Collateral Damage

by Cas_tellations

Summary

Many years have passed since the great battle of Hogwarts, and Harry's life has only gotten worse. Of course, he had imagined that after the battle ended, everything would go back to normal; at least, as normal as possible. But it wasn't long until the Ministry was taken over by yet more evil, dark, corrupt wizards. Wizards who wanted Harry out of the picture. After a series of unfortunate events, Harry is left on the run. Running from both the ministry and himself, it seemed. He has nowhere to go, and year after year passes by.

He doesn't want to live like this anymore. He wants something better for himself; he wants the life that he once had. Being compared to Voldemort takes it's toll though, and the wizarding world no longer looks upon the boy who lived with wonder. They look upon him with disgust, with suspicious eyes and wands at the ready. He is an outcast in the only place he could call home. Stories about him are riddled with evil and lies, being passed down from generation to generation.

But it all changes when a storm above London, England, at 9:46 am on August 13th, brings an outsider to earth, a powerful sorcerer with shoulder length black hair and and charming yet somehow malicious smile.
Hi!

This is a total shot in the dark -- I have a loose plot for this but for the main part I'm just going with it. As of now, I definitely have motivation/passion/I genuinely want to write this, though I have no idea if that will stay with me. However, this is a very interesting plot line and I'm So Excited for it so I will try my best!!

Please, please, please, let me know what you think of this!

(Just a little note; the short paragraphs with frequent breaks(scene changes are intentional! They'll lengthen out in the next chapter, as this first one is just for me to kinda get a feel for it/for you, the reader to see some of Harry's background in this storyline!)

See the end of the work for more notes.
“We’ve all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That’s who we really are.”

-J.K Rowling, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.

Harry James Potter, a wizard of magnificent strength and power, with dazzling green eyes and a heart of fire, is on the run from the Ministry of Magic. Well, ‘running’ is a loose term, really; because currently he’s sitting on the edge of a cliff, head tipped towards the sky and watching the stars sparkling up above. It’s pretentious and desperate, the way he looks at the stars, as if they somehow had the power to change the outcomes of Harry’s own mistakes. However pretty they are, they’re not sentient and they most certainly do not hold time changing powers.

At the end of the day would he really change the past, though?

He doubts it. He’s created a problem for himself, for the rest of his life, but perhaps that’s his mistake to bear. The sheer amount of deaths in his name is - no. He stops himself. He curses at himself internally, glaring angrily. He told himself that he wouldn’t think of them ever again. He won’t go down that hole again, not if he can help it.

He’s doing his penance.

He can barely remember how long it’s been, moving every few days, scarcely eating, scarcely sleeping. Forget months or years; it’s been centuries.

He falls down onto his back, absentmindedly gesturing with his hand around the meadow he’s laying in, setting up wards without uttering a word. He’s got a lot of time on his hands; he mastered non-
verbal magic ages ago. The wards are strong, and will keep him safe as long as he stays there. But this place, for some reason he can’t place, makes his mouth taste sour and his stomach turn over. It doesn’t feel safe.

The summer night is warm enough that he’s nearly comfortable on the ground, drifting off into sleep as he counts the constellations above him, trying in vain to remember all the stories that they hold.

II.

As soon as Harry wakes up, he leaves. That place had felt weird. He couldn't find any peace there. It had almost been like someone was watching him.

Watching him as he stumbled away from the edge of the cliff, the morning so new that the sun had not yet risen over the horizon.

Watching him as he turned his head sharply from side to side, eyes flashing as he sliced the elder wand through the air, a thin white mist hanging in the air for a beat before it seemed to swarm away, as if the mist itself was looking for someone watching.

Harry has not felt safe in a long time.

That being said, this is the most unsafe he’s felt in… years.

It’s too quiet. Too still. Where are the small creatures, snuffling around through the nearby forest and around the edge of the cliff, only being awake at night as predators lurk in the sunlight of the daytime. There’s no wind, trees and bushes and grass alike staying too still. There’s no owls in the trees, no bats fluttering through the light overlay of clouds that covered the stars at some point within the last half hour or so. His wards are still up. Logically, there’s no way anybody could even begin to get close enough to attack him.

But, as Harry Potter had come to learn, logic doesn’t always apply when it comes to the people following him.

He fights to keep his breaths slow and even, carefulling spinning around in a circle, eyes wide, waiting.
Have they found him?

Suddenly, somewhere to his right, by the edge of the forest, there’s a shout. A scream. A yell. An, “Over here! Quick!”

Harry watches as a group of men, fully dressed in leather dragonhide armour and holding their wands up high, stalk out from behind the cover of the trees. The wards stop them from hearing or seeing Harry. Either way, he crouches down, his hand steady as he grips his own wand so tightly he can almost feel it humming with magic.

His pulse quickens as the leader of the group jerks a hand up, signalling the rest of them to stop. There has to be at least twelve of them, all highly trained aurors, if Harry were to guess. Highly trained and with their commander’s orders in their minds. They’ll believe the stories that the Ministry told. The lies and the manipulation will have got to them, making them believe that Harry is bad. That Harry has to be feared.

At this point though, he doesn’t even blame them. There’s a part of him that thinks he’s bad, too.

But that doesn’t mean he’ll let them catch him. So he stands tall and takes several steps backwards, until the heels of his feet are standing on the rough sandy edge of the cliff.

The group of wizards are getting closer. The wards are still in place; Harry can practically feel them.

But the aurors are trained. They know how to disable wards, even Harry’s, which are stronger and thicker than any normal ones. So as they wave their wands at the wards, muttering spells under their breath, Harry closes his eyes, shifts his weight back, and lets himself fall.

III.

He doesn’t often visit the graveyard in Godric’s Hollow anymore. It’s full of bodies of people who died so that Harry would live. Dozens upon dozens. Hundreds, thousands even, all around the country. Buried underground with a gravestone above their head. Hundreds that had one goal as death came for them: ‘Let Harry Potter live’, and that is something that Harry himself cannot live with.

He keeps the invisibility cloak over him as he stares at his mother's grave. His father’s is beside it.
Lily Potter. Mother, sister, daughter, friend. Loved one. Beautiful one. Died to keep her only son alive.

If only she could see him now. Would she be disappointed in him, wanting more of her child? Wanting him to have become a great wizard?

He is a great wizard. But so was Voldemort.

IV.

Harry doesn’t hear about it until almost three days after the event itself happens. Daily Prophets are few and far between, a hard thing to come by when you’re on the run and trying to stay as far away from the wizarding world as possible. But there’s an owl, flying through the sky in the early morning, the paper tied to its leg. A quick summoning charm is all it takes. The owl itself seems to care very little, simply letting out an indignant squawk before taking flight again.

**MASS PANIC, MINISTER OF MAGIC “TRYING” TO CONTAIN THE SITUATION**

There’s a large picture and the people in it are running around, terrified, screaming. In the background there’s a building collapsing, and a furious cloud cover rolling and tumbling, lightning spiking out of it and… Harry squints, looking at it closer. It looks like there’s something inside the clouds. It’s dark, almost like waves, crashing to the side.

*On August 13th, at precisely 9:46 am, a strange storm took over the whole of London - some witnesses even stating that they could see it from their houses miles away from the city. People panicked and fled the scene as buildings seemed to collapse of their own accord.*

*Muggles are saying it was an earthquake coupled with a lightning storm, however aurors are saying with definite certainty that this was the work of something larger. It’s been nearly three hundred years since the Dark Lord was defeated during the great battle of Hogwarts, but did he really die?*  

*Harry Potter, who disappeared after an ‘accident’ that took the lives of over seventy of the survivors of the great battle, has yet to be found. We are told that it was he who defeated he-who-must-not-be-named during the battle. What if they were working together the entire time? Could the Dark Lord be back? More on pages 4-6.*

Harry’s hands are shaking. His face is transformed into one of anger, and the ground beneath him starts rumbling. The

Prophet, in his hands, bursts into flame. He throws it aside and disapparates.
Every single person in a twelve-mile radius of Harry Potter at that moment does not get a good night’s sleep for over a month.

V.

For years, Harry has sacrificed everything he knows and loves for the good of the wizarding world. He’s laid down his life, more than once, to free them all from the evil lurking. He’s killed all types of demons and monsters; he’s fought countless battles, all for the people who took him in when he was eleven years old, wanting nothing more than to disappear.

The wizarding world, for all intents and purposes, saved Harry Potter.

In the past, he would have done anything for them. He aspired to be great, to become an auror, to marry Ginny and start a family and live a life that, when he was eleven, he never thought he’d be able to have. The wizarding world was a safe haven, a home for Harry when he had nowhere else to go.

He went above and beyond in repaying them, defeating the darkest wizard of all time. Dying for them.

At the end of the day, tens of years later, he’s in the middle of the forest, eyes flashing red and magic seeping into the ground beneath him. Dark, angry magic. He screams. An inhumane sound fills the air, thick with betrayal and hatred. He falls to the ground and digs his fingers into the dirt. A dark mist wraps around him and the sheer amount of power that he conducts through his body and out into the forest is incomprehensible.

He’s angry. So, so angry. Unbelievably angry. So angry that his blood is running hot and he can barely catch his breath. So angry at the way that the very world that saved him, so many years ago, is now treating him like he’s no better than Voldemort. Just because of an accident that happened. Just because of a corrupt government that took everything Harry had built up.

It was them who killed all those people.

It was all them.
Harry is sick of hiding. Sick of running. Sick of blaming himself.

He screams again. Birds take flight, leaving the forest as quick as their wings can take them.

It’s the Ministry who took everything away.

And fucking hell, even if it’s the last thing that the Boy Who Lived ever does, he will make them pay.

Over the years, Harry has found out more about both his own magic and the magic that the world held than Hogwarts had taught him during the six years that he attended.

He can do everything without the aid of a wand, to the point where doing magic is second nature to him. He needs it to to survive. Perhaps more important than that is that he needs it to stay sane. It’s a friend, a power deep inside him, so strong that he doesn’t know who he’d be without it. Or if he would even be alive without it.

The elder wand does what Harry bids it to, being that to obliviate the memories of people who lay eyes on him or set wards so strong that he’d be impossible to find, no matter how smart the wizard or witch.

He hasn’t had much human contact since the incident that resulted in him becoming a wanted criminal. The encounters are always fleeting - Harry lost in a crowd of muggles halfway across the world from London; placing his order at a cafe; disappearing into dark alleyways, a homeless person watching from a distance with blurry eyes. He tries to keep these encounters few and far between, making sure to change his appearance enough so that nobody can recognise who he is.

VII.

Harry’s life passes by in segments, fragments of the whole story. His hair grows too long and the bags under his eyes become deeper and darker. He stays in one place for no longer than twenty four hours. Slowly, carefully, he plans.

Plans to get back what was taken from him.
Plans to get revenge.
Three months ago, the darkest wizard of all time was killed, saving the world from death and destruction greater than anybody could have ever imagined. In the wake of his death, the wizarding world rejoiced; pubs all around the country were filled with wizards, holding their glasses up to the sky and shouting, “To Harry Potter - the boy who lived twice!” Looking back on it, Harry knew he should have basked in the glory - it wouldn’t last longer than those few months.

Three months after the battle, everyone who had fought and survived the battle of Hogwarts was invited to a ceremony in honor of those who had died. The list was long, and several statues were built in the memory of some of the most notable dead. Professor Severus Snape, Fred Weasley, Remus and Tonks. Nearly fifty more had their names engraved on plaques at the base of the four large statues. They were placed on the edge of the forbidden forest, near Hagrid’s hut, facing up towards the castle. Each was covered in a thin, silvery-white cloth, ready to disappear into a flock of white doves when they were revealed at the beginning of the ceremony.

Right now, however, it’s just Harry, the Weasleys, Hermione and Draco, who was lurking at the
edge of the lake, throwing rocks into the dark water. Harry watches him for a split second before turning back to his friends. “You ready for this?” he asks carefully, putting his hands into his pockets and rocking back on his heels.

“Ready as I’ll ever be.” Ron offers him a lopsided smile.

“It’ll be fine,” Hermione cuts in. There was no doubt she’d memorised her speech already.

Mrs. Weasley smiles sadly at George, who’s staring at the covered statue of his twin brother. “You alright dear?” she asks softly.

“Yeah,” he answers, his voice is hoarse. “Sorry, I’m just-” He gestures a hand through the air hopelessly, like that describes his feeling and then quickly covers his mouth, turning away.

Harry averts his eyes.

Ron and Hermione gravitate closer to Harry, a little ways away from the rest of the family. Hermione catches Harry watching the unmoving shape of Draco Malfoy, silhouetted against the darkened lake. “He’s early,” she comments. Ron shoots him an ugly look.

“I wonder what he wants,” Harry says, his voice wary and laced with confusion. After a pause, he motions to Ron and Hermione to stay put and heads towards the blonde.

Gravel slips out from under his feet as he jogs down to the lake. Malfoy doesn’t turn towards him, but instead spits out his familiar greeting, “Potter.”

“Malfoy.” Harry nods. Draco throws another rock into the water. It splashes, and ripples extend from the point of impact. They can be traced back to where it hit the water, even though the rock has disappeared from view. “The ceremony doesn’t start for another few hours. What are you doing here?”

Malfoy takes a deep breath. “It’s changed since the battle, hasn’t it?”

Not knowing how to reply, Harry contemplates the question in silence for a few moments. A great
portion of the castle is missing. Rubble is scattered everywhere. Trees in the forest had been broken -
some even being torn down completely. Hagrid's cabin is nonexistent, a pile of wood and stones is
all that's left.


“Yeah.” Malfoy bends down to pick up another handful of rocks. “The lake hasn’t changed.”

Harry stares at the dark water. He hasn’t seen the giant squid, and is suddenly worried about whether
it's still alive or not.

“You changed,” Harry says suddenly. He turns away from the lake, facing the other boy. “You’re
different.”

Malfoy glances at Harry, sneering, “So are you.” He throws another rock into the water. It
disappears.

“I guess.” Harry tips his face towards the sky. It’s a clear blue, the sun shining down brightly. It
seems stupid, to be making small talk with the person he swore to hate for so many years. Maybe he
really has changed. Have other people changed too? Was he too blind to see it? Malfoy was obvious -
he wasn’t making any snide comments, wasn’t being rude. But what about Ron? Hermione? There
wasn’t any obvious difference, but there must be. They’d been through too much to stay the same.

“It was my fault,” Malfoy whispers. Then, silence overtakes them for several minutes because Harry
has no idea how to respond. Vaguely, Harry realises that his shoes are muddy from standing so close
to the lake.

“Look, Potter-...” Malfoy takes a deep breath, and throws the rest of the rocks he has into the lake.

“Yeah?” Harry can see Malfoy’s jaw clenching. “What is it?”

Draco stares at his feet. Moments of silence pass. “Nothing. Nevermind.” He spins on his heel,
taking a few steps before looking over his shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” Harry asks. He watches as the other man’s hunched form strides quickly away from
him, his dark grey suit blowing in the wind. “Wait- Draco-” He cuts himself off before he can start begging him to stay. Harry Potter, the boy who lived, watches as Draco Malfoy walks away.

About five minutes later, when the sun has moved a fraction of an inch across the sky, Ron and Hermione walk down to the lake’s edge, standing on either side of Harry. Neither of them ask what Malfoy said. There’s a few minutes of quiet, before Hermione breaks it. “I never thought I’d see the castle looking so…”


“Like the past seven years didn’t count for anything,” Harry says, his voice barely over a whisper. “That place was my home and now it’s just… a ruin.”

“It will be fixed,” Hermione states, her voice strong but still wavering around the edges.

“It will never be the same,” Ron says grimly, his hand finding Harry's and squeezing it tightly.

“Nothing will be the same.” Hermione whispers in response.

“The lake’s the same,” Harry says as he drapes an arm around her waist.

She takes a moment to respond. “On the surface, maybe. But under the waves everything’s different, too.”

This takes Harry back to the last time he entered the lake, the task in the triwizard tournament where he had to dive under the water of the very lake they’re watching now, years later. Back then, he hadn’t known what was going to happen. There’s no way he could have known.

They stand there for a long time, holding each other. Supporting each other. Harry bites back his tears because this is not the time to cry.

There’s something about seeing the first place he can ever remember calling home, torn to pieces by the very people who had taken everything else from Harry. There’s something about that that makes him so angry, the anger intertwined with sadness so deep that he can barely tell the difference at this
point. His home. A pile of rubble now. Some of it is in the lake.

As if reading his mind, Ron says, “Home isn’t Hogwarts. Home is people.” And he squeezes Harry’s hand.

They stand there for a long time, transfixed on a dead castle.

*Home isn’t Hogwarts. Home is people.*

When crowds of people start to arrive the three of them trek back up to the hidden statues, standing by the edge of the small stage and greeting people. Neville, Luna and a few other ex-students walk in a group, sitting near the front. Harry can’t remember ever seeing Luna wearing all black. It doesn’t suit her, not really. She belongs wrapped in happy shades of yellow and purple.

Ginny sits with the rest of the Weasleys, shooting a small, sad smile in Harry’s direction.

People fill up all the chairs provided, and then spill out across the grass, clustered in groups. The chatter of voices makes it hard for Harry to think. It’s dull and gloomy, clouds scattered across the sky. People are dressed in dark colours, their faces vacant of smiles. They’re here to grieve.

*Nothing will be the same.* Hermione’s words run through his head. Professor McGonagall gets up from her chair to address her fellow wizards. She points her wand briefly at her throat to amplify her voice.

“Welcome,” she starts. “We are gathered here today to remember those who have fallen.” Her cat-like gaze sweeps across the hundreds of people hanging off her every word. “We are gathered here today to remember those who fought bravely. To remember those who fought against all odds. To remember those who could have left, who could have chosen safety, but who chose to be here instead.” She waves a hand towards the ruin of the castle. “We are here to remember, because not one life was in vain…”

McGonagall keeps talking, but Harry tunes her speech out. Ron and Hermione are standing on either side of him. They hold him up, their presence steady and strong. Before he knows it it’s his time to speak - his time to get up in front of all these people and say something profound and impactful upon their lives. He had written a good speech a week ago, and he had memorized it so well he reckons he could perform it even in his sleep.
“Hello,” Harry says, looking out over the crowd. A sea of people with lifeless eyes. “I had a speech prepared.” He glances at Hermione and Ron. “But it doesn’t feel… right.” All these people have lost people they loved. Because of him. “I’m so, so sorry.” His voice breaks. “There’s nothing I can do to ease your pain. There’s nothing I can do to ease our pain. I can’t say anything to magically make everything better. There’s no spell to erase suffering. I fought in that battle alongside every single person who laid down their life for the wizarding world as a whole. Most of you fought alongside them, as well.” Harry’s eyes sweep over the crowd. He doesn’t see a single face that hadn’t been covered in blood and dust during the battle. “We fought and we won.”

His eyes catch Malfoy, standing with his mother at the edge of the crowd, at the very back. “We fought, and we lost some of the best people that I will ever meet.” He turns and flicks his hand in a wide circle, at the cloth-covered statues. The cloth turns into flocks of white doves, which fly over everybody watching Harry.

Four statues stand tall. Nymphadora Tonks. Remus Lupin. Fred Weasley. Severus Snape. He says these names out loud.

“These four people, along with fifty more, died in order for all of us to live.”

He stares directly at Malfoy, and says the same words he had spoken to Harry earlier. “It was my fault.” He can’t tell if they’re making eye contact; it’s over too long of a distance. But Harry is staring in the general direction of Malfoy, and Malfoy’s staring in the general direction of Harry. “I am the boy who lived too many times.”

“Every single person who fought in that battle deserves to still be breathing. Every single person who fell deserves to be more than just photos in frames and names spoken about solemnly.”

“I let everybody down. They died while I live.” He feels Hermione and Ron’s eyes boring into him. “This isn’t about me, though. This is about them.”

He yells the next few words; “Every single person who fought in the war deserved better! At the end of the day, if you fought against Lord Voldemort you are nothing but good. Everybody was scared, everybody did things they are not proud of.” He’s still looking at Malfoy. “You deserve better. You deserve to still have your loved ones by your side. You deserve to feel happiness again.”

Harry turns slightly, looking up at the four strong, tall statues. “These four devered better.”
“But we have to move forwards!” Harry spins around, facing the front row, picking out Luna and Neville’s faces. “We must rebuild what we lost.”

The castle, his home, is in ruins. “We must seek out happiness again. New wizards will rise, both good and bad. It is our duty to help the good and fight the bad.”

“We are the future. We are the survivors. We are all that’s left of the people who fell!” He’s speaking loudly, and tears pool in the edges of his eyes. “We will rebuild the happiness and hope and light that we once had in memory of those who died!”

His eyes meet Ron’s. “Home isn’t Hogwarts. Home is people.”

He nods abruptly, and exits the stage.

Just as he’s stepping off the stage, one foot on the grassy ground, screams break out near the back of the crowd. Harry’s head whips towards the noise. He can’t see much; everybody’s running. He can’t see much, but he can still hear the curse being screamed, a yell so full of anger it makes the hair on the back of Harry’s neck stand up. Crucio.

That had been nearly three centuries ago.

And that’s the beginning of the end.

He doesn’t remember much of what happened next. Chaos. Terror. Hermione screaming, “Harry! Look out!” People trying to disapparate but being unable to do so. A baby crying. The trees, behind them all, swaying dangerously in the sudden wind. The statues of the four great wizards being blasted apart. Someone yelling as they were buried in rubble.

Then he was hit with a stupefy - before he could even do so much as draw his wand.

He later learnt, in a cell in Azkaban, that Draco Malfoy was the one hit with the cruciatus curse. He learnt that not a single person survived that day. He learnt that his wand was the one that was used to murder each and every one of his friends and loved ones. His family. His wand was the one that tortured Malfoy, and blasted apart the statues built in honor of the best wizards he had known.
It was a closed case. The wand was snapped and buried somewhere deep inside the Ministry. On the way back to Azkaban from his hearing, Harry Potter escaped. He’s been running ever since.

He didn’t realise that he had stopped aging until nearly ten years later.

Harry thinks about that last day of peace a lot. The conversations that he had, the smiles people had shared with him. His speech about moving forwards, about finding new happiness.

Moving forwards. It doesn’t seem to fit with the three hundred years he’s spent running from the Ministry (and running from himself, too, though he’d be hard pressed to admit that.) Would Ron have wanted this for him? Would Hermione? Of course not. But what else could he do? They had been his best friends and more. His family. Ginny and McGonagall and Slughorn and Malfoy and Neville and Luna. Everyone. They were there because he organized a ceremony in remembrance of those who had fallen. He had organised it. He had signed each and every one of those letters with the dark midnight-blue ink that he found at the bottom of his school trunk when he was unpacking. All those people were there because of him. And then his wand killed them.

An act of terrorism.

Harry bites his lip until it bleeds. He tastes thick metal on his tongue and spits onto the ground beside him. He sets about putting his regular wards up, waving his wand through the air in a large, sweeping motion. Wards to stop people from seeing him or hearing him or smelling him. Spells to prevent people from tracking him, muggle repellents and a spell that Harry himself created - that he’s very proud of, thank you very much - a spell that makes other wizards’ magic considerably weaker.

He’s in a forest, his preferred place to stay as it provides him with shelter, places to hide and most importantly, food and water. He ducks down to a narrow stream, waving his wand and whispering a series of ancient latin words, and smiling to himself as a few fish suddenly fly out of the water, thrashing around on the damp, pine-needle covered ground.

He eats well that night.

When he’s done, he performs a quick *scourgify* on himself and settles down, leaning up against a thick tree and letting his eyes flutter closed. His wand is still at the ready, tucked away safely inside his sleeve. It takes him a while to fall asleep, but that’s not a surprise in the slightest. Harry Potter isn’t a stranger to insomnia.

He’s deep in sleep when the magic inside him screams at him to wake up. Something’s wrong.
Something’s too close to the wards. He’s awake in moments, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and slowly standing up, holding his wand steady in front of him. It has to be very early in the morning - the forest is bathed in darkness, and he can barely see past a few meters in front of his face.

The sound of branches breaking around him is too loud and widespread to be wildlife. Harry spins around, desperately trying to identify the sounds around him.

When he hears a chorus of voices - at least a hundred, maybe more - start chanting in ancient latin phrases, fury runs through his veins. There’s nothing he can do as his wards shimmer like they’re putting up a fight.

There’s nothing he can do as the layers of wards break down, slowly at first, then faster and faster, until there’s only bits and pieces left. Until all that Harry can do is stand tall and prepare for a fight.

Maybe this is it. Maybe he can die here, fighting for life without a future.

He could disapparate, but he doesn’t.

Maybe it’s time to stop running.

The wizards must have been lurking there by the edges of the wards for longer than Harry has been aware of it, for they broke through them relatively quickly. Harry has to give them credit - it wouldn’t have been easy, especially with the power-dampening wards.

Fight or flight.

Harry’s tired of running.

So barely ten minutes later, when the hordes of aurors break through the wards, Harry Potter doesn’t run. He fights.

His wand is slashing through the air, bringing trees to life and coaxing a wall of fire to rise up, surrounding him and the people against him, preventing them from running away.
But they have magic too.

They’re not aurors for nothing; they know how to deal with all types of magic. Even Harry’s.

It’s a hundred to one. Not a fair battle in the slightest. Harry barely dodges an array of precise stunning spells, and almost gets hit by the cruciatus curse when he’s not fast enough to throw up a strong shield charm. There are screams as the trees he’s brought to life swoop down, raking their branches over dozens of aurors.

He’s on the defence, breaths coming in short gasps as he slashes the elder wand through the air, setting up shield charm after shield charm, trying to look for an opening, a spot of weakness he could attack.

He underestimated his opponents. He didn’t think that they could beat him.

They haven’t - at least, not yet, but they’re getting far closer than Harry wants them to.

“EXPULSO!” someone shouts, and the ground near Harry’s feet explodes, the force of it throwing him into the air and slamming him back to the ground several feet away.

He’s winded.

They’re closing in.

“Crucio.”

And Harry screams. He screams and he screams and he screams.

It feels like centuries pass - he’s engulfed in pain.

He’s barely conscious when the torture stops, and so he’s only able to roll onto his side, eyes glazed
over, hands covered in dirt, heart beating unnaturally fast, and listen as a fight rages on around him.

The forest is lit up in bright green light, so similar to that of an Avada Kedavra that Harry’s body grows impossibly more tense. Even through the aftershocks of the pain he’s able to crawl to his knees, summoning all the magic he can from his weak body to make the earth come up, wrapping around the ankles of the aurors, holding them immobile.

“Stop this madness!” says a stranger’s voice, low and smooth.

Through half-lidded eyes, Harry looks up, watching as someone strides through the wreckage. The figure bends down, picks up a wand and tosses it in Harry’s direction. Then he turns his back to Harry, holding his arms out wide to the aurors, the ground having swallowed them up to their hips. They stare up at the stranger.

Harry’s whole body hurts.

“You have fought a gallant battle,” he says, his voice clear and ringing through the suddenly still forest, “but there must be losers to every battle.” With that, he smirks, raising his arms up as if he’s about to do something awful. “See you in hell.”

The stranger starts to say something else, but with the last of the energy that Harry has, he launches himself forwards, off the ground, grabbing the stranger around the waist. As they fall to the ground, Harry disapparates.

Chapter End Notes

I made a tumblr (@collateraldamagepng password: Loki) for this fic, which has some updates and scenes from the next chapter!
Never thought I'd be one to say this but this morning my bunny got really sick, so pls keep her in her prayers.
Chapter Summary

Harry meets the mysterious man who saved his life.

Chapter Notes

This is a bit shorter than I wanted it to be, but I still hope y’all enjoy it :)

Harry passes out before he realises where he’s landed. Where they’ve landed. He was aiming for a small forested area in France, though he’s almost positive that they didn’t make it there, for it was over such a long distance and he has such a small amount of energy.

He drifts in and out of consciousness, dreaming restlessly for close to an hour.

He’s in the Chamber of Secrets. The ground is covered in water and mud. There’s screaming, a wail so loud and full of pain that Harry can’t breathe. The water seems to grab at his ankles, trying to draw him into the concrete. He finds himself walking towards the screams. He’s trying to run but the water is stopping him, not allowing him to go any faster. The frustration grows, and when he finally makes it to the screaming sounds all that he finds is a body, a shell of someone who used to exist.

His nightmares continue like this, accompanied by the memory of the excruciating pain of the cruciatus curse.
He tries screaming, but no sound comes out of his mouth. He tries running but his feet stay firmly planted in place.

All control has been taken from him, and maybe that’s the scariest thing.

When he wakes up, he’s not alone. There’s someone standing a few metres away from Harry, leaning up against a tree with grace.

“Who are you?” he demands as soon as his eyes focus. His voice is raspy.

“I could ask the same of you,” the man replies.

“Harry Potter,” Harry says automatically, raising a challenging eyebrow. His hands shake slightly as he pushes himself into a sitting position.

“Pleasure to meet you, Mr Potter,” the man sneers, “You say your name as if I’m to recognise it.”

“Well you’re a wizard, aren’t you?”

The man’s eyes narrow. “No. I’m much better than that.”

“Yeah?” Harry’s voice is patronizing and angry. He spits a mouthful of blood onto the ground, “Then what are you?”

The man raises his chin, eyes sparkling defiance. “A god.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “Yeah right. And why on earth would a god save my life?”

“Does it matter?” the man challenges.

“Not really.” He says this because it doesn’t. Saving someone’s life is simply that, it means very little
to Harry who is the one doing the saving. He takes a large gulp of air, pressing a hand to his stomach, just below his ribs, where ripples of phantom pain still shoot through his skin. “But I’d at least like to know what your name is.”

“Loki Laufeyson of Asgard,” he states clearly, raising his chin.

“Nice to meet you.” Harry winces, running a shaking hand through his already messy hair.

Though the cruciatus curse has been lifted, he’s still shuddering with the after-effects of the torture, making his body seem frail and breakable in front of a person who is quite literally a god, standing tall, teeming with power.

Loki’s face is solemn, his eyes slightly downcast. He has long, shoulder-length hair that’s ever so slightly curly, its dark black contrasting greatly with his pale skin. He wears a type of leather-looking dark green armour, tight pants of the same material and what looks like a long, two-toned gold and green cape. The outfit is set off nicely with what looks like gold plates, less for protection and more for ornamentation. He has a long nose, high cheekbones and thick eyebrows. His lips are thin but well-defined.

Harry grits his teeth as another wave of phantom pain ripples through his body. He hisses and grabs for his wand, pointing it at his own chest and muttering a few words under his breath. He’s all too aware of the way that Loki’s gaze is tracking his every move. The healing spell works, and Harry’s body relaxes.

He stands, brushing the dust from his jeans, and runs a hand through his hair.

“What I do need to know,” Harry starts, “is which side you’re on.” He waves his wand through the air almost automatically, sending wards out. “Because if you’re going to turn me in,” he says, slipping his wand up his sleeve, out of sight, “I’ll have to kill you.”

“Nobody in their right mind would ever tell someone who has just threatened them with their life which side they’re on,” Loki speaks quickly, “Presently, however, I am on nobody’s side.”

“You were about to kill all of those wizards back there,” Harry challenges, taking a step towards Loki and raising his chin, “Why would you do that?”
“For fun?” Loki phrases it like a question.

Harry lets out a huff of breath. “You weren’t doing that for fun.”

Loki clenches his teeth. “Oh yeah? You don’t know me; you cannot make that call.” His eyes narrow.

“No, that’s true. I don’t know you.” Harry forces his body to relax, forces himself to take a step backwards. He’s spent - he doesn’t want to fight. He tries to keep his voice steady and calm. “But I have seen people who kill without reason.” His thoughts flash back to Bellatrix. “You don’t strike me as one of those people.”

“You’ve known of my existence for what? An hour tops.”

“Longer, actually. Read about it in the paper - at least, I’m assuming it was you. The Ministry has been after you too, haven’t they?” Harry watches intently as Loki’s eyes flutter to the ground for a fraction of a second. “Running gets real tiring real fast, doesn’t it?”

When Loki doesn’t respond, Harry keeps going. “Soon enough you get angry. So angry at these people who won’t stop for even a minute to hear you out. They fire to hurt you, hell, they may even fire to kill you. It gets exhausting, having to set up wards every night so that you can get even a little bit of sleep without someone blowing your head off, doesn’t it?” He spits out the last words. “You get so angry that you want to kill, you want to hurt them. But not for fun… for revenge-”

“What is your point?” Loki cuts through Harry’s monologue.

Harry takes a deep breath and a few steps forwards, towards the seething god. “My point is, we’re not so different, you and I.” Another step forwards. Maybe pissing off a god isn’t Harry’s brightest idea. “And I know that I would never kill for fun.”

Loki’s face stretches into a smile tainted with over a drop of madness. “Well played, Mr Potter.” He glances around the forest, masking his face, making it impossible for Harry to read through the complex emotions portrayed in his eyes.

Moments of silence pass. Harry turns to establish the rest of his wards, setting up some especially nasty ones. Ones based around curses and pain.
“I am here because I need your help.” Loki’s voice runs high and clean, commanding.

“I’m afraid I’m in no position to help anyone.” Harry spins, keeping his back to Loki.

“I will give you something in return.”

“I don’t want anything.”

“Potter.” His voice sounds scarily like Malfoys, dripping with jeers and bad intentions.

Harry spins. “You can leave.” His eyes are dark, shadowed and filled with anger.

“I cannot.” It doesn’t sound soft or clear as Loki’s voice did before. It’s rough around the edges.

“You won’t tell me who you are! Or anything about yourself! You save my life and then you just hang around-”

“You brought me here!” Loki yells.

“Because you were going to kill hundreds of wizards!” Harry screams, clenching his hand around the elder wand, which is practically buzzing with excitement.

“They were torturing you!” Loki roars.

“I didn’t ask to be saved!” Harry takes a threatening step forwards, jutting out his lower jaw.

“Would you have rather been left there to die?”

“It would be better than being here with you,” Harry says with a scoff, flicking his wand in an almost
dismissing manner towards the trees behind Loki. They shudder to life, swaying menacingly while awaiting Harry’s command.

“Your little tricks do not scare me.”

“What? Because you’re a god and I’m a mere mortal?”

Loki’s form flutters, and then suddenly, all around him are carbon copies of the god - all with matching smirks. “No. Because I know better tricks.”

Harry’s eyes dart around, trying to pinpoint where the real Loki is. He spins, brandishing the elder wand. Someone grabs the back of his robes, tugging hard, causing him to stumble to the ground.

“Expelliarmus!” Harry shouts, but nothing happens. “You don't have a wand,” he says dumbly.

“What part of I’m a god did you not understand?” The Lokis flutter and disappear, leaving only one behind.

Harry stands up, brushing off his pants. “Very little of it, actually.”

“Will you listen to me if I talk?” Loki raises an eyebrow. “Stop unleashing your anger out on me?”

Harry’s eyes narrow. “Depends.” He keeps his wand out, simply for precaution.

Loki nods slowly. “You know I will beat you.”

“You haven’t seen me fight - not properly.”

“Stop lying to me.” Loki sighs exaggeratedly. “I need your help-”

“So you’ve said,” Harry cuts across him.
Loki glares, clenching his teeth and taking a deep breath through his nose. “I need to know - this is Earth, is it not?”

Harry tilts his head curiously, his voice still fuming. “Of-fucking-course it is.”

“Ah. Very well.” The furrows across Loki’s forehead grow. He mutters the next words under his breath: “Those imbeciles.”

“What?” Harry asks, with more than a little bite to his tone.

“This is… not the earth that I’m familiar with.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean when my brother yelled that he was banishing me to somewhere that I could never bother him again - somewhere far away from his friends - I thought that meant galaxies away. Not dimensions.”

Chapter End Notes

Your feedback is really important to me! Please leave comments <3

As always, there will be another chapter next weekend, and to stay updated on everything about this fic be sure to follow @collateraldamagepng on tumblr!
Potions and Possibilities

Chapter Summary

Harry brews a potion, and Loki comes up with an interesting idea.

Chapter Notes

I hope you like this! the next chapter is quite a bit longer :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For the longest time, Harry didn’t understand potions - or what made them tick. It was because of that that Harry’s grades in potions were so abysmal for most of his time at Hogwarts. This, of course, wasn’t helped by Professor Snape, who seemed to do everything in his power to make sure that Harry failed. His grades in potions only went up when Professor Slughorn took over - and Harry found the Half-Blood Prince’s book.

It was close to one hundred years ago - give or take a bit - that Harry’s interest in potions grew dramatically.

With a couple handy charms he was able to acquire a cauldron with very little effort, and from there he travelled across the country, finding ingredients for some simple potions. At first it was for nothing more than to keep himself busy, doing something during the day that required a large portion of his attention, diverting said attention off of the negative feelings that had been creeping into his mind.

He started with the easiest potions, simple ones that were taught to first years at Hogwarts. He had to eyeball it, guessing quite a few factors to the potions as he didn’t have any textbooks. At first he ended up with little more than singed eyebrows and yet another failed attempt. Over time, however, he learnt from his mistakes and could make even the most difficult potions.
He treats the potions as more than just objects, which is how he saw them before. They aren’t sentient, not by a long shot… but they still hold a sense of self. They all react differently to wrong ingredients, missed steps and even the weather. (This surprised Harry the most; most potions hate the sun, and it soon made sense to Harry why all potions masters seemed to live underground, in damp basements.)

That may be one of the reasons as to why Harry keeps to the forests. The potions do better under a thick cover of tree branches.

Harry brews a potion right now, by the base of a tree, using the elder wand to stir it twice clockwise, then blow out the flame beneath the cauldron and stir it five and a half times counter-clockwise. He sprinkles in some powder from a small flask, humming softly under his breath as bubbles start to rise from the bottom. He watches it for exactly twenty-six seconds and then taps the elder wand on the bottom of the cauldron, reigniting the flame.

The potion turns from a dark purple sludge to a thin silvery liquid, as light as plain water.

Felix Felicis. Liquid Luck. He’s only made it a few times.

He’s brewing it slightly different, trying to achieve a version of it that lasts longer without having to constantly be taking it. However, this has proven to be a difficult feat, as the potion is more temperamental than most and even the tiniest wrong step could result in disaster. So he’s careful, writing down his every step, watching the potion intently.

His cauldron is small; he’s not making a lot. But it’s enough, hopefully. He just needs enough for both he and Loki to have some.

It’s been a month since they first met, Loki saving Harry’s life in the clearing of the forest Harry was hiding out in. It hasn’t been an eventful month, most days spent sitting around, bouncing ideas off each other and practicing magic when all else fails.

Loki’s sarcastic humor and shameless charm along with his wit have forced Harry to let his guard down, though he still keeps his wand tucked up his sleeve in case he needs it. Loki hasn’t said much about his past, but then again, Harry hasn’t asked. He doesn’t want to pry when the almighty god obviously doesn’t wish to share his past with him.

The god seems to know more about Harry then he’s letting on, his prying eyes seeing through...
Harry’s tough facade. There’s enough written about Harry in old papers that it isn’t surprising, but the fact that Loki hasn’t asked for Harry’s point of view is unsettling. Then again, they’re both hiding skeletons.

It’s been three hundred years. Harry is rarely talked about in the papers anymore, save for when something particularly nasty arises. He’s practically erased from the greater public’s media consumption. They still know he exists, and are still buying into the lies the ministry told about him all those years ago, but three hundred years does lots to dull the public’s fear.

“Potter.” Loki says it in the same way that Malfoy used to - with a sneer embedded into the way the first syllable met the second.

“How was it?” Harry doesn’t turn away from his potion, carefully stirring it and keeping his back to Loki.

“Same as it always is.” Loki lets out an exaggerated sigh. Harry can hear him walking closer, twigs cracking underfoot. He stops beside Harry, staring at the potion in the same way as he does.

“Are you sure?” Harry asks, his voice hushed.

“Of course I’m sure.” Loki lifts his chin indignantly.

The plan seemed simple at first, it had been one of the ideas that Loki threw at Harry a week and a half ago, but Harry took it in stride. It was an outrageous idea, but he’s done it before, breaking into the Ministry - with Ron and Hermione, on the search for Horcruxes, with no idea that their time was almost up. No idea that they wouldn’t live for another year.

It was hard back then. In the last three hundred years the security has only gotten stronger, no doubt about it.

Sometimes however, breaking into the Ministry of Magic is just another step towards a greater goal.

“I need you to be right.” Harry tips his gaze towards Loki, green meeting green as their eyes sought out the others. “I need to know who’s behind all this.”
“I know you do,” Loki says steadily, “This man - or woman, or whoever... They took everything from you. You deserve to know who they are, and you deserve to get revenge…. But what if it’s no more than just some insane madman wanting power, when they know that you’re the one who has the most power?”

“I need this to work too, remember?” Loki continues, raising an eyebrow, “You’re my best shot at getting home, and you’re the only one here who would even begin to help me. I want this to succeed just as much as you do.”

“I haven’t helped you yet,” Harry mutters, “Don’t count your eggs before they’ve hatched.”

“I have to trust that you will help me.”

They lapse into silence.

Loki leaves. Not long after, Harry turns his full attention back to his potion. He’s always coming and going, to do one thing or another. Harry has long since stopped questioning it.

An hour later and the liquid luck is almost done. Five more strokes clockwise and the required incantations are all that remain to the complicated and long brewing process.

“One, two, three, four, five,” Harry counts the strokes out loud, maintaining a steady pace.

He says the incantations loudly, making sure that his voice doesn’t accidentally waver. He holds his breath. The potion should be turning a clear, tinted golden shade.

After a moment, it turns gold. Harry releases the breath he was holding.

“Thank fuck,” he mutters, flicking the elder wand at the flame to make it go away and slowing lowering himself down into a sitting position, before flopping down on his back. He’s exhausted. In every potion made, part of the magician is demanded. For simple, easy potions, you don’t feel the effects of it. But the harder and more complicated the potions get, the potion itself demands more of the magician, leaving them with very little energy.
The ground is soft under his back, a bit of moisture seeping through his robes and t-shirt, leaving its mark on his skin. There’s a couple odd sticks poking into him uncomfortably, but he’s far too tired to care. His eyes stay open, looking at the pale blue evening sky through an array of different tree branches. He takes a deep breath of air, exhaling through parted lips.

Equilibrium isn’t a state of mind that he’s accustomed to being in, the stress of, well, *everything* is usually embedded so deep into his mind, body and soul that he rarely ever feels this… at one with his surroundings. Calm. Like everything’s going to be okay. Balanced. The sticks poking into his back aren’t hurting him, they’re merely a feeling on his skin. The sky is a blue so pale, it’s almost white. A few clouds drift by, but not enough that Harry’s worried it’s going to rain. His breathing is deep and easy. His mind feels light, his body weightless.

He wishes, briefly, that he could remain like this forever, becoming completely at one with his surroundings until they swallow him whole, tree roots tangling over his arms and moss creeping up his legs. Rain hitting his face and leaves dancing across his robes. Earth, slowly but surely consuming him.

Birds dance through the air above him, nothing more than dark specks fluttering across the otherwise azure sky.

“I could kill you right now, you know that, right?”

Just like that, the peace is broken. Harry frowns as he sits up. “You wouldn’t do that.”

“Wouldn’t I?”

Harry rolls his eyes. “*No*, you wouldn’t. You need me.”

“And that I do,” Loki says, his voice slightly quieter than usual, with maybe a hint of regret in it.

Harry sighs, pushing himself to his feet and brushing off his robes. He blinks rapidly as he sways from side to side, stumbling forwards a few paces and landing heavily against a tree. He keeps his back to Loki.

“I got you something,” Loki says, stepping forwards, “Coffee. If you want it.”
“Where did you-” Harry cuts himself off, “Nevermind.” He shakes his head slightly, pressing the palm of his hand to his forehead, wishing that the sudden intense headache would go away.

“Is that a yes?” Loki inquires. His question has a bite to it.

Harry grits his teeth, rubbing his hand down his face in defeat. “Alright then.”

Loki sidles up to him, handing Harry a (large, hot) paper cup of coffee. “There’s some sugar and creme in it,” he says.

“Thanks,” Harry murmurs, grateful for the caffeine.

He can’t remember the last time he got a coffee - even with powerful shapeshifting charms or polyjuice potions he’s too wary to venture out into the ‘real world’ with other people. He’s done it a few times, usually late at night, slipping through the outskirts of towns as if he were nothing more than a shadow. He nicked a few chocolate bars off of a shelf at a gas station. For the most part, he doesn’t want to get tangled up in other people’s lives. It would get too complicated too quickly, and wouldn’t end up being worth the pain that he’d bring to both them and himself. Besides, the people that he gets close to end up dead.

He takes a gulp of the coffee. It burns his lips. His hands shake.

If Loki notices how… run down Harry is acting, he doesn’t say anything. For that, Harry is appreciative.

The hot drink warms Harry from the inside, rejuvenating his body from the after-effects of making such a powerful potion.

Loki’s wearing normal muggle clothes today, Harry notes. They’re a stark contrast to the outfit that Loki was wearing the first day they met, decorated with gold armor and green leather, set off with a cape. The muggle clothing suits him better, Harry thinks. Black trousers coupled with a black, button up top and a long, thick dark green jacket left unbuttoned. His hair remains long, slicked back, shiny but not greasy.
“Stop staring at me,” Loki chides, raising his eyebrows and maintaining eye contact with Harry as he takes a long sip of whatever is in his cup.

Harry’s face burns and he averts his gaze quickly, “Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Loki’s lips widen into a smug smirk. “I’m used to it, I’m just so...” He waves a hand down his body. “…irresistible.”

Harry shakes his head quickly, taking another huge gulp of coffee.

They’re two specks in a forest. From above the trees, you’d barely be able to make them out. You’d have to know exactly where to look. In the dimming light of the late evening, it’s even harder to tell where they are. Even harder to tell who they are. They could be anyone - two young people hanging out in the forest. Nobody in particular.

It’s at times like these that Harry wonders at how easy it would be to change his appearance, to go to someplace far away from England, to pretend to be a muggle, to start a new life. He could become just another body that you pass on the street, barely even turning your eyes towards them. You never wonder who they are, what their lives are like, or what troubles they’re facing. You don’t stop to ask how they’re doing. You don’t greet them or acknowledge their existence. You turn a blind eye to the rest of the world, becoming completely wrapped up in yourself. Because of that, anybody can disappear.

Outside of the wizarding world, outside of England, nobody would be looking for the boy who lives.

They might catch up to him, though. They might have spies all over the globe. They might track him down. They might kill the people that would inevitably grow close to him. They might catch him again; might try to kill him again; might send him off to azkaban again; might make him relive his worst nightmares over and over again.

It’s those doubts that hold him back. Well, those doubts coupled with the fact that he knows he’ll never be able to rest without getting proper revenge on the people who have taken everything away from him.

