Playing Hero

by theimperialpurple

Summary

Aster Jane Potter is a transgender witch attempting to make a normal life for herself in Gotham City. Trying to make a name for herself beyond The-Girl-Who-Lived, even to the extent of leaving her best friends Ron and Hermione in England. Unfortunately for Aster, one thing she can't leave behind is that damn saving people thing; which has now made her a target for both the mafia and the city's cape crusader.

Notes

Updated: 3/1/2019 I am back from my break and I'm going through each chapter to clean up any mistakes I have made. I'm only tweaking a few things here or there but the overall story
will remain the same.

Updated: 2/4/2019: Guys, I changed my username from justaddgigi to theimperialpurple.

Dedication: Before I start this long ass author's note. I want to first thank my team of betas whom without them I would have never had the courage to reboot this fic! I want to thank my two real-life transgender betas The Batty Beater and E.S for the editing and for make sure I don't screw this up. I wanted this to be as respectful and as factually correct as possible and they kept me from dipping too far into my cis lens. I especially want to thank all the trans and non-binary people that I have met on Twitter in the process of writing this fic. They have inspired me with their courage and pure awesomeness. And finally Special thanks to RavenclawPixieRose for the Brit-pick on the first chapter. Also love to my cheerleaders and my best friends Starr_Falling and Bendersfan for all their awesome input.

Author Note: I know, I know this is like the fifth attempt in trying to write this series. If you don’t know this was originally the ‘Criss Cross’ series and I stopped writing the other fics because I got uninspired and real life got in the way. However, it was due to becoming more entrenched in transgender rights that I was once again ready to reboot it. I took down the earlier fics expect “Behind the Mask” but that will remain as a standalone and not at all connected to this verse. Yes, this will be a long series so I suggest you buckle up your seat belts. This will be a very long burn when it comes to the Bruce/Aster romance and this fic is completely pre-relationship. They won’t get together for several stories down the line.

Now as for Batman, I, of course, didn’t take from one version. I literally mashed together and cheerily picked my favorite elements from different adaptations up including the Batman: Arkham video game series and then added my own faceclaims which are up on this series Tumblr blog which you can find here.

I urge everyone to follow the Amalgamation blog because you will get lots of behind the scenes stuff, multimedia, fanart, wallpapers, and so much more. Also, access to stuff related to my world building.

As for my posting schedule, I’m trying for bi-monthly and I’m actually almost done writing this fic. I’m three chapters away from the ending. If you have any questions or concerns especially on the transgender stuff please let me know. There will be no overt transphobia in this. So diffidently no misgendering, or trans slurs. In this universe, trans people got all the rights, but there are still some passive transphobia and micro-aggressions. Similar to my own experience as a black woman growing up. I’m especially open to constructive criticism when it comes to my writing of the trans and non-binary characters from people who actually transgender or non-binary in real life.
Aster Jane Potter ground her teeth, her hands clutching her mobile so hard that she was sure that the device would eventually break under the strain.

“I’m sorry, but Mr. Wayne is booked until the August 29th,” replied the sweetly condescending voice of Bruce Wayne’s assistant, over the phone. Aster wanted to reach through the mobile and hex the twit.
The thought of making this woman snort out bats through her nose marginally calmed down Aster’s rising temper.

“...Mr. Wayne is a busy person,” Aster conceded, thinking that he was just probably busy buying another penis compensation of a car and shagging his way through the rest of the female population of Gotham City. “Mr. Wayne is an influential person in Gotham and his presence at the Pride Gala would do a lot to help the LGBT centre and a lot of disadvantaged—”

“Mr. Wayne would, of course, consider giving a donation.”

“Yes, a donation is always welcomed but—” Aster’s face flushed; her hand dipped towards the other sleeve where her long-sleeved blouse concealed her wand holster when there was a knock on the door. Since the assistant continues to talk over her, Aster muted the call, sure that the other woman wouldn’t notice.

“Come in.”

The door opened, and Aster gave a tired smile as she recognised her first real friend in Gotham, Loren Marbury. They stood there in the doorway, a person about two centimetres or so shorter than her own 1.76 meters. They had short light blonde hair that fell around their head in a neat bob. Their face had delicate almost elfin type features, high cheekbones, and uncharacteristically haunted blue eyes. Aster waved Loren in, and they nodded forcing a shade of their usually bright and bubbly smile that seemed to light up every room Loren walked through.

Aster frowned dread pooling in her stomach. Shaking her head, Aster hurriedly unmuted the call and thanked the assistant politely for taking her call and that, of course, she would be available if Mr. Wayne changed his mind. She hung up the phone and quickly circled around the desk to hug her friend.

As Aster hugged them, she realised that Loren had lost a lot of weight. Aster stepped back out of the embrace and studied their features. Their face was dangerously gaunt, and there were dark circles under Loren’s eyes.

“Are you okay?”

Loren’s mouth stretched into a wide grin. “I’m fine, more than fine actually!” they chirped in that familiar southern accent, as their eyes darted around the office and to the door. Loren looked back at Aster, and the corners of their lips started to slide off of their face before it was pasted right back at with apparently forced earnestness.

“I got some wonderful news!” Loren announced excitedly as they took a seat in a guest chair. Instead of going back to her chair, she perched on the corner of her desk. Aster’s arms crossed as she frowned at her friend.

“I finally quit Candies.”

Aster gasped, her eyes going wide with shock. Loren had been working as a stripper at Candy Girls Strip Club since before Aster moved to Gotham. The place was a cesspool, and the customers were creeps. Aster had been begging her friend to quit forever, but Loren stubbornly refused. Least to say it had been the start of many arguments.

“Oh my god, Loren!” Aster shot up and hugged her friend. “I’m so proud of you.”

Loren hugged her back but looked away once again to throw a glance at the door.
“Do you have another job lined up?” Aster asked excitedly. “You know Mr. Janney was complaining how short-staffed we are here after the whole...” She was the one this time to dart a look at the door this time before whispering. “The whole embezzlement scandals.”

Aster felt a little silly whispering it, but her tyrant of a boss Robert Janney had banned all talk about how the almost the whole upper management was caught embezzling from The Centre. Not that she wasn’t grateful for being promoted to read: forced into being Event Coordinator despite the fact she was categorically rubbish at it.

Loren wrung their hands, and that feeling of dread that had been building since her friend’s arrival rose steadily inside of Aster.

“Lo, what’s going on?” Aster asked, concerned.

Loren finally looked up to meet Aster’s green eyes, “I’m leaving Gotham.”

It felt like all of the air had been sucked out of the room. “What?”

Besides, Ron and Hermione, who were all the way across the pond in England, Loren was her best friend. They were always either exchanging texts and calls or Loren would often drag her out of the office on Friday nights to make sure she had ‘fun’. Loren’s version of fun was doing pub crawls, watching terrible rom-coms at their flat, and trying to set Aster on a series of lousy blind dates. Yet, despite all of that Loren had taken up the empty space in her lonely life and she suddenly didn’t know what to do without them in it.

“I-I got a new job lined up working at Nordstrom’s in Metropolis, and I’m applying to the university there.”

Aster blinked back tears, “I’m so proud bloody proud of you, mate.” Aster was entirely telling the truth. Despite her own despair at losing her friend, she was really happy for them, this was all Aster had wanted for Loren. Loren was brilliant. Unfortunately, for all of Loren’s intelligence, they somehow had slipped through the cracks.

“So, how does Gio feel all about this?”

Loren froze, their eyes wide and filling with unshed tears. They sniffled and wiped their face. “It doesn’t matter what Giovany thinks.”

“What?” This was so unlike Loren. Giovany Brizzi and Loren had been together for four years, and they were that couple. Loren and Giovany were utterly in love, they were always all over each other and were practically attached to the hip. Come to think of it, Aster was pretty shocked that she hadn’t even noticed the mountain of a man’s absence.

“W...What happened?” Aster asked, shocked.

Loren shrugged, “We grew apart. It happens to the best of them.”

“Bollocks!”

Loren uncharacteristically threw a resentful glare at Aster. They shot up to their feet. “It’s none of your business, okay!!”

Taken aback, Aster put her hands up. “I’m sorry, but this is not like you Loren.”

“Why can’t you just be happy for me,” Loren shot back.
“I am happy for you,” Aster hurried to reassure them but finally sighed. “But this is all so sudden.”

Loren sighed, a shaking hand through their hair. “I’m sorry, but this is how it is.”

Aster slumped, utterly defeated. “When are you leaving?”

“My bus leaves tomorrow.”

Aster mouth dropped, “So soon?”

“Yeah, I start the new job in a few days, and I wanted to get a move on.”

‘Liar’ Aster wanted to protest, but the stubborn rise of Loren’s chin told her that there was nothing she could say to change their mind. “Can I at least drive you to the bus station?”

Loren shook their head. “No, that’s okay. I already got a ride.’

Aster sighed, “Okay.”

Loren hugged her, and she held her friend close to her as a wave of sadness flowed through Aster.

“This is only goodbye for now,” Loren tried to reassure Aster. “Besides, I’m going to be sending you texts, emails, and all the postcards: so much you will probably get sick of me.”

Aster snorted and wiped away the tears that had finally fallen down her cheeks. “Never.”

Loren stepped back and smiled. “See you around, Ash.”

“See you around, Lo.”

And with that Loren turned and walked out of the room. As Aster watched Lauren’s retreating back, she couldn’t shake the feeling of foreboding.

Soundtrack: Change - Lana Del Rey

The rest of the day crawled at an infuriatingly slow pace. Aster had a million things she had to do to get ready for the centre’s Pride Gala. Aster still had vendors to call, press releases to write, invoices to fill out, and she still hadn’t picked up a dress.

Yet, despite Aster’s best intentions, the meeting with Loren earlier that afternoon haunted her. Aster’s Auror instincts couldn’t quite shake that Loren was in some type of trouble. Her thoughts kept replaying the earlier meeting. The breakup with Gio, the way Loren looked like they hadn’t slept in days, and how jumpy Loren was.

Finally, it was the end of the day. Aster looked at her messy desk. Papers, folders, and discarded empty cups on every surface. Aster sighed, she was going to have to take her work home with her again. Wincing, Aster started to sort through the paperwork, shoving what was important into her magically expanded briefcase.

Aster grabbed her purse, turned off the lights, locked the door, and hurried out of the office. Abruptly, Robert Janney, an older man in his late fifties in a tailored expensive navy-blue suit and slicked back salt and pepper hair unknowingly passed her. ‘He’s probably heading to my office to harass me about the Pride Gala,’ Aster thought sourly to herself. After her earlier blunder with
Wayne’s assistant and her complete inability to tell a convincing lie, Aster knew he would get the whole sorry affair out of her in no time.

Aster quickly cast a notice-me-not spell, throwing a guilty look at the receptionist, Samirah Niazi, who was in a cute lavender hijab today, answering phone calls. Aster would typically stop to chat about the office gossip which Samirah had a endless pipeline into. Today, however, Aster hurried out the building, into the busy streets of Gotham to her favourite place to apparate was an abandoned office building a few blocks away.

It took Aster no time to get there, despite being pushed and shoved as the mass of people hurried off to get to their destination. Once inside the building, Aster took out her wand and thought about home and her beloved dog Sirius (named of course after her beloved Godfather) who would be eagerly awaiting his meal. Aster smiled ruefully to herself, her dog would be whining pitifully like he had hadn’t ate in days instead of merely hours.

Then her thoughts wandered back to Loren and Aster sighed in resignation. There was no way Aster could ignore all of her gut instincts that told her Loren was in trouble. For the first time in over a year, Aster couldn’t push aside her visceral need to save people. She sighed; Sirius would just have to wait a little longer than usual.

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**Soundtrack:** *Kids (Ain’t All Right) - Grace Mitchell*

Aster arrived in the alleyway with a pop. A stray cat who sat on top of a bin fell onto the ground and hissed at her before running away. Aster recast the notice-me-not spell and decided to add a muggle-repelling charm on herself as well for good measure. This was probably the worst neighbourhood in Gotham. And since this was Gotham City, that was saying a lot.

She hurried out of the alley into a street that was the very definition of run-down. Shops with bars on the windows that made them look more like fortresses. Dotted in between the shops were abandoned buildings with graffiti all over the walls, some sagging in their foundation, the doors and windows boarded up. Honestly, the buildings looked worse than Aster’s own house that had sat abandoned for well over fifty years. As Aster walked down the street, she passed a few homeless people sitting in doorways and laying on benches. On the corner, there was drug dealer nonchalantly selling drugs under an unlit street lamp.

Aster shook her head. This was so typical of Gotham. From what she initially researched before she moved here that the city didn’t quite recover from the 2008 recession and neighbourhoods similar to the Narrows outnumbered the ones that came out from the recession unscathed.

With a sigh, Aster quickly went down the street until she spotted Loren’s block of flats. It was just as run-down as the rest of the road. As Aster cast an unlocking charm and made her way inside, she immediately noticed that the interior was just as horrid as the outside. Peeling paint, graffiti on the walls, trash everywhere, and it smelled oddly of piss.

Aster noticed the lift and groaned in frustration when she spotted the out of order sign taped to it. She would have tried to apparate straight to the flat, but it would gather too much attention. Aster put a wandless cushioning spell on her heels and hurriedly climbed up the stairs.

With her heart pounding in her chest. Aster was panting for air, as she climbed step after step. When Aster eventually got to the fifth floor, she idly thought maybe she wasn’t as in shape as she thought was.
After taking a moment to catch her breath, she made her way across the long narrow hallway that had long stretch doors on either side. It took no time for Aster to find Loren’s apartment, the door was open. A shrill scream rang out, and her wand was instantly in her hand.

Had this been fifteen years ago and Aster was still in Hogwarts, she would have just stormed through the doors, wand at the ready. After two years of being on hormones, Aster’s physical strength had significantly decreased. It was one of the many reasons Aster was ordinarily hesitant to jump impulsively into a fight. Unfortunately, with her friend in trouble she had little choice in the matter.

Aster opened up her briefcase, thankful that she took it near enough everywhere. She reached deep down into it and, pulled out a pouch of ‘Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder’. She cast a spell that would make her see in the dark. Aster took off her heels, and crept closer towards the door, before she opened the pouch and slowly opened the door a bit wider, throwing a good pinch of the powder into the room.

“What the fuck?”

“Who turned off the lights!”

Aster hurried inside, rage boiling inside of her at the sight of two men who were looming over what was obviously Loren’s prone figure. With a sharp whip of her wand and Aster shouted: “Stupefy!” Both men immediately went rigid and fell to the floor with two distinctive THUDS. Aster hurriedly stepped over the prone bodies of the men and knelt down beside her friend.

She took their pulse. It was steady, and they had bumps and bruises and a quiet spectacular black eye, but Loren looked to be okay.

Panting, adrenaline pumped into Aster’s veins as she looked at the prone bodies around her and groaned. “How in Merlin’s name am I going to explain this to the police?”
Chapter Summary

Previously On Playing Hero:

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Chapter Notes

Woo, I'm back! Those two weeks have gone so fast. I was not expecting the amount of positive response for this fic. It was more than I could ever ask for! And I want to personally thank all the people who kudos, commented, subscribed, and bookmarked this fic. Thank you, thank you, thank you! It makes all the blood, sweat, and tears that I have poured into this more than worth it.

Before we begin, I want you guys to note that I have updated the tags. If you believe I need to add more tags then please let me know. They are trigger warnings for PTSD, and Panic Attacks in this chapter and going forward into this fic. Please go proceed caution, especially if these are your triggers.

If you want to know more about why Aster has PTSD please read this post! Now I have babbled on enough, on to the fic! Also, I want to let you know that I'm pretty fond of cliffhangers. I'm sorry, but that's how I write. However, I plan to always keep on
See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**Soundtrack:** Blood in the Water - Layup

‘Breath,’ Aster thought to herself. ‘Just breathe.’ She closed her eyes and took deep breaths, inhaling air through her nose as she fought the bile that threatened to rise. Every sense was heightened, Aster could hear her heartbeat pounding in her ears, the sharp smell of the Hospital’s disinfectant, and her body’s faint shaking.

“Breathe.”

Aster took another breath, pushing back the images of Loren’s prone body and the way the men fell down under the rage of her wand. She wanted to scream and cry because Aster had left England to escape any fighting.

She just barely pushed away a sob, feeling the sting of unshed tears in her eyes.

‘Breathe, Goddamnit!’

She just wanted to go home, where everything was safe. Where Aster could pretend that Loren was okay and that not all of her carefully laid out plans weren’t just broken and laid at her feet; not unlike shards of glass.

Aster breathed in and out for Merlin knows how long. Gradually, she could breathe, and her senses returned to normal enough to pick up something beyond her own body.

“—I’m looking for Aster Potter?”

Startled, Aster sat up and opened her eyes to see a man and a woman standing in front of the receptionist desk. The nurse behind the counter pointed at Aster, and her feeling of apprehension swept through her because maybe these guys worked for Loren’s attackers? Aster cursed her own stupidity, instead of acting like a baby she should have been more alert.

The two turned and headed over to her. Aster fingers inched towards her wand in her holster, but with all the cameras and muggles around she knew could never use it. Aster had been surprised she didn’t have representatives from the Magical Congress of the United States of America breathing down her bloody neck. There was no need for Aster to tempt fate even more than she already had.

Aster sighed, and just prayed that these folks wouldn’t try anything in front of any potential witnesses.

“Ms. Potter?” the woman asked, who was would be pretty if she didn’t look so stern. The woman had tawny brown skin, hard dark eyes, and her curly black hair pinned into a severe-looking bun. Honestly, she reminded her of a Latinx version of Professor McGonagall.

“Yes?” Aster answered, hesitantly as she got to her feet.
“I’m Detective Montoya.” Montoya took out her badge. “And this Detective Harnell from the GCPD.”

“What can I do for you, Detectives?”

Montoya exchanged her badge for a notebook and pen, “We would like to know more about the altercation that happened in the Narrows tonight.”

Aster frowned. “I already gave my statement to the responding officers.”

Montoya’s narrowed her eyes. “There are still a few things that don’t quite add up.”

Aster bit back a groan and ran her hand through the mess of her wine-red hair. “What exactly do you want to know?”

“How did you take down two grown men?” Harnell suddenly piped up. He was a few years younger, closer to Aster’s twenty-seven years than Montoya who looked she was pushing her mid-thirties. He had blonde hair, blue eyes, and looked like the perfect description of an all-American boy.

Montoya turned to glare at Harnell, who looked away and blushed.

“Do you know Giovany Brizzi?”

“Sort of? Aster shrugged again. “I work at the LGBT centre, so he would often come in with Loren. But I didn’t know Gio all that well.”

Montoya scribbled something down on her notebook. “Do you have any knowledge of Mr Brizzi’s whereabouts?”

“No, the last time I saw him was two weeks ago.” Aster threw up her hands, confused and frustrated at all the questions about Gio. Didn’t they give a shite about Loren being attacked?

Montoya sighed and put away her notebook before looking to meet Aster’s eyes. “Look, It’s best that you be truthful with me, Ms. Potter—for both your and your friend’s sake.”

Aster’s tenuous grip on her emotions broke, she gritted her teeth, her nostrils flaring as she glared up at the other woman.

“Giovany Brizzi, a soldier for the Falcone family, is missing and now if it wasn’t for your heroics—” Montoya said heroics like the word was an obscenity. “Your friend would be laying on a slab at the morgue.”

Aster opened her mouth to speak, then shut it as she comprehended the rest of what Montoya was saying. Aster felt like Montoya had just suckerpunched her in the stomach. The Falcons had been all over the news for months. It seemed like every time Aster had passed by a newsstand or turned on her tv these days someone was talking about the Falcons and the recent arrest of Carmine Falcone the patriarch, and boss of the family. If the rumour was anything to go by then Carmine ran the oldest and most ruthless mafia family in the entire city. She couldn’t believe that Gio was working for them?!

“Bloody hell!” Aster gasped.

Harnell stood up and threw a pleading look at his partner. “Look, we want to help you. So, help us help you!”
Aster threw up her hands, “I didn’t have a clue about Gio until you just told me.”

“I find that hard to believe.” Montoya glowered down at her. “I looked at your records and the only ones I could find were spotty than best. You practically disappear off the grid at age 11, and then suddenly you move here and end up working at the LGBT centre with little credentials to back it up? Now, you are all buddy-buddy with the partner of a member of the Falcone crime family?”

Aster rolled her eyes, “First of all, I went to a private school in Scotland, and that is why my records are spotty. And I didn’t have to work after college because I have a substantial inheritance from my godfather.” While this was not 100% true, Aster did get an inheritance from Sirius and her own family’s estate. Unfortunately, she couldn’t explain how she took down Falcone’s men. Aster also had no idea how to explain her time in the Auror Corps, and besides, she didn’t have any muggle records to back any of that up. Aster continued, “I already told you I didn’t know about Loren.” she shook her head, “All I know is that they were a stripper at Candies.”

“A Falcone Hangout.”

Aster shot to her feet, “Look you can believe me, or not! It’s your call, but until you have proof enough to book me then you both can leave Loren and I alone!”

Montoya got into her face, “I think it’s best for your friend to come clean or they are going to be the next one in a body bag.”

“You are trying to threaten me now?” Aster ground her teeth, her finger twitching for her wand. She really wanted to hex the smirk off this infuriating bint.

“Not from me,” Montoya shrugged. “But the Falcones are going to be after the both of you now, and your best bet is to go the police.”

Harnell coughed awkwardly and stepped between them. “Look, we just want to help you.”

Aster snorted, “Some help.”

Harnell took out his card and handed to her. “If you change your mind, please feel free to contact me day or night.”

Aster hesitantly took the card but didn’t say anything else. Harnell and Montoya exchanged looks before she rolled her eyes. “Let’s go Harnell.” Montoya turned around and stormed out of the hospital, her partner quickly following on her heels.

Aster groaned, running a hand over a face. ‘What in Merlin’s name did I just get myself into?’

Soundtrack: Magda Smolková - Umbrella

After the bombshell Montoya and Harnell dropped, Aster couldn’t stop thinking about it. She went over every little bit of her previous interactions with Gio and Loren. She couldn’t help but feel angry, betrayed, and not a little bit resentful of the situation she found herself in.

‘I didn’t ask for this,’ Aster inwardly shouted. However, she couldn’t just stew in her anger. Aster had to check on Sirius, and then she had to call Mr. Janney and tell him about her sudden “family emergency” that just popped up. He would not be happy that she was taking time off so close to the Pride Gala, but she didn’t see any other choice.

A part of her felt sorry for Samirah and the rest of her co-workers. Mr.Janney was going to be even
more a git to everyone because of this. However, Loren was more important. Her friend had a big
target on their back, and no matter how pissed off she was at Loren right now, she wouldn’t just turn
her back on them. And Admittedly, it had been Aster’s own choice to barged into Loren’s flat.

In the end, she didn’t regret saving her friend.

Aster shook her head and looked at the clock. It had been hours since Loren had been admitted and
she was getting restless. All of this waiting didn’t really help Aster’s own frazzled state of mind.

