Vacation Time

by Earthiana

Summary

Daredevil's identity is revealed. Matt invites the Avengers on holiday because he's fine, totally fine.

OR

Matt is an adorable duckling who really just needs a hug.

***works as a STANDALONE fic***
The Avengers have gathered in one of Tony’s shiny, black limousines. Happy Hogan is acting as their chauffeur, sitting silently in the front seat.

“Get it out now, while we’re not in range.” Stark says, too caught up in his own worries to be toying with his StarkPad.

“This is a bad idea.” Natasha claims from beside Steve, who speaks up in response.

“He asked us to spend time with him, I think that’s a positive thing.”

“Yeah.” Clint agrees. “I’d rather he wasn’t alone.”

“I’m not disagreeing, there.” Natasha argues. “But I expect this to end in disaster.”

“Daredevil’s identity got out, ok. Not good.” Tony checks the GPS on his phone, double-checking they aren’t in the aforementioned man’s hearing range. “But it’s not the end of the world.”

“Tony’s right.” Steve nods. “This is a vacation, we shouldn’t be worried. It’ll be fun.”

Matt’s breath catches in his throat as he hides from a hoard of eager reporters. He feel like Stark and it’s not a feeling he enjoys.

Luckily for him, Dice is cuddled against his knee and he can smell the Avengers (Particularly the chemical smell radiating from Bruce.) walking around somewhere outside. He hadn’t planned on actually spending time near civilians, but the light rain was becoming a headache and then a migraine.

Dice is whining and pulling on his sleeve, so he pets the dog to quieten him.

This is fine. It’ll be fine. Don’t talk, they can’t judge you if you don’t talk.

Matt leads Dice through the swarms of families and businessmen waiting to go through security. He only hears his name called a couple of times as he hurries past. He makes it to the sliding doors and rushes outside, glad when he doesn’t hear footsteps running after him.

“Matt!” He hears Clint call his name as he makes his way over. He hears something pitter-pattering across the ground and recognises the swishing of a furry tail. Clint brought Lucky.

Matt unclips Dice’s lead; he isn’t wearing his jacket so he’s allowed to greet the Avengers individually with a wagging tail and wet tongue.

“I was waiting to the rain to clear up.” Murdock claims, gesturing upwards.
“Sure.” Steve is the first to talk. “I expected it to be a better day.”

“What can you do?” Matt shrugs, but his shoulders are stiff.

_Are they really talking about the weather?_

“Stark, are we ready to board?” Natasha asks as Lucky and Dice sniff each other’s butts.

“Stop it, Dice, you have more class.” Matt chastises his dog, who returns to his side happily.

“What’s wrong with my dog’s butt?” Clint pouts.

“You feed him pizza.” Matt reaches down to touch the other dog gingerly. It slobbers all over his hand, so he pets his own dog instead.

“And let me guess, Dice eats prime cuts of steak?” Clint scoffs as they head after the other Avengers, who are, by this point, climbing the stairs to Tony’s jet.

Matt considers this.

“If I’m eating steak.” He agrees. “But usually fish.”

“You can’t just feed him kibble like a normal owner, can you?” Clint grumbles.

The jet is thin but spacious, Matt discovers as he steps inside.

The engines are somewhat daunting, but Dice continually nudges his hand, distracting him from the rumbling.

“You haven’t been out of New York before?” Tony asks incredulously when Matt tells him.

“No.” Matt admits. “The farthest I’ve ventured is probably to the Avengers tower. Or on visits to our resident Spider-Man.”

“First time to Hawaii, then.” Tony says lightly.

Daredevil doesn’t answer and, instead, urges Dice (who is much cleaner than Lucky) to jump on the seat beside him.

With the whole world knowing his identity, he figured he wouldn’t need the yellow harness so Dice is wearing a black vest.

Dice sits patiently beside Matt until the plane is ready to take off, at which point he lies across both his seat and Matt’s lap.

There’s minimal conversation as the jet starts to move but Matt occupies himself with stroking Dice gently and finding comfort in his strawberry-scented fur.

Dice has adjusted easily to the monthly, occasionally more frequent, baths. Matt has adjusted to being nudged repeatedly during the day.

_He was in the shower that morning, face wet. His laboured breaths must have attracted Dice’s attention because the dog wouldn’t stop—_

Whining. Dice is whining. He’s burrowing his face into Matt’s chest, just as Matt realises that he really doesn’t like the sound of the engines.
It doesn’t escape him that the Quinjet is much quieter.

“Matt, you ok?” Clint sits across the table from him. When he reaches over, Dice actually growls, so he pulls back.

“Good boy.” Matt mumbles into the dog’s head before lifting his head at Clint. “I’m fine, it’s just loud.”

“Ok, Buddy.” Clint nods at that.

Matt doesn’t think the others are talking but there’s a niggling hum from somewhere.

“Matt.” Clint talks to him again. “Steve has sleeping pills, if you want them?”

Matt shakes his head.

Clint doesn’t understand when he makes a hand symbol at Dice, who scampers off the seat and pulls out Daredevil’s red bag (Really, what is with him and red?), lifting it onto the seat with his mouth.

Matt takes out some headphones and Dice returns the bag.

Once the dog is settled on his lap and the noise-cancelling headphones are on his head, Matt doesn’t talk for the rest of the trip.

The landing required almost constant nudging from Dice, but Matt ‘forgot’ his worries upon leaving the jet.

The plane had landed somewhere near the beach and, on their way to the hotel, Matt experienced a cacophony of noise. There was the sound of the ocean rolling in, the clashing of luau music playing from several tiki bars. The mixed voices of tourists and natives left Matt a bit disorientated but otherwise intrigued.

The hotel, Matt can sense, is a widespread one with multiple, but not many, levels. There’s splashing and the stench of chlorine from a pool that Matt reminds himself not to set one foot near.

Matt’s carrying his suitcase while Dice proudly holds his red bag (it’s not very heavy).

Tony is trailing at least two cases towards the hotel and Matt is positive that they’re mostly filled with metal.

The others have a case each, with the exception of Clint who has his bow stored in its own bag.

“We have two single rooms.” Tony explains after he collected the keys from reception. The place smells like jasmine. “And two paired rooms.”

“Looks great.” Matt grins.

“You’re bunking with Clint, I’m bunking with Brucey. Cap and Nat get their own rooms.” Tony says definitively.

Matt’s face falls. He had hoped for some privacy, since Tony was paying. “I’m bunking with Clint?”
“Problem?” The archer wraps an arm around his shoulders, much to Matt’s distaste.

“I have super senses and I have to bunk with Clint?” Matt groans.

“Would you rather sleep with Tony?” Bruce offers. “He’s nocturnal.”

“Crepuscular.” Tony corrects. “There’s a sweet spot at 4 AM.”

“Cap has rights as team leader and Tasha has rights as a super scary assassin.” Clint claims before pulling Matt along by his arm. “Let’s go.”

Matt does find the heat pleasurable, along with the salty smell of the ocean. He’s glad he packed Dice’s moisturizing shampoo, though, because sleeping with a pickled pup is not his idea of fun.

“That animal is not allowed on my bed, or the couches.” Matt points unhappily at Lucky, who is sniffing around the living room area.

“Fine, fine.” Clint calls from one of the bedrooms.

Matt claims the other. He takes off Dice’s vest, lead, and collar so he can run around on his own but the dog opts for sitting beside Matt on the bed, resting his head on the man’s shoulder.

If Clint hears Matt crying in his room, he doesn’t comment.
The Beach

Steve starts making his way around the rooms after his morning run because they’re on holiday and no-one is sleeping in on a Steve-approved holiday.

“Clint! Matt!” Steve knocks on their door until the duo wake up.

Matt rolls over in his room. Admittedly, Clint hadn’t snored as much as he expected, however, Lucky had flight-induced diarrhea that had Matt with his head in the toilet for a portion of the night.

“Steveeee!” Matt hears Clint groaning after opening the door.

“Clint, it’s 9 o’clock.” Cap’s voice sounds happy and cheerful and it makes Matt leave his warm bed so he can throw a pillow in its direction.

“Matt, you ok?”

Matt and Clint glare at Steve.

“We’re what the kids call ‘sleep deprived’.” Clint grins, but without his usual gusto. “Lucky had diarrhea, Matt was sick…”

“Murdock, you should come downstairs and eat something.” Steve tells him. “You too, Barton, it’ll wake you up.”

Resigned, the duo find their dogs and follow Steve downstairs with the others who, except Bruce, are equally as tired.

“Maybe Tony talked him to sleep.” Clint tells Matt as they lead their dogs away from the group and towards some grass, where they can relieve themselves.

Lucky seems to be feeling better (Good for him, Matt thinks.) so they quickly catch up to the others in the reception.

Tony’s wearing sunglasses and rests himself on Bruce when they find a table. Natasha is glaring directing at Steve, unrelentingly annoyed. Clint is cuddling up to Matt, who finds himself quite hungry after last night’s escapades. Steve is quite happily looking at the hotel’s menu.

There’s foreign food on the menu but (most likely due to the amount of tourists) there’s a great deal of American food. Not wanting to unsettle his stomach, Matt orders some waffles. Clint does the same while Steve gets something called ‘loco moco’. The others have bacon and eggs.

The dogs get fed a decent amount of bacon while Dice has some egg to accompany the meat.

“Lucky probably wants to go swimming.” Clint tells Matt from the redhead’s shoulder.

“I’ll join you.” Matt agrees. “Dice is warm. You brought shoes, didn’t you?”

Clint thinks of the hot asphalt outside and nods. “I’ll need to get them from the room.”

Dice is already wearing his little red shoes, enjoying the cold, white tiles of the restaurant against his stomach. His fur had been trimmed in preparation for the warm holiday and, wow, Matt is really starting to fuss over his pet.
“I’ll be at the pool with these dorks.” Natasha gestures to Bruce and Tony.

Tony makes a face but it’s difficult for Matt to detect with his glasses in the way.

“You don’t want to go sightseeing?” Steve sounds a little disappointed.

“Jetlag.” Bruce says, softer than anyone else would have in their sleepy stupor. “We can go sightseeing tomorrow, right?”

No-one answers.

Dice behaves perfectly in and out of the hotel.

*Lucky* however, runs up the stairs, almost knocking a teenage girl over in the process. He skids around their hotel room on his fluffy paws, knocking a lamp over. Thankfully, it didn’t break. The dog then tumbles down the stairs in his shoes, almost knocking over an entire family when he slips. Outside the hotel, he pulls on his lead and he scampers across the beach, spraying Matt with sand, then splashes into the water once his shoes are off. Uncouthly as possible.

“You’re welcome at the tower.” Clint tells Matt, who freezes.

“What?”

“Avengers tower. You’re welcome to stay at any time, for as long as you want. You know that, right?” Clint scratches his head as he follows the dogs to the shore.

“And why would I want to do that?” Matt asks, his blood like ice in his veins.

“Just, I dunno, if you’re worried about security.” Clint offers but his heart is racing.

Neither of the pair expect Matt to push Clint, knocking him onto his backside. Clint doesn’t say anything as he stares at Matt, who is visibly shaking.

“I’m not worried about anything.” Matt hisses. He starts making his way along the beach, as far away from Clint as he can.

He faintly hears Dice following him, maybe even nudging his leg, but Matt is focusing on the way the sand keeps swallowing his feet until he’s sinking, sinking, sinking.

He can’t hear Clint’s heartbeat. He doesn’t know where he is and he doesn’t care to find out.

Dice is licking his cheek (When did he kneel down?) and nuzzling into him but Matt’s throat is too tight to tell the dog how much he appreciates it.

So Matt stays quiet.

“I don’t understand why he would do that.” Steve’s voice says in the distance.

Daredevil has been walking for a while, following the trail of scent he left after running away. Guilt floods his chest when he realizes Clint told them what happened.

He hopes his cheeks don’t look too red as he silently follows his trail off of the sand and across the
street to the hotel.

He considers going to the pool, where he can hear the other Avengers resting, drinking, and chatting, but decides against it.

Who does he think he is? He’s not one of them. For God’s sake, Matt Murdock isn’t real, he never was.

He’s just pretending. Lying. Deceiving. Only Daredevil exists and Daredevil doesn’t need something as useless as friends.

“You came back.” Natasha’s voice is reaching him, he hears her heartbeat in front of him, but she feels a distance away.

He doesn’t apologize to Clint. He doesn’t say anything.

Dice is slick with salt water and sand, but he doesn’t feel the urge to wash the animal who keeps prodding him why won’t it stop?

“Looking a little hot, Murdock.” Natasha points out. “Day spa, scheduled in twenty minutes.”

Matt doesn’t respond to that, either.

Natasha understands, however, just like she always does, and urges Dice to tag along as she drags him away.
“Hello, did you have an appointment with us, today?” The receptionist asks.

“Yes, it should be under ‘Stark’.” Natasha explains, garnering a squeak from the woman.

“Yes, yes, come this way, please.”

Matt brings Dice, who the woman quickly notices.

“Lovely dog. Can I pet it?” She asks kindly and Matt gestures for her to go ahead, since Dice’s vest is back in the hotel room. She strokes Dice’s back before leading them to what Matt assumes is a changing room. The receptionist confirms this and leaves Natasha and Matt alone.

“It’s a fancy place.” Natasha comments. “Rich snobs probably bring pets here all the time.”

“Rich snobs like Tony?” Matt smiles cheekily as he pulls off his T-shirt. He’s beginning to think it’s Clint’s, actually, but he sniffs it and smells his own scent.

“It’s the one Clint gave you at your first movie night.” Natasha tells him softly, not moving to undress.

Matt figures he should say something but Natasha beats him to it.

“He’s your friend, Matt.” She tells him as she starts undressing (or performing a tribe ritual, Matt can’t decipher which when she starts moving her arms around). “You can’t pretend it didn’t happen.”

Matt figures Nat is undressed when he hears her throw her clothes on the bench. In his opinion, she doesn’t seem any different from normal.

“It’s not a problem.” Matt says and he feels his face stretch into a grin. “Think they’ll wash Dice?

They do wash Dice. They wash, dry, groom, and pamper Dice, all before lying him down and massaging his hard-worked muscles.

From the sound of his softly wagging tail, he enjoys the attention.

Matt and Natasha are laid naked on tables, cloth barely covering their various zones.

Neither seem to mind – with Matt’s blindness and Natasha’s living situation, they seem to be ok with being seen naked.

“Beautiful couple.” Matt’s masseur tells him. He’s not quite as fluent as the receptionist but Matt is overall surprised by the hotel’s staff.

“We aren’t together.” Matt corrects while Natasha cackles. “We’re colleagues.”

“He couldn’t handle me.” Nat flirts with his masseur, to the chagrin of both Matt and Natasha’s masseuse.

Matt is overall trying to ignore the heat he feels in both of the professionals and is especially glad
he’s being massaged by a man.

The lotion smells potent, but not unpleasant. After his morning adventure, the (Aloe vera?) oil feels good against his light skin. He relaxes into the table and ignores the soft breath he hears from Natasha.

He grimaces when the masseur touches a sore spot on his ribs. They’d been bruised a week prior. Matt hesitates but ultimately doesn’t say anything, allowing the masseur to knead the painful area.

It doesn’t last for long and Matt doesn’t know how to feel about that. He ignores the feeling and concentrates on the gentle swooping of the ocean waves outside, like heavy breaths.

The session ends with Dice falling asleep in his masseuse’s hands. The dog jolts awake, however, when Matt and Natasha get up from their respective tables and put on their gowns.

They thank the hotel staff, who leave with polite smiles.

“It wasn’t horrible.” Matt admits, because that was his expectation.

“Quite nice.” Natasha agrees.

She kindly doesn’t mention that the lavender candle sent him into a sneezing fit halfway through.

Natasha, not kindly, mentions his sneezing fit to the other Avengers.

Clint seems to have forgiven Matt and is deviously attempting to drag him into the pool.

“Why won’t you come swim with me?” Clint pouts. “I want to play marco polo!”

“Am I supposed to be It?” Matt asks, unamused as he tries to hide in the cool of the parasol. The sun feels like acid on his skin.

“It’s nice and cold.” Clint offers, trying to entice him. “Tony, stop working!”

Stark looks up from his tablet to stick out his tongue. “I’m reading.”

“I’ll play.” Bruce offers. “We haven’t done much together, as a team.”

Steve, who would normally jump at this, almost looks lethargic. A bored Clint is a tired team.

Tony’s yelping suddenly, squirming as Natasha grabs him by the arm and throws him into the water. She dives in after him, poking her head with a shark-like grin.

It hasn’t escaped Matt that he’s the only one not wearing a swimsuit.

“Steve.” Bruce urges, taking off his own shirt and climbing in.

Cap cannonballs into the water.

“Matt, c’mon!” Clint calls.

Matt sank into the sensory deprivation tank, his ears no longer twitchy. The world grew more and more muffled as the iron lid slides over the tank, locking him in the tiny space. His ears searched in the noise before his eyes fluttered closed.
Matt vaguely wonders if Clint would still want to play if he knew what he was swimming in.

Despite the chlorine, the stench of urine is overpowering. There’s blood somewhere in the far right of the pool, near the closed-off kid’s section. He can’t smell anything too revolting, so he takes off his shirt and shorts, sacrificing his boxers.

“Go hide.” He tells the others bluntly as he dips his body slowly into the filth.

Once Matt has overcome the smell of the pool and the Avengers have wandered off, he slips under the water and takes a long moment to appreciate the silence of the depths.

Matt ensures Clint is the first to be picked off, grabbing his foot from underneath him and pulling him down into the water, a hand over his mouth and nose to make sure he doesn’t inhale out of surprise. Clint makes muffled noises when Matt releases him, then swims to the edge of the pool unhappily.

Matt comes up for water before diving underneath and jetting over to Bruce, who he light taps on the foot. He doesn’t want the Hulk to think Bruce is in mortal danger.

Likewise, Matt taps Steve’s foot as to not bring up any bad memories.

Tony is the easiest to find, with the humming from his arc reactor. Matt finds a good spot to hide and snatches his foot, grinning devilishly at his surprised screams. He even blows bubbles at the inventor’s face when he’s holding him under.

It takes him an embarrassingly long time to find Nat. Heartbeats are flickering in his ears, fading in and out until he feels as if his head is about to burst.

Matt comes up to the surface to breathe, not as a failing attempt to hear her.

He scans the area with the beds before returning to the depths of the water.

Instead, he finds the scent of aloe vera oil hovering above the surface of the children’s pool and no, Matt is not putting one foot near the infant-infested waters.

Natasha wins.
Matt heard Stick approaching him with loud, echoing footsteps, just before he was sucked into the void.

Clint wakes up to Dice’s paw in his face. The dog’s mouth is wide open but Clint can’t hear anything without his aids, which he puts in immediately. Dice’s howling hits him full blast, as does Matt’s screaming from the other room.

Clint rushes to the adjacent bedroom, which has considerably quietened by the time he gets there. Matt is crying on his bed, but wipes his face when Clint opens the door.

“I’m fine.” Are the first words out of his mouth, even as he’s shaking.

He flinches when Clint takes another step towards him.

“Matt, it’s Clint.” He thinks to tell the man, who openly starts sobbing once more.

Clint hurries to the bed and wraps his arms around Matt, who initially tries to shove him away before babbling apologies that Clint doesn’t care to listen to.

Matt clings to the archer, his head wishing his hands would give up the fight.

He thinks back to the bracelet he gave Stick, and how the older man had promptly broke his arm.

*He doesn’t need friends. He doesn’t. Not like—*

“Are you even really blind?”

Clint moves him into a lying position and lies beside him, not asking any questions.

Matt wakes up with Clint draped over his stomach, snoring softly.

*He’s like a cat. Matt thinks as he sits up, rubbing at his face. How could he be so stupid…?*

He pulls away from Clint’s warmth and heads to the balcony, not quite sure what time it is. Steve hasn’t been knocking, that’s for sure. He sits on the warm tiles, facing the sun with his back to the doors.

“What’s it gonna be, Matty? You gonna spend the rest of your life crying and rocking yourself to sleep at night?”

He hears Clint approaching from behind. The archer doesn’t move; Matt crosses his legs and breathes deeply, allowing his energy to focus on stilling his jittery nerves.

He wonders, with all of his heart and soul, why God put the Devil in him. Why he feels it in every waking hour, clawing to be let out.

“You’re going to get yourself killed if you keep this up.”

Matt slowly moves to his feet, tracing the railing on the balcony before lifting himself onto it, perching quietly.
He hears, vaguely, a phone ringing from somewhere, but doesn’t listen to it.

“Matt, want to go get breakfast?” Clint offers, his heart speeding from the glass doors.

Matt listens for the three story drop below.

“Matt.” Clint repeats.

“You know you’re one bad day away from being me.”

Matt sways, his heart lurching when his foot slips.

In that moment, he hears the *woosh* of something mechanic grabbing him from underneath.

Stark.

“Are you crazy?” Tony demands over the roar of his boots.

Tony feels warm against his back, and soft, unlike his hands; he must only be wearing the gauntlets and boots. Matt soon feels the ground below him and Clint grapples for his arm, tugging him back inside where it’s safe.

Matt snaps out of his stupor instantly. “I slipped.”

“Sure as hell you slipped!” Stark yells at him.

Matt does twitch at the blasphemy but it’s not something unexpected, especially from Tony. “I slipped! You’ve seen me jump off of buildings before!”

“Yeah and you had your grapple-thingy.” Tony waves his hands around. “What the hell was that, Daredevil?”

“Clint, you saw—” Matt addresses the other man, who doesn’t utter a word.

“Fine.” Matt’s chest constricts. “You’re blowing this out of proportion but fine! I don’t care! Think what you want.”

Matt leaves both men and returns to his bedroom with Dice, who remains exceptionally quiet for a change.

Once he’s in the room, he closes the door and sits with his back against it, face buried in his knees.

“Why did He put the Devil in me?” Matt whispers to Dice, who rests his chin on his owner’s shoulder.

The tension at breakfast is difficult to miss.

Matt is sitting beside Steve and Bruce, completely ignoring Clint, who Bruce sees giving Matt sad looks.

Last thing he heard last night was Tony leaving their suite, half suited-up. He’d checked the man’s phone and still can’t forget what he read.

**DD on balcony. Worried hes bout to jump HELP**
That was at 4 o’clock. Now, at 9 o’clock, the team is silently eating (or not eating in Matt, Tony, and Clint’s case).

“Matt, I was thinking of going exploring this morning, care to join me?” Bruce gives the man an out. By the look of his scrunched forehead and trembling hands, he really needs an out.

He accepts it eagerly with an immediate nod. “Sure, sounds great.”

Bruce’s chemical smell and slow heartbeat places him in the couch in the hotel reception.

Dice is wearing his shoes and vest, ready to go on their little adventure. Bruce, after living in India’s heat, is wearing a pair of jeans and a shirt.

They set off early and don’t talk until they’re almost a mile from the hotel.

“How’s bunking with Tony?” Matt asks, a rollerblader narrowly avoiding him. His cane is folded up in his hand, Bruce notices, and Dice is wearing his yellow vest.

“Good, overall.” Bruce replies earnestly. “I think he’s making an attempt to relax.”

Matt’s foot stumbles over a crack in the road, but Bruce steadies him by grabbing hold of his arm. Matt tilts his head, frowns, and continues on.

“Matt, I struggle with depression and it really… stinks.” Bruce tells him. “The Avengers help a lot.”

“I slipped.” Matt insists, because he did. Sure, he was considering it but he slipped. Nothing else.

“If you’re telling me that’s the truth, then I believe you.” Bruce says, fiddling with something from his pocket. “But that doesn’t change that we’re all worried about you. We care, Matt.”

He doesn’t have anything to say to that, so he directs his head away.

“If you don’t feel that way, then good. But, if you’re starting to feel a little stressed or a little sad, and it’s becoming too much, you need to ask for help.” Bruce explains. “There’s no shame in that.”

“Lie, Matthew.”

*Stick’s voice was in his ear. The nuns were hovering over Matt, asking about the bruises on his leg. Who hurt the poor blind boy? Who broke his femur and sent him to hospital?*

“Lie. Lie. Lie.”

“Maybe I’m a little stressed.” Matt chokes out, Dice nudging his leg repetitively.

Bruce would say he looks downright terrified but he decides not to comment. Instead, he leads Matt to one of the many benches facing the sea. Matt clutches at the wood, then taps the seat before sitting down.

“I’m fine.” He tells Bruce, who nods.

“Ok, that’s ok.” Bruce sits beside him. “Let’s just look at the beach… sorry.”

Matt laughs earnestly but it turns into a sob that he struggles to cover up. When he puts his head
between his knees, Bruce rubs his back.

“Is something in particular bothering you?” Bruce asks.

“My mentor, I keep hearing him.” Matt sniffs, wiping his face as he sits back up. “That’s all.”

“Has he passed away?” Bruce guesses.

“No.” Matt focuses on the water and they leave it at that.

“Jewellery, Matt?” Bruce asks curiously as the man in question wanders around the stalls selling necklaces, bracelets, and more.

“I should probably get a souvenir for Karen.” Matt comments slowly, stroking a bead necklace idly.

“Would you like some help?” Bruce offers when Matt doesn’t move very much.

“I’m not sure what she likes.” Matt admits.

“Well,” Bruce looks around, examining the sets of beads in thought, “why don’t you get her something that you like? If you like it, I’m sure she’ll appreciate that.”

Matt ponders this before his head moves around. He seems to have an idea of what he wants, at least.

Bruce follows Matt over to a vendor with wooden beads and Matt doesn’t hesitate in buying a bracelet.

“It feels like my rosary beads.” Matt says offhandedly. Bruce, however, stares blankly at his companion. “You’re Catholic?”

That was more surprising about Daredevil than anything else. Then again, he is the Devil of Hell’s Kitchen, so maybe not.

“Liberal Catholic.” He assures Bruce.

“My grandmother, she was the real Catholic. Fear of God ran deep.” Matt explains as he runs his fingers over the beads. “She used to say, ‘Be careful of the Murdock boys. They got the devil in ’em.’”

Bruce looks appalled at that. “Your grandmother thought you were… evil?”

“Yeah, well, I was a bastard.” Matt says reluctantly.

But the scary thing is this: Bruce has seen it. He’s seen the way Daredevil goes still, corner his prey, and lets all of Hell loose in his fists. Bleeding, broken, beat – and he still gets up. Daredevil’s resilience is remarkable.

“Any family back home?” Matt asks, wandering along the street with Dice two steps ahead.

Bruce comes out of his stupor and looks up at Matt. “My father, he killed my mother.”

Matt pauses to turn his face to Bruce, which is always an odd occurrence.
“Did he—?” Matt starts but quickly stops talking and starts walking faster.

It didn’t matter.
Clint wakes up on Sunday morning after a quiet night. After putting in his hearing aids and leaving his room, he sees Matt sitting with a lit candle and instantly worries.

Then he notices the Bible in front of the redhead and feels instantly guilty.

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.”

“Sorry.” Clint says to Matt, who smiles softly at nothing.

“I was finishing.” Matt explains lightly.

Clint goes into the bathroom, turns on the shower, and then pops his head out.

“Are we good?” Clint asks.

Matt nods as he wraps his rosary beads around his Bible, moving into a meditative position.

“We need to be ready and downstairs for 10.” Clint explains. “Steve’s orders.”

Matt nods, but doesn’t speak.

Clint takes a long look at the candle before leaving Matt to his own devices.

“We’re going to be a little late.” Clint says softly into his cell at 10.

“Clint, everyone else is waiting.” Steve’s disappointed tone responds.

Clint glances into Matt’s bedroom quietly, where the man is curled up with Dice in his bed, hugging the dog.

“I’m not ready yet, sorry.”

Matt doesn’t leave Dice much, all day. Tony realizes this when Matt snuggles into the dog on the bus, despite his vest being on. Tony figures it might be an emotional support thing, considering how often Dice snaps Murdock out of his frequent dazes.

He isn’t so much petting the dog – that’s what Tony finds strange. Murdock is draped over the animal, head resting against his back. Hugging.

It’s not a very dog thing to enjoy having someone hold them for so long. Their species values a certain amount of personal space. Dice is putting up with it, however, and is sitting politely on the seat of the bus (there’s a few other pets on this thing doing the same).

Once they arrive at their destination, a quaint little town, Steve tells everyone to get provisions for the day at a corner shop.
Steve notices Matt’s head turning in one direction and remaining there for a long moment.

“Matt?” Steve asks when the man starts walking off in the direction he was listening in.

Steve follows Matt up a thin road and they find themselves standing in front of a small, white building with a cross on its spire.

“It’s Sunday.” Matt says by way of an explanation. A moment later, he turns his head directly at Steve. “I won’t be long.”

Steve nods. “I’ll go manage the others.”

Matt steps through the open doors to investigate. He senses a crucifix above the door.

A voice is speaking to him in a foreign language. Tony explained to him that the main two languages are Hawaiian and English but he quickly figures out that this man doesn’t share his language.

He recognizes the sound of robes and tilts his head. “Father?”

The man is guiding him inside, kindly speaking words he doesn’t understand, and sitting him at a pew.

There’s only a few other people in the room, he senses.

He hears words being recited by the priest and bows his head politely. He doesn’t stay for long, but the sense of comfort he got from being in the little church gave him some hope.

“You’ve really outdone yourself, Boy Scout.” Tony gushes as they arrive at the coffee farm.

Matt feels an arm being slung around his shoulders and, if Bruce’s squeak is any indication, he received the same.

“Breathe it in.” Tony grins so widely that it’s apparent in his voice, even to Clint. “Coffee.”

It does smell good, Matt recognizes as they step through the doors of the small tour building.

“What gave you this idea?” Clint nudges Steve, who laughed.

“There’s a taste test and I thought we needed something uplifting.”

Tony practically moans when he enters the building, hot coffee being made all over the room for tourists to taste.

“Who’s on Tony duty?” Bruce asks. No reply. “Let me guess, me? Again.”

Bruce sighs as he tries to stop Tony from taking multiple shots of the first sample.

They spend their time being guided around the place. Tony seems rather attracted to Matt today, like a magnet. He spends his time rubbing elbows with the redhead, pointing out machines that he could improve.

“A portable coffeemaker!” Tony exclaims in Matt’s ear. Apparently a wristwatch-coffeemaker is a good idea.
Bruce desperately tries to drag him away, apologizing to Matt, but Matt doesn’t mind as much as he should.

“What kind do you like?” Matt murmurs against Tony’s shoulder, feeling oddly lethargic despite the caffeine.

Tony’s heart jumps and he feels eyes on him but doesn’t comment.

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“Glad you asked, Shades!” Tony swings an arm around him. One which Matt feels supporting him, keeping him from wobbling. He leans into it, nestling his head in neck as the shorter man explains his coffee masterpiece. “The secret – Tanzania Peaberry. Tastes like wine. And velvet. You’d probably like it.”

Matt hums along as he explains exactly how he imports the coffee beans.

“Plus there’s the hygiene aspect; I paid a shitload to make sure they all wear gloves.” Tony’s rambling in his ear and it doesn’t escape Matt that they haven’t moved along with the tour. Actually, the Avengers have disappeared.

“Hey, Scarlet Avenger, ‘m I losing you?” Tony squeezes him.

When did he start crying?

Tony’s voice is softer now, closer to his head. “I like black coffee. That’s how you know it’s good, when it’s rich.”

When did his life start falling apart?

His identity, spread all over the New York Times. His name, his face, his blindness. He’s blinded, all over again.

He can never have that again. He’ll never be taken seriously, viewed as a threat to his enemies.

His Achilles heel is showing.

He’ll never be Daredevil again. He’ll never have that strength. He’ll forever be Matt Murdock.

The orphan.

The blind orphan.

Just once, he wanted to have strength. To have the courage to do what no-one, not even his father, thought he could do.

He’s crying on Tony’s shoulder. This is what Matt Murdock is – weak, pathetic, and a charity case.

“Buddy, as much as I don’t mind keeping you up, here, it’s really testing my strength.” Tony says in his ear, lightly as usual. “Maybe we sit?”

And Tony’s right. He’s weak at the knees, wobbling. He allows Stark to shift him into a chair by the wall. Stark makes a shooing gesture at something but Matt can’t see. He can’t see. Around him, silence fills his ears. A black void in space and his senses aren’t working.

“I can’t see.” He sobs into Tony’s ear, all thoughts of being manly thrown out of the window.

“Sure you can’t.” Tony agrees.
“No, I can’t—I can’t—”

“Jesus, Matthew.” Tony sighs, squeezing him in a side-hug. “You’re blind. You can’t see. Senses or no senses. It’s not the end of the world.”

“But I’m weak.” Matt grinds out. “You don’t understand.”

Matt’s hand is being moved. His fingers graze what he assumes is Tony, then a metal disc. The arc reactor.

“You know, my heart fucks up sometimes. Cardiac arrest, chest pain.” Tony tells him. “Doesn’t make me weak. Sure, I might not be able to fight but, Murdock, life isn’t all about fighting.”

Matt finds himself burrowing into Tony again, simply wishing he didn’t exist in this moment. That he was in bed, his own bed, and not on this stupid holiday.

“What’s this?” Tony’s fingers graze something now and it’s Matt’s arm. Pushing up his sleeve, nudging the inflamed burn on his forearm. “You do this?”

“I’m not…” Matt starts but he really doesn’t know where to go with that sentence.

“Ok.” Tony moves against his hair. Nodding. “Ok, Murdock. I need to tell the others about this, you know that.”

Matt doesn’t reply.

Tony goes to move, presumably to tell them, but Matt grips his arm tightly.

“Why are you doing this, Matt?” Tony asks. “We love you, you idiot.”

“I told Bruce.” Matt defends himself. “I told him that I—I was…”

“Murdock, a little stressed does not equal self-harm!” Tony argues in his ear.

*Stick’s body hovering over him. His foot grinding into his chest. Pushing. Pushing.*

*His rib cracks. He feels it strain and twist and, ultimately, crack.*

“I don’t know why I bother with you, Kid.” His rough voice says in his ear.

*The spit hits the side of his face, just as Stick forces his foot down sharply on his ribcage.*

Tony’s holding him in a tight hug now, even as Matt scrambles to push him away. The pressure on his chest is painful, excruciating.

Was it so much to ask for?

“Murdock!” Tony’s saying in his face, just before he feels his fist connect with something. His efforts don’t help, especially when a larger hand starts rubbing his back.

“Shit.” Tony grunts but he continues to grapple at Matt.

“Be quiet, Matthew.” A voice in his ear. Soft. *The sound clouds over him, pushing him down in his bed.* “Matty, Matty, Matty. Just take it.”

He lands several hits, each of which connects with different parts of flesh, until big arms are around
his chest and he’s sobbing, sobbing, for them to stop. To let him go. He doesn’t want this.

Matt starts praying. It’s childish, the way he’s asking God to forgive him, to save him from this. Whatever this is.

“Matthew, you’re safe.” Steve reminds him in his ear. “You’re perfectly fine. It’s just Tony and I.”

“Don’t hurt me.” Matt pleads before he can stop himself.

“We’ll never hurt you, Murdock.” Tony says, a little nasally, from in front of him. Wet hands are holding his.

The warmth surrounding him doesn’t cease, even after Matt makes another pathetic attempt at struggling.

He leads into the warmth on his back. The arms wrapped around his chest loosen and Steve starts to hug him more gently.

*When did his life become so wonderful?*
“Even when I was first blinded, I never told anyone about my radar or my hypersenses. Not even my dad... I enjoyed having a big secret. When people make you feel weak and helpless, it's empowering to know something they don't. And, Boy, did I need empowering.”

The Avengers are surrounding Matt in his and Clint’s hotel room. Clint is coiled around him, their heat merging together.

“Back then.” Natasha insists.

“Back then. But here's the truth: learned behaviors die hard. They become a comfort zone. So even though I grew older and stronger, I somehow never let go of that need for secrecy. And, along the way, it went from survival skill to habit to... to...”

Matt’s voice breaks and Clint doesn’t fail to make him feel safe, nuzzling his head into Matt’s shoulder.

“Emotional addiction.” Tony says, teasing. “No wonder you took to law.”

Anyone else would give Tony a stern look but Matt knows him better. His heart is racing and his palms are sweaty. He’s concerned. They all are.

“I’m scared.” Matt admits, his cheeks flushing as he says it. “I don’t want to become the poor blind orphan again.”

“You’re not a blind orphan to us, Murdock.” Steve says. “You’re our teammate. Even if you like working on your own most of the time, you’re an honorary Avenger.”

“Scarlet Avenger.” Tony reminds him helpfully.

“Moments of weakness don’t make you weak. Everyone has them.” Bruce inputs. “I think everyone in the room can attest to having PTSD. It comes in the line of work that we do.”

Matt fiddles with Dice’s fur, stroking it from where he sits between his owner’s legs.

“Stuff like the burns, Matt.” Clint taps his arm. “It’s not the way to cope. We care about you, all of us. No—one wants to see you hurt yourself, or worse.”

“You scared the shit outta me with that balcony trick, even if you did slip.” Tony scorns him.

“What Tony means to say”—Matt hears a slapping noise—“is that we don’t want to watch you fall apart like this.”

“I told you this trip would end in disaster.” Natasha huffs from her stool.

“It’s,” Matt sniffs, “not over yet.”

Clint grins from Matt’s shoulder and pats his back excitedly. “That’s the spirit! Why all the doom ‘n’ gloom? Let’s have some fun tomorrow!”

“There’s a water park nearby.” Tony says, tapping away at his StarkPhone. “2.3 miles from here.”

“You aren’t angry?” Matt asks hesitantly. “For ruining our trip.”
“I’m sure it won’t be our last.” Bruce assures him.

Clint messes up Matt’s hair before fussing over Dice, who seems to be pleased with the attention.

“Clint?”

Clint wakes up from his catnap when Lucky jumps off his bed.

In the corner of his eye, Murdock is standing at the door, talking to him. Clint knows he’s young but, God, he looks so innocent.

He pops in his hearing aid, then looks at his friend. “You ok?”

“No.” Matt mumbles. Dice nudges him as he scurries into the room, curling up near Lucky.

“Alright.” Clint replies, still tired. “What’s up?”

Matt hesitates before stepping into the room. “I keep… Can I stay in here?”

Clint sees his hands shaking from where they keep fiddling with the hem of his shorts. He pulls back his covers and pats the bed. “C’mon, Cuddle-Buddy.”

Matt, relieved, pushes the door closed and scampers over to Clint’s bed, nestling under the covers.

“Nightmares.” Matt explains, very conspicuously snuggling into Clint.

“Sure.”

After a few moments of silence, Clint settles in his spot.

Even as he dozes off, he keeps his aids in. Just in case Matt needs him.

What Clint didn’t realize is that Murdock really likes snuggling. The next morning, Daredevil is looking chipper at breakfast as he fiddles with Clint’s arm, eating his bacon silently.

Clint, himself, is leaning on Matt’s shoulder, trying to ward off his sleepiness. When Matt’s hand fiddles with his thumb, he closes his hand on Matt’s, giving the man a fright.

Clint snickers as he shoves waffles into his face, only for Matt to move over to Bruce and play with his arm instead. Admittedly, Bruce looks uncomfortable at first, but the sight of a jealous Clint is enough to make anyone feel happier.

“Ok, so, at the park, we need to stay in pairs. That is, Bruce and Matt, Clint and Natasha, and myself and Tony.” Steve explains.

“Aw, what?” Tony pouts. “Why can’t we choose?”

“Because you and Clint need people to watch you.” Steve raises an eyebrow. “You were shaking at the coffee farm, yesterday.”

“I paid for the table.”
“Do you like roller coasters?” Bruce asks Murdock.

They’re standing together in line, Dice between them. Up ahead, Clint is making a poor attempt to use Natasha as shade from the sweltering heat. Steve is stuck listening to Tony’s one-sided conversation about how beneficial an Avengers theme park would be.

“As well as advanced hearing, I have advanced balance and special awareness.” Matt replies. “It’s a lot to take in and…”

“They make you sick?” Bruce asks.

Matt nods, then directs his head at Bruce. “And you?”

“The adrenaline makes me nervous.” Bruce smiles. “At least we can find something low-key.”

They move forward in the line until they reach the staff members checking bags. Steve and Matt haul theirs up for the men to dig around in.

A woman is speaking in Hawaiian when she finds Matt’s cane and figures it must be a weapon. She pulls it out and her co-worker talks with her for a moment before he places a hand on Matt’s arm.

“Sir, excuse me?” He says in a rich toned voice. “What is the folded apparatus in your back?”

“My cane.” Matt gestures to his glasses. “For walking without my guide dog.”

The man must suddenly realize Matt is blind because he chuckles. “Yes, Sir, of course. This way, please, you can walk on up to the park with your friends.”

_Ah, the joys of being disabled_

Despite not having tickets, Matt and the Avengers are moved into the lane reserved for customers who have already bought a ticket.

“They think I can’t walk in a crowd.” Matt grins. Bruce is laughing beside him as they continue up to the park with no interruptions.

They buy their tickets at the next gate, and then immediately find themselves in the park.

Natasha drags Clint off to the biggest ride they can find while Tony and Steve start looking for a more average one.

“You’re taking Lucky.” Matt sniffs, handing the dog’s leash over to Bruce, who takes it hesitantly.

“There’s some dogs in that pool.” Bruce points.

Matt turns his head to the sound of several thrumming heartbeats. “Then we should let them cool off first.”

Bruce agrees so they spend the hour with Dice lying in the shallow waves of the pool and Lucky trying to get them all into trouble.

Clint returns, looking frazzled.

“Take care of Dice to better standards than your own dog.” Matt tells Clint as Lucky runs around with another dog’s tennis ball.
Clint makes a move to argue but then Lucky starts humping the other dog and he nods. “Yeah, ok.”
“Well, that was awesome.” Tony hums after the jet has taken off.

Natasha shares his sentiment.

“I think you’re tall enough.” Steve points out (Unhelpfully!) to Tony, who scoffs.

“I’m sorry, do you have defibrillators or a spare arc reactor?” He snarks, eyeing the warning chart for the waterslide. “Because I don’t.”

“I think you’ll be fine.” Steve assures him.

“What part of that was fun?” Clint demands.

Bruce shares his sentiment.

“Nat, I’m not too sure about this…” Clint worries. He’s peering over the drop when the assassin shoves him over the edge.

Just like a cartoon character, he only realises her treachery when he’s plummeting to the ground on a water death trap.

“I concur.” Matt pipes up.

Matt’s ears pick up when a woman starts groping his dog.

Lucky may be a love-magnet but Dice the Devil-dog has some class.

“Excuse me, can you stop petting my dog?” Matt asks politely. “He’s on duty.”

“But you’re at a water park, Puppy.” The woman says and it takes a second for Matt to realise she’s talking to his dog. “How old are you, Sweetums?”

“He’s only here because my friend needs a guide for the park.” Bruce points out.

Matt’s getting that chemical smell off of him, slowly growing stronger.

“Ma’am, he’s doing his job. Please, stop petting him.” Matt tries once again, to little avail.

“You’re such a smart thing, in your little uniform.” She coos, completely crowding Dice’s space.

Dice snarls suddenly, then bellows out a series of vicious barks that scare the woman into running away. The dog is standing, yet his legs are perfectly still. There’s no risk of violence, despite the barking.

“Sit. Good boy.” Matt says when the dog plops his bottom onto the ground, wagging his tail.

“She talked to Dice?” Clint gapes when Matt explains his story. “What, did she expect him to reply?”

“Oh, that’s not all.” Matt winces.

“Get that horrible beast off of the premises! It tried to attack me!” Mrs Ignorant points at Dice with a security guard by her side.
“Ma’am, it’s a service dog, it’s allowed to be here.” The guard explains patiently, though she is clearly exhausted with the lady.

“It was going to kill me!”

“Ma’am, if I may, my dog is highly trained in defending his owner. I suggest, when this lady continued to insist upon petting him while on duty, he thought she was a threat.” Matt says in a sigh.

“He asked real nicely and she still got all close.” A man next to their table attests.

“Alright, Ma’am, this animal has the right to be here so you can either sit back down or go to a different area of the food court to eat.” The guard suggests kindly, despite what she’s saying.

“Why do I have to go?” She objects, but leaves in a huff anyway.

“People suck.” Tony says, joining Matt and Clint at their table. Smelling like alcohol, Tony smothers Dice with love, kissing his furry head all over.

Since Dice isn’t wearing his vest, he soaks up the love.

“Hey, Crimson” Tony puts an arm around his shoulders. “Got a big, empty room at the tower with your name on it. You can put your stuff there.”

The suggestion is nice but Matt shakes his head.

“We know your apartment was trashed.” Natasha sighs, moving to lean on the back of Clint’s seat. “Tony found out a week before this trip, so just come live with us, ok?”

“Sorry, Buddy.” Clint nudges his foot under the table, a somewhat apologetic gesture.

It had happened after the article. His furniture was wrecked bit Matt doesn’t care. It’s not a big deal.

“I should visit Jarvis.” Matt murmurs, petting Dice. “But don’t you have new… Avengers?”

“Sam and Buck? Nah, they’re nowhere near Murdock-coolness-level.” Clint shrugs. “Bucky’s in therapy and Sam keeps to himself.”

“Just like a big sleepover, Matt.” Tony grins at him, not that he senses it. “Plus, it’ll be easier to get your lazy ass into training practice with us.”

“And we can physically ensure that you visit medical.” Steve adds.

Matt figured what they really meant was free healthcare, living conditions, and the best gym he’s ever encountered.

“Maybe for a few days.”

Matt’s ears throb as cameras click all around him. He grabs an arm for stability, but the cyclone of clicking cameras and talking reporters leaves him in a kind of daze that prevents him from determining exactly who he’s holding.

Dice is nudging him as he tries to follow the arm (Muscular?) towards the entrance to the tower.
Happy Hogan. Tony’s driver, is clearing a path for them to follow, apparently, but Matt hears microphones being shoved in his face.

His nails dig into the bicep he’s holding and an unsteady heartbeat meets his fingertips.

“Tony?” He chokes out before another hand shoves him into a small room.

“Mr Murdock, please take deep breaths.” Jarvis says in his ear and Matt startles, not having noticed the small microphones.

“Yeah, Buddy, you’re ok. We’re alone, now.” Clint gestures but half of the moment is lost somewhere in Matt’s head.

“Hurting me, Red.” Tony says gently and, oh, Matt’s digging his nails in.

He releases Tony quickly, then backs into Natasha, who steadies him. Dice yips at him.

The whirring of the elevator makes him jittery and he finds himself against the wall, pressing his forehead against it as he tries to curl his head into himself. Gears clunk and whir against the walls.

Matt throws his fist against the surface, choking on the air, then hits it again.

“Noise is too much?” Clint puts a hand, gently, on his back.

The clamour of reporters. Wind against glass, long gusts whipping the side of the building with vengeance. Footsteps bustling from room to room below. A distance to his left, a metal creak and the grating of sand. Joining that, the scuffle of shoes, then the shift and thump of a punching bag. A heavy sigh. A pulled string howling mournfully and the elastic shift of youthful skin over nimble fingers. In the outside gale, a bird glides with the current, long feathers barely shifting in the strong waves of air. The tilting of liquid in his inner ear. His heart stuttering.

“J, cut the elevator.” Tony instructs the voice in the walls.

The lift slows to a stop. Matt waits for his senses to reign in, waits until the moment he can ignore his senses.

“Better?” Clint questions.

When Matt nods, Tony knocks on the elevator walls. “C’mon, let’s get Scarlet to his room.”

The elevator kicks into action, dropping off the Avengers on the communal floor. Tony keeps Matt in the elevator, however, and they continue up another three floors.

“You’re on the floor under mine.” Tony tells him as the doors open. “Clint’s is under yours, then Bucky and Sam, the communal floor, Natasha, Bruce, Thor, and Steve’s.”

Matt frowns slightly, making an over emphatic fist for Dice. The dog hands him his red bag, out of which he pulls his cane.

He snaps open the stick and walks into the open space of his floor.

“Not very full, yet, but you can pick out stuff to decorate it with.” Tony points out, standing just in front of the elevator.

Matt detects several couches in his living room, which is connected by an island to an empty kitchen. Matt wanders around the island, tapping the marble with his fingers briefly before opening
Matt grimaces at the glass cups, how they bounce the high pitched *whir* of Tony’s many appliances.

He closes the door in response, turning to inspect the sink. He feels braille on the handle, ‘hot’ on the left and ‘cold’ on the right. Curious, he tracks the sound of crackling electricity to the oven, where he finds more braille on each of the knobs.

“Tried to keep the accessibility up to scratch.” Tony says from the island. “Any settings are in braille. They’re printed too, if you bring anyone up here.”

Matt nods slightly, not quite willing to acknowledge that for now.

“I am also able to provide assistance at any given time, Mr Murdock.” Jarvis tells him from all around the room, but mostly near the elevator.

“You’ll love Dice’s play room.” Tony grins. The man offers his elbow, which Matt frowns at.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean, uh…” Stark, figuring he’s somehow insulted Matt, drops his arm but Matt reaches for it mid-way.

“No, it’s fine.” Matt feels Stark’s arm relaxing. “Foggy used to lead me that way.”

“Used to?” Tony asks as they make their way into the wide hall.

“I don’t need it.” Matt grinds out, his grip tightening.

Stark raises an eyebrow.

“I told him about”—Matt gestures to his face—“and he knows I don’t need it now.”

“But isn’t it better than having to constantly be alert?” Stark huffs. “You might not need something but it doesn’t mean you don’t want it.”

Matt doesn’t reply as Tony leads him through the second door on the right. Inside, he describes Dice’s new paradise.

There’s some artificial grass since Matt would have to go to the ground floor to clean up after the dog. Beside the grass is a garbage chute and a small, standing shower. In the corner is a dog house shaped like a bunk bed with toys on the lower ‘bunk’. The best part of the room, in Matt’s opinion, is the agility training gym.

Dice has a seesaw, a tunnel, and an A-frame.

After Tony gives Matt a tour of his bedroom (which is conservative with only a bed, a wardrobe, and some drawers), he heads back to the elevator.

“The communal floor is three floors down, Jarvis will keep you right.” Tony reminds Matt as he steps into the elevator. “Any of the Avengers can go down there, at any time.”

Matt nods slightly, but he knows that there’s no chance of him going downstairs tonight.

“Jarvis will alert the person if you want to go to someone else’s floor but you may or may not be
allowed, depending on the person’s requests.” Tony explains. “Yada, yada, yada. If anyone wants on your floor, they’ll ask Jarvis, who’ll ask you.”


“We have some food downstairs, if you’re interested?” Tony offers but Matt’s head turns away slightly.

“Some other time, maybe.”

“Well… you can get Jarvis to order in whatever you like, my treat.”

"Thank you, Tony."

And, with that, the elevator doors close, leaving the Man Without Fear completely alone.

It's the most fearsome thing he's ever felt.
Soldier In Peacetime

“Mr Murdock, Sir is waiting in the living area. He wishes to speak with you.”

The water from the shower hits the floor of the tub like bombs falling on no man’s land. Matt’s the soldier in peacetime, lost in the sounds of gunshots and grenades.

Jarvis’ voice distracts him for long enough; Matt is in the shower. He was fiddling with the shower knobs, trying to reach optimum temperature.

Somewhere between searing hot and ice cold, Matt stepped in – still wearing his clothes – and found himself on a battlefield.

Dice is in his bedroom.

“Sir?” Matt forgets, his fingers trailing over the ‘hot’ braille message on the shower.

“Tony Stark.” Jarvis explains and, somewhere in his head, Matt replies with ‘Oh, sure’. Out here in reality, he keeps his ears trained on the water droplets.

“He wishes to speak with you when you are finished.” Jarvis repeats.

“I’m showering.” Matt says, even though he isn’t – not really. His hair is wet, as are his clothes, but at least his glasses are safe in his bedroom.

“Sir wishes to know if he can be of assistance.”

“No.” Matt hisses, then reigns himself in. “Don’t let him in my bedroom, Jarvis.”

“The bedroom area is off-limits to the other Avengers, Mr Murdock?”

“That is correct.” Matt nods, moving the knob until the water on his skin starts to create steam.

“Sir will wait in the living room area.”

Matt doesn’t reply to Jarvis and, instead, he strips off his wet clothes, slightly hesitantly. Everything except his briefs is removed and tossed onto the floor of the bathroom.

“Mr Murdock, visual footage of the bathroom areas is scanned and deleted. Sensitive content is not archived.”

Matt nods, however he keeps his underwear on as he stands under the water.

After a while, he washes his hair and, somewhat, his body, but the effort he typically includes is absent. Matt then leaves the shower, his head smelling like salty liquorice and strawberries.

He finds a soft bathrobe in the bathroom closet and makes his way through his bedroom to the hall, where he hears Tony’s uneven heartbeat ticking.

“Red, you’re wetter than usual.” Tony comments, trying to hide the slight confusion.

“I had a shower.” Matt claims.

“In your undies, I hear.” Tony hums and there’s the stretch of leather when he leans back on the
“Really not necessary, J filters the footage.”

“I don’t care about footage.” Matt claims.

Dice’s paws click against the wooden floor of the hall. The dog takes a quick glance at his owner, deems him uninteresting, and clicks over to Tony, who gives him a hearty chuckle and a warm greeting.

“Allrighty, then.” Tony says, for lack of anything better.

“Did you forget something?”

Tony’s head tilts up. “Huh?”

“You were here earlier, an hour ago. Did you forget something?” Matt asks, his weight shifting between his feet.

“No, didn’t forget anything.” Tony stands up and Dice does the opposite, plopping down onto his backside. “We’re thinking of having a movie night, if you want to join.”

Matt winces when his phone starts talking from inside his red bag. “Foggy. Foggy. Foggy.”

“Oh, he’s been trying to get in touch.”


“You need to know why I hurt you, Matty.” Stick says, breathing in his ear. “Because you are not a human being.”

Matt takes his phone from his bag, listens to the chant of “Foggy. Foggy. Foggy.”

The next thing he knows, his phone is colliding with the floor, skidding somewhere in the direction of the kitchen.

“Foggy. Foggy. Foggy.”

Before Matt can find his phone and put an end to the chanting, Tony spins him around and pulls him into the hall.

“Wanna take a breath for me?” Stark asks, holding Matt’s arms tightly in his hands. He snaps his fingers in front of Matt’s face. “Hey, hey! Tell me what’s going on in your head, Crimson.”

“Why’d you come up here?” Matt demands.

“Will you feel better if I leave?” Tony asks. “Just say fuck off and I will.”

“No, just—!” Matt grunts, rubbing his temples with the heels of his hands.

“Just say what you’re thinking.” Tony urges him, gently this time. “Either tell the truth or say nothing but don’t lie.”

“They’ll hate me.” Matt gestures to the kitchen, where his phone disappeared. “Foggy hated me when he found out about… I know I don’t need them but I shouldn’t make them hate me, that isn’t right, and Foggy meant it. He hated me.”
“‘K.’ Tony takes a deep breath. “Murdock, if he knows, then it shouldn’t be a big deal.”

Matt doesn’t say anything.

“You’re worried for their safety.” Tony figures. “They can stay here. Plenty room and Nelson’s a good lawyer, he could take up a job down in legal.”

“No, he can’t see me like,” Matt’s face contorts into something hateful, “this.”

“Jesus, Murdock.” Stark nudges his arm. “Don’t talk shit about my friend.”

It takes a second for Matt to figure out Stark means him. He leans into Tony’s side-hug and murmurs into his shoulder.

“Not yet.”

“Sure thing, Red.” Tony pats his back. “Movie night?”

Matt huddles under Clint’s arm while Natasha makes popcorn in the microwave. He’d dressed in new underwear, sweats, and Clint’s old T-shirt.

“You two almost match.” Bruce grins just past the smell of herbal tea. Matt frowns into Clint’s shoulder.

“We’re both wearing purple. Different shades.” Clint explains in his ear. “And we look fabulous.”

“Fabulous.” Matt agrees with a faint smile.

“Who’s the new guy? Clint found a stray?” An unfamiliar voice asks, making Matt stiffen. He curls into the heat of Clint’s side.

“Fuck off, Wilson.” Clint snaps, tightening his hold on Matt.

“Sam, this is Matt.” Steve introduces.

“Shit, you’re Daredevil – the blind dude from the papers.” The voice says, approaching him. However, Matt’s interest has shifted to something else in the room.

A walking mass of muscles reminds the redhead of Steve, but lithe, agile. Their feet move steadily into the room, confidence ensured, to the beating of his slow heartbeat.

Matt hears long hair brushing against each other like leaves in the wind, quirks his head, and focuses on the clump of nothingness in the room.

The perfect absence of energy is similar to the way glass has a lovely effect on bass. It’s complete silence, yet noisy. Like machinery, grinding against itself in the form of metal slates, yet Matt’s certain it wouldn’t make a noise if he tapped it.

Just like Cap’s shield.

It’s when the mystery body approaches him, sticks out the metal, and talks to him that he figures out it’s a prosthetic.

“Have some class, Wilson.” The voice scoffs.
Matt tentatively shakes the hand he senses in front of him, aching to knock his cane against it (but very much resisting the urge).

“James Barnes, call me Bucky.”
Clint's Audio Descriptions

Chapter Notes

Hopefully this will provide as some relief from the heavy scenes of Matt's depression.

Matt shakes the hand presented to him, then snuggles back into Clint’s warmth as he clears his throat. “Matthew Murdock. Matt.”

The other man sits without a word. Matt’s content with that.

He’s heard about the Winter Soldier from Foggy, mostly, and partly from Steve.

Keeps to himself, mostly, Matt figures. He’s heard enough of the brainwashing and mind wipes to judge him for that. Not that he would, mind you, he enjoys solitude himself. If only he could get any.

“What are we watching?” Sam asks, relaxing back into the opposite couch.

Matt turns his face into Clint’s arm, nudging it with his forehead. The other man rubs his back, seemingly getting the message.

“Nothing too dark.” Clint suggests. “How about Disney?”

“Aladdin?” Tony suggests. “J, pick something out for us.”

“Sir, the audio will take some time. Hotel Transylvania by Sony Pictures is ready to play.” Jarvis suggests.

“Ooh!” Clint pipes up. “That’s good! It’s got the Sandman, werewolves, Frankenstein’s monster, and it’s all about Dracula and his daughter.”

“That sounds fun.” Steve agrees.

“Set it up, Buddy.”

The TV bursts to life with a warmth only Matt can detect.


As the music builds, Matt can sense Sam turning his head.

“What’s this?” Bucky gestures to the TV.

“It’s audio description.” Steve explains to the other man. “Matt can’t see the TV so it gives him a clearer picture of what’s going on.”

Bucky nods and Matt guesses he doesn’t know much about the current state of accessibility for disabled people. It’s easy for that kind of information to go over your head, even if you haven’t
been frozen for several decades.

Matt squirms, unnerved. What exactly would Bucky think about his blindness?

“A vampire bat flies to a balcony and transforms into Dracula. His body angles inward from his shoulders to his skinny waist. Dracula’s shadow creeps over a crib as he approaches. His long claw-like finger reach for the baby.”

“He looks badass – wearing one of those cloaks with the spikey collar.” Clint tells him.

Matt tilts his head.

As the movie progresses, Clint readily fills in the blanks that the audio description provides.

“It’s like a big, fat bird with six long necks with dog-like faces.” Clint describes the creature complaining about wanting aromatherapy.

“Hercules?” Matt asks and Clint agrees.

“Yeah! Like the Hydra, but this thing is blue and less scary.”

Though, Matt does pout when Dracula states that Mavis wouldn’t want to be with someone who has red, curly hair.

Clint laughs at him and messes up his hair, earning himself a poke in the ribs. Natasha also slaps him in the back of the head.

When Mavis eventually argues with Drac about ‘no longer being 83 and being allowed to kiss’, Tony calls out Steve and Bucky and insinuates something or other about them sharing a bed.

Matt chooses to smirk into Clint’s arm as they protest.

“As they lean in to kiss, Dracula growls.” The speakers recite, nearing the end of the movie.


Matt flashes a toothy grin in Tony’s direction.

“That one looks like a spider.” Clint says as the speakers announce their lines.

“The crowd chants along as Dracula and the whole crew rises up on the floating tables. A spectacular fireworks show erupts over the hotel and a title appears: the end.”

“Drac was awesome.” Tony gushes. “He was hardly scary.”

“I might scream if I saw a rapping, triangular vampire, no matter how big his eyes are.” Matt smirks.

“He’s not triangular, Clint’s just bad at describing.” Bruce laughs. “Dracula was biconcave.”
“Oh, sure, because that’s helpful.” Clint huffs.

Matt simply smirks when they start arguing. They decide on an hourglass shape.

Matt outlines the shape he has in his mind with his hands, to which they all groan. In his head, Dracula is looming but also goofy, so he is lank with droopy but wide shoulders.

Steve agrees with him while the others complain.

Sam is partially snoozing on Steve while Bucky is quiet, so Matt stands up to leave for his floor when he grabs Clint’s arm and tugs him.

“What’s up?” The archer asks, evading Natasha’s swats when he sweetly suggests that she should incorporate stripy tights and a cloak into her outfit. She takes it in good humour and suggests faux fur for Clint.

“Pillow.” Matt claims, tugging him lightly on the sleeve.

“Nat, take Lucky tonight?” Clint asks as he stands up, sipping from a carton of what smells like apple juice.

“If I must.” She grins.

Matt takes Clint to the elevator and they step in. The doors close before Clint starts talking.

“Tony had a word with me.” He starts. “Suggested that maybe you should text Foggy at some point, tell him you’re in safe hands. He been in contact?”

Matt nods shortly.

“Ok, Bud. Well, I can give him a call.” Clint offers. “Tell him you’re good so he doesn’t worry and call even more.”

Matt agrees quietly.

Dice is waiting on the couch when they return.

“Your clothes are wet.” Clint says when he sees Matt’s wet underwear in his bathroom from the door connecting to the hall, not the one connecting to his bedroom.

“Shower.” Matt says in lieu of an explanation.

“With your clothes on. Ok.” Clint agrees, not questioning anything.

Matt brings his phone to Clint, who opens it and dials Foggy’s number.

“Matt, where the hell are you and why aren’t you answering my calls?” Foggy demands frantically over the phone.

“Foggy, this is Clint Barton. Hawkeye.” Clint explains. “Matt is with the Avengers, he’s in good health, and we’re taking care of him.”

“Oh. Why isn’t he home? I was worried.”

Matt winces, curling up in a little ball on his bed. The crisp pillows crinkle when he leans against them; he can feel the down.
Clint rubs Matt’s back as he sits down on the bed. “Matt isn’t coping too well with the Daredevil fiasco. He’s a little stressed so we’re keeping him at the Avengers until the frenzy blows over.”

“Why isn’t he talking?” Foggy asks, sounding concerned.

“I don’t think he wants to upset anyone by saying the wrong thing.” Clint sighs, continuing to rub circles on Matt’s back. “But, I assure you, we’re taking good care of him.”

“Is he having nightmares? The screaming ones?”

“A few.” Clint admits.

Foggy starts grilling Clint for answers until he’s finally content, then hangs up. Clint, who didn’t reveal very much, sighed at Matt’s embarrassed look.

“He needs to know the truth.” Clint says. “Because he’s your friend and I’m sure he loves you as much as we do. That’s what a friendship is all about.”

Matt nods, turning his face into his pillows.

“But let’s save all that for later.”

They’re both wearing sweats already so they hop into the bed and Matt nuzzles into Clint, using his chest and arm as a pillow.

Dice sleeps contently in the corner of the bed.

The day ends with the heat of the lights slowly fading.
The night begins with the heat of the lights slowly fading.

Matt can’t sleep. He sucks up Clint’s heat and makes himself comfy but he’s unsettled. Clint doesn’t say anything but he doesn’t take out his aids, either.

The man shuffles against Clint throughout the first portion of the night, restless and uninhibited. The bed feels too new. It doesn’t smell like his bed and it’s scratchy, despite the silk sheets.

“Just take it, Matty.”

Matt shoots out of bed, already out of the bedroom before Clint stirs. His feet lead him to the couch in the living room, where he sits after a few moments of deliberation.

“Matt?” Clint asks from the hall. Dice pitters around in his bedroom, but doesn’t leave it.

Like an exposed nerve, Matt is aching on the couch, throbbing and making an attempt to ignore his heartbeat.

"Matt, Buddy, not looking so good here.” Clint kneels in front of the couch, but doesn’t touch him.

Matt sobs, tears streaming from his eyes, but tries not to move. He’s frozen, like a mouse hoping it hasn’t been noticed by a cat.

“Tell me how you’re feeling and we can talk it out.” Clint says, always gently. Clint doesn’t get angry with him. “Maybe it’s not as upsetting as it feels just now.”

“I can’t sleep.” Matt claims, squeezing his eyes closed. His hands are dripping with sweat, like they’re being wrung out.

“Ok.” Clint accepts this. “Is this a senses thing?”

“No, I can’t sleep.” Matt insists.

“Well, I think you need help relaxing if you want to sleep. A bath or—”

Matt chokes out a sob as he hits Clint, not hard, on the chest. “No! I can’t… sleep.”

“You can’t sleep.” Clint says slowly. “You need to stay awake, is that it?”

Matt nods, his shoulders caving in on himself when he tries to roll into a ball on the couch.

“Right, Bud, then let’s see what’s on TV.” Clint offers, moving up onto the couch and wrapping an arm around Matt’s shaking form. He holds him tightly, securely, with his arm until Matt moves to lean against him.

The TV blares to life and Clint tilts his head up an inch. “Jarvis, make some coffee?”

“Certainly, Agent Barton.”

Matt cries against Clint, making his shirt a little damp under his face, but the archer doesn’t seem to mind.
“Should we talk about why you need to stay awake?” Clint asks, pulling Matt in closer. Murdock shakes his head against Clint. Wet breaths as he tries to stop crying. “Sure?” Clint is looking down at him, Matt can tell. Craning his neck. He turns his face, shying away from Barton. “It seems bad, but maybe it’ll get easier if we talk about it.” Matt snakes his arms around Clint’s waist, as if he could merge into the other man. “Alright.” Clint accepts this, albeit hesitantly. Matt smells like fear for the remainder of the night. Like it’s pouring out of him and oozing all over the room. He hates it and he doesn’t leave Clint’s warmth. Clint never drinks his coffee.

Matt’s coiled embrace softens during the night until he’s draped over Clint’s side, using him as a pillow. “Sir is now awake.” Jarvis tells them. “It is 6:13AM.” “Matty, you awake?” Clint whispers. When Matt nods against him, Clint gives him a quick squeeze. “I think our sleepover needs coffee. Want some?” Matt nods, but his head slips down onto the couch when his ‘pillow’ leaves him. “How do you take it?” Clint calls. “Black.” “We have some of Tony’s fruity coffee. Want to try some of that?” Clint holds up a box for Murdock to see, then wonders if he can sense it. Probably. When Matt doesn’t answer, he shrugs. “I’ll make you some of that. It’s actually quite nice. I think Tony imports it from somewhere sunnier.” Matt sits up on the couch, not replying. When Clint brings back the coffee, he can see Murdock pinching his wrist between his fingernails. “Mattie.” Clint sighs as he quickly puts the cups down. He wraps his hands around Matt’s wrists and draws them apart. “That doesn’t solve anything.” Matt rubs his hands on his knees, pointing his head away from Clint. “Talk to me, c’mon.” Barton sits beside Matt, resting a hand on his shoulder. “I keep hearing him.” Matt admits uneasily. “My mentor.” “Do you miss him?” Clint asks and, wow, that was the wrong question because Matt’s hands curl into fists and he punches his leg before Clint can stop him. “Matt, no more hitting yourself.” Clint scolds him. “Talking helps but this?” Clint gestures to Matt’s knee. “This doesn’t help. It really doesn’t, Buddy. It’d be too easy if it
“Sorry.” Matt grimaces, drawing his legs up onto the couch and into his chest.

“Shit, Matt.” Clint sighs. He runs a hand through his hair before lifting his coffee to take a mouthful before continuing. “Bud, I think we need to talk to Tony about getting someone for you to talk to.”

“No!” Matt objects, stumbling on his feet as he gets up from the couch. “I don’t need a therapist, I’m completely—”

“Fine, Matt?” Clint asks. “Because it seems like you just want to hurt yourself.”

Clint’s throat starts to sound clogged and wet before he speaks again. “Matt, you’re my friend, I don’t want to watch this happen to you.”

Clint’s crying, Matt senses.

The guilt in his gut eats open a crater. He listens silently as Clint wipes his face, then nods – ever so slightly – and sits beside Clint on the couch, cozying up to his friend.

“You’re my friend, too.” Matt tells Clint as he nuzzles into the crook of his neck. Clint wraps an arm around him, patting his back.

“This’ll be good, Mattie. I promise.”
“Jarvis, where’s Bruce?” Matt asks. It’s mid-day and he’s been hiding on his floor with Dice.

“Dr Banner is with Sir in Sir’s personal lab.” Jarvis answers. “Shall I ask Sir for permitted access?”

Matt nods, twiddling with Dice’s leash.

“Sir has granted access, the elevator will take you to their floor.”

Matt moves into the lift, which takes him down several floors before stopping. Matt thanks Jarvis as he leads Dice into the room.

“Hey, Crimson!” Tony calls, cutting off what sounds like a drill. He turns to the man beside him. “Brucie, Matt’s here.”

“Good afternoon.” Bruce greets him, somewhat distracted.

Matt sniffs the air in the lab, thinking that the place rather smells like disinfectant and oil. There’s a lot of gadgets in the room that *whir* and *beep*, making the place seem quite lively.

“Couch is to your left if you want to sit.” Stark suggests.

Matt tilts his head and, sure enough, he smells leather. The second he climbs on the thing, Dice hops onto his lap, heavy as he is.

“Something wrong with my food, Murdock?” Tony walks over to him in long strides before halting, rolling on his heels.

“I’m not hungry.” He replies and he isn’t. There’s no ache in his stomach telling him to eat and he’s not interested in the additive-laden food the Avengers have stuffed in the communal fridge.

“You’re looking thinner.” Tony points out. “Don’t want to lose all that muscle, do you?”

Matt ignores Tony and curls up on his back, Dice shifting onto Matt’s stomach to lie down.

“Did you call Foggy?” Tony asks innocently. He fiddles with yet another machine while he talks. “I only ask because he showed up this morning, demanding that he could see you.”

“Clint called him.” Matt says, frowning. “He showed up here?”

“Guns ablaze, so to speak.” Bruce agrees.

“Why didn’t anyone tell me?” Matt sits up, trying and failing to keep the hurt out of his voice.

He tries to remember what he done to deserve friends as nice as the Avengers when Bruce joins him on the couch, patting his arm. “He was angry, Matt, and Jarvis told us you weren’t in the mood to see him. Clint agreed when we told him.”

Matt leans back on the couch, leaning his head on Bruce.

“You smell like you.” Matt says gently. “None of yesterday’s horrible shampoo.”

“Er, is that a good thing?” Bruce asks.
Matt nods into his arm. “Stronger when you’re angry. Chemicals.”

“Are you talking about gamma radiation?” Tony asks but Matt’s done with the conversation.

Foggy was here. Foggy.

*Matt remembers the day that he first met Foggy. He wasn’t familiar with the concept of talking to people for fun, perhaps he still isn’t, but Foggy had been his first friend, if only in his head.*

“Hey, is this room 312?”

“Yeah, who’re you looking for?” Foggy looked up at noticed that Matt is wearing shades and holding a white cane. “Oh, uh, sorry.”

“What for?” Matt reached out with his cane and found the second bed in the room. He tapped it with his hand.

“You're blind, right?” Foggy asked awkwardly.

“Uh, yeah, so they tell me.” Matt said quickly before becoming aware of his bad attempt at a joke. He made a little smile. “I hope that won’t be a problem.”

“Why would it?” Foggy asked as Matt place his bag on the other bed.

“Oh!” He laughed. “You're my roomie!”

Matt listened to his elevated heartbeat for a moment before sticking out his hand, although he knew that he really shouldn’t be encouraging whatever is going on. He just wanted to finish law school, make his father proud. No point in wasting time. “Er, Matt Murdock.”

“Foggy Nelson.” Foggy jumped up to shake it. “Wait, Matt Murdock? Are you-- You're not from Hell's Kitchen, are you?”

Matt forced a slight smile and it felt jagged -- like a wound over his face. “Yeah, born and raised.”

“So am I!” Foggy responded, sitting back down on his bed. “Yeah, I heard about you when you were a kid, what you did, saving that guy crossing the street.”

“Yeah, I-I just did what anyone would have.” Matt stumbled over his words, folding up his cane.

“Bullshit! You’re a hero.” Foggy exclaimed and Matt startled.

“Good, ’cause that would be a little freaky.” Foggy breathed a sigh of what Matt guesses is relief. “But... no offense.”

“Please, none taken.” Matt felt the corner of his lips turning up. “Uh… Most people dance around
me like I'm made of glass… I hate that.”

“Yeah, you're just a guy, right?” Foggy said. “A really, really good-looking guy.”

Matt paused, not sure how to respond to the complement.

“Oh, um I mean, girls must love that, the whole wounded, handsome duck thing.” Foggy explained with an awkward tone. “Am I right?”

“Right.” Matt thought back to the nuns at the church. “Yeah, it's been known to happen, I guess.”

“This is gonna be awesome!”

“What is?” Matt tilted his head to the odd comment.

“Me as your wingman!” Foggy exclaimed as if it’s obvious. “You're gonna open up a whole calibre of women I've only dreamed of. A lot! We're gonna be like Maverick and Goose!”

Not understanding fully, Matt lowered his head slightly. “O-Okay.”

He’s getting the impression that Foggy is rather excitable.

“Oh, shit!” Foggy exclaimed when his laptop makes a noise. “Yes -- I'm in!”

“In what?” Matt asked after a second, curling up on his bed and trying to simply disappear. He was foolish to get his hopes up. Foggy’s different, just like the nuns, just like his dad, and just like the other boys at school and the church. He can’t get his hopes up.

“Punjabi.” Foggy answered, making Matt frown slightly.

“You're taking Punjabi?” Matt asked nervously. Perhaps he should have taken something more interesting than Spanish.

“It's spoken by 130 million people.” Foggy reasoned. “I'd like to know what they're saying.”

“That's the only reason?” Matt asked. As much as he tries, he can’t find any reasoning behind the answer. Why would he take a class just for fun? Wasn’t he trying to prove himself?

“Well, yeah.” Foggy answered lamely. His heart stuttered, making Matt frown again. Foggy continued. “I mean, why else would I learn it?”

“I don't know,” Matt said quietly before thinking back to Foggy’s earlier subject of interest. “a girl, maybe?”

Foggy seemed satisfied. “See? This is what I'm talking about!”

Foggy jumped from the bed and advanced, making Matt flinch and duck his head slightly as he moves back into the pillows. A slight stutter in Foggy’s heartbeat.

“Me and you... Maverick and Goose,” Foggy said excitedly before taking on the same edge to his voice that the nuns would after he started having nightmares. “No secrets.”

Faintly, Matt remembered his father watching a movie. “Goose died... and he was married.”
“Details.” Foggy made a face before asking. “Hey, do you know a good place to get a cup of coffee on campus?”

“No.” Matt responded quietly.

“Well, lucky for you, I do.” Foggy said, something altering his voice that Matt thinks is probably a grin. “And it's filled with luscious coeds. Shall we?”

*And then the night came and ruined everything. Foggy’s snoring was atrocious.*

Matt tilts his head up from the couch he’s sitting on. He can hear Tony working quietly.

Bruce is still rubbing his arm gently, simply being there for him.

No, he doesn’t know what he did to deserve his friends.
Matt’s never been very good at friendships. He imagines it takes a great deal of practice – trial and error – before one can truly be a good friend.

Foggy’s messages make this abundantly clear to him.

“You promised this was over, Matt, the secrecy.” Foggy slurs into his phone via voicemail. “Now I have to hear from your fucking secretary that you’re depressed again.”

Matt flinches at Foggy’s tone.

“We dealt with this, Matt. You passed out in Intro to Ethics and I had to take you to the hospital. They told me you were depressed and we fucking dealt with it! You promised to tell me if you were—”

“Foggy, what’re you doing?” That’s Karen, sounding annoyed.

Scuffling noises, then the line cuts off.

So, when Stark finds him crying in the communal kitchen, he’s pretty worried. Matt replays the message.

“He’s drunk, Crimson.” Tony sighs, throwing an arm over Murdock’s shoulders. “People say shit when they’re drunk. He’s worried and it just came out wrong.”

“He sounds angry.” Matt points out, wiping his face as he discreetly tries to wriggle further into Tony’s hug.

“Look, uh.” Tony falters. “Did you ever try my super totally awesome coffee? Because I’m going to give you some and you’re going to love it.”

Matt sniffs as Tony bustles around the kitchen.

Admittedly, Matt wasn’t very much in the mood for the cup Clint made him (he left it somewhere upstairs), but Tony’s creation smells quite attractive to Matt’s nose.

Matt considers asking Tony for a hug but quickly ignores that idea.

He’s presented with a mug of coffee, somehow cool enough for him to drink, and his first sip is ambrosia. It’s rich and caffeinated, but the sweetness of the drink reminds him of berries. He takes several sips before telling Tony such.

Stark grins and pulls Matt into an affectionate side-hug. “There we go! Told you it was orgasmic.”

“I don’t think you quite used those words.” Matt sniffs the drink curiously before taking another
mouthful.

His cheeks tinge with red when he remembers his outburst. He wipes them instantly, turning his head away from Tony.

They don’t discuss it but the sentiment is there when Tony keeps Matt busy by yammering on about coffee beans.

“Do you know any therapists?” Matt asks Tony.

He’s been following the man around all day, with lack of anything else to do. They mostly spent time in the lab, with Matt listening to Tony update Natasha’s Widow Bites.

He’s mostly hovered, keeping to himself.

“Therapy.” Tony turns to face him, powering down the wristband tasers. “I can 100% get Pepper to look into that. She’ll set you up with a good one.”

Matt nods slightly before returning to the couch to pet Dice.

“You haven’t called in a while.”

Matt clears his throat uneasily. “I’m not hurt, Claire”

“Then why are you calling, Matt?”

*Claire leaned against the door and stared at the masked man on her floor, then raced to another room for her first aid kit.*

*Kneeling at Matt's side, she snapped on latex gloves. As she leaned over to assess his condition, she found a stab wound in his shoulder. She took his pulse and frowned.*

*Claire then removed a flash light from her bag and waved it across his eyes. No response.*

*She checked for head wounds as she cautiously pulled the black mask off his head. From the tear in his tight shirt, she located the deepest wound. Her eyes then lingered on it, studying the bleeding gash.*

*Sighing, she grabbed her cell phone from her jeans. The phone unlocked and she dialed the emergency services. Matt's hand shot up and grabbed her arm.*

“No, no calls.” He grunted, half delirious.

“It's ok, I'm just trying to help.” She assured him.

“No.”

“We have to get you to the hospital.” She insisted.

“They’ll kill everyone.” Matt warned her.

*She pulled back. “Who?”*
“The men who did this -- they'll kill everyone in the hospital to get to me.” Matt cried out in pain as he rolls over onto his side.

“You can’t... Don’t. You've lost a lot of blood, I think you might have been stabbed.” Claire explained, as if that wasn’t the understatement of the century.

“I have to leave.” Matt grunted. Matt struggled to his feet, clutching his side.

“You wanna leave? Door's that way.” Claire snapped. Matt, his face pale and streaked along his jawline with dry blood, stopped, turned to her, and then fell face down on the floor.

“What thing, Matt?” Claire asks, gently.

“Are you gonna listen to me this time?” Claire asked as Matt's awareness steadily returned to him.

“Where am I?” Matt asked, his muscles stiff as he took in the shape of the foreign room.

“You're in my apartment.” She answered calmly.

“Who are you?”

“I'm the lucky girl who pulled you out of the garbage.”

Matt reached for his mask, which was gone. “You've seen my face.”

“Yeah.”

“Great.”

“Your outfit kinda sucks, by the way.” Claire snarked.

“Yes, it's a work in progress.” He grimaced, trying to sit up.

“Ok, I really wouldn't try to move too much. You've got two or three broken ribs.” She gestured to his torso. "Probable concussion, some kind of puncture wound, and that's just the stuff that I know about.”

After a pause, she continued. “And your eyes, they're non-responsive to light, which isn't freaking
you the hell out, so you’re either blind or in way worse shape than I thought.”

“How do I have to pick one?”

“I’m hurting myself, Claire.” Matt chokes out. Clint stops pretending and shuffles over to Matt, wrapping himself around the other man. “I’ve had a shitty week. A really shitty week.”

“Matt, what’s going on?” Claire sounds concerned now.

It doesn’t help that Matt starts crying, and heaving. Dice starts yowling at his owner, nudging Matt’s head when he doubles over.

“Matt?” Claire asks into the phone. “Matt, tell me you aren’t about to do something stupid.”

“No.” He grinds out. His expression scrunches up. “But we’re friends, Claire, aren’t we?”

“Yeah, Idiot.” She sighs into the phone. “But what is going on? Because you’re scaring me, you know.”


“Where will I meet you?” She asks certainly.

Matt smiles, just a little, into Clint’s chest. “Avengers Tower. Thank you, Claire.”

“You’ve got someone with you?”

“Yeah, I’m being,” Matt sniffs, “taken care of.”

“Good. See you tomorrow.”

The call ends, leaving Matt crying into Clint once again.

“Now, don’t sell yourself short, that took guts.” Clint commends him. “It’ll be easier to build up to becoming Matt again.”

He nods, tugging Clint’s T-shirt. “Pillow?”

The man flops back onto his bed, pulling Matt with him. Matt smiles into Clint’s arm.

“Take it, Matty.”

He doesn’t sleep that night.
“So who’s our guest?” Steve asks upon hearing from Tony that Claire is visiting.

“Claire.” Matt fiddles with the sleeve of the hoodie he’s wearing – Tony’s black hoodie that he may have borrowed the previous day in his lab. “She’s a friend.”

“She used to patch him up back when he wore pajamas to fight mobsters.” Clint corrects. “She’s a nurse.”

“She bring her outfit?” Tony pats Matt on the back suggestively. “Good on you, Murdock.”

“We aren’t together.” Matt nudges the other man.

He finds himself wearing another one of Clint’s shirts when he takes a brief sniff, but decides that it isn’t something he has to concern himself with.

“Mr Murdock, Miss Temple is arriving in the elevator.” Jarvis announces on his right.

“Thank you, Jarvis.” Matt stands up to approach the elevator. He can hear Claire’s heartbeat steadily rising in the lift, until the doors open.

Steve has given them some space, while Tony and Clint have stayed. He knows there’s no chance of getting them to leave, not that he minds.

At least Stark is doing some work (or reading, as he’s apparently known to do) on his StarkPad.

“Claire.” Matt steps forward to embrace her, then reminds himself that it isn’t something they do. However, Claire grabs him in a tight hug and squeezes him.

“Don’t scare me like that.” She hisses at him before grabbing his face in her hands. “Have you slept? You look dehydrated.”

“Thanks for coming.” Matt smiles, resisting the urge to pull her into another hug.

“I’m always going to be there for you, Matt, when you need me.” Claire tell him before looking past him. “Uh, I meant to ask…”

“Claire, this is Clint Barton and Tony Stark.” Matt explains. “They’re friends.”

“Iron Man and Hawkeye. Wow, ok.” Claire nods.

“Can we just sit for a while?” Matt asks before he hears Dice’s collar rattling towards him. He runs over, snuffling at Claire’s legs.

“Allergic to dogs, too, or just cats?” Matt asks curiously. Claire smirks as she reaches down to pet Dice.

“Just cats.”
“This is Dice the Devil-dog.” Matt explains with a light tinge to his cheeks. “Also my… guide
dog.”

“Smells cologne through a wall, needs a guide dog.” Claire laughs at him as they both move
towards the sofas.

“He was for appearances.” Matt defends himself, leaning against Clint on the couch. The archer
messes up his hair teasingly.

“Holy shit.” Claire stands up, distracted by something over by the windows.

“What?” Matt asks, his ears perking to attention.

“The view from here is amazing.” She explains. “Sorry.”

Matt smiles warmly while Tony glances up from his StarkPad. “You’d appreciate it if you could
see it, Shades.”

“I’d appreciate it if there wasn’t glass.” Matt quirks his lips slightly before his mouth forms a
straight line. “Claire—”

“Don’t apologize.” She warns him.

“Matt, asking for help is a great thing.” Clint assures him, tugging him into a hug before he can
curl up.

Clint looks between them before agreeing. “He’s right, Matt.”

“I didn’t want to drag you back.” Matt lowers his head but Claire only hums disapprovingly.
“You’re going to eat a good meal, have lots of water, then rest. And I’m going to police you.”

Matt eats for the first time since arriving at the tower. It’s plain pasta but he eats it. He doesn’t
drink water but he’s partial to some of Tony’s coffee.

Resting is next but cuddling into Claire on his bed hasn’t improved his situation.

His head is resting so that his ear is over her heart, trained on the thrumming of her heart in her
chest cavity, and the flowing of blood through her chest and shoulder. It’s soothing being so close
to her, nuzzled in, but Matt’s not even remotely tired.

“You’re supposed to be asleep.” She tells him. “Not staring off into the distance.”

“I’m tired.” Matt slurs. It’s been several hours since Claire arrived and they’ve been talking, but
they haven’t made progress.

“Matt, most insomniacs don’t stay awake for two days without any rest.” Claire says in his ear.
“Why do I feel like you’re trying not to fall asleep?”

“I can’t sleep.” Matt says but Claire shifts under him.

“Are you having nightmares? Night terrors?” She asks. “Why don’t you want to fall asleep?”

“Claire, I can’t.”
“Why not?” She persists.

“Because he’s there!” Matt shouts. He pauses, breath catching in his throat.

“Who?”

“Stick.” Matt grimaces. “He’d train me. Train me for all kinds of scenarios.”

His fingers feel shaky and uncoordinated as he fiddles with the silk sheets. “He taught me things like how to endure torturing and rape and bullet wounds.”

“Whoa, hold on.” She says, voice tight. “He raped you, Matt?”

“It was a training exercise.” Matt says definitively. “Wasn’t like that.”

“Matt, how old were you?” Claire asks, her hands on his arms now.

“Nine.” Matt speaks softly, his eyelids closing for more than a blink.

“That’s rape, Matt.” Claire says as she draws him into a hug.

“It was a training exercise, Claire, Stick wasn’t like that.” Matt insists as he pushes her away. Matt laughs unhappily as he wipes wetness from his face.

“Matt, he abused you…” Clare argues but their disagreement makes Murdock tense. His heart hammers against his chest as he forgets what the room looks like. Moment by moment, noises returning to his ears garbled and distorted by the chaos.

Dice howls from the foot of the bed, bolting to Matt immediately.

His hands are shaking as he backs himself into the corner, sliding down the wall until he’s in a ball in the corner.

Dice is growling at Claire to warn her off, but predominantly pawing at Matt’s legs. His breath is catching in his mouth, to be swallowed like viscous gulps of soup.

His senses begin shifting in his state of tired hysterics.

Blood gushes in his chest, flooding out to his extremities in rapid fervor. The wooden floor beneath him pierces his skin like parallel slates. Rotting food chokes his nose but three familiar scents center him.

Apple juice. Oil. Chemicals.

Matt’s eyes close slowly as the world around him runs on high voltage.

Chapter End Notes

So Claire is really nice and great (I love her) but she doesn't handle this particular situation well because she's so horrified. She'll be back in later chapters.
Matt shifts in the bed beneath him but a jolt of pain instantly inhibits his movement. Crying out, he clutches his head as his senses peak, allowing in a slur of noise that he can’t even begin to decipher.

His body burns to the point where Matt starts to believe he’s been taken to Hell. Even the cool air against his skin is a torment. He kicks violently at whatever is on his skin and jerks to his feet, wobbling and almost falling over at the sudden vertigo. The grain of polished wood flooring on his bare feet only fuels his screaming. He feels jagged ledges under his feet, scraping the lines of his skin at an angle that makes him weep.