He takes another sip of coffee.
“Tomorrow.”

“Excuse me?”

Harry takes a deep breath, turns his whole body to face Loki, and with every word dripping with emotion he says, “Tomorrow we’re going into the Ministry. And we’re going to figure out who the fuck is behind all this.”

Loki’s face positively lights up. “Finally, something fun.”

“The fact that you’re so… excited for this… should that worry me?”

“Not at all.” Loki grins. “Mischief is my middle name - this is well in my comfort zone.”

There’s a beat of silence before Harry says, “Something tells me you would have gotten along well with Fred and George.”

“Who are they?”

“They are- no. They were good men.” Harry mentally curses himself at the mistake. His heart clenches.

“That’s where they and I would differ,” Loki offhandedly, “I am no good man, nor are any of the people close to me.”

Harry scoffs, “Stop being so bloody dramatic.”

Loki’s jaw tightens, but he remains silent.

They finish their coffee in silence, and when the white paper cups are empty, Harry makes them disappear with a flick of the elder wand.
“Alright,” Harry starts, “About what we’re going to do tomorrow…”

Chapter End Notes

Your input really helps me write! I use it to judge what people want from this fic, and then I can write according to how people feel, so comments are really appreciated <3
Harry and Loki have a plan - to break into the Ministry.

Chapter Notes

I hope y'all like this ;)

It’s uncharacteristically windy, the trees are bending all around Harry, their huge branches raining leaves down onto the soft ground of the forest. Loki’s just waking up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and pushing himself to his feet.

Harry is rummaging through a small, dragon hide bag containing all the potions that he’s made and hasn’t used yet. A handy charm makes the inside much larger than the outside, though the downside to this is that it’s bloody impossible to find what you’re looking for inside of it. There’s a distinct smashing sound when Harry bumps his hand a bit too hard against an object near the bottom of the bag, and he curses out loud.

“Accio Felix Felicis,” Harry says irritably, casting a quick, wordless reparo charm to the inside of the bag. A small vial wizzes out, straight into Harry’s outstretched hand.

“What’s a Felix Felicis?” Loki mutters from behind Harry, standing on a blanket laid out over the dirty forest floor.

“Luck potion,” Harry replies, his answer short and clipped. “Otherwise known as liquid luck. This one took me a very long time to make. And it was hard. But if there’s a time that we need it, it’s now.”
“Ah. Is that what you keep in your purse?”

“It’s not a purse,” Harry snaps. “It’s a bag. Dragon hide. Very strong, good for carrying all this stuff.” He gestures over the cauldron, burner and the small array of ingredients. He sets about putting everything away, slowly but surely erasing all evidence of them being there in the first place.

“You remember what the plan is?” Harry asks once everything is packed away. Loki has since stood up, made the blanket disappear and somehow left and reappeared with a cup of coffee.

“Of course.” Loki’s voice is dismissive.

“Let’s go over it one more time,” Harry prompts, leaning back against a tree.

Loki sighs, exaggeratedly.

“We go to the Ministry of Magic, kidnap some weaklings-”

“Don’t call them that, and we’re not kidnapping them,” Harry cuts in.

Loki purses his lips, continuing. “We take their things. Use them to get inside. There, we use your fancy little Felix potions and I’ll try to find as much information I can about the things they know about us - folders, paperwork and whatnot. You’ll be…” Loki pauses, trailing off. Harry had conveniently left out what he’d be doing when they drew up the plans the previous night.

“Finding the Minister of Magic,” Harry states firmly.

“...Is that such a good idea?” Loki implores.

“I’ll be fine,” Harry says shortly.
The look that Loki gives him shows Harry just how much the other man does not believe his statement. But it’s Harry’s justice - Harry’s revenge. Nobody will stand in his way, not even Loki.

Loki continues after a moment. “Once we’ve finished, we meet back here.”

Harry takes a deep breath. He reaches into his pocket and takes out a vial of the potion that he brewed the day before, liquid luck.

“You can only have a small amount of this. It’s incredibly lethal.”

“Potter, I’m a god. Drinks don’t kill me,” Loki says patronizingly.

“This isn’t just any other drink. You have to be *careful* with it. People have died taking the wrong doses. I don’t care how well you can hold down your whiskey, this is different,” Harry warns. “Please.” He adds the plea on as a whim, hoping it will have an impact on Loki.

The god raises his pointed chin defiantly, but a sharp nod tells Harry all he needs to know.

“This is it, this is…” Harry takes a deep breath. “This is everything. If we can pull this off… I can be free.” His brow is furrowed and his eyes are filled with want.

“And then you, and the rest of the wizarding world can help get me home, right?” Loki cuts in. His jaw is clenched. “That was the deal, right? I help you, you help me?”

“Yes,” Harry agrees after a pause, as if he’d forgotten. “That was the deal.”

They make their way to London with no problem, as disillusion charms can go a long way. They wait in a back alleyway, hidden off from the general public.

There’s a few muddy puddles. Harry is sure he sees a rat scurrying away under a dumpster earlier. Brick buildings rise up on either side of them. From the street, the sounds of dozens of cars reach their ears. People walking by the entrance of the alleyway pay no attention to the thin passage between the two buildings. They’re invisible, Harry and Loki. Except that they’re entirely *too* visible. Hiding in plain sight.
There’re dark storm clouds above, the promise of heavy rain on the way.

“Are you ready?” Harry’s voice is quiet. It doesn’t shake.

“Yes.” Loki replies easily.

“They should be crossing any second now…” Harry’s voice trails off, keeping his eyes trained on the pedestrians.

Loki’s gaze follows Harry’s. In his pocket, Harry’s fingers fiddle with the vial of Felix Felicis.

As a crowd passes, two people appear.

“There.” Loki whispers, his voice quieter than Harry has ever heard it.

Two men, wearing obscure wizarding clothes, have apparated right beside a crowd of rowdy teenagers who’re only paying attention to themselves. They blend in easily with the abundant crowd of people walking down the street, despite their odd attire. Loki and Harry are following them closely. Harry has changed his appearance with the aid of a polyjuice potion, making him look like just another nameless, faceless muggle walking down the street.

Loki has changed his appearance too, though his changes are much slighter. He’s simply… tweaked himself. He’s shorter, his chin is more square, his hair impossibly short and his build a tad heavier.

Harry’s never been good at blending into crowds. He’s always stood out, and over time he’s grown to simply ignore the way that people look at him and stopped trying to disappear. This doesn’t help him now, when he needs to disappear into a crowd, needs to be just another muggle.

Loki isn’t much better at it than Harry is. He’s used to keeping his chin held high, used to looking down on everybody around him. He’s used to storming into places, wreaking havoc and taking whatever he wants - whatever that may be.
But right now, he cannot do that.

Harry splashes through a puddle, sending droplets of murky water over the bottom of Loki’s legs. They’re walking close together, though not close enough that their shoulders or arms will accidentally brush against one another. Their eyes bore into the backs of the two wizards, who are walking only a few metres in front of them.

The entrance to another alleyway looms to the right. They’re almost upon it. It’s now or never. Harry lets the Elder Wand slip down from his sleeve, just a few inches so that he can grasp it in his hand. With a small, hidden flick of the wrist, Harry performs a wordless imperius curse.

It’s a weird sensation, and Harry isn’t exactly sure how to control it, not completely, but he manages to make the two wizards turn into the alleyway without anybody else on the street noticing, not that they’d care, anyway. A quick “Stupefy!” is all that it takes to knock the two wizards unconscious.

Two hairs. Two vials of Polyjuice Potion. One turns a thick, gloopy brown colour, the other a clear, but tinted pink. Loki grabs the one with the pink tint before Harry can hand him the gross-looking one.

“Bottoms up.”

Their skin bubbles as they change. Harry grows taller; Loki’s body shrinks. Their black hair dissolves into two different shades of brown, and eyes are splashed a dark brown shade. They drag the bodies around a corner and put on the wizards’ robes, hiding the two bodies in a door frame, reminding Harry of his actions so many years ago. They sort through the wizards’ belongings, even though they already have a vague idea of who they are. Edward Smith and Luke Bucherie. Both in their late 40’s. Other frivolous facts are gained as well, though they’re of little help to Harry and Loki.

Harry gains a new sort of confidence from the different face he’s wearing. He holds his chin high, leading the way the the familiar telephone box.

He catches his bottom lip between his teeth, taking a deep breath and then dialing the numbers he hopes haven’t changed. 6, 2, 4, 4, 2.

They get in smoothly. The trip down into one of the best-guarded wizarding locations is flawlessly easy. Considering they’re two wanted criminals, perhaps Harry should have been a tad more
cautious.

As they step out into the Atrium, Harry’s breath catches in his throat, and he stumbles back a step.

Three hundred years.

Three hundred *fucking* years, and he’s here. He’s in the Ministry of Magic. His head swirls.

The floor is polished marble, the walls made up of a shiny black brick, stretching high up to the tall, curved ceiling. Office windows are placed along the walls, the bright lights that shine from them illuminating the hard-working employees.

It’s bright and bustling and… for lack of a better description, purely magical.

In the centre of the huge, round room there is a magnificent, tall fountain. Giant golden statues stand tall on podiums, sculptures of significant wizards, portrayed in their best light. It’s glamorous, everything radiating power.

Not much has changed in all the years.

Emerald flames flare out from indents in the wall, wizards and witches appearing, ducking out of the small space and disappearing into the bustling crowd of people hurrying to get to their office, anxious to start the day promptly.

Harry stands there, in someone else’s skin, staring up at the world around him, unmoving. Loki grabs the crook of his elbow, dragging him forwards a few paces until Harry seems to snap out of his trance-like state. Harry blinks rapidly, tugging his arm out of Loki’s grasp and walking forwards purposefully.

“Keep your head *in the game,* ” Loki, or rather, Luke Bucherie hisses sharply.

Harry grits his teeth. He shoots Loki a look before slipping away from him, disappearing into the flow of people, following where it’s taking him. *Time to find the Minister.*
The wizards and witches walk in waves, organized to a T. It’s loud but quiet at the same time.

The body that Harry is in isn’t particularly popular - but they aren’t particularly unpopular, either. It’s a fine balance that allows people to say a quick hello, ask how he’s doing and then go on their way.

Bodies are pressed against bodies in the lift, the busy morning rush not leaving much room for anybody.

“Thought your office was down,” someone says in Harry’s ear, uncomfortably close.

Harry clears his throat. “Getting some paperwork.”

There’s a hum of approval from the prying wizard. Something tells Harry that the real Edward would have said more - engaged in some sort of work-related gossip at the very least. But Harry is not the real Edward. He’s flawed in his sullenness and isolation, accumulating no social skills over the three hundred years of being alone.

“Cheers,” Harry says offhandedly when he slips out of the lift at the next stop, along with a plump little witch carrying an impossibly tall stack of paperwork. Harry is amazed that she can lift it.

He stumbles over the bottom of his robes, losing his balance for a fraction of a second. The robes that Edward owns are too long. Maybe they’ve been passed down through his family; that would support the musky old sent that they hold.

He only has a vague idea of where the Minister’s office is. Somewhere on this floor, he’s sure. Beyond that he’s clueless. His eyes dart around restlessly, although he’s got plenty of time to find the correct office. Though he is tense, he’s finding it surprisingly easy to slip back into the wizarding world. A nod towards people who look his way. Eyes searching but head not swiveling around restlessly as if he’s never been there before.

Someone bumps into him. A pile of papers fly out onto the floor, fanning out, scuttling away.

“Shi- sorry,” Harry ducks down, gathering up a large quantity of the spilled papers.
“It’s no trouble, Ed,” comes a humorous reply. Ah. So, a friend then.

“So sorry.” Harry - or rather, Edward - glances down absentmindedly at the papers. It’s official-looking; he only catches a glimpse of: ‘EVIL: Lurking in YOUR own home’ before he hands it over to the tall, handsome man standing in front of him.

“It’s alright, Ed,” the man emphasizes. “Hey, how’d it go with the raid last night? Didn’t expect to see you in today.”

“The raid?” Harry’s caught off guard.

“...Yes.” The man looks at Harry quizzically. Around them, people pass by, unperturbed. “I know that you don’t want to talk about it, it being your cousins’ house after all.” He lets out a small chuckle. “But the law is the law.”

“Yes,” Harry stumbles through an awkward sentence, “It is the law - the raid - that is. Ah. It went well, we were able to er- get what we had been looking for.”

The man raises an eyebrow. “You killed him then?” He says it so nonchalantly. Like it’s normal. Like the real Edward wouldn’t be offended, wouldn’t act surprised. People pass by. Some of them have to have heard. Not one pair of eyes shift in their direction.

“Er-” Harry shoves his hands deep into the pockets of the too-long robe. “Yeah.”

The worst part of it is, he doesn’t know if it’s a lie or not. He doesn’t know what type of man Edward is. All he knows is that every Friday he takes the visitor’s entrance to the Ministry. Every Friday he walks past alleyways with his friend. That’s all that Harry needed to know.

The man seems satisfied. He nods, inclining his head towards Harry ever so slightly.

It’s just as the man turns away that the alarm goes off. A loud, blaring noise, pulsing through the Ministry. The lights flicker off for a second, and he can hear someone give a short scream of shock.
“Edward- quickly-” The man grabs Harry’s arm, right above the elbow. “You’re not supposed to be on this level, people are going to suspect you - come on. ”

It’s the fear in the man’s voice that makes Harry run beside him, shooting down a stairwell.

Harry can only catch small portions of what people are saying - or rather, yelling over the alarms: “A breach in security!”

“Someone’s brought dark potions-!”

“Could ruin-”

“We must find-”

“Lock everything down! Everything!”

The man’s hand travels down Harry’s arm until he’s gripped at his hand, lacing their fingers together.

“Was it you?” The man’s voice is low. They’re speed walking, down the last corridor that will lead to the auditorium. “Tell me if it was. Tell me now.”

Harry’s mouth goes dry. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He finally says.

The man’s head spins towards Harry’s. Their eyes meet. “You’re lying.” A pause. They’re still moving. Harry averts his eyes. “It was you.”

Harry feels something uncomfortable lodge in his throat. Someone pushes past Harry, knocking into him and sending him flying to the ground. The man’s hand is ripped out of Harry’s grasp.

“You two should be going to your stations!” the someone barks. One of his eyes is swollen shut. There’s a scar, pale and pink, running down from his jaw and disappearing under his robes. “Wait-it’s you.” He says it with contempt. “You’re coming with me.” He grabs the collar of Harry’s robes, dragging him to his feet.
“Wait!”

“No, Robert. I won’t wait. This man murdered my family and he’s wandering around the Ministry?!” His voice is dripping with hatred.

Harry’s face runs pale. What kind of man Edward is. What has he done?

Harry is shaken roughly. “You’re coming with me, you hear me?” There’s a vein bulging on the man’s neck. “It was you who snuck those potions here, wasn’t it? Wasn’t it?!” He’s yelling now. Harry can barely breathe, the grip on the robes around his neck is so tight. “Were you going to murder more innocent people?” the man spits in Harry’s face. “Trust me when I say that pretty soon, when the Ministry finds out what you’ve been doing, you’re going to wish you had never been born!” What kind of man had Harry turned into?

“Please - Marcus. It wasn’t him - it wasn’t Edward, I can prove it, I can-”

“It was him!” Marcus screams, eyes wide with anger and a hint of madness. “I SAW HIM!”

“LEANING OVER THEIR BODIES!”

“LAUGHING, HE WAS LAUGHING, ROBERT!”

“It wasn’t him,” Robert pleads.

The corners of Harry’s vision are darkening with shadows. His hand scrambles across Marcus’s arm, trying to rip him away.

“It was,” Marcus spits. “It was him. And he’s going to pay.”

“You’re not going to get the justice you want,” Robert states.
“As long as this man,” Marcus shakes Harry roughly, “dies, then I will be happy.”

He drags Harry down the hallway. Thankfully though, he’s loosened his grip slightly. Harry can breathe.

They make it to the auditorium. The alarms are starting to make Harry’s head hurt. People are rushing, piling themselves into lines at the floo network entrances. Ministry officials stand in their way, wands raised. Nobody is to leave.

Harry’s gaze scans the crowd desperately. Where is Loki? They need to get out of there, now. This was not how he had planned things to go.

Distantly, Harry hears Marcus and Robert arguing around him.

The alarm continues to blare over the sounds of yelling and people’s shoes against the floor, running. Harry wants to scream. He’s not used to this - all the noise, all the movement, all the bustle.

Where the ever loving fuck is Loki? They have to leave, right now. Before they’re caught, before they’re found out.

Panic bubbles inside of him. He grips his wand tightly.


Eyes, hundred upon hundred of them. Harry can see the Ministry officials barging through the crowds. His blood boils.

“HE’S EVIL!”
That’s what crosses a line. Voldemort was evil - not *Harry*.

“I AM NOT!” Harry roars.

He snaps. He wrenches himself away from Marcus’s heavy grip. “I AM NOT.” He repeats. Even if this Edward is evil, Harry sure as hell isn’t and he will not be treated as such.

The Ministry officials are getting closer. They’re having a hard time pushing through the crowd.

Harry can feel his magic under his skin, ready to burst out. Ready to kill, ready to fight. His breathing is coming out in ragged gasps. His face is red - coloured with anger. He grips his wand so tightly that his knuckles turn white.

“Ed- no, stop, please.” Roberts voice breaks through Harry’s anger.

He turns halfway towards him. “I’m sorry.” He murmurs those words so quietly, owing Robert at least an apology for what he’s about to do to Edward’s life. “I have to do this.”

And then, in a flurry of movement he’s throwing a hex towards Marcus, sending him tumbling to the floor. He doesn’t get back up.

“STAY BACK!” Harry yells as the Ministry officials - the aurors, the soldiers, the fighters - advance on Harry. They’ve surrounded him; he’s trapped. He can’t take them all at once. But they don’t have to know that.

Harry brandishes his wand.

“*Expelliarmus!*”

“*Stupefy!*”

“*Expulso!*”
Curses and counter curses roll off Harry’s tongue, almost too easily.

“Protego!”

“Stupefy!”

Harry whirls around.

He’s no longer just a wizard; he’s a natural phenomenon. A tsunami. A force to be reckoned with. His wand slashes through the air. He barely has to speak the curses out loud. They just happen, all around him, as if by pure instinct. He holds one hand up to the ceiling, and brings the light fixtures down with a swing of his hand. He directs the water from the fountain. The fire that he produces from his wand. The earth that makes up the Ministry. He commands the elements, all at once yet all separately.

It’s then, when the people see what Harry is capable of, holding off the whole Ministry, that the screaming starts. The running, the panicking truly starts. They’re all trying to get away.

Behind Harry, standing frozen in shock, is Robert. Harry casts a strong shield charm around him, guarding the other wizard from the wrath of those trying to get to him.

He tears through the laws of physics, making the world around him do impossible things.

It feels like an eternity. It will have just been a few minutes, a few moments. Time passes differently when pain is raking through you and anger is embedded in your veins. Time changes when physics is torn apart. Time morphs when there’re alarms blaring ever so loudly, making your head pound. Hexes fly through the air

He can’t look everywhere at once, can’t be everywhere at once.

He’s one man, and he’s battling against the whole world.
The people fighting him are desperate - they’re scared. They’ve thrown common decency and pride out of the window. All that matters to them now is their own lives.

His back is exposed.

“CRUCIO!”

But the curse never hits Harry.

Someone else is screaming in agony. A man, falling to his knees.

Harry roars, an inhuman sound. It’s just another echo through the cavern. He spins, his wand streaking through the air. Blood suddenly starts dripping, gushing, running out of the wizards. It’s not enough to kill them - even the volumes of anger coursing through Harry can’t make him kill anybody. But it’s enough to slow them down. It’s enough to make them hurt.

The wizard who took the cruciatus curse stands up slowly, shakily. He holds his chin high. He narrows his eyes. He clenches his jaw. Around him, the world seems to still.

Loki.

Green light, so bright Harry can’t see. Screaming, begging.

Pain.

“Sectumsempra.” It’s not Harry who says it.

He watches as Loki collapses.

And then the world explodes, and it’s all Harry can do to leap forwards, grab Loki and disapparate.
It’s not possible to disapparate directly out of or into the ministry - or, at least, it’s not supposed to be possible.

Maybe it’s Harry’s anger, or his pain that gives him the energy to do it. He can feel his insides twisting and turning as they rip through the wards and charms surrounding the ministry.

They land on a soft, mossy surface.

Harry’s on Loki instantly. There’s blood everywhere - why isn’t the god healing himself?

“Please, fuck.” Harry grabs at the robes that Loki’s wearing. The polyjuice is starting to wear off. Harry can feel his skin bubbling unnaturally.

He rips the robes off the god. His hands shake as he waves his wand over Loki’s chest, chanting healing spells. Loki’s eyes are closed, he’s not making any noise. If it weren’t for the faint rise and fall of his chest Harry would have thought him dead. But Loki’s alive, and Harry’s trembling as he tries his hardest to heal him.

“Wake up, dammit!” Harry curses under his breath.

He continues with the healing spells. Over and over again, running his wand over Loki’s body. The wounds close up, though they leave angry red scars in their wake.

It’s only five minutes later that Loki wakes up - but it feels like forever.

His eyes shoot open suddenly, and he takes in a huge gasp of air and rockets to his feet, a wild look in his eye.

“Loki.” Harry stands up slowly. He has his wand in his hand. “Loki, it’s just me.”

“Potter.” Loki seems to deflate, his shoulders slumping. However, his breaths are coming too fast - on the verge of hyperventilating. “Potter.” He repeats.
“Yeah… just me.” Harry says. He takes a step towards the god. “It’s alright. I got us out of the Ministry.”

“How - w-what happened?” Loki stutters, and looks shocked at himself for doing so.

“Well, we were attacked-”

“I know what much,” Loki interrupts.

Harry presses his lips into a thin line. “You were hit with a curse. I think someone was firing it at me or… Robert. I don’t know. Suddenly, you were there and you got the full blast. You might have been hit with others as well, I couldn’t tell. You were unconscious for about fifteen minutes.” Harry gestures to the ground where Loki was lying. It’s stained red. “Sectumsempra,” he says with contempt. “I’ve only seen it once before. It’s-” Harry swallows, remembering Malfoy. “It’s not designed for people to survive.”

Loki narrows his eyes. His heavy breathing has ceased. “I’m not a mere person.”

“I know,” Harry says hurriedly. “But even your body didn’t heal it automatically.” Harry looks down at Loki’s torso. Some cuts still ooze with blood.

Loki catches his gaze and looks down at his own body. He frowns.

“Does it hurt?” Harry asks.

“What do you think?” Loki says sarcastically.

“You’re a god. You don’t feel pain, yada yada. Some bullshit about you not being a regular human,” Harry mimics Loki, changing his voice.

Loki’s frown grows. “Of course I can feel pain. Of course it bloody well hurts.” He turns away from Harry.
Harry can see his shoulders rise and fall as he takes a deep, calming breath. He turns back to Harry, but their eyes don’t meet. Loki stalks forwards, grabs his blood-stained robes and shoves them on roughly. Harry’s not one hundred percent sure but he thinks he sees Loki wince ever so slightly. He turns away from Harry again, running a hand through his long black hair. Another deep breath.

Loki gets a few steps away from Harry before he has to lean against a tree, letting it support him, allowing him to stay standing. The adrenaline that kept him up before has worn off, and exhaustion seems to hits him like a punch to the stomach.

“You alright?” Harry asks carefully.

In reply, Loki shoots him a murderous look. Harry watches him carefully, but only for a second.

He starts setting up wards. It’s second nature, at this point. It only takes him a few minutes. Besides, if he has any say in it, they’ll be leaving within the hour. He feels uneasy. Maybe the Ministry officials have figured out a way to track them and they’re about to surround Harry and Loki, capturing them once and for all.

Loki slides down the tree, into a sitting position.

He looks pathetic, covered in blood. One hand is pressed up against his stomach, the other laying limply against the forest floor.

Before Harry can stop himself, he’s padding over to the other man, crouching down in front of him, gently prying his hand away from his stomach. Opening his robes, Harry traces his wand over the wounds that still ooze blood.

“We can’t keep doing this,” Loki gasps. Harry hushes him. The god is in pain.

“I’m sorry,” Loki continues. The way that he says it suggests that he isn’t used to apologizing. “I messed up.”

“We messed up,” Harry corrects him. “We went in there as a team, remember?” He continues to cast his magic over Loki, who looks to be on the brink of losing consciousness yet again.
“Yeah. I guess.”

Loki is bathed in magic. His own seems to have diminished drastically, but Harry’s is as strong as ever, and he projects it onto Loki.

“We need to do better than this,” Loki says softly. “There’s no way I’ll ever get home if this is how we’re going about it.”

“Well? What do you suppose we do then?”

“I-” Loki’s sentence is drowned out by a pained gasp before it’s even begun. “Be careful Potter, that hurts.” He chides angrily.

“Sorry,” Harry says quickly. “Go on.”

Loki’s hand fumbles in one of the pockets of his robe. He pulls out a tiny handful of organized papers, which magically grow in size until they’re a standard shape. Harry realizes with a start that it’s not just a bunch of papers, but files.

Loki puts them on the ground beside him.

“I found these while you were off planning to murder some old nag.”

“What are they?”

“Everything the Ministry knows about a certain group of people,” Loki says triumphantly.

“How on Earth is that supposed to help us?” Harry barks. He doesn’t stop casting the healing charms over Loki.

“No, you don’t get it. The Ministry, it’s… it’s not good. It’s covered in fraud. Everything’s corrupt.” Loki tilts his head back so that it’s resting against the tree. “There’s got to be hundreds of people who are losing their lives - like you did.” Harry bristles. “Some of them are angry, I’m sure.”
He continues after a slight pause. “We can use that anger.”

“How?” Harry asks, although he can already see the pieces of a plan forming in his own head.

“Their hatred can fuel an uprising.”
As dawn touches the forest, Harry is ready to leave. He’s already wiped away all evidence of them being there. Loki is awake, but barely. One of his hands is pressed against his chest, as though it still hurts.

“Ready?” Harry’s voice is soft. Birdsong echoes around them.

Loki doesn’t answer him. He stands, grimacing. He raises his chin high - arrogant. Harry knows he must be in pain, but the god is doing everything in his power to hide it. Typical. Harry almost wants to punch him, to hurt him until the god admits to not being okay. Almost, not quite.

“I’m not the best with healing spells,” Harry finds himself saying, trying to add some sound to the awkward silence between them. “I don’t even know what Snape used on Malfoy…” He trails off, brain thinking hard.

“I’m not a mere mortal,” Loki hisses. “I don’t know who this ‘Malfoy’ is that you speak of, but I assure you that this… spell does not hurt me as it must have hurt him.”

Harry resists the temptation to stare at Loki and roll his eyes. He rambles, because it’s all that he can do to fill the silence as Loki gathers his strength. The birdsong isn’t loud enough. “The only other time I’ve seen this curse was when…”
Harry wondered vaguely if Malfoy forgave him before he died. He clenched his jaw, spitting the next few words out. “...When I fought a boy named Draco. He was sad, lost, maybe. But he was also—” Harry rubs a hand over his eyes. They’re burning. “-he was with a dark wizard… he was helping - he ruined so many lives.”

A pause. Loki seems almost curious.

“I didn’t know what the curse did. All I knew is that I was angry and he was fighting me so I just… I used it. Just like that. A man named Severus Snape had to come in and save his life. Loki, listen, this is a serious curse. I don’t know if the Prince invented it - maybe that’s how Snape knew how to help him… but either way. It’s okay to be hurting. I’m quite handy with potions, I can try brewing a healing one or pain relief. Something, at the very least.”

“Did the boy - Draco, did he deserve it?” Loki asks, eyes gleaming. He disregards Harry’s offer completely.

Harry swallows thickly. He doesn’t reply for some time, long enough that Loki assumes Harry isn’t going to answer at all.

“No.”

A simple word. Two letters, but in this case the meaning is deeper than those two letters let on. Draco Malfoy had been suffering. Back then, when Harry could have made a significant difference, he had blamed Malfoy for everything - letting his feud get in the way of life and death, in the end.

But hadn’t it been the Malfoys, Draco and Narcissa, who had saved his life when it really mattered? Narcissa, in a forest much like the one where Harry currently stands. Narcissa, declaring to the Dark Lord that Harry Potter, the boy who lived, lives no more? Earlier when Harry, Ron and Hermione had been dragged off to Malfoy Manor, which had been turned into a ‘safe house’ of sorts for the death eaters, hadn’t it been Draco himself saying that the boy with the swollen face was not Harry Potter, but somebody else, the likes of which the Dark Lord would have nothing to do with?
In the end, after everything else, Harry owed a lot to the Malfoys.

Memories wash over Harry, and he can do very little to make them stop.

“Scared, Potter?”

Draco Malfoy’s voice runs through his mind at an alarming rate. He spent so much time and wasted so much energy hating Malfoy. He had forgiven him, in the end, even after all the destruction he’d caused. Kind of, at least. It was better than nothing.

Standing on the edge of that lake, so many years ago, Harry hadn’t hated him. He doesn't think that Malfoy hated him, either. But he’s not the best judge of that. He had never been good at reading Malfoy. He was an enigma, wrapped up in layers upon layers of personalities. Harry had been able to get a glimpse of one of those personalities - nothing more. In the end, did anybody really know Malfoy?

“It was my fault,” Malfoy had whispered. He was going to say something else, then. He had gotten two words out: a “look” and a “Potter.” Because after all that time they had never transitioned to first names. There had been some meaning, some feeling, some emotion in the words. What he had to say was obviously something important. Maybe extending a hand of friendship, maybe offering an apology that had more depth than just a muttered ‘sorry’.

But he had lost his nerve. He had thrown the rest of the pebbles in the lake and Harry had watched as they sunk to the bottom. Malfoy had spun on his heel and left without so much as a backwards glance. Harry had been left staring at his back as he walked away.

Harry doesn’t know what Malfoy would have said. Before he could ask, Malfoy had died.

Before he could ask, Harry Potter’s whole world had fallen into shambles.

Every single person that he had grown close with - every single person that he had loved-

Tears prick his eyes. He blinks them away. This is a time to be strong. A god is watching him, eyes trained on his every move like a hungry wolf waiting for a show of weakness to attack. Harry isn’t
going to give him that satisfaction, isn’t going to show someone so powerful how weak he can be.

“We need to leave.”

Loki doesn’t ask as to where they’ll be going. He’s long since abandoned such trivial questions. It’s better, after all, to simply wait and see. Eventually with Harry Potter everything becomes clear, it seems.

Harry stalks forwards. There’s a crease in his forehead as he reaches for Loki’s hand. For a moment - less than a second, really - Harry marvels at how soft Loki’s hand is. And then he’s spinning on the spot. The place that he is thinking of in his head is a place that he never thought he’d go back to. But Loki is hurting, and they need shelter with a bed. More than that, they need a place where they can safely hide out - a place where they can safely go through the files that Loki nicked. A place to sort out just exactly what they’re supposed to be doing next.

There’s only one location that serves all those purposes. Harry promised himself that he’d never go back there. Desperate times, it seems, call for desperate measures. The forest around them disappears in a swirl of colours. Harry squeezes his eyes shut as they move through space; he’s never been one to particularly enjoy apparition, always being a little nervous about splinching himself (which he has done, for the record).

He grits his teeth as they land. He doesn't want to open his eyes. Scared as to what he might find if he does, perhaps. Loki is letting go of him, stumbling away a few steps, taking in the surroundings no doubt. Harry takes a deep breath. Seconds pass and he has yet to open his eyes. He hates the way that it smells the same. Hates the way it sounds the same. A creek, trickling by not far to his right. Birds overhead and the breaking of branches as a family of deer gingerly make their way through the array of closely-packed trees.

The air is damp. Harry can tell rain is on its way.

Finally, slowly, cautiously, Harry opens his eyes. It’s not exactly as he left it. How could it be? It has to have been close to two hundred and… eighty? Seventy years ago? Harry can’t remember exactly. The trees are bigger, tougher. There’s a whole lot of new trees, and the underbrush is dense. The creek, which was previously quite wide, is down to about a metre in width. Harry can see a few frogs resting on the rocks by the bank. Ivy crawls its way up the trees. Over time, it will suffocate the trees. But now it’s too new and does little more than add a pretty decoration.

“Potter,” Loki calls from somewhere behind Harry, who’s staring at the water running down the creek.
“What?”

“What?”

“If you had a house all along, why in Odin’s name were you forcing me to sleep on a filthy forest floor?” Loki’s voice is angry. It takes a large amount of energy not to spin around and hex him.

Harry clenches his jaw. So the hut’s still standing, then.

His answer comes out just as tense as he is. “Some things happened here.” He grimaces. “…A very long time ago.” Still, it has ghosts. Metaphorically, that is. There aren’t any real ghosts that he knows of.

Loki doesn’t seem to be phased in the slightest. Harry turns to watch him stalk forwards, towards the small building. It’s not much, around the same size that Hagrid’s hut was back at Hogwarts. The glass in the windows has been blown out, plant life having grown over where it lay in the ground. The door hangs open. A robin flies through one of the gaping windows.

When Loki steps inside, Harry knows he has to follow him. He doesn’t want to, but it seems… wrong. To let the god go in there first, to not make sure it’s safe. He doubts it would be particularly unsafe; the place is so well-guarded that it’s more than likely that the only beings that have been in it since Harry left are birds, or maybe the occasional fox. But even that's a stretch.

Harry nudges his glasses back up his nose with the back of his hand. It’s an act of habit more than anything else. A reflex. His hands shake a little bit when he finally gets the nerve to step forwards. He has to ball up his robe into his fists to stop them from trembling.

“It’s going to use some work,” Loki says loudly from inside. “But I daresay it’ll do.”

High compliments from Loki Laufeyson, Harry notes.

He steps inside cautiously.

The place is in shambles. Harry’s not surprised; it’s not like it was intended to last hundreds of years. It’s still standing, but the floor has almost completely rotted away in some spaces. The door to the bedroom is hanging off its hinges. The main room, complete with a small broken-down kitchen and
The wide ‘living space’ is covered in a layer of dust and animal droppings.

Harry runs a hand through his greasy hair. It’s getting too long again. He’ll have to cut it. With a swish of the elder wand, the dust disappears.

He tries his best not to look at the stain that is spread across the floor, deep into the wood, a few feet away from the door. He scratches his fingers over the back of one hand, suddenly itchy, almost as if there’s bugs crawling all over him. He looks up at the ceiling hopelessly. His eyes trail across the walls, noting the cracks and holes. He trudges over to the bedroom, through the open door.

The window over the bed is nothing more than a gaping hole in the wall.

The magic that Harry cast over the place has kept it together. It’s still there.

The bed is still pressed against the wall. The sheets are still pulled back and half on the floor - just as Harry left it.

He sighs, stepping forwards and sitting on the very edge of the bed, barely perched there like a bird ready to take off in flight.

Memories wash over him in giant waves, tsunamis crashing over his head. He can’t fight them away.

It had been roughly twenty years after the events at Hogwarts, and Harry was angry. At the world - at himself, the Ministry... everyone. But deeper than the anger, more powerful and prominent, was the sadness. It was a stronger emotion, and by far a heavier emotion. It tugged at his chest and made it hard to breathe. It sent him to the brink of everything. It was the cause of the insomnia that led to sleepless night upon sleepless night, when he stared at the stars as if they’d give him an answer to his cries for help.

He had longed for something regular... something familiar and comfortable. He longed for his old life back, when he had been eleven and was thrust into a world of magic with two amazing friends at his side. He had longed to go back to the Burrow, to be enveloped into Mrs Weasley’s arms just one more goddamn time.

But that chapter of his life had closed.
Instead of his best friends surrounding him, forests had enveloped him.

He had been wandering around one of these forests one day. His mind was in a dark place; he had no goal to work up to. There was nothing to live for, anymore.

Until, he had stumbled upon a cabin - more like a shack than anything else, really. It was overgrown and abandoned. He hadn’t gone inside straight away.

The sun had been shining, filtering down to the forest floor through the canopy of leaves above him. A little ways away in front of the cabin was a river. He stood there for a long, long time, just listening to the sound of the water rushing past.

When he did step foot inside the cabin, there was a small bark-squeal noise and he whipped out his wand, casting a quick ‘lumos’. A fox stared at him curiously. When Harry moved to the side, the fox streaked past him, back to its home.

Harry had thought, This could be home, couldn’t it?

And, Maybe I can get myself together - maybe I can go to the Ministry or something… take veritaserum… maybe this could be the start of me getting myself back on track.

He felt better after he told himself that this was the start of a brand new, happy beginning.

He used his magic to get the bigger things cleaned up - fixing the floor, repairing windows, installing a door, clearing out the plants from where they’d made their home, crawling through the windows. He even got rid of a slight infestation of doxies. The rest he did by hand. The ‘muggle’ way. But it made Harry feel better, putting his energy towards something positive. It made him feel like he had made a difference, no matter how slight that difference may have been. It was something, and that counted for a lot more than nothing.

He shakes himself out of the memories.

The reality of the situation hits him like a bus - he’s in the exact same position that he had been in so many years ago. At the same time though, it’s all different. There’s hundreds of years between now
and the last time he was here. There’s thousands of memories.

There’s a blood stain on the floor and the windows are blown out.

He gets up from the bed quickly, exiting the room to see where Loki is - if there’s any fragments of curses here he doesn’t want the god to be alone, even if he thinks he’s capable of taking care of himself. Harry’s magic - this whole realm of magic is different than what Loki is used to. He may be a god, but he still is able to hold ignorance.

Loki is sitting on the faded, moth-eaten couch. One hand is pressed up against his stomach. His eyes are screwed up in pain. A rare display of weakness. Loki would never, ever willingly show this side of himself to Harry.

Harry doubts that Loki would willingly show his weakness to anybody - not just him.

He clears his throat pointedly. Loki’s eyes fly open and he takes his hand away from his stomach, so quick it’s as if he’s been burned.

“I can try making a potion for that, y’know,” Harry offers, carefully keeping his voice light.

“It doesn’t hurt,” Loki snaps roughly.

“And pigs fly.” Harry rolls his eyes. “It’s no trouble.”

“Potter,” Loki growls. “I do not need your pity.”

“This isn’t pity!” Harry snaps, his voice rising. “I need you to be healthy, Loki!” He has a dangerous, wild look in his eyes. “What we’re going to have to do will require me to trust you to have my fucking back! I can’t do that if you’re injured! Neither of us are going to survive if you can’t handle yourself in a battle!”

Outside, the trees suddenly start swaying, even though there’s only a slight breeze.
Loki clenches his teeth. His eyes are narrowed, his thick eyebrows scrunched up.

Harry thanks Merlin for shrinking spells as he enlarges his dragonhide bag, accio’ing his cauldron and a few ingredients. He sets it up on the stone countertop.

He’s well practised with healing potions (an encounter with a dragon made him aware of how much he has to rely on his own potion making and magic skills to make sure he stays relatively in one piece) but for Loki, he thinks he’ll need something stronger. He has no idea what Madame Pomfrey and Professor Snape did to Malfoy to ensure his pain ceased, so he starts throwing some basic components into the cauldron. He steps outside for a minute to fill a flask with water from the creek and then pours most of it into the cauldron, drinking the rest.

He lights a small fire under the cauldron, being careful to keep the heat low, bringing the mixture to a boil very slowly. He uses the elder wand to stir it, then spoons in a small amount of crushed unicorn horn, watching as the potion suddenly flares up with a cloud of smoke. When the smoke disappears, the liquid is thick and golden.

Harry furrows his eyebrows in concentration, immersed in the potion for quite some time before he deems it ready. He pours it into an empty flask, using magic to clean up the cauldron and the array of ingredients that he’s left splayed across the countertop.

“Here.” He pads over to Loki, who’s still sitting on the couch. He’s been watching the entire time, Harry realises with a jolt. He hands Loki the flask. “This should help… I think.”

Loki peers at it in a doubtful manner before taking it from Harry’s hand. “You sure this isn’t some elaborate plan to poison me?”

“I could have poisoned you earlier,” Harry points out. “But I didn’t.”

Loki raises an eyebrow. “Maybe you did and I’ve been dead this entire time.” He takes a swig of the potion.

“Maybe,” Harry says suspiciously, trying to keep a hint of humor in his voice.

He waves the elder wand around, letting his magic seep into the cracks of the cabin, dust leaping out from where it has been piling up. He hums with concentration as he bewitches the roses and vines
that have grown through the windows, making them retreat.

The blood stain on the wood has disappeared. Harry knows for a fact that he himself didn’t do that. He turns towards Loki, looking at the god quizzically. Loki avoids his searching gaze. He takes another sip of the potion from the flask, and carefully pulls up his shirt a little bit.

Harry stares at Loki, then follows his gaze down to the god’s stomach. The scars that were previously a dark angry red, still oozing with blood, are now a pale pink. The inflamed skin around them has turned from a purplish-red to Loki’s normal skin colour, pale ivory.

“It worked then,” Harry says, matter of factly. “That’s good to know. It will be useful.”

“Harry…”

Loki doesn’t normally call him by his first name. “What?”

“...Thankyou.”

“Yeah well.” Harry awkwardly scratches the back of his neck. “Thank you, too.”

“What did I do?” Loki looks up at Harry, and their eyes meet.

Harry gestures to where the blood stain had been. Loki’s face flushes red. “It was nothing.”

“That wasn’t nothing,” Harry argues.

“A simple spell, barely any magic. It was nothing.”

Harry grits his teeth. “I wasn’t always alone here.” He moves forwards, sitting on the couch beside Loki. There’s space between them.
Loki looks on, eyes gleaming with curiosity but not asking any outright questions himself.

Harry waits a beat. His words get stuck in his throat. “There was a guy - a squib.”

“A squid?” Loki cuts across him.

“No, you idiot. A squib. His parents were wizards but he didn't have a drop of magic in his veins.”

“Oh,” says Loki quietly, then, “Go on.”

“I found this place pretty soon after the Ministry… after everyone left.” He rushes. “I needed something positive to focus my energy on, and this place was it.” He looks around the small room. “I know it doesn't seem like much, but it was something for me to do back then, cleaning it up and organizing things so that it was somewhat livable. It took some time. But I did it.”

Harry takes a deep breath. “Tobias - the squib - had been wandering around the forest. My wards were giving him a hell of a time.” Harry chuckles, somewhat sadly. “I found him. He looked lost...

“But maybe he wasn't; he seemed to know the forest better than I did. At any rate, he didn't seem to recognize me or hate me so I… offered him a place to stay - just for the night, mind you. But… that night turned into two and then three and then it just kinda- melted into weeks, y’know?

“A year had passed before I knew it. I don't know, everything in my life up to that point had seemed so… dark and I was always fighting. So then, when it was just me, him and the forest... I don't know.”

Harry babbles, stumbling over words. “It felt safe, almost. I was happy. At least, I think I was.”

Harry takes another deep breath. When he doesn't continue after that, Loki prompts him. “So what happened? There obviously wasn't a happy ever after.”

“Nah.” Harry fiddles with his hands, wishing he had a drink in them. “For three years it was fine and then…”
Memories overtake him.

Tobias was tall, his curly hair brushing the tops of the door frames as he walked through them. His skin was always warm, even through the cold winters, when their little cabin in the giant forest was bathed in snow. His face always seemed to be home to a smile, and kind friendly eyes that looked at Harry with love. It had never changed, from the first day when Harry had awkwardly invited him in, trying to ignore how the cabin still looked all old and raggedy, to the last day, when Harry was impossibly comfortable around him and the cabin was furnished and warm.

The mundane things were what charmed Harry the most, he thinks.

Like how Tobias would walk for an hour to get to a field full of wildflowers, just to pick an armful of them and carry them back for another hour, returning sweaty and covered in leaves and pollen. He’d put them in glasses or mugs, filling them with water and placing them all around the cabin. He could have just asked Harry to use his magic and conjure up some flowers. He never did, though.

He would light a fire with paper, wood and matches in the wood stove they’d found and installed, instead of letting Harry cast a simple warming charm.

“...Then, they found us.”

“Who?”


Fire and blood and screams flash before his eyes. He shakes them away. “They were looking for me. I guess if you stay in one spot too long they… I don’t know.” He takes a deep breath. “I tried to save him, I really did.”

He rubs his hands together uncomfortably, ducking his head and hunching his back. “Fuck.”

“It’s all their fault!” Harry’s angry. “They keep taking and taking and taking. I’m sick of it, Loki! I just-” He blinks away the tears that threaten to fall from his eyes. “I just… why me? Why on Earth is it me who all this is happening to? Did I like - fuck up real bad in a past life or something, and this is
“Don’t be daft, reincarnation isn’t real,” Loki scoffs.

“Maybe not in your dimension, but here…”

“When souls die, that’s it. There's no coming back.” Loki glares. “Don’t be an idiot.”

“Fine!” Harry whips towards Loki, a desperate look on his face. “Then what am I doing wrong? All my life all I’ve had is hardship. How on earth is that fair?”

“It’s not,” says Loki, quietly. His voice is so soft, Harry’s surprised. His tone suggests that he knows exactly what Harry feels. Desperation and hopelessness mixed in with anger and sadness. Above all though, the bravery is thick, mixed in with every single word. Bravery that can and will lead to greatness. Ambition, too, just as strong as the courage. Ambition for something greater.

The blood stains on the floor had been Tobias. He had bled out there, almost three hundred years ago. Choking and screaming at Harry to run, he had died. Harry clenches his teeth. Just another name on a long list.

A list of the people the Ministry had taken from him.

He seethes with anger.

When he glances out of the window and sees flowers, all he can think about is a soft utter. “I got us flowers - to freshen up the place.” And a pair of warm, large brown eyes.

He hasn’t been back here in almost three hundred years.

Outside, rain pours down, and Loki flinches as thunder rolls.
Harry and Loki go to Vienna, with the hope of help from Natasha Romanoff.

I hope y'all like this!!!

Nights, Harry thinks, are the worst. At least, here they are. In a place so intertwined with memories the little sleep he does manage to catch is ridden with nightmares. Insomnia clings to him. He’s tried his best to sleep on the moth-eaten couch, but it hasn’t worked all that well. After years and years of sleeping on damp, bumpy forest floors, the cushions on the couch are too soft. It feels like he’s falling. The roof above his head is too constricting, the walls too tight. He feels like he can’t breathe, and so he creeps out into the woods, where the trees welcome him.

Old habits die hard.

When the sun touches the horizon softly and the forest is slowly bathed in light, Harry goes back inside. It’s a little more bearable when it’s light, his eyes not having an excuse to make up their own reality as they could in the dark.

The files that Loki took are laid out across the floor.

Harry sinks into a cross-legged position, thumbing through the pages absentmindedly.