Aster tapped idly on the floor and was considering getting up for a good pace when she heard the
name Falcone coming from the telly that was mounted in the corner of the waiting room. She turned
to see the front of the Gotham Superior Courthouse on the screen. On the steps, there was a gruff
looking man with faded ginger hair and beard and a black, heavyset woman in a neatly tailored skirt
suit was being besieged on all sides by reporters as they stood on the courthouse steps. The woman
put her hand up. “One at a time, please!”

“D.A. Porter,” shouted one reporter. “What is your reaction to Carmine Falcone’s Indictment?”

“We are satisfied with the Grand Jury’s decision.” Porter replied, “I am confident that My team and I
can prove without a shadow of the doubt that Carmine Falcone is not only the head of the Falcone
Crime Family but by being so he has violated New Jersey’ RICO act.”

A pretty blonde Polynesian woman shoved her way forward and waved her microphone in front of
the ginger man’s face. “Vicki Vale, GCN news,” she announced. “Is it true, Commissioner Gordon,
that one of Falcone’s men flipped and is now going to testify against Carmine Falcone?”

Commissioner Gordon scowled and pushed the microphone away. “No comment.”

“Aster Potter?”

Startled, Aster turned to see an older black woman in lab coat standing in the doorway. Aster felt like
butterflies were dancing in her stomach as she walked over to the Doctor. “How is Loren?” she
asked.

“Your sibling is fine,” The Doctor said, and Aster was grateful that she had the foresight to lie to the
admitting nurse about her relation to Loren. “Actually, they are very fortunate. Mx. Marbury only
has some sore ribs, and a few bumps and bruises. They were very lucky that they didn’t get a
concussion as well.” The Doctor gave Aster a rueful smile. “I recommend that Mx. Marbury stays
the night for observation and then I probably release them in the morning.”

Aster sighed in relief. “When can I see them?”

The doctor checked her watch. “You got about an hour until the visitor’s hours are over.”

The Doctor quickly gave Aster directions to Loren’s room before leaving. As exhausted as Aster
was right then, she was surprised that she only got lost once in the Gotham General’s labyrinth of
hallways. Finally, Aster made it to Loren’s room and was shocked to see her usually vivacious friend
laying too still in the hospital bed. The only thing that reassured her was the steady beeping of the
heart monitor and the whirl of the machines Loren was connected to.

Aster sighed and sat down on the bed watching her friend sleep. It seemed that Aster spent a lot of
time in hospital herself, or in Hogwarts infirmary under the tender care Madam Pomfrey.

Time seemed to creep by quickly as she studied the steady rise and fall of Loren’s chest. Then before
Aster knew it was close to the end of visiting hours.
Aster sighed, she would have to come back tomorrow. If she had the invisibility cloak, she could probably camp out here for the rest of the night. However, the ancient cloak was still hanging up in the back of her wardrobe at home.

“A..Ash?”

Aster looked up and was surprised to see Loren was tiredly blinking up at her.

“Loren!”


“W-why I am in the hospital?” They wrinkled their nose. “The last thing I remember was going to my apartment, packing, and then nothing?”

Aster sighed and sat down before she once again repeated her side of the story. Of course, Aster omitted the magic stuff, thinking that a hospital room was not exactly the best place to reveal that she was a witch. And Aster knew that there was probably a good possibility that she was going to have to disclose the existence of magic to her friend. Loren had nowhere else to go, and they certainly couldn’t go back to their flat. So, it was logical for Aster to bring them to Aster’s house in North Gotham. For all of Aster’s careful facade of normalcy, her place was far from what most people would call “normal”. It would only take Loren stepping on the doorstep to Aster’s home to realize that something was up.

“Now, I answered your questions.” Aster glared at her friend, her anger about Loren’s lies surging back into the forefront of her mind. “You can answer a few of mine.”

"You are in trouble with the Falcones.” Aster tried to say calmly but failed. She was angry, no she was bloody furious Loren. They were supposed to be her best friend, and Loren had kept something like this from her. In hindsight, it had been so fucking obvious. Gio’s odd hours even though he was supposed to work construction. How Loren begged Aster not to go down to Candie’s. Aster had thought it was because Loren was ashamed that she was a stripper. Now, she knows otherwise.

“It is none of your business, okay?” Loren said, stubbornly. “This my problem, and I was dealing with it.”

“Dealing with it?” Aster snorted, “If I hadn’t come you would be dead.”

“I wish I were dead,” Loren said quietly, as they looked down at their hands. Aster’s anger deflated at her friend’s words. She felt ashamed of how selfish she was being after all Loren had gone through.

Aster took her friend into her arms” I’m sorry.”

Loren ducked their head into Aster’s chest, as they sobbed into Aster’s blouse. Their shoulders are shaking, Loren finally let's go. Aster held them silently, knowing again from her own experience that there was nothing she could say to make this better.

"Gio is," Loren started, then their voice failed. Loren closed their eyes, shuttered. "Gio is dead."

Aster felt lightheaded as for the second time that day she felt like she had been suckerpunched.

"What? How do you know?” Aster asked, frantically. It didn't make sense; Aster remembers seeing Gio what two maybe three weeks ago when Aster had stayed over at Gio and Loren’s flat for their
monthly viewing of 'Love Actually'. Gio had smiled that bright, brilliant toothpaste commercial smile, and left to 'take care of some business'.

Once again, Aster wanted to kick herself. She hadn't thought to ask him what that business was. What the people back home would be surprised most was that she didn't pry any further. Aster was proof positive that everyone had their secrets and if that situation with Snape's Pensive was anything to go by she had no right to pry. Now in hindsight, Aster wished she did.

Then her thoughts went back to the newscast in the waiting room, and what Montoya's question about Gio's whereabouts and she got a sickening feeling

"He was going to testify against the Falcones."

Loren’s eyes went wide, “Yeah, how did you know?”

"Two detectives were asking about Gio."

The fucking police," Loren snarled. "I told him not to go to the police, but you know Gio."

"Stubborn."

Loren nodded, whipping away their tears with their hand. “And then I heard on the streets that bastard Johnny Viti was bragging about it to anyone who would listen.”

"Merlin," Aster swore. " I wish you would have told me." Aster could have most likely could have saved Gio if she had known. Aster was a former Auror, and she could protect him with protection charm or amulet. As much as she didn't want to gather MACUSA's attention, she would do anything to save her friend the pain of losing someone that you loved.

Aster idle thought of what she could do if she hadn't thrown away the resurrection stone. Aster gave a defeated sigh. What had Remus used to tell her: 'What ifs were useless'.

Aster met Loren's eyes, and square her shoulders. "I'm in it now."

Loren popped opened their eyes and meet Aster's hard stare their lips pressed tightly together.

Loren started to argue, but Aster put up a hand. “No, I’m not going just to walk away from this.‘And I probably couldn’t if I wanted to,’ She thought to herself. “So, I need you to tell me everything.”

Loren groaned and ran a hand through her face. They turned and threw a look at the open door. “Okay, but this is private.”

Aster closed the door and sat back down. “Yes, Gio was working for the Falcones,” Loren admitted. “ He wasn’t giving Carmine a cut and shit like that will get you whacked. I told him to stop, but he said he had everything under control.” Loren shook their head.

Aster nodded because that sounded like Gio. He was cocky to the point of arrogance at times, with a devil may care attitude like nothing could touch him. He was charming and handsome enough to get away with it. All he had to do was flash that smile at you, and you would suddenly find yourself forgiving him.

Loren sniffled and wiped away their tears. “And a month ago, Gio proposed, and I swear I wanted to tell you. But he made me promise not to tell anyone.” Loren threw a pleading look at Aster.
For the second time during this conversation, Aster wanted to be angry. Yet, now she couldn’t quite drum up anything but just weary acceptance and a pervading sadness for everything Loren had lost.

In the end, Aster just said: “It’s okay.”

“Thanks,” Loren sighed, in relief. “We were finally engaged, and Gio said we were leaving this hell hole.” They smiled sadly as the thought back to that memory. “I was so happy then. Finally, I was going to get my happy ending. Despite all of those losers who just used me for a good time, I had finally got my Prince Charming.” Loren snorted bitterly. “He had it all worked out: we were going to go settle down in California, maybe buy a house, try having a few kids. You know, try our luck at achieving the American dream.”

Loren wryly shook their head and continued. “I should have known it would never last. Nothing good in my life ever does.”

Aster didn’t know what to say or how to comfort her friend so she just asked: “Then what happened?”

“The cops happened,” Loren bit out, their hands practically strangling the duvet. “They caught Gio with a 100 kilos of cocaine, and they were going to send him up to Blackgate for 20 years. Gio wasn’t completely an idiot and decided to cut a deal, and a few days later Gio went missing.”

“M-M-Merlin,” Aster shakily gasped, eyes going wide.

"And then I found out that Gio was gone and I knew I had to get out."

Loren looked away and didn’t answer.

Aster studied Loren's face and new she was missing something. "What are you not telling me?"

"Like I said earlier, I'm in this. And I need to know everything so we can get out of this situation alive."

"Gio told me the day before he went missing that he had a notebook.” Loren started, “Names, dates, bribes, the whole shebang.” Loren shrugged. “It’s enough to take down the entire family.”

“Blimey.” Again, Aster felt like the floor was swept from under her. “And that is why they were at your flat.”

“He told me to take it to the cops if anything happened to him. But look what that got him!” Loren snorted. “The cops were the ones that got him killed. I bet half of them are on Falcone’s payroll.”

The woman who spent five years as an Auror was inwardly warring with how she knew the police operated down in Gotham. In Gotham, it was known that the cops were just as bad as the criminals.

In the end, Aster knew that Loren was right.

“Where is the notebook now?”

Aster and Loren’s eyes met for a long moment, “It’s safe,” Loren said, firmly. “I trust you, hell, you saved my life. But I promised Gio not to tell anyone where it was.”

Aster wanted to argue, wanted to demand the location out of Loren. Unfortunately, Aster was just too exhausted both mentally and physically. Then she looked at Loren who so bloody sad and alone right now. Their fiancée was dead, murdered by the Falcons. And Aster knew that from what little
Loren has spoken of that their parents back in Tennessee, that they would hardly welcome them home with open arms.

All Loren had now was Aster, and it made her think of her old cupboard at Dursley. Back then she had been a just tiny underfed little girl in boys clothes alone with no one who gave a damned about her.

Aster wearily stood up, picking up her briefcase, and turned to the door.

“Wait!” Loren called out, “You’re just going to leave?”

Aster turned, “No, I’m going to have to talk your Doctor into releasing you early.”

“What?” Loren asked, bewildered. “I can’t exactly go back to my apartment tonight.”

Aster inwardly winced, “You going to stay at my house.” Then she turned and walked out of the door.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will be posted on Saturday, October 6th! I expanded this story to ten chapters instead of eight, so the posting schedule I made for it as changed. Make sure to stop by this series's Tumblr for all the special extra content that I posted for this chapter. I also updated the character page with all the character bio information.
Previously On Playing Hero
“Wait, you're just going to leave?”

Aster turned, “No, I’m going to have to talk your Doctor into releasing you early.”

“What?” Loren asked, bewildered. “I can't exactly go back to my apartment tonight.”

Aster inwardly winced, “You going to stay at my house.” Then she turned and walked out of the door.

Chapter Notes

Yes, it's another post and right on time. I want to thank you all for all the kudos, bookmarks, subscriptions, and comments. I really appreciate it and it really encourages me to finish this fic. A couple of things, the inspiration for the great house was taken from The Mortal Instruments series. Also, the dog is not Sirius Black, but he is named after him. From this point on, I want to give a warning that a few characters are going to be OOC. Mostly, Renee Montoya who is way more bitchier than what she was in the comics or Batman: The Animated Series. She has her own reasons for this, that will be revealed later on.

BIG REMINDER: There is going to be another cliffhanger. I did warn you guys that I love writing them. If you want to wait until the next update to see how it turns out I won't hold it against you.

Also, I would once again urge you to follow my tumblr blog where I have tons of extras and bts scenes goodness. Also all of my chapters will be posted there first so if you want a first peek, I suggest you go ahead follow the blog. Anyway, that's all for now. On with the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Soundtrack: White Rabbit by Emiliana Torrini
As Aster suspected, Loren's doctor was at all not happy with the decision to check out of the hospital early. Fortunately, with Aster's own stubbornness, and with Loren backing her up, the Doctor finally gave them the discharge papers. Aster called a cab, and ten minutes later she was carefully helping Loren (borrowed scrubs and all) inside. Aster gave the driver directions to her place in Burnside.

The trip there was quiet and tense. Loren looked through the window, their lips pinched together in a grimace ever so often in what was probably in pain; the painkillers the Doctors prescribed them probably hadn't hit them yet. The only sounds that could be heard in the back of the cab were the traffic and the soft melodic instruments of jazz music coming from the radio.

In the end, it took them almost forty-five minutes to make it through midtown with even with the light traffic. Then to Aster's relief, the cab was finally crossing the Schwartz bypass into Burnside.

When Aster was initially trying to look for possible places to settle down in, she had come across Burnside. Due to Mayor Hills tyrannical need to "clean up" Gotham, Burnside had been on the first test subject. The poor families that had previously lived in that neighbourhood were sadly pushed out and were replaced with pretentious art galleries, trendy restaurants and cafes, overpriced niche boutiques, and a few head shops all painted in bright obnoxious colours. By the time Aster herself moved to Burnside, it had looked like a more insincere imitation of Camden town, Soho, and Brooklyn mashed together into one absurd combination.

Although it pained her very soul to ever step foot in a place as utterly ridiculous as Burnside, this was a neighbourhood that the eccentric and the bizarre was all part of the scenery.

It was the perfect place for a witch such as herself to hide in plain sight.

Aster shook her head as the cab finally rounded the corner onto Vermilion Street and came to stop in front of an old Gothic church. The church was diffidently anachronistic like something ripped straight out the imagination of Bram Stoker or Poe. It loomed menacingly over the other buildings with its two enormous towers on each side of the church. It was a clear dichotomy of the brightly coloured shops across the street. Aster paid the driver and helped a very reluctant Loren out of the cab on the curb.

"Why are we even at church?" Loren's eyes were wide, their teeth nervous biting the bottom of their lip. "Do you need to give a confession or something?"

"Um, not exactly?"

Aster, with a firm grip on her briefcase with one hand, used her other free hand to half-carry Loren to the front porch. Aster's entire body went rigid the moment she stepped foot on the front step. Aster shivered as she felt an ice cold wave wash over her as if she was dumped in an ice bath. As the feeling faded away, she rubbed her head as she abruptly felt annoyed.

Loren went rigid and started shivering. "What was that?"

"Um, can the explanations wait until we are inside?" Aster said, testily. Her annoyance growing into real anger now, Aster pushed aside those feelings as best as she could as she tried to unlock and open the door. She cursed underneath breath as the door refused to budge. Aster threw a glare at the door, and Loren's eyes were darting around them.

"Let us in or I swear to god you won't get any jelly babies for a week," Aster muttered to herself, as she tried to open the door.

"What?" Loren's eyes darted around the street. "Who are you talking to?"
Aster turned to quiet reassure Loren that she hadn't gone completely barmy when she spotted movement on a rooftop of the greengrocer's across the street.

Aster spun around, her eyes scanning the rooftops but she didn't see anything. One part of her wanted to brush it off as her being paranoid. Loren had a big fat target on their back and it was natural for her to this paranoid. Yet, Aster couldn't shake the feeling that they were being watched. She gritted her teeth, her fingers itching towards her wand before Aster abruptly spun around and said out loud to what seemed like no one:

"I'll give you two chocolate frogs if you let us in."

"What?" Loren asked, alarmed and backing away slowly "Who are you talking to?"

The doors suddenly flung itself opened, making Loren jump and almost fall over. Aster caught them in time and pretty much shoved her friend inside the church. The doors slammed closed again by themselves and Loren scurried away from the door and right into Aster. "What the actual fuck!"

Aster put her hands out to steady Loren but jerked themselves out of Aster's grip. "This place is haunted."

Aster sighed and threw an exasperated look up at the ceiling. "I promise you that it's not haunted."

"So, why are the doors shutting by themselves then, Ash?" Loren asked, hysterically.

Aster opened her mouth to explain, when Loren's eyes went wide when there was a sudden clamour, sounding like nails clicking rapidly on the floor, then Loren screamed as a black blur was colliding into Aster's side with the force of a speeding bullet.

"Hey, Sirius," Aster said, fondly. "Please tell me you ate more than dog biscuits and jelly babies?"

The massive beast of a dog was barked happily, its tail wagging back and forth.

Aster rolled her eyes, "I will take that as a no."

"You know he's not supposed to eat jelly babies," Aster muttered to herself. "You know that jelly babies are not good for him."

The dog barked again and licked her on the face. "Off, you menace." Aster rolled her eyes and wiped the dog slobber off her chin with her sleeve.

"Ash?"

Aster's eyes went wide and she looked at Loren, who looked terrified.

"Look, everything is going to be okay." Aster put her hands up. "I will explain everything in a minute." She ignored Sirius who was still trying to jump on her.

"O-okay?" Loren said, throwing a look at the door.

"Come on let's all sit down," Aster said, pushing away Sirius again. "I promise you no one will hurt you here."

With Sirius on her heels, Aster leads Loren further into the church proper. All the interior trappings of a church were pretty much gone except for the arch stained-glass windows and the layout. Instead, it resembled a posh loft style flat. The interior was an open floor plan, a living area that flowed seamlessly into the modern looking kitchen were the altar used to be.
"Please make yourself comfortable," Aster said, gesturing to the grey leather sectional. To her surprise, Sirius jumped on the sofa next to Loren and put his head in her lap, his long tail thumping loudly on the sofa. It was quite unlike her dog to take to strangers so quickly.

"Ash?" Loren squeaked, throwing a bewildered look at the dog.

Aster laughed, shaking her head. "Don't worry about that old softy. His bark is worse than his bite."

Loren nodded and tentatively started to pet his head and Sirius moaned in bliss.

"So, you live in a haunted church?" Loren shook their head, their eyes warily darting around the church.

"It's not haunted," Aster corrected again. "I bought for it a song."

"In Burnside?" Loren lifted an eyebrow. "You work at a non-profit, Ash. How can you afford all of this?"

Aster shrugged, fidgeting with the handle of her briefcase. "When my parents and then later my godfather died, I inherited some money."

"Must be a lot?" Loren gestured the church, "This couldn't be cheap to renovate."

Aster winced, "Yeah, it wasn't. "She rubbed her head again as Aster felt the anger grow inside of her, pushing aside her inner defences.

Loren sighed, and Aster turned back to look at them.

"None of this makes sense," Loren said.

Aster tried to find the words to explain, but she didn't know where to begin. She winced at as the anger started to grow into rage.

"Okay," Aster snapped, finally fed up. Loren threw her a confused look. "What?" Aster sighed and shook her head. "Not you Loren. Just you stay right there, and whatever you do —don't move!"

Aster turned and dug into her bag for a second swearing up a storm, as she finally pulled out a bag of 'Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans' and a box of chocolate frogs that were under a preservation charm. Aster had been planning on eating them later but unfortunately, she is going to have to sacrifice them to cause if she wanted any peace tonight. Aster felt the anger fade into sharp interest them into excitement. She opened the bag and the chocolate frogs and threw them on to the floor.

"What--"

Aster put her hand up, "Stay absolutely still."

The jelly babies rolled across the floor, while the frogs went crazy jumping around all over the place. Loren screamed, as the floor as the jellybeans and frogs were suddenly sinking into the floor, not unlike someone sinking into quicksand.

Aster felt a pleased hum in the back of her head, next disgust, and then there was a jelly baby popping out of the floor to land in her hand. Aster shrugged. "I guess they didn't like the earwax flavour."

"What the fuck, Aster!" Loren shouted again, their nails digging into the sofa and into Sirius's hair. The dog whined and Loren unclenched their fingers from his black fur.
"I am a witch," Aster said, as she sat down next to Loren. She gestured to encompass the whole of the converted church. "And this house is not so much haunted as very alive."

Loren went weak at the knees, their mouth dropping. "You can't be serious?"

"You just saw the floor absorb jelly babies and chocolate frogs that moved by themselves," Aster said, and took out of her wand. She muttered a Latin word, and the coffee table was suddenly a miniature plushy version of Sirius. "And I just transfigured the sofa."

"Holy f-" Loren stopped and shook their head. "You're a witch living inside a sentiment church?"

Aster just shrugged.

Loren shook their head, eyes wide staring at Aster with a mix of fear and wonder.

"Tell me everything."

Aster took a deep breath and told Loren about finding out that she was a witch at eleven, about Hogwarts, the houses, and the professors. Loren listened with rapt attention at the innocent adventures she had when she was a child. Of course, Aster decided to gloss over Voldemort, her parent's deaths, and the role she had played in the war. She had enough things on her plate right now to even consider opening up those old wounds. She mentioned graduating from Hogwarts and deciding to follow in her father's footsteps and become an Auror. She had to pause briefly to explain what exactly an Auror was.

"So basically, you were a cop?" Loren wrinkled their nose.

"For five years," Aster hesitantly admitted, "Eventually seeing the worst of humanity day in and out got to me. I guess the final straw the divorce."

"You were married?"

"For 8 years," Aster shook her head wryly. "In our world, you marry young and you spit out as many kids as you can. In hindsight, we just both gave in to the pressure from our family and friends to marry. In the end, We wanted different things, and it didn’t help that Ginny was attracted to men and I wasn't a man. "

Loren shook their head, "Wow, you never told me that. I knew you had a bad break up...."

"Not bad," Aster corrected them. "We were just too different people. Anyway, we are still mates, but I wanted to live my own life. And I couldn't do that back in England."

Loren and Aster sat there in awkward silence then Loren suddenly asked: "So why the church? I mean thou not suffer a witch to live and all that."

"That is complete bollocks," Aster snorted. "The whole thing was mistranslated and besides a church is a perfect place to hide in plain sight. Besides, there is no safer place to live than in a Great House."

"Great house?"

"In our world, the old families would call their family estates "The Great and Noble House." Aster started, thinking of Grimmauld Place. "That was mostly lip service away to show that they were better than everyone else. However, true Great Houses are not just places with walls, ceilings, and doors. They are magical energy in of themselves."
"Really?" Loren looked around the church. "It looks like pretty solid to me."

As on cue, the walls began to bubble and ripple not unlike a surface of the water and then suddenly they were not in a church but brick loft.

Loren shot up to her feet, "What?"

The loft faded away back into the church.

"It's okay," Aster stood to reassure them. "For some reason, the church is its favourite form? But it has and will change it as well. I got glamours around the place that will always make it look it was a church so the muggles in the neighbourhood won't suspect."

Loren shook their head. "This is all too much."

"I promise you, Loren, that this is the safest place in Gotham to be," Aster reassured them, "The house will protect you."

"Okay, alright." Loren closed their eyes and sighed. "But tomorrow we got to go to my apartment. I need to pack and then I'm getting on the first bus out of here."

"What about the police?"

Loren snorted. "Fuck the police! I'm not going to just wait around and be a sitting duck."

"Fine.," Aster reluctantly nodded, then looked over to the kitchen. "Do you want something to eat before I show the guest room?"

Loren grimaced. "No, thanks."

Aster smiled as Sirius stood, stretching his long legs before he jumped off the sofa and came over to her. Aster patted him on the back and turned to smile. "Come on, I think it's well past time to head to bed."