The city’s heartbeat is washed out by insufferable noise, so much so that Matt can’t hear his own screaming. It’s consistent – growing and growing until Matt considers if he lost his hearing. Noise or no noise, there’s no difference. Just pain. An insufferable, insufferable pain. He stumbles and weeps harder, pleading for God to let him keep his senses.

The sound of a door being thrown open lulls his senses into the background.

“Matthew, can you hear me?” A voice says near his ear. He flinches, but nods shortly.

The chemical smell means that Bruce is attending to him.

“I argued with Claire.” He admits quietly.

His glasses are missing so he avoids facing Bruce directly.

“I know.” Bruce nods. “But mistakes can be rectified.”

Matt feels something soft being draped over him and it’s at that moment that he becomes aware of his lack of clothes.

He uses the bathrobe to cover himself before sitting on the edge of what he now understands is his bed.

“You’ve been sleeping since Claire left yesterday.” Bruce informs him. “It’s the early afternoon.”

“Why wasn’t I wearing clothes?” Matt asks, his brow furrowing as he turns his head away from Bruce.

Bruce clears his throat. “Your body had a urinary response to the stress it was under. Nothing to worry about.”

“I—” Matt’s face reddens, almost as dark as his hair. He hadn’t wet the bed since starting college. Admittedly, the mortification of Foggy finding out was enough to end his problem.

“Matt, you hadn’t slept in two days. Your body wasn’t waking you up for anything.” Bruce assures him. “I’ve been the only person in the room.”

“Did you,” Matt hedges, “do anything?”

Bruce turns to him, frowning. “You don’t have anything I haven’t seen before. I gave you a bed-bath and changed your clothes.”
Matt faintly smells the stench in the mattress but ignores it. Bruce’s heart didn’t falter, so he nods silently.

“Now, Claire tells me that there’s a reason you haven’t been sleeping well.” Bruce states calmly. “Is it something you would like to share?”

“Claire didn’t tell you?” Matt asks in surprise.

“She claimed it was a private matter.” Bruce says slowly. “You know you can talk to anyone in this tower if you need a confidant.”

“It’s nothing.” Matt claims. Bruce makes an amused sound as he leans back against Matt’s set of drawers. It’s empty and he’s running out of holiday clothes.

“Then you should be aware that staying awake for 24 hours is comparable to a 0.1% blood alcohol level and shouldn’t be attempted for several days.” Bruce scolds him. “And at 72 hours, hallucinations can occur. Keep to a regular sleeping pattern or I might have to tell Steve to mother you.”

“Don’t put Steve on me.” Matt whines, standing up. His hands are nervous, trembling as they toy with the hem of the robe’s pocket.

“Matt, there are healthier ways to cope.” Bruce explains. “Sleep isn’t something you can boycott.”

“I’m sorry, Bruce.” Matt murmurs.

Bruce moves onto the bed to sit beside him. He wraps an arm around Matt’s shoulders and doesn’t comment on the redhead’s flinch at the contact.

“Don’t be sorry, just be healthier.” Bruce corrects him. “I’ll leave you to your devices but I’m worried that you’re slightly dehydrated so you’re joining us for dinner tonight.”

Matt nods obediently.

Bruce leaves his bedroom after a few more kind words about how the team worried about him.

Matt’s attention turns to the ears in the wall.

“Delete it, Jarvis.” Matt hisses at the wall. “Footage and audio.”

“Mr Murdock, I am not permitted to delete content with no sensitive footage.” Jarvis informs him. “And I do not care for your tone.”

“What Claire said – that was a lie. She was lying!” Matt insists. “Jarvis, please, it’s not something you have to bother Stark with.”

“If asked, I must relay any footage to Sir in the circumstance that it contains no sensitive footage.” Jarvis explains, then pauses. “Mr Murdock, Miss Temple’s concerns may be valid.”

“I was not abused or raped or any of that bullshit.” Matt growls at the wall. His hands are shaking as he runs them through his hair. His voice levels out, toneless, in his next words. “You won’t mention this.”

“Not unless directly asked by Sir.” Jarvis agrees ruefully. “No.”

Matt silently locates his glasses in the drawers beside his bed and places them on his face. He
tracks down a pair of jeans and then finds something smelling faintly like chemicals by the bed. He finds a folded shirt, crisp yet soft to touch.

He pulls on the shirt, fastens the sleeves, and then whistles for Dice’s attention. Once the dog is out of his bedroom, Matt takes a deep breath – his hands shake in his pockets – then follows Dice to the elevator.

It was a training exercise, nothing more.
Naturally, when Matt finds Bucky, and only Bucky, sitting at the downstairs table, he slumps into the seat directly beside him. That is, rather than taking any of the other eight seats at Tony’s table.

Bucky clears his throat, most likely thinking Matt hasn’t realized he’s there. Matt appreciates the sentiment.

“Matt, you came!” Bruce says happily, the wood of the door frame creaking as he leans on it.

“I was invited.” Matt points out.

Bucky jumps up from his seat, almost falling over his chair. Dice sticks his head out from under the tablecloth, mischievous.

“Down.” Matt scolds the dog, who disappears under the table to lie down.

Matt rubs his temples, a headache growing, as the food is brought out. They ordered takeout – Chinese – and the scent of MSG is choking Matt’s nose.

Bucky investigates Dice as he sits, looking at the dog curiously under the table.

“Crimson, got you egg fried rice from that place you like.” Tony calls out and Matt gives a sigh of relief.

No MSG.

“Correction:” Tony places his tub in front of him, “the only place you like.”

“If you knew what you were eating, you’d be picky, too.” Matt shrugs. He leans on Tony’s shoulder when the engineer sits on his right.

The others hesitate but Matt smiles to comfort them. “It’s the MSG, I hate the taste.”

Bucky stops investigating Dice and starts eating quietly, his arm whirring with each movement.

Matt hears Clint tug up the edge of the tablecloth.

“Don’t feed my dog that crap, Barton.” Matt warns.

The cloth slowly falls from his coarse fingertips.

“You’re blind.” Bucky says from his left, waving his hand slowly in front of Matt.

“I can’t see for shit but my hearing’s spectacular.” Matt grins, reaching out to poke Barnes’ hand. “I can hear the dog tags under your shirt, which is a v-neck, and that your hair is tied up in a bun. I can also hear that you’re wearing one glove and that it’s finger-less. You’re wearing a hoodie with the sleeves partially rolled up.”

Bucky shoves some noodles in his mouth as he thinks this through.
“I guess you have to think of it as more than just five senses. I can't see, not like everyone else, but I can feel. Things like balance and direction. Micro-changes in air density, vibrations, blankets of temperature variations. Mix all that with what I hear, subtle smells. All of the fragments form a sort of... impressionistic painting.” Matt delves deeper into his explanation. “But I don’t know what you look like, or the colour of your hair.”

“It’s brown.” Bucky grunts his response before gesturing a fork to Matt’s face. “It’s not a blind thing?”

“It’s a strange-chemicals-in-my-eyes thing.” Matt eats a mouthful of his own food. “I was in an accident when I was a kid.”

“We didn’t talk much about blind people back then.” Bucky shrugs. “Cared more about who could keep their own. No offense.”

“None taken.” Matt replies. “Most blind people can’t jump off of buildings.”

Bucky hums in agreement.

“Can I touch your arm?” Matt asks curiously.

He figures the talk about his blindness gives him his opportunity to ask. Tit for tat.

He hears Bucky’s muscles stiffening but then the soldier leans across for Matt to touch the metal. Matt does, his fingers lightly caressing the hard surface and all its crevices.

He hears the metal straining under his touches, fidgeting, like the muscles in a real arm.

Matt wonders about this as he lightly taps his fingers against the surface, completely enamored with the way it swallows up what should be noise.

Matt pulls back when Bucky gets a little restless.

“Sound thing, Scarlet?” Tony nudges his side unexpectedly, making him flinch. “It’s vibranium, like the shield. Absorbs vibrations.”

“Eats the sound vibrations.” Matt agrees sweetly. “It sounds nice.”

“You like the murderer’s weapon because it makes a nice noise?” Bucky asks incredulously.

“Matt’s big on senses.” Clint shrugs from across the table. “Haven’t you noticed he steals our clothes?”

Cheeks tingling red, Matt ducks his head to continue eating his food silently.

The evening goes well.

“Pillow.” Matt tells Clint later that night. They’re on one of the couches in Matt’s living room.

“Buddy, don’t you want to go to your actual bed?” Clint sighs, sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of Matt.

“Clint, I can’t.” Matt insists.
“Matt.” Clint runs a hand through his hair. “No questions, ok? I promise. But tell me what I can do to help.”

“I just…” Matt grimaces. “Don’t tell Tony.”

Clint nods.

“I hate the bed.” Matt growls, fidgeting with the blanket Bruce gave him after dinner. A ‘gift to help him sleep’.

“It’s uncomfy?” Clint asks. His expression is bewildered, not that Matt sees his raised eyebrows or slightly parted lips.

“No, it…” Matt wraps his arms around his waist. “It took me so long to get used to that bed and now I have this and I just hate it.”

He remembers the sleepless nights spent listening for ghosts in his old bedroom. Waiting for Stick to show up at the door, his heavy breath leading an alcohol trail through the air to Matt.

And he would crawl into his bed.

Matt shudders when Clint wraps an arm around him. “We can get your bed, Matt, no problem.”

“Really?” Matt asks warily.

“It’s no big deal; you like your own bed.” Clint chuckles, not cruelly. “See how much sleep you lost over such a little thing? It can be so easily fixed, Matt, all you had to do was talk to me.”

Matt admits that it does seem easy, perhaps too easy.

“Sorry.” Matt says, latching onto Clint’s arm. Somewhere in his head, ‘sorry’ and ‘don’t go’ became the same thing. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, sorry.”

“Matty, deep breaths.” Clint reminds him. “Nothing’s wrong. There’s no problem.”

“I-I’m sorry.” Matt pants, tugging Clint closer by his shirt.

“Listen, let me run things down.” Clint suggests. “We sleep wherever you choose tonight, we go to your apartment tomorrow and pick up your bed, we bring it back here, and Tony pays someone to assemble it because the Avengers do enough assembling of their own without starting on beds.”

Matt finds himself laughing into Clint’s chest.

“Let’s do something relaxing.” Clint suggests, moving to sit on the couch so that Matt’s head is in his lap.

“Tense your right hand an arm for a few moments, then relax it.” Clint tells Matt, who looks doubtful. “Just do it, Buddy.

They go through each body part, tensing then relaxing. They do it a second time with less tension. And a third with no tension at all, just relaxing.

Matt’s calmed down considerably by the time they get to the third round. He’s nuzzled into Clint, not moving, when Clint realizes that he’s sleeping already.

He smiles, tells Jarvis to cut the lights, and then throws some of Matt’s blanket over his own legs.
“Goodnight, Buddy.”

Chapter End Notes

Bucky is not ableist, he just doesn't quite understand Matt's blindness. He's from a different time and is trying his best to understand Matt's condition. I think it's more accurate that Bucky believes some myths about blindness, given his lack of understanding, because blindness used to be a stigma. However, he's just curious.

Also, I have no stance on MSG. Matt just doesn't like the taste.
Matt’s eyes open to the sound of Clint snoring above him. Vaguely confused, he reaches up, finding Clint leaning against the back of the sofa while Matt sleeps on his lap.

His sleep, however noisy, ultimately comes to a sudden end when Matt’s hand accidentally slaps him in the face.

“Matty!” He complains loudly.

“Sorry.” Matt blushes. “My ears are still asleep.”

“Yeah, well, my nose isn’t.” Clint raises an eyebrow. “Go take a shower.”

Matt sniffs the air and agrees with Clint’s sentiment.

He smells bitter, like fear sweating, and potent, like dying skin and oil. Matt figures Clint only means B.O.

“C’mon, I’ll make you something to eat.” Clint tells him as he sits up slowly. “Whaddya want?”

Matt takes a sniff, ventures the possibilities of fruit, bacon, bread…

“Oatmeal.”

“You suck, Murdock.” Clint makes a face. “But, fine, I’ll make your barf-meal.”

Matt smirks as he ambles through to the bathroom. He enters through his bedroom, then looks around for a change of clothes.

His jeans will do, but he’s lacking a clean shirt and his holiday clothes haven’t been washed.

He finds a pair of briefs that aren’t too bad and tries to ignore the smell of blood that he’s positive he’s imagining.

With trepidation, he approaches the shower and turns it on.

Matt spends a good minute adjusting the heat as high as he can handle it, then strips of Bruce’s shirt and his sweats.

He runs his fingers over the hem of his underwear before checking Clint’s location. He’s already downstairs, probably rummaging around for oatmeal.

“Jarvis?” Matt asks weakly.

“Mr Murdock.” If the AI could sound any harsher, Matt’s sure he would.

“Am—Am I…?” Matt trails off, already wanting to draw a towel over himself.

“Entry to the bedroom/bathroom area is only permitted to the other residents in the case of a medical emergency or an invitation by yourself.” Jarvis sounds softer, kinder.

“Clint can’t get in?” He asks, instantly hating himself for not trusting his friends. Not even Clint. He slept with Clint in his bed, for God’s sake!
“No.” Jarvis answers.

He nods slight, still hesitating. After a minute, he swiftly removes his briefs and steps into the hot shower, grimacing at the scalding water as it hits his skin.

He fumbles with a plastic bottle. “Jarvis?”

“You are holding shampoo. There is soap on the shelf behind you.”

Matt nods, squirting some of the mixture into his hands, then his hair. He’s glad the smell isn’t especially potent.

His hair is easily washed, but the soap is a completely different story.

He cranks up the heat on the shower, which doesn’t seem to work, and starts working the soap into a lather.

His upper body is taken care of but he’s somewhat reluctant to clean his lower half. He deals with the vitals then leaps from the shower as quickly as possible.

With no regard for his wet skin, he dresses himself in his underwear and jeans. The denim scrapes over his knees, soaking up the water on his legs.

Matt lurches violently when he hears the door creak open. Dice sniffs his wet foot with interest before his paws pitter-patter from the room.

Clint is in his kitchen, making oatmeal and what smells like eggs.

Matt approaches him from behind and drapes his arms around Clint’s neck. Clint startles and moves the pan he was working with.

“I’m cold.” Matt complains. “Heat me up.”

“Maybe try a shirt?” Clint offers, poking him in the stomach. Matt grunts and ends up hugging Clint’s back until he’s finished cooking, at which point Clint gives him a quick hug. “C’mon, Buddy, go eat.”

Matt grudgingly picks his favourite spot at the table (left side, facing the elevator) and holds his head, hand cupped so Clint can’t see his eyes.

“You ok, Matty?” Clint kicks his foot lightly under the table to get his attention.

“I forgot to grab my glasses.” Matt ducks his head. “I’m sorry.”

“Hey, it’s no big deal.” Clint shoves his hand away. “Just eat normally, Idiot.”

Matt rubs his knuckles for the lack of something to fidget with. “Clint, I can’t maintain eye contact.”

“So?” Clint pins his hands down to the table.

Matt turns his head away. “I’m told it’s off-putting.”

“You’re blind, Matt, I don’t care. Just eat your damn breakfast like a normal person.” Clint urges
him, releasing his hands.

He does, but avoids looking too much in Clint’s direction as to not draw attention to himself.

“Steve! Buckaroo!” Clint calls out to the two men on the couch. “Ready to go?”

“Go?” Bucky asks, settled into the couch playing what sounds like a video game heavily involving jets of some kind.

“We’re going to pick up Matt’s bed.” Steve tells him. “They could use some muscle.”

“Hey!” Clint objects, only mildly irritated.

Bucky pauses the game and stands up, pulling on his old baseball cap. “You’re a weakling, Barton.”

“Says the super powered soldier.” Clint complains.

“He has a point.” Matt says as he joins the others in the elevator.

“Hey! What happened to being my buddy?” Clint objects. “Ninjas and soldiers…”

Matt laughs lightly as he tilts his head down at the floor. His glasses have been recovered but his cane and Dice are on his floor.

He’s wearing Tony’s hoodie and Clint ‘loaned’ him another shirt.

*He’s not getting it back.* Matt smirks to himself. His old Clint-shirt no longer smelled like apple juice, scotch, and mint shampoo.

Hell's Kitchen is the same as it always was.

The seedy underbelly of New York.

Matt's barely recognisable in his hoodie, missing his cane, but the glasses must be a dead giveaway.

He hears doors being bolted and people pulling their children away from him.

"Oh, shit, scram." A man says from behind them, several pairs of feet following him away from Daredevil.

"You're popular." Clint grimaces.

"There's few people in the Kitchen who aren't scared of justice. I'm mostly interested in the ones who indulge in human trafficking and sex slavery. Occasionally the murderers get on my radar." Matt spits as he hears some lowlife scatter away from him.

Bucky pulls back his hoodie, plops his own cap on Matt's head, and pulls the hood back up over it.

"I know what it's like being the bad guy." Bucky grumbles, grouchy as ever.

The hat draws the attention away from his glasses, to an extent.
"Thanks." Matt replies slowly before falling behind Clint in their group.

Matt figures Bucky's pretty cool.
Foggy had been alone at his desk, trapped in the never ending nightmare of sorting through Consolidated Global’s financial records. Looking for anything that could prove admissible as evidence. He had no such luck.

Karen entered the office slowly, her heels clicking through the door, only to stop on the inside. Foggy looked up to see her leaning on the frame. She had a newspaper in her hands. It was torn and soggy – a piece of garbage – but their friend’s face was printed clearly on the front page.

In his red, leather suit.

The minute Foggy approached her, she grabbed him in a white-knuckled hold and, without looking at him, she addressed the elephant in the room. “Foggy, that’s Matt.”

“Yeah.” Foggy says, for lack of anything else. He hadn’t showed up to work for two days and now this.

Last night, he’d been so angry. Sent him a voicemail, bitterly pouring his heart out with breath smelling like vodka. He’d been so exhausted with having to lie to Karen, yet again.

Then Foggy saw the broadcast.

**Daredevil Unmasked.**

He’d got drunk, like he does whenever Matt fucks with his head, and hailed a cab. Slept in the office. Looked through cases until the sun rose.

But, now, Matt’s face is all over Hell’s Kitchen. All over *America.*

He felt numb as Karen cried in front of him, but he held her tightly.

Matt was kidnapped, defaced, found by the police in a vat – a sensory deprivation tank designed especially for him.

The picture, taken by one of his many enemies, presumably, showed him barefaced.

It was Matt’s glassy eyes, his stupid fluffy hair, his stubble-laden jaw.

Karen’s crushed Foggy’s hand in hers when they pulled apart.
“Matt’s blind.” She said, tears streaming down her face. “He saved my life.”

“Yeah, well… That’s Matt.” Foggy agreed, still partially drunk. Reaching a hangover.

All they had was Matt’s empty apartment.

“Matt, get your lazy ass over here and help.” Clint calls as he shoves the contents of Matt’s wardrobe into a bag.

Matt’s touching the wall, lightly tracing the spray paint letters with both hands.

‘GO BACK TO HELL’ It reads in red block capitals.

Matt’s furniture has been slashed open, revealing the stuffing in the couch cushions. The contents of his kitchen have been spilled onto the floor, a demolition site for plates, cups, and bowls.

“Matty, don’t make me do the thing.” Clint taunts him.

Matt makes a face and covers his ears when Clint starts whistling ‘Old MacDonald Had A Farm’, off-key.

“Heathen.” Matt walks over quickly, anything to get the archer to shut up. He touches the bag Clint has; his suits are badly folded inside but he supposes he won’t need them.

“Grumpy.” Clint encircles his waist. “You doin’ ok?”

“Peachy.” Matt sighs, rubbing his temple. “I tried to help. Why didn’t it work? Every time I tried to help, they’d just…”

“Kick you down.” Clint nods into his hip. “Well, you know what fixes that?”

Matt gives him a look. He can’t see Clint, but he aims what he hopes conveys his severe admonishment for Clint’s futile attempts in his general direction.

“Wow, grouchy.” The man laughs. “I was going to say a drink because German beer? Nice, Murdock.”

“It’s really shitty beer.” Matt starts laughing, plopping himself down beside Clint, who laughs back at him. It’s a sweet moment for Matt.

Until a balled-up sock hits his head. He sensed it, of course, but not in enough time.

“Stevie and I just carried your bed into the van and you’re chatting like teenage gals.” Bucky huffs. “Get your stuff so we can go.”

“Is this a competition?” Clint asks. “Because moody is not the new black. Purple, now that’s the new black.”

“I concur.” Matt straightens up when Clint uses his arm to pull himself to his own feet.

Clint seems happy with that until Matt starts walking into his living room.

“Hey!” Clint shouts through to him, vaguely irritated. Matt isn’t funny.
Murdock pulls open the door to the heavy storage cabinet on the wall, revealing the fireman’s hose within, as well as an average sized chest.

“Wassat?” Clint hurries over, intrigued. He peeks over Matt’s shoulder as he lifts the lid off of the chest.

Inside, he feels the soft silk of his father’s robe, but no suit.

Matt drops the box in a panic.

“Whoa, Matty.” Clint grabs him before his feet can kick into action.

“My suit.” He gasps for air. “The suit’s gone. Melvin made it especially... I can’t go back and ask him—”

“Your armor.” Clint interrupts his frantic tirade. “That’s ok, we’ll look around. Someone will have it.”

Matt nods stiffly, grabbing Clint’s arm. Clint’s heartbeat travels through his fingers and Matt feels that he can breathe easily. He’s safe.

“Failing that, Tony can made you tech all day long, just like your old suit.” Clint assures him. “Nothing to get panicky over.”

Matt recognizes that Clint is making a lot of sense today.

*It's a nice surprise.* He grins internally.

“You’re right.” Matt agrees, not letting go of Clint, but feeling calmer. Clint whoops and Matt struggles with a smile at the man’s nature.

Ever since finding out Daredevil’s identity, the police have been eager to hunt Matt Murdock down, but Foggy got there first. Daredevil’s suit is stashed at Karen’s apartment, in her vent. Foggy’s been sleeping over, to be on the safe side.

However, they both decided to take a trip back down to Matt’s apartment, try to clean it up a little.

Karen’s crying in the cab and Foggy tries not to mention it.

“He’s with the Avengers, safe.” He assures her, but to no avail. Her makeup is smeared, making her eyes look unintentionally smoky.

Her hand is at her mouth, fingers clacking against each other.

In her hand, squeezed into the back seat of the vehicle, is a helium balloon.

“Ready to leave?” Clint asks, sipping shitty beer with Matt, who is multitasking.

Alcohol and folding clothes.

Obvious to the archer, Matt’s senses quickly became fuzzy (he’s such a lightweight) but he’s relatively fine, other than the giggling. That might just be a Matt thing, though. A happy Matt
Clint thinks it’s great when Matt starts bouncing around at his own little jokes.

He’d barely noticed it at first, just a few hops when Clint noticed his terrible pun. And, now, the cuddling has increased, along with the puppy-like bouncing.

“You’re a goof.” Clint laughs after Matt makes a joke about buying some paintings, which he finds incredibly funny. He leans on Clint, rolls happily on his heels, and sighs.

“What?” Clint nudges him, glad that there’s a break from all the doom and gloom.

He puts on a show for Matt, being the cool and collected one, but it’s tough watching him fall apart so quickly.

He’s happy to see that stupid grin on his face.

“You’re my favourite.” He stage-whispers to Clint, then hugs him. “Because you’re soft and squishy.”

“You are not drunk enough to be calling me cuddly, Murdock, when you’re acting so squishy, yourself.” Clint pouts. “Because I’m worried the terrible blind jokes will continue if you drink any more, we should head off.”

“Steve’s coming.” Matt hums thoughtfully but doesn’t say more on that. “You think I’m funny.”

“I said no such thing, Counselor!” Clint protests dramatically before Matt starts in another giggling fit.


“You dick.” Clint shoves him playfully when Steve decides to interrupt their fun.

“Should I have named myself after a malevolent entity instead?” Clint asks Matt as Steve walks into the room with Foggy Nelson, his eyebrows knitted together in the creases of his frown.

He walks straight up to Matt, silently with red eyes and a hurt expression. His suit looks worn, Clint notices.

Matt squirms uncomfortably before resting his head on Clint’s shoulder. “Foggy?”

“Murdock, we need to talk.”
They’re on the communal floor when Tony saunters over to the redhead.

“Matt, how about you come upstairs with me.” Tony suggests. His heart is beating quickly, Matt notices immediately. Muscles stretching and tightening. Blood pumping to his extremities.

He’s angry.

Matt hesitates. “I’m just going to—”

“Wasn’t a request.” Tony states bluntly and there’s the sound of his arms crossing.

Matt winces as Clint wraps an arm around him. “Tony, what’s this about?”

Tony doesn’t say anything but Clint leads Matt to the elevator, making him think that they shared a glance. Once he’s in, they leave Foggy and Karen, travelling up three floors.

Matt expects the doors to open but they rise another floor to Tony’s penthouse.

Once they’re in, Matt takes a brief walk around the space, grimacing at the sheer amount of windows.

He can hear the familiar hum of the Iron Man suits from Tony’s personal lab.

“You been hurting yourself?” Tony asks frankly.

Matt spins from his spot near the window, lips parted. “No, I haven’t.”

“See, I don’t know if I believe you. Not when Jarvis has to tell me about blood in your shower.” Tony snaps.

“Whoa, take a step back, here.” Clint argues with him. “If Matt has been self-harming, this isn’t the way to deal with it.”

“And hugging him’s going to make it ok?” Tony asks. He runs a hand over his face. Matt can smell his sweat.


“A bruised rib doesn’t equate blood.” Tony sighs. He walks over to a glass monument, it seems to Matt, or rather his personal bar. Pours himself a drink.

Matt envies him; he’s feeling really sober right now.

“There’s a cut on the skin. I was going to ask Bruce about a suture, but he wasn’t around today.” Matt carefully ignores his heartbeat.

“Bruce is at a conference.” Tony says.

“He’s got a nasty bruise.” Clint agrees with Matt, who tinges red in his cheeks.

“Lemme see.” Tony says shortly, taking a large, burning gulp of scotch.

Matt lifts his shirt, Clint’s shirt, to show the inch-long cut surrounded by bruises. Tony strides over
to him, his steps even, and pulls up his sleeves. Checks his wrists, the healing burn he made in Hawaii, then drops his hands.

“Aright.” Tony says, taking another drink.

“Matt, go downstairs and make sure Bucky isn’t scaring your friends.” Clint smiles but Matt can hear the flicker in his chest when he smiles.

He moves into the elevator and Jarvis takes him to the communal floor.

Clint slaps Tony’s arm, glaring. “You think he’s going to be open with us if you accost him like that? He was hurt and you had to act like an asshole!”

“Need I remind you that he’s already burned his wrist?” Tony snarks. “Maybe you’d forgot.”

“I haven’t, Tony.” Clint pinches the bridge of his nose, then looks up at the drinking man. “Shit, I’m worried about him, too. But what if he doesn’t come to us next time he’s hurt? What if he hides it? Did you think about that, Tony?”

Stark sighs, puts the glass down on the granite bar. “No. Didn’t mean to scare the guy.”

“Yeah, well, you did.” Clint scolds him. “And, now, he has to deal with telling his friends that he’s depressed. How much do you think you helped?”

Stark’s quiet as Clint makes his way into the elevator.

“Matt, Foggy told me, um,” Karen wipes her face when Matt returns from the penthouse, “how much you liked the last one.”

A string is placed in his hand. He tugs it gently, trying to ignore Clint and Tony arguing above him. The balloon bounces on its string.

“It’s a dog because… Dice.” Karen explains hesitantly.

“Thank you, Karen.” Matt pulls her into a tight hug.

One she clearly didn’t expect, if her gasp was anything to go by.

Clint exits the elevator.

Bucky and Steve, who are playing the same video game from earlier, notice the tension.

“We can leave?” Steve offers but Matt shakes his head.

“My floor?”

“Good idea!” Clint says in a, rather forced, happy voice.

On Matt’s floor, Foggy looks around silently while Matt ties his balloon to the coffee table, tapping it a couple of times. It crinkles at a pleasing pitch.

“I didn’t want you or Foggy to be in danger by knowing my secret.” Matt curls up with Karen, which he can feel confusing her.
“I understand.” Karen admits. “You wanted to protect me.”

Matt nods into her arm, then rests his cheek on her shoulder.

“I don’t appreciate being lied to, though, Matt.” Karen tells him. “Foggy explained your super-radar thing and I understand, I do, but I’m not stupid.”

“I’m sorry.” He whispers.

She hugs him back, however, gently and calmly. “I know.”

“Matt, maybe this is a good time to get everything off your chest.” Clint suggests. “I can take Dice out for a walk, if you’d rather…”

“No, stay.” Matt murmurs. Clint ruffles his hair gently, sits on his right, and pets Dice.

Matt’s fingers find some of Karen’s hair. Leaning up, he twists three sections absent-mindedly into a braid.

“I haven’t been coping so well.” Matt says slowly. Karen’s hand snakes it way into his, making him smile faintly. “Tony offered to let me stay here for a while.”

“You should’ve called.” Foggy tells him from across the room. “We’re your friends, Matt.”

“I know.” Matt says but Foggy yells before he can finish.

“I don’t think you do, Matt!” He storms over to Matt, who shrinks back as he looms over him. “Your name’s out there! What if some of your little friends went after us? We work with you, we’re your friends, it’s pretty dammed obvious that we know something! But you just disappeared for a week!”

“Back. Off.” Clint snaps at Foggy, who steps back in surprise.

“Hey, Matty, you need a minute?” Clint messes up his hair, which develops into a full on hug when he feels Matt shaking under his hand.

“I’m fine, I’m fine.” Matt pushes Clint away.

The archer stares between Foggy and Matt for a moment before slinging an arm around his shoulders and staying quiet.

“They can stay here, right?” Matt sniffs, his eyes tearing up as he turns to Clint. His eyes are wet through the red of his glasses. Turning back to Foggy, he wipes his eyes. “There’s enough rooms, you can stay and—and be safe here.”

“We were worried and you left, Matt.” Foggy says.

“I’m sorry. Foggy, I’m really—I’m sorry.”

“No.” Foggy shakes his head. Matt can hear the strands moving against his head, can hear the wetness in his voice and the catch in his throat. “I can’t do this. I’ll come back later, but I can’t do this now, Matt.”

Matt grips Clint’s arm as he hears his friend leaving him.

“He just needs to cool down.” Karen tries to assure him but the twinge is in her heart and Matt
starts sobbing.

Clint gathers Matt into his chest as he falls apart, resting his chin on Matt’s stupidly fluffy hair.

“C’mon, Buddy, that took a lot of guts.” Clint squeezes Matt. “Proud of you, Matty.”

“I should go.” Karen says gently, but not before giving Matt a kiss to the top of his head. “We’ll be back tomorrow, ok?”

Matt nods slightly into Clint’s arm.

“You’re free to stay any time.” Clint tells her. “Both of you. Ask Steve, downstairs, he’ll give you an emergency number.”


She leaves quietly.

They don’t end up moving for a while, but Clint eventually convinces Matt to get into his bed, snuggling beside him.

Matt doesn’t stop gripping Clint’s arm and the crying is periodic, but the fatigue catches up to Matt and, in his assembled bed, Matt falls asleep in the early hours.
Matt paces back and forth in the kitchen. He’s supposed to be making toast while Clint grabs him some butter infused with chilli that Tony loves from the fridge downstairs.

He’d opened the cabinet door in search for a plate and was faced with the glass cups.

Hesitant to move much closer to them, Matt suffers with the onslaught of bass vibrations around him. Dice howls at him, upset, but it makes the situation much worse.

“Away!” He shouts at the dog, who scurries around the breakfast bar and barks from the living room.

“Be quiet, be quiet, be quiet.” Matt chants, clamping his hands over his ears. Every time he nears the cabinet, he has to hurry back to his previous spot.

“STOP IT!” Matt screams, lunging for the glasses and throwing several onto the floor at once.

“Matt!” Clint’s running over to him, trying to pull him back by his shirt, but Matt draws several more glasses out of the cupboard and smashes them on the floor and worktop.

Clint only drags him away with his forearm around Matt’s neck and his other arm around his waist.

It’s now that Clint realises he underestimated Daredevil’s brute strength.

Matt screams, grabbing the cabinet door and ripping it from the shelves as Clint drags him away.

“Shit, calm down.” Clint pants in his ear but Matt’s screaming drowns it out.

“Matt, you’re bleeding! Stop moving!” Clint screams at him, twisting his arm behind his back to disable him, but Matt falls limp in that moment.

Clint supports some of his weight but Matt ultimately falls to the floor, slumping over onto his side.

Bruce stands at the elevator doors, having recently entered, mouth agape.

“Make it stop.” Matt grabs Clint’s forearm, gasping for breath.

“Make what stop?” Bruce asks patiently, seeing that Clint is at the end of his tether. He’s tugging on his hair with both hands, standing up so he can pace around the room.

Bruce grabs something from a wall panel beside the elevator. Matt smells bitter alcohol and guesses that it’s a medical kit.

“You’ve got blood in your right hand.” He says to Matt, kneeling beside him. “I need you to stay still.”
Matt feels the grating shards slit through his skin and presents his hand to Bruce, using the other to cover his ear.

“Matt.” Bruce doesn’t sound happy. “Relax your hand.”

But his fist is clenched, the small fragments of glass biting into his palm. He’s squeezing blood from his palm onto the floor. That is, until Bruce pries his fingers apart.

“Matt, do I need to worry?” Bruce asks sternly.

He shakes his head, his hand falls limp, and breaths in the scent of the varnished flooring.

The smell of salt hits his nose. The scraping of glass against plastic bristles. He faintly feels pain somewhere in his body but he can’t determine where it’s coming from. He focuses on Bruce’s slow heartbeat.

“Matt, can you tell me if there’s any glass left in here?” Bruce says as he starts on the first suture.

Matt winces, but shakes his head. None left.

“Are you telling me the truth?” He asks. Despite his words, he sounds gentle. Matt nods.

“Why did you break the glasses?”

Matt looks in the direction of Bruce’s voice, tired. “Hurt my ears.”

“Ok.” Bruce nods along to that, doesn’t say anything else as he sticks the needle in Matt’s hand.

“Did you clean up the glass?” Tony asks.

They’ve told the team; Matt is huddled on the couch on his own. Bucky comes over to keep him company, but doesn’t touch him.

“All of it?” Tony approaches Matt, takes his hand gently, looks at the bandages.

“All that we could see.” Clint rubs his face. He sighs. “Matt didn’t take any.”

“Are you sure about that?” Tony laughs. “You were so sure that he wouldn’t hurt himself.”

“Tony, I can’t guarantee anything but I didn’t see him take anything, neither did Bruce or Jarvis.” Clint hisses.

“Both of you, calm down.” Steve chides them both. “You’re acting like children.”

“Look, both of you, I don’t think this was planned.” Bruce sighs. “He got overwhelmed. It’s different from the burn. The burn was calculated and planned, this was after, according to Jarvis, two minutes of what looks like a panic attack.”

“So we should ignore it?” Tony scoffs. “Am I the only sane one here?”

“What I’m saying is: we should start therapy as soon as possible and maybe consult Matt about this instead of acting as if he isn’t here.”

Matt twitches when they all turn to him.
“The glass was… hurting my head.” Matt murmurs. “Wanted it to stop.”

“There we go.” Bruce crosses his arms. “Squeezing your hand, however, was a different matter.”

Matt looks away, not wanting to partake in this conversation any more.

Luckily, it ends somewhat ambiguously.

“Tony?” Matt moves into the spot beside Stark on the couch.

“What?” He asks, distracted by whatever’s on his phone.

“I’m sorry about the kitchen.” He tries to wriggle closer in the hopes that Tony will wrap an arm around him. He does.

“I’m not worried about the kitchen, Murdock. I can pay for cups. There’s no amount of money that will fix you shedding yourself, or worse.” Tony tells him. “I want you to stop acting so damned self-destructive.”

“I’m sorry.” Matt wriggles to hug his waist, slipping a hand between Tony and the couch to properly hug him.

Tony rolls his eyes. “No, you’re not.”

“I’m working on it.” Matt claims.

Tony scoffs, but there’s a smile to it. “Whatever, Crimson. Go wash up before your friends visit.”

“Shit.” Matt grunts into Tony’s shoulder. “They’re going to kill me.”

“Ah, he shows self-preservation.” Tony announces to the room. Natasha’s silently judging him as she grabs food from the elevator. “Go clean up, you look like crap.”

“Mean.” Matt pouts but Tony shrugs.
Matt wriggles as Clint blasts a hairdryer at his head.

“Stop moving, God damn it, you’re the one who forgot they were coming over.” Clint gestures to Matt’s lunch. “Eat, or I’ll tell on you.”

Matt frowns, enduring the jet of air as he cuts up his pancake.

“What do I do now?” Clint asks, touching the fluffy mess to ensure that it’s dry. It seems to bounce back at him.

“I’ll comb it.” Matt shrugs.

“You’ll do nothing because Karen and Foggy are on their way and you’re sitting in your underwear eating breakfast.” Clint tells him. “You want Tony to get all fussy again?”

Tony glares from the living room.

“He loves you.” Clint snickers, grabbing the comb on the table as he tries to work through the red tufts.

“Anyone ever tell you that’cha look like a cotton swab?” Clint asks, cursing as the comb does absolutely nothing to his hair.

“I’m sure it’s fine.” Matt shrugs, picking apart his blueberry muffin.

“You can’t see it.” Clint grimaces, then indicates to his hand. “I want to have you looking all spiffy before we have to explain that to Foggy and Karen. Doesn’t exactly say we’re taking good care of you.”

Matt rubs his hand, lowering his head. “My fault.”

“Do you usually use gel on this?” Clint asks curiously.

“Only for court.” Matt explains, pulling away from Clint. “And it itches until I wash it. It’s fine, Clint.”

“Good.” Clint huffs.

“Mr Nelson and Miss Page are in the lobby.” Jarvis tells the residents of the tower.

Clint spins Matt around in his chair and shoves clothes in his hands.

“I’m rolling my eyes.” Matt narrates. “In case you can’t see because of the glasses.”

“Oh, aren’t we sassy all of a sudden?” Clint grumbles, taking his plate away. “You’ve advanced from starving yourself to a single pancake, I applaud.”

Matt rights himself after the sweats and T-shirt are on.

“The muffin was your treat.” Clint complains, giving him his mug of water. “Drink.”

Matt and his stupidly fluffy hair are situated on the couch beside Tony when Karen and Foggy
arrive. Foggy is behind Karen, who wraps her arms around Matt the instant she sees him.

“Doing ok?” She asks him, sitting on the opposite couch.

Matt doesn’t say anything, and it gives Foggy the opportunity to talk. “What happened to your hand?”

“Broke a glass. Some of the shards caught me.” Matt explains. “I’m fine.”

“Matt.” Clint scolds him, turning to the duo. “The glasses in his kitchen were bothering him and he ended up smashing them. A few stitches, nothing much.”

“The glasses were bothering you?” Foggy asks, deadpan.

Matt locates Clint and slumps into his shoulder, not speaking.

“There’s a lot of windows on each floor, the glass affects how Matt hears noise.” Tony explains. “Currently working on it.”

“You were supposed to be watching him.” Foggy snaps at the Avengers. “Why are you letting him —”

“We aren’t letting Matt do anything.” Clint defends. “I was with him all night and all morning, then I left to get butter for all of two minutes. Jarvis told me Matt was freaking out and I got up there before he was hurt.”

“You got the voice in the walls to watch him.” Foggy states, slumping onto the couch beside Karen, who is rubbing her forehead.

“I alerted Agent Barton to the health hazard.” Jarvis says in clipped tones.

“Anyway, he was fine until I got there. You ever tried to pull him away?” Clint scowls at Matt. “Seriously, Matty, what do you bench?”

“Foggy, arguing isn’t going to help.” Karen tells him. “We both want the same thing.”

“Which is why,” Stark looks up from his phone, “there’s an open offer for you to stay in the tower. Since Barton and Murdock are shacking up so often, he’s going to move into the bedroom on Matt’s floor. That means the floor below Matt is completely open to new residents.”

“Sleepover.” Clint corrects. “Not shacking up.”


“Then it’s a done deal.”

“Your friend sucks.” Bucky says without prompting.

Matt’s sitting with Steve, Bucky, and Natasha. Braiding Nat’s hair and listening to Steve lose at the videogame is only so fun, so he makes his way over to Bucky.

He has Clint’s jacket, so he curls up on the couch, hiding underneath it.

“Foggy?” Matt asks.
“He’s not very supportive.” Bucky claims, to which Steve argues.

“I’m sure he’s just trying to hide how worried he is.”

“He’s angry at me because I’m not a good friend.” Matt explains, shuffling a little closer to Bucky’s arm before deciding against that. He really doesn’t want to get punched by a metal fist.

“I tried to kill Stevie after being an assassin for HYDRA for over half a century.” Bucky states blandly. “He didn’t bust my balls about it.”

“It was really difficult for me, though, Buck.” Steve pauses the game. “Foggy’s a civilian. He’s probably scared for his life just now. He found out that Matt was Daredevil, not just Matt. That’s a difficult thing to realise, that your friend has changed without you.”

“All he’s done is mess things up!” Bucky argues.

It’s then that Matt remembers: Bucky is just as messed up as Matt.

Matt can hear his seizing heart, the way his fists clench. He’s defending Matt because he understands that they’re both in the same boat. Their traumas are different but Bucky’s fucked up and he’s trying to help.

Matt wriggles closer to Bucky on the couch, rests his head on Bucky’s metal arm, and fully indulges himself with the sound-sponge. Bucky stiffens and Matt considers that this might not have been a good idea.

Matt stays perfectly still while Bucky and Steve play their game.

Bucky seems ok with it.
Matt taps his balloon.

“It’s a blue dog.”

Matt is currently behind his couch, pressed against the wall.

“Big, blue dog with sappy eyes.”

Clint is trying to retrieve him, it seems.

“Your hair is fluffier than its, though.”

He lied to Foggy, that much he knew. About his senses, about being ‘fine’, about Stick… He had lied. Matt had made Foggy think he was a good person, he’d hidden the crippled, broken, torn-up version of himself at his core and hid in a shell of himself. He’d kept so much from his best friend.

Maybe it would be better if Foggy had left. Stopped being his friend before they opened their very own firm.

But then that girl…

That girl down the block, her crying muffled into her pillows.

Matt, hands clenched so tightly that they ached, had tried to call Child Protective Services.

The mom wouldn’t believe it, couldn’t believe the repulsive man her husband was. No-one would believe him.

For a while, the dad was scared away.

But then, Matt was forced to listen as a child was raped. And he cried. He tried to tune it out but Stick’s lessons remained in the forefront of his thoughts.

He tracked the dad down.

Drew back the rusted locks on the snarling beast he kept inside himself.

Let the Devil out.

But maybe Foggy should stop being Matt’s friend. That is, before Foggy becomes any more entangled in Matt’s disaster of a life.

“Matty, talk to me.” Clint urges, camping out on the couch, peering over the back. “We can work through whatever this is.”
When did he start liking Clint? Matt thinks this through, wondering if he can pinpoint the good decisions he makes.

Is he a bad friend?

“Of course you aren’t, Matty.” Clint reaches down to ruffle his hair. No wonder it’s so fluffy. “Who gave you that idea?”

“Foggy and I fought when I told him about Daredevil.” Matt explains. “I broke Tony’s cups.”

“You broke them because they were a trigger for your senses.” Clint says, sighing. “Steve gets scared around the fridge, sometimes. Bucky gets scared of people standing over him. Sometimes, I think my drink’s been poisoned even though that’s stupid.”

“I would tell you.” Matt whispers and Clint smiles.

“You’re a good friend, Matty.” Clint squeezes his shoulder. “I think that, sometimes, you forget things. Like asking for help. Or telling people things because you think you can do it all on your own.”

Matt freezes.

“What, Buddy?”

What if Clint hates him? Matt really doesn’t want Clint to hate him.

“Breathe, Matt, deep breaths in and out.” Clint urges him from above. “Was it something I said?”

“Please don’t hate me.” Matt pants, moving onto his knees so he can grab Clint’s arm.

The air is gone from the room. Something wild and fluttery starts eating through his chest when he thinks of Clint leaving him. Of the Avengers walking away, slamming the door on him.

“I’ll tell you, I’m sorry.” Matt pants, panicky.

“Tell me what?” Clint asks. “Matt, you’re upset, it can wait until later, ok?”

Clint shoves the couch aside and gathers Matt up in his arms. Matt’s nose finds Clint, his comforting smell, and burrows his face into the warmth of his chest.

Apple juice. Scotch. Mint shampoo.

“He forced me, Clint, I didn’t—I didn’t want it.” Matt sobs into Clint, who backs up a step.

“What?” Clint demands. “Force you? You were raped?”

“The night my identity got out.” Matt whimpers, worming his way into Clint’s warm chest. “D—Don’t leave.”

“I’m not going to leave you.” Clint says, holding him tightly.

Matt’s in his late twenties, not like the other Avengers. They’re all at least a decade older than him, not to mention Cap and Bucky. He’s got his life ahead of him.

He’s been raped. Some bastard raped him.
Matt tries his hardest to make his city a better place, and look how Hell’s Kitchen chewed him up and spat him out.

He feels so fragile in Clint’s arms – trembling and small.

For the first time since knowing Matt, Clint feels bad for the man and it’s got nothing to do with his blindness.

Matt’s snuggled into Clint in his bed, Dice licking his chin.

“I was looking into a murder. Linked it to Confed Global.” Matt explains in barely a whisper. “Fisk was causing trouble, even in prison.”

“One of his men?”

Matt shakes his head slightly. “It was a ruse.”

“Matty, Matty, Matty.” Stick’s voice penetrated his mind.

Acting on instinct, Matt’s body writhed in the bondage, his limbs straining against the chains that tethered him to the table. Spread eagle and naked.

“Relax, I’m not going to hurt you.” His voice was sickly sweet, with the distinct, rough tones Matt’s used to.

Matt’s body was moving without his permission, though. Straining as best as he can in a futile attempt to break the chains.

“I missed you, Matty.”

“I was—” Matt tries to explain the table, explain anything, but his words are failing him.

“You’re safe here.” Clint reminds him. “No-one’s going to hurt you here.”

“Promise?” Matt chokes out and he hates how childish he sounds.

He remembers the first time.

“Stick, can we stop? I’m getting tired.” Matt said, his shoulders slumped as he struggles to remain on his feet.

Usually, Stick would hit him. Break something.

But he was approaching Matt, touching his shoulders gently. “Sure, Matty. Let’s do an easy task.”

“Easy?” Matt doubted, nervously tugging the edge of his shirt.

“Lots of things happen to soldiers like us, Matt. We need to endure it.” Stick tells him as he trails a hand over Matt’s chest. His other hand grabbing him by the waist and pulling him closer.

“Get on your knees, Matty.”

“I promise, Buddy.” Clint brings him back to his bedroom, Dice licking his chin as if nothing happened. He supposes nothing did.
“Safe.” Matt mulls the idea over in his head, not making anything of it. Clint draws him into the warmth of his chest, arms wrapped around him securely. They don’t move below his shoulder blades.

“You’re safe, Matt.” Clint repeats for him. “I won’t let anyone hurt you.”

For the first time since arriving at the tower, Matt sleeps easily.
“Matt, wake up.” Clint shakes the redhead awake in the morning.

His eyes open slightly, then close again. “Clint, I’m tired.”

“Buddy, you need to get up. C’mon.” Clint’s hand pushes him up by his shoulders.

Matt’s nose catches a whiff of urine and he grabs the bedsheets tightly. His face turns hot and all he wishes is that he could crawl back into his bed and die silently.

Alas.

“Matty, it’s nothing to be embarrassed about.” Clint insists and Matt’s ears tell him that he means it. “Come through to the bathroom.”

Matt gets up slowly, his face burning even more so when he feels the way his boxers are sticking to his legs.

“Therapy today, remember?” Clint tells him, helping him into the bathroom.

Clint turns on the shower, sets it at what feels like a pleasing warmth. He hands Matt a towel and pats his back. “Have a shower while I change the sheets, ok?”

Matt nods, feeling numb and warm.

“Good shower?” Clint asks when Matt emerges a while later.

“I’m sorry.” Matt says, standing behind Clint in the kitchen. He’s cooking again. Clint’s food is good enough. He always washes his hands.

“Don’t be.” Clint tells him without turning around. “I’ve had to clean up worse bodily fluids from team members, namely Tony. It’s a fear response, Matt.”

“I’m sorry.” He repeats, worming his way into another hug. Clint smiles back at Matt as his arms wrap around the archer’s waist. Matt’s weight shifts partially onto Clint, who keeps him standing.

“Excited for therapy?” Clint asks. “You, Tony, Bruce, and Steve are in today.”

Matt makes a disgruntled noise.

“It’ll be really easy to start off with.” Clint shrugs. “They like having a chatting session to get to know you.”

“You’ll come?” Matt asks, or rather, insists.

“Sure, Buddy. You can ask me to leave at any time, though.”

Matt nods, resting his chin against Clint’s shoulder.

His therapist (psychiatrist or whatever) smells like beans and it makes Matt somewhat less anxious.
“Hi, Matt, I’ve heard a lot about you.” She reaches out to shake his hand but Matt finds himself behind Clint. He’s not hiding. Just resting.

Taking her hand back, she continues just as happily as before. “My name is Emily Collins.”

Matt ignores her, trying to figure out what beans she ate. Pinto? Kidney?

“Why don’t you both take a seat and we’ll get started.” She suggests as they enter an office together.

Matt flinches at the smell of fear in the room. It catches in his nostrils and he grapples for Clint’s arm.

“Is everything alright?” Miss Collins asks. Her hair brushes against the nape of her neck as she looks up.

“Matt?” Clint gives him a side hug, usually reserves for Tony, but Matt leans into it.

“I’m fine. Smells like sweat in here.” Matt’s nose crinkles before he finds his chair, touching the back and the seat before sitting down.

“Alright, Matt, let’s get started by talking about why you think you’re here.” She’s touching paper and there’s wood in her hand. Matt twitches.

“Tony.”

“Yes, Mr Stark booked the appointment. I meant, in your opinion, why do you think that you need a therapist?”

Matt turns his head to Clint, who doesn’t say anything. His opinion.

“The others were worried.” Matt says in explanation. “They think I’m going to hurt myself.”

“Are you going to hurt yourself?” She starts scribbling and Matt shifts.

“Matt burned his hand around a week ago.” Clint pipes up. “And he recently got glass in his hand but that was more of an accident.”

Matt shrinks into his seat, trying not to draw attention to himself.

“Alright, Matt, why don’t you tell me about Daredevil.” She says and Matt relaxes slightly.

“He protects the city. My city.” Matt clarifies.

“And it needs protecting.” She agrees, then scribbles again. “Tony told me about echolocation?”

“Sort of, it’s echolocation combined with my other senses. They’re heightened. I can’t see but I can perceive.”

“Tell me about why you wanted to become Daredevil.”

“I am Daredevil.” Matt frowns. “Matt Murdock is the one who isn’t real.”

Matt feels Clint’s heart rate spiking beside him.

“I’m not sure I understand.” Emily remains calm. “Perhaps you can explain that for me?”
“I couldn’t tell people about my senses, it was…” Matt trails off. “So I had to pretend to be blind. Well, more than not being able to read screens or perceive faces.”

“What about the other parts of Matt Murdock, other than the blindness? Your relationships, likes, dislikes.”

“I don’t need those.” Matt frowns, then grinds his teeth when she starts writing again. “I’m a soldier, I don’t need that stuff.”

“You’re thinking of a weapon, Matty.” Clint tells him. “You’re a person with thoughts and feelings.”

Matt stays quiet.

“Alright, why don’t we go through some questions?” Emily suggests. She shuffles her papers. “Now there’s a few common themes, we’re not going to delve into them just now, no matter what the answers are. Just short answers.”

Matt crumbles the sleeve of Clint’s shirt in his hand, tugging restlessly.

“How old were you when you started your training?” She asks.

Matt rests his head on Clint. “Nine.”

“Alright, how old were you when you started fighting?”

Matt pauses.

“Kill ‘em, Matty.”

“My mentor tried to get me to kill a member of his organisation for speaking out at ten. I didn’t fight crime until after college.” Matt lightly hits Clint with his hand. “I didn’t—I haven’t killed anyone.”

“Have you been abused?” She asks. “To be clear, this includes neglect and psychological abuse.”

Matt shifts against Clint, who starts running his hand through Matt’s fluffy hair.

Matt thinks of the sensory deprivation chamber. “Maybe.”

Emily pauses. Hair shifting as she nods.

The questions continue and Matt makes parallels between the Avengers.


She’s trying to figure out if he matches the experiences that the others have in common.

Matt yanks Clint’s shirt sharply after several more questions.

“I want to go.” He says, his face hidden in the archer’s arm.

They leave early.
Matt jumps when Clint smashes his fist through the wall of the communal living room.

“Hey!” Tony snaps, slightly irritated after his own therapy session. “I’ll bill you, Barton.”

Matt feels the rapid thudding in Tony’s chest. The stuttering of his breath.

“Cold.” Matt claims, working his arms around Stark’s waist. They’re snuggling on the couch, Bucky sitting across from them with a quiet Steve.

“Find a jacket.” Tony complains, less bitterly than expected. Matt rests his cheek against his bicep.

Bruce seems tense, too, and Matt considers that he might need more arms. The doctor enters the room, sits close enough for Matt to drape himself over Tony and Bruce’s laps.

“Sorry, Buddy.” Bruce sighs. “Therapy day’s always a bad day.”

“How’s your session go, Scarlet?” Tony asks, taking out his phone.

Clint huffs from the corner.

“Clint’s angry with me?” Matt ponders, moving his face into Bruce’s stomach. This gets his attention.

“Clint, what happened?” Bruce asks, running a hand through Matt’s hair.

“Nothing.” Clint sighs. “Matt just needs so much therapy and I’m pissed because you’re a good guy, Murdock. You don’t deserve any of this.”

Matt’s stomach flips and he feels squirmy as he waves his arm for Clint to approach.

“What’s up, Bud?” Clint asks, dropping to his backside on the floor. His legs shift underneath him.

“You’re my favourite pillow.” Matt smirks devilishly.

“Is that all I am to you, Murdock?!” Clint demands dramatically.

Karen and Foggy leave the elevator just as Clint lands on his back on the ground. “Woe is me! My feather-down heart, Murdock, you broke it!”

Matt giggles, tossing a pillow from the couch at Clint.

Foggy stays relatively still until Karen leads him to the adjacent couch, sits him down and whispers for him to behave. Their move was short and silent, with no fuss. Matt was nowhere to be seen.

Clint holds the pillow in his arms. “My brother! How dare that human?”

“Bruce is my favourite, then.” Matt says, to which the doctor laughs.

“If you want a green rage pillow.” Bruce hums.

“I don’t mind green.” Matt gestures to his eyes. Clint hurries over to him, crouches in a squat.

“But purple, Matty.” Clint whispers. “Join the purple side. We have cookies and cake and
“Your dog smells like shit. Literally.” Matt deadpans, making Clint pout.

“Wow, low blow.”

“I think we can all agree my coffee trumps Clint’s dog any day.” Tony says haughtily.

“I call movie night!” Tony exclaims, shooting up. Matt’s legs retract in time. Tony puts his fists on his hips can a cartoon hero. “A totally awesome and not-at-all-lame animated movie night. J, Darling, get Romanoff and Wilson in here.”

“Certainly, Sir.” Jarvis responds happily.

“Oh, we have to watch Megamind.” Clint pipes up, ever the animated movie connoisseur.

“Tony.” Matt swats at the brunette. “You’re not watching the movie!”

Clint gasps, scandalized. “For SHAME, Stark.”

Matt smiles shyly from under the blanket Bruce wrapped him in. It’s exceptionally fluffy.

“Neither are you.” Tony grins, making Matt smile back at him.

“Tony, I can hear you not having fun.” Matt complains, then recedes back into his blanket like a mole.

“Designing your super-duper non-glass windows, thank you very much.” Tony leans close to the blanket, whiskey on his breath. Matt’s hand, like a snapping snake, snatches the StarkPad from his left hand.

“Scarlet.” Tony’s advancing but Matt’s securely hidden under the blanket. “Gimme.”

“No.” Matt says. “Watch the movie.”

“Brucie, back me up.” Tony whines but Matt’s new pillow only laughs.

“Sorry.”

Matt sticks his empty hand out to wave a line across the middle of the couch, halving it with Bruce and Matt on one side.

“You have Clint on your side.” Matt explains.

“Hey!” Clint pouts. “What happened to dumpster buddies?”

“You smelled like rotten food for two weeks after that.” Matt pops his head out, screwing up his nose.

Tony snatches back his tech and Matt lets him. Tony doesn’t use it.

The film is forgotten.

“Crimson, let me try your glasses?”
Matt freezes, feels Bruce squeeze him a little, and hesitantly takes them off. He gives them over to Stark, who hands him what smells like Tony’s own pair.

“Wow, Stark, your eyesight is terrible!” Matt makes a face. “I can’t see a thing!”

“Haha.” Stark says, slipping Matt’s on. “I look so retro. Don’t I look retro, Steve? Real 90’s. Then again, probably futuristic to you.”

“You’re hilarious.” Steve’s tongue pokes out, as does the smell of licorice. Bucky laughs at him.

“Those look good on you, Bud.” Clint says earnestly.

Matt traces the rim, careful to void the glass. “I had glasses these shape in college. Sister May found them in the donation’s box.”

Foggy carefully doesn’t say anything. He already knew.

“Shit, Man.” Clint breathes.

Matt quietly hands the glasses back over and puts on his own, turning his head down.

“Where’s my blanket, Buddy?” Clint complains. “You’re hogging!”

Matt shakes with Clint, who nuzzles up to him.

“You smell like dog shit.” Matt snickers into his shirt but he doesn’t mind very much. He’s used to Lucky’s stench by this point.

“You smell like absolutely nothing.” Clint grumbles, watching Matt move his legs over Clint’s lap.

His feet are on Tony’s legs. Despite the bumpy knees, he’s comfortable in the warmth.

A moment of silence and twitching hearts makes Matt sigh. “Let me guess, Tony Googled me?”

“It was much more intricate than Google!” Tony objects, then mumbles. “But, yeah, we know about the orphanage.”

“Anything else?” Matt asks.

“The truck.” Steve says.

“Your dad.” Bruce pets his head gently, shifting his hair off his forehead.

“Ok.” Matt nods slightly. “Then I guess I have to tell you all about what I heard Tony doing three nights ago because my ears are scarred—”

Tony’s attacking him with a pillow and Matt tries to stifle his laughter. He locks Tony’s arms in his, flips the engineer onto his back with his feet.

“Point.” Clint laughs as Tony gets on his knees.

“I’m glaring, Murdock. I’m glaring so hard.” Tony says, grabbing Matt in a headlock that he easily gets out of. His arms wrap around Tony’s waist while the man squirms, mock-pleading for mercy.

“At least you’re not in a coma.” Clint whistles. “I remember when we met, you scared the shit
“I try my best.” Matt beams widely as he puts his weight on Tony, knocking him onto the floor unexpectedly.

Tony grunts and crosses his arms under his head.

“How did you meet?” Bucky asks. A flicker in his chest.

Bruce, Tony, Steve, Nat, and Sam groan loudly.

“Oh my god, Buckalicious, you don’t know?” Clint purrs. “Murdock, story time.”

Matt hops up beside Clint, releasing Tony.

“This is the story of how I met Daredevil. Gather ‘round.” Clint clears his throat but Matt butts in.

“This is the story of how Daredevil scared the shit out of Hawkeye.”
The Origins of the Dumpster Bros!

“Ok, so I might have jumped to conclusions…” Clint admits. “But to be fair, Matt was running around in red, putting guys in comas and calling himself the ‘Devil’. Plus the cops thought he was a terrorist…”

“Devil, stand down.” Hawkeye announced, arrow drawn in his bow. At close range, they could both do some damage.

Matt’s head cocked to the man wielding what seemed like a bow and arrow… Really?

“You’re an Avenger.” Matt turned to face the man, his horned mask covering his vacant eyes. “You already wrecked half the city. Get off my turf.”

Clint’s eyes narrowed. “You think you have the upper hand in this scenario?”

“Obviously.” Matt said, taking a step backwards. He fell from the building, throwing his extended billy club half way down. He swung to the ground, where he continued west to the commotion he heard in the distance. Screams. Crying. Mechanics.

“I just want to talk.” Hawkeye was behind him, suddenly.

He’s fast, Matt noted.

“Get out of my city.” Matt stopped walking. His fists clenched as his voice dropped an octave. “Now.”

“You blew up a building but you’ve been culling the gangs around here like a hero. Explain that.” Clint hissed.

Matt spun around, only for a stick to be presented to his face.

“So Hawkeye – like all of us back then, not knowing that Daredevil is blind – puts a phosphorus arrow to Matt’s nose.

Matt felt a faint heat on his skin and frowned under his mask. It wasn’t until Hawkeye articulated utter confusion that Matt remembered his cue. The phosphorus arrow.

“The light! My eyes.” Daredevil gestured wildly, trying to remember how he reacted when he was younger. He can hardly be blinded by the light…

Fun fact about Daredevil: the human lie detector is a horrible liar. And, evidently, actor.

Clint shook the arrow, as if it wasn’t working, while Matt continued his forced cries. “The pain! The paaaaain!”

They spend a moment standing there like that, awkwardly, before Matt swung his foot into Hawkeye’s face and took off towards a fire escape.

“He didn’t climb the damned thing, like a normal person, he flipped up the railings like some kind of backwards-Slinky.”

“You were jealous because even after years of practice, you can’t match my level of parkour.” Matt sticks out his tongue at Clint, who pouts.
“I’m pouting because that is so not true and you know it. I rock.”

“Anyway!” Tony rushes them, having heard this story too many times to count.

“Get.”

Matt threw Clint over his head, slamming him into the ground.

“Oh.”

Matt deflected an arrow that produces some kind of net, twisting out of the way before it even fires.

“Of.”

Matt lifted Hawkeye into the air and threw him down onto the floor of the roof, looming over him.

“My city.”

Daredevil climbed up some kind of pillar on the building, shaped like a telephone pole. He was aiming for a vantage point, listening to the sounds of screaming in the distance.

When he hopped back down onto the roof to run to the civilians’ aid, Clint tumbled off the edge of the roof, landing on what sounds like cardboard somewhere below.

“He’s a brute!” Clint defends himself as Matt snuggles his waist. “Pure muscle. Scared the Hell outta me, climbing that bell like a demon.”

Matt grins, teeth showing, as proudly as he can.

Daredevil flipped down the fire escape.

“Again!”

“Get up.” Daredevil slapped the man’s arm. “Trouble two blocks down.”

“Thought I was supposed to stay out of your city?”

“It’s Stilt-Man.” Matt grimaced. “I could use that bow of yours.”

“I was the—”

“Eyes of the operation. Clint, you tell that joke every time.” Nat grumbles. “It wasn’t funny the first time.”

Matt holds out his fist with a grin and Clint fist-bumps him, equally as amused.

When Hawkeye first saw the silver man on humungous stilts, he burst into laughter.

“You brought an Avenger, Daredevil?” A throaty cackle called to the red man climbing the steeple of St Patrick’s Cathedral. They’re out of Hell’s Kitchen by this point but Stilt-Man’s trail of terror originated in Matt’s territory so he should deal with it.

“What the fuck, Man?” Hawkeye called out. “You run out of ideas? You’re not a supervillain, you’re a circus performer!”

Daredevil paused and chuckled, to which Stick-Man raged. “I’m faster than you both! I can retract my hydraulic legs faster than you can move, Devil! You're no match for Stilt-Man!”
Clint’s laughter was infectious, leaving Daredevil shaking with laughter on the spire.

“Stop laughing at—” The looming man cried out, but an arrow hits one of his legs, jamming it. He tried to adjust his height, but the leg was stuck while the second gets shorter, leaving him stumbling around, lopsided.

Daredevil jumped from the spire, clicking on the electrocuted ends of his billy club. He jammed the spikes into the front of Stilt-Man’s robot body, zapping his controls with a sharp jolt of electricity.

Stilt Man’s right leg started retracting and expanding, making him tilt towards the ground but Matt noticed the crowds of people running around at Stilt-Man’s feet.

Matt swung back towards the steeple, dragging Stilt-Man with him.

“You tied him to a church?” Bucky asks incredulously.

Matt grins. “The gift of a sinner.”

“A guy on metal stilts, a guy who shoots light out of his face, a frog, and a matador who fights using… a cape.” Hawkeye shoved a mouthful of pizza into his mouth.

Daredevil looked up from his cheese pizza, considered Hawkeye, and then nodded. “Yeah, that’s about it.”

Bucky stares at Matt and Clint then looks to the other Avengers.

“Dumpster bros?” Bucky raises an eyebrow.

Clint and Matt exchange a look, think of the amount of times they've been found together in a dumpster, bleeding and bruised by any other member of the team. Clint shrugs. Matt yawns.

“You two are well suited for each other.” Bucky says slowly.

Clint gleefully wraps an arm around Matt, who’s also grinning.

“It wasn’t a compliment.”
"Maybe you should go to the toilet? Just to be safe, Matty." Clint says before he can step into bed.

"A—Already went." Matt says quietly before crawling into the bed beside Clint.

"Buddy? Can we talk about something that's been bothering me?"

Matt perks to attention, listening to Clint's heart. Nothing sounds stressed or worried but Clint does feel a little warmer than usual. "Are you ok?"

"I'm fine." Clint starts rubbing Matt's back, which he thinks means Clint expects him to be upset. Is this about him? "You said that you weren't sure if you were abused, Matt. You know she was including sexual abuse? It doesn't have to be recurring, either. Rape counts."

Matt grimaces.

"I'm not sure." Matt tugs on Clint's sleeve, for lack of something to toy with.

"I didn't"—Matt swallows, hard—"I didn't say 'no'."

"That doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is if you wanted it. Did you consent?"

May shakes his head, tugging her on Clint's sleeve. His shoulders hunch and he takes off his glasses with a shaky hand, placing them on his bedside table.

Lucky looks up at the noise from the corner of the room.

"If you didn't consent, it was rape. That's it. They're the one that's supposed to get valid consent from you." Clint tells him but that doesn't sound right so Matt ignores it.

"Matty, you understand that you were raped?"

Matt shrugs but it comes out like a twitch so he stays quiet.

Clint drops it.

"You got any medication from Claire? Did she give you anything?" Clint asks, moving to lie down.

"I—I told Claire but she didn't..." Matt curls up into Clint's side, burrowing his face where he can't see it. Matt takes a stuttering breath as his heart riots.

"You didn't get checked out?" Clint bolts upward. Matt flinches when Clint looms over him, making the archer back off a little. "Matty, you could have an STD. Or injuries, Buddy, you need to see a doctor."

Matt pulls Clint back down so they can cuddle.

"Tomorrow." Clint tells the fluffy mess of red hair on his chest. "Matty, I’m taking you to a doctor. No ifs or buts. You can choose Bruce, the med bay, or the hospital by then."

Matt’s face turns. Clint can see his face, rouge hair flopping over his forehead, just above his eyes. The vacant eyes are a cloudy blue. From far away, the pupil looks slightly reflective but, up close,
Clint can see the light scarring across his eyes, like a burn.

Matt closes his eyes suddenly and Clint grimaces. “Sorry. I hadn’t seen your eyes up close before.”

“They’re disgusting.” Matt hisses.


Matt frowns.

“What?” Clint asks, prodding his side.

“I was in love. She died.” Matt turns his head away. “Haven’t been with anyone since.”

“Shit, Man, I’m sorry.” Clint squeezes his shoulder. He gives Matt a moment to continue and, when he doesn’t, Clint grins. “I’ve been married to my wife for almost ten years now.”

“You’re married?” Matt asks. “I thought you were…”

“A playboy like Tony?” Clint grins. “People seem to think I’m not the settling-down type.”

“Sorry.” Matt wiggles beside him.

“Natasha knows. The team doesn’t.” Clint tells him, grinning broadly. “Laura’s the love of my life. We have two kids, a third on the way.”

Clint can feel a wetness on his chest. Matt sniffles, his nose blocked up.

“Buddy?”

“I want that.” Matt whispers. “Family.”

“What are you talking about, you goof?” Clint sounds affronted. “You’re my family.”

Matt sniffles into Clint’s side, gripping at his shirt.

“And, you know, I’d love to show you a picture. Cooper and Lila, my son and daughter.” Clint sits up, hugging Matt tightly in his embrace. “They’ll just need their Uncle Matty to visit.”

“Really?” Matt sits up suddenly, wiping his face with a shaky hand. “You don’t have to do that, Clint, I’m not—not—”

“You’re my best friend, Matt. Really.” Clint sticks his nose up. “You think I let just anyone make me a pillow? I’m not a pillow slut, Matt. I have high standards.”

Matt’s heart skips in his chest. Clint thinks Matt meets his high standards. Clint thinks Matt is his best friend.

“Tomorrow? Can I go to the hospital? I don’t want anyone…” Matt whispers, his eyes bright and wet.

“Yeah!” Clint says, over enthusiastically. “We can keep this quiet if you want. I’ll sort it all out, Buddy. Quick check-up then leave.”

Matt smiles, shuffling closer and resting his chin on Clint’s shoulder. “You’re my best friend, too.”
Fear pricks at Matt’s eyes as he clutches Clint’s arm, looking for guidance in the swarming mass of sensory input (read: hospital).

“The doctor won’t say anything. I made sure.”

The examination had passed seamlessly, with Matt under a papery sheet and Clint chatting to him. The doctor was almost forgotten, even if Matt jumped a few times.

Clint assured him that he was doing well.

Dice was stationed at the reception with a kind nurse.

The world is oozing. It should be normal, expected, but it was nothing so easy. Matt smells death and sickness and decay and why can’t he stop crying?

Clint got him a female doctor because he’s Matt’s favourite.


She talks over Matt, sometimes to him, but mostly to Clint. Clint’s being very helpful.

“There’s no sign of STD’s but we’re going to provide some laxatives that soften stools, as to make the process less uncomfortable.”

Matt’s hurt. He gathered that. His underwear smell like blood, both fresh and dried.

He knows that there’s no risk of an STD. He knows Stick. He doesn’t sleep around.

Matt’s his special little secret.

He’s given antibiotics and HIV preventative medication.

They want him to have surgery. Local anesthesia, can squeeze him right in, no big deal.

Lateral internal sphincterotomy.

He doesn’t want to make things difficult for Clint. Clint’s upset about this, Matt can hear the wetness in his throat.

Matt’s lying on a metal table, being given an injection.

Clint’s at his head, telling him about his home. The cows, the chickens, the pigs. Matt’s curious as to the smells that live on a farm. Crops spreading out as far as the eye can see.

Matt feels the tingle of local anaesthetic start to leave him as Clint talks with the nurse. It was an easy procedure but he’s hesitant to move.

Matt’s snuggled up on the scratchy hospital sheets.
Clint is talking to the doctor.

They take a cab back to the tower.

“Matt? What’s wrong?” Bruce asks with concern when Matt enters the communal room, crying silently with Clint helping him walk.

Stark looks up, then gets to his feet. “Murdock?”

“Matt wants to have a movie night with you two. Think we could claim the living room?” Clint asks, straining as he lowers Matt into the chair beside Bruce.

“I’ll tell the others not to bother us.” Tony says, patting Matt’s shoulder as he goes to the elevator.

“Clint.” Matt whimpers, nuzzling into Bruce’s heat. “Think that—that Bucky might…?”

“You want him here?” Clint asks gently, perching on the end of the couch. “Jarvis, ask for us?”

“Certainly, Agent Barton.” Jarvis replies in a soothing tone from the walls.

“Clint?” Bruce asks, gathering Matt into his arms.

“Unless Matt wants to tell you, you’re not going to ask.” Clint explains. “He told me and I’m helping him. We’re not going to bring it up unless you want to, Matty.”

Bruce nods against Matt’s fluff-ball hair. “Had a bad day, Matt?”

Matt sniffles into Bruce’s shoulder.

He wants his favourite people.

For the first time since they met, Foggy isn’t included on that list. Matt can’t bear being shouted at again. Can’t bear to have him angry at Matt for not defending himself, again.

It echoes in his head. Flesh on flesh. Hot breathing on his skin. The cry of pain. It blends behind his eyes until it’s the smacking of flesh-on-flesh. His childlike crying. He takes a breath and it smells like him. He remembers his taste. He’s not sure he’ll ever forget.

“Hey, hey, Matty. What’s wrong? Are you in pain?” Soft hands on his face.

Bruce’s signature smell envelops him. The hug is a little awkward, not as easy as hugging Clint. Bruce is rigid, almost. Overly careful, as if Matt is a precious figurine he doesn’t care to break.

The arm-shaped sponge in his radar alerts him to Bucky. Bucky smells like Matt’s favourite berry: cranberries.

“You’re crying, Pipsqueak.” Bucky alerts him, as if it’s news.

“D-Do you want to watch—movie time?” Matt stammers, gesturing where the flat screen is on the wall. Bruce moves his hand slightly, showing him where it actually is. He’s not mean about it.

Bucky sits down in the couch next to him, reaches out with his metal hand to gently touch the back
of Matt’s hand for a moment before pulling away and getting comfy.

“Ok, ok, I have the best gift for Matt!” Tony hurries into the living room from the elevator, holding something fluffy and demands that Matt wears it. He also ‘has a movie that fits the theme’, whatever that means.

Clint helps him get dressed in the bathroom, giggling happily while Matt rubs his cheek on the gentle fabric.

It’s a onesie.

The hood has a flat plush head, a Mohawk, and ears. He has a detachable fluffy tail.

Emerging with the onesie on, Tony makes a fuss over him.

“It’s soft.” He tells the engineer, much to his heart’s delight. “Thank you.”

Clint’s chest shakes against Matt (he’s sandwiched between Bruce and Clint) when the movie starts. The audio description is heavy and there’s not a lot of dialogue so Matt enjoys the poetic descriptions.

It occurs to him halfway through DreamWorks animation’s *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*.

“Am I dressed like a horse?”
Matt shudders awake.

His face is nuzzled into a solid, thrumming disk. Matt smells the familiar scent of Tony: predominantly oil and fruity coffee.

He blanches when he feels a wetness in his underwear. About to panic, thinking that he’s embarrassed himself, Matt suddenly tastes copper in the air.

It’s blood.

It hurts. Lord, does it hurt. Matt shifts, his briefs sticking to him under the fluffiness of his onesie. He hasn’t ruined it, has he? He likes the soft ‘fur’ of the horse, running his fingers through the mane and curling up in the gentle pelt.

“Morning, Crimson.” Tony yawns, stretching out. His brow knits when he feels Matt turn rigid in his arms.

He tosses a pillow at Clint, who was snoozing on the floor, and Bruce, who’s beside him.

Bucky’s absent.

“Matt, you ok?” Clint asks curiously, reaching for his hand.

“No.” Matt shakes his head. “No, ‘m not—No… Clint.”

“I’m here.” Clint squeezes his hand. Clint’s grip falters before he jumps to his feet. “Shit. Shit, shit, shit!”

He gingerly helps Matt stand up.

Bruce leaps to his feet. “Matt, you’re bleeding. What happened? Are you in pain?”

Matt nods. He was supposed to take medicine last night but they all fell asleep in the living room.

“Matt, bathroom.” Clint helps him start moving but he wobbles, the pain making his head throb. The room’s underwater, the echoing sounds of his friends floating somewhere above the surface.

“Matt, Matt, Matt!”

His eyes flutter closed slowly, his body failing him.

It’s an unknown period of time, if time has passed at all, before he thinks he feels his hand. His nerves don’t work — he can’t feel — but Matt can almost position his arm in his mind. It’s relatively close to his side, while the other is sprawled out to the left, far away from his body. It’s a faint sensation running only through his bones, making him feel rather like a stick figure.

Then it’s cold. Freezing, actually. He feels it in his arms and legs with an odd heat in his head and chest while his abdominal region remains neutral.
The scraping of silk sheets against his naked flesh. The brush of erecting hairs on his arms and legs. The mattress sinking under his weight.

Copper on his tongue. Bitter oral anesthetic. Bacteria on his teeth. Motor oil.

Garlic from another room. B.O. Wet fur. Nail polish.

“Dr Banner, Mr Murdock is now awake and requires assistance.”

Matt shifts in the bed but a jolt of pain hits him in the head like a bolt of lightning. Crying out, he clutches his head as his senses peak, allowing in a slur of noise that he can’t even begin to decipher.

His body throbs and burns to the point where Matt starts to believe he’s been taken to Hell. Even the cool air against his skin is a torment. He kicks violently at whatever is on his skin and jerks to his feet, wobbling and almost falling over at the sudden vertigo. The grain of polished wood flooring on his bare feet only fuels his screaming. He feels jagged ledges under his toes, scraping the lines of his skin at an angle that makes him weep.

The city’s heartbeat is washed out by insufferable noise, so much so that Matt can’t hear his own screaming. It’s consistent — growing and growing until it reaches a point where the noise is so constant that Matt doesn’t know if he has lost his hearing altogether. Noise or no noise, there’s no difference. Just pain. An insufferable, insufferable pain. He stumbles and weeps harder, pleading for God to let him keep his senses.

The sound of a door being thrown open lulls his senses back into an overlap of havoc. Voices chat in his ears with inane tones that make him want to tear off his ears, if only to lessen the noise somewhat.

“Matthew, can you hear me?” A voice says near his ear. He flinches, rocking himself back and forth until hands rest on his shoulders, making him scream again, the salt of his tears feeling like acid on his face.

“Matthew?” Murdock is screaming when Bruce enters the sterile infirmary bedroom, leaving Tony and Steve outside the door. His body is soaked with sweat and writhing in an almost fitful way. His eyes are wide open but unmoving. The IV has been ripped from Murdock’s arm, leaving a hole in his vein that weeps over the floor among the tears that drip off his chin.

“Matthew.” Bruce says in what Tony dubbed his ‘doctor voice’. “Can you hear me?”

Murdock’s head violently nods as his body slows down, sluggish and uncoordinated.

“You’re in the Avengers tower. You’re in the infirmary, Room B-5.” Bruce explains slowly in an even tone. “The only people in this room are me, Bruce Banner, and you. Clint and Tony are outside.”

_He knows. He knows, knows knows._ Matt’s mind goes into hyper-drive.

“No.” Matthew bemoans. “I’m sorry, ’m sorry, ’m s-sorry!”

“Matt, you don’t need to apologise.” Bruce says, slowly again. “I need you to know that Avengers tower will always be a safe place for you. The surgery that the doctors performed seemed to go well, but there were some bleeding complications. I closed the wound.”
Murdock calms almost instantly at that and Bruce feels that he’s being given his full attention. He starts rocking back and forth with his head tucked between his legs, almost in his lap.

“Matt?” Bruce asks when Murdock starts rolling his fist across the floor, making a faint knock as each knuckle hits the surface. His head tilts.

“Safe to come in, Doc?” Tony calls through the door, Clint shuffling at his side.

“Matt? Is that alright?”

He’s wearing the strange fabric trousers that they provide in medical – like scrubs – so it’s ok. They can’t hurt him.

_They would never hurt him._

Matt nods and Clint rushes in, joining him on the floor.

“Hey, Bud.” Clint sniff. “I’m sorry; you worried me. Are you mad?”

Matt shakes his head, lightly, to his own surprise.

“I’m going to fucking kill them, Bruce.” Tony whispers, not intended for Matt’s ears to hear. “I’m going to hunt them down and kill them.”

“Not now.” Bruce responds softly, gesturing in Matt’s direction.

“Matt, you should have told us.” Bruce directs at him, voice as gentle as ever. “It’s a very serious issue. You could have got an infection if you hadn’t told Clint.”

“But we’re glad you did, Cherry.” Tony sits on the edge of the hospital bed, lastly bumping Matt’s shoulder with his fist. “Real good judgement on that one.”

Clint tightens his embrace, as if Matt’s about to fade away.

“The injury should take about four weeks to heal completely.” Bruce explains. “But your hand has made excellent progress, so perhaps less.”

“Still my friends?” Matt whimpers, his face in Clint’s chest.

“You’re kidding. You are kidding, right?” Tony scoffs. “Who else am I gonna drink amazing coffee with?”

“And I need my cuddles.” Clint points out.

“We love you, Matt. Of course we’re still your friends.” Bruce comes over to join the group. “This doesn’t change the way we see you.”

And if Matt starts crying, he can rest assured that the Avengers will be there for him.
And They All Fall Down

“Cherry!” Tony beams when he sees Matt returning from the med bay. “Renovating your floor with all-new windows today!”

Matt shuffles over to Tony from the elevator, rests his head on the inventor’s shoulder. Matt pats his head. “Problem is, Buddy, you can’t go up until they switch them up. Jarvis is taking good care of your bedroom and bathroom.”

“No problem, we can walk the dogs.” Clint gestures to the couch, where Dice has claimed his own space beside Bruce.

“Good idea!” Tony grins at them, then falters. “Matt, you ok for some walking?”

Matt winces.

“We could take a car to the park?” Clint suggests.

“Would—Would Bucky want to come?” Matt asks hopefully. Clint chuckles, patting him on the back. “The puppies like each other. Steve’ll be thrilled.”

Matt pouts. So he may or may not be wearing a dog onesie until his horse outfit is washed but he’s not a ‘puppy’.


“Poodle?” Matt asks, his brow creasing. Clint tickles his hair pointedly.

“Poodles are hunting dogs, Crimson. Very scary.” Tony messes up his red hair, making Matt walk over to Bruce, scowling.

“You’re my only friend.” Matt nudges him, making him chuckle. Matt finds his dog, who yaps excitedly. Dice knows better than to jump on him, however.

Matt runs his hands through his soft fur, then pats his head.

“Why don’t you go ask Bucky if he wants to join us?” Clint suggests, just before the man in question places a hand on his shoulder.

The archer jumps rather dramatically, then hides behind Tony, who is less than pleased. Clint eyes Bucky in annoyance but Bucky’s blank face displays how little he cares.

“Join who where?” Bucky questions.

Ruffle of clothes as he crosses his arms.

Matt fidgets with the fluffy zipper on his onesie, then reaches for Dice to centre him. What if Bucky doesn’t want to come?

Bucky’s in the other ‘group’. There’s Tony, Bruce, and Clint. There’s Steve, Sam, and Bucky. Natasha drifts between the two, but mostly is in Cap’s ‘team’.

Matt doesn’t understand the dynamics, but he doesn’t want to mess them up.
Matt likes Bucky. How can he be sure that Bucky doesn’t despise him? Won’t think he’s disgusting for what happened to him?

Dice snuffles Matt’s hand, then throws an agitated paw at his hip.

Bucky huffs, walking over to Matt. He stands in front of the redhead, clears his throat. “Pipsqueak.”

Matt shifts. “Clint and I are going to the park.”

“Uh-huh.” Bucky encourages him.

“Do you—Maybe you—” Matt stammers but Bucky saves him.

“You want me to join?” Bucky assumes. Matt nods.

“Sure.” Bucky pats his back, then looks expectantly at the duo. “When are we going?”

Matt does change out of his onesie to go to the park, into Clint’s T-shirt, Tony’s hoodie, and his own jeans.

Dice walks slowly at Matt’s side, matching his pace despite his obvious excitement.

“Stevie told me about the op.” Bucky says, watching Dice for a long moment as they walk alongside each other. “How’re you feeling?”

Matt ducks his head. “Hurts a little.”

“We can sit down at any point, if you’re tired, Matty.” Clint tells him, attempting to keep a reign on Lucky.

“’M fine.” Matt murmurs, stopping. He bends over to unclip Dice’s leash, then gestures for the dog to run around in the spacious park.

Matt takes a step forward, hesitates, then stop completely. Clint’s running ahead after Lucky, who pulled his leash from Clint’s hand and dashed.

The lack of structure to the park makes Matt’s radar weaker. Less surface for sounds to bounce off of. Less sound.

“Bucky? C-Can I—Would I be able to hold…?” Matt stumbles over his words, saliva pooling in his mouth. Matt swallows nervously.

“Huh?” Bucky turns to him, offers his arm out. “Thought you had that radar thing?”

“Not—Not working properly.” Matt says in short. He’s holding Bucky’s flesh arm, being led forward.

When they catch up to Clint, the Matt gives Matt his cane and Bucky takes his arm back.

When they return to the tower, Foggy is waiting for Matt. They silently take the elevator to his and Karen’s floor.
“Matt, I didn’t know.” Foggy says as they exit the elevator.

Matt starts tapping around with his cane. The layout must be the standard for each floor because the three couches are in the same place as Matt’s floor and—

“Matt, I’ve been a shitty friend.” Foggy talks to him again.

Matt supposes he can’t get out of this conversation but, without Clint there to stop Foggy from screaming at him—

“How many fingers am I holding up?!”

Matt’s eyes brim with tears as he hears the lone finger, Foggy’s middle finger, hover in front of his face.

“One.”

—talking seems much more difficult.

“I’ve been so worried about you, and me and Karen, that I just took it out on you, Matt, and you don’t deserve that. That voicemail I left you… Shit, Man, it was so shitty of me.” Foggy says, throat tight.

Matt hates that he has to listen to his heartbeat, even though Foggy hates it.

Matt hates that Foggy hates it.

“Matty, say something.” Foggy’s heart shudders.

His senses, while different, are as much a part of Matt as Foggy’s eyesight is. Why doesn’t Foggy want him to reach his potential? To control what hurts him? To be strong?

Matt sits down on the couch, leans on the headrest, and wonders if his balloon is safe.

“Matt!” Foggy frantically exclaims, making the redhead flinch.

“Mr Murdock, your current heart rate suggests that you are experiencing anxiety. Should I alert Agent Barton to the situation?” Jarvis asks from the sky.

Matt ducks his head, wipes some tears from his face.

Foggy’s his friend. His first ever friend. Foggy was the first person to care about him, besides his dad.

Matt thinks, in some twisted way, Stick might have cared about him.

Matt doesn’t count Stick.

After being rejected by so many people out of the awkwardness of talking to a blind man, and more for being… quirky, Foggy was the first to really accept him.

“Are you even really blind?”

“Is everything ok?” Karen sticks her head out of the hallway. Matt hadn’t heard her.

“I was apologising.” Foggy says defensively, then, to Matt: “And I mean it.”
“Foggy, maybe Matt isn’t up for apologies just now.” Karen suggests. “How about we watch a movie for just now, instead?”

Foggy and Matt both keep each other in their heads as *Up* plays on the flatscreen TV.

*Where did it all go wrong?*
It’s been a whole week since Matt’s fainting spell and he’s made great progress, in terms of healing. With only two nightmares in the week and one rather unfortunate accident that Clint assured him ‘wasn’t a big deal’, the Avengers were rather amenable when he made plans to go on a walk, alone.

It’s at the foot of some hulking skyscraper that Dice starts barking, pulling on his head.

Matt startles. He checks over his emotions – he feels fine – then follow’s Dice’s tugging. The dog leads him around a corner.

The lack of heat on his skin suggests that he’s in shade. Paired with the thin path and towering walls, he considers that Dice’s objective was an alleyway.

Dice’s nose – his snuffling is wet and breathy – leads Matt to what sounds like cardboard, when Dice paws at it impatiently.

Matt hesitantly runs his hand across the box, realises it’s upside-down, then lifts it up.

A tiny heartbeat drums faster as Dice approaches the creature, sniffing and then licking it.

“Leave.” Matt tells Dice, who reigns himself in. “Good boy.”

Matt crouches, lightly holds out his hand to the copper-smelling animal. It’s covered in wet, sticky fur. Despite the blood-urine mix, the animal does feel considerably soft. Its fur isn’t matted; perhaps an abandoned pet?

Matt hears the creaking of an old ship – the animal is injured.

Unwrapping his scarf from his neck, he bundles the animal up in his arms, lightly petting it with his fingers.