Stark, Anthony. Rogers, Steven. Barton, Clint. Banner, Bruce. Romanoff, Natasha. Miller, Dessa. The list goes on. The only thing they all seem to have in common is that they are currently residing somewhere in the muggle world. It doesn’t say where. He sorts them into piles; people who look like they may be desperate enough to go to Harry’s side are all thrown together. It’s a large pile. All of
these people, from the looks of it, have lost too much.

*What is the Ministry playing at?*

Harry runs a hand through his hair, making it stick up on end. His eyebrows are knitted together in confusion. At first, he thought that it had something to do with jealousy or fear - if Harry was the only one capable of defeating the Dark lord, when even the most highly trained wizards were not able to do it, then the logical conclusion is that Harry is… more powerful. Stronger. Capable of greater, worse things than Voldemort did.

Harry thought that that was why the ministry targeted him. Because he was too strong.

But the files prove otherwise. The wizards and witches in the file aren’t anything *special*. There’s no mark somewhere that says, “Wow! This wizard killed an entire village with a flick of their wand!”

The notes in the margins are closer to, “Got one OWL. Failed ___ class. Dropped out of school. Grew up with muggle godparents.”

Nothing *special*.

Except that someone close to them died in an attack they were involved in. Except that they were prosecuted for something *impossible*. Except that each of them is now running, just as Harry is.

The floorboards creak as Loki emerges from the room off the main living area.

“Morning,” Harry says, absentmindedly, still too engrossed in the notes and letters and pages upon pages of people who could help save Harry’s world.

Loki grunts in reply. He sits down opposite Harry.

He picks up a folder and leafs through it, face etched with a scowl.

“God, the way you’re looking at that suggests that it once tried to kill you,” Harry jokes, laughing for
the first time in a while.


Harry’s smile dissolves from his face. He squints at Loki. “What?”

Loki’s pale lips press into a thin line. “These aren’t just random people.”

“Aren’t they?” Harry’s eyes wander to the papers strewn everywhere.

“I recognized them.” Loki picks up another folder. “Ah. Tony. What a bitch.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asks, gaze trained on Loki. The god doesn’t meet his searching eyes.

“In my… universe. These people are known as the ‘Avengers’.” He pauses. For dramatic effect, Harry thinks.

Harry takes the bait. “Alright. What do these Avengers do, then?”

“They save the Earth from all evil,” Loki laughs, but it’s not filled with happiness or joy. “World’s mightiest heroes saving Midgard over and over again no matter how awful the foe may be.”

“That’s a good thing, then,” Harry comments. “Maybe their counterparts here will be similar.”

“Gods, I pray not.” Loki waits a moment before continuing. “We- ah... didn’t exactly hit it off, I suppose.”

“Must be your terrible sense of humor.”

“Very funny, Potter.” Loki stretches his arms above his head, tensing his muscles before relaxing again. He’s got good posture, Harry notes. Very straight. Like he’s got an iron rod running up his
spine - a stark contrast to Harry, who’s hunched over. “No. It was because I tried to kill them.”

“Sounds like a great start to a friendship,” Harry says.

“I tried to take over Midgard.”

“Sounds festive.”

“I caused hundreds of people’s deaths.”

Loki looks up and Harry can finally look into his eyes. His mouth goes dry as he sees not even a hint of insincerity. “You’re not joking.”

“I am not.”

Harry bites the inside of his mouth so hard it draws blood. “All those times you insisted you weren’t a good person- it was because of that?”

“Yes,” Loki says, after a second of hesitation.

Harry kind-of wants to punch him.

“Why?”

Thousands of emotions flash over Loki’s face, much too fast for Harry to catch them. But then Loki’s face steels into a cold, angry, foreign emotion. “It’s none of your business.”

Neither of them say anything else for over an hour, when the sun has almost reached its peak.

“Loki.” Harry finally says, when he’s cooled down significantly - because this is Loki and he’s full of rash choices and driven by mischief. “This isn’t the same place that you did… what you did.” A
deep breath. “Don’t do it here, because then I’d really have to kill you. But Loki… you don’t seem like a bad person. You’ve saved my life more than once.” Loki looks like he’s about to interrupt, as he so often does, so Harry rushes on. “I’ll leave it behind. I won’t ask about it if you don’t want to talk about it. We don’t have time to worry about the past at this point; it’s a luxury we cannot afford. Leave it behind. You can do your penance in helping me make my Earth a better place.”

Loki stares at him for a long while. “I’m not doing all this as penance,” he finally says. “I’m doing this because I need your magic to be able to get home. Hell, I may even need your little wizard friends’ help. I’m doing this to get home, Potter.” He lifts his chin high.

“Okay.” Harry doesn’t want to argue. Loki’s too stubborn, too driven in his own way. “We’re going to Vienna.”

Natasha Romanoff. Her mother, it seems, has been off the grid since just after Natasha was born. There’s nothing in the file about her, save for the one sentence: “Mother: unknown, deserted.”

Deserted, in a fire that reportedly “took the shape of a giant serpent and could not be put out until it claimed dozens of lives.” Her father died. Fiendfyre, Harry would bet. He can picture it all too well. She was a child at the time. After that, she was passed through foster homes and orphanages, eventually finding herself at Hogwarts at the age of twelve. She missed the entire first year. Her only good grade was in Defence Against the Dark Arts, and in the margins on one page it says, “Had problems with authority. Antisocial and often seen yelling at fellow students. Once punched a classmate (see: Stark, Anthony) hard enough to knock out three teeth and cause him extreme distress…”

Currently residing in Vienna. That’s their only lead. Four hundred and fourteen square kilometres. One point eight million people. They have to narrow it down to one person in one town.

“Natasha Romanoff,” Loki says. He grabs the folder from Harry’s hands, standing up and heading towards the door. Harry follows him quickly.

“It’s going to be like finding a needle in a universe of haystacks. All it says is that she’s probably somewhere in Vienna.”

“I never understood that saying,” says Loki curiously. “The standard needle can be found quite quickly among hay - as long as you’ve got a magnet.”

“Loki Laufeyson,” remarks Harry with a grin. “you are a genius.”
A genius may be a little far-fetched, but Loki’s statement makes it easy for Harry to figure out a way to locate the witch within a few hours at the very most. Magic goes a long way, especially if you’ve got three hundred years of experience at your disposal.

They narrow it down to a single street, and then a single building. Café Schwarzenberg.

The street is busy, muggles hurrying past Harry and Loki, who are standing side by side a few metres away from the door. Harry takes a deep breath and adjusts his glasses. He’s altered his appearance just enough to be unrecognizable by any wizards who might be around. His hair is curly and piled on the top of his head, the sides shaved short. His forehead lacks the iconic scar.

Loki is casual and classy, sporting shaved sides as Harry is, though his hair is a shade lighter and slicked back dramatically. He’s gone for a dark green polo shirt and beige slacks, topped off with a silver watch and shiny black shoes. Harry has opted for a long, dark jacket and a plain t-shirt tucked into some jeans.

“You ready?” Harry asks quietly.

“Always,” Loki replies, shortly.

Harry shrugs and steps forwards. Loki follows half a pace behind, hands shoved into his pockets.

It’s an expensive place, as evident in the polished wood and bright lighting illuminating everything perfectly. Harry glances around, taking in the general aesthetic of riches and coffee. There’s a handful of people scattered about - not particularly busy, but not empty by a long shot either.

“Grab us a table, will you?” Harry mutters to Loki, throwing the god a glance over his shoulder.

People chatter amongst themselves as Harry makes his way up to the counter, gaping at the wide selection of cakes. He rummages through his pockets for the little bit of muggle money that he’s been able to acquire (or, more accurately, that Loki has somehow been able to acquire and then proceeded to give to Harry. How Loki ended up with it though is beyond Harry’s imagination.)

He wants to get one of everything, they look so good. He edges forward, eyes brought to the biscuits and squares, each as equally mouth-watering as the cakes. Harry looks down at the slip of paper money and the few coins he has in one palm. He wonders how much they will buy.
He stumbles through his order, changing his mind halfway through when his eyes catch sight of yet another delicious looking dessert.

“Will that be all?” The cashier asks. She’s a pretty girl, of medium height and build with soft brown hair and honey-coloured eyes. Pure, innocent.

“No- actually.” Harry takes the two plates of treats from the counter. “Does there happen to be a Natasha Romanoff working here today by any chance?”

The lady doesn’t look surprised. “Yes, she’s here. Shall I tell her you want her?”

“Yes, please.” Harry gestures to where Loki is sitting. “Me and my… friend are just over there.” He offers her a lopsided smile. “Thanks.”

“No problem. Everybody likes her.”

*Everybody likes her.* Harry shrugs off the somewhat snide comment and makes his way to the table that Loki has decided to sit at.

“Hungry much?” Loki quips, staring at the abundance of sweets.

Harry raises an eyebrow. “Yes. Of course. If you hadn’t noticed I’ve been living in a forest for close to three hundred goddamn years. I haven’t had this sort of thing in a long time.”

“Fair enough.”

Three pastries later and a tall, slim woman saunters over. Red hair is tied back in a ponytail. There’s a pen tucked behind her ear and a pad of paper in her hand.

“I’m Natasha,” she says. “My coworker told me you wanted to talk.”
Harry hurriedly rubs crumbs away from his mouth with the back of his hand, ignoring the look that Loki shoots him. “Yes. Talk - we need to talk… er…”

Her lips are pressed together in a thin line. “What can I help you gentlemen with?”

“Magic!” Harry blurts out. Loki kicks him from under the table.

Harry grimaces. “I need - we need to talk to you about… the magical world.”

Natasha’s face pales. Her jaw drops open. She swallows. “No. No - they said that as long as I stayed away then they’d keep you guys off my back - please, no.” Her voice is quiet, low. If they weren’t in such a public setting, Harry is sure that she’d be yelling, fighting - or really, doing anything other than pleading.

“We’re not with the Ministry,” Loki says snidely. “This idiot here is awful at explaining.” Loki sighs, dramatic as per usual. “We don’t need your magic, necessarily. We need your help… your alliance.”

Natasha squares her shoulders and raises her head. “I have no idea who you two think you are. But if you have any sense of self-preservation, you’ll stay far away from me. If you don’t, you’ll be very, very sorry.”

“We need your help! This isn’t a choice.” Loki raises his voice.

Harry senses the anger flaring up around the god. It can’t end well. He nudges the toe of his shoe against Loki’s, just hard enough to bring his attention away from Natasha. “Loki, stop it,” he says, barely above a whisper.

“We’ll be by again tomorrow, okay?” Harry says gently, turning back to Natasha. “Give you some time to think about everything.”

“Don’t.”

“Sorry?” Harry blinks at her.
“Don’t come back.”

“You don’t mean that,” Harry says quietly. “Because the wizarding world - it’s embedded in your blood. You’re a witch, Natasha, and no witch can pretend to be a muggle their whole life.”

They exit the building before Natasha can reply. Probably for the best, though. Because she did look like she was about to explode.

“What the hell was that?” Harry roars at Loki as they exit the building.

“What do you mean?!” Loki hisses back, keeping his voice significantly quieter so as to not alarm the muggle pedestrians. “It was you who sprung that on her! How did you expect her to react?!”

Harry frowns and doesn’t respond.

They go back to the cabin in the middle of the forest. Loki downs the rest of the potion that Harry made for them. Harry kind of wishes for a cigarette, or a bottle of some cheap liquor - he’s not picky. Just - something. Anything to keep the memories away; a distraction, if nothing else. Loki retreats to the bedroom for the night.

He’s still angry at Harry, who has to bite back the ‘what a slytherin’ thought and leave the cabin before he yells after the god. Loki is complex, and he’s hiding lots from Harry - he can tell that much. But they need to work together, because for the first time in quite literally hundreds of years, Harry’s got a real chance of becoming… a human again. With a house and a life and a job and maybe even a dog. Hiding out in forests and wishing for a bottle of rum - that isn’t really living, now is it?

When’s the last time he slept without nightmares plaguing his dreams? An infinite amount of time. Exhaustion drags at his bones when he tries to keep his eyes open. The stars shine brightly above. His mind is a mess of emotions, memories tangled up in the darkness. He scratches at his forearms.

Could he stand up, if he tried? He’s getting his trousers dirty. It rained earlier, and the ground is still slightly wet. Harry bangs his head back against the tree he’s leaning on, hard.
“This is so… pointless,” he whispers to himself. He squeezes his eyes shut. Begs the tears to stay away.

Natasha was angry. Will she really help them? And the other wizards who have been thrown out of the magical world. Will they really help? Harry’s asking them to put their lives at risk, when they’ve spent so long trying to build up a steady, safe presence within the muggle world.

Harry bites the inside of his mouth. He tastes blood.

His chest is heavy - so, so heavy. His shoulders are slumped, his eyes wet with unshed tears. The stars are shining down on him from above, mockingly, as if they’re laughing at the pathetic failure of a wizard down below. Harry’s head rolls to the side, his cheek resting against his shoulder.

Hopelessness, yes.

The nightmares come again and again, unrelenting, until Harry is screaming in his sleep, mind refusing to become fully conscious. His robes stick to him with sweat.

It wakes Loki, and when Harry wakes up a half hour later he’s on the couch in the hut, a hot cup of tea on the table near him.

The stars continue to laugh down as Harry’s exhaustion wins over and he falls back to sleep.

Before long the tea gets cold, and nightmares swamp over Harry Potter’s brain yet again.

Harry wakes up to the sound of birdsong. Sunlight is filtering down through the tree leaves, onto the little cabin, through the window, casting spots of light against the wood floor. His mouth tastes like something died in it.

He drinks the cold mug of tea. Earl grey, no sugar, no milk. Plain, old tea. A heavy sigh.

“You ready?” A voice speaks from behind Harry.
Harry nods. He’s not, but he’s got no choice in the matter.

“Good.”

The street is empty when they apparate in Vienna. Harry’s half expecting some Aurors to immediately swarm them, Natasha having tipped them off. But the street is clear and the twinge of anxiety in Harry’s chest fades away.

Natasha watches them as they walk through the doors. Harry self-consciously shoves his hands into his pockets. No use sugar-coating it. He’s about to stalk up to the counter when Loki grabs his forearms, hauling him back.

“Be civil,” he hisses.

Harry shoots him a glare, but obeys, sitting at a table by a large, steamed up window.

Loki’s the one to go up to the counter, leaving Harry to fiddle with the hem of his sleeve.

It feels like hours pass before Loki comes over to the table that Harry’s sitting at, but in reality it can’t have been more than a few minutes. Natasha is following closely, a few steps behind the god. Loki hands Harry a cup of tea and a biscuit.

“Thanks,” Harry murmurs, sipping at the tea.

He raises his gaze to Natasha. Her lips are pursed into a thin line. Her eyes are narrowed and her arms are crossed.

“So?” Harry prompts, careful to keep his tone even-tempered.

“You were right, kind of.” Natasha sighs. She sits opposite Harry. “This man,” she gestures towards Loki, who’s lowering himself down into the remaining chair, “told me that you were Harry Potter? *The* Harry Potter?”
Harry swallows. Tea burns down his throat. He almost chokes. “Er-” He glances at Loki. He did not
tell the god that it would be okay to tell her who he really is. Loki shrugs at him. “Yeah,” Harry says,
defeated.

Natasha nods. “It makes a bit more sense now, I guess.”

“Will you help us?” Harry asks, barely hoping.

Natasha takes a long, deep breath. She doesn’t answer straight away. Her eyes are drawn to the
window, working hard to see through the steam to the outside world where muggles walk down the
street, umbrellas in hand.

She takes another deep breath. She snaps her head towards Harry. “I’m ready to fight for what I
deserve. I will join you.”

And Harry feels some of the tension is his chest unwind.
When they arrive back at Harry’s cabin, deep in the woods, the sun is about to duck below the horizon and the birdsong from the morning has died down a considerable amount. Natasha looks out of place and on edge. Her suitcase, packed full of all the belongings she managed to grab, is laying on its side on the forest floor beside her.

After she agreed to join them, back in the cafe, she took a seat opposite Harry and they talked for a long, long time. Loki was there too, though he was reserved, spending the majority of the time staring out of the fogged-up window. The only times that he contributed to the conversation were when Harry asked him a direct question, and even then the answer was short and clipped.

Many long hours later they left, walking down the street to Natasha’s small, dingy apartment that she shared with three other people. She packed in a hurry, but even then it took a while for her to mentally prepare herself to say goodbye to her whole life. She had to say goodbye to her housemates, which was a tearful ordeal in and of itself. Loki disappeared for a while and came back with a bag from a liquor store, at which Harry raised an eyebrow. In response, Loki simply shrugged.

But eventually, they made their way back to the forest.
Harry takes a deep breath of the fresh, clean air, tilting his head back to stare at the sky through thick tree branches.

Almost on autopilot, Harry shows Natasha around the cabin. “There’s er- limited living space… Feel free to take either the bed or the couch, whichever you prefer.”

Natasha raises her eyebrows as she looks around. “You’re going to have to make this place bigger if you’ve got other people coming.”

“Yeah.” Harry shrugs. “I will. Tomorrow, probably.” After a second he makes her an offer. “Want to help me?”

She looks at Harry. “You want my help?”

“Yeah, well, I could ask Loki as he could probably flick his wrist and turn this place into a castle, but he doesn’t seem to be in the best mood.”

“Good point.” Natasha offers him a rare smile. “I’ll help you, but I have to warn you: my magic’s a bit rusty.”

She gets settled in relatively quickly, sitting on the edge of the couch, sipping at the tea that Harry makes her, already complaining about the utter lack of any living necessities. (“Do you seriously only have two blankets?” “My foot almost fell through the floor there” “This place is a disaster. How do you manage?”)

As time passes though, she gets tired and eventually calls it a night, curling up on the couch under a moth-eaten blanket. She falls asleep in seconds.

Harry goes off to find Loki. He’s seen him only twice in passing ever since they apparated back to the cabin.

His shoulders are heavy and his eyes are tired, but the day’s not over yet; he’s still got things to do.

Bats fly overhead, replacing the birds from earlier in the day. Stars shine down from where blue sky
“Lumos.” Harry says under his breath. The tip of the elder wand lights up and he uses it to guide his way. Twigs and fallen leaves alike crunch under his feet as he makes his way over to the hunched form of Loki, sitting on the stream’s bank, bare legs dangling into the rushing water.

“Mind if I join you?” Harry asks, his voice cutting through the stillness of the night.

“Sure,” Loki says absentmindedly.

“What’cha looking at?” Harry asks as he sits beside the god.

“Finding our next, ah, target.”

“Target?” Harry raises an eyebrow. “That sounds like we’re planning on murdering them.” He trails off in a laugh, but stops abruptly when Loki doesn’t say anything else. “You’re not… planning on murdering them, are you?”

“Sadly, no,” Loki says, his gaze still transfixed on the pages he’s holding in his pale hands. “But if this all ends badly then they’re going to die. In fact, even if it does go well someone’s going to die.”

“Or we could all live,” Harry points out.

“Not likely.” Loki smirks. “According to your plan.”

“- Our plan,” Harry quickly cuts in.

Loki sighs. “According to the plan,” he says pointedly, “each of these people will have to blindly put their life on the line. It’s - it’s an attack on what you’ve described as the most powerful wizards… Not only just physical and magical power, but these are also the people who seem to have the most influence. They have whole armies. And what do we have to counteract that? A few misfits, an immortal, depressed, pathetic excuse of a wizard and a god who just wants-” Loki chokes, clearing his throat a few times, and then drags a sleeve across his face, pushing the papers that he had been holding to the side.
Harry grabs the papers before they fall into the water. “A god who wants what?” he asks pointedly.

Many beats of silence pass before Loki answers, and when he does his voice is watered down and defeated.

“A god who just wants to be accepted.”

Harry takes a deep breath before speaking.

“Loki… who exactly are you, in your world?”

“You know who I am,” Loki spits.

“No, I don’t,” Harry says quietly. “I know who you are when you’re here… I know that you like the colour green and that you’re very dramatic, but I don’t know what type of person you were before you came here.”

“You don’t want to know.” Loki’s back is hunched. His bare feet dangle into the water. His head hangs down. “If I were to tell you, you’d see me in a different light.”

“I do want to know,” Harry murmurs. “Will you tell me?”

Loki glares at him as if his life depends on it. “No.”

“Oh.” Harry is slightly taken aback.

They allow silence to stretch between them, Harry thumbing through the papers that Loki was holding. Loki himself is holding a hand in front of his face, flexing his fingers from left to right, letting eerie green magic dance between them. Like a mini aurora borealis, in a way. It emits very little light, but that’s alright as the elder wand still shines brightly with Harry’s _Lumos_. 
“So, have you picked out who we’re going after next?” Harry breaks the silence.

“Yes.” Loki sighs. “Clint Barton. He tried to shoot me once. With an arrow.”

Harry suppresses a laugh. “Seems like a nice kind of guy.”

Loki rolls his eyes. “Yeah right.”

The night crawls by, agonizingly slow. By the time sun rays peek through the thick branches above both Harry and Loki are itching to leave the forest, to go find the archer and try to convince him to join their cause. Natasha agrees to stay behind when Harry asks her, and shouts some advice after them: “Don’t just throw it on him like you did with me. Actually take some time to explain what the hell you mean, Harry Potter!”

Clint Barton is currently residing in a small, cheap apartment built above a Chinese restaurant in Manchester. Harry approaches it cautiously, Loki walking a half a step behind. They’ve both altered their appearances slightly, but not dramatically. Harry has spelled his hair a dark red, made himself slightly taller and completely hiding his scar. Loki has gone for short brown hair and brown eyes to match, not doing any more than that. It’s enough that nobody will recognize them.

They get there early enough that very few pedestrians walk by. The old homeless man on the corner of the street pays them no attention.

The spell, which Harry is using to locate the precise place where Clint Barton is, points his wand in the general direction of the door to the Chinese restaurant. Harry continues forwards, deftly putting one foot in front of the other. The door creaks ominously when Harry pushes it open and the wand points upwards, towards a tall flight of rickety steps.

A flickering light leads their way up, up, up. There’s a narrow landing with a door to each side. Harry knocks on the one to the left.

Loki remains standing a few steps down, looking at the cracks in the walls with a calculating expression. “This building appears as if it is one step away from toppling over,” he says with disgust.

Harry rolls his eyes and knocks again.
The door swings wide open on the 7th knock, and Harry is met face to face with a very angry looking man.

“Whadd’you wann.” His words are mumbles, slurred by sleep’s hold.

“Hello,” Harry says, plastering a smile on his face and hoping that it looks genuine. “Me and my… friend would like to talk to you about something quite important. Can we come in?”

Loki takes the steps two at a time to reach the landing. “Good Morning,” he starts, “I hope my accomplice didn’t wake you - he has a knack of coming off quite rude, you see.” He offers his hand to the man, who shakes it with a grateful smile. “My name is Loki Laufeyson.”

The man nods. “I’m Clint Barton.”

“Charmed.”

Barton steps back, holding the door open for the two strange men who have shown up at his doorstep way too early in the morning.

Loki leads most of the conversation with his smooth, almost flirtatious voice that wins over everybody he interacts with. A stark contrast to Harry, who stumbles over every second word and is often too blunt.

The apartment is homey but minimalistic with a sofa, coffee table and television in the main living area, though its lack of pictures on the walls - or bookshelves, or anything to that extent really - sends a shiver down Harry’s spine. Loki remains unfazed.

Barton is polite but maintains a careful, tired facade. He watches Loki and Harry’s every move carefully, with a calculating expression. Harry leans against the wall just to the inside of the door, the wallpaper of which is peeling off and revealing the unfinished drywall beneath. Loki perches on the edge of the sofa. Barton remains standing in the middle of the room, looking between the god and the wizard.

“So now that I’ve let you into my home, mind telling me who you are and what you want with me?”
Harry doesn’t know how to start. “I’m a wizard,” he ends up blurting out.

That’s all it takes for Barton’s face to run pale, lips tightening into a thin line and hands clenching. He takes a deep breath, and Harry can see him physically fighting his body to relax. “I don’t want anything to do with your sort,” Barton spits. There’s a tremor in his voice, fear in his eyes. He’s scared. Of the wizarding world.

Harry swallows. “No, no, no.” God he’s bad at this. “Sorry, I said that wrong. I’m - we’re not with the er - Ministry. We’re just - er.” He looks over to Loki helplessly.

Loki rolls his eyes. “You’re useless, Potter.” Then, turning to Barton, “We’re against the Ministry and all that they’re doing.” He bites his lip, almost thoughtfully. “This is Harry Potter-”

Barton interrupts him with a gasp. “The Harry Potter?”

“Yes.” Loki states plainly.

Barton squints doubtfully. “He doesn’t look like the papers and books say… I imagined him taller.”

Loki does a bad job hiding his amusement. “He is quite short, isn’t he?”

Barton nods vigorously.

“But we’re both in disguises,” Loki says. “So he doesn’t appear the same as usual.” He shrugs, and if Harry weren’t able to see how tense his shoulders are, he’d assume that Loki was at ease.

But Barton is slowly letting his guard down. His face opens up and his body relaxes. “So you’re really not with the Ministry?”

“No,” Harry quips from where he’s leaning against the wall. “Quite the opposite, in fact.”
“So if you’re Harry, then who is this… Loki?” Barton says quizzically, eyebrows knitting together.

“Exactly who he says he is.” Harry pauses, then continues. “He’s er- not from around here, I guess you could say.”

“Oh. American?” Barton raises an eyebrow.

“So I sound American to you?” Loki challenges, though he keeps his voice light. Teasing.

“No but - disguises, you said.”

“Indeed I did.”

Harry wanders over to where Loki’s sitting. Floorboards creak under his feet. He plops himself down beside Loki. Barton is easy to talk to, even though his answers and questions are sometimes quipped and short. He’s tall - at least six foot, maybe more. His hair is short on the sides, sticking up a bit at the front with the help of hairspray, Harry suspects. Or gel. He’s wearing an old plaid shirt, unbuttoned at the top, and a pair of sweatpants. He offers them tea, and shoos away a young black cat trying to claw his way up Harry’s leg.

He agrees to join them almost too easily. He’s packed everything he needs up into a single suitcase in a half hour. He doesn’t say goodbye to anyone. He does, however, grab a bag of dry cat food from under the kitchen counter, shaking it to call the kitten over.

“Hope you’re not allergic,” he says offhandedly. “Casey’s coming with us.”

They apparate back to the cabin in the woods before noon. The sun is shining brightly.

Birdsong and the familiar scents of plant life and dirt reach them and Harry takes a deep breath, finally relaxing. He watches in amusement as Natasha comes out to greet them, immediately being charged by the kitten named Casey. She scratches him behind the ear, and Harry can hear him purring even though he’s standing a considerable distance away.

Harry strides forwards, making the introduction. “Natasha, this is Clint Barton. Barton, this is
Natasha Romanoff.”

“Please,” Barton says with a half smile. “Call me Clint.”

Casey trots around them and then disappears, following the sounds coming from the rushing water in the creek.

“I’ll be right back,” Loki says in a low voice to Harry. Then the god disappears. No puff of smoke, no loud bang. Just… gone. Like he wasn’t even there in the first place. Harry shakes his head slightly before stepping forwards, towards where Clint and Natasha are talking.

“Now, how about making this cabin a bit bigger…”

It takes a few hours for the three of them to add on a couple more rooms and another whole floor to the cabin. Natasha even adds a small turret, almost making it seems like a castle. Magic flows through Harry so easily; he’s forgotten how good it feels to push his magic to its limits, to see how far he can go before he has to take a break. They’re all sweaty and tired by the end of it, even though they’ve done none of the physical work that comes with building a house. Magic goes a long way.

They rest by the creek, letting the water wash over their legs. Casey bats at minnows in a pool. Natasha runs a hand through her hair, absentmindedly picking at daisies.

Clint leans back, sighing loudly. “So this is all really happening?”

“Yes,” Harry says. “You thinking of backing out?”

“Nah.” He grins. “This is going to be fun.”

“You could die,” Harry points out dryly. “We are talking about taking down the entire Ministry, after all.”

“So that’s what we’re doing,” Natasha says suddenly, sitting up straight and looking towards Harry with a gleam in her eyes. “You never said exactly what you were planning, just that you needed me.” She glances at Clint. “Us.”
“We’re going to need more people,” Clint says.

Harry thinks of the files. The whole stack of them. “Yeah,” he agrees with Clint. “I know of some people.”

“Good,” Clint says.

Silence lapses over them. It’s only slightly awkward.

“So the stories about you - the Harry Potter...” Clint takes a breath. “Were they true?”

“Which stories?” Harry enquiries, thinking back to the books on how he slayed the basilisk, and the triwizard tournament.

“About how you murdered everybody who survived the final battle.”

Oh. Harry’s brain short-circuits.

“Yeah, I’ve been wondering about that too.”

Harry can barely hear Natasha’s voice. His mind is being transported back in time to when he stood, watching helplessly, as Malfoy was tortured. As the grand statues were torn to bits. As his friends died.

His chest suddenly feels impossibly heavy and his eyes have a far-away look in them. Everything hurts so much he feels like he’s being ripped in two.

Everybody, dead. God, how he loathes the pain of remembering.

to… go. Sorry.” He wants to scream.

He gets away quickly, wiping tears away from his eyes. His head hurts.

Deftly, he takes his fingernails over his forearms. Over his neck. Across his face. Hermione’s face flashes through his memory. It’s too vivid - too real - like she’s right here right now. Harry crumples to the ground. Ron. Oh god, it’s too much.

He’s a wizard, but he’s still human. With human emotions and human pain and human feelings. It feels as if someone is sticking their hands inside his chest, extending claws into his heart and ripping it out of his body.

Still human. Three hundred-something years old, but still human. Able to build a house in a matter of hours, barely moving a hand - but still human. He feels love and loss just as strongly as any other human, no matter how mundane the human is.

He’s real, but he doesn’t feel real. He doesn’t feel like a human anymore.

Because he shouldn’t still be alive. Because he should have died. Because he’s lost so, so much.

He wonders if this is how Voldemort felt when Harry destroyed one of his horcruxes. Losing part of your soul, and then some. How is anybody supposed to truly live after feeling this amount of utter… despair?

Still human. And a broken one at that.

The ground is cold against his cheek. Dirt gets under his fingernails when he digs his hands under the fallen leaves. He has to get over this - he’s no leader if he can’t even talk about what happened without being assaulted by all the memories that he wishes he could delete. He’ll have to tell the other people that join his cause in the future that he isn’t a terrorist. He’ll have to be able to explain to them what happened so that they can understand. So that they can trust him fully.

He sucks in a big breath. Sobs take over his chest. It’s too much.
Hermione, the Weasleys, Neville, Luna, Hagrid… everyone. They meant the world to Harry.

The closest thing he had to a proper family. After an abusive and damaging childhood, being surrounded by people who genuinely cared about him was something that Harry wouldn’t have even been able to fathom when he was younger. Hagrid saved him, that night in a shack on an island in the middle of nowhere.

“Yer a wizard, Harry.”

That one sentence and Harry’s fate was sealed. He was Dumbledore's now. A pawn, in the grand scheme of things. Or the queen in a game of chess. He was the powerhouse. He was the one with the will to fight for the king - to fight for the rest of the wizarding world. He was finely tuned into a soldier without even realising it. He was thrown into a war that the wizarding world had been fighting long before he had even been born.

It wasn’t fair.

But he did it, in the end. He ended the war. He was the one to finally kill Voldemort for good.

But was it worth it?

In killing the Dark Lord, he sealed the fate of all of his loved ones. He’s spent three hundred years running away from his past, but he can only run for so long. It’s catching up to him.

Minutes later he sits up, leaning back against a tree and wiping the tears off his face with the edge of his sleeve. He summons his dragonhide bag with a flick of his wand and rifles through it, looking for a calming draught.

He drinks maybe too much of it but it’s worth it when his body instantly relaxes. He lets his head fall back against the tree with a dull thud. He used to rely on the calming potions to bring him peace, though he hasn’t had to take one in a number of years. He tells himself that it’s fine. That he’s fine. He pulls himself together because he has to. People are counting on him now. Natasha, Clint. Even Loki. They’re all counting on him to help change their lives for the better. They’re counting on him to save them, just as Hogwarts saved him all those years ago.

The war never stopped for Harry Potter. For a long time he thought that it had. But that was simply
because he stopped fighting it, hiding away between trees and watching as vines crept along the ground. Hidden away from reality, he created his own type of security and home. He had run away from the war - from the battles. For so, so long he kept himself isolated.

But some people kept fighting the war. Natasha, Clint, all the other people in the files. Most likely countless others as well that didn’t survive. The Ministry is doing something unspeakable, and for once Harry feels like destroying them for more than just revenge. He wants to tear them down so that nobody ever has to go through what he did. He wants them to perish so that witches and wizards can grow up feeling safe.

He wants them gone so that he can finally be at ease. He wants the whole world to know what they’re doing.

*He wants to fight.*

“Potter?”

Harry’s head snaps up.

“Natasha told me that you’d run off.”

Loki’s voice is laced with curiosity more than anything else.

“Yeah, er...” Harry scrambles for words. “...Just needed some time to cool off.”

“Oh.” Loki takes a seat on a stump beside a patch of wildflowers and leans forwards to hand Harry a paper coffee cup. “It’s hot chocolate.”

Harry blinks. He takes the drink. “Thanks.”

“I suppose it must be difficult for you to deal with all of this.”

Harry looks up. “It’s fine.”
“You’ve spent three centuries alone. Now suddenly there’s four more people living with you.”

“Three.” Harry corrects.

“No, four. I picked up another kid. Peter Parker.”

“Oh.” Harry takes a sip of the hot chocolate. It burns down his throat. “It’s alright, though. It has to be done.”

“You could have just stayed by yourself,” Loki points out. “You didn’t need to agree to any of this.”

“No. I didn’t. But it needs to be done, doesn’t it?”

Loki shrugs. “Someone else might’ve come along and done it all.”

“But what if they didn’t?”

“Then that’s none of your business.”

Harry shakes his head. “It’s too late to think of that now.” He continues after a moment of silence. “Why are you here?”

Loki raises an eyebrow. “To bring you a drink.”

“No, Loki. Why did you come looking for me back when you first came to this… dimension? I’ve never been able to piece that together. You could have gone to anybody. But instead you somehow hunted down a wizard running from the law.” Harry sighs, taking another sip of the drink.

“Because I came here and learned stories about an extremely powerful wizard who knows all the secrets to alchemy, who’s immortal and who killed over a hundred highly skilled wizards so that he could rule over the wizarding world.” Loki lets out a dry laugh. “Turns out that ‘powerful wizard’ is
just a small git who hides within the trees because he’s too scared to face who he really is.”

Harry stares at Loki, not really sure what to say.

Loki continues before Harry can think of something. “The things I heard about you… it seemed almost as if you’d be able to send me back to my world with the wave of a hand.”

“Why didn’t you leave when you found out I’m not all of those things?”

This time Loki throws back his head and lets out a cackling laugh. “Oh, but Potter, you are.”

Harry blinks owlishly.

“The way magic works around you - I’ve never seen it before. It’s almost like you’ve got more than just one magical signature. You’re unbelievably powerful. You could take down whole armies if you put your mind to it. Don’t underestimate yourself, Potter.”

“Oh.” Harry continues being at a loss for what to say. He takes another sip of the hot chocolate. “You really think that?”

Harry watches Loki’s Adam’s apple bob as he swallows. “Yeah.” His eyebrows crinkle. “Look, Potter. You’re my best shot at getting out of here. Do you really think that any other wizard or witch would help me?”

Harry takes a moment to consider. “No, I guess not.”

Loki scoffs.

He’s spent his entire life helping people. Helping people. The Boy Who Lived To Save Lives. He tells himself that Loki is just another nameless person on that long list. But it feels different.

All of the other lives Harry has saved felt like a choice - Loki feels inevitable.
Chapter End Notes

please remember to leave kudos/comments!
Banner, Stark and Booze

Chapter Summary

Harry and Loki make alliances with Bruce Banner and Tony Stark, and they learn about how science has progressed within the muggle world.

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone's having a lovely easter/april fool's day :)

There was a part in this chapter where I was trying to write dialogue and ended up staring at the screen blankly for ten whole minutes with Hayley Kiyoko music blaring. Dialogue is my worst nightmare but I was able to get this chapter written thank god ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the three hundred years of his life Harry has never, not once, gotten tired of the way the forest feels just as the sun is rising. It’s the grey area between night and dawn, when the sky is void of stars but not yet light. It’s the time when the critters of the night are retiring back to their burrows, hiding away in holes dug under trees, between the roots. It’s the last hoot of an owl, flying upon silent wings back to its nest.

Harry basks in it. The silence. The almost-dawn. The feeling of a beginning.

It’s been three days since Clint and Peter came to the forest and Harry has yet to feel comfortable in the cabin. There’s simply too many ghosts there. Metaphorically, of course. He spends the majority of his time outside. Nobody else seems to mind, or question him, for which he’s grateful. He stretches in a languid manner and sits up, rubbing sleep from his eyes and yawning.

He lets the morning wrap around him, enjoying it’s presence. He smiles to himself as the birds wake, one at a time at first, just a few tweets here and there. And then, almost all at once, before he is able to pinpoint the moment it happens, all the other morning birds join in until the forest is alive with friendly noises. He used to never think of himself as a morning person but over the years it has become more and more apparent that he likes waking up early, mainly to see the world come alive before his very eyes. And he likes watching the sun rays stream through the leaves. And the quiet.
The peace of it all.

The forest is always peaceful - that’s why Harry’s so drawn to it. But the mornings are special. The mornings are pure. Nothing bad ever happens in the morning. The evil comes later, when the sun is high in the sky and nobody is expecting anything to happen.

The early dawn slips by like water through fingertips; he’s trying to hold onto it but it’s impossible. The morning brings peace and calm. The daytime brings sun too bright and anxiety too high in turn.

He stands up slowly, letting his eyes flutter shut and taking a deep breath of the fresh air.

Back to business, then.

He and Loki need to go track down some more of the wizards from the files, as it’s been a few days and if they want their whole ‘revolution’ thing to happen they’d better start it soon. Plus, winter is on the horizon. The leaves have already started to turn brown, their energy being drawn back into the trees so that they can survive the cold months. Soon enough freezing rain will come, and in turn snow. Cold weather and rain will prove to be a mild (yet effective) distraction, and will make it easier to wreak havoc on the ministry. (At least, that’s how it will start - little pranks, mild ailments. Annoying things. Spray paint on walls, declaring some sort of slogan. Only after that, when the whole of the magical world is on edge and stressed, will they pull out the big guns.)

Leaves and twigs crunch under his boots as he makes his way between the trees, back to the cabin. He spends his nights just out of view of it. Close enough that he’s be able to make it there in an emergency quickly, but far enough away that he doesn’t need to catch it in the corner of his eye and relive some of his worst moments. He steels himself now as he rounds a corner and emerges on the clearing where the cabin is located.

He slows when he hears voices. He’s coming at it from the back and a window is propped open, likely to let in a bit of the morning’s sweet-smelling air.

He doesn’t mean to eavesdrop. Just wants to know what’s going on when he’s not present.

“I don’t know y’guys. I just don’t have… the best feeling about this all.” It’s Natasha’s voice. “Like, where did Harry Potter even come from? Not to mention that Loki guy. I’ve never even heard of him before a few days ago.”
“Yeah.” It’s Peters voice. Higher-pitched than Clint’s and laced through with a sort of innocence that the other’s don’t possess. “I mean, how do we know for sure that he isn’t going to just kill us all?”

“We don’t know for sure.” Clint. Sounds like he just woke up, too, judging by the grogginess in his voice. “But… I don’t know. We’re kinda forced to trust ‘em, aren’t we?”


“We have to do it.”

“Why?”

“It’s for the good of the whole wizarding world.” Peter pipes up. “We can save lives.”

“Are you sure about that?” Natasha snaps.

“Nat’s got a point, kid. We know next to nothing about these guys. And, on top of that, all the things we have heard about Potter aren’t good!”

“Didn’t he defeat Voldemort?”

Harry can almost feel Natasha’s eye roll. “The only reason he was able to do that was because of his accomplices. And then he killed them. So that he could take over the world. Like the wizard he killed.”

Accomplices. That’s what his best friends have been reduced to. He almost wants to be sick.

“I know… still.” Peter’s actually standing up for him. Harry’s surprised, but happily surprised all the same. “He could kill us. But what difference would that make to the world?” Harry’s heart wrenches as the teenager continues. “It’s not like people would miss us. This is our chance to… like… I don’t know. Make a name for ourselves.” He’s speaking in broken sentences. He’s having a hard time putting his thoughts into words.
Before he can hear the others’ replies to what Peter Parker has stated, Harry loudly stomps around to the front door of the cabin. As he predicted, the voices coming from inside quiet down.

He opens the door and offers the wizards a smile. “Good morning.” He doesn’t want them to know he was listening. Besides, they’ll learn to trust him… soon enough.

There’s a chorus of good mornings back at him as he busies himself with making tea. The muggle way, no less. With a kettle and everything. He sets a cup aside with a tea bag hanging out of it. He pushes the window above the sink open a bit more to allow more light and birdsong into the cabin. It’s too quiet.

A cat rubs up against his leg and Harry glances down, surprise in his widened eyes. Casey blinks up at him, his black fur shining.

He’s a handsome cat, striking black fur but with perfect, pearly white paws and white on his chest reaching all the way up to his chin. There’s even a small splash of white between his nose and mouth, almost as if he’s been drinking milk and splashed it over himself.

He meows loudly and then leaps onto the counter, sniffing curiously at the tea. Harry scratches him behind the ears. He huffs with laughter as the kitten leans into his hand, a loud purr rumbling in his chest.

There’s a pointed cough from behind him and Harry turns, a grin on his face, to face Loki. He’s in a good mood this morning.

Loki’s hair is ruffled, and stands up on end. Harry chokes on his laughter. Loki glares at him.

“I’ve never seen a god with bedhead before!”

“I’m the only god you know,” Loki snaps.

Harry grins stupidly at him.

“Shut it, Potter, before I put a curse on you so powerful that you’ll never be able to speak again.”
“I didn’t say anything.” Harry’s face is still the epitome of childish humor.

Loki rolls his eyes. Behind them, Peter is badly masking a laugh in a cough. Loki reaches a hand up, running it through his hair. There’s a slight green aura around his head for a millisecond and then his hair is laying perfectly, as if he hasn’t just woken up.

Harry raises an eyebrow. “You’ll have to teach me that sometime.”

“Maybe,” Loki says, turning to sit at the table. The files are laid out. Clint takes a seat beside him, thumbing through one.

“Tony Stark?” Clint says thoughtfully. “Why does that sound familiar?”

“Stark?” Natasha’s voice is loud. She slips into the chair opposite Clint and grabs the papers from his hands. “God. This prick. Don’t tell me he’s coming here, too.”

“He is,” Loki says with a smirk. “Try not to punch him.”

“That was one time.” She mutters. Clint has a look on his face that seems vaguely impressed.

“Anyway,” she continues after shooting Clint a look, “you’d recognize him if you watched… literally any news, ever. He’s not one for hiding away, that’s for sure. He’s still in the muggle world, but in plain sight. He’s gotta be one self righteous son of a bitch to do that. He’s right in the Ministry’s hands, if they want him.”

“Why’s he always on the news?” Peter takes the remaining chair around the small table.

“His work in science. Epigenetics, I think it was. Something with CRISPR.”

Peter looks impressed. “He’s a scientist working on CRISPR?”
“Something like that. I don’t exactly keep detailed tabs on him; I just know in general. How didn’t you know about him?”

Peter shrugs. “I’ve been doing my best to stay off the radar. It’s the last thing my Aunt told me to do before she… y’know.”

“Yeah,” Natasha runs a hand through her hair.

Harry pours hot water over the tea bag. Then, after a second’s thought, pulls out another mug and puts a tea bag in it, dumping more hot water over it. He hands one of the mugs to Loki, who takes it without thanking him.

“So. Today. Stark, and who else?”

“I was thinking this… Bruce Banner. It’s not my first choice, but he seems to work in the same building as Stark. Different departments, but still closer than any other two,” Loki says quickly, as if he’s rehearsed his words in his mind before saying them out loud.

“Sounds good.” Harry drinks his tea, leaning a shoulder against the wall. “Why isn’t he your first choice?”

The other wizards are watching carefully. Loki wrinkles his nose. “Bad memories.”

“Ah. I can get him, if that works better. You can talk to Stark.”

Loki nods his head quickly, murmuring a quick “Thanks”.

“What do you mean by memories?” Natasha demands. “Do you know him?”

Loki takes his time replying. “…Not exactly.”

Harry quickly cuts in before their conversation progresses too much. “We’d better get going then, Loki.” It’s not that he wants to keep them in the dark about Loki’s… situation, but he doesn’t know
how they’ll react. Doesn’t know if they’ll call it quits and leave. Doesn’t know if he should trust them. Not yet, anyway. He hopes that they’ll get there though, because in war you need to be able to trust your allies.

Loki stands up quickly, his chair making an awful scratching noise against the floor. He’s out the door before anybody can call after him. Harry follows closely behind. “We’ll be back by nightfall,” he says in way of a goodbye.

Loki holds his hand out to Harry, inclining his head slightly.

The world twists around them as they disapparate.

They appear in a darkened alleyway, two blocks north of the skyscraper where Tony Stark and Bruce Banner are. Loki drops his hand and then turns to face Harry, snapping his fingers and grinning as Harry’s appearance changes. Harry feels himself growing taller, much to his dismay. His hair lightens considerably. Harry’s clothes - old, ripped robes over jeans and a graphic t-shirt - melt into a tailored suit jacket and slacks.

Harry frowns. “This is a bit extensive, isn’t it?”

“Just trying to make sure you’ll fit in, Potter,” Loki grumbles, and then snaps his fingers again and his own appearance changes. He wears a similar outfit to Harry’s, though Loki’s favours a rich, emerald green whilst Harry’s remains dull and grey. “It brings out your eyes,” Loki snaps when he catches Harry looking at his grey suit for a second too long.

The Elder Wand is still tucked safely up Harry’s sleeve, and he lets it fall down just a bit so that he can wrap his hand around it. He bends to the ground, picking up a small, light-coloured rock. He taps the tip of the Elder Wand to it, focusing and channeling as much of his tracking magic into it as possible.

He straightens, handing it to Loki who looks less than impressed. “Why are you giving me a rock?”

“Just take it,” Harry says. “It’ll lead you to Stark.”

Loki still looks doubtful, but he takes the stone anyway. “Oh.” He lets out a small noise when he touches it.
Harry smirks. “You can feel the magic, can’t you?”