Aster lead Loren and Sirius upstairs, passed a balcony where the church's petitioners used to sit to watch the sermon then down into a short hallway where they were three doors.

Aster pointed to the door on the right, "That's my room." She walked over to first door across the hall and opened to reveal a small basic guest room. "And this is the guest room." Loren walked passed her and sat on a full-size bed that took up most of the room. Sirius barked, and jumped on the bed and licked Loren on the cheek making them giggle. Aster rolled her eyes, knowing that it was a lost cause to try to demand the massive dog to get off the bed. He just looks at her with those huge brown eyes and gazes at her soulfully. Then like always she would crumple like a wet paper bag.

Loren gazed around the room taking in the nightstand and then the wardrobe squeezed in the corner. "Thanks, I mean it Aster."

"You're welcome." Aster smiled before she looked up the vaulted ceiling. "By the way before I forget to tell you the bathroom is next door. So, you might hear me in the morning."

"It's okay," Loren shrugged. "I'm a pretty deep sleeper."

Aster nodded. "I'm going to get you a change of clothes, although, it might be a little short on you."

Loren cracked a yawn, "Ash, don't worry about it." Loren assured, "Anything is fine and you have done more than enough." Then a worried look came over their face. "Is it safe with the house-"
Aster inwardly chucked, as she noticed the house feeling insulted. "It's perfectly safe; the house won't mess with you unless you trying to hurt me."

Loren shuddered and wrapped their arms around themselves. "O-okay?"

"Are you sure going to be fine?"

Loren sighed. "Yeah, I just want to go to sleep."

Aster muttered, "Agreed." She turned to walk across the hall back to her room, hearing another bark and the jingle of his dog tags as Sirius got off of the bed and followed Aster. Aster gathered an old faded Weird Sisters t-shirt and a pair of tartan pyjama bottoms.

She headed back to Loren's room and dropped them off with her friend, before finally heading to her bed for the night. Aster fell head first onto her wrought iron bed. She felt a heavy weight drop on the bed beside her and huff.

"I'm completely knackered." she said, muffled into the pillow.

Sirius barked as if in agreement, and Aster turned to absently pet the dog. "I just want to go to sleep." Aster groaned, but she knew she would be miserable in the morning if she just slept in her clothes, besides she needed to open her window. Aster pried her body off the bed and walked over the window. It had been a few days since Aster had seen her owl that was busy sending a letter to her friends Ron and Hermione back home. It would be just her luck that the cankerous owl would arrive in the middle of the night.

Better to be prepared, then get a hard nip in the morning to the ear in the morning. Aster opened the window, then went to the wardrobe and quickly changed into her snitch pyjamas. With a relieved sigh, Aster finally slipped into bed, Sirius taking his customary spot at the end of the bed on top of Aster's feet -- pinning her to the bed. "Can you turn off the lights?" Aster asked the house, too tired to even consider using magic to do it. The lights turned off and Aster laid on her pillow, closed her eyes, and fell into an exhausted sleep.

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**Soundtrack:** Mad World by Jasmine Thompson

Aster was standing back in Loren's apartment. Unlike before the place was completely empty, and her bare feet were freezing as she walked over the cold wood floor.

"Loren?" Aster called, but they didn't answer. Aster's voice echoed eerily off the blank walls. She checked the empty kitchen, and then down the hallway. Aster walked forever; the hallway seemed to expand not like a rubber band being yanked.

Aster called out for Loren over and over again, there was never an answer. The walls closed in around her, and she ran hoping to find a way out of the hallway and out of the apartment. Her heart was pounding in her chest, breaths coming out in short laboured breaths as she continued to run, run, and run some more.

It seemed like it took an eternity for Aster to finally escape the hallway. She froze as she was once again back in the centre of the living room. However, there was one big difference. Where there had been once empty space was now Loren's rigid body lying in a pool of blood that seemed to grow larger by the second.
Aster gasped, her hand flying to cover her mouth. Bile rising in her throat, she found herself running looking into the empty grey eyes. "No," Aster sobbed, "Oh Merlin, not you too."

The blood soaked into her pyjamas, oozing between her toes, but she didn't care. Her body shuddered, as she clutched her friend to her chest and sobbed.

"You cannot help them," Aster heard a familiar sibilant voice making feel as if she had a vice squeezing her heart. She looked up to see Voldemort standing there in his dark robes, his wand pointing directly at her. "And you can't even save yourself." He smirked down at her, "Avada Kedavra." Aster's world exploded into a flash of poisonous green.

Chapter End Notes

Please kudos and leave a comment. The next chapter will be dropping on October 20th. I see you guys then!
Forces Collide

Chapter Summary

Previously on Playing Hero
Aster gasped, her hand flying to cover her mouth. Bile rising in her throat, she found herself running looking into the empty grey eyes. "No," Aster sobbed, "Oh Merlin, not you too."

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Chapter Notes

Hey guys, this is the third time I tried writing this damn Author's note because ao3 keeps fucking up. It's getting aggravating. I want to thank everyone who commented and left a comment. Every kudos, new subscriber, and bookmark is the highlight of my days and keeps me going. I especially want to thank Bally for keeping me real and being my cheerleader.

This is a chapter that I have been waiting with baited breath to share with you and I'm just so happy the time has finally come. Also, they are NO CLIFFHANGERS in this chapter so you guys should be happy.

If you want extras, as always please head on over to the Amalgamation tumblr blog. I just posted a few more things up including some mock blog posts that were mentioned in this chapter.

One last thing: I need a brit picker. My old one disappeared on me, and so I need someone to whip my Americanisms into shape. You can contact me on tumblr via ask or PM or at my email address amalgamationfic@gmail.com.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Soundtrack: Pick Yourself Up –Julianne Wright
Aster woke up with a start, her wand instinctively in her hand. Sweat is sticking to her body, her breath coming out in short breaths, her eyes darted around the room, travelling across her bedroom doors, and the windows as at the same time the lights automatically turned on. Aster could distantly feel the houses' worry for her in the back of her mind. Sirius was sitting up in bed, whining but knowing with long experience not to come near when she was in this state. Aster closed her eyes and rocked back and forth.

'Loren was alive and sleeping in the room across the hall from her. Voldemort was dead long dead, with no way to return with all of the Horcruxes destroyed.'

Those thoughts circled around and around in her head as she tried to get her tumultuous feelings under control. If Aster had to whip away a few tears, then lucky for her it was only the house and Sirius to witness it. Aster sniffled and sighed. She should have known after everything that happened last night that this would would get nightmares.

Aster was no stranger to nightmares, although this had been the worst nightmare she had since moved to Gotham. Unfortunately for her, Aster's fucked up psyche decided to add Voldemort to this mess. Aster shuttered before she finally stood up and walked out of her room. She crept quietly towards Loren's room across the hall, or as quietly as one could be with a 45kg dog on her heels.

Aster cracked opened the door, and at first, she couldn't see anything so she cast a faint 'Lumos' spell, but Aster practically sagged in relief as she saw that her friend was indeed sleeping their bed. Aster just stood there in the doorway for a long time watching as Loren's breathe rise and fall in an oddly reassuring pattern.

Aster finally sighed, cancelled the spell, and closed the door. She cast a 'Tempus' spell and realised that it was just a bit over six am. Aster knew she wasn't going to be able to get back to sleep. She patted Sirius on the head who had to wait patiently beside her, his tail wagging slowly and methodically like a metronome.

Aster sighed and walked down the stairs.

She fixed Sirius breakfast. He barked in thanks, and as usual dove into his food head first. Aster chuckled, with the help of magic it took no time to make tea. The cabinet opened and her favourite Chudley Cannons cup floated out and over to Aster. She patted the wall, in thanks to the house.

Aster inundated with the house's sudden good mood which in combination with some of the tea from Mrs. Weasley's last care package; bolstered her own feelings. She thought about eating, but it made her feel ill just contemplating it. Aster groaned, carrying her mug in one hand, walked over to the lounge to pull her iPad off its charger.

Aster sat on the couch, and decided to look at her favourite Wizarding blog, 'Magic Mirror'. It was the Wizarding equivalent of the Huffington Post. Her old Yule ball partner and her former housemate's twin brother Jashun Patil was Editor and Chief of the small news blog and did not put up with any of the nonsense that the 'Daily Prophet' does. It was one of the new sources that Aster actually read these days.

There was a post about how The Ministry of Magic in England was talking about officially establishing technomagic as a course of study at Hogwarts. She shook her head, before taking another sip of her tea. After the war, a lot of Muggle-borns and half-blooms recognised that it was quite ridiculous how technological backward the Wizarding World was. If their world was to survive in this new age, they would all have to adapt. Despite their vehement arguments against any type of modernization, it was very clear that the purebloods and the old families’ method of total separation wasn’t going to work forever.
As muggle science and technologically advanced, it was only a matter of time when they no longer could hide.

It was five years ago when a Turkish potion master developed a potion that when applied to muggle tech would keep it from overloading in the presence of magic. Aster shook her head, "Snape would be proud." Thinking back at her former Professor and the speech he gave in her first year: bottle fame and glory indeed.

Then Aster clicked on the article as she clicked on the Quidditch game between The New York Newts and The Boston Bangers. She interrupted reading about the fight that broke out between rival fans during the game when Sirius barked and jumped on her.

"So you ready to go outside, Siri?"

Aster was answered by another bark and a lick to the face. She put down her now empty mug, shoved the tablet under her arm, and stood up to the French doors that used to go out into what had been a parking lot but was now a gated garden. Aster chuckled as Sirius excitedly ran passed her and out of into the yard.

Aster shook her head fondly, as the huge black dog barked happily as he ran across the yard. She stood for a moment revealing in the cool spring breeze as she gazed at the pink and orange hues of the sun as it rose over Gotham's skyline. Standing there in her garden, for that brief instant, Aster's nightmares and all of her worries about Loren and the Falcones seemed a million miles away. She shook her head and padded over to a lawn chair and tables set under a wide umbrella. Aster took out of her tablet and started to read again when abruptly there was a screech.

Aster rolled her eyes, and just gave up trying to read. With a wave of her wand, she banished the tablet back to the charging station just barn owl swooped out of the air, the rays of the rising sun glinting off its tawny feathers as it dropped an envelope on her lap before perching on the back of her chair.

"Thanks, Archimedes."

The owl hooted, then turned its heart-shaped face and nipped her hard on the ear. "Ouch!"

Aster rubbed her sore ear, picked up the letter, stood up, and flicked her wand. "Accio, owl treats."

A moment later, a bag flew out of the door, and into her outstretched hand. Aster poured a good portion of the treats on the table and conjured a bowl of water. The owl hooted again and flew to the table. His beak in the air, as he sniffed disdainfully at Aster, then swerved his head and looked down at the treats as if to say: "This food just barely meets my standards." Even though those owl treats were imported from a luxury brand in France because the damned bird refused to eat anything else.

"Um, did you steal a bird from the zoo?" asked a voice.

Startled, Aster turned to see Loren standing sleepily in the doorway. "No, I adopted that wretched creature square and fair." The owl hooted, its black beady eyes glittering dangerously at her.

Aster sighed and rolled her eyes before she turned to look at her friend.

"How are you feeling?" Aster asked. "Did you sleep well?"

"I'm okay." Loren shrugged.

"So how about some about some breakfast?"
As if on cue, Loren's stomach growled, and then they blushed.

Aster chuckled, "I will take that as a yes, then."

Loren rubbed the back of her head, their blonde hair sticking up all over the place. They gazed back at the two animals. "Will they be okay out here by themselves?" Sirius who stopped running and had excitedly come over to the table. The dog's front paws were balanced on the table as it leaned over to nuzzle the bird.

Aster smirked, as Loren's eyebrows rose as the owl didn't peck the dog's eyes out for its impertinence. Archimedes just stood still and took the adoration as his due glaring at both Loren and Aster as if to silently say, "Say anything and I will cut you"

"Come on," Aster said, as she walked back in the house "Let's get some food into you. Today is probably going to be a long day."

Soundtrack: Unraveling (Interlude) – Evanescence

It took no time at all for Aster to fix breakfast and making Loren a cup of coffee and Aster her second cup of tea of the day. They hurried up to get ready for the day. Aster decided to keep it simple for both of them and picked out jeans and t-shirts for the both of them. Aster with her black Harpies t-shirt and Loren wearing a slightly oversized Gryffindor one. They both took showers and said goodbye to Sirius and Archimedes who was snoozing outside in the garden.

Once again, they caught a cab. Aster wanted to apparate, of course, normally it was the quickest and safest way to travel. However, with Loren still recovering from their injuries and with them being a muggle Aster was reluctant to try apparating them to their flat. Splinching her friend would not be helpful to Loren's overall recovery.

A second option would have been of course a Portkey, but legally that means going to the MACUSA and she was already lucky that they weren't sticking their big fat noses in this situation.

With apparition and portkeys out, they took a cab back down to the Narrows. Once again, the car ride was silent and tense; any attempt on the driver’s part to start any small talked died quickly. With the heavy morning traffic, it took them almost hour until they finally pulled up in front of Loren's block of flats.

Aster had to pay the driver a ridiculous amount of money to stay put, with promise for twice his fair if he waited for half an hour while they both gathered Loren's things. They both quickly headed inside, glaring at the broken lift, she cast a cushioning spell on both of their shoes. With a long put-upon sigh, Loren leads the way and climbed up the extremely long flight of stairs. The trip seemed to take forever, but they made it to Loren's flat.

The inside of the flat was in complete disarray like a mini tornado went through it. Furniture was either broken or turn over. Lori's favourite Salvador Dali prints which they Loren had painstakingly collected was laying torn on the floor in cracked or broken frames. Books and clothes were thrown all over the floor and Gio's prized massive collection of DVD's were scattered all over the place which would have made him insane if he wasn't dead.

Aster shook her head, "Where do you want me to start?"

Loren shuttered, "Let's start with my clothes."

They both split packing up things into a few duffle bags. Loren disappeared into the bathroom and
Aster was almost finished and she threw a thoughtful glance at the broken picture frames on the floor. Aster bent down and picked one up and it was of Loren and Gio. She dumped out the glass and looked at

They looked so happy and at that moment it was almost like nothing could touch them. Aster looked over to the mess of the flat and shook her head and stuffed the photo in the bag. She was just zipping it up when the door to the bathroom opened and they were carrying a duffel bag and a satchel that was looped over their neck.

Aster hurried to take the bag from them, "Your ribs are still healing, remember?"

"Thanks." Loren nodded. "We better get going."

Aster picked up the other bag and tried not to wince under the heavyweight. Loren didn't look back as they hurried out of the flat.

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**Soundtrack:** *The Great Escape – We Are Scientists*

"Loren?"

Loren paused in the middle of opening the door. "Do you want to me take that as well?" Aster asked gesturing to Loren's sachet. Loren looked away, clutching it to their chest. "N..N..No that's okay."

Without another word, Loren slid into the cab and Aster shrugged and opened the boot. Aster threw in the two bags, she gazed around the street, worried if they were being watched. Thankfully, no one on the street seemed to be paying attention.

"Aster," Loren called from inside the cab.

Aster gave a relieved sigh and hurried to the other side of the cab and slide in. The door barely closed before the cab started and pulled away from the curb. They sped out of the Narrows, Aster eyes darted from window to window.

If Aster thought the trip to the Narrows earlier was nerve-wracking, it had nothing on how she felt right then. Aster felt like she was almost going to jump out of her skin as her eyes scanned traffic. Every stop, every honk of a horn, had Aster tensing in her seat, fingers reaching for her wand. Loren was little better, teeth biting at their lip, gripping the satchel for dear life.

Aster wondered briefly what was in it that was so precious. A memento of a happy memory with Gio, perhaps? Aster shook her head and went back to scanning the traffic. She inwardly chastised herself. This was no time to get distracted. Finally, Aster saw a sign for the bus station ahead.

"We're almost there," Loren murmured to themselves.

A car smashed hard into them HARD, making both of them slam headfirst into the front seat. Loren screamed, and Aster looked just in time to get an impression of a group of men in a huge black SUV before it accelerates and slam into them again.

"The fuck?" shouted the driver.

Aster instinctively ducked, as a shower of bullets rain down on them. Aster cast a quick 'Protego' spell around both of them, the bullets exploding as it hit the invisible barrier.

"Aster!"
Aster snapped her head as Loren showed the satchel at them. "Take it!"

"What?" Aster said as she couldn't hear in a hail of gunfire.

"Take it!" Loren screamed, shoving the satchel in Aster's arms before just then the car was swivelling, tires screeching on asphalt before the car FLIPPED, and they all went rolling inside the cab, not unlike clothing in a dryer. They rolled once, twice, three, times before they came to a screeching halt.

Aster and Loren fell on to the ground with a loud painful THUD. She groaned, satchel still clutched in her hands but her wand was nowhere to be seen. Aster looked over to Loren was lying unconscious next to her for the second time in the last few days. She checked their pulse and sighed in relief. 'Thank Merlin!'

Aster turned to see the driver slumped across his wheel. She crawled over to the driver's seat, feeling every one of her injuries as she did. With shaky hands, Aster checked the man's pulse.

The driver was dead.

Aster closed her eyes, her eyes stinging with unshed tears. This was her fault, she should have spotted the Falcones. She was a powerful witch and yet with all of her power, another person was dead because of her.

Aster angrily wiped away her tears. She didn't have to sink into self-pity. Aster needed to get out, needed to get away from the Falcones, and get medical attention for her friend. She tried to wandlessly summon her wand to her, but she couldn't focus. All she could feel something dark and ugly creeping into her mind.

Aster cursed underneath her breath, she would have to do this the old fashion way. She threw the strap of the satchel over her head, and with as much strength as she could muster, Aster kicked the remaining glass out of the window. When she had removed as much glass as possible, she grabbed Loren's arms and pulled their friend across the cab's floor.

Aster took a deep breath and wiggled through cab window. She bit back a scream as glass bit into her skip; scrapping over her injuries. She managed to get her legs in first, then with her last of strength pushed her head and torso through the window.

Aster turned to pull Loren through the window when a hard foot connected to her ribcage sending her flying through the air to collide with a black SUV. Exhausted, pain throbbing her entire body, Aster could only stand there as a rotund man with dirty blonde slick hair smirked down at her. The man's hazel blues lit with malicious glee that reminded her a little too much of Dudley.

He turned and to the beefy goons that stood around him in a semi-circle. "Bring the bitch to me alive."

The goons scrambled to follow his order. There was a crash of something hitting the glass and then something being dragged. A now awake and struggling Loren out of the car.

"You got some nerve trying to cut and run, Lo," He smirked.

"Johnny," Loren gasped, looking as they have seen a ghost.

Aster remembered Loren mentioning a Johnny. Johnny Villa? Johnny Viti, Carmine Falcone's nephew. Great! The Potter luck stuck again and now they are captured by an extra from the Sopranos.
"Especially after your boy tried to rat us out to the cops."

"Johnny listen," Loren pleaded, "It's me that you want. Just let my friend go!"

Johnny turned and looked Aster up and down. Aster wanted to shutter in revulsion but she wasn't going to give this bastard the satisfaction. "What a pretty thing."

He grabbed Aster by her long hair and yanked her head painfully back. "It would be ashamed too for me to blow her pretty head off just like I did Giovany."

"No!" Loren struggled harder against her captors. Then they slumped in defeat, "I-I'll give you the notebook! Just please don't hurt her!" They pointed shakily to the satchel around her neck. "It's in there."

"Give it to me." Johnny cocked the gun as Aster hurriedly took off the satchel. "Slowly."

Aster started to slowly hand over the satchel, quick as a flash she pivoted her head. The gun went off with a bang, barely missing her head. Aster grabbed the gun with one hand, and twisting his hand and jerking the gun out of his hand. At the same, her knee jerked up into groin with vicious satisfaction.

He fell to the floor, cradling his groin. "Kill both of them!" He snarled. Suddenly six guns were trained on Aster, but she didn't move, as she pointed Johnny Viti's own gun steadily at his head.

"I think that's more than enough!" Aster said, sweetly through gritted teeth. "Now you all be a dear, and release my friend there."

________________________

**Soundtrack:** [Reckless by Jaxon Gamble](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Reckless)

They stood there in a tableau, no one moving an inch, fear of striking the match that will surely roar into a firestorm. The street was eerily quiet, and the weight of the gun was heavy in her hand.

Aster was so damn grateful in hindsight that Mad-Eye Moody had forced mandatory gun training for Auror trainees. Adrenaline pumping in her veins, blood roaring in her ears she wasn't seeing any possible good ending for this standoff.

Then a grey and black form dropped into the middle of the fight and everything went promptly went to hell. The form was a whirl of movement, legs and arms kicking out disabling goon one by one. Then Aster shouted as she was being slammed hard on to the ground with a thud.

Aster didn't in have time to even grunt in pain before a pair of meaty hands was around her throat.

"I was going to kill you quickly," Johnny Viti snarled down at her. "But now I take my time with you, bitch!"

Aster gasped usefully air as Johnny's arms tightened like a vice around her throat, as she uselessly gasped for air. Panic flooded her for a moment, before once again her training kicked in. Aster gripped Johnny's up arm with her right hand, and bucked her hips up and with the momentum was able to flip him off of her. Johnny grunted, as she rolled on her knees in front of him and struck the bigger man again in his groin. She didn't wait for him to recover this time and knocked him out with a punch to his temple.

Aster spotted something shiny out of the corner of her eye and she quickly ducked. The witch cursed, as she felt white hot pain in her shoulder. Aster ignored the pain, grabbed Johnny's gun and
aimed and shot the gun.

The man went down, but there was still bullets flying at her. Still bending down, she darted as fast as she could behind the car. Aster caught her breath, checked the clip, and she swore underneath her breath. She didn't have much ammo left, and Aster cursed under her breath because her wand would super helpful right now. Aster's shoulder was throbbing, and she had no idea where Loren was. She needed to end this as quickly as bloody possible.

Aster crept to the side of the mangled lump of metal that had once been the cab and peered around it. But Aster ducked away as another hail of bullets rain down on her. There was nothing for it, Aster was pinned with limited ammo with no way out.

Then there was a loud BAM, next to a THUD, and then there was a man flying over the car to land right in front of her in an unconscious heap.

Aster saw movement in the corner of her eye and she swung her gun to aim at the most peculiar thing she had ever seen, and as a witch, that was saying something. The thing or rather the MAN was covered in light Gray armour with black patches on the side. He loomed over Aster, it's very aura was menacing and spoke of repressed violence. His head was covered with a helmet type thing with pointed ears and holes for the eyes (which was pure white) and although Aster was pretty much sure she was hallucinating at this point the part where the mouth is was quirked at the edges into a possible smirk. Yet, the expression disappeared way too quickly for Aster to be sure.

"Fuck me," Aster swore. "It's Batman."

"Aster!"

Aster turned to see Loren running towards her and into her arms. "Oh my god, you are okay." Aster winced, adrenaline fading enough to feel the gunshot, and every cut, bruise, and scrape on her body.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine!" Aster lied.

She frowned as then spotted the notebook, "Merlin's beard! You got the notebook."

"You will never be safe." Batman said, his voice was deep, low, and more growl than not. "You can't run from this."

Aster jumped, incredulously realizing that she forgot about Batman's presence he had been so silent.