It mews. Cat, then.

Matt remembers where Clint took him, that one time when Lucky hurt his tail. The vet is near the Avengers tower, yet still several blocks away.

The cat whimpered in his arms.

Matt bursts through the door of the vet clinic, his lungs on fire.

He stumbles over to the front desk, places the cat down gingerly, and aims his glare for the woman behind the desk.

“Lady,” He struggles with his breath, “fix this cat.”

He slumps into an empty chair, between a tall, lithe dog and a short, pudgy one. Dice rests his head on Matt’s knee. Having led him through the crowds of civilians, running at full speed, the dog is
also panting. He doesn’t care if the dog drools on his trousers or not.

“Poor thing...”

“Doctor!”

“How did this—”

“—bleeding—”

“—needs some towels—”

“—fill out some forms—”

“Where are those towels?”

“Who did—?”

“—blood—”

Matt wakes up, slumped over in a waiting room chair. Dice is between his legs, licking his left hand lightly. It’s wet with blood, under the bandages.

“Sir, what happened?” The receptionist asks when he stands up, limps over to the desk. A burning pain is blossoming between his legs and he just hopes he isn’t bleeding.

“Found it in an alley.” Matt grimaces. “S’it ok?”

“She’s being sutured just now. She’s underweight and the doctor will need to give her some vaccinations but she looks like a house cat that someone abandoned.” She explains, sighing. “It’s sick what some people do to animals.”

“Sick what people do to people.” Matt grumbles, then hears a heartbeat leaving the operation theatre. He turns to it.

“Mr… uh…” The vet recognises him, but doesn’t say his name. “Sir, why don’t you join me in the consulting room?”

Matt follows the man into a room with what sounds like cabinets and a table, nothing more.

Matt sneezes, rubs his nose. There’s a fur blanket over each surface in the room, more so on the table.

“Mr Murdock.” The vet holds out his hand. Matt shakes it. “I didn’t want to arouse suspicion, after current events. Any friend of Mr Barton’s is one of mine.”

“Thank you, Doctor.” Matt nods.

The smell of the place is sterile and deathly, much like a hospital but less potent. Matt can handle it.

“My cat, is she ok?” Matt garners the animal is female. “I just want to take her home.”

“Certainly. She’s on the mend – the young thing – however, I’ve given her a vitamin B12
injection, which should prove to be an appetite stimulant. If she has any trouble eating, bring her back on any day, between 9am and 4pm.” The vet explains. He, then, goes on to explain the number for the emergency clinic and how exactly to take care of the sick animal.

“She’ll be a little drowsy.” The vet leads him through to a thin room, lined on both sides by kennels.

Matt smells his cat straight away, walks to the cage and listens to her relaxed heartbeat. There’s faint purring from the animal when he comes into view.

“I assume you don’t have supplies?” The vet asks him.

He shakes his head, accept the small animal when it’s handed to him, and strokes a pair of fluffy ears with his finger.

“I’ll set you up with food for her. I’m sure Barton will be helpful in finding a bed and whatnot.” The vet smiles, his voice light. “Her leg is bandaged for now, I’ll give you some rolls of dressing.”

Matt nods his thanks.

He has a cat now.

“Are you an idiot?!” Foggy demands when he reaches the tower. His hand has been bleeding more than he anticipated and two of the cuts have opened. “You ran for seven blocks to a vet – when you are supposed to be resting – because of a stupid cat?!”

Matt ignores Foggy and pets the animal’s back. He doesn’t particular want to keep the cat, himself. Maybe one of the other Avengers would like her? He wouldn’t mind having her around.

If push comes to shove, he can keep the animal. His dog is perfect and, therefore, won’t stoop so low as to chase a cat, but Lucky has less class. Maybe it’s not the best idea to keep two dogs and a cat in his apartment.

They shed fur. Matt hates fur.

Matt hears a little hum from where he sat the cat on the couch. Metal is sliding smoothly in uniform. Bucky.

Matt’s ears twitch. Bucky’s petting the cat.

“I’m sure Matt has a good reason for helping the cat, even if it stunted his healing.” Clint defends him. “No need to shout.”

Foggy does, however, start arguing again. Matt tunes it out.

Bucky’s fucked up. Just like Matt.

But Matt has Dice and Bucky likes the cat.

“Yours.” Matt says quietly to the other man. He can hear Bucky’s chest singing.

“Pipsqueak, you’re giving me your cat?” Bucky asks hesitantly.

Matt reaches for Bucky’s hand – his flesh one, no need to startle him – and guides it along the cat’s
“She’s soft.”

“Yeah.” Bucky agrees, his voice sounding wet. “Thanks.”

“Name her.” Matt prompts. He never had the opportunity to name Dice, even though he likes the name, so he’s excited for Buck.

“Nova.” Bucky murmurs, scratching the cat’s chin with his index finger. The animal purrs.

Matt doesn’t see the smile on Bucky’s face but his happy heart and light voice are enough to make the injuries worth it.

“Nova the cat.” Matt agrees proudly.

It’s all worth it.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter highlights what Foggy doesn't understand about Daredevil or the Avengers -- Saving one life or making one person feel safe is always worth the injuries they get. If they can help someone, they will, and that's what Foggy just doesn't see.

Nova is a maine coon and looks like a tiny silver lion but that will be explain later :) Nova: https://www.demilked.com/magazine/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/biggest-maine-coon-cat-photography-robert-sijka-1.jpg

See (below) for Clint's trip to the vet with Lucky. http://blogdesuperheroes.es/wp-content/plugins/BdSGallery/BdSGaleria/17438_medium.jpg
“As nice as it was of you to make Bucky so happy,” Bruce says as he wraps a fresh bandage around Matt’s hand, “maybe not make a habit out of this?”

Matt smiles innocently.

“C’mon, Bruce! I wanna go into the bedroom – Tony said he changed stuff and Tony is the best gift giver and I love him.” Clint whines, shaking Matt’s good arm.

“Then go.” Bruce shrugs but Clint shakes his head emphatically.

“Nuh-uh. Matty and I are going in at the same time. Bros before super amazing Tony-gifts.” Clint explains, then bumps Matt’s hand with his fist.

Matt bumps Clint’s forehead with his fist.

“The windows are quiet.” Matt notes. Since Tony had them swapped out, there’s been no bouncy base noises that grate on his nerves so, all in all, he’s happy already. If Tony’s gifts are always as good as that, he’s excited.

Bruce cuts the end of the bandage like a snake tongue, forked at its end, and ties it around Matt’s wrist.

“On you go.” Bruce gestures.

Clint immediately whisks Matt away (of course he moves slowly enough that Matt won’t be hurt or uncomfortable). They go into Matt’s bedroom, which they not share, apparently.

Two king-sized beds. Clint still has his own room, but there’s also an extra bed in here.

“That was my idea, Bud. Just in case you want me nearby but not necessarily beside you.” Clint ruffles his hair.

Matt makes his way over to the wardrobe, which is open.

“Matt!” Clint exclaims excitedly, running over to the wardrobe. He stands beside the redhead and laughs. “There’s so many onesies in here!”

Matt pouts to hide what was quickly becoming a giddy smile.

“Sir has stocked the wardrobe in your personal bedroom, Agent Barton.” Jarvis informs Clint, who squeals and runs out of the door.

Matt runs his hand across the materials of his clothes, judging each one in terms of softness, when he hears a tinkling noise. Metal.

Matt picks out a random shirt, shakes it. Sure enough, he finds a dogtag on a band around the
hanger. He touches the metal plate, feels some writing in braille.

**T-SHIRT**  
**V-NECK**  
**DARK RED**

Matt frowns. He moves to the opposite end, finds a suit.

**SUIT JACKET & PANTS**  
**BLACK**  
**SKINNY FIT**

Tony had his clothes labelled?

By the time Clint returns, pleasantly surprised by his own bedroom (something about darts), Matt’s crying.

“Buddy?” Clint hurries over. “Something wrong?”

Clint has his hand on Matt’s back immediately but Matt shakes his head, gesturing to the clothes. “Says what—What it looks like.”

Clint picks up one of the metal tags. It jingles in his hand. “That’s good, right?”

Matt nods, then turns to cry into Clint’s chest. “Tony did all that for me.”

“Oh. Oh.” Clint chuckles. He pats Matt’s back, then ruffles his stupidly fluffy hair. “Course he did, Matty. It’s helpful, right? Tony’s your friend, he wants to help.”

“Didn’t have to.” Matt sniffs, then reaches for the bottom of the wardrobe. To his delight, he finds plaques with braille, dictating a wide array from **PURPLE DRAGON SLIPPERS** to **BLACK BROGUES**.

Matt kicks off his sneakers and puts on the dragon slippers, feeling the long, plush claws.

“Well, don’t you look pleased with yourself?” Clint smirks, then finds Matt’s drawers. The top drawers have been filled with displays for watches, cufflinks, and glasses. All in plastic displays with braille descriptions.

“Tony really done his research.” Clint whistles when he sees bank notes in the bottom drawer, for which there was a key. Four plastic wallets, each holding $1 notes, $5 notes, $10 notes, and $20 notes respectively. Folded and ready to be put in one of the many wallets on display.

“He didn’t have to.” Matt whimpers cautiously.

Tony wouldn’t give him this just to take it all away. Tony’s nice, he doesn’t have to worry… right?

“You’re his favourite, Bud.” Clint hums. “Well, after Bruce. But they science together. Can’t beat Bruce’s bulbous brain.”

“Goofball.” Matt deems him, running his hands over several ties. He finds a cravat and does Tony really expect him to wear that? Matt hopes not. He also finds a top hat, so maybe this is a recurring theme.

“I suggest venturing to the second door on the left.” Jarvis pipes up when they leave Matt’s room,
finally. “And then the third door on the right.”

Clint frowns, but then opens the first mentioned door.

“MATT!” Clint screams. Matt covers his ears.

“Tell Tony I’m gonna kiss him, Jarv. Hell, show me your circuit board and you’ll get one, too!” Clint gushes. Matt giggles at Jarvis’ haughty reply.

“I will pass, Agent Barton.”

“Matty.” Clint whispers in his ear. “Imagine a fort, ok?”

Matt nods.

“We have a fort!” Clint exclaims, gesturing wildly.

Matt tries to roll his eyes but it’s difficult to tell if they move or not. Probably not.

He ventures to the left wall of the room. He can make out what feels like a bunkbed, but extended from the far wall to the door. Instead of a mattress, there’s spongy, soft material. There’s a divider halfway down the room with a circular door to… crawl through?

He climbs a wooden ladder, which gets him to the second level of the ‘bunkbed’ wall. Examines the door with his hands, then pokes his head through. Instead of more spongy material, like the lower level, Matt finds a wooden floor, then another door ahead of him.

“Matt, go right.” Clint tells him from somewhere in the air. Sure enough, Matt senses a platform. It’s a bridge. He crawls across it (there’s not enough room to stand, until he reaches three stairs which lead into a floating space attached to the ceiling. Clint’s laughing as he shuffles around on a beanbag chair.

“This is amazing.” Clint claims.

Matt agrees, smiling. “Treehouse.”

“Oh, you see the hammocks?” Clint asks excitedly. He crawls onto the bridge, opens what feels like a rope gate, then slides down a short fireman pole. Matt feels for the pole and climbs on before closing the gate and sliding down it.

His slipper falls off and he has to retrieve it.

Clint’s swinging, now. Exploring, he finds a hammock with pillows and a duvet, a chair swing, and regular swing with chains and a wooden seat.

“This is amazing.” Clint breathes out. “We could play capture the flag and Nerf in here.”

Matt nods, then ventures to the back of the room.

His favourite of all, he finds a tepee-like tent. He goes inside, finds a fluffy pillow.

“Matty, Jarvis said to go across the hall, want to join me?” Clint asks, still excited.

Matt exits the tent, follows Clint out of the room. Across the hall, Clint opens the door.

“Uh, are we harbouring a vampire?” Clint asks hesitantly. “Jarvis, what’s with the coffin?”
“This is a sensory deprivation tank.” Jarvis explains.

Matt flinches.

“Inside is a mould that prevents the individual from turning over. Sir believed Mr Murdock would find it beneficial if sleeping is difficult.”

“Oh.” Clint walks over to it.

Matt stays by the door. He’s done this, before two weeks ago, and he was fine. He loved it.

He shouldn’t need it. That’s the problem.

“Matt?” Clint asks. “Looks pretty cool, want to investigate?”

Clint’s not forcing him, which he appreciates. Gingerly, Matt steps closer.

He feels a soft base inside the water, shaped roughly like a human indent. Clint fiddles with some dials that change water temperature and open the lid.

“Can we see Tony?” Matt prods the other man, who grins.

“Sure, Bud.”

Matt grabs Tony as he’s pouring coffee. He wraps his arms around the inventor’s waist and snuggles his face into his back.

The fact that he’s dressed like a dragon holds no relevance.

Especially if his ‘neon orange’ wings are flopping around when he moves.

No relevance at all.

“Coffee, Murdock.” Tony warns him, puts the jar down. Matt lets him go, grins broadly.

“Like the renovations, then?” Tony asks, lifting the plush head of Matt’s dragon onesie over his fluffy hair. “Oh, I have to get a—”

Matt pulls him into another hug. Squeezes Tony tightly.

“—picture.” Tony gasps, then pats Matt’s back. Carefully avoiding the floppy dragon wings.

“You’re a nice friend.” Matt dubs him, wiggling happily.

“Yeah, yeah.” Tony shugs out of the hug. “It’s just stuff.”

“Nope!” Matt pops the ‘p’. “You made picking clothes easier and less chaotic for me, plus you made something fun for Clint and I to do because we both like high places all because you’re a nice guy.”

“H’m. Interesting point… completely wrong.” Tony huffs. “I’m awesome, not nice. Totally badass.”

“You’re nice and sweet and you want Clint and I to be happy because you looove us.” Matt chirps.
“Do not!”

“Do so!”

Tony glares at Matt.

Matt is unaffected.

“WELL!” Tony scowls. “Don’t blow my reputation, Murdock. I’m the cool guy around here.”

Matt bounces a little, grinning. “Sure.”

Tony goes back to his coffee, pours the sweet stuff into a coffee mug. Matt slinks to his side, swipes the coffee and makes off in haste, calling out to Tony as he escapes.

“You looove us!”

Chapter End Notes

So I really hate 'Daredevil' the movie but Matt's apartment is actually pretty cool, albeit a little creepy. I like the idea of him sleeping in sensory deprivation and the braille labels.

For Matt and Clint's 'fort'; similar to this:
https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/24/dc/be/24dcbeafd304b267a8d7c642619f542e--boys-bedroom-ideas-with-bunk-beds-cool-bunk-beds-for-boys.jpg
“Matt—Matt, Buddy, stop that.”

Matt’s teeth dig into his forearm, clamping down on his skin as he tries to stop from screaming.

Clint’s holding his arm, holding it but trying not to tug. “Let it go, Bud, c’mon, you don’t need to hurt yourself.”

Matt screams, his arm muffling the sound.

“I know you’re not feeling good but this isn’t the way to solve it.” Clint insists. He wipes a hand over his face rubbing away his own tears, and then pulls Matt’s head to his chest.

“Matty, breathe with me. Listen to my lungs, c’mon.”

And he does. For a long moment, Clint’s lungs are so calm, so natural, that the pain numbs.

*Stick.*

> Hovering over him, the scent of cheap tobacco in his mouth with each acid kiss he left on Matt. Disgustingly tender.

> Matt was in bondage, tied in knots he couldn’t fathom. Knots that his shaking fingers couldn’t decipher. Spread out on his bed at St Agnes, Stick was leering over him, leaving his scent over Matt’s body like a disease. Infesting his skin, seeping across his flesh. Like a parasite eating him from the inside out with each movement, each breath, each—

Matt’s face leaks with tears.

—each thrust.

Matt drops his arm from his mouth and, dripping with sweat, worms his way into Clint’s arms.

“I’m here, I’m here.” Clint chants in his ear as Matt struggles to move closer and closer, even as there’s no space between them.

Matt sobs into Clint, his body shaking. “The light, Clint, turn on the—”

Clint doesn’t react, muttering some inane thing – “uh” – and Matt shoves him, hard. Clint wobbles, almost falling onto his back.

“THE LIGHT!” Matt screams.

Clint needs to see to keep him safe. Clint needs to keep him safe.

Jarvis must turn the light on because a vague heat flushes Matt’s skin before he starts sobbing again.

Clint approaches him, wary, and essentially lifts Matt into his embrace.
Matt’s gathered in Clint’s arms and it feels safer. Safer than being alone and having Stick—

“Buddy, it was just a bad nightmare.” Clint hushes him, pulling up the duvet to cover them both. “A really bad nightmare, yeah?”

Matt nods shakily, curling his hands in Clint’s shirt. He can’t leave. Matt will die if he leaves – Stick will come and he’ll see Matt, crying like a baby, and just kill him. Matt can’t die, he doesn’t want—

“But it’s all over now. I’m here with you and all of your favourite people are just an elevator away.”

Matt’s pretty sure he’s getting tears and snot all over Clint. His face is bright red, stained with wetness and embarrassment.

“Jarvis is here, too.” Clint tells him, rubbing Matt’s arm. “Keeping the tower safe. No-one can hurt you, Matty. You’re perfectly safe.”

Matt considers this, wipes his runny nose with his hand because there’s no tissues and he’s disgusting.

“I need to use the bathroom.” Matt sniffles.

“Oh. Alright.” Clint releases him but Matt’s grip tightens.

They settle for Clint leading Matt across the room to the bathroom door. Matt goes inside, Clint turns his back and waits in the doorway.

However, things don’t go as planned when Matt pulls down the front of his PJ pants, and then his boxers.

“Clint, I—I don’t want…” Matt whimpers hesitantly.

Matt likes Clint because Clint’s a genius. Clint understands.

“Is sitting any easier?” He suggests. “Take your time.”

Matt does feel awkward but his world is filled with dark corners and lurking shadows. Admittedly, the thought of leaving Clint in this moment is suicide.

Matt changes position and takes a minute before he can work up the courage to relieve himself.

When he’s fixed his PJ’s, he washes his hands and face, then hurries over to Clint.

“Not so bad, right?” Clint asks. Matt nods but his hands don’t release their new grip on Clint’s shirt.

Clint leads him back to bed and he sleeps with his head under the covers until morning.

“I’m sorry.” At breakfast. Matt fumbles with the cone tail of his crocodile onesie, facing Clint. The man in question is making toast for them, covering his own in jam and leaving Matt’s plain.

“For what?”
Ok, maybe Clint is dumb.

“Last night.” Matt insists, shuffling closer. He freezes when Clint turns to face him.

“Funny.” Clint comments. “I didn’t know there was a law against feelings. Care to enlighten me?”

Matt splutters.

“Exactly.” He sighs, putting Matt’s toast on a plate and handing it to him. “Matty, you had feelings. Oh, wow, shocker!”

Matt pouts.

“What I’m saying is this.” Clint turns him around and moves him towards the table until his brain keeps up and finishes the job. “You’ve been through some shitty stuff and you’re not going to feel normal straight away, maybe ever. That’s not a bad thing, if you can control it. Nightmares are scary and you were scared. Totally reasonable.”

“But I was acting like a baby.” Matt murmurs.

“Matthew, if I had a nightmare and acted like you did, would you call me a baby?” Clint messes up his hair.

“That’s different.”

“You’re not special, Buddy.” Clint shrugs. “Answer it.”

“No.” Matt mumbles, taking a weak bite of his toast. Clint takes a ravenous bite of his own, drops some of the floor for Lucky.

“Exactly, ’cause only a bad person would say something like that.” Clint points out. “You were upset, it happens. Seen worse.”

Matt considers this. Dice nuzzles up against his leg and Matt feeds him the tiniest bit of toast. The dog picks it up with his teeth, takes it off to his bed, and then licks it curiously.

“I’m very special. You’re boring.” Matt says after a moment.

Clint grins at him. “Yeah, whatever. Eat your blandness.”

Bruce is disappointed when he sees the swollen bite on Matt’s arm. It spits out a few drops of blood, but is more or less harmless, in Matt’s opinion.

“Can you tell me why this happened?” Bruce asks him, lightly cleaning the wound with a wet cotton ball that stinks of antiseptic.

“Nightmare.” Matt claims, playing with a little wooden slate Bruce handed him. It’s a tactile puzzle, apparently. The jigsaw pieces feel like crescent moons and he’s supposed to assort them on the base.

“That’s not a reason for self-harm, Matt.” Bruce chides him gently. “Why did you think harming yourself was an effective solution to feeling upset?”

Matt was muffling his screaming, but he supposes he could have done that with a pillow. Or not at
“Distraction.” Matt offers, not especially wanting to have this conversation.

“Right. There are other ways to distract yourself, Matt. Clint would have helped, if he was aware that was what you needed.” Bruce wraps a bandage around his arm, then takes Matt’s hands from the puzzle.

One crawls back without Matt’s consent, fumbling with the wooden shapes.

“We care about you, Matt, that’s all.” Bruce explains, then gestures to the puzzle. “Do you like it?”

Matt doesn’t reply because does that piece slot into this one? Matt’s other hand joins its twin, fixing both pieces into a hole on the board.

Bruce smiles at the man, leaves the couch in the communal living room, and passes a happy Tony.

“Brucie, I have an idea.”

“What?” Bruce hesitates but Tony’s grin only spreads as he throws his arm over the taller man’s shoulders.

“Capture the flag.”

Chapter End Notes

Up next: Foggy and Matt's friendship will be put to the test.
“Avengers assemble!” Tony is holding Matt’s white cane, standing in front of the residents of Avengers tower. He gestures with the cane to the top hat from Matt’s wardrobe. Inside, there are ten straws of various sizes.

They’re at the entrance to the Nerf room in the gym. It’s filled with ledges, walls, and various obstacles. There’s even a few fireman poles and ropes.

“This is how it's going down.” Tony claims. “The goal is to capture the enemy team’s flag. Each member of the team will have enough bullets to fill their gun, but only six bullets can be used per team. If a bullet hits you, you are ‘dead’, for all intents and purposes.”

Natasha grins from his seat. “This is an active shooter situation. You’re cleared for maximum engagement.”

“First, everyone take a straw. Longest and shortest are team captains. You must listen to, obey, and report to your captain via headsets.” Tony passes the straws around. Once everyone has taken one, Bucky proudly holds up the shortest straw.

Everyone waits for a moment before Clint nudges Matt. “Yours is longest, Matty.”

“I’m captain?” Matt asks excitedly. With his blindness, he was never allowed to contribute in playground games as a child, or sports in school. He eagerly stands on Tony’s left. Bucky goes to his right.

“I’ll wipe the floor with your ass, Murdock.” Bucky grins, teeth gleaming.

Matt grins silently and shakes his hand.

“Pick teams. Matt, you’re up first since you had the longest straw.” Tony encourages him.

Without any doubts, Matt bounces on his heels. “Clint!”

Bucky scowls. Clint has great aim but it’s obvious that Murdock is going to choose his friends. “Romanoff.”

“Tony.” Matt tugs the man’s sleeve and Tony pats his back.

“Stevie.”

“Bruce.”

“Wilson.”

Matt thinks of the two players left: Karen and Foggy. He grimaces, thinks of his balloon. “Karen.”

“Nelson.”

“Ok! So we have Matt, Clint, myself, Bruce, and Karen on Team Red.” Tony announces, handing each player a loaded gun and taking one for himself. “And Buckaroo has Natasha, Steve, Sam, and
Blue’s flag is in the west wing, Red’s is in the east. They split into two and trudge through the maze to their respective flags.

“You’re in charge, Matt. What do you want us to do?” Tony asks.

“Don’t use radios to communicate with me. Whisper and I’ll hear it.” Matt straightens up, looking amazing in his crocodile onesie and no-one can tell him otherwise.

“Take out the Blues, bring them back here, and get the flag.” Matt explains. “Karen, no offense but no-one will be looking for you so you head out alone, go for Sam or Foggy.”

Matt turns to Clint. “You go for Natasha. You’re as difficult to hit as each other.”

Matt swivels, gestures to Tony and Bruce. “Go together, they’ll try to pick you off because you can’t utilize your abilities in here. Ideally, go for Steve and Bucky, but shoot to kill. Have each other’s backs. Stay near no-man’s-land, you’re on perimeter security.”

Matt straightens his back. “I’m going for the flag.”

“Don’t we need someone to defend our flag?” Karen asks worriedly.

“No. We’re going to let them take it.” Matt explains. “They need to bring it back to their own base to win. I’ll know the location of each Blue member, I’ll keep you updated via comms. We’re on attack, force them into defence. Remember, I’m the command centre. Keep me updated on body and bullet counts. We lose if we shoot more than six times.”

They nod.

“If I tell you to go somewhere, you hurry but with caution. Try not to get shot.” Matt frowns. “Clint, stay on the ground. Natasha will expect you to go high but there’s limited climbing options. You’d get trapped.”

“Yes, Sir.” The spy grins.

“All right, on three. Team Red.” Matt puts his hand in and the others copy. “Ready? One, two, three.”

“Team Red!” They all chant.

Matt sprints up a stairwell, confident that there’s no-one in his proximity. He leans on the wall, fiddling with his gun.

“Stat report.” Matt says into his comm, then waits for the voices in the maze to meet him.

“Falcon down by Page.” Karen reports, whispering from somewhere near the base but not in it.


“Iron Man is down!” Bruce says urgently, then: “Hulk down.”

Matt frowns, listens in.
“You’ll never take me ali—” Tony’s cries are muffled by a familiar metal hand.

“Stevie, get him.” Bucky hisses. The shuffle of clothes and the trembling of foam bullets in a plastic gun.

“Yeah, I’m just going to walk free.” Bruce says cheerfully. No-one replies.

You just don’t fuck with Bruce Banner.

“I’ll report from the base, Daredevil.” Bruce says as he walks away, almost silently on his part.

Daredevil grins.

“Three blues left.” Matt says into the comm. He advances around a corner, not particularly cautious. “Iron Man and Banner are dead. We shot Falcon and Nelson.”

“Shit.”

Matt frowns at the comms, then hears the wicked laughter of Romanoff. “Widow will cull you all. Page down. You have three bullets left, Devil. See if you can catch me.”

Matt growls to himself. Natasha has a Team Red comm.

“Double team, Matt. I’ll stay put, you come and find me.” Clint tells him through a far-off whisper. “I’m throwing my comm away, you should copy.”

Matt’s ears twitch. He tosses his comm along the hall, leaps over a low wall and continues alog his path.

Three bullets. One each for Natasha, Steve, and Bucky.

Matt approaches Clint with his hands on his head. He hears the plastic gun being pointed at him, then it lowers.

“Matt, three left, three bullets.” Clint restates their point. “What do you want to do?”

“I agree with you, double team. I can’t have you getting shot and you can’t locate the others like I can.” Matt frowns, then beams. “By the way, this is so much fun.”

“Hell yeah, Buddy.” Clint pats him on the back, then they both resume serious mode.

“Our hostage is in the Blue base.” Matt explains. “Stay close to me.”

“Got it.”

They find Steve first. He hasn’t been alone since ‘killing’ Tony and Bruce but Bucky’s doing interrogation with Tony.

“No talking.” Matt warns Clint before they get too close. “It’ll blow our position. You get behind Steve and cover his mouth before I can shoot him.”

“Copy that.” Clint whispers.
Matt gestures for Clint to move forward.

Steve is guarding the base doorway. Matt grimaces, unbuttons the tail of his onesie, and then throws it through the window-like hole in the wall he’s beside. He and Clint duck.

Steve advances into the adjacent corridor, followed by Clint. Clint disarms Steve by grabbing his gun from behind and clamps his hand over Steve’s mouth while Matt springs up and shoots his chest.

Clint keeps his hold on Steve while Matt bursts into the base with his gun, shooting Bucky in the back. Foggy and Sam are in the corner of the room.

“Shit, Murdock!” Barnes curses. Tony’s tied to a chair, looking vaguely annoyed.

Matt hears the blast of a Nerf gun and spins around, only for his face to feel the lightest movement of air in front of him.

Natasha.

Matt focuses on the base, searches for the flag. It’s gone. They moved it?

“Well, well, well, Murdock.” Natasha advances, her steps clicking against the floor. “Drop the gun.”

Matt’s finger slips off the handle, dropping it. The plastic clatters against the floor.

Matt raises his hands, slips them behind his head.

“You will admit defeat.” Natasha grins toothily.

“Natasha.” Matt sighs, forlorn. “I admit—”

Matt pulls a Nerf gun from his crocodile hood, shoots Natasha in the forehead before continuing.

“I admit that RED TEAM WINS!”

Clint whoops from beside him. “Team Red rocks!”

“You had an extra gun.” Steve says lamely.

Grinning, Matt holds out his fist to Clint, who knocks his own against it.

Bruce hands over his gun, which is fully cocked and loaded.

“You’ll need a trick shot for Natasha.” Bruce points out. “Meanwhile, Karen and I will go and look for the flag. We were shot in view of the base – she moved it.”

Karen nods. “We can’t move it but we can find it and wait there.”

“Thank you for the balloon, Karen.” Matt’s arms find her, give her an affectionate squeeze, then he hurries from the room.

“Found the flag, Matt.” Bruce hears in his ear.

The last thing he has to do – get the flag back to Team Red’s base.

Matt saunters out, followed by the ‘dead’ members of both teams. He follows the trail of the maze.
– its twists, turns, and occasional jumps – in Bruce’s direction.

“Oh, shit.” Clint hisses.

Matt tilts his head, listening for the fabric of the flag, and finds it at the top of a dangling rope.

“Maybe you should take it easy, Bud.” Clint suggests.

“Haven’t won yet.” Matt points out, grabs the rope. He loops the length around his foot, pushes himself up. He continues to climb like an aerial dancer until he’s nearing the top of the rope.

The flag is jammed in a ceiling panel, sticking out a meter away from Matt. He lowers his torso so that his legs are in the air, coils his leg around the rope. He then sends the length around his other leg and around his waist. Pulls himself up, curls the rope around his first leg’s thigh, and then swings back and forth.

Foggy’s heart practically leaps out of his chest as Matt reaches out with both hands, only holding onto the rope with his legs.

He makes a final swing and grabs the flag before tossing it down to Clint.

Matt twists, drops down on the rope until he’s dangling just above Clint’s face.

“Well done, Murdock.” Natasha comments dryly.

“Enough with the theatrics!” Clint exclaims. “Let’s go win this shit!”

“Are we just not discussing the fact that he shouldn’t be doing stunts when he’s as injured as he is?” Foggy demands. “Look, he’s got rope burns!”

“Nelson, don’t be a sore loser.” Tony says as he takes a swig of whiskey.

“I’m not being a sore loser. Is that all that matters? Winning and losing, not the shit that he gets into in between? He runs seven blocks, he does tricks on a rope, what next? Plus, none of you seem to care about the fact that he’s hurting himself!” Foggy exclaims when they get back to the communal floor.

Matt tunes Foggy out and curls up beside Clint. Bucky, surprisingly, sits beside him. Directly beside him.

The soldier offers his metal hand. Matt moves the fingers around, rests his ear against Bucky’s shoulder. He taps the coldness with his nails.

“He’s not a china doll.” Bucky states blandly.

“He’s not a super soldier!” Foggy insists, throwing his arms around. Karen sighs quietly from her chair.

“Foggy, he knew what he was doing today.” Karen points out.

“In a Nerf game?!”

“No, as a leader!” Karen insists hotly. She’s fed up with this fighting.
“Shit, Nelson, he’s stronger than Tony and Sam!” Tony snaps. “Better at gymnastics than Clint who grew up in the circus, can take Natasha in a fight— God, he can take Steve in a fight!”

Matt frowns when Bucky’s arm pulls away from him.

“Look, just because you think you’re doing your best for him, just because you want to do your best for him, doesn’t mean that you are!”

“I’ve known him for years and you’ve known him for all of two minutes!” Foggy objects.

“And look at him, Nelson, he look happy to you? ‘Cause he’s sure as hell a lot happier when he’s watching movies with us, playing darts with Barton, meditating with Bruce, than he is with you when you’re acting like this!” Bucky shouts, then turns his voice into a softer tone. “Clint, get him to stop.”

Stop? Stop what? Stop breathing? Matt doesn’t think he can.

Matt likes the Avengers, of course he does. Matt likes Karen. Matt isn’t so sure about Foggy.

“Grow up, Matty, enough with the Catholic guilt.” Stick whispers in his ear, tightening the noose around Matt’s neck before cutting him to the floor. “Fucking weak, good for nuthin’ kid.”

“Stop.”

“Karen. I can’t do this alone. I can’t—can’t take another step.”

“You’re gonna get yourself killed if you keep this up. You know that, right?”

“No matter what I do, I’m just making things worse.

“Stop it.”

“It's not how you hit the mat, it's how you get back up.”

“This is my city. My family.”

“I don’t want to stop.”

“Stop it!” Matt shouts. Clint runs a hand over his arm, trying to soothe him, to no avail.

“He made each of us with a purpose, with a reason for being... Then why did he put the Devil in me?”

“I’m not a duck, Foggy!” Matt screams, jolting to his feet. His breathe catches in his throat, deep and rogue. Not his own.

“I’m a guy who can take down a hundred men with my bare hands and go back for more.” Matt growls out, met with the complete silence of everyone else in the room. “Enough people pity me, I don’t need that from you.”

Foggy’s gulp resonates in Matt’s ears, even as his own throat pools with moisture. “I’m supposed to be your friend, I get that. But you’re supposed to be mine.”

“Matt...” Foggy says gently, for lack of anything else.

“If you’re the type of friend who sees me as weak, as someone you need to shield from the world,
then I don’t need your friendship.”

With that, Matt walks directly to the elevator and takes it to his floor.

Bucky’s right – Foggy shouldn’t be making things worse.

Chapter End Notes

So you'll have to wait until the next chapter to find out what happens between our favorite avocados, but Matt stood up for himself! Yay!

(I already can't wait to start on the next chapter!)

Thanks to everyone for kudos and comments. I love reading your feedback! <3
“Matty, don’t, please.” Clint takes a hold of his arms. They’re in the ‘treehouse’ in their fort room. Matt was occasionally punching his legs but there’s no blood and he doesn’t see the big deal.

Annoyed, he throws the bean bag chair at Clint, who grabs it and moves it out of the way.

“That wasn’t nice.” Clint tells him. When he tries to approach Matt, the redhead shoves him away.

Murdock drives his head, hard, against the wall. Clint, avoiding another shove, drags Matt away from the wall and holds him securely.

“Words, not fists.” Clint says, dropping his arms when Matt starts pushing him away with his feet. “I won’t touch you unless you start with that again.”

“Foggy’s my friend, why is he doing this?” Matt asks carefully.

Thinking about it makes his head hurt.

All he did was lie about his eyes. Did Foggy want to know how much of a risk Matt was before they started spending time together?

Matt hits his head on the wall again. He’s not good at friendship – Foggy made that abundantly clear.

“I didn’t know!” Matt insists. “Foggy wanted to know the risk, but I wanted to keep him sa—Stop it!”

Matt struggles as Clint tries to hold him in one place.

“Matt, how would you feel if I never told you about Laura? My kids? For years, how would you feel if I kept that from you?” Clint asks but Matt shoves him away again.

“You’re not listening to me!”

Clint huffs and Matt can tell from the blood pumping to his muscles that he’s angry. Matt shoves him again with his foot.

“Matt! Stop it!” Clint snaps, then schools his tone. “I understand that you’re frustrated but you’re hitting me and I don’t appreciate that when I’m trying to help.”

Matt quiets. “Sorry.”

“Apology accepted.” Clint says. In a lot of ways, Matt reminds Clint of his kids. He has virtually no social skills, sometimes, despite how smart he is. “Will you let me move closer?”

Matt nods, reaches for Clint with a sad face. “Did I hurt you?”

“No, you little shit.” Clint grumbles, ruffling Matt’s hair affectionately. He moves Matt onto his chest. “I think I would feel like you didn’t trust me if you hadn’t told me something like that for years. Maybe like you didn’t care enough about me to tell me.”

“But that’s not—!” Matt objects before Clint hushes him.
“Shh, Buddy. Relax, I know you didn’t mean that. But maybe you need to do more than explain to Foggy that you were trying to keep him safe. Maybe you need to show him that you care about him.” Clint suggests.

Matt hits the wall with his fist and Clint gathers it back into the Matt-shaped fluff in his arms.

(Really, Tony, a tabby cat onesie? It matches his hair perfectly.)

“Here, answer this for me: how do you know that I care about you?” Clint asks, shuffling Matt away from reach of the wall.

“You told me.” Matt’s voice wavers, as if he’s about to start crying. It sounds wet and dry at the same time and Clint considers killing whoever made him so fucking insecure. “You told me.”

“I did, Buddy.” Clint assures him. “And you know I care about you. Anything else that I do?”

Matt hesitates.

“I cuddle with you, for one.” Clint points out, squeezing Matt as he says it. “And I talk through things with you when you’re upset.”

Matt nods, burrowing his face into Clint’s chest. “I should hug Foggy?”

Clint would sigh, if he didn’t think Matt could hear it.

“Do the kinds of stuff that you used to bond over in college.” Clint suggests.

Matt nods slightly, then tugs Clint’s arm. “You still like me?”

“Of course, Buddy.” Clint laughs, moving onto his knees. “Want to go lie in the hammock?”

Matt would bounce if there was enough room but there isn’t so he settles for following Clint over the bridge.

Bruce is sitting in the swinging chair opposite him when Foggy arrives. Matt already gave Jarvis the permission to let him in.

He pokes his head in with sweet-smelling goodness.

“And now your legs.” Bruce tells him. Matt forgot – he was supposed to be meditating. Bruce seems familiar with Clint’s strategy for getting him to fall asleep. Nevertheless, Matt is drowsy when Foggy enters with coffee.

“I’ll give you some privacy.” Bruce gets to his feet. “Matt, Clint and I will be in the living room.

Matt nods, presses his face against his pillow.

“I heard you have a fort.” Foggy comments lightly.

Matt’s stomach flips and levitates in his chest at the nervousness he feels, making him consider just how much he wanted a friend. He trails his fingers back and forth over the stitching of the duvet, pressing down hard when he finds the rope of the hammock.

The feeling simmers slightly.
“Matt?” Foggy whispers. The contrast between the hushed tone and the volume of his voice tells Matt that Foggy is close now. Matt shyly looks up in his direction. “What?”

“Are you ok? You’ve went quiet...” Foggy asks, slightly louder.

“I don’t—” Matt pauses, tilting his head as he struggles for the words. Resigned, he lightens the pressure on the rope and allows the soft flesh of his hand to trail over the stitching once more.

“Maybe I should go first?” Foggy suggests.

Matt agrees, taking the offered coffee. He sips it gratefully.

“We’re not working like we used to.” Foggy admits. “We’ve both done things that have hurt the other. I want us to explain it, calmly on my part and honestly on yours.”

Matt remembers the heart-to-hearts they used to have in college and scowls. It’s difficult to smile when the sweet fragrance of coffee is right under his nose, wafting up.

“I was hurt because I didn’t think you cared about me. I was so honest with you, even when it was difficult, and you weren’t.” Foggy explains. “Though, seeing how dangerous this whole scenario has played out with your apartment being demolished, you might have been right. It still hurt.”


“Yeah, I know.” Foggy sighs. “I worry about you because, y’know, you’re like my baby brother. I love you and I thought you didn’t care.”

“I do care.” Matt ducks his head.

“I know, Matty.” He nods. “I just didn’t want you to get hurt either but I guess you’re stronger than I thought.”

Matt smiles slightly.

“You, now.”

Matt scowls.

Foggy doesn’t let up and he eventually gives way. “I don’t like it when you shout at me.”

“I’m working on that.” Foggy agrees. “My temper’s been turned right up lately and I’ve been taking everything out on you.”

“You scare me.” Matt disposes of his coffee, buries himself under the duvet. He hears Foggy move to the side of the hammock. He continues warily. “It’s difficult trying to figure out how to do this and you shout at me when I do it wrong.”

Foggy frowns. “How to do what?”

“Make friends.” Matt explains, fidgeting. “I don’t—don’t want you all to leave.”

Foggy’s heart positively breaks at the kicked-puppy look Matt is sporting. His eyes spill over with tears and Foggy pulls him into a hug.

“I’m not going to leave you, Matty. I’m sorry I’ve been so unhelpful.”
“Can we be friends again?” Matt whimpers. Foggy smiles, pats his shoulder.

“Best damn avocados for life, Matty.”

Matt feels a small laugh passing his lips as he wipes his face of tears.

“Best damn avocados.”
“Ok, it’s Matt’s therapy day today and I promised him that he could make dinner tonight so try not to be rude.” Clint whispers.

Matt’s hearing has been somewhat deficient today, like any other time he’s in a bad mood, so they’re safe to whisper.

“Tell me we’re not eating plain toast?” Tony screws up his nose. “Because Murdock’s palate is a little askew.”

“You’d better hope it’s plain toast.” Foggy grumbles from his chair.

Before anyone can ask, Matt’s cane taps its way out of the elevator. He’s dressed in his blue unicorn onesie, spiralling horn pointed at the ceiling. His purple man bounces as he walks.

“Clint, can’t we stay here?” Matt grumbles, finding the couch and sitting in an empty space.

“Matt, c’mon, you need therapy.” Clint nudges his shoulder. “So much therapy.”

He’s not amused.

Regardless, Clint drags Matt back into the elevator and they travel down several floors to the med bay.

When Matt exits, his nose crinkles up and his face twists into a perfectly disgusted expression. Clint drags him along the hall, past the ICU.

“It’s going to be fine.” Clint assures him.

“Good morning, Matt!” A cheerful voice calls out to him from an office.

Matt’s ears pick up at the sound of the doctor’s voice. Apparently he had helped during Matt’s fainting spell and, later, he had dropped in to thank him.

“Dr Schneider?” Matt leaves Clint, tapping his way into the office.

“That would be me.” He chuckles. “I hear you are visiting Miss Collins this morning?”

“That would be me.” He chuckles. “I hear you are visiting Miss Collins this morning?”

“Being dragged.” Matt gestures behind him at Clint. “How did Lucy’s exam go?”

“She has scoliosis.” The man frowns. “Thankfully, it’s minor. She’s going to be given a back brace.”

“I’m sorry.” Matt tilts his head. “She’s a strong young lady, remember that. I doubt she’ll let anything worry her.”

“It’s stressful.” Schneider admits. “I’m glad we caught it early, she should be fine.”

“Hang in there for her. Having her family there will mean the world to her.” Matt smiles innocently. “Anyway, tell Sharon ‘thanks’ for the vegetable soup, it was lovely.”
“Of course, Matt. Thank you for visiting.” Schneider calls as Matt makes his way out.

Clint gawks at him, not that he can see it. Once they’re far away enough, he leans over to Matt. “You’re the one getting therapy, Bud.”

Matt shrugs.

Clint leads him into the assigned room (It’s not the same one as before but it’s on the same floor.) and he slumps into one of the hard chairs.

Emily smells like beans and tomatoes today. She moves easily, her muscles lax. Casual. From the swaying sound as she crosses her legs, she’s either wearing a dress or a T-shirt and skirt.

“Good morning, Matt, Clint.” She greets them both.

Clint sits down heavily beside him, leaning on the arm rest nearest Matt.

“Do you like unicorns?” Emily asks sweetly. “I used to have a toy one, about hip-high, that stood in my bedroom.”

Matt shrugs. He does like his slippers (they look like hooves, he’s told).

He doesn’t like the scraping sound of the carpet so he lifts his feet onto the chair, hugging them quietly.

“Well, it’s very nice to see you both. How have your days been?” Emily questions.

Matt doesn’t reply so Clint goes ahead: “Tony got this new garlic butter and it’s amazing on toast. We slept in this morning, so well-rested.”

“That’s good. Matt?” She asks.

“I get to make dinner.” Matt says shortly. “If I behave.”

“Behave?” She asks.

“Try.” Clint amends. “Matt was a bit nervous but he agreed to try so, in return, do something he wanted. He wants to cook dinner for the team.”

Matt nods along.

He wishes he was back in his bed, no-one to question him. The only person around would be Clint. Something wild and panicky eats at his chest when he considers Clint leaving him alone with this stranger.

“Do you like cooking?” She asks him.

Matt screws up his nose. “I want to cook for the team.”

“Alright, well, that sounds fun.” She trails off. “Let’s get started.”

She shuffles papers before sliding something across to him. Matt touches it, feels braille rows of writing. Matt touches the paper Clint has, feels ink.

“Zero… endless… suicidal thoughts… no… way… out, no… movement…” His fingers slowly drag across the faint impressions of the ink. “Everything is… bleak… and it will… always… be
like this.”

“You can read that, Buddy?” Clint asks, his eyebrows raised.

“I can feel the ink.” Matt shrugs stiffly, draws back into himself. After a moment, he reads the same line in braille on his own paper.

“This is a scale that is typically for bipolar disorder, but I like to use it with all of my patients.” Emily explains. “It ranges from a low bad mood to a high bad mood. Depression to mania. It assesses much more easily what kind of mood you are experiencing and I would like you to try using it between now and our next session.”

Matt scans the scale. It ranges from 0 to 10. 0 is depression and 10 is mania, with 4, 5, and 6 being a ‘good’ mood.

Zero – endless suicidal thoughts, no way out, no movement, everything is bleak and it will always be like this. Ten – total loss of judgement, exorbitant spending, religious delusions and hallucinations.

They’re both a bit extreme, but that’s the point.

Matt ponders the idea of religious imagery, ponders Daredevil, and figures it means nothing. He’s just a regular Catholic.

“Matt. I want you to know you’re in control; you make the rules in our sessions. If you don’t want to do this, we won’t, but I think it will be helpful, both for yourself and for others around you.” Emily explains, waits for Matt to reply. He doesn’t. “Why don’t we try it out just now? Can you tell Clint and I how you feel, using the scale?”

Four – slight withdrawal from social situations, concentration less than usual, slight agitation. It’s a ‘balanced mood’, so Matt goes with it.

“Four.” Matt murmurs.

He makes the mistake of breathing in through his nose and promptly hides his face in his knees. The stench of sweat, adrenaline, in the room is sickening. He rubs his knuckles against each other, slowly, feels the impulses from his brain shooting to his hands and back. Lets it centre him.

“Sure about that four, Bud?” Clint’s putting a hand on his back.

Matt tilts his head. “Senses thing.”

“Too much?” Clint asks. “Too little?”

“Don’t like it in here.” Matt whines, gripping Clint’s sleeve.

Clint is a warm, cozy presence to his side. Matt’s not letting him leave. The swirl of negative emotions in this room – tears, sweat, coppery blood – influences his head more than he wants to admit.

“Ok.” Clint nods. “Why don’t you describe it for me?”

“Smells anxious. Sad.” Matt sniffs to stop his nose from running, regrets it. “You were in here, while ‘go. Pun—Kicked a wall?”

“Wow, ok.” Clint sighs. “Yeah. Maybe we need a new room next time.”
“I have an office to coordinate my work, so all I really need is a notepad and a notice of where to go.” Emily explains. “Why don’t you pick a new room by next week and we can go there, instead?”

Matt nods slightly. Calms when Clint cuddles him, surrounds him with mint, apple juice, and scotch.

“Do your senses often both you, Matt?” Emily asks.

Matt burrows away into Clint, doesn’t answer.

“Alright, we can leave that until later, if you’d rather.” Emily redirects. “I understand you’ve been having trouble sleeping? Can you tell me about that?”

Matt nods slowly. His jaw clenches.

Chapter End Notes

So this ended up being longer than expected... Continued in next chapter.

The chart Matt uses:
https://knittyhelen.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/moodscale.jpg

So the therapy sessions will be based off of therapy I went through about a year ago (CBT ect.) so if anyone wants to correct me, feel free to point anything out, but I didn't have PTSD therapy so I'll try my best. I don't know the format for those sessions so It'll be more CBT based (which will be explained in the story if you don't know what it is).
“Clint stays with me at night.” Matt says hesitantly.

Emily seems confused, so Clint explains. “Matt’s nightmares are less frequent when we sleep in the same room, or the same bed.”

“I see.” Emily nods. “I imagine that feels quite comforting.”

Matt shows his face nervously. He guesses it’s not that weird – he and Clint are friends. Cuddling isn’t weird.

Stick would say otherwise.

Matt winces at that thought, then sighs tiredly. “Clint keeps me safe.”

“Oh… Safe from what?” Emily asks pleasantly.

Matt grips at Clint tighter. “Stick.”

Clint hasn’t heard of Stick before; it’s a fact of which Matt is painfully aware. He locks his jaw.

“My men—mentor.” Matt stammers, tugging hard on Clint sleeve. “Clint said—said it was…”

“Matty, you’re doing really well.” Clint tells him, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. “I’m really proud of you, you know that?”

The dam of Matt’s eyes floods over when he starts sobbing into his knees.

“S-Said it was rape. S’not—not that. Training exercise, just a training e-exercise.” Matt chokes on his words, reaching up to grab a hold of his hair and pull.

“Buddy, think you can let go?” Clint asks, wrapping his hands lightly around Matt’s wrists. He does, stiffly, and folds his arms in the space between his stomach and thighs.

“Matt, I’m glad that you were able to take this step.” Emily says gently from across the desk, pushing a box of tissues towards him. “These ‘training exercises’, could you describe what Stick would teach you?”

“Be prepared.” Matt grinds out. “Punish me i-if I—Clint, stop it.”

“Want to change topic?” Clint asks, squeezing Matt’s shoulder. He nods, grabs a tissue, and then wipes his face.

Tired. Heavy. He nods.

“Why don’t we talk about your sleeping habits?” Emily asks. He starts taking a few notes before talking again. “Emotional trauma can be draining, just like physical trauma. It’s not surprising that your body needs to rest. However, emotional trauma can also be detrimental to sleep. Clint tells me that you’ve been experiencing nightmares and urinary issues during the night?”
Clint shifts at his side.

Matt gives a one-sided shrug.

“Why don’t we start with the nightmares – are they made up? Fantastical? Or do they resemble events that have happened to you, like flashbacks?” Emily asks, writes something down when he nods at the second option.

What is she writing?

“Now, flashbacks can be a little bit different so I’m just going to try and narrow down what kinds you’re experiencing.” Emily explains. Continues writing. “What senses do you experience a flashback with?”

“Hearing.” Matt says. “Smell and taste.”

“Do you feel pain in your flashbacks?” She questions. “Nausea, headaches, needing to use the toilet?”

The last one, Matt nods at.

“Alright.” She says slowly. “I’m going to ask you one more question before I tell you about some techniques that can help with flashbacks. If you don’t want to answer, or if you start to feel negatively, I want you to make a fist with your left hand.”

Matt focuses on his hand. Wipes his sweaty palm on the fluff of his onesie. His throat tightens as he tries to swallow a golden nugget, or rather, saliva.

“Are your flashbacks predominantly sexual in nature?”

Matt gulps, almost swallowing it down the wrong pipe. He makes a fist with both hands, closes his eyes, nods. “Yes.”

The taste of Stick in his mouth.

“Alright, let’s move on.” Emily suggests, moving her papers around. “I’ll give you a list to take with you, but there are techniques called ‘grounding techniques’. They’re supposed to help you ‘come back’ when you have a flashback.”

Matt blinks away tears, grabs a new tissue. Clint’s cuddling him. He slumps his head against Clint’s shoulder.

“An example is, perhaps, listening to some music that relaxes you.” Emily hands over another piece of paper. “Using a sound technique might be more helpful in combating a hearing flashback, but whatever works for you. It’s heavily subjective.”

Matt tries to read the list but his hands shake and he pushes it towards Clint. It takes into the air and falls off the edge of the table. Matt taps the arm of his chair fitfully, air catching in his throat with each stilted breath.

“Now, urination during the night is a common symptom of sexual abuse.” Emily says quickly, just throwing it in, before explaining to him in a slower tone. “Bedwetting is called nocturnal enuresis. Some ways to combat it are cutting coffee out of your diet, not drinking for a few hours before sleeping, or urinating at the same time every night before bed.”
“I want to go.” Matt says to Clint, grinding his knuckles against his knee.

“Ok, Buddy.” Clint is a little disappointed but Matt has truly tried his best during this therapy session. He knows that.

“I’m so proud of you, Buddy.” Clint smiles widely as Matt stirs rice in a pot with boiling water.

Matt ducks his head, face flushed. His chest swells. Therapy was horrible, utterly horrible, but he supposes it’s manageable if it makes Clint so happy. Admittedly, it feels odd to have someone proud of him.

At least, not in a ‘you’re blind so clearly that makes you an incapable idiot’ way.

It makes Clint’s hand on his back feel warmer and softer.

“I know it was difficult, but you tried your hardest and now Emily has a better idea of how to help.” Clint says. “That’s great by my standards.”

Matt’s face falls. “T-Tony and Bruce won’t—”

Matt’s cut off by Tony, who grins at him as he struts into the kitchen. “It’s amazing by our standards, Cherry Pie.”

Matt smiles slightly, remembers to stir his pot.

“Clint told us you done a really good job, h’m?” Tony says earnestly, leaning on the worktop. “Feeling peachy?”

Matt hesitates, then smiles slightly. “Five?”

Clint pats his back happily, then spends some time explaining the scale to Tony.

Matt starts serving his concoction later, when all of the tower’s residents are surrounding the expansive dining table.

“Looks great, Matty.” Foggy’s sitting there with a devilish grin.

“I remembered you’re allergic.” Matt says happily, handing a specific plate over to Foggy, who smiles.

Karen gives him a curious look and he doesn’t reply.

“Are those onions?” Steve asks hesitantly, poking his food with his fork.

“It’s rice with onions.” Matt explains happily, sitting down with a plate of his own.

“Spring onions, pickled onions, and red onions, right?” Foggy asks with a smirk that Matt can’t perceive.

Matt nods happily, savouring the bite his food has when he lifts a forkful to his mouth.

“I like it.” Bruce says, having some of his own. “It’s spicy.”

The others realise this when they take bites of their own.
“It’s,” Clint coughs, his face heating up, “hot.”

“Ghost pepper sauce.” Matt explains, gesturing to the wall. “Jarvis ordered it for me. Nice, right?” Tony runs off to the kitchen, gagging.

“Don’t you like it?” Matt’s face falls. He directs his attention at Clint, who’s breathing quite heavily.

“It’s hot, Bud.” He gasps. “How much sauce did you, oh God, use?”

“Just one bottle. I ordered two but I couldn’t find the other.” Matt frowns, taking a small bite.

“I really like it, Matt. It’s fiery.” Bruce assures him.

“How are you not DYING?” Tony demands. Foggy looks up curiously before smiling innocently.

“Matt knows I have a reaction to peppers.”

Karen chokes, not on the spice, but in laughter.

Matt pouts, putting his fork down. “You hate it.”

“It’s just a little—” Steve says awkwardly, his face heated as saliva pools in his mouth.

“—BURNING, BURNING!” Clint jumps from his seat, bolting to the kitchen. “WHERE THE FUCK IS THE MILK, STARK?!”

One by one, the Avengers file out in a mad rush. Karen runs to the toilet, where Matt can hear her gagging. Foggy runs to help her.

“We can’t control our senses to your extent, Matt, it’s not that…” Bruce starts, then pauses. The corner of Matt’s lips turn up in a sly smile.

“Did you…?” Bruce’s eyes narrow slightly before he joins Matt in grinning like an idiot.

“I would never.”

Chapter End Notes

MATT IS A LITTLE SHIT but we love him <3 <3 <3

Didn’t expect it to take this turn but oh well. Such is fanfiction. *shrugs*
Matt’s in the tent in his and Clint’s base.

He’s hiding, not that he would care to admit it. He’s just waiting for Clint to leave so that he can take the elevator to one of the floors near the base of the tower. He could hide with the Stark employees.

Matt shakes his head at that.

Clint’s not moving from the apartment.

“Matt!” He shouts from the bedroom. “Matty, where are you? This isn’t funny – I’m getting worried!”

Matt slowly moves out of the tent, finds his way to the door. He checks Clint – who is still in his bedroom – and bolts into the living room.

Matt’s really good at staying quiet.

He hears Lucky panting from across the room. Matt takes a step towards the elevator and the stupid dog starts yapping, running for him.

Matt hears Clint making his way to the living room and bolts to the elevator, forgetting about staying quiet.

“Matt!” Clint exclaims as Matt hurries inside but Jarvis closes the doors before Clint can catch him.

“Which floor, Mr Murdock?” Jarvis asks gently.

“Get me away, I want to stay away.” Matt mumbles, checking his pockets frantically for his cane. He left it in the tent.

“To the communal floor?” Jarvis suggests.

“No!” Matt snaps. “Don’t want to see the others!”

“Perhaps to the—” Jarvis starts but Matt shouts at him instead.

“Floor 22!”

Jarvis doesn’t answer, but the elevator starts dropping.

Somehow, the walls are closing in and everything seems to fade away at the edges. Matt slumps to the floor of the elevator.

He’s only in his boxers and he’s really missing his fluffy array of onesies.

The doors open.
Matt pokes his head out. He hears nothing.

He can faintly make out some corridors but nothing far away enough that he’ll know where he’s going. Backing against the wall, Matt worries about getting lost in this maze of walls.

“Can I be of assistance, Mr Murdock?” Jarvis asks. Matt jumps out of his skin, heart fighting with his lungs for dominance. His watch.

“J-Jarvis?” Matt asks into his wristwatch. Checks the tactile surface. Almost 3PM.

“Indeed.” The dry voice returns.

Matt worries less about getting lost. Wanders down the hall on the left. He traces the wall, feeling no doors. A breeze hits him and he spins around, finding nothing. His radar is lacking, today, it seems.

“This is Research & Development.” Jarvis explains. “Though, this floor is under renovation.”

Matt sniffs, nods slightly, and then continues down the hall.

Sudden footsteps alert him to a presence in the hallway. An annoyed, sharp voice cuts through Matt’s ears. “Look, if you’re here to pester me about the finishing touches for Miss Romanoff’s armoured leotard then you can just—You’re not wearing any clothes…”

Matt flinches at the tone, feels his eyes start to water, and then frantically tries to wipe his face.

“Shit, you’re crying. I don’t really do,” she gestures to all of him, “but I have potato soup.”

Matt’s shoulders slump. He thinks about the prospect of food, sniffs, and follows the woman quietly.

“Where the hell is he Jarvis?!” Clint screams before Tony puts a hand on his shoulder briefly. “Jarvis would tell us if he’s in danger of if he leaves the tower.”

Clint’s foot finds its way into the wall pretty easily.

“Dammit, Stark, what if he’s hurt? Or upset?” Clint grinds out. “He wasn’t exactly having the best of nights.”

“What happened?” Bruce asks, putting down his tablet to join the conversation.

“I can’t tell you, I promised him.”

“You are in a similar scenario as I, then, Agent Barton.” Jarvis points out, much to Clint’s fury. “Mr Murdock is wearing his watch, I have visual and audio.”

“See?” Tony shrugs. “Let the puppy play.”

“Hope you like yellow.” The mystery woman tells him as he eats soup from a mug. The spoon clatters against the edges but it’s not unpleasant.

“C-Can’t see it.” Matt says slowly, ducking his head.
“You’re Daredevil.” She acknowledges.

Matt squirms in his chair.

“Badass.” She says, grinning. Matt hears leather squeaking as she crosses her arms. “You’re a lawyer, right?”

Matt nods, taking another mouthful of soup. It’s good.

“You’re on the wrong floor.” She scoffs. “Should be with those numbskulls in Legal.”

“What do you do here?” Matt asks. He puts his soup down and stands up. She gives him some kind of leather suit, much like his own. It feels stretchy, like spandex, however.

“Make clothes. Armour. Whatever Rich Boy wants.” She shrugs. Her hair sounds heavy, like a lion as it brushes all over her shoulders. “Month ago, some jackass called Wade files reports for a ton of stupid costumes. I was on vacation.”

Matt walks towards the pile of bagged clothes where she gave him the suit. “Really? These are just here?”

“Well, they’re not in Canada.” She says pointedly.

Matt grins widely.

“What if he’s an inch away from mortal peril!?” Clint demands. He looks between Tony and Bruce, who both wear judging expressions. “Ok, ok, a bit far-fetched.”

“You look ridiculous.” Olive – her name is Olive – comments as Matt eats the gifted soup.

He’s wearing the yellow suit with black shorts and a vest, which is apparently bulletproof. He found some black boots and gloves to match.

“I know.” Matt grins, finishing the last of his soup. “I like it.”

“You’re an idiot.” She says but he can hear the smile in her voice.

“Play dress-up with me.” Matt says excitedly, rummaging through the pile. He ignores how childish the wording sounded. He’s just a man trying on clothes. No playing.

Matt feels something furry. “Is this a…?”

“It’s a King outfit, but I only have the cloak and crown.” She digs around.

“Ooh, wear this!” Matt urges, completely forgetting about his earlier mood.

“That is a banana costume.” She shoves him playfully. “No way. I’m wearing this.”

Matt waits a moment.

“Uh, it’s a sweater made out of toy bears… Seriously, who approved this shit?” She curses, then slips the thing over her clothes. Matt giggles when she holds out the arm for him to feel. He slips
his crown on and it falls over his eyes.

“It’s big.” Matt pouts, tosses it into the pile.

“Wear this.”

He’s given a hat that feels like worms. Puts it on his head.

“Looks like a brain.” She tells him.

“Can you make stuff up here?” Matt asks excitedly, bouncing on his heels as he draws his cloak up over one arm.

“Sure.”

“Seriously, it’s been four hours.” Clint groans. “Jarvis?”

Sighing, Tony gestures to the archer. “Just tell him, J, I’m sick of him complaining.”

“Mr Murdock is with the executive manager of R&D on F22.”

“It’s ok, you should just tell Sarah about the cat. It was a complete accident.” Matt has an arm over a crying man’s shoulder when Clint storms in, Tony and Bruce behind him.

Olive Torres is sipping coffee until she notices her boss and stands up abruptly.

“But he ate her engagement ring! It’ll be covered in cat shit!” The man weeps. “She’ll want a new one and I’ll be flat-out broke! How am I supposed to pay for a wedding and a new ring?”

“She’ll understand, Rodney. Sarah’s reasonable, you know that. That’s why you proposed! She’s down to earth, nothing like Amelia!” Matt tells him, then pats his back. “Look, you have to take the first step. We all know she’ll forgive you. She forgave you after you lost Teddy but you found him again! I mean, it was Teddy’s fault for eating it anyway, why should she be angry at you?”

“Yeah.” Rodney sniffs. “You’re right, I need to make the first step.”

“There you go.” Matt encourages him. “You’re responsible, she knows that. And, hey, you’re going to have a great wedding!”

“What the fuck is going on?” Clint demands.

Matt spins to face him.

“You’ve been MIA for four hours, you know this bozo’s life story, and why are you dressed like a cactus?” Clint asks, breathless.

Matt frowns. “Rodney’s had a really tough time since Francis moved to Florida, so let’s not be mean.”

“Will you come to the wedding?” Rodney asks. “You can meet Teddy!”

Matt gives him a thumbs-up. “I would be honoured, Rod.”
“Matt, what…?” Bruce asks, dazed, while Tony laughs his ass off in the corner. Matt shrugs, slipping out of his cactus getup to reveal a red T-shirt reading ‘I might be blind but I know I look good in GREEN’.

“Well, I was upset and I came down here and Liv found me over near the copier—” Matt explains, then looks at Olive, “not that anyone ever uses it since the Christmas party – really, Greg needs to grow up.”


“You know, I bet he’s acting out because he didn’t get to plan the party, I mean, it’s such a Greg thing to do.” Matt scoffs. Olive sips her coffee as she nods.

“Matt!” Clint exclaims, seriously considering that the damned redhead drove him insane.

“Oh, yeah, so Liv brought me to her office, gave me some soup.” Matt explains, then puts a hand on her shoulder. “Tell Annabeth it was heavenly… And we put on some costumes before coming in here. Rodney printed some stuff on shirts for me! Isn’t that nice? Rod, this is why Sarah loves you, you’re just so giving.”

“And you made friends.” Bruce fills in.

Matt smiles proudly, then his face falls. “Didn’t mean to run away.”

“Yes, you did. You hid from me.” Clint raises an eyebrow. “You formed the pillows in your bed into a human shape and told me you were going back to bed.”

“Well, maybe I tried to run away, but I just wanted to be alone.” Matt sniffs.

“C’mon, Doofus, we’ll talk about it upstairs.” Clint ruffles his hair.

“Your stuff is here, Matt.” Rodney hands over a cardboard box full of clothes.

“Thanks, Rod.” Matt gives him a quick hug.

“I’ll send you the RSVP.” Rodney says as Matt hugs Olive.

“Someone had a busy day.” Clint says. He’s on the bridge in their fort while Matt is in the treehouse.

“I didn’t want to see you.” Matt sniffs. He’s wearing a king’s crown and cloak, neither of which make sense to Clint. Especially considering the crown is too big.

“Why not?” Clint asks, his voice hurt. “Did I upset you?”

“Therapy.” Matt spits the word out with as much loathing as he can muster. Then his face relaxes and he fumbles with the fur of his cape. “You know about—about…”

“And I haven’t said anything because you didn’t seem ready to talk about it.” Clint sighs. “You could have told me that you wanted some time alone. I would have respected that.”

“I’m sorry.” Matt murmurs. “I didn’t want you to get mad.”

“It’s ok to want some time alone, Matty. Everyone needs it.” Clint rubs his forehead. Each
conversation with Matt shows him just how love-deprived the redhead used to be. “It’s ok to want you-time. If you needed time to work through your feelings, I would have given you it.”

Matt drops his head, looking guilty. His head feels fuzzy with combating thoughts but he trusts Clint. Clint’s his friend, he wouldn’t tell Matt this, only to get him in trouble.

“I don’t like it when you run off, all upset, and I don’t know where you are.” Clint says, almost in a whisper. “I was worried, Bud.”

“I’ll tell you next time.” Matt winces, then flops onto his side. He curls up, his head on the bean bag chair. It rustles under his weight.

“That’s all I ask. Now, do you want to talk about… the therapy stuff?” Clint asks, moving closer to take off the crown and move Matt’s hair away from his eyes. It’s a little less floppy. He hasn’t washed since therapy, two days ago.

“Stick, he… He hurt me.” Matt says hesitantly. “But I’m not sure it was…”

“You’re a lawyer, Matt. A child can’t consent.” Clint says slowly.

“Ok.” Matt murmurs and they leave it at that.

“Matt?”

“Yeah?”

“You’re a goofball.”

Chapter End Notes

Everyone loves Matt. He's so silly and lovable; he makes a great first impression. :D
“Matty, I promise I’ll be back on Wednesday.” Clint wraps his arms around the fluff of hair against his abdomen. “And I’ll miss you, but Tony and Bruce are here – they’ll be great fun.”

Matt looks miserable, Clint notes when the fluff pulls away. His eyes are wet and his mouth is slightly downturned but he’s trying his best to remain calm.

“Day after tomorrow, Matty – I’ll be back.” Clint tells him.

Natasha’s waiting patiently by the elevator to go up to the helipad on the roof. They were called by SHIELD that morning.

The elevator starts moving and Matt flinches at the noise. Bruce rubs a hand over his shoulder while Clint turns to face it.


“Coulson, I’ll just be a minute.” Clint says, then turns back to the redhead. “Ok, Bud, I really need to go now.”

Matt’s fingers tremble as he toys with the hem of Clint’s sleeve. “Ok.”

“Bruce and Tony will keep you safe.” Clint assures him, pulls him in for another hug.

“This is Mr Murdock?” Matt hears ‘Coulson’ ask Natasha quietly. Her hair bounces across her shoulders as she nods.

“Bye, Matty.” Clint ruffles his hair.

Matt doesn’t say anything as Clint gathers his bag and bow, then leaves slowly.

The trio get in the elevator and Matt waits until he can’t hear Clint’s heartbeat to allow himself to curl up in a ball.

Matt’s taking extra good care of Lucky. Bruce is helping.

The dog rubs wet fur against him as Matt tries to wash him in the dog shower on his floor. Dice is teetering in the middle of the seesaw.

“When does Clint come back?” Matt asks quietly. Being without his best friend makes him jittery. As if a hand ghosts over the back of his neck, just waiting to strangle him.

Stick.

“He’s scheduled for midday on Wednesday.” Bruce explains, lathering Dice’s special shampoo onto Lucky’s back.

“What if he doesn’t come back?” Matt asks quietly. His chest is aching with nervousness, even as Bruce reassures him.

“He’s just taking out a target, it’s highly unlikely that he’ll be hurt.”
Matt sniffs, shaking his head. “What if he doesn’t want to come back?”

Matt’s given Clint every reason to hate him. He’s been emotional, broken, and completely dependent on the other man. Why should Clint return? To take care of Matt? As if he’s a child that needs protecting from monsters under his bed.

His bed.

Matt’s heart rate spikes.

A hand. Trailing slowly across his back. Along the curve of his spine, ending somewhere near his coccyx.

A fist in his face and rough, calloused fingers wrapped around his limbs.

Thunder as his limbs are pressed down onto the ice table, naked and splayed out, and endless display of shame. Coiling serpents around his arms and legs.

A hand grazing his inner thigh.

Matt lurches from the dog, screaming as he stumbles into a wall, his senses wreaking silent havoc. He hits as hard as he can when a hand touches his arm, fights on instinct.

“Matt—Matt, I need to go.” Bruce says in a strained voice.

The chemical smell is choking his nostrils.

“I’ll send Tony…” Matt hears footsteps trailing circles around his ears, coming and going in zigzags.

“Matty.”

His head moved up to the sound, an old habit. He smiles toothily. “Stick, are we fighting again today?”

“No.” Stick replied, gruff as ever. “Something different. On the chair.”

Matt positioned himself on the wooden chair and Stick set to work knotting ropes around his ankles and wrists, then his waist and even his thighs. The ropes hurt – they dug in until Matt whimpered.

He got a slap for that.

“Free yourself.” Stick told him, pushing the chair to Matt’s left. He crashed onto the floor of the basement, his shoulder clipping the ground at a painful angle. His arm felt crushed under the weight of the chair, his body resting on it.

It took an hour of pleas and feeble attempts before Stick righted his position. Pulled the chair back onto its four legs and drove his fist into Matt’s nose.

It gushed with blood.

“I’m sorry. I’ll do better next time.” Matt promised as Stick undone the bondage pinning down his waist and thighs.

“Yeah, you’d better.” Stick leered over him for a long moment before dipping a hand to the
waistband of his trousers.

“S- Stick?” Matt asked warily. Surely the man wouldn’t pull his pants down?

But Stick started.

He never stopped.

“Murdock!” A voice insists near his face.
Wet fur on his chest, rubbing up against him. Something moist and coarse stroking his face. A tongue?

Hands under his back, pushing him upwards. A cold wall.

“He’s not screaming or anything.”

“Yeah, he’s just crying under his covers.”

“Probably thinks a monster’s going to jump out!”

Matt sniffs under the sandpaper sheets of his bed. A familiar smell of incense hits him when the covers are lightly pulled back. “Matthew?”

“S-S-Sorry—Sorry, I’m sorry.” Matt sobs, curling up tighter.

“No need, Child.” She brushes away his hair, wipes his cheeks. “But it’s bedtime. Turn over, I’ll tuck you in.”

“You’re soaked, Murdock.”

Metal. Bucky. Matt moves closer to the soft whir of his arm, then remembers it’s an arm. Arms have hands. Hands can hurt him.

“Just, um, I’m going to move you. Ok?”

Matt flinches, expecting the touches to come quickly. They don’t. Matt searches around. For what, he isn’t certain. He finds Bucky’s flesh arm and nudges it.

“I need your permission.” Bucky says. “Don’t want another one o’ them.”

Matt nods.

Bucky’s arms slot under his back and knees, pulling him close to a thumping chest and then off the ground. He shuffles in the strong arms until he smells mint shampoo.

“Clint?” Matt asks hesitantly. Bucky falters, then gently places Matt on the floor. From the feeling of the square tiles under his hands, he realizes that it’s the bathroom. Clint’s shampoo is somewhere in here, bottled and potent.

“It’s Bucky.” He’s told hesitantly before a hard hand brushes against the soft bristles of a towel.

Bucky drapes the towel over his shoulders and it’s the minute heat that makes him sneeze, makes him realize that he’s shaking because he’s freezing.

He hears Bucky turning on the tap. From the time it takes to hit the floor, Matt garner’s it the
bathtub.

“I won’t make it too hot.” Bucky tells him.

Matt wonders about Bucky taking a bath with his arm. Surely Stark updated it to be waterproof. Does he wear it in the bath?

Then Matt discovers that the bath is for him.

“No.” Matt whines.

“Pipsqueak, you stink. No offence but you need a bath.” Bucky points out. “You’re covered in more fur than Lucky and you’re cold. You’re having a bath.”

Matt hears something smelly being poured in. He’s not sure how he feels about that but, when it starts making bubbles, his ears perk up to the sound of gentle popping.

“Bubble bath?” Matt asks curiously. He’s never had one before. Is it just soap in water?

Matt’s nose likes the idea of a bubble bath when each pop lets off a fruity fragrance.


“No!” Matt insists. He didn’t. He’s not going to do that, even if he wants to, until Clint comes back. Maybe if Tony tells Clint how well he’s been behaving, then Clint won’t leave.

Oh shit. He made Bruce angry. He made Hulk angry.

His face falls.

“What?” Bucky asks. He’s already turning off the water.

“Did Bruce…?” Matt tugs on his wet T-shirt but it sticks to him again in a matter of seconds. He’s soaked to the bone.

The dog shower must have turned on him.

“No. He had to go, though. Was green at the edges.” Bucky’s metal arm shrugs and Matt finds it delightful. “He was real sorry about leaving you. I was closest.”

Matt doesn’t say anything. Bucky tells him to get in the bath so Matt tries to get up but a crippling pain between his legs renders him useless.

“Need some help undressing?”

Matt flinches at the thought of Bucky seeing him naked. Even Clint hasn’t seen him naked!

“Oh, grow up, I was a solder. I’ve seen weirder than whatever you have down ‘ere.” Bucky raises an eyebrow before kneeling beside Matt.

With Bucky’s help, he manages to his feet. Bucky holds him steady while Matt tugs off his shirt, and then Bucky helps him with his trousers.

“You ok, Pipsqueak?” Bucky questions as Matt hesitates.
Matt nods after a moment of careful consideration.

Bucky’s fucked up too. He won’t hurt Matt.

He tugs down his boxers and Bucky helps him step out of them. Limping in the direction of the bathtub, Bucky serves as his crutch.

Matt’s heart is thumping against his chest but Bucky’s hands are on his ribs, nowhere near his pelvic region. He tries to relax, counts to ten in his head.

Bucky notices, starts humming gently. The song makes roots in Matt’s ears. The soft tune coaxes his attention away from his nakedness, at least until he approaches the popping bubbles. They take over for Bucky.

“Think you can step in, Pipsqueak?” Bucky questions. Matt simply glares as best he can at the older man and slowly moves one foot over the side of the clawfoot tub. His foot slips but Bucky keeps him steady while he moves the other in.

Once Matt’s in the bath, the feeling of bubbles popping on his skin distracts him enough from Bucky’s humiliating presence.

“I’m going to check on Banner. I’ll be back soon to check on you.” Bucky explains as he throws a fresh towel at the side of the tub. It lands in Matt’s reach.

“If you start bleeding, tell Jarvis.” Bucky says. “Jarvis, watch him.”

“Certainly, Sergeant Barnes.”

When Bucky returns, Matt has already poured more bubble bath into the water and the foam is slipping over the edges. Matt, himself, has a majestic bubble beard and soapy hair.

“Enjoying yourself?” Bucky asks, entertained. Bruce is outside, smelling much less like chemicals and much more like nervous sweat.

“I made more bubbles.” Matt points out proudly. “Did you know that dogs like bubbles?”

Dice is sitting happily beside the bath. Matt blows a bubble through his index finger and thumb and the dog growls at it before snapping his jaws shut over the thing. The pinprick remnants land on his nose.

“Yeah, yeah.” Bucky rolls his eyes. “Bruce is here, for when you’re done. Don’t go trying to climb out if you’re hurt. I’ll be in the living room when you’re ready.”

Matt wipes away the middle of his beard, now sporting white mutton chops.

Bucky closes the door.
Matt dips his face until the water until his mouth is covered and he has to breathe through his nose.

“Don’t pout, I’ve given you long enough.” Bucky scowls. “The water is cold and the bubbles have mostly popped.”

Matt flicks the boring, non-bubbly froth on the surface of the bathwater. He sinks under the water, lies on the base of the tub with his knees poking out. The water muffles the world. Matt’s closed eyes stop pressing hard together and relax, no longer tense.

It’s as if he’s sleeping.

Bucky grabs him from underneath. His lungs are burning.

“Are you trying to drown yourself, Idiot?” Bucky snaps.

Matt frowns, panting above the surface. He hadn’t tried to – he just forgot. Forgetting is fine. He’s fine.

Matt’s eyes open slowly, he turns to Bucky. Resting his arms and head on the side of the tub, Matt wonders what the soldier looks like.

He has long hair, of which Matt is aware. He’s not sure of much other than that.

“What colour are your eyes?” Matt asks quietly, reaching down to trace the foot of the bathtub.

“Grey.” Bucky mumbles.

“Hair?”

“Dark brown. Does it, um, matter?” Bucky asks. “Nelson figures you have an idea in your head.”

Matt frowns, leans back into the cool water. “I don’t think in looks, not like you do. I don’t describe people like that. I just think in shapes, feelings, smells. I don’t see people so I don’t usually think about appearances.”

“Then why do you ask?” Bucky sighs as he sits down beside the tub, evidently tired of trying to coax Matt out.

“Dunno.” Matt shrugs. “I guess it’d be nice to see you all.”

“It’s not important.” Bucky says. “Hair colour, eye colour, skin colour, who gives a damn?”

Matt hums his agreement, then reaches out for Bucky’s arm. The soldier jerks away, his flesh hand moving to rub the metal surface awkwardly.

“Sorry.” Matt ducks his head.

“Why do you insist on touching my arm?” Bucky asks, his fingers gripping the metal surface.

“I like it.” Matt drapes himself over the edge of the bath. “It sings to me.”

“Sings?”
“It takes away all of the noises that touch it.” Matt fawns over the prosthetic. “It moves so—so smoothly. It don’t change temperature. So strong.”

“You’re a dope.” Bucky tells him, then holds out his arm.

Matt’s careful to feel the metal slates one by one across Bucky’s forearm before slipping back into the bath.

“Pipsqueak, get out the damn bath.” Bucky nudges his shoulder with his flesh hand, then crosses his arms.

Matt, reluctant, leans forward. He’s in less pain but his legs aren’t exactly flexible. Bucky helps him stand up, like before, and then eases him out of the bath.

“I told you to tell Jarvis if you were bleeding.” He accuses, tossing a towel at the redhead.

Matt tilts his head, wraps the towel around his waist with wrinkled fingers. “I didn’t realise.”

“Mr Murdock showed no visible signs of discomfort.” Jarvis pipes up.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m taking you to Banner.” Bucky informs him.

“Matt, I apologize for earlier.” Bruce drops his head. “I wasn’t very helpful.”

Matt’s lying on a bed in the med bay, in Banner’s private room, because Bucky is overprotective. His hands aren’t tied down but he feels uncomfortable, especially with what is about to happen.

“S’ok.” Matt turns his head, fidgeting. “Bucky made me a bubble bath.”

“That sounds fun.” Bruce smiles but his hummingbird heart is nervous and much faster than it usually is. “I like those, so does Natasha. Was it the summer fruits or lavender?”

“Fruity.” Matt jumps when Bruce’s gloves snap around his wrists.

“I know you’re nervous but I’ll talk you through everything I’m about to do.” Bruce lifts up a speculum and Matt lurches back in the bed, grabbing either side.

Bruce drops the instrument back onto the metal tray and sits on the edge of the bed. “Matt, you realise, if something goes wrong with your treatment, there’s the risk of permanent incontinence?”

Matt’s face drains of blood. The heat from his face pools in his chest, where his heart runs a mile a minute.

“I don’t want to worry you. So far, everything’s went well. You’ve been healing at an extraordinary rate and I’m very pleased with the progress. But, Matt, I need to do my job.” Bruce explains.

Matt hesitates, then slides back down the bed, on his back.

Bruce removes the bedsheet and moves Matt into position (soles flat on either side of the bed) before performing the check-up.

Matt’s mind flutters away while Bruce does what he has to do.
“Matt?” Bruce is talking to him, gently. “Matt, can you hear me?”

Bruce’s calm voice translates somewhere in the back of his head. His voice is calm, like tea or a heartbeat. Centring. His head shifts to the side but the sight movement feels tiring.

When did his head become so hot and heavy?

He’s asking about bruises. Matt supposes he hasn’t seen him fully naked before. He thinks back to the fainting spell – perhaps Bruce only took care of him upon waking? Matt can’t remember.

“These bruises, they’re from… before we went on holiday?”

He can’t even say it.

Matt was raped. Tied down, beaten, deprived, and fucked.

Fucked mercilessly.

Matt’s not sure why Bruce isn’t happy. He’s laughing, he’s laughing, and Bruce should be overjoyed.

Bruce isn’t.

Matt remembers it. Like hell he doesn’t. Stick leading him down to the basement of St Agnes – it was ‘haunted’ by a wailing spirit – coaxing him into fights and trials.

Every damned time he failed… Stick would be there. Leering.

He was fucked. Hard and painfully fucked. Stick didn’t care, no matter how often he promised Matt that he’d be his mentor, that he’d help the boy.

He was a child.

Sometimes it was sweet. That’s how they do it, you see. Stick was kind. Took Matt for ice cream and told him he was a good boy.

Told him he was loved.

It was on occasion. Usually, Matt didn’t get ice cream. He wasn’t a good boy. But he was loved. Stick’s perverted idea of love crepted under his skin and bit at his bones. He reached into Matt and stole everything dearest to him.

Matt was raped.

Even as a man, Stick’s twisted him. The idea that he could be out there, watching at any time…

“Matt?” Bruce is breathing shakily, his teeth clicking together as his jaw clamps down. “I think we should talk.”

Matt’s eyes close. Tears roll along his temple to his hairline, disappearing. Erased.

There was no proof. No proof.

“Matthew, I was abused, too.”
“He… thought I was a monster.”

Matt’s sitting on the bed, wrapped in the thin sheets. Bruce is across from him, smelling like chemicals.

The thing is: Bruce doesn’t feel angry.

Matt knows emotions. He used to be terrible at figuring out how people felt, and it shows when he tries to anticipate behaviour, but hearts don’t lie.

Bruce’s heart is fast. His throat is wet with saliva. He’s pulsating with fear-induced adrenaline.

Classic fight or flight.

But his eyes are wet and his movements are slow, despite the blood pumping to them.

Matt thinks Bruce might be ‘green around the edges’.

“I guess he was right.” Bruce sniffs, backs himself against the far wall. His head turns to Matt suddenly.

The chemical smell is pungent now, growing acrid as it fills the room.

“You’re different, Matt. Innocent. You don’t deserve—You were hurt!” Bruce’s voice is stilted, deeper. His muscles are growing and Matt’s a little afraid because the Hulk is big and Matt is so tired of being the small one.

The weak one.

The Hulk comes out, slowly. Like a mole, Matt thinks. Like an animal, jumpy and wild.

Maybe Bruce is scared. Maybe Bruce doesn’t want to be the little guy, either.

“You’re scaring me.” Matt says, quietly. Maybe Hulk won’t hear him.

He does. He doesn’t seem happy. Doesn’t seem angry.

“Is Bruce scared?” Matt asks.

“No talk Puny Banner!” Hulk snaps, throwing his fist around. He doesn’t hit anything.

Matt shuffles in his bed.

“Matt, we’re stationed outside. Hulk isn’t violent, try to keep him contained.” Tony’s robotic voice floats through the walls to him. “We’re going to—”

Matt stops listening to the Avengers.

“Clint says Stick raped me.” Matt confesses. “I guess, legally, he did.”

Hulk doesn’t move. It’s strange, witnessing the strong scent of (Bleach? Medicine?) the Hulk. Matt can perceive the large body but, really, he thinks the visual perception might be scarier.
“Hurt Devil Man.” Hulk grinds out, his large teeth clicking around in his mouth.

“Do you…” Matt sniffles. “Do you want to be friends?”

Hulk turns to face him abruptly. Matt jumps slightly.

“Devil Man scared. STUPID!” Hulk hits his head angrily.

Matt shuffles out of bed, keeping the sheets around him. “It’s ok. You’re not stupid.”

Hulk grunts, hits the metal table.

Matt can hear Jarvis talking to Tony in the distance. Ignores it.

“I think, if you’re gentle, I’d like to give you a hug?” Matt asks softly, reaching out his hand. He hesitates. “You’re a man a-and that’s scary, but I think you’re nice.”

“Devil Man.” Hulk pokes his arm, tests it. Matt doesn’t flinch. “Devil Man hug.”

Hulk takes incredible caution when sitting down – denting the tiled floor – and moving Matt towards him like a doll.

Matt climbs up onto one of his thighs, feels the muscles in Hulk’s leg bulging without effort, and shuffles against his chest, nuzzling in. He feels a tree trunk arm reach around his back and carefully give him a small pat. It surprises Matt, but he’s in no pain.

It occurs to Matt that Hulk is like a child. A massive, muscular child.

“Maybe we can play a game?” Matt asks.

Hulk bounces a little and Matt almost falls off but Hulk steadies his back with a single finger.

His nerves are still fried, but Matt thinks Hulk’s anger issues might be his attempts to protect himself more than anything else.

Matt sits with Hulk for a while. They play ‘I spy’, which is interesting when Hulk describes things as colours, but Matt can use his imagination.

“Red, red…” Matt listens to the room, tracks the objects. Bruce doesn’t exactly decorate. “Paper?”

Matt points at the papers on his desk but Hulk lifts him from under the arms, carefully. “Devil Man! Devil Man!”

“Oh, you mean my suit?” Matt asks curiously but he feels a thick finger brush against his hair.

“Well, I see something green.” Matt giggles, reaching out to lightly touch Hulk’s face.

He seems nervous about it, doesn’t say anything, but then moves Matt closer.

“Your hair’s curly, too.” Matt says when he feels some of the thick hair brush against his hands.

“Curly.” Hulk murmurs, then puts Matt against his chest and holds him there.

Matt wonders if it’s supposed to be a hug, then he hears Hulk’s fast heart in his chest. He presses an ear close and listens.
Hulk’s hand starts to feel smaller and smaller as his heart slows down. At half his usual size, the large arms wrap around Matt’s waist and a face burrows into his chest until Bruce is there, his snail-pace heart and tea-like demeanour.

“Thank you.” Bruce cries into his shoulder. His nails are practically digging into him with the intensity of the hug. “Thank you. Matt, thank you.”

Matt returns the hug, trying to keep a hold of the blanket with one hand because he’s still naked and Bruce’s stretchy pants are ripped.

“He’s trying to protect you.” Matt says quietly. “Just like—just like I’m trying to…”

“It was rape, Matt. Denial doesn’t protect you.” Bruce pulls away, sniffling and wiping his face. “It keeps you ignorant.”

Matt tightens his grip on the sheets.

“Did he hurt you?” Bruce asks nervously. “I-I remember it. Much more than usual, it was… easy. But did he?”

“No.” Matt shakes his head, shuffles back to the bed. “He was kind.”

“Thank you, Matt.”

“Ok. Ok, ok, ok.”

Matt’s thinking of calling it ‘the Council of Overly Worried Friends’. It consists of Tony, Clint (who is currently absent), Bruce (who is currently curled up beside Matt, sleeping), Foggy, and (apparently) Bucky. Foggy is reporting to Karen.

“Ok.”

“Stark, shut your trap.” Bucky grunts, then scowls at Matt. “Of all the people to fucking cuddle, Murdock, what were you thinking?”

“That Hulk might be a cuddler?” Matt offers. Humour does not help the situation.