Loki nods, and rubs the stone between his thumb and forefinger. “It’s like it’s trying to pull me somewhere.” He’s quiet for half a second, staring at the stone. Then, “That way.” He points to the right, through a brick wall.

“That’s good, means it’s actually working,” Harry says, a flame of pride in his chest.

They walk quickly towards the skyscraper. CRISPR-Industries. The architecture is really quite beautiful, lavish fountains and art sculptures dotting the premises. There’s a large metal-and-glass archway leading to the main guest doors, and Harry finds himself looking upwards through the glass to the sky above, with something akin to wonder within his eyes.

They walk through the automatic doors side by side and Harry lets his magic flow out around them. Loki tenses slightly, but aside from his lips being pressed into a thin line he appears unaffected.

“They won’t see us… or remember us. Or anything. To them, we’re not here,” Harry whispers, stepping through yet another automatic door. “I’ll see you later, yeah?”

“Back in the forest,” Loki confirms, and then slips down a hallway to the left towards a flight of stairs, stone still held tight in hand. Harry watches the god until he’s out of view. Only then does he embrace the feel of his magic, letting it engulf him for a second (like a tsunami, a giant wave crashing down on him so heavily that he can’t breathe). But then he takes a deep breath, channeling his energy into pinpointing where his spell wants him to go.

Up.

He makes his way to the elevator, an uncomfortable feeling in his chest when he remembers that muggles made it. There’s no magic holding him up, just engineering and a couple thick cables pulling him up a long elevator shaft.

Bruce Banner works on the seventh floor. Lab Number 018. When Harry knocks on it, it takes several minutes for the door to open. He’s greeted by a middle-aged man wearing a lab coat over jeans and a t-shirt. There’s a pair of safety glasses balanced on his nose. He’s a few inches taller than Harry.
“Hello,” he says, his voice questioning. “I didn’t know that I was… expecting anybody.”

“You weren’t,” Harry says, “but I’m here anyway. Urgent news, I’m afraid.” He glances down the corridor, then back at the man. “You’re Mister Bruce Banner, right?”

“Yes.” The concern in his gaze only grows. “And who would you be?”

Harry’s first thought is ‘What would Loki say?’ because the god is always so good with words, and always somehow manages to persuade people to do whatever he wishes. He’s demanding yet polite.

The truth. That’s what he settles on, because it’s easiest.

“The name’s Harry Potter. And I really, really need to talk to you.” He lets urgency seep into his voice, hoping that it will help convince Banner. He takes a small step forwards. “May I please come in? This isn’t a conversation for the hallway.”

Banner’s face is white. “Um. Yeah, of course…” He trails off at the end, stepping back and opening the door a bit more. “Nice to meet you.”

“You too.” Harry looks around the lab. Everything is pristine and white. There’s a rack with clean white jackets, and a large board takes up half of the far wall. There’s diagrams all over it, the label above reading ‘smartboard’. Harry’s out of his element.

Banner is nervous. There's sweat dripping down the side of his face. His eyes are wide.

“Don’t worry,” Harry says, keeping his voice soft. He scans the room for surveillance cameras and then points the Elder Wand at each of them in turn, rendering them lifeless. “I’m not here to hurt you or anything.”

“You don’t even look like Harry Potter. But you- you have magic. Do you work for the ministry? Is that why you’re here? Did you hear of my work looking for… nevermind.” Banner is stumbling over his words. He’s talking too fast - his thoughts are getting scrambled on their way to his mouth.
“I am Harry Potter.” Harry frowns. “This is just a disguise. Necessary precaution, I’m sure you understand.”

The latter part of Harry’s morning through to the late afternoon is filled with terse exchanges.

He can’t believe that this is the man who Loki feared from his world. Circumstances can do a lot to a person, but even Harry doubts that Bruce Banner’s doppelgänger could hurt anyone. As far as Harry can tell, he’s a ball of anxiety. Harry does his best to put him at ease but nothing seems to resonate with Banner.

Harry leaves the lab at one point, walking to the end of the hall and back, focusing on not putting his hand through a wall. This whole thing is just so frustrating; he’s trying to save the wizarding world, for fuck’s sake, and nobody seems ready and willing to help except Loki who’s not even from this world. Figures.

As it is, Harry doesn’t manage to convince Banner that joining their cause would be a good idea until the sun is setting, sending shadows streaking across the city. And even then they don’t make it back to the cabin in the woods until the stars light up the sky, courtesy of Banner wanting to go back to his studio apartment to pack some clothing and other belongings. The whole time Harry’s terrified that Banner is going to change his mind (though he doesn’t, thankfully).

Harry breathes a heavy sigh of relief when they finally arrive back at the forest.

Loki is there waiting for them, a sly grin taking over his face. “You’ve shown up, Potter. And only five hours late! How nice.” Sarcasm is laced through every single syllable. Harry rolls his eyes and turns to Banner.

“Welcome to your new home.”

It’s a bit later in the evening when they gather around a small campfire, resting up against trees or rocks and talking amongst themselves. Loki’s the one to bring out some alcohol.

Harry finds himself listening rather than contributing any conversation of his own.

“So this - CRISPR - does it have anything to do with magic? Surely the muggles didn’t think of it all on their own?” Clint is leaning forwards, elbows balanced on his knees, eyes trained on Stark.
“It’s all the muggles, if you believe it or not.” Banner says in a monotone voice.

“It’s actually quite interesting,” Stark says, “and it’s so important to what muggle society has become. They’ve used it to re-write their DNA, essentially. They’ve managed to completely wipe out cancer and increase the average lifespan of any given individual by about 78 percent.”

“You mean - they’re making themselves immortal?” Natasha glares at Stark. “That’s impossible.”

“It is possible,” Stark says with a grin. “They’re not living forever by a long shot, but they’re living for much, much longer than they did a couple hundred years ago.”

Harry takes a long drag from the cigarette he’s holding between his fingertips (a bad habit he swore he’d quit, but that hasn’t happened yet) and blows the smoke in Loki’s direction. “You understanding any of this?” he murmurs to the god, who appears to be pleasantly drunk.

“I’m not even going to pretend to understand muggle science,” Loki shoots back, grinning.

Harry snorts, shuffling over to the side so that their shoulders are almost touching.

“Scientists started… tinkering with DNA in the 1960’s. Mostly just bombarding plants with radiation and crossing their fingers for mutations in the genetic code. But that was based all on luck.” Harry listens to Banner speak. He doesn’t necessarily understand half the stuff that the two scientists are saying, but he finds it interesting all the same. “So that’s why CRISPR is so important. It’s precise, easy and efficient. It doesn’t cause any side effects.”

Stark picks up when Banner pauses to take a sip from the bottle he’s holding. “It cut out the MYBPC3 gene from human embryos by 2017. That gene causes hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and effects one in five hundred so it was kind of a turning point.”

“Yeah,” Banner agrees. “And then scientists found out that they could completely cut out HIV. And we even got it to turn genes off that cause cancer.”

Parker is leaning forewards, picking up every word the two scientists are saying. “Could you teach me?” he suddenly blurts out.
“About what?” Stark asks.

“CRISPR. All that.” he waves a hand through the air, “bioengineering. Biotech. Just… all about it.”

“We don’t have a lab out here,” Banner points out. “Or equipment.”

“Sorry kid,” Stark says.

Peter Parker looks crestfallen.

Natasha speaks up suddenly. Her words are slightly slurred. “But you guys know all the other stuff about it! Why don’t you just give the kid a chance.” She glares at Stark.

Stark stammers. “Um. Sure.”

Harry laughs under his breath, leaning towards Loki’s ear. “Five galleons says she’ll punch him before the sun rises tomorrow.”

“That’s quite likely,” Loki admits, a smile stretched across his pale lips.

“We can tell you about it,” Banner says. “But that doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll learn about it.”

Peter shrugs. “It’s better than nothing.”

“Sorry to ruin all the fun.” Clint is sitting the farthest away from the fire, a book in hand, though he’s looking around the forest with darting eyes far too often to be paying attention to what the pages are saying. “But I just have to point out that all this science bullshit is not going to help us take down the Ministry. What we need is soldiers, not scientists.”

Peter goes silent, watching the shadowed figure of Clint Barton. And then, “I don’t think it’s pointless. Maybe it can help.”
“How?”

Peter swallows.


Harry frowns. “Wait.” The atmosphere shifts slightly. “This thing could end the world.”

“Yeah,” Banner says, at the same time that Stark says, “It almost did.”

“It didn’t, though,” Natasha says evenly. “Besides, that happened over two hundred years ago. It’s regulated now.”

“Regulated against the general public,” Stark says. “But you don’t want to know about the things I saw in my line of work.”

Harry turns to Banner. “What happened?”

“Your guess is as good as mine, mate. I just worked with the mice and rats - I wasn’t authorized to do more than that. Tony’s team were the ones who got to play with the big stuff.”

Stark rolls his eyes. “That’s an understatement. Last thing I heard you were trying to make it possible for people to see more colours. While I was working on making it possible for humans to live with less oxygen, to make populating another planet easier.”

Banner grits his teeth. “There are some animals in the world that can see more colours than us and I just thought it might be interesting…”

“Yeah. But thanks to me we’re one step closer to populating Mars again after that disaster a few decades ago.” Stark laughs, but it’s full of kind humor, nothing malicious. “But I’m sure you had fun with your colour quest.”
Harry nudges himself closer to Loki, so that their shoulders and arms brush against each other. “What do you think of all this?” His voice is quiet, as not to disrupt the others. They pay him no mind.

“Changing eye colour… changing the way people see or consume oxygen. Without using magic, no less. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“I wonder if Stark could make pigs fly.”

“Probably could, the way he’s describing things.”

“Maybe. Pass me that bottle, would you?”

“Don’t drink too much,” Loki says as he hands it to Harry, eyes trained on the way the amber liquid sloshes around.

Harry narrows his eyes at the god. “You’re a hypocrite.”

“Maybe so.”

Harry bites back a laugh, but he can’t make the grin on his face go away.

Smoke rises from the campfire which is dying down, ambers smoldering. Stars light the sky above them and the trees wave lazily back and forth, a heavy breeze sending some of the leaves flying. There’s a slight chill to the air - a sure reminder that winter is indeed coming sooner rather than later. He’s sitting beside someone that he trusts. So close that their sides are pressed together. Harry takes another sip of the booze. He takes another drag on the cigarette and snuffs the butt out into the damp ground, making sure that it won’t start a fire. He blows the smoke into the forest, watching as it disappears.

The others are talking amongst themselves, joking and laughing. They seem innocent, even though they have a knowing look in their eyes. A look that you only get after you’ve seen something truly damaging. But they handle it well, taking everything that life throws at them in stride. Harry finds himself respecting them greatly; he knows how hard it must have been for them.
“What are you thinking about?” Loki takes the bottle from Harry’s hands, bringing it up to his lips.

“I’ve been running for three hundred years, Loki.”

“I know.”

“It just feels like…” Harry turns to look at the god. Really look at him, as if he’s memorizing the way the dying embers from the fire light the god’s face up in the softest glow possible. “It feels like... I’m finally getting somewhere. Like…” Harry’s eyebrows knit together, his mind working to try and find the right words to describe his feelings through the haziness of the booze.

“Like everything’s starting to make sense?” Loki offers.

“Yeah. How’d you know?”

There’s a long silence. Loki shifts uncomfortably, but doesn’t pull away from where Harry is leaning against him. “Because I feel the same.”

Harry tilts his head. “You’ve been running.”

“Yeah.” Loki takes a deep breath. “I know I’ve said this before but I’m not a good person, Harry.”

Harry smiles, his whole face brightening up.

“What?”

“You called me Harry.”

Loki’s cheeks take on the slightest bit of colour. “You’re missing the point.”
“No, I get it. The point is that you don’t think you deserve to be able to stop running. You don’t think you deserve any of this.” Harry gestures around the little clearing, to where Natasha is grabbing a bottle from Clint’s hands, to where Casey is curling up on Peter’s lap. To where Stark is drawing diagrams into the ground with the tip of his wand, Banner looking over his shoulder. “You don’t think you deserve friends. Or happiness. But Loki...” Harry tips his head back to stare at the stars in the sky. “You do deserve this. I don’t care what you did in the past. We all did bad things.”

Harry turns to catch Loki’s gaze, making eye contact and putting as much meaning into his words as he possibly can. “What matters is how we act now. I don’t think you’re a bad person, Loki.”

“So what am I then, if I’m not bad?”

“Scared, for one,” Harry says, sighing. “You think that nobody will ever grow close to you again because you fucked up. You’re not a bad person.” Harry says firmly.

Loki doesn’t argue any further, but Harry can tell that Loki doesn’t believe him.

Soon after that everybody retires to the cabin, heading to bed. There aren’t enough bedrooms for anybody to be able to sleep alone, but they make it work.

Harry ends up on the floor, a blanket thrown over him. For a second, Loki looks like he’s going to offer his spot on the couch to Harry, but ends up just shrugging and snapping his fingers, making all the candles in the cabin go out, sending darkness sweeping across the floor. Harry thinks about how someone he loved bled out on the floor he’s now laying on. Somewhere to the left, he thinks numbly.

But he’s able to take a deep breath, closing his eyes and focusing solely on breathing evenly. Soon the thoughts slide out of his brain and sleep takes over.

Chapter End Notes

If you have any thoughts/opinions about this fic be sure to leave them in the comments!
I love hearing what y'all are thinking.

Also, I did so much research on CRISPR a while ago, so most of what Stark and Banner say has been directly taken from the essay I wrote about it last semester! All the facts are correct, and it really is an amazing bit of science. If you're interested in ~where science is heading~ especially biotech/bioengineering, i'd strongly suggest looking it up. It's very interesting.
The pre-dawn stillness washes over the cabin full of sleeping bodies. A mouse scampers from one corner to another, and then through a small hole in the floor. The sandy hardwood floor is blemish-free and swept clean, the only dust on it being under the sofa. Soon enough, birds start chirping and sunlight streams through the cracked windows above the sink.

The Boy Who Lived wakes up from a long, dreamless sleep.

He tenses for a second, the muscles on his back going rigid before he realises where he is. He’s used to sleeping outdoors, but with yet another cold winter quickly approaching he has allowed himself to be persuaded by Loki to sleep inside. (“Just this once. Give it a try. If you hate it, you can go back out.”) He sits up with a sigh, rubbing his dry hands over his face and letting the moth-eaten blanket fall from his thin frame. He straightens, cursing under his breath when his back cracks loudly.

There’s a headache forming behind his eyes and his back is sore. His mouth tastes awful.

“Good morning.” Loki’s sitting up on the couch, Casey perched on his lap.

Something tugs at Harry’s heart. “Morning.” He stands, using the elder wand to quickly make some tea for himself. “We going after someone else today?”
“Steve Rogers.”

“Alright. Want some tea?”

“Please.”

The cupboard isn’t well-stocked. Harry takes the second-least damaged teacup. It only has one chip out of the corner. He taps it with the elder wand and it fills with tea. He performs a quick charm to keep it warm and then spells it to fly over to Loki.

Harry leans against the sink, taking a sip of the tea. The sun has started to filter through the windows, sending patches of light dancing across the wooden floor. “Sleep well?” Harry asks through a mouthful of tea.

Loki shrugs. “I slept.” He tilts his cup back and drains the last of the tea. “Ready to go, then?”

“The others haven’t even woken up yet. The sun is barely even awake. Give it some time.”

Loki says, “No.” And Casey leaps off his lap as he stands.

Harry raises an eyebrow. “No?”

“We have to find Rogers,” Loki says, and his eyes are screaming. “We have to find him so that we can take down your Ministry and then - and then you can help get me home.”

Harry says, “I will help you. You know I will.”

“I have to get home,” Loki repeats. “Please. Can we just go.” He’s too close to pleading. Harry’s skin crawls, like there’s bugs in his veins.

“Why?” he asks, maybe a bit too loudly. “Why is it so important that you go home?”
Loki’s adam’s apple bobs up and down as he swallows. “If you were stuck in another dimension, would you not want to go home?” Loki’s voice is harsh. It cracks around the edges.

“From what you’ve told me, you don't have much of a life back in your world,” Harry hisses, slamming his cup down onto the counter. “I had a life here! I’m just trying to get that back, and you’re really not helping by trying to rush this all along! Let me finish my fucking tea before we go off to ask yet another person to uproot their life for this quest!” Harry yells. Loki bristles, then deflates.

“Fine.” He sits back down.

The tension in the air unwinds just as quick as it flared up. Harry rubs his forehead, and nudges his glasses back up his nose. He runs his hands through his hair. “Let’s go.”

Loki’s head shoots up.

Harry gives him a tight-lipped smile. “I’m sorry.” He holds out his hand.

They disapparate with a pop.

It’s a strange sensation, trying to apparate somewhere you’ve never been. It’s not supposed to be possible, but Harry’s had three hundred years to learn how to break or bend all the rules that were drilled into him as a student at Hogwarts. He’s always allowed his anger and rash thinking to fuel his magic, influencing the way it performs. Now is no different. Red surrounds them, and Harry pours everything he’s got into apparating close to a specific person in a place he’s never been. It’s about tapping into a different magic signature, he discovered over the years. Instead of thinking of the place he needs to go, he focuses on the feeling of magic that surrounds that place, and harnesses onto it, letting it drag both himself and the man clutching tight onto his hand back to the ground.

Loki stumbles slightly upon landing but straightens right away. They’re on a street corner and Harry frowns at having apparated into such a public place. Thankfully, it doesn’t seem like any muggles are about. It’s too early for that. A dog barks at them from the confines of its yard, and Harry glances towards it warily. Dew covers the perfectly square grass yards in front of the small, identical houses that line the street. It reminds Harry a little bit too much of Privet Drive, and an overwhelming urge to leave takes over his body.
“Know which one of these it is?” Harry asks. His voice is pinched and tight. He feels too exposed here. There’s no muggle groups passing by that they can blend in with. They’re out in the open; anybody could see them if they draw back their curtains and glanced outside. They’re standing on the corner of a four-way stop. High above them a plane flies by, a heavy contrast to the blanket of leaves that Harry is used to seeing when he looks up.

“Number 009,” Loki says, looking down at the palm of his hand where he hastily scribbled the address earlier. “Should be that way.” He points down the street to the right.

Harry nods and turns on his heel, stalking down the pavement. He shoves his hands into the pockets of his robe, grimacing when he sees movement flicker out of the corner of his eye. Someone drawing back their curtains to stare at them or just a stray cat? He doesn’t allow his head to whip around and check.

“Here.” Loki turns up one of the driveways, towards a pristine house.

“You sure?” Harry hangs back. All the others hadn’t lived in the best of places. They had all made their homes in tiny, dingy apartments and thrown themselves into the muggle working class, but it seems as though Steve Rogers has settled down in an actual house, with a yard and everything. There’s a car in the driveway.

“Yes,” Loki says. Then he catches sight of Harry’s pale face. “You alright?”

“Yeah, I’m just...” Harry bites the inside of his mouth and walks up the drive towards Loki. “This reminds me of the place I lived when I was younger.”

“Is that not a good thing?” Loki has a rare, soft look on his face.

“No, er- not for me, it isn’t.”

“Ah.” Loki looks sympathetic for a moment but then turns back around to the front door, and Harry can no longer tell how the god is feeling. He knocks on the white door three times and then rings the bell, tapping his foot while he waits for someone to answer.

Harry is perfectly fine with letting Loki take the lead on this one.
A scruffy, long-haired man opens the door and greets Loki with a suspicious look. “How can I help you?”

“You’re Mister Rogers?” Loki has a smile on his face, and if Harry didn’t know him so well he would think it was genuine.

“Uh, no. The name’s Bucky.”

Harry takes a hesitant step backwards. They’ve gone to the wrong house. They’ve blown their cover. Fuck, why didn’t they take polyjuice or at least alter their appearances with magic as they have in the past?

Bucky turns and Harry thinks he’s going to slam the door, but instead he calls, “Steve! There’s some people at the door for you.” Harry breathes a sigh of relief and walks up a few paces to stand beside Loki.

Steve is easy to talk to. He’s tall and broad shouldered. He’s kind and his smiles come effortlessly. He invites Loki and Harry in without asking what they’re there for, and asks Bucky to put on a pot of tea while he shows them to the sitting room.

When he speaks, he’s eyeing Harry’s wizarding attire warily. “Are you here to take me away?”

“What? No.” Harry stammers. “We’re not with the Ministry. We’re actually here to um... ask for your help.”

Steve relaxes, but only slightly. “Help with what?”

“We want to take down the Ministry.”

Steve takes a deep breath, and leans back against the wall farthest from Harry. He crosses his arms over his chest. “A revolution. Why?”
“Well, I’m Harry Potter.” The name seems to have little effect on Steve. “And- my life has been destroyed by the Ministry.” He’s never really opened up about the full extent of what the Ministry took from him, mostly because he hates to relive those last few hours of calm before his life was ruined, but also because he hates when people looked at him with pity. Somehow, he doesn’t think Steve will pity him. Or at least, he hopes not.

“They took everything.” He looks over to Loki, who’s staring at him with an unreadable expression. “And recently it’s come to my attention that the Ministry is unbelievably corrupt. Loki and I have been tracking down some people that the Ministry has hurt, because we believe they’ll be motivated to help us.”

“What are you proposing, exactly?”

“We’re going to try and uproot them. Take away everything that makes them powerful… try to ensure that they can’t hurt anybody anymore.”

“Do you know why the Ministry is doing this?” Steve asks. He’s not dismissive, just curious by the sound of it.

“Because they want more power? Because they need to make the most powerful wizards go away so that they can continue to rule?”

Steve shakes his head slowly. “The Ministry isn’t a monarchy. They’re a democracy; the general public votes them in.”

“Well-” Harry grasps at straws. “They’re up to something. Why else do you think that they’d be killing people, and not letting others go through fair trials?”

“Are you sure it’s the Ministry that’s doing that?” Steve’s voice is careful.

“Yes,” Harry says without a second’s thought. “Nobody else could orchestrate this, it’s on such a large scale. And the trials? The murders that they cover up? Either it’s the Ministry or there’s one very smart, powerful wizard that has every employee under the Imperius curse.”

“We went to the Ministry,” Loki says. “Something wasn’t right. There were too many guards - it was hard to get anywhere. The amount of security they’ve got… it’s unrealistic. You would be a
powerful addition to our team - if you do decide to join, that is. We’ve got a little house in the forest, covered in wards for the best and safest homebase possible.”

Steve takes a deep breath. “Are you sure you’re right? About the Ministry being behind all this? If I join you I don’t want it to be founded on suspicion.”

Harry and Loki exchange a glance. “Yes, I’m positive,” Harry ends up saying. Because it’s the truth - and because he needs this alliance.

Bucky comes out with four cups of tea and a small pile of cookies, all balanced precariously on a tray.

Steve turns to him and says, “How would you feel about moving out?”

Satisfaction clings to Harry. He and Loki have gotten seven other people to join them, a feat that Harry would have thought impossible just a few months ago. His vision of a safer wizarding world is closer than ever before. If all goes to plan, he should be able to be a free man by the end of everything. That’s what he wants more than anything else in the world. To feel accepted and welcomed in the wizarding community. To build up friendships and get a real job and a real life. He doesn’t want anything special. He just wants a place in the world. A place in the very same world that used to embrace him with open arms. He believes it’s possible - it will just take time, and lots of work.

But with a god and a handful of wizards by his side, everything is sure to fall into place soon.

It doesn’t take long for Bucky and Steve to pack up the belongings that they want to bring. They arrive back at the cabin before midday. It starts raining soon after that, and everybody stays inside the cabin. Tony shows Steve and Bucky where their room is.

Harry sets up his cauldron on top of a flame on the kitchen counter, pouring in some water and bringing it up to a boil. He hasn’t brewed any potions in a while, and better to be safer than sorry. Healing potion stores should be kept high.

He takes out a thin vial of unicorn hair and plucks out a strand, dropping it into the boiling water and immediately stirring it clockwise so fast that it sloshes around the edges. He murmurs spells under his breath, the elder wand sending clouds of colour into the liquid.
“So is this everyone, then?” Natasha asks from where she’s sitting on the couch beside Peter.

“Yep,” Harry says as he stops stirring and adds in a small amount of powder from another vial. “Everybody from the files Loki managed to get, at least.”

“So… what’s the plan now?” Peter asks.

“Yeah,” Banner agrees from where he’s sitting at the table, tilting the chair back onto two legs. “Where exactly do you propose we go from here?”

“Well,” Harry starts, “I was hoping some of you might have some idea.”

Tony snorts. “You didn’t think of the next step.”

“I did. Kind-of, anyway,” Harry says with a frown, still stirring the potion. “I want them to be scared. I want them to be slowly torn apart and I want them to not know when the attacks are coming. I want them begging for mercy.”

There’s a stunned silence and then Steve says, “How about something a bit more… civil.”

“What’s your idea, then?” Harry shoots back.

“I agree with you on some accounts… making them scared, and slowly tearing them down. I can get behind that, but maybe something a little less violent.”

“Yeah!” Peter pipes up. “I was reading in a book ages ago that before the Battle of Hogwarts, there was an organization called Dumbledore’s Army that helped defeat Voldemort.”

Tony speaks up. “Didn’t they put graffitti up and send the message out that Harry Potter Lives?”

There’s a moment of silence where everybody turns to Harry, waiting for their words to be confirmed. “Oh.” Harry looks down at the potion he’s stirring. “Yeah. Neville Longbottom, Luna Lovegood… Lavender. Ginny. They did that, while I was away.”
“They were brave,” Natasha comments.

“Unbelievably so,” Harry murmurs. “They were amazing people. They didn’t deserve what they got.”

“We’ll avenge them,” Loki speaks from where he’s standing, resting against the counter beside Harry. He makes eye contact with Harry, repeating his words, “We’ll avenge them.”

“I know,” Harry says.

“So let’s start like they did,” Bucky says, casually. “Graffiti, telling them that you live - that you’re still going strong and that you now have followers. They won’t be able to hide that from the public, unless they’re able to wipe hundreds of memories. And if we can get it in the papers - the wizarding world will know.”

“The power of the crowd,” Loki drawls. “If everybody is scared then the Ministry needs to do something. Are we able to steal things from them? Hide things? Small disturbances... but we need to make sure that they know we’re behind it.”

“And then what?” Harry asks, dropping another pinch of silver powder into the potion. “So, we make them scared. We get the public involved. What would that do, and where would we possibly go from there?”

“We’re not the only people with stories like this,” Banner says. “I know of other wizards who have dealt with unfair trials and are now in Azkaban or on the run. Or worse.”

“We get them involved, there’s got to be hundreds - or thousands of people out there with similar stories.” Natasha says.

“If there’s enough, we can stage protests,” Steve says, glancing at Bucky. “We might know of some friends who could help out.”

“We’d need to get to the Minister for Magic.” Harry’s thinking out loud at this point. “See if he’s under the Imperius curse. If he is, then we can break it and find the real person who’s behind all this.
And if he isn’t, then we can…”

“Murder?” Tony says. “Surely not?”

“Have they not murdered our own families and friends?” Natasha cuts in.

“We won’t murder.” Steve is glaring. “Nobody’s dying. We’ll cause them disturbance and all that, but under no circumstances are we going to murder the Minister for Magic.”

Loki glares. “You’re not in charge here.”

“Neither are you,” Steve barks. “And who are you, anyway? I’ve certainly never heard of any Loki Laufeyson on the run.”

“He’s a friend,” Harry says sternly, “and if I were you, I wouldn’t piss him off. I’ve seen his magic up close when he gets angry. He’s not forgiving.”

Steve leans back. “Fine.”

There’s a few seconds of silence before Peter speaks. “I could start a radio station. I’m good with technology… that way we could tell people what’s happening if they’re interesting in making an alliance.”

“That sounds good,” Harry says, grateful for the shift in conversation. “Why don’t you organize that with Banner?”

Peter nods vigorously. “I will.”

“I have a niece,” Natasha says. “She’s at Hogwarts right now… sixth year. She’s hell-bent on avenging her mother’s - my sister’s death. She has some friends there that share similar… interests. We could get the students involved.”

“Is that such a good idea?” Clint says. “They’re just kids.”
“I was a baby when Voldemort tried to kill me,” Harry says. “I didn’t choose to fight in that war but the war found me anyway. This is going to turn into a war. Don’t underestimate the power of students.” Harry thinks back to the D.A.

Clint shrugs. “If you’re sure.”

“I am sure,” Harry says. “So, you all in? Are you going to help me fight this war?”

“We’ve been fighting this war for a long time,” Natasha says. “We haven’t been vocal about it and we haven’t done much but we’ve fought.” She raises her chin. “We’re ready to end this war - once and for all.”

Loki nudges himself a bit closer to Harry and speaks to him quiet enough that the others aren’t able to hear. “See, Potter? Everything’s going to work out perfectly. And then you can help me get home.”

All Harry can do is smile at him and continue stirring the potion.

Yes, everything is working out. He just hopes it will stay that way.

Chapter End Notes

leave a comment if you've got some thoughts about this fic! All comments make me smile, even if it's just a keyboard smash :)
Three weeks have passed and everything is running relatively smoothly. There have been a few minor disturbances, but nothing so drastic that they haven’t been able to fix it. The small band of wizards that Harry has gathered, along with the graffiti and signs that they have left around the Ministry of Magic and other wizarding hotspots, have not gone unnoticed. It’s made the front page in the Daily Prophet for five days in a row now. Giant, bold letters above a moving picture of writing on the side of a building on the outskirts of Hogsmeade - “Harry Potter Lives”

Harry himself has skimmed through the article, but hasn’t bothered to thoroughly read through the entire two-page piece. The press had a field day with it, and Harry can imagine the spirit of Rita Skeeter cackling happily. It’s had the desired effect among the public - pamphlets being sent out to wizarding families, containing information of how to keep their loved ones safe from the ‘coming evil’. For that is one thing that the papers did get right - this is only the tip of the iceberg. There’s much, much more to come. It’s teetering more on the ‘revenge’ side of wanting his place in the wizarding world back.

Natasha, Clint and the others are having the time of their lives. It seems as though they are settling in well and have even grown to enjoy living in the forest. More than that though, they are absolutely loving the graffiti - the messages, the small spells placed around wizarding developments, making… less than ideal situations occur. The small group of younger witches and wizards back at Hogwarts are doing their part, too. The shrieking shack is more haunted than ever.
It’s all little things, but stacked together it’s making a difference. It’s causing unsettlement, making people wary and looking over their shoulders at every scuttling sound. An odd feeling of pride creeps in Harry’s chest. He’s finally doing something. The Ministry will have to take action soon. The public will demand it of them.

“Potter.”

Harry turns, facing Loki. Vines cling to the trunks of trees around them. The late afternoon sun is beaming down through the leaves.

“Just call me Harry, please.” Harry is exasperated and rolls his eyes.

“Potter,” Loki repeats with a grin on his face. And then his hard exterior dissolves and Harry is suddenly left staring at a very open, almost soft version of the god. “Harry,” he says, as if he’s trying out how it tastes upon his tongue.

“That’s better.” Harry leans his shoulder against a tree. “What are you doing out here? Thought you’d gone with Stark.”

Loki shrugs. “Wanted to talk to you.” He says it so nonchalantly, but Harry’s heart flutters all the same.

“Talk, then,” Harry says and watches as Loki puts the wall back up around himself. It’s amusing, the way that the god can command himself to appear open and friendly or closed off and unfeeling.

He says, “You can’t possibly think that all this will work.”

Harry frowns. “What do you mean?”

“The Ministry - your whole plan. Making the public demand the truth. It’s not going to work, you know that.”
Harry’s mouth twists. “Elaborate, please.”

Loki sighs heavily, and then continues speaking. “You lost people you loved. Trust me when I tell you that I know exactly how that feels. I know how much pain you must have been in-”

Harry cuts him off with a snarl. “That is not relevant.”

“Oh but it is!” Loki exclaims. “Your past has everything to do with what you’re currently orchestrating.” Loki saunters a few paces closer to the tree that Harry’s leaning against. “What you’re doing… all of these plans to use the public to take down the Ministry, all of your talk about justice and fighting for what is right, all of your ‘we need to expose them for what they really are’... it’s all just a cover-up, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Loki tilts his head. “Yes, you do. I’ve been thinking about it for some time now. I couldn’t seem to figure you out.” Loki lets out a huff of laughter, though it’s void of any amusement. “All you want is revenge.”

Harry swallows. His hands feel clammy. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”


“Fine,” Harry says, and he lets out a long breath.

Loki’s eyes light up in triumph. “So, what is your plan then? What’s the real plan?”

Harry digs through a pocket for a cigarette. He lights it with nothing more than a thought and takes a long drag, turning his head away from Loki to exhale a breath of thick smoke. “What do you think the ‘plan’ is?”

“I’m not exactly sure. I know that you’re probably already ahead of the Ministry - I know that you’re likely using this little rebellion as a distraction.” Loki meets Harry’s piercing gaze. “Am I right?”
“Maybe.” Harry is feigning nonchalance. His heart is beating too fast beneath his ribs. Sweat clings to his palms.

“You’ve been planning for months. No - years. Haven’t you? This is the beginning, isn’t it? Now that you’ve got the distractions and the—” Loki stops talking abruptly, as if something has just occurred to him. He slowly raises an eyebrow. “...and the manpower. You’ve been waiting for someone to come around that has my level of… abilities.”

Harry tilts his head. “How do you figure that?”

And Loki says, “What’s your game, Potter? What in Odin’s name are you playing?” Every single syllable is laced through with complete and utter wonder.

Harry takes a deep breath. Another drag on the cig. He chews at the inside of his cheek. And then finally, he smirks. “You’re smarter than I’ve given you credit for, Laufeyson.”

And Harry tells him. He tells him everything. Everything and *more*. He spills out his secrets like water flooding down a river.

The thing is, nothing is as it seems. Nothing is ever as *simple* as it seems. Nothing is clean-cut. Black and white decisions don’t exist, only the in-between colours and choices. Does making one choice equal being a bad human? Does saving someone’s life mean that you are any better than a regular criminal? In the end, when time ceases existing, what else matters what you, yourself manages to achieve.

It’s selfish, Harry knows. But he hasn’t had to care for anybody else for a very, very long time.

Harry talks for a long time. He goes into detail about the smallest things and Loki hangs off every single word. He tells Loki about how ever since Tobias was killed, all he’s wanted is revenge. He wanted revenge before Tobias’s death, of course. But it wasn’t until afterwards that it grew unbearable. Soon enough he stopped caring about any sort of future that he might be able to achieve if he tried his best.

So yes, it started, in a way, with Tobias.
Not quite three hundred years ago, he fled as the man he loved died in front of his eyes.

He ran at first, crashing through bushes, legs nothing but a dark blur in the twilight atmosphere as he fled. Tobias had screamed, “Run! Run, Harry! Please - run!” His last words. And then the aroma of blood had taken over and his brief existence on this earth had ceased.

Days bled into weeks and then months. It was all Harry could do to bite his tongue and close his mind.

That's when he made the conscious decision that he could never be something more than what had already been made of him. In the mind of the public he was evil, wanting only fame and glory. There was nothing to contradict the thoughts of the public. And Harry was so, so tired.

Liquor on his lips and smoke on his tongue, potions sending a dense fog throughout his corner of the forest. Mind so full of anger that his fingers trembled and his mouth formed a silent scream.

His thoughts were clouded and half-formed ideas that got scratched into the mud with the tip of his wand, nothing more than a fantasy of a far-fetched revenge plot that needed much more than a single, anger-driven wizard. Nonetheless, he allowed his actions to be influenced by the pure hatred coursing through his veins every minute of every day. It manifested itself through unhealthy addictions and the thought: “Why don’t I just end this all?” The only thing that stopped him, in the end, was his need for closure. He needed to make sure that his friends didn’t die in vain.

He had to kill the Minister for Magic.

It was a foggy day, rain gathering in puddles on the sidewalk. The village of Hogsmeade was clinging to the last strands of daylight before the night truly took it’s hold. It was cold and the strong winds ripped at his robes, trying to pull them free from his cloaked body. Trying to show the world who had just arrived in one of the larger magical settlements. He stomped through puddles, uncaring as it splashed up his legs, soaking through his boots and socks alike.

He had one thought in his mind: the Minister, at the three broomsticks, 7pm sharp. To meet with the new additions to the staff of Hogwarts, and to make sure that the school was under the utmost protection. The Boy Who Lived had slipped through their fingertips once again, and they needed to ensure that the students stayed safe. Ha, like Harry would ever try to murder children.

It was nearing eight thirty and Harry stood ready a few streets down from the Three Broomsticks,
eyes intently watching the door to the pub. Any minute now.

The door snapped open. Harry’s body tensed.

The Minister was walking closer - he had a limp and was using a cane to walk. He was tall, and people walked on either side of him. Harry swallowed. Steeled himself. Gripped the elder wand so tightly that his knuckles turned white and he could feel his pulse reflecting back at him against the thin wood. He took a deep breath that he held for a second before letting out.

Closing his eyes, he lets the anger run through himself freely-

“Run! Run, Harry! Please - run!”

“Home isn’t Hogwarts - home is people.”

But what was the point if he’d lost all the people? What was the point if there was no Hogwarts? What was the point if he could never find his way home because home was a fictional place buried deep inside the mind, something that he could have had at one point in time if only he hadn’t organized the memorial? If only he hadn’t said goodbye to Ginny; if only he had kept his head down and mourned the loss of his friends from the great battle like everybody else had done - locked away behind doors, leaning over graves, screaming until their voices were hoarse.

“We are gathered here today to remember those who have fallen.”

Harry was here, now, to avenge all the others.

His gaze flashed red and he slipped away from the wall he was leaning against. The group of wizards was right in front of him. The Minister.

Harry roared “CRUCIO!” and the Minister collapsed like a lifeless doll, a shriek tearing its way out of his chest and through his lips.

The wand burned in the palm of Harry’s hand. Around him there was uproar. The hood stayed over his head, obscuring his identity, until someone fired a curse at him and he had to spin out of the way,
sliding across the wet ground.

He dodged and ducked, robes whipping around him, magic his for the taking.

Someone was trying to get the Minister to stand up, to stop screaming, to stop hurting.

“Expulso!” someone yelled and the ground beneath Harry’s feet exploded, sending him flying backwards. His balance was off and he landed hard on his back, smashing his skull against the hard stone ground. His vision went blurry for a second and he blinked rapidly, scrambling to his feet and casting a strong shield charm.

An Avada Kedavra was on the tip of his tongue. The Minister was on the ground, still screaming in agony. The other wizards’ curses bounced off Harry’s invisible shield, flying off in all directions. He was a Gryffindor, but it seemed cowardly to kill someone who was already down. At this point though, he was well beyond caring about his moral compass.

Lights flashed, sparks flew. Yells erupted from wizards who Harry slashed his wand at. He was a ball of fury - a fire that couldn’t be vanquished. His need for revenge was unparalleled.

Just as he was pointing the Elder Wand at the Minister, unspeakable words about to be uttered, something smashed through his shield charm and he barely dodged half a dozen badly-aimed stunners.

His boots slipped through mud as he jerked backwards, wand slashing through the air, screaming curses.

But he’d lost his touch.

They were getting reinforcements and Harry was quickly overpowered. They were closing in on him when he disappeared.

Three hundred years in the future and he’s still chasing after the same goal. Because maybe, if he can make the people behind his misery pay, then he can finally be at peace.
A different Minister is now in power, but that doesn’t change Harry’s plans. The current Minister can still be in contact with the past ones - in the magical world, it’s not impossible to speak to the dead. It’s still a corrupt and broken system. It’s still ruining people’s lives, and so Harry’s darkness, his anger, stays as strong as ever.

“All for revenge?” Loki muses. “After all this time.”

Harry shrugs. “I guess.”

“Do you even care about what happens to Natasha, Clint, Stark, and the rest? After your vendetta has been waged?” He’s met with an uncomfortable silence. Loki dryly laughs after a moment. “You’re playing a dangerous game, Potter. If I tell them about this they could make your life infinitely harder. They’re smart, and powerful too, whether or not you like to admit that to yourself.”

“You won’t tell them,” Harry snaps. “You need me.”

“But where will you go, after? When this is all over.” Underneath the carefully spoken words is a soft, curious and genuine tone.

“I don’t know. On.”

“On where?”

Harry waves a hand through the air vaguely. “I’ll figure something out.”

Loki steps closer. Harry sighs, and slumps back. He tilts his head back so that he can see Loki. They’re standing too close. Harry’s heart is beating too hard. His breath catches in his throat.

“Harry.”

And Harry runs. He pushes past Loki and disappears into the woods. Because that’s what he does. He’s constantly running, and this is the first time that he’s taking a stand and fighting. Really, truly fighting for what he so strongly believes in. There’s a voice in his head telling him that he shouldn’t have spilled his secrets to Loki.
But he can’t bring himself to regret it.

Chapter End Notes

Pls leave comments!!! they’re really nice to see, they really do make my day xxx
Adrenaline pulses through his veins and his heart pumps faster than ever, sending blood rushing to every part of his body. Running isn’t necessary but it’s the excitement that he loves. The thrill gets to him and he relishes in it, letting it overtake him. A bark of laughter bursts from his chest and wind whips through his hair. Natasha and Peter are running on either side of him, caught up in the exhilaration just as Harry himself is. Nobody’s chasing them but someone could be chasing them.

Harry has never felt more alive.

When they reach the end of the alleyway, they disapparate in the same instance. A moment of swirling colours later and they’re stumbling into the moss-covered clearing in front of the cabin. Someone’s been doing garden work, Harry notes. Roses have crawled their way up the sides of the cabin, pale pink petals too full of life to be anything less than magic in the mid autumn weather. The sun is hidden behind a thin blanket of clouds, a promise of rain on the way. Wind roars through the treetops, causing Harry’s hair to press down over his forehead and against his eyes. Pine needles rain down and pinecones thump against the ground.

Some potions can be finicky in the warmer weather and Harry heads inside to grab his cauldron in the hopes of starting a potion. Mainly Polyjuice, since his stores are low and Clint prefers using Polyjuice over having someone transfigure his looks when he wants to get out of the forest - sometimes to help with the Harry Potter Cause and other times to just go to a muggle pub.
Or, alternatively, Veritaserum. He’s never made it before because he’s never had to make it before. It would serve no purpose, just left at the bottom of his bag until it gathered dust and eventually all the magic seeped out of it. Preservation spells could only do so much, and Harry’s been around for so long. But now, with other people joining him and supporting his ideas and vendetta… well, maybe he could use it. Hypothetically speaking, of course. He shudders at the thought of actually having to use it on any of the wizards currently in the small, rose-covered cabin. Not that he fully trusts them, but still.

Banner calls Spidey into the room off the main living area, sternly asking him not to touch any of the equipment and promising him that he and Stark will finally start teaching Peter at least the basic scientific theories that go into CRISPR. If the elated look on Peter’s face is anything to go by, he’ll soon convince the older scientists to teach him everything.

Harry grabs his cauldron from the cupboard under the sink and carries it outside, leaving Natasha in the company of Clint and Casey. Steve and Bucky left early in the morning to do recon at the Ministry. Or more accurately, they left to go hang out near the Ministry, watching the people that pass and picking up on any patterns that could be used at a later point in time.

Harry sets up the cauldron under an ancient oak tree. He lights a fire beneath it with a snap of his fingers - a habit he’s picked up from Loki, who always likes acting as if magic is nothing but commonplace. He’s not one hundred percent sure how to brew Veritaserum, but he knows the basics to any potion and pops open a flask of pure, distilled water (Harry got the original water from a beautiful underground cavern somewhere in Wales a little under a year ago).

Potion-making brings peace to him, helping him calm down and letting his mind rest. He wishes, now more than ever, that he actually paid more attention in Potions Class back at Hogwarts. If he had understood potions then, then maybe Snape would have gone easier on him. At least, he could have gotten good grades in not just one class, but two. It’s too late to regret it now, as Harry’s sure that now he could brew potions better, faster and stronger than Snape had ever been able to. Years upon years of total isolation provided a useful excuse to learn skills that he previously never thought he would need.

The adrenaline runs down and Harry’s left feeling completely and utterly calm, equilibrium taking over his body. He relaxes completely and closes his eyes for a second just to listen.

To his left the stream is bubbling and gurgling, the water splashing over rocks as it flows quickly downstream, washing away the dead leaves that fall into its path. Trees creak and the wind roars and from the cabin, Harry can hear the soft murmur of happy voices talking. Small animals rustle through the Juniper bushes and birds sing as they dance effortlessly through the heavy wind.
He hears footsteps headed his way and clenches his jaw; his heart beats faster, anxiety spiking. His eyes fly open, and Loki offers him a friendly smile. Harry sighs.

“Don’t sneak up on me like that.” He bends down to pick up his dragonhide bag, digging through it. “Almost gave me a heart attack.”

“I didn’t sneak up.” Loki frowns, walking past Harry and sitting down by the edge of the stream, taking off his shoes and then socks, letting his feet dangle in the cold water.

Harry stares at Loki’s back. He’s wearing thin emerald green robes and Harry can’t help but wonder if the god is cold. Maybe where he’s from, cold doesn’t exist. His black hair is a little bit too long and it hangs down to his shoulders, wavy enough that it could be mistaken for curls in the right kind of light. Normally, whenever anybody else approaches Harry whilst he’s brewing any sort of potion, he grows irritated and snaps at them, telling them to go away so that he can focus better. He can’t help it - it’s instinctual. It feels weird having people hanging around all the time, and potions are his escape from that.

But it’s different with Loki.

Loki’s presence is steady. It’s dependable, and above that, it’s safety. For all the god’s talk about being a bad person he’s managed to worm his way into Harry’s life, making it infinitely easy for Harry to learn to trust him. They haven’t even met that long ago, but time seems indifferent when it comes to Loki.

“Stop thinking so hard,” Loki says, not even glancing back at Harry. “You’re not doing anybody any favours.”

Harry laughs dryly and after a few moments of quiet contemplation, lowers the heat on the potion and pads over to where Loki is sitting. Loki looks up at him and smirks. “Am I really that irresistible?”

Harry’s laugh echoes through the forest and he sits down beside the god, crossing his legs and running a hand through his messy hair.

“Look,” Loki says slowly, keeping his gaze trained on the rushing water beneath his feet. “I want to help you.”
The carefree atmosphere is whipped away before it’s truly able to take its hold and Harry lets out a breath of air, waiting a moment before speaking. “No. You want me to help you so that you can go home.”

“Well, yes. Of course I want that. But that’s not going to happen any time soon, so I may as well make my time here worthwhile. I want to help you because you’re carrying too much of a burden for one person.”

“So it’s pity then.”

Loki lets out a frustrated laugh. “No, you idiot. It’s because I… care.”