Aster shook her head, and suddenly feeling annoyed at what Batman just said. "Then what do you expect us to do,"

Loren threw frighten gazes from Aster to Batman.

He cocked his head and studied them both not like bugs under a microscope. "Go to the police."

Loren snorted, and we both looked at them. "They won't help us."

"Gordon will.", Batman replied.

There was the sound of sirens, and they both turned to see flashing red lights in the distance.

"How can Gordon help--" Aster started to say as she turned around, but Batman was gone.
Aster swore under her breath.

"Ash, what do we now?"

Aster threw the gun away and stumbled on to her feet. "We greet the coppers and hope for the best."

Chapter End Notes

Please, kudos and comment! Again, they really keep me going. The next chapter will be dropping on November 3rd! I wish everyone a very happy and safe Halloween and I'll see you, folks, next time.
"Gordon will," Batman replied.

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"How can Gordon help--" Aster started to say as she turned around, but Batman was gone.

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"Ash, what do we now?"

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Hey guys, I hope you had a wonderful Halloween. This chapter I wasn't as prepared as I thought I was. I thought that I lost the previous beta'd draft. So my wonderful beta Batty once again went over the call of duty and did a very much late minute beta hours before this was supposed to be posted. Thank you, thank you, thank you! Speaking of thank yous, I want to thank all of my readers who left wonderful comments, bookmarked, and subscribed. If you weren't for you guys, this story would have never reached a 100 kudos. It was the best birthday present to see that in my stats.

Right now, I'm also in the initial stages of outlining the second story in this series. I also decided that I will be posting a ficlet in between this story and its sequel. Although, I will be taking a few months hiatus to rest and recharge after I'm done with this story. Speaking of this story, you will see I updated how many chapters. It will be 9 chapters in total plus epilogue.

One last thing, I want to warn you guys there is a really derogatory term for a police officer in this chapter. So if that may offend you, then please just give this chapter a pass.
Aster woke up many times, with many voices, some familiar, but most not; yet there was a constant nagging beating that intruded into her sleep. It was hard staying awake, it felt like being back in fourth year with the second task of the Triwizard tournament. Trying to desperately to break the surface of the Black Lake but being held down by mermaids who wanted to drag you down to the depths and keep you there.

Finally, finally, after what felt like an eternity, Aster was able to stay awake for more than a few minutes. She felt disconnected from her body, not a bit, unlike the occasional diaspora she experienced from time to time.

Aster twitched, and then slowly managed to open her eyes. She snapped her eyes shut again and groaned.

"Aster?"

Aster tried to turn her head away from the loud noise and groaned again.

"Aster?" the voice asked much quieter.

Aster opened to speak, but only came is a garbled mess. Her tongue smacking against her dry mouth. Aster tried again, slowly pushing the word, "L...l...lights" out of her mouth.

"It's too bright?"

Aster managed to nod, and under her lids, the bright light flicked off.

"I'm going to call the nurse, okay?"

So, Aster was in a hospital. She should have figured that out but it was hard to think. Aster felt like her brain was wrapped in cotton; everything was mushy and disjointed. She felt surprised that she was panicking, but Aster couldn't really drum up to feel anything but floaty numbness. 'I must be high as a kite'. In the end, Aster didn't say anything, just nodded again.

There was a sound of footsteps walking away and then time seemed to speed up and the next thing there she knew they were hands all over the body. A distant part of her brain was trying to say that this was wrong, but all Aster could do was lay there and take it.

"Her vitals are good and she's is recovering well from surgery," The nurse said. "But she is going to loopy for a while until we gradually wean her off of the harder drugs."

"In the whole drama, I forgot to ask if the painkillers interact badly with her Hormone drugs?"

"No, but we are monitoring her for any changes--"

The rest of the conversation faded out and she slipped out of conscious. Aster woke again with a jerk, panic welling up inside of her. 'Where am I?' This time it was somewhat easier to open her eyes and now she was a bit more lucid. The room was dark, except for a small light in the corner, Aster heard the steady beats that in the background speed up, as she arched up, her body meeting something soft.

"Aster," She went rigid as Aster recognised the familiar voice. "Loren?"
"What?" Aster asked, but then as the room came into focus. 'Oh, right I'm in the hospital.' All the tension left her body and she slumped back on to what Aster realised was a bed.

'You were shot,' Loren explained. "And you had some cuts and bruises from the accident."

Aster blinked, looking down at her bandaged shoulder. She remembered taking Loren to the bus station, the cab crashing, Johnny Viti, a fight, a possibly a firefight, and her eyes went wide as she remembered the man dressed in Gray armour She tried to say something yet again but it was a mangled mess.

"Let me get you some water."

Loren rushed around the bed to the nightstand where a picture and a cup stood. They poured the water into a cup and put a straw up to Aster's lips.

"Sip slowly".

Aster nodded and took a few sips of water. "Thanks."

Loren nodded and returned the picture.

"So Batman saved us," Aster asked.

"Yep, and he is much scarier than he is on TV. " Loren replied, shivering obviously at the thought of the caped crusader.

"Huh, I reckoned that I have seen scarier." Aster shrugged and winced at the sharp pain.

"Painkillers wore off?"

"Let me summon the nurse."

Aster just nodded wearily. Loren pushed the call button and it felt like an eternity until the nurse walked through the door.

"Well, look who is in the land of the living." the nurse annoyingly chipper.

Aster said nothing but gritted her teeth, as the nurse skimmed through her chart and checked her out. However, finally, the nurse adjusted the IV and Aster slumped as the painkillers flooded her system.

"Much better," Aster moaned.

Aster pretty much tuned out the rest of what the nurse was saying as basked at the pain fading away. However, she was startled out of her stupor when there was a knock at the door.

Loren stood rigidly, "The nurse just left."

Aster felt for her wand underneath her pillow, but her eyes went wide when she found nothing. Then she remembered: 'I lost my wand in the accident.'

"Bollocks!"

Fortunately, before Aster could really panic an oddly familiar older man in a tan trench coat entered the room. He was tall, with faded ginger hair with streaks of grey and an average built.

"Who are you?"
The man came to stop in front of her bed, laugh lines prominent, but the way his intense blue eyes stared at Aster then Loren was similar to what Aster could remember of Batman's stare—penetrating as he could see into your very soul.

Aster shivered, as she remembered those eerie white eyes.

"I'm Commissioner Gordon," He took out his badge. "From the GCPD."

"They won't help us."

"Gordon will."


"Excuse me," Gordon blinked, non-pulsed.

"Batman told you," Aster clenched

Gordon nodded. "Yes, but he didn't need to tell us much. The cell phone footage and the presence of Falcone and his goons told us the rest."

"We didn't need your help," Loren sneered, crossing their arms.

"Well, that clusterfuck downtown tells me otherwise," Gordon replied, calm. "Let me help you."

Aster fingers twitched longed desperately for her wand and five minutes alone with that costumed wanker so she can fulfil his wishes of being a bat.

Loren snorted, "Like you helped, Gio? Gio, wouldn't be dead if wasn't for the police--"

"Loren," Aster snapped.

"Look, Mx. Marbury and Ms Potter I know you have some reservations about cooperating with the police," Gordon started, putting up his hands. "But you can't do this by yourself or you're going to get killed."

Aster rubbed her head, "I don't know what Batman has told you--"

"He told me enough," Gordon stared down at her, raising an eyebrow. "Enough to tell me that Johnny Viti has a bounty on both of your heads now. I'm going to level with you here and admit that there was a leak in the department. I'm doing the best to find the perpetrators."

Loren snorted, and Aster threw them a glare. They huffed, and rolled their eyes but stayed mercifully silent.

"The Falcone Family has had this city in their grip for a long time and this is the only chance to take them down once and for all."

Aster exchanged a look with Loren, and they vehemently shook their head. She turned to look back at Gordon, "It's no secret that Falcones have police on their payroll. How can we trust that what happened to Gio won't happen to us?"

Gordon sighed, "Honestly, there is nothing that will magically reassure you that working with us is your best shot of getting your life back and getting justice for Giovany." He threw a calculating look at Loren, before turning back to stare at Aster. He probably figured that Aster was the more reasonable one here. "Let's be real here, you two have no chance against Johnny Viti and the rest of
his family." He shook his head. "I get it, I do. You're ex-MI5 and you think just because you took
down some terrorists back home that you can take whatever Gotham can throw at you. " He rubbed
the back of his head, "To tell you the truth, I felt the same after I got out of the Marines. But
Gotham? Gotham is a totally different animal and frankly, you don't have any idea what you are
dealing with. Another incident like that clusterfuck downtown and not only will you get yourself and
your friend here--" He nodded to Loren was watching them both angrily. "---killed, you will
probably take a bystander down with you.

Aster inwardly winced. When Aster left England she didn't see it necessary to bury her past as an
Auror and one of the last missions she had taken was as part of a joint task force with MI5 to take
down a cell of half-blood terrorists. Aster was surprised that she still was listed as a former agent. She
shook her head and turned to frown at her Loren.

This should be Loren making the decision, but if she left it up to Loren she would tell the
Commissioner to bugger off and Aster wasn't so sure anymore that was the right thing to do. Her
inner Gryffindor rebelled at the thought of just surrendering and trusting this man to keep both Loren
and her safe. Yet, again Aster had matured enough to see the sound logic of what Gordon was
saying. As much as it galled her admit that without Batman's interference earlier, Loren, Aster, and
possibly some innocent civilian would be dead.

And just like the cabbie’s death, it would be her fault.

'I would have more blood on my hand.'

"Let me help you," Gordon pleaded, eyes darting between Aster and Loren. "I will put my most
trusted people to protect 24/7 if you give us the notebook and testify at Carmine Falconer's trial.
Then we will help you disappear so no one finds you."

Aster turned to Loren who was still just staring balefully at the Commissioner. She sighed
exasperatedly and looked at Gordon. "Can you give a few minutes?"

"Sure," Gordon nodded. "I needed to make a call anyway."

Gordon turned and walked out of the room leaving them alone.

"You going to just make turn myself over to him?" Loren bitterly shook their head. "Figures that pigs
would stick together."

Aster had to admit that stung. Loren had always had a problem with the police. As much as Loren
was her best friend, she had felt reluctant to ever tell them that she had ever been in Law
Enforcement. It not only hurt Aster that Loren would just lump her in with the GCPD but now it also
pissed her off that Loren would call into the question Aster's loyalty after everything she had given
up to protect them.

"You know it isn't about that," Aster gritted her teeth, and just barely refrained from shouting. She
took a deep breath and tried to not let her fraying temper make her say something that she would later
regret. "Gordon is right, I couldn't protect you and you and god know how many others were almost
killed!

I may be annoyed that Batman took the decision out of our hands, but if he hadn't shown up both of
us and god knows how many others would have died. And now, I'm a liability with me being injured
and with my wand being Merlin knows where." So unless you want to become a hermit and stay at
my house for the rest of your life, I. Can't. Protect. You!".
"I can leave," Loren snapped.

"We tried that and look where that got us." Aster gestured to the hospital room. "Besides there is no way out of this for me anymore. You heard what Gordon said, ‘Falcone has a bounty on my head now too.' I'm in it whenever you like it or not."

"You can leave. Hell, you are probably just as rich as Bruce Fucking Wayne." Lore said, throwing up their hands. "You can live in any other place in the world."

Aster sighed and raked a hand through her hair which was more of a mess than usual. How to explain that there was a reason why she had settled in Gotham despite all of her friend's arguments against it?

Gotham was a no man's land for magical people. No one knew why, but the whole place had been a Bogeyman of sorts for magical people since before the Dutch settlers came to this land. Hell, the Indigenous tribes refused to even settle on the land because the land was thought to be cursed.

And for the Girl-Who-Lived this was the one place that she could be herself without paparazzi following her everywhere she went. Where Aster could live a relatively normal life and not have to live up to the heavy expectations the Wizarding world heaped on her shoulders since she was one year old. There was no other place she could go and besides she was tired of running and like or not Gotham was her home now.

In the end, all Aster could do was shake her head and say: "I--I can't leave."

Loren narrowed their eyes and looked down at Aster. She looked away, fidgeting with the end of her bed sheets. Aster wouldn’t couldn’t open that can of worms.

"Fine, " Loren said, crossing their arms. "Well, do it your way. But don't say I didn't tell you so."

Exhausted, Aster slumped back against her bed. "Fine, you reserve the right to say I told you."

Loren nodded, and with another huff, she stormed out of the room. And Aster prayed that her Potter luck wouldn't make this all backfire on them in the end.

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Soundtrack: Short Change Hero - The Heavy

With great reluctance, Loren finally handed the notebook over to a Gordon. He was practically gleeful as he excitedly flipped through the pages of information Gio had literally died for. Aster watched all of this tiredly from her hospital bed.

"Names, numbers, the whole enchilada," Gordon muttered to himself.

Aster closed her eyes, exhaustion and the pain medication nipping at her. She shook her head and forced herself to open her eyes. "Is it enough?"

Gordon looked up from the notebook, and nodded: "Yes, this could certainly put the entire family away."

Loren sighed in relief, "I gave you the notebook. Now what?"

He slammed closed the notebook and straightened up, "You are to have round the clock protection
and then once you are released we are going to relocate both off to a safe house.

Aster straightened up, "Absolutely not!"

"Ms. Potter, I understand your concern but this is the safest option for both of you."

Aster thought about the house, Sirius, and Archimedes being alone for god knows long. She, of course, could put them both in a kennel, but Aster was quite afraid of what the House and Archimedes would both do to her if she did. And if she left her beloved familiars in the house's care she was sure that they would be eating Jelly babies every day. Not to mention, all of Aster’s medication was there, and she was pretty sure that she due for another Hormone patch.

Unfortunately, no matter she would prefer to stay at the house, she couldn't allow a bunch of muggles staying there. The wards would chew them up and spit them out and she had already pushed her luck by telling Loren everything she had. Aster didn't really want to know what MACUSA would do to her if she exposed to explain magic to a bunch of muggle coppers.

And speaking of unnecessary reveals, Aster turned to throw a significant look at Loren. "You are going to have to pack up my meds as well." Loren instantly understood and nodded.

"We can surely get some guys to get it for you--" Gordon started.

Aster vehemently shook her head, "No! it's Loren or nothing."

Gordon pursed his lips and sighed, "Fine, but you're not going alone."

"Okay," Aster agreed, "but only Loren is allowed inside my house."

Gordon crossed his arms and lifted an eyebrow, "Got something to hide?"

"No," Aster lied, rolling her eyes. "I'm just very fond of my privacy."

Gordon started suspiciously at her, but in the end, just shook his head. "Fine, you might as well be introduced to the people who will be in charge of your protection detail." Gordon opened the door and waved. To her utter horror, Detective Renee Montoya and Deactivate Harnell walked inside the room. Aster shot up in bed, then groaned as she pulled at her bandaged shoulder.

"What in the bloody hell are these two doing here?"

Gordon threw Aster a confused look, "Do you know them?"

Aster crossed her arms and glared at the two detectives.

"Yeah, actually Montoya decided to treat Loren and I like criminals instead of actually going after the arseholes that attacked them."

Gordon whipped his head to look at Montoya who just shrugged, looking stubbornly unrepentant and Harnell was blushing and looking away who reminded her suddenly of Teddy after he had been caught in the cookie jar.

Gordon ran a hand over his face and groaned. "Montoya."

"Look, I knew they weren't telling me everything." Montoya sniffed. "Besides if they would have just come clean that shit Downtown would have never happened."

Loren's mouth dropped, "So you are blaming us?"
"The evidence speaks for itself," Montoya smirked, and Loren face flushed as they took a step a forward.

"Loren, no." Aster snapped, thinking that Loren really didn't need a charge for assaulting an officer right now. Although, to be honest, Aster longed for her missing wand: 'Montoya would make a lovely toad.'

"'Enough!' thundered, Gordon."This is not helping the situation." He pinched the bridge of his nose. "Mx. Marbury, Harnell will take to Ms. Potter's place so you can pack her stuff. We recovered your bags from the wreckage and miraculously they were undamaged."

Aster took a deep breath and pasted on a smile. "Thank you."

"Montoya," Gordon ordered, he handed over a sheet of paper. "This who I want on guard detail until the trial, tell them only what they need to know."

Montoya scanned the list. "10 guards? Don't you think this is a little excessive, sir?"

"This is the Falcons and I'm not taking any chances."

"But do we need her?" Montoya nodded to Aster who rolled her eyes. "She doesn't know anything."

Gordon smirked, "I don't think Mx. Marbury will go without their saviour."

Loren stubbornly glared at all of them, "You got that right."

"Fine," Montoya huffed. "But I still say this is a mistake." Paper in hand, Montoya spun on her heel and stormed out of the room.

Gordon sighed, "This going to be a long couple of weeks."

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Soundtrack: Deep End - Ruelle

After the others left, it didn't take much for Aster to fall back into an exhausted sleep. Honestly, it was only by her pure stubbornness that Aster had stayed awake as long as she had. Aster slept the rest of the day of the way, and it was in the middle the night when she woke again. The room was quiet, except for the noise coming from the machines around her. It was dark, and the rays of the neon lights of the city shining through the open window.

Even with the drugs, Aster feels someone's gazing boring into her. She reached for her wand, but then Aster remembered. Her wand was gone, and she had felt as vulnerable as she did now. In desperation, Aster tried to again wandlessly call for her wand but all she could feel was a mental pull to that dark presence. Aster shivered, and her eyes darted in the gloom of the room for a possible weapon.

"Don't bother,"

Aster whole body went rigid as a deep voice brushed over her. A voice Aster would never forget.

"Batman."

A pair of white glowing eyes appeared in the darkness then a form stepped directly into the light like a menacing gargoyle. It took a moment to calm her nerves before she finally took a deep breath and
then rolled her eyes.

"Of fucking course you to have the most dramatic entrance ever."

Batman didn't move, he just looked down at her with those fathomless eyes.

"Well, you woke me out of my sleep, Edward Cullen, so it better be worth it."

"Who are you?"

Aster groaned and slapped her forehead, "Look, if you are going to ask asinine questions then please leave and let me bloody sleep."

Batman didn't move, he just stared her down like he was intimidating her at all. And yes, he had startled her. Who wouldn't be startled with some creepy man dressed as a Bat watching her sleep? Unfortunately for Batman, Aster wasn't moved by this man's show of intimidation. Bigger and worse people have tried to cowl her, and quite frankly Batman could learn a thing or two from her old Potion's Master.

"You're weren't always Aster Potter,"

Aster rolled her eyes, "Yeah, because I'm a trans woman and I changed my name." She wiggled her fingers. "That is the great conspiracy."

Batman moved forth until he was looming over her, he was so close that Aster could feel the heat of his huge, muscular body for the first time since this encounter begun he made her both anxious and uncomfortable.

"Then when I started digging, I found something interesting?"

"And that would be?"

"Your records for one. On the surface, everything looks normal, but the more I dig the more see that a lot of your records have been falsified. Your parents died when you're one year old, you go to live with your relatives until your eleven, and then your records say you went to The Graeme School in Scotland: a very exclusive boarding school.

Turns out that the school doesn't exist, and you are one of the hundreds of students who were supposed to go there. "Just like your mother Lily. I find it strange that her records have the same irregularities as your own, Potter."

"That is quite enough," Aster snapped.

There was silence, and Aster really wanted to hex this presumptuous bastard who thought he could just dig into her life without a by you leave.

"Who are you?"

"None of your sodding business!"

"It's my business when you are risking the lives of the residents of my city."

Aster felt that pang of guilt as he reminded her of how she was to blame for what happened Downtown. She took a deep breath and sighed. "I'm sorry, I never meant for that happen. I just to help my friend."
Batman didn't say anything for a long time, he just stared down at her.

"I'm going to get the bottom of this."

Aster ruefully chuckled, "You can try, but I can guarantee you won't like what you find."

"Is that a threat?"

"No, just a friendly warning."

The door opened, and Aster snapped their head to see the nurse come in. "Are you alright, Ms. Potter? I heard you shouting."

Aster opened her mouth to explain about Batman appearance in her room, but as she turned around she realised that once again the Cape Crusader pulled another disappearing act. Aster sighed, her shoulders relaxing.

"Ms. Potter?"

"I'm fine," Aster slumped back down on to the pillow and gave a long frustrated sigh. "Everything is just brilliant."

Chapter End Notes

Please comment and/or leave a kudos! Not only do they fuel my writing, but they are also the highlight of my day. The next chapter will drop on November 17th. See you guys, then!
"Is that a threat?"

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Whew! Those two weeks went super fast. I want to thank all of you guys who have been so supportive. Every kudos, comment, bookmark, and subscription just makes me smile. I feel the love! Right now, I'm doing the final rewrites of the end and I will not spoil it but it's going to be a ride. On the Tumblr blog, I'm slowly rewriting the bios for the characters. So be sure to keep your eyes peeled on that. I also got the next two stories pretty much flesh out and I actually finished making the cover for one of them.

Before I get started with this chapter, I just want to make it clear because there has been some confusion with some readers. I am not really taking from CW, or Synder/Movieverse, and I mostly combining various DCverse (Comics, Animated Shows/Movies, and Video Games) to make my own verse. This especially pertains to the Justice League. The only faceclaim that I will be keeping from the movies is Aquaman because I love Jason Momoa and the casting for the movie.

Now, I have yammered on long enough! On with the chapter!
"What's the verdict, doc?" Aster said as the elderly man checked over her shoulder.

He didn't respond for a long moment, then the doctor nodded. "You are healing up well."

"So, I can leave?" Aster asked, hopefully.

The doctor threw her a rueful smile, "Yes, you can leave. I'm going to go ahead and discharge you."

Aster slumped against the pillow and felt excited. She had been cooped up in this tiny hospital room for days now and if Aster saw it again it would be too soon.

The doctor just patted her comfortingly on her legs and headed out of the door. Aster walked over to her go bag that Loren had dropped at the hospital before they were whisked away to parts unknown; leaving Aster alone with the coppers guarding the doors. No offence to the GCPD, but they didn't ease her jittery nerves in the slightest.

Aster crossed the room into the bathroom, figuring it would take some time for the Doctor to get the papers together. Aster indulged in a long hot shower that quiet felt like heaven. and went through the rest of her morning absolutions. Aster managed to not think about Carmine Falcone and all the obstacles that laid before. She thought about her Sirius, and Archimedes, and conversed with the House as much you could with just flashes of images and emotions. Regretfully, after a while, the bit of hot water didn't last as long as she had wanted before she finally turned off the shower. After drying and slapping on a hormone patch on her neck, Aster got dressed. She gave a silent thanks to Loren for the foresight to pack a simple button-down blouse, leggings, and a pair of flats; things that would be easier on her injured shoulder.

Finally, she stepped out of the bathroom and her smile slipped as Aster was met with a grim looking Montoya holding a wheelchair. Aster groaned and slapped her forehead. It was too much to hope that it would be Loren taking her to wherever Gordon had set up for them to stay until the trial. But yeah, in hindsight that had been stupid. Loren couldn't be seen around town. It was just too dangerous, but it had to be Montoya?

Aster groaned and threw a disdainful look at the wheelchair. "Really?"

Montoya rolled her eyes, "Just get in and stop wasting time."

Aster gritted her teeth but magnanimously held back from saying anything. With a put-upon sigh, Aster dropped into the wheelchair and placed her bag in her lap. With the last look at the hospital room, Montoya rolled Aster out of the room.