“That Hulk might be a cuddler?” Matt offers. Humour does not help the situation.

“Matt, I’m trying this thing where I don’t yell at you but you’re not making it easy.” Foggy rubs a face over his hand.

“What the hell, Matt?” Tony demands, then shuts up when Bruce stirs.

“Hulk is just keeping Bruce safe.” Matt defends himself. “I understand that!”

“Yeah, Pipsqueak, we all do stuff to keep ourselves safe.” Bucky stands up, gestures to Tony. “Like alcoholism. Not all of us turn into a giant ass monster.”

“He’s not a monster!” Matt shouts back. “He’s not! Stop it! Is this how you talk about me when I’m not around?”

“Of course not, Matt.” Tony sighs, going for a drink. “And I’m not an alcoholic. I can stop if I want.”

Matt wouldn’t touch that with one of Stilt-Man’s legs.
“Bruce is your friend.” Matt accuses. “And Hulk is a part of him!”

Bruce stirs again, his eyes opening slowly. He shuffles closer to Matt, who wraps his arms around him tightly.

Bruce seems surprised, if his quiet gasp is anything to go by, but he relaxes into it.

“Hulk is my friend, just as much as Bruce is.” Matt argues defiantly.

“Matt…” Bruce says hesitantly from his arms.

“Don’t argue.” Matt tells him sternly. “We played ‘I spy’, there’s no coming back.”

“If, and only if, you happen to be in the same room together again with the Hulk, I’ll be wearing my armour and you will have a comm with you. Clear?” Tony rubs his head.

The other two look horrified but Tony makes a shushing gesture at them.

“Agreed?” Tony asks.

Matt nods, sticking out his fist. “Agreed.”

Tony bumps it and the deal is made.

Since there’s no Clint to stay with him, Matt’s snuggling with Bruce. The only reason he was given permission by the Council today was because he argued that Bruce is far too tired to be angry in any case.

Bucky may or may not be sleeping in Clint’s unused bedroom as back-up.

“Bruce?” Matt nudges the half-asleep scientist.

“H’m?”

“I think… maybe I was raped.” Matt whispers. Bruce turns his head to look at the redhead, pulls him closer.

They both fall asleep soundly.
Matt’s excited for his video call with Clint. He’s also nervous. Currently, Tony is recounting the events of yesterday and the Hulk fiasco from the hammock. Bruce is patiently waiting outside of the tent, where Matt is trying to block out the world.

“Matt, can I peek in?” Bruce asks, ‘knocking’ on the thin flap.

Matt shrugs. He forgets Bruce doesn’t see like he does, and then murmurs into his folded arms. “Fine.”

“Clint’s asking for you.” Bruce tells him. “Would you like to talk to him?”

Matt turns away.

“Matt, can you tell me what number you’re on?” Bruce asks, shifting so that he’s cross-legged outside the tent. “On the scale that Dr Collins showed you.”

Three – feelings of panic and anxiety.

“Four.” Matt says, mostly for Clint’s benefit. He wants to be strong.

He’d really like to go back to bed.

“Alright.” Bruce’s heart spikes – he doesn’t believe it. “Well, in that case, Clint would like to say ‘hi’.”

Matt hesitantly turns around, crawls out of the tent. Tony positions him on the hammock in front of the camera. Matt doesn’t face it.

“Hey, Buddy!” Clint’s voice is distorted through the speakers. Hollow and robotic. “Matty, it’s really warm over here! I mean, I can’t tell you where I am, but… How’re you doing?”

“Fine.” Matt turns his head away, picks at the duvet. “I’m fine.”

“Tony told me you and Bruce had fun yesterday, h’m?” Clint asks, a little concerned.

“I was careful!” Matt objects but Clint is quick to shush him.

“Hey, Buddy, I wasn’t accusing you of anything. From what I hear, you and Hulk hit it off. As long as you continue being careful, I think it’s great.” Clint says through the monitor. “But I was a little worried about why you were with Bruce in the first place.”

“I was fine.” Matt insists. “I just—I couldn’t remember Emily’s tips. I—Last night, Bruce helped me. Bruce, tell…”

“Listening to music was helpful.” Bruce offers, leaning against the back of the hammock. He gently pats Matt’s shoulder. “Just a nightmare, no panic attacks or flashbacks, but it was helpful.”

“That’s great!” Clint says enthusiastically.

Maybe Clint will come home if Matt keeps doing the therapy stuff. Matt hopes he will – not having Clint around is stressful. He hadn’t even considered the idea that Clint, himself, might get hurt. What if he doesn’t come back for an entirely new reason?
Matt’s stomach gurgles.

“He’s been trying to impress us, I think.” Tony comments, loudly enough so Clint can hear. “Ate four pieces of toast for breakfast, no coaxing.”

Matt turns his head away. It doesn’t pass his attention that he’s being treated like a child. This stuff should be easy. Why isn’t it easy?

“Well, it sounds like you’re keeping an open mind about therapy.” Clint sounds happy through the monitor.

“Then you’ll come back?” Matt asks.

There’s a pause from the screen and Matt can’t perceive Clint’s image. His face falls.

Maybe he should try harder.

“I washed Lucky, too. L-Let him sleep in the bedroom.” Matt sniffs, then straightens up.

Stop crying, he berates himself, you’re supposed to be showing Clint that you’re a man – one who can take care of himself. Not a child.

“Matt, of course I’m coming back.” Clint says, completely ignoring how he tolerated Lucky’s horrible stench and, worse, the licking. “Is that what you’re worried about?”

“I’m fine, not worried.” Matt insists.

“Yeah, yeah.” Clint says in a sigh. “Matty, listen, ok?”

Matt nods, presumes Clint can see it.

“I’m coming back tomorrow.” Clint states. “Even if you completely ignore the therapy stuff, stay in your bed all day, don’t eat, or blow up the freaking tower. Matty, what on Earth made you think I wasn’t coming back?”

Matt shrugs with his left shoulder.

“Ok, that’s a whole new can of worms.” Clint says slowly. Rustling noises. “I need to go, Bud, but I’ll be back tomorrow, I promise. I’m really proud of you.”

“Bye.” Matt says quietly.

“Bye, Bud.”

When they finish, Matt closes the screen of the laptop, gingerly lifts it up, and hurls it blindly across the room. He clambers out of the hammock, runs to the living room, curls up in the elevator.

The doors close before Bruce or Tony can reach him.

Jarvis is nice to him, asks him gently if he wants to go anywhere. When he doesn’t reply, the box drops two floors and the doors open.

“Pipsqueak?”

Matt sniffles, listens for Bucky’s heartbeat, then his arm.
“You’re on the floor.” Bucky points out, joining him with an undignified grunt.

“What if Clint doesn’t want to come back?” Matt sobs, reaching out for Bucky’s shirt. He shuffles over to the soldier, places his head on the strong chest, and listens for the steady heartbeat.

“He’s obsessed with you, Pip, he ain’t staying away for long.” Bucky rolls his eyes. “C’mon. We’re baking.”

“Baking?” Matt frowns at the sudden change of topic. He really wants to cry.

Unfortunately, Bucky lifts him up and carries him through a door. Matt’s nose picks up several things in the room – mostly chocolate – as Bucky sits him on a stool. His ears twitch at the other heartbeat in the room.

“Hey, Murdock.” Wilson says, clearing his throat.

“Matt’s going to bake with us.” Bucky states blandly, crossing his arms.

“But Clint might…” Matt mumbles but is that flour? Are they making cookies? A cake?

“Therapy baking.” Sam explains when he opens a carton of eggs curiously. He touches the shells lightly but then pushes them far away. He hates the feeling of raw egg.

“Chocolate, nuts, raisins…” Sam lists off each flavour as Matt’s nose searches the kitchen.

“Oatmeal?” Matt asks shyly. He hurries to wash his hands with smelly soap. The water is forceful on his sensitive palms and he forgot which way was hot, but they’re cleaned soon enough.

Matt finds the raisins, sticks his hands in and feels their squishy textures.

“Oatmeal, sure.” Sam offers.

Bucky’s not talking very much and that’s ok because Matt is quickly preoccupied when they finish the batter.

The oily chunks mush under his fingers, creamed and satisfying. His fingers sink into the mix. It almost feels like being under water – his fingers aren’t feeling much in particular. Touch is muffled as everything blends together in large globs of paste.

In contrast, Matt knows there was seven hundred and seventy-eight grains of salt in the pinch he lifted earlier.

Ok, he wasn’t very helpful in the whole ‘baking’ part but Sam made it clear that Matt is doing a great job at mixing the dough.

He’s finished with his dough when Bucky insists they need to add more.

Matt’s fingers are delicious, he finds as he unabashedly licks them clean. The last one is cleaned by Nova, the slightly larger kitten he gifted Bucky. Matt delights in feeling the bristles on the cat’s tongue, strokes her soft fur and almost purrs himself.

“These’ll go pretty quickly.” Bucky nudges him while Sam adds the various flavour ingredients. “Might want to save one for Clint.”

“What if—?” Matt goes to ask but Bucky laughs at him. “There’s no way he doesn’t want to rush on the next plane back and find out what onesie you’re sporting.”
“Dog.” Matt says, as if Bucky can’t see the floppy, black ears.

“Pipsqueak, people are strange.” Bucky says slowly.

Matt nods, waiting for him to continue.

“But Barton is the weirdest and there’s no chance of him finding someone else to put up with him, so I guess you’re stuck with him.”
“Jarvis?” Matt’s in the elevator, holding a box with several cookies inside. “Can… Is Foggy upstairs?”

“Mr Nelson is present on his floor. Miss Page is absent.” Jarvis tells him. “Shall I take you there?”

“Foggy says it’s ok?”

The elevator moves without any more conversation.

The metal doors whoosh open and the speaker dings obnoxiously. Matt steps through the doors and into the sweet-smelling room.

“He’s quiet. Nervous. It’s as if he’s afraid of the world, y’know?” Matt hears Foggy’s voice travelling through the walls. “He’s always been shy with people. Introverted. But he’s scared of me.”

“Give him some time.” Claire. “Everything probably seems difficult right now, more than it usually does.”

“I know, I know.” Foggy sighs. Flesh on flesh. Wiping a hand across his face. “Karen was scared like this after the Union Allied disaster. It’s just not going away, what if it doesn’t—”

“Mr Nelson,” Jarvis tells Foggy, “Mr Murdock has arrived on this floor.”

Matt shifts. Has Claire told Foggy about Stick? He doesn’t want to lie to Foggy because, apparently, that’s not a good thing, even if it’s for his own good. But what if it’s for Matt’s own good? What if he’s scared to say it?

What if Foggy tells him he should have fought back?

Because he didn’t. He didn’t fight. The first time, he couldn’t. Then, later, when the ropes were gone and Stick was promising love and a father and a home? When he threatened violence? Matt didn’t fight. He’s not sure he would, now. Stick knows his weak spots, emotionally and physically.

But he was too young. So it was wrong.

“Matt!” Foggy greets him. “You brought delicious treats!”

Matt thinks of the cookies.

Matt thinks of Foggy.

Shy? He isn’t shy! Sure, he doesn’t like strangers, especially when they get too close or, God forbid, talk to him. That’s normal. He can hold a conversation – like with Olive and Rodney! He’s not shy.

You hate parties, he tells himself, And crowds.

They’re loud and annoying. No-one likes parties.

“Everything ok?” Foggy asks, gently.
Matt nods, doesn’t say anything, and holds out the plastic box.

“I can have one? Thanks.” Foggy says, opening it up. Matt follows him to the soft couches, sits down quietly.

“Oh, hey.” Foggy gets his attention. “You convinced Sam to make oatmeal?”

Matt’s favourite.

Matt’s face crinkles, for just a second, before he hits Foggy’s arm to get his attention.

“What’s up?” Foggy asks quietly, putting the box down on the coffee table. He sits beside Matt.

“Three.” Matt says quietly. He knows he’s really a two but he doesn’t want Foggy to worry any more than he so clearly is.

His heart is hammering, his throat wet. Matt’s really sick of people being sad because of him.

“Three, that’s…” Foggy falters. “Not great. You have a list or something, stuff you’re supposed to do?”

Matt curls up but, somewhere on the ‘outside’ of his head, Jarvis is reciting the various options on the list.

He hears Jarvis mention something about his fort, and then Foggy is taking the pillows off of the couch.

“Matt, come make a pillow fort with me.” Foggy takes his hands, eases him onto the ground, and fits pillows around them. Each one is heavy, Matt senses, they must be from the expensive couch. Foggy slots them into a ring around Matt and himself, then props up some on the ring. A blanket is the finishing touch.

“Little spaces are good, right?” Foggy asks him.

Matt burrows his face away.

Foggy almost destroys the fort by jumping up when he has an idea, bolts frantically from the circle of pillows, and then returns moments later.

“Matt, ok, I have something you’ll like.” Foggy says, doesn’t show him what it is.

Matt can hear hair swishing back and forth from the thing Foggy holds behind his back. It doesn’t smell like much.

Uninterested, he turns his head away. Tries to hide the few tears that drip down his cheeks. Breathing is difficult.

It’s getting caught in his throat. Thick, rancid air that his tongue and nose don’t agree with.

Matt tries to puke but nothing comes up, despite his gagging. He dry heaves for a minute with Foggy keeping a hand on his back. He almost wishes he was sick – it would be more satisfying than choking on nothing.

Then the thing is plopped in his lap.

It’s soft, Matt realises immediately. His fingers graze the short, stubbly fluff that grows
considerably longer at one end. It’s an odd shape. Oblong with a head and four limbs. Matt finds a tail with a fluffy tip, frowns at it.

“Wol—Dog?” Matt asks, then shakes his head.

“Keep guessing.” Foggy encourages. “Soft, right?”

Matt nods along, judges the thing. He can’t think of anything with a fluffy tip on it’s tail.

“Rabbits h-have—they have short tails.” Matt states warily.

“Not a bunny.” Foggy agrees. “It’s a wild animal.”

Matt can’t remember what many wild animals look like. It’s not what he spends a lot of his time on. He traces it. It’s got fur like a horse’s mane but all over its face. Mane.

“Lion?” Matt asks and Foggy congratulates him.

“Yeah, well done!” Foggy squeezes him lightly. Matt prods the plush nervously. “Remember how you used to play with my dino figures?”

Matt screws up his face. He wasn’t playing – it was research! How is he supposed to know what a dinosaur looks like? Museums are great for disability services but they don’t exactly let him grope T-rex skeletons!

He’s not a child, he doesn’t need a toy.

“It’s fluffy.” Foggy coaxes him. “This way, you’ll remember what lions look like.”

Matt knows they look like cats. Large cats. There’s a mane and claws involved.

But Matt didn’t know about the fluff on the tail. He hasn’t seen one before – his did didn’t have money for zoo trips and, after Stick, he grew up. Adults don’t care about lions. Unless they work in a zoo or something.

Matt runs his fingers over the face, decides it’s a good research tool, and feels the plastic of a round eye.

“Ok.” Matt murmurs.

Foggy is very helpful, in Matt’s opinion.

With Bruce at some conference, Tony is his new pillow.

He notices the lion toy.

“Found yourself a toy?” Tony chuckles, turning over gingerly. “It’s cute.”

Matt can hear the arc reactor moving in Tony’s chest. It sounds deep and uncomfortable.

“Foggy gave me it.” Matt says, then steels his face. “So I can identify lions better.”

“Obviously, Cherry. That’s a skill we all desperately need.” Tony hums along, not believing him. “Gives me an idea, though.”
Matt ignores Tony and his ideas. He places his head on Tony’s chest, below the reactor yet still over his ribs, and closes his eyes.

The lion nestles into Matt, completely by coincidence.
Here's To Shitty Fathers

Tony’s eyes open slowly. The lights turn on (dimmed – Jarvis is amazing) and Tony squints. His chest aches, but not more than usual. He squints at the corner of the bed, where Dice is sleeping soundly. Lucky is curled into the other dog, lying on his back with four golden paws flopping in the air.

Matt whimpers.

Tony glances to the spot beside him. Matt looks uncomfortable, but not fitful.

The smell hits him after a small moment of making sure that Matt isn’t having a nightmare.

Tony looks to the dogs – they’re sleeping soundly. No yellow spots on the duvet. He glances at his side again, takes in Matt’s restless expression.

He looks under the covers and, sure enough…

“Matt, wake up.” Tony climbs out of the bed, shakes Matt’s shoulder gently. The dogs wake with the movement.

Dice, alert, jumps from his spot and glances at his owner. Lucky flops onto his side, closing his eyes again.

“Matt.” Tony moves around to the other side of the bed, turns the redhead over by his shoulder.

Matt’s eyes open, his eyelids fluttering. Tony’s gaze is drawn to the unmoving orbs of grey-blue. They’re certainly eye-catching, Tony thinks, but to be afraid to show them (Yes, Tony knows about the glasses obsession.) is unnecessary. Frankly, Tony likes the way Matt handles himself without his eyesight. For him, vision is something he relies on, and Tony likes things that function in an unexpected way.

A string of apologies flood from Matt’s mouth and Tony remembers why he got up in the first place.

“Matt, don’t.” Tony puts a hand on either of his shoulders. “It’s not an issue to clean up. You can’t control it. I’m not angry at you, or upset, or anything else. Understand?”

Matt sniffs, looking so young with his glistening, hopeful eyes and small, hunched stature. He’s ducking away from Tony, every fibre of his body repelled from this man in his bed.

But Tony’s nice, Matt knows that.

“C’mon, Crimson.” Tony pats the side of the bed. “Go and clean up while I change the sheets.”

Matt looks terrible disappointed at having to take off his onesie but he strips into his boxers before padding off to the bathroom.

Tony looks at the sheets – in the wet patch is a red smear and Tony doesn’t doubt it’s origin.

He doesn’t understand why his eyes become wet. It’s not as if he has anything to be upset about but when he looks at the spoiled sheets, the trace of blood that Matt didn’t even notice, when he thinks about thirty-something Matt and his stupid, floppy hair and sad, empty eyes…
He cries.

It’s not a thing he does. Stark men are made of iron. He doesn’t cry, especially at something as stupid as someone else’s nightmare. Sure, he might get blindsided by his own nightmares and slip, just a tad, but there’s something about Matt that’s different.

Tony wonders how he would feel if Rhodey underwent something as traumatic as Matt. He’s not sure that they’re that kind of friends.

“Sir?” Jarvis brings him back.

Tony wipes a hand over his face, sighs, then starts stripping the bed.

Matt sniffs in the shower, feeling horrible under the stream of scalding water.

Tony doesn’t like cuddling him. The one time Matt has a chance to spend time with him, he goes and...

Matt makes a feral noise in his throat, something between a sob and a shout.

He listens for the battlefield at his feet – the falling droplets of water as firing guns. As canons and grenades and bullets. Matt’s in no-man’s-land, stuck in the middle of the raging war below. Imagining a sea of red tones, of blood spilling from ripped limbs and bullet holes.

Matt feels sick. Sick as he drops to his knees on the shower floor. Sick as he screams in rage, the sound muffled by his wrist. Sick as his teeth bite into his skin, gnawing on bone. Sick as blood pools in his mouth.

Sick as Tony barges in, crouches beside him, grabs his arm.

“What would Clint think?

He’ll see the bite mark.

Matt releases his wrist from his jaw, slams his fist into his head. The slight disorientation of his senses, the minute numbing of the war around him, is enough to urge him on.

Tony tries to grab Matt’s arms as his fists fly at his head. When he finally catches them both, Matt is yanking on his hair, fists buried at the roots.

“Matt, stop it!” Tony shouts, then releases Matt, seeing as he’s not helping. His voice drops into a whisper. “Matt, c’mon, Cherry. Stop it, please.”

It’s 3AM but Tony was hungry so they’re eating burgers.

They both look shaken.

Matt’s tongue explores the burger – tastes the bite of the red onions and the savoury, umami taste of the meat, especially. The burger is standard but Matt enjoys it. He spends time crunching the onions separately before Tony’s voice cuts through their shared silence.

“Why’d you do it?” Tony asks, staring at nothing in particular.
“I’m sorry.”

“No, you’re not.” Tony laughs bitterly. “You’re not fucking sorry, don’t lie to me. You meant to do it for whatever reason but you don’t regret it, Matt. One day you’re going to regret it. I mean, really regret it. That day, you’ll know you’re better. But you’re not, yet. You don’t regret it.”

Tony’s expression turns soft. “Just don’t lie. It doesn’t help. You meant to do it, that’s… ok. But lying about it is bad, Matt. I just want to work through it with you. Tell me the truth.”

Matt’s eyes are glazed and naked to Tony’s eyes.

“I’m angry.” Matt ducks his head.

“Alright.” Tony nods. “Anger, I can deal with.”

“I’m angry at the shower for being too loud and Clint for being gone. I’m angry at Foggy for talking to Claire. I’m angry that I can’t look at a computer screen and that I can’t look at all. That I haven’t been to church, that I don’t confess nearly as much as I should.” Matt takes a weak breath in his tirade. “I’m angry that I need someone in my bed, that I need toys and fluffy pyjamas and slippers. That I’m hurt and I keep hurting myself. Most of all I’m so fucking angry that all of this happened because of him and I still don’t hate him, that I still want—I want him to love me. I just wanted a dad—Why couldn’t he have been a dad?”

Matt stands up after his tirade, throws his plate and burger at the ground. The plate smashes somewhere at his right.

“Ok, maybe anger, I can’t deal with.” Tony sighs, pulls Matt away from the shards. “Sit.”

Matt slumps onto the couch. He feels Tony’s arm wrap around his shoulders, pulling Matt towards the thrumming of the reactor.

“This about the rape? Because it doesn’t just go away. You need to work through it, slowly.” Tony says, brushes his face with his opposite hand.

And Matt relays the story about Stick, as he had to Claire and Clint and Bruce, to Tony.


Matt dips his head onto Tony’s chest.

“Here’s to shitty fathers and mentors.” Tony says sarcastically, and then sighs. “Fuck, you were a kid.”

Matt’s interest is captured when Tony stands up to get a drink (Matt has some beer in the fridge).

“You shouldn’t.” Matt says hesitantly but Tony takes a bottle anyway. His heart is racing from the first drop, even as he drinks half the bottle.

“Brucie was beat, Nat was a child soldier… My pops just slapped me around, y’know? Nothing like,” Matt can hear the lie, “the others.”

“Did he hit you?” Matt asks warily.

“He drank too much.” Tony’s voice wavers. “I could deal with that. That was fine, I just… He didn’t love me.”
Matt’s heart reaches out. The ache stick left in his chest was worse than any other.

“I just wanted him to love me, I didn’t *m-mind* if he hurt me, so much. He promised he loved me.”

Matt’s shoulders slump. “But it wasn’t a nice kind of love. I just, I didn’t have any friends and my

dad d-died so I had no-one left.”

“Did the nuns—did they know?” Tony asks, the beer trembling in its bottle.

“No.”

Tony nods slightly. “My father paid off the maids.”

Matt finds Tony in the space of the room, brings him back to the couch and feels through the thick

curls of his hair.

“Jarvis was my butler. He was nice, cleaned me up.” Tony says quietly. “He died, later. He was a

father to me. Sounds like our Jarvis now.”

Tony gestures up at the walls. He hasn’t told anyone this. “Used his voice from home videos. Pathetic, really.”

“It’s not pathetic.” Matt says in a small voice. He makes a little smile. “Father Lantom was from a
different church but he visited, sometimes. I think he lived nearby. He used to drop by, talk to all of
the children. He gave me my rosary beads.”

“I remember Jarvis used to pray, sometimes. He was Protestant, I think.” Tony took a bite of his

burger, swallowing hard. “My mother, she was Catholic. You’d have liked her. Went to Sunday
Mass.”

“Was she also English?” Matt asks curiously. “Or American?”

“Neither, she was Italian.” Tony shrugs. “Her family was very religious. Of course, my father

thought it was ridiculous.”

“Do you think I’m ridiculous?” Matt puffs up Tony’s hair, stopping when the man bursts into

laughter.

“I think you’re ridiculous because you’re playing with my hair and wearing a tiger onesie.” Tony

smirks. “Your religion is just way of understanding what you see. My opinion isn’t relevant.”

Matt runs his fingers through Tony’s hair, making it all stand on end as he makes a pout. Tony pats

his back, stands up with his new, gravity-defying hairdo.

“We should go to sleep.”
Matt wakes up slowly sometime in the afternoon, curled up under his pillows.

He nudges Tony, wriggles out of his duvet den, and then stretches out his back, cracking each and every bone.

Tony’s heartbeat is different, Matt notices, so he presses an ear to the man’s chest. Then he smells mint and realises that ‘Tony’ is not, in fact, Tony.

“Clint!” Matt wriggles closer to the other man, who chuckles at the puppy-like wiggling. Matt snakes his arms around Clint and squeezes the life out of him, burrowing into his friend’s warmth.

“Miss me?” Clint hums, running a hand over Matt’s head.

For a moment, Matt’s affronted. “Of course I did!”

Clint laughs at him again. “I got you something from Moscow.”

“Russia?” Matt asks curiously. Clint’s reaching off of the bed for something, retracts it. Matt’s hands are filled with a delicate weight.

Matt gropes the ovoid, finding bumpy gems and twisting, metal designs. He taps his fingers against it and the egg trills.

“Egg.” Matt claims confidently.

“Fabergé egg.” Clint explains, twists the thing in Matt’s hands. Inside, Matt finds a tactile map of Moscow. A sculpted skyline for his fingers to browse. It wasn’t accurate, but there were several major buildings that Clint explained to him before the egg was stored away on Matt’s drawers.

“Can you make me toast?” Matt asks eagerly as Clint joins him in leaving the bed. He’s still in his tactical gear, from the sound it makes. Just the under armour.

“You can’t make yourself toast?” Clint asks in a laugh, following Matt to the kitchen. Once there, Matt directs Clint to the toaster.

“I like your toast best.” Matt claims, gesturing to the metal contraption.

“All I do is put it in the toaster.” Clint raises an eyebrow.

Matt makes the best puppy eyes he can muster, adding a little pout for emphasis and Clint collects the bread.

Satisfied, Matt sits at the table in wait.

“Lucky’s looking more golden and less brown, I see.” Clint comments. “Bruce tells me you’ve been taking good care of him.”

“I even let him sleep on the bed so he didn’t get lonely.” Matt adds. “And I washed him thoroughly. Not that he smells any better.”

Clint grins widely, wondering how much he missed on the short trip.
“Oh!” Matt exclaims, stumbling out of his chair and darting to one of the cupboards. “Bucky, Sam, and I made cookies.”

“I get one?” Clint gasps. “You’re the bestest.”

“Obviously.” Matt holds out the box. “But the oatmeal is mine.”

“Ew. Just ew.” Clint makes a face as he takes a chocolate chip cookie. He moans unabashedly as the cookie enters his mouth. Sam’s baking is heavenly and, surely, Matt’s cooperation was nothing less than helpful. “I’m having a foodgasm.”

“Ew.” Matt mocks him, but his cheeks turn red. “They’re ok?”

“They’re amazing, Bud.” Clint squeezes his shoulder. “Sit down, plain toast comin’ up.”

Clint brings his toast on a plate that feels larger than last night’s burger plates.

“Ok, serious talk, Buddy.” Clint says slowly.

Matt’s heart sinks and he must make a face because Clint is suddenly reassuring him.

“I’m not mad, Matty. I promise.” He takes a deep breath, chomps down on his own toast. “Just, I heard that you bit your wrist last night with Tony after an accident.”

Is that what they’re calling it?

Matt’s cheeks turn red. He nods in response, nonetheless.

“Alright. Bad day. I think we should move therapy up, what do you think?” Clint asks. “Your choice, but I think going twice a week might be more helpful.”

That’s what Clint thinks is best. Matt isn’t sure about it, but he nods, giving the suggestion the benefit of the doubt.

“Really? That’s great, Matty.” Clint’s sounding surprised but happy, so he must’ve said the right thing. “You know, Tony told me that you were upset yesterday and ran off. I mean, you should’ve been on bedrest, but I’m really happy that you went to visit Bucky. I’m proud of you, Matty.”

Matt’s cheeks might be purple, with all the blood flushing them.

“I know it’s difficult to talk to people about this stuff but I can tell that you’re trying and I’m really, really proud of you, Bud.” Clint tells him. “It might not feel like it, but you’re doing well.”

Matt thinks about that.

“How was your trip?”

Bruce is looking at the bite while Matt sits quietly on the couch in the communal living room.

Matt is in reach of Bucky’s head and, obviously, that means that three locks of hair are being folded over in ‘the most beautiful braid any person has ever made’. Clint’s words.

“Your hand is…” Bruce has unwrapped the bandages and the cuts have fully disappeared, no scar, no scabs.

“What?” Clint peeks over. Matt fluffs up his hair with his free hand. Bucky’s braid is holding in
place without Matt’s help.


“Isn’t that a good thing?” Clint asks, smoothing his hair back over. Matt fluffs it.

“Good, but extremely unexpected.” Bruce turns to the man in question. “Matt, you don’t have any kind of enhanced healing, do you?”

“Meditation.” Matt replies, then smiles smugly at Bruce. “You do it wrong.”

That’s the only answer they get.

Tony – the sly dog – told Bruce that, apparently, he was bleeding last night and Bruce insisted on drugging him with painkillers because he ‘must be feeling discomfort’ and he ‘should stay in bed’.

“You’re so pretty.” Matt gushes over Bucky’s arm, which the owner finds highly amusing. He wishes Cap’s shield was here.

“Matt, you’re rambling.” Clint tells him after listening to a ten minute explanation as to why Bucky’s arm is ‘the most beautiful thing’ and how he ‘just wants to stroke it’.

“I’m not rambling, Sam and Steve are rambling.” Matt sniffs indignantly. “C’n I fly Sam’s wings? I want to be a satellite.”

“Don’t want to be a bird?” Bucky sniggers, stroking his cat’s back gently. The tiny thing strutted into the elevator all on her own and Nova was brought to the communal floor by Jarvis.

“Jarvis is,” Matt thinks of something hovering, something that watches, “an angel. A buzzing angel.”

“Why, thank you, Mr Murdock.”

“You’re on the smallest dose I have.” Bruce points out but Matt’s hands find their way to his face. Everything is slightly askew, so the best way to get comfort from Bruce is to reach out and bring his smell closer so it doesn’t get mixed up in the confusion.

“Matt, you’re sniffing me.” He points out, quite closely.

“I’m a rat.” He recalls.

Matt’s hand is somewhere to his left but the nerve impulses get lost like lonely cars along a dark highway. He slaps Clint with the hand he can’t feel.

He whispers because everything is loud outside. “Clint?”

“Yes, Matt?”

“What happened?”

“You don’t care about your bodily health, that’s what happened.” Clint responds.

“Did you drug Matt?” Foggy laughs from somewhere near the kitchen.
“Is he always like this?” Bruce asks.

“Your heart rate is increasing.” Matt tells him, very concerned, but all thoughts of worry are thrown out of the window when warmth spreads through his scalp in the form of Foggy massaging him.

He moans, languid, and turns his head so Foggy can get the right spot.

“Matt, why don’t you go to sleep?” Foggy suggests helpfully.

“No!” Matt objects, throwing his pillow at something. Actually, sleeping sounds quite nice.

Matt gets up, sways, and stumbles away from the others.

His onesie is grating on his nerves. It’s hot – Matt prefers the cold. Likes the way his hairs rise and blood draws in.

“Matt!” Clint sounds shocked. His thudding heart, his hitched breathing, his fast steps, they all sound very shocked.

Maybe it’s because Matt’s taking his clothes off, but he’ll never know.

“Matt, stop it.” Clint tells him, throwing something scratchy around Matt that he pushes away. All that is left is his underwear. The waistband is too tight and he really doesn’t want any friction down there. Every part of him is hot and sweaty and overworked.

Matt’s underwear comes off and Clint grabs him in the scratchy towel.

Matt feels his eyes closing, he doesn’t have to keep them open, but everything feels bottom-up when Clint ushers him into his underwear again.

It’s back on but Matt isn’t putting on the onesie. The fur is sticking to him and he’s not really a tiger, he doesn’t need fur.

Matt sways, feeling on the wrong side of reality. He should be upside-down.

Clint seems shocked, again, when Matt does a handstand and stays there, perfectly content as blood rushes to his head. He should really get something done about that.

“Matt, you’re going to fall and hurt yourself.” Bruce warns him.

But Matt’s arm is still detached so he lifts it, balancing on one hand. He stays there for as long as he can before Clint tips him around again and he can’t find gravity.

“You passed out.” Clint relays what happened as soon as Matt’s eyes open.

“Clint”—he’s still drugged—“I can’t find gravity.”
“Criminal case 2001-455-A, United States of America vs. Matthew Murdock.” The judge’s bushy moustache brushes over his lips as he speaks. “Will counsel please note their appearance for the record?”

Matt closes his eyes, hard, against the siren in his ears. How did this happen?

Matt woke up slowly. He'd been on bedrest for four days and he’d had enough. He was tired of his bed, tired of the couch, and tired of Bruce worrying over him.

“Foggy?” Matt shuffled into the kitchen, where he smelled Foggy’s horrible hair gel. The stuff he only used for court.

“Matt!” Foggy startled, his heart thrumming heavily. “Aren’t you on bedrest? Doc’s orders?”

“Do we”—Matt flinched—“Do you have a client?”

“Huh? Oh, uh, yeah. Yeah, I have a client.” Foggy stammered. “You should go back to bed and—”

“Nelson, you’ll be late for Matt’s trial!” A voice called from the living room. Bucky’s metal arm crossed over his chest when he joined the duo.

“My trial? I’m on trial?” Matt asked, lips slightly parted. “What did I do?”

“Obstruction of justice, resisting arrest, and assault. Some little stuff too, property damage…” Bucky listed them off before pausing. “Don’t glare at me, Nelson, I still think he needs to know.”

Foggy sighed.

Matt shrunk into himself. “This is because of Daredevil.”

“This is because you dress up like the devil and beat the living crap out of scum bags.” Bucky shrugged, his flesh shoulder rolling in its socket.

“I can’t go?” Matt asked, toying with the strap on his cane.

“Matt, it’s really boring. Promise, I’ll tell you if anything interesting happens.” Foggy insisted, barging past Bucky with his briefcase. “I need to go, but you should go back to bed. Relax, I’ll take care of this.”

“Why wouldn't Foggy tell me that I’m being charged as Daredevil?” Matt asks as he rifles through Foggy’s files.

Apparently he was being charged with the deaths of several police officers but Foggy already cleared up that misunderstanding.
“He didn't want to upset you. None of us did, when you're going through so much stuff already.”

Clint crouches beside Matt on the floor, carefully avoiding the rows of paperwork that Matt set out around himself.

“You knew?” Matt asks, something inside of his chest hurting. “We're not supposed to keep secrets.”

“I know, Matt.” Clint reaches out to hug him but Matt slaps his arm away. Clint slumps back into his position as Matt gets to his feet, backing away.

“I've been honest with you.” Matt states, his brow scrunching. “I told you about… You said we shouldn't keep secrets! I could go to jail!”

“Matt, don't be worried.” Tony says from somewhere across the room. “We won't let you go to jail. We do worse than you do and get away with it.”

“I don't—” Matt shakes his head. “Clint, you lied to me!”

“I'm sorry, Matt. I just didn't want you to feel bad.” Clint explains. “I've been honest about everything else and I didn't lie, per say.”

“Guilty by omission.” Matt spits, walks back and forth on the same spot. “Don't lie to me again. Not about this – this is important.”

Clint nods, making a motion over his chest. “Promise, Matty. I'm really sorry.”

“Are you even really blind?” Foggy asked him. Matt wished he wasn’t. He really, really wished he wasn’t. Foggy’s heart is racing, his voice is wet but dry at the same time, and his muscles sag. It all just screams sad, hurt, betrayed.

Foggy asks how many fingers he’s holding up, his middle one directly in front of Matt’s face.

He’s angry, he’s so angry. Matt wants to reach out and touch Foggy, hold onto his friend and cry into his warmth. But Foggy’s angry. Foggy isn’t his friend. Matt just wants his friend.

Matt listens to his heart, which tells the complete truth, and nods slightly. Clint is his friend and, while he was lacking in honesty, Matt understands that Clint (probably – Matt has doubts) had good intentions.

“You’ll forgive me?” Clint questions hopefully.

“On one condition.” Matt's hands shake. “I want to go to court.”

“Good morning, Your Honour. Paul Delacourt, Ken Goldberg, and Delilah Novak for the United States.” Mr Delacourt states, his mouth a thin line.

“Your Honour, Franklin Nelson for the defendant: Mr Matthew Murdock.” Foggy stands up beside Matt, his teeth grating as Matt releases a whimper through his teeth.

The device on his ears is intended to incapacitate ‘Daredevil’ to prevent harm to anyone in the room, and to prevent escape. But they don't know about his hearing.

Matt writhes in his seat, making a feeble attempt to inconspicuously grab his head. The high-pitched whine blocks all other sounds out – Matt can barely hear Foggy – and leaves Matt in a poor
state.

His pallor complexion, pained whines, and uncontrolled contortions go unnoticed by the judge and the opposition.

“Alright. Mr Nelson, does the defendant wish to have a formal or informal arraignment?”

“Your Honour, we will waive formal reading of the indictment.” Foggy’s voice is tight. Annoyed. “We will ask for a trial by jury.”

“Mr Murdock, are you under the influence of drugs or alcohol at this time, or have you been during the last 24 hours?”

It takes several moments for Matt to find enough control to speak. “N-N-No… Sir.”

“No. Not with this thing paralysing his nerves. Matt’s crippled by the blaring siren that no-one else can hear. “Yes, Sir.”

“Has Mr Murdock been given a copy of the information in this case?”

Foggy’s nerves grate as Matt whimpers at his side, trying his hardest until they can go through with this. They’re treating him as guilty when nothing has been confirmed. “Yes, Your Honour.”

“Mr Murdock, you understand what you’re charged with and the possible penalties?” The judge’s eyes narrow on Matt, who is finding it difficult to make sense of anything.

“I-I do.” Matt tilts his head up, tries to coordinate his arms into folding in front of his body.

“And how do you plead?”

Chapter End Notes

The court storyline is from Daredevil (1998) #81 onwards, but not canon. Borrowed dialogue. I know nothing about law, don't hate :)
“I asked you a question, Mr Murdock! For the court records, what do you plead?”

It’s not a question of assault or any other crime. Everyone wants to know that this man, this blind man, is Daredevil. The Devil of Hell’s Kitchen.

“Not guilty, Your Honour.”

Matt hasn’t stopped shaking since leaving the courthouse. Clint noticed, even from the audience, that Matt was in severe pain due to the ‘sonic taser’ that was recommended to hold him.

Like an animal.

Clint rubs a hand over Matt’s arm. The redhead is cradled against Clint, sobbing and screaming on repeat. It’s been like this for an hour.

Luckily, Tony’s new device has been made exactly for this purpose. The items look like Clint’s aids, but he’s told that the small covers are designed to block out sound. Matt seems to like the anti-aids.

“Your Honour, Mr Murdock is a huge flight risk! Not to mention a physical threat to the population!” Goldberg, one of the three prosecutors, argued in a heated manner.

“Your Honour!” Foggy protested but he couldn’t get a word in due to Novak’s equally inappropriate outburst.

“In this very audience, we have any number of mutants or people with the motivation and the wherewithal to help Mr Murdock out of the country or even off the planet, as far as we know!”

“Your Honour!” Foggy tried again. Clearly, the situation was growing ridiculous.

“He has travelled to Japan in seven times in as many years and owns property on the—”

“Your Honour!” Foggy finally interrupted. “Mr Murdock is a fine member of the community who—”

“Order!” The judge, at least, wouldn’t humour their childish back and forth. “Mr Delacourt, I have read your proposal and I assume that the director of the FBI, who I see is in court, has made or is prepared to make the special arrangements you’ve described?”

That was the origin story of the sonic taser. Apparently, Tony recognised the device, despite it being less potent than previous designs, and set to work in finding something to help Matt’s ears, rather than electrocute them with sound frequencies.

“Used to fully paralyse an adult.” Tony explains briefly to Foggy. “It was deadly. Luckily, this model looks highly revamped, but I have no doubt that it’s in testing.”
“Matt can’t sit through court like that. He could barely speak.” Foggy states sharply, his palms sweating. He rubs his hands on the legs of his pants, then pushes back his hair. “It’s unethical but they’re claiming he’s dangerous. Think he’s a mutant or super-powered something.”

“He is.” Tony shrugs. “But biological proof means nothing to a judge or a lawyer or even the jury. They’re idiots. If he has any kind of enhanced ability, they think he’s a maximum threat.”

“This has already been coordinated.” Foggy sighs, exhausted. He reads over his notes as a distraction. “We seen it with Fisk – judges and lawyers reading from scripts because they’re being paid off.”

“Who would want Matt in jail?” Tony asks. “Fisk revealed his identity, but wasn’t he taken to jail over the cop thing? I hear he’s on some island.”

Foggy shrugs. “Matt’s life was ‘ruined’ the moment his identity was revealed. This isn’t a plot to wreck him, this is an attempt to cover something up.”

Tony tosses the file in his hands.

“Peter? Is everything alright?” Aunt May asks as the teenager in question gapes at the television.

“Shame what they’re doing to him.” She gestures to the screen, where Daredevil – Matt – is crying and shaking on his way out of the courthouse. Allegations for assault, mainly.

“Yeah. Shame.” Peter frowns down at his cereal. “I know him from the—the Stark internship.”

“Peter, I know this is a good opportunity for you and that these people are heroes, but they’ve hurt a lot of people. I don’t want you getting mixed up in anything.” May sits beside him on the couch. “Just be careful.”

“I am. Super careful.” Peter nods at the screen, notices the way Matt is flinching at the sounds of clicking cameras.

The wheelchair slows to a gentle halt as Charles’ hand lifts from the control pad. He stares at the television, at the ‘Daredevil’, and takes in the sight of his fear, displayed for the world to see.

He’s not a mutant, but he’s something.

Xavier hears something shatter in the hallway, followed by the clamouring of young feet. It sounds expensive. Why does it always sound expensive?

Nevertheless, his worries are centred around the blind man on the news, pictured leaving the courthouse in a frenzy of reporters and angry Avengers.

His eyes scan over the situation before his hand rests quietly on his dead leg. His eyes drop; the world quietens.

Nothing to concern himself with. Not yet.

She walks in slow, precise steps. Her eyes search the room, finds the figure she’s looking for.
The blind man turns to her, grey-haired and wrinkled, but no less terrifying.

“Maya.” His mouth shapes her name. “How great [straight? narrate?] to see [knee?] you.”

She sets down the mobile phone, video of Matthew Michael Murdock in court displayed for her to see and him to hear.

“You’ve been [mean?] productive. Here. [air? ire?]”

He throws the wad of notes in her direction. She counts through them. Fisk will be pleased.

“Great doing business with you.” She says distinctly. “Mr Stick.”

Chapter End Notes

Ok, before anyone gets cold feet, bear with me.

Maya: I do not know this character well, but this is Echo, or Maya Lopez. She will not be a love interest. She will be very OOC because I DON’T KNOW THIS CHARACTER WELL. So, therefore, her backstory and everything will be provided and you don't need to know anything about her.

Charles Xavier: I'm not a great lover of the mutants but I have plans for Xavier and Matt. There will be small references to other mutants, but very minor mentions. Likewise, Xavier will be fully introduced to my readers and you don't need to know anything about him.

Both of these characters are fairly minor but they will be required for the Stick (in Maya's case) and therapy (in Charles’ case) storylines.

I'm welcome to any and all feedback so please ask if you have concerns about future story lines or characters. I hope everyone has toasty, warm feet. Bear with me, it'll be worth it.

(Plus, Spidey will return because he's Matt's baby brother, duh.)
Spider-Man Returns

“Why does NO-ONE TELL ME ANYTHING?”

Matt startles as he hears a voice from the communal floor, three floors underneath him. Currently, he’s snuggled beside Clint in his treehouse-like fort.

Clint doesn’t react – he must not have heard it. It is from three floors down.

“Jarvis, did you let Spidey in?” Tony is replying, sounding annoyed? “Kid, look, this isn’t the best time.”

But Matt is fumbling his way across the bridge. Misjudging the fireman pole, he tumbles off the bridge but it doesn’t stop him because Peter is here, why is Peter here? Is he hurt? Is he going to the med bay? Did something happen? Why doesn’t Tony want to see him?

“Matt!”

When he gets to the elevator, Clint jumps in beside him before the doors close. He recites the floor to Jarvis several times, his heart thumping like a rabbit’s foot.

“What’s going on, Buddy?” Clint puts his hands on Matt’s shoulders, trying to stop the nervous shifting that Matt has quickly adopted.

The doors open and Matt flies at Peter, grabbing him in a hug that knocks the wind out of the little spider.

“Are you ok?” Matt pushes Peter back, holds his arms as he examines Peter thoroughly with his senses. Heat – chilly.

“You’re cold, Peter.” Matt scolds him, situating Peter – who is quite silent all of a sudden – on the fluffy couch and grabbing his blanket from his usual spot to throw over the boy. “You’re cold-blooded, you need to make sure that you regulate your heat or you might get hypothermia, or heat stroke, without noticing.”

“Pfft.” Peter sniggers, reaches up to Matt’s head. “Are you wearing a bunny costume?”

Matt scowls because Peter really needs to take care of himself. Peter wiggles the pink ears of Matt’s onesie before Matt pulls away, smoothing the ears nervously. He’s not exactly making the best impression here. Honestly, out of ‘Team Red’, Matt hoped that he could set an example for Peter, be a mentor to the boy.

A good mentor.

And he’s in a fluffy onesie, eyes probably red and bloodshot from crying. His senses are all scrambling for attention and his identity is blown.

Matt supposes he’s pretty short but he’s a hare, not a bunny. He tells Peter that.

“Sure.” Peter grins, then stands up defensively. “I’m mad at you, don’t act all innocent!”

Matt flinches, quite taken aback. “You are?”

“Well, yeah.” He crosses his arms awkwardly. Matt’s an adult. His friend, but an adult. If he does
yell at Matt, the man will probably send him home. But Peter is mad so he puffs up his chest.
“You disappeared on me. You can’t just do that, I thought you died or something! Then, today, I hear your identity is out and I haven’t been told about any of this!”

“Mr Parker, watch it.” Tony chides him but Matt puts a hand on Peter’s shoulder.

“You don’t watch the news, do you?” Matt asks ruefully.

“I’m a teenager.” He points out. “Not the point – I shouldn’t have to learn all this from TV, you’re my friend.”

Matt nods quietly, shuffles side to side. “I’m starting to think I’m not very good at friendship.”

Peter crawls up the side of his treehouse easily, while Matt shuffles up the pole. They move over the bridge and sit in the little room. Matt chooses his bean bag, while Peter situates himself on the wall, perched quietly.

“Peter, we have some things to talk about.” Matt hedges. They were left alone so that he could explain this to the boy but Peter is a boy and he’s not sure how his message will be received. “Grown-up things.”

“I’m an adult!” Peter protests. “I’ll be sixteen in a couple of months.”

Matt smiles fondly, finds his toy lion that he stashed earlier, and crosses his legs. “Peter, there’s a reason why I’ve been missing in action, as it were.”

“The identity thing?” Peter asks, then he gasps. “Don’t tell me someone’s hurt…”

“No, nothing like that.” Matt was aware that his identity reveal could end up in Foggy or Karen getting hurt but, thankfully, they were moved before anything could happen. The tower is too secure for any of his meagre (mostly, compared to Loki or Hydra) villains to try.

“Then what?” Peter huffs. “You trust me… don’t you?”

“Of course I do, it’s just that you’re young and,” Matt pauses, “I don’t want you to think less of me.”

“You’re wearing a pink onesie and I still think you’re the strongest hero I know.” Peter nudges him, crawling closer along the wall. “Matt, come on.”

“I was raped.” Matt’s eyes close for a moment before his voice starts all on it’s own. “But it wasn’t a big deal, I—”

“Me, too.” Peter says quietly.

Matt thinks his heart might have stopped.

“Long time ago, a babysitter – Skip. I’m over it.” Peter shrugs. “But, Matt, I don’t think less of you.”

Peter drops onto the floor and cocoons Matt in his arms when the tears start falling. “No-one’s immune to abuse, not even heroes. Matt, you’re a hero.”

“How did you get over it?” Matt whispers into Peter’s chest.
“I told Aunt May and Uncle Ben.” Peter says, dipping his head, presumably to look at Matt. “They helped, a lot. Have you told…?”

Matt nods slightly, makes a show of giving Peter a weak smile. “It’s just—I’m not—Dealing with it is tough and I’m not doing so well.”

Peter nods, then beams. “Hey, uh… Maybe I could stay the night?”

“Peter, I don’t want to get on the wrong side of your aunt.” Matt sniffs but he scoffs. “I’ll tell her it’s an excursion for the Stark internship or something.” Peter crawls out onto the bridge. “I want to meet all of the Avengers, plus, I have to take care of you, don’t I?”

Matt groans, wiping a hand across his face to clean away the tears. “I’m not sure that’s how this is supposed to work.”

“Fight me, Old Man.” Spider-Man sticks out his tongue.

“Shit!” Clint’s heart rate skyrockets as he meets Peter on the way to the kitchen. Thing is, he’s on the ceiling.

“Hey, Hawkeye!” He waves excitedly. “Guess what? I’m staying the night!”

“Is that cobwebs?” Clint warily peeks at the creepy spider nest in the corner, twisted into some kind of sphere with a support network that stretches across two walls.

“Well, I’m sleeping in the living room.” Peter points out, gesturing with a mug of what smells like herbal tea.

“Matt, there’s a nest in our living room.” Clint calls over to the couch, where Matt is curled around his stuffed lion.

“Webhead, your hand is going to burn.” Matt says slowly. Peter shifts the mug over in his palms, rubs the red spot. He crawls over to Matt, placing the mug on the coffee table before crawling into his nest.

Matt admires the nest, it’s strong fibres that Peter weaved together so carefully, strand by strand. He’s been at it for half an hour and it finally seems to be good enough.

Matt takes a sip of his tea, which tastes like nothing more than hot water and the slightest hint of lemon. Matt loves it.

“Do you think Tony’ll get me a spider onesie?” Matt asks quietly to no-one in particular.

Clint holds out the box of Matt’s cookies and he happily takes an oatmeal one.

“I smell sugar!” Peter pops his head out, takes a cookie offered to him by Clint. But he latches onto Clint’s arm with the fine bristles on his hand and lifts the other man up into the nest. Matt is next, but he cooperates more and he’s in the white globe without any struggling or girlish squeals.

Matt rubs his hand against the strands – they’re completely smooth and tough, but bendy and coarse at the same time. Matt considers that Peter is his favourite.

“Ew, cobweb, cobweb!” Clint squirms but settles down quickly upon realising the webs feel like
Peter moves into position so that Matt is curled up against his chest. Clint smiles at the pair as he snuggles in on Matt’s opposite side, squeezing his hand.

Matt takes off his glasses and tosses them onto the couch, outside of the comfortable nest. Peter’s heartbeat shudders but his arms squeeze around Matt, breathing in his presence like the social creature he was. Matt finds some comfort in Peter’s kind attempts to settle his senses – the tea, the soft nest, the complex temperatures of his cold-blooded body – and tries to take a step in the right direction. His face feels bare, his eyes are a sensitive spot in the fortress of Matt’s structure.

But Peter is gentle and kind and he doesn’t say anything, doesn’t stare. He rests his chin on Matt’s head and wraps himself around Matt, syphoning off warmth.

Matt feels the warmth of his favourite person, Clint, and the gentle chill of Peter nuzzling against him and his eyes close.

Peter may be young, hopeful, and naïve, but who says that’s a bad thing?

“Matt! You got a puppy?”
Strength

Peter loves Dice. When Matt wakes up, Peter is on the living room couch, whispering and giggling with the dog. Dice’s tail thumps against the floor enthusiastically.

Matt sits up and nudges Clint, who sways Peter’s webbing nest as he shudders awake.

Finding the cause of his awakening, Matt locates Clint’s buzzing phone and tosses it at him, then climbs out of the cocoon.

“Morning, Matt!” Peter chirps, tumbling onto his back when Lucky tackles him. Dice is unimpressed because he has class. Unlike Lucky.

“Is this a good time?” Matt hears a robotic voice asking though Clint’s phone.

“No, Laura, it’s fine.” Clint hums, his heart sounding relaxed and happy. “How are you?”

Matt figures he’s trying to avoid too much affection in front of Peter. But Matt knows Clint’s secret and it makes his heart sing at the trust Clint has in him. He steps closer, rests his head against the webbing. Laura sounds nice. A kind sort of person.

“Missing you. The kids, too.” Laura replies, a little sad, then her voice lightens. “But we’re so proud of you and your work, you know that. How was the trip?”

“Moscow was good, everything ran smoothly. There’s no need to worry.” Clint’s smile can be heard in his voice. “Maybe I can visit soon…”

“I’ve been keeping updated on the news; I understand, Love.” She replies through the phone.

“Speaking of which, I think we have an eavesdropper.” Clint smirks.

Matt startles, jumps away from the cocoon, not that it makes any difference. Peter makes some excuse about going to join Tony and Bruce while Matt fidgets with the sleeve of his onesie. He tugs free a threat, twists it between his fingers.

He didn’t intend to eavesdrop, though, looking back, maybe he did. Laura will hate him if she thinks Matt is the kind of man who spies on others. He wants Laura to like him. Clint likes Laura, loves Laura, and Matt likes Clint.

“It’s alright, Matty.” Clint says, climbing down from the webs. Matt flinches when Clint wraps an arm around his shoulders, sits with him on the couch. “Want to say hello?”

Matt hesitates but Clint is holding out the phone, trusting him with this.

“My name is—My name’s Matthew Michael Murdock.” Matt fidgets. “Hello.”

Clint soothes Matt’s shoulder with his thumb, rubbing over the tense skin. Matt throws the phone back before Laura can reply.

“He’s shy.” Clint explains fondly.

“It’s alright. Bring him to dinner next time you come home.” Laura suggests, happily enough. Matt wriggles beside Clint, feels Dice nudging his leg.
Matt paces back and forth in his fort-room. Clint watches, huffing, from the chair swing.

“Matt, explain what’s wrong. We can talk it through.” Clint says, slowly. Calculated. He knows Matt well enough by now.

“Messed it up.” Matt hits the fireman pole with his fist but then stops walking, hanging onto it silently.

“Dude, you were nervous.” Clint says, swings ever so slightly. “Laura likes you already, no need to worry.”

Matt shifts.

“It makes me really happy that you’re trying so hard to make a good impression, but you don’t need to stress yourself out.” The archer stops his motion, clasps his hands. “You’re in court on Sunday, right? Well, why don’t we go visit Laura and the kids on Monday?”

“Monday?” Matt shudders, thinks about the idea of messing up like he had today. His mind just failed him, and everything was jumbled up. Introductions are made up of a greeting and basic information. He provided his name and said ‘hello’ before giving the phone back, that should have been enough.

But it didn’t fit and Matt got it all wrong, though he’s not sure how.

“What if—They won’t like me, I’m not—” Matt struggles, taps his fingers on the pole. “I’m not likable.”

“I like you.” Clint points out, reaching out to squeeze Matt’s hand. “The Avengers, Peter, Foggy and Karen, at least. We all like you.”

Matt tugs Clint’s hand, moving it around to distract himself.

“Don’t put yourself down like that, Matty.” Clint smiles as Matt plays with his fingers instead of tugging at a hem like he usually does. “They’re really eager to meet you. Laura likes your unicorn onesie.”

Matt looks appalled at the thought. Clint explains that he’s been sending daily updates on Matt’s onesies, as well as pictures, and laughs at the blush growing across Matt’s cheeks, practically blending in with his hair.

“You didn’t, Clint.” Matt slaps his arm, pulls the pillow from the chair wing and starts thumping Clint’s side. “Tell me you didn’t!”

“Sorry, Matty!”

“Make sure to drink that tea.” Peter tells Matt, shifting hesitantly on the helipad.

“We’ll take care of him, Kid.” Tony states, for both of their benefits. Clint agrees with the sentiment.

“No need to worry.”
“Matt, remember what I told you.” Peter pulls his mentor into a hug, squeezes him tightly. “You’ll always be a hero. You’ll always be strong, especially when you’re hurt.”

Matt hides his face in Peter’s shoulder.

It’s a give and take between them, Matt finds, maybe a give and take in all relationships. He’s the mentor, the big brother, but no-one can be strong all the time, right? Even Clint has nightmares.

“I’ll talk to you more.” Matt promises into the thin shoulder. He blinks lamely when something is placed around his neck – a scarf?

Matt inhales the scent of lemon tea and youth (which is quite musky, Matt thinks, like a moose). He lifts his head, sends Peter a smile, and waves him off.

Peter’s over joyous scream can be heard as he plunges into the depths of the city, heart trilling in pleasure as adrenaline floods his system.

Matt can be strong.

Matt needs to be strong.
“Why are we doing this?”

Fisk’s ugly, bald head reminds Maya of a bulldog. An ugly-ass bulldog. Fisk is ugly.

“Miss Lopez,” his wistful voice drawls out the shape of his words, “all you need to know [do?] is that your check will [quill?] clear.”

Fisk has the wrong idea if he thinks she’s a sell-out. Sure, money pays the bills, but she’s not pushed for work.

“You want me to be your messenger.” She accuses. “That’s not my job.”

“What is your job [chop?]?”

“Cutting the heads off of snakes.” She leans towards the glass screen dividing the prisoners and visitors. Dividing her and Fisk. She runs her eyes over the man. “Fat snake, fat check.”

The orange jumpsuit is doing him no favours, showing off the bulges of what she knows is actually muscle. She’s not one to underestimate. “My question, Mr Fisk, is why I’m running between two snakes, chasing a kitten.”

“Mr Murdock is no kitten [giddy?].” Fisk claims.

“He was crying in the news.” She tilts back in her chair. “Looked scared and helpless, even for a devil. Good thing you can’t see.”

Maya curses as she spots the old, blind ninja standing statuesque beside her car.

“Maya.” He smiles. She has no doubt that he can hear her every move. “I’ve been [mean?] waiting for [fur? fog?] you.”

She crosses her arms over her chest, eyes the man. “I delivered your message. I’m not a postal service.”

“No, my dear [seek?], you’re something else [elk?].”

A sick feeling rises in her gut as she thinks about what this man has done to so many people. It makes her want to rip out his tongue. His hands cross over the stick he holds, grip it, and then relax. “You didn’t get the pictures [big chairs?].”

“Can’t say I’m all too eager to hunt down child pornography.” She snaps, twists her head away so she can’t read his lips.

She knows what’s on the tape, it’s her job to know. Hunt it down from the clutches of Daredevil.

Maya wonders if he’s on the tape. Wonders how old he was. The youngest was 7. She wonders and wonders why his tears won’t escape her mind, pushes it down enough to look at her employer again.

“I was training them. Couldn’t have elite members of the Hand crumbling under sex.” He states.
She hears the lie in his voice, pushes it down. “They would ruin us.”

“You’re sick.” Maya spits at his feet, opens the door to her car. The feeling of his cane trails down her back but no way she is putting up with his bullshit, not when she knows what he done to those poor children. She twists, catches the cane in her hands. “I quit.”

He doesn’t make a move as she slips into her car.

Maya slips through the night like a raven, unnoticed and undetected. Breaking into Avengers tower is impossible, literally. Even for her.

She perches on the roof of Murdock’s old building, breathes in the cool air of the night.

Stick is not a good guy – that’s an understatement. When has that ever mattered? When has anyone ever mattered?

Her name is Maya Lopez, she knows that, but she’s not sure if she’s still that person. The newspapers called her Echo. That’s what she feels like – an Echo.

She flops onto her back, stares up at the sky.

Matthew Murdock frequents dark alleys and abandoned buildings to beat the crap out of ‘bad guys’. Maya knows that something changes in the shade of an alley, in the darkness of an old building. Something that doesn’t go away. Something that leaves you bare and exposed, ready to be lead astray. Lead into the arms of something evil. Someone evil.

Maya’s done her research.

Matt entered a dark alley one day, long ago, found something bloody, and left with a new shadow. A shadow that walks, talks, and breathes. A dark figure hanging over his movements.

Stick.

Maya closes her eyes, effectively blocking out the world.

In the daytime, Murdock hides under a hat and shades, leading two dogs with a male companion.

Maya follows closely behind, watches him. He walks with a slight limp. Injured, then. She focuses closely on the companion.

Clint Barton, Hawkeye. His main ability is his extraordinary talent in marksmanship, with a particular speciality in archery. Maya’s bumped into Bullseye, a mercenary who always hits his mark.

The image of a bike speeding towards her distracts her from her thoughts. Before she can think to move, a hand is tugging her out of the way.

The thing speeds by and Echo whips around to face her ‘saviour’.

“Watch [quad? quirk?] where you’re going [cork?]”

Echo’s eyes narrow. Saved by her target. Ex-target, whatever.
“Likewise.” She huffs, pushing her hair back out of her eyes. She steps forward, but the men don’t move for her. Her eyes narrow.

Murdock’s lips twist up in an amused smile. His companion is less than amused. He pulls his dog to attention while the golden lab struggles to chase a squirrel. “You could be more grateful, Lady [late?] .”

“I didn’t need saving.” She states bluntly.

Murdock’s red hair fluffs up in the breeze as he tilts his head.

The blond man is watching her eyes intently, she notices when she moves them away from his lips.

He hands the dog lead to the other man, who looks quite displeased at the fact. Hawkeye’s hands start moving in rapid succession. “Are you deaf?”

She watches the movements and frowns. She isn’t giving anything away. “I didn’t see the bike.”

Hawkeye nods, glances at Murdock when the man tugs his sleeve.

“Copper.” He states quietly, as if they’re sharing some kind of secret. Luckily, Maya doesn’t rely on volume.

The blood on her leg is minimal, no cause for alarm. She wipes the stuff away, hesitant.

If they offer to take her to Avengers Tower, that’s their choice.
Blind And Deaf

Maya scowls at the doctor that’s suturing the slash across her shin.

“Not a fan [van?] of doctors? [otters?]” He laughs, smiling up at her. “I’m used to it [in?]. You’re almost done[ton? none?].”

Murdock is in the corner, his head tiled (Seriously, does it live in that position?) as she formulates a plan of action.

She’s been briefed on Murdock’s radar – Stick’s description was in depth about how exactly to distract her target. His suggestions were graphic and bloody.

But Murdock isn’t her target anymore.

Child pornography. Evidence of child abuse against Stick. Maya owes no obligation to Murdock, to any of those other children. Echo can’t stand the thought of Stick crawling into another child’s bed.

Her fists clench. Murdock might not be a victim. What if he’s a sick, perverted bastard who enjoys that kind of stuff? What if he was an assailant?

Murdock approaches her, slowly, and tugs at the fur of a toy lion’s mane before handing it over. She grabs it, looks at the face of the plush cat, and frowns. Is this supposed to help anything? She turns to Murdock, about to tear him a new one, when she sees the nervous way his hands fiddle with the strap of his white cane, his head tracking her actions, slightly too far to the left. This stupid toy means something to him.

So why is he giving it to her?

The doctor is looking tense, she notices, so she squeezes the toy in distraction.

The stitches are quickly done and she’s handing over the fluffy toy again. Murdock looks relieved, tracing it with his hands carefully as if he’s thankful to have it back in one piece.

“Are you in pain [main?]?” Dr Banner asks, peeling off his gloves.

She gives him a look, stands up. Her skirt is dirt from the bike, smeared with mud, but she’s lacking in care.

“Where’s the bathroom?” She asks carefully, looking at Matthew.

“Down [town?] the hall to your left [leave?].”

She leaves the room, looks briefly to the left, and strays right.

Surely, she isn’t lost?

Matt quirks his head, runs over Bruce’s instructions, then shoves his lion into Bruce’s arms. Lucky that he doesn’t have to worry about being quiet, he chases down the hall after Miss Lopez.

When he gets close, Maya’s foot cuts through the air in his direction.
“I can see all of your movements, Murdock.” She says, voice cold like ice. She lashes out, again, with her feet, flipping through the air with a sharp stiletto heel. Matt dodges the kicks easily.

“And I can hear all of yours.” He smirks, throwing his fist into her midsection with all the force he can muster.

This woman is a threat to Matt, which makes her a threat to the other Avengers. Matt won’t let that happen.

“You didn't see that coming, did you?” Matt asks as she falls back against the wall, clutching her side.

She cackles, however, giddy and angry at the same time. Her heart is racing as she throws her own fist, this time at Matt’s face. It’s fast and hits with the fury he just delivered to her. It does, fortunately, miss his nose and connect with his jaw.

Matt swallows a mouthful of copper, squaring his jaw. It’s not broken.

“You didn't hear that coming, did you?” She asks, throwing herself at Matt while he’s distracted. She snakes her arms around his neck, tightens her grip into a headlock. “Are you a pervert, like him? A sick, disgusting…”

Matt chokes, throws his weight back so he hits the floor with her underneath him.

“Jarvis…!” Matt chokes around her arms, trying to find some leeway with his hands. “Lights!”

The lights cut out and blinders fall over the large windows.

Maya curses, tightening her hold on Murdock.

Unfortunately for Maya, he’s stronger than she is.

The second he breaks free of the grip, she’s lost in the blackness of the room, blind and deaf.

A kick cracks against her back, knocking her completely to the floor.

“I can handle it, Clint.” Matt shoves the archer back into the elevator when he arrives on their floor, Maya held tight against a chair with some ropes.

Her head is spinning. Concussion? The lights are blaring, an unwelcome assault on her eyes. She groans, pushing her eyes open to focus on Murdock.

“Matt, I’m not leaving you alone.” Clint, no, Hawkeye growls at him, bow loaded and ready.

“Just go over there.” Matt relents, pushing him towards the far wall. Clint looks between them both, nods, and stands as backup.

“What did you mean?” Matt turns on Maya, his voice heavy and dark. It scares Clint, to be honest, especially knowing that this isn’t for the benefit of sounding scary – this is the Devil when he’s angry. “Tell me!”

“You have it, don’t you?” Maya spits at his feet, bares her teeth. “The tape.”

Matt blanches, backs away as if burned. “He sent you, Stick sent you…!”
Clint moves forward, grabs her by the neck. “Tell us where he is. Now.”

“I don’t work for him. I don’t work for _men like him_. Sick men.” Echo hisses. “Murdock, are you a man like him? You get off to kids being—”

Clint’s knuckles clip her face, snapping her head to the side. His face is rage, complete and utter rage. “What the fuck do you know about him, huh? Nothing.”

Her nose gushes with blood. Thick, coppery smelling, and potent.

Matt thinks that Clint might be angrier than his blood-filled muscles are letting on. The adrenaline is mixing with the anger, leaving his body on edge. Matt perceives it all, worries for a moment, then focuses on Maya's words.

“No.” Matt shakes his head, grabs Clint’s arm for support. Hawkeye reaches out, pulls Matt into his chest, even as he stares down the girl.

“You’re one of them.” Maya accuses. “I need the tape – he can’t go free.”

Matt's face fully drains of blood, his heart racing a mile a minute in his chest. She knows about the tape. _Oh, God, what if she's seen it? Does Stick have copies? It wouldn't surprise Matt..._

“You don’t put a man like him in jail.” Man snaps, turning his face so she can read his lips. “No-one stops him.”

“You’re weak.”

“And you’re naïve!” Matt shouts.

He can't even look at it, but it's there, hidden under his dad's old boxing uniform. An old tape. He played it for himself a long time ago, cried to the sounds of his desperate pleas and screams. Matt's not even sure if Stick makes an appearance and he sure as hell isn't going to ask someone to check for him.

But Maya seems less concerned, calm.

She thought he was like Stick, then. But now she knows. She _knows._

She narrows her eyes, smiles. “Let me out before I get angry.”

Matt leaves Clint, who is very concerned, in favor of approaching the chair. He takes off his red glasses, moves his face near hers. His fingers find her chin, move her face as if inspecting her nose. His eyes are unmoving and glassy.

The chair hits the ground as a thunder shock of noise. A clap of sound, then silence.

This woman broke into his home, the home of his _family_. Matt's not too sue that he wants to be helpful.

Matt smiles. “Do it yourself.”
“I’m an assassin. I get paid to kill fat cats and bureaucrats.”

Maya’s wearing Matt’s clothes as she speaks in front of the Avengers, because he really did feel guilty about leaving her to struggle with the ropes for a half hour.

“Stick wants the tape.” Maya looks at Matt, who gulps quietly. “I told him to fuck off.”

Her heart is honest so Matt’s really starting to feel guilty about the burst blood vessels on her wrists and ankles but his resolve is final.

“Ok, what is on this tape?” Steve asks, looking between Maya and Matt.

“Child porn.” Maya answers bluntly.

Steve’s disgust is evident in his voice when he speaks next, even as he tries to hide it. “Matt, explain.”

“He’s the one on the tape.”

Matt stands up, fists clenched, but Clint pulls him away from Maya.

“Don’t be so brash.” Clint snaps at the woman, who holds her palms up in surrender.

“Matt was sexually abused by his mentor.” Clint tells the others, at least, the ones that don’t know.

Bucky looks furious. His arm isn’t connected to the rest of him, but Matt can feel his anger pulsating through it as if it was. Jagged joints and sharp slates.

“We’re supposed to believe that you’re not working for Stick when you just tried to beat the crap out of each other?” Bucky demands.

“She’s telling the truth.” Matt says, and the others exchange looks. His face points to Maya, so she can read his lips clearly. “What is your goal? What do you stand to gain?”

Echo’s eyes narrow. “He’s a rapist piece of shit, I want him to stop hurting kids.”

Matt feels her heart’s honesty and nods. Turns to the others. “Stick’ll hunt her down when he finds out about this.”

“So?” Clint asks angrily. “Matt, she might be against Stick but that doesn’t mean she’s on our side.”

“I trust her.” Matt says slowly. “I need you to have faith in me, Clint.”

Clint watches his friend for a long moment, and then glares at Maya. “Fine, fine. But I don’t trust her.”

“Thank you.” Matt reaches out to squeeze his arm, then stands up. “You can stay on our floor.”

“What makes you think I’d want to do that?” Maya snorts, shoving her hands in the pockets of Matt’s sweats.
“Because Stick trained me. I know how to kill myself in three different ways from a seated position and it took you half an hour to get out of basic bondage.” Matt taps his stick over to the elevator when he’s finished talking, turns back to Maya and Clint.

“It’s late, are you both coming?”

Matt’s dragon onesie is, by far, his favourite. He toys with the floppy wings as he eats his last bite of toast.

“Help yourself to food, or anything.” Matt says, facing Maya. “I’m not very good at sign language but I know the alphabet. Clint is fluent – he’s partially deaf.”

“Matt.” Clint grinds out from the couch.

“It’s not a big secret.” Matt defends himself. “I don’t like people using my clothes so you can keep that and I’m sure Tony’ll get you something for tomorrow.”

Maya raises an eyebrow before crossing her arms. “You’re trusting me with access kitchen knives?”

“Need something to spread butter.” Matt shrugs, then gestures to the bathroom. “There’s shampoo, soap, toothpaste, et cetera. There’s no feminine hygiene products but that should be a problem for another week. Plus we have three medical kits, though one is out of bandages.”

“Oh, my God, Matt!” Clint is horrified and Matt agrees with him. “It makes me nervous, but it’s the one in the bathroom and it’s only a couple of steps from the hall kit so it shouldn’t be a problem. We should ask Bruce, though.”

“Sooo not talking about that.” Clint gets up and grabs Matt’s arm, dragging him down the hall. “Goodnight, Witch.”

Maya doesn’t answer, Matt thinks, because Clint was facing away from her. He needs to keep that in mind.

He gives a polite wave.

“Why would she be offended?”

“It’s just something you shouldn’t comment on.” Clint groans, his face in his pillow as Matt sits, cross-legged, beside him. Dice is curled up in his lap.

“Like when I hear someone, um…”

Clint looks up and the pink tinge in Matt’s cheeks is enough to understand what he means. “Oh, ew, yes. Don’t comment on anything.”

“Tony brings a lot of women home.” Matt comments absently while Clint pretends to barf. “I hear everything in about a ten-block radius, Clint.”

“No more girl talk.” Clint tells him, turning over.

Matt and Elektra had sex, of course. Multiple times, multiple different ways.
Initially, Matt had been hesitant. He’d made his way around the bases with other girls, but always went home before reaching a home run, as it were. Foggy thought otherwise and Matt didn’t have the courage to explain.

She got him comfortable with his body.

He remembers the way she would cut cheese on his stomach, jokingly, but turned it into something more. He trusted her near him with a knife. They progressed from jokes and games to actually kissing. Touching places Matt wished were dead.

The first time they made love, Matt cried and his masculinity was thrown out of the window, at least in his own head.

But Elektra had trained with Stick. She understood, not in the same way, but she understood.

Patient, loving kindness.

And now she’s gone and Matt can feel himself wishing his body was dead. Not just the intimate, scarred places, but its entirety.

“I’m going to get a drink.” Matt tells Clint, moves away from the bed and shuffles out of the door, closing it so the dogs won’t follow.

The hall is quiet but he hears Maya at the end of it, leaning on the wall.

Matt wonders what she’s thinking about. He moves to the wall farthest from her as he moves past her, hoping not to startle her.

“Why do you trust me?”

He doesn’t move at the voice but she knows he heard it.

Matt sits at the table, reclines in the wooden chair.

“Because you’re like me.”
“Stick is working with Fisk through a third, fourth, fifth party. Goes on and on, untraceable. Good thing you have me.”

Bucky’s holding boxing pads. Matt’s really hitting them with everything he has but the bites on his forearm are in the forefront of his mind. He hasn’t been exercising and it’s starting to show.

“You’re slow.” Bucky comments. “C’mon, Pip, keep it up.”

Matt punches harder but it’s taking up too much of his effort.

Maya is talking to him from a seated position outside of the ring. The training room is quite expansive and it seems to have grown in Matt’s absence.

“Figure Fisk wants vengeance and Stick wants you locked up.” Maya continues talking. “You’re talking to powerful people about what he did. That’s not in his best interest.”

Matt, sluggish, pauses in his punching, sways on his feet.

“Water.” Bucky guides him off but his head is swimming and the bites are digging in, cutting into his nerves.

Matt’s stomach revolts against his unease, spilling over the floor of the ring, putrid.

“Shit, ok.” Maya stands up, surprised and unsure. Bucky pulls Matt away from the mess but Matt lashes out with punches.

*Stick’s teeth on his neck.*

Matt punches Barnes in the chest.

“Murdock, calm down.” Bucky steps back, a concerned frown etching into his features. Matt struggles with his gloves, rips them off and throws them in Maya’s direction.

He follows Bucky’s heat, his heart, his blood.

The first punch lands on the pads, as does the second. Bucky uses the pads to deflect Matt’s fists, but ends up taking most of them in his left hand.

“Matt, calm the fuck down!” Bucky snaps, getting agitated himself.

A pair of fingers jabs Matt in the small of his spine. He whips around, lashes out at Maya but she’s prepared for him. Bucky watches the pair for a moment as they start kicking at one another but, ultimately, decides he shouldn’t try to stay.

“You’re angry.” Maya deduces as she blocks one of Matt’s punches with her forearm. Matt snaps his elbow against her cheek and she swears but grabs his red hair from behind, drives her knee into his face.

“You’re being an ass.” Maya tells him, throws him back against the ropes of the ring. He leans back on the ropes, kicks her backwards in the chest.

They punch and kick until Matt isn’t really sure what he’s fighting about anymore. All he knows is
that Maya is fighting back and she isn’t treating him like an enemy or an ally.

Just Matt.

He grabs her in a chokehold, feels blood on his lips when she drives her head back against his.

“You think this’ll fix things?” Maya flips him over her head and, wow, is she stronger than he expected.

Matt laughs on the floor, blood choking his nose and mouth. Every part of his body feels like copper, dusted across his flesh like a fine line of red kisses. Sweet and gentle but filed with longing.

Matt thinks about the bites on his arm, mulls them over in his head. That is, until Maya kicks his face with her foot. Lighter than any kick he knows she could deliver.

“Get up.” She demands. “You don’t get to lie there giggling. Face me, Jackass.”

Matt struggles to his feet, his head protesting at the effort the movement requires. He reaches out for Maya, feels his blood staining her face in a handprint as he reaches for her. She’s there, scowling at him. He pushes her head away.

She grabs his neck, he lets her.

“Treat a lady right.” She says in his ear. “Face me while you beat the shit out of me.”

It’s not an angry voice but Matt feels horrible about their rather violent training.

He checks her arms absently for broken bones, listens to her ribcage.

“Better.” She says, tilts her head as she look him over. “Fists up, you suck at blocking.”

Matt tilts his head. “You’re not angry?”

“Why would I be?” She jabs him in the stomach. “You’re training. Think I can’t handle you because I’m a lady?”

Matt smirks, throws up his arms when a fist flies in his direction.

“Are you serious?” Clint slaps Matt upside the head as he enters the boxing ring. Maya’s face is soaked with blood, though Clint suspects Matt’s bleeding hands are the cause of that.

She’s got some ruffled feathers, but mostly bruises. She grins like a hungry cat.

“Why would you punch Bucky without gloves, you idiot?” Clint pulls Matt to his feet, glances at the puddle of vomit across the ring. “Of all the people, you pick the one with the cybernetic arm.”

“Is… Is he ok?” Matt wipes blood from his nose, sniffing on reflex.

“He’s fine. Angry.” Clint goes to the edge of the ring, opens a compartment on the base. He signs at Maya as he carries over a first aid kit. “This is why I don’t like you.”

“Valid.” Maya gives another catty grin that makes Clint want to shudder. There’s just something about the way she watches them…
“Because of me?” Matt asks, tilting his head back so Clint can wipe his nose clean.

“No.” Clint sighs. “But you didn’t exactly help. What came over you, Buddy?”

Matt’s hand grazes over the bite marks. Clint takes a hold of his hands, separates them. He practically pours antiseptic over Matt’s face, making the small but profusely-bleeding cuts weep.

“Angry?” Clint asks, continuing when Matt nods. “Better ways to deal with anger than taking it out on yourself.”

Matt takes off his shirt when Clint’s done with his face. Clint alternates between wiping and cleaning.

Matt takes a swig of Tony’s whiskey before plunging the needle into his forehead, knotting together a cut above his eye.

“This one, for example. One of my favourite pieces.”

“Describe it to me.”

“Imagine a sea of tonal reds. The color of anger, of rage, but also the color of the heart – of love, hope. This strikes the perfect balance between the two.”

“I don’t know, it sounds aggressive.”

“All depends on your point of view.”

He feels red.

A blind man describing himself as red – it’s ridiculous, really, but it’s how he feels.

Hot, angry, bloody, and aggressive. He doesn’t feel loving or hopeful.

Stick turned him red. Stick took his bloodstained hands and left his marks on Matt’s skin. On his chest, his thighs, his back... Stick left his stains on Matt’s heart. Matt takes another swig from the bottle, and another, and another.

Until he can work up the urge.

He pushes the tape into the old set Jarvis helped him find. Sits on the couch with the bottle in his hands, still working up the nerve.

“Stick, can we stop? I’m getting tired.” The tape relays into his ears. The first time.

“Sure, Matty. Let’s do an easy task.”

“Easy?”

“Lots of things happen to soldiers like us, Matt. We need to endure it.”

“Get on your knees, Matty.”

Matt squeezes his eyes shut, places the bottle against his lips and doesn’t stop drinking.

“What now? Stick? What’re you...?”
“Open your mouth.”

The whiskey burns his throat. It burns and Matt’s afraid, deep in his gut. But he doesn’t want to be afraid anymore. Doesn’t want to be angry. Stick raped him – he wants to listen and make sure because he feels horrible and so confused. He wants to stop being uncertain.

He wants to stop.

To stop.

Stop.
Matt’s asleep on the couch, Clint notices first.

Then the TV.

When he walks in, Matt is snoozing quietly, covered in blood and wearing only his sweats from training earlier in the day.

Tony’s stash of booze has been raided, it seems, but some of the amber liquid has spilled over the couch and Matt really reeks of the stuff. Clint approaches the couch and hears a soft noise coming from the TV. Matt’s not the type to watch on his own (Clint’s sure he doesn’t know how to work it and is too proud to ask for help), so he moves to face the thing.

His mouth tastes bitter and he almost retches but he’s frozen in complete shock.

There’s a little flash of red hair between the two bodies. Crying and screaming and “Stop, please, stop!”

Clint watches completely in terror, horrified and looking for any sign that, no, this isn’t Matt. Please don’t let it be Matt.

But it was.

Clint throws the glass bottle at the centre of the TV, smashing the glass and cutting off any visual that is sure to haunt him in his sleep.

Matt startles, his movements heavy and languished.

“Matty, it’s Clint. You’re safe.” Are the first words out of his mouth as he bundles the man into his arms. Matt struggles, searches the couch for his drink.

“Need—” Matt slurs, his voice raw from crying.

“You’re safe.” Clint reiterates in his ear. Only when he feels like he can pull away from their hug does he do so because he’ll never have hugged him enough, not after this, but it’ll have to do. He keeps his hand on Matt’s shoulder, helps him onto his feet.

“Why’re you sleeping down here?” Clint asks gently, directing Matt to the kitchen of the communal floor for coffee.

Matt lamely tries to find the bar but Clint gets the message in his wavering gesture to the room. Even if it’s pointed in the wrong direction.

“Ok.” Clint says, steadies his walk to the coffee machine.

“You’re going to sober up.” Clint tells him. ‘Bud, get me some milk?”

He leads Matt to the fridge and turns to wash his face in the kitchen sink before flicking on the switch for the coffee machine. He turns to get the milk he thinks Matt has found but, instead, the redhead is guzzling chilled brandy like Tony on a bad day.

“Slow down.” Clint takes it from him, hands shaking. His voice is quiet when he talks, still imagining that bastard and how he hurt Matt so, so badly.
Matt doesn’t complain when he pulls the drink away and grabs the milk instead.

When Matt starts drinking the milk enthusiastically (Clint might not have any left) he’s either relieved that the man is just thirsty or worried that Matt is so drunk that he’s getting the taste of alcohol mixed up.

He sniffs the stuff to make sure that Tony hasn’t been making eggnog. It’s safe.

When it’s ready, Clint leads Matt’s hand to the coffee but he spills it in a matter of seconds. Luckily, it’s when he’s setting the hot drink down and not when he’s drinking it.

“Hun—” Matt’s words jumble up in his head and he feels gravity sliding out of his control. Matt also wants the milk.

He reaches past his cup for where he knows the milk is, but his hand strays left and he overcompensates, knocking it over.

Clint’s heart breaks when Matt literally cries over spilled milk.

“I think there’s a saying for this, Matty.” Clint smiles weakly at him, placing the carton in his hands. He throws a towel over the mess, lazily, and then tosses it to the side. It’s the least of his concerns.

“Hungry.” Matt murmurs, closing his eyes as he takes copious gulps of the milk. “Sick.”

“You’re going to be sick?” Clint pauses.


“No, you’re right.” Clint opens the fridge, looks around. There’s Chinese food that Matt usually objects to, but he doesn’t seem to mind when Clint places it in front of him. He’s not very successful with the noodles but he’s getting the hand of a spoon with his rice.

“Matty, how’re you feeling?” Clint nudges his hand from across the table. “Jarvis, is Tony awake? Bruce?”

“Sir is awake, Dr Banner is not.”

“Call Tony up.” Clint says slowly as Matt’s head tilts. “Matty? Matty, are you ok?”

Matt moves his hand in surprise, completely knocking over the coffee. He doesn’t seem to notice the hot liquid scalding his leg. He does, however, startle and whimper “no” when Clint dabs it with a cool cloth.

Clint won’t hurt him. Clint won’t hurt him. But Clint’s hand is on his thigh and he really doesn’t want to be scared but the tears keep coming, even when Clint stops.

Clint takes off his glasses, wipes the wetness away with his thumbs. “Matty, I will never, ever hurt you.”

Matt knows that, wants to tell Clint, but can’t. Everything hurts.

“What the hell, Barton?!” Tony demands when he stops into the kitchen.

Matt buries his face in Clint’s soft midsection because it’s all his fault that the TV is smashed and the couch is a mess. He cries into the warmth, plays with Clint’s hand when it starts petting his
hair. He tugs each finger, twists and pulls, all the while listening to the bones roll and ligaments pull.

“Matt was watching the”—Clint cradles Matt’s head with his free hand—“fucking tape.”

“The…” Tony stops talking, watches Matt for a second. “He’s drunk?”

“He’s had some coffee and a lot of milk.” Clint explains. “I’m worried about him being sick.”

“Well, I’m the expert.” Tony sighs. “Coffee is good for a hangover but it’ll dehydrate him more. Milk is good.”

Clint nods. Matt feels it in his spine. Matt really likes the way Clint ruffles his hair.

He does it again and Matt thinks he might be talking out loud.

“You are.” Clint laughs softly.

Clint and Tony lead him in the direction of the living space. Tony looks at the broken TV, then sits down. Matt snuggles into Tony’s side, his head spinning.

Clint walks towards the TV, takes out the tape and clutches it tightly in his hand.

“That bastard hurt Matt.” Tony states, his arms wrapping around Matt’s slumped form. “What are we going to do?”

Clint looks down at the tape and turns to Matt.

The fluffy-haired idiot who wears animal onesies and carries his fluffy lion everywhere with him (insisting it’s ‘research’). The man who smiles shyly as if he’s afraid he’s doing something wrong, who sleeps with Clint by his side every night because he’s afraid of the dark that consumes his every waking moment, the man who loves wearing his friends’ clothes because it reminds him that they’re always with him, even if he can’t reach out and feel them. Matt never had a childhood, never had a home, and he never had a family.

Clint’ll be damned if he lets Stick take that away from him now.

“We’re going to find him.”
Haircuts

Bucky runs his hand through Matt’s shaggy hair. Matt hates having his hair cut – he can feel the hair follicles prick and poke his neck all day long afterwards and the lack of hair on his head is distracting for several hours, throws off his balance.

“Used to cut Stevie’s hair, don’t worry.” Bucky tells him.

Matt’s positioned on one of the kitchen chairs, a towel around his neck. Clint is in front of him, promising all sorts of things. Mostly that he’ll make it better. Matt isn’t sure how or what he’s talking about but he believes Clint.

Matt winces at the tugging, making the nerves in his scalp light up. He tugs Clint’s arm closer, wants to cuddle without moving too much for Bucky.

He’s still hungover, despite the copious amounts of water that have been poured down his throat. Tony woke him up that morning gently and everyone in the tower whispered when talking to him for the first couple of hours. It was nicer than he expected.

Speaking of Tony, the engineer enters giddily with something in his hands.

“Hey, Crimson.” He kneels beside Matt, who keeps his head still. “Gotcha a present.”

Matt frowns, curious.

“For research.” Tony places something soft and fluffy in his hands. He squeezes a curl in his hand before venturing the rest on the animal.

There’s a horrible sawing noise when Bucky starts cutting his hair. He feels the air shift beside his ear and briefly worries about getting clipped.

It has antlers, Matt realizes as he fondles the toy, and straight legs.

“Deer.” Matt says, feeling for a stubby tail.

“Close.” Tony says, directing his hands to the curls. “But this is different – tell me what this is?”

“Antlers?” Matt’s quite uncertain now. He’s not familiar with animals but he knows deer have hooves and thin bodies and antlers and a stubby tail. They’re brown, not that it matters. “Horn?”

“That’s right, horns. What has horns?” Tony’s moving his hands over the animal.

He flinches and flicks his head when Bucky snips around his ear, suddenly.

“Sorry, Pipsqueak.” He pats Matt’s head with his metal hand. “Stay still for me.”

Matt’s hands are moved across the toy once more by Tony, who seems eager for him to guess.

“Buffalo…” Matt says hesitantly, feeling that the toy is too slim to be a buffalo. They’re big.