Harry swallows. “You shouldn’t. The people who care about me die.” His voice is gruff, and it shakes around the edges. He’s grateful when Loki pretends to not have noticed.

The god pushes on. “I could get inside the Ministry-”

Harry cuts him off. “No, you couldn’t. We tried that, remember? You almost died.”

“That’s because of your potions. That’s what set off the alarms, not me. My magic has a completely different signature from the magic of this world; they won’t have the the right instruments to detect me. I’ll be able to get around without any trouble,” Loki says. His voice is careful and calculating.

Harry sighs heavily, and dramatically throws his body back so that he’s laying on the soft grassy forest floor. “What would you even hope to achieve? We’ve already got our little army and I don’t want you killing the Minister for me.”

“I mean undercover. Steve and Bucky are always out doing reconnaissance, and whilst that’s good and all, it doesn’t help much to simply look on the Ministry from the outside. They’re seeing it through a keyhole - they’re only observing glimpses. If you really want to properly tear them down, it’s got to be done from the inside.”

“You’ve thought this through,” Harry comments, tilting his head to the side so that he’s looking at Loki, and not just the branches of the trees blocking out the afternoon sun.
“Of course I have.”

When Loki glances back at him Harry holds his gaze, unblinking. “Are you certain you’re up for this?”

A few seconds pass of startling silence, and when Loki finally speaks up his words are packed full of so much emotion that Harry shivers. “Of course I’m up for it.” He raises his chin, challengingly.

There’s so much said between the words, the unspoken: ‘It’s for you - and for you, I would slay the world’ and the way that the god’s voice broke off at the end slightly.

“Oh okay.”

“Oh okay? Just okay?” Loki’s lips curve up into a smile.

“Oh okay.” Harry grins.

Loki leaves Harry alone to his thoughts soon afterwards. He gets up, going back to his potion and staring blankly at the thin liquid, before pulling out the Elder Wand from a pocket in his robes. He stirs the potion a few times each way and then picks up his dragonhide bag, digging through it for some sort of ingredients that would prompt candor.

The peace that previously took over his mind is disturbed by his swirling thoughts.

He finds himself smiling to himself when he remembers the sincerity to Loki’s words.

Two stirs clockwise, sprinkle in a pinch of ground unicorn horn, three stirs counter clockwise.

What Loki said, what he had offered, could potentially be a suicide mission. They could capture the god; they could overpower his magic. They could sentence him to Azkaban or avada kedavra him right on the spot, saving them the trip to the island where happiness doesn’t exist in any way, shape or form. Loki’s not full of happiness, not in the way that Luna Lovegood or Lavender Brown had been. He’s not sad, but from what Harry has seen he prefers to live in-between the two - where he’s comfortable, but never happy go lucky. It’s just not in his nature.
He doesn’t brood as much as Harry himself does.

But he has shells. A careful exterior that Harry sees when the god is interacting with the team. Below that, though, when it’s just Harry and Loki, tucked into their own safe little world, Harry can see the exterior fall away until all that he’s seeing is the raw, pure Loki. Mischievous and with an evil glint in his eye but sincere and kind too. It’s not fake, either. Harry has seen the fake trust that Loki has shown everybody else with flashy smiles and a tilted head, palms out and eyes crinkling at the edges, showing the textbook physical motions of openness. Harry can see through that. Loki keeps a shield around him at all times and only lets people see what he wants them to see.

Except when it comes to Harry.

Because Harry can see Loki and not just the god’s attempts at a facade.

Steve and Bucky arrive back at the cabin just as the sun is beginning to dip down below the horizon, shrouding the forest in soft shadows.

“Harry?” Steve’s voice cuts through the silence when Harry doesn’t turn to greet them.

“Yeah?”

“Can I talk to you for a second?”

Harry gives the potion one final stir before covering it and turning the heat down, turning to face Steve. “Yeah, of course. What’s up?”

“The official report would be that security is visibly getting tighter. Harder to get in. And they seem to have posted guard around the main entrances.”

Harry raises an eyebrow. “And the unofficial report?”

Steve shrugs. “They’re scared. Owls all over the city, even in broad daylight. Wizards are working longer hours than ever. I overheard some talk about trying to find Harry Potter but nothing too serious, in my humble opinion.”
Harry nods. “Thanks.”

“That’s - um… not all I wanted to talk about, though.” Steve rubs a hand over his mouth, as if he’s struggling to find the words he wants to speak in order to properly convey his feelings. “Where’s Loki?” He settles on.

Harry shrugs. “He was here a while ago. I figured that he went back to the cabin.”

He watches as Steve’s lips twist. “Are you… sure that it’s best to leave him all on his own?”

“What do you mean?”

“The guy is obviously not from around here. He’s - I don’t know. Something seems wrong, like he’s not telling us everything. When he talks it’s like he’s trying to hide something obvious from us. I don’t trust him and I don’t think that you should either. He could tear us to pieces if he wanted to.”

Harry’s blood boils, but he fights to keep his sudden rage at bay. “Are you scared of him?”

Steve plants his feet in place and crosses his arms. “There’s something odd going on with him.”

“There’s something odd going on with all of us!” Harry throws his hands up in the air. “We’re all fucked up; don’t single one guy out.”

Steve looks like he’s about to fight back, but Harry beats him. “I trust him. He has saved my life multiple times and has been a good person from the very start of this whole thing.”

Harry spits on the ground at Steve’s feet and glares at him with too much anger to be contained within one human being. “You’ll never be half the man that Loki is.”

And maybe that’s going too far. Maybe it’s uncalled for. But Harry is beyond caring at this point in time.
Steve gives Harry a curt nod and then spins on his heel, stalking over to Bucky and then disappearing into the cabin, slamming the door behind them.

Harry’s chest heaves.

He doesn’t go back inside when the moon replaces the sun in the sky, mostly because he’s still too angry to be able to face Steve. He doesn’t need Steve to trust Loki, but Harry does need Steve to trust him. Loki’s going to escape one day, and he won’t have to deal with Steve or Bucky or Peter or anybody ever again. But Harry’s stuck here and he needs everything to work out according to his plans. It won’t work out if Steve is distrustful or feels any kind of hatred towards Harry. Their army is too small to waste a soldier.

So Harry stays outside, even as it gets too cold to be comfortable, because he doesn’t want to make things worse. He doesn’t trust himself enough not to go off and ruin everything even more. He walks because he doesn’t want to stay in one place, energy and claustrophobia pushing him to weave his way through trees and bushes, subconsciously making his way to the large clearing in the forest where Tobias used to go to pick wildflowers.

The moon does little to light his way, so he casts a dim *lumos*. It takes a while to walk to the clearing and by the time Harry arrives his legs ache and his throat is dry. Sweat soaks through his robes.

He collapses in a pile, dying flowers curling around his exhausted body. Crickets chirp incessantly and the low croak of frogs can be heard over the occasional hoot of an owl.

Wisps of clouds crawl across the sky, high above him. Stars dance across a dull navy blue background. His breaths slow down steadily and then finally even out, anger seeping away as his eyes meet the sky. Beauty is etched in the way that the constellations blend into one another. The cloudiness of the Milky Way is distinct, a few shades lighter and brighter than the surrounding space.

Peace settles over Harry’s body, and he can physically feel each and every one of his muscles relaxing.

“Harry?”

Harry jolts upright, heart quickening under his ribs.
“What are you doing out here?” Loki’s voice is soft. And of course it’s Loki. It’s like the god manifests out of thin air whenever Harry is most vulnerable. “I didn’t see you at the cabin and Steve was acting strangely… thought I’d find you to see if you’re alright.”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

Loki hesitates, then sits down next to Harry - close enough so that their shoulders are almost touching. “Don’t be rude, Potter. It doesn’t suit you.”

Harry doesn’t reply. He lies back down, dew from the long grass and flowers coating his robes. He stays like that for a long while, pretending that Loki isn’t there at all but enjoying his presence all the same. Eventually, after the moon crawls a fraction of an inch across the darkened sky, Loki lets out a breath of air and then lays back beside Harry. Their shoulders touch but neither of them comment on it.

“How did you find me, anyway?” Harry murmurs into the night.

“Remember that rock you gave me to find Stark? Turns out the magic on it is easy to warp.”

“You kept the rock?” Harry’s heart thuds in his chest. “Why did you keep it?”

“I don’t know.” Loki shifts in the grass.

“How does it work, then?”

“Well, it’s a neat trick, really. You poured your magic into it and it retained your magical signature. All I had to do was tap into that and it pulled me in your direction.”

Silence lapses over them. Loki kept the rock. For a long time, without knowing what purpose it could serve until he wanted to find Harry. Because he was worried about him, because he was curious and because he felt as though something was off between Harry and Steve. Harry’s mind races and the exhaustion that flooded through his veins earlier is overtaken by something akin to happiness.
Harry points towards the sky. “That’s Ursa Major, there.”

“I know.” Loki says simply.

“And then above it is Draco and then - there, to the right. That’s Cassiopeia.”

“I’m aware.”

“Stop being a know-it-all for once.” Harry chides. “Let me have this.”

Loki grumbles something incoherent under his breath.

“Sorry, what was that?”

“Please, show me all the constellations that I definitely don’t already know, Professor Potter!” Loki says, thick with sarcasm.

Harry nudges his shoulder a bit harder against Loki’s. “Don’t be weird.”

But he tells him the constellations. And the stories behind them, the mythology that is intertwined with the stars. He tells him everything he knows and then he rambles about his own thoughts and opinions concerning the lights in the sky.

He goes on for a long time - until his lips are chapped and his throat is sore, words coming out increasingly more raspy. Loki is only too happy to listen, cutting in with a comment here and there, but other than that staying completely silent.

Harry points at one star in particular. “That one’s your star. I’m naming it Loki.”

“That star already has a name. Mizar, I think.”
“That’s a boring name. As most powerful wizard that ever lived, I am re-naming it Loki.”

“At this point you’re just fueling my narcissism, Harry.”

Harry rolls on his side, partially leaning over Loki. “You called me Harry.”

“It’s your name, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. But you hardly ever call me by it.”

“I’m not… accustomed to being close to people. They always get scared away, and if they stick around long enough I end up hurting them.”

Harry frowns slightly. “Those people are bloody idiots if they’re scared of you. You’re about as intimidating as a dead butterfly.”

Loki rolls his eyes. “I mean it, though. I’m not a good person to be around.”

“Stop it. Stop acting like you’re not a good person. You are good, despite what anybody else may tell you.”

Loki laughs dryly. “I don’t know about that.”

Harry sighs. He props himself up on his elbow so that he’s in a more comfortable position and Loki looks away from Harry, opting to gaze at the stars once again.

A few moments pass where neither of them speak. Then, “What are you thinking about?”

Loki keeps his answer hushed, barely a whisper over the sounds of the night that fill their ears. “Maybe Thor banishing me here was for the better.”
“Why?”

“Don’t get me wrong, I still want nothing more than to go back to my home. However… it’s not all bad, what this Earth has.”

“You enjoying your little vacation?” Harry says, a silent laugh dancing through his words.

“In some ways,” Loki says. And then, after a moment's thought, “Some of the people are tolerable.”

“Just tolerable?” Harry laughs out loud this time. “I had hoped you thought higher of me.”

“I didn’t even say it was about you,” Loki chides.

“But it is about me.”

“Maybe.”

“Just maybe? That's all I get?”

Loki counts the stars. He traces his eyes between them.

“You… you came out here because you were worried about me,” Harry states softly. “You always check up on me when you think something bad has happened. You’ve been supportive of… everything, right from the start. You threw yourself into my vendetta and have, so far, helped me in - in ways I couldn’t have ever imagined.” Harry pauses for a breath. “Loki?”

There’s a shift in the atmosphere. Something that was previously voices thick with laughter and sarcasm as they watched the stars morphs suddenly into something new, intimate and careful. Harry knows that Loki feels it too because he tears his gaze away from the stars and holds eye contact with Harry.

Harry swallows around nothing and reaches his free hand forwards, hesitating centimetres in front of Loki’s skin, before biting his lip and reaching forwards all the way, hooking his thumb and
forefinger under Loki’s chin, forcing him to tilt his head upwards ever so slightly.

“You’re not doing this just to get home anymore, are you?” Harry’s voice is breathless. “You’re doing all this for me.”

And it’s Loki who tangles his hand through the hair at the nape of Harry’s neck and yanks him down until their lips are pressed together.

Chapter End Notes

pls comment and let me know what you think!! especially of that last scene ;)
Chapter Summary

Harry and Bruce have a conversation that gets Harry thinking, Loki is an untouchable God made of intertwined gold and silver.

Chapter Notes

:) I hope you at least kind of enjoy this

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

What starts in the nighttime doesn’t carry on into the morning. At least, that’s what Harry’s terrified of. So he holds Loki as long and as close as he can. He kisses him until his lips are numb and then rests his head against Loki’s chest, his ear pressed right over top of the god’s heart.

He breathes in the late-night air. He tries to remember this feeling; he tries to catalogue it in his mind so that he’ll never forget it. He counts Loki’s heartbeats and fists a hand through his robes. His mind is racing, thoughts coming and going faster than he can keep track of. The darkness leaves everything to his imagination. What evils could be lurking just out of sight, between the trees, waiting for their chance to strike? What evils are lurking under his hands, hiding within the man who he has grown to care for?

“Stop thinking so loud,” Loki murmurs, his voice cutting through the stillness of the night.

One of Loki’s hands comes up to card through Harry’s hair. He stiffens under the touch, but then relaxes again when Loki’s hand doesn’t move away. He casts a warming charm with nothing but a thought as his eyelids grow heavy.

“I’m glad you came here,” Harry says finally. “I probably would have… I dunno. Drowned in my thoughts.”
Usually, Harry only finds true peace and equilibrium when he’s alone - surrounded by either the stars or the sweet aroma of a potion brewing. But he finds it here and now, a soft almost-winter breeze brushing over the wildflower-covered clearing. And with that, he drifts off into a dreamless sleep.

When Harry wakes up the next morning, it’s both cold and uncomfortably wet. Harry sits up, frowning. A large raindrop lands on the tip of his nose. He runs a hand through his hair and his eyes turn to look down at Loki. The god is blinking awake - confusion settles over his face for a split second until it melts into a soft smile at the sight of Harry. His stomach flips over.

The morning, however, brings with it more rain and the distance that Harry had been afraid of. Because when the sun’s up, and nothing is shrouded in shadows, it’s harder to think that things don’t mean anything. Except that it did mean something. He (gently) pushes that thought away though. It’s too early and the mission at hand is still too prominent.

They need to take down the Ministry.

Unsettlement pulses through Harry’s veins, a familiar but unwelcome feeling. He pushes himself to his feet, waving a hand absentmindedly through the air, casting both a warming and a drying charm over the two of them.

“We should get back,” Harry says, uncomfortably. “Lots of work to be done today.”

“Oh.” Loki stands. “Okay.”

Immediately, Harry regrets the dismissive tone that he had so rudely spoken in. But he clenches his teeth and the thought of an apology doesn’t even cross his mind.

The walk back to the cabin is long and packed full of uncomfortable silence.

Maybe it’s just because he’s got no idea where they stand with each other. His mind is racing, grasping onto straws and filling in the blanks, answering questions that Harry hasn’t had a chance to ask the god. Spiderwebs that cover the bushes attach themselves to Harry’s robes. Twigs break underfoot and the droplets of rainwater that balance on the undersides of leaves are shaken free. Above them, birds flit through trees.

The sounds of the forest surround them, but between them is nothing but tense silence.
Harry breathes deeply, savouring the sweet morning air.

He wants to close the distance between him and Loki. He wants to grab Loki and figure out what the god wants from him. Because surely Loki doesn’t mean to kiss him and then leave him hanging, ignoring him as Harry is stuck craving a god sculpted from gold and silver with a sharp tongue and a brilliant mind.

He feels as if the forest is holding him back; the vines that creep up the trees in a uniform manner seem to grab onto his ankles, holding him back and dragging him down life carries on in a seemingly calm and collected manner. He feels more isolated than ever, the metaphorical brick wall around him only growing stronger, even though he’s been clawing at it for ages, trying to get it to break down so that he can… feel again. He feels the pain and the loss and the grief - all of that is as strong as it has ever been. But he wants to feel love and peace and happiness too. Not just every so often, in the rare moments that he can escape to make potions or watch the stars. He wants to feel it freely and abundantly. (He felt a snapshot of this, the previous night. When nothing other than the stars and the god under his fingertips seemed to matter.) But, as everything else in Harry’s life seems to do, the peace fades away as quickly as it came.

He craves Loki’s comfort so desperately.

But Loki stares straight ahead, lips pressed together into a thin line. His chin is tilted upwards and his shoulders are thrown back, his walk regal, as if he’s walking through his own castle instead of a dense forest. Harry wonders how he does it, staying elegant and composed no matter where he may be or what circumstances he may be in.

They draw nearer to the cabin and Harry’s time with Loki is quickly coming to an end.

His mind continues to move far too fast. Should he say something? Do something? Staying silent is killing him but he doesn’t know what else to do. Words get caught in his throat and his body refuses to listen to him when he tells it to move towards Loki. He walks beside the god, close enough to touch but far enough away that they don’t accidentally brush up against one another.

Harry steals a glance at Loki’s face. His outward appearance is stony, not portraying his emotions in the slightest. Harry sighs and looks back in the direction of the cabin.

Time is running out and to Harry it seems as if Loki is slipping through his fingertips.
The cabin is nearing and Harry catches a glance of it through the thick tree cover. Seconds tick away.

Then Loki’s hand is reaching out, grabbing Harry’s briefly. He inhales sharply, his stomach jumping to his heart. His head snaps towards Loki’s once more, but the god is still staring straight ahead.

Loki squeezes once, hard, and then lets Harry’s hand drop back down to his side.

The cabin looms ahead of them but Harry feels a small, almost happy smile creep across his face.

Harry enters the cabin first, Loki close behind him. Peter and Bruce are sitting at the table, leaning over stacks of paper filled with moving, colour-coded diagrams.

“You’re back!” Peter sits up, his back cracking loudly. “Bruce was just teaching me about how CRISPR could potentially be used if it like... mixed with magic.”

“Oh,” Harry rubs the back of his head awkwardly. “That’s cool.”

Harry walks through the space by the doorway where Tobias died and tries his hardest not to think too much about it. He can’t afford to. The cabin is too small and too cramped to let his memories flow out into the little remaining space. It would just overwhelm him, driving him to escape back into the forest where his thoughts would no doubt consume him in the way that they have for three hundred years. Ever since Loki showed up he’s tried harder and harder to keep his thoughts at bay. He’s proud to say that he’s been mostly successful. His vendetta is a welcome distraction.

When he does go out to gather intel around the Ministry or place elaborate spells over specific wizarding parts of the world, he usually opts for going with either Natasha or Tony as they both know when to keep their distance from him and when to stop him from going too far, but can also keep pace with a running dialogue. They’re both incredibly talented wizards as well, and Harry is constantly impressed at their level of knowledge about both the wizarding world in general and the specific spells and curses, both ones that they teach in Hogwarts and ones that they’ve learnt out of a book whilst on the run.

They’ve also introduced Harry to several spells that had simply not been invented back when he was an accepted wizard of the magical world.
That’s what intrigues Harry the most about them, and the other people who have joined him on his quest. The knowledge that they have that Harry has simply not had access to.

A lot can happen in three hundred years, after all. Even though Harry’s life was put on pause whilst he raced through forest after forest, trying to find some peace somewhere, life beyond him went on without a hitch. It wasn’t as if his disappearance had held the world back in any way. It just goes to show how insignificant everyone can be when they disappear without a trace, with no loved ones left behind to look for them.

Today though, instead of Natasha or Tony joining Harry, he finds himself in Bruce’s company, who quickly excuses himself from his and Peter’s work.

Harry digs through his dragonhide potion bag, grabbing a small vial of Polyjuice Potion. Even though Harry himself prefers using regular transfiguration to alter his appearance, everybody else save for Loki and Bucky would much rather just go for polyjuice as it exerts much less magic than transfiguration does. But Harry is powerful enough to hold his appearance as somebody else for a very long amount of time. Loki has said that the only reason he hates using Polyjuice is the way it makes his skin bubble when he switches to and from somebody else’s body. Harry doesn’t know exactly why Bucky opts for transfiguration, but he has a sneaking suspicion that his reasoning is quite close to Loki’s.

He hands the vial to Bruce and then offers him his hand, disapparating after giving Loki a fleeting smile.

The world twists around them and they appear somewhere a few city blocks to the north of the Ministry.

The muggle whose skin Bruce is wearing is tall, with long orange hair and a large amount of freckles dotted across his face.

Harry has turned himself blonde, narrowed his face and changed his eye colour to a deep blue. He doesn’t intend to look like a cousin of Draco Malfoy, but that’s the vibe he gives off nonetheless.

Anxiety makes Harry’s skin crawl. He hates this, being out in the open. His eyes are constantly darting around, looking for threats that don’t exist. The muggles and wizards who pass him on the street just see him as another faceless and nameless man, instead of the Harry Potter who is said to be the most powerful wizard ever, who can cast an *Avada Kedavra* over an entire city and who knows
all the secrets of alchemy. And mostly, above all other things, they know Harry Potter as a murderer, a bloodthirsty individual who will do anything in his power to gain complete and utter control over the entire world.

But they don't see the man that Harry is now. Because now he’s within a disguise everybody’s eyes skim across him, as if they don’t see him at all. It’s better this way, but it doesn’t stop the hair on the back of his neck from standing up, making him feel like someone’s watching him and Bruce walk down the street side by side.

Harry quickly finds that Banner is an easy person to be around. He doesn’t demand any attention, keeping his thoughts to himself. He’s incredibly intelligent, but he doesn’t let that on.

“So…” Harry starts, as they walk down the pavement, “How are you handling… everything?” He ends with a dry laugh, glancing up towards the taller man.

“Easier than I expected to,” Bruce replies easily. “I thought it would be really difficult to adjust. But there’s enough to do that I’m never just alone to think, which is good. Plus, more than that I feel like I’m finally doing something, y’know? My whole life I’ve just been kinda - existing. Floating around, no purpose in sight. But now I’m doing something - I’m creating a future that’s safe enough for me and coming generations to live in peacefully and safely. It feels good.” He ends his monologue with a smile.

“You don’t regret coming with me and Loki, not even a little?”

“No. I thought that I might, but I don't. Like I said, I’m finally doing something that I was too scared to do alone.”


They near the Magical Visitor’s entrance to the Ministry of Magic.

“Nothing too intense today.” Harry grins. “This one is actually kind of funny. Just a simple spell and then we’re out of here. Unless, of course, you want to go to a pub while we’re in town.”

“It's not even noon,” Bruce scoffs.
Harry shrugs. “Throw up some wards so that nobody sees me do this, will you?”

Bruce does as he’s told without question. He holds the wards steady just long enough to spell the telephone box so that whenever someone enters it it loudly screeches, “Harry Potter is coming!”

It’s childish, he knows, but he finds amusement in it anyway. What better way to announce his return to the wizarding world then to have the words spoken by an ancient telephone box as they try to enter the supposed most secure location in the whole wizarding world. (Save for Hogwarts, obviously. But the sheer amount of tragedies that have occurred within Hogwarts’ walls is cause enough for Harry to doubt that particular fact.)

“You know, we could always take a more… political approach,” Bruce says as they walk back to the apparition point, an alleyway a couple blocks away.

“That’s what Steve keeps telling me,” Harry says dryly. “The Ministry has failed us in millions of ways. Their political system is so fucking messed up that there’s no way in hell that we even have a chance at getting through to them.” He ends with a humorless laugh, and Bruce looks at him curiously.

“Have you ever thought that… I dunno. Maybe it wasn’t their fault, what happened to you.”

Harry glares and anger burns just under his skin, threatening to burst out. “I lost everything. Don’t you dare say that.”

“No- no, I’m not saying that they didn’t… do what they did. I’m just saying, ever since then. You’re the one who’s hidden away scheming. That part wasn’t their fault - that’s on you.”

“They drove me to that,” Harry retaliates, but Bruce’s steady tone helps keep Harry’s own anger down. It’s evident that the other wizard just wants to have a polite discussion without throwing completely unfounded accusations through the air as if they mean nothing to who they’re being spoken to.

“I would have just… gone to America, had I been put in your situation,” Bruce says, a thoughtful expression adorning his face.
“I thought of that, actually,” Harry says. “In the end I just… I’m so angry, you know? It just keeps building up and I know that once this is all over - once we’ve taken down the Ministry and got some proper justice - the anger will ebb away and I can be myself again.”

“So that’s what you want out of all of this?” Bruce asks. “You want to find and be yourself?”

“Er…” Harry runs a hand through his hair. “Yeah, I guess in the end, that’s it. I used to be happy.”

Happiness, or revenge? Maybe simply a mix of them both, swirled together so densely that it’s hard to tell the difference at this point. Revenge on the Ministry would lead to happiness - at least, that’s what Harry chooses to believe in his current state of mind, always balancing on the precipice of a life-shattering mental breakdown.

They go back to the forest but Harry’s short but deep conversation with Bruce burns though his mind. He turns it over and rewinds it inside his brain, working through every syllable spoken, truly thinking and debating Bruce’s points. He’s not necessarily wrong; the Ministry would, no doubt, take them a tad more seriously if they went with a more political approach.

But said approach is impossible when their whole team consists of a rag tag group of misfits, people running from the law and people running from themselves, looking for a life in which they can live out the rest of their days in a free world.

Besides, Harry just wants the world to know that he’s there. He wants them to know that he’s coming.

Natasha, Peter and Tony are gone when they arrive back at the cabin.

“They went to a muggle town near Hogwarts, apparently talking to some students about how they can help, but they probably just ran off to a pub in order to get shitfaced,” Loki drawls, greeting Harry and Bruce with a raised eyebrow and a small, secretive smile shot in Harry’s direction.

There’s a part of Harry that’s skeptical about trusting Hogwarts students. When they’re so young, all they should be worrying about is their OWL scores and who they’re going to ask out to a dance. Not the fate of their futures. But then again, it is their future.

More than anybody else, the people living in the future are the ones who should have a say about it.
If they’re strong and willing to fight for what they believe in, who’s Harry to tell them not to fight for what they want and need? He was born into the battle; he fought all through his time at Hogwarts. He’s a hypocrite if he wants to tell them to live their life before fighting for the fate of the world.

He almost wishes, deep down, that he had been given the chance. Given the chance to step away from everything. Given the chance to opt out of being the chosen one.

Bruce shrugs and goes into the cabin, calling back over his shoulder almost as if he can read Harry’s thoughts. “Let the kids do what they want. They’ve dealt with their fair share of trauma. They deserve to be able to fight.”

The silence that stretches between Harry and Loki is instrumental.

“Bucky found me a job at the Ministry,” Loki says, shattering the silence with a few words.

Back to business then, as if it had ever been anything more than that.

“That was quick,” Harry says.

“But it’s good.”

“I suppose.”

“I start next week. It's just a glorified janitor’s job, apparently. They haven’t found anyone willing to take up the position even though it’s been open for a few months now.”

“Great,” Harry pushes a hand through his hair. “Everything’s falling into place, then.”

“Don’t worry. Before long it will all be sorted into place and you can go back to… well, whatever you want. If this is successful, you’ll have the whole world at your fingertips,” Loki says. He takes a few careful steps towards Harry.

“And then I’ll have to figure out how to send you away.”
Harry’s staring at his feet and his blood runs cold, realisation dawning on him. Leaves crunch as Loki continues to walk closer, no falter in his step. He stops inches away from Harry.

He doesn’t confirm nor deny what Harry said. He’s inches away, but it may as well be miles.

And god, Harry despises the way that his eyes sting with unshed tears.

Loki sighs, heavy and tired.

“Tell me that-” Harry’s voice breaks off with a badly concealed watery sob. “Tell me that… that last night didn’t matter. Tell me that it - it meant nothing. Don’t lead me on, don’t make me… You’re going to leave, that’s your plan.” He wipes the tears off his cheek with the back of his hand. “Don’t make me believe a lie.”

Because that’s the truth. Loki will leave, and Harry will be left with a gaping hole in his chest. He’s suffered too much loss to be able to bear it. Not now, not ever.

“Harry.”

Arms circle around Harry’s thin body, a hand on his waist and another on the back of his neck. He’s being pulled against a solid, warm body.

And his walls, however thin they may be around Loki, crumble into nothing.

Chapter End Notes

You can just assume that everybody in this fic looks like they did in infinity war.

I just saw infinity war last night and Oh My God. In every scene with cap and nat
standing next to eachother I was reminded of how goddamn bisexual I am.

Also I have never sobbed so much in any movie. Within the first 5 minutes I had tears literally streaming down my face

ANYWAY if you've seen it pls talk to me about it in the comments if you haven't seen it I strongly urge you to as I really want to like, sprinkle in some references to it.

And if u just liked this chapter be sure to lemme know in the comments, too :D
An Attack

Chapter Summary

Sometimes things don't go to plan.

Chapter Notes

Hi! I really really enjoyed writing this so I hope y'all enjoy reading it <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Before Harry knows it an entire week has passed by. His mind stays quiet, dreams of drifting through the cosmos blanketing his mind each night, a welcoming distraction from the glimpses of nightmares that he can see etched between the stars.

He’s moved forwards, as steady as he can. He has some of the best people by his side, urging him on when the world closes in on him. The last week has been thankfully uneventful; every mission that the team has gone on went by without a blip.

The first frost of the season came, a thin layer of white covering the underbrush. It was soon burnt away by the sun’s rays, but it’s yet another reminder that winter is coming weather they like it or not and they’d better practice their warming charms if they hope to stay in the cabin comfortably.

Harry still finds peace in the night. Personally, he doubts that that’ll ever change. At this point it’s written deep within his DNA. It’s like his body seeks out the night, relishing in the calm and the cold. His eyes reflect the stars back up at the night sky, and when they blink to sleep, his wand is clenched tight in his hand and his head is resting on a bundle of robes, rising and falling as Loki breaths.

Morning comes too quick, and the sun shines too brightly.
But with the morning comes Loki’s presence. It warms Harry from the inside out, his lips quirking up in a smile when his eyes catch the god’s. They’re a greying blue shot through with flecks of gold.

The tea that Steve has made this morning is boiling hot, most likely courtesy of someone practicing a warming charm, and it burns Harry’s chapped lips. The radio that Peter has been fiddling with for the past few days is tinny and static comes in waves, but through that, a gentle singing voice is heard. It’s hard to pick out the exact lyrics, but it’s beautiful all the same.

Floorboards creak underfoot as Harry pads back outside, the walls feeling too tight and the spot where Tobias had lain screaming guilt at him. The tea lies forgotten on the edge of the table and nobody calls him back when he leaves without a word or glance behind him.

He can tell that it’s Loki who follows him because his footsteps fall even, an arrogant air about him. Harry’s robes brush over the leaf-strewn ground and he leans his back against a tree, a shaking hand going to his head, slicking the hair away from his forehead. The lightning-shaped scar stretching across his forehead is a deep red, angry and irritated-looking. It doesn’t hurt - the physical pain from it faded away the second the Dark Lord’s life ceased. But the mental pain runs deep - and the phantom pain will always be with him, no matter how many times he tells himself that it’s not real.

It aches now, deep within his head. He presses his palm over the slightly raised skin, and squeezes his eyes shut.

It’s not real, it’s not real it’s not real it’s not -

“Potter.” There’s a tight hand on his shoulder, grounding him slightly.

“I hate it when you see me like this,” Harry spits through gritted teeth, taking a deep breath.

Loki says, “Like what? Weak? It’s not exactly a rare occurrence.”

Harry opens his eyes for the sole purpose of shooting a glare at the god. “Don’t be an asshole.”

Loki’s teeth are a sparkling white when he grins at Harry. The pain ebbs and Harry finds himself, once again, caught up in the god’s gaze.
He tears himself away when he realises what he’s doing (the whole staring thing, like Loki’s made of pure gold or something to that effect) and pushes himself away from the tree, shrugging Loki’s hand off his shoulder. He manages to take a few steps away before Loki’s voice halts him in his tracks.

“I’m assuming that you wish to come with me to the Ministry?” Loki inquires at Harry’s back.

“You’re working today?”

“Yes. In- ah, a half hour now. I really do hope that this job will lead to something, seeing as at its current rate I’ll end up killing someone out of sheer boredom.” Loki’s voice fades into a drawl, and Harry turns back to look at him curiously.

“Sure, I’ll come with you.” Harry frowns slightly as he stalks towards Loki. “Ask them to give you more work if you’re bored. I’m sure they can dig up something.” Harry’s frown fades into a smile when Loki takes his outstretched hand.

The forest spins around them as Harry disapparates.

Apparating is confusing and uncomfortable; when Harry’s in the midst of doing it, he’s not sure about anything. All he can do is think about where he’s going, and pray that he’s going to arrive there. It never feels like he has a body of any sort, but now - now, Harry can feel Loki’s fingernails digging into his hand as he hangs on to Harry. He can feel the warmth emitting from the god’s hand. He can feel Loki, his presence strong and surrounded by a strange sort of magic.

It’s always an alleyway.

Over and over again, dozens upon dozens of apparitions into the magical world, and he always appears in an alleyway. It’s a good thing - less people loitering around. It’s a neutral, dark and quiet place for them to gain their bearings and discuss any last-minute plans or ideas.

Loki’s hand stays clasped in Harry’s for a picosecond too long, but when he lets go Harry wants nothing more than to grab onto it again. And again and again, he just wants to hold onto the god that’s made of mischief. To the end of time, if he can. If he’ll let him.
Puddles of dirty rainwater gather in the divots on the concrete. Loki splashes through them, leaving Harry to follow him.

There’s not many people out and yet Harry remains on edge, feeling countless eyes burning into the back of his neck.

Harry needs to walk fast to keep up with the god’s long strides. Always one step away, always too far to hold onto. Harry curses under his breath and grabs onto the back of Loki’s robes, hauling him back.

“Slow down,” he hisses, frowning up at Loki. The god narrows his eyes and then opens his mouth as if he’s going to say something. His mouth snaps shut when a large booming crack sounds from behind them.

“Eyes everywhere,” he mutters, lips barely moving. There’s another loud sound and Harry jumps, head spinning around. He can hear people screaming.

They’re in the middle of the pavement, a mist-like rain falling over their shoulders, a sudden cold surrounding them. Heavy dread fills Harry’s chest. He looks to Loki - staring in the god’s eyes, begging for reassurance.

*Not dementors, please, oh god, not dementors. Not now - not here. Please please please.*

His fear is not mirrored in Loki’s eyes.

Whatever is happening is not yet upon them - they’re on the edges of the storm, caught in a riptide, steadying themselves for the oncoming battle. The mist grows thicker and frost creeps across shop windows.

“Harry. Leave, now.” It’s not a suggestion. The god’s eyes burn red but they’re not glazed over with fear as Harry’s are.

“Not without you.” The screams rise louder. Echoes of terror and pain spread through London. This isn’t supposed to happen. All Harry wanted was to accompany Loki to work, to catch a few moments of time just to themselves. Just a few minutes, it’s nothing, really, in the grand scheme of three hundred years. Just a collection of seconds, all strung together to form a memory - that’s all he
wants.

Magic flows off Loki, a pale emerald against the mist.

“If they find you-” Loki grabs Harry’s shoulders, squeezing too hard, holding him back, at arm’s length. “If this is the Ministry - if this is all their doing, and they find you - you’re not going to survive!”

The screams are getting closer. Car horns sound too loudly, and Loki flinches at a crack of thunder from above. “You need to go.”

“Not without you.”

Harry tries to disapparate with Loki, but the god’s magic grounds him. He can’t make Loki disapparate with him. Is someone watching them? Harry’s skin crawls. His breathing is coming too fast, borderline hyperventilating. He holds the Elder Wand so tightly that his knuckles turn white.

Back in Hogwarts, an eternity ago, a boggart had turned into a dementor. A fear of fear. Now, he has more fears. More trauma, barely held back. His hand shakes. “Not without you.”

Sounds crash down upon them, the suffering shrieks punctured by sirens and thunder.

Loki’s fingers dig into Harry through his robes. His skin takes on a grey tone and his eyes bleed with red. Emerald and silver flares of magic encase him and Harry in a web. Loki slams Harry against a brick wall. “LEAVE!” he roars.

And then the storm, a giant tidal wave, comes crashing down.

It’s dementors, dozens of them. Dark and cloaked, floating a few feet above the ground.

It is said that a dementor’s touch effects more the people who have had the misfortune of experiencing more pain. Of course, a dementor will bring pain and unrelenting despair to whomever it goes near, but more so those who have more bad memories to make them relive, over and over again.
Is it the Ministry? Or is it just rogue dementors who’ve left Azkaban in favour of more souls to destroy?

Surely the Ministry wouldn’t do this. Helpless muggles are being affected. A dark shape is bending over an unconscious body.

Loki steps back from Harry. He raises his hands, palms out. His cape flows behind him and a smile, malicious and evil, takes over his face. Harry moves to jump forwards, to grab onto the god and to disapparate far from here. But he’s held back by emerald chains, built of a magic that Harry has only dreamt of. Silver and green surrounds him, a shield against any army. And he watches as Loki runs - not away, but towards the oncoming dark shapes.

Someone’s screaming. It’s the exact same scream that Harry’s heard countless times before, long, drawn out and full of anguish. Lily Potter, dying and protecting her only son with the strongest spell of love. He fights to keep his eyes open, to watch Loki.

But oh, how the pain eats at him. No dementor can come near him, but the overwhelming pain that they bring winds its way through Loki’s shield, hitting Harry at full force. He raises his arm with difficulty.

“Expecto-” Harry coughs. Nothing comes from the Elder Wand, for you need a happy memory to defeat creatures made of evil. But now, three hundred years since Harry has had to defeat any dementors and he can barely tell who has more evil inside of them - him or the dementors?

No pale silver magic shines from the Elder Wand. The stag that used to leap from his wand is tired, and too weighed down with Harry’s misery.

His wand clatters to the ground and Loki - Loki is alive.

He’s a swirl of magic, slashing hands with a wild, angry look in his eyes. If Harry didn’t know Loki so well, he’d think that the dementors weren’t affecting the god at all. There’s bodies littering the street. A few crashed cars and a heavy, thick mist lay over it all.

Harry reaches out with his mind and pulls. It’s a mantra, repeating over and over again, help, help, please, help help please-
He doesn’t know if it will work. He’s never tried it before, contacting someone with nothing but a thought. But the dementors are closing in on the god and even though he seems to have it handled Harry can see the god faltering. Dementors bring pain and suffering to all they touch and Harry knows that Loki has had to bear too much pain and loss in his past. All of that is likely being amplified by the dark creatures.

Help, help, please, help please.

Harry’s eyes are blurry. The tears streaming down his face turn to ice before they hit the ground and agony rips through him.

A ceremony at Hogwarts, to honor those who fell.

His mother, screaming as the wizard who was scared of death murdered her in front of her son.

As darkness takes Harry over and he starts screaming for real, giving in to the pain and letting it rip an agonizing yell from his chest, several figures apparate just in front of him. The world shines bright as silver animals bound towards Loki.

And then everything goes black, and Harry is living his worst moments over and over again.

Harry’s body is limp. It’s strewn across the forest floor like a ragdoll. Loki closes his eyes and sways on his feet, fighting to keep the bile down that is rising in his throat.

Harry is powerful - Loki has known that ever since he first laid eyes on the wizard. He was a whirlwind of magic and obviously had a lot of experience with the specific type of magic that he wielded. He was wielding a thin piece of wood in his hand, acting like it was a sword, slashing it through the air and screaming orders that his magic followed.

Powerful, but unsteady.
Loki could see the suffering rippling across the wizard’s features, his hand shaking, his eyes flashing with memories from a time long ago.

Above that, however, is an unmistakable anger and thirst for revenge. That’s what has intrigued Loki the most about Harry, from the very beginning.

And now that powerful and rageful wizard is lying broken on the ground in front of him, unconscious to the world around him. Loki runs a hand over his eyes and breathes deeply through his nose - helpless.

Everybody else is in a similar, reeling state of mind, trying to process everything that happened. Trying to regain the warmth that the dementors sucked from them.

Even Steve, who usually acts like he’s untouchable, is now collapsed in Bucky’s arms. Natasha is unwrapping a chocolate bar with trembling fingers, Clint close by her side. Peter is barely breathing, staring off into the middle distance. Tony is splayed out on the ground close to Harry. Bruce is leaning over him, speaking in soft tones to the barely-conscious man, his voice shaking like a leaf in the wind.

Loki feels the sadness too, deep within his bones, eating away at his entire being. He’s spent the majority of his life living in a shadow; he’s no stranger to great suffering. If the other wizards hadn’t showed up, Loki’s almost completely sure that he would not have left that battle alive. His magic is built on mischief, nothing akin to the pure happiness that radiated from the others’ wands. Even if he had tried to create something like that, he knows that he would not have been successful.

It was all he could do to keep Harry safe.

A tangle of green magic, strong enough to keep the dementors physically as far away as possible. Because Harry refused to leave, and because Loki was itching for a fight.

And now look where he is. Where they all are.

Guilt grabs onto Loki and doesn’t let go.

His robes are ripped in several places, but he doesn’t try to repair them. Instead, he steps closer to Harry and kneels by his head, holding his chin with a hand, tilting the wizard’s face towards his
own. He’s too pale. His breathing is too slow. Another layer of fear is constructed on top of the rest of Loki’s suffering. He tried to keep Harry safe - he can’t die now.

Loki closes his eyes. He hasn't felt this weak in a long time, but he focuses as much as he can and lets an emerald green mist dance between his fingers. He pushes it into the fallen wizard.

*Wake up, please.*

He watches as Harry’s chest rises and falls with stronger breaths.

Something in Loki unravels, and he feels his eyes sting with tears for the first time in too long.

Loki reaches down, grabbing Harry’s hand and clasping it between his, ever so gently. A few tears fall from his eyes when he blinks and he doesn’t have the heart to wipe them off of his cheeks. He tells himself that he’s strong - but right now, he's just scared.

Scared for Harry, because he has somehow found himself caring a great deal about the wizard.

Harry’s breathing speeds up and his eyes flutter open when Loki moves one hand off of Harry and uses it to push back the hair that's glued down to Harry’s forehead with sweat. Anxiety radiates off of Harry. He gasps and sits bolt upright, his head swivelling around wildly, looking for the attacker.

“Shh,” Loki murmurs, squeezing Harry’s hand. “It’s okay. We’re back at the forest.” His voice is steady but his heart is racing, thumping loud and hard against his ribs.

He’s caught off guard when Harry throws his arms around him, clinging onto him as if for dear life. Loki’s tears fall faster and his hands shake, grasping at Harry’s robes. “Gods you scared me.” Loki buries his face into the crook of Harry’s neck.

He’s not used to being held. Especially not like this - full of desperation. Under his hands, Harry is shivering. Loki rubs a hand over his back, trying to comfort him.

They’re tucked away in a forest, closer to winter than summer, storm clouds gathering above and around them.
Natasha comes close to Harry and Loki, offering them each a huge slice of chocolate. She stays close to them, placing a comforting hand on Harry’s shoulder. Peter shifts closer and leans against Natasha, eyes closed as if there will be monsters awaiting him when he cracks them open. Bruce has been successful at talking Tony out of the anxiety attack that he was stuck in. They sit close together, leaning on each other for support.

Loki looks a bit farther off and sees Bucky, still holding onto Steve tightly, as if he can stop the other man from re-seeing the horrors that are embedded deep within his mind.

Loki runs a hand through Harry’s hair.

The forest is still, free of both the familiar breeze and birdsong.

Nine lives, intertwined.

Loki holds onto Harry a little bit tighter. His heart thumps so hard that he’s positive Harry can feel it.

The events that the creatures - whatever they were, Loki has no idea - forced to the surface of Loki’s memories are a collection of his lowest moments, when his body was being hit by infinite amounts of pain. He doesn’t know how he was able to hold out against them for so long. But he does know why he was able to hold out against them. Because of Harry Potter.

Ever since Loki came to this dimension, his world has been focused around Harry Potter. At first, it was simply because of the rumors that he picked up on. Whispered words about a sorcerer who was powerful enough to destroy the world, if he wished it to be. He heard about someone who has discovered all the secrets of alchemy, who’s immortal and who has evaded the law for three hundred years.

He heard about a man who’s running after having killed everyone he ever loved.

And he knew that if anybody was able to help him return home, it would be that man.

Oh, how Loki tried to get back to his dimension on his own. But his magic, however strong it was, wasn’t enough. Being here, it’s his penance for... everything that he’s done back in his home
universe. He can’t imagine even *trying* to live out the rest of his years on this Midgard. He has been banished from his home but it remains just that: his home.

It’s a goal to reach for. It’s the only thing keeping him sane at this point - the promise that one day he’ll figure out how to go back to Asgard.

Harry Potter is the only wizard powerful enough to help him. He’s the only one who may be willing to help him. But Harry is weak and he’s angry and all he wants is to go back to the past, when everything made sense to him. Loki understands, he really does.

Maybe it’s the strength that Harry portrays even though he’s fighting against his whole world that causes Loki to admire him, that causes Loki to care for him.

He cares for him so much sometimes it hurts.

He was only able to fight the dark creatures because Harry refused to leave. Because Harry was *there* and he was suffering. Loki was only able to fight them because there was no way in hell that he was going to let Harry die. He continues to run a hand through Harry’s hair, and eventually the wizard under his hands stops shaking so much. But Loki doesn’t let him go, even though he knows that the rest of the wizards are watching. Maybe it’s selfish, to be holding Harry like this. But the wizard does not pull away.

With every fibre of his being, he hates that he’ll need to leave this one day. This comfort. This security of being able to count on Harry. One day Harry will help get him home - because Harry promised, and Loki knows, deep down, that Harry Potter is not the type of Chosen One to break promises. When that day comes, Loki will have to leave. Harry will be busy re-building the wizarding world into one that isn’t riddled with corrupt, evil witches and wizards.

Loki wants to go home, and he wants to get there in time…

He swallows the lump in his throat. Thanos is growing stronger. It’s only a matter of time before he succeeds in finding all the Infinity Stones. Loki just needs to get there before that happens. He’s never been the hero type but he doesn’t think that even he would be able to live peacefully knowing that he did nothing to save his universe.

So yes, he wants to go home. Because he can’t change what fate has declared, but he can try his hardest to ensure that his home is safe.
Harry pulls his head back from Loki’s shoulder, and Loki lets his hand drop away from his hair.

“You alright?” he asks. He’s well-aware that there’s tear tracks running down his cheeks.

Harry reaches forwards and cups Loki’s face in his hands. And even though the rest of the team is there, Loki turns his head in Harry’s hands, pressing a kiss to his palm.