Ten minutes later, Aster and Montoya were driving down Interstate 295 headed out of town. Yet, again had to endure an awkward car drive. Honestly, she had to wonder if she was cursed to have nothing but horrid car rides for the rest of her life. Hopefully, this one wouldn't crash like the last one. Montoya was stonily silent, her fingers tapping idly on the steering wheel to Indie band on the radio Aster never heard of.

Aster's sighed and looked out of the window, watching the cars pass by. She had tried to innate small talk, but it didn't go anywhere fast. Aster had to wonder why Montoya disliked her so much? In hindsight, Aster knew that her own actions during the shootout weren't exactly stellar. Unfortunately, Aster still couldn't see how it could have been avoided.
GCPD had a reputation for a reason.

And speaking of the incident, Aster narrowed her eyes as she spotted another sedan trailing them. She has been spotting occasionally since they entered this interstate. She might be paranoid, but after what happened to the cab, Aster was not taking any chances. Keeping her eyes on the other car, she said: "We are being followed."

There was no response.

Aster turned then and Montoya's eyes were firmly on the road.

"You don't care we that we are being followed?"

Montoya finally turned to look at Aster and rolled her eyes. "Stop being a drama queen, Potter. It's your protection detail."

Aster blushed and looked away. "Sorry."

Aster didn't see it, but she could practically hear the other woman roll her eyes again. "Look, since you are making an annoyance of yourself. Let's get a couple things straight."

Aster turned around to look at her, "Really? Are we going to talk about the bloody stick up your arse?"

Montoya tightened her grip on the steering wheel, and Aster can see a hint of other women's eye ticking. "Firstly," Montoya continued like Aster didn't say anything at all. "I didn't want to be your babysitter, but since I was ordered to, we are going to have a few ground rules."

"Such as?" Aster crossed her arms.

"1) You are going to keep your head down and stay out of trouble." Montoya ticked off.

Aster raised an eyebrow but didn't say anything. It didn't sound too unreasonable.

"2) You are going to do what you are told."

Aster snorted, "Really? Let me clue you in, Montoya. I haven't obediently and mindlessly followed orders since I was eleven years old."

"You will or I'll make you regret it."

Aster is the one this time to roll her eyes. She was not intimidated by this muggle in the slightest. Her fingers twitched, and Aster longed for what seemed the thousandth time for her wand. Yet, once again it was that distracting pull to that overwhelming darkness called to her like a constant thorn in her side. She shook her head, and just barely managed to push away the temptation.

She opened her mouth to clap back at the Detective, but Aster eventually thought better of it. Since Aster couldn't hex her, it was her best bet to take a page from Montoya's book and ignore her. Aster turned back to see them getting off the exit, into where the mansions of the dotted the skyline out until finally, they were passing turrets of what was obviously a mansion that looked strangely familiar. Then she remembered that big charity gala that was on the news last year.

This was Wayne Manor.

'Figures with everything going on, Bruce Wayne continued to follow me like an unwelcome shadow.'
They drove for a little bit longer before they finally pulled up in front of a white old two-story white ranch house that sat behind a wrought iron gate. A man hurried over to the gate and swung it open. And the man waved and Montoya honked the horn as they drove up to the long drive.

Once the car finally pulled up the house, Aster quickly fled from the car, wanting to escape being in Montoya's oppressive presence for one more second. She cupped her shoulder, wincing at the pain from accidentally pulling at the wound. Aster jumped as she heard the bonnet slam down, and she turned to see Montoya caring her bag in an unanticipated act of kindness. Montoya just dropped Aster's bag next to her and walked passed her to unlock the door and then walked inside without a word.

Aster shook her head and picked up the bag with her uninjured arm and climbed the porch steps. The door swung open and Aster couldn't help but smile in relief at the vision of Loren standing in the doorway.

"Ash!"

Loren quickly crossed the distance to carefully hug Aster. "God, I'm so glad to see you!"

"Me too," Aster replied, hugging her friend back. "That week in hospital was way too long."

"Yeah, I know right?"

Aster nodded idly, thinking that it was weird that both of them had spent some time in hospital in that same month.

"Nice to see you again, Ms. Potter."

Aster turned to see Harnell standing behind Loren giving her a warm smile.

"And you, Detective Harnell."

"Since we are going to be all staying here together for the foreseeable future, you can call me Connor."

Aster smiled, "Then please call me, Aster."

Harnell walked over and took Aster's bag out of her hand waving off her protests. "It's no problem."

Aster opened her mouth to still protest, but Loren elbowed her in the side. She rolled her eyes and then turned to throw Harnell a relieved smile. "Thanks, Connor."

Aster quirked an eyebrow, and Loren rolled her eyes.

"I'll take this up to her room, and Loren, you can show her around?"

Connor turned and left, leaving them Loren and Aster alone on the porch.

Aster turned to Loren, "I thought you didn't like cops?"

Loren shook their head, I don't."

Aster just stared at Loren, and they just shrugged. "We were all cooped up for a week and him 's--"

Loren trailed for a long moment, then shrugged. "Despite him being a cop. He is surprisingly nice, you know?"
Aster nodded, just a tiny bit bitter that Connor--Harnell wasn’t the one to pick her up from the hospital. Being stuck with Montoya was difinitely cruel and unusual punishment.

"Show me around?"

The place was huge and well lived in; a place that Aster could see a family living comfortably in. They walked through a large family room. It had pale green wallpaper, two sofas with faded floral upholstery and a massive easy chair parked right in front of a flat screen tv that looked strangely out of place amongst the outdated decor.

“This is the family room."

Aster nodded, "It's nice."

Loren walked further into the house, passing a flight of stairs, then down a short hallway where they were photos sitting in variously different frames of what looked shots of a happy family and in the centre of was a huge framed photo an elderly couple holding each other, smiling joyfully into the camera. She didn't get to study the photos very long before Loren was dragging her all over the ranch house. There were a study, a bathroom, and a huge kitchen and dining room combo. Finally, after what seemed like a bloody age, they were heading upstairs. Aster didn't really want to admit that she was knackered. At that point, all Aster wanted was her bed.

Upstairs, Loren pointed out the other bathroom, Connor’s bedroom, then Montoya's, and FINALLY the bedroom that both Loren and Aster would be sharing. Sitting one bed was her bag, and Aster tried not to sag in relief. Although it was only a narrow twin bed, it was calling to her and all she wanted to do was lay down.

"Sorry, that we have to share."

Aster shrugged, "It's like my dormitory all over again."

Loren turned to Aster, "Private school?"

"Yes," Aster admittedly sheepishly. "It was a boarding school in Scotland. And before you even start, yes I know how posh that is."

"I think you and Bruce Wayne would get on like a house on fire."

Aster winced, "Don't ever say that again." No matter, how much they looked similar on the surface. Aster wasn't born with a silver spoon in her mouth with everything handed on a platter. Actually, Aster had to fight for everything she ever got. Bruce Wayne probably didn't know how to get dressed by himself, the entitled tosser!

Loren chuckled, "Alright, whatever you say Ash."

Aster pushed her bag on to the floor and dropped exhaustedly on the bed. She was the one to roll her eyes this time. "Whatever." Aster tried to say but was interrupted with a loud yawn.

"Tired?"

Aster shrugged, and Loren shook her head. "I'll leave you so you can rest. I'll wake you up for dinner, okay?"

"Yeah, that's fine."
Loren turned around and started to leave when Aster called: "Loren?"

They turned their head, "What?"

"Thanks."

Loren didn't say anything, but nodded and walked away. Aster sighed, slipped off her flats, and fell quickly into an exhausted sleep.

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**Soundtrack:** Lay Down Your Weary Tune by Bob Dylan

Aster woke up with a start, her heart beating loudly. Her eyes wide and panicked for what seemed to be the dozenth time in as many days because she didn't automatically don't recognize where she was. The light in the room was dim, the pink-orange rays of the sunset shining through the window. Her fingers dived under the pillow, but once again there was nothing and she rolled her eyes at herself as Aster remembered that she was safe and in Montoya's house.

"No wand," Aster muttered to herself, the sense of darkness pulling at her mind. She managed to push aside and stumbled out of bed. The phantom feeling of the glass cutting into her skin, and the sharp smell of gunpowder burning her nose. Aster should have anticipated the nightmares. Maybe it had been the heavy medication, but while in hospital Aster didn't any nightmares. Yet, now in new unfamiliar place, with her wand gone, and the comforting weight of Sirius was absent it was no wonder that they started again.

'If you give in you will always be safe,' The darkness seemed to almost whisper in her ear. 'You will never be scared and defenseless again. ' 

She closed her eyes, the darkness tempting her to give in and instead reached out for the House. The connection was faint, due to Aster being as physically far away from it as she was now. She felt the emotions of joy at their reconnecting, worry, and annoyance. Aster tried to mentally reassure it to the best her ability, but she was unsure if was getting through at all.

The door opened and Loren poked their head through the door. "You okay?"

Aster nodded, "Yeah."

"Okay, are you hungry?" Loren replied, "Dinner is ready."

"You cooked?" Aster asked, incredulously. a ghost of a smile on her lips.

Loren rolled their eyes, "I burn something one time and you never let me live it down."

The old familiar argument made the rest of the tension leave her body. Aster wryly shook her head, "How do you water?"

"I still say it was something wrong with the stove."

"Uh, uh," Aster replied, dubiously as she pulled on her shoes.

"Yeah, you can stop with the judging."

Now, feeling the darkness finally recede, she was able to give Loren a small smile. Aster stood up and walked pass Loren and down the stairs, her friend following close behind.

As they made their way downstairs, Aster could smell the heavenly aroma of tomato sauce and
spices. They walked passed the living room and into the kitchen to see Harnell or rather Connor--remembering their earlier conversation--at the hob with a frilly pink apron on, stirring a pot. Aster barely reframed from laughing at the hilarious sight. Looking pass Connor, her smile fell from her face, the barest hint of panic, as she spotted through the window a back of a man.

"Don't worry about it."

Aster turned to see Connor following her gaze. He turned and gave her a reassuring smile, "Johnson is just part of protection detail."

Aster sighed and nodded. "Do you need any help?"

Connor gave her a bright and charming smile. "No, actually I got all covered. You will get my Nona’s super special spaghetti bolognas"

"Really? I always wanted to make that but I never had the time."

Connor sighed, "Same, but now all we have is time. Besides, I think Nona would approve of me feeding people."

Loren laughed, "Really? The only thing my grand ever did was smoke too many Marlboros and going off on tangents about how the world was full of sinful people and that is why the world is going straight to hell."

Connor laughed, "Yeah, well my Nona was a stereotypical Italian grandmother in a lot of ways. If you came near her, she was going to feed you" He shrugged. "I guess I got that from her."

Aster shook her head and hen her gaze around the large and comfortable kitchen and then back to the front lounge. "Where's Montoya?"

"She's outside putting up the horses for the night," Connor said.

"She likes horses?" Aster asked incredulously, strange to think that Montoya could like anyone or anything. She guessed her own prejudices were getting the better of her again.

Connor snorted as he carefully poured the tomato sauce into a pan of spaghetti. "Yeah, she likes horses more than people most days."

Aster looked to see the man outside move out of the way, and she could see a Montoya walking the horse into the stables.

"Why don't you sit down and relax," Loren said, biting their lip.

Aster sighed, and threw her friend an exasperated look, "I'm fine."

Loren squared her shoulders, their eyes narrowing. "You just got out of the hospital, Ash."

"So, did you!"

"Ash!"

Aster rolled her eyes, and considered arguing more but honestly, she didn't think that it was worth it. Besides, she would never say it but Aster was a bit tired. "Okay," Aster replied sullenly and made her way to the table and flopped down in the chair.

Loren threw up their hands, and Connor chuckled.
Finally, Loren began to set the table, while Connor finished dinner. It was an oddly domestic scene for four people that were literally thrown together by crazy circumstances. She sat there and drifted off in thought. Her thoughts idly floating from all the events that brought her to this point, to her job, and wondered if she would still have a job when Aster returned. Knowing, Janney that was less than likely. Aster thought turned to the Gala, and she couldn’t help but wonder if Bruce Wayne actually decided to get off his high horse and actual R.S.V.P. or will he just have one of his subordinates show up in his stead like last year. Dick Grayson for being the heir to the Wayne fortune was actually not like the rich snobs she usually had to put up with. Last year, Aster found him surprisingly funny and down to earth, Dick had an acerbic wit and stories for days that made the boring gathering actually entertaining for once.

Honestly, if Dick wasn't so young, she might try flirting with him.

Aster snorted and shook her head.

"What's so funny?" Loren said as they laid a plate and silverware in front of her.

"Nothing.” Aster shrugged. "Just thinking about work."

"Why am I not surprised?" Loren rolled their eyes as they moved around to arrange the rest of the settings, "You are such a workaholic."

Aster groaned, "I'm not a workaholic."

Loren arranged the last plate down across from Aster and raised their eyebrow. "Really? Because I seem to remember you debating buying a couch for your office just you can sleep."

Connor quirked a smile, as he brought out the pot and put it the centre of the table. "Aster is not alone in that. I can't tell you how many times I had to drag Renee out of the office."

Loren and Connor exchanged commiserating looks. Aster was still shocked at how close Loren had gotten to Connor in such a short amount of time. Especially, with their usual vehement dislike of the police. It was strange, and Aster had to wonder if Loren had somehow gotten replaced by a pod person.

The door opened, and everyone turned to see Montoya walking into the kitchen. Curly black tendrils escaping from her usual severe bun. She looked flushed and there was even a sparkle in her brown eyes. Aster was taken aback at how beautiful she found the other woman at that moment. She blushed and turned away, maybe whatever was affecting Loren was infecting her as well?

"Dinner ready?" Montoya asked.

"Yeah, why don't you go get cleaned up and we can all sit down."

Montoya didn't say anything, but Aster watched her as the other woman headed out of the kitchen and up the stairs out of the corner of her eye.

Aster turned to look at Loren and found her friend smirking at her.

"Don't even start."

Soundtrack: Ooh Child by MILCK

The supper was of course delicious. The taste of tomato and beef and spaghetti of the Spaghetti
Bolognese was brilliant. It could give even Mrs Weasley's cooking a run for its galleons. Unfortunately, the experience was soured by Montoya's presence which after returning downstairs had gotten back to her usual frigid personality that no matter of small talk between Connor or Loren could penetrate. Aster herself was dealing with the consequences of forgetting her pain medication. The pain in her shoulder had gradually gotten worse through the dinner; souring her appetite.

Unfortunately, Aster refused to show even a hint of weakness in front of Montoya. Aster forced down a few bites, ignoring how her stomach turned and pretended like everything was okay. Loren kept showing her concerned looks, who like always can see right through her. Yet, Aster ignored them and endured the goddamn dinner that seemingly would ever end.

"You don't like it?" Connor eyed her plate, and then back up to Aster.

"No, I do." Aster pasted on a smile. "It's actually quite good."

Connor looked at her, but nodded and went back to his own dinner. Montoya didn't say anything, focused completely on her plate. The awkward silence seemed to get more and more tense. Only the sounds of forks scraping against the plates as people ate could be heard in the room.

This was practically Aster's version of hell, well no, actually being back at the Dursley's was her picture of hell, but this would make a fantastic alternative.

The dinner seemed to go on forever, every tic on the grandfather clock in the corner gnawing away at her nerves just as much as her throbbing shoulder. Finally, the dinner was coming to the end and she can make her excuses. Aster offered to tidy up the dishes, but it was Montoya, not Loren who shot her down.

"I'll take care of it." Montoya curtly said and stood up gathering the dishes.

"I can help--" Aster protested, but Montoya turned and glared at her.

"I don't need your help." Montoya turned away from her, carrying the dishes into the adjacent kitchen.

Connor shook his head, "I'm sorry about that."

Aster shrugged, "I'm getting used to it."

"Come on," Loren added. "It's time for your pain medication."

Aster whipped her head around to throw a wide-eyed stare. "How--"

Loren rolled their eyes, "It was pretty obvious to anyone with eyes, Ash."

Aster groaned but allowed Loren to take her hand and led from the table and up the stairs and into their room. They led Aster to sit on the bed. "

"Where are your pills?"

Aster told them that they were in her bag and Loren quickly found them the small paper bag from the chemist. "You stay there while I go get you something to drink."

Aster sat there in the empty room and drifted off. Her idle for once, with only brief interruptions from the house. Loren came back pills and water in hand and Aster gratefully took the pills.

"Do you need to help getting dressed?"
Aster lied and said no, and carefully slipped into simple red and green tartan pyjamas.

"What do you want to do?"

Aster hated to admit that once again, just the awkward supper with the others and the pain was enough to exhaust her again. "I don't know."

Loren perked up, "How about--"

"If you say 'Love, Actually' I will hex you."

Loren paused, suddenly looking weary. "You wouldn't?"

"Actually, I can't," Aster admitted, "I don't have my sodding wand."

Loren sighed in relief, "But come on, Ash. You love that movie!"

"The first dozen times I watched it."

Loren pouted, and with their elvin features it really them look like a child. "Please."

Aster thought about really arguing with them, but again she didn't have the energy to really put up a fight. "Fine."

"Yes!" Loren said, doing a goofy happy dance. Aster was happy to a bit of reemergence of her usual happy-go-lucky personality. As much as Aster would hate to admit it, maybe time away from Gotham was what Loren really needed.

Loren grinned, and then hurriedly got dressed in oversized Gotham Knights baseball jersey. The jersey was so long on Loren's petite frame that it looked like a nightgown more than a t-shirt. Aster got a pang of sadness. Gio had always said that was his lucky shirt. It both surreal and a little bit heartbreaking to see Loren in it now. She pushed away her sudden melancholy. They grabbed Aster's laptop, which she was more than a little ashamed that the DVD was still in her disk drive from the last time she had been forced to watch it.

They snuggled up together, Aster's head laying on Loren's shoulder as they started the movie and heard the familiar tones of Hugh Grant's voice over. She smiled at the people hugging each other in Heathrow. She thought about her own departure in that very same airport a year ago and how tightly both Ron and Hermione had hugged her as Aster said goodbye. She only saw them a few times since then. Aster thought part of the reason why Loren made Aster watch this movie so often was that it was a piece of home. Yet, in fact, it always made her that much homesick. It wasn't a day go by that Aster didn't miss all the friends she left behind.

Yet, she never said anything because Loren was only trying to help. Aster just laid there in a daze, as Loren silently said their favourite lines of the movie in the dark. The blue light of the monitor lighting the sharp angles of their face.

It was right along the time Mark was on Juliet's doorstep with the cue cards that she heard a sniffle. Aster turned to see Loren whip away tears from her face. "You are okay?"

Loren shook their head and just put an arm around Aster. They placed their head on top of Aster, and she ignored the tears that were dripping into her hair. She didn't feel the need to push Loren, Aster just held them as Loren sobbed into her hair. After a while, Loren stopped crying, only occasionally sniffling ever so often. At the end of the movie, they watched silently as the cast met in Heathrow before fading into people hugging and kissing each other while the Beatles song playing
in the background before it faded into black.

They sat like that in the dark, the laptop blank, and both them curled up against each other.

"That's how he proposed, you know. “Loren admittedly, softly. "With the cue cards."

"Yeah?"

Loren sighed, "Gio did the whole shebang." They gave a choked laugh, "I know it was cheesy and overdone but I loved it."

"I bet you did." Aster hugged them tighter to herself.

Loren sniffled again and then finally sat up. They reached over and turned on the lamp. They both blinked, and then Loren carefully put away the laptop on the nearby nightstand and sat there fidgeting with their hands.

"Loren?"

They sighed and then said softly: "No matter what happens, I'm going to leave Gotham."

Aster nodded. "Yeah, I know."

"But Aster?"

Aster looked back at them, blue eyes meeting green.

"I want you to make me a promise," Loren asked.

"What?"

"Promise me that you will be okay."

Aster frowned, "Of course I will be. I love you Loren, but I have been taking care of myself for a long time now."

Loren frustratingly shook their head, "No, you haven't. You work all the time, you have no love life, and no other real friends than me."

Aster flinched, stung, “What about Samirah?”

“Yeah, you gossip together like two hens.” Loren waved it off. “But I noticed that you always come up with an excuse when Sam invites you along for drinks.”

Aster scrunched up her nose, “You know that it’s not really my scene.”

Loren took Aster's hands and squeezed. "I'm not trying to be a bitch here. I just want you to be okay after I leave."

Aster didn't know what to think. On one hand, Aster was a bit pissed off and not a little bit indigent. As she said before, Aster could take care of herself. Hell, Aster had been doing that long before she stepped foot in Hogwarts. Yet, on the other hand, this whole situation made her realise that what she had been doing since her divorce from Ginny was surviving and not really living at all. Aster could now admit now (if only to herself) that moving to Gotham was not just about running away from the paparazzi but from everything else. The divorce, no matter how amicable it had truly hurt her. She had truly loved Ginny, but it was also the death of her dreams. The dreams of having a family, of
following into her father's footsteps and making her parents proud.

It had been too much, so Aster had withdrawn from everything. She moved across the five thousand kilometres across the pond to the one place the wizarding world wouldn't find her.

"Ash?" Loren asked, their eyes full of worry.

"I'm fine." Aster gave a defeated sigh. "Okay."

"Okay?"

"Yeah, when this is over, I promise to start really living."

Loren's face broke out into a wide grin and they hugged her. "Love you, Ash."

"Love you too."

Chapter End Notes

Please kudos or leave a comment! They really do brighten up my day and they fed my muse. The next chapter will be dropping on December 1st. I hope all of you guys in the U.S. and Canada have a Happy Thanksgiving and I will see you guys next time!
The Darkest Night

Chapter Summary

Previously On Playing Hero:

"I'm fine." Aster gave a defeated sigh. "Okay."

"Okay?"

"Yeah, when this is over, I promise to start really living."

Loren's face broke out into a wide grin and they hugged her. "Love you, Ash."

"Love you too."

Chapter Notes

Whoop! We are back! I hope everyone else had a wonderful Thanksgiving. I sure did! We are so close to 150 kudos with this fic and I'm like blown away at every kudos, bookmark, and subscription. Thank you so much! I think I haven't mentioned this until now, but yes I'm aware of the mistakes (even after many re-reads and proofreading session and beta sessions). Once this fic is finished, I plan to actually go through this fic with a fine tooth comb for a final polish. Thank you all for putting up with my borderline dyslexic foolishness. My beta can only do so much and I tend to tweak even after that. Hence all of my mistakes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Soundtrack: Teardrop by Massive Attack

Aster closed her eyes, breathing in and out, and tried to calm her mind. She would need all of her
concentration for this. She focused on the eight inches of her holly wand. The way it had felt in her hand, and the rightness of it when Aster used it. She tried to picture it clearly and Aster said out loud, "Accio Wand."

It didn't come.

Instead, the darkness laid in wait for her. Stalking her like some great cat waiting for its prey. Just waiting for her to slip up, and for even a crack in her defences. It whispered in her, low and sweet as honey of all the things she could do with it.

'You can be powerful.'

'You can bring those who hurt you to your knees.'

'You would never have to hide again.'

'You can heal yourself and be whole again.'

'You can go back to your old life.'