“You might find it near cows and sheep, Matty.” Clint supplies.

Matt squeezes it again. “Goat?”
“There we go!” Tony pats his shoulder. Matt smiles nervously. To be proud over such a little thing is ridiculous. *But he got it right.*

“What about this?” Matt’s handed something else, with long, curly legs and a bulbous head.

“Squid.”

He feels over the stubby legs, stroking each one in turn before realizing that there’s a total of eight. “Octopus.”

“You’re getting good at this.” Tony pouts. “I’ll need to up the ante.”

“Thank you.” Matt recites, bringing both of the toys onto his lap so he can inspect them some more.

Bucky starts working through the top of his head – the longer strands – with a wet comb. The shock of the cool water to his scalp makes him flinch.

“Sorry, Matt.” Bucky soothes his head with gentle fingers, rubbing his scalp for a long moment before starting again with the scissors.

Bucky’s very nice about the whole thing. He asks Matt to move his head around instead of manhandling him. Tries not to tug.

He can’t stop squirming when Bucky’s hands dust across his ears, the hair on the back of his neck standing up to attention.

“You’re ticklish, huh?” Clint teases. “I’m thinking you need to shave before court tomorrow, Matty.”

Matt touches his face. He can’t grow a beard easily – it comes in slowly and in stubby patches. The stubble seems to have covered most of his jawline, however, and it feels itchy to touch. However, he really doesn’t like shaving.

He sniffs unhappily when Bucky starts brushing his neck with a thick-bristled brush.

“I can do it.” Bucky offers. “If you want.”

Matt figures he isn’t really in the mood for cutting his face (his radar is decidedly off today) so he nods, squeezing his toys.

Turns out Bucky uses a straight razor. Doesn’t like the buzz of clippers and isn’t fond of how flimsy multi-blades feel.

Matt likes the shaving cream and Bucky doesn’t seem to mind that Matt has a dollop between his hands, squeezing it and listening to the squelching foam wrap around his fingers.

“Still, Pipsqueak.” Bucky tells him, serious as he holds the blade to his neck. “Or I won’t be happy.”

Bucky does touch his face but Matt is spending to much time enjoying the foam to notice. It’s thick and creamy, like putty.

Matt digs around in the tin for more when his starts to become a thin layer of flat cream.
“Stop moving, Matt.” Clint warns him. “Keep your head still.”

Bucky’s at his Adam’s apple. Matt can hear each hair being cut, sliced like an old, weary oak. Timber.

Matt feels the scratch of the blade, it unsettles him. And, then, Bucky wraps a hand around his neck.

*Matt struggles under Stick. His arms are bound behind him, his weight pushing them into the bed. His back’s aching at the odd position and he focuses on it, anything other than Stick.*

*Then two hands wrap around his neck.*

Matt hears the heartbeat stir as the hand falls away from his neck.

Air splits in two directions before his face, meeting together after a brief interval. His hand cuts through the air to knock the knife out of Stick’s hand, lock his other arm around his neck. The knife finds its way to his jugular, waiting.

Matt’s heart is pacing in his chest, back and forth, side to side. He’s waiting.

Listening.

A movement and Matt throws the razor directly at it. Having lost his weapon, Matt clamps his arm on Stick’s neck, kicks down on the backs of his knees and forces him onto the ground, slowly. Carefully.

It’s easier than Matt remembers. The Hand members aren’t fighting back – there’s two of them there and he can hear their hearts, for some reason. They’re not trying to surprise him.

Matt’s listening for Stick’s breathing, waiting for it to stop.

“Matt.”

He flinches, pulls Stick’s head backwards as he’s pinned on the ground, yanking it as if trying to decapitate him.

“My name is Tony. Bucky is beside me and you’re hurting Clint just now.”

Matt closes his eyes, pulls harder on Stick’s neck. Blood is filling his head, turning it a sickly red, he’s sure.

Violence, rage, blood, anger.

“Matt, you’re hurting Clint.” The voice tells him again, patient. “Smell him, it’s Clint.”

The body under him is making a strangled – literally – noise and it *sounds* like Clint but it’s Stick, he knows it is.

“Stick.” He grinds out, hits the body with his knee.

“Matt, you’re in the Avengers tower, with Tony, Bucky, and Clint. Stick isn’t here.” The voice is so nice, Matt wants to reach out but he’s pinning Stick down.

He’s pinning Clint down.
“I’m sorry.” Matt whispers, drops Clint’s head. “I’m sorry, I’m s-sorry—sorry.”

Clint heaves on the floor, catching his breath. He strangled Clint. He threw a knife at Bucky! It hit him, if he hadn’t caught Bucky’s arm, he might…

Matt’s legs work before his brain does, taking him to the far wall, where he crams himself behind the couch and covers his head with his hands, rocking back and forth as apologies pour from his mouth in short, stuttered breaths.

He whimpers when he hears something moving closer, ducks away from it and backs into the wall so suddenly that he hits his head when one end of the couch shifts slightly.

“Matt, it was a flashback.” Bucky says, his voice gentle.

But Matt threw a knife at Bucky.

“Trick, you’re—tricking me—a t-trick.” Matt stammers, barely making sense.

“I’m not tricking you.” Bucky tells him and his heart is honest but Matt is scared. He’s so, so scared and he just wants to stop existing so no-one can find him.

“No, no, no.” Matt chants, hitting his head again on the wall.

Bucky takes his hand and it doesn’t feel like he’s grabbing Matt but Matt knows he is and he just wants to be safe. He doesn’t know how to find safety.

“Don’t scare him, Bucky.” Tony says and he sounds sad. “Matt, Cherry Pie, we’re going to let you sit there by yourself until you feel like you can come out. We’re not angry at you, remember?”

Matt waits until the footsteps have strayed away from the couch but, even then, his heart doesn’t calm down.

He can’t be safe. He’ll never be safe. Not when Stick lives in his head.
Concussed?

Matt wakes up from his snooze abruptly. His head is tucked between two hard surfaces and he suddenly recalls where he fell asleep. Behind the couch.

Matt’s face sticks up behind the back of the couch. He hears Clint’s snoring on the couch he’s pressed against and Tony’s thrumming reactor some distance away. Bucky’s void-arm is on the floor.

“Clint.” Matt prods the sleeping body, which awakens slowly.

“H’m? Matty, wassup?”

“I have court today.” Matt prods the body again, making it jolt upright suddenly.

“You have court!” Clint exclaims. “Shit! Bucky, Tony, wake up!”

Clint starts throwing pillows immediately. Bucky isn’t very happy but Matt’s half-shaven face must amuse him because he snickers.

“Not funny, Matt has court.” Clint scolds him.

“Clint?” Matt asks nervously. Clint’s grabbing him and sitting him in a chair, wrapping a fresh towel around his shoulders without taking any notice.

“Clint?” Matt whimpers, sniffling.

Clint pauses, glances to Matt on his way to make breakfast.

“I’m sorry.”

The trio were nice about the flashback incident, and didn’t even seem to be angry on the way to court.

Clint was with Matt, cuddling him and keeping him warm (it’s December, already, and he forgot Peter’s scarf) all morning. That is, until Foggy had to lead him into the court hall.

Minutes before, Matt had been fitted with the electronic sirens that are supposed to impair his movement. It works and Matt is staggering, balance off, into the courtroom.

They call out the charges, again, and Foggy claims self-defence and defence of others. His opening speech is well-done, passionate and thought-out, but it makes Matt’s heart ache with longing. He liked his job, having the jury listening to his own arguments. It was a form of power, of strength. The blind thing even worked in his favour, Foggy would argue, but he preferred to ignore it.

Apparently he’s been disbarred.

“My client is a hero for Hell’s Kitchen.” Foggy is being very nice, but Matt’s not sure it’s the truth. He’s just a client, just now. “I hope that any one of us in this room would run to the aid of a defenceless victim if we passed them in the street, crying out for help. My client can hear screaming across the city, is he expected to ignore that? What kind of good person would? It is discrimination to not acknowledge my clients actions as self-defence and defence of others, simply
because he can hear the screaming from further away.”

Matt winces when there’s a tonal shift in the sonic device. And it hurts. Oh, God, it hurts.

Foggy’s feet trace the floor before the grand jurors. “Would you be justified to hit an assailant with the force needed to protect someone in need? Legally, yes. You are legally allowed to defend another in immediate physical danger, just as you are allowed to—”

His ears are throbbing at the high-pitched whine of the sonic device. That is, until it cuts off abruptly.

“My turn”

The pain in his ears is immense, barely enough for him to even register the voice of his mentor in the brief moment of silence.

The first thing he feels is a wetness trickling from his nose.

“Foggy!” He calls out, whimpering, before silence closes in on him at the edges.

“Foggy…”

Foggy watches in horror as blood trickles down Matt's face, a thin, red line from his nose. His body slips out of the chair he’s in, slumping to the ground like a limp corpse.

Bruce is darting through the audience when Matt starts twitching and convulsing after a long moment.

“Bruce?” Foggy asks hesitantly, hovering over Matt’s shivering form.

“Grand mal seizure, he's not epileptic, is he?” Bruce rips the devices from his ears, watches as blood runs out onto the floor.

“No.” Foggy chokes out. People are starting to gather, the Avengers and some people Foggy doesn't even recognise.

Matt's having a seizure.

“Hello, Matthew.”

The Voice is gentle and low-toned, like a vague murmur, but entirely in his head.

Matt can't feel anything. Hear anything. He's not a body in a room, positioned however, he's just a pinprick spot in a void of silence.

I'm dead, is his first thought.

“I'm afraid not, Matthew.” The Voice is quiet and somehow Matt doesn't feel it in his ears. “My name is Charles Xavier. A telepath. There's no need to be afraid.”

Matt wants to frown but he doesn't actually have a body. He's just a stray thought listening to the stray Voice -- Charles Xavier.
He wants to wake up, wants to move and feel and hear but there's nothing except Xavier and his thoughts.

“I agree, it's quite empty in here.” Charles’ voice meets him like a thought of his own, but completely in the wrong voice. “I'm going to release some of your senses, but I need you to start focusing only on what you want to hear.”

It hits Matt like a tsunami of sound. He can't speak or move but there's a dull ache in his head, now that he can locate it.

“Focus on what you want to hear.” Xavier is guiding him again. Accompanied by his thoughts is the far-off sound of his voice, somewhere near the smell of antiseptic.

Mint. Matt smells mint and struggles in his head like a drug addict finding his next fix, just itching for the stuff.

“Mathew, please calm down.” Xavier asks him, not happily but not sounding angry in the slightest. Matt shies away from Xavier's mind, ducking into some memories.

“We love you, you idiot.”

“You're my best friend, Matt. Really.”

“I worry about you because, y'know, you're like my baby brother.”

“Your friends care very much about your safety.” Charles comments, gently. “Currently, you're in the medical bay of Stark tower. Your body is unconscious because I'm concerned that your mind may relapse into another seizure under the strain of your senses.”

Matt had a seizure. That's right, he recalls, the sonic taser was reaching a pitch that Matt hadn't even thought possible. And then he felt something in his head, something stretching too far until it snapped.

“Minor brain damage.” Charles explains. Matt realizes he's talking about the snapping sensation. “It's healing quickly, though your abilities may be somewhat compromised. I'm going to wake you up, now, Matthew, and I need you to remain calm. Your friends are here to take care of you.”

Matt suddenly feels his body, knows where it is and what it's touching, when he returns to it from whatever mindscape he was in.

“Matt, don't move.” Bruce is talking. He sounds happy about something. “You had a seizure. Have you had one before?”

Matt goes to shake his head (his mouth feels odd) but realizes quickly that it's a bad idea. He's attached to wires or something, his scalp itchy with whatever is holding them to him. Electric pulses swim through his scalp and, consequently, his head, like little eels zapping his nerves.

“Charles?” Matt asks, tilts his head slightly in search for him.

“Matt, you're concussed, please lie down.” Bruce insists but Matt isn’t obeying because he’s not concussed, he can’t feel it.

Bruce continues to annoy him, however, by pressing him down by his shoulders when he tries to sit up.
“Charles?” Matt asks again, louder, but his ears are ringing and he’s not sure if he’s shouting or not.

“Matt, I really don’t want to sedate you,” Bruce is holding him firmly, not enough to hurt him but enough to prevent any kind of movement, “but I won’t let you hurt yourself.”

Hurt himself? Matt squirms and pushes against Bruce’s chest because he’s been trying hard not to and he’s doing really well.

“I need to find Charles!” Matt snaps, squirming out of the way. He yelps when the things on his head yank on his hair.

“Matt.” Bruce is using his nice-doctor-voice now. “How about you sit back down, I’ll take those off, and you can tell me all about Charles, ok?”

Bruce’s hand takes his wrist, guides him back, and Matt’s hands clasp over it, playing with his fingers. “Am I in trouble? For court?”

“Matt, you had a seizure.” Bruce lifts his chin. “Not your fault.”

Matt starts giggling and, ok, he might be a little concussed because he really wants to leave again to find the mystery voice and it’s difficult to remember why or what Bruce wants, but he’ll play along.

“Tell me about Charles.” Bruce tells him, offhandedly, as he starts taking the glue-like things off of his head. His scalp feels oily as a result.

“He was in my head, helped me wake up.” Matt explains, gesturing at nothing in particular. “Walked me through controlling my ears.”

“I see.” Bruce says, slowly. “Can you tell me what date it is?”

Matt recites it perfectly, quite pleased with himself because—

“Bruce is stupid.” Matt finishes his thought out loud, frowns. “’M I medicated?”

“No.” Bruce is frowning, by the unhappy sound he’s making. “Matt, is Charles like Clint and Tony and I?”

Is Bruce asking if Charles is real?

“I can’t smell him?” Matt mumbles. “He’s just noise.”

“And is Charles nice to you?” Bruce keeps asking questions and it’s annoying because he’s tired. “Does he say bad things to you?”

“No, he was nice.” Matt says in a small voice, getting more confused by the second.

The trickle of blood from his nose is the last thing he feels before the silence closes in.
The Bartons

Matt is nervous. Really, really nervous.

He shifts on the plane. As a plus, he’s in the co-pilot’s seat, twisting the stick around and pressing buttons. They don’t do anything, but the illusion is exciting.

He’s meeting the Bartons.

Plus, Clint’s been acting strange around him ever since his seizure. High heart rate when he talks, sometimes.

“Charles?” Matt asks, waiting for the voice to reply. Clint’s heart spikes again.

“Yes, Matthew?” The friendly, deep voice replies. Matt smiles to himself.

“I’m flying a plane, can you see?”

“I perceive what you perceive, I’m afraid, but I hear it. Your abilities are quite intriguing.” His reply is amused, but quickly turns serious. “How are you faring, my friend?”

“My head hurts a little.” Matt pauses to rub his forehead. Clint’s interest is peaked.

“Want some medicine?” He gestures to the medical kit. “Matty, are you talking to ‘Charles’ again?”

“Not that sore.” Matt shrugs, then nods at Clint. “Want to say ‘hi’?”

“Matthew, I’m afraid I can’t communicate with anyone at this distance unless they make an attempt to project to me.” Charles explains. Matt hears some mumbling in the background as Charles pauses, but it disappears quickly. “Like you are, now.”

“Did I project when I had the seizure?” Matt asks curiously and Clint’s heart is really starting to confuse Matt. Especially the occasional sigh.

“I have a machine that helps me, Cerebro.” Charles’s voice is quite calming, Matt finds, probably like normal people sound, without the emphasis that Matt’s hearing puts on their words. No throaty noises or tongue movements, just words. He also sounds English and Matt likes the posh accent.

Charles is chuckling at his thoughts and Matt pouts, nudging the joystick. “I wish I had a machine. I could stop it if I wanted.”

“Certainly, I’m thankful for Cerebro but to have her assistance in my day to day life would be taxing.” Charles sighs, then there’s the noise of a throat being cleared but not really. “I’m afraid I have a class to teach, now, but please feel free to contact me if there’s a problem.”

“Oh, ok. Bye.” Matt’s face falls a little. He searches for Tony’s hoodie as Charles’s connection disappears from his mind.

“Matty, I think an imaginary friend is a bit concerning.” Clint tells him when he returns to the padded seat.

“What?” Matt frowns, pushing his sleeves through the jumper. “But Charles is real.”
“Matt, we’re alone. There’s no-one else here.” Clint sighs, exasperated. “Maybe we need to call Emily.”

Admittedly, it’s difficult for Matt to remember that Charles isn’t physically present. Most of his radar is hearing-based so, like Jarvis, he forgets that these presences don’t actually have bodies. It’s why he talks to Charles, forgetting that he doesn’t have to.

“No, Charles isn’t here because he’s telepathic.” Matt explains, starting to get annoyed. True, it’s not as if he has any proof but Clint is his friend – that should be enough to make him believe Matt. “We’re too far away for him to talk to you.”

“But he can talk to you?”

Matt opens his mouth, then promptly shuts it.

Matt is excited the moment he leaves the small jet. Dice is following him calmly, because he is the superior dog, while Lucky darts out and runs wild.

“Clint, is that a horse?” He squeals.

Clint looks up to see zebra-Matt (Tony is really enjoying these onesies) with his black hoodie, red scarf, and green wellingtons, facing a cow.

“Cow, Matt.” Clint tells him, shutting the door to the jet as he leaves with their bags. “You can go pet her, be gentle.”

Matt flips over the high fence, lands on the other side in a cowpat. His feet are clean but his boots? Decidedly not. Clint sighs as Matt slowly approaches the fly-ridden animal, reaches out to pet it.

“Clint, it’s a cow!” Matt exclaims, tracing the animal’s lazy face.

Matt shudders and waddles back over to the fence, leaping over easily.

He chases Clint along the dirt path, almost stepping on a chicken that he then proceeds to chase. It clucks and squawks unhappily until Matt catches it and holds it in his arms, petting the thick feathers.

“Matt, you’re going to get your onesie filthy.” Clint warms him.

Matt’s quite unhappy at the prospect but a real chicken. Matt’s never really left the city, so he’s a little excited to pet all of Clint’s fluffy, furry, feathery animals.

“She’s got an egg in her!” Matt tells Clint, pets the chicken’s head gently.

“I sure hope so.” Clint laughs. “That’s breakfast.”

“No! Clint!” Matt stops, holds the animal to his chest.

“The egg, Matty.” Clint points out.

“You’re my favourite.” Matt whispers to the feathery creature before placing it on the ground. It
follows them for several steps before darting away.

“Clint, you have a horse, don’t you?” Matt asks, following some chickens around the front of the house. “Can I ride it? Is it a boy or a girl? Is it the kind that pulls carts?”

Clint smirks as Matt returns with a new bird in his arms.

“Clint, this one’s different?” Matt notes, stroking the animal’s long tail feathers.

“It’s a cockerel.” Clint explains. “You’re covered in dirt.”

“I brought another two.” Matt flinches when the bird’s face approaches his, nudging his cheek with a stubby beak.

“Of course you did.”

Matt hears a couple of human heartbeats approaching and cries of “Daddy’s home!” from inside the house.

Matt starts walking after some chickens, away from the building and towards the chicken pen. There’s a bustle of fluffy feathers and clucking that draws him nearer, farther away from the source of his worries.

He sits among the birds as the pitter-pattering of small feet rush outside to see Clint.

“Daddy!” They cry, clashing against Clint in tight hugs.

Matt’s alright, he has the chickens. Who, like most animals, are quite fond of Matt. The rooster is perched beside Matt’s knee, stretching his neck. A clawed foot rests on his thigh, then a pair of wings shuffle against him.

“Matt!”

Clint’s calling on him but he doesn’t particularly want to get up, so he moves the male bird onto his lap and strokes the long, elegant feathers of its tail.

Clint’s hurrying over to him, another heartbeat waiting with the younger ones.

“I want to go home.” Matt tells Clint and he can virtually hear his heart falling.

Clint sits beside him, then, and looks at the birds. “I see you’ve found some friends.”

“I like this one – he’s friendly.” Matt runs a hand along the stiff feathers, his fingertips picking up on the thin barbs extending from each quill.

“Are you kidding?” Clint scoffs. “He pecks me every chance he gets.”

Matt can hear the bird’s heart fluttering in its breast, but it seems, overall, quite relaxed. The cow’s was rather slow, however, so perhaps it’s because they are such different animals.

“Matty, what’s wrong?” Clint leans in, wraps an arm around his shoulders.

“I don’t want—I’m…” Matt stammers, ducks his head.

“You’re nervous?”
Matt nods, his shoulders slumping. Clint hugs him, pulls him closer, and rests his chin on a Matt’s stupidly fluffy hair. “That’s ok. It’s ok to be nervous. But, I also know that you’re a very brave man and I bet you’ll have more fun here than if we take another long plane trip back to the tower.”

Matt frowns.

“Because,” Clint leans in, “we have a donkey.”

Matt jumps up instantly. “Can I pet it?”

“Course.” Clint grins. “But, first, why don’t we go say ‘hi’?”

Matt hesitates, shuffling in place, before nodding. He’s careful to avoid the scuttling flock of chickens as he leaves the pen, brushing down his onesie.

“There we go, Bud.” Clint pats him on the back as they walk towards the house.

Matt stops walking hallway there and Clint stops with him. He puts a hand on Matt’s head, gently ruffling his hair while he catches his breath.

“Can you see my eyes?”

Clint frowns at the question, looks at Matt’s glasses, and then shakes his head. “No, not that it matters. Your eyes look fine.”

Matt disagrees but he doesn’t say anything but whistles for Lucky to come to him. He clips on the dog’s lead and then makes his way towards the woman and two children.

“You must be Matt.” A feminine voice says.

He must be Matt? Has Clint been talking about him? Matt really doesn’t want to know because what if Clint told Laura about the flashback and hurting Clint? She’ll hate him, surely.

Matt takes a step back and Dice barks, not aggressively, at him. Clint doesn’t say anything but his heart is fluttering. Nervous.

“M-My name is Matthew Michael Murdock.” Matt recites his go-to introduction because he really just wants to hide behind Clint.

“It’s lovely to meet you.” Laura offers, sounding happy.

“Lila, Cooper, this is Uncle Matt.” Clint’s saying and Matt isn’t so sure meeting the fabled donkey of Barton Farm is worth it.

“Uncle Matt has a doggy!” The girl exclaims and she’s asking to pet Dice.

Matt reaches for Clint’s arm, grabs it and tugs hard.

“Uncle Matt’s jet lagged, Kiddos, why don’t we let him rest, h’m?” Clint suggests, giving them both a squeeze. They run inside ahead of them, giving Clint time to rub Matt’s tense shoulder. “Doing great, Bud.”

“How was your flight?” Laura asks and Matt hears Clint giving her a chaste kiss.

Matt trails his fingers over Dice’s back, rewarding his dog for being so well behaved around children. He’s not aware if Dice has met any up close before but the dog is so well-trained,
anyway, so it doesn’t surprise him.

When Clint nudges his arm, he realizes Laura’s talking to him.

“Oh,” Matt stutters, “Clint, um, let me be co-pilot.”

“Not really, though, because that would be a disaster.” Clint laughs, slinging an arm around him. “Remember when you drove Spidey to the tower? He was in shock.”

“Not really.” Matt squints. “I was concussed.”

Then, he pouts. “I’m an amazing driver! I even beat you in darts, once!”

“I was drunk.” Clint shrugs.

Matt crosses his arms. “So was I.”

“Sounds like you boys are having fun.” Laura comments. “Well, boots off and I’ll get dinner started.”

“Right, Love.” Clint gives her another kiss and Matt suddenly realizes that he should have been nervous for a completely different reason.
Matt is wearing clothes (unhappily) because he’s supposed to be an adult, no matter how fluffy and soft his onesies are.

His sweats are noisy and not at all fluffy. There’s elastic material around his ankles that grate on his nerves.

The unusual sensory input he’s receiving—feathers and fur and lots of grass—has Matt on edge, so he unfolds his cane just as a precaution.

“Matt? You ok, Bud?” Clint calls from the kitchen when he steps on something hard and rectangular.

Matt groans, rubs his foot. “I’m fine!”

The lack of foot protection is comfortable but painful, he realizes quickly, when he stumbles over a toy train. It’s metal.

Unhappy, he sits on the couch and avoids the floor altogether, drawing his knees up to his chest.

Lucky rushes over to him, seeing this as an invitation onto the couch. He hops up, wipes his wet nose over Matt’s arm, making him shuffle away from the dog.

He starts folding up his cane when one of the children (they’re everywhere, Matt’s convinced) approaches him.

“What’s that?” Cooper asks.

Matt jumps, hesitates. “My cane.”

“Can’t you walk?” Cooper asks, picking up the evil train on the floor, rolling it around over the arm of the couch. “Daddy says you’re Daredevil. He showed us videos of you jumping off stuff and doing cool kicks.”

He makes whap, swoosh, and whack noises as he plays with the train, as if it’s Daredevil fighting imaginary foes.

“I can walk.” Matt clears his throat. “It’s to check that there’s nothing at my feet.”

“Can’t you just look?”

Matt pauses, his heart battering down the door of his ribs. “No, I—I’m not—I’m blind.”

“You can’t see?” Cooper is grabbing his face now, making Matt flinch violently. “Not at all?”

“No, not at all.” Matt clears his throat.

“But how do you do stuff?” Lila asks and when did she get there? Matt’s head tilts to the side, where Lila is peeking over the back of the couch.

“I have good hearing.” Matt clears his throat, hoping Cooper will let his face go.

He’s realising that he’s not a people-person, never mind capable of minding children.
“Daddy can’t hear well, do you have heary-things like Daddy?” Lila clambers over the back of the couch, flopping onto the cushions. “For your eyes.”

“No, it doesn’t work like that.” Matt says, though he supposes Tony could make him something if he asked – the man’s a genius. “I don’t need to see.”

“But how do you read?” Cooper asks, then he gasps. “Or watch TV?”

“There’s a language for blind people, with little bumps to feel on the paper.” Matt frowns, finally able to breathe when Cooper releases his face. “And I’m not much of a TV person, but sometimes there’s a person talking to explain the things I can’t look at.”

“But how do you do flips?” Lila prods his arm, sitting up.

Matt reaches out for a bouncy ball he found earlier. He stands up, carefully. “Watch this.”

He throws the ball, catching it when it returns to him.

“Now, I can’t see the wall but I know it’s there because the ball bounced off it and came back, right?” Matt explains. The children nod, so he moves a step closer and throws the ball again, catching it in his palm. “Now I know I’m closer to the wall because the ball didn’t take as long to hit it and come back.”

“Uh-huh.” He hears their little minds working like clockwork.

“Noise works like that.” Matt says. “I can hear noises hit the wall and come back to my ears, where I can hear them, just like the wall.”

It results in the children shouting at the walls but Matt feels accomplished.

“Dinner time!” Laura calls, appearing from the kitchen with Clint’s arms around her.

Matt frowns when the children zoom past him. He follows, hesitantly. When he meets the table, he touches the back and seat of the wooden frame before sitting, only as a reflex.

Then he smells it.

Clint must worship him because he’s been gifted with a divine offering.

“Think you’ll like it, Bud.”

Omelette. No, authentic, homemade, straight-from-the-hen omelette with no chemicals. Organic food.

“Thank you.” He says enthusiastically before folding up his cane and placing it in his hoodie pocket.

Matt’s hands lace together and he pauses, remembering he’s a guest.

“Go ahead, Matty, we can wait.” Clint encourages him, stopping the children from devouring their food straight away. His face turns red at the attention but he continues, anyway.

“Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.” Matt recites softly before clearing his throat. He picks up his knife and fork before smiling at Laura. “Thank you, Laura.”
“Hey, I could’ve cooked!” Clint protests.

“And I would be amazed that you found the sweet spot between salmonella and charcoal.” Matt’s lips quirk up at the corners before straightening out nervously.

Laura seems to agree, however, and her laugh trills throughout the dining room.

“You’re supposed to be my wingman, not team up against me.” Clint objects, amusement lacing his tone. “Knew I should’ve brought Sam.”

Matt sniggers at that, then ducks his head to eat a mouthful of eggs. The savoury taste hits him like an explosion of ambrosia, perfectly hearty and slightly salty.

Matt’s taste buds are singing in his mouth.

“You got the seal of approval.” Clint stage-whispers to Laura, who beams.

Matt suddenly becomes aware of the fact that his eyes are closed as he chews. Clint must’ve noticed at the side of his glasses. He pouts.

“It’s good? Clint told me about your senses.” She explains. “I collected the eggs and milk this morning.”

“It’s amazing.” Matt breathes. The burgers the others are eating smell much worse, like dirt, and Matt’s very glad he’s eating something that came directly from the hens, untouched and pure in a little, brown case.

“Matty, we can go visit Rufus after dinner, h’m?” Clint offers, then addresses the others. “He’s excited to see the donkey.”

“Are they horse-sized?” Matt asks because he really wants to ride a horse.

“’Fraid not, Matty, but you can feed him carrots.”

Matt’s excited all over again.
Matt is perched on a fence outside, revelling in the wide expanse of nothingness outside.

“Charles?” Matt whispers at the sky. “Are you awake?”

“Matthew, good evening.” He feels the response in the back of his brain, like a gentle reminder that he’s not alone, even with Clint in the house behind him.

“What do you teach?” Matt asks curiously. He’s been stuck on that fact all day. “Because I think you sound like you teach French, maybe. Do you speak French?”

“I have a Ph.D. in Genetics from Oxford University.” Charles tells him, making his eyebrows shoot up.

“I work at a school for mutants, help them become comfortable with their gifts. I also dabble in History – I find it’s a delicate subject.”

“You’re smart.” Matt comments lamely.

“As are you, Matthew.” Charles changes the subject.

“You practice law.”

“I was disbarred.” Matt curls up into a ball, balancing on his post.

“Due to the trial.”

“My dad wanted me to be a lawyer. Wanted me to be smart, not use my fists like he did.” Matt sniffs. “I tried hard, I did. Went to law school, didn’t fight for years, didn’t… Even though I wanted to. He’d hate me.”

“You are not afraid to protect others, even when your life may be at risk.” Charles’ mind is close to his and Matt almost feels the man beside him; he feels so real. “As dangerous as that may be, one cannot deny that it is a courageous and altruistic act. Any good man would be so lucky.”

Matt sniffles, tears spilling over his cheeks like hot acid. “Then why do I hate myself?”

“To be a happy person, you must know yourself.” Charles says, sounding tender. “You have lost who you think you are, Matthew. You must learn to know yourself.”

Matt wipes his face with shaky hands, giggles into his palms. “I petted a donkey today.”

Matt remembers squealing softly as Rufus the donkey ate a carrot from his hand, furry lips like velvet on his palm.

“You harbour an interest in horses, I gather.” Charles chuckles as Matt thinks through the events of the day. “I own several, perhaps you should visit, soon. In peacetime.”

“Are you in trouble?” Matt asks worriedly. “The Avengers can help.”

“We can protect our home, Matthew. Thank you for your offer.” Charles laughs in his head again and Matt likes the way it sounds. Quiet and untouched by anything biological. “This is no trouble that we can’t handle.”

“Alright. If you need us, though…” Matt trails off. “You’d want me to visit?”

"Of course, Matthew.” Charles replies. “I do enjoy our conversations, though I also enjoy a game
of chess.”

Matt smiles, feeling giddy inside. He’s not quite sure how he keeps making friends but it’s not a bad experience for him. If only this mysterious gift had kicked in when he was in middle school.

Matt clamps his hands over his ears and considers going outside again.

They’re just kissing. Just kissing. Nothing else.

Matt’s face is bright red and he truly just wants to fall asleep. He’s certain that Clint and Laura aren’t being very active for his benefit, but Matt can hear everything.

Matt reaches out to pet his dog, finds Lucky instead.

“Behave.” He tells the animal as he lifts it onto the couch to snuggle with it, despite the shit smell. His own dog is too far away and no way is he crossing the Lego infested floor.

Matt is exceptionally unhappy.

He could always sleep with the chickens, he mulls over in his head as Clint’s voice can be heard reminding Laura that Matt can very well hear them so please be courteous.

Matt shuffles on the couch awkwardly. Lucky is quite warm, he notes, he might just fall asleep.

And that’s when the bed creaks and Matt darts out the front door.

“I’m really sorry.” Clint calls, standing at the fence of Millie’s field. He’s had a long night with the cows and each one has a new name. Millie, Darcy, and Terror. Not that it matters.

Matt buries his face in Terror’s flat back. He’s not looking at Clint ever again. Just on principle.

“Matt, c’mon, surely you’ve heard Tony in his bedroom?” Clint’s stomping across the field to reach him, boots squelching into the mud and cowpats.

“I’m used to it!” Matt shouts back at Clint, who is getting quite near and smelling different.

“Go ‘way.” Matt clamps his hand over his nose. “Go take a shower.”

“Forgive me?” Clint asks, edging closer.

Matt notices something smelly in his hand and blanches. “Don’t you dare.”

But Clint throws the mud and Matt laments as the smell seeps into his clothes, as does the stinging itch.

Matt grabs a large handful, hits Clint in the face.

“Oh, now you’ve done it.”

Matt and Clint spend a good ten minutes throwing muck and dirt at each other but it’s only when they topple into the filth together and Matt starts giggling like a lunatic that they relax.

“Sorry.” Clint nudges Matt’s arm.
“Liar.” Matt nudges him back and Clint grins. He runs his muddy hands through Matt’s hair, making it stand on end before Matt smooths it down.

“Clint?”

“Yeah?”

“I heard everything, you horrible, horrible friend!” Matt shoves Clint back into the dirt, making him laugh at the former-redhead-now-brunette.

“Just be happy for me, will you?” Clint nudges Matt.

Matt leaves him in the mud for Terror to deal with.

Matt grins as he gets the last of the mud out of his hair. Clint and Laura are in the hall, the latter unhappy about Clint’s messy antics.

“Matt isn’t my husband!” She argues when Clint tries to drop him in it. “You are and you smell like Lucky!”

Matt stumbles across something on the side of bath (which he’s standing in to shower).

It occurs to him, as he picks up the multi-blade razor, that he’s alone. No Jarvis, no Avengers. Just Matt, a quiet bathroom, and a blade.

A blade.
Matt stops moving altogether.

It’s new, he thinks, the razor. Smells new.

Misplaced, would be the excuse. Matt plans it out as he breaks the thing with the base of a plastic bottle. He’s blind in an unfamiliar bathroom, it’s entirely believable.

He fumbles with the little slate of sharpened metal.

“Charles?” He whispers, reaching out with his mind.

He didn’t think he’d be doing this today. Not after spending time with Clint and enjoying a quiet night under the stars (which was quite enjoyable, he might add). He expected to be curling up on the couch with his dog and the Bartons, enjoying his last day here.

But it’s there, in his grasp, and he could do it.

“Matthew.” Charles’ voice is kin but stern in his head. “This will only cause you more pain.”

Matt isn’t sure he wants to tell Charles, anymore. He sounds like the Avengers and, knowing the Avengers, they wouldn’t keep this a secret from each other. Charles will want to tell Clint.

“Matthew, take a moment to talk to me. Please, my friend.”

Matt hesitates, not quite sure how to get rid of Charles.

“Leave me alone.” Matt whispers.

No-one would notice his thighs if he just—

“Matthew, all your attempts, your hard work, has been futile if you allow yourself to do this.” Charles is saying in his ear. “Don’t let your efforts go to waste.”

Matt isn’t quite sure why he wants to, just that it’ll be easier if he does. Everything will be easier.

“This only makes things harder.” Charles is pestering him again, an ever-knowing voice in his head. Not the bad kind, Matt admits. He likes Charles.

“But I told you, that’s what I’m supposed to do.” Matt says quietly, gently lowering his hand. “I just, I want to…”

“You’re in anguish, hurt. This won’t solve anything. Hurting yourself, by definition, is detrimental.” Charles is saying in his ear. “It’s harder to stop once you’re adept at it.”

Matt thinks about the thin blade, then closes his eyes.

Matt’s never liked his body. Not in a way that other people do.

It feels shameful. Riddled with something corrupt and black, coloring his insides like a thick smog. Leaving his organs inky, blood running black.
Never liked it since the accident. Hated it since Stick.

He confirmed Matt’s young concerns, that others would think he’s weak and incapable. Twisted his body, molded its shape into something Matt barely dares to think about.

The scars don’t bother him. Fighting has its values, but also its downsides. That being said, scars on his thighs have a certain appeal. Would Stick have dared to come near him if he could feel thick ridges of poorly healed skin? Certainly, sighted men wouldn’t.

The reason he stops is that he feels guilty from dragging Charles into this situation. Just one, faint trace of red, and then he stashed the blade in his bundle of clothes. No-one would ever know.

Charles spoke with him for a while but Matt was lacking in a sociable nature. He insisted he was fine, returned to Clint, and the kind telepath receded from his head. Clint hasn’t mentioned the razor and Laura knows nothing, even though both had been in the bathroom after him.

He’s in the clear.

It’s hidden inside a compartment in Matt’s bag, completely out of Clint’s view.

“Not so bad, huh?” Clint’s voice is slightly raw. Saying goodbye to his family was difficult, Matt can tell, but he’s still chipper.

Matt shifts in his seat.

He should tell Clint. They’re friends – he’s done it, it’s over, and he should tell Clint. Clint will be disappointed and upset but he’ll cuddle Matt and help because Clint always helps, even when he’s not trying.

Matt shrinks in on himself when Clint turns to look at him.

“You ok, Bud?” Clint asks, twisting the joystick of the plane.

“I’m fine.”

Matt crawls inside his tent in the tower because there’s no-one in his tent and no cameras. It’s perfect.

He wriggles out of his onesie, pulling it down just enough so that he can feel his thigh.

No-one will hurt him this way, Matt thinks as he fumbles with the metal between his fingers. Stick won’t hurt him. No-one will hurt him, ever again.

Not if he hurts himself.

Matt stays in the tent for a while.

“Matty, everything ok?” Clint asks, ‘knocking’ on the tent.

Matt startles. “Don’t come in!”

“Why not?” Clint asks dubiously.
“I’m naked?” Matt feels for the arms of his onesie.

“We’ve all seen you naked.” Clint laughs before his face floods with heat. “Oh, you’re… busy. Sorry, Bud. I’ll go.”

Matt’s a little confused but it seems to work because Clint rushes away.

Matt draws his onesie over his thighs, gingerly.

He doesn’t feel as accomplished as he thought he did. It doesn’t feel the same as biting, which leaves a dull throb in his arms.

They sting. Nip at his flesh and shift every time he moves. He doesn’t want to move.

Matt feels his eyes brim with tears and tries to blink them away. This is all his fault and now he’s going to cry about how much it hurts?

He throws the little blade away in disgust as the smell of copper floods his nose, stinking up the tent.

He doesn’t like this.

The hand-drawn lines of red across his legs are amateur at best – a child playing with a red fountain pen. Ten abstract paintings in an empty gallery. Imagine a sea of tonal reds.

Because Matt’s not an artist but, if art is an expression of emotion, that Matt fancies himself a calligrapher. Red-inked pen curling lines across the blank page of his body, impressing meaning into the whiteness of his flesh in fleeting strokes.

Leaving behind no trace, no bristle of brush or graphite dust, Matt’s words remain in the drawn-out sweeps of his blade.

But his work is sloppy. Smudged around the edges, a blurred picture of fingerprints and sleeping thoughts that do not cease thinking.

Because Matt is wavering between the bitter sweetness of futile hope and aching exhaustion.
Matt starts panicking quite quickly. He’s in the tent, blood slick on his thighs, hiding from the rest of the Avengers. His hands are shaking and he’s not sure how to help himself.

“Matthew?” Charles’ voice sounds far-off in his head, unlike the way it usually ‘sounds’.

Matt tries to ignore the bleeding wounds. He’s been hurt before – this is nothing. It should be nothing.

It’s not nothing.

“Matthew, I need you to take deep breaths. You’re not in danger.” Charles reminds him. “I’m unable to aid you from this distance, however. Are your friends with you?”

“D-Downstairs.” Matt whispers, trying to wipe the blood off of his hands. He can’t leave like this – Jarvis will know. Matt likes Jarvis but he’ll be worried.

“Matthew, deep breaths. Calm your body and, in turn, your mind.”

Matt tries to take a deep breath but it feels like a shudder. “Charles, can you get Clint?”

“Matthew, your friends are out of my reach.” Charles reminds him, voice nice like always. “Perhaps this is something they would like to hear from you?”

“I’m scared.” Matt admits, trying to press down on the cuts without making them worse. Why is he bleeding so much?

“Matthew, you know what you have to do.” Charles whispers in his head. “Be brave, my friend.”

“C-Clint?” Matt asks from his tent.

“Jarvis said you wanted me?” Clint asks softly. “Is something wrong?”

“Promise you—you won’t be mad.” Matt sobs, reaching out of the tent with a red-stained hand to grab Clint’s own.

Clint’s tongue chokes his throat. His mouth is suddenly dry, not that he pays it any mind because his focus is on Matt’s bloody hand.

“I’m not mad.” Clint says steadily then, immediately: “You’ve hurt yourself.”

A little blade drops out of the tent. Matt’s hand nudges it towards Clint, who carefully puts it in the pocket of his hoodie so as not to forget to take it away.

“I’m sorry.” Matt’s words come out easily. He sobs on the other side of the tent’s door. Matt, huddled inside the pyramid tent, remembers Tony’s lecture from what feels like an eternity ago.

“No, you’re not.” Tony laughed bitterly. “You’re not fucking sorry, don’t lie to me. You meant to do it for whatever reason but you don’t regret it, Matt. One day you’re going to regret it. I mean, really regret it. That day, you’ll know you’re better. But you’re not, yet. You don’t regret it.”
Matt’s throat feels dry, despite the wet voice that comes out. “Clint, I regret it. I-I really do.”

Clint moves the door aside, draws in a silent gasp at the cuts on Matt’s legs, and then helps him shuffle out onto the floor.

There’s three knocks at the door. “Clint? Matt? Jarvis mentioned that you need me?”

“Bruce, um…” Clint rushes over the door, opens it. Bruce slips in quietly, looking over at Matt.

“I called him.” Matt says softly, ducking his head.

“You did?” Clint breathes, rubbing his face with his hands. “Good. That’s good, yeah…”

Bruce does his thing – cleans the cuts and wraps them – before Matt is allowed downstairs.

“C’mere.”

The ‘Council of Overly Worried Friends’ is present, once again. Matt stands, feeling awkward, while the others sit on the couches.

Bucky, Foggy, Bruce, and Tony. Clint is sitting on the edge of the couch.

“Matt, first off, great that you asked Jarvis to get us.” Clint encourages him and Matt’s starting to wonder when this became an official thing.

“But remember at Columbia? Passing out? Hospitals?” Foggy pipes up. “This is dangerous, Matt, and we want to keep you safe.”

“You have an inclination towards this, if you don’t realise it.” Tony comments. He’s not drinking but Matt knows he wants to. Badly. His hand is perpetually shifting on the armrest, itching for a glass to hold. “Your first suit was a pair of pyjamas, for cryin’ out loud.”

“So, if you want to use anything sharp in the kitchens, you need to be with someone else or Jarvis will alert the closest Avenger, just like with a health risk.

Matt nods slightly.

"Now, let's just talk about this." Clint pipes up. "Because we don't want you to get to that point again. Did something trigger it?"

Matt shakes his head. "I found—There was a shaving razor where we..."

Clint understands, nods slightly.

"Nothing caused it?" Foggy asks, confused more than anything else.

"Sometimes, you don't need a reason." Bruce sighs, leaning back against the couch. "How about why you called Clint and I? I think that's more important."

"I was talking to Charles and he—" Matt pauses when he hears several heartbeats spiking. "What?"

"Matt, I understand that Charles may seem very real to you, but depression can cause very realistic thoughts that might not be true." Bruce explains carefully.
"Why don't you believe me?!" Matt demands, his feet kicking into gear. He paces back and forth a few steps, irritated. "I'm not delusional! Charles is real and we're friends!"

"Your brain—" Tony pipes up but Bucky cuts him off.

"I believe you." Bucky gets up and walks over to him, patting his shoulder lightly with his metal arm. "Matt's got a different view on the world. He turns at Jarvis' speakers even though he doesn't have to. He seems more real to Matt because he's not judging by sight. Mutants can be telepathic, so if there's one communicating to Matt, it's only natural that he's talking to them like they're in the room."

The others are quiet while Matt snuggles into Bucky's warmth. "Thanks."

"You have to understand, Matt." Clint sighs. "It's difficult to believe something's real when there's no proof."

Matt thinks that's a reasonable argument. Judges, for example, require evidence for any defence. They don't believe word of mouth.

But maybe Matt can get Charles to visit him?

It is almost the 13th of December and Matt's excited, even though no-one else realises how important that day is to him. Maybe Charles can come visit?

It will be his birthday, after all.
Matt shouldn’t feel bad, he tells himself, when he hears no mention of his birthday. It’s not as if he talks about it, or regularly celebrates the day.

But he has friends, now. More than Foggy, at least.

They probably wouldn’t do anything for him, anyway. He’s been acting like a child, hurting himself, and even tried to kill Clint. Not consciously, but he still tried. They wouldn’t reward that.

“Your birthday is arriving?” Charles asks curiously in his head.

Oh, crap.

“Apologies, Matthew. I intended to talk to you about the events of yesterday – I was concerned.” Matt thinks that Charles might be frowning but he can’t be sure. “Is there a celebration I can attend? Or is that too forward?”

Matt’s grin couldn’t be wider if he tried, just before remembering that there’s no celebration.

“Maybe you could visit me instead?” Matt shuffles in his spot, huddled up on the couch. “It’s just my birthday, it’s not a big deal or anything.”

“That sounds lovely.”

Bucky’s grabbing Foggy and biting the cap off a pen.

“IS IT MATT’S BIRTHDAY?” He scrawls, then hands over the pad and pen for Foggy to write on.

“13TH – IN THREE DAYS.” Foggy scribbles in return. “DOESN’T CELEBRATE IT.”

“Well, he does now.” Bucky says as he stalk off and no-one messes with the Winter Soldier.

Matt shuffles into the kitchen that night, where Tony, Bucky, Clint, and Foggy are huddled together in a circle.

“Matt, how about I show you one of my puzzles?” Bruce calls out from where he was sitting with Matt, previously.

“Are you playing a game?” Matt asks the four men nervously. They haven’t been speaking to him as often, even Clint, and Matt’s worried that they’re angry about what he done to his thighs.

“No!” Tony says quickly. “Just chatting.”

His heart rate is speeding, just like the others.

“Matt, come on, we’ll go do something fun.” Bruce approaches him, trying to lead him away by
the arm. He pulls himself free and reaches for the notebook but Clint pulls it away from him.

“Bud, why don’t you go do something with Bruce?” Clint suggests.

Matt focuses on them in turn before wandering off with the doctor. Bruce leads him down to his own floor, brings out another tactile puzzle. It’s bigger, with different shapes.

“Are they angry?” Matt asks quietly. “Did—Did I do something?”

“Of course not, they’re just, um…” Bruce pauses, his heart hammering. “Let’s do the puzzle, Matt.”

Maya doesn’t frequent their floor often. She’s a night owl, sleeping in late and venturing in the streets of New York in the wee hours. Matt doesn’t see her often but he’s been awoken by the rummaging in the kitchen fridge more than once. No fault of hers, of course.

Maya throws a bottle of water at his head. He catches it, a reflexive movement, and greets her with a smile. She doesn’t return it.

“You look like shit.” She comments, sitting down.

Matt takes a quick drink from the offered water before closing the lid over it. “I think the others are angry at me.”

Her eyes narrow as she glances over Matt’s pale, tired skin. He’s growing dark beneath the eyes.

“About cutting yourself?” She reclines on the couch, sinking into the plush cushions. Her feet rest on the coffee table, making Matt cringe. She drinks it in, rubbing the soles of her feet on the wood, just to aggravate him.

Matt scowls in her direction.

“Does everyone know about that?” Matt asks, drawing his knees into his chest.

“They’re just too nice to comment on it.” Maya points out. “I’m not.”

Matt rests his forehead on his knees, sighing into his lap. Then, he turns his face so Maya can read his lips. “I thought that, maybe, Clint wouldn’t be so angry if I told him.”

Truly, he’d expected Clint to be angry, but not like this. Shouting and hitting, maybe, but not ignoring him. It didn’t seem a very Clint-thing to do. Because, for the lack of communication he’s showing with Matt, he still cuddles him after his nightmares and fusses over him, the perfect mother hen.

“Why’d you do it?” Maya asks, moving closer to gently run a finger along his thigh. She’s touching him tenderly, nothing like the brutal way she fights. Mercilessly and violently, she’s kicked him and beat him, but this isn’t training. This is tender and gentle, like approaching a spooked animal. Matt barely feels her touch.

“I wanted to stop anyone from…” Matt licks his lips, closes his eyes. He can’t think about this just now.

“Raping you.”

“You’re an idiot.” She kicks him in the shin and he jumps.

“Ow!” He complains pointedly, rubbing his leg. “What was that for?”

“Being an idiot.” She says, as if it’s obvious. “If somewhat wants to rape you, it doesn’t matter how you look, what you’re wearing, or how capable you ‘should have’ been. If they want to, they’ll do it.”

For a moment, that thought terrifies Matt.

Then he realizes that she’s trying to make him feel better because ‘it wasn’t his fault, no matter how attractive, uncovered, or strong he is’.

Matt rubs his shin slowly, contemplating this. “Thanks.”

“Don’t thank me, I just kicked you in the shin.” She points out. “Idiot.”

Matt frowns, reaching to his right for his stuffed toy. “Are we going to talk about it?”

“No.”

“Really?” Matt asks, fidgeting. “I mean, we’ve both—”

Maya grabs his neck in an instant and Matt blanches, his face molded into something without emotion.

“You’re going to be quiet.”

Matt nods.

“Then one night, right after we quit Landman and Zack, I heard it.”

“ Heard what?”

“A girl, crying in her bed, in a building down the block. Her father liked to go to her room late at night… when his wife was asleep.”

Maya slams the door as she escapes to her bedroom.

Matt shifts in his seat.

Chapter End Notes

So this strays from Maya's background a little bit in terms of her father, but she's quite OOC anyway.
Charles Xavier

It’s his birthday and he’s excited for Charles’ visit. Partly so he can shove him in his friends’ faces (except Bucky).

“Good morning!” Matt shakes Clint awake, grinning at the groaning man.

“You’re chipper.” Clint comments from under his pillow, then rolls onto his side, squints at Matt.

“That’s because I have a friend visiting today.” Matt smirks, beaming widely.

Charles is a far way away, so he’s arriving in a plane. Matt told him all about the helipad, so he’s even getting to meet one of Charles’ friends. Another mutant! Matt’s quite excited to find out what their power will be.

Alas, it’s not nearly time for any of that.

“You do?” Clint raises an eyebrow. “Do you two, uh, have plans together?”

Clint admits that checking Matt isn’t busy might’ve been an important aspect of his birthday surprise.

“Playing chess, I think.” Matt screws up his face. “I’m not sure I know how but I’ll get to show him our fort.”

Best not to mention that his friend is Charles. Clint might laugh at him.

“Ok, sounds fun.” Clint says, then shoos Matt away. “Go and make me breakfast.”

“But I want your amazing toast.”

“All I do is put it in the toaster!” Clint objects for the billionth time.

Matt sneaks under the covers and places his hands on Clint’s face, knowing he’ll find them cold. Clint shakes his head in a futile attempt to get rid of the cold hands, but the cool flesh has already woken him up. “Fine! Fine, I’ll make you toast.”

Matt smirks.

He dons his dragon onesie because he loves the floppy wings. Following Clint into the living room is truly a first experience (for Clint) because Matt goes crazy when he approaches the window-walls.

“CLINT!” Matt screams, then presses his hands against the window. “Is it snowing? It’s snowing, isn’t it? Clint, I can feel it snowing!”

“Yeah, Bud.” Clint grumbles, covering his ears jokingly. “Snow. Great.”

“But I can hear it, Clint. In the clouds. I can hear it.” Matt points up at nothing in particular, but his face twists into utter delight when he hears water droplets crinkling into ice flakes that land as fluffy snow.
Bruce tells Matt the basic rules of chess but he walks off hallway through the explanation, having lost interest. So, when Matt makes his way up to Tony’s apartment and waits at the door to the Helicarrier (it’s too cold to stand outside), he’s not prepared at all.

Charles can teach him, he figures, or they can climb into his treehouse.

Matt hears the spinning blades from a distance. It sounds just like a helicopter, but with smaller turbines. Small, circular engines. Like a big drone.

“Whoa, Murdock!” Tony’s holding something that rustles (he stashes it in a drawer) when he appears in his own living room to see Matt waiting by the door. “Not that I don’t love you sneaking around up here, but I might have a friend, if you know what I mean. A heads up would be good.”

“I know when you’re having sex, Stark.” Matt says indignantly. “You’re not quiet by normal standards.”

“Oh, ew.” Tony makes a face and Matt agrees.

“My sentiments exactly.” Matt sticks out his tongue. “But my friend is arriving on a plane and the helipad is on your floor. Not that kind of friend, though.”

“Wait, what?” Tony asks, joining Matt at the glass door. “Who? Murdock, we have security for a reason!”

“It’s my friend, I trust him.” Matt protests laxly. If he was Dice, he thinks his tail would be wagging.

He waits at the glass while he hears the jet landing smoothly on the helipad, the whirring engines coming to a halt.

Then he steps outside, walking briskly through the cold to the opening door.

The sound of wheels is quite confusing, but he hears two heartbeats and only one set of feet.

“Charles?” He asks excitedly.

“Matthew Murdock.” His name is returned from half of his height.

Charles can’t walk. Matt’s hearing closes in on his back, where nerves fizzles and pulse from his shoulders, ending somewhere in the middle of his spine. It’s quite interesting, actually, to hear how the nerves end.

“Charles!” Matt sticks out his hand enthusiastically, bouncing on his heels as he makes an active attempt not to shiver. “I’ve been exited all morning.”

Charles makes a pleased noise before reaching out to shake his hand. “Likewise, although, I admit that the students occupy a great deal of my energy with their antics.”

Matt beams, then addresses the other mutant. “Matthew Michael Murdock, nice to meet you!”

“Raven.” The voice says slowly. Feminine.

“My younger sister.” Charles explains. “We attended Oxford together.”

“Really?” Matt reaches out, grabs Raven in a tight hug before realising he probably should’ve asked beforehand. For safety reasons. And politeness.
“Are you staying?” Matt asks, pulling back because she’s not quite as enthusiastic as he is and, as a result, his cheeks are tingling pink. “You can, if you want?”

“I have a school to run, in his absence.” Raven gestures to Charles before clearing her throat.

Matt jerks back when her skin literally starts ripping apart and reforming across her body. He checks her heartbeat to ensure that she isn’t dead.

Matt listens for a few seconds before noticing the lack of hair around her shoulders.

“Raven can change her appearance.” Charles explains.

“Oh.” Matt says, relaxing. “Oh! That’s awesome! You’re probably a great spy, right?”

“The best.” Raven smirks, Matt can hear it in her voice, before returning to the jet in a fluent walk, despite the cold bite of the snow on her now-bare feet. “Later, Charles.”

“She’s not a people-person.” Charles says as they start moving towards the glass door.

Matt holds the door open for Charles to wheel through, then grins at Tony, who hasn’t moved since the jet landed.

“She—She was blue?” Tony whines in an utterly confused voice. “Matt, who is he? What is going on?”

“This is Charles.” Matt grins widely, pushing the door closed. “Told you he’s real. Charles, this is Tony Stark.”

“Lovely to meet you.” Charles says but Tony is frozen stiff and not from the cold.

“Matt.” Tony says, then throws his hands in the air and walks off in the direction of his workshop.

“He’s not a people-person.” Matt grins, gesturing to the elevator. “Come on, I want you to meet everyone.”

“It’s strange hearing you talk.” Matt says as the elevator lands on the communal floor. Matt steps out first, giving Charles enough room to move through the doorway. “Because when you’re in my head, I can’t hear your vocal chords.”

“Your ability truly is fascinating.” Charles says after a thoughtful moment.

“Wait ‘till you meet Bucky.” Matt grins. “He’s the only one that believed me – that you’re real.”

Matt turns his head to the roof.

“Jarvis, can you call everyone down here? Or up here?” Matt asks. To Charles: “Tony’s Artificial Intelligence. Tony’s smart.”

“Indeed.” Charles wheels into the center of the room, presumably looking around. “I’ve read about his progress in clean energy. Commendable achievement.”

“The Avengers are alerted, Mr Murdock.” Jarvis says and Matt hops onto the couch, slyly smirking at Charles.
“You have the same accent.” Matt gestures to the walls.

“Matt?” Clint steps out first, but the elevator brings everyone at the same time.

Matt waits until everyone’s paying attention before he gestures to the man beside him. “Everyone, this is Charles Xavier.”

“Greetings.”

Charles sounds quite amused by the situation at hand, especially when Clint whispers in his ear. “Matt, you realise your friend could be your grandfather?”

“So could Bucky and Steve!” Matt objects, then grins slyly. “So, Clint? Do you believe me? He’s right there, is that enough proof?”

Clint grumbles before turning to introduce himself.

“Clint Barton, at your service.” Clint gives a little wave before pausing. “Wait, Matt, is he really telepathic?”

“Charles can speak for himself. You’re being rude.” Matt points out, then beams at his friend.

The other Avengers are staring, dumbfounded. None, surely, expected Matt's telepathic friend to be an old man in a wheelchair. But he is, and Matt barely even notices.

“I am, indeed, a telepath.” Charles nods, then pauses. “Though, I make the effort to stay out of passing minds.”

“But you listen to mine, right?” Matt’s a little concerned that Charles might think he’s uncomfortable about the situation.

“You’re quite adept at projecting your thoughts, my friend.” Charles notes. “If you ask, I will steer clear. Now that we are not solely communicating telepathically, that is.”

“No, I don’t mind.” Matt assures him.

“Yeah, because you say everything that pops into it, Pipsqueak.” Bucky points out.

“This is Bucky.” Matt points at the man, who approaches to shake Charles’ hand.

He does it with his metal arm, which Matt is sure means a lot to Bucky. Perhaps because they both have a disability? Matt supposes he hates that awkward moment when people realise he’s blind.

“Charles, you’ll teach me how to play chess, right?”
Happy Birthday!

Chess is confusing, Matt realises when he starts playing. Charles is being patient with him, however, explaining moves when he asks and not playing competitively. The first game is just a run-through.

Matt tilts his head. The pieces are different sizes, one taller than the other, and Matt's supposed to concentrate on the tall ones.

“Is this mine?” He nudges a pawn but finds out that it's a rook when he feels a slight indent on the head. “Never mind.”

Charles points out which ones are his and he nods, screwing up his eyes in concentration.

“Can I take your bishop?” Matt lifts his queen, moving it diagonally to the small bishop.

“Yes, very well done.” Charles congratulates him as he snatches the piece and settles it in the jail he made out of balancing forks on their heads in a cone shape.

Matt can balance anything.

“You only have three left, right?” Matt points out the small pieces to make sure he's counting correctly.

“Correct.”

“And I want the king.” Matt mumbles, then picks up the head-like figure. “What does the horse do again?”

“The knight,” Charles chuckles, “can move two spaces horizontally or vertically, and then one space at a 90° angle.”

“Right.” Matt places it down.

The board has slightly raised spaces in a checkered pattern that indicate where the spaces are and Matt's starting to think this game is especially for blind people.

“You are correct.” Charles replies to his assumptions. Matt loves it when he does that. “I believed your abilities would be somewhat lacking.”

“I'd have to touch the board all over.” Matt admits, then grins. “Makes it too easy to cheat.”

“Does it, now?” Charles hums with amusement in his voice. It soon turns to something else, something discernable. “How are you feeling, Matthew?”

“Ok.” Matt shifts under the question.

Charles doesn't comment on the lie because they both know that's what it is.

After an unsuccessful move on the board, Matt frowns. “I just thought that, maybe, Foggy would have remembered my birthday. Or Tony might’ve found out. Somehow; he has a way of doing that.”

“I was under the impression that your birthday is not a day you wish to celebrate.” Charles moves
his castle, taking Matt’s knight.

“It isn’t. Not really.” Matt toys with the horse he previously stole from Charles, making it gallop around the board. “My dad never had money for anything, so it's not something we would do. He got me ice cream, sometimes.”

“I see.” Charles slides Matt’s stolen knight along the table, sitting it beside the other.

“I don't need presents or a fuss, just…” Matt lowers his head.

“Happy birthday, Matthew.” Charles says the words and Matt takes off his glasses, wiping wetness away from his eyes. He puts them back on, carefully.

“Thank you.” Matt ducks his head, moves a boring pawn in no particular direction.

“Can I ask a personal question?” Matt's head tilts up.

Charles’ lips form a slight smile as he listens to Matt's train of thought.

“No feeling at all.” Charles pats his knees. “My spinal cord is severed.”

“Just like my eyes.” Matt takes off his glasses again, fiddling with them. They're staring ahead of him, gaze slightly downwards, in a relaxed position. “Lots of blind people can still see, but my eyes have no light perception.”

“Yes, being in your head is quite confusing at times.” Charles leans back in his chair, contemplating the lightless world and it's endless song of heartbeats. “I had to rely on your thoughts in recognising your friends.”

Matt smiles shyly, then tilts his head up. “Would you walk? If you could?”

“No.” Charles replies. “Though I do miss running. Matthew, sight is not needed for survival. It is a privilege that some have and take for granted. Vision is not a requirement and you are no less of yourself for not being able to see.”

Matt tilts his head down at the board. “It would make chess easier.”

“Walking would make stairs easier, though this is a part of my life and a part I am accustomed to.” Charles gestures to his chair. “My abilities are not hindered. Neither are yours, my friend.”

Matt nods slightly, then shifts his queen. “Checkmate.”

“Tony made this for me.” Matt leads Charles into his fort, gestures to the place. “Lots of places I can hide.”

Charles circles the room, inspecting the room. He nods in Matt’s direction. “I imagine it’s quite fun. Do you feel the need to hide often?”

“I don’t need to, I guess, but I think the others are mad at me ever since, um…” Matt climbs into his hammock and then peeks out at Charles. “Want to lie up here? I can help, if you want?”

“No, thank you, I’m quite comfortable.” Charles moves closer so they can face each other. “After self-harming?”
“Why do you all have to call it that?” Matt buries his face in the rope net of the hammock, then tilts his ear at Charles. “It was a mistake.”

“Because that’s what it is, Matthew.” Charles reaches out to hold his hand and Matt looks at it before twisting his body completely and playing with Charles’ fingers. He imagines four little warriors on a quest across a rope bridge to fight a big dragon. Charles laughs at him before speaking again. “Self-harm is a bad thing, of course, but a stigma is never helpful.”

“But I don’t want to upset them.” Matt gestures with his head at the door.

“They’re upset because they care about you and it’s difficult for them to see you hurt yourself.” Charles reasons, acting out Matt’s warrior-dragon fantasy so Matt’s left hand can act as the dragon. Matt’s enjoying it very much. “If you tell your friends when you’re initially upset, they’ll be better prepared to help. No need to let an issue stew.”

“O-Ok.” Matt says, drawing out the sound. “I’ll try that.”

“Are you hungry?” Matt rolls on his feet from his heel to his toes as he and Charles take the elevator down to the communal floor: the main hub of food. “Bruce think’s I’m a great chef and Clint likes my baking.”

“Bruce enjoys spice.” Charles drawls, making Matt grin slyly.

“I wouldn’t put chillies in it. Already done that.” Matt points out.

The elevator doors open and Matt bounds out at the speed of light. “Hey, why is everyone crouching? Are we playing a game?”

Then, Matt shuffles nervously. “Can I play, too?”

“Whose idea was it to hide from Matt?” He hears Bucky say, just before he stands up.

“You’re hiding from me?” Matt’s shoulders droop. They really are mad at him, then.

“Matthew, use your senses.” Charles suggests.

Matt scans the room, hears everyone slowly rising. But there’s something across the ceiling, hanging in an arc. Matt sniffs something spicy and sugary in the kitchen.

“Surprise.” Clint gestures to the rest of the Avengers. “Happy birthday.”
Gifts

Matt starts crying. His face is wet with tears as he runs into the communal kitchen, taking off his glasses so he can wipe his face dry. It doesn’t work.

He hears Charles’ chair wheeling after him, pausing beside the island. “Matthew, how are you feeling?”

Matt sniffs, his eyes leaking hot tears across his cheeks and down his neck.

“That’s good.” Charles’s smile is kind, just like everything about him. The slightest curve, subtle yet powerful. It matches his ability. “Your friends might be concerned, however.”

Matt reaches for the sugar/spice smelling thing on the worktop, sniffs the cake, then has to step back and wipe away more tears.

“I’ve never had a birthday before.” Matt sobs, then approaches Charles from the side. “C’n I hug you?”

Charles makes a surprised noise, then nods his head. Matt hears the movement and wraps his arms around his shoulders. He feels Charles rub his back for a long moment, then Matt pulls back, not wanting to make the other man feel uncomfortable.

“Sorry.” Matt sniffs, reaching for the roll of paper towels on the counter. “I’m gross.”

The others are waiting quietly, patiently, while Matt relaxes. Matt appreciates that.

“Charles, I have a party.” Matt whispers, rolling on his heels. “Does it look nice?”

“Very.” Charles laughs, then takes a hold of Matt’s forearm. “Are you ready?”

Matt nods and follows Charles back into the living room. He, then, proceeds to hug each member of the team, including Foggy and Karen.

Natasha and Maya are carefully avoiding the hugs but Matt tracks them both down.

“Please?” He opens his arms, making the best puppy eyes he can muster.

Natasha and Maya both hug him at the same time and Matt sneakily kisses both of their heads before cackling and darting back over to Clint, tackling him to the ground.

“Watch my head, Bud.” Hawkeye complains, wriggling underneath Matt, who is sitting on his chest. “Not all of us have thick skulls.”

“I have a party.” He says, grinning as if he’s telling his friend some grand secret.

“Yeah, we know.” Bucky rolls his eyes as he lifts Matt off of Clint like a dog.

Matt wiggling in the air until Bucky places him on the ground, directing him to a pile.

“Presents.” Tony tells him.
“For me?” Matt cocks his head, reaches out for the little pile.

Matt opens the first thing he can find, in a large, cardboard box. Matt’s glad there’s no wrapping paper that he can sense because it’s more hassle than it’s worth.

Matt pulls open the folds of the box, touches the surface to find soft balls of squishy foam. The group gathers around him on the couches when he takes a full minute to ‘investigate’ the Styrofoam blocks.

Clint keeps him on track, urging him to put his hands in. Matt’s somewhat hesitant, so he sniffs the package and shakes it but there’s not much he can discern with all of those interesting blocks.

“We’ll keep them for later.” Clint promises and Matt plans on holding him to his words.

He sticks his right hand in hesitantly, finding something hard and smooth. Matt pushes his hand in deeper, touches the thing. He’s standing up in order to push his arm in.

“Ok, ok.” Tony laughs, reclining back in his chair. “It’s a carousel horse. You can sit on it. Dummy might have to lift it out.”

“But I want it…” Matt pouts.

Bucky and Steve get up and, because they’re super strong assholes, lift it out with ease.

Matt feels, which he presumes are reigns, and sits on the statue, perching on a hard saddle. Matt holds the pole, feels little indents that must look quite nice.

“Also…”

Tony gives him another box full of onesies because he just loves the way Matt walks around dressed like an oversized, fluffy animal.

Matt does a happy squirm after thanking Tony, then climbs off of the horse to find something else.

Clint gives him a bow – a wooden recurve – and feathered arrows. Matt thinks that they’ll match his horse quite well. He also receives a bow and set of arrows that is apparently a Nerf toy.

Amongst the pile, he finds scented candles (Foggy and Karen) and a giant teddy bear (Steve and Natasha).

Maya throws a toy at him, doesn’t say anything. It’s a stuffed bird. Matt thanks her, not that she replies.

“It’s a box.” Bruce explains quietly when Matt fumbles with the wooden thing in his hands. It’s hollow and he’s unsure of how to open it. “Japanese puzzle box.”

“How do I open it?” Matt shakes it, longing for the little thing moving around inside. It’s soft and he’s unsure of what it might be with the box in the way.

“That’s the puzzle.” Bruce says, pleased with himself. Matt thinks it says a lot about Bruce. He can either break the puzzle or carefully spend time figuring out how to open it – each method will satisfy his curiosity but only one will keep the box intact.

Matt’s heart starts buzzing when Bucky hands him a flat circle of metal on a leather necklace. The disk has a swirling pattern, but the thing he loves about it is that it’s made of the same material as Bucky’s arm. Matt is tempted to chew it, for some unknown reason. What does it taste like?
Metal? Nothing? It sounds like nothing, feels perfectly smooth with no ridges (bar the pattern). Does it taste like anything? Matt knows metal sometimes has a bitter taste.

Charles’ light laughter alerts him to the telepath’s presence. Matt pouts, slipping the leather around his neck.

“Tony helped me with it.” Bucky murmurs. “Spare part…”

“I love it.” Matt proclaims, again tempted to slip the metal into his mouth. Just to test it.

“If I may, Matthew, I have a gift of sorts for you.” Charles says, softly. “Though you may have no want or need for it.”

Matt’s ears perk to attention and he shuffles closer to Charles, sitting comfortably on his giant teddy.

“Your mind has the capability for sight. Through my own eyes, though you will have vision, briefly. If that is something you want.” Charles tells him in his head. Then, in words: “Of course, our chess set should remain with you. Perhaps you can practice.”

But Matt isn’t listening because is Charles offering to let him see? To look, just for a moment. For a fleeting, beautiful moment…

Matt might not be blind.
“Yes.” Matt nods. His neck is stiff and the movement is difficult but he’s nodding. “I want that.”

“Alright, Matthew.” Charles nods, lifting his fingers to his right temple. “Please remain as calm as possible.”

But Matt’s shaking. Shaking all over wit nervous energy. He gets up – he has to move – and paces before squeezing his eyes shut.

“Matthew.” Charles reminds him, gently. “I’m going to start slowly.”

“Start what?” Clint’s asking.

It’s difficult for him to describe. Just, suddenly, there’s a darkness in his eyes. Something to aim them at, to move them in the direction of, without really finding anything. But they can move and Matt suspects this might be like looking around in darkness.

“That’s it, Matthew. Embrace it.” Charles is telling him.

The next wave is blurry, a dissonance of color and Matt thinks he might be crying. Ok, he is. A lot.

He feels his way to the window. There’s blue and more blue but it’s different – darker – and darkness, black.

Matt makes out rectangles. Long, tall rectangles.

His sonar isn’t bothering him, quite the opposite. It’s lacking, for some reason. As if all of the information he usually reads is being visualized by his eyes, now. It’s converting into sight. Matt doesn’t understand.

But he doesn’t care because why did no-one ever tell him the skyline was so beautiful? Twinkling blobs of white painted on dark silhouettes, a blue blur of sky above him like overlapping fingerprints dipped in blue hues.

Matt’s hands touch the glass before he backs up suddenly. Glass. Glass is see-through, that’s right. Huh. It looks odd, now that he truly thinks about it. He’s used to thinking of sound-bouncing walls, not transparent sheets of this stuff.

Matt taps it. It doesn’t trill.

Matt turns around, looks at bodies and faces that he doesn’t recognize. It occurs to him that he doesn’t know who these people are, now. What was Clint wearing? No-ones talking.

The wheelchair draws his attention, though, because he knows that’s Charles.

“Hello, Matthew.” Charles’ voice greets his head but the man – the old, bald man he’s looking at – doesn’t move. He’s concentrating.

Matt reaches out to touch the nearest person’s face and, dear God, he’s wearing a yellow shirt and it really looks horrible on him but he loves it because it’s yellow and Matt knows it’s yellow.

But he touches the face. It occurs to him that Tony has a beard and Natasha has red hair so he scans the room for identifying traits. Bucky’s arm, Foggy’s long hair, Clint’s…
Clint’s hearing aids.

Clint.

He’s touching Clint’s face. This is Clint.

“Wow.” Matt laughs hysterically but his voice is almost silent to his normalized ears. Joking, he looks at them all. “You’re all so ugly.”

“Holy shit.” Clint replies and this isn’t what he imagined Clint looking like. He’s blond? Matt runs his hands over Clint’s shocked face, touches his blond hair before darting from the room.

He has to find a mirror. He has to find a mirror. He has to find a mirror.

Matt tracks one down in the communal bathroom. Clint follows him, looking all serious and, wow, does Clint always look serious or does he smile? Does he smile around Matt? Matt knows he does, but what does it look like?

The tower is really small, he realizes, when you can see the furniture and the walls. When you don’t know what’s happening in the next room.

But Matt finds the bathroom.

He’s not used to his face, he understands immediately, because his eyes are looking at this face as if it’s someone else. But it’s Matt. His hair is fluffy and dark red, he has a couple of freckles but not as many as he’d expected. His skin is otherwise blemish-free and he has a sharp jaw, but that’s not what Matt is looking at.

Matt is looking at his eyes.

Because his eyes are looking straight ahead and this isn’t a blind man, this is a man. Just a man. No-one would hesitate upon seeing this man – a lot more people might actually approach him. No-one would think twice if this man tried to cross the road by himself. No-one would question his intelligence or question his authority.

But this man isn’t Matt. This is just a man, looking back at him in the mirror because Matt doesn’t recognize his own face. Not looking ahead, eyes moving like any other normal person on the planet.

Matt is the perfect host for billions of bacteria that keep him alive. Matt is a good night’s meal sloshing around in stomach acid. Matt is insulation under the hairs on his arms, poor as it may be, and minimal air currents when he walks. Matt is the pulse from his head to his arm to his hand and back if he shifts a finger. Matt is mint and oil and chemicals and everything else because he spends so much time around the Avengers that he smells like them, smells like home.

But Matt doesn’t smell like home.

So, with several tears over the sink, Matt works up the courage to walk back into the living room. Looks at his friends, gathered around him. Looks at his dog and the black spot on his back, then at Lucky slobbering all over Nova, the silver lion at his paws. Looks at Clint, his best friend, and then looks at the sky.

“I’m done.” He says, voice ripped to shreds by his crying.

“And you’re sure about that?” Charles asks, his head tilting up to face Matt’s.
“It doesn't change the fact that I... I'd give anything to see the sky one more time.”

“I’m sure.”

And with that, the blue glow of New York and its twinkling lights are replaced with rays of sonar waves, mapping out the city in a euphonious song that Matt’s ears recognize, note by note.

Matt thinks it's beautiful.
“Sam baked your birthday cake.” Clint says as he wheels through the beautifully spicy thing.

“Thank you!” Matt hugs the man enthusiastically before reaching out his hand but Bucky dives in front of him.

“Singing, first.” Bucky reminds Matt, walking him back to his spot.

“Oh, um, ok.” Matt frowns, waits patiently.

Their rendition of ‘Happy Birthday’ is awful for all the right reasons. Despite their passable singing, Matt’s ears ache when the cacophony of noise starts in different octaves. Clint’s a little bit drunk already, so he’s louder than the rest.

But it’s amazing because his dad used to sing to him, with Matt curled up in his arms. Wishing him a happy birthday. Despite not having presents, birthdays in his little family was sweet. Until the accident and St Agnes.

“C’n I eat now?” Matt twitches, reaching out for the knife. Clint gestures for him to go ahead and he does, cutting off a slice of cake and shifting it onto a paper plate. “Who wants cake?”

“Oh, I think we’ll have chocolate, Pipsqueak.” Bucky snorts.

Matt shrugs because they don’t know what they’re missing. Matt’s mouth is on fire and he loves it.

“You’re staying, right?” Matt asks when the others go into the kitchen for another cake.

Charles looks at him, hesitates. “Matthew, I’ve had a lovely time, but—”

“But there’s lots of room!” Matt insists, swallowing a mouthful of fiery goodness. “You can sleep on mine and Clint’s floor and we can have a sleepover!”

“Matthew… it’s easier for me to return home.” Charles says, shifting his weight to one side of his chair.

“Is it because you’re disabled? Because that’s no problem, I’m sure we can accommodate anything you need.” Matt offers, reaches for Charles’ hand. “It’s my birthday.”

“There are certain things I have trouble controlling about my body, Matthew.” Charles lowers his voice in a little sigh. Matt’s face screws up before he understands.

“Oh, um, your…” Matt murmurs, then sits on the couch so he can whisper in Charles’ ear. “I sometimes have accidents, but Clint’s really cool about it. Bruce has lots of medical stuff if you need anything. You don’t have to stay if you’re uncomfortable.”

Charles takes a moment to think about it before resting a hand on Matt’s shoulder. “I think I will, actually. If it’s not any trouble.”

Matt fist pumps the air, grinning. “Sleepover!”

Charles laughs at him heartily as he rushes off to tell Clint.
Matt is in his dragon onesie again, tired of wearing ‘normal’ clothes all day, and ready to retire to his bedroom with Clint, Lucky, and Dice. That is, after he makes sure his duties as a host are fulfilled.

“So do you need a catheter or anything?” Matt asks as Charles wheels into the extra bedroom. “Because I can ask Bruce if you don't want to?”

“No, I'll manage.” Charles assures him.

“Pajamas are on the bed and there's an extra toothbrush in the bathroom under the sink.” Matt explains, then wracks his brain for anything else. “Oh! If you want a shower in the morning, my bathroom has a seat thing you can use. And Clint makes amazing toast.”

“I'll keep that in mind.” Charles does a transfer from his chair to his bed. Matt listens curiously.

“If you need anything, you can ask Jarvis.” Matt gestures to the ceiling, where the main microphone is situated. “Or you can call me through.”

Matt sits on the edge of the bed, judging it's comfort level. It should be good for Charles.

“And, um,” Matt tilts his head, “if anything happens and you're embarrassed, you can tell me because you're my friend. You don't have to be embarrassed about anything with me.”

“You've been very helpful, Matthew.” Charles tells him. “Admittedly, I was nervous about the chair, but you have been nothing but accommodating. Thank you.”

Matt beams. “Sleep tight!”

“Don't let the bedbugs bite.” Charles hums as Matt scampers towards the door.

“Don't let Lucky bite.” Matt amends, waving as he closes the door.

Clint's waiting for him in the bedroom when Matt scampers in, his spiked tail wiggling. Matt slips underneath the covers and wiggles towards Clint, who wraps an arm around him.

“Nice day?”

“The best.”

Matt's worried when a beeping sound wakes him up. Especially when he hears it coming from Charles' room.

He slips out of bed, careful not to wake Clint, and tiptoes to the door, motioning for his dog to be quiet. Lucky's out cold so he doesn't need to worry about him.

Matt walks along the corridor at a fast pace, knocking lightly on Xavier's door before entering.

“Matthew? Apologies, did I wake you?” Charles asks but Matt is too busy scanning for injuries and sniffing for blood.

“I'm fine, please relax.” Charles calms him, dropping back onto the pillows. “I have to turn every three hours.”

Matt relaxes somewhat. He closes the door behind him and approaches the bed, perching on the
edge like a real dragon. “Why?”

“To prevent pressure sores or pain.” Charles says, breathing out heavily.

“You're tired.” Matt comments. “Is it difficult?”

“No, I'm just old.” Charles chuckles. “Sorry for waking you.”

“S’fine.” Matt shrugs. He wriggles closer, plays with the corner of his wing. “Maybe I can sleep in here, too?”

Charles studies him before pulling back the covers.

Matt grins and wiggles in beside Charles.

He doesn't quite wrap himself around Charles because that might be harmful, going off of what he says, or, at the very least, uncomfortable. He does, however, lie close enough that the sound of Charles’ light breathing pulls him into a deep sleep.

Friends gathered together on his birthday, what else could he want for?
Bracelet

Matt groans when he hears Charles sitting up, propping himself up against the pillows.

“Good morning, Matthew.” He sounds amused but Matt is far too tired to figure out why.

He snuggles up under the covers, closing his eyes again.

“I do believe we should take your pet for a stroll.” Charles offers and, a mere second later, Matt’s head peeks out of the covers.

“You’ll come with me?” Matt asks happily. He’s been nervous to leave the tower without Clint, so the farthest he’s ventured has been on a walk with Lucky and Dice.

“Of course.” Charles smiles, tilting his head.

“You always sound like you’re having a seizure.” Matt tells Charles, resting his head on the table.

“Your brain is busy.”

“As long as it isn’t quiet.” Charles hums.

Clint’s making toast unhappily because God damn it, Matt, all he does is put it in the toaster!

Clint throws it at Matt, who catches it cheerfully. “Thanks, Clinton!”

“Matt, you’re a little—” Clint pauses, quietens for Charles’ benefit. “—a little nuisance.”

“I try.” Matt beams.

Dice stops to lift his leg against a tree.

He’s wearing his yellow jacket, leading Matt around like the perfect guide dog. Matt fumbles his way back over to Charles, who is patiently waiting on him.

“Matthew, I encounter a lot of young men and women with difficulties, whether they are physical, psychological, or in relation to their abilities.” Charles tells him, using the joystick to direct his movements at Matt’s side.

“I know, you’re a teacher.” Matt says pointedly. “Want to get ice cream?”

“Matthew.” Charles says and he sounds serious. Matt stops walking, flinches slightly. Is he in trouble? Did he say something wrong?

“Matthew, I would like to hear from you more frequently.” Charles explains, looking up at the scenery. “Mr Stark has informed me that you are attending sessions with a psychiatrist?”

“Yeah.” Matt frowns, plays with the harness Dice has. The dog is standing still, like a statue. A panting statue.

“Perhaps, instead, you could attend my school, once a week, for a visit?” Charles asks. “I should
like to help you in any way I can, my friend.”

Matt frowns. “Why are you saying this?”

‘Because he needs help’. Well, Matt scowls because he doesn’t need help, he just wants the world to slow down because it’s making him dizzy.

“Because, and I will be frank with you because I don’t care to lie, you’re having unhealthy thoughts. That can be helped, remedied, but not without assistance.” Charles tells him, turning his head to Matt. “You needn’t agree, of course, though the Avengers will insist on some kind of therapy, Matthew. You know that. What do you, in your heart, feel is more beneficial? What kind of help do you need?”

Matt stills.

Charles insists on getting ice cream and Matt is sure it’s a bribe to cheer him up. Well, it’s working.

Matt licks the sweet dairy, his tongue catching droplets of moisture as they melt in what must be the midday sun. Charles picked vanilla while Matt opted for chocolate. Admittedly, Charles is surprised by how effectively Matt eats the thing, no stains nor drips.

Matt’s also running his hands over the paper wrapper, fumbling with it.

“Are you enjoying yourself?” Charles asks curiously; Matt’s mind has been rather quiet, except the flashes of sensory input he always receives when Matt is nearby. Ringing bells, scraping fur, stretching leather, old copper, a small emptiness hanging around his neck.

Matt doesn’t reply, but he does stop licking the ice cream.

“Would you hurt me? If you could?” Matt’s voice comes out shy and timid, barely reaching above a whisper. Charles is getting nothing and Matt clearly doesn’t want him in his mind so he doesn’t push. Matt’s words echo around in his own head, bouncing on the walls of his skull before dying out.

“Never, Matthew.” Charles replies, frowning when Matt’s hand sticks out near him, something enclosed in the fist.

The paper is folded into a loop and this must be what Matt was focusing on.

Charles sees Matt’s eyes shift behind his glasses, trying to keep from crying. His fingers are shaking and Matt almost looks as if he doesn’t want to hand this thing over.

Charles frowns at it in contemplation before accepting the gift.

Matt bites back a harsh breath, reaching up to rub his eyes behind his glasses.

“This means a lot to you.” Charles comments, staring across the park. “Thank you for entrusting me with it.”

If Matt cries, neither of them mention it.
“Do you have to go?” Matt asks.

Raven is waiting over by the jet, leaning on its hard exterior. Charles is situated in the center of the helipad, saying his goodbyes to Matt before he flies back to wherever he came from.

“I’m afraid so, my friend.” Charles pats his shoulder. “You have a strong character, Matthew, know that. We shall arrange another meeting soon, I hope.”

Matt nods, then moves to the side of the chair so he can wrap his arms around Charles’ neck. “You’ll still talk to me in my head, right?”

“As long as I’m not busy, of course.” Charles pats his back before they both break apart. “Work on your chess game, Matthew, and we can continue our game.”

Matt nods.

With that, Charles boards the jet. Clint, who was waiting inside, comes out to give him a little side-hug. “You ok, Buddy?”

“I’m ok.” Matt says, even though he can hear the familiar buzzing in Charles’ overactive head fly off into the distance. “I mean, I’ll… I’ll see him for therapy?”

Clint smiles and pulls his friend into a tight embrace.
Matt’s an adult. Being an adult has certain requirements so Matt’s sitting on his bed, naked and trying his best not to shiver.

Because he’s having adult feelings, not that he wants them, and he’s trying to approach the situation with caution because this hasn’t happened in a long time.

He’s terrified, frankly. When his hand so much as grazes his leg, he pulls it away in an instant, body quaking with fear.

Matt’s crying, but only slightly so it’s ok.

He sits up, throws a pillow at the floor in annoyance. How exactly is he supposed to do anything about his problem when he can barely even touch his hips without feeling his heart fizzle and burn?

He hits the bed, then breathes deeply.

He supposes he could find something to listen to, although Tony might find out and he doesn’t want to be in that scenario.

“Mr Murdock, if you are in need of assistance, Mr Stark has uploaded some audio files. Shall I play one?” Jarvis suggests and Matt’s head nearly hits the wall with how violently he jolts.

“Jarvis, that’s really not the kind of assistance I want.” Matt murmurs, covering himself with the blankets (he’ll make a point of washing them). However, after a moment, he relents. “Ok.”

An audio description starts playing over the speaker in the wall near Matt’s head. Quiet but loud enough for him to focus on.

And while it’s good – Matt can’t seem to stop his face from heating up – he just doesn’t feel anything. In any case, he’d appreciate it if his private parts just disappeared.

Matt knows he shouldn’t feel ashamed, no matter how horrible he feels, because it’s the world’s most common ‘pastime’. Nevertheless, he’s covering himself up hurriedly and waiting out the humiliation on his bed.

Should he talk to someone about this? Probably. Will he? Never, in a million years.
“I have a problem.”

He’s talking to Tony because he hears Tony and his lady friends twice a month, at the very least, so it’s only fair that Tony is the one he talks to.

“Sure.” Tony grins cheerfully, slumping onto his uncomfortable but expensive couch. “Thought you’d ask Clint about… well, anything.”

“It’s an embarrassing problem.” Matt’s ears are as red as his hair, he’s sure. “And you’re more, um, active so I thought…”

“Active?” Tony quirks a brow.

“Mr Murdock is having difficulty masturbating.” Jarvis says and the colour drains from Matt’s face, leaving him white as a sheet and thoroughly shocked.

Tony doesn’t laugh, even though he really wants to. Matt is clearly flustered and upset; he came to Tony for help and Tony is going to help him. Or at least make a real effort.

“You get the audio stuff?” Tony asks, leaning forward.

“Yes.” Matt retains some colour again but his face hides away. “But I can’t even—I can’t even pee st-standing up… Never mind…”

Matt’s murmur sound small and pathetic, he realises, so he shakes his head. “Can we forget about this?”

He tries to make a break for it but Tony reaches out for his hand, tugging him back. “Hey, now, wait.”

Matt’s head turns away, but his ear is cocked to attention.

“Sit down. You have a problem, I’ll try to help.” Tony tugs him towards the couch, where Matt perches directly beside Tony, squatting instead of sitting.

Tony gives the odd gesture a confused look, but otherwise continues with the predicament.

“You know it wasn’t your fault.” Tony asks, but it’s more of a statement. “Being raped, it’s your mentor – Stick? – his fault, no-one else’s.”

“I didn’t fight back.” Matt lowers his head. “I-I wouldn’t win, not back then, but… I just done what he—I done everything he wanted.”

“’Cause you were a kid and kids tend to do that.” Tony shrugs. “Ask Brucie, he’ll go into the whole ‘humans are pack animals’ and ‘primary socialisation’ spiels.”