In the end, Loki’s not sure how long they all stay out there. But he feels like maybe…

Like maybe the battle, the fight with the dark creatures, was just the beginning of the war they’ll inevitably have to fight. And as Loki looks around the clearing, he decides that they have a decent chance at winning.

The wizard under his hands has stopped shaking, exhaustion from the terror that has been coursing through him taking its toll, and Loki finds Harry falling asleep against his chest.

Natasha offers Loki another piece of chocolate and warmth runs through him as soon as he bites into it.

“You saved my life back there,” she says softly. “All of our lives.”

“Loki…” Steve says, he and Bucky making their way over, sitting in the tight group that Loki and Harry are at the centre of.

And Steve says, “Thank you. Thank you so much.”
Tell me what you think about the use of Loki's POV in the comments - should I switch to Loki (or any other characters) POV more often?

As always, thank you so so so so so much for reading <3
The Beginning of The End

Chapter Summary

The team must deal with the aftermath of the dementor attack.

Chapter Notes

oh boy oh boy the plot's actually goin somewhere now. hope u enjoy xx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pine needles fall down upon a sleeping forest, a chill breeze sweeping over a landscape that will soon be covered in drifts of powdered snow.

Brown leaves layer themselves across the mossy forest floor, the soft footing taken over by crispy leaves. The trees shed their leaves during the fall, drawing their essence of life deep within themselves and away from the leaves that they previously were able to grow. If they keep the leaves, then they don’t survive the winter. A survival mechanism, whether or not the trees themselves know it.

The Boy Who Lived wakes up covered in sweat, a scream on the edge of his lips. He manages to bite it down, pushing the nightmares away.

There’s nothing worse than fear, he thinks vaguely, as memories wash over him, a cascading wave that he cannot push back.

At the young age of only one year old, he’d been witness to his own mother’s murder. Back then, he didn’t know what that meant. The infant Harry Potter had no idea that his fate was being sealed with an ‘Avada Kedavra’ and a burst of bright green light. The war was being fought before Harry was born and he was thrown into the fray, barely knowing what was happening.
A childhood spent in an abusive home, only to then go off to a boarding school that he would learn to love and eventually call home. The boarding school where he would almost die at least once a year, but it was away from the Dursleys and that’s all that he could bring himself to care about. Later, it became about finding and putting an end to Voldemort.

That was a good purpose - he could fully immerse himself in it, ignoring everything that he could have been in the real world had he been given the chance.

The Chosen One Without A Choice. A bit ironic, if nothing else.

Even through everything that he’s had the misfortune of going through, when the dementors had surrounded him the only thing that had sprung to the front of his mind was his mother.

Screaming, crying, begging an evil wizard to have mercy.

Someone hands him a cup of tea. Harry’s eyes are blurry, but he sips at the hot liquid and lets out a long sigh, his chest weighed down with a hundred bricks.

“How are you?”

A voice like the night, speckled through with stars and promises. A voice like a waterfall, smooth and rushing water, quickly falling down in a mighty splash.

He takes another deep breath because a war is not a time to show weakness. But then again, Harry has never known a life without a war embedded within it.

“Alive,” Harry says, as if that were an answer to Loki’s question. “You?”

The god lets out a dry laugh. The couch dips down to Harry’s side when Loki sits down beside him.

He says, “I’m alright.”

There’s hundreds - no, thousands of things that Harry wishes he could ask Loki. Because even
though Harry thinks that he knows the god well, Loki is still wrapped up in more mysteries than
Harry can even bring himself to imagine. Every word that Loki speaks is careful and calculated. The
tone of a man who has more than just a few small, trivial facts to hide.

A thousand things that Harry could ask, a thousand things that Harry could say, and yet he still
allows silence to lay heavily over them.

Natasha comes in some time later, a copy of the Daily Prophet held tightly in her hands.

“You’re mentioned in this,” she says, tossing the paper towards Harry and Loki.

DEMENTOR ATTACK - HARRY POTTER TO BLAME?

The front page is taken up mostly by the enormous bold headline and a moving picture of a man
fighting with emerald green magic. It’s blurry, and whoever took the picture was obviously moving,
or had very unsteady hands. The figure isn’t much more than a darkened blob, but even with the lack
of detail Harry can clearly tell who it is. Loki.

Harry turns the page over, reading the article out loud.

“A ferocious attack merely a city block away from the Ministry of Magic has put three muggles in a
 coma, injuring ten more. The muggles that were affected, however, are the last of the Ministry’s
 concern at this current point in time. The manhunt for the elusive wizards caught up in the battle is in
 full swing as some rightfully believe that a tremendously powerful wizard, pictured on the front page,
is the Chosen One gone evil - none other than Harry Potter himself!”

Loki scoffs. “You were out cold the whole time.”

Harry nudges him with his shoulder and keeps reading.

“Harry Potter has been on the run for the last three centuries, following the end of the Great Battle at
Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.” Harry frowns, and goes quiet as his eyes quickly
skim through the rest of the article. “This is all just about me and how I’m super evil - oh wait, no.”
Harry’s eyes focus on the last few sentences. “Why the dementors were even in London in the first
place is a question that the Ministry is now facing with many families being terrified for their safety,
especially in a setting where they should feel nothing but safe, so close to the Ministry headquarters.
Minister Harold Parkinson says that it was the work of a few rogue dementors that had escaped from Azkaban, and urges the general public to cease spreading panic about a situation that has been ‘dealt with’. Are we to trust the Minister? Is he covering up Harry Potter’s tracks, not wanting us to focus on the vandalism that has been haunting the wizarding community with signs saying that the great wizard himself is returning after three centuries of silence? What now plagues our world is the knowledge that this is just the beginning - Harry Potter has said he’s coming, and this is simply his first play against our world. How To Keep Your Family Safe: Pages 5-7.”

“That’s stupid,” Tony says, leaning back in his chair. “They said that you were the man on the front page - fighting the dementors. And then at the end they say you brought the dementors?” He raises his eyebrows critically. “They’re digging themselves into a hole.”

“Because they’re scared,” Natasha says, a smirk dancing across her face. “They don’t know what to do.”

Steve wanders in from outside, followed closely by Bucky. “Who doesn’t know what to do?”

“The Ministry,” Harry says, chancing a glance at the two wizards.

“Good,” Bucky says. “They deserve that. The fear of the unknown.”

Harry takes another sip of his tea. “I suppose.”

The cabin is little. Really, it’s too small for the nine of them to be crowded into one room, even if that room is the biggest out of all the additional ones they added to the original design of the place. But they crowd in nonetheless with Natasha leaning against the wall, her arms crossed over her chest, Banner, Tony and Peter sitting around the table, Loki and Harry taking up the couch, leaning into each other and Steve and Bucky standing close together by the counter.

“What were those creatures - dementors, did the script say?” Loki inquires, leaning over Harry’s shoulder to see the small text in the paper, declaring the creature’s names.

“Yeah, dementors,” Harry says, glaring at the paper he holds. “The embodiment of evil. They feed on happiness. Or all positive emotion, really. If you’re around them for too long you just sort of… slip away.”
“They should all be killed,” Clint speaks up. “Under normal circumstances I wouldn’t promote genocide but when it comes to dementors… well, they don’t deserve to exist, plain and simple.”

“For some people they just cause discomfort and distress, but the more pain you’ve endured the more they get to you,” Banner says grimly.

Loki narrows his eyes slightly. “Would they cause… visions of the past, perhaps?”

“Yeah,” Harry automatically says. “They can.” He turns to look at Loki thoughtfully. “What did you see?”

Loki runs a hand over his face, shaking his head. His actions are enough to tell Harry all he needs to know - that Loki must have re-lived something awful. Halfheartedly, he nudges their shoulders close together, reaching over and letting his hand rest against Loki’s knee for a second before pulling away.

“I saw my Aunt,” Peter says, an agonizing look upon his face. “Right before she died.”

Tony, with a rare sympathetic look, leans over and pats Peter on the back. “It’s okay, now.” His comfort falls short, and Harry can tell it does nothing to lift the grief that settles heavy over the young man’s shoulders.

The brief silence is shattered by Steve saying. “I saw… and heard Bucky, screaming, still stuck and being tortured within the Ministry before I was able to get him out.” His words are raw and broken.

And god, how Harry wishes that he could have prevented all of this. These people don’t deserve all the suffering and pain that they’ve gone through. They don’t deserve the bags under their eyes and the way they carry their bodies - constantly on edge, looking behind their backs and keeping themselves closed off and distanced from others because they’ve been taught and have learned that for them, threats can come from anywhere when they’re least expecting them. It’s a lesson that they have discovered the hard way, with a loved one being lost.

Harry rubs a tired hand over his eyes. He longs for a time when the fight is over - for a time when he can rest his tired eyes and think of nothing at all.

Three hundred years of running, and now that he’s finally confronting all of his pain head on, all he
can think about is a time when he can just… sleep. Dreamless, floating, his whole entire body, mind and soul being able to finally, after so long, get a chance to feel complete and utter calmness. Right now though, it seems as if all that is way too far out of his reach. What he wants, what he so desperately craves, is so far away he can barely see it. It’s just a feeling at this point - a pull in his chest. It’s promise on the wind of something that has yet to come.

His hair is thick and greasy. His eyes are heavy.

But war has been Harry’s whole life - he’s a fighter, now and forever.

So forgetting about his sadness and pushing through the pain is something he’s only too used to.

Harry and Loki find their way outside, away from the prying eyes of the team. In front of them Harry feels as if he has an obligation to keep up a strong, cool and collected front, so that they don’t see through to the real him, where he’s marred with scars too deep to heal with the flick of a wand. But when it’s just him and Loki, he doesn’t try to hide himself.

His scars, his flaws, everything that makes him feel ugly, is on full display for the god made of gold and emerald flames. It hasn’t been like that for a long time - Harry has tried to maintain boundaries and limitations, carefully pushing away anybody who dares to get close to him. Times change, he supposes.

Loki says, “We’re all scared of something, Potter. But our fear is not what determines our worth.” His chin is lifted ever so arrogantly and his hair is swept back by a thin barely-there breeze.

“What did you see then?” Harry says slowly, turning towards Loki, watching the weak rays of sun catch on the god’s rough edges.

There’s hesitation written clearly across Loki’s features, embedded into the tight lips and the crease between his eyebrows, as well as the way that his hand fidgets ever so slightly by his side, almost as if he wants to reach out and grab Harry.

The silence that stretches between them lasts too long. Harry knows that he’s not going to get an answer; Loki’s too arrogant. Too self-assured. Too egotistic. All of his thoughts are based around him being superior to others. He flaunts his self-glory.
“What did you see?” Harry repeats, letting his own frustration seep into his words. “Was it really that bad that you can’t speak of it? Or did you see nothing at all, your head so far up your ass that you can’t even think to acknowledge your weakness?” Harry rubs a hand over his forehead. A headache forms behind his eyes and he turns away from the god, walking over to the small stream that winds its way through the thick foliage of the forest. He stands there, arms crossed over his chest, waiting for Loki to speak.

“I did see something,” Loki says sharply after too many beats of silence.

The tension that curls around them dissipates like smoke.

“Everyone is scared of something,” Loki says, softer this time. “Me. You. Everybody back in that cabin.”

Harry sighs, heavy and drawn out. Loki moves closer, standing beside him, just far enough away so that their shoulders aren’t touching. He mirrors Harry’s stance, crossing his arms and looking off into the woods.

“Fear makes us vulnerable more than anything else. It has caused a large quantity of great warriors to make idiotic moves,” Loki continues, not once glancing Harry’s way. “But I believe… fear might also be a strength. It gives us something to fight for, if nothing else.”

After a moment of silence, Harry says, “So back there. In London, yesterday. What were you fighting for?”

Loki lets out a dry laugh. “At first, it was simply for the thrill of a good battle.”

“But then?”

Loki purses his lips. “But then… I just fought for you. After you had passed out and the battle grew faster and harder those creatures were affecting all of us, you know. It was difficult to even stay upright. So I fought for you. Because if I died then my magic around you would waver and you would surely die as well.”

They’re still not looking at one another. But Harry reaches out and lets his fingers tangle together with Loki’s. “Next time, just let me disapparate with you.”
Loki’s head snaps towards Harry, looking at the wizard. “I pray that there will not be a next time.”

“Oh, of course.”

There’s a casual grin painted across Loki’s face when Harry looks his way.

Harry tugs him closer, pushing himself up onto the balls of his feet. Loki leans down, meeting him halfway. He places a gentle kiss to the corner of Harry’s mouth. And then Loki’s hands move to Harry’s back, holding him tightly.

For a long time, they stay like that. Two souls intertwined, finding companionship and comfort in one another when the world around them is riddled with twisted, cruel individuals.

Their silence and growing comfort is only broken when Loki leaves, heading back to the Ministry for another day of work. An over-glorified janitors job with horrible hours, indeed.

Harry’s day is spent around the rest of the team. They’re good people, but staying inside in such a small space surrounded by so many people heightens his ever-growing claustrophobia and reminds him all too much of a time long ago when he would spend time with the Weasleys at the burrow.

Whole lifetimes ago, by anyone’s standards. Harry is in no way the same type of person that he was back then, because then he had a hero complex and an intense need for justice - a desire to do what’s right. And now he’s just a broken shell, a fragment of who he used to be. Now he’s angry and couldn’t care less about what is morally correct. Then he was full of fire, and now he’s just dying embers.

Still, nostalgia washes over him, and he allows himself to drown in it.

“Have some more soup, Harry dear. You’re skin and bones!”

Mrs Weasley ladles more soup into Harry’s empty bowl and teenager-Harry smiles at her, a silent thanks. In the background some wizard music is playing, just loud enough to make out the lyrics but not so loud that it’s overly distracting. Mixed in with that sound is an undignified roar of betrayal from Ron as Fred Weasley beats him at yet another game of exploding snap. Ginny’s laughing at her brothers, and Hermione is tucked comfortably into the corner of the couch, flipping through an old, worn out book.
Mrs Weasley takes a seat at the table opposite Harry, pouring some more soup into her own bowl.

“You excited to go back to school, Harry?” She’s all motherly, wrapped up in warm smiles.

Teenager-Harry smiles and nods vigorously, swallowing the soup he has in his mouth. It burns its way down his throat.

Her tone turns serious then and dips down just above a whisper. “Your parents would be proud of you, you know.” After a pause, where Harry’s at a loss for words, “Arthur and I are proud of you, too. Whether or not you like it, you’re part of this family now.”

“I know,” Harry says. And god, he doesn’t know if he’s ever felt this full. This satisfied.

This happy.

The nostalgia ebbs away and then leaves entirely when he goes outside to clear his head. Despite how much his past tries to cling to him, he wants nothing more than to leave it where it is: the past.

Loki doesn’t come back from the Ministry until night has already fallen. He barges into the cabin, the door rattling on it’s hinges when he slams it behind him. Before long, they’re all gathered around the small table in the main room.

“The Minister for Magic is going to Hogwarts, exactly a week from now, to talk to the students about the wizarding world’s whole… situation,” he says, head raised high and shoulders thrown back. The stance of a king talking to his subjects, Harry notes.

“What situation?” Harry cuts in.

“Your situation. Everything you’ve done. Well, everything we’ve all done coupled with the dementor attack yesterday. They’re scared, Potter. The Minister, the aurors. They’re terrified of you - of the sheer amount of power you have,” Loki says.
Tony smiles lightly. “I don’t know how aware you are, but everybody who gave their life for you - every single person who fought for you during the Great Battle, and the attack after that - they all left imprints of their magic on you. Kind of like when your mother died, but not as extreme. The Ministry, though they don’t disclose it publicly, are completely aware of this.”

“You’re a ticking time bomb to them, basically,” Bruce fills in. “They know you can’t die - or at least, haven’t found a way to die just yet. And they know that you have a long history with Defence Against the Dark Arts, and by extension the Dark Arts themselves.”

Harry frowns. “I’ve never been one for the Dark Arts. I’m more for fighting them, actually.”

“Well, we know,” Natasha begins, “but in order to fight the Dark Arts well, you have to understand the Dark Arts themselves. It only makes sense. How are you supposed to stop something you don’t understand?”

“Anyway.” Loki clears his throat, effectively gaining everybody’s attention. “The point is that the Minister is going to give a speech at Hogwarts, likely because they’re young and impressionable to their propaganda. So, the Ministry with a team of highly skilled aurors are going to be in Hogsmeade in a week, on their way to Hogwarts.”

“A perfect time to attack.”

“Exactly.”

Chapter End Notes

lemme know what you think in the comments, i love hearing any type of feedback!!
Chapter Summary

As they wait, Harry finds out more about Loki.

Chapter Notes

hiya! I really hope you like this one! the end notes are kinda important so pls read them if you can xx

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Rain patters against the ground, pooling on top of the fallen leaves, seeping through a thick layer of moss and into the earth. A heavy mist wraps itself around the trees, making it impossible to see more than a few metres ahead.

There’s a burst of blinding light, thunder rolling immediately after through the thick storm clouds.

The cabin feels too cramped, an ever-growing claustrophobia increasing tenfold as everybody hunkers down to outwait the raging storm. So Harry escapes to the outdoors, casting a water-repellent charm over his robes to help keep his body somewhat dry. He sits by the creek, watching water cascading by. Bubbles toss and turn and leaves are ripped off branches, settling into the water for only a split second before being swept downstream.

He doesn’t feel like he belongs in his own skin. Barely-out-of-teenagehood Harry Potter, and yet his mind is centuries old. He wants to claw it off, wants to rip free from everything that he is. He wants to become one with the mist - curling around everything, being at peace, with no guilt and no responsibilities. He’s been stuck in one place for so long, and at this point he’s just… tired.

Tired of trying to fulfill his vendetta, tired of fighting for revenge, tired of keeping a team of misfit
wizards in check.

He tilts his face towards the dark clouds, letting the rain splash over his eyelids. His chest feels so, so heavy and he wishes that it was clean-cut sadness or anger, because the overwhelming emotions of *everything* were better than this desolate depression characterised by the feelings of complete exhaustion and emptiness. And not for the first time does he question the meaning of his existence on this earth.

His thoughts are evil. They tear away at all the things he used to like about himself - his courage, his hero complex, the way he could feel happiness and not think about all the strings attached to it…

Three days have passed since Harry, Loki and the rest of the team worked out what they were going to do when the Minister was travelling through Hogsmeade, to Hogwarts. And though Harry originally wanted it to just be him and Loki that went after the Minister, he eventually gave into Loki’s reasoning. It’s best to have backup, after all. The plan that they’ve composed is mediocre at best, but it should get the job done. Maybe when the Minister is dead then Harry can finally rest.

“You mortals never cease to prove your stupidity.” Harry jumps slightly at Loki’s voice. The god walks over, plopping himself down onto the soaking wet ground next to Harry. “Why on any earth people would seek out the rain is beyond me,” Loki says dryly, letting his emerald green fog-like magic dance between his fingertips. He sweeps his hand over his body and the rain parts for him. He smirks, raising an eyebrow at Harry.

“For all your talk about being superior, you’re still sitting in the rain as well,” Harry says.

“It’s better than being inside,” Loki offers, following Harry’s line of sight, staring at the bubbles that bob down the creek. “Bucky looked like he was one step away from killing Peter. Steve had to hold him back.”

“What’d Peter do?” Harry asks curiously.

“No idea,” Loki says with a grin. “Where I come from though, Bucky was a trained assassin. Maybe some of that carries on into this world.”

“A what?” Harry asks, shock laced through his voice.
“Assassin. Killing people, you know. So were Natasha and Clint.”

“I-“ Harry turns to Loki, about to say something, but then shakes his head, deciding against it. Instead, he lets out a weary sigh and leans his shoulder against the god. “Tell me more. About you world.”

“You sure?” Loki asks carefully. He slings one arm around Harry’s shoulder, pulling him closer.

“Yeah,” Harry murmurs, letting his voice wind into the wind.

“I come from a beautiful planet called Asgard, where the sun drips with gold at sunset and the civilization is advanced and intertwined with magic and science alike. I was born somewhere else though… Jotunheim. A place covered in ice and despair. I was born the son of King Laufey.”

Loki tightens his grip on Harry before continuing. “When I was a child, Odin, who raised me, went to war with Jotunheim. He left Asgard to kill frost giants and returned with one of his own. Me.” Loki sighs, a long, bitter sound. “He didn’t tell me, the oh-so-wise king. I was raised alongside my brother Thor, god of thunder. We got along well enough when we were children, but Thor was thirsty for the throne, whilst I was the rightful king. He was rash and wanted a war full of glory. We fought many battles - some together and others… against each other. During the last one he banished me here.”

“Stop squeezing me so tightly,” Harry says suddenly, reaching a hand to tug at Loki’s fingers, which had unconsciously tightened angrily around Harry’s arm.

Loki doesn’t apologize, but Harry sees a flash of regret and pain flash over the god’s eyes.

“I don’t want to soil this perfect image of me that you hold so dearly in your mind,” Loki says softly. “I don’t- I can’t tell you more about… my past.”

“You can,” Harry says simply. “You can tell me anything.”

Thunder cracks through the sky and Loki jumps. Harry pulls Loki close, wrapping his arms around the god’s torso. “It’s alright,” Harry whispers into Loki’s neck. “It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s okay, you’re safe here. You’re okay.” He repeats the words like a mantra, like it can erase Loki’s previous mind-shattering experiences.
Time passes by and Harry can feel Loki’s muscles gradually relaxing under his tight hold.

“There was always a moon in the sky,” Loki says eventually, not pulling away from Harry. “Though sometimes they were so faded against the light blue backdrop that they could barely be seen, they were always there. And during the night, oh, Potter, you would have fallen in love with the sky. More stars than you could possibly hope to count. A long time ago, I used to go out during the night and ride my horse down from the palace to the rainbow bridge. I would just sit there - looking at the stars, thinking of ways to trick Thor, without a care in the world.”

Loki rubs a hand across his eyes. The rain is still falling, heavy as ever. But it bends through space for them, letting the wizard and the god of mischief exist solely in each other’s presence.

“One time when we were eight, I turned into a snake. Thor went to pick me up, as in his eyes I was nothing but a snake and he loves snakes, and then I turned back and stabbed him.” Loki lets out a huff of laughter. “But at the time at least, he didn’t hold that against me. We were brothers - family.”

“You miss him,” Harry murmurs.

“No,” Loki says too quickly, too defensively. “My whole life I was living in the shadow of his greatness, for he was the god of thunder, headstrong and the king’s favorite, and I the god of mischief, with a tongue of silver and some little magic tricks that my mother taught me.”

Harry runs a hand through Loki’s hair, pushing it away from his eyes. “But he is your family.”

When silence hangs between them, he continues. “I never got a chance at an actual family,” Harry begins, “Both my parents were killed. My godfather was only in my life for a second before he was swept away. My Aunt and Uncle were abusive. Don’t… Don’t take your family for granted.”

Harry stands, offering his hand to Loki. “C’mere.”

Loki takes his outstretched hand, letting himself be pulled out of the invisible sphere that had been protecting them from the rain. Water splashes down the back of Harry’s neck. “But… at the end of the day...” Harry says, placing a hand on either side of Loki’s waist, “family is the people you choose, not just the people you are born to.” He pushes himself onto the balls of his feet, brushing his mouth against Loki’s. “You are so much more than what Thor and Odin said you were.”
And where their lips meet they are warm, despite the raging storm and the thoughts and fears that torture both of their minds.

It’s strange, almost. Two people so different and yet so similar, hopelessly infatuated with one another.

When they break apart, some time later, Harry’s lips are tingling and stretched into a lazy smile, grinning up at a god who stares at him as if he’s holding the whole world between his hands. Rain pelts down upon them but their eyes seek out only one another, ignorant to the world beyond.

“Every sorcerer has their own unique colour that the magic itself manifests into,” Loki says, pulling back from Harry’s hold and lifting up a perfectly manicured hand. A thin emerald mist winds its way between his fingertips, crawling down his forearm. “I’ve always wondered what yours manifests into.”

His gaze returns to Harry’s, a grin spreading across his face.

“I don’t even know how to do that,” Harry says, tilting his head. He reaches forwards, his hand brushing against Loki’s. The green casts a faint light on his pale skin, but it’s so cold that Harry has to jerk his hand back after a few moments. Loki grimaces slightly.

“You’re arguably one of the most powerful wizards on this entire planet and yet you are ignorant as to how to create a perceptible image of your magic?” Loki scoffs slightly.

Harry rolls his eyes, sarcasm thick in his voice when he speaks. “Well, I suppose we can’t all be as smart and talented as you.”

“I suppose not,” Loki agrees with an arrogant smirk. “Like this.” The god raises his hands, his palms facing Harry, standing in front of him.

Harry mirrors the image, lifting his hands up and widening his stance.

“Now - imagine that the wand you use to conduct your power has disintegrated into the whole world. This forest - the trees, the mist, the rain. All those objects are your wand,” Loki says. “Are
“Are you picturing that?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Now close your eyes.”

Harry’s breath catches in his throat at Loki’s authoritative yet gentle voice, but he does as the god says.

“Now… push. Feel the magic running from your heart all the way to your fingertips. Feel it flowing from your hands. Imagine that your wand is everywhere yet nowhere—” Loki breaks off with a soft barely-there huff of pleased laughter. “You’re doing it— gods, Potter. Open your eyes.”

Harry’s eyes snap open and the world is bathed in gold. Rain splashes into his face as he stares, mouth dropped open in wonder.

“You did well,” Loki murmurs. “I must be a good teacher.”

Gold - bright and shining as a star it drips from the trees, thick and beautiful, streams of it weaving between the tree roots. The storm clouds that block out the sun cannot prevent the light that shines around Harry. His hands tremble slightly as he channels more of his energy into the world, watching molten lava-like golden streams twist into stunning plumes of fire that reach up towards the sky.

He imagines himself re-absorbing the pure magic and it flows back towards him, not a trace left on the ground. It surrounds him, lighting up his features, his eyes so green and full of life.

“I—Look, Loki! I’m doing it!” He stumbles over his words, and they come out excited and muddled.

Then suddenly there’s an explosion of blindingly bright green - so much stronger than just a thin mist, and Loki laughs at the look of surprise that flashes over Harry’s face.

The rain seems to pause, hanging in the air as if suspended by thin threads. The trees seem to clear away, leaving them in a field of lush grass instead of dying moss. The world fades - and gold and green are left to clash against one another. Harry reaches out towards Loki, and though the green
cloud is cold, the gold remains pleasantly warm, crawling along his skin.

Colours intertwine and nothing else exists.

Except for the man beneath his hands who tastes of a land far away - of a sunset specked with moons.

Harry hasn’t considered himself whole in a long time. He’s always thought of himself as broken - simply a jumble of fragments of the man he used to be. He’s always said that the Battle of Hogwarts Memorial changed him, and it’s because of that he can’t sleep at night and feels himself slipping farther and farther down a dark road every day. Joy and peace have not come easy to him, but now...

Now, with emerald green mist mixing into bright liquid gold, startling cold intertwining with gentle warmth, Harry smiles. Magic surrounds them; it is his and it is untamable all the same. It is Harry and Loki, cut apart and mixed together until it’s difficult to distinguish between the two.

Harry breathes in Loki’s space.

And happiness grips at him.

They return back to the cabin when the early winter’s chill bites into their flesh. Harry’s too-long hair is stuck down on his head, curling at the ends slightly. His lips are red, a pale pink blush brushed across his cheeks. He’s a little too breathless and happy looking for someone who was practically drowning in the rain only moments earlier. But the happiness is good. Refreshing, especially in a space that is characterised by unrelenting despair and anger.

Clint throws a towel at Harry’s face. “You look like a drowned rat,” he comments, but his tone has a grin embedded into it.

“Thanks,” Harry replies dryly. He tosses the towel back to Loki, who drapes it over his head.

Harry toes off his boots and then peels off his socks, leaving them by the side of the door.

“You’re going to stain the wood by leaving that there.” Comes Natasha’s drawling voice from the
Harry rolls his eyes, but lets his wand slide down from his sleeve. He briefly flicks it at the pile. “There,” he says. “All dry. Don’t know why it matters anyway. This floor is beyond saving at this point.”

“Have you even tried?”

“Nope. Not planning on it, either.” He laughs, his chest feeling blissfully weightless.

Harry shrugs off his thick outer robes and then performs a quick drying charm on the rest of his robes. He turns back to Loki, who is ruffling his hair with the thick blue towel that Harry gave to him.

“Don’t you have magic for that?” Harry asks, subconsciously moving closer to the god.

“No,” Loki replies shortly. “It dries out my scalp and it’s so itchy.” Loki frowns. “This is better.”

Harry hums, flicking his wand at Loki’s torso, carefully drying his clothes but not his hair. He reaches up and brushes away the raindrops that had caught on the ends of Loki’s eyelashes. They sit around the table and Harry puts on some tea. The rain bangs on the windows, begging to be let in.

It’s rare, for everybody to be in one place at the same time. Usually, at least a few members of their little revolution are off in either the wizarding or muggle world - spreading the news that Harry Potter is both alive, powerful and coming back.

The tension that was held tight between Loki, Harry and Steve has disappeared. It makes Harry want to ask what exactly transpired after he passed out during the dementor attack in London, but he suspects that’s a conversation for another time. He doesn’t want to shatter the small window of peace that they have found themselves in.

Bucky is laying across the couch, his feet propped up across Natasha’s thighs. His head is cushioned in Steve’s lap, Steve’s hand absently combing through Bucky’s long hair. Peter is sitting on one of the kitchen chairs, leaning it back on two legs. He’s talking animatedly with Tony, who seems to be attempting at having a somewhat serious conversation about science. Clint is sitting in front of the sofa, knees tucked up to his chest. Bruce was talking with Tony, but he now just sits and listens.
Harry and Loki are sitting side-by-side, so close that their elbows brush when they move. Soon though, Harry gives up on trying to keep distance between himself and Loki when the team is present and grabs Loki’s hand, lacing their fingers together and squeezing tightly.

That night Harry lies in the same bed as Loki, arms wrapped tightly around the god. When lightning flashes and thunder rolls, Loki shivers in Harry’s hold.

“I’m not… weak, you know. It’s just… cold,” Loki manages to get out, his head tucked under Harry’s chin.

“I know,” Harry whispers through the darkness, running his hand up and down Loki’s back, a soothing gesture. But he remembers what Loki told him about his past. About his brother who was the god of thunder. About how Thor had banished him here, casting him away from his own home.

Loki is far from weak. He’s so brilliantly strong.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so firstly, I hope that you enjoyed this chapter!

Secondly, I'm not going to be posting next week. My life has gotten pretty hectic now that the school year's wrapping up, and I really want to do the next chapter justice instead of rushing it and it turning out shitty.

If you want to keep up-to-date with everything that I'm doing, as well as see sneak peeks of upcoming chapters and such, I'd highly recommend you follow this blog: Collateral Damage

Thank you so much for reading! make sure to leave a comment <3
Loki has a hand tangled through Harry’s hair, tugging him down restlessly to press their lips together. The sun has not yet risen and they’re within the safe walls of the cabin, pushed together on a twin-sized bed in the room just off the main living quarters. Birdsong from outside has not yet started - the room is quiet save for the sound of fabric shifting.

Harry’s tired. The night has been ridden with nightmares, to the point where he woke up gasping for breath, eyes wide with panic. Loki then pulled the wizard tightly against his body, holding him until his mind loosened its anxious hold. There’s deep bags under his eyes and his limbs feel pleasantly heavy. He tries not to think about what they are intending to do today. Instead, he lets Loki take control of his body, kisses turning deeper and hands wandering further across pale, scarred skin.

They stay like that while the early morning makes way for late dawn - intertwined, gasping each other's name’s into sloppy, open-mouthed kisses. The sheets tangle between their legs and Harry memorizes the way that Loki’s skin feels under his hands, because he can’t help but remember that one day - one day, sometime soon, he suspects - Loki will leave. He holds on just that much tighter because this man, this god, is someone that he never wants to let go of.

Loki, right now, is his clarity. He gets drunk on the way that Loki’s mouth feels against his and he becomes addicted to the god’s hands working their way over his body. Lust is put on the backburner, making way for something much closer to love. At the very least, that’s how Harry wishes to remember these events. He doesn’t want to think of it as the meaningless type of ‘oh god we could die tomorrow’ sex. Instead, he’d rather remember it as something that would have happened
regardless of weather or not death was something on the horizon.

Avoiding the inevitable is impossible, but Harry wishes that it wasn’t. The time they have together is ticking away quickly like dry sand between his fingers.

“Harry.” Loki’s voice is soft and raspy, encased in desire and concern. “You’re thinking too loud.”

“Sorry,” Harry murmurs against Loki’s collarbone, placing a chaste kiss against the soft skin there. “Just - a lot is about to happen, right?”

“Yes,” Loki agrees. His hand runs down Harry’s bare back. “Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Of course,” Harry says quickly. “It’s just that... once this is done - which like, is going to happen sooner rather than later - you’ll be…”

“Don’t ponder on that,” Loki says slowly.

“What? I should just forget that you’re going to leave me?” Harry spits out. He regrets the harsh tone behind his words immediately when Loki takes his arms away from Harry, rolling onto his back and folding his arms on his stomach. Harry watches as the god’s adam’s apple bobs up and down.

“I apologize for allowing you to get too attached,” Loki says coldly.

Harry pulls the discarded quilt up over his naked chest. “I just- I don’t… I can’t like-” He breaks off in frustration, running a hand over his eyes and laughing hollowly. “Loki.”

Loki doesn’t reply, his eyes fixated on the ceiling as if the stains on it are more important than the conversation at hand.

“I think that I might lo-“

“Don’t,” Loki snaps harshly, cutting through Harry’s murmured, thoughtful and scared words.
“Don’t - don’t make this harder for me.”

“Don’t make what harder for you?” Harry asks, frowning, his tone anything but soft. “You’re going willingly. From the very beginning, all this has been about was what you could get from me. Specifically, my magic. That’s why you hunted me down and saved my life in the first place, remember?”

There’s a long silence as Harry’s words hang in the air. The birdsong finally picks up from outside, creeping through the barely-open windows. Harry pinches the bridge of his nose and tells himself that he knew that this was coming. There’s no way of avoiding the inevitable, after all.

Finally, too many minutes after Harry’s outburst, Loki talks. His voice is cracked and raw around the edges, his pain only too evident.

“I don’t want to leave. Leave you. I never expected that I would… care for someone like you. You’re correct, this was just supposed to be me helping you and then you helping me in return. But it’s turned into something much greater than that. I don’t want to leave you.” He takes a deep, shuddering breath. “I don’t have a choice in the matter. My home is threatened, and however much I resent what the people there have done to me, they do not deserve to have to battle the monster that is coming on their own. My magic should be able to help, and my knowledge will no doubt prove to be infinitely useful. If I could, I would stay here.” There’s a pause, only a short one, where Loki regains his breath and tears his gaze away from the ceiling, his eyes meeting Harry’s.

“When this is all over, if I can manage to stay alive… I swear I will come and find you.”

And Harry cannot do anything to hold back his tears. Loki cups his cheeks in his hands, his thumbs swiping under his eyes to brush away the tears. He leans forwards and whispers the next words against Harry’s parted lips.

“I will always come back to you, no matter what.”

“You better,” Harry threatens. “You fucking better.”

Loki’s mouth turns up into a smirk and he presses his lips to Harry’s. Even though it’s officially morning time - sunlight and the sound of countless bird calls streaming through the windows being one indicator and the chatter of the rest of the team in the kitchen another - they don’t leave bed for a long time, because it could very well be the last time for a long while that they are able to bask in this
one-on-one comfort.

When they do get up, a strange anxious-excited emotion fills Harry’s stomach.

Today, the Minister for Magic will be making his way through Hogsmeade on his way to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Loki, who’s used some sort of illusion of himself at the Ministry, has been able to confirm that the Minister will be accompanied by a team of aurors: close to a dozen of them, if not more. They should hope for the best but prepare for the worst, Natasha says.

And so they have, with training exercises and practice duels. They’ve improved on what they were lacking on and excelled in what they’re already talented in. In only a week, they’ve worked as hard and long as they possibly can, striving to become the best wizards and witches that they possibly can.

Out of everyone’s progress, Peter’s has impressed Harry the most. He really buckled down and worked harder than ever with Tony and Bucky, of all people. They make an odd little trio, with Steve usually watching from the sidelines, his eyes following Bucky’s movements especially. Dawn to dusk they’ve been outside practicing, from the simplest spells like *expelliarmus* to the more complicated - even a few unforgivable curses, which Steve was unsure about at first but easily gave in to when Bucky shot him a glare and told him to, quote, “Stop being such a hypocrite, doll.”

All in all, everything has fallen into place like some sort of giant mosaic jigsaw puzzle, and to that Harry is grateful.

Anxiety boils in the pit of his stomach but it’s mixed in with a barely-concealable excitement, and he can’t seem to shake the grin that sneaks it’s way onto his face.

Today is the day. The big day. The day that decides the future. The day that Harry can finally, *finally* get the revenge that he’s been aching for for three hundred whole goddamn years.

Everybody’s gathered in the main living area. Harry’s eyes sweep over the surfaces, struck by the reminder that this could very well be the last time that he’s ever going to have to stay in this dingy old cabin tucked away in the corner of the forest, out of eyesight from the rest of the world. Back when it was just him and Tobias trying to make a life for themselves away from civilization, small knick-knacks had found their way onto the shelves, scattered haphazardly across the back of the counter and spilling out on the ground. There would always be a fresh vase of flowers placed in the centre of the table.
But then the items had been broken, left shattered on the hardwood floor as Harry ran and Tobias lay in a pool of his own blood, drowning in the crimson.

Now though, centuries later, Harry’s hit with just how much it has come to represent something more than just a cabin in the woods. It’s a home, embodied in the pile of wildflowers that Natasha picked the day before. It’s shown in the piles of parchment that holds years of Bruce’s and Tony’s research, along with colour-coded diagrams that make it just that much easier for Peter to understand. Clint has made a bow and a quiver full of arrows - without the aid of any magic - and they’re proudly standing on display on the shelf above Loki’s books. Steve’s paintings are hung around the room as well, beautiful swirls of colour against the stark brown of the peeling walls. Casey has staked claim to one of the armrests on the couch, curled up there with his tail covering his nose.

It has become a home again, gathering memories.

“Suit up,” Harry says, feeling his heart beat erratically beneath his ribs. “We’re heading out in ten.”

And with that, Harry seals the fate of everybody in that room.

Harry packs up his things with a steady hand. He makes his dragonhide bag bigger with a few simple charms, quickly sorting vials of potions into little compartments on the side. It doesn’t take long for everybody else to get ready as well. Clint slings a quiver of arrows over his back and Natasha tucks dagger upon dagger into her robes. Tony seems to be going through a checklist, making sure that he has everything he could possibly need. Banner is taking giant gulps of what looks like a pepper-up potion. Steve is as organized as ever, though his eyes keep darting in Bucky’s direction. He’s worried. When Bucky catches his eye he pushes close to Steve and Harry catches a soft, “Hey, hey. Stop. It’s not going to be like last time, I’ll be fine. We’ll be fine. He have Harry-fucking-Potter...” before he averts his eyes, feeling like he’s intruding on something too personal.

Peter is white as a sheet.

Harry surprises himself when he walks up to him, briefly resting a hand on Peter’s shoulder. “You ready for this?”

You up for this? He wants to tell the younger wizard that he can stay behind if he wants to - but they need all hands on deck. It’s not even an option at this point.

“Yeah - yeah. For sure.” He gives a half-hearted attempt at a smile. “What’s the worst that could
happen?"

Harry bites back the thought of the thousands of possible scenarios in which everybody in their little revolution dies a horrible, painful death. Instead he says, “Exactly,” and tries to keep his smile light and easy. “Everything’s going to be perfectly fine.”

“Everything’s gonna be fine, kid!” Tony shouts from across the room. “We’re all going to be right by your side. Besides, the enemy is only a couple second-rate mediocre Ministry guys. They won’t be able to do anything.” He says it with such certainty, but Harry can see the hesitation within his eyes. Even the most arrogant have fears, at the end of the day.

The minutes tick by too quickly, and before they know it they’re huddled together beside the stream in the early morning mist, each of them gripping tightly to a tattered shoe. Harry counts down under his breath.

*Three... Two... One-*

And the world around them disappears.

It’s raining in Hogsmeade. Not very hard, granted, but the cold air makes the droplets feel heavier. Harry flips up the hood of his robes.

They’ve appeared in the corner of an alleyway, a few streets down from the Three Broomsticks. Puddles of muddy water have gathered in the dips within the brick floor. The sun is blotted out by the clouds and it remains darker than it should be at this time of day. It’s still too early for the Minister to arrive, as they planned.

“Are the students at Hogwarts ready?” Harry asks Natasha. He keeps his voice carefully hushed even though nobody is out and about yet.

“They’ve been ready for a few hours,” Natasha replies. “They’re eager to prove themselves.”

“Let’s hope it won’t come to that,” Bruce says darkly. “They’re a last resort, remember?”
“Of course,” Harry says smoothly. “It’s better to be safe than sorry, after all,” he goes on before anybody else can try to convince him to allow the students to help from the beginning of the battle. Natasha and Bucky have been trying to get them into the fight but Harry has fiercely opposed them. It’s not that he doesn’t think much of their magic - from what Natasha has reported, they’re all incredibly gifted young witches and wizards. No: it has more to do with trust. He knows, at the bottom of his heart, that each and every person who lives in the cabin wholeheartedly believes in Harry and his capabilities. He knows their personalities. He knows them and he’d even go so far as to call them his friends, if not his family.

And in war, in battles, you have to be able to trust the people around you. If you don’t, you’ve already lost.

“Clint - can you get up onto a roof somewhere? Cover us from above. Nat - I need you to go farther down. Get to where you can be behind them easily. Bruce - you go with her. Bucky - you go down the street between the Three Broomsticks and the Owlery. They’ll walk past; you need to stick to the shadows by their side until they reach me and Loki.”

“I’m going with him,” Steve says quickly, reaching over and grabbing Bucky’s hand.

“Of course,” Harry says, flashing him a smile. “Peter…”

“He’s with me,” Tony says.

“Alright. Go to whichever street is opposite from where Buck and Steve are. That way we can surround them. Clint, you need to make sure that nothing sneaks up on us. We don’t want any surprises. Loki and I will take the front. You know the plan - we attack simultaneously once they reach Loki and me. If all goes to shit, regroup back at the cabin. Any last questions?”

He’s met with silence, save for the soft patter of rain against brick.

Then Peter is saying, “I… I just want to let you guys know that- that I’ve really enjoyed my time. With you. All of you… I dunno, after my Aunt w-was murdered. I didn't think I’d ever have another chance at a family but- yeah.”

“Jeez, kid. Don’t be morbid,” Tony quips, but he pulls Peter into a brief one-armed hug anyway. “We won’t let anything happen to you.”
“I’ll have your back the entire time,” Clint says reassuringly.

“We all will.” Natasha smiles. “We’re all in this together, you know.”

“Thanks.” Peter’s voice cracks a bit at the end, but everybody Pretends not to notice.

Harry turns to Loki. The god has been uncharacteristically quiet throughout this whole ordeal. In fact, he hasn’t spoken at all since they woke up together in bed. It feels like years have passed since then.

Loki has a strange look on his face. His lips are twisted together, his eyebrows furrowed. His hands are clasped behind his back and he’s wearing the same robes that he wore the previous day. Everybody else has changed into something a bit more… battle-ready, armour and all.

“You alright?” Harry sidles closer to the god.

“Of course,” he replies quickly, a smirk spreading across his face. “This will be fun.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “It’s a battle. Not exactly supposed to be a good time.”

“Oh, but Potter. I can finally show off. I don’t need to hold back during this, do I?”

Harry frowns. “You were holding back during training?”

During training the god had single-handedly defeated the rest of the team in under thirty seconds, which had earned him several dirty looks. That is, until Clint shot an arrow through his shoulder. Natasha had laughed at that, a loud joyful sound.

Loki raises an eyebrow. “Trust me, I was holding back.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” Harry says, then after a pause. “I bet you couldn’t beat me, though.”
“Oh please, Potter. Until a few days ago you didn’t even know how to allow your magic to manifest physically.”

Harry glares at him but it doesn’t hold any heat.

“Oi! Lovebirds,” Clint calls, breaking through Harry and Loki’s bubble. “We gotta move out.”

“You ready, Potter?” Loki says, lifting his chin up even higher, allowing a smile to grace his thin lips.

Harry says, “Of course,” unthinkingly.

A strange gold-tinged-green flame enfolds Loki and Harry’s eyes narrow automatically. His hand flies up to shield his face, but when nothing hits him he opens his eyes fully. When he sees Loki, his body takes an involuntary step backwards.

His shabby robes have been replaced with deep shades of green and black, the leather of which catches the faint light of the sun as it attempts to break through the heavy cloud cover. His boots are tall, reaching up to his knees. They’re intricate, made with immense care. The cloak he wears is dark - Harry can’t quite pinpoint if it’s truly black, or simply a dark green. There’s gold creeping up his forearms and more decorating the sides of his lapels. It’s all very arrogant and expensive looking, but that’s not what makes Harry’s eyes widen comically.

No, what stuns him the most is the larger, two-horned crown that adorns his head. The horns are tall, curving backwards. It reaches down past his high cheekbones, all the way to where it curves against his jawline.

He looks like how he should. An all-powerful god.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Clint breathes. “Holy shit.”

“That was neat,” Harry says, trying to keep his tone light. “Teach me sometime?”

“If you wish.” It’s not a promise of anything that’s going to happen in the future - but it’s something.
Harry knows that he’s grasping at straws because Loki is going to leave.

“Any final words?” Natasha quips. “Or are we ready to get this show on the road, boys?”

“Yeah, sure.” Tony clasps his hands behind his back. He looks around their small group. “It’s been good. When this fine specimen of a—” He waves his hand over Loki’s body. “-a… I think, human came and talked to me in my lab, I was skeptical. That lasted all of about five seconds, to which I’ll always be grateful for. Because without him being exceedingly convincing, I would never have met all of you. And as far as people go, you guys are pretty cool. So yeah, let’s go kick some ass.”

“Yeah,” Harry finds himself replying. “Life doesn’t mean much, in the grand scheme of things. Lots of shit just ends up being meaningless but – I don’t know. This feels different. This feels like the beginning of something… great, I guess. Like we’re carving out a path for future generations.”

“Alright.” Natasha claps her hands together, slowly taking a step backwards to the entrance of the alleyway. “We gotta get going. Like, right now.”

They disappear into the shadows and Harry is left feeling so, so small next to the battle-ready god.