The darkness tempted and cajoled her, and talking to those deep dark impulses that she kept a tight leash on. Yet, Aster remembered there would be no peace for her or anyone else if she gave in. With great effort, Aster reigned in her own doubts and begin to push it out of her mind. It took more effort than usual, it was stubborn like a boulder that refused to move. Aster used her own not inconsiderable persistent will and pushed it out of her mind.

Aster sat there in the silence of the room, panting as if she actually really did actually push a boulder. She opened her eyes, still wandless, and alone.

Well, as alone as one could be when you are sharing a house with three other people.

Aster was just starting to get up when she felt the faint feeling of the house's concern. She tried to reassure it as best as she could, but Aster wasn't sure that it got through to the House as far away as she was from it. Frustration erupted from her, and Aster kicked the bed. She winced at throbbing pain in both her shoulder and now her toes.

"Fuck," Aster cursed, lunging for her pills. She shakily opened the pill bottle and dry swallowed two pills. Aster winced at the taste and flopped down on to her bed. She put her head in hands and tried to pull herself together and wait for the pain to recede. Aster had very little patience at the best of times, but being stuck in this house for now close to a month injured and powerless was wearing thin on her.

This last month had been hard. She was away from the support of Archimedes, and the house with no wand. For those few weeks, Aster basically just ate and slept. The painkillers and the lingering pain from her injuries were still taking a toll on her. Now, Aster got around much more and was able to stay up most of the day. She got up, ate breakfast, watched boring telly with Loren and Connor. The telly didn't have cable, so they were stuck boring daytimes shows. Connor especially was a huge 'Days of Our Lives' fan and unfortunately got Loren hooked on it as well.

Montoya spent most of her days out with the horses. She was always organising the patrol or walking around the perimeter with their assigned guards. Aster watched the other woman with no little amount of jealousy. When everything got to be too much, She went up to her room and tried to do wandless magic with little success. She always tried to summon her wand but nothing but the darkness would answer.
Then she would (and Aster would only admit this to herself) sulk before they all sat down for dinner.

They all took turns making dinner, except for Loren who once again almost burned the kitchen down during a disastrous attempt at making a roast. Aster sighed, tonight was her night to make dinner. And honestly, she was way too depressed to even put up that much of an effort. She just wanted to get out of this horrid house and go home.

"Aster!" Loren called out. "Come down here, you got to see this."

With a groan, Aster stood up, massaging her still aching shoulder, and walked downstairs.

______________________________

**Soundtrack:** Echo by Foreign Air

In the front lounge, Aster saw that Connor, Montoya, and Loren was crowded around the telly.

"What's going on?"

Loren looked up, her lips breaking into a wide excited smile. "Aster, look!" They pointed what was on the screen.

Aster frowned and shooed Loren aside to get a good look at it. To her surprise, it was Johnny Viti with his slicked-back hair and impeccable suit in handcuffs. Despite being the centre of a sea of news cameras and reporters, he looked as calm as if he was taking a stroll through Robinson Park as he was forced through the cacophony by a grim looking Commissioner Gordon into Police Headquarters.

The camera panned back to Vicki Vale, a gleeful grin on her face. "Johnny Viti, nephew and rumoured heir to the Falcone Crime Family were arrested minutes ago. Both D.A Porter and Commissioner Gordon have yet to comment on what Viti will be charged with. However, this reporter can only speculate that it has something to do with the shootout near the bus depot that happened a month ago. With Carmine Falcone and now his nephew in prison, the question is who will now run the Falcone empire?"

This is Vicki Vale, GCN Channel 3 news."

Aster just stared in shock at the screen. Everything seemed to be frozen in time. The silence was broken by the sound of Frank Sinatra's 'My Way'. Aster turned to see Connor fumbling with his mobile.

"Harnell," He said faintly into his mobile. His eyes widened as he listens to the reply.

"You okay?" Loren mouthed. He smiled at them, a strange expression quickly coming over his face. "It's just my mom checking up on me." He put the phone up to his ear and walked out of the lounge.

Loren shook their head and turned to Montoya. "This means we can go home, right?"

Montoya threw a narrowed look at Connor's retreating back before turning to Loren. "No, it's still too dangerous." Montoya shook her head. "You are still our best witness. You won't be safe until you testify."

Aster knew this was the case from her own experience as an Auror. Although the law in muggle America was different than the laws in Wizarding Britain. She still remembered the long drawn out process getting everything ready for trial. However, for the first time in weeks, she felt some hope that this was the beginning of the end of this entire ordeal and Aster could get back to her normal life.
"Aster?"

Aster shook her head and turned to smile at Loren. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine." Aster threw a hopeful look at Montoya. "I know we still have to stay here, but can we at least walk outside? I'm tired of being cramped up in here all the time."

Montoya rolled her eyes, "You have been bitching and moaning about it for weeks, but the answer is still the same."

"It's not safe," Aster parroted the answer Montoya consistently gave her every time Aster tried to ask.

"Right," Montoya crossed their arms and glared. "I would rather you get cabin fever than for you to end up dead."

Aster glared at Montoya, and the other woman rolled her eyes. "If, Connor asks for me tell him that I'm going to put the horses to bed."

Montoya spun on her heel and stormed out of the front door. The door slamming hard behind her.

"I really want to know what crawled up her arse and died," Aster muttered to herself.

Loren snorted, "Good luck with that."

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**Soundtrack:** La Nuit by AH-MER-AH-SU (feat. Pale Eyes)

Later that night, the house was so quiet. Only the sounds of crickets and the house settling could be heard. Aster leaned against the pillows of her bed and looked over to a sleeping Loren. She looked down at her book, the pages dog-eared, the spine cracked from overuse. 'The Restaurant at the End of the Universe' was one of her favourite books but she couldn't even concentrate on the antics of Arthur Dent, Ford Prefect, Zaphod Beeblebrox, and Trillian.

Yet, her mind kept going back to Johnny Viti's arrest and the shootout Downtown. She once again reached out for the faint emotions of the house but all she could get back was a weak feeling of aggravation. The corner of her lips quirked up, as Aster wondered if Sirius and Archimedes were driving the house nuts.

Aster looked around the small dark room, and she longed to just apparate to her house or at the very least get there for a little while. Aster looked out of the window out into the wide open farmland, the silhouette of the barn in the distance, and the dark shape of trees of the wood that bordered the farm. She needed to get out of this blasted house, and especially out of this room.

But Montoya was right, even with Viti behind bars, it wouldn't be safe for Loren and her until the trial. Yet, Aster would only be out for a tick and then back before anyone would figure it out. Aster struggled with herself for a long moment before finally sighed. And quietly as she could get out of bed. With a wince, Aster bent over to slip on some shoes and pulled on a jacket. She threw another look at Loren who snorted in their sleep and turned their back to Aster.

Aster carefully slid the window up and crept out of the window. She almost slipped on the roof, but spotted a storm drain and shimmied down it on the ground. Aster rubbed her throbbing shoulder, cursing underneath her breath at her own stupidity. Yet, it was too late to go back and Aster especially wasn't looking forward to trying to climb back up into her room.

'Nothing for it," Aster thought.
With a sigh, Aster hurried across the lawn, the full moon bright in the sky. The cool breeze, a left over from the harsh winter made her shiver and she zipped up her coat. Aster made sure to not to go near the barn as she made way across the open field. Montoya was sure to be in there communing with the horses or some such rot.

Aster finally made into the woods, the thin light of the moon peeking out of the canopy of trees. As she walked, she heard the hoot of the owls and the stirring of the forest’s animals. She tripped over the root, here or there and her jacket got caught on a few branches. The more she got away from the house, the more Aster felt she could finally breathe.

If she ignored everything, Aster could trick herself into thinking that this was another elicited walk through the Forbidden forest and not a foreign wood an ocean away from her friends and surrogate family.

Aster finally broke into a clearing; the moon was beaming down a stream. She spotted a large boulder nearby and sat down. Aster just tried to not think about her problems just take in the nature that surrounded her, and the dark blue water that glittered in the moonlight.

Time trickled by, and Aster passed the time by skipping rocks. Back at Hogwarts, she would skip stones on the Black Lake. The Giant Squid would even chase after them in a bizarre game of fetch. Aster smiled at the memory of those huge tentacles reaching out of the water to catch stone after stone.

With a sigh, Aster stood to her feet. It was time to get back before Loren or even worse Montoya figured out that she was gone. She turned and walked back into the trees.

Aster tried to go the way she thought she came. Aster couldn’t be certain but she had walked passed the same bunch of blue flowers for the third time. It was getting later and later, and Aster was no were near the entrance of the woods.

"Bugger," Aster swore under her breath. If Aster had her wand, a point me spell would have helped her find her way out of the woods. Powerless as she was, Aster had to just fumble her way through the woods until she either found a way back to the house or someone came to find her. Aster groaned, slapping her forehead.

Aster was completely regretting sneaking out into an unknown forest She should have just listened to Montoya and stayed at the house. But oh, no, Aster decided to act like an idiotic firstie.

Aster wandered through the woods, trying not to jump at every little noise when there was suddenly a CLIP, CLIP, CLIP, sound and Aster eyes darted for a weapon and picked up a rock. She grimaced, it wasn't her wand or even a muggle weapon but it was better than nothing.

Something burst out of the bushes and Aster was about to throw the rock when she noticed that her would be attacker was just on a horse. Aster couldn't make out the horse’s rider until the horse moved into the moonlight.

It was Montoya.

Aster sighed in relief, "Oh, it's you."

Montoya lifted an eyebrow and glared down at the other woman. "That's all you got to say?"

Aster rolled her eyes, "Look if you are going to lecture me about sneaking out then don’t."

Montoya unmounted the horse and stormed up to Aster until the other woman was only a few scant
inches away from her. "I told you to stay inside."

Aster's shrugged, "And? I needed some time away from that house."

Montoya's nose flared, "So your need for 30 minutes of freedom is worth your safety?"

Aster rolled her eyes, "You are being dramatic." She gestured to the forest. "The place is guarded 24/7 and 30 minutes is not going to endanger me." She huffed. "Besides, I find it hard to believe that you give a damn about my safety."

Montoya gritted her teeth, "I care about doing damn my job. And sure, I didn't want to babysit you and Marbury. Actually, if it wasn't for you I would have been finally able to close the case of my career. Now, I'm stuck babysitting you and the stripper."

"Oh, thanks for taking precious time out of your day to do your sodding job and help us." Aster sneered. "And besides, if I hadn't "stuck" my nose into it Loren would be dead which none of you would actually give a damn about: because for you what's another dead stripper in the scheme of things, right?"

"And your friend might be alive, but there are plenty of people like the taxi driver who is dead because of you."

Aster flinched back as if she had been physically slapped. It stung because it was true. During this last month, all she had left to do was reflect and the death of the cabbie bore heavily down on her. Aster tried not to think about it, but the guilt was always there just not unlike the darkness that threatened to consume her.

Aster just shook her head and stormed passed the other woman. Unfortunately, there was a grip on her arm.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?"

Aster yanked her shoulder free, wincing at the sudden sharp pain of her injury. "I'm going back to the house."

"By yourself?" Montoya lifted an eyebrow. "I don't think so!"

"I don't need your help!"

"Really? Because you pretty lost to me." Montoya sighed, and then shook her head. "Potter, just get on the horse."

Aster shook their head, "What?"

"Get on Canción, or I will shove you on it."

"What?"

Montoya rolled their eyes, "The horse. Get on the fucking horse!"

Aster was angry, but she was also exhausted from her foray into the woods. "Fine."

Aster marched over to the brown horse and tried to push herself up on the stirrups. She found herself slipping, but there was suddenly a pair of strong hands gripping her around the waist. Montoya, held her steady, before pushing her up smoothly into the saddle.
"Thanks." Aster grudging said.

Montoya said nothing but pushed herself on the saddle in front of her. She patted the horse lovingly, "Giddy up". Then Montoya steered the horse away down the path.

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**Soundtrack:** Nowhere to Go by Arch Leaves (featuring Randy Coleman)

They travelled in silence and yet again, Aster's curse for awkward car rides was actually extended to horseback as well. She clung on to Montoya's back and hated every bit of the ride back to the house. You would think with being used to riding a broom that the sensation would have been similar. It wasn't, especially with her now throbbing shoulder that was being jostled by every movement of the horse.

The horse suddenly came to a stop and reared up. Frightened, Aster held tight to Montoya’s waist. “Whoa Canción.” Montoya tried to comfort the horse. The horse whinnying and paced— visibly upset.

"What's wrong?" Aster asked.

"There is something on the ground that got Canción spooked," Montoya replied, patting the horse’s head.

After the horse finally be calmed down. Montoya slipped out of the saddle and then grabbed a torch out of the saddlebag.

"Stay there," Montoya ordered. Aster nodded, she had enough excitement for the night. Montoya stepped forward, the torch illuminating a body of a man on the ground.

Aster tried to swallow around the sudden lump in her throat. "Who is it?"

Montoya grabbed the shoulder and carefully flipped them over. “it’s Mitch Johnson.” It was the guard that Aster first saw when she got here. Montoya took unclipped a radio, "Station 1 come in?"

There was nothing but static. Montoya tried to contact the rest of the guards and even Harnell at the house but nobody responded.

"We’re fucked." Aster bit her lip, worried about Loren. She had been such a fool to leave Loren by themselves. Merlin only knew what was happening.

There were a crack and rustle of leaves. Montoya stood up her gun instantly in her hand and pointed in the direction of the disturbance. They gave a sigh at relief at Connor.

"Thank god, it’s only you," Montoya said, shoving her gun back into its holster. “Johnson is down and no one is responding. "Where’s Marbury?"

"Safe back at the house," He said, giving her a reassuring smile. "But there was some recent interference and I decided to check up on you."

"Good, I'll have headquarters look it over."

Montoya turned to get back on the horse, but everything slowed down as two things happened at
Connor took out his gun and shot Montoya in the back. Aster couldn't react, because the horse spooked by the loud noise once again reared up on its hind legs this time bucking Aster off its back. She was falling and then crashing hard on the ground. Aster groaned pain lancing every inch of her body.

Distantly, she heard the horse galloping away.

She turned to see only the black of Montoya's head, and then there was a glint of metal in the moonlight. Aster saw a gun, and it was pointed at her head.

"I got someone who wants to see you," Connor said, with a smirk.

And then abruptly there was a sharp pain to her head and everything went dark.

Chapter End Notes

I ended it on a cliffhanger. I told you guys I love cliffhangers! Now, you guys we are hurtling towards the last three chapters + epilogue. So we crashing right into the climax, all I can say is that you guys need to buckle up. It's going to be a bumpy ride for all of us. Also, I want to let you guys know that I'm currently outlining the sequel to this fic. *wiggles eyebrows* Anyway, the next chapter will drop on December 22nd. I will see you guys then!

Please kudos and/or leave a comment!
Aster gasped, as she felt something hard hit her face. She snapped opened her eyes to see Connor Harnell's blank face inches away from her own. Some emotion that she couldn’t quite decipher was in his eyes as he stared back at her. At the same time, she cringed at the pain flaring up in her shoulder. The reason for the pain was that her arms were stretched above her head, wrists to the ceiling. She hung there, her feet barely touching the floor.

Connor turned away and nodded. "See? I told you I would get her in one piece."

Aster gritted her teeth, her nose flaring in a mixture of pain and anger. She tried to turn to see who Connor was talking to, but moving even a centimetre made the pain in her shoulder just that much worse.

"You did good, Con," replied a male voice.

Finally, the other man came into sight and her stomach hit the floor. It was Johnny Viti.

"How?" Aster asked, in dismay.

Viti patted Connor on the shoulder, and the other man flinched away.

"Where is Loren, you bastards?" She spat.

Viti smiled, a grin so wide it split his face. He walked over to her and backhanded Aster. "You don't get to make demands here, bitch."

"Johnny?" Connor asked, nervously.
Viti turned to Connor, lifting an eyebrow. "What?"

"My debt?"

"All paid up." Viti turned and grinned almost manically at Connor. "And you deserve a reward for such good work."

"That won’t be isn’t necessary," Connor replied quickly. "I just want to settle my debts."

Viti pulled out a gun and shot Connor twice in the chest. Connor's blue eyes went wide, as he slumped down on the ground. He managed to slightly turn his head and again Aster and Connor’s eyes met one last time before his body went completely still.

"I hate cops." Viti put his gun away, and walked over to the door and opened it. "Hey!"

Two men that could only be called goons hurry to the door. "Yes, boss?"

"Get him out of here." Viti nodded to Connor's body. "Dump him in the usual place."

"Sure thing," replied the other goon. Both of them walked passed Viti and nonchalantly picked up the body and carried it out of the room.

Eyes watering, Aster swallowed down the bile that threatened to rise. Suddenly, she saw some movement in the corner of her eye. And despite wanting cry out as the ache in her arm intensified, Aster just barely managed to turn her head to see Viti carefully laying his jacket across a chair, pulling up his sleeves, donning on a simple white apron, and feeling dread pool in her stomach Viti finally slid on a pair of gold knuckledusters.

"You know you caused me a lot of trouble," He finally said.

"Sorry?" Aster replied, cheekily. She didn't want to him to see her fear of what she knew what was to come.

"Oh, you will be." He grinned, and then he pulled his hand back and punched her in the stomach.

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**Soundtrack:** [Fade to Black (Instrumental) by Apocalyptica](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Fq5yM5Z7c4)

So, this how was it was to be a human punching bag', the small detached part of her mind thought as Viti rain down punches and kicks on to her as she swung uselessly in the chains. The only good part was that in the overwhelming agony, any thoughts of her injured shoulder was long gone. Aster just tried to hold on.

Surely, the cruciatus was worse?

Yet, Aster still found herself biting back screams all the same. Stubborn tears pooling in her eyes as he hit Aster over and over again. Everything was amplified, the smack of the knuckledusters colliding with her skin and bones over and over again. The smell of blood, probably Aster’s blood actually, and the thick pungent scent of Viti's cologne. There was almost no place that escaped the fury of Viti's fists; her chest, her stomach, her face, her legs.

It all blurred together, Aster’s agony was an unending stretch of time. Her perception narrowed down to the pain and every blow Viti dealt with her. If she could concentrate on anything else right now, Aster would have probably been glad that she couldn't see Viti's triumph face.
Aster for what seemed like the dozenth time swung in the chains, the tip of her bare toes touching the cold wooden floor as he delivered a quick one-two punch to her stomach.

Then suddenly Viti stopped hitting her. Aster sucked in a breath, pushing back the sob that wanted to tear from her throat. She just barely managed to not cry, because even now after everything Aster went through, she wouldn't give this bastard the satisfaction of seeing her cry.

Aster flinched as she suddenly heard a noise, and she clenched her eyes shut as she prepared herself for another volley of blows. Yet, it didn't come.

Instead, Aster winced as she felt something hard and cold slide across her throat and then trail down her t-shirt to pause at her chest.

"This has been fun," Viti taunted. "Don't you agree?"

"Sod off," Aster weakly replied.

"Oh, don't be like that sweetness." Viti cooed. "We had such a good time. Just like I had with your friend. They screamed so beautifully when I killed them."

Aster by nature wasn't a bloodthirsty woman, but rage boiled inside of her, as she fiercely yearned for her wand. With it, Aster could have easily made this worm pay for killing her friend. Yet, here she was powerless, a squib without her wand. And Aster failed Loren, just like she failed Sirius, Remus, Tonks, and everyone else she had ever loved.

"Now, I wish I could take more time with you" Viti gave a wistful sigh. "But I have to deal with my Uncle." He shrugged. "Family, you know how it is."

Then suddenly she just barely managed to see a glimmer of something possibly silver or grey and a blur of movement. At first, Aster couldn't comprehend what happened. Then she looked down to see Viti's hand around the hilt of a knife that was now stuck in her chest.

Viti gave her a wide grin and whipped away his hands that were splattered with her own blood. The last thing Aster Jane Potter ever saw was Johnny Viti taking off his blood splattered apron and throwing it carelessly to the floor before everything went mercifully black.

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**Soundtrack:** Don’t Fear The Reaper (Cover) by Gus Black

Aster was naked standing literally in the middle of nowhere. Everything was blinding white, no windows, no doors, no ceiling. Just white as far as the eye can see. She looked down at her body, it was clean with no sign of the damage it had taken under Johnny Viti's hands. She felt fine, better even than she had before the car accident surely?

With wonder, Aster touched her chest and suddenly a robe appeared to cover her, while at the same time the nothingness morphed into the achingly familiar King's Cross station. Aster jumped as she heard the sound of a train coming. She watched stunned as moments later with a sharp whistle the Hogwarts’s Express pulled up in front of her.

The train car doors opened as if in a silent invitation.

Aster stood there feeling a mix of emotions. Relief was the biggest one. Her hard and difficult life was over, and Aster could be finally be reunited with her family. She blinked back tears, it was all Aster ever really wanted in the end. To be with her family again, and all the people Aster had lost along the way. She took a step forward but then paused as Aster thought about her friends who were
still living. Sirius, Archimedes, and the House. What would happen to them? And what about Hermione, Ron, and all the people she had left behind in England. Surely, Aster’s death would hurt them. Especially little Teddy Lupin, who already lost his parents and would be losing his godmother. Aster had been planning on visiting him in July before going to Ireland for Seamus and Dean’s upcoming wedding. The 12-year-old had been so excited in his letters about her visit.

Yet, unlike last time the express was here waiting for her.

'I'm dead,' Aster thought to herself. 'I guess I don't have a choice.'

"You always have a choice," A soft quiet voice repeated what Dumbledore had told all those years ago.

Aster spun around, and almost tripped on her robes at what she saw.

Death stood before her in its long black flowing robes, a deep hood covering its face. In one hand it held a long scythe in its skeletal fingers.

"What?"

Death leaned on it’s scythe, and even though the interior of the hood was pitch dark hiding anything that would be a face. She could feel it’s piercing stare that seemed to slice through her very soul as if to judge it's worth.

"You have a choice." Death said again, "You can get on the train and go to the otherworld."

"Or?" Aster asked, feeling a sense of deja vue.

Death stood to its full height, the strength of the stare seemed to get more and more intense. "You can accept your mantle as Mistress of Death."

Aster gave a choked laugh, "You got to be kidding me?"

Death didn't reply, he just stood there still a statue.

Aster felt like she was caught in a vice, everything closing around her at the thought. She threw the Resurrection Stone away, buried The Elder Wand with Dumbledore, and the only Hallow she was able to stand to keep was the Invisibility Cloak that was one of the few things she had left of fathers other than the Maurader’s map. Yet, Aster hadn't really touched it since discovered that it was a Hallow, and it was now locked in deep inside a trunk at the bottom of her closet.

"I can't be the Mistress of Death," Aster protested. "Besides, I don't even know where the two other Hallows are."

As on cue, the stone, the wand, and the invisibility cloak were suddenly hovering right in front of her.

Aster gulped, giving the items a wary glance.

"You can live, and be the Mistress of Death."

Aster turned to through the train a longing look, feeling torn. Yet, she thought about Viti who murdered not just her, but Loren as well. Her thoughts turned to the notebook. Without the notebook, without Loren testifying against The Falcone Family. Both Johnny Viti and his uncle Carmine
Falcone would surely get off scot-free. There would be no justice for anyone, and the Falcons would go back to doing whatever to whatever the bloody hell they want. On the other hand, Aster couldn't really see how getting further involved in this mess would help anyone? She had failed once and look where that got her.