Matt fidgets.

His hands are sweating so he rubs them on his pants, hoping Tony doesn’t notice how nervous he is. It occurs to him that the way he is feeling might be why others are so nervous around him. People like to keep their private feelings private.

“Lemme guess, he sat you down and told you to do whatever perverted thing he fucking got off on, you weren’t quite sure because isn’t that an adult thing? But he’s reassuring so you go along with it
because he’s bigger and smarter and scarier, then you realise you really don’t like it and you ask him to stop but he doesn’t so you just go along with it?” Tony’s hand itches for a glass to hold but he resists the temptation. Then he sees Matt’s watery eyes and pouty lips. “Shit. And I’m being a jackass. Sorry.”

“No, you’re—it’s correct.” Matt sniffs, turns his face away.

“Then you’ll know I’m correct when I tell you it wasn’t your fault.” Tony says, turning Matt’s head with his hands. “Seriously, Cherry Pie, you listening? Do not blame yourself for that sicko’s actions. You know the laws.”


“Yeah, well, most people don’t appreciate the ‘brutal’ part.” Tony sighs, then turns to Matt. “Look, I can’t just make this go away in an instant. You’ll need to talk about it. I suggest, maybe…”

Matt listens as Tony takes a deep sigh, his hand twisting.

“Just, I don’t know, try building up to it? Try peeing first, standing up, and then maybe get used to the whole contact thing.”

Tony stands up but it’s Matt grabbing Tony’s hand this time.

“Don’t.” Matt says softly. “You’re doing well.”


“Can I sleep here tonight?” Matt asks and God damn it, he looks hopeful and Tony cannot resist those big, wet eyes and pouty lips. Not when his hair is fluffed up. The man looks like a freaking kitten.

“You just asked me for help jacking off and now you want to snuggle?” Tony raises his eyebrows. “Wow, Murdock, buy me dinner first.”
Tony’s bed is lovely. Big enough for a hoard of people (which Matt knows all too well, unfortunately) and he even changed the sheets! Matt’s appreciative.

“Will you stop rolling around?” Tony moans, nudging Matt’s back. “You’re kicking me.”

“Sorry.” Matt shrugs and opts for lying beside Tony. Then his head shifts onto Tony’s chest, under the reactor. His body shortly follows.

Tony, however, huffs and deposits him on the opposite side of the bed.

“You said we could snuggle!” Matt protests hotly, grabbing the blanket he brought. So far, it smells of Matt, Clint, Bruce, and Tony. He thinks he needs to replenish the chemical smell, however.

“Not crush me!” Tony argues back. “Go lie over there.”

He points at an empty spot but it’s too far away from Tony’s warmth to be acceptable.

“Are you wearing cologne?” Matt wriggles closer, but doesn’t crush Tony. It’s a ‘compromise’.

“I wore some two days ago.” Tony says, sniffs his armpit. Matt is much more subtle in his sniffs, which are really just deep inhales through his nose. He’s not a wet-nosed dog.

“You’re squishier than Clint.” Matt wraps his arms around Tony. Tony’s slighter bigger than Clint, who is by no means lank but is slim. Matt considers himself slim, too. Not like Bucky or Steve.

“You little shit.” He says affectionately, pushing Matt’s face away gently. “Well, you’re short.”

“I’m 5’10 and you’re shorter than me by three inches!” Matt protests.

“Yeah, but I’m a rich playboy.” Tony grins widely, then props himself up slightly against the pillows. “Hey, can I ask you something?”

“Shoot.”

Tony shuffles in his spot. “Do you think I’m an asshole?”

Matt frowns, sits up promptly, and slaps Tony’s cheek. Not too hard, but enough for him to complain.

“Ow!” Tony holds his cheek, scowling. “What was that for?”

“You’re my friend, don’t insult yourself because people aren’t allowed to insult my friends.” Matt tells him sternly.

“Cap bit me out today.” Tony mutters. “I don’t know, I just… I’m not good at touchy feely crap.”

“Don’t you like cuddling me?” Matt asks, picking at some of the covers between his thumb and fingers. “Because I’ll move away if you really want me to.”
“No, Matt. Shit, I’m not explaining this well.” Tony sighs, rubs his forehead, which is smelling slightly of sweat. “It’s like I try to do something good, like get you onesies or whatever, and it’s apparently a bad thing, like I’m buying you out or something.”

“I don’t think that.” Matt says, pausing. “I think you buy things because you know they make me feel good and you want me to feel good.”

Tony nods quietly. “Yeah.”

“Though, I do feel bad because I can’t repay you.” Matt says quietly, then reaches out for Tony, grabbing the man in a tight hug. “But I think you secretly like touchy feely crap, so I’ll do that instead.”

“Yeah, well…” Tony shuffles. “Women only stay the night, y’know. Not like Bruce is very cuddly.”

Tony’s lonely. It occurs to Matt in an instant and he’s left regretting every time he hesitated in touching the other man. His heart spikes and his palms sweat like he’s nervous, but maybe he’s nervous because it’s surprising for him.

Tony doesn’t object as their conversation dies down. Matt cuddles his waist until Tony reciprocates, his hands stiff on Matt’s back, joints locked awkwardly. Matt likes it, though, because Tony’s trying, even though he’s not very confident in really hugging another person. Quick, affectionate hugs he’s perfected, but tender, intimate cuddling seems like new territory.

His heart doesn’t relax, but his muscles do.

Matt wakens in the middle of the night abruptly.

Tony’s not working correctly, he understands immediately. His blood is pumping irregularly and Matt is instantly terrified.

“Jarvis!” He shouts, listening worriedly as Tony’s heart starts beating faster and faster until it stops altogether. “His heart isn’t—it stopped!”

“Defibrillators are in their casing across the hallway, Mr Murdock.” Jarvis tells him in a rushed voice and Matt is telling himself to just remain calm because Bruce has been alerted and is going to help Tony.

In the meantime, Matt runs back to Tony and sort of rips off his shirt, taking the electrodes and placing one under his left nipple, over his ribs, and the other on the right side of his chest, above his right nipple.

He’s hoping this doesn’t affect the reactor but Jarvis isn’t intervening so it must be fine. The AED (Automated External Defibrillator) tells him to shock Tony, so he finds the button and shudders when a current flies through Tony’s torso, violently shaking his limp body.

That’s when Bruce arrives, tells him to wait in the corner, and does his thing.

Matt’s worry had scrambled his senses, so it was difficult for him to understand exactly what was going on until Bruce approached him.
“Matt.” He’s using the nice doctor voice, Matt imagines it sounds like how a doctor would placate a child. He’s ok with that. “Tony’s going to be ok.”

Matt releases a breath he didn’t realise he had in him.

“You were very helpful, Matt.” Bruce tells him. “Jarvis told me that you were frightened, but you kept a level head and I’m proud of you. You might have saved Tony’s life.”

“He was dead.” Matt says, his body shaking. “Bruce, his heart stopped—He died.”

“I know.” Bruce nods along. “Cardiac arrest. He had another heart attack and it was a consequence of that.”

Matt reaches for Bruce’s arm. The man shifts him into a gentle hug, holding Matt while he tries to relax his breathing.

“If you want to see Tony,” Bruce cocks his head to look at Matt, “He’s in his bed, but try not to worry him.”

Matt nods. He can do that. Gentle, like with a baby.

So Matt leaves the whispering doctor, fumbling his way over to the bed until his hand finds Tony’s foot. Then, he positions himself near the man’s head.

“Hey, Cherry Pie.” Tony murmurs, sounding tired.

“You need to sleep and get better.” Matt tells him, voice quiet. “Because you’re my friend.”

“You’re my friend, too.” Tony says.

Matt’s not really sure what to do when Tony’s eyes start fluttering closed, so he works his hand into Tony’s limp one and gently strokes the back of it with his thumb, sending all of his warmth to Tony.

Because Tony is his friend.

Chapter End Notes

TEASER!

Tony's unwell, so what MCU character do we think will pop in to visit him? H'm, I wonder... Perhaps...

*whispers* War Machine *whispers*
Tony smiles when he feels Matt carefully nuzzled into his side, arm loosely wrapped around Tony’s waist.

The suggestion from Bruce that he should get an ICD (Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator) implanted in his chest was not a welcome one, however, Tony can’t deny that his heart attacks are becoming a problem. What if he has another cardiac arrest and neither Matt nor Bruce are there? He knows he’s lucky that Matt woke up with the sound of it, truly a testament to how sensitive Matt’s senses are, and that he was officially dead for two minutes. It’s his fourth official cardiac death.

He’s been anxious, which surely isn’t helping. He’s been making attempts to mix up his lifestyle choices, from spending less nights in the lab to drinking less coffee to drinking less altogether. It hasn’t been going well. He has, however, been eating healthier, though that’s mainly due to Bruce’s healthy cooking for the both of them.

But Matt crawled into Tony’s life and, last night, into his bed, washing away some of his worries. Matt’s the lovable kind of friend. He’s just liked, by everyone. A real charmer when he’s not trying (his attempts have much poorer results).

And he cuddles Tony. That’s always… interesting.

His father never did. Neither did his mother, what with the depression and the alcoholism. Jarvis, his human butler in his youth, would but Tony was shipped off to boarding school early enough to realise there was no chance of that bond forming. So Tony went without.

Then Matt came along with his tendency to steal warmth and Tony can’t help but indulge him.

Stupid, lovable Matt.

“Colonel Rhodes has arrived via elevator, Sir.” Jarvis tells him, making Tony sigh. Rhodey always makes such a fuss when Tony is completely fine.

“Send him through.” Tony whispers back, though he supposes his attempts at keeping Matt asleep are futile because the man can be woken by his heartbeat. Matt doesn’t stir, however, and simply continues snoozing, little snores making themselves known when he turns onto his front. Matt shifts, his head moving onto Tony’s hip. He’s trying to avoid his chest and has been all day.

The door opens. Rhodey’s eyebrows shoot up when he sees Tony with a man in his bed but, hey, it’s not as if it hasn’t happened before. Rhodey makes a couple of gentle steps before Matt jerks awake, his body rigid. His head tilts, eyes closed sleepily, then moves to Tony’s chest again, clearly listening to the heartbeat.

His hearing is terrible in the morning. At least, by Matt standards.

“Tones, you look like shit.” Rhodey tells him.

Mat situates himself beside Tony, squatted in a crouch, somewhat over his body like a possessive lion with its meal.

“Matt, this is Rhodey.” Tony rubs his back, letting him know Tony’s ok because Matt is really protective all of a sudden.
Matt relaxes, moving into a more comfortable position. “Hi, my name’s Matthew Michael Murdock, please don’t call me Matthew.”

“Uh, ok, Matt?” Rhodey holds out a hand. “Colonel James Rhodes, you can call me Rhodey.”

“Colonel? Ooh, are you in the army?” Matt asks happily. “I wanted to be a soldier when I was little.”

“Air Force.” Rhodey’s lips thin into a straight line when Matt doesn’t shake his hand. “Why’d you change your mind?”

Matt grins, pretending to hold a rifle. “Can’t shoot what I can’t see, right?”

“You’re…” Rhodey’s lips part as his jaw slackens in surprise.

“Completely blind.” Matt shrugs. “Super hearing, radar like a bat, Tony can fill you in. I get bored explaining it.”

Rhodey nods slightly.

Tony smirks from his place on the bed. “Matty, you think you’ll be ok until your ears wake up or do you want me to call Clint up with your cane?”

Matt tilts his head, pouts. “I’m leaving?”

“I’ll be downstairs in a little while, Cherry Pie.” Tony says, patting his shoulder.

“Fine, I’ll just play avoid the glass.” Matt scowls before running from the room.

“I need backup.” Matt tells Bucky, who questions nothing and tags along as Matt gets in the elevator, telling Jarvis that he wants to talk to Steve.

Bucky’s a good person, so of course he doesn’t mind when Matt asks for a piggy back and indulges the man in a ride from the elevator to the boxing ring in the communal gym. Bucky sets him down beside Steve, who is beating the life out of a punching bag.

Matt approaches Steve, who pauses to talk to him.

“Murdock, looking to—” Steve looks at his arm where Matt punches it, no real effort behind the hit.

“What did you say to Tony?” Matt asks unhappily, resting his head on Bucky’s arm, somehow not losing any of his intimidating glare.

“Stark?” Steve asks. “Nothing, really. He was talking about buying you more clothes and I just think he uses it to get out of really communicating with the other team members.”

“Really? Because we just snuggled all of last night, um, right up until the whole cardiac death fiasco.” Matt argues but Steve is puzzled.

“He had another…?”

“You would know if you tried to talk to him.” Matt points out sourly. “Maybe he just doesn’t like talking because he’s not sure what to say. Have you tried starting a conversation?”
“Of course, I tried to talk to him about Howard but he couldn’t leave fast enough.” Steve frowns, unwashing the tape around his knuckles.

“Howard and Maria Stark were alcoholics, the former of which who spent years devoted to finding yourself in the ocean.” Matt points out calmly. “Tony’s not very happy.”

“Howard would never—” Steve starts but Matt’s eyes flash in sudden rage.

He shoves the super solder against the far wall, pressing his forearm against Steve’s neck. He knows it’s wrong but Matt despises the words ‘would never do that’.

“I dare you to finish that sentence.” Matt hisses.

Steve is quiet so Matt lets him go, panting as he returns to Bucky and starts braiding his hair. Bucky smiles because Matt knows he secretly (maybe not so secretly) loves the attention.

“Abuse isn’t always physical or s-sexual.” Matt stammers, practically draping himself over Bucky. The man smells like fruit today and Matt’s finding himself partial to it. “Tony’s unsure about talking to the team. He’s very kind and you’re not giving him a fair shot.”

Steve’s quiet. Contemplating.

“I like you and you’re nice but you’re not very patient with Tony. Not like you are with Bucky or Sam.” Matt says, raising his head to face Steve. “I just think, maybe, give him some time? To find his comfort zone.”

Matt leaves before Steve says anything. Bucky joins him.

“Steve thinks of him like Howard.” Bucky says as they enter the elevator, the heavy, metal doors sliding closed after them. “Real piece of work, Howard was.”

Matt thinks about Howard. He thinks about Stick and Banner Snr and Maya’s father.

“Yeah. They usually are.”
He’s walking up the court steps and everything is going wrong.

There’s a smell that’s making him uneasy but he can’t quite label it. He stumbles up the steps, guided by Clint, who can sense his reluctance. The snow crunches under his feet like tiny skulls. Matt’s sliding as he tries to pull away from Clint.

“Something’s wrong.” Matt hisses at the other man. “We need to go, Clint, now.”

“Matt, we can’t just get up and go.” Clint tells him, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. “Keep going, Bud. It’ll be over, soon.”

Matt doesn’t know what it is, he just knows that he has to get out of here, now.

He turns around, ducking out of Clint’s reach, and hurried back down the stairs but Bucky grabs him.

“This way, Pipsqueak.” Bucky says, then tilts his head to the reporters to remind him that he needs to ‘look good’.

“I can’t, something’s wrong.” Matt insists. “Something really bad, you have to believe me!”

He’s shouting now but he doesn’t care.

Bucky doesn’t let him escape, however, and takes a tight hold of Matt’s arm, pulling him along. And, of course, Bucky is too strong for Matt, no matter how much he literally digs his heels in.

There’s cameras clicking and reporters asking what he’s doing but Matt is too busy trying to spare himself because something is very wrong and if they go inside, he’ll have to wear those sonic tasers and he won’t be able to concentrate enough to find out what.

So he starts hitting Bucky, punching him at full force, despite his awkward positioning.

“Matt, just behave, ok? It’ll be over soon.” Clint says. “You need your cane?”

Clint is assuming he’s having a bad day but he’s not! It’s just that something is wrong and the stupid white stick isn’t going to—

Stick.

Matt recognises the trace of his scent up the stairs, more pungent as he climbs the steps. The stench of death, of old age and illness.

Matt thrashes against Bucky, loosening his grip and pulling something in his hand in order to squirm out of Bucky’s metal grip.

Matt darts, quite blindly he might add, in the direction of the reporters. The news van is easy to scale and dart over.

There is no chance in hell that he’s going anywhere near Stick.
Matt doesn't stop running. He's unsure if this is just some big metaphor for his life. He'll never escape Stick. He'll always be running.

He can't hear anything, not in its usual depth, so his focus is on the park he's currently in, and trying not to hit a tree.

He's being followed. A heartbeat, not Stick’s, is tailing him through the trees with silent steps.

And Matt's getting tired.

Maybe that's why he's running towards the East River. He's seconds away from the edge of the park. Seconds.

3, 2, 1…

As displeasing he's told the colour of the water is, he's well aware that the river meets the federal bacteria guidelines and is perfectly safe to swim in.

Still, when Matt's body plummets into the water, he's careful to keep his mouth and eyes shut. The chill hits him immediately, right down to his bones, but he doesn't fixate on it.

He starts swimming immediately, despite not being very good at it. His face occasionally comes up for panting breaths but his focus is on the retreating footsteps into the forest.

And now he's in the middle of the East River.

Matt coughs, spits up water that he managed to swallow in his haste.

He doesn't hear anyone suspicious but his ears are waterlogged and defective.

He swims slower in the direction of the other side but his minor coughing fit disoriented him. The smell of the water is horrendous, even if it's not dangerous.

Matt's body is starting to grow stiff with the cold because he's swimming in mid December.

His mind really isn't in the right place to block out the coldness creeping up his limbs, freezing his fingers and toes.

The vague sound of an engine catches his attention as his body locks up, growing quickly lethargic. The rush of adrenaline is wearing off and Matt's slight shivers are wearing off into a cold stasis.

Matt's eyes are closing, heavy and sore, and the water is creeping over his face like crawling frost.

That's when two metal arms grab him out of the river, lifting him into the relative warmth of the air and then across the water to the other side.

Matt splutters on the grass where the metal man dropped him, his body drawing in on itself in the bitter breeze. His suit is soaked through, sticking to his flesh like a second skin.

“Matt.” Rhodes — Rhody — talks to him once his faceplate is removed. “I'm going to lift you back up and carry you to the tower. The others have been alerted.”

But his words don't matter because Matt's eyes are already closing.
“I think we need to believe him. His senses would surely alert him to threats we can’t see. Look what happened with Charles.” Bruce is talking near Matt when he wakes up. His eyelids don’t lift, however, because he feels so, so tired.

“I agree.” Tony says and he sounds tired. Matt thinks he might be in a wheelchair. He's not supposed to be doing anything. “We should trust him. If there is a threat and we don't believe him…”

Matt sniffs.

“Matt?” Bruce is asking him, fussing over him in an instant.

“Cold.” Matt manages. He feels like a fish when he realises that he's wrapped in some kind of warn sheet. Apparently it's a ‘Bair Hugger’. Bruce tells him he had hypothermia and that he's an idiot for doing what he did. You know, the usual.

Clint is sitting beside him, petting his head. Matt doesn't mind the attention.

“Stick. At court.” Matt says, his teeth chattering together.

“Shit. Ok.” Clint replies.

Matt sniffs, tries to sit up but Bruce gently presses him back down. “You're in the tower, safe. We can worry about court later.”

“Ninja.” Matt tries to sit up again but finds it very difficult with Bruce's hand holding down his head. It's light but he can't get the momentum to sit up. He whines in protest.

There's only one thing on his mind: he's being hunted. He's being hunted by Stick.

Stick wants to kill him.
WARNING!

This chapter includes rape (no explicit sex but violence mentioned).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Matt’s supposed to be thinking of that day. The day after. Remember his assailants, remember it all.

He goes into the untouched room containing the sensory deprivation tank and the hot tub. Matt’s heart is eerily calm, as is Clint. The man is at his side, not saying anything. Simply ensuring Matt doesn’t do anything stupid.

“You don’t have to try this all at once, Matty.” Clint eventually says after Matt spends 12 minutes and 47 seconds (he counts the seconds with exceptional precision) of listening for the casket-like container in front of him.

He has to do this.

The drug was wearing off as his eyes opened.

Suddenly, it was as if his other senses had seen blinded. Deafened, numbed, and muddled. He could wiggle his arms, there was enough room, but whatever was inhibiting his movements was preventing any real force collecting in his arms. Not nearly enough to hit against the lid.

He might've been lying down but it’s difficult to tell.

He could smell salt, hear the inner workings of his own body, and taste traces of blood in his mouth, but the sensory input ended with Matt.

It was as if the world had been squished down to the size of this case and it was terrifying.

Matt was crying, not of his own violation – it was difficult to control his eyelids, never mind his tear ducts. He was sleepy and it would've been so easy to close his eyes and drift off.

Salt water in his mouth made him gag and spit up. He’d turned over without realizing.

He was naked in a vat of brine. Floating was easy in the salty water and it felt like he was in the vacuum of space, nothing to sense except his own self.

Then the lid opened.

“Matty, how nice to see you again.”

Matt wasn’t quite sure where his body was trying to go when it jerked back into the salt water. Matt swallowed a rancid mouthful when he tries to scream but Stick’s hand clamped over his
“Let’s not go through this again.” He tilted his head. “You’re outnumbered, not that that’s important. Because you’re going to obey me, aren’t you, Matty?”

His voice was sickeningly sweet and Matt hated that his head was nodding without his permission.

Stick lifted him out by his throat and Matt struggled to climb over the edge of the case, get some footing, but Stick simply dropped him onto the floor. Matt slipped, his side connecting harshly with the rock-hard tiles of the room.

**Smooth tiles, square and roughly 5x5 inches.**

Matt curled up on the ground, trying to figure out a way that he could cover the entirety of his body at once. Or become invisible.

“If you’re going for the submissive bullshit, shouldn’t you be,” Stick rolled Matt over with his foot, knocking him onto his back, “presenting yourself?”

Stick’s cackle resonated around the room. It was an enclosed space that seemed to loom over Matt, no less than Stick himself. **20 x 20 feet? No windows. One door with two guards outside.**

Matt, in a desperate attempt to get away, tried to clamber away from Stick but the old man simply laughed at him.

“You’re pathetic, aren’t you?” Stick kicked him over in one fell swipe.

He knelt beside Matt, who was crying quite earnestly then. Pressed his lips against Matt’s ear before whispering into it.

“The tape. It’s causing quite a problem for me, Matty.” Stick told him, trailing fingers down to his hip. “I can imagine how much you enjoy it. At night, all alone.”

Matt whimpered, face flushed with embarrassment. He knew Stick could hear his every sniffle and whine.

“Do you miss me, Matty?” Stick’s hand traveled lower and Matt found his body shutting off automatically. It’s a routine he learned early. Face blank, mind wandering outside to give his body some space. Some ‘alone time’ with Stick.

There was the noise of a child’s whimpers, the scent of blood from the same direction. Close by – he wasn’t quite ready to venture further. Not after being drugged. Regardless, he was positive that there’s a child outside, beside vrooming cars and the fleshly cut aroma of grass. **A street in the vicinity. Grass beside the pavement/ a play park? Possibly near a housing estate.**

But Stick was hurting him. He knew the routine, too, and he was hurting Matt where he knows it would get his attention.

Matt sniffled – his face was dribbling with tears and snot – and tried to ignore everything but Stick wouldn’t let him.

“I need that tape, Matty, but I can’t seem to find it in your apartment.” Stick growled, but then he smiled. “I know you’re going to be a good boy and do everything I ask, Matty. I know you’ll behave for me.”
“Don’t know what—I don’t understand.”

And, oh, how Stick hurt him for lying. They both knew it but he was expected to answer, so a lie was just as bad as remaining silent. Stick took both hands away from his midsection, slammed his foot into Matt’s chest until something snapped, shifting out of place.

“Matt, you need to listen. I’m in charge here. Just because you’re a retard doesn’t mean you don’t understand that. I know you do.” Stick paced back and forth before pausing at Matt’s side. Matt flinched at his words.

“I’m—I’m not…” Matt whimpered. “I’m fine.”

“You really believe that?” Stick scoffed, knelt at his side. Matt jerked away in fear but Stick didn’t hit him. Instead, he moved Matt’s head and inspected the blood on his face. Wiped it away. “Matty, you’re not normal. Don’t play pretend. I’m choosing what’s best for you.”

Matt flinched, tried to wriggle away. Stick allowed him to shift to the other side of the room, where he stroked the wall anxiously.

**Wallpaper with prominent vertical ridges. A house interior?**

“Matty, give me the tape and you can go. Tell me where it is.” Stick told him from across the room. “I know you’re sensible, you’ll do the right thing.”

“No.” Matt whispered but, obviously, Stick heard it.

There’s a long pause.

“Ok, Matty. Ok.” Stick sauntered over to him like a prowling lion, footsteps loudly tapping against the hard tiles. “I didn’t want to do this to you. Not really. But I’ve missed you.”

Matt pushed himself back against the wall.

Stick crouched in front of Matt, slid in between his legs, and stroked his cheek with his wrinkled thumb.

**Two levels.**

Matt didn’t struggle, but he was fairly certain Stick heard his pleas.

**Extensive lawn.**

Stick filled his senses, flooded his mind with horrifying sensations of sex, sex he didn’t want.

**Detached garage.**

Stick left him in the corner, blood painting his inner thighs. His breathing was hitched and weak sobs were the only sounds in the room as the smoke from Stick’s cheap cigarette wafted through the room. He left all kinds of marks that Matt doesn’t want to think about. Matt, himself, was trembling and his heart was throbbing, but Stick paid no mind.

And Matt can’t see colors but Stick taught him red.

Chapter End Notes
I HATE, HATE, HATE the word 'retard' but Stick is a jackass. Just a disclaimer that Stick's opinions are not mine and I seriously dislike the word.

Also, if you hate me for hurting Matt, you might like to know that I wrote this entire thing before realizing that the flashback was in PRESENT TENSE when it should've been PAST and I had to change it all. :P
Meeting Aunt May

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Matt’s not vulnerable but he’s been following Bucky around all day. He’s sure Bucky must be sick of Matt, especially when the redhead drags him underneath the table in the communal living space.

Bucky doesn’t crawl underneath because Matt is shorter and Bucky can’t fit easily, but he sits at the edge with Matt cuddling his flesh arm, holding on for dear life.

Out of his friends, Bucky and Bruce are his best bets for safety. Bruce got annoyed at the clinging. So, now, he’s with Bucky. He’s \textit{not} feeling vulnerable, the world is just scary.

Clint, Cap, Natasha, and Sam are investigating some houses matching the descriptions Matt gave them. They’re currently in Hell’s Kitchen. Matt’s not sure what to think of that.

Bucky’s muscles are starting to tense when Matt tries to shuffle further under the table. His eyes are flitting between the small space and the wide expanse of the room.

“Matt, stop it.” Bucky pulls his arm back as Matt tries to drag him under.

But the redhead is feeling lost in the wideness of the living space. The table is small, cosy. If the table is the sensory deprivation chamber, the room is where Stick will grab him and that’s not where Matt wants to be.

He struggles when Bucky pulls him closer to the edge, not wanting to let go but also feeling fearful of the wide space.

“Matt, stop it!” Bucky snaps, his heartbeat thudding in Matt’s ears. He can feel his blood pulsating under his fingertips, through Bucky’s arm. It’s making them both nervous.

Matt’s starting to wonder if Bruce will tolerate him for another couple of hours. Until someone else can keep him safe.

“Murdock, fuck off!” Bucky hits him across his face, fist splitting open his lip.

Matt thinks that, if he was doing anything in that moment, it would be called ‘staring’. Because he feels his head pointing in Bucky’s direction, eyes staring somewhere near him as they start to fill with tears. The only thing in his ears is the blood in his own chest, pooling in four constricting compartments. Matt hears the waterfall splash of the liquid shifting through his heart and out the other side.

Bucky reaches out for him, saying something about sorry but Matt can’t listen because \textit{Bucky hit him}.

Tears leak out of his eyes as he lurches away from Bucky’s hand, scrambling to the other side of the table and out into the open space.

Matt finds the elevator, stumbling in his haste, and leaps in.

Bucky doesn’t follow him.
He’s not supposed to bother Tony because *Tony is resting* but Matt’s really starting to worry and he’s not sure where to go.

Foggy and Karen are off, somewhere. He’s not sure but Jarvis tells him there’s no-one on their floor. Something about his trouble at the courthouse.

“Lobby. Take—I want—” Matt sobs, sniffling and trying to wipe his face because *it’s all his fault, he deserved it. Bucky doesn’t like small spaces and Matt scared him and now Matt’s scared and he can’t breathe.* Why is breathing so difficult? Why is his chest feeling tight?

The elevator doors open at the lobby and Matt can hear Jarvis’s soft voice talking to him through his watch, assuring him it’s all ok, but it’s not. It’s not ok. Matt can’t be in the tower, his home, and he can’t be outside, so where is he supposed to go?

He guesses running is just exercise. Nothing to worry about.

His ears twitch to a familiar sound outside of his apartment, then frantic knocking. Fleeting gasps and sobbing.

Matt?

Peter skids into the living room, gives a quick glance at his aunt before answering the door.

Matt falls against him in a fit of sobs, clutching at Peter’s shirt as he sobs into the teen’s shoulder. His lip is busted up, covering his face in red blood that matches the colour of his hair.

“Hey, hey,” Peter pats his back, then pulls back to inspect his face, “what’s up?”

“Bucky hit me—I wanted to—Peter, I don’t…” Matt trails off in sobs, his hands shaking as he tries to reach out for another hug.

Peter wraps an arm around his shoulders, glances back at May. “Aunt May, can you make some coffee? Please?”

She nods hesitantly, goes to the kitchen to put on the kettle.

Peter guides Matt inside and the man looks lost, just like he does when he’s got a concussion. Peter doubts that’s the case, but he also wonders how Daredevil stumbled all of the way to his house.

“Sit down, I’ll clean you up.” Peter tells him, his brow creasing.

It doesn’t look bad so he grabs the family first aid kit, not his private one, from the kitchen. May gives him an odd look.

“Stark internship.” Peter ducks his head. “He’s really sweet.”

“Is he now?” May raises an eyebrow, returning to the living room with Peter. She quietly sits down, watches Peter clean up Matt's face with a handful of tissues, then wet wipes and antiseptic for his lip.

“Hey, Red, talk to me.” Peter nudges his arm. “What happened?”
“I forgot Bucky doesn’t like small spaces and I was hiding – just, um, because – and he hit me.” Matt sniffs. “My fault, just… wanted to leave.”

“Where was Hawkeye?” Peter frowns. “I figured he was your best buddy?”

“Investigating th-the locations I gave him. Can’t tell you.” He says for May’s benefit. Ultimately, Peter gestures emptily to his aunt. “This is Aunt May. Aunt May, this is—”

“Daredevil.” She says in a tight voice, though not an angry one. “Peter, you shouldn’t be getting involved in anything…”

“I’m not! Matt’s just a friend. I talk to him sometimes, at the tower.” Peter insists.

Matt sniffs, trails his fingers back and forth along the soft material of his sweats. “I’m Matthew Michael Murdock, very nice to meet you. Please don’t call me Matthew.”

May’s brow creases. “May.”

“Tony’s on bedrest, I’m not s’posed to stress him.” Matt draws up his knees and squats in his spot. “But… But we’re friends, right? So I ran here.”

“Are you an idiot?” Peter huffs. “You’re supposed to be resting, too.”

“I was! I was in bed all day yesterday – behaving, just like Tony said.” Matt takes Peter’s hand and starts moving his fingers around, listening to the roll of his knuckles. “Didn’t run all the way here. Got lost.”

“That’s because you don’t have your cane.” Peter pats his head with his free hand. When he looks at Aunt May, her face is in a different expression. It’s softer, understanding.

Considering that Matt’s squatting with his head tilted, Peter assumed she would be more confused.

“Matt, how do you like your coffee?” She’s asking all of a sudden and wow, Peter did not expect that. I mean, Daredevil isn’t even an official Avenger – he’s a badass vigilante.

“Black, no sugar, no milk, no cream, please. Thank you.” Matt recites.

May leaves and Peter follows after patting Matt on the shoulder.

“Peter, you didn’t tell me he’s autistic. I wouldn’t have snapped like that.” She frowns and so does Peter because… what?

“Matt isn’t autistic.” Peter says, taking the coffee once May has mixed the water in.

“Oh.” May blushed a little. “Sorry. Just, with the way he was acting… Never mind, my mistake.” Peter brushes it off, returns to Matt.

“Coffee in front of your left knee, on the table.” Peter tells him, rubs his back.

Matt’s quiet all of a sudden, however. Obviously, he heard May in the kitchen. He’s not autistic, Peter’s right. It’s not as if he’s seen a doctor about anything like that. But Stick called him a ‘retard’ and isn’t that supposed to be a bad word for… It’s not something to worry about, but Matt’s not sure what it means. Does he act strangely?
Matt takes in his squatted position. It’s not strange, he just gets cold easily. Plus, he likes having his limbs close to his torso. It’s convenient. Chairs have only been invented recently, in the course of mankind’s history, so it’s not too strange. Bruce even commented on it, told him that squatting is better for using the toilet because it’s a more natural position.

But perhaps he should sit like Peter is, currently. Peter doesn’t seem unnatural.

Matt’s not sure what autism is, really. He’s not interested in many things unless it’s important to him. He shrugs it off, drinks his coffee once it cools. However, it’s still in the back of his mind.

He might not be autistic, but he’s not normal.

Chapter End Notes

Matt doesn’t have a bad opinion on autism, but he does think of it as unnatural. Simply because doesn't want to seem anything other than neurotypical -- it's just not something people would like to be called unless they have a diagnosis because it is a disorder and people are conditioned by their biology (humans are social animals who rely on being in a herd for survival) to want to appear 'normal'.

Now, again, Matt's opinions are not mine.

In my story, MATT IS NOT AUTISTIC, but it's undeniable that he has many characteristics associated with autism. For example, sensory issues are commonly associated with autism, however this is due to his abilities. His poor social skills are due to being ostracized until college. Other signs could be due to being abused. Now, Matt isn't going to be diagnosed as autistic or treated for autism, but the story can be read as this if you prefer. Your choice, readers. But I'm not directly aiming for an autistic Matt. Just to be clear.

This will be cleared up in the next chapter, but I just wanted to be clear.

I WILL NOT TOLERATE HATE SPEECH SO PLEASE BE KIND IN THE COMMENTS OR SAY NOTHING. You are allowed to have your own opinions, but don't be cruel to others. Please be courteous and thank you for reading :)
“Mr Murdock.” Jarvis speaks up from his watch. Matt tilts his head. “Agent Barton has currently returned to the tower with Agent Romanoff, Captain Rogers, and Mr Wilson. Agent Barton is requesting your whereabouts.”

“How’m?” Matt rolls on the balls of his feet. He’s standing near the couch, tired of sitting. Peter is holding his hand because he got a little uneasy, but he’s doing a good job of calming Matt down. “Clint’s home?”

“Yes.” Jarvis responds. Peter stands explaining Jarvis to May, who seems no less confused.

“But I’m blind.” Matt points out. “Blind-blind, my hearing isn’t working. Forgot my cane; is Clint mad?”

“Agent Barton has assured me that he harbours no ill feelings towards you, only concern.”

Matt laughs to himself because Jarvis sounds quite posh. Peter squeezes his hand, gets his attention. “I can walk over with you, if you like?”

“Sleepover?” Matt asks happily.

“School tomorrow.” Peter says hesitantly. “Sorry.”

“Oh.” Matt falls flat on his feet, frowning. “You’ll pet Dice and Lucky, though?”

“Sure!”

Clint and Bruce are there when Peter leads him into the communal room.

Matt darts over to Clint with open arms, grabs him in a tight hug. “Did you miss me? I missed you.”

“Sure I did, Buddy.” Clint squeezes him back. “But I think you scared the shit out of Bucky and Bruce, running off like that.”

“Bucky was quite upset.” Bruce nods in agreement, tilting Matt’s head up with his hand. He examines Matt’s split lip. “Did something happen?”

“I scared Bucky.” Matt pulls away from Bruce’s hand, buries his face in Clint’s scent because he’s missed his friend. Clint makes him feel safe, more so than when he’s with the other Avengers or Peter.

“And he acted defensively.” Bruce gathers, sighs.

“I cleaned him up.” Peter pipes up. “Looked worse before.”

“How can I look worse before when I can’t look now?” Matt asks seriously and it takes a moment for them to groan unhappily at his bad joke.
Peter, unfortunately, has to leave, so Matt’s left with Clint and Bruce. Surprisingly, he follows Bruce down to his lab, connected to his arm with the excuse that he has no idea where he’s going.

“What’s autism?” Matt asks, trying to figure out one of Bruce’s puzzles.

“A complex developmental disability that commonly displays signs beginning in early childhood. It affects a person’s ability to communicate and interact with others.” Bruce answers, then pauses, glancing up at Matt. “Any reason why you ask?”

“Peter’s aunt thinks I’m autistic.” Matt stops fiddling with the tactile puzzle pieces. “I’m not really sure what it is.”

“Did you have a language delay as a toddler?” Bruce asks.

Matt shakes his head. “Not that I know of.”

“That might have been more of an indication.” Bruce says, putting a pen to his lips. He doesn’t chew on it. “It’s possible, though I would say that any symptoms you have would be related to a different cause.”

“Huh?” Matt finds himself getting absorbed in the puzzle again.

“Well, sensory issues – most people with senses like yours would have difficulty dealing with the sensory input. Social skills – you were ostracized as a child, yes?” Bruce gestures to Matt with his pen before turning back to his work. “I wouldn’t rule it out, though I think it would be more accurate to say that you display traits of autism, not autism itself.”

Matt rests his head on the desk, thinks that through. He reaches for Bruce’s arm, stealing warmth through his fingertips.

“Would you like to be tested?” Bruce asks after a minute. “I wouldn’t be able to test you, you would have to visit another doctor.”

Matt screws up his face, shakes his head against the worktop. “I don’t care that much.”

“Alright.” Bruce gently pats his shoulder before getting back to his work.

Tony’s feeling well enough and Bruce is allowing him to leave his wheelchair, as long as he isn’t walking too much at once.

They’re celebrating with a dinner together and Bucky is acting strangely.

Matt’s noticed Bucky looking at him, then looking away. Repeatedly. He’s also noticed the subtle nudges between Steve and Bucky.

Matt is resting on Clint’s arm. The man doesn’t seem to mind. Matt can feel his shoulder rolling as he cuts through his steak. Matt reminds himself to make salads for Clint. He needs to continue eating healthily.

Matt’s been moving things around in the fridge, urging Hawkeye to eat more vegetables, without him noticing. Tony’s heart attack scared Matt – he wants to ensure his other friends are healthy. Especially Clint. Matt’s working hard to ensure that nothing bad will ever happen to Clint.
“Matt?” Bucky asks and it sounds shy, not like his loud nature.

Matt hides his face in Clint’s arm, breathing in the scent of mint – Matt likes the minty body wash smell – and then turns his ear to Bucky.

“I’m sorry about your face.” Bucky clears his throat. “Scaring you.”

“My fault.” Matt lifts his feet up onto the wooden chair, tucking them under his body. He hits the table by accident, disrupting the drinks. “Forgot ‘bout the space thing.”

“Well, I think that’s settled, h’m? Just a misunderstanding.” Clint nudges Matt’s legs. “C’mon, Bud, there’s not enough room at the table.”

Matt unhappily crosses his legs instead. Clint seems more approving of that instead of squatting.

“Not that we mind you squatting.” Foggy clears up. Some heads turn to him. Foggy smiles at Matt. “There’s just not enough room at the table.”

Matt turns his head to his lap, as if he’s looking at it. He’s so used to conveying his attention like this. Apparently it’s helpful in conveying if he’s ignoring people or not. For sighted people, that is. Matt isn’t affected.

“You haven’t done that in a while.” Foggy comments.

He remembers college and the odd way people would pay attention if he squatted. Matt touches his knee, contemplating.

“Just letting you know we don’t care. As long as you’re comfortable.” Foggy verifies, cutting into his own meal.

It’s moments like this that Foggy reminds Matt why he decided to make him his first friend. Despite the initial scent and snoring problems Matt had to overcome. Foggy has always treated Matt kindly. Even when Matt cut his wrists open, showed up to Intro to Ethics and passed out in the middle of class. Foggy held is hand in the hospital, even when the sounds, smells, and the sandpaper bed make him cry more than he cares to admit.

Even when Matt wet the bed, Foggy didn’t hurt him or mock him in front of the others. He sat with Matt until he could urge his friend to go and have a shower. Ensured that the bedsheets were taken care of.

*He was totally out of his element.*

*After passing the bar, Matt moved from New York City back to Hell’s Kitchen.*

“How hard could it be to adjust?” He actually said, out loud. He’d lived there, for years.

What he wasn’t taking into account is maybe his greatest weakness: sensory overload.

For Matt, it’s not just about warmer weather or navigating traffic. Because of his hypersenses, everything out here is new to him. But the human brain, no matter how smart, can only process so much data at any given time. The more there is to learn, the more difficult it is to maintain your normal level of concentration.

That is either the God’s honest truth... or a ridiculous line of crap to cover an idiot lapse of judgement on his part.
Hard to tell.

Matt locates the salad bowl on the table, pushes it towards Foggy. Foggy’s a good friend. He’s always been a good friend.

Matt thinks he should probably take care of Foggy, too.

Chapter End Notes

Text in italics near the end of the chapter credited to Daredevil Vol. 1: Devil at Bay. Slightly altered.

On the subject of Autistic!Matt, here's a link that I agree with:
http://thequeerwithoutfear.tumblr.com/post/134886005310/i-am-so-here-for-autistic-matt-murdock

I think Matt shares a lot of autistic traits. A common example is his stimming (sensory-seeking activities), such as:
http://68.media.tumblr.com/0d5a5f74ff004346ce55b69ffdf7278e/tumblr_inline_o4itfwwAKG1qib1

I don't think Matt is autistic in canon, but I think he could easily be described as autistic and it would be accurate. Here's some more pages if you're interested in more arguments:
https://www.tumblr.com/search/autistic!matt%20murdock

Again, please no hate speech. Let's be considerate of everyone, regardless of neurodivergence or not.

Thank you all for reading! <3
Matt really is excited because it’s his first time visiting the X mansion. He gets to visit Charles’ school! So he’s shaking and pacing and trying to figure out how to urge the jet to move faster.

It’s snowing, so Clint’s being careful, but Matt’s too excited.

He’s jumping giddily, tugging Bruce’s arm. Bruce seems equally excited at the prospect of meeting Dr Hank McCoy. He’s not jumping, however, so Matt thinks he’s winning.

“Oh, shit.” Clint says from the pilot’s seat.

Matt skids over to him, slips into the adjoining seat and wiggles the joystick around, pretending to land dramatically. “Oh, no, snowstorm!”

“Matt.” Clint chides, but he’s smirking. “I see the mansion and, yeah, it’s a mansion.”

“Does it look nice?” Matt asks, hitting buttons at random. “I bet it looks nice.”

“Very nice. Lots of snow.”

The jet lands somewhere on a track. Matt hears the crunch of snow under the wheels and a thought occurs to him.

“Matt, it’s cold, put your jacket—” Bruce starts to suggest but, as the plane halts, Matt pushes the door open and runs outside.

He eagerly flips into the air, landing on his back in a pile of snow. It compresses underneath him, crunching together while a poof of snow swirls up into the air around him.

Matt giggles as he spreads his arms and legs, making quite the snow angel. It’s not as if he can do this in many places in New York. He supposes he could use the Helipad…

“Matthew, how lovely to see you again.” Charles states from somewhere near him. Matt sits up, then stumbles away from his masterpiece.

“P-P-Pretty?” He asks Charles, his teeth chattering together.

“Much so.” Charles agrees in a chuckle. “Though it may need a halo.”

Matt considers this until Clint captures him in a blanket.

“You dork!” Clint huffs, pulling a fluffy hat over his head, then earmuffs. “You’ve had severe hypothermia once this week!”
“Matthew?” Charles asks in worry. Matt shifts – he’s not wearing shoes and his bare feet are starting to feel cold.

“I jumped in the East River.” Matt steps into some boots that Bruce brings out for him. “But I was being chased.”

“Well, why don’t we talk about that inside?” Charles suggests. His chair moves and apparently there’s no snow on the path so Matt runs over to Charles’s chair, walking alongside him.

“Can you tell if your legs get cold?” Matt asks curiously.

“No.” Charles answers lightly. “I have a blanket over them, currently, however, I prefer not to slend too much time outside in the snow.”

“In case you don’t notice?” Matt focuses his efforts on Charles’ legs. His toes are a tad cold but they are overall safe from hypothermia.

“Helpful to know, Matthew, thank you.” Charles comments on his thoughts. “That, and because mobility is an issue.”

Matt nods. “Your arms are strong but it must be an issue.”

Matt’s attention is brought to a horrifying ripping of skin that is surely Charles’ younger sister. It makes Matt wince at the shifting skin but he steadies himself quickly and runs to approach the girl.

“Raven!” He encases her in a hug, squeezing happily. “Nice to see you again!”

“Matthew.” She addresses him.

“Oh, you can call me Matt. I feel like I’m in trouble, otherwise.” Matt scratches his head for a moment, brushing off snow. “Or in church.”

He can feel Charles’ confusion and his cheeks tinge red at the probing feeling he detects in his head. Like a question mark.

“I like your accent.” Matt blushes, smiling innocently.

Charles laughs at him while Clint and Bruce trudge inside, shaking snow off of their own boots.

Now inside, Matt is warm enough to take off his shoes and layers, leaving himself in only a T-shirt and sweats.

He stretches his toes, feeling the smooth carpet underneath them. He starts counting hair fibres until Charles grabs his attention. “Matthew, I would like you to meet some of my friends.”

“Huh?” Matt tilts his head, following eagerly when Raven and Charles start walking. He shuffles closer to Raven. “Hey, Tony says you’re blue.”

Raven stiffens, pauses. Matt can hear her toes against the carpet – she must be barefoot, too. Come to think of it, Matt couldn’t hear her wearing clothes before her skin stretched and switched.

“Yes.” She replies shortly. “Not currently.”

“Why not?” Matt pouts, skipping alongside her. “I used to like blue. I bet you look pretty. What colour are your eyes and hair? Are they blue, too?”
“Gold and red, respectively.” She answers hesitantly.

Matt flinches when he hears her skin changing. His cheeks tinge red. “Are… Are you wearing clothes?”

“No, I don’t need to.” Raven replies calmly. She offers her arm to Matt.

He gently traces his fingers along her skin, marvelling at little bumps, like a leopard’s spots. “You really are pretty.”

She scoffs and pulls away while Charles chuckles light-heartedly. “You have yourself an admirer, it seems, Raven.”

“I-I wouldn’t think like that!” Matt exclaims, his face bright red as he comes to a halt beside Charles. “Natasha and Maya are pretty, too, but I don’t like-like them!”

“Naturally, my friend.”

Matt sniffs something odd and moves a step closer to investigate. It has an original smell, like Wade, but there’s also a strong metallic odour. Beside that, someone who smells electric, and then a furry-sounding body.

“Matthew, I would like to introduce you to Logan, Ororo, and Hank.” Charles’ voice sounds calm but Matt suspects some nervousness in his chest.

“Hi!” Matt waves. “My name is Matthew Michael Murdock. Matt.”

He hears a snort from the metal person and steps closer, again, to investigate. “You sound… busy.”

“Watch it, Bub.”

Matt hears something piercing his skin but he’s not quite sure what. He reaches out because Logan is holding something.

“Matthew is blind, Logan, I doubt your intimidation techniques scare him.” Charles chuckles in amusement. “Matthew, the metal is Logan’s skeleton and the ‘knives’ are claws attached to his skeleton. This is his mutation.”

“Really?” Matt rolls on his heels. “I wish I had claws, then I could be like a cat. Hey, can you run faster if you try on all fours?”

There’s a stunned silence until a kind, feminine voice addresses him. “Matthew, I am Ororo, or Storm. Charles has told us much about you.”

“You sound like Charles but more…” Matt struggles for a word. “Electric.”

Matt hovers beside Logan, tempted to touch the claws that are frozen in place. They sound heavy and sound is having a hard time passing through them.

“I wouldn’t, unless you don’t want your fingers.”

Matt moves his hand back at Charles’ words. Logan draws the claws back in, which makes the redhead quite unhappy, but then he hears the skin knitting together.

“Oh, you’re like Wade!” Matt grins widely. “Wade heals, too. But he has to wait on his limbs growing if they’re cut off – they have to age. It’s funny when he has a baby’s hand.”
Matt screws up his face, then. “Wade is vulgar.”

“I think you’ll find that Logan is quite like Wade.” Ororo says, her voice lilting. She sounds musical.

No-one can compare to Hank, however, because he shakes Matt’s hand and the softness is unbelievable, much better than a kitten’s fur. Matt wants to cuddle.

He reigns himself in, thinking that he might be prolonging the handshake.

“Soft.” Matt sighs happily, quite love-struck.

Logan scoffs again.

“Th-Thank you?” Hank tilts his head.

Hank’s also barefoot and Matt thinks he’s starting to like this place.

Chapter End Notes

Matt is a tad forward (arguably rude, but not in my opinion) but, bless him, he just has no social awareness. I love the idea of him just not caring at all about how dangerous or strange the mutant powers are, he's just so fascinated!
Matt wriggles with glee as Charles leads him into his own, personal office. Matt's comfortable around Charles (he might be a man and he might be powerful but there's no chance of him hurting Matt like Stick would), so Clint is spending time with the X-men. Last he heard, Clint planned on talking to a man with lasers for eyes. Matt's quite interested, but he promised the Avengers and Charles that he would get therapy.

Matt climbs onto a stool, perching opposite Charles, who is tucked into the other side of the desk.

"Please, get comfortable." Charles welcomes him. He doesn't feel so bad about squatting or not wearing shoes. Not when Charles can look into his head and feel how comfortable it is.

"Now, I want to start by giving you a task, Matthew. I want you to identify your three best traits."

Charles leans forward in his chair, steepling his fingers.

Matt frowns, shuffles in his seat.

"Now, go by your own definition. It might be a trait you value as helpful, or an admirable quality."

Charles makes an empty gesture with one hand, then smiles sweetly. "Take your time, think about it."

Matt's aware that Charles will want him to think in order to hear his train of thought before choosing some verbal answers.

But Matt's not quite sure how to answer, so he can't avoid thinking about it.

He has a strong sense of justice but that's not good, that's just required. It's not something to boast about – everyone has an opinion about morality. Likewise, Matt doesn't think he should include his senses.

"Athletic." Matt stumbles over the word, nervous.

"Alright." Charles nods, leaning back. "Tell me why that's a good trait."

Matt pauses, shifts his weight between his feet. His hands move to the stitching on his shirt, rubbing the threads between his thumb and finger.

"What efforts do you go to keep your body fit?" Charles presses, but not in a cruel way. Regardless, Matt can feel his face heating up and he doesn't like it. He feels like he's being pressed down on by a falling ceiling, forcing his head between his knees. There's not enough space in the room.

"Deep breaths, Matthew." Charles reminds him, wheeling around the desk. He stops at Matt's side, gently placing a hand on his heavy shoulder. "Just think through the question before answering."

"Gym." Matt spits out, wanting to be done with this conversation.

Charles gives him some time to reply, which he doesn't, before relenting. "I'd say that takes a lot of dedication and hard work. Wouldn't you agree?"

Matt frowns, tilts his ear to Charles. Apparently his answers weren't wrong.

"I don't know." Matt’s chest tightens and he hits his thighs, trying to release some of the pressure.
he feels in his fists.

“Matthew, I understand that you're feeling under pressure, but perhaps focusing on controlling your breathing will be more beneficial.” Charles suggests, rubbing his back.

Matt gives a quick head tilt before slowing down his hands. Instead, he trails his fingers up and down the seams on his sweats, breathing with each slow rise and fall.

“Well done, Matthew.” Charles rubs circles on his back. “Can you explain why you think you're feeling this pressure?”

“You're asking me questions.” Matt shakes his head, running his hands through his hair.

“Why don't you like being asked these questions?” Charles questions.

Because Matt doesn't like talking about himself. He doesn't want to talk about feelings, he wants to go investigate in the snow, maybe even bobsled.

“Therapy is supposed to be personal, Matthew. I understand that talking about your depression is difficult, but it's necessary in order for you to get better.” Charles leans over a little, wrapping an arm around Matt.

The redhead leans in. His eyes close slightly as he nods.

“Can I choose what we talk about?” Matt sniffles, reaching out to rub his knuckles across the wooden desk, making thudding noises against the wood as he rolls his fist.

“Within reason, my friend.”

Matt takes a deep breath, shifts in his place. “I want to stop hurting myself.”

“Alright, Matthew, we’re going to do a different exercise, if that’s alright with you.” Charles pushes a sheet across the table to Matt. The fact that it’s printed in braille makes him indescribably happy. “It will include describing how you were feeling several moments ago and I would like you to employ this technique at home.”

Clint was called up by Charles and, as far as Matt can tell, he’s been given a printed sheet, just like Matt’s.

“Describe the situation for me.” Charles tells Matt. “Just the facts.”

“Answering question you gave me.” Matt sniffs. Charles fills Clint in on exactly what that question was before nodding at Matt.

“Correct.” He puts a hand to his temple in concentration. “Now tell me how you were feeling. Sad? Happy? Scared?”

“Anxious.” Matt reads over the little guide on the sheet. There’s boxes with the questions Charles is asking him, little descriptions at the bottom of the page. ‘Rate each mood from 0-100%’ it reads. “50%. A-And, um, sad. 50%.”

“Can you tell me, Matthew, what exactly you were thinking or imagining when these feelings arose?”
That he’s worthless. How is he supposed to name his good qualities when Stick made it very clear to him that he’s not good enough?

“Matthew, is that your answer?” Charles asks. He sounds the same as before – gentle but not overly concerned or sympathetic after reading his mind. He sounds calculated – professional. Matt prefers that to Emily’s sympathetic tones.

Matt nods because Charles really seems to be trying and Clint even seems on board, despite his slight stress whenever Charles reads Matt’s mind.

“Alright.” Charles nods. “Thank you for being honest.”

Charles smiles then, quite slyly. “You’re a lawyer, Matthew, I imagine this next part will be quite easy. I need you to provide some evidence supporting your argument.”

“Stick told me.” Matt says weakly, well aware that ‘he told me so’ wouldn’t stand up in a court of law. Charles is likely counting on this.

“You graduated summa cum laude, I’m told.” Charles notes, leaning back in his chair. “That’s quite impressive. I believe it would be quite accurate to state that you are an intelligent man. Am I right?”

Matt’s about to protest but he settles with. “Not like you or Tony.”

“No.” Charles admits. “But certainly above average. You’re specialised in your field. You might not know much about genetics or engineering, but I’m sure you could tell me all about our country’s legal system.”

Matt fiddles with his shirt. He’s not acknowledging the compliment.

“Do you believe intelligence is a good trait to have?”

Matt can see where he’s going with this.

“Perhaps, describing yourself as worthless is more of a black-and-white outlook on your situation. If you struggle with one task, you must not be capable of anything. Is that a fair assessment?” Charles asks, taking note of something on Clint’s paper. “That’s called an unhelpful thinking strategy. It’s a – possibly irrational – way of processing your situation. Everyone tends to overestimate the worth of something or other during the course of their life, but it’s when it becomes a habit that we have a problem. Working your way through how you actually think and process a situation, as I’ve demonstrated, is helpful in changing your outlook. How are you feeling just now, Matthew?”

“Anxious. About 20%.” Matt murmurs, reading over the sheet again.

“That’s excellent.” Charles praises him. “Well, I think you’ve had a long day. Perhaps you can decide, with Clint, if you should like to continue with this exercise at home.”

“Can I stay for a sleepover?” Matt asks hopefully, balancing primarily on his hands as he leans forward on the stool, lifting up onto his toes. “I can, right, Clint?”

“If Charles agrees.” Clint reminds Matt carefully. Matt shrinks slightly, wondering if this is one of those moments where he’s being too pushy.

“Let’s make a deal, shall we?” Charles moves around to Matt in the hope that he’ll stop playing
around on the chair. Despite his balancing skills, the position looks quite precarious and he doesn’t wish for the young man to fall. “If you agree to another therapy session tomorrow morning, then you can stay the night.”

“I have to do more therapy?” Matt asks, figuring it’s a small price to pay. He longs to go outside, however, and play in the falling snow. He wants a legion of snow angels.

Maybe Clint will make a snowman with him?

“An hour, at most.” Charles chuckles lightly, heading towards the door. “I won’t tire you out too much.”

Matt wonders what the beds will be like.
Hank has *monkey feet*!

Matt walks in on Hank and Bruce discussing their alter-egos and Hank is hanging from the ceiling. It makes him squirm with joy.

“Clint can shoot a bow with his feet!” Matt hurries over to the upside-down doctor. “Can you use your feet like hands? That seems really cool!”

“This is Matt.” Bruce is saying to someone and Matt listens for another body in the room but he’s too interested in Hank to be polite.

“Do you have a tail? What colour is your hair?” Matt jumps up, grabbing onto the stray pipe with his hands. He flips over, trying to get a good grip with his feet. It doesn’t work so he slings his knees over the metal, his head hanging slightly higher than Hank’s.

“I don’t have a tail… Blue.” Hank murmurs, his cheeks tinted with blood. Matt wonders if his blushes are purple.

“I wish I was a cool colour.” Matt laments, swinging himself back and forth. “My suit is red.”

“This is the guy?” Matt hears a voice whispering near Bruce. “I thought he was a kid?”

“I’m not a child, I’m just fun.” Matt pouts, crawling along the pile so he can get closer to the new body. It’s wearing glasses.

“Hey, are you blind, too? Or just sunglasses?”

“I shoot lasers out of my face.” The man tells Matt bluntly. It starts a string of giggles (honest to God *giggles*) from Matt’s mouth.

“Can you do it?” Matt asks, running out of pipe. He flips his way back onto the floor.

“I’ll cut through the walls if I do.” He grunts, then crosses his arms. “Scott. Summers.”

“Matthew—”


Matt pouts, crossing his own arms. “You’re not very nice, are you?”

”*Dinner will be served soon, Matthew, please bring your friends to the dining hall.*”

Matt is allowed to sit opposite Raven, at Charles’ left hand side, during dinner. Bruce and Hank are having an animated conversation at the end of the table, but the rest is awkwardly quiet.

“You’re blue again.” Matt nudges Raven’s foot under the table to get her attention. “You don’t usually do that in front of people.”
“Is it a problem?” She hisses, chewing down viciously on a cut of meat.

Matt shakes his head happily. “Nope!”

Her heart makes an awkward skip before she scoffs at him.

The table falls into another silence. Matt eats for a couple of slow moments before Charles sighs. “Is there a problem, my companions?”

The table erupts in a second.

“You told us he wears footie pajamas, Charles, and he walks in here with a good set of—” Logan starts talking and Matt quickly zones out because Logan has quite the vocabulary.

“We expected a child, Professor, not an Avenger.” Ororo explains.

Matt shrinks slightly.

“Your assumptions are your own.” Charles clears his throat, sounding slightly annoyed. His lips are tight and his focus is on his meal. “I don’t see why it’s a problem.”

“It’s the exact reason we started the X-men.” Scott says briskly. “When have superheroes ever stuck up for mutants?”

Matt leaves because that’s not true but he doesn’t want to fight.

Surprisingly, Clint doesn’t follow him when he runs off to the center of the mansion.

He sits in the lobby for a while, just taking some deep breaths, before a small person approaches him. A child.

“You’re an Avenger.” Comes the awed little voice.

Matt shuffles. “I’m Daredevil.”

He’s not quite an Avenger, not by the public standards, but he’s something.

The child gestures for him to follow him, then grabs Matt’s hand and leads him to the front door. “My brother ran out with his friends and he hasn’t come back. Professor’ll be really mad. You won’t tell him, right?”

Matt supposes not… But having children outside in the storm is dangerous.

He thinks for a moment before locating his boots. Matt hasn’t been a hero in so long. He’s not sure if he ever was, but this is his chance to prove that he can help. He realises it’s selfish but that’s a conversation he’ll have with himself later.

Now, he has to save some children in a snowstorm.

Matt immediately regrets his decision when he slips on some ice, handing awkwardly on his foot.

The children find him, in an ironic twist of fate. They don’t seem to care.

“A-Are you here to help us?” A little boy shivers. One girl is made of what seems like ice,
completely fine in the cool weather.

“Yes?” Matt says uncertainly, then struggles with the root. “Yes, I am.”

The ice girl saves his leg from its cruel fate. He thanks her, then pants heavily. Perhaps running was a bad idea.

“Are you all here?” He examines the bodies – 4 children in total.

He finds out that their names are Jaleel, Justin, Bryce, and Amy. He does scold the children, but only a little because it’s cold and they’re scared stiff. Amy’s not sure how long she can stay ice.

He brought his billy club, however, because he’s a responsible adult.

Breaking apart the plastic, Matt presents the long, durable length of cable inside the cane. It’s what he uses to grapple buildings.

He makes sure each child is holding on, and then tells the kids to follow the prints his feet are making in the snow, and to be careful of their footing.

When they start making their way back, Matt tries to work as a shield for the four children, who are huddled behind him like penguins.

“Let’s play a game!” Matt shouts as a blast of chilling air hits him in the face. It feels burning against his skin, with how his blood retreats deeper inside of him in revolt. He can feel his muscles working hard, swelling up with blood as they work. Hot veins are freezing over like a frosty rivers, cutting a path through the white of his flesh. “You’re gonna have to speak up over this wind!”

Matt admits that the howling gale is somewhat distracting, even to his ears. It feels like a defeat.

Surely, the others haven’t realised that he’s run off.

“What does everybody want for Christmas?” He shouts over the wind, turning his head towards them so his voice is uninterrupted.

“C’mon! Justin, trains? Modelling clay?” Matt calls out when one of the kids starts crying.

“Clay, I guess.” He sniffs, nose runny as he shivers from the cold, trying to suppress the scared sobs.

Their hummingbird hearts quake with fear.


Matt’s pouting a little because his efforts are failing and he doesn’t want the children to lose hope.

But, then…

“I bet Bryce wants eight kisses from Amy for Hanukkah!” Jaleel pipes up in a shuddering laugh.

“N-No, I don’t!” Bryce objects, tightening his grip on the cable. Amy simply laughs, good-natured.

“What do you want for Hanukkah, Bryce?” Matt asks over the wind, which seems to be picking up.

Bryce is cut off when Amy collapses, her ice skin melting away.
It occurs to Matt that she’s only wearing a dress – her arms and legs are bare.

He refrains from swearing, he doesn’t do that around children, and moves back along their line to pick up the girl. He shrugs off his coat, wrapping it around her shaking shoulders.

Another boy is crying now, Jaleel, and they all sound terrified.

“It’s alright, I’m sure Amy’s just tired.” Matt rests her head on his shoulder, cradling her in one arm while he leads the boys with the other. “We need to keep walking.”

The sleet is making it difficult for Matt to concentrate. It’s falling in all directions and he’s having a difficult time trying to locate the mansion. The path here was winding and complex to remember – he’s not certain they’re walking in the correct direction.

Matt’s starting to get tired. His arms are bare now and the snow is painful on his skin. He’s getting some warmth from Amy but he’s otherwise freezing.

He starts to worry when he feels himself stop trembling.

“Dashing through the snow, in a one-horse open sleigh,” Matt’s not sure if he’s delusional or if it’s his last resort, but he starts singing slowly, “over the fields we go, laughing all the way…”

Amy wakes up sleepily against his chest, slurring her words. “Where are we?”

“Almost there.” Matt’s slurring, too. Not because he’s tired but because there’s ice in his bones and frost in his mouth, numbing his tongue.

Matt’s not sure how worse he’s made this situation. He should’ve alerted the others, should’ve asked for help. Now he’s going to die in a blizzard with four children and it’ll completely be his fault.

“I see it!” Amy cries happily, her arm trying to point somewhere to the right. “That—that way!”

Matt sniffs. His leg almost collapses underneath him when he tries to change his path. The others are practically clinging to him for warmth.

“Mr Matt?” Justin asks him, shaking his arm.

Matt isn’t feeling too hot. Actually, he’s feeling quite too hot. His head is warm and everything is tilting… tilting…

“Matt!”

Chapter End Notes

Daredevil Vol.3, #7 for Matt leading blind children through a blizzard.

Yes, Matt is hurt again, but I promise there’s a reason why! :P
Logan’s rough voice cuts through the wind. He’s barely wearing anything because the cold doesn’t bother him, but he’s aware that any other person would need winter clothes, at the very least.

He spots the fluffy, red hair fairly near the school, but also going past it.

“Matt!” He shouts, running through the crunching whiteness to the unconscious man.

“Mr Logan!” A few of the children hurry over, dropping what looks like a rope.

“Stay.” He grunts at them, approaching Matt.

He’s not actually unconscious. Matt is sleeping. His body is resting in the smooth grooves of snow, which were packed together when he fell. He’s not shaking, of course he isn’t, because Matt’s warm.

His skin is alight with steamy blood, like delicious coffee running through his veins. The world is colder than Matt, but heated.

Matt can sense the radiating warmth from Logan and the children – it’s enough because Matt is sharing it, revelling in the pocket of heat their bodies have created in the winter wonderland.

When it occurs to him that he might be saying all of this out loud, he’s being placed on a bed, covered in blankets, with a warm body taking care of his fingers and toes. Matt smells mint, buries into the scent.

“Hypothermia. Again. Twice in one week!” Clint is saying in his ear, sounding displeased.

Matt cuddles into the heat, his eyes closing.

The night is spent with Clint and Bruce on either side of Matt, keeping his warm throughout the night.

They seemed to think the idea was awkward but Matt’s health was their number one priority.

So, when Logan bursts into the guest room, Matt is sandwiched between Bruce Clint, who are both snoozing peacefully.

Logan gives the trio a look before shrugging. “Get up, we’re going for a run.”

Matt frowns, tries to snuggle back into his bed. He’s not quite in the mood for a 5AM run. He is quite in the mood for crawling back under the covers and closing his eyes. When he tells Logan, the man must not approve of his brilliant plan because a hand sneaks under said covers and drags Matt out by the foot.

He gives the panda onesie a look before huffing and releasing Matt’s foot.

“Lobby. Ten minutes. Wear warm clothes.”

Matt grunts as Logan leaves him on the floor. Bruce is, unfortunately, awake now and doesn’t he just think it’s an amazing idea for Matt to haul his ass outside into the snow and bitter wind at 5 in
Regardless, Matt is dragged downstairs and presented to Logan in a cosy tracksuit. He’s not happy about it.

“Charles, Logan is being mean.” Matt ambles over to his friend, rubbing sleep from his eyes.

“I’m afraid it is I who is being mean.” Charles is grinning – Matt can hear it in his voice. The bastard. “For I suggested some exercise. You’ll enjoy it.”

“But I’m tired.” Matt objects. Why is the world out to get him?

“It’ll wake you up.” Logan grabs him by his scruff and drags him towards the doors. “Get movin’.”

Matt’s body protests greatly to the cold. He wonders why Logan doesn’t like being cuddled. That is, as he wraps himself around the heated man and clings for dear life.

Snow is one thing. Matt likes snow; he hates the cold.

But Logan’s sheathing his claws and Matt doesn’t want to become a kebab, so he starts jogging reluctantly.

Logan leads him on a path around the house. It’s fairly flat with little snow – Matt can’t imagine the X-men shovelling snow – and seems to wind past what would be some lovely scenery.

Matt finds himself a little distracted going past the gardens and Logan has to wait for him to work up the nerve to run past the floral wall of scent.

However, they do take a break beside what Matt finds is a lake, a thin layer of ice on the surface of the water.

“I only say this once.” Logan nudges his arm, making Matt rub it hesitantly. Logan is strong and his fist is solid. “Sorry about yesterday and thanks for finding the kids. From all of us.”

Matt tilts his head, frowns.

“You got a problem, Murdock?” Logan demands and Matt squeaks, shaking his head.

“No!” Matt exclaims, leaning back on his heels. “I’m just surprised.”

Logan snorts, starts running away from him.

Matt hurries to catch up, shouting after the man. “Does this mean you’re my friend? Logan? Hey, wait up!”

“Did you enjoy yourselves?” Charles questions happily when Logan strides into the lobby, followed by a heaving Matt. Logan seemed to have a problem running alongside him – every time Matt would try to chat, he would run ahead! It wasn’t fun but Matt persisted.

“Logan’s my friend, now!” Matt exclaims in a gasp, squeezing his arms around Logan’s bulky arm.

The man shoves him away, but doesn’t hit Matt so he figures it’s a win.

Charles gestures for Matt to follow him and he does.
Matt’s legs are on fire and his lungs are aching but the familiar rush of energy through his veins is electrifying. He’s missed being Daredevil.

But Matt can’t be Daredevil and Daredevil can’t be Matt. Matt is too Matt right now to be anything else.

“Your thoughts confuse me, Friend.” Charles says conversationally as he leads Matt through the building – along corridors and, occasionally, up or down a ramp.

He doesn’t answer, however, and follows Charles in silence.

Charles leads him to an underground bunker, briefly explained about his step-father’s worries about nuclear war. Hank is there, fiddling with some equipment.

“Hank! Is everything set up?” Charles calls out.

Matt approaches the wall of the bunker, strokes the thick layers of metal tentatively.

“What are we doing down here?” Matt asks worriedly – these walls are quite thick and sound is passing sluggishly through them.

“We’re going to train.”
“You don’t control your abilities, not yet.” Charles tells him, tapping his temple in thought. “They control you. I want to test them, work with them.”

“How?” Matt asks, hesitant.

His training with Stick was also in a dark place and, although he doesn’t fear Charles, the atmosphere is daunting.

“You’ll never truly be yourself if you are supressing part of your nature.” Charles explains.

Matt flinches when some footsteps lead another adult male into the vicinity. There’s something off about him, his neck. His vocal chords are striking and Matt’s not sure if that makes him mute or much, much scarier.

“Matthew, this is Sean Cassidy.” Charles gestures towards the man.

Hank has some kind of microphone, Matt realises. Recording equipment.

“How is he going to ensure that you are in no danger, physically.” Charles explains, gently patting Matt’s arm to reassure him. “As am I going to ensure your mind is not in danger.”

“What is he?” Matt steps behind Charles, focusing his ears on the man.

“Sean has the ability to create high-powered sonic waves with his voice.” Charles answers as if he’s being helpful. “Good luck.”

Matt has no doubt that he can call this off if he needs to, however, that fact doesn’t quell his worry. Matt tries not to rely on thoughts like that.

And Sean is lining up, breathing in deeply as he aims his mouth at Matt.

Matt is overwhelmed instantly. The high wail cuts into Matt’s head like a thin needle, slicing into his brain and severing his cognitive function.

His mind turns blank as blood trickles from his nose and his brain throbs, pulsing irregularly.

He’s dangerously close to a seizure.

Sean’s voice lowers, ever so slightly, to help take some of the strain off of Matt’s head.

“Don’t shut it out, Matthew.” Charles whispers in the back of his mind. It doesn’t affect his ears. “You’ll hurt yourself that way.”

Matt’s already hurt.

His eyes close and his body slumps, lax, onto his knees as the smell of copper chokes his nose. Tears are leaking from his eyes when blood pools in his ears.

“Listen, then funnel it back out. Let it go, don’t block it out.” Charles is directing him but it hurts and he wants it to stop.

Matt hits the floor, lashing out in a fit of anger. There’s no escape for his ears – he’s stuck in the
path of a bouncing screech and there’s no escape from the sharp edge of its blade.

Matt’s ears stop working when the scream ends, when everything quietens.

Hank tries to touch him, help him up, but it burns and Matt hits his head on the wall trying to lurch away from the hands.

He’s not sure of his main senses: hearing, smell, touch, and taste. Instead, he focuses on his body’s positioning. His head tilts at a strained angle as he rocks back and forth, trying to recalibrate.

He’s too fast or too slow in his motions and it’s not correct, so he fastens his pace and nearly screams at the hurt feeling it elicits from Matt.

“Matthew, you have to let it in before you can release it.”

Matt scrunches up his face. His senses are shutting off, one by one. It’s out of his control, even though he knows he’s the cause.

Focus on what you want to hear, taste, smell, feel…

Matt pushes harder on the world, feeling like Atlas with its weight forcing him down. Crushing him.

Letting some in is difficult, but Matt focuses on the scent of blood and almost vomits. He can taste it in his mouth, bitter yet sweet. He feels it trickling down his face, brushing past short hairs on his face, and then staining the shallow crevices on his lips. Then he really does taste it.

Pushing it back out is difficult because Matt isn’t capable of withstanding this, never mind controlling how it goes through his head.

Charles sends some warmth to his mind, however, some reassurance.

He makes a weak attempt at filtering the noises into the background and it works. Slowly, but surely, Matt allows his senses in, using some to bounce around the bunker and give him an idea of what he’s doing. Others are used to locate and label Charles, Hank, and Sean.

It takes several moments, but he gets his bearings.

“Hank, if you would?” Charles asks.

Hank helps Matt to his feet. The touch hurts, it always does, but Matt shifts his attention to the soft fur.

He didn’t expect the world to go blank.

“You’re worse than Lila and Cooper.” Clint accuses him from the second he opens his eyes, but he’s doing it quietly. “I swear, it’s like having another kid. I will ground you.”

Matt pushes him away, doesn’t think about their friend/brother/guardian dynamic, and then pulls him back, nuzzling into the warmth Clint always expels.

“At least tell me that was helpful because if you die, I’m going to kill you.” Clint scolds him, pulling him into a close hug.
Matt nods slightly, feeling quite lethargic.

Sure, it was painful, but Matt feels much better afterwards. The world is a little easier to deal with when he lets it all in, finds the stuff he likes and pulls it to the forefront of his mind.

Low, steady noises. Softness and spice. Warmth.

Matt smiles into Clint’s chest, thinking that Charles might be the best ‘therapist’ he’s ever met.

Maybe therapy won’t be too bad.
Parting Ways

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Matt never considered teaching. He ponders this fact as he’s being led into Charles’ class. He’s allowed some time during the lesson to ‘teach’, though Matt suspects Charles just wants to have some fun.

Either way, he’s rolling on his heels in glee.

There’s an even mix of boys and girls in the class, some made of strange, non-biological materials and some coated with non-human skin.

“Class, I would like to introduce you to Mr Murdock.” Charles starts introducing him but Matt really dislikes that and starts tapping his way around the desk with his cane.

“He’ll be joining us for the hour and we’ll be having a rather relaxed class.”

Matt finds a chair, squats on it and folds up his cane, setting it on the table. He scans heartbeats, then notices a particularly jittery one. A button being pressed underneath a table and a surge of electricity.

Matt lifts his cane, snaps it in two, and tosses it at the surge.

“Hey!” A young voice protests. A phone can be heard skidding across the floor.

“Professor is talking.” Matt gestures to Charles, who smiles in amusement. Why the children think they get away with it (in front of a telepath) is beyond him.

“Not quite that relaxed, Roy.” Charles scolds, clearing his throat. “Now, let’s begin.”

Charles’ morning lecture is incredibly interesting. For the first five minutes.

Matt starts searching the drawers, boredom encompassing him, until he finds something that smells of ink.

He sniffs it, then lifts it up, fondling its structure. It feels like an ink cartridge. He rummages around more, finds a fountain pen.

Grinning, Matt entertains himself by placing his head on the desk. He listens for the vibrations of movement as he holds the pen against the table by its nib, slowly releasing the object.

Next, he finds a pencil. He balances the pencil by its uneven graphite, taking almost five minutes to get it situated on top of the pen.

He leans close, listening in fascination. There’s a drawer full of pens! Maybe Matt can do this until —

“Matthew?” Charles interrupts his thoughts, making Matt jump and knock his project over.

“H’m?” Matt asks, distracted. He’s searching for more pointy objects to balance.
“Perhaps you could talk to the class?” Charles suggests airily. “Any topic you like.”

Matt frowns at the concept, then tilts his head towards the class.

“Questions?” Matt asks and feels a wave of air shift as every hand shoots up. Most of them revolve around the balancing, Matt discovers, and grows bored of answering with ‘a world on fire’ and ‘an impressionistic painting’.

“Can I teach any subject?” Matt nudges Charles.

“Anything you like.”

Matt doesn’t really understand what value his presence has but, if he can call in a guest of his own, he has a great idea.

“Ok.” Matt stands up, grabs a pen, and scribbles across the whiteboard. “I’m going to tell you about my dog.”

Clint is standing at the door of the classroom, holding a loaded bow, and gaping at Matt.

“So, in conclusion, Dice is superior because, as a police/guide dog and a vigilante sidekick, he is well-behaved and disciplined, unlike Lucky.” A girl in the class reads off her notes.

Matt’s been teaching debating.

“And, could you explain to Mr Barton why exactly his mutt is inferior?” Matt grins, bouncing a little. He’s cross-legged on the desk.

“Because Lucky exhibits unnecessary social skills with other dogs upon sight, meaning that Lucky becomes erratic and over-excited. As a result, he causes distress in his owner and is a danger to his own life, depending on setting.” Another girl pipes up.

“So we can all agree that…?” Matt gestures to the class, who chant in time.

“Dice is a classy dog.”

Matt looks pointedly at Clint, grinning smugly.

“I do not suggest—” Charles starts, just before Clint draws his bow and shoots at Matt in a split second.

Matt catches the arrow in a thick textbook. It pierces the book, merely an inch from Matt’s face.

“Tah dah!” Matt bows in place.

“Anyway, there’s some kid looking for you.” Clint gestures to a boy that Matt senses hiding behind his back.

Matt cranes his neck. “Oh?”

He comes closer and Matt recognises the boy as Justin, one of the four children he had to lead back to the mansion.

“Got you a present. Me ‘n’ the others.” Justin mumbles, edging closer.
Matt’s ears perk up happily. Justin gives him what feels like a train and he gushes. “Awesome, thanks!”

He rolls it across the desk before nudging Charles. “I’m going outside!”

Charles laughs after him as Matt runs from the room with Justin.

“Matt, Buddy.” Clint crouches carefully beside Matt. His friend is sitting in the middle of a snow and ice sculpture, made with the help of the mutants he rescued. They all look pleased.

The result of their efforts is a rather detailed snow track, with a rail of ice for Matt’s newest gift to ride along.

“It’s time to go home.” Clint tells him. Bruce is already packing away their bags into the jet.

“I don’t want to.” Matt says, then pushes his train hard along the rail, making it skid up a short hill, then slide along the lengthy track.

“But we have to go home at some point, Bud.” Clint looks to the kids, makes a gesture for them to give the duo some space.

Matt gets a series of quick hugs, and then, like good kids, they run back to the mansion to play a different game.

“I like it here.” Matt says. “Maybe Charles will let me stay?”

But Clint knows exactly what Matt’s doing, despite the happy face he’s putting on.

“I know you’re scared to go back home, but you know we’ve got Stick’s DNA and we’re looking for him, now. We aren’t going to let him touch you.” Clint rubs a hand over Matt’s back, spreading warmth through his spine.

Matt doesn’t want to think about how they found his DNA in that house.

“What if he finds me again, Clint?” Matt hides his head in Clint’s chest, his lips breathing out white puffs of condensation.

“If something ever happens, and you get taken, then we’ll find you straight away.” Clint tells him. “We are upping the security, though.”

“You’ll keep me safe?” Matt whispers, his hands trembling and not from the cold.

“I’ll try my very best.” Clint holds out his pinkie finger for Matt to squeeze. “We all will.”

Matt’s hearing wanders over to Bruce, who is saying farewell to Hank and promising to catch up at a later date. Matt’s happy that Bruce is making friends, too.

He stands up, hesitantly, and follows Matt over to the others.

“I’ll miss you.”

Matt can hear shocked heartbeats when he hugs Charles. It must not be something he does very
often but Matt senses nothing other than happiness from the older man.

“The chair is somewhat a barrier for most people, even those with good intentions.” Charles answers in his head.

Matt frowns at that but doesn’t comment as he pulls away. That seems stupid. Hugging is quite easy as long as you do it from the side. He doesn’t understand the issue.

Charles smiles fondly at Matt, patting his arm. “I’ll see you later, my friend.”

“Yeah.” Matt nods, a little reluctant to leave. “Later…”

“Feel free to contact me if you require my help.” Charles tells him.

Matt nods and sadly parts ways.

Bruce gives him a hug when he climbs onto the plane. It must be obvious that he doesn’t want to return home.

“Matty, how about you be my co-pilot?” Clint calls from the front of the plane.

Matt doesn’t say anything, just nuzzles further into Bruce and tries to forget about Stick.

The tower is his home, Stick doesn’t get to ruin that.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not sure if this chapter was a result of me listening to the same seven songs whenever I write this fic (1 hr per chapter, 78 chapters...), but it's comic relief, at least. A slight break :P

Anyway, if you're interested in Daredevil-themed music...

https://youtu.be/BKSip7nZBzw
https://youtu.be/eD398Lv5WI0
https://youtu.be/vc70yZ3nR7g
https://youtu.be/_jfXtLO3_sU
https://youtu.be/XAfGj-VV9I4
https://youtu.be/GWzdJZOwrZs

AND THE BEST ONE is a Foggy/Matt song:
https://youtu.be/jEyqs1w0cjA
Elektra

“Strawberry, come help me with this?” Tony asks, his heart shuddering as he tries to lift a box.

“You’re not supposed to do strenuous activities.” Matt scolds, taking the box from him.

“I know but I’m meeting Nelson in a—”

Matt drops the box suddenly and grabs Tony, frantically grabbing his arm as something heavy hits the tower in a flash of lightning.

“Jarvis?” Tony asks when a vibration is sent through the tower, causing the lights to flicker momentarily.

“Mr Odinson has landed on the helipad.” Jarvis explains and Tony grins.

“You haven’t met Thor, have you, Cherry Pie?” Tony nudges Matt, making him wince. “He’s just a big teddy bear.”

Matt keeps close to Tony as they take the elevator up to his own floor, where a hulking man stands out in the snow, a cape fluttering behind him.

Matt’s face hides in Tony’s shoulder as the body enters through the glass door.

“Shield Brother!” The new voice booms, arms spread wide as he approaches Tony with a swaggering walk. “I have missed you, Man of Iron.”

“You too, Thor. Everything a-ok back home?” Tony squeezes Matt’s hand, lets him know that everything’s ok. Thor isn’t a danger.

“Aye, all is well. The All-Father wishes Earth’s Mightiest Heroes well.” Thor’s laugh dances around the room like a ricocheting bullet.

“Thor, this is Matt.” Tony shifts Matt forward, gently, with a hand on his back. “He’s Daredevil, a local vigilante. He’s living in the tower with us.”

“A new shield brother!” Thor exclaims, delighted. He pats heartily on the back and Matt feels like his insides are being jostled. “Tis a cause for celebration, is it not?”

“Sure.” Tony grins.

Matt was somewhat worried about the big, muscular man that dropped on their roof. However, it turns out that Thor is delightful.

He has no qualms about Matt snuggling into him, especially when Matt starts to have a few beers.

Daredevil fact no.1: Matt is an amazing drunk.

Matt thinks therapy might be a good idea, and readily tells Clint this. As he approaches the microwave, he also explains that some problems can be punched.

Daredevil fact no.2: Matt is an irresponsible drunk.
“You can’t punch fire, M-Matt!” Clint laughs, trying to drag his friend away from the blazing contraption.

“’Course I can.” Matt pouts, trying to put out of Clint’s weak grip with his equally weak body. “’M the devil. Rawr.”

Clint giggles his ass off as Tony guides Matt back to the table, completely sober.

“Aren’t you nice?” Matt flops onto the table, grinning as Tony sits beside him. Matt feels his head being patted by Thor.

“You Midgardians handle your ale ill.” Thor laughs at him. “Man of Iron, you choose not to partake?”

“I’m quitting.” Tony gestures to the beer Matt’s drinking. “It’s not good for me.”

“I have heard of this poisoning.” Thor says thoughtfully, then gestures to Tony’s chest. “You are weak.”

“Heart attack.” Tony sighs, absent-mindedly rubbing the skin around the reactor. “I’m on bedrest.”

“I must bring healing crystals on my next outing.” Thor comments thoughtfully, scooping Matt up in a side hug. The young Midgardian is quite affectionate, unlike most of his kind. “For my friends have many wounds.”

Tony’s not quite sure how to respond.

Thor’s always struck the others as a big goofball, but he’s been treating Matt oddly since he arrived. Almost as if he’s guiding Matt’s attention.

First there was dinner – the conversation was relaxed until Thor started sharing food with Matt. Thor would eat some of the redhead’s chilli dish, while Thor shared freshly roasted pig with his newest friend. Now that Tony thinks about it, Matt didn’t seem especially hungry before Thor’s coaxing.

Then, drinking. Urging as many people to stay awake. Everyone had protested, at some point, except Matt, who quietly went along with the activity.

Does Thor notice something about Matt that the others don’t? Plus, that comment about having wounds…

Clint’s a mess, so Tony figures this might be his job. Urgh, is this was sobriety feels like?

“Hey, Apple.” Tony nudges Matt. The man will answer to any red fruit, now, or colour.

“Mn?” Matt mumbles, squirming in delight when Tony pulls him into a hug.

“Maybe we should have a feelings talk?” Tony suggests but Matt blows a raspberry and slides back over to Thor, braiding his hair clumsily.

“Dear Matthew is love-struck.” Thor claims, patting Matt on the back.

“Oh, pfft.” Matt complains, resting his head on the table.

“You are?” Tony questions, then his voice takes on a teasing tone. “So is that why you asked me for advice?”
Matt turns his head away, blushing. “She’s dead.”

“Oh.”

“Stick killed her.”

All heads turn to him. Matt scoffs, a smile playing on his lips, bitter yet wistful. “One of his soldiers, Jacques Duchamps, was supposed to assassinate her. I showed up, too late. Stick killed her.”

His heart aches. It’s not something he wants to talk about. However, being back in New York, knowing that Stick is out there, looming… Matt’s fully aware of what he is capable. Stick killed his true love. Elektra.

Sure, he raped Matt and lied to him but Matt always thought Stick cared about him, even in some perverted way, until he listened in horror to his love’s fading heartbeat.

He loved, no, loves Elektra. And Stick took her from him.

“Shit, Man.” Clint slurs, dropping his head into his hands. “I’m gonna put an arrow in his face.”

“Stick takes everything I love.” Matt says into his bottle, laughing brokenly until tears slide down his cheeks. “Takes everything.”

“You have us.” Tony says, reaching out to squeeze Matt’s hand.

His lips curve into a silly smile as he leans into Tony’s warmth.

“Yeah, I do.”
Matt wakes up in a foreign bed, his muscles stiff.

Then he recognises Maya’s scent in the fluffy pillows and his heart rate skyrockets.

So he’d gotten blackout drunk, but surely he wouldn’t… Surely he couldn’t, with how much he drank.

Then he feels Maya’s arm against him, feels her sports bra as she presses against his back, and he stumbles out of the bed, terrified when he finds himself naked.

“Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God.” Matt chants, laughing hysterically because he was so hung up on how much he loves Elektra and he goes and… sleeps with Maya.

Oh, God.

He doesn’t even care about his nakedness at this point, he’s running from the room and across the hall to his own, where Clint is half asleep in the bottom of his wardrobe.

“What’ve I done?” Matt kicks his drawers, then immediately regrets it.

Admittedly, he’s surprised he isn’t a little more bruised, given whose bed he woke up in.

“Shit, Matt, hangover. I’m not equipped for another naked freak-out.” Clint slurs, throwing a onesie at him.

Matt can’t quite think straight.

“I had sex with Maya.” He says, voice higher than he’d like to admit.

“No shit!” Clint looks up, pauses. “Wait, really?”

Matt nods, unsure if he wants to vomit or not. He can’t imagine wanting something like that.

“No claw marks.” He comments, stumbling to his feet. Clint grabs his head, groans. “No wonder Tony stopped drinking.”

“He’s an alcoholic.” Matt points out, then flops back onto the bed.

“Will you put some clothes on?” Clint huffs, throwing the blankets over him. “Seriously, why do you strip every time you get drunk?”