Harry’s mind is full with millions upon millions of things that he wants so desperately to say to Loki but not one word gets past the lump in his throat. He shouldn’t be feeling this lost all of a sudden - this is what he’s been attempting to obtain for the last three centuries, god dammit.

Picoseconds tick into moments that span into seconds - time, always moving forwards, always managing to slip through Harry’s fingertips.

That’s when he hears it. The faint pop of wizards apparating and then loud, echoing, purposeful footsteps. His stomach rolls over and he turns his wide eyes to Loki. The god is anything but comforting though. He’s holding a dagger in each hand and he looks… happy. Excited. Comfortable. Like he’s exactly where he wants to be.

But all that Harry can think about is the last time he tried to do this and oh god - what if everybody dies and everything is lost?

The footsteps are getting closer and the seconds continue to pass by. Time will forever be linear after all, remaining unchanging even when the world itself disappears.
He takes a deep breath. He closes his eyes for a brief moment, gathering all the shattered pieces of himself back together. When he opens his eyes and puts all his energy into focusing on the real world, the footsteps are getting closer, sounding louder and louder. He lifts his chin up and throws his shoulders back.

His hand grips the Elder Wand like his life depends on it. But then again, it kind of does.

The footsteps are getting even closer. Harry follows Loki’s lead and edges to the entrance of the alleyway. It’s now or never. It’s now or never it’s now or-

Loki opens his arms and blinding emerald light explodes across the road, right in the path of the Minister and his team of aurors.

And that’s when the screams start.

Harry rushes forwards - Loki is beside him. Always, always beside him, always a steadying presence, always the clarity within the storm. But now is not the time to dwell on all the things that Harry will be missing in Loki’s absence. No, now is the time to fight.

Stunning spells are being shot off in all directions but Harry casts a strong shield charm in front of him and Loki. The stunners smash into it with a flurry of giant red sparks.

The bright emerald light is clearing, slowly but surely. Soon the Ministry will be able to see them. The stunners pause and Harry can hear panicked voices. He forces himself to appear as tall as possible - raising his chin, puffing out his chest, holding his wand slightly in front of him, ready for anything. His stance is wide and his muscles are coiled tightly, ready to spring. Loki is in a similar position beside him except-

Harry’s breath catches in his throat in surprise.

The god’s face is one of pure ecstasy. His lips pull up into an arrogant smirk and his chin juts out slightly, one eyebrow raised comically. He spins a dagger through his hands as if it is merely a plaything.
But then the blinding mist clears and all hell breaks loose.

Harry doesn’t let himself think. There’s no time. He lets his body flow with magic, barely knowing what spells he’s throwing at the aurors, hardly even realising when his anger has wrapped itself around the auror closest to him. It’s the cruciatus curse, so powerful that the auror blacks out after just a few seconds.

Harry’s a whirlwind of movement. His robes catch in the breeze and billow out behind him as he plants his feet and dodges a handful of curses. He throws himself forwards, slashing the Elder Wand through the air as if it is a mighty sword.

“IT’S HARRY FUCKING POTTER CALL FOR BACKUP!”

“THEY’RE TOO MUCH!”

“FIGHT HARDER, YOU IMBECILES!”

Yells reach Harry’s ears but he is strangely deaf to it all. It’s like he’s underwater; the words he catches are sounding thick and dull.

He uses his apparition to his advantage, disappearing for moments only to reappear, the Elder Wand channelling his magic into whatever he wishes it to be perfectly. His anger is what drives him. Blinding hot rage takes over and his mind goes on the backburner, allowing his body to mercilessly fight.

They have the advantage of surprise. Neither the Minister nor the aurors were really expecting an attack, as is evident by the utter lack of experienced warriors. But Harry’s team has been practicing for a long time. They’ve picked up tricks from both Harry himself as well as Loki, who has introduced them to another whole type of magic.

“Please, please, please, plea-”

“You have some nerve coming here we’ll kill you we’ll kill you we’ll-”
The pain they must be feeling is unimaginable. But they have done the very same thing to Harry, killing his friends in front of his eyes, blaming him, ruining him, killing him, destroying any ounce of happiness that he could feel.

Above the fighting, above the screams, storm clouds gather. Rain splashes down and Harry turns it to ice, letting it smash onto his enemies heads, sending them toppling to the ground as the frozen raindrops grow bigger and bigger until they’re the size of horses. *Smash, smash, smash.*

“Stupefy!” a young man is screaming. Half of his robes are covered in blood and yet he’s still standing there - still fighting. He’s brandishing his wand in Harry’s direction. His whole arm is trembling, as if he’s exhausting a massive amount of effort just holding his damn arm in the air. “Stupefy, stupefy, stupefy!” His voice stays steady.

Harry deflects them with nothing more than a thought. He doesn’t even need to raise his arm to do it - the shield is just there. His face takes on a murderous glare and he strides forwards, taking huge steps, his cloak ragged and flowing out behind him. He knows his face is probably bruised in some places - he knows he has bags under his eyes.

The young man looks terrified, but he’s not backing down. He stands his ground. “STUPEFY!”

“You’re going to have to do a hell of a lot more than that,” Harry growls. He snaps his fingers and the man collapses to the ground, hands clawing at his throat, trying to pull away a rope that isn’t there.

Harry steps over his body. He doesn’t look back to see the man’s eyes roll back, doesn’t pause to watch as his body takes its last heaving breaths.

No, he keeps walking. Towards his next victim.

But even he is nothing compared to Loki.

Because Loki is not just another ordinary man. He is, quite literally, a god. He has been alive for much longer than all the others and has evidently used his time to his advantage. His power is unparalleled. His knowledge is greater than all the others’ combined and his spells rip at the very
fabric which creates the universe.

The other wizards are a storm - Loki is an entire tsunami.

He ducks under a spell and slides forwards, slashing at the backs of two aurors’ knees. They scream and then topple to the ground. Loki is everywhere but nowhere; he fights hand to hand and yet still maintains a steady command with the magical aspect of his personality. His long, dark green robes whip around him. He takes out three more aurors with his daggers - one skimming through an auror’s throat, then launching one at the second auror’s heart. He spins to his left, stabbing into the gut of the third auror.

He rips the dagger upwards.

The auror screams and screams and screams.

Blood drips from Loki’s hand. It’s dark and red against Loki’s pale skin. It stains the leather and crusts onto the gold.

The aurors seem to have pegged Loki for the most powerful - and subsequently the most dangerous to them. The ones that aren’t maimed too badly and can still fight converge on Loki, surrounding him.

They put up shield charms behind them - nobody from Harry’s team can break through long enough to help him.

“Stand down, sorcerer,” a tall auror with startling orange hair says. “If you come with us peacefully, we can guarantee your safety.” He’s trying to reason with the god of mischief. Like that’s going to work.

Loki’s mind seems to be on the same path as Harry’s, because he leans back and laughs at the orange-haired man’s proposition.

Harry hits the shields with spell after spell. He has no doubt that Loki can take on the aurors, but he doesn’t really want to take the chance. Maybe they have something up their sleeve. Maybe they have the ability to subdue a raging god. It’s a big maybe but it is something.
“You must be quite daft if you believe I would willingly go with you.” Loki’s face has taken on his arrogant smirk yet again. He raises an eyebrow challengingly. If Harry didn’t know him so well, we would not have caught the way that Loki’s body tenses. The god is readying himself for something.

From a building above, an arrow flies down. It goes through the eye of one of the aurors. He’s dead before he hits the ground. Harry has to swallow the bile that rises in his throat.

The aurors take another step towards Loki. The god’s grin only widens. He sheaths his daggers and Raises his arms up into the air slowly. “I wouldn’t come any closer, if I were in your shoes,” Loki says slyly.

“Seize him!” the orange-haired man says. A dozen curses fly towards Loki but he-

The god disappears. The curses clash against each other in the spot where Loki should have stood. Harry’s mouth gapes open as a dozen Loki’s pop into existence among the aurors. They all have the same look upon their faces: mouths stretched into grins, arms raised high. In the confusion, the aurors’ shield charms fall. Harry leaps forwards, holding his arms out in front of him, and screws his eyes closed as he pushes.

“Now-” Loki had said, “imagine that the wand you use to conduct your power has disintegrated into the whole world… the mist, the rain. All those objects are your wand… Are you picturing that?”

He can feel the magic flowing out of himself. He can feel it engulfing the world around him.

“Gods, Harry.” Loki’s voice is right behind him. “Open your eyes. Look - fuck, just look.”

When Harry opens his eyes, the world is still. Loki’s back is pressed against his own.

And Hogsmeade… Hogsmeade is drowning in gold. But it’s not the bright colour and the stark beauty that makes his breath stop. No, what stuns him the most is how everything else is completely still. Like statues, carved from marble. Even the spells and charms and curses hang in mid air.

“Harry… Harry, you stopped time.” Loki’s voice is thick with wonder.
Molten lava painted with hues of yellow and gold runs down the streets. It curls around wizards’ and witches’ shins. It’s deep and thick, creeping up the sides of brick buildings like fast-growing ivy. The screams, the smashes and the constant loud noises that had been echoing through Harry’s ears have stopped.

Dead, unrelenting silence. It rings through his ears.

“I- I… how?” Harry gasps out as he whirls around, grabbing Loki’s shoulders and forcing him to turn around as well.

“I don’t know,” Loki confesses. His delicate fingers come up to Harry’s face, cupping his cheek. “I have never seen this happen before.” His eyes flit between Harry’s, almost as if he, too, is looking for the answer to the question that Harry is asking.

“We… we need to keep fighting,” Harry says slowly, hesitantly.

“I know,” Loki says simply.

Harry closes his eyes. He feels Loki pull his hand away from his cheek. He takes a deep breath, holding his arms up with him palms out, and pulls. He thinks about re-absorbing all of this magic, he imagines it becoming his again.

And the ringing silence makes way for a crash - a shriek - a scream of terror.

Loki is everywhere but nowhere. Harry is simply trying to keep up with the enemies in front of him. He can see the others fighting through the fray - Tony and Bruce are back-to-back, wands raised, their voices intermingling into some soft of magical song, the lyrics embedded into the curses they throw at their victims.

Natasha fights mercilessly. She is but a blur of black robes and red hair, moving so fast that Harry’s eyes can barely focus on her.

From above, Clint carefully aims his bow, picking off aurors one by one.
Steve and Bucky work together as if they’ve known each other their whole lives. They seem to know what the other is going to do before they even think of doing it. Their attacks are perfectly coordinated, fighting smoothly and with amazing precision. Harry doubts that even he and Loki would look that good fighting together.

There are dozens of loud cracks as more and more aurors apparate into the narrow street, throwing themselves into the battle. They don’t have long - Harry has to find the Minister now. They didn’t count on the reinforcements getting here so soon.

Harry’s head whips around - and then his heart skips a beat in his chest and his blood freezes over. *Where is Peter?*

He was supposed to stay with Tony. But Tony is with Bruce and Peter-

-Peter is not there.

“TONY!” Harry roars over the sounds of the battle. “TONY! WHERE IS PETER?”

He knows that the wizard has heard him because his mouth drops open and his eyes scan the battleground.

“*Stupefy!*”

Harry barely gets a shield charm up fast enough.

“*Expelliarmus!*” he screams back, sending the wizard’s wand flying into the sky.

Blood runs between the bricks beneath Harry’s feet.

Harry soon finds himself fighting next to Bucky and Steve. They’re backed up into a corner. Sweat makes Harry’s hair stick to his forehead, brushing into his eyes. He doesn’t have time to wipe it away however, for his mind is running solely on adrenaline and survival instinct.
But the aurors are getting so close, and there’s so many of them. They’re not ready for this, goddammit. Sure, they expected some resistance. Some backup. But not an entire army. Harry hasn’t even caught sight of the Minister since the beginning of the battle. But there’s no way in hell that he can simply leave now and find him - he has to get out of this corner first. He has to get past the dozen or so aurors that are shooting all types of unforgivable curses towards Harry, Bucky and Steve.

He doesn’t get a shield charm up in time. He can barely even see the spells that are being fired at him but-

-Bucky launches himself in front of Harry, taking the full force of the curse.

“Protego!” Harry yells, channeling all of his anger and worry into the spell. It holds. Or at least, it will hold for now.

Steve is on his knees next to Bucky, pushing at his limp form. Bucky’s eyes are open slightly and his voice is broken and hoarse when he speaks. “Get out of here, Stevie. Run, just run. Please, please leave, please don’t die here, please, please please.”

Harry can’t tell what curse the wizard has been hit with. He stands there, holding the shield charm, feeling helpless.

“I said I would stay with you to the end of the fucking line, Buck! I’m not leaving you here. Not now, not ever. We’ll get through this, I swear - just, get up, get up, please.”

Harry reaches inside of his robes, trying to grasp at a vial of the strongest healing potion he possesses, but comes up empty. Shards of glass slice through his fingertips.

Smashed, every single one of them. Gone.

Steve is performing healing spells on Bucky but Harry can’t tell if that will be enough. They need help, they need backup. Where the fuck is Loki?

He lets some of the shield charm fall and he unleashes his previously mostly-contained anger. He shows them just how unparalleled his power is. He shows them just how weak they are. Screaming,
screaming, screaming. Always sound, always loud.

Never - never a moment of peace and quiet. Unless time ceases.

Harry escapes from the tight corner, his eyes scanning across the narrow roads. There’s too many people packed in such a tight space. The spells are getting sloppy, being so close to their targets. The fear in everybody’s eyes is more prominent than ever. Harry has to step over a body. And another and another and - and it’s a sea of bodies, blood running freely.

*Is this freedom?* Harry asks himself. *Three hundred years, leading up to this. Leading up to a massacre.*

And then he sees Peter - and sees the aurors closing in on him, and sprints forwards, throwing himself at the attackers, trying to get in between them and Peter before-

-Something hits the young wizard and Peter falls. A stunned cry escapes from his lips. Tony is there, right in front of Peter, arms out as if to catch the boy.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” Harry screams, and emerald light much sharper than Loki’s magic explodes.

“I- I don’t feel so good,” Peter coughs. His voice is the epitome of terrified. There are tears spilling down his cheeks from the corners of his eyes.

“You’re alright,” Tony’s voice quivers.

“I don’t - I don’t know what’s happening.” Peter breaks off in a sob, stumbling towards Tony and falling, falling into the wizard’s arms. They collide with a dull thud and Peter’s hands grasp at Tony’s robes, holding on as if for dear life.

Sobs wrack over his body. “I don’t wanna go, I don’t wanna go. Mr Stark, please I don’t wanna go I don’t wanna go.” His voice breaks off. Tony lowers him to the ground, slowly, carefully.

Tony stares down at Peter, true fear taking over his body. His hands shake uncontrollably. Peter
meets his eyes. “I'm sorry.” It’s nothing but a whisper; it’s a miracle it’s not carried off into the wind. Peter’s eyes roll back and his body shudders before becoming too still.

“No,” Tony says. “No. No, no no no nonono-” He shakes at Peter’s body. “No, no I promised.”

“Avada kedavra!” Harry shouts, over and over again until the words get so muddled within his mouth that they barely come out coherent at all. But non-verbal commands are as natural to him as verbal ones are, and his rage is fueled into the killing. Blood and tears run into his eyes. But he keeps slashing the elder wand through the air, bodies dropping around him.

Dropping in the same manner that his own parents had, all those years ago.

The screams of the battle are nothing compared to Tony’s wail of pure, unrelenting grief.

That’s what makes Harry falter. Tony’s cries - they make Harry spin around. He lowers his defences for nothing more than a moment.

But a moment is all that it takes and-

-and everything goes black.

Chapter End Notes

uhhhhh pls dont hate me

also u may have noticed! there's only 2 chapters left! This whole thing will be wrapping up pretty quick im emotional
Dust and Gold

Chapter Summary

The battle rages on.

Chapter Notes

firstly -- I've updated the chapter count from 19 to 20. I'm not necessarily adding anything, I just want the final chapter count to be a better number than 19, so I'm splitting the last chapter in two.

secondly -- This fic has already been tagged with violence, but this is just another reminder that this chapter gets a bit... gruesome at times. Reader's discretion is advised.

I hope you enjoy this chapter! It was my favorite one to write so far :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Whilst Harry seems to prefer fighting using primarily his magic above all other skills that he has honed over the years, Loki is the opposite, greatly preferring to use a more physical approach helped by his natural mischief-induced witchcraft. He loves the way that he can trick people during a battle, making their heads twist around trying to find the source of Loki’s attack. He loves the way that he can transform their wands into other things - mainly snakes.

He loves the way that he can catch them completely off guard - because they’re expecting a normal type of magic. They're expecting the spells that were taught at a wizarding school called ‘Hogwarts’, not Loki’s own magic, which is funded on science and a great liking for chaos in all of its many forms.

Above everything else, that’s why he is enjoying this battle.

Until they call for reinforcements.
Until Loki loses track of the Minister.

Until Loki watches as Harry crashes into the ground.

Instantly there is a small army of soldiers upon him, attacking his every side. He doesn’t get his defences up fast enough and has to duck and dodge their many spells and curses. The blades of his daggers have become dulled, having sliced through too much flesh. Too much muscle. Too much bone.

His mind is screaming at him.

Where is Harry - is he? Is he gone - dead? Or, or, or injured? Harry, Harry, Harry. Please, no. I never even told him that I - that I - that I -

He’s spiraling, thoughts jumbled and incoherent. Screams of pain and terror fade into the background as he launches one of his dull-bladed daggers into someone’s face. It sinks into flesh and through bone just under the wizard’s eye. The second embeds itself into a witch’s neck. Within himself, he summons as much black magic as he possibly can. He closes his eyes and calls to it, bidding all the dark creatures of this land to obey his commands. He gathers it all up around him.

The curses that hit him don’t affect him. Static fills his ears, the terrified sounds of the battle disappearing into nothing.

He hasn’t necessarily been holding back up to this point, per se, but now his own fear digs its claws in deep and his overwhelming anger that he’s packed away for so long is rearing its ugly head. Storm clouds gather darkly above him, blotting out the sun completely. Night-like darkness takes over the streets and Loki lets himself explode with pure rage.

He can’t pinpoint the creatures that he’s summoned to his aid - blackness takes away from his vision and his head feels like it’s about to be split open. He’s exhausting too much power, too quickly. Bodies fall all around him as he runs forward, lashing out wildly. He barely even pauses to see if the magicians approaching him are good or bad; he just fights and fights and fights and fights.

He hears the screams - the pain from others. But he keeps fighting. Keeps pushing forwards. Keeps hurting and keeps fighting with everything that he’s got.
Terror. He’s never felt it this intense before, and it consumes every bit of him.

He launches himself forwards - hands are clawing at him, spells are smashing against his back, the blood underfoot is thick and wet. He slips -

-but keeps moving forwards, always forwards. Always towards Harry, no matter what. Three giant bat-looking horses prowl by his sides, blocking the worst of the attacks. Dark green mist surrounds him in a loose sphere and the magicians are choking on it - his magic is too unfamiliar and freakish for them to have any hope against it. It melts them from the inside; it is everything that Loki is feeling.

The pain, the terror, the -

-hopelessness.

Harry’s body is one of the many laying strewn across the cobblestone ground. Green encases them and -

-gold.

Loki blinks, trying to clear his mind, trying to make sense of everything, trying so, so, so hard to get his racing heartbeat under control so that he can think.

Gold, bright and shining, thick like molten lava. It covers the ground, spreading from where Harry is laying. It overtakes the pools of blood. Like he’s bleeding out magic.

Loki’s ears ring. Sound is coming back, slowly.

His surrounds come back to him sluggishly. He reaches a hand forwards, pressing two blood-stained fingers against Harry’s neck, under his jaw and beside his throat.

*Thump, thump, thump.*
And clarity crashes into Loki, sending him reeling.


Harry’s chest heaves as if he’s been submerged in water for several minutes.

**Peter.**

His eyes fly open and sounds assault him. The stench of blood and vomit is almost too much for him and his body shakes.

“**Harry.**”

Loki is kneeling above him. Red drips from his face and his robes are tattered and torn. Miraculously, the two-horned crown still adorns his head, but it’s tilted slightly to the left and his hair hangs down around his face. His hands shake against Harry’s chest. Harry coughs, his lungs still fighting for sufficient air.

“Peter- where’s… where’s Peter?” His voice comes out hoarse, like he’s been screaming for weeks on end.

Loki’s head snaps up, scanning the battlefield.

Harry wipes a hand over his eyes. “Loki,” he says, when his foggy brain clears enough to identify the green mist that surrounds them. He flinches as an inhuman roar splits the air and a wild trail of fire lights up the sky far above him. “Loki, what have you done?”

Harry sits up, flinching back and instinctively grabbing at the Elder Wand when a flash of red light explodes in the air mere feet in front of his face. “Loki.”

But when he turns to face the god, he has a strange, horrified look on his face. “**Loki what did you do?**”
“I just-” Loki covers his mouth with one hand. From where he kneels on the ground, blood stains his robes a dark shade of crimson. “I - we were - losing so I - I just,” he stumbles over his words, a completely different person to the arrogant god that Harry saw at the beginning of the battle. “You were hit so I -”

“You did what?” Harry snaps, pushing himself to his feet. Every single one of his muscles groans in protest, but he fights off the pain.

“I called all the dark forces of the world here. They are - they are under my command, they shouldn’t attack anyone who fights on our side but-” His words are rushed, tumbling into each other. He doesn’t stand.

“But what?”

“But they take their power from me. I -” Loki’s face turns an awful shade of green and his body seizes up. He vomits onto the ground. “You were falling - you were hit - I had to do something.” Loki screams the last word. Saliva runs from his mouth and his eyes have deep bags under them.

“Hold them, hold them. For as long as you can,” Harry says hurriedly, spinning around and squinting his eyes, trying to see through the fog. “I don’t know if Natasha’s backup has arrived. We can’t fight this many alone. I need to - god, Peter.”

And then he’s running. Because he sees the limp, unmoving body of Peter Parker. Tony, Bruce and Natasha are crouched around him, murmuring incantations under their breaths.

“AVADA KE-”

Harry throws up a shield charm so powerful it not only blocks the unforgivable curse but also sends three aurors flying backwards, landing flat on their backs several feet away. It’s hard to see through the thick mist - Harry can only catch glimpses of the battle raging around him.

There’s an ear-splitting roar and flames explode somewhere off to the left. The mist swirls heavily as if - wings?

Oh, god. Loki has summoned dragons.
Harry slows when he reaches his teammates, crouched around Peter’s body. Carefully, he lowers himself to his knees, eyes wide and hands shaking uncontrollably. “Is he…?” He lets himself trail off.


“Loki has brought… reinforcements. He seems to think that they’re under his command,” Harry says. He’s surprised at how calm his voice sounds. “We have a little bit of time but I haven’t been able to find-”

“No,” Tony cuts him off, his voice sharp. “We need to leave now - this is all too much! This isn’t a battle that we can win!”

“We have to win this!” Harry shouts over the cry of the battle. “We don’t have a choice!”

“There’s always a choice,” Bruce says. There’s a large gash, dripping with blood, running from his cheekbone all the way down to his neck, disappearing under his robes. “Do you have any healing potions?” His words shake, as if he’s having a hard time getting the sounds past a lump in his throat. “We can’t keep him alive like this. Please.”

“No - they’re smashed, I-”

“In your bag, you fucking idiot,” Natasha yells, springing to her feet. She whirls around and slashes her wand through the air, sending a curse into the gut of an auror who’s been attempting to sneak up on their little group.

“Accio bag!” Harry shouts, hoping, wishing, praying that his dragonhide bag is where he left it near the entrance to the alleyway, behind a trash can.

He holds his breath.

But at last he sees the bag flying through the air towards him. He grabs it. “Accio healing potion,” he hisses.
He hands the clear vial to Tony. “Don’t stop what you’re doing. But -”

“Thank you,” Tony says, grabbing the vial from Harry’s hands.

“Go find the Minister,” Bruce tells him. “We’ll be alright.”

Harry nods once, gripping his wand even tighter. Now, more than any time before, he needs to be able to trust his teammates. He needs to be able to trust them to keep one another alive because if he can’t then everything is lost.

In all the wars he’s been a part of, in all the battles he has fought he has never, not once, become accustomed to the sounds. There are screams, of course. But those are easily blotted out by wails of grief. There are loud, echoing booms and sharp cracks. There are roars of fire and snaps of sparks. There’s the dull thud of bodies hitting the pavement and the yells of terrified, desperate people, calling out for help amongst the panic.

The mist is thinning slightly and Harry’s eyes adjust through the tears and blood to see the carnage surrounding him.

He walks forwards, steadily. He steps over the strewn body parts.

A shield of thin golden fibres encircles his body and the spells that aurors fire at him bounce off easily.

“Stupefy, stupefy, stupefy!”

Harry almost laughs at them in pity. Their uncoordinated stunners can do nothing against his unconditional power.

A screech splits the sky and Harry’s eyes dart up, his step only faltering for a moment. A giant silver dragon streaks through the sky, coming to a thundering landing a few meters to Harry’s left. He has to remind himself, over and over again, that Loki has utmost control over the beast and that it will not attack him as long as that fact stays intact.
The dragon stares at Harry with a dark, calculating eye. Harry fights to keep his breathing steady. Then, as if the dragon has made up its mind about something, it spins, facing protectively away from Harry.

And the aurors that have been trying in vain to attack him turn to dust.

“Good dragon,” Harry murmurs, and stalks forwards. Always forwards, but for once, away from Loki.

The battle rages on all around him, cruel and damaging in as many ways as possible. But Harry makes it through easily though. The silver dragon stays by his side, in manner akin to that of some sort of bodyguard.

There are more than a few other dragons leaping from building to building, huge wings beating into the sky, sending flames shooting down towards the aurors. There are some thestrals as well, teeth gnashing and hind legs kicking out wildly. A sphinx, hippogriffs and giant serpents send the aurors tumbling to the ground, another life added to the death toll, another drop of blood flowing onto the cobblestone street.

Harry is nearing the edge of the battlefield, eyes as wide as ever, searching for the Minister for Magic. He prays that Steve has managed to get Bucky back up on his feet. He hopes that Clint is staying safe, high up on the rooftops.

His gaze darts around rapidly when he catches sight of a small group of aurors rushing into an empty alleyway, a fair distance away from the bulk of the fighting. Harry’s boots slip as he pushes himself into a run, racing to the spot where they disappeared.

“Sir! Sir! You need to go back to the Ministry, right now!” Harry slows down to a silent walk as his ears catch the soft tones of voices coming from the alley. “It’s a bloodbath out there, and we can no longer keep you safe.”

“Yes,” a posh female voice chimes in. “They have some strange sorcerer with them - I wasn’t able to get a good look but his magic is unlike anything I have ever seen before.”

“Is it Harry Potter then?” a weary voice says. Harry bristles when he realises it must be the Minister.
“No - well, I think I saw him too but - the other sorcerer, he had… blue skin? His eyes glowed red, at any rate.”

“A demon, then?”

“Er- I dunno, sir. He looked pretty regular.”

“You just said he had blue skin! And red eyes!”

“Well, yes. Other than that, regular.”

“Where are they now? The sorcerer and the Potter boy?”

“I- er. I’m not sure.”

“You lost track of them?!”

“Well. There’s… dragons, now. And everything glowed green; I could barely see a foot in front of me.”

The sounds of the battle have completely faded into the background. Harry’s anxiety has faded down to a dull throb. His head no longer aches. His steps feel lighter, his head clearer than it has been in a long time. He keeps his back pressed against an abandoned storefront, creeping up on the alley.

“So - you have to leave. It is unsafe.”

“God! The three of you! You’re a bunch of bumbling idiots! I tried to disapparate the second our forces started falling.”

“And?”
“And, one of their bloody wizards has put some sort of spell over the whole place! No escaping.”

“They’re going to come for you.”

“It’s your job to keep me safe!”

“Well-”

“Right, right, it’s unsafe and you wish for me to leave immediately!” The voice of the Minister is filled with rage.

“Minister Lestrange, please, calm down. We will do the best we can.”

But Harry is no longer listening.

Lestrange. So many years ago, fighting a brutal battle within the Ministry of Magic. So many years ago, watching Sirius duel with Bellatrix Lestrange, an evil, terrifying glint to his eye. So many years ago, watching as one of the only people that he ever managed to call his family fell through a curtain.

It happened so many years ago, but it all comes crashing down on him now. In another battle, in the future, with a group of talented misfits by his side, fighting with everything they’ve got even though they’re helplessly outnumbered.

The pain comes back as it always does. Just as sharp as ever, stabbing into his heart as if he’s being impaled on a sword. Everything hurts and his anger, though it’s always there, comes bursting out of him. He spins around the corner, gripping the Elder Wand so tightly that his knuckles turn white.

He knows how he must look - wild. Untamed. Evil. Powerful. His robes fly out behind him and his hair is pushed back, his lightning-shaped scar standing prominently against his pale, bruised skin. His robes are ripped in several places and his mind attacks him with the same thought, over and over again, running on repeat.
This is it, this is it, this is it, this is-

This is everything, this is the end, this is the beginning, this is where the story ends and this is where the story begins-

“CRUCIO!” he roars, a sound so full of rage, a voice like a raging fire, tearing at the world around him. “CRUCIO, CRUCIO, CRUCIO!”

And when the screaming starts, when the wizards before him fall to their knees, when the dragon who previously stood protectively by his side falters and takes a step back, Harry Potter, the chosen one, a sorcerer with magnificent power, allows a demonic look to wash over his face and smiles.

An arrow flies through the air, embedding itself magically into the stone directly in front of Harry’s feet. There’s someone screaming at him - but not out of pain. Fear?

“-Stop, stop, Harry, please you need to stop.”

“Bucky! Get back, it’s not safe - he could hurt you.”

“I trust him - he’s killing them, Steve! I need to-”

“No. No, it’s not safe. I won’t lose you to his wrath. I won’t.”

He can barely hear the voices through the static in his mind. The anger that he’s unleashing now has been festering inside him for over three centuries and even if he wanted to stop it, he’s not sure that he could.

The darkness is everywhere - all around him, surrounding him like a pack of wolves, surging inside his body like a storm.

He hurts them and he hurts them and he hurts them, and he-

His chest, his heart, his soul, the very essence of his being, cries out in pain.
Is this how Bellatrix had felt, every time that she cast the cruciatus curse? Did it hurt her as much as it hurt her victims? Because Harry aches.

He aches and he cries and his face is a canvas filled with blood and tears and dirt. His eyes, though they are as startlingly green as ever, are glazed over, shaded with a hopeless look. He’s too far gone.

“Harry! Harry, please! You’re better than this! I know you, you’re better than this!”

“Nat. Don’t… there’s nothing - nothing you can do.”

“Clint let me go!”

“He’s gone, Red. That’s-- that’s not him.”

“Please, I owe him that much. I owe it to him to try.”

He pours all of his suffering into the wizards before him. Eventually, the two bodyguard aurors fall silent, crumbling into lifeless piles on the cobblestone grounds. But the Minister - Lestrange - keeps yelling. Begging, screaming for mercy - for a way out.

And Harry cries and cries and cries.

“We should leave - go back to the forest - this was a bad idea-”

“He’s gone mad!”

“Someone go get Loki!”
Is this revenge?

Is this the answer to all of his suffering?

Is this really what he’s waited and schemed for?

Was this how Voldemort had felt as he murdered his victims? Did the raw, unnatural rage take over his body just as it now takes over Harry’s? Yes, no, maybe. In the end, killing is killing, no matter what the incentive may be. For revenge or for power, it all becomes meaningless when bodies build up and blood runs swiftly. But gods - Harry has been hurting for far too long. It’s all flowing out of him now, like a cascading wave.

His magical signature is gold; innocent and expensive, but his mind is plagued with black, rage and murder taking over the good.

And oh, how it’s easy to give in to the rage, to the murder and to the complete evil.

“Harry.”

He hears it as clear as morning daylight, rays of sun breaking through the pre-dawn mist.

“Harry, please.”

It’s a pained sound, but coherent still.

“Harry, look at me.”

He turns, barely feeling his body. It’s almost as if someone else is controlling him, forcing his limbs to move when he’s too exhausted to do it himself.

“That’s it. You’re okay, now.”
Loki’s voice, though it trembles, remains strong.

Harry blinks as his eyes focus. His body still feels hazy, but he’s rational enough now to process what he’s seeing.

He sees the background first - fire and blood and fallen bodies. Giant dark creatures, rearing their ugly heads, picking off aurors as if they’re no more than ants. During the best of times, aurors have a hard time controlling one dragon. But when there’s a dozen dragons and thestrals and basilisks - giant spiders, chimaras, and trolls - well, the aurors don’t stand a chance. Even though more keep appearing, they’re picked off easily. It’s a bloodbath - limbs scattered across the ground, wails of despair piercing above the sound of clashing bodies and bright spells.

“Breathe, Potter.”

Harry coughs up blood and sinks to his knees. His head suddenly hurts sharply. Behind him, the Minister’s screaming has ceased.

His whole team has gathered before him. Tony is holding Peter off to the side a bit, the older wizard’s face bruised almost beyond recognition. From the way he holds himself, Harry can bet that one - if not several - of his ribs are broken. Peter is unmoving, save for the very faint rise and fall of his chest. Natasha rests all of her weight on one leg, the other bent at an impossible angle at the knee. She has a huge, ragged gash running from the bridge of her eyebrow down the side of her nose, stopping just before her upper lip. Blood drips into her open mouth, staining her teeth. Her robes are ripped apart, exposing expanses of broken pale skin.

Steve’s hair is wild and caked with red. One of his eyes is swollen shut, and an arm hangs at his side limp and uselessly. His chest heaves as though he can't breathe properly, and he coughs wetly. There are flaps of flesh hanging off his lower legs where his robes have been sliced off. How he’s standing right now, Harry has no idea. He’s leaning on Bucky who seems to be the worst off - physically at least.

Unlike the others, he doesn’t hold a wand in one hand. His hair sticks to his face with sweat and what looks like chunks of somebody else’s flesh - like somebody blew up and bits of them landed on his face. The skin on his neck is peeling back - burns running down from his jaw and covering his chest. The worst though, is the bloody stump where an arm should have been. He’s clutching at it with his other hand - leaning heavily against Steve. His eyes are glazed over, likely in shock. How he’s still standing, Harry has no idea.

Clint appears to be the most unharmed due to having fought the battle from the rooftops, picking off
aurors one by one with magically-enhanced arrows. But even so, his robes are still torn, his face is still bruised and his body shakes with fear. Bruce’s wand is cracked in half and he holds both pieces of it so tightly his knuckles have turned white. His mouth hangs open, his jaw off-centre slightly. A few of his teeth are missing and blood runs down his chin.

But Loki -

Loki is the only one on the ground. His eyes are pleading and his hands are trembling uncontrollably. He’s drenched in blood, but Harry cannot tell if it is his own or somebody else’s. The two-horned crown that adorned his head earlier is nowhere to be found, and his hair runs wild.

But what stuns Harry the most is how weak the god appears.

Like glass, about to break.

Like a bird, falling from the sky.

“I’LL HAVE YOU ALL LOCKED UP!” the Minister - Lestrange - screams from behind Harry. “You’ll go to Azkaban for this; you’ll be killed! You’ll get what you deserve!”

Harry leaps up and whirls around. He’s but a blur of gold and red, magic flowing from him. His mind is fuzzy - he can’t quite figure it out -

Because everything’s hazy, caked in red rage. He needs to lash out - wants to hurt - thirsts for the kill .

And yet -

-Loki’s body, weak and unprotected. Loki’s magic, holding all of the dark creatures in place, ensuring that they fight for the right side.

Loki, who has always had faith in him. Who has never pushed him, who holds him close on the darkest nights.
Loki, who has stood by his side and supported him even as he gave into the evil lurking inside his chest.

He deserves something better than this. He deserves someone who can love and feel true, unparalleled happiness. He’s holding the power of dozens of monsters, forcing them to obey his will. It should be impossible but it’s not because it’s Loki and Harry is-

-Harry is so, so, hopelessly in love with him.

The anger is still there, and it’s roaring, trying to escape, trying to fight.

But Harry relaxes his hand and the Elder Wand clatters against the hard ground.

It’s time to stop fighting. It’s time to become better.

Chapter End Notes

lemme know what you thought about this in the comments!
Watch the mountaintops, as the sun rises upon a new day

Chapter Summary

Before the sun rises, there is always a gray area, where twilight takes over the universe.

Chapter Notes

GOD I'M SO SORRY THIS TOOK SO LONG. I had final exams and then had to deal with my Shitty mental health. And just LIFE, y'know? Anyway I hope you enjoy this ^__^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stop, think. Take a deep breath; close your eyes. Imagine you’re somewhere else -- on top of a mountain, watching the sunset in fiery red tones. Or in a field of wildflowers, letting the summer’s heat wash over you. Imagine you’re by the ocean, sitting among a pile of shells and salt-crusted driftwood. Breathe in the sweetness of the air, listen to the waves slapping against rock and sand.

Allow the peace to enter you; allow the happiness to surround you.

Because right now, it’s not peaceful. Happiness is far away, chained up and locked away in an iron vault.

“It’s over.” Harry’s voice shakes, but he speaks through the tightness in his throat and the horror in his chest. “It’s all over.”

“You have no proof.” It sounds as if the Minister is speaking through a veil - static is surrounding his words. “You make accusations with nothing to back them up.”

“We have evidence,” someone’s voice breaks through, ending in a wet cough.
“It’s over,” Harry repeats. “It’s all over, now.”

“Is it?” the Minister asks. “I am under the impression that this is simply the start, nothing more than the tip of the iceberg.”

“We’ll bring you to justice.” It’s Steve speaking. Harry can recognize the voice and he frowns, trying to break through the veil, trying to hear the sounds and voices as if he’s not underwater.

“It’s over; we’ve won,” Steve is saying, low and urgent, as if he’s trying to keep someone awake.

The Minister laughs, high and loud. Mocking. “You say you’ve won and yet you are drowning in death. That does not seem like a victory, does it now?”

“And yet, despite it all, we are still here. We are the ones alive.”

Harry’s head spins. It’s over, it’s over, it’s over. The mantra repeats through his head. He can stop fighting. He did stop fighting.

We are the ones alive, despite it all.

Someone’s hand wraps around Harry’s wrist, grounding him gently. “Harry.”

“Yes,” he says automatically, with a robot-like tone.

“It’s time to go. Remove the anti-apparition wards, please.” When had he set the wards? He cannot remember.

“I-”

“Just let go, Harry. Just relax. It’s okay. It’s over. We won.”
He’s struggling to breathe, struggling to swim to the surface of the water. Struggling to stay sane.

War - it pushes people to the edge of their humanity. It tears them down and strips them of their skin, leaving nothing but muscle and blood and bone. Leaving nothing but a shell, nothing but a body missing a critical piece. A body missing a soul, a body missing love and hope and *happiness*. War rips people to shreds.

It’s romanticized, more than people would care to admit. Tales of battles and lost love are intertwined deeply into culture, but they fail to capture the way that heroes stutter - they fail to show the way that bits and pieces of the heroes do not return from war.

For they are lost, swept along in a river of blood.

Harry’s not fully aware of what’s happening. His body is *here*, amid the damage and breakage, and yet his mind is elsewhere.

His mind is at Hogwarts, years in the past, reliving his death - reliving the battle that he was born into. A battle that he shouldn’t have been thrown into fighting. If nothing else though, he remained resilient, taking all the punches that life threw at him and surging forward regardless of his own pain. His mind is a mess, it’s blurry and faded, exhaustion sweeping over him.

He dimly realises that he’s being moved - the ground has disappeared beneath his feet. He tries to protest, really he does. He thinks he manages some sort of disdainful sound before someone’s murmuring low in his ear and he falls quiet.

It’s Loki. That much he’s sure of. He can’t make out the words through the static that encases him, but he hears the comfort.

“You’re safe, now. *Be still, my darling.*”

And Harry embraces the darkness like an old friend.

His dreams are full of the past, evenings spent tucked away in the library with Ron and Hermione, working on homework until their eyes are heavy and their hands struggle to remember how to write.
Loki has to keep reminding himself to breathe. In and out, over and over again, rise and repeat, till the end of time.

He watches as Harry drops his wand, watches as the Minister starts spewing accusations, hiding behind his words, biding for time, hoping for a savior to come to his aid. He watches it all, because he is powerless to do anything more than that. He is stretched thin. His magic is great, and it is powerful, but it can only do so much.

The other side has magic as well, after all.

They fought gallantly, but at the end of the day, Loki is stronger. He is a god after all. But the creatures that he summoned to his command took more than he bargained for, and they’ve left him weaker than he had counted on.

If it weren’t for Clint and Bruce, he would not be alive right now. They grabbed him before the curses hit him. They dragged him here, to Harry. Compared to the others they are practically unharmed. The whole team, save for them, is in varying states of death. Both Peter and Bucky are barely there, barely breathing. Steve and Natasha stand strong not for themselves, but for the people around them. But the pain rolls off them in waves. Tony’s body is broken and battered, but he holds onto Peter tightly nonetheless.

Humans, Loki has found, tend to try their very best to stay strong for the ones they love.

Loki wishes that he could be that strength for Harry.

But it’s Clint and Bruce that end up holding them all together. It’s Clint and Bruce that cast some sort of spell over the Minister - it’s them who convince Harry to remove his wards, even though the sorcerer is unaware of his surrounds.

It’s dangerous, Loki knows, to be around a wizard who no longer has any control over his abilities. Especially a wizard with Harry’s power. It’s a death wish, and yet Loki remains caught up in Harry’s orbit, unable to break away from him no matter how much he has tried to close himself off.

Loki does not want to leave until everybody is safely away.
He never thought of himself as the self-sacrificing type. It’s pitiful, he keeps telling himself. It’s something Thor would do and it’s something Odin would do. It’s something a good person would do - something a good god would do. Certainly not something he would do.

But he waves off Bruce when he tries to get close to him. “Get- get the others away first. The second I’m gone, these creatures go rogue.” His words are rushed and they jumble against each other. Bruce looks like he’s going to hesitate - for only a second though, before he gives a curt nod and turns, grabbing Tony’s elbow and curling his other hand around Peter’s limp bicep.

The three of them disappear into thin air.

Loki is used to the horrors of battle; he’s used to the blood and the loss. He’s read about it ever since he was young and he trained for it alongside his brother. Later, he fought real battles of his own, using his tricks and magic to win.

But it was always a game. He always had a tight hold, he always had enough magic and enough power to do exactly what he wanted, when he wanted. He would make snakes appear, he would create illusions. He would fight with a grin upon his face and a sparkle in his eye.

It’s not a game, now. He lost track of the battle - lost track of the lives he took. He’s used up too much magic and his teammates are suffering because he wasn’t enough.

He feels ill.

One of the giant, leathery black winged horses stands at his back, almost protectively. He can feel the death radiating off of it.

“Loki,” Loki startles, opening his eyes. He hadn’t realised he’d closed them. “Everybody else is gone.”

Even Harry’s body is no longer there. It’s just him and Clint. He looks as if he’s barely holding everything together.

“Harry?” Loki finds himself asking, his voice nothing but a rasp.
“Passed out. Nat stunned him. Said he’d feel better when he wakes up. Plus, nobody could deal with keeping him in check,” Clint rattles off. He crouches down in front of Loki. “You good to leave?”

Loki nods quickly and accepts the arm that Clint offers him. He’s never become used to the way that the earth tilts and spins away from under him during this form of teleportation. It’s only more difficult now, in his own weakened state. He lets go of the dark creatures, and as the world disappears, he can hear their roars of triumph.

☽ ☆☽

When Harry blinks his eyes open, the first thing he’s hit with is how much his head hurts. It’s like someone has taken an axe to it, splitting his skull cleanly in two, leaving his brain to seep out. He brings a hand up to his forehead, feeling for blood that must be there, but his fingertips come away clean. Pale and shaking, yes, but free of anything even remotely close to crimson.

He swallows, wetting his dry lips with a flick of his tongue. He looks around, taking in his surroundings. He’s sitting on a low wooden bench that is pushed up against a polished stone wall. He sits up on the bench, swinging his bare feet down onto the ground. Three of the walls are the same; nondescript stone. The fourth wall, the one that he’s facing, is composed of iron bars.

He’s in a cell.

First step of escaping is figuring out where you are. He’s got that down. He stands, wincing as a dull pain shoots throughout his body. When he wraps a hand around one of the bars and pulls, nothing happens. It stays sturdy. He grits his teeth, feeling the pockets of his robes for his wand. It’s not there.

He takes a deep, steadying breath. There’s some sort of anti-magic wards set over this place, as even without his wand he is usually able to call his magic up. He’s usually able to use it without having to rely completely on his wand.

“Hello?” he says, hesitantly.

There’s a flurry of footsteps and Harry quickly backs himself up against the wall furthest away from them.
“Harry?” It’s Steve. Relief washes over Harry like a tidal wave. “I’m sorry about- I didn’t know
that-” Steve’s eyes are wide and scared, though he holds himself tall and strong. He takes a deep
breath, clears his throat and says, “I tried telling them that they didn’t need to lock you up, but it was
part of the terms so…” He lets himself trail off. To stop from rambling too much, Harry suspects.

“How long was I out?” Harry asks. He’s surprising himself with how steady his voice sounds.

Steve bites his bottom lip, averting his eyes from Harry’s.

“How long?” Harry repeats when he doesn’t get a reply straight away.

“Two days. Just under forty-eight hours.”

“Oh, god.”

“Can I come in?” Steve asks.

Harry runs a hand through his hair, his eyes wide. He nods.

The bars creak when Steve opens them with a touch of his wand. He strides forwards and sits on the
bench, leaving the bars open. A year ago, Harry would have made a run for it. He would have
escaped the prison and stunned Steve before he would even be able to call for help. But it’s not a
year ago, and Harry sits on the bench next to Steve.

“Tell me,” he says. “Tell me what happened. From the beginning.”

“Okay.”

He talks and talks and talks - until his throat is dry and raspy, and Harry has long since stopped
staring at the bars that have been left open.

After the initial battle - the battle that ended the moment Harry’s wand clattered against the blood-
stained cobblestone, the Minister had started spewing accusations. He said that everything was
Harry’s fault - from the deaths, all those years ago, to the current state of the economy, as if Harry Potter had anything to do with that.

“He doesn’t think that he’s a bad person. Even though he- he tortured Bucky and- took *everything* from us,” Steve said. “He’s grieving. He’s - he’s fallen apart, in a way.”

This Minister, of course, is not the same as the one three hundred years ago, during the incident at Hogwarts. This minister only knows bits and pieces of the story, enough to fabricate a lie believable enough that he can rule by a steady hand, without second guessing his motives.

After all, it was because of Harry that the Minister's family died. Or, at least, the Minister’s relatives, many generations ago. “He honestly thought that it was you, Harry. The veritaserum that he took proves it.”