"Will, I ever to see my family again with the resurrection ring?"

"Yes, you can even resurrect them if you wish." Death said, "I have to warn you that resurrection the dead will have consequences.

"What consequences?" Aster asked, narrowing her eyes.

"Death is a balance." Death intoned gravely. "If you disrupt that, nature will try to balance that out anyway it can."

"How will nature balance it out?"

Death shook it's the hooded head, "I do not know. You can not predict nature's whims."

"But I can talk to them?" Aster pressed.

"Yes, you can summon their souls to you. Yet, they will be merely shades." Death replied. "And it is possible that one day you will be able to cross into the otherworld. Unfortunately, you will be not able to stay there for long, for only the dead can stay in the otherworld."

Aster frowned, "I don't understand why you would even want a mistress. The whole point you made with my ancestors was to prove that no mortal should have power over death."

Death tightened its grip on its scythe, "Death is not just one entity. There are many deaths in many different cultures such as Hela, Kali, The Morrigan, Anubis, Hades. I am only one incarnation of Death."

"Really?"

"Yes, and you already have my allegiance."

"Why?"

"You chose not to accept the Hallows. You discarded them and walked away. Not even Ignotus, whom I gave my cloak to learned that lesson. You have proved your worth. Yet, again, I am only one incarnation of Death. Each Death will challenge and test you to determine if you deserve mastery over them and it will not be as easy as the challenge you faced for my allegiance."

This brought Aster aback. It is one thing when Aster thought she would Mistress of Death for just one version of death. Yet, she would be challenged over and over again to be Mistresses of many different deaths?

It was completely mental.

Aster bit her lip, eyes darting between the hovering hallows and the train. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

"Okay."

Death didn't respond, it just stood there silently.
"I will be the Mistress of Death."

Death stood there unmoving and then swept down into a low bow. "I am Chronos, and you have my allegiance, my mistress."

With shaking hands, Aster put on the cloak, then slid the resurrection stone onto her finger, and finally grasped the elder wand. All three Hallows thrummed with power.

Aster winced as she felt a sharp sting on the inside of her wrist. She turned over her wand hand, and there was the symbol of the Hallows tattooed on it.

Yet, before she could ask Death or rather Chronos for about the tattoo the world around them faded away into black.

Chapter End Notes

Guys, I'm so glad that you made it through. This chapter was short but BRUTAL! I hope you guys have a wonderful Holiday season and I will see you all in the new year. The next chapter will be dropping January 5th and stay tuned for updates on twitter for any information about the upcoming new website for Amalgamation.

Please leave a comment and/ or kudos! They really are the highlight of my day.
That Girl Is A Goddamn Problem

Chapter Summary

Previously On Playing Hero

"I will be the Mistress of Death."

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Chapter Notes

First of all, I want to apologize to you guys for such a late posting. I have used my buffer up right before Christmas, then the holidays happened, and I was sick. Thus this chapter is a week late. Thanks to everyone for being so patient. I also want to thank my beta Batty as always for being my rock and for kicking this chapter into shape. I also want to thank my constant cheerleader Bendersfan for cheerleading me through this difficult time. Speaking of thanks, I want to thank everyone who has left a comment, bookmark, kudos, or subscription. You guys are part of the reason why I have gotten this far. This is the second to the last chapter, not counting the epilogue. And I wouldn't have gotten here without everyone's support.

As for the Tumblr situation. Yes, I still plan on migrating to a self-hosted site. I was %95 done with it when Wordpress crashed and all my good work was gone. I had it backed up but apparently, that backup was corrupted. So I'm starting from scratch. I probably will be completely done with this fic before it's finally finished.

Finally, I have decided to change my faceclaim for Aster from Michelle Hendley to Munroe Bergdorf. I honestly feel like Munroe is a better fit being that she is British. I have always been a huge fan of the headcanon that Harry and Hermione are POC. I actually planned on making Hermione black, but the more I progress through writing this series the more I realize how much I regret Aster not making a POC. So I will be redoing the cover for this book, but I won't delete the previous cover.

One last thing, I changed things up with the way I list the music from the soundtrack. I usually do them at every scene break, but I actually inserted some extra songs to fit the changing moods of the scenes. This is not going to be a regular thing. It will go back to normal the next chapter.
And that's it! I have yammered long enough and it's now time to get on with the chapter.

P.S. Yes, they are now chapter titles. This title was taken from Natalia Kills's Song 'Problem'.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Soundtrack: Paint It Black (Cover) by Ciara

The first thing Aster noticed was the pain. It was excruciating and it is was everywhere with no place to escape. Blood pounding in Aster’s ears, her heart thumping madly in her chest as if she was being jabbed with tiny, sharp needles all over her body. The familiar feeling of the darkness that Aster had fought relentlessly flowed inside every pore, every molecule of her body.

The agony lasted forever, her shrill screams echoing off the walls. She arched and writhed, her wrists pulling against the chains that still held her. The power slid past her lips, pouring down her throat into the very core of her.

The agony seemed to last forever until it finally came to a mercifully stop.

Aster just laid their limp in the chains, panting for breath. It took a while, but Aster gradually became lucid again. The first she thing noticed was the sound of drip, drip, drip of what sounded like water, and thick cloying humidity. Aster slowly opened her eyes, and she immediately discovered how sharp and clear her vision was. Aster had worn glasses since she was five and then got her vision corrected after she graduated from Hogwarts.

Yet, Aster's vision was like she was truly seeing for the first time. Aster could see everything. She could make out each brick. Aster could see where the paint peeled the particles of the tiny bits of paint and the grains that made up the wall. Aster turned her head and discovered a pile of bodies lying in the doorway. 'Maybe Viti killed them too?' Aster turned to look down at the large pool blood underneath her bare toes and then up to shoulder where her hair fell long across her white blood splattered t-shirt; it was no longer burgundy but a raven black. Aster shook her head, her gaze travelling up the ceiling, seeing the exposed beams her arms were still chained too.

'Right,' Aster thought. 'I need to get out of these chains.'

The Elder Wand appeared in her hand.

'So it wasn't a dream'.

Aster could think about the implications of that later. Now, she had to get out of there and find Loren. Aster shuttered, at the thought of her friend being dead. Yet, lucky for her that didn't seem to be deterrent anymore, but she still needed to find them first. Aster pointed to her right wrist as best she could and said a quick incantation to dissolve the chains.

She was suddenly falling down into the pool of blood. Aster groaned at the mess and rubbed her sore wrists. She froze as she spotted the familiar black thick lines of the symbols for The Deathly Hallows on the back of her wrist. Abruptly, the resurrection stone appeared on her other hand, then she felt the weight of the invisibility cloak fall around her body.

"I'm the Mistress of Death," she whispered to herself.

Aster shivered as the weight of those words fell down on top of her like an anvil, she clenched her
fists around the Elder Wand. *This was no time to fall apart. I have things to do.* Aster cast a quick cleaning spell wiping away all the blood that covered her body and the room itself. She didn't want to leave an easy trail for the American's Aurors to find after all. It was most likely that they would just ignore this incident, not wanting to step foot in Gotham. Yet, Aster wouldn't feel comfortable leaving even that to chance. What she was about to do was going to break not a few laws. Now that she was clean as she going to get, she touched her wand to her chest and intoned: "Excitant".

She felt a cold shiver as dirty clothes were banished and the magic smoothly as if someone was pouring her clothes on to her like a glass of water; bare skin was covered with each piece of her old Auror's battle uniform. Her feet were encased in black leather combat boots that just below her knee. Her bare legs were covered with black tight leather dragon hide leggings. Across her chest, a leather hooded double-breasted jacket that cut off right just below her waist in the front and then fell into a short tail at the back. She was surprised though when the invisibility suddenly transformed as well: the hood disappearing to make it as appear as a long cloak that fell around her shoulders; attaching itself to the shoulders of her uniform. With another flick of the wand, the tendrils of her black hair twisted away from her face into a long braid. She pulled the high collar of the jacket over her mouth, to obscure her face. *The less they are able to identify me, the better*

She walked out of the room she had quite literally had died in. Wincing as she stepped over the bodies of the guards, and up the stairs. At the door, Aster touched the collar, wondering if how she can get the hood of the invisibility cloak to reappear. Right on cue, the hood did and she pulled the cloak over herself and she was suddenly disappeared from sight. Wand at the ready, Aster carefully opened the door and made her way onto the ground floor.

It was a small lobby, but opulent in design. It had white marble floors with dark mahogany fixtures, an elevator, and then a shortly curved reception desk along the side of one side of the wall. She could see the moonlight filtered through the skylight. Honestly, if this hadn't been the place where both she and her friend were murdered in, Aster would be slightly impressed.

Unfortunately, there was no sight of Loren anywhere although she wasn't really surprised that Aster would have to go search for them.

A goon walked passed her, and Aster cursed her lack of foresight of casting a silencing charm on her feet. She couldn't quite take out the Elder wand and do it now. It would be seen by the guards, and she wanted to get Loren and get out. Once Loren was safe, she could deal with Viti.

Carefully, Aster crept across the lobby making sure to be as quiet and up the long flight of stairs. She barely missed bumping into another goon and pressed herself flat against the wall. She held her breath, but the guard passed her completely unaware of her presence.

Aster gave a sigh of relief and started up the stairs. She parted the Invisibility cloak, to finally cast a silencing spell on her feet before casting the 'point me' spell. The Elder Wand spun in her hand for a few moments, she darted a look around to see if anyone was coming mentally willing the spell to hurry up.

The wand stopped, pointing straight ahead.

She looked up the stairs and mentally groaned. *Well, that was helpful.*

---

**Soundtrack:** *Werkin Girls by Angel Haze*

It was all so surreal as Aster ran through the labyrinth of hallways, offices, cubicles, and conferences rooms. It was a different world from the dank basement she had died in. She worried that the point
me spell was wrong, but the Elder Wand's directions never wavered even once. She was just about to turn a corner when she bumped into another goon. She pressed her free hand to balance herself and looked up to see the man staring down at the disembodied hand in bewilderment.

“What the fuck?”

In one quick moment, the goon slid his gun out of his holster and she just had time to duck. As Aster fell to the floor the cloak fell back to reveal her head. Her eyes widen as she spotted the group of reinforcements approaching. They were shouting, and Aster instinctively yelled: "Protego!"

Lucky for her, the bullets immediately collided efficiently against her shield.

Aster needed to get from out of the open. She spotted under a nearby cubicle and lunged under it. Another hail of gunfire erupted fast and fierce. Pieces of the cubicle fell down all around her. Aster clenched her fists around the wand and gritted her teeth. She was pinned down under this desk and Aster needed to take these men out as quickly as possible.

"Shite," she cursed as she felt a sting in her side. Aster looked down and saw the crushed bullet on the ground.

'Thank Merlin for Dragon Hide Armor!'

Aster cast another shield charm and then a blasting charm. It collided with one of the men throwing them into the wall, their gun falling on to the ground.

She held steady under the volley of gunfire, the muzzle flash lighting up the visible parts of her face.

'I need to disarm them.' Aster smirked, as an idea came to her.

With a swipe of her wand, she shouted, "Praefervidus Maximus Guns!"

The guns started to turn red hot and the guards yelped; dropping them. guns. While they distracted, she cast the Leg-Locker Curse and then finally tied them up with an 'Incarcerous' spell. Panting, Aster went over to check over the men.

They were alive, just unconscious.

**Soundtrack:** This Is Not The End by MILCK

Aster sighed and turned to look at the still struggling guards. ‘No need to leave loose ends.’ She pointed her wand and one by one obliviated all of them. She recast the point me spell, and thankfully it led her to a small cupboard.

Inside Loren worryingly still.

Aster ran over to knelt down beside them. Ignoring the pool of blood, she threw a sorrowful look at the gunshot wound, and with shaking fingers checked Loren's pulse.

Dead.

Her eyes stung with unshed tears. She closed her eyes and bit back a sob. Viti hadn't been truthful for once, he had murdered Loren just as he had done to Aster. Then he discarded them like so much trash. She was shaking with grief and rage. Aster swore that Viti would pay for this and pay dearly, but first, she had to right this wrong.

She touched the resurrection stone. The symbol of the Hallows engraved prominently on the black
surface. Aster began to turn it.

"Careful."

Aster looked up to see Chronos standing in front of her.

"Why?"

"Remember there will be consequences." Death reminded her. "Is one death worth the possible death of hundreds?"

Aster stared at Loren's cold body and then down at the ring. "I can't lose anyone else."

She turned the stone once, and the air changed around them that was heavy with energy. She shivered, goosebumps rising up on her arms. Aster turned it a second time and a bright ball of light appeared hovering in front of Loren's body.

"What is that?"

Chronos simply replied, "Their soul."

Aster turned the ring for the third and final time and the soul sunk inside of Loren's body.

She waited, and waited.

Aster's hopes started to wane, 'Did I do it wrong? Does the ring even sodding work?'

Then Loren jerked up, gasping for breath.

Aster sighed in relief.

"Loren?"

They looked up at Aster, their eyes going wide and they frantically scrambled back. "What are you?!"

Aster paused, frowning. "Loren it's okay."

"D-D-Don't come any closer," Loren said frantically.

"It's me, Aster." She pulled down the collar covering her face.

"Really?" Loren yelled, not a little bit hysterically. "Because last time I checked my best friend didn't have black hair and black eyes."

Aster startled just stared back at her friend in complete astonishment. She knew about the hair, but her eyes were black as well? She shook her head, Aster didn't have time for this. Loren was alive, and now Aster had to keep them that way.

"I'm Aster."

"Then tell me something only Aster would know."

"You a secretly a Justin Beiber fan."

"Oh my god, it is you." Loren's mouth dropped and then shook their head. "And just because I had a few songs on my playlist --"
"Loren, we discuss your appalling taste in music, later.." She turned but Chronos had disappeared. “I have to get you out of here.”

"You are going to spill everything later," Loren promised, as Aster helped them up.

"Right," Aster distractedly agreed. "But first, I got to get you out of here." With a wave her hand, they disappeared with a loud pop.

---

**Soundtrack:** Dark In My Imagination by Of Verona

Aster popped back into Viti’s office building this time alone. She left Loren protected under The House’s impenetrable wards. Sirius and Archimedes would also protect them while she dealt with Viti. Aster clenched her fists, nose flaring. It was time to give that bastard a dose of his own medicine. She grinned ferally behind the high collar of her jacket and pulled the invisibility cloak up around her.

Now out of sight, again Aster cast the ‘point me’ spell.

She wasn’t had been really surprised that it led back to the lobby. However, what did surprise her was that Viti was nowhere to be seen. Aster idly wondered if she miscast the spell? She inwardly sighed in frustration as Aster noticed that this time the lobby had way more people in it. It had a dozen or so armed goons mingling around talking excitedly to each other. Yet the noise was so great she could only pick up a few words here or there.

It would make looking for Viti all that much harder.

Aster crept carefully passed the goons, making sure to not to bump into them. She had just made it to the reception desk when Viti sauntered in surrounded by an entourage, and to her shock, he was flipping through what was clearly Gio’s notebook.

‘How the hell did Viti get his hands on it?’ Aster seethed silently under the Invisibility Cloak. It was possible that Gordon had betrayed them. Harnell was proof positive that she couldn’t trust the GCPD despite that Batman had personally vouched for Gordon. And really, could she honestly trust Batman’s word at this point? Trusting both men, was partly how she had gotten into this mess in the first place.

In the end, the notebook didn’t matter. Viti wouldn’t be alive to reap the awards of his horrible deeds.

Aster continued her way to Viti, subtly certifying the goons one by one when the lights abruptly went out.

‘Yet, to her astonishment, Aster could still see everything clearly meanwhile the men were panicking around her. She was startled out of her shock when there was a sudden crash and then the glass was raining down all around her. Aster bent to cover her head, darting around the goons to get out of the way of the shards of glass. She found herself yet again grateful that her dragon hide armour protected her from the brunt of the onslaught.

"What the fuck?" She heard Viti demand over the cacophony. "Someone get the lights!"

Aster finally stood up and looked around. Her black eyes met the equally unnatural white eyes of Batman. Yet, thanks to the darkness and her invisibility cloak he couldn't see her. He stood still directly in the centre of the chaos, his long black cape billowing out dramatically behind him. ‘Of course, he had to stick his big nose in it’, Aster thought to herself, aggravated at hero's dramatic entrance.
Batman started taking out the bewildered men one by one. Aster used his distraction to make her own way towards Viti cutting a wide swathe through the goons with 'stupefy', petrificus totalus', and various of other offensive spells spilling rapid fire out of her mouth.

The light turns on and Aster blinked.

"Batman!" Viti exclaimed, alarmed. Then he turned to look at Aster. "And who the fuck are you?"

Batman turned to look at Aster, the edges of his white eyes widening slightly beneath his cowl as he took in her. She must make quite a sight in her battle uniform. In the panic, Aster's invisibility cloak must have once again slipped open which was just her sodding luck! In the end, Aster chose not to say anything at all. The high collar of her leather coat covered most of her face, leaving only her black eyes. And really, if Loren couldn't recognize her then she was pretty sure no one else would.

Although, with her distinctive British accent, it was best if she stayed silent.

"One of your sidekicks, Bat freak?" jeered, Viti.

Batman just stared intensely at her for a long awkward moment before he turned back to Viti. "I'm taking you in Viti."

"Like hell you are." He waved the notebook. "Without this, you got nothing on me or Uncle Carmine. He's going to be so fucking grateful, he'll probably make me his heir and not that pussy Alberto." He grinned manically then turned to his men. "Kill them both!"

The men turned their guns on Aster and Batman.

**Soundtrack:** Problem by Natalia Kills

Aster spun her wand in her hand, and then said, 'Praefervidus Maximus Guns!'

There were high pitched yelps as the men dropped their guns. Batman moved taking goon after goon. She went flying as a hard boot connected with her stomach. Aster tripped over a goon who was lying prone on the ground, The Elder Wand dropping out of her hand as she hit the ground. Aster groaned, rubbing her sore head but she spotted a movement in the corner of her eye and rolled away. She reached out with her other hand and grabbed his leg and sharply twisted it.

"Aargh!" He screamed.

Aster then moved swiftly to kick him back in the solar plexus, then she hit him hard in his face making him stumble back. She jumped to her feet and swept his feet from underneath him. The goon went down like a felled tree. In one smooth movement, the Elder Wand smacked back in her hand and she stunned him.

Aster shook her head, her eyes darted to Viti who was trying to flee. *That wouldn't do.* She cast a lock spell on the door and was about to cast an incarcerous when time seemed to slow down as Aster spotted a movement out of the corner of an eye. Unknown to Batman who way too busy dealing with the rest of the goons, a man was aiming right at him. The gun went off and she instinctively called out:

"Protego!"

The shield shot out of the Elder Wand and just barely managed to deflect the bullets. Batman turned and glowered at her from across the room.
She rolled her eyes, 'Would it kill him to be grateful?'

Aster ducked another throw at her, and she countered with a jelly-legs hex that made her would be attacker fall flat on its ass. With another charm, she jumped over a cluster of goons and raced after Viti who was making his way up the stairs.

'VITI!'

The man turned around his face bone white. He shakily pulled out a gun out of his pocket and she instantly put a shield charm. The rain of bullets bounced off it, but Aster knew that she was pinned down and it would be a while until he ran out of bullets. With the protego charm, she wouldn't be able to cast another spell while it still protected her.

Then an idea came to her. It was risky but, it was the only way to get to Viiti.

Aster cancelled the shield charm. She cried out, her body jerking as bullet after bullet hit her before she finally collapsed onto the ground.

"No bitch is going to take me down," He gloated. Viti walked over to her and put a gun up to Aster's head. Quick as a snake, Aster pivoted her head to the right, and cast her favourite spell, "Praefervidus Maximus Gun!" Vitii yelped dropping the gun. She jumped to her feet, rage exploded as she cast a stinging hex and he yelped. She jumped to her feet as anger exploding inside of her as she punched him right in his face. Viti bellowed in rage, and try to land a sloppy haymaker, but Aster easily dodged hit to his chest. He once again tried to land another hit but what she lacked in body weight and muscle she made up for it in speed and agility. She easily ducked all of his blows and return a punch just right under his chin and then finished with a with a roundhouse kick to the stomach that sent him on his ass.

Unseen to anybody, Aster grinned fiercely behind the collar and pointed her wand to his throat.

"Don't do it."

She turned to see Batman at the bottom of the stairs, his eyes glowing up at her. Aster was tempted, Merlin knew how tempted she was. She said nothing, just turned to stare down into Viti's round terrified eyes as he quivered under her.

"Killing Viti won't change anything," Batman argued.

Aster abruptly barked out a bitter laugh. 'Justice? What did Batman know about Justice?' She thought angrily to herself. Aster stood there on the edge of a precipice, struggling with her need for vengeance and Batman's arguments. It reminded her all too much about the Battle of Hogwarts and that final battle with Voldemort. She had killed him, but really what had that changed? It didn't bring back all the friends she lost and the Wizarding World was more than ever divided by bloodlines. If Aster killed Viti, another gangster would simply rise up to take his place. She knew in the end, Batman was right.

She sighed and with a murmured spell and another flick of her wand Viti slumped still on the ground.

"NO!" Batman hurried up the stairs and shoved Aster to the side. He bent down and checked Viti's pulse. "He's alive?"

Aster rolled up her eyes, "Yes, I just stunned him."

Batman turned to look at her, "Huh. You continued to surprise me, Potter."
Aster was so startled she almost tripped down the stairs. His gloved hand gripped her shoulder and pulled her close to him. The hard armour pushing into the supple dragonhide armour. She felt her cheeks flush and yanked her arm away. "How did you know?"

The corners quirked up once again into a condescending smirk, "I have my ways." Any trace of emotion was wiped away and he asked coldly: "What is a witch doing in a place like Gotham?"

Aster didn't say anything she just stared up at him.

"Just trying to live my life."

Batman just looked blankly back at her.

Aster threw her up hands. "Look, I didn't mean to get involved in all of this." She shrugged. "I am not trying to be a hero, this all just happened."

"I need to call Gordon," Batman finally said, shaking his head. He was just raising his arm when she pointed her wand at him and said: "Petrificus Totalus"

His entire body went rigid, his hands froze in mid-tap.

"Sorry, Bats," Aster said, with a put a sigh. "I can't really risk anyone knowing my secret. Obliviate!"

She made sure to erase her entire identity out of his head. Aster also made sure to plant the seed that he rescued Aster and Loren and allowed them both to escape. She regretted having to do this. After her third year and Lockhart memory charms left a nasty taste in her mouth. Yet, this was necessary,

Shaking her head, Aster tied up Viti and then turned to take one last look of the mess of the lobby. The bodies of unconscious goons laid scattered across the floor before she finally disappeared with another pop.