“Clothes are uncomfy.” Matt says, the words feeling very far away. “Did I use protection?”
“Why are you asking me?” Clint demands, covering his ears. “TMI!”

“Clint, be a grown up!” Matt huffs, standing up and going to his unit for boxers. “I’m having adult issues!”

“Still.” Clint points out before sighing. “Go talk to her if you can’t remember. She wasn’t drunk.”

“Wait, she wasn’t drunk!” Matt exclaims, more worried than ever. “Does Maya like me?”

“That’s what you’re worrying about?” Clint snaps. “Go see a doctor!”

“Ew, Clint.” Matt shudders. “I’d know if anything like that happened.”

“Then go talk to Maya!” Clint flops onto the bed. “And let me sleep!”

It’s not Matt’s fault that Maya is in the kitchen that morning – she usually sleeps in.

“Sorry.” Matt says on instinct, as if he’s walked in on something he shouldn’t.

“For what?”

Well, that is a question he doesn’t have an answer to. Instead, he turns on the coffee maker and fidgets with the sweats he ended up wearing.

“I’m sure last night was lovely but it was a mistake.” Matt says once he has her attention. She frowns. “I was drunk and I don’t know what happened, but… Did I use protection?”

Laughter is not a good sign.

“First of all, it would be lovely.” She agrees, smirking like a hungry lioness. “But we didn’t have sex.”

“Oh, thank goodness.” Matt sighs, then frowns apologetically. “No offence.”

“You stripped, wandered into my room last night and fell asleep on the bed while I was in the shower.” She shrugs.

“I didn’t take advantage?” Matt asks hopefully because that was the last thing he wanted.

“You were the drunk one.” She points out. “And I’m afraid onesies aren’t really my thing.”

Matt blushes, mutters something or other about comfort.

“Hey, Murdock?”

Matt’s face heats up when he feels gentle lips press against his cheek, then the blood runs elsewhere when Mia’s knee collides with his front.

“That’s for being so presumptuous.” She smirks.

Matt nods, breathing out heavily. “Let… me guess: buy you dinner first?”

“Exactly.” She purrs, stalking off.
Maya leans against the door of her bedroom, lets out a tired breath.

“Murdock.” Maya accused when she found Murdock sprawled out on her bed, undressed. “What are you doing in here?”

“Why are people horrible?” Matt asked, turning over to face Maya so she could read his lips.

Maya’s cheeks lost their colour as her lips pressed together. “Because people are shit.”

Matt laughed, then.

“How’d you have sex after?” Matt turned his head away.

Maya scowled. “We weren’t going to talk about that.”

“Can I kiss you?” Matt stepped a little closer. “You can say no.”

Maya doesn’t reply, but she does place her lips on Matt’s. They share a sweet moment before Matt laughed against her lips. Distracted as per usual.

“You smell like lemons.” Matt laughed, moving one hand to clasp her hand and the other to hold her waist. They rocked back and forth before he twirled her under his arm.

She twirled awkwardly, gives Matt an uneasy look. “You’d better not be sick.”

“Promise.” Matt made a crossing motion over his heart. “You’re very pretty.”

“You can’t see me.”

“Not talking about that.” Matt shrugged, flops back onto the bed like a happy cat. Then, he sighed. “I miss Elektra.”

Maya looked across his face for emotions. “Of course you do, you love her.”

“I love Elektra.” Matt agreed, then he pointed at Maya with an accusing glare. “Why aren’t you kicking me out?”

“Because you’re just a lonely idiot.” She moved closer, sat on the bed.

“You like me.” Matt told her, stretching out his back and popping each bone, one by one.

“I like a lot of people.” Maya shrugged, pulls the blanket over him. “Go to sleep.”

“Mnn.”

Maya breathes out an impatient sigh as she brushes back her hair.

Murdock is an idiot.

Chapter End Notes

So Matt was sexually abused and, naturally, a large part of his recovery is him being comfortable in his body again.
I don't plan on making this Matt/Maya but Matt does need to exhibit his recovery in this area because it is sexual abuse and Matt will be affected in this area. Matt is a bit of a dog, anyway :P What with Claire, Karen, Elektra. He's a real flirt <3

No established relationships, though.
Matt gets drunk for the second night in a row and, initially, he’s alone.

Then he breaks a bottle in his liquor-induced haze and, suddenly, Bucky thinks it’s a great idea to join him.

Matt’s not talking to Bucky, the other man is just there and it’s annoying Matt.

He has court in two days, so this is his only opportunity to get drunk. He’s enjoying every minute of it.

When he drinks, the world calms down. Matt understands why it’s addictive. Because his world on fire is drenched with each bitter sip. But alcohol is flammable and, perhaps, that is why he starts pacing the room, sluggish and stumbling.

“Pipsqueak, how are you feeling?” Bucky asks in his ear, guides him away from something he’s about to walk into.

“You can’t spend half your life rocking yourself to sleep at night.”

Matt shakes his head, trying to get rid of the taste in his mouth. He’s not sure if it’s ethanol or faint traces of something else, but Matt hates it. It coats his tongue.

With the glass on the floor, Matt laughs, thinking about another way he could have quelled the clawing feeling in his gut.

“I was raped.” Matt spits out his words, laughing harshly. “How the fuck d’ya think I feel?”

Bucky’s quiet for a moment.

He’s in his treehouse with a small collection of bottles, some empty.

Matt figures he could run away from Bucky – he’s a lot thinner, much more agile. But the world keeps spinning and it’s hard for Matt to navigate, even with his cane, so he takes a swig of vodka instead.

He hugs the bottle to his chest because Bucky is moving closer but Matt doesn’t want to stop because the alcohol stops his thoughts. Muddles them too much for anything to make sense. Matt thinks, if he stops drinking, he might cry.

“I just want you to climb down, instead of hitting your head.” Bucky coaxes him.

Matt doesn’t object to being lifted in the same way that Bucky lifts Nova, under the arms and cradled. It’s quite comfortable.

Then it isn’t.
Bucky’s hand under his legs is making him nervous. He kicks at the warm chest until Bucky sets him down in his hammock, swinging lightly with the movement that was created when he got in.

But then Matt realises that his hammock is like a bed and Stick didn’t even need a bed, but Bucky…

Matt isn’t coordinated enough to climb out, but he tries – desperately. When Bucky approaches, he slowly shifts between Matt’s legs and the man pauses.

His body is frozen.

Bucky lifts him, again, but Matt doesn’t move. He’s completely limp because he doesn’t know what Bucky’s going to do.

“S-S-Stop.” Matt shakes as Bucky settles him against the wall. He’s crying and Bucky’s not quite sure why, but Matt looks terrified and defeated at the same time.

And he’s so drunk. Bucky isn’t sure if it’s this new fear or the fact that alcohol can cause incontinence, but a wet spot starts to appear on Matt’s sweats. A fairly small patch.

Then Bucky notices his positioning.

“Shit, no, Pipsqueak, I’m not going to do anything.” Bucky hushes Matt, moves out from between his legs. “Let’s take you to bed, to Clint.”

Bucky lifts Matt under the arms, urges him to his feet.

The corridor spins, twists, and turns when Matt makes an utterly blind attempt to walk along it, no idea where he’s going.

He doesn’t want Bucky in his bedroom, just Clint. Clint will keep him safe.

“Can’t sleep.” Matt insists. Stick agrees in his head. “’M not weak.”

“Sleeping is a necessity, not a weakness.” Bucky tells him, pushing open what must be the door to his bedroom but ends up being the door to his bathroom.

“Set him down.” Clint is saying and Matt has no idea where he is, not even what direction he’s in, because he’s pretty sure he’s been drinking the shit Thor likes.

Matt feels himself being put in what appears to be a bathtub and he grabs at the sides, trying not to spin away.

“I think you need to rest, Matty, but you can’t sleep like that.” Clint’s saying, slowly pulling his sweats down his legs.

Matt protests a little but not much because Clint won’t hurt him. He won’t, he won’t, he won’t.

His stomach threatens to spill but he holds it in.

“That’s great, Buddy. Just let me wash you off.” Clint coaxes him.

Matt thinks Bucky might have left.

“Why aren’t you hitting?” Matt asks in a roundabout way, his words slurred and stuttered.
“Because I don’t like seeing you hurt.”

Clint’s spraying him with lukewarm water, rinsing him off, and then Matt feels himself being lifted out of the bath, a tight grip stopping him from slipping.

“There we go.” Clint’s whispering. Either that, or Matt’s hearing is really going to shit.

“Why would I hit you, Matty?” Clint asks, guiding him through to their room.

He manages to pat himself dry with a towel Clint gives him, just before Clint urges him into a pair of boxers.

Clint’s very nice to him.

“Learn that way.” Matt ducks his head, waits for Clint’s fist to land.

Clint’s hand moves, always gentle, and rests on his shoulder. “That’s not a good way to learn, Matty.”

“Stick.” Matt’s being guided under the covers and bundled up in his blanket. “Stick says so.”

“He’s a terrible man.” Clint’s voice is quite relaxing. It’s making Matt’s eyelids droop, even as he fights to keep them open.

“Alcohol ‘fective.”

“What?”

“Need glass.” Matt reaches out, wondering how far away the broken bottle is. Clint presses him back down onto the bed.

Matt’s sobs start and don’t stop for most of the night and Clint, watching over Matt like an angel, notices one common theme.

“Stick won’t stop shouting at me.”
Matt’s head is burning when he opens his eyes.

He’s been glad that he doesn’t have to experience the pain of bright lights ever since he met Foggy (the man can drink). However, he does come to the conclusion that he could do without his consciousness.

His nose picks up on the smell of fruit.

“Herbal tea.” Bucky’s voice is a knife through his frontal lobe, as is the shuffling of book pages. How long has he been waiting on Matt?

He’s in his own bed, which seems strange because Clint isn’t with him.

“Clint.” Matt says, his ears listening for his friend’s heartbeat and finding nothing.

“We were taking turns watching you.” Bucky comments, then pauses. “Listen, Matt, we need to talk.”

Bucky’s calling him Matt? It must be serious.

“Yesterday, I should’ve asked before touching you. Made sure it was ok.” Bucky says, running a hand across his face. “This therapy shit is new to me.”

Bucky makes a stilted laugh but Matt isn’t falling for it.

He doesn't remember a lot but he remembers the wetness between his legs in breath-taking clarity. Matt pulls the covers over his head, despite how stuffy it feels, and wills Bucky to leave.

“Pipsqueak, don’t do that, don’t hide.” Bucky sighs, shifts to sit on the edge of the bed.

Matt’s head aches as his cheeks flush with hot blood, tinting him with new shades of red.

“What happened yesterday, it’s a natural reaction to fear.” Bucky pats a hand on the lump of Matt’s form, aware that he probably shouldn’t pull the covers away from Matt, no matter how much he wants to.

“Stop it.” Matt’s voice comes from under the sheets, shuffling into a little ball of sniffles. His gut twists with shame.

“When you get scared, the sympathetic nerves in your body release adrenaline and adrenaline cause more urine flow.” Bucky explains, smoothing the covers over Matt’s arm. “You know how kids can wet themselves when they get scared? Well, it’s not just kids.”

Matt’s head might catch on fire at this rate.
“Happens in a lot of anxiety disorders.” Bucky shifts. “People don’t talk about it.”

Matt doesn’t believe Bucky. Stick wouldn’t have pushed him so hard. Stick wanted Matt to be the perfect soldier – surely he wouldn’t jeopardise that?

Matt pushed Stick away with shaking hands when the older man accosted him in one of the orphanage’s many ‘haunted corridors’.

“I quit.” Matt sniffs, turns away from Stick.

The other man grabs a tight hold on the back of his shirt, pulling him back. “Stop acting like a pussy and get downstairs.”

“No!” Matt snapped, his hands shaking. “Not after… Dad says—”

“Your father’s words are worth shit, now he’s dead.” Stick spits, literally, the words at him. Then, and only then, does his voice turn silky. “Matty, don’t you want me to train you?”

“It really hurt.” Matt shuddered as Stick ran a hand down his back, a touch that made Matt turn to ice.

“H’m.” He murmured. “C’mon, let’s go get ice cream.”

“I don’t wanna talk.” Matt shoves Bucky through the covers.

Bucky stands up, huffing. “Matt, I just want to talk it through and—”

“No, no, no!” Matt shouts, hitting his leg because Bucky isn’t listening to him. Why won’t he stop?

Matt wants it to stop.

“You promised y-you’d listen, all of you.”

Bucky relents – they’d all promised to quit the feelings talks and therapy work if Matt became overwhelmed. Sometimes, he has difficulty expressing his emotions in a comprehensive way.

“I was used to being on a catheter for my cryogenic ‘sleeps’.” Bucky confesses. He slips onto the bed slowly, trying not to spook Matt. “I wasn’t used to sleeping like a normal person and, well, I had some issues.”

Matt’s head pops up. His eyes don’t move, but Bucky feels Matt searching his expression. “Like me?”

Bucky shrugs, his cheeks tinting red. “I was embarrassed. And you kept saying shit about yourself, that you ‘weren’t good enough’, and I just need you to know that it’s all bullshit. It’s a survival mechanism.”

Matt knows that’s not an excuse. His body is his weapon, he should be able to wield it. When he tells Bucky, the man frowns at him.

“Your mentor tell you that?”

Matt nods, happy to finally have a question he can answer. Then Matt feels the familiar absorption of sound shifting to rest against his huddled form. It's Bucky's arm, gently smoothing his tight muscles.

Matt swallows, wonders if Bucky is tense because of him because Matt can feel it. He can feel it twisting like a knife in Bucky's gut.
“He taught me how to meditate.” Matt decides to explain but it doesn't seem to help. “How to focus my senses. I can control my organs if I try hard enough. My nerves. Shut everything off if I get captured or… or finish a task efficiently on no sleep.”

“Matt, you can't control the way your body was wired. Maybe some things, but not everything.” Bucky shifts around Matt's body, sits him up.

Matt screws his face up in confusion when Bucky starts undoing the knots in his shoulders. This must be a massage. Matt have had one before, not unless he was trying to ease pain in his legs, but even then it was his hands stumbling over the stressed knots.

“What else did Stick tell you, Pip?”

Bucky is using a fond voice, clearly trying to be gentle when he his fingers work over Matt's muscles. The redhead doesn't feel uncomfortable but, for some reason, his lips stumble over his next words.

“F- Focus really hard and I can control anything. Work hard enough and I can stop st-stuff like emotions and pain and my senses…” Matt ducks his head, not especially wanting to continue with this conversation but Bucky seems persistent.

Bucky sighs and an apology slips past Matt's lips.

“Not your fault, Doofus.” Bucky gently pats his shoulder, then punches the bridge of his own nose.

“You're blaming yourself because he fucking made you love him.” Bucky growls, then wraps a loose arm around Matt's shoulders. It's the metal one and, while Matt finds it delightful, it's a little heavy. Bucky notices and moves it over his shoulders so the weight is being supported by him.

Bucky makes a muffled sort of noise that Matt can't decipher, not with his pulsating head and tired ears.

“Matt, there are some things you can't control.” Bucky squeezes him and it feels nice, so Matt leans into the hug. “Stuff like mental health takes therapy and hard work to get over, so don't blame yourself for being upset.”

But Matt doesn't understand because Stick wouldn't lie to him, not about his powers.

Bucky wouldn't lie either, right? But someone must be.

Bucky starts hushing him, rocking him back and forth gently, encouraging the movement. Matt sniffs, blinks his eyes until everything starts to make a little more sense.

Stick encouraged him to forget about his feelings, but apparently that's a bad thing. Matt explains this train of thought to Bucky, who agrees.

“That's unhealthy, Pipsqueak.” Bucky brushes away his hair, probably wanting to see Matt's face without the fluffy, red locks all over it.

“Your mind's a muscle and it gets tired.” Bucky explains for him. “You need to let go of whatever you're holding so it can rest. Mediation can help, but it's not going to stop you from feeling.”

Then Matt's shoulder is patted again. “You're not perfect, Pip, no-one is.”

Despite the horrifying feeling in his gut that ‘everything is a lie’, Matt's feeling better. Obviously
he can’t be perfect because everyone has a different idea of what perfect is. But, somewhere in the
darkest corner of his mind, Matt hoped that he could be the perfect son for Stick. Then, maybe he’d
stop hurting Matt.

What if Stick lied to him about everything?

“All I want is for you to not be upset over things you can’t control, like yesterday.” Bucky pulls
back to look Matt in the eye, no matter how they stared blankly in return.

It doesn’t make sense but Matt nods, figuring it might make sense to him later.
Foggy wants to have lunch with him, so Matt's obliging.

Steve and Natasha are acting as guards, with Steve sitting three tables away and Nat eating a subway sandwich at a bench.

Matt nudges Foggy's foot with his own as a waitress hands them both menus.

“My friend needs a braille menu.” Foggy hands one of the slippery sheets back to her, leaving no room for questions.

“Oh, of course.” She says, cheeks bright. “I'll get that for you just now.”

Matt smiles but he isn't feeling very chatty, so he doesn't say anything. He's no longer hungover but he's not feeling hot. Tomorrow is court.

“Matt, there's pasta.” Foggy suggests. “Or some vegetarian options? I know the meat sometimes makes you feel sick.”

Matt shakes his head, taps his fingers along the table. His stomach is twisting over and the only way to relax it seems to be by making soft noises against the wood.

He finds the necklace Bucky gave him, presses it to his lips for a long moment. He sneaks a small bite, inconspicuously, and notes that it tastes bitter but not entirely unpleasant.

He's given the braille menu.

His hand reaches out to inspect the options.

“You have to eat something.” Foggy nudges him under the table, this time.


He points at the salad, inconspicuously places the metal in his mouth.

“So this place seems nice.” Foggy offers. “Right, Matt? Cozy?”

The waitress returns to save Matt from answering. He's enjoying himself with Foggy, he really is, but he doesn't exactly want to speak to him. Matt figures he feels the presence of others much stronger than a regular person would. Matt knows more about Foggy than he knows about himself in this single moment and it's more intimate than talking.

Foggy just sees Matt, he thinks. Sitting quietly.

No week-old Cheeto smell from Matt.

“Can I have a cheeseburger and a salad?” Foggy orders for both of them. “Thanks.”

Matt drops the necklace, leaving it dangling around his neck.

“So how was your day?” Foggy presses.
Matt's head flicks to the side, considers.

Foggy's had a shower, with strawberry shampoo, and then got coffee from that place outside the tower. He was with Karen, then Tony and Bucky. Rode in the car with Matt and Happy Hogan, Tony's chauffeur.

Matt doesn't want to hear about Foggy's day because he already knows what happened.

His head returns to a less awkward position.

“Hangover.” Matt says. He hears a glass being placed in front of him. Did Foggy order drinks?

Foggy's drinking his so Matt assumes it's safe. He places his lips to the straw Foggy dropped in his glass, sips.

Lemonade. Matt takes a long sip of the cool drink before pushing it away.

“I heard about that.” Foggy nods along. “Want to talk about it?”

Matt doesn't answer, lets that be answer enough.

“What's wrong, Matt?” Foggy asks.

“Am I guilty?” Matt asks softly, more to himself than to Foggy.

“You're worried about court?”

It's become a sensitive topic; ‘court’ is as good as a cuss in the tower.

“Oh, Matt.” Foggy sighs, takes a deep breath. “Look, you were helping people. Self defence of others, remember? I might not have viewed it that way when… when you told me you were going on your nightly adventures, but even Claire agrees that you've helped a lot. Just not yourself.”

Matt ducks his head.

“Call me selfish, but I care about you most.” Foggy takes a gulp of something fizzy. It has bubbles and Matt quite enjoys the popping. When Matt gravitated towards it, Foggy offers it by moving Matt's hand onto the glass, just so he doesn't spill it.

Matt's face screws up at the chemical taste but his senses are dampened enough by sleep that he still enjoys it. It tastes slightly like medicine or aniseed.

“There's always someone less capable, weaker, more scared.” Matt grinds out, then his defensive tone dissolves into a small laugh as a bubble popping hits his nose. It tickles when Matt tries to drink from the glass again, bubbles popping in his face.

“I know, Matt.” Foggy's hair sounds sure when he nods.

Matt reaches out to touch and Foggy laughs at him. “God, you're so cuddly.”

Matt pouts, strokes his hair for a moment, then sits back in his chair.

He's allowed one discreet foot tucked away on the chair in public. No more or it draws attention, unless he's in a booth.

His shoe is carefully not touching the chair, as to not ruin it.
“Court will be over. Very soon, Matt.” Foggy assures him. “Your ninja-mentor-rapist? That’s not my territory. But court will be just fine. Nothing to worry about.”

Matt tilts his head, checks to see if anyone has overheard.

No-one seems to have noticed so he leans back on the chair, breathes out deeply.

“Matt, I’m gonna tell you something.” Foggy’s saying with a calm laugh, but his heart is beating rapidly. “And I need you to stay really, really calm.”

Matt figures that Foggy has noticed something important, something that might be more evident to sighted people.

“What’s up?” Matt keeps his voice calm. He taps his fingers over the table again, trying his best to look distracted. His heart doesn’t worry more than it already was and he focuses strongly on keeping it sounding the same as before.

“There’s a guy behind Steve. Behind you.” Foggy continues with his little laugh. “Staring at us.”

Matt reaches forward, sips some more of Foggy’s drink.

Matt hears the seat behind Steve shifting. The light-footed man stands up, makes quick steps towards their table.

Foggy’s heartbeat jumps when Matt swings his cane, newly unfolded, at the man. Matt stops a sheathed knife with the stick.

“Everybody out!” Matt shouts, dodging the assailant’s stabbing motions.

Steve is being occupied by whatever’s fighting Natasha. He’s punching at an awfully quiet ninja that Matt can barely sense, while Matt’s own attention is on keeping Foggy and himself safe.

His foot clips the side of the body, off centre and flimsy, while the thug clobbers Matt.

With a leaping kick, Matt sends the ninja into the restaurant’s bar.

“Holy shit, it’s that Daredevil guy.”

“No way is he blind.”

“Look, it’s Daredevil!”

A quartet of Yakuza with submachine guns. Two on Steve and Natasha, another entering through the back of the restaurant.

Matt kicks away one of the thug’s weapons in an instant. The sound of Natasha’s widow bites crackles in the air, causing one of the ninjas to spasm on the floor. Steve ducks a kick aimed at his head.

There’s a couple of shots from outside, screaming and sobbed names.

Daredevil launches himself at the two Yakuza, disarming one and using the gun to beat both of them to their knees.

Matt knees one thug down but he comes back punching. He flips over the thug’s back, then throws him into a collection of chairs and tables.
Matt barely misses a frantic bullet in his direction. A knife clips his hip, not enough to seriously hurt.

He’s ok.

Daredevil spin kicks the first man to the ground and, when he staggers to his feet, he throws the gun and hits the guy in the throat.

Steve and Nat take down the last gunman, then watch as Daredevil pounds on his limp adversary, painting his face with a fresh burst of blood.

Matt’s ears scan the area, listens carefully for pained breathing, and any medical problems. He can only smell the blood of the Yakuza and his own.

Matt gathers the guns, kicks them away from anyone.

“Is anyone injured?” He asks, just to be sure, but something unexpected happens.

There’s clapping.

Matt frowns in confusion while those around him start cheering and clapping. That is, between scared sobs and cries. Matt’s not sure who they’re clapping for but, soon enough, happy calls of “Daredevil!” clear up his confusion.

They’re clapping for Matt.
The Last Stand

DAREDEVIL: HERO OF HELL’S KITCHEN?

Tears well up in Matt’s eyes as his trembling fingers carefully scan each letter of the newspaper headline. Matt’s ears lift up as he listens in to the news.

“The Yakuza gang has taken multiple lives today in New York city. Three police officers were killed in...” The news says through the TV. Matt’s ears perk up. “However, the true hero today was the Devil of Hell’s Kitchen, none other than blind lawyer Matthew Murdock."

Matt never liked the way he’d be characterised as ‘a blind man’, not a ‘man who has blindness’. Something about the wording seems off to him, as if his blindness is his defining characteristic. He shrugs it off.

“Matthew Murdock has recently been accused of assault charges and is awaiting a jury verdict. The court case, due to end tomorrow, surely has to be re-examined after the events of today, when Daredevil brought down the Yakuza members, alongside Captain America and the Black Widow.”

Matt shuffles closer to the TV, but Bruce guides him back, trying to finish stitching his hip.

“Four ninjas.” A male voice comments.

“He saved lives today. This only proves to show that Daredevil is a hero.” The female reporter argues with her colleague. “His worst crimes are assault – how can we justify the Avengers when this lone vigilante is clearly more disciplined?”

“I wouldn’t say more disciplined…” The male considers. “He’s violent, but he’s never killed his victims. Hell’s Kitchen has had a lot to deal with – a man on stilts and a hoard of ninjas roaming around the streets. As a lawyer, Murdock even brought down Kingpin – Wilson Fisk. I think the jury needs to look at this man’s moral standpoint – clearly he has a set of boundaries that he adheres to. We know his identity – that’s also a plus.”

Matt stops listening when Bruce’s needle jabs him painfully.

“Sorry, Matt.” He sighs, rubs his head, and then continues doing his job.

“Will this change anything?” Matt directs are Tony, who has been snuggled up on the couch since that morning. He’s started walking around but he’s not supposed to exert himself.

“They can’t ignore it.” Tony points out. “The jury are just people – they’ll realise that this could have been them, their families…”

“You were a hero today, Matt.” Bruce says softly.

Matt brought his toys to court. He is currently holding his octopus, making it grab his goat (which Clint is holding). His lion is tucked tightly under his arm.

“Hey, Matty, you playing with me or what?” Clint encourages him.

Every time a stranger walks by, Matt suddenly goes still and pretends he doesn’t exist. But Clint
has to spoil it by pulling Matt over to the chairs, making the goat bounce around.

Matt’s not a child. He just wants his goat and Clint keeps moving it out of reach. He’s too lethargic to really try.

His court suit is made of stiff and unforgiving fabric. His socks are tight around his ankles like coiling snakes, scratching at his flesh like sandpaper.

Matt tries to take his shoes off but Clint moves his hands away from his feet and laces them back up.

“No, no, stop it.” Matt whimpers, trying to push Clint’s hands away with his feet.

Bruce approaches him, gently strokes his hair. “Matt, you need to keep your shoes on for court. Dress code.”

“So socks?” Matt protests.

Bruce and Clint exchange a glance before Bruce slips Matt’s shoes off of his feet, very gently, and removes the horrible socks. He puts the shoes back on Matt.

The socks get bundled up and hidden in Matt’s backpack.

Matt thinks that, sometimes, Bruce understands his difficulties.

“We’re going home, now?” Matt asks.

Tony is ushering them into a long car that fits all of the Avengers. Not Thor because Thor left for Asgard, promising he’ll return quickly.

“Yeah, Bud, we’re going home.” Clint pats his knee, takes his lion from Matt’s rucksack and hands it to him.

Matt drops it, not especially interested in his toy.

They’re going back to the tower. Doesn’t Matt have to get sentenced? He’d assumed they would fast track the case but it usually takes between one and twelve months. Matt thinks he should be in a cell by now.

The crowd of reporters is shouting loudly outside of the limo, cameras clicking and snapping at him. His head swirls, dizzy with the weight of his thoughts. He doesn’t understand what the others are telling him.

“Plum, they found you ‘not guilty.’” Tony tells him, shifting in his seat. He’s sitting beside the bar, but not reaching for a drink.

Tony is on Matt’s side, so he rests his head against the warm body.

“Not guilty, no.” Matt frowns, rubs his temples with his fists.

“What?” Clint asks in confusion, suppressing his happy grin.

Matt kicks off his shoes, tugs against his seatbelt when his chest starts to feel jittery. His mouth dries up and his stomach seems to revolt.
“You’re not guilty, Matt.” Bruce clarifies, sounding a little tired. “We’re going home, now.”

“Sentencing.” Matt explains, tugging on Bruce’s arm.

He doesn’t feel warm enough. He feels like he wants to cuddle up beside all of his friends, just try to think his way through this situation. He’s not guilty?

Matt tugs Clint, gestures to his bag. Clint, now frowning in confusion, hands Matt the bag. “Aren’t you happy, Bud? No more court.”

Matt digs around for his phone, turns it on. “Call Father Lantom.”

“Calling Father Lantom.” His phone recites back. Matt puts it to his ear, rests back on Tony’s shoulder.

“Matthew?” The kind, old voice asks through his phone. “Is there a problem?”

“Can—I want to go to confession, are you busy, Father?” Matt twists his fingers into Tony’s shirt. He needs some advice.
Confession

Clint goes into the church with Matt, just to stand watch, while Matt here over to the priest, who is sitting at one of the pews.

“Father.” Matt greets him with a handshake, for which Father Lantom smiles.

“Matthew, I hope this is a friendly visit?” Lantom asks. “Shall we do this formally?”

Matt smiles awkwardly, turns his ear to Clint. “Oh, Clint's not Catholic. He's my bodyguard… You've seen the news?”

“I have.”

Matt sits beside the priest, while Clint takes a space near the door to the church. He looks around curiously, running his fingers over the back of one of the pews.

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.” Matt bows his head, crosses himself again. It doesn't feel like anything has changed. “It's been a while since I've come to church, Father.”

“For worship can take place anywhere. You've been busy.” Lantom assures him.

Matt nods, licks his lips. “Sodomy.”

Lantom gives him a glance, then rethinks his actions. He lets out a soft sigh. “Matthew, love between any two persons is cherished in the eyes of the Lord. Sodomy is an outdated crime.”

Matt notices how he doesn't say 'sin'.

“No, Father, I…” Matt hears Clint's blood pulsing in anger, but the other man doesn't interrupt, for which Matt is thankful. “With an older man, I was a child—”

“Forgive me, Matthew, but that sounds like abuse.” Lantom interrupts him, quite seriously. “Hopefully no-one at At Agnes’?”

Matt's heart shudders in his chest. “No, no, Father, of course not. The nuns were… accommodating.”

“Lying is a sin, Matthew.” Lantom chastises him, turns his head away. “I wasn't happy with how you were treated there.”

Matt ducks his head, twitches his feet. He especially wants to draw them in but he wouldn't do that in church. He respects the church much, much more. This is God's house.

“I'm sorry, Father.” Matt whispers, tightening his grip on his white cane. Hesitantly, he folds it up.

“Matthew, it doesn't sound like you should be the one confessing.” Lantom shifts in his seat.


“Hard to think of something you don't feel guilty about.” Lantom comments in amusement, then he sighs. “Matt, you're a good Catholic. For every sin, you've repented. Even those which most would never admit.”
Matt thinks back to that small period with Elektra and his frequent confessions of premarital sex. Lantom started to joke that he was bragging.

But Matt cherished his time with Elektra, proposed clumsily as they climbed into bed together. She gave him a look, not one that Matt noticed, and told him how sweet he was. Told him to sin a little.

“This is not something you should repent.” Lantom explains clearly.

“Yes, Father.” Matt nods obediently. Everyone seems to be telling him that.

“Three Hail Marys for dishonesty, Matthew.” Lantom tells him, then his mood lightens. “I'll get it through to you yet.”

Matt's lips curve up slightly, then fall into a guilty expression.

“Yes, Father.” Matt stands quickly, flips open his cane. It clicks into a stiff position for him to navigate.

Matt hears Clint standing up, walking around to meet Matt in the middle of the church. His footsteps echo in the silence.

“You're certain, Father?” Matt asks, just to make sure.

“Positive.” Lantom nods, waving him off.

“Thank you, Father. Good day.” Matt nods his head, reaches for Clint's elbow and follows him outside.

He's perfectly calm until he gets into the car, at which point he sits down and holds his breath. He can't do this right now, he needs to think. Needs some room.

Nothing is making sense — first, he's innocent, and now sodomy isn't something to be sorry for. Matt thinks being raped is something he should feel bad about. Loving sex is different, cherished. He slams his first into his leg, just over the newly-healed cuts he left there.

“Matty, whoa.” Clint grabs Matt's arm, then pauses when Matt doubles over, starting to sob.

It doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel right and Matt has no idea what right is.

Clint holds him when the car starts moving, shifting Matt onto his shoulder and squeezing him gently.

The others remain silent in the car. There's no witty remarks or assurance because it's obvious Matt doesn't want it.

He wants to go to bed. More than anything else, he's so tired and the world isn't making sense to him. Not when a court finds him not guilty and his priest sends him away with only three Hail Marys. It's almost not fair.

Bruce takes Matt straight to his bedroom.
Matt sits on the end of his bed for a long time while Bruce waits on him.

“Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death Amen.” Matt recites after introducing the prayer, repeats himself another two times.

He spends his time thinking about the lie, thinking about how nasty the nuns could be, and thinks about how other children could end up being treated the same way. Then, Matt closes his eyes. Allows his guilt to wash away, slowly. He shouldn't have lied, but God will forgive him.

Bruce is cuddled into the covers when Matt joins him in the bed. It's midday but they're both tired after court.

Bruce had only attended previously for short bursts, no longer then an hour each time. He doesn't like the stuffy nature of court. Matt doesn't like the attention being focused on him. Not like this.

Matt clambers over to Bruce, tentatively nuzzles into his chest.

He wants to feel guilty about something. He knows how to understand guilty. But this feeling? This gnawing, deep in his gut, is not something he can understand.

He's not sure what he's supposed to feel.
Matt grabs Clint's wrist when he starts eating.

Clint's response is to smile. “Sorry, Matty. Pray, then we'll eat.”

The others don't pray with Matt but they give him the minute it takes to recite his prayers every time they have ‘family dinners’.

“Bruce.” Matt explains, crossing his arms in preparation to wait.

“Oh, er.” Tony mutters something unintelligible before leaning towards Matt, as if he's sharing a secret. “Brucie isn't feeling great, Matt.”

That can't be right. Tony isn't even calling him anything even remotely red, so he lifts out of his chair.

“Where are you going?” Clint grabs his hand. Matt swings Clint's hand, tugs the fingers, and then lets go.

They're calling after him but Matt doesn't pay any notice.

Jarvis takes him upstairs to the labs Tony and Bruce commonly use together.

The doors slide open, grating against the metal framework. Stepping through the exit, the scent of salt hits his nose.

Is Bruce crying?

“Bruce?” Matt's calling out, not wanting to frighten his friend.

He hears small, glass object hit the ground and smash. Bruce is rushing towards the blacked out doors of the lab. Matt approaches the top of the stairs, waiting on Bruce to emerge on his own. When he does, his breathing is steady yet forced, like he's trying too hard.

“The others are having dinner.” Bruce tells Matt, and then shuffles from side to side.

“And you’re up here.” Matt nods, considers Bruce. His weight is tilted quite far forward, as if he’s looking at something.

“Matt, leave me alone, I don’t want to talk to you.” Bruce scratches his forearm, shifting to lean backwards.

“Ok. But I want to have dinner with you, so maybe we can sit quietly?” Matt suggests.

Bruce stops scratching, turns on his heels. Then he turns back to Matt, nodding.

Matt goes to the kitchen on Tony’s floor, just above the labs. Bruce moves to sit at the table, his weight rolling forward in the chair, closing himself off.

Matt fills a pot with water, rummaging around in the cupboards and fridge for spicy ingredients. Bruce likes his food, Matt reminds himself, and so he puts extra work in. Minding the texture of the rice is easy – the hard pellets should progressively get softer, stirred so as not to burn.
Matt doesn’t say anything when Bruce stands extra close to him.

The wooden spoon stirs the steaming water, calmly guiding the swirling current.

Bruce’s arms snake around Matt, his cheek resting against Matt’s shoulder. He feels slightly stiff, his muscles rigid as they lock into the hugging position.

Bruce seems to be watching Matt work from over his shoulder. Matt’s hands are picking seeds out of chilies, slicing and chopping the fiery peppers.

But Bruce’s muscles jitter, spasming shortly before he pulls away from Matt.

Matt listens for the smell of chemicals fighting with a strange calmness in Bruce’s heart.

Again, it’s quite terrifying to hear Bruce’s muscles bulge and swell. ‘Hulk’ is truly a fitting name for the alter-ego, Matt thinks as Bruce’s body stretches above him, looming like a sun in the room. Hulk roars behind Matt, who doesn’t react.

Hulk stares a Matt for seconds before stomping over to the couch, kicking it across the room.

Matt ignores the muscled figure as he pours rice into a colander, listening to the waterfall rush of water down the drain.

Hulk roars at him again, stomping around behind his back.

“Dinner time.” Matt presents the food, giving more to Hulk, since he’s much bigger than Bruce.

He grunts at it. Matt sets down the pepper-laden rice carefully.

“Hulk SMASH!” Hulk argues, waving his fist around.

“But I cooked dinner.” Matt gestures to the steaming plates on the table. “And I’ll be upset if you knock it over. Bruce likes spicy food, but do you?”

Hulk waves his fist slightly, then drops it in confusion.

Matt smells blood and steps closer to investigate. Hulk flinches. His jaw opens and his weight shifts forward, as if to support the force of the roar that rips through the air towards Matt. It’s loud and deep, not something that especially bothers Matt. When Hulk finishes, he steadies himself.

“Devil Man cook?” Hulk asks warily, hits the table lightly. It nudges closer to Matt.

“I cooked us dinner.” Matt sits down in his chair. Hulk joins him, throwing the chair across the room (it smashes horribly against the wall) so that he can sit in front of the table. He tips the chili rice into his mouth and chews.

“You shouldn’t smash Tony’s things.” Matt scolds him, crossing his arms, just in case Hulk finds it difficult to sense Matt’s emotions. He acts with a young mentality, Matt notes. “He won’t be happy.”


“Thank you. But Tony’ll be upset because you smashed his chairs.” Matt swallows a mouthful of his own food, then pauses to listen to Hulk.

“Hulk bad?” He swallows loudly, then raises himself to his large, flat feet. His figure stomps
towards the broken chair, lifts a snapped leg and inspects it carefully.

“You’re not bad, you done something bad. There’s a difference.” Matt says, leaving to table to join him. “And Tony’s not feeling very well, so you shouldn’t upset him.”

Hulk does something surprising, then. He starts crying in short sobs, pawing at his face. Falling onto his backside, he weeps louder. Matt approaches the large body, places a hand on his shoulder.

“It’s alright, I’m sure Tony will forgive you. Why don’t we go apologize to him? I think he’ll appreciate it.” Matt suggests, then raises his head. “Jarvis, can you bring Tony up here?”

Hulk shuffles, then lifts Matt like a toy, settling him in his lap. He’s especially careful with Matt, not wanting to hurt the small man.

When Tony does arrive, no more than a couple of minutes later, Hulk is trying to press the chair together. Matt’s in the middle of explaining that it doesn’t work like that, but he seems determined to try.

“Everything cool here?” Tony asks warily. He has the bracelets that call his suit wrapped around his wrists.

“Hulk chair—Chair smash.” Hulk lifts up the broken pieces, presenting them to Tony. Then, he sits down and sobs again. “Hulk bad – sorry, sorry.”

“Hulk feels bad about breaking the chair and he was trying hard to fix it, but he’s sorry.” Matt explains in more detail, gently stoking his hand over the bulging shoulder.

“Oh, uh… That’s cool, Big Guy, I can buy a new one.” Tony shrugs it off.

Matt frowns because that’s not what he’s trying to teach Hulk.

“It’s wrong to break other people’s stuff, but Tony knows you didn’t mean to upset him.” Matt explains, then smiles. “I told you he’d forgive you.”

Hulk rubs at his face again, wiping away the tears. He nods, seeming to understand Matt’s point.

“I think you’re tired, so maybe Bruce can come back?” Matt asks, cuddling the large arm (Matt can’t get his arms around Hulk’s waist) one last time. “I’ll see you again. Soon, hopefully.”

Hulk presses his forehead against Matt’s. Matt feels the space draw in on itself, shrinking smaller and smaller as the potent smell of chemicals retreats from the air. It doesn’t hang around – it must be something inside Bruce and the Hulk, themselves.

“Sorry.” Bruce sniffs when he comes back to himself.

“C’n I hug you?” Matt think’s it’s a good idea to ask from now on. He hears the movement of Bruce’s head in the air and wraps his arms around the smaller body.

Bruce doesn’t say anything, but he starts crying into Matt’s chest, tears soaking through his shirt. Matt rests his cheek against Bruce’s head, squeezing him just enough to remind Bruce that he’s there for him. When Bruce starts rocking, Matt goes with the motion.

After all, he’s not the only one who needs a friend.
A fucking talk show.

Tony is livid. L.I.V.I.D. Officially pissed off because this is so good for Matt but also detrimental to half of his team’s mental health. He knows it’s important to show that Daredevil is an Avenger.

It’s not helpful.

When he told his team, he knew there would be three problems: Matt, Bruce, and Bucky. Matt hates cameras, Bruce hates people, and Bucky hates talking.

Bruce and Matt immediately retreated into their shells, while Bucky didn’t react. He didn’t seem to realise how horrible it will be, but he’ll learn when the patronising host starts talking.

In the present moment, Matt is trying to take off his shoes while Bruce is leaning forward, curled in on himself subtly. Bucky is leaning back on the bright couch, waiting on the host to arrive.

“This is bullshit.” Bucky claims, ignoring the catcalls and shorts from the audience.

Clint is insisting that Matt should keep his shoes on.

Tony is sort of hoping he’ll have another heart attack and get out of this. But, thankfully, he and Steve will draw a lot of the attention.

Matt’s not wearing his Daredevil suit. No-one asked him because it’s obvious he wants to forget it exists. Nelson currently has it. He’s wearing his ‘Devil of Hell’s Kitchen’ suit (glorified pyjamas); Bruce is wearing a dress shirt and pants; and Tony is in a tux, looking formal as usual. Everyone else is in costume.

“Matt, put your shoes on. You aren’t wearing socks, which was our agreement.” Clint sighs, practically pinning him to the sofa.

“But it hurts.” Matt objects, wriggling.

The hostess walks on stage, a man with a script following her closely. He’s wearing a uniform for the show: CelebTalk. After chatting to the young blonde for several moments, he scurries off.

“Just try to stay quiet, we want to get this over with.” Clint whispers to Matt, who scowls. Clint takes his hands away, watching the redhead carefully.

Dice is at the end of the couch, in his bright, yellow jacket. He’s sitting calmly, statuesque.

“Good morning!” The woman chimes from her desk. “I’m Lucy Frost. The show will start in a minute, just get yourselves comfortable.”

Matt immediately takes off his shoes and lifts them onto the couch, hiding his bare feet from Clint,
who seems utterly defeated.

“Matt.” Clint warns.

Matt pretends not to hear.

“3, 2, and…”

“Hello and welcome to CelebTalk, the late night talk show will all the latest gossip on your favourite celebrities.” Lucy introduces the show. “Tonight, our guests are Earth’s Mightiest Heroes! That’s right – the Avengers! Also joining us will be Matthew Murdock, Manhattan’s resident Daredevil and newest Avenger. Now, I’d like to welcome our guests to the show, it’s great to have you.”

Matt’s ear clocks an audience member shifting in their seat; the crew is whispering offstage.

“Thanks for having us, Lucy.” Tony flashes his signature smile.

“It’s lovely to be here.” Cap lies through his teeth and Matt wonders what the punishment is for that. He shifts in his seat, pondering the situation. Protestants don’t have confession, so what happens when they sin? Matt supposes he’ll ask Cap later. Praying, perhaps?

“Mr Murdock’s trial is finished with a ‘not guilty’ verdict – that must be relieving to hear.” Lucy’s saying and Matt pipes up.

“My name is Matthew Michael—” He starts but Clint laughs to interrupt him.

“He prefers ‘Matt’.” He pats the man’s back. “It’s been a horrible trial. Daredevil has helped countless people, recent events have proved that, and the trial was stressful for us all.”

“Especially the sonic tasers.” Tony adds, part of his plan.

“Sonic tasers?” Lucy questions.

“Well, the FBI believed that Matt was too dangerous to stand in court without a deterrent – they used small devices in his ears that emit a sound designed to prevent the subject from being able to fight. Sonic taser.” Tony explains, reclining casually. He’s used to this. “What they don’t understand, or didn’t take into account, is that Matt’s only ‘superpower’ is enhanced senses. The tasers caused an overload in the part of his brain that understands auditory input and even caused a seizure.”

“Oh, God.” Lucy sounds horrified, her hair swishing as she turns to look at Matt, then back to Tony.

“It was never out of the testing phase but… what can you do?” Tony shrugs. “Matt didn’t want to be in contempt of court, of course.”

Tell the world on a talk show, perhaps?

Someone is chewing gum in the stands and it’s very distracting. He focuses on trying to find the person.

“Super senses, huh?” Lucy comments, sounding surprised. “The public have been told very little about Daredevil.”

It’s really bothering Matt – the slurping, wet sound of the viscous material being crushed between
“Something up?” Clint nudges his hip.

Matt sighs, tilts his head. “Third row up, fifteen from the left. Could you please stop chewing? It’s very distracting.”

He hears the chewing stop.

“Thank you.” He responds.

“No problem.” The voice says back, face flushed red.

After several inane questions, they reach the issue of Matt’s eyes.

“So, the world is curious: are you really blind? There’s several theories about it being a decoy, something to separate yourself from Daredevil.” Lucy says, carefully. She doesn’t seem like a bad person – she’s just reciting the questions of the public.

“NLP – no light perception.” Matt takes off his dark glasses and gestures with them to Dice. “I’m fully blind. I have a cane and my guide dog, Dice, to navigate. My enhanced senses allow me to use sonar, like a bat. Other blind people do it, too, but not to my extent. I can hear the heartbeat of everyone in a ten-block radius, police sirens for twenty. I know you’ve eaten a tuna mayonnaise sandwich for breakfast, a cheese pizza three nights ago, and you washed your hair this morning with… Is that eucalyptus shampoo?”

He’s shocked her into silence.

He’s shifting in his chair, quite uncomfortable.

They take a brief intermission.
“She’s going to the bathroom.” Matt explains when the hostess runs off. “Wouldn’t last twenty more minutes.”

“You’re creepy.” Bucky comments, worrying the fabric of the couch.

“Will you put your shoes on?” Clint asks, sounding quite annoyed.

“Can I sit on the floor?” Matt tilts his head, scanning the room for the comfiest spot. He figures that he can’t join the audience.

“For God’s sake—”

“Blasphemy!” Matt snaps, pouting. He has an idea that Clint might be staring him down, but doesn’t linger on it. He gets up and swaps place with Clint, joining Tony.

“Hi.” Matt nudges the man, as if he doesn’t know Matt moved.


“This is,” Matt does a 360 degree sound check, almost like a ‘glance’ around the room, “a lot.”

“There’s a lot going on in here, but it’ll all be over soon.”

It’s not over soon. Lord, is it not over soon.

“So, Matt, what is daily life like with the Avengers?” Lucy asks, after a long conversation about climate change.

Now, this is a question he can answer.

Clint’s heart is racing, for some reason. Maybe he’s getting stage fright?

“Well, I wake up with Clint and he usually makes me toast – Clint makes the best toast in the world – but sometimes I make my own breakfast because Clint can only make toast. Then I usually take Dice out for a walk with Clint and his dog, Lucky, or I go to the communal floor in the tower.” Matt describes. “I usually find something to spend time with during the day. Tony and Bruce don’t always like it when I’m in their lab, though, because they might be doing something dangerous. Or I sometimes read. We try to have family dinners once a week but it’s usually every second day or so. Clint’s my favourite to hang around with, so I usually do what he does. But we have movie night and Nerf gun fights and do training together. Last night, I cooked dinner for Hulk and we ate together before he turned back into Bruce.”

Everyone is staring at him.

“But I’m supposed to go to therapy once a week, too, so now I talk to Charles – he’s a telepath – if I’m feeling bad.” Matt adds, thinking that he should probably mention the TV show. Maybe he’ll want to watch it. “Charles is really great. He’s a teacher, too, and a doctor – but not that kind of doctor.”

They’re still staring.
“Tony made me a room with a treehouse in it – it has a hammock and a swing…” Matt rambles, not sure when he’s supposed to stop talking.

“Matt, you can’t just…” Clint groans, then addresses Lucy. “We’re not gay, Matt has nightmares so I stay with him.”

“Being gay isn’t a bad thing.” He points out, then nods. “But we’re not gay.”

Tony is laughing at them. Matt’s not sure if it’s a nervous tick or if he said something amusing.

“First step to living with Murdock is learning his language, right, Strawberry?” Tony nudges him, giggling.

“He even found me a cat.” Bucky says in a bored drawl. “Abandoned thing in the street. Ran like an idiot to an emergency vet.”

“It sounds like you’re quite the family.” Lucy says, bewildered but somewhat amused. Then she sounds somewhat probing. “You’re going to therapy?”

Matt hears Tony diverging the conversation, saying something about feeling tired due to having his heart attack but Lucy isn’t responding much.

Matt’s going to therapy. That’s true – no biggie.

Matt was abused. Somehow, in his mind, he feels dishonest. But then he thinks back on Father Lantom’s words, on Charles’, and on all of the Avengers’ guidance.

“I was raped.” Matt says. It’s blunt, sharp, and leaving no room for discussion.

“This is bullshit, why do you have any right to know about our lives?” Bucky snaps, shifting in his seat. “No-one’s asking questions about those creeps in the audience. Where do ya get off knowing all about our personal lives?”

There’s no doubt that Bucky means well, but he’s tired and irritated at how everyone’s bothering Matt. “Look, Pipsqueak here ain’t perfect. He does bad things, he does good things, and he’s had bad moments and good ones. He’s not guilty, he’s not breaking any laws, so people need to leave him the fuck alone.”

“Bucky, that’s not kind.” Matt points out shyly.

“No, he has a point.” Nat grumbles while Tony buries his face in his hands. This is so not going to plan. Why isn’t Steve redirecting attention? Actually, no, he’d probably agree.

“You think it’s easy being a fucking superhero all the time? Every single one of us have PTSD. Depression, anxiety disorders, abuse, torture. You name it, one of us fucking has it. Not to mention that Natasha and Matt were child soldiers, for cryin’ out loud.” Bucky snaps in what Matt assumes is the direction of the camera. “Stevie and I are in the wrong century, I lost an arm, Stark has a heart condition, and Barton was deafened on the job!”

Bucky crosses his arms, muscles straining as his heart flutters anxiously. “Do you think we really need you, out there – the people we try our hardest to protect – peering into every moment of our lives? What does it matter what we do on a daily basis? Why do you care about our favourite fucking colors? We don’t need to worry about talk shows and reporters when we already have so much shit on our plate.”
Matt squirms awkwardly.

“Buckster, maybe it’s best if you take Matt and Bruce for some fresh air.” Steve suggests and Tony thanks gods he doesn’t believe in because that’s actually helpful.

Matt hops out of his seat, quite relaxed, and grabs Dice, following Bucky’s stomps off of the stage. Bruce tags along, undoing the buttons on his sleeves and rolling them up.

“What Bucky means to say is that our job is a difficult one and we get a lot of criticism.” Steve amends. “When reporters crowd you after leaving court, already a stressful thing, it turns a bad moment into a bad day.”

“Or a bad week.” Nat huffs, leaning back.

“When you’re not in a good place already, prying eyes just add pressure.” Tony says and, with that, he leaves to join the others because he’s itching for a drink and he’s too stubborn to let this break him.

“You realise that was live. We are going to be trending on Twitter.” Tony says as he makes his way outside.

Bruce is huddled into Matt’s side, Matt is leaning on the wall of the building looking forlorn, and Bucky is positively furious. He hits the stone wall with his flesh arm, cusses when his knuckles burst open. They’ll heal in twenty minutes.

“You made a good point, you really did.” Tony leans beside Matt on the wall. “But you never get anywhere in life if all of your good arguments are made in anger.”

“Shut up, Stark.” Bucky snaps.

“Ok.”

They stand there in silence.
For some reason, everyone seems to think Matt and Clint are gay. Matt doesn’t linger on it. Apparently Laura keeps making jokes about it to Clint.

Oh, and they’re also focusing on the whole ‘Bucky Barnes hates people’ situation. And the rape thing. Matt wants to ignore the rape thing.

He’s doing a pretty great job.

“Scarlet?” Tony shuffles into the room, hummingbird heart pumping with adrenaline. “I was wondering, uh… I need to go to therapy today, y’know, but there’s some stairs I have to go up and I should probably bring someone—”

“Sure.” Matt agrees, lifting the pillow he’d been using to smother himself with off of his face.

Ok, not a great job. But Tony sounds worried about his heart, so Matt doesn’t mind the distraction. In fact, he welcomes it.

Tony holds Matt’s arm for support when they get off of the elevator in the med bay. They have to go through the ICU to reach the small stairwell, which Matt takes slowly so Tony can keep up. His heart seems to be perfectly fine, however, and there’s no real strain on his muscles.

“You seem much better.” Matt comments.

Tony’s heart skips. “Thanks…”

Tony’s therapist is in room 3A, compared to where Emily was in 1C. Matt’s figured out that the A rooms are for Bucky, Natasha, and, of course, Tony. The B rooms smell less like sweat – they’re for Sam and Steve. C1 (the only C room) smells like Matt, Clint, and Bruce.

Clint is the most ‘stable’ of all the Avengers. He opted to join SHIELD and, while he’s had some tough times that must be terrible to live with, the others were forced into their situation. War, brainwashing, a hostage situation, the ‘Red Room’, abuse.

Then there’s Bruce. Bruce isn’t the Hulk – he shares a soul with the Hulk, but they’re separate personalities. Matt thinks there’s something he doesn’t understand about Bruce, not yet, but he’s learning. He’s willing to admit his ignorance. Willing to learn.

But, now, he’s here with Tony.

“Maybe you can stay? Since you’re here, I mean, I’ll need an escort…” Tony jokes.

“You should have asked if that’s what you wanted.” Matt tells him. He’s not in the mood for joking.

Tony seems relieved as they enter through the door.

Matt supposes they all have the same experiences – witnessing crime, being attacked,
tortured. But, then, there’s the extra stuff. For Matt, it’s mostly Stick. For Bucky, it’s HYDRA.

Matt knows that the extra stuff doesn’t always mean you feel worse. Steve has a lot of extra stuff, but it’s mostly the time change that bothers him. Not the war or the deaths. Just feeling lost. Likewise, Natasha has a lot of extra stuff – Matt knows she can’t have children and he can hear the scars in her body that scream stories of her past – but she’s collected. She doesn’t cry herself to sleep at night.

Whereas, Bruce doesn’t like himself. It doesn’t seem like much, but Bruce cries himself to sleep at night. He feels worse for less and that’s ok. It just means that, in therapy, there’s less things to address.

Just because something seems less traumatic to the general populous doesn’t mean that it’s less traumatic to the individual.

Bucky and Natasha are both in the A rooms but they act differently and that’s ok. Matt doesn’t feel that the C group follows the same pattern, however.

Matt and Bruce are so similar, but Clint’s past is so different. Clint has a lot of little ‘extra things’ that accumulate to not very much. Nightmares and trouble sleeping, but he’s mostly collected.

But Matt and Bruce have a big ‘extra things’, and not many.

A group: several things that pile up. B group: one or two things to focus on. What does that make C1?

“Tony.” A man greets them. “I see you brought a friend?”

“This is Matt.” Tony says. Matt introduces himself in the scripted way. It’s easy – he gets anxious and unsure about introductions and it happens a lot when he would meet clients, so he quickly developed a greeting that stuck with him. Sometime during law school.

“Lovely to meet you.” The man greets. “Tony, would you like Matt to stay?”

“Sure.”

Matt finds out that the therapist is called Leo.

“Would you like to start our discussion, or shall I?” The man sounds strict, but Matt supposes that’s intention. Tony is the type to joke himself out of a conversation he doesn’t want to be in.

“Go ahead.” Tony swivels in his chair. It’s a desk chair. Matt has a regular, four-legged chair and is immediately jealous. He shifts into a squat, scowls into his knees.

“Alright.” The man is rather brisk. “Have you drank alcohol since our last meeting?”

Tony’s heart thrums. He swivels again. “Asking me out?”

“Yes.” Tony sighs, flexes his hand. “But I didn’t get drunk. I had a mouthful, then decided I really shouldn’t. Locked myself in the workshop.”

“That’s an improvement.” Leo comments, leaning back in his own chair. He has a boring chair, just like Matt.
Emily had a desk chair. Wait, did Tony steal the chair? Matt gets out of his own chair, pushes it away, and sits on the floor. He’s quite annoyed by its existence. Stupid chair.

Leo barely acknowledges him. Matt finds that intriguing.

“What was going through your head when you decided to resist the urge?” Leo questions Tony, who seems rather uncomfortable.

Matt’s hand crawls across Leo’s desk. It bumps into a glass of water (not spilling it, thankfully) and then a stapler. Finally, it finds some paper. His fingers scan the page, deem it blank, and drag it back to the rest of Matt’s body.

He starts folding.

“That I really fucking wanted a drink.” Tony grumbles.

“What else?” Leo probes. He pushes some blank paper to the edge of his desk for Matt.

Matt decides he likes Leo. He makes an Equidae; even if it looks like a white horse, Matt will insist it’s a zebra. He can’t make stripes, though. He starts on an origami cat which, of course, won’t be any old big cat – it will be a jaguar.

“Figured I reminded myself of Howard.”

Something clicks in Matt’s mind that Howard Stark is Tony’s dad. It seems weird to think that Tony came from a family. He seems a bit like a creation, sometimes. Like Jarvis. Something made in adulthood.

Humans don’t work like that, alas.

“How did that make you feel?”

“Like I wanted to fuck my mum, Freud, try something more original.” Tony quips. Matt is appalled until Tony tells him that it’s a reference to some old psychologist.

“I don’t know.” Tony sighs when Leo doesn’t relent. “Sad, is that what you want to hear? He wasn’t exactly a loving father or husband. I don’t want to be an alcoholic.”

“Ready to go, Crimson?” Tony questions Matt. Leo had left, giving Tony some time to sit in the room until he wanted to leave.

Matt listens to Tony. He doesn’t move to leave the chair. Actually, he’s holding the arms tightly.

The redhead’s fingers scan the origami object in his hands before he shuffles closer to Tony. He takes a stuff hand and loops his creation around Tony’s wrist.

“A bracelet?” Tony questions, flicks it so that it spins on his arm. His voice is tight and raw, like he’s trying his best not to cry. “Don’t you think I’m pretty enough already? I’m offended.”

“Important to me.” Matt gestures to the bracelet, then at Tony. “Also important to me.”

Tony’s trying his best not to cry.

“Your family might not have thought you were important to them but, now, you have a new family
and you're important to us.” Matt reasons from the ground, already working on a dog (he’ll insist it’s a wolf) to join his safari. “So no more drinking.”

Tony cries.

Chapter End Notes

I've carefully read over the rooms thing and I'm positive it makes sense but, then again, I know what point I'm trying to make and it is 3:30AM for me just now so if I'm unclear, leave a comment and I'll fix it in the morning.

My main point is that bullying seems less detrimental to mental health than rape (AS AN EXAMPLE). However, someone can be raped and it might not be a big deal. Someone can be bullied and commit suicide. In the reverse, someone can be raped and have to undergo therapy for years, etc. Or someone can be bullied and think nothing of it. Sometimes, you can be bullied for years, but one instance can really bother you. Sometimes it's the whole experience.

My point is that you might have severe depression but you should treat someone with minor anxiety with the same level as care because, to that individual, it's probably the worst they've felt. All mental health should be taken seriously. There's always someone worse off than you and you shouldn't discredit someone because you feel worse more frequently than they do. So when Matt explains that Clint and Natasha seem more 'put together', he's not discrediting their feelings. If they do get upset, he'll treat them in the same way that he might treat Bucky, who is less 'put together'. But they might need less attention in terms of therapy, hence the room idea.

Plus, no homophobia with the gay thing, just to be clear. People don't usually like being accused of being gay when they're not, just like a brunette wouldn't like someone insisting that they're blonde. Especially since Clint has a wife :D

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IF ANYONE CAN GUESS WHAT BRUCE AND MATT HAVE IN COMMON, YOU WIN A PRIZE (Or something, I don't know. I might write you a oneshot or something? Idk, I'm tired, it's 3:30 AM). BUT, YEAH. MAYBE WIN A PRIZE. To be clear, the first person to guess correctly.
Matt is in Charles’ head.

It’s a strange concept. Anything he thinks of appears in the mindscape of Charles’ own little universe. But, if he thinks of his bed, he doesn’t smell the familiar scents of Clint and himself until he thinks about those scents. He even created a horse, but it smelled like nothing because Matt’s never met one. Charles input some general animal smell – what it must smell like to him.

Matt’s enjoying himself with some marshmallows, squeezing them between his fingers. He wonders if his body is coping his head on the outside.

“I assure you, it is not.”

Charles is sitting in a comfy chair. Matt doesn’t know how he’s aware of the fact that it’s comfy but, none the less, it is. It’s as if he’s in an audiobook, everything being narrated.

He finds a rabbit, wanders after it. Then, Matt starts running away from Charles, as fast as he can. When he thinks about the man’s position, he hasn’t moved. Several paces behind him. But Matt felt ground moving under his feet? Curious.

“This seems much easier than travelling each week, no?” Charles reclines. Matt hears the delayed noise.

Matt thinks of the tower and feels the setting change. He thinks of the ocean and Charles chuckles at him. They’re in the ‘communal room’.

“I was on the TV.” Matt tells Charles as he tries to think of a hammock. One appears and he climbs inside.

“I saw.” Charles nods. “You seem to frequent the news, lately.”

“Bucky got a little upset.”

Charles laughs again. A desk forms around him, which he leans forward on.

Matt wriggles in his hammock.

“Now, can you tell me how you’ve been feeling since we last met?” Charles questions, and Matt wonders why he doesn’t have hair. It’s a random thought, a passing one, but his friend addresses it. “It is a side effect of using my powers while in Cerebro’s helmet. I ended up shaving my head prematurely – it was starting to thin and fall out.”

“My’ hair’s red.” Matt says happily. “Not orange, but reddish.”

“Indeed. And, as lovely as it is, perhaps we could return to our first topic of conversation?”

Matt thinks of Sam’s amazing spicy cake. Charles’ head is rather fun.

“Matthew.” Charles scolds him.

“Sorry.” Matt figures he might be being rude as he sticks some cake in his mouth. Then, he pauses. “Are you angry because I’m the only one eating cake?”
“I’m not angry.” Charles tells him. “But, we have a task to accomplish today.”

“I’m ‘not guilty’, apparently.” Matt reclines, the cake disappearing. “And I felt like I should feel guilty, but even Father Lantom thinks I shouldn’t feel bad. My priest.”

“You’re Catholic.” Charles notes. “It’s a very positive thing to have a religion. Do you often go to church?”

Matt nods. “Not so much now, but I recently went to confession about being, um, y’know.”

“Raped. Abused.” Charles’ voice dips an octave. “I would like you to use the words.”

Matt nods. “He told me I shouldn’t be the one confessing. He also thought I might be gay and talked to me about love, but I’m not gay. I just sleep with Clint.”

Charles chuckles at him. Matt pouts. He thinks very hard about pouting.

“Have you had any instances in which you used the sheet we went over?” Charles probes into his mind slowly, scanning carefully through his memories once he’s sure Mat’s ok with it. Charles must see the thing about Maya, making his cheeks bright thinking about it.

Charles runs through the drunk memory of Bucky and Matt, then the following morning.

“I didn’t do the sheet.” Matt feels bad about it but his friend doesn’t get angry.

“I imagine the hangover was quite enjoyable.” Charles hums, placing his fingers to one temple, even in this ‘mindscape’. “Let’s run through it just now, shall we?”

“Buck was with me. Night-time in the tower.” Matt huffs, nuzzling his face into the imaginary pillows. More appear for Matt to snuggle. “I was scared that Bucky would hurt me.”

“Let’s run over facts that support that.” Charles gestures emptily. “He was between your legs, in a rather intimate position and you were incapacitated by alcohol.”

Matt nods in agreement.

“Opposing argument?”

“Bucky would never hurt me.” Matt states, but Charles shakes his head, telling him to rephrase it. Too subjective. “Bucky’s never hurt me before and he promises that he’s my friend.”

“Very good argument. Now, what do you think actually happened?”

“Bucky tried to help me up.” Matt verifies, fiddling with a soft pillow. The thread pattern keeps changing under his fingertips.

“That is the most rational explanation.” Charles agrees. “Now, the incontinence.”

“I was—Bucky scared me and—” The redhead stammers but he quick feels what must be a hug. It’s the warm sensation of arms around his body, slight squeezing, and a heartbeat, but Charles doesn’t move.

“Matthew, nothing subjective.” Charles reminds him, lightly. “Take your time.”

“I peed.” Matt says eventually. “Bucky was there. Communal room.”
He’s blushing very brightly. Charles gestures for him to continue, leaning back in his comfy chair.

“I was embarrassed a-and sad, I guess.” Matt shifts awkwardly. He felt horrible. He felt like a child, being unable to control himself like that.

“And are you?”

Matt’s confused.

“You felt like a child.” Charles comments. “Arguments for and against. You’re doing very well so far.”

“I dress in… and I’m always emotional and stupid and I just…” Matt feels his eyes brim with tears as he hides his face in the pillows. “I can’t protect myself.”

“I see.” Charles nods, sending the hugging sensation over to Matt again. “And the arguments which disagree?”

When Matt doesn’t reply for a good few minutes, his thoughts horribly degrading and cruel, Charles fills them in.

“Matthew, you’re twenty-nine.” Charles points out. “Therefore, you can’t be a child. You’re an adult in the eyes of the law. Your mind is fully developed and is capable of understanding adult concepts. Biologically, you’ve undergone puberty and become a man. This makes you an adult, do you agree?”

Matt sniffles into the pillows.

“As for protecting yourself…” The space between Matt and Charles disappears. Charles’ hand rests on Matt’s shoulder. “You shouldn’t feel like you have to.”
The Mystery Of The Putty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Matt is underneath a table in Tony’s lab. He’s allowed to be in there as long as Jarvis watches him – makes sure he doesn’t touch something he shouldn’t.

That’s when Bruce and Tony come in, chattering hurriedly.


“Moments of weakness don’t make you weak. Everyone has them.” Bruce says to himself. Matt remembers him saying something like that when they were on holiday together. Such a long time ago, it seems.

Matt feels slightly awkward, as if he’s intruding. Really, he’s just trying to find a marble he dropped under the workbench. Bruce has a hoard of toys in his desk that he’s allowed to borrow.

“That’s right.” Tony agrees, pausing. “Want to talk science? You like science talk.”

“No talking.” Bruce shakes his head, pacing.

Matt figures he’ll just find the marble and go. If only he could reach behind the leg…

Bruce hits something onto the floor and Matt jumps, hitting his head on the underside of the workbench.

“Hello?” Tony calls out, rounding some of the lab equipment. “Matt? What are you doing under there?”

“I lost my – Bruce’s – marble.” Matt struggles to twist his fingers, accidentally knocking the marble further into the thin gap.

Tony hands him a screwdriver, which Matt uses to knock the slippery ball closer to him. He climbs out triumphantly.

Bruce is buzzing with nervous energy at his desk.

Matt approaches, crouching on the opposite side from Bruce. He rests his cheek on the glossy wood, softly rolling the marble in Bruce’s direction. He doesn’t catch it, so it drops onto the floor with a light thwick! Matt hurries after the sphere, grabbing it before it traps itself again.

“I don’t think Brucie’s in the mood, Plum.” Tony rubs a hand over Matt’s back. “How about you go and play with Bucky or Clint?”

Matt scowls. Bruce and Tony do interesting things in the lab. Bucky’s pretty boring – he just plays video games most of the day. Plus, Matt already tried Bucky. He’s busy with Steve.

Clint is out with their dogs.

“Exercising my spatial reasoning skills.” Matt corrects haughtily. “Not playing.”
Bruce hits the desk again, shoves Tony when the man goes to comfort him.

“You have to ask to touch Bruce.” Matt points out. Tony really doesn’t catch on quickly.

Tony is slightly surprised, but he’s removing a metal lid from a glass jar and the sound makes Matt want to moan in delight.

Tony removes something squishy and Matt steals the jar, playing with the lid on the ridges of the glass. It’s absolutely delightful.

Bruce is angrily hitting the squishy blob, prodding and ripping it with his fingers. He’s not green, however.

“Are you ok with Matt being here?”

Matt’s only listening because his name was mentioned. The glass jar is very distracting. He swivels the lid repeatedly.

Bruce’s head nods, making Tony sigh in relief.

Matt locates more glass jars on Bruce’s desk. The glass is thick, so knocking them together in a high-pitched clatter isn’t especially dangerous. He finds a tin containing a liquid.

When he opens it and sticks his fingers inside (precisely why Matt should be supervised while in the lab), the liquid turns hard in response to the pressure. When Matt’s hand relaxes, it softens again. As if it’s nervous. Matt wiggles his hand around excitedly, but it stops the movement quickly.

He realizes that his hand is trapped, now. Covered in the stuff. It drips off when Matt hovers his hand above the jar.

He finds more marbles, sticks his clean hand in that jar. When the marbles move, they click against the jar, trilling in the room.

When Matt pays attention to Tony and Bruce again, Bruce is scribbling with a pen while Tony chatters.

It’ s then that Matt notices how Bruce holds the pencil. It rests between his middle and ring fingers, thumb curled around its middle. His hand is squeezing it tightly, almost like a fist. It seems awkward, but Bruce’s movements are short and controlled. His wrist is doing the work instead of his fingers.

Matt shuffles closer, trails his fingers over the writing to read it.

“**Stone, bone, drone, cone, alone, tone.**” Bruce is writing. He’s rhyming the words. Matt can feel it calming Bruce down – as he’s trying to think of rhyming words, he’s distracting himself.

“Matt, maybe give Bruce some space.” Tony moves his hands away, gently.

“Did something happen?” Matt asks.

“Bruce is just having a bad day.” Tony responds, then (as he’s sitting on the desk) nudges Matt’s leg with his foot. “What about you? Feeling good?”

Matt shrugs. He demonstrates the noise of the tin lid on the glass for Tony to listen to. His fascination is lost on the other man. Tony’s boring, Matt deems.
Bruce ends up throwing the pencil away. He stands up, paces back and forth. He seems to be restless, not quite sure about what he wants to do.

Matt huffs because Tony is making a terrible job of this. Bruce is obviously nervous about, well, nothing in particular.

“We’re going to stay here for an hour, then you’ll go downstairs and have a family dinner with the rest of us. You’ll eat dinner. We’ll have a movie night and then you’ll go to bed.” Matt explains his own plan for the day.

Bruce pauses.

“Can you do that?” Matt asks.

“I can do that.” Bruce shudders, nodding stiffly. “Downstairs, dinner, movie, bed.”

“Sounds good.” Tony says oddly. He hands Bruce a book to occupy himself with. Matt goes back to the strange watery-but-not-watery putty. He’s not playing, he’s sciencing. It’s completely natural.

“Tell us about your new project then, Brucie.” Tony invites the other man, who takes great pleasure in rambling on about his tumour-scanner. Apparently he’s working on a retinal prosthesis. Matt’s quite appreciative that neither Bruce nor Tony suggested it to him. He smiles, just a tad.

Then he spends the next hour with his hand in the putty.

Chapter End Notes

The ‘putty’ is cornstarch and water... Anyone? I freaking hate it but I think Matt would like it.

For the record, Bruce's way of holding his pencil is the same way I do it. It changes how you write so that you write with the wrist, not with the fingers. Easier if you don't have much co-ordination in your hand.

So I was listening to ASMR Darling's newest video on YouTube and she had this glass jar with a metal lid and I absolutely loved the sound it made. (ASMR is sensory stimulation, mostly noises, to promote relaxation)
Check her out here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCikebqFWoT3QC9axUbXCPYw
The video I was listening to: https://youtu.be/eLjSyI8bNfk

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I will write in an end note if someone WINS THE PRIZE (which will probably be a random oneshot if they want that). No-one has yet, but I'm hoping that this chapter will make things more obvious. The clues so far are: Bruce's awkwardness when hugging and people are close, generally, with 'senses'. Nothing to do with abuse (which, yeah, they both have in common but that's already stated).
EmbersToAshes was the first correct answer for my challenge so well done! Everyone offered great suggestions but...

**SPOILER BUT NOT REALLY:**
- Matt has autistic traits, Bruce actually is autistic. He has savant syndrome and is on the spectrum. His aversion to hugs was a mix of being socially awkward and touch-sensitive. He hated wearing his shirt during the CelebTalk chapters, and he stims with the toys in his lab.
- Matt understands some of Bruce's difficulties, like explaining how his day will go because he's stressed. So, when Matt explains the routine, it calms him because he knows what to expect. Depression, anxiety, sensory integration disorder -- they're all associated with the autism spectrum.
- Bruce and Matt both have the common 'special interest'. Bruce with medicine and science in general, and Matt with law. Anyway, it's not a big thing for the fic but it means they can relate to each other.

**WARNING FOR THIS CHAPTER:**
It has Wade Wilson/Deadpool in it, expect some more swears than usual. Not a ton, though.

“Hey. Yeah, you. Reader.” Wade addresses the audience only he can perceive. He cackles. “I’m used to comics and movies. You can’t even look at my pretty face.”

Wade lists his mask, revealing the deep dips in his skin like craters on the moon.

“Wow, rude.” Wade huffs, pulling his red and black mask back over his face. “I bet’cha you’re wondering what I’m doing here. Some of you probably don’t even like me. Hurts, B-T-Dubbs.”

Wade steps through the entrance to the Avengers tower.

“Well, I’m here to see my special little snowflake.” Wade rolls on his heels happily. He gestures to nothing in particular. “Because he seems to be all over the news these days but there has been—”

Wade screams up at the ceiling: “—NO MENTION OF TEAM RED!”

The elevator opens for Wade. Obviously. He’s adored by all.

“Don’t laugh at me, you…” Wade bites back a curse. “I should probably only through around a few f-bombs but – yeah, put me in italics -- you know who you are.”

“Long time no see, Red.” Wade opens his arms wide and grabs Matt in a hug. “Gimme a kiss!”

Matt squirms as Wade kisses him through his mask. From anyone else, he might feel forced and uncomfortable. From Wade? He’s just glad the man seems somewhat sedated. Plus, Wade may be
strange, but he’s harmless. He’s so sexual that it’s not sexual.

“How did this a-hole get in here?” Tony grumbles, rubbing his head. Steve and Bucky look somewhat confused as they pause their game. The new TV has been put into full use.

“Doesn’t matter.” Wade shrugs. “Didn’t you see the break? Couple lines up? I could have rode in here on a unicorn that flies by pooping rainbows and you’ve never know.”

Matt has no idea what Wade is talking about, so he gently taps his shoulder. “Did—Did you take your medicine?”

“Antidepressants for stress for breaking the fourth wall. What a joke.” Wade huffs as he relaxes onto the bright couch. “Just ’cause my superpower is amazing doesn’t mean I need pills. Not like they work…”

“How are you here?” Matt changes the question.

“Well, I’ve been catching up on my reading – y’know, I had to be prepared for when I was introduced – and my role is that I’m supposed to ask how you are. Team Red is just comic relief.” Wade wiggles his eyebrows. “But we can always notch up the rating to mature and start some slash here, if you know what I mean. Invite Spidey. Oh, wait, he’s just a kid in this one, yeah? Maybe not. We can have enough fun on our own. Who knows? Poly-Avengers seems popular.”

“Shh.” Wade tilts his head, then pets his hair. “Good.”

“Wade, you’re not making sense again.” Matt sighs.

“H’m?” Wade turns in a random direction. “You guys understand me, right? I’ll have to dumb it down for the ‘characters’.”

“Don’t hit him.” Matt warns Bucky, then grabs Wade’s hand. “Let’s go to my treehouse.”

Wade’s grin spreads across his face. “Matt and Wade-y, sitting in a tree! F-U-C—”

“Wade, you’re being hyper again.” Matt tells the other man. “So why don’t you calm down?”

It doesn’t seem like it, but Wade is actually only 25. He discovered the cancer in his early twenties and he’s had a few years to deal with his powers. Matt’s the ‘big brother’ to the other members of Team Red, and if Matt thinks he’s a child, the others must be something else.

“I just came here because shit’s about to go south. Thought I should warn you.” Wade shuffles. “Look forward a few chapters and that dick of a mentor gets another mention. I’m just saying, be careful.”

“Stick?” Matt’s blood runs cold. Wade always has this weird precognition thing going on. It’s been correct, so far. “What are you talking about?”

“I don’t know much – the writer is making use of my age to limit my abilities. You know how it is.” Wade shrugs, slumps against the wall. “But, hey, that cactus outfit? Loved it.”

Matt smiles slightly.
“I take it those OC’s are just casually never going to be mentioned again until some later point in this story where the author will be like ‘so Matty-Pie couldn’t have a playdate with the others because he was at – enter name here –’s wedding’?”

“Huh?” Matt questions.

“I got you a sandbox.” Wade ducks his head, turns his face away. “Missed your birthday and it’s almost Christmas, so…”

“Oh. Thanks.” Matt nods.

“You _dick._” Wade snaps, then wraps his arms around Matt’s waist. “I hate you.”

“I know.” Matt smiles into the mask, resting his cheek against Wade’s head.

“I’m going to take it off, not that you can appreciate my beauty.” Wade sniffs, ripping the thing off his face. As far as he’s aware, Deadpool’s skin is simply scar tissue and tumours at this point. It feels bumpy to Matt and he smells like death, but it’s no worse than being near Hulk’s potent smell. Matt doesn’t particularly mind, at this point.

“Anyway, I have to go.” Wade stands up, grins wildly. “I have a job to do. _They’ll_ read about it next, you’ll have to wait a chapter or two.”

“Alright…” Matt nods along, even though he doesn’t understand.

Wade kisses his head, sloppily and dramatically, before jumping from the treehouse.

Wade dumps sand into the tray for Matt, then hands him a tiny rake and a handful of stones he picked from the streets. Wade picked the ones with weird shapes, not that Matt needs to know.

“Do I even want to ask?” Clint watches the exchange incredulously.

“**Long story.**” Wade signs at Clint, not mentioning how he used to throw stones at Matt’s window, shouting ‘But soft, what light through yonder window breaks! It is the east and Matthew is the sun!’ until the other occupants of Matt’s building complained.

Matt smiles, endures another kiss from his favourite weirdo, and then watches Wade leave in the elevator, his words in Matt’s mind.

Wade fights for the happiness of those around him. He’s willing to die for that happiness…”
“What do you mean he’s not guilty?”

Stick paces back and forth in front of his underlings. Two are even trembling. “You let him go.” Stick accuses, coming to a stop before the teenage boy.

“He jumped in the—”

“Is that what I asked?” Stick swipes his cane at the back of the boy’s knees, sending him onto his back.

“No, Sir.” The boy scrambles away, clambering back to his feet.

“And you fucks were supposed to kill him in that God damned café.” Stick whips around to face the four Yakuza members.

They bow apologetically but Stick walks off, leaving them alone.

“If you want something done right…”

“Bundle up.” Clint says, pulling a fluffy hat over Matt’s head. “You know how cold you get.”

“You’re such a dad.” Tony pretends to retch as he buttons up his own jacket.

Clint blushes to the tips of his ears, patting Matt on the shoulder. “Sorry, Bud, just saying.”

He has a point, though. Matt doubles up his scarf around his neck, stuffing his mitten-covered hands into his pockets.

“Christmas shopping is so boring.” Tony laments. “This is what the internet is for. Ever heard of Amazon?”

Clint scowls at Tony. “Well, I think a day out is a great idea.”

They make odd gestures that Matt doesn’t understand, clearly trying to communicate something.

Matt’s quite excited to leave the tower. Because of the whole security problem, it’s too much of a danger unless he has backup. But Tony has his bracelets on that call his suit, which will be in a briefcase in a nearby car at all times. His gauntlet is somehow integrated into a bulky cuff.

“Fine, fine.” Tony mumbles. “But it’s freezing outside and I’ll be miserable. Just so you know.”

“Don’t mind him, we’re going to go to the fair. We’ll have fun.” Clint reassures him.

Matt smiles.
Tony’s overcoat does a poor job at keeping his warm. Why does he wear suits?

Matt looks particularly cosy in his woollen layers. His bright red hat and scarf suit him quite well. Tony reaches over to poke at some of the hair sticking out from under his hat.

“Growing it out or just avoiding a haircut?” Tony grins, grabbing Matt’s hand because, ok, he’s freezing and Matt just looks so warm.

Matt swings Tony’s arm happily, a grin on his face. “Both?”

“Yeah, well… Don’t tell Clint he was right or I’ll never hear the end of it.” Tony huffs, practically hugging Matt’s arm for warmth. It’s mostly his hands. He could buy gloves but they’re at the fair and Matt seems to be interested in the stalls.

“Found anything interesting?” Tony asks, resting his face on Matt’s shoulder.

“No.” Matt sighs. “I’m not sure what to get anyone. I’ve only ever had to buy presents for Foggy.”

“What kind of stuff’d you get him?”

“Dinosaurs.” Matt shrugs. “He has a collection.”

Tony chuckles, throwing all caution to the wind – the cool, bitter wind – and full-on hugging Matt at this point. “We don’t make that much of a fuss. No-one cares much about presents.”

“What does Tony want?” Matt says thoughtfully to himself.

“Tony wants gloves.” Stark scowls, burying his face against Matt’s chest. “And a hat.”

Matt goes to offer his own, his hair looking ridiculously long and fluffy when he takes it off, but Tony declines.

“I’ll stick with the hug.” Tony nuzzles in. “You stay warm, you keep me warm.”

Matt pats Tony on the head, giggling to himself when Clint returns.

“Aha! And you were complaining about me being ‘such a dad’!” Clint exclaims.

He’s wearing a jumper, no jacket at all, and is still warm. Matt might be reconsidering his theological standpoint because Clint is a god if he can withstand the chill without layers.

“Matty, you wanted to go on the Ferris wheel, right?” Clint says, taking a mouthful of horrible-scented cotton candy. “Well, I’m sure if I break out the sign language and you use your cane…”

“That’s not nice.” Matt scolds him. “There are lots of children in the line who want to ride in it, too.”

“So we should just get Tony to sign something?” Clint asks.

Clint’s unhappy. He blames it on Matt being a good Catholic boy.

“There’s a disabled bit, Matt, it’s not as if we’d be doing anything wrong!” Clint insists but, no.
“There’s no reason why we can’t wait like everybody else.” Matt insists. He cringes when a child grabs his hair. She lets go almost immediately but it still hurt. He’s starting to rethink his morals.

Matt’s rethinking a lot.

She tugs it again and Matt turns around to ask the parent to stop his child but then he hears a shy giggle.

“Dawedevil.” She murmurs, tugging gently this time.

Matt’s appalled and very concerned until the father notices what’s going on.

“Oh, Bella, stop that.” He removes her hand. “Sorry, she’s usually quite shy.”

“It’s alright.” Matt shuffles closer to Clint, collecting his thoughts.

Then, when the father turns, he smiles mischievously and holds his fingers up to his face, just like devil horns. The girl laughs.

“No-one’s even noticed me.” Stark laments, earning a slap on the arm from Clint.

Tony pouts and grabs Matt’s arm. Matt pats his short friend on the back, smoothing out his jacket.

“MATT, NO!”

No-one ever questioned why Matt wanted so badly to ride a Ferris wheel. He’s blind.

Matt giggles at Clint’s shock as the gondola rocks back and forth at the very top of the big wheel. Tony is sinking in the seat, apparently feeling motion sickness.

It’s not as if he does loop-de-loops in a mechanical suit at 40,000 ft, or anything.

It’s an enjoyable outing.

Chapter End Notes

I love the idea of Clint parenting the other Avengers, so... :D

Charlie Cox with long hair is my new favourite thing:
http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_Ne5Lb2SiFHg/TAZ8EjW8aTI/AAAAAAAAxO0/BL1Cj5DJbC4/s1600/

Anyone know the difference between 'loop the loop' and 'loop de loop'? I've only heard 'loop de loop' with reference to roller coasters. Anyway, if anyone knows that'd be cool. Googled it and couldn't find much.
Christmas Eve for the Avengers is bustling with people, all gathered for the evening party. That means Peter is invited, which also means he needs a lift to the tower.

“Ms Parker.” Matt nods his head in greeting. He’s been coerced into a suit, but apparently he looks quite nice.

Matt loves the bowtie very much.

“Matt, come in.” May opens the door for him, smiling sweetly. “Call me May, Sweetie.”

Matt walks inside, wiping his shoes on the doormat before entering.

“Matt!” Peter runs out from his room, pausing several steps in front of Matt. “How do I…? Uh…”

“You look amazing.” Matt laughs, rolling on his heels. He turns to May, shuffles shyly. He’s trying quite hard to impress May, considering she’s Peter’s legal guardian. “You’re sure it’s not a problem for Peter to stay into Christmas morning?”

“As long as you boys don’t stay up too late.” She jokes.

Matt pauses, shuffling his weight again. “I’m actually going to Christmas mass tonight, but the others are aiming to end the party at 11.”

“Call me before you go to bed and be safe.” May tells Peter, giving the teen a kiss that he wipes away with pink cheeks.

Peter fusses in the elevator up to the showy room Tony is using for the party, not wanting anyone near their living space after recent events. He’s awkwardly pulling at the tie, then sighing.

“Problem?”

“My aunt tied it and, I don’t know, I’ve messed it up.” Peter turns red, rubbing his forehead. Matt pulls Peter aside after they step out of the elevator, undoing the tie completely. He ties it again, then pulls it up to Peter’s collar.

“Better?”

Peter wraps his arms around Matt’s waist unexpectedly. Matt flinches, drawing slightly away from Peter. The suit is scratchy and the physical contact with Peter is making it rub against his sensitive skin.

Peter instantly notices his discomfort and steps away. “I’m sorry. Matt, is everything alright?”

Matt takes a moment to decide – takes a moment for the touch to pass through his nerves to his brain, fizzling out. He decides he’s ok.

“Just, thanks for the tie thing.” Peter gently reaches for Matt’s hand.
The redhead offers it, squeezes Peter’s for a moment, and then lets go.

Matt takes Peter’s elbow, following him into the busy room. It’s expansive and Matt hears hundreds of people bustling around, from reporters to celebrities to the heavy footsteps of Thor, who returned for the occasion.

Matt hears something like a drinks fountain – a tower of curvy glasses, overflowing with the bitter scent of alcohol. Champagne?

“Two drinks max. One if it’s something strong.” Matt tells Peter, reaching up to stroke a hand through the kid’s hair. “And make sure I check anything you get or if you set it down. Peter, I don’t want your drink getting spiked.”

“Yeah.” Peter seems somewhat distracted by the hustle and bustle, so Matt turns the teenager to face him.

“I know this all seems very fun and exciting, and it should be, but you have to promise me you’ll follow these rules.” Matt tells the boy sternly. “I’m already being lenient letting you drink a little.”

“I promise, Matt.” Peter makes a crossing motion over his heart, which beats true.

“Good boy.” Matt pats his back, then ambles over to the bar.

Peter accompanies him, seeming quite at a loss for what to do around so many new people. No-one knows he’s Spider-Man but he brought the suit if he wants it.

Matt orders an old fashioned from the bartender. While he prepares it, Peter asks Matt what they have.

“Get cider or beer or something.” Matt shrugs, then screws up his face. “Not tequila.”

Matt approves of the Snakebite he gets (equal parts beer and cider) and they walk through the crowd in search of the others.

“Mr Stark!” Peter exclaims, as if he’s surprised to see Tony.

“Kid, sure you should be…?” Tony says cautiously, but Matt pats a hand on Peter’s shoulder.

“I’ll be making sure he’s ok, until I leave. Two drink minimum.” Matt takes a bitter sip from his own glass. “I’d rather he got drunk around us instead of at a high school party where he doesn’t know his limits. Especially with his senses like mine.”

“Good point.” Steve agrees, scrutinising Peter. “As long as you keep an eye on—Er, take care of him.”

