” he asks, disassembling his suit. It folds itself neatly besides him. Everyone is still glancing at him as if he’s a circus animal, doing tricks.

Bruce responds hesitantly. “Not so well. His vitals are dropping fast. But your talk with Freya seemed to be... active.”

Tony glances at the monitors Freya’s hooked to. He imagines their fighting presented itself in the readings. He shrugs. “She refused to cooperate. I changed her mind.”

“What did she tell you?” Thor asks, shadowed look on his face. He is standing nearest Loki out of all of them, almost protecting his brother. Tony would think it sweet, if he didn’t have more pressing matters to attend to.

Tony sighs. They’re not going to accept it if he tells them. “There may be a way, but it’s not fool proof,” he says. “Strange and Frey can stay. I want everyone else to go, for now.” He may need Strange to guide him in some magic, even though his works differently, or Frey may have picked something up in the centuries on Alfheim, surrounded by elven magic. Everyone else will just hinder him at this point.

“I want to stay,” Thor says resolutely.

Tony gives him a look. “Look, there is one shot at saving Loki now. I am going to take it, but I need to concentrate, which means I don’t need you here staring at me. Strange and Frey can help me, but Thor, you’re only going to be worrying. Please let me try this.”

All other Avengers have quietly left the room, Thor with one last glance at Loki and Rhodey with a fleeting pat on Tony’s back.

Stephen Strange gives him a wary look. “What is your plan, exactly?”

Tony rolls up his sleeves. The end of his wound is still visible. It’s not aching, at the moment, but Tony knows that the moment he starts using a spell, it will hurt again. But if it means Loki will live, he would endure all the pain in the world.

“Freya told me,” he starts, “that the only thing that can undo elven magic is elven magic. Considering I’m the only one around with elven blood, that means I have to do this.”

Frey’s eyes widen. “But your injury won’t permit that kind of use.” Well, apparently Frey is that knowledgeable about the potions. Tony kind of hoped he wouldn’t know that, but he does.

“It doesn’t matter,” Tony defends himself. “This is the only shot we have at saving Loki. I’m not going to sit by doing nothing.”

“What does the injury do?” Strange asks, looking more towards Frey than Tony. He has a certain worried expression on his face.

Frey sighs. “It’s a popular magic potion among elves. When the poison gets in the blood, the injured won’t be able to use magic without feeling excruciating pain, even to the point of death. That includes Shapeshifting, and that’s even one of the less painful magic elves perform, so I’ve heard. Magic like this will kill him.”

“I won’t let it,” Tony says stubbornly, placing his hands over Loki’s chest. He’s barely breathing,
anymore, and Tony’s resolve hardens.

Frey lays a hand on his shoulder. “Saying it won’t doesn’t make it true. Egil, you can’t save Loki at the cost of your own life.”

“My name is Tony,” he says, and his hands start to shine a bright golden. “And watch me.”

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Something is not adding up, Loki realizes.

Something is tickling in the back of his mind, like a warning. Something is telling him that he knows how this plays out, and suddenly he sees it.

His mouth is hurting, but he knows they are old wounds. He knows the scars have already faded. He knows that the dwarfs will let him go, and he knows he will scarcely return to Alfheim after it, hating Birger and the other elves for putting him through that.

The dwarf is still standing in front of him, Loki’s mouth sewn shut. It’s almost like an image that is frozen, and Loki makes himself move.

Something is pulling him from this, and into another reality. He touches his mouth, and it is healed again, just like he knows it is – will be? Everything is paused, and Loki frees himself from the binder.

And then he is pulled away. The movement almost makes him dizzy, until he lands on his knees in the grass. It’s still Alfheim, he realizes, and as he looks up Birger stands in front of him. He looks exactly as he did that day when he betrayed Loki.

“Why are you here?” Loki asks. “You are dead. Am I? This is not a place I know.”

Birger smiles. “This is not quite death, but it’s something near it. I am here because you never asked me why.”

“Why you betrayed me?” Loki says, standing up so he can be face to face with the elf that was once his closest friend. “I know why. Because elves are treacherous and unreliable.”

“You don’t think that about Tony,” Birger says, and Loki’s mind strays to his lover.

“Tony is different,” Loki snaps. “You betrayed me. Tony has lied, but he loves me. He accepts me, and I accept him.”

“I betrayed you to get into Freya’s good books,” Birger says suddenly. “You did not ask, and I did not know how to tell you. Freya wanted the dwarves gone, and I knew she disliked you. I wanted to stay in Alverbyen, and I wanted to help her. She was my Queen. But then she gave up the necklace out of paranoia, and I couldn’t stay in Alverbyen after that, seeing what she has become. You were my friend too, you know.”

Loki laughs bitterly. “You aren’t my friend, Birger,” he tells him. “Not if you dropped me for Freya. Not after what the dwarves did to me. I do not forgive you.”

Birger does not move. “I did not expect you to,” he says eventually. “But you are near death, Loki, and I am already there.”

“Why did I relive the memory? Why am I here now?” Loki asks pointedly.
“That was because of me. Because I can help you.”

“I don’t trust you,” Loki says.

Birger holds up his hand. “I know. I understand. But Loki, let me do this, as one last attempt to make it up to you, so you may remember me a little more fondly. Tony is going to use magic to bring you back to reality. It’s already started, and it’s working, which is why you were pulled out of the memory. But his wound won’t take it. He will die from his injuries.”

Loki’s eyes widen and he curses. It sounds like something Tony would do, but Loki does not want him to die so Loki may live.

“Listen, Loki,” Birger says. “You can’t stop it now, but there is a way to save Tony, if you are fast enough.”

“If you speak the truth now, I will forgive you,” Loki says.

Birger gives a fleeting smile. “Then listen,” he says, and tells him.

End Notes

how did this part get so long? anyway, comments and kudos are awesome and I love every single one of my readers. just wanted to say that. also, who is hyped for the last part?!?!
(because I am lol)
ALSO!!!! I woke up today, and the first thing I saw was that someone made art based on this series. I just want to say, I absolutely love you. You can click here to go to her blog and see the picture of elf Tony she made!! My links always seem to refuse to cooperate though so just in case: she posted it under the name swordgunumbrella so you can check it out there I suppose if the link doesn't work. adore her, ok? (I hope it's okay that I said this here? I mean I am so absolutely thrilled someone created art for hiraeth and I just wanna tell everyone because it is P E R F E C T)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!