Chapter End Notes

Aster really kicked some ass in that one, didn't she? Anyway, please leave a comment and/or a kudos. I really want to know what you guys think of this chapter. The final chapter will be dropping on January 26th. See you guys then!
Chapter Summary

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Chapter Notes

Oh my god, guys, this is officially the last chapter of this story. I started writing this fic in April and it’s been a long 10-month journey to get here. I will, of course, be posting the epilogue to this on the usual schedule. So, stay tuned for that, but I plan on taking a long break to rest and relax and then I plan on finishing getting the Amalgamation website up and running. I also plan on releasing my own special edition eBook versions of this story so stay tuned for all of that. Also, during the break, I might post some vignettes and I am thinking of rebooting my Teen Wolf fanfic: From Beginning’s End. You can contact me as always by hitting me up on my Twitter account or you can email me here.

As for the chapter, I’m going to ask you guys to suspend your belief on a few things. First of all, the court process and legal stuff is coming from three months of Paralegal training, and all the true crime movies and documentaries I watch. Which means to say, yeah take it with a grain of salt. I did my best to research it, but I am no legal expert. Also, I know that in real life the U.S. Marshalls would not let Loren be at the trial or let Aster’ through at all. However, I had to give them the last few scenes to wrap Loren’s storyline.

Thanks again to everyone who has stuck by me throughout this story from my betas, especially Batty for being my number #1 cheerleader. To all of you have given such thoughtful and heartfelt comments. I also want to thank all the people have subscribed, bookmarked, and kudos. And speaking of kudos did you guys notice that this story has reached 200 kudos! Oh my god, I never would have thought that my story would be this popular, especially since the ship is so rare. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Now, I have babbled on enough. On with the story!
"Damn it," Aster cursed under her breath as she ran down the hall. Her heels click-clacking madly on the floor as she rushed passed a man; bumping slightly into him.

"Sorry," she called out but Aster still picked up the pace. She was already running late as it was. Finally, Aster spotted the right room number. She stopped, catching her breath, straighten herself up and pushed back the burgundy curls that slipped out from her sloppy attempt a chignon.

Aster nodded to the guards, and carefully opened the door into a packed courtroom. The press were beside themselves as they took photos. At the centre of the mess was Johnny Viti who was leaning casually back in the chair as if he had not a care in the world next to his attorney who was speaking to him quietly. She barely was able to push down the bile that threatened to rise. This was the first time Aster had seen Viti since battle a month ago. She looked away from him, scanning the onlookers, and the rabid press before she finally spotted Loren's light blond hair in the third row.

Aster pushed her way through the crowd, and over to them. She was waved at them, and thankfully it didn't take long for Loren to spot Aster. Loren threw her a relieved smile. She made her way to them but was stopped by a group of burly blokes.

"Sorry Ma'am, but you can't sit here," said one man.

"Look, Loren Marbury is my friend."

"Be it as it may," begun the second man.

"It's okay," Loren said rushing over to her.

"Mx. Marbury, we already are putting you in danger by having you."

"Believe me, Marshall," Loren threw Aster a rueful look. "Aster would be the very last person to try ever hurt me."

"Fine," The first Marshall sighed.

Aster pushed her way past the Marshalls and hugged Loren.

"I'm so glad that you came, Aster," Loren said, fiercely hugging Aster back.

"I wouldn't miss this for the world."

"Please Rise the Court is now in session, the Honourable Judge Kendrick Saliba presiding. " loudly announced the Bailiff.

The court quieted down, everyone faced the front as Aster saw an imposing looking bloke with dark sepia coloured skin and grey hairs at his temples walked out of the chambers, his robing billowing around him in a way that reminded her oddly of Professor Snape.

"You all now be seated."

Everyone complied and the judge turned to the jury. "Have you reached a verdict?"

The Forewoman stood calmly, even under the piercing glare of Johnny Viti. "We have."

Loren gripped Aster's hand. This had been long in coming and with this decision, it would determine if Johnny Viti would finally pay for all of his sins or if would he once again walk again free to
terrorize Gotham again.

"We the Jury, in the case of the State of New Jersey versus Jonathan Viti find the defendant guilty of the charge of Second-Degree Murder."

The court erupted in a roar, and Johnny Viti shot up to his feet, his meaty fists in his hands. "This is bullshit." He shouted, jerking his shoulder out of his bewildered Attorney's hands. The judge slammed down his gravel. "Order, Order in the court." A group of bailiffs just barely made Viti settle down, but if looks could kill the poor Jury Forewoman would have become yet another one of Viti's many victims.

"Continue, Forewoman."

Aster sat stunned as the Forewoman announced that Johnny Viti was subsequently found guilty on the charges of Racketeering, Obstruction of Justice, Kidnapping, Assault, and Tax Evasion. Aster wished the police had found enough to charge him for Gio's murder, but she would have to be satisfied with him paying for Connor Harnell's death and for his role in both Loren and Aster's kidnapping.

Aster turned to see Loren staring in disbelief at the jury, tears streaming down their face.

"Loren?"

Loren turned back to Aster and hugged her again in visible relief. She held them tighter in her arms as she felt Loren's tears soaking through the jacket of her pantsuit.

"You!"

Aster looked up to see Johnny Viti lunging at them, now being held down by the guards. "You think you can get away with this bitch? It ain't over! I'm going to get you for this."

"I think it's time for us to go, Mx. Marbury," said one of the Marshall's.

"Okay," Loren nodded, hesitantly pulling away from Aster to stand to their feet.

Aster turned to see the bailiffs dragging a belligerent man away. "Yeah, agreed." Aster helped usher Loren away from the chaos of the courtroom, ignoring the flashing lights of cameras and the questions shouted loudly at them by reporters.

Soundtrack: *I'll Never Forget You* by Birdy

Outside the courtroom was just as hectic as the inside of it. The light from the press's cameras stung her eyes.

"How do you feel about the outcome of the trial, Mx. Marbury?"

"Do you have any words for Johnny Viti," shouted another journalist.

"Do you think you being a stripper contributed your fiancé's death?" shouted a particular disgusting journalist. Loren clenched their fists and tried to turn around but Aster stopped them. She vehemently shook her head, knowing that they were just trying to get a rise out of them. If they were anything like the rabid piranhas of the Wizarding Press, they would use everything they could to get a story out of Loren.
Loren sighed and continued forward, the Marshall's making a physical barrier between them and the press. Finally, they made their way to a small conference room not too far away from the entrance of the Courthouse. Aster tried to follow them inside, but the Marshalls once again stopped her.

"You can't go in," The Marshall said. "You’re going to have to leave."

Loren threw them a frustrated look, "Can I just have five minutes alone with her?"

The Marshall opened his mouth to protest.

"Just five more minutes and I promise I won't give you any more trouble."

The Marshall threw up his hands, "Fine. Five minutes and then she leaves. We will be right outside the door."

The blokes walked out of the door and shut it firmly behind them.

Aster turned to Loren and gave them a watery smile. "I guess this goodbye."

"Yeah," Loren nodded, sniffing. "When all of this started, I was prepared to leave you and all this behind. But now? After everything?"

Aster walked over to Loren and pulled them into arms. She ducked her head into the crook of Loren's shoulder. "I'm going to miss you." She blinked back tears as both the good times and bad times they had together flashed through her mind. The movie nights, Loren telling her that they were leaving Gotham. the talks over burgers at Paulie's diner, comforting them in the hospital as they told Aster Gio's death, Gio and Loren sappily dancing to some silly love song in the middle of their living room while Aster threw popcorn at them, and then Loren's body lying dead in her arms,

"Me, too," Loren replied tearfully. After a moment, they hesitantly let each other go.

"It sucks that I won't even get to bloody write you or text you."

Loren snorted, "The downsides of joining Witness Protection program."

"Yeah," Aster just said. She was grateful that Loren would be protected and to finally get the chance to start a new life. Yet, Aster would never say it to Loren. It hurt her to have that last lifeline stripped away from her. Shortly, Aster would have to walk out that door and never see their friend again.

"You'll keep your promise?" Loren asked.

They sighed and then said softly: "No matter what happens, I'm going to leave Gotham."

Aster nodded. "Yeah, I know."

"But Aster?"

Aster looked back at them, blue eyes meeting green.
"I want you to make me a promise," Loren asked.

"What?"

"Promise me that you will be okay."

"I will," Aster whipped her eyes.

There was a knock on the door, and the Marshall's peeked their head in. "It's time to go."

"Love you, Ash." Loren tearfully smiled.

Aster took one last moment to engrave Loren's elfin features into her mind for the last time. Although Aster would she would never see Loren again she would never forget them.

"Love you too Loren."

Then Aster turned and walked out of the room; not daring to look back.

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**Soundtrack:** [Float On by Modest Mouse](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6B7L5b3uIE)

Aster took the tube, feeling all the while like a zombie. Normally, Aster hated taking the tube and Apparition was a much more efficient way to travel. Yet. She couldn't concentrate, her mind replaying everything on repeat like a Wizarding Photo. She was so out of it that she almost missed her stop. Aster made her way up and out of the tube, and up on to the street.

Occupied as she was, Aster wasn't able to drum up her usual disdain for the quirky shops, and pretentious cafes and niche bistros she passed by on the way home. She even managed to not roll her eyes at the group of Hipsters she walked passed as she turned the corner on to Vermilion street. Aster could feel The House's emotions. It was happy to see her, but there a brief flare of irritation. She wondered if Sirius and Archimedes destroyed something else today?

Aster crossed the street, feeling the magic of the place thrum all over her like an icy chill down her spine. She fondly patted the stones and the door opened by itself. Aster walked into The House and just like always Sirius ran over to her. Acting like he hadn't just seen her this very morning. He barked and licked her face. Aster hugged him to her, burying her nose in its short black fur. Tears spilling again as she just sat there in the middle of The House and grieved for a loss of yet another friend. Picking up on her emotions, Sirius whined.

"Don't worry about me, Siri," Aster said, tearfully. "I'm just being ridiculous."

Suddenly, there was a disturbance of air, and then there was a pair of claws biting into her suit jacket. Archimedes nipped her hard on the ear.

"Ouch," Aster complained.

"Let me guess you want food?"

Another nip and Aster rolled her eyes. "Go to your perch and I'll feed you."

There was a ruffle of feathers and in the corner of her eye, she could see Archimedes move its head
before it finally let go and flew over to his perch near the door. Aster petted Sirius one more time and
gave a sigh at the tear in the shoulder of her suit jacket. She would have to repair it once she got a
new wand. First of all, Aster didn’t think she should be using the most powerful wand in known
existence for simple repairs. Aster also didn’t want to be caught wielding the Elder Wand in public.
She didn’t need the shit storm that would inevitably come during her visit to Ireland this summer
when her best friends and/or her old classmates got a good look at her wand. Also,

Aster shook her head and hurried to the kitchen to fill her familiar’s food and water bowls. Later,
while her familiars were busy chowing down, she took kicked off her heels and peeled off her ruined
suit jacket and padded outside into the garden. She looked up at Gotham’s skyline, and Aster wonder
what she would do next?

To be completely honest with herself, she was now at loose ends. To no one’s surprise, Janney had
fired her. She felt pity to the person he roped into taking over the last-minute planning the Pride Gala.

Speaking of the Gala, Aster couldn’t quite believe that the Gala was tonight. It seemed like a lifetime
had passed since the start of this whole mess. She closed her eyes and delighted in the summer
breeze that wafted around her, disturbing the loose tendrils of her hair.

Inwardly, her thoughts moved to Gordon. After the battle, Aster had called Gordon and told them
that both Loren and she were okay. Yet, the two friends vehemently refused to trust their safety to
the police after Harnell's betrayal. Gordon tried to argue, but in the end, Aster's own stubbornness
had won out. They both showed up at that D.A. Porter's office just a few hours before the trial
began. After that Loren reluctantly went into the Marshall's custody.

Aster herself had gone to the trial every day and sat in the audience to give her friend the emotional
support she could as Loren testified against The Falconers. Today was the first day since the trial
began that Aster had gotten to talk to them.

Aster sighed, started to walk the perimeter of her garden, the warm grass tickling her bare feet. She
couldn’t believe that her friend was gone and she didn't know what to do with herself now. During
the trial, Aster spent her days concentrating on just getting both Loren and her through it. She visited
Monyoa in the hospital a few times, Monyoa was recovering nicely from her gunshot wounds but
the other woman’s attitude only just warmed up to Aster.

Through all of that, Aster had apparated to Iowa to attend Connor Harnell's funeral. To be honest,
Aster hadn't known why she felt that she needed to be there. Harnell had betrayed them all, was
partly responsible for Loren's and Aster's deaths. Yet, thinking about in hindsight, maybe Aster just
needed that closure?

The funeral itself was a small and quiet affair. Even after all Connor had done to all of them, it still
hurt to see the palpable grief of his family.

Aster stood there in the hot summer evening and hoped to Merlin that this would be the last funeral
she would have to attend.

Starting out her thoughts she suddenly heard her phone ring.

She pulled out her mobile and it was Samirah. She was probably asking to go out for drinks. and her
finger hovering over the accept button. Then she thought of her promise to Loren and gave a
bittersweet smile and accepted the call. ‘Time to start keeping my promises.’

Chapter End Notes
As my beta and my group chat can attest I was literally in tears when I wrote this chapter. I hope all of y'all are okay. *hugs* The epilogue will drop on February 9th. See you guys then! Please leave a comment and/or kudos! Thank you.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Previously on Playing Hero:
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Chapter Notes

I know, I know I'm a little late. I usually post on or before midnight of the date of my deadline. However, this has been a shitty week for me so I couldn't get the final touches by my usual time. A couple things, 1) There are more links in the story itself. You will get to see the outfit I put together because I love fashion and aesthetics. Basically, I'm being extra as hell as usual. 2) There are mentions of lady boners. Meaning, Aster makes a brief mention of her lady penis. I went over this with my transgender beta to make sure it was not offensive at all, but if you are trans or nonbinary and do find it offensive please let me know and I'll change it. 3) I changed my username and my icon. My new name is ImperiousPurple and yes, I know misspelt my new name on the cover (damn dyslexia). I will correct soon.

Once again, I want to thank all my readers who have subscribed, bookmarked, kudos and left a comment. I was not expecting that anyone would love this fic as I do. I was pleasantly surprised at the great reception to it. For someone who thought honestly that they couldn't ever write because of disabilities, you have proven delightfully wrong. So thank you guys from the bottom my heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Soundtrack: Glamorous – Fergie

"I can't believe I agreed to this," Aster muttered to herself as she stepped out of the cab and in the front of The Royal Hotel. She grimaced at all the paparazzi that was all around her. Even with her sudden notoriety with her face in every newspaper in the city, with the elite of Gotham City out in full force Aster's presence would be only a tiny bleep on the radar. Aster shivered, as a cool wind whipped across the exposed skin of her evening gown.

Really, Aster should have chosen a dress with some bloody sleeves! Unfortunately, this dress had been hanging in the back of her closet when she needed something to wear to the gala when Samirah called her at the last minute and shanghaied her into being her plus one. Her former sister-in-law Fleur Delacour had bought it for her as a 'coming out' present. As far Aster was concerned, it was way too revealing, but she didn’t have time to go out to the shops and buy something new.
The dress was a black halter mermaid dress that had silver geometric lines on them. It had a low v in the front that showed off her cleavage. It was connected in the bare parts by a thin black strap at her chest and straps lacing up corset style on the sides.

She blinked at a sudden camera flash. 'Spoke so soon', Aster thought bitterly to herself as she turned to glare at a photographer. He just leered down at slightly exposed cleavage and took another photo.

"Aster!"

Ignoring the photographer, Aster whirled around and did a double take.

Samirah stood before her in a gorgeous emerald green dress and a matching silk hijab. Similar to Aster's own dress, it had a mermaid silhouette that hugged Samirah curves. A pair of sandals peaked out from beneath her dress. Around her was a detachable silk green skirt that flared out at her sides.

That is where the similarities between the two dresses ended.

At first glance, it looked it was a sheer dress with the green applique swirls on it. Yet, as Aster got closer it was obvious that had a nude colour underdress to give it that appearance.


"I decided to splurge for once." Samirah preened. "And you look hot, Aster! Just like a red-haired Veronica Lake. You are going to have to beat the guys and girls off of you."

Aster blushed, fiddling with the waves of her hair that had taken her longer than she willing to ever admit to achieve. She coughed awkwardly and glanced at the people across the quad that were posing on the red carpet. "Why exactly am I here again?"

"Samirah smiled at her, "Because, no matter what Janney says you planned most of this and you deserve to be here." Samirah's smiled faded. "Besides, my girlfriend broke up with me and I had an extra ticket."

Aster hugged her, "Sorry, Sammie."

Sammie shrugged, "Eh, her loss and your gain Aster." Samirah hooked her arm into Aster's and smiled. "Now, let's mingle with the rich and famous, shall we?"

Aster laughed, Samirah was right she had done most of the work and she was diffidently going to try her damnest to enjoy it. Hand and hand the two women joined the well-dressed crowd inside.

**Soundtrack:** High Society by Betty Who

Aster had the very intention of having fun. Unfortunately, even with Samirah on her arm, she was still forced to pretend that she wasn't socially awkward. She gritted her teeth and pasted on her fake vapid smile that she had perfected during all those Ministry functions she had to attend as an Auror.

No matter what the Purebloods thought, there was very little of the difference between snotty Purebloods and Muggle socialites.

She stopped a passing waiter and desperately grabbed a flute of champagne, "You want one?"

"I don't drink alcohol, remember?" Samirah shook her head. "I'll go and a get a virgin Mimosa later."
Aster shook her head, "Only you go out for drinks every week and drink nothing but mocktails."

Samirah laughed and shrugged, "What can I say? I'm the queen of the mocktail? Besides, I get to both drink lots of delicious drinks and get tons of blackmail material. What's not to love?"

Aster gave a rueful shake of her head and took a long sip of her own drink. "I reckon I will be drinking for the both of us tonight."

Samirah wagged her finger at her. "Don’t get too wasted."

Aster turned to give a long look at the crowd of glittering gowns and expensive bespoke suits. Before she finally shook her head, "No promises, mate."

Samirah patted Aster consoling on the shoulder, "While you over here sulking, I'm going to ask someone to dance."

Aster smirked as she took another long defiant sip of her drink. Samirah rolled her eyes and turned walked away into the crowd. She wouldn't be surprised if Samirah went home with someone. Her friend was outgoing and ridiculously charming. Meanwhile, Aster was probably going to end go home alone to get pissed on fire whiskey.

‘God, I’m probably going to die alone’, Aster thought to herself.

Aster took another large swallow to wash away those utter depressing thoughts and gave a sardonic smile as she spotted Samirah. She was not surprised to see that in the short time she had been gone that her friend had persuaded a very pretty brunette to dance. Aster took her half-full flute and headed through the crowd out towards the balcony.

She diffidently needed some fresh air.

Aster made her way through the crowd, and the door was only a few meters away when suddenly she found herself slamming into what felt like a brick wall. Dazed, Aster took in the navy-blue tuxedo that even though it had a stain from her split champagne fit this deliciously muscular man's body like a glove, up to his broad shoulders, and then lovely long neck that she had a sudden irrational urge to lick and bite. Heart pounding in her chest, she tried not to visibly squirm.

Aster jumped back, almost tripping the skirt of her dress when she felt warm calloused hands reached out to hold on to her wrists. Her breath caught in her chest as Aster finally looked up into intense dark eyes that seemed to pierce inside of her very soul. His full lips quirked into a cheeky smirk that made her want to both smack or kiss him.

Which, if the news was anything to go by was the normal reaction most women had to billionaire playboy Bruce Wayne.

Feeling embarrassed at her own reaction to the man, and at ruining his suit. Aster pulled away from him. "I'm so sorry."

Bruce threw her a charming grin, "You can make it up to me by dancing with me."

Aster blinked up in utter bewilderment. "Um--"

"Come on, one little turn on the dance floor won't hurt you."

Before Aster could really say anything, she found herself being led to the dance floor blushing at the mix of curious and envious looks that were thrown at her. Any attraction Aster had felt for the man
had been washed around by the discomfort of being the centre of attention. She really should pull away, make her excuses and leave. Yet, Aster knew that would gain her even more attention. It was not every day a woman rejected Gotham's most eligible bachelor.

Aster inwardly gave a defeated sigh. She would give him once dance and slip out and apparate home. As they made their way to the centre of the dance floor, Aster caught Samirah's gleeful grin in the crowd and knew she would be squeezed for every detail of this fiasco.

He pulled her into his arms, and the band started playing "Unforgettable". They swayed together, their bodies pressed together. She prayed silently to Merlin that she wouldn't step on his toes or get an inconvenient boner.

"My name is--"

"Is Bruce Wayne," Aster interrupted him. "I think everybody knows who you are."

"Please call me Bruce," Bruce corrected her. "And you are?"

"Aster Potter."

"I haven't seen you before, have I?" He asked.

She looked up to meet his eyes and shook her head, "No, this is the first time you decided to bless us with your presence."

Instead of looking offended he just smiled down at her, "You don't seem all that happy about that."

Aster shrugged, "I have been trying to get you to attend this ball for a year or so."

He lifted an eyebrow, "Really? Why?"

"I used to be the Event Coordinator for the LGBT Centre. " Aster rolled her eyes, "You ditched the party last year for an impromptu trip to the south of France with some supermodel if I remember correctly."

Bruce winced, "Sorry about that."

Aster gave a defeated sigh, "It is okay, it was a nice touch though to send your ward, Dick."

Bruce grinned at her, then frowned. "You said you used to be the Event Coordinator?"

Aster shrugged. "Yeah, I was fired."

Bruce's eyes went wide, "And you still showed up?"

"Thought I enjoy the fruits of my labour." He spun her around and pulled close to him again. He smiled down at her, "Well, that's a shame. I would have diffidently come here last year if I knew that the staff was as beautiful as you."

Aster blushed again but rolled her eyes. "If that's your usual line, I'm astonished that you pull anyone at all."

He tucked a strand of her burgundy hair behind her ears, "I have you know that people find me very charming."

Aster eyes darted from those enigmatic brown eyes back to his lips. There was idle part of her mind
that was screaming that kissing Bruce Wayne in the middle of a crowded dance floor was a terrible idea. Yet, it felt like she was under a spell and trying in vain to fight against the compulsion to feel her lips against his.

"Brucey!"

Aster jerked away, her face burning with embarrassment as she saw a gorgeous strawberry blonde woman a few years younger than her making their way towards them. She threw a verminous glare at Aster before she was all over Bruce.

"You promised to dance with me." She pouted up at him.

He threw a bewildered look at the woman, then back up at Aster. She stepped back, feeling uncomfortable as more and more people started to pay attention to the scene being played out.

"Sorry, I didn't know that he had a date," Aster apologized.

"Aster--" Bruce tried to interrupt but was suddenly occupied by looping the other woman looping her arms around him.

Without another word, Aster turned on her heels and walked away. Regretting that she ever danced with the wanker. She should have known that he was a womanizer and she fell right into his trap. Aster had thought that she had been better than that, but now she knew she was just as susceptible to his charms as any other woman. She would just have to write this off as one off and do everything that she can to never see Bruce Wayne ever again.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end. This has been a ride and I'm so glad that you guys stuck out with me. It's going a be a while before I start posting the sequel to this because currently preparing to write another fic. I will be posting that fic at the same time as the sequel to the next one. If you want to know more and get updated please follow me on my twitter account @amalgamationfic, if you have any questions you can also ask me by email at amalgamationfic@gmail.com.

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