Daredevil grins. “I’ll be watching him all night.”

“Steady.” Matt grabs Peter when he almost runs into a guest. He’s not drunk but his spatial reasoning skills seem way off the chart.


“It’s making me slightly dizzy, too.” Matt admits. He’s been nursing his drink for the first hour.
They’ve spoke to a few people but, overall, it’s been anti-climactic. So Matt takes Peter over to a quiet corner, where the young man laughs at him. “You really aren’t a party guy, are you?”

“I’m concerned about how much you can hear.”

“You mean the couple in the spare bedroom?” Peter grimaces, yet smiles awkwardly at the same time. “I thought we were just avoiding mention of it.”

Matt snorts into his glass, grinning. He clinks his fingers against the crystal. “Perhaps you’re too young…”

“Matt, I live in an apartment complex. I’ve heard people having, well, y’know.” His blush travels up to his ears.

Bruce finds his way over to them. His forehead finds Matt’s shoulder and makes it his new resting place.

“It’s a bit tiring.” Matt agrees with Bruce’s sentiment, patting the curly hair.

“Thor is being louder than usual.” Bruce comments, pushing his hands into his pockets. His gaze shifts to Peter.

“Peter’s staying the night.” Matt mentions.

Bruce doesn’t say anything, but he does offer the teen a blueberry. Apparently Tony has little bowls floating around along with mini quiches.

Peter enjoys the blueberry.
Matt loves and hates midnight mass. Clint goes with him, just as a bodyguard, and falls asleep on Matt’s shoulder.

It’s ok because he’s not there to pray or show worship.

However, those who annoy him are the ‘twice a year Catholics’. Sure, people pray in different ways, not everyone goes every Sunday. Not even Matt – he takes some weeks off, but he’s pretty frequent.

It’s great that people are worshipping but the texting and sleeping and latecomers get on his nerves.

However, he finds pleasure in the fact that Father Lantom chooses this mass to ask for money towards the church. Obviously, Matt gives over a good amount. He figures two hundred is enough but not too much. After all, it’s Tony’s money, even if the man gave it to him. This was near the end, at which point Clint was awake.

He only really slept during the blessing of the Eucharist.

He enjoys the wine and bread more than others, he suspects.

“No offense,” Clint tells him as they enter the lobby of the tower, “but I don’t know how you put up with that every Sunday.”

“It was fun.” Matt smiles warmly, relaxed after the drinks he’s had. “I don’t usually have company.”

Clint frowns because that’s not Matt being bored in church, that’s an orphan having no-one to spend Christmas Eve with.

“Sorry for falling asleep.” Clint nudges Matt as they step into the elevator, his elbow prodding the hand that’s already on his arm. “Think God’ll forgive me or should I be afraid of fire and brimstone?”

“I already pray for you.” Matt giggles as Clint calls out the number of their floor to Jarvis, who raises them up in the metal box.

“You do?” Clint asks. Matt really believes in Heaven and Hell, despite being quite liberal with his beliefs. He wants Clint to go to Heaven that badly?

“So the Lord said, ‘If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.’” Matt recites, closing his eyes peacefully. It’s one of his favourite quotes. “You might not pray, but if I try hard enough… I pray for all of you.”

“Well, aren’t you sweet?” Clint slings his arm around Matt’s neck and grinds his knuckles into the fluff of hair.

The doors open, and Bucky shouts over to the brawling men. “Bozos! Get in here!”

“So what is your Heaven?” Clint asks, leading Matt into the room since he’s too tired to navigate properly. “Golden gates and fluffy clouds?”
They sit on the floor beside the filled couches. Peter is crouched on the ceiling, venturing happily.

“Heaven is the presence of God.” Matt answers, flopping onto his back. “God is different for everyone. The definition can change, depending on what you believe.”

“What is God for you?” Steve asks from his seat on the couch. He can’t get drunk, so he’s pretty coherent.

“Love.” Matt tilts his head to the side. “Happiness. I think God is a concept, just like the Devil. God is goodness and the Devil is the opposite.”

“That’s deep.” Bucky comments. He might be sarcastic but Matt can’t tell.

Matt hasn’t actually thought about it, but Bucky might be religious, like Steve. It was a big thing back then. He shrugs it off.

“Well, as long as you’re cool with us being atheists, we don’t care.” Tony shrugs, leaning back on the sofa.

“My ex-fiancée was Buddhist.” Matt shrugs. “I believe that a religion is just a name for a specific set of norms and values.”

“Elektra?” Tony asks, his tone lower.

“You break up?” Peter drops from above to Matt’s side.

Matt’s lips curve into a fake smirk. “She died.”

“Buddy, I had no idea you were engaged.” Clint shuffles over to Matt, moves his head onto Clint’s lap. The man wipes his hair off of his forehead.

“Can’t be helped.” Matt forces the words past his lips, then sits up abruptly. “Slumber party time!”

The majority of the group are a little drunk by the end of the night, some are sober, and some are completely inebriated.

Sober: Steve, Tony (Matt’s made it clear that he’s very proud), Bucky, and Karen. Tipsy: Bruce, Peter, Matt, Clint, Maya, Karen, and Foggy. Heavily sedated but powering through: Thor, Sam, and Natasha.

Matt and Peter are curled up together under Matt’s fluffy blanket because it is the fluffiest blanket to ever exist and, NO, Matt is not exaggerating.

Matt is currently making a poor attempt at Clint’s makeup. He’s aware of the motions he has to go through to use each applicant, but the colors and uses are lost on him so he’s guessing.

“Matt, that’s concealer.” Karen is guiding him through the process.

“Which is?” Matt asks, painting Clint’s lips.

“Skin-colored. Clint has no lips!” She gasps, laughing against his shoulder.

“Shit, how d’ I speak?” Clint asks worriedly and, ok, maybe Clint has dropped down a category.
“Shuddup, lemme paint.” Matt bites his lip in concentration, moving onto Clint’s eyes.

Maya moves her hands at Clint, accompanied by amused-sounding words. “You look ugly.”

“Ok, mean.” Matt pouts, accidentally smudging some of the mascara.

“Ow, don’ poke my eye.” Clint huffs. “Like my sight.”

“You don’t wanna be blind? S’fun.” Matt laughs, coating his lashes in the thick stuff.

“You stole my lips.” Clint accuses, slightly slurred.

“You wouldn’t be surprised with you two cosying up all night.” Tony snorts at them, popping several blueberries in his mouth. “Clint, you’re corrupting my sweet, little Cherry Pie.”

“I HAVE A FREAKING WIFE!” Clint snaps.

Matt smears the mascara on Clint’s nose and giggles.

His previous attempts with Sam and Natasha (she’s really drunk) went much better, no smears. Matt even convinced them to change clothes, so Sam is in Nat’s chemise and Natasha is wearing Sam’s shirt and her boyshorts.

Matt wonders if he can get Clint to dress up, too.

“YOU HAVE A WHAT?” Tony is screaming, jumping to his feet. Nat wakes up and hisses at him, like Medusa.

“M not gay, for God’s sake.” Clint huffs. “We just sleep ‘n bed. Matt’s my little bro-brother.”

“Aww.” Matt grins happily, cuddling Clint and making sure he doesn’t touch the man’s messy face.

“Matt is everyone’s little brother.” Bucky states with a light chuckle.

“Big brother.” Peter pipes up, nudging his ribs.

“Cousin.” Maya haughtily argues. However, with another glance at Matt, she smiles warmly in his direction.

His family is fully fledged and blossoming.
“Tony and Steve, definitely.” Nat’s inhaling water like there’s no tomorrow.

“Wait, what?” Tony screws up his face. “That just sounds… wrong.”

“No, I can see that.” Clint agrees.

“Clint and Thor, then.” Steve smirks over his hot cocoa.

Bucky makes a face while Clint rolls his eyes.

Matt’s face scrunches up when he makes it known that he’s awake. “What are you guys talking about?”

“Team dads.” Natasha fills him in. “My makeup was lovely, Murdock. Alas, it didn’t stand the test of time.”

Matt smiles lazily, then heaves himself into a seated position.

Peter is in a web hammock on the freaking wall.

“Wake up, Webhead.” Matt leans on Peter’s chest with his folded arms.

The kid wakes suddenly, just before he accidentally tips himself out of the hammock.

“Are you kidding me?” Peter grumbles as he gets to his feet. “Spidey sense warns me about how my Spidey sense will knock me out of my nest.”

Matt sniggers at him, giving him a hand up. Peter takes his outstretched hand and pulls Matt to the ground, making the redhead scowl as he curls up beside a cackling Peter.

“MERRY CHRISTMAS!”

“Charles!” Matt excitedly calls out, skipping happily around the living room. Everyone gives him a funny look but they’ve learned all about Matt’s oddities and it hasn’t come as a shock.

"Matthew, good morning. You’re up early.” The voice in his head responds happily.

“Merry Christmas!” Matt exclaims, rolling on his heels. “And a merry Christmas to everyone else, too – Logan, Hank, Raven… Do you have a tree? We have a tree, we’re about to decorate it just now.”

“Thank you, Matthew, merry Christmas. Raven especially enjoys Christmas, she woke everyone at the crack of dawn.”

“Was dawn early?” Matt tilts his head. “I was later up than the rest, I just got up recently.”

“Apologies, Matthew, dawn was about an hour ago.”
“S’ok.” Matt grins. They talk for several more moments before their connection ends and Matt jumps onto the couch. “When do we open presents?”

“After dinner, Apple.” Tony pets his head fondly. “So everyone has a chance to wake up.”

Matt scans the tower – indeed, the other inhabitants are sound asleep, including Sam, who has been ever since the makeover.

“Where’s all the tuna?” Steve asks as he rumpages through the fridge. Tony points a thumb at Matt.

“What? I can’t eat meat on Christmas Eve.” Matt says as if it’s obvious. “And I won’t until dinner today. You can only eat fish for Christmas Eve’s dinner.”

Steve looks confused. “Why?”

“Well, Catholics don’t have to do it anymore but it’s an old tradition. My grandmother use to do it.” Matt shrugs, picking at the deer legs of his onesie. “No meat ‘til dinner.”

“This is your holiday, Matty, don’t feel bad about your traditions.” Clint nudges him with his big toe. “We’re just stealing it for the gifts and pretty lights.”

“Actually, it’s Pagan.” Tony points out. “But don’t feel bad.”

Matt smirks, shuffling closer to Clint. “Does that mean we can celebrate on the Epiphany?”

“The what?” Nat asks, more than a little lost.

“Twelfth day of Christmas!” Matt grins. “Big feast!”

Clint groans, covering his face with a pillow. “I’m going to get dragged to the church a lot this holiday, right?”

Matt snuggles into his side.

“I should take you home soon.” Matt tells Peter before dinner, smoothing his hair.

“No, I want to stay!” He objects, grabbing Matt’s arm.

“You haven’t seen you aunt all day.” Matt objects, tilting Peter’s chin up to face Matt. “I love spending time with you, but you can’t—”

“She’s out with friends.” Peter says bluntly, turning his face away. “It’s fine, I can stay.”

“But she’s your family.” Matt grabs the boy’s arm when he tries to walk away. “She doesn’t want to spend time with you?”

“It’s not a big deal, Matt, I’m an adult.” Peter insists.

Matt’s frown is powerful, Peter thinks as the redhead turns him to where the others are chatting at the dinner table. Sam is busy in the kitchen with Steve while Bucky sets plates.

“Look.” Matt tells him, sharply. “Do you know why these guys make such a big deal about holidays and eating dinners together? Who’s the team dad?”
“No.” Peter mumbles.

Matt’s fingers tighten slightly on Peter’s shoulders.

“Because they don’t have families to go home to. Thor’s family is in Asgard, of course, and Clint will be flying out to see his own soon. But do you think any of us would be here if we had parents to go home to? Regardless of age, I would give anything to have my father back.” Matt tells Peter, spinning him back around. “That’s why we’re a family. That’s why we have a team dad and why we have family dinners. If your aunt left you alone during Christmas, that’s… that’s a shitty thing to do.”

Peter’s head lowers. His hands move gingerly around Matt’s waist, hugging him gently.

“She’s been distant since Ben died.” Peter says into Matt’s shoulder.

“It’ll be tough for her, Webby, but you need to talk to each other.” Matt tells the teen, then pats him on the back. “Smell what I smell?”

“Cranberries.” Peter moans, licking his lips eagerly.

Through the frosty panes of the tower windows, the Avengers sit at Tony’s dining table, pulling crackers and eating various fruits with gusto.

“Cranberry, pass the cranberries.”

“They’re red?”

“Yup!”

“Damn.”

Through the frosty panes of the tower windows, a family celebrates Christmas.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the premature Christmas stuff, btw, but I think it's cute. Even if it's September!!!

Just a relaxed chapter before THE SHIT GOES DOWN. :D
“Clint, it’s cold.” Matt complains as Lucky pees on a tree. “This is decidedly less fun than I had expected.”

“C’mon, Matt, let the dogs play, then we’ll go toboggan riding.” Clint teases, spreading his arms wide in the falling snow.

“Yeah, Matty, let the dogs play.”

Matt freezes. Immediately, his body feels colder than any kind of hypothermia he’s endured. Stick’s voice is calling to him through the wind.

“I wouldn’t.” Stick says as he hurries towards Clint, grabbing his arm. “Unless you want a bullet through your buddy’s skull.”

Matt listens to the area, finds three snipers with guns trained, most likely, on Clint.

“You ok, Matty?” Clint nudges his arm. “You look pale. Wait, are you really that cold? ‘Cause we can go home if you need to…”

Clint doesn’t have his bow. There’s no way of shielding him.

“I’m fine.” Matt says steadily.

“You’re going to run off into the trees. No fuss, not that I think ya’ll put up much of a fight.”

Matt locates Dice – the dog is sniffing somewhere near Lucky.

“Clint, um…” Matt grabs his arm, hesitates. He makes sure his face is stoic. “I think Lucky just threw up.”

Tears escape Matt’s eyes as Clint runs over to the dog, marking hot lines across his cool cheeks. In that same moment, Matt starts running towards the treeline.

He hears Clint calling his name as a hand clamps over his mouth, an arm locking around his neck. Matt recognises the sweet scent of chloroform over his face. It takes a while to numb Matt’s senses, but it does.

The inside of his nose feels dry and tingly, travelling up into his head until his eyes are drooping.

The last thing he recognises is the sound of a motorised engine.

“Matty, get the fuck up.”
His eyes open to Stick’s voice, but there’s no chance of him crying out for help – he’s gagged and bound tightly in the back of the van. Matt doesn’t want to think about the taste of the cloth in his mouth.

Clint. Is Clint ok?

“Good boy, Matty.” Stick trails his fingers over Matt’s cheek, wiping away a couple of tears with his short nails. “You done well. Really. 5 stars.”

Matt wiggles, trying to kick or punch or anything.

The horrible thing about Stick is that, now they’re in close vicinity, he doesn’t seem so daunting. He seems sweet and gentle and fatherly. He pets Matt’s hair, his fingers grabbing at the roots. He yanks Matt’s head back, turning his face to himself.

“Matty. You’re been a thorn in my side, you little shit.” Stick tells him.

Matt screams as loud as he can, which isn’t very loud, when something jagged cuts through his shirt, ripping the front open.

“You hate this, don’t you?” Stick sneers, dropping him back onto the floor of the van. “You know what’s going to happen if you don’t give me what I want.”

Tears bleed from Matt’s eyes as he curls up on the base of the van. Salty sweat drips down his back.

“You reek.” Stick tells him, standing up against the walls of the van’s interior. “Don’t worry. I’ll give you a bath.”

Matt’s screams are lost in the interior of the sensory deprivation tank.

“What do you mean you fucking lost him?!” Bucy slams Clint against the wall when he steps out of the elevator.

“What the hell, Clint?” Tony demands, sounding dangerously calm. “Jarvis, facial recognition.”

“I don’t know! He told me Lucky was hurling, I went over to check and he was just gone! Lucky wasn’t even sick, I think he ran away.” Clint argues, grunting when Bucky drops him back to the ground.

“After running away, Mr Murdock had a brief interaction with some men.” Jarvis explains, replying the grunting sounds of them struggling with Matt, then:

“Get rid of that. Break it first.”

“Fuck.” Clint punches the wall, hard enough to make his knuckles burst open.

“What?”

“Audio analysis matches this voice to the male voice on Mr Murdock’s video tape.” Jarvis explains.
“Stick.” Clint growls. “We need to find him. Now.”

“Jarvis, amp up security on the tower.” Tony says, turning to Clint. “Where’s the tape? I’ll fly it to my Malibu house.”

“Why would I have it?” Clint shakes his head, holding up his hands. “I wouldn’t keep it without breaking it into a million pieces.”

“No Matt. No tape.” Tony growls out, tugging on his hair. “What the fuck?!”

“Where’s the tape?”

Maya looks unamused. She’s in the middle of yoga with Bruce.

“Why would I have it?” She responds vocally, stretching out her arms from her splits position. Bruce is meditating beside her, paying interest in the conversation.

“Because you were working with him and I trust everyone else in the Tower. Someone fucked with Jarvis and I blame you.” Tony spits out the words, Clint’s hands keeping up in translation.

“Murdock’s an idiot but he’s a cute idiot.” Maya closes her eyes, moving out of the splits into downward-facing dog. “Wasn’t me.”

“Jarvis?”

“I have audio of Miss Lopez asleep at this point.”

“Shit.” Clint looks to Tony and Bucky. “Wat are we going to do?”

Matt lands on the concrete floor, his face bloody and eyes wild. Matt's shirt is smudged with coppery blood and his eyes are wide with fear as Stick approaches him once more. Stick lifts him by the neck, shoving him onto a chair. In a fury, Stick throws his foot into the wall beside Matt, breaking through the cheap plaster.

Matt sobs silently, shaking his head. He arches back in the chair as Stick wraps a hand around Matt's neck, grasping just over his Adam's apple.

“Where is the tape, Matthew?”

His sobbing turns into a wet cackle laced with the moisture of blood in his mouth. He throws his head back against the wall, choking out his next words.

“I have no idea.”
Bruce ambled into the living room to see Matt passed out on the couch.

Tony’s phone was lying on the couch, screen lit up. He must’ve stepped out for a moment, considering how drunk Matt is and the fact that Clint is snoozing under a blanket on the floor.

He shuffled his weight, glancing around. The television is smashed, glass shards all over the floor. Bruce noticed a VHS player and approached cautiously.

Inside is a black tape.

Bruce frowns, running his hand over the drawer of his desk, looking inside at the envelope holding Matt’s tape.

No-one can torture Bruce without being ‘smashed’ by the Hulk, so it’s best that he keeps it. After all, if anyone else gets captured, he wants Matt’s tape to be safe. He needs it for some reason – Bruce understands. It’s like his father’s old journal.

Ever since he was diagnosed with autism, he felt alone. Some things were so easy, like counting and learning. But making friends was always difficult. Understanding his emotions. Understanding others. So Bruce focused on the easy things and ended up turning himself into a monster. Created a face that embodies all the bad parts. Matt might be like him, might not be, but he understands Bruce. He wants to be Bruce's friend, even wants to be Hulk's friend. That makes Matt something for Bruce to cherish. So, if Matt wants the tape to be safe, Bruce will keep it safe for him.

Bruce slides the desk shut and looks up when Tony comes into the lab with a scowl on his face.

“Brucie.” Tony sits on his desk, looking down. “Can we chat?”

Bruce checks his emotions. His heart is steady, so he figures that he’s up for talking.

“Ok.” Bruce replies, reaching for his glass jar of marbles. He pauses in opening the lid, his thoughts occupied by Matt’s absence.

He rolls one of the marbles around in his hand, pondering its weight.

“We don’t have many leads. The guys have went underground.” Tony tells him, taking a marble for himself. He rolls it across the desk between his two hands. “If we need Hulk’s help… Can I ask for it?”

Bruce drops his marbles back in the jar, gives a quick glance at Tony. “It’s quiet.”

“Without Matt?”

Bruce hums in agreement.

“I know.” Tony offers his hand. Bruce takes it, watches Tony squeeze it gently. It’s supposed to be reassuring. “And I know you’re worried, we all are. Matt really makes us a family here, huh?”

Tony knows Bruce doesn’t cry very often. Instead, he sits in his own silence. Sometimes working, sometimes not. It’s one of the ‘not’ times.

“I’m sad, too.” Tony squeezes Bruce’s hand again when his train of thought wanders off in a
different direction. “Matt’s our friend, yeah? We’re trying our best to help him, but… I need to know if Hulk should be taken off the team, while everything is complicated.”

“I want to help.” Bruce takes his hand away from Tony, not enjoying the heat that their hands create in close proximity.

“Brucie, if you’re upset, Hulk is upset.” Tony says bluntly, getting up off of the edge of the table. “If you want to help us, you need to tell me when you start to feel overwhelmed.”

“Tell you.” Bruce agrees, then reaches into Tony’s hoodie pocket for his phone.

“Have you checked the sewers?” Bruce asks, turning on Tony’s phone.

Tony enters the password for him, watches over Bruce’s shoulder as the man goes into the blueprints for the building Tony’s been investigating.

Bruce holds up the phone for Tony to look at, focused in on the basement.

“Sewers.” Tony repeats, staring at the layout on the screen.

“Confuse Matt.” Bruce digs around in his desk, finds an eraser, and then surrounds the eraser on his desk with marbles.

“You are a freaking genius.” Tony grins, moving the scan on his phone to view the sewer underneath the building. “Matt goes into the sewers, the smell freaks him out, and then they take him to an undisclosed location. But it seems like overkill.”

“Charles – CelebTalk.” Bruce sighs, turning to look at Tony.

“Oh, sorry, am I being slow on the uptake?” Tony smirks at him.

“Charles is a telepath. If Matt knows where he is, he can—” Bruce goes to explain but Tony eagerly interrupts.

“He can tell Charles and get help!” Tony grabs Bruce’s face, then lightens his grip when Bruce squirms. “Can I kiss you? I’m gonna kiss you.”

Bruce endures Tony kissing his curly hair, then glowers at the man when he pulls away.

“You know you’re invited to the team meeting?” Tony states, patting the desk.

“Yes.”

“Ok, bad wording.” Tony huffs. “Steve called a team meeting and he’s going to bite my butt if I don’t convince you to join us after that display of complete and utter genius, you up for not having him do that?”

Bruce smiles at the jar on his desk, pushing it back into position. “Perhaps.”

“So mean!” Tony complains. “Let’s go or I’ll be forced to give you a big, wet, slobbery kiss. It’ll feel like Lucky licking your face and you’re gonna hate it.”

Bruce is rightly horrified and joins Tony in walking to the elevator.
“Good work, Banner.”

Bruce wants a uniform, he thinks, feeling completely under-dressed.

He’s wearing his specially-made trousers that stretch when he turns into the Hulk, but his khaki trousers and dress shirt feel stuffy and wrong.

He mentions it to Tony, who gives him a once over.

“Don’t worry about it, you look great.” Tony pats him on the back, wearing the spandex clothes for underneath his suit. They’re fully black with a space for his reactor to slot into.

The others start discussing ideas, throwing things around. If they contact Charles, get him to zero in on Matt’s thoughts, and get an idea of where he is, then they’ll be able to start narrowing it down.

Clint is the one who notices Bruce leaning forward.

“Bruce, everything alright?” He approaches the other man who clears his throat.

“Stick has Matt’s powers and Stick is with Matt.” Bruce says, looks at Tony. It would be a lot easier if Tony could read his mind so he doesn’t have to translate all of these images and concepts into coherent sentences.

They stare at him and Bruce’s tongue dries up like a shriveled fruit in his mouth. He should have wrote a script so he could prepare his idea.

Tony takes his hand, smoothes out the skin. It grabs his attention for a moment. Clint even sits down so Bruce doesn’t have this intimidating group staring at him.

“Stick can hear what Matt hears, he’ll know what we’re doing.” Bruce clears his throat again.

“So we shouldn’t do the sonar thing.” Tony runs a hand through his hair.

“But people expect the Hulk to be erratic and, especially when Matt’s been taken…” Bruce murmurs, leaning back.

“I know he thinks you smell, but not that bad.” Clint chuckles.

Bruce shakes his head.

“Roaring?” Tony asks.

Bruce touches his nose happily. Tony pats him on the back, grinning. “You’re on a streak today.”

Hulk hits the ground around him angrily, pummeling it with all the rage he can muster until a hole forms.

He scrambles at the fallen floor, dropping onto the ground in the floor below with a thump.

He misses his Devil Man, quite aware that he’s been stolen from him.

The Metal Man flies around him like a buzzing fly and Hulk tries to grab, his attention drawn to the flying man.
Tony’s faceplate lifts up, revealing the face of Bruce’s friend. Hulk’s not sure how he feels about that.

“Big Guy, you want Matt back, don’t you?” Metal Man asks.

Hulk sneers at him, deciding he dislikes Bruce’s friends. But Devil Man is Hulk’s friend and Hulk likes his friend. He only has the one, so losing him isn’t a great idea.

“I need you to climb up to the Helipad and scream as loudly as you can.” Metal Man points upwards with his hand.

Hulk glances up, grinning.
Matt hears the powerful roar in what seems like the middle of the night.

It wakes him up. Upon groping, he finds that he’s still in the small, barred cell.

Matt was stripped in order to go inside the sensory deprivation tank. Fortunately, nothing has happened except Stick roughing him up. However, he’s still naked and it’s making him anxious.

“Seems your friend is pissed.” Stick comments dryly from the corner.

Matt lurches back against the cell’s bars. He’s in some kind of cage.

Hulk? Hulk. Eighteen blocks away? Seventeen? It came from his left but Matt’s not sure what direction that is. The sun, he senses, is still heating up the right side of the building.

“Matty.” Stick’s voice drops. He sounds calm. Calculated. “Why do you even want the tape? I could fuck you, right here, right now. Wouldn’t that upset you more? All I want to do is destroy it.”

His heart beats truth but something inside Matt tells him that it’s wrong for the tape to be destroyed.

“I doubt it gets you off.” Stick scoffs, getting out of his chair. He faces one of the walls quietly. “I don’t want to do this, Matty. Think I want to waste my time with you? I want to get business done, not waste time with this shit. So tell me where the tape is. No-one gets hurt and everybody wins.”

“That’s the problem.” Matt wipes blood from his nose. “You win.”

“You’ll lose just to make sure I do? That sounds like revenge.” Stick accuses. He approaches the cell, kneels in front of Matt. “Didn’t figure you were the petty type.”

“Sounds like justice.” Matt argues, but lurches back against the cage bars when Stick drops something inside.

The bracelet Matt made him. He kept it. He kept it.

The cage door opens. Stick wanders back over to the chair he was sitting in. Reclines.

He doesn’t see Matt as a threat and it makes him feel sick because he’s right. Matt has no intention of taking a swing at Stick. No intention of attacking him, of making an escape plan.

Matt curls up in the corner of the room with his forehead pressed against the wall.

The tower is undergoing construction and Tony’s unhappy about it. He expected this but the tape is already missing and, despite the background checks, he’s nervous.

Bruce has been clingy since the Hulk incident and Tony’s theory is that Matt’s disappearance is really doing a number on him.

“Where’s Bruce?” Steve asks, checking emails on his StarkPad because he’s amazing with technology – he was friends with Howard Stark, it’s the only way the man would tolerate him. Or anyone, for that matter.
“With Tony.” The Avengers say at once, not one of them looking up.

Clint and Bucky are also taking Matt’s absence badly – Clint didn’t even go home to see his family. Bucky is currently in the gym, destroying the ‘highly’ reinforced punching bags.

But the worst thing – the worst thing of all – is that Dice is pacing from room to room, looking for Matt and whining.

Whining.

He keeps nudging Clint’s leg and, sure, Lucky does that when he wants food but this damn dog’s eyes are staring at him with so much hope and yearning, no idea of what could be happening to Matt.

They don’t comment when Clint starts crying. Natasha does get up, however, and joins Clint on the couch, wrapping her arm around him.

“God damn it, Nat, he’s just a teammate. He’s not a brother or a kid, he’s just—”

“You love him.” Natasha squeezes his shoulder. “It doesn’t matter if he’s related or not, he’s your family.”

Clint openly sobs into her chest while she pats his back.

“We’ll find him. You know we will.” Steve reaches over to pat Clint’s back. “I have news, but we need Bruce and the others. Team meeting. Jarvis, call the others?”

“Already done, Captain Rogers.” Jarvis assures him. “Though, Sergeant Barnes may be in need of your assistance.”

When the Avengers finally gather in the communal room, Steve stands with his StarkPad in the centre of the room.

“Mr Xavier plans on communicating with us in exactly 23 seconds at 4PM sharp.” Stark explains, checking his watch.

“Professor Xavier, Dear Boy.”

The apparition seems completely real. As real any anyone else in the room. However, Charles’ body is merely a shared hallucination influenced by his telepathy and shared in the team’s mind.

“Holy shit.” Tony murmurs, Tony gapes, then bites his tongue.

“I would have preferred to meet with you all in my own mind but that can cause a headache with too many people. I thought I would save you the trouble.” Charles smiles lightly, though it doesn’t seem genuine, even when controlled by his mind.

“Professor, let’s put the pleasantries aside for a moment.” Steve crosses his arms. “Matt, is he…?”

“Matthew’s body and mind are healthy and working in full capacity.” Charles assures him, then notices some confusion. “His physical body is healthy and unrestrained. As far as I am aware, he is in a small room with one door. His senses are working as one would expect, however, he has experienced long periods of… emptiness, for lack of a better term.”

“Like sleeping?” Nat asks, still comforting Clint – who is no longer crying but is clearly upset. His
eyes are bright as he looks up at the imaginary figure.

“No, the mind is very active whilst sleeping.” Charles tells the group. “Whilst in the room, Matthew senses noises from outside. The heat of the sun on the side of the building. However, this box is some kind of deprivation chamber filled with water and salt. There’s nothing else for him to sense and I believe it makes him restless. There is one other thing…”

“Spit it out, then!” Clint shouts, then immediately recoils and runs his hands through his hair, making it all stand on end. “Sorry, Charles, that was uncalled for.”

Charles gives him a warm smile, then frowns deeply. “Matthew is… undressed, as far as I’m aware. He typically pays great attention to his clothes, playing with sleeves and focusing on the material, but I’ve heard no such thing. On a better note, I’m not aware of any other injuries.”

“He’s not been raped.” Bucky murmurs, mulling it over.

“No.” Charles sighs in relief. “He appears to be seventeen or eighteen blocks North-West, in his own opinion. The direction should be liberal, since Matt was basing this fact on the positioning of the sun.”

“We have a lead.” Steve looks around the Avengers’ forlorn faces. “It’s more than nothing. Thank you.”

“Now, go and find our friend.”
“I’m getting tired of your witty back and forth.”

Matt turns his face up, his eyes black with bruises and his lip newly burst, in addition to the burst of blood leaking from his nose, dried on his face.

He smiles weakly, breathing in heavy wheezes. Stick’s already choked him several times but, as of yet, nothing below the belt. Of course, Matt isn’t wearing a belt or anything at all.

“Then… let me go.” Matt pants.

Stick kicks him hard in the ribs. They both hear the sickening crack and the rocking of a rusty ship.

“You don’t know where it is but I want you to bring it to me.”

“And I want you… to let me go.” Matt clears his throat, choking and spitting up blood from the back of his throat. “I don’t know where it is, who has it…”

“Find it.”

“No.” Matt’s eyes close as he rests his cheek against the wall.

Stick hasn’t exactly been the ideal host. He has a bucket, at least, but no way is he using it while the man is here.

Stick sneers at him. “You need to piss, go ahead.”

Matt turns his head against the wall, rubbing his forehead on the surface.

“Oh. Oh.” Stick sits beside Matt, grabbing his hair and bringing the redhead’s ear close to Stick’s mouth. “Are you wetting the bed, Matthew? Pissing your fucking pants?”

Matt feels the spit coming before it hits his cheek. He wipes it off with the back of his hand, shame turning his cheeks a bright red.

“You could have been so much more for me.” Matt draws his legs in, hugging them tightly. “And you screwed it up, you bastard.”

“Oh, go cry into your pillow.” Stick walks over to the other side of the room, pausing. “You were the one who quit.”

“Because you…!”

“Because I fucked you?” Stick whips around, closing in on him. “Big deal, grow up. You didn’t even fight. I went easy on you.”

“I loved you.”

“Love gets you killed.” Stick spits on the ground this time, near Matt’s feet.
“No. You were the one who strangled me and hit me and raped me.” Matt tilts his head in Stick’s direction. “Love was what helped me through it. You were my mentor, my… You were my family and you fucking ruined it!”

“Wow, big boy words.” Stick grins, prowling closer.

Matt presses himself against the wall, squeezing his knees together.

“You’re bigger now. An adult.” Stick hums as he crouches beside him, resting a hand on Matt’s knee. It doesn’t move. “Is it really rape when you’re not telling me to stop?”

“Stop.” Matt pushes the word through his lips as a shout, a scream, but it only voices itself as a whisper.

Regardless, Stick trails a hand across his throbbing ribs to his hips and… And Matt punches him. Square in the face. Breaks his nose.

Stick did not expect that.

“I said ‘stop’.” Matt breathes, his body shaking without his consent. It quakes, even as a voice calls along the hall “we need to go” and Stick darts from the room.

Whether it’s the fear or the relief, Matt’s complete disregard for anything between his hips and lower thighs leaves him feeling wet and tired.

He gets up, unsteady on his feet, and loses himself in the stench of the new puddle.

He hears movement, smells something familiar, but everything is difficult and Matt almost wants to climb into the sensory deprivation tank.

“Matt?”

A voice he recognises.

“Ok, ok. Um, Matt? It’s Spidey. Here to help you.”

Matt crumbles, dropping to his knees as he brings up nothing but stomach acid. It pools on the ground, the smell causing him to dry heave until thin but strong arms pull him away.

“Tell me where it hurts.”

Matt doesn’t move much – he’s too tired to think. Too scared to sleep around Stick and unaware of how to sleep in the tank, when it felt like he already was.

“Oh, Matt, you look hurt. I’m going to help you into some shorts because it’s cold and I know you’ll just complain if you get cold.”

He’s already cold. So, so cold. Why is it so cold?

He’s naked on the ground and his chest is aching for so many reasons. The blush in his cheeks makes his head spin. Matt tries to bring up his knees, cover himself in front of the kid that’s supposed to be his little brother.

“Hey, same parts, remember? Matt, I won’t look.” Peter assures him.

Matt cries out, hoarse, when Peter lifts him by his waist, squeezing the cracked rib.
“Matty, Buddy, listen to me.” A new voice. Clint. Matt smells mint shampoo and cries, reaching out for Clint’s warmth. “There we go, listen to my voice.”

He doesn't mention the acrid stench of the mess but it doesn't matter because Matt completely forgets about his worries, allowing the familiar voice and heartbeat and smell of his best friend consume him.

_They came to rescue him. Someone saved him. He's safe, he's safe._

“I hit him. Said no.” Matt tells Clint and it sounds utterly pathetic in his frail voice but it’s a big thing to Matt. It seems impossible in his own mind, even after.

“I’m so proud of you.” Clint presses a kiss to Matt’s hair just before ruffling it and sobbing against him. “So proud, Buddy.”

“Missed you.” Matt manages, then reaches a hand out for Peter, who clasps it.

“You have no idea.” Clint tells him, brushing his sweaty hair off of his damp forehead. “Hey, Matty, gonna get you dressed.”

Matt shudders, but reluctantly allows Peter to slip his shorts up his legs, then struggles on his own into a T-shirt that smells like Clint.

He cries more, weeping into Clint’s chest until there’s nothing but the sound of sobbing in and out of the room.

“We’re gonna get you home, Buddy.” Clint whispers against his hair. “Let’s get you home.”

Chapter End Notes

I feel bad for all of the swearing... I don't swear a lot in real life (once or twice a week?) but I stand by the fact that there's an appropriate time and place. So, in this fic, characters only swear because it's a personal habit to use foul language (Bucky, Maya, Stick...) or it's an appropriate moment to swear (when angry, when hearing bad news...) It's not irrational, promise :)

Remember to let me know how you feel, I love reviews *nudge, nudge*. Your kudos and comments keep me going and I love you all for being such loyal readers.

Just a short chapter (Only 1000-odd words, my minimum) to show Matt getting saved. I feel like adding more would be overkill.
Sleepy Or Not Sleepy? That Is The Question.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Home seems far away, in Matt’s opinion. So far away.

His head jerks up, causing his eyes to open and his hands to reach immediately for Clint.

“It’s ok, Matt, whoa.”

It’s Tony that says that. The car is stationary, Matt notices, and Clint is gone.

Matt undoes his seat belt, trying to scramble over Tony to the door but the man wraps his arms around Matt’s waist, trapping him.

“Matt, Clint is grabbing food.” Tony reassures him. “Sit back, go back to sleep.”

Matt tilts his ear, clawing at Tony’s arm. “Stop it, stop it, stop it!”

Tony lets him go, but steadies his weight so he doesn't fall.

“I want Clint.” Matt’s eyes brim with tears as he slaps Tony’s shoulder.

“I know, I know.” Tony takes hold of Matt’s face, pawing away the tears, then cradles Matt against him.

Tony jerks when Matt touches the reactor, startled, but allows the man to tap on the cool metal, inspecting it.

“Tony.” Matt claims, pointing a long finger at his chest.

“That's right. Buck’s even driving because he wanted to be here with you.”

Matt searches for the familiar metal of Bucky's arm, finds nothing. Then it reaches into the back and a cool thumb rubs Matt's cheek as if he's some kind of cat. If he was, he thinks he'd be purring.

Bucky doesn't say anything and Matt doesn't need him to.

Matt lurches eagerly at the smell of Thai food and the familiar thud, thud, thud of Clint’s footsteps.

The door opens and Matt grabs at the body, startling Clint into dropping the food. Bucky gets out of the front seat to clean it up while Clint stumbles into the car, Matt latching onto his waist.

“I got your favourite: plain noodles.” Clint tells him in a little laugh, guiding Matt back into his own seat. “Belt on, don't want you getting hurt.”

“Don't do that. Don't leave like that.” Matt tells him sourly, clinging on like a baby monkey.

Clint nods against the top of his head, then fluffs up his hair. “C’mon, Bud, belt on and you can go back to sleep.”

Bucky carries him from the car into the tower like a medieval maiden because he doesn't have any
shoes.

No-one pays him any mind. They're Stark's employees, after all.

“Where's Bruce?” Matt mumbles into Clint's arm.

“Upstairs. Real eager to see you, not so eager to talk to the rest of us.” Tony assures him. “You can go talk to him when we get in.”

Matt pats his toes against the floor of the elevator. It feels like grit.

Matt finds Bucky’s back and climbs up him like a tree, settling on his back. Bucky helpfully supports his weight.

Clint tickles his dangling foot.

Matt paws at Clint with said dangling foot.

“Welcome home, Mr Murdock.” Jarvis greets him.

Matt smiles politely at the air, resting his chin on Bucky’s man-bun. Upon finding the bun, Matt starts to play with it, nudging the ball of hair and flicking it with his finger.

“You're a dope, Apple.” Tony laughs, reaching up to wipe his face. Matt smells salt and frowns.

Bucky carries him into the living room of what must be Bruce's floor. The place reeks of chemicals and oil.

“Bruuucie!” Tony shouts in the direction of where the smell is coming from. “Guess who's here!”

Matt’s ears perk to attention.

A door is pushed open.

“Go on ahead, Pip” Bucky sets Matt down on his feet again, nudging him in the direction of the door.

Matt’s feet lead him towards the door but various smells distract him on the way so it takes him a full minute of starting and stopping before he reaches the room. He steps inside and closes the door.

Bruce is in bed, it seems, but he climbs out and approaches Matt.

The hug is surprising from Bruce. He didn't typically initiate them.

“I missed you.” Bruce tells him, pulling back. Matt smiles, then frowns when Bruce doesn't react.

There's no heat on his skin.

“Is the light off?” Matt asks.

Bruce hurries over and pushes the switch down. “I was taking a break.”

Matt nods in understanding.

Bruce starts poking and prodding at the cuts on his face with intrigue but Matt’s grin makes him pause.
“What?” Bruce asks, pulling back and crossing his arms. His shoulders hunch in, seeming like an awkward position.

“I heard you. Hulk.”

When Matt changes into his dragon onesie, his favourite, Clint changes into his pyjamas, too.

“Should I keep the light on?” Clint asks because Matt feels reassured when Clint can see, even if he can't.

“The light?” Matt looks up with a confused frown. “Not going to bed.”

“Yes, you are.” Clint uses the voice he uses with his kids and Matt scowls in response. “Matty, the past few days have been really draining and I think you need a nap.”

“I'm not a child and I can stay up on my own.” Matt objects when Clint guides him towards the bed.

“But you're sleepy.” Clint tells him. “H'm?”

Matt can't argue with that. He's more tired than he's ever felt before.

“You're taking really slowly, Matt. I don't think you can hear it but I can and you need a nap.” Clint lightly presses his shoulders down until his backside connects with the bed. Continues until his head is on the pillow. “I need one too.”

“You too?” Matt asks, his body too heavy to move. He doesn't sense it objecting to the softness of his bed. He likes his bed.

“Mnn.” Clint mumbles and Matt hears it because his voice isn't working like Clint's is but, now that the other man is meeting Matt's speed, he notices it. It's mumbles and murmurs, nothing more than slurred syllables.

“Sleepy?” Clint asks him, rolling Matt onto his side when his body refuses to cooperate.

“C'mon, close your eyes.” Clint chuckles, enticing him.

When he does close his eyes, his ears and nose seem to close, too, for the whole world comes to a peaceful standstill.

Matt lifts his head when he wakes up, promptly dropping it back onto Clint's chest when the world starts spinning.

“Everything ok?” Clint sounds tired now, having been woken up.

Matt's stomach speaks for him as a sharp pain hits his middle.

“Hungry.” Clint starts, sitting up immediately. “Shit, you're hungry. Why didn't I think you'd be hungry?”

Matt rubs his eyes, his head flipping back onto the pillows.
Clint lifts him up over his shoulder, leaving no room for argument. Not that Matt has the energy to object.

Clint carries him the entire way to the elevator, where Matt is lowered into his feet. He slumps against Clint's body, draping himself over the other man.

“Sleepy.” Matt complains but Clint just laughs at him.

“A couple of hours ago, your wanted to stay up. It's only 9 o’clock.” Clint rolls his eyes, leading Matt out of the elevator as the doors open.

“What the…?” Clint stares at the Avengers, who are grouped around the dining table, serving reheated Thai food.

“Jarvis told me you were up.” Tony explains, gesturing for them to sit.

“Family dinner?” Matt asks hopefully, flinching when Tony pats him on the back.

The man notices and pulls him into a comfortable side-hug.

“Can't have one without you, Murdock.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the support I got for updating my 100th chapter. You guys are amazing and I hope I continue to not disappoint. <3
Hygiene

Bruce approaches Matt as he helps Clint clear the table. He doesn't talk, but he follows Matt closely.

“Hi.” Matt addresses him but Bruce grabs his arm suddenly and drags him away from Clint, towards the elevator.

“Where are we going?” Matt asks, reaching out to find the elevator buttons. He reaches out with his senses, the ring of heat in his mind. Matt’s hand gropes the buttons, pressing each one in turn. Tony’s tower is tall and there’s a lot of them!

Matt smiles, stroking the braille beside each circle.

Jarvis takes them straight to Bruce’s floor, despite Matt lighting up the panel like a skyscraper.

Bruce drags him away from the panel and into his own private lab. Typically, he shares with Tony, but the duplicate of his desk and the similar equipment makes it easy to switch between.

Matt locates a jar of marbles just like the one from before. He unscrews the lid but Bruce takes the thing away from him.

“Matt.” Bruce draws his attention to something in his desk.

Curious as to what new puzzle Bruce has, Matt reaches to inspect the flat object, then recoils.

It’s his video tape.

“I took it.” Bruce admits, then shoves it towards Matt hurriedly. “I haven’t watched it! You just wanted it safe and I knew the Hulk would put up a fight if anyone—”

“Thank you.” Matt takes it gingerly, weighting it in his hands.

Bruce’s sigh of relief can be heard in the quiet room. He watches Matt. “What are you going to do with it?”

“Matty, come on, don’t be frightened.”

Well, Matt is frightened. The shower is terrifying right now and he doesn’t care how bad he smells – he’s not taking one step towards it.

“At least come down from there?”

He may have squeezed himself into the space between the top of his wardrobe and the ceiling. It’s a small space.

Matt sort of wishes Peter was here. He understood.

“I’m not taking my clothes off.” Matt tells Clint, jerking his feet away from Clint’s grabby hands.

“I get that it’s scary—”
“I’m not taking my clothes off.” Matt hisses, holding the zip of his onesie tightly. He trusts Clint, he really does, but he doesn’t trust anyone enough to undress and step under a horrible stream of water.

“Well, how about you keep your boxers on?” Clint reasons, giving a little smile. “I love you, but you really stink, Bud.”

Matt’s not in a smiling mood.

“Is a bath better?” Clint offers. “If you sit on your chair, it’s not even really like you’re in the water.”

“Leave me alone.” Matt whimpers, biting the zipper in his mouth to keep it up while he covers his ears with his hands.

“Matt, you have nothing I haven’t seen before.” Clint huffs. “Actually, I think there’s moments when you’re all too comfortable with your nakedness, especially when drunk…”

“Fuck off.” Matt growls with all the fierceness he can muster.

A pause.

“Matt, I was only joking.” Clint says slowly, clearing his throat. “Should I leave?”

Matt nods. Clint must see it because Bucky’s stepping into the room, patting Clint on the shoulder as they pass each other.

“Pipsqueak, get your ass down here.” Bucky crosses his arms. “Know what happens when you don’t wash?”

Matt’s completely aware of what can travel across his skin and he’s wiggling out from the small space with Bucky’s assistance. The man supports his legs as he scrambles out.

“Why’d you send Barton away?” Bucky asks conversationally, leading Matt through the door in the bedroom that leads into the bathroom.

The bath is filled with water already, slightly warmer than he likes. His seat is positioned at one end of the bath.

“I’m not undressing.” Matt tells Bucky, gripping the zip again.

“Down to your shorts.” Bucky raises an eyebrow. “Don’t think I’m sending a tiger into the bath.”

Matt’s lips curve up.

“How are we going to do this?” Bucky sits on the lid of the toilet seat. “Because you don’t look quite ready to do this by yourself.”

Matt’s head turns away.

“Should I sit here and read or do you want help?” Bucky offers, relining.

Matt shifts from foot to foot. The bath seems daunting and small. At least Clint isn’t watching him act like a baby over such a simple thing.

His cheeks are pulsating with blood when he murmurs the word “help” to Bucky.
Bucky rolls up his sleeves but doesn’t move.

Matt takes off his onesie with his side to Bucky, not particularly wanting to turn his back on the man. He steps closer to the bath but an electric current shocks his nerves.

“Pipsqueak, you’re doing great.” Bucky slowly gets to his feet and pats the side of the bath. “No lid like that coffin thing, right? Nothing to close in.”

“I don’t like it.” Matt tries to back away but Bucky gently grabs his hand.

“Why don’t you stand in the water, h’m? It’s not very deep, just stand upright.”

Standing in the water is much more difficult than it seems because the moisture crawls up his toe the second he makes contact, twisting around his leg and up his back like cool tendrils grasping at his limbs.

Matt grabs Bucky’s shoulders, tries to shy away from the water whilst standing in it. His foot edges towards the curved side of the bathtub and Bucky catches him when he slips. He eases Matt into the chair, the water moving no further up his leg. It only just reaches his knee and doesn’t pass the height of the chair.

“See?” Bucky taps the arm of the chair. “Doin’ real well.”

“I’m scared. Let me out.” Matt sobs, his body repelling the water like a sickness trying to crawl past his skin, trying to bite into his feet and suck free his blood.

“You’re sitting in a chair, Matt.” Bucky explains. “I’m with you and you’re above the bath. The water is too shallow for you to be held under. Tell me the bad thoughts.”

Matt isn’t worried about waterboarding.

“I don’t want to be naked in here.” Matt whispers against Bucky’s shoulder, his shoulders caving in on himself. “I want to get dressed.”

“You’re not naked.” Bucky points out. “What’re you feeling?”

“Scared.” Matt chokes, his hands grabbing at Bucky’s shirt. “Let me out, let me out, Bucky, I need to listen for him.”

“For who?”

“Stick! I-If I can’t hear, he might be here and—”

“The tower is safe.” Bucky tells Matt. It’s somewhat comforting. “I’m here and my arm is a freaking metal death-trap – you think a ninja can beat me?”

Bucky presents his arm for Matt to tap his fingers along.

Bucky’s strong, Matt can’t deny that, Listening to his chest, the heartbeat inside is eerily steady. Bucky’s not scared. Stick doesn’t scare Bucky.

“Plus, y’know, we have a Hulk.”

Matt’s lips twitch up.

“Got a bit of a beard going on there, Pip.”
“I’m sorry.” Matt wraps his arms around Clint’s neck, nuzzling against him, despite the wavy locks of wet hair.

“No beard.” Clint touches his face, then pats his shoulder. “It’s ok.”

“I didn’t want you to see me like that.” Matt climbs over the back of the couch and curls up beside Clint, who wraps his fluffy towel around the redhead’s shoulders.

“I understand. Really, Matt, I do.” Clint assures him but Matt pushes him back when he goes to hug him.

Matt drops the lost video tape between them, presents it to Clint.

“I want to report Stick for child abuse.”
Now Or Never

Matt slaps Clint's arm in his half asleep daze because something is very wrong.

“Maaatt.” He complains, inspecting him and then the clock. “It's 3AM.”

Matt actively sniffs the air. It smells like urine. Like stale urine.

“Do you need to pee?” Matt asks Clint, tugging his arm until he's in an upright position. Matt's exhausted so the smell could be coming from anywhere but it feels as if he's sitting in it.

He checks and the mattress is dry.

Clint doesn't even comprehend when he asks. “Matt, you woke me up to ask me if I need the toilet?”

Matt's feeling uncomfortable, though he's unsure why. He nods, prodding Clint again. “Clint, there's a smell.”

Clint grumbles as he makes his way out of the warm bed to the light switch. “It's not the dogs.”

“It smells like pee.” Matt reiterates. “And it smells close, can you smell it?”

“Matt, it's 3AM.” Clint takes his hand and points his face at Matt, though it's probably him looking into the redhead's eyes. “Maybe you're just anxious. Go back to bed, it's not something to worry about.”

Matt shakes his head stubbornly. “Jarvis?”

“I don't have a nose, Mr Murdock.” Jarvis reminds him. Matt frowns, spinning around on the bed. “But I smell something.”

“You could be smelling someone just going to the toilet three blocks away.” Clint moans, flopping onto the bed. “Why do you hate sleep?”


“Bad?”

“Bad.” Matt agrees. “Like a stone of some kind; a kidney stone or…”

“Or…?”

Matt's face pales. No wonder he's feeling so uncomfortable. He tries to focus in on a certain part of his body.

Matt needs to pee. Bad. But his bladder is nearly empty.

“I agree, let's go to bed.” Matt deflects, moving to lie down. When he does, Clint pulls him back into a seated position. “Oh, no, you don't. You don't wake me up then pretend whatever you're hiding is nothing.”

“I need to pee.” Matt explains.
“Not buying it.”

Clint crosses his arms and stares at Matt until the other man breaks. Matt's fingers fiddle with the fluff of his onesie.

“I need to pee but I'm afraid it'll hurt.” Matt confesses, turning his head as warmth creeps up his neck.

“Why would it hurt?” Clint's voice softens as he bundles Matt up in his arms like a hungry spider, testing his chin against his shoulder.

“I think I have a bug.”

Clint glances at the door to the toilet, then his mouth makes an 'o' shape when he returns to face Matt. “Kidney bug?”

“Something like that.”

Matt has a UTI.

“That's why you need to go to the toilet when you need to.” Clint lectures him. “If you don't, bacteria in your urine can cause an infection.”

“Go 'way.” Matt kicks at him.

“Stop being a moody idiot and come get my amazing toast.” Clint crawls onto the couch, situating himself beside the Matt-shaped lump. “My tasty toast, Matty, don't you want toast?”

Matt's hand reaches out to shove him away.

“Refrain from annoying my patient.” Bruce is less amused. He's standing beside the couch, joining Clint in staring at the Matt-lump.

“Sorry, Bruce.” Clint smirks, reaching a hand out to pat the doctor on the back. “No need to get upset, I'll leave him alone.”

Bruce stares at Clint until the man disappears into the kitchen, muttering about toast and coffee.

“Matt, I'm going to prescribe you a course of antibiotics.” Bruce explains. “There will be some discomfort for several days.”

“Bruce, will you prescribe punching Clint?” Matt asks, shouting the last half of the sentence in the direction of the kitchen.

Bruce's hands flex before a smile appears on his face. “Why not?”

“Mean, Bruce.” Clint leans on the island, tapping the granite countertop out of boredom. “You're supposed to be nice to me.”

“I wasn't aware.” Bruce drawls, taking the seat beside Matt’s form. He pokes his head out of the blanket he's wrapped in, looking like a burrito.

“Yeah, well, now you know.” Clint huffs dejectedly as he picks toast out of the toaster. “Matt! Food!”
Matt sends a glare in his direction.

“Matt’s in discomfort.” Bruce reiterates impatiently, then glances down at the redhead. “I’m supposed to warn you that Tony is talking too the police today.”

Matt covers his head with the blanket once more.

“About Stick?” Clint sets Matt’s plain toast down on the coffee table, plate clicking against the wood. “Matty, we don't have to do it so soon if you're not up for it.”

“Want to.” Matt wriggles his hand. Clint places a piece of toast in it and the thing disappears into the blanket.

“Should we do it up here or do you want to go to a different floor?” Clint asks and it's an amazing question but the thought of moving his lower body makes Matt groan.

“Downstairs.” Matt replies after a moment. “Bucky carries me?”

Clint laughs at him. “I think we can arrange that.”

They occupy one of the sparse rooms on the communal floor. The Avengers meeting room is across the hall from this room.

Matt's on a beanbag chair, wrapped in a thick blanket. It's not as fluffy as his personal one but, admittedly, the meeting room is slightly chilled.

Brett.

Matt smells the officer before he enters the room, smelling like his mother's cigarettes. Foggy walks into the room with him. Clint is beside Matt, brushing his hair out his eyes.

Brett's shoes click into the room, towards Matt, and then pause in front of him.

Brett gives him a quick once over.

This is it. No going back. No opportunity for doubt.

“Shall we get started?”
WARNING:
Suicide attempt and (sort of) suicide ideation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Brett. Foggy. Clint.

Matt tries to control his sniffles, keeping them infrequent because he doesn't need to cry.

“Your partner bribed me again.” Brett states as he sits at a proper seat, facing Matt in his bean bag chair.

Matt doesn't reply, grimacing. His nose is runny and he wipes it with his sleeve, thinking to clean it later.

“Stop bribing cops.” Matt tells Foggy and he senses Clint and Foggy gaping at him.

Brett clicks on some kind of recorder, tells him about it.

It's the first time in a long time that he's talked in that fake, horribly calm voice. He feels like he might be sick.

“I'm going to cut to the chase because I don't dislike you.” Brett tells him. Matt's a little tempted to reach for the cool metal of his badge. “Foggy gave me the tape. I haven't looked at it but I'll deal with it. If it shows your face and the assailant’s face, it works as evidence. I'm aware that you were recently taken hostage, were you sexually assaulted during this time?”

Matt shakes his head. “No.”

His voice is small and pathetic again. He reaches (the temptation is unbearable) for Brett’s badge and strokes the metal imprints. However, his abdomen and chest ache so he pulls back.

“He just touched me, no…” Matt swallows. “No sexual assault.”

“Touched’ you.” Brett asks for clarification.

Matt’s face burns bright red.

“He needs you to be specific, Matt.” Foggy tells him apologetically.

“My hips and,” Matt looks away, “and my groin.”

Alright. Were there been instances of physical assault?”

“Yes.” Matt waves a hand at his face. “He choked me repeatedly and broke one of my ribs.”

“What?” Clint asks, grabbing Matt's arm. “Why didn't you tell me?”
“It’s not sore.” He defends himself. “Plus, it's not a big deal.”

“Breaking your rib is a big deal, Matt.” Clint insists, taking his shoulders in his hands. “Matt, he broke your rib, explain to me why it would be ok for someone to break another person’s rib.”

Matt shifts, dropping his face against the bean bag.

“Have you washed since this ordeal?” Brett writes something down in a notebook he pulls from his pocket.

“Yes.” Matt hadn’t even considered DNA evidence. Then his heart stutters. “But I washed in my underwear, maybe…?”

“Bruce should be able to do a forensic test.” Foggy clears his throat, slipping into the chair at Brett’s side.

“Email the results.” Brett nods. His face turns to Matt, takes in the usually-proud lawyer’s crumpled face, and sighs.

Brett looks down at his badge.

Matt’s eyes have been glassy all evening. More than just not seeing, there’s a void of emotion in his features, which sit languid.

Tony and Clint have stayed with Matt since his exam, but the whole thing went poorly.

They weren’t in the room but, according to Bruce, Matt started crying and refused any kind of reassurance. When he left, Bruce had to coax him to move. His eyes were red-rimmed and lost.

“Dice!” Clint calls over to where the dog is watching Lucky chew his bouncy ball. The dog looks up, notices Matt, and then jogs over to investigate, claws clicking on the floor. He sniffs Matt’s leg before deeming him worthy enough to lick.

A wet tongue on Matt’s hand does nothing to startle him. His eyes are half-lidded as if he’s falling asleep.

“Matty, Buddy?” Clint shakes his arm lightly but it elicits no response. “Matt? Matt!”

“Ok, don’t freak out.” Tony pats a hand on Clint’s shoulder. “Let’s just take him to his room and see what happens.”

“You are aware he has a UTI? He needs to go to the bathroom before sleeping.” Clint tells Tony, his eyes still trained on Matt’s. “Matt, I know the exam was invasive and it must’ve been scary, but ignoring us isn’t going to fix anything.”

“It’s psychomotor impairment.” Tony taps Matt’s arm, watching as nothing happens. “Natasha does it. He’s just tired and emotional. I say you two love birds go cuddle in the nest and wait for Matt to ‘wake up’, as it is.”

“Tony, not the time for jokes.” Clint warns the man, rubbing a hand over his forehead. At least Matt is recognising that the abuse was, in fact, abuse and is somewhat attempting to cope, even if that means shutting himself off like this.
Clint doesn’t wake up when Matt does.

“Kill yourself.” The voice is nothing but a far-off whisper but Matt’s body feels itself following obediently. It’s easy to obey. Easy to listen to Stick’s echoes.

He sits up straight in the bed, then gets to his feet.

He follows his guideline in his head: wake up, go to kitchen…

He walks directly out of the hall and through the living room in a straight line. In the back of his mind, he thinks there’s something he should be paying attention to, but his mind isn’t his right now.

The cabinet under the sink contains a hefty bottle of bleach that Matt locates easily. The smell is pungent and it’s supposed to hurt but Matt’s not worried because he’s not thinking about anything.

He’s not thinking.

It disappears from his hands and that’s not ok because he’s supposed to be following orders. Orders. Stick’s old orders.

Matt finds the cutlery drawer next, but it doesn’t open. He doesn’t question why. Instead, he closes his hands around his throat, digging his fingers in against the thick rivers of blood coursing underneath the cover of his skin.

Immediately, he finds himself light-headed. Blood is pooling in his face until it’s not and, just like a boy with dead batteries, Matt’s movement stops.

The world keeps turning.

Chapter End Notes

Matt is working with the police now so this is one of the last darkest moments you can anticipate. At least, I haven’t planned any more and there’s a chance I’ll go off-plan but I anticipate Matt getting better from now on. Of course, mental health treatment is a slow process.
Emotional Misdirection

Chapter Notes

Warning (but not really a warning because I expect this being the only time it's mentioned in detail):

**Bisexual!Tony** in a 300 word extract. Not a main theme at all.

Matt wakes up.

He's standing, a knife in his hand, and struggling with someone who he identifies as Steve.

Dropping the knife (not a good idea when their feet are below), Matt makes an attempt to scramble away but Steve seems eager to keep him still.

Matt whimpers when Steve twists his arm behind his back.

“Stop!” Matt exclaims, struggling against the hold.

The hands tense up.

“Murdock?” Steve asks. “Tell me who's in the room.”

“I'm tired.” Matt whines then, seeing as he won't be let go otherwise, sniffs the air. Oil… alcohol?

“Tony and… Clint, are you drinking?” Matt drops forward when he's let go. His body shakes, slick with sweat, but there's no emotion behind it.

“You've been trying to kill yourself all night.” Clint mumbles around the neck of a bottle. Swallows.

“But I didn't!” Matt shouts, then thinks of Steve and the tight hold. “I don't remember.”

“We know, Matt, it was probably some kind of trigger.” Tony nods, but Matt hears his hand shuffling on the arm of the couch. He wants to drink.

Matt's been sleeping but he doesn't feel rested at all. His movements are sloppy in that he's telling his body what to do and it's responding too slowly.

“Clint?” Matt asks shyly, but the man's heartbeat stutters and explodes.

“God, Matt, don't you think this shit is difficult for me, too?” He snaps, resting the glass bottle on the table with a *thump*. “You almost drank fucking bleach.”

Matt shrinks into Steve, who places a hand on his shoulder. “I'll make Matt breakfast, why don't you go downstairs to the game room or something?”

Matt hates how jealous he suddenly becomes of a room, of all things. The game room is filled with video games and other methods of visual amusement. Clint should be with Matt.
Matt doesn't say any of this and listens as Clint walks to the elevator without saying a word.

His shoulders slump. Everything's less comfortable without Clint.

Tony leaves, too, and Steve makes Matt mediocre toast.

Matt's unhappy and he blames it on Steve. Steve.

He kicks at the soldier, stubbornly insisting that he's not getting out of bed. At least, not without Clint, he thinks.

It's rather pathetic.

“Matt, please cooperate.” Steve sighs, picking up his toy lion and wiggling it in front of him. “Would you like to go into your play room?”

“I'm not a child.” Matt protests. “It's a fort and you're not invited. Go away.”

“You know I can't do that.” Steve crosses his arms, dropping the lion. “Bruce and Tony are busy. Bucky isn't up for company. Should I get anyone else?”

Matt’s face tells him everything he needs to know. Yes, Clint.

“We can train?” Steve suggests.

Matt squirms again, kicking out at Steve’s chest and pushing. It doesn't move him and Matt gives up.

“I want to sleep. I'm not going to kill myself. Leave me alone.” Matt growls, unzipping his onesie because Clint isn’t here so he'll just sleep naked. It might get Steve to leave.

Matt is sitting on the bed, onesie and boxers on the floor. Steve is still there.

Matt focuses on the man's can breathing for a long time before anger pents up in his stomach. Matt turns and hits the wall before Steve can stop him but he only manages one heated blow before he's wrestled away from his target.

Matt shoves Steve away because the close proximity is making him anxious. The man steps back, crosses his arms again.

“Are we going to repeat this all day?” Steve sounds unimpressed. “You're not a child, Murdock, no matter what you wear or how emotional you get. But you're throwing a mighty tantrum.”

Matt glowers in Steve's direction. He's still mad. He tells Steve.

“Why are you mad?” Cap sits on the bed beside him, throwing his blanket over his lap.

“Because…” Matt thinks for a moment. “I don't know, I don't know, but I am and I hate you and I hate everyone in this stupid tower.”

Steve watches him for a moment, then nods calmly. “That's fair. I would be, too.”

Matt grabs his pillow and screams into it. Screams and screams until there's no air left in the room. Then he breathes in the remnants.
Steve doesn't say much else.

Clint arrives in the bedroom slowly, as if he's intruding.
Matt doesn't look up. He doesn't want to think about a Clint that doesn't want to be his friend.

“Steve was trying to help.” Clint kneels beside the bed, a cool hand resting against his cheek. The coldness turns his flesh hot and sweaty by comparison.

Matt blinks away moisture, ignoring the tickling trickle of salt water across his nose and onto the bed sheets. Clint is his best friend in the world and the thought of losing him causes an ache in his chest more painful than any broken rib. Matt would prefer to have every bone in his body broken than to have Clint snap at him like that again.

“I know that you’re hurting and this is tough, much more for you than me, but I’m struggling here.” Clint draws back his hand, rubs it over his face.
Matt’s lip is trembling and he doesn’t want to cry because it’s upsetting Clint but his heart is breaking.

“Y’know, I’m just helpless here.” Clint rubs his hands together. His heart is pacing, all adding to the allusion that he’s stressed. “You just grabbed that bottle and tried to—Matt, you just kept trying and I know you don’t remember but I do.”

Matt can’t bring himself to sleep because everything is too much and his head is racing.

“Say something, Bud.” Clint pets his fluffy hair again, eliciting a sob from the redhead that he can’t repress.

Matt’s hand slowly moves towards his blanket. His fingers weave into the fluff and grab it in his fist. He’s glad that he put on some boxers since Steve was here.

Clint doesn’t make a sound as Matt leaves.

Tony looks Matt over when the man shows up on his floor. The bags under his eyes are a dead giveaway but his features are slumped and lax, displaying just now tired he is.
He’s not even wearing his glasses, meaning that Tony can see just how red-rimmed his eyes are.

“Can I sleep in your bed?” Matt asks, his tone flat.

“Sure.” Tony nods, his voice more serious than it usually is. “Go brush your teeth.”

Matt doesn’t move. After several seconds, his feet lead him in the direction of the bathroom.

Tony goes to his bedroom and starts stripping the sheets, switching them out for the special- ordered kind he’d bought. Silk sheets, just for Matt’s occasional visits.

Matt appears when Tony’s in the middle of changing the sheet on the duvet.

“Did you have a fight?” Tony pats the bed, inviting Matt over.
“Clint’s not… my friend anymore.” Matt whispers, his voice breaking. Tony glances up. He gives Matt a side of the duvet to hold, which he does half-heartedly.

“What happened?”

Matt drops the duvet and cries shamelessly. Tears gush from his eyes, leaking across his face. Tony opens his mouth to make a joke or sarcastic comment but thinks it best that he doesn’t and moves to sit on the edge of the bed beside Matt.

“I’m making him tired and no wonder he’s sick of me, having to t-take care of me and… and…” Matt chokes out. Tony wraps his arms around the younger man, patting his back when heaves wreck his body.

“He’s not sick of you.” Tony sighs, leaving his hand on Matt’s back. “He’s watching you hurt yourself and it hurts him. He just needs some time to clear his head.”

Matt lowers his head.

“Clint’s been there for you a hundred percept, Cherry Pie, and that’s great but it’s draining. He’s sad, too.” Tony reasons, not quite holing Matt but the close proximity is enough from Tony. It’s called a ‘compromise’.

Tony decides to surprise him, however.

“Come on, let’s cuddle.” Tony mumbles, gesturing to the bed. He quickly does the buttons on the sheet before lying it on the bed. Tony carefully lies down, his lungs straining under the reactor as he moves around. There’s not enough room in his chest.

“You don’t like cuddling.” Matt points out sceptically. “I don’t have my pyjamas and Clint is downstairs…”

“I’ve slept with men and women wearing much less than boxers, Crimson.” Tony shrugs flippantly.

Matt freezes. Tony isn’t straight? Matt turns his body to face Tony, thinking deeply.

“I shouldn’t have said that.” Tony nods, scratching his head. “Uh…”

“You won’t hurt me, is ok.” Matt decides. Tony doesn’t exactly go for disabled man-children with an array of mental health issues, anyway. He probably finds Matt just as attractive as Natasha does. That is to say: not at all. “I trust you and I don’t care.”

Tony smiles but doesn’t say anything; Matt suddenly has a lot of questions.

“Still want to cuddle?” Tony offers with an awkward kind of grimace.

“Warm.” Matt claims as he rests his head on Tony’s chest, avoiding putting any extra pressure on Tony’s lungs.

“Plum, you know everyone in this tower cares about you, right? Everyone.” Tony tells the curled up man under his arm. “Even the goth chick.”

“Maya?”
“H’m.” Tony hums in agreement. “Black hair, scowling…”

“Maya’s Native American… and she only scowls when you, er, flirt with her.” Matt points out, then cringes. “Please, don’t flirt with my friend.”

“Can I flirt with Bruce? Cause I can’t see that stopping any time soon.” Tony laughs heartily.

Matt raises an eyebrow. Tony shakes his head. “No, Matt, God. I love the guy but he’s my friend. Feel free to set me up.”

Matt ponders before realising his friend group is highly limited to the Avengers. Then he thinks Tony is probably having too many dates as it is.

“I can hear your mind working.” Tony groans, prodding Matt in the side. “Go sleepy-bye.”

Matt scowls.
Tony nudges Matt sometime in the early morning. He’s exhausted and is just about to tell Tony when the man’s rapid heartbeat meets his ears.

“Hey, Cherry.” Tony chuckles, sounding out of breath.

Matt sends a hand in the direction of Tony’s head. He finds a nose, then navigates by touch to Tony’s hair, which he pets slowly.

“You mind if we cuddle?” Tony presses his face against Matt’s shoulder, his breathing hot and ragged.

Tony frowns in the man’s direction – Tony is a proud man and it’s surprising that he’s actually asking for cuddles.

“Of course not.” Matt yawns, pushing himself into a seated position.

Matt’s especially good at not saying anything when Tony starts crying into his neck, moisture pooling against his bare skin. He’s never been fond of anything unclean (including the snotty tears Tony’s leaving on him) but it’s not a concern when Tony’s upset. Tony is his concern.

“Did something happen?” Matt rests his head against Tony’s, the man’s thick hair tickling his cheek.

“No. God, no, I just,” Tony chokes out, his voice raw and filled with moisture, “lonely, I guess.”

Matt squeezes his arms around his friend before giving him a little kiss to his head. Clint occasionally does that to Matt. Did that.

“Shit, Strawberry, I’m sorry.” Tony pulls back, grabs a tissue from the drawer in his nightstand. He wipes at Matt’s shoulder haphazardly.

“It’s ok, I need a shower anyway.” Matt shrugs to convey to Tony that he really doesn’t care if the man breaks down in front of him. “This is a safe space.”


Matt grins, tilting his head. “What time is it?”

“Good morning. It’s 6AM; the weather in New York is scattered clouds.” Jarvis tells them from the ceiling, sounding somewhat pleased. “Can I be of assistance?”

“Jarvis approves.” Tony laughs, patting Matt on the shoulder.

Matt’s in Tony’s kitchen, stuffing his face with redcurrants, when Iron Man’s steps thump thump thump into the living room.

Matt figures he’s doing some kind of test. He looks for an apple in the fridge, sniffing one behind
the sweet scent of plums. Tony thinks he’s funny.

However, the sound of the other Avengers’ heartbeats in the elevator, all arriving at once, causes him to poke his head out. He’s in Tony’s clothes, thankful that he’s just as short as the other man.

“Stark, is the Quinjet ready?” Steve questions.

Matt edges forward, moving towards Natasha. He touches her arm lightly to grab her attention.

“Dr Doom.” Widow tells him briefly.

“We won’t be long, Sugarplum.” The mechanised voice of Iron Man’s suit relays to him. Matt can hear Tony’s own voice inside, milliseconds too early.

It occurs to Matt that he’s not invited. Hell, it occurs to Matt that he’s not Daredevil anymore. He’s lost that part of him.

“Matty?” Clint asks as he walks straight towards the elevator. He ignores his friend and takes the lift down to Foggy’s floor.

Matt’s chest is tucked away in Foggy’s wardrobe.

Foggy is in his bedroom.

Matt’s determination doesn’t waver because he isn’t Matt anymore, he’s Daredevil. He’s only Daredevil. Matt doesn’t exist.

So the devil walks in a straight line for Foggy’s bedroom, light footed like a cat. He prowls through the hall and pauses at Foggy’s open door. He’s snoring – loudly, in a way some old, old part of his mind remembers hating – and Daredevil easily slips into the room.

The wardrobe door creaks but he tugs it open easily enough. His chest aches as he bends down to lift the small crate, carrying it steady so as not to hurt himself in the process. It’s being careful, not being a wimp, the devil in his head reminds him.

People are parting in the street for Matt.

He’s wearing the suit, mask under his arm as he walks because it’s very uncomfortable to have his nose covered tightly.

His ears are leading him to a destination near the tower and he can hear Natasha firing the Quinjet’s machine guns at some floating object above him.

People are running, now. Screaming and bumbling in different directions like dazed dopes.

Daredevil fixes the mask over his head as he runs towards the source of anguish: several small Doombots.

“Daredevil!”

“Hey look, it’s the Devil!”
“Isn’t that the blind guy from the news?”

Matt’s lips feel weighted at the corners as he listens over his city.

“Righty-o, Kids! Time to show ya how to beat bad guy ass.” An arrogant voice shouts out over the line of heat that Daredevil recognises as the horizon. His eyes slant behind his mask, not that it matters, as his head tilts in the direction of the five static echoes.

“Roger that.” A deeper voice responds professionally and Matt can hear the rev of motorbike engine over the echoing responses. Six pinpoints in Hell’s Kitchen.

Matt breathes in deeply through his nose, sucking in the odour of old spices and fresh herbs as his body darts forward past several restaurants.

The first metal creature to attack him is humanoid, cloaked in light material. The cape flaps in the wind and it’s easy enough for Matt to grab the thing and cover its face.

A kick to his chest leaves him winded and thinking about heat sensors.

“STAND ASIDE FOR THE GLORY THAT IS DOOM.” The robotic voice commands.

Daredevil ducks a second blow at the ground, listening to the sickening crunch the ground makes as it’s churned up.

His billy stick sits comfortably in his hand, slicing through the air to the Doombot’s neck area. The electric fizzle of the taser completely shuts down whatever system is working inside the robot. He internally thanks Iron Man for his new tech, though stealing it from Tony’s lab probably wasn’t a great idea.

Dreadful churning echoes swim like fish in the noise sea, amplifying those dreadful pinpoints in the devil’s mind. Where the Avengers are crushing Doombots easily. Far easier than Matt. He’s on Nat’s level with the taser idea.

Matt scales a nearby fire escape, making several leaps up the metal railing to a cold signature on the rooftop. He lifts his body up and focuses on relaxing his heart rate.

He throws his club in the direction of the robot, striking it with two charged electrodes. The thing convulses, legs and arms twisting on their ball joints, before collapsing.

Daredevil hops down to another building, rolling through his landing. He keeps himself moving because he knows that there’s projectiles being fired.

“Target in sight.” Claims another pinpoint. Clint.

Matt freezes violently – he’s too close – physics seeming to forget him as the force moving his body vanishes abruptly. He hits the ground suddenly in a tumble, hitting a wall with his back.

His ribs ache but it’s not something Daredevil worries about.

Slow as his own beating heart, Matt smells natural oil as a disturbance slits the air. He twists and locks his hand around the object without much effort on his part.

A bow.

Matt frowns, smelling the familiar mint of Clint’s shampoo, right in front of him.
A hand grabs the scruff of his neck, pulling him to his feet.

“You are in so much trouble.”

Chapter End Notes

Don't ask me why but this chapter just took so long to write. I had to keep rewriting it and I was had some writer's block for the fight scenes but I pulled through.

Is it sad that I feel as if I've neglected you guys because I haven't updated in a day? Probably. Oh well! :P
Clint’s mad at him.

Steve doesn’t seem very happy either. Really, everyone is annoyed and Daredevil is standing at the Quinjet window, trying to ignore the heated muscles and pacing heartbeats.

“Are you freaking kidding me?” Tony demands, his suit folded up in his briefcase. “Matt, you’re injured!”

Daredevil’s voice is deep and stoic as he responds because he isn’t Matt. “That doesn’t affect me.”

“By definition it affects you!” Tony snaps, pacing back and forth. “Matt, I know you’re bored but this isn’t the way to entertain yourself! We can’t waste our time looking out for an injured teammate when we should be saving lives!”

“Stark is right. You were benched, Murdock, you know that. During all of this,” Steve gestures at him, “you’ve been benched because you’re not capable of fighting. Bucky is benched, too, because he’s not emotionally prepared and neither are you.”

The use of Matt’s surname makes Daredevil furious. His face twists into something hateful while his fists ball up. That’s the name of the Murdock family. Jack, Matt. That’s the name of a baby, a child, a teenager, and an adult. That’s the name of a human and Daredevil knows he’s a weapon. Like Black Sky, like Elektra.

No, Elektra was tender and loving and beautiful in so many ways other than sight.

Matt’s the Devil.

“I took some down before I was brought into custody.” Matt scowls pointedly.

“Oh, come on.” Clint huffs, hitting his head back against the interior wall.

“Am I wrong?” Matt asks, turning to face Clint. “Because I was handling things until you showed up.”

“You were on the ground, actually.” Clint snarks before sighing. “Matt, I understand that you’re restless, just like Tony said—”

“If you understood then you would realise I’m not Matt!” He screams, throwing a fist into the wall because the small aircraft is suffocating him. The churning air is making it difficult to breathe.

Bruce is asleep but Matt thinks, of all people, he and Hulk would understand.

Daredevil is the sick, twisted, bitter inner nature of Matthew Michael Murdock’s mind. He’s the truth sneaking anxious peeks from behind the truth of the charming lawyer.

“I’m a thing, not a person, and broken ribs aren’t going to stop me from fighting.” Daredevil grinds out through gritted teeth. “You’re so ‘sighted’, but you still can’t recognise the difference. I’m not him, I’m not.”
Matt runs a bleeding hand through his hair, a demented cackle breaking loose from his mouth.

It’s not funny.

It’s really not funny.

But this costume, this suit, it does something to him. It gives his fists the freedom to explore and his mind the opportunity to hide.

Matt hits the wall again, opposite hand, then spends some time breathing peacefully, the laughing having died out.

His grandmother understood. She could see the devil in him.

The Quinjet lands with a light thud.

Daredevil is escorted by Nat and Clint, one hand on each arm, like a prisoner, to the med bay.

Matt feels like a prisoner.

Daredevil isn’t ready for the suit to come off.

Bruce has woken up and Tony insisted on speaking with him privately.

There might be tears under the mask, trapped on his cheeks, but the suit is keeping them from ripping down his face. Daredevil is getting anxious, as a matter of fact. His hands are twitching and he can sense Natasha watching him closely but it’s difficult to remain still with Matt clawing to get out and the Devil keeping him contained.

These are friends. Allies.

Cut it loose. All of it. Cut them loose for their sake.

Friends are a good thing. Loving. Caring. Kind.

They will suffer and you will die. The Devil cannot be contained. ‘Matt’ isn’t real. It’s an illusion, a mirage created by weakness. Warriors don’t need friends or love. Weapons don’t need. Weapons hurt. Weapons kill. Weapons dole out justice.

“Let me go!”

The voice is familiar to both Matt and Daredevil but neither is aware of who’s speaking. If they sound frightened or enraged. It’s their shared body, stepping away from Clint Barton and Natasha Romanoff. Not Hawkeye and Black Widow. Not Clint and Nat.

“You’re not a weapon. Movement, respiration, sensitivity, growth, reproduction, excretion, nutrition. These things make you living.” Natasha chants, her chest confident. “You’re not a weapon because they told you that.”

“I’m Daredevil.” Matt grinds out. No, the devil? “I’m the Devil, I’m—”

It’s not sure what it is.

Matt starts screaming. If anyone asked him why, he wouldn’t be able to explain it. Maybe it’s Stick
or Clint or the Avengers, he doesn’t know. Maybe it’s Daredevil and ‘being a weapon’. Whatever it is, it makes him furious in a way punching won’t help.

Clint pulls him into a hug and they sink to the floor together when Matt’s knees cave in. He’s almost certain he’s not upset – just angry and tired and filled with want for something unknown.

“I think you’re a little run down. Is that fair?” Clint says in his ear, being careful to avoid names.

Matt pauses, claws at Clint’s arms, unsure if he wants them closer or to push them away. Then he screams again into Clint’s chest.

Clint wants to take off the mask but he doesn’t. Not without asking Matt first and he isn’t sure that the redhead won’t punch him. He might just continue to scream.

‘Daredevil’ is appreciative because he’s not sure how to be Matt. He’s never been Matt. Matt is Daredevil’s façade, nothing more than the hollow image of a man.

How do you be someone that you don’t recognize?

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter but I had to write this. I'm too invested in Matt's troubles :/ Enjoy!
Clint looks at the other Avengers after ten minutes of waiting. “He’s not coming to say goodbye, is he?”

“He’s probably asleep.” Tony shrugs awkwardly. “You know he’s going to miss you.”

“Just… tell him I’ll only be a few days.” Clint runs a hand over his face. “I need this.”

“Go relax.” Natasha urges him. “We’ll take care of Murdock.”

The Quinjet looms over Clint on the Helipad, a hulking mass of metal. It seems ominous. He’s going to stay with his family. To visit. To calm down. Despite there being nothing to worry about, he can’t stop himself from feeling sick every time he thinks about Matt playing with the joystick, overjoyed as he plays the role of Clint’s co-pilot.

Clint smiles bitterly as he waves off the Avengers.

“Charles is coming to visit.”

Matt hears Tony at the doorway, Bruce snuggled into his side. The taller man hurries over to his bed and inspects the Matt-shaped lump hidden under blankets.

He’s still in the suit, Bruce notes as he peels back the covers.

“I have a new puzzle you might like.” Bruce offers.

The mask’s horns get caught in the fabric of the pillows under Matt’s head as he faces Bruce.

“I’m not sure how you wash that thing but I think you should do it soon. Y’know, sweat is smelly.” Tony points out, strolling over to Matt’s drawers. He inspects the Fabergé egg and its map of Moscow before turning to Matt. “Clint’s going to be gone for a few days. He really would have appreciated a goodbye.”

Daredevil’s head raises as his body turns on the bed. He perches on the edge of the mattress, squatting.

“Matt, be upset all you want. But not hearing Clint out is just damned unreasonable.” Tony scolds him, tugging the blankets away. “He’s been there for you through all of this and it’s getting on top of him. The least you can do is let him explain himself.”

“I’m not Matt.”

Tony laughs incredulously. “Yeah, you keep saying that.”

“I’m Daredevil.” He clarifies. If ‘Matt’ was the blind lawyer Daredevil used as a cover story…

Matt is not blind. Not like a normal blind person.
Matt isn’t a lawyer – he’s been disbarred.

Matt isn’t a cover story because everyone knows his face and his name.

Doesn’t that make ‘Matt’ Daredevil? Doesn’t that mean that Daredevil is Matt’s identity? Who is he if he’s not the hypersensitive vigilante? Boxing isn’t a hobby when you use it to beat up murderers in dark alleys.

“I shouldn’t take off the suit.” Matt surmises. If Daredevil is his identity, then this is his new skin.

“Am I going insane or is he?” Tony asks Bruce, completely serious.

Bruce shrugs. “Sanity is subjective.”

Tony slides down the wall to sit on the floor, landing on his backside with a thump. He runs a hand through his hair, laughing softly. Matt’s aware of how the situation must appear.

“I am Matt because Matt is Daredevil and I am Daredevil.” Matt runs through the confusing train of thought.

“That’s right but it sounds so wrong.” Tony murmurs into his arm, resting his head against his leg and shoulder.

“Chronology.” Bruce tells Tony.

“Matt came first.” Tony agrees, lifting his head. “You’re Daredevil because Daredevil is Matt and you are Matt. There we go. Sorted.”

“Stopped being Matt.” Daredevil steps off of the bed, leaves the room. This word play is quite boring.

“Matt! What the hell—Where are you going?” Tony demands, scrambling to the door of his bedroom.

“For a walk.” He claims, gesturing to his watch over his glove. “Jarvis.”

Matt guesses that the amount of turned faces in his direction means that people are staring. For God’s sake, he just wants a burger.

Handing over the money to the vendor, he accepts the horribly fake meat and walks across the road.

Honking cars alert him that he probably should have looked first, however, it’s becoming increasingly difficult for him to concentrate.

There’s a helicopter above him. Probably expecting a chase or a fight of some kind. He can hear curious news anchors narrating his movements.

He steps onto the pavement and navigates his way into the park. The floral scent tickles his nose but it’s not unpleasant.

Matt finds a bench covered in spit-smelling gum underneath. He sits down, crosses his legs, and bites into the burger. It’s acrid and greasy. Matt’s tired of trying to find nice things.
“What does he mean he's not Matt?” Tony demands as he paces the living room. Bruce is having a really good day so he's making himself some tea to celebrate. Tony's ranting isn't especially bothering him, though, the Hulk stirs inside of him when he thinks of Matt.

“Would you like some tea?” Bruce offers.

Tony gives him an appreciative glance. “You're really happy today, offering your favourite tea, huh?”

Bruce smiles, not sure what to say.

“What's this about Matt?” Nelson walks into the kitchen looking like the living dead.

Bruce holds out the cup of tea he just finished making and hesitates before giving it to Foggy.

“Thanks. I'm working on Matt's rape case. This guy is a shadow.” Foggy laments, moaning happily when he tastes the drink.

Bruce collects his measuring mug to pour himself some more milk. Doggy looks confused at the action but his eyes light up. “I remember when I met Matt, he kept buying black coffee from the college. Hated it. Could barely drink it without wincing like it hurt him. Once he actually threw up.”

“Wait, what?” Tony asks, brows knitting together.

“To be fair, he had a cold.” Foggy takes another sip thoughtfully.

“No, why would he get something he doesn't like?” Tony clears up, grabbing his StarkPad and turning on the recording app.

“Dunno.” Foggy shrugs. “Wouldn't even sleep with a blanket. Got all angry and tense sometimes.”

Foggy frowns, then, placing the mug down. “He used to strip down to his briefs, back when he wore briefs — hated them too, too stuffy or something — after class and just stand in the middle of the room looking lost.”

Foggy makes a confused face. “Actually, I thought he was lost. He told me he got lost. Is this another Matt thing?”

“Oh, it's a Matt thing.” Tony turns off the recording and stomps out of the room. He stomps back and looks at Bruce. “Brucie, science.”

“Tea.” Bruce objects, weighing sugar.

“Ok, science after tea!” He proclaims.

Matt’s restless. He’s getting ‘all angry and tense’ because he’s uncomfortable. Before, it was bad coffee and clothes, now it’s… something else.

It’s not like the meltdowns Bruce has – Tony’s had to stumble his way through helping Bruce often enough in the lab – but it’s something. Just like Bruce struggles to convey how upset he gets when Tony tries to use a certain wrench or change something on his whiteboard, Matt is struggling to
deal with what’s bothering him.

It’s easy enough to find Matt. He’s been on the news, eating food, all afternoon. A burger, a hot
dog, and then ice cream half an hour later. Fries, soda, and pizza also made appearances. Tony’s
really hoping this isn’t a new thing because Tony has enough shit to deal with. Matt’s a walking
disaster.

At 4PM, he’s surrounded by reporters as he licks his way around an ice cream cone, ignoring them
completely.

“Matt!” Tony hurries over, dragging Bruce alongside him.

Tony’s not sure what will happen at Matt’s breaking point but he doesn’t want it to happen in a
park full of civilians.

A little girl is beside him.

“Do a flip, do a flip!”

Matt barely recognises the voice, but it screams in his ears, unwilling to go unanswered. The voice
outside of his ears, in the real world, is sweet and hopeful.

Matt ignores the growing lump in his abdomen – too much food – and places his hands on the back
of the bench. His legs lift into the air as he lifts himself onto his hands. From the bench, he
performs a tucked flip to the ground. His stomach promptly protests but the child is happy, so it’s
ok.

Daredevil wonders if ‘Matt’ wants a family. Decides against it.

“Bravo!” Tony grabs Daredevil’s arm, pulling him away from the crowd. “Let’s get you home for
dinner, h’m?”

The idea of dinner makes Daredevil spew the contents of his stomach onto the grass. Where’s his
ice cream?

“I don’t think I like any of those foods.” Matt mumbles, shuffling his weight. “Can we go to the
supermarket?”

“Enough food for