“He truly thought that I murdered all of those people? *Me* ?”

“That’s what he was told, by the Minister before him. It keeps going back, to the Minister that was appointed directly after the incident itself.”

“And who was that?”

“Johann Schmidt. Known affiliations with the Nazis, back after the second world war.”

“Motives?”

“Unclear, so far.”

Clint Barton and Bruce Banner had apparated them all to the Ministry, once Harry had unknowingly removed the anti-apparition wards. Bucky and Peter had been immediately whisked off to St Mungo’s. Tony had gone with them. Natasha, though injured beyond belief, had reacted quickly, hitting Harry with a strong stunner and then grabbing the Minister by the back of his robes, holding her wand to his neck and digging into flesh.

The aurors that came pouring out of the Ministry couldn’t do much. Natasha wasn’t letting up, and
they wouldn’t risk the Minister’s life.

But it was really a credit to the public and the press that they hadn’t been sent to Azkaban. Because the press was already there at the Ministry, cameras flashing and owls flying out, spreading the news that yes, Harry Potter was indeed back, and he and his team had some interesting ideas. Or - theories - they called it.

“...This group of magically advanced witches and wizards have theories about what happened, nearly three hundred years ago, when the survivors of the Great Battle of Hogwarts joined together for one last time, to mourn their loved ones and celebrate the life they still possessed. As we all know, it was said that a certain Harry Potter was the cause of all their deaths, murdering them with the power that he had stolen from Lord Voldemort himself.

Their theories state that it was not Potter who did this, but members of our very own Ministry of Magic. Whether or not this is true has yet to be discovered...”

The news travelled fast and within a few hours the general wizarding public had rallied both inside and outside the Ministry. Some were yelling that they wanted the truth - the stories of the ones who died had been passed down through their family, and they needed to know what really happened. Others said that of course Harry Potter was the murderer - there was all this evidence, after all. Like how it was his wand that was used to cast each and every one of the spells used to torture and kill dozens upon dozens of people.

But there were also a huge amount of people who had stories similar to Harry’s. Who had stories similar to Natasha’s and Bruce’s and Peter’s and Tony’s. They talked about with a hopeful look upon their faces, as if they could barely believe that all this was true - all this was really happening. They would finally be able to get justice for crimes that were committed against them. Crimes that they had been silent about for far, far too long.

Apparently Harry woke up a few times but wasn’t coherent, and was asking about Ron and Hermione and if their potion’s homework was due today or tomorrow. He tells Steve that he can’t remember that happening. Steve says he knows, with a sympathetic look on his face.

“And Loki. Where was he. Is he-”

“He’s okay. Alive, breathing. Out of a cell, but it’s not like we’d be able to keep him in one even if we tried.”
“I can’t even get out of one.”

“Yes, but we know your magic. It’s the same type of magic that everybody else in this universe has. Sure, it’s stronger than a normal person’s, but it’s still very much from around here. Loki’s is not. You know, he told us things…”

Things about where he’s from. He came clean about being banished from another dimension. There wasn’t much in the way of evidence that he could show to the court to prove his case, but they ended up accepting it when Loki broke out of every single curse they tried putting him under. In a fit of mixed frustration and rage, one (now fired) auror had shot an Avada Kedavra at the god of mischief. Loki had deflected it with a lazy wave of his hand.

He’s fine, now. Loki is. He was unresponsive for the first few hours though. Some healers came over from St Mungo’s, but none of them could do anything in terms of helping the god. Thankfully though, after they got some fluids in him, and had managed to get him to eat a bit of lousy cafeteria food, he’d quickly regained his natural unswaying authority, holding his head high and standing with his shoulders thrown back.

He hadn’t immediately asked after Harry. Instead, he cast protective spells over each of his teammates and then demanded to enter a meeting with whomever was in charge. Bruce had gone with him, and Clint had to very quickly negotiate with some angry aurors, eventually convincing them that throwing Harry back into Azkaban was a very bad idea.

At first, it had been tough getting through to the Ministry.

“But they saw how well we fought together. And none of them could touch us, what with Loki being there. The outrage from the public was what really pushed the Ministry to sit down with some of us and really listen to what we had to say.”

“Where’s the Minister, now?”

“In holding. His trial is scheduled for tomorrow afternoon. It will be a public affair, but it’s for show more than anything else.”

“Why’s that?”
“Because *we’ve* already been questioned. With veritaserum. There’s no denying what we told them, and our testimonies were printed by the paper practically word for word. They know about what the Minister and countless others have been doing.”

“They haven’t questioned me.”

“Yours has been scheduled for tomorrow morning, just before the Minister’s.”

“Is it public?”

“Yes.”

And Harry finds himself thinking back to the forest, with birds calling out during the early hours of the morning. With stars that shone down so brightly, illuminating his path. With Loki, by his side, forever a steady and supportive presence.

There’s no way in hell that he’ll ever be able to go back to that point in time. Either he’ll lead a life living within the Ministry, or will be sent off to Azkaban for life. Or maybe, fate will take pity on him and finally allow him to die in peace. As soon as Loki finds out that Harry is awake, he’ll demand Harry’s help to transport him back to his own dimension.

Loki has held up his end of the bargain, at least. And even if Harry does get sent to Azkaban, he’s sure that Loki will not hesitate for even a moment before breaking him out, if only to get Harry’s help. Because Harry is powerful, and Harry has spent three hundred years honing his skills in magic.

This is the end, Harry realises. He’ll never go back to the time where he was living in a forest, listening to the way the wind sung through the trees.

1.

Chapter End Notes
okay but - here's the thing.

I wanted to write a different fic this summer, which is maybe why I'm cutting this shorter than I probably should. But next year I'm gonna be so busy with school and I really wanna get this other fic written so. Yeah. BUT that does not mean that this universe is over.

I am going to write a fully-fledged probably around 100k second fic for this series. I have some of it already planned out I just have no Time. It will happen, I just have no fucking idea when.

But I don't wanna completely ignore this universe until then SO if you have an idea -- anything really, of events that could have happened in this fic or SOMETHING that you want me to write -- leave a comment down below, and I'll write it! This could include, but is not limited to:

a) character backgrounds! What their stories are, etc
b) same events, different POV. maybe you wanna know what the big battle was like from clint's perspective, or something idk.
c) what Harry and Loki got up to when they weren't trying to save the wizarding world. (Fluff! Cuddling! Potion-making! Smut! Magical creatures!)
d) literally anything else. ANYTHING.

The other Big Thing I wanted to say was that I need a beta for the fic I'm writing this summer. It's gonna be uuuhh complicated but HELLA fun to write. Marvel/DC crossover, Bucky and Peter get trapped in the dc universe after thanos did the killing half the population thing. Unlikely romances arrive between some badass people like Bucky and Jason Todd! And Peter and Tom drake! Wow super cool. No but really, it's gonna be loads of fun and way better than I'm describing. If you wanna help me out as a beta for That, leave a comment or contact me on Tumblr: @castellation or Twitter: @castellation_
Dawn is upon us now, my love

Chapter Summary

The end is here, though it feels more like a beginning than anything else to Harry.

Chapter Notes

im emotional this is the last chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Justice shall be brought to our world today, with both a finality and a certainty that has been severely lacking during the past centuries. We have all been told stories, of course, but it remains to be seen if each of these stories - or myths, if you will - are candor in nature. Everyone is familiar with the tale of Harry Potter, a mediocre student in school brought to fame with his unquestionable talents in both the Defence against the Dark Arts as well as the Dark Arts themselves. We are here today to learn his true story, told from the man himself. Justice will be served!”

The man has a booming voice and a wide, charming smile. He reminds Harry of an older, more mature Gilderoy Lockhart. He is the Ministry’s chosen spokesperson, though he is not the one that will be making the final decisions as to what Harry’s fate will end up being. He is but a voice for the public, employed to have no opinion about Harry’s - and the Minister’s - crimes. He is the front - someone for people to blame if the court’s decisions do not align with the general public’s opinions.

The chair is hard and cold and Harry’s arms are chained to the armrests. His breathing is shallow and his face pale, long and messy black hair framing his skin, brushing past green eyes. He’s skinny, ragged clothes hanging off his frame. He’s hunched in on himself, as if he’s trying to disappear.

He’s a far cry from the sorcerer who defeated the Dark Lord.

But the power is thrumming just below his skin, waiting to be released. He’s always been a fighter - ready and willing to do whatever he possible can to defeat the evil lurking within the shadows.

Footsteps echo towards him and an electric hush settles over the onlookers as a vial of veritaserum is pressed against Harry’s chapped lips. He tilts his head back and swallows.
“Veritas vos liberabit - and may the truth set you free.”

Time seems to slow and clarity takes over Harry’s mind. He sits up a bit straighter and shakes the hair away from his eyes. The back of his hand itches. *I will not tell lies.* His eyes are frantic - where’s Loki? Scan the rows of faces, look for -


The god catches his gaze and his mouth quirks up in a slight smile. His presence reassures Harry. He allows his muscles to relax and sinks into the back of the chair.

“Please state your full name.”

“I am Harry James Potter.”

Quiet takes over the room after he speaks his name.

“Now, Mr. Potter,” the Gilderoy-Lockhart lookalike begins, “*tell us your story.*”

The effects of the veritaserum are impossible to resist, but Harry doesn’t talk right away.

It’s hard to know where to start. It’s hard to shift through the painful memories.

It’s hard to tell the entire world whom you are, especially when you’ve spent so long hiding.

So, where does it start?

“I loved my friends. More than anything else. Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, that is. There were other people too, but I loved Ron and Hermione. I trusted them with my life - and in turn, they trusted me with theirs. You have to understand that, if you are unable to understand anything else. I am not some emotionless monster that you’ve been told about - I felt emotion. I was happy and sometimes sad and I felt joy as well as sorrow... and I loved.”
There are whispers, coursing through the crowd like a roll of thunder through the sky.

“You speak in past tense about your emotions. Why is this?” Harry’s being prompted. It’s not harsh, just… searching.

Don’t tell them, don’t tell them, don’t-

But the veritaserum wins. Doesn’t it always?

“I am not the same person that I was. A long time has passed. It-” He forces himself to stop talking. The words bubble in his chest, trying to escape.

“Do not resist. Let yourself go, Mr. Potter.”

“I do not know if I am a good person.” He can feel his teammates’ eyes burning into him. They would argue with him, if they were allowed to speak up. They would insist that he is good - that he is more than the stories told. But right now it’s just him. Just him and the world and the truth, and there’s nobody standing in front of him to fight.

“I loved them. I could never hurt them. Not intentionally - not ever. They saved my life, over and over again, in our quest to stop Voldemort from taking over our world.” He always calls him by name. Voldemort. Tom Marvolo Riddle - for he does not deserve the luxury of hiding behind a facade. “We got to the ceremony early.” His thoughts are everywhere. He’s backtracking to the beginning, if you can call it the beginning. Didn’t it all begin when Harry was born?

“Me and the Weasleys and Hermione. It was the first time I had been able to properly see them since the battle. All of our grief was heavy… but it always feels lighter when you bear the weight of it with the help of other people.”

What is he talking about? These are supposed to be private moments, buried deep in the past where their edges can dull. These are not events to speak of in front of such a large audience.

“I had noticed Malfoy - Draco Malfoy, by the lake. I think I wanted to try and forget some of my own grief for a moment. I went down, to speak with him. Maybe I went to tell him I forgave him for
what he did. But I don’t think I could forgive him. He let Voldemort use him.” His words, though he does not speak loudly, echo throughout the entire room. It is as if everyone is holding their breaths, waiting to hear if Harry was the murderer or not.

“He apologised. And then he died. They say - they said that he was tortured to death. I didn’t even like him and yet I was told how he died. I still don’t know what curse claimed the lives of my friends. But I know how my enemy died - full of agony.”

Harry’s mouth is dry.

“I do not know how they died because I was not the one who killed them.”

And then the room is in an uproar. Several Ministry officials are trying to keep it quiet - trying to calm everyone down. Their efforts are in vain, however.

*I was not the one who killed them.*

For too long, he had been blamed for a crime that he could not have possibly done. He was left the only one alive, and the blame of the whole event was put onto his shoulders. His wand was snapped and he was condemned to a life in Azkaban without even the thought of a fair trial. Governments are always in disarray after war. They are always trying to reassure its citizens - trying to tell everybody that everything is okay, even if it’s not. And if they have to throw a few people in jail to put a damper on the raw panic building up, then they will. If that philosophy fits with a hidden agenda - a vendetta, a need for vengeance - then so be it. It is easy to kill two birds with one stone if neither of the birds are watching.

Minutes pass before everyone is seated again. Several owls swoop in and out of the large open door frame, the news spreading as fast as possible.

“I was stunned during the beginning of the battle. When I woke up, I was being held accountable for the murder of *dozens* of people whom, over the years, I had grown to consider family members.”

“Why did you run?”

“I wonder what each and every one of you see when a Dementor gets too close to you. Azkaban is full of Dementors, you know. I see my Mum. I see her as she’s dying. I can hear her last screams and
I can remember what it felt like to have the killing curse thrown at me. If I were to hear that even just once every day, I would have gone insane. But that’s only half the reason. I knew I wasn’t guilty. I wasn’t guilty and I was scared, and I thought that if I ran then I could build myself a new life, somewhere far away.”

His gaze snaps to Loki, locking in on the god, who stares right back. “I thought that I could find myself someone to love and that I could live out the rest of my life with some sort of happiness. At first, that’s what I thought. And then it hit me, later on.”

Harry’s eyebrows knit together. “Everyone I could have ever seen myself loving was dead. And I - I was alone. There was no… life. No happy ending. Not for me. But I cannot die - or, I have not been able to die yet.”

He never told anyone about this part. Not even Loki, who he spilled his secrets to without a second thought.

“I tried. Merlin, I tried. I did everything I could think of but nothing worked. It was like death itself had closed the doors to whatever Heaven or Hell I could have gone to. It was just me and life. Just me and living, with no purpose at all.”

“Take me through who you think actually committed the crimes.” Harry is being prompted, guided in the right direction.

“I am told that it would have been down to Johann Schmidt, the Minister at the time of the attack. All these years, I would just tell myself that it was the Ministry who did it. But maybe it was one man and the ones who kept his secret after him.”

“Are you claiming that the current Minister of Magic is partially guilty of these crimes as well?”

“Yes. And others.”

“Tell me about them.”

“He has kept this corrupt justice system around, aiding and watching on as dozens of helpless witches and wizards have been convicted for crimes that they did not commit.”
“We heard testimonies like that during the rest of your… accomplices’ trials.”

“He deserves to be locked up,” Harry says through clenched teeth. “He deserves that more than any of us do.”

“It was only a few days ago that you went on a murdering spree.”

The rest of the trial is ugly. It’s filled with accusations and tears and truth upon truth, falling from Harry’s lips. Looks of horror appear speckled across the room. They take a break at one point, over an hour in. Someone gives Harry some water and more veritaserum. Loki’s eyes do not leave Harry’s, not for one second.

By the time it’s over, Harry feels like he’s about to vomit. Guilt claws at him even though he was pleading as not guilty. Bad, angry memories take over his vision, and when he’s dropped back off at his cell he can’t do anything more than sit on the ground shakily. The worst is over now, but his fate has yet to be decided. He sinks into nightmares.

“Potter.”

Harry opens his eyes. Loki is crouched before him. Harry opens his mouth to say something - anything - but the words can’t seem to travel from his brain to his mouth.


Numbly, Harry realises that he’s shaking. His hands are trembling where they’re fisted into Loki’s robes. Grief comes off of him in waves, filling the small cell with sickness.

“How long has it been?” Harry asks, pulling away from the god for a brief second only to bury his face into the curve where his shoulder meets his neck. He has told himself not to get too close - Loki will be leaving soon, no matter what. But Harry is craving physical touch so badly that he cannot drag himself away.
“The Minister’s trial ended just over an hour ago. The judges should be releasing their final decision momentarily.”

Harry nods against him. Then he says, “Merlin, what have I done?”

“You did what was right.” The answer comes quickly, practiced.

“Don’t say that. I murdered.”

“We all did.”

“You all did because I gave the order to.”

“We did it because we trust you. Because no matter what, we’ll stand beside you.”

“The others wouldn’t. Not through everything.”

“But I would. I will.”

“Loki…” I love you. I won’t ever give up on you, either. I will stay with you forever, if you allow me to.

But Harry just holds on tighter and prays that he will never have to let go of this comfort - even though he knows it’s temporary. Soon, Loki will disappear too. And what hope is there for Harry, in a world like this, where he has fought so hard for so long and yet never gets any time to rest? They stay like that for a long time, neither willing to let go of the other.

Steve comes, eventually. He has easily fallen into the role of ambassador, a buffer between the two powerhouses that are the Ministry and Harry Potter. Steve has worked hard to keep his own misgivings and anger at bay so as to help both sides come to a peaceful conclusion. Harry will later learn just how difficult it has been for Steve - every second he saw the Minister he wanted to do nothing more than watch him burn. Even later, a dungeon will be discovered beneath the Ministry. Where I was tortured, Bucky would say. They thought that I knew something impossible. Eventually they just did it for fun. Experiments. You know, all that fucking shitty stuff.
He says, “Loki… Harry… the judges are requesting us. They know what’s going to happen, from here on out.”

Harry says, “Oh, god” and his stomach clenches uncomfortably. He has to fight to keep his breakfast down. Loki helps him to his feet with soft, caring hands. He allows Harry to rest on him, offering unspoken support.

Steve leads them to another courtroom. It’s smaller and lined with polished brick. Benches are stacked up high, each one raised a little bit higher than the one before it. Every step that Harry takes he feels his magic flowing back into his body, coming alive inside of him. The Ministry hasn’t bothered to put any power-dampening spells over this room and Harry lets himself breathe deeply, knowing that if the Ministry were to turn against him and his teammates now he’d be able to put up a hell of a fight.

Loki turns to him with a bemused expression. Harry smiles back, lifting up a hand and absentmindedly letting it flood with gold magic.

“Feels good to have power back, doesn’t it?” Loki says, his voice hushed.

Harry nods quickly and then twists his hand, his expression twisting in concentration as he shapes the magic into a little bird. He pushes it through the air and Loki laughs when it explodes into a flurry of stars in front of his face.

“Er-”

Harry’s head snaps towards the rest of the wizards. The Ministry officials - the judges - are looking at Harry and Loki, mouths gaping open. Back to reality, then.

Harry takes a seat on the lowest bench, flanked by Loki and Steve. Behind him, Natasha, Clint and Tony sit. He’s surrounded by people he trusts.

Moments later the Minister and a group of aurors file in.

“How’re you holding up, Harry?” Natasha leans forwards, whispering in his ear. Harry leans back a
bit, resting his back against her knees.

“Still alive, Nat. Guess that counts for something.”

“Sorry that I wasn’t able to see you earlier.”

“S’okay,” Harry says. “This place is morbid; I don’t blame you.”

She ruffles his hair and silence lapses over them all.

The Minister and the Aurors sit on benches a little ways away from Harry and his team. With a start, Harry realises that those must be the only remaining people on the Minister’s side of the battle. The rest were killed by Harry. Another wave of guilt crashes over him, and, as if he can sense Harry’s discomfort, Loki rests a hand on Harry’s knee.

“We are here now to tell you all the verdict of this… unfortunate case.” One of the judges stands before them. The metal chair in the centre of the room remains untouched. “We’re telling you in this setting as we strongly believe that you understand the extent of each of your peers’ sentences. We believe that everything should be put out into the open, as secrets have been kept for far, far too long.”

The two other judges step forwards, each holding long parchments in hand.

“Lestrange. You pleaded guilty. The veritaserum confirmed the horrific stories told by Romanov, Stark, Banner, Barton, and Rogers. Parker and Barnes have yet to enter trials, due to their fragile states, but their life stories have been told by Rogers and Stark. Close to three dozen other wizards have come forward to us directly, wishing to add their tales to the extensive pile of suffering that you have caused. You have tortured, maimed and killed. You have killed good men, women and children, all in the name of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. You have used and abused our justice system to the point where it was incredible and allowed innocent people to take the fall for crimes that you committed. You are hereby relieved from the title of Minister of Magic and have rightfully earned a life sentence in Azkaban. After five years, arrangements can be made for you to undergo supervised visits with your family.”

Harry has to remind himself how to breathe. Under the influence of veritaserum Lestrange told the court that he did what he did for Voldemort. Harry feels like he’s going to be sick. Three hundred years since his death and Tom Riddle continues to hurt good people. If Lestrange is getting a life
sentence then surely - surely Harry won’t be admitted into that prison? Loki squeezes his knee, albeit a bit too tightly. It grounds Harry though, bringing him back to earth.

The aurors get off with lesser sentences.

“Potter. You pleaded not guilty.” Harry looks down to his lap, where Loki’s hand is resting against him. Forever supportive. He lets his eyes remain fixated there; the words will hurt enough without having to look at the one speaking them.

“The veritaserum revealed the truth. You have wrongfully been on the run from the law for close to three centuries. You friends and family were killed in front of you, which is truly a terror that nobody on this earth should ever have to experience. The things that does to one’s mind are truly unimaginable. From the Ministry, I would like to offer an official apology. We were wrong. We are investigating Johann Schmidt in hopes to properly understand the events that happened at Hogwarts. However, just a few days ago you murdered a number of very talented individuals. You will undergo a rehabilitation program that will help integrate you back into wizarding society, and you will serve one thousand hours of community service. You will not be admitted to any prison, however you will be issued with a house, and will not be able to leave that house without the accompaniment of an assigned auror for the foreseeable future. As you can understand, this is to ensure your own safety as much as it is to ensure the public’s safely.”

Loki’s hand finds Harry’s and he squeezes tightly. He feels one of Natasha’s hands on his shoulder. He remembers how to breathe and takes a deep breath. “I’m - I’m free?”

“You are no longer a wanted man, yes.”

A stunned laugh escapes Harry’s lips and he turns to Loki, a helpless grin dancing across his face. His chest buzzes with happiness. “Loki - did you hear that? I’m fucking - I’m free.”

And then Loki is kissing him, like his life depends on it. Happiness is funny. It has eluded Harry for so long but now - finally now, he feels joy. True, unstoppable happiness.

The rest of his team gets off pretty easily as well, all of them having to go through the integration program, but all things considered…

“You did what you thought was best.” The judge smiles at them. “Sometimes that’s not the right thing to do, but the first set of deaths at Hogwarts had nothing to do with you lot. I expect you to
become better now, though. A lot of people, including myself, have fought to keep you out of prison. Don’t make me regret it.”

“We won’t,” Tony says, with a huge grin on his face. “This is fucking amazing. I could kiss you.”

The judge gives him a lopsided smile and Harry finds himself laughing.

“By the way, sir, what’s your name?” Steve asks the judge, holding out his hand to shake.

The judge clasps his hand. “You may call me T’Challa.”

And for once, Harry feels on top of the world. No longer a wanted criminal.

He isn’t cleared to leave until the next morning though. He spends one last miserable night in the holding cell, not knowing where to go next. Maybe he could ask to go to Godric’s Hollow, to visit his parents’ grave. Maybe he could find Ron and Hermione’s graves. Or he could go to Diagon Alley and get some magical flavour-changing ice cream. His mind whirls. Ice cream and graveyards. Oh, how his life will be filled with joy.

He doesn’t know exactly what he originally expected out of… everything. The thought of true freedom is both tantalizing and daunting. He doesn’t want to be on the run anymore but at this point he has no idea what to do with the alternative.

He runs a scarred hand through his hair. It’s long again, reaching his shoulders. If he was able to do magic here he would cut it, relieving himself of the weight, allowing himself to appear to be a new, fresher version of himself. Guilt eats at his chest, telling him that he doesn’t deserve this second chance, that he doesn’t deserve to feel fresher and cleaner. The joy that overtook him in the courtroom when T’Challa declared him a free man has worn off. He sighs and thinks it would be so much easier to sleep if he were surrounded by trees and an endless, star-speckled sky.

Through chosen actions, a person is able to show if they are good or bad, or even somewhere in the thin grey area somewhere in between. Harry spared the Minister’s life - that makes him good. But the countless other killings… the needless bloodshed, the lives he stomped out of existence in a fit of rage… that makes him bad.

He isn’t able to catch much sleep, but morning time comes soon in the shape of Steve Rogers, who
offers him a worn smile and tells him that he can finally, finally go back out into the wizarding world.

“Fuck,” Harry says, and then, “Let’s go to St Mungo’s. How’s Bucky holding up?”

When they get to St Mungo’s, eyes burn into Harry from every direction. He tries to ignore it, to smile like he’s more than a murderer, but he can tell it comes off as more of a grimace.

Steve takes him to Bucky’s room first. He’s propped up in bed, tucked in with crisp, white sheets. He has deep circles under his eyes which puncture through the pale skin. Steve sits down on the edge of the bed, lacing his fingers through Bucky’s with comfort and ease. Harry takes the chair beside the bed and surveys the small room. There’s a potted plant on the table by a small window, the curtains drawn tightly. The room is all sharp, bright angles, caging them all in.

Bucky and Steve both thank Harry and for the life of him he cannot figure out what they are thanking him for.

The healers tried to save Bucky’s arm, but in the end it was in vain. It ends just below the shoulder where it’s bandaged. And all Harry can think is that it is his fault.

Seeing Peter brings the same sour taste to his tongue.

“Has he woken up yet?” Harry asks Tony, who’s leaning against the wall with sunglasses perched on his nose and a cup of coffee in his hands.

“Yeah. A few times, but not for very long. They’re trying to figure out which curse he was hit with so that they can treat him better but-” Tony shrugs. “Only time will tell. He’s strong though. He’ll make it. He has to.”

He looks so small, laying in bed. His chest rises and falls faintly.

“I’m sorry,” Harry says, after a long moment of staring. “I should have done better. I failed you.”

And the worst part of it, Harry thinks, is the way that Tony just sips at his coffee, eyes trained on the unmoving body of Peter, staying absolutely silent. Maybe part of him blames Harry, too.
It starts raining outside and Harry realises that everything would have been so much easier if he had died at Voldemort’s hand. Steve comes and gets Harry, some time later.

“We need to get you to your assigned supervisor,” Steve explains as he leads Harry down long, winding halls. “He’s gonna show you to where you’ll be living, too.”

“Okay.” Harry can do nothing but roll with it, allowing the ocean to crash over him, moving his body to and fro. “Do you know where my wand is?”

Steve sighs. “The Ministry has it. I don’t think they’re really willing to give it back. Apparently it’s the Elder Wand? Wizards have been looking all over the world for it for ages.”

“Right.”

The place that Harry is to be living in now is small and severe. It doesn’t feel friendly and it’s empty whilst still fully furnished. No pictures decorate the walls and everything is too clean. It’s infinitely different from the dormitory at Hogwarts, and the Weasley’s house, and his own cabin in the middle of the woods. There’s two bedrooms - one for himself and one for his supervisor.

The supervisor himself is a tall muscular man with short, sandy brown hair. When he shakes Harry’s hand, his grip is strong. “I’m sure we’ll get along just fine,” he says with a grin that makes Harry’s stomach roll.

The next few days pass by routinely, none of them standing out more than the other, each dull and listless. Technically he’s permitted to go whenever he wishes, but when he asks his supervisor - Adam Blake - he just purses his lips and says, “Well, I don’t wanna be the bad guy here but… maybe that’s not the best idea?” And so he’s more or less been confined to his quarters, save for the daily Ministry visit where Steve tries to get him involved in the quickly-changing government. “We could really use you,” he says. “We’re on the precipice of something new. I know politics aren’t your strong suit, but there’s only so much the rest of us can do.” And Harry tries his best, he really does. But it’s so hard to concentrate when someone’s whispering “murderer” at every turn.

Bucky is discharged from St Mungo’s and returns to the house where he and Steve lived before Harry recruited him. Harry and Adam go there one morning, Harry making tea whilst Adam and Bucky sit on the sofas in the living room, making awkward small talk. Casey winds his way around Harry’s legs, purring happily.
The living room lapses into uncomfortable silence when Harry re-enters with the tea.

“I wanted to apologize,” Harry says finally, after he burns his tongue. He clears his throat. “I let my need for revenge take over… I led everyone into a merciless battle and I-” He pinches the bridge of his nose. “I should have put the lives of my teammates - of my friends before everything else. I hurt everyone. Fuck. Bucky, you lost your arm. This was all my fault. I’m sorry.”

Casey leaps onto Bucky’s lap and he puts down his tea so that he can scratch the black cat behind his ears. “Y’know… I should blame you. You brought me and Steve into this whole mess.” He pauses before plunging on. “But I don’t blame you. Without your will to fight we would have ended up being hunted down by Lestrange and murdered.” He gives a dry, humorless laugh. “Hell, Lestrange and his buddies woulda killed the whole team in the end. Not to mention countless other people. You gave us all the motivation to fight back. You reminded us that it’s worth it to fight for our rights of freedom. I know now that maybe revenge was all that was on your mind, but at the time - back in the forest - nobody saw you as someone looking for revenge. We all saw you as a soldier willing to do whatever it takes. It was - inspiring, I guess. After hiding for so long, we could finally fight for ourselves again. Yeah, I’m down an arm, and yeah, that’s shitty as fuck. But all things considered, it’s not as bad as it could be, so don’t apologize.”

It takes longer for Peter to be discharged from St Mungo’s. Even after he wakes up, the healers insist on keeping him there for several days, purely for observational purposes. When he does get out, Harry expects him to move in with Tony, which is why he’s surprised when Adam tells him that Peter asked to stay with Steve and Bucky.

Harry finds himself visiting them a lot, comfort washing over him in their easy friendship. Technically it’s simply Adam’s job to follow Harry around everywhere, but he quickly becomes genuine friends with Bucky, Steve and Peter.

When Natasha returns back to Vienna, she brings Clint with her. When she first joined up with Harry, she had told him that she was prepared to fight for what she deserved. Now she has what she deserves - a free life and the promise of a future with a loved one. The goodbye is tearful, but Harry is endlessly proud of both Natasha and Clint. “Keep in touch?” Natasha asks, giving him a watery smile. “I’ll even visit once in a while,” Harry says. Clint claps him on the back. “Thank you. Really - you saved us.” And then they were gone.

Bruce, Tony and Steve spend the majority of their time at the Ministry. Slowly but surely, they’re weeding out everyone who supported Lestrange. In a month’s time, a new Minister will be elected, but it’s not much of a competition what with Steve in the running.
News articles upon news articles are published about each of them. Harry hates the spotlight, but he’s endlessly grateful that the real story is finally coming out.

Loki is around but he’s distant, withdrawing into himself. Harry’s seen him a few times here and there. The god always seems distracted though, bending down to give Harry a quick peck on the lips before rushing off somewhere. Harry doesn’t let it bother him - he knows what Loki is doing. He’s just glad that Loki hasn’t asked him to be actively involved yet. He tells that to Loki one night.

“It’s not that I don’t want to be supportive. It’s that I don’t want to… help you leave.”

To which Loki responds mildly with, “Oh. I suppose I can understand, though I wish that you were able to support me… in the way I’ve supported you with your whole vendetta.” He doesn’t say it with any malicious intent, but the words still sting. Loki leaves soon after and Harry busies himself with other things.

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Harry is having supper at Steve and Bucky’s one evening, joined by Bruce, Tony, Peter and Adam. Everybody’s about two glasses of wine in and laughter fills the house with ease. The food tastes good. It’s sweet on Harry’s tongue, the heaping piles of it reminding him strongly of the meals in the Burrow, where everything was as steady and warm and happy as possible.

It’s cut short, however, by a loud and insistent knock on the front door. Adam gets up with a cheery smile to go answer it.

“So uh -” Peter starts, trying to break the awful silence that suddenly washes over the table. “Did I tell you all I applied for Harvard? It’s a- a muggle school, but that way I’d really be able to learn more about science like Bruce and Tony. Maybe I can even be as smart as them one day.”

Tony beams at him. “Shit, kid. That’s amazing.”

“Congrats!” Bruce shouts.

“I should see if we have champagne. Stevie? Do we have champagne?” Bucky turns to Steve.

“I haven’t gotten in yet or anything. I just applied,” Peter says, his face a bright, tomato red.
“You’ll get in,” Steve says with a proud smile. “We’re all so happy for you.”

“Champagne,” Bucky says. “We’re celebrating this.” He gets up from the table, disappearing into the kitchen.

“Wait - how did you even apply? You need to have gone to muggle high school. You went to Hogwarts.”

“I- um. Well, funny thing, really.” Peter, if possible, turns an even brighter shade of red. “I would always get bored during the summer when I was a kid, so my Aunt signed me up for muggle courses on the internet so that I had something to do. My marks weren’t amazing but… well, it’s better than nothing, right?”

“You completed an entire year’s worth of school work during three months over the summer?” Bruce wolf-whistles. “Impressive.”

“Thanks,” Peter says, grinning from ear to ear. “I really hope this works out.”

“You’re doing really good, Peter,” Harry says finally. His chest aches with pride. “I’m so proud of you.”

The attention quickly moves off of Peter though when Adam comes back. He’s not alone. Standing half a step behind him is the one and only Loki Laufeyson, chin raised arrogantly, a smirk playing across his thin lips, casual as always.

“Hello,” he says, eyes sweeping over the table. “Sorry to intrude.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Steve says, gesturing to the empty seat at the table. “Take a seat. It’s good to see you.”

“Likewise.”

“There’s roast, potatoes and vegetables. Help yourself,” Bruce says offhandedly.
“Actually, I just came here to speak with you all.”

“Another announcement?” Bucky reappears with a dusty bottle of champagne. He holds it up, saying, “Found this under the sink. I have no idea why it was there. Loki - you’ll never guess what Peter just told us. He got into Harvard university - it’s a… smart muggle school? We’re celebrating.”

“Actually, I haven’t gotten in yet,” Peter says, his voice muffled by food.

“What did you come here for?” Harry asks, staring at Loki intently.

“I… I believe I figured out a way to bring me back to my home world. I just need help now with putting it into action. On my own, I do not have enough power.”

Harry slams his cutlery down onto the table with a deafening smash. “I thought you needed my help to figure out how to get you back.”

“I thought I did,” Loki says, tilting his head to the side slightly. “I was approached by some ‘unspeakables’ at the Ministry. They were able to aid me adequately. But to put it in motion, I will need your help. Nobody’s as powerful as you are, Potter.”

“Gods,” Harry says. “I am so not drunk enough for this.”

He doesn’t know how he feels. Empty, for sure. Sad, too. But mostly just lost. This is real. Loki’s leaving. He’s leaving and there’s absolutely nothing to be done about it.

Bucky puts the champagne away, throwing Peter an apologetic smile. He comes back with a bottle of rum and hands it directly to Harry, who immediately takes two huge gulps. Loki talks, going into depth about his plans. He talks until his voice goes hoarse, and then he spends another hour answering everybody’s questions.

“This is really happening?” Harry slurs, by the end. “You’re really leavin-… leaving me?”
“Harry. You know why I need to do this.”

“But - but I lo-”

“Stop,” Loki says. The others at the table are deathly silent. “We’re not saying that to each other. Remember? It’s too hard. This is for the best.”

“Is it?”

_Is it really? Because I feel as though I am aflame, the burning from my heart spreading throughout my body, scorching my flesh._

“Tomorrow,” says Loki finally, standing up and looking at Harry sadly. “Sober up, pretty boy.” He turns his eyes to Steve. “Can you make sure everyone’s at Godric’s Hollow tomorrow morning, please?”

“Of course,” Steve says. “We’ll do whatever we can.”

“Thank you,” Loki says, and then he’s gone with a swish of his long, dark robes.

Sleep doesn’t come easy for Harry that night. He lies awake for hours, staring at the ceiling. He’s been frozen in time for so long, living in a weird plane of existence somewhere between the past and present. But now everything’s slipping away so fast; every time he blinks he loses someone. And tomorrow, Loki’s going to be the one he loses.

He thinks about everything that night.

His mind wanders back to all those nights spent tucked away in some field of wildflowers within the forest. He thinks about how it felt to have Loki leaning against him, lips pressed against Harry’s. He thinks about the peace and the comfort and the happiness. He thinks about how much he dreads having to let it go.

By the time dawn touches the horizon, Harry is up and dressed in a fresh set of robes. He doesn’t have a wand, but over the years he’s perfected magic without it, so he’s not too worried.
Godric’s Hollow is empty, save for an unmoving shape standing before a set of graves - Loki.

Adam hangs back by the gate whilst Harry stalks forwards, towards the god. Harry is endlessly grateful for the respect and space that Adam continuously gives him.

Harry stands beside the man he loves in front of the graves of his deceased parents. Harry says “I wish I could have known them” and Loki wraps an arm around Harry’s waist, pulling him up against his side.

By the time the sun has risen up fully the rest of the team has arrived. Even Natasha and Clint are there; someone must have told them that Loki’s leaving.

“So, Loki.” Harry is proud of how steady his voice sounds. “How’s this all working?”

“We need to form a circle, say some special words and manifest some magic. If all goes well a… portal, of sorts, should open up in the centre of the circle. I’ll be able to walk into it and… go home, I suppose.”

“It’s that simple?” Clint asks.

Loki gives a dull laugh. “I wouldn’t call it simple. We’re opening a door between dimensions.”

“And this door, it will be open from both our dimension and yours?” Steve asks.

“Yes.”

“So, hypothetically, when it’s open someone or something from your dimension could cross over here?”

“Hypothetically, yes,” Loki says with a smirk.
“Alright,” Natasha says calmly. “Wands at the ready then. We’ll be fine.”

Loki goes more in-depth with the explanation, handing out pieces of parchment with incantations and chants on them. He answers everybody’s questions freely and confidently. He offers re-assuring smiles and creates a jacket out of magic when he sees that Peter is shaking slightly. Cloudy skies give way for a light dusting of snow and it settles around them, white and crisp and clean, holding the promise of a good future.

Harry pulls Loki to the side, standing a few yards away.

“Loki,” Harry starts, and he doesn’t cry because he’s stronger than that, but he feels grief in every fibre of his being. “Loki I-”

Loki is so warm, beneath Harry’s hands. He steps into the god’s space and melts into his embrace, clutching at him as if he is a lifeline.

“We’re all out of time, aren’t we?” Harry gasps.

“I don’t want us to be,” Loki says, and Harry can feel the regret and the sadness in his voice and in the air that he breathes. “I wish for nothing more than the ability to rewind the clock for- for you, Harry. I… Harry, you have to understand that I would give almost anything to be able to spend just another day with you.”

There’s a moment of silence before Loki speaks again, pouring out his heart. “I always thought that leaving was the best thing to do. I have to save my world. But I - fuck, Harry. I didn’t even know I had the ability to care about somebody in the way I care about you. I swear, there’s never been anybody like you. I wish you could feel this feeling, Harry - for the way I feel about you is stronger than any magic has ever been. I need to go back - through that portal - to save my world.

“But my home, Harry. My home I am holding in my hands right now.”

Harry laughs into Loki’s chest, but it comes out as a watery sob. Harry clings to him and Loki clings right on back, holding him so tight it’s difficult for Harry to take a full breath.

But it is oh-so-cold, snowflakes brushing down upon them, and Loki is warmth and comfort and everything that Harry wants so badly to fight for.
“Loki,” Harry is able to get out, past the lump lodged in his throat. “Loki, I know you don’t want this - but I need to tell you - this is my last chance - I need to - I feel like I’m drowning so I need to tell you-”

Loki doesn’t try to hush him, he just rocks him back and forth ever so slightly. The snow creaks beneath their feet.

“I love you.”

I love you so much it hurts to breathe whilst I know that you are leaving; but you must know, my love, that I would do anything for you. I would walk to the ends of the Earth to hear your laugh. Tell me, my love, do you love me as I do? Do you feel this raging fire inside your chest as I do?

Loki says, “Come with me.” Harry’s eyes are rimmed with red when he looks up at the god.

“What?” His eyebrows furrow in confusion and Loki pulls back a fraction of an inch, just enough to cup Harry’s face in his hands.

“Come with me,” he repeats. “For Zeus’ sake, Harry. Come to my world with me. Help me defeat Thanos. Stay with me.”

Harry says, “I would follow you to the ends of this universe and the ends of the next as well.”

“Is that a yes, my love?” Loki says, and Harry can tell he’s trying to keep his dignity even as tears gather in the corners of his eyes and his hands tremble against the stubble on Harry’s jaw.

“It’s an of-fucking-course.”

And when their lips meet, their hearts feel light and beat as one.

Several minutes later they return back to where their teammates are gathered. Harry holds Loki’s hand tight in his own, and the team quiets down as they approach.
“I need to tell you something,” Harry says, and Loki gives his hand a squeeze. They all turn their heads towards Harry expectantly but do nothing to prompt him.

Harry takes a deep breath. “I - I know this may come as a shock to most of you, but I’ve decided to stay with Loki. I’ll be going back to his world, with him.” He rushes on, before anybody can interject as they so often do. “I know that everyone had hopes of me really fitting into society again but I - I come from a different era, an entire different century. I am not the same man I was three hundred years ago, I’ve changed in ways I never thought I could. You have no idea, the amount of guilt and pain I feel every single day.” He sucks in a long breath. “I want to be happy. God, all I have ever wanted was to be happy. You guys don’t need me here. You have everything under control without me. I don’t think I have the ability to help any more than I already have. I’ve poured my heart and soul into fighting for what is right and I think I’ve achieved that, with all of your help. But I want to be able to help new people, now. I want to move on and spend the rest of my life - however much longer I have - chasing after my own happiness. I don’t think I’ve ever been given that chance before. I’m still so angry about what happened to me. About what happened to all of us. I don’t belong here anymore. I don’t have a home here, I don’t have even the slightest thought of what my future here could be. So I’m going with Loki. I’m going with him, and I’m going to try and save his world as he has helped me to save mine. And I… I love him. So, er- I really want to stay with him. The world needed Harry Potter, once upon a time, but now it just needs each of you.”

The snow falls thicker and Peter jumps forward, giving Harry a hug.

“I’m really going to miss you, Mr. Potter. You saved me. You saved all of us.” He steps back, and though his eyes are sad, he gives Harry the most magnificent grin.

“You really did,” Steve says. “Save us, that is. I know I’ve said this before but I’ll say it again: without you this world would be a hell of a lot different - in a bad way, that is.”

“I hope that you become the new Minister,” Harry says. “You deserve it, more than anything.”

“You gave your heart and soul to not only the fight, but to us all too,” Bucky says. “I’m not all that good with words, to be frank, but coming along with you was the best choice of my whole damn life. I know what it’s like to follow someone you love into another battle, into another hell. But you guys are strong, and you’ll make it out the other side just fine.” He claps Harry on the shoulder. “I know you’re like three centuries older than me, but I’m proud of you.”

Clint’s smile is warm. “You haven’t had the opportunity to make very real decisions in life, have you?” He gives a weak chuckle. “I’m gonna miss you… but this is the right decision. Really, it is.”
“Live your best life, Grandpa,” Tony says. “We’re replacing you with Adam - he’s better looking anyways.” He clears his throat awkwardly. “But really, Harry. We’re not exaggerating when we tell you that you saved us, because you really did. I’m really glad to have known you.”

Natasha steps forwards and hugs him. “You brought me back to life,” she says. “You did that, not Loki, not Clint, nobody else. It was you who did all of this. And I guess I’m just so fucking happy that you did.”

“Never thought I’d have the courage to fight for what I believe in,” Bruce says. “I was always more of a Ravenclaw than a Gryffindor. You brew courage and glory in your potions, but you embody strength, and that is the most inspiring thing I have ever been witness to.”

“Technically, I think I’m supposed to stop you from doing something like this,” Adam says with a grin. “But you deserve this, Potter. You really do. I haven’t known you for as long as these guys have but even I can tell that you’re a pretty special guy. I hope that you have a good life.”

Snow falls fast and Harry hugs everyone, telling them how much they mean to him.

“Are you ready now, Harry?” Loki asks, and the rest of the team forms a circle around the two of them.

“Yes, just one second,” Harry says, and he steps towards the gravestones of his mother and father.

It’s both the easiest thing that he’s ever done and the hardest thing he’s ever done. But then again, goodbyes are never easy. His parents hadn’t been there to watch him grow up, but he’s always felt loved and supported by them, even during the darkest nights. Because he knows, and will always know, that they love him to the ends of the earth.

He moves to the middle of the circle and joins hands with Loki. “We’ll just walk towards the light together?” Harry jokes.

Loki says, “We’ll walk towards our future together.” And Harry knows that he will not regret his decision to leave.
The ground begins to tremble as everybody circling them begins to chant the incantations, at the same moment manifesting their magic to the best of their abilities. It’s the most beautiful thing that Harry has ever seen, all that magic winding around each other. It’s colourful and bright - it’s happy.

But it needs more than just them for it to work properly - it needs Harry.

His magic is gold and it is strong. He pours all of his magic out, letting it flow like an endless river. Loki murmurs words beneath his breath, using his own knowledge and strength to conduct the magic. Slowly but surely, they’re ripping a hole into the fabric of the universe. Harry has never tested the limits of his magical abilities, not like this. Never like this. It eats up his power and begs for more but there doesn’t seem to be a limit and it keeps pouring out of Harry, running off his body and encasing them all, taking over the snow, building up against the tombstones.

And then, suddenly-

-there’s a doorway. It’s dark at the centre, spreading out to a dark navy blue and finally to white, as blinding as a star. The portal. Loki holds Harry’s hands so tight that they hurt. Loki stops his own chanting and smiles.

Together - always together, always supportive of each other, they take the first step towards the portal.

Because at the end of the day home is home and love is love and beyond that, there is really no other meaning to life.

They take another step and the doorway is upon them. Dawn is upon them, holding in it the promise of a new day.

And as they walk through the portal the sun rises upon a new day, carrying with it nothing more than hope and love - a promise of a prosperous future.

And so they go on, against all odds, fighting against the current, defying both fate and death. They carry on, hand in hand, love thick in their hearts and smiles on both their lips.

They walk through the portal and everything clicks into place.
Because home is nothing but the feeling that takes over you when you are surrounded by the ones who love you the most.

They walk through the portal and oh, isn’t love beautiful? Cry it from the rooftops, for love is something worth fighting for.

Chapter End Notes

so now if you have any prompts for short oneshots you want me to do in this series, comment them below!

I'll be writing a full multi-chapter part 2 sometime next year :D stay tuned at my twitter @castellation_ to hear updates on that

End Notes

I really hope you enjoyed that! This is just something I whipped up over the course of two days, so it will get better (hopefully) and I'll props do longer chapters! Please let me know if you liked this, or is you have any constructive criticism :)

The tumblr I made for this pic (photos, snippets, updates, playlists, etc) can be found @collateraldamagepng and the password is Loki!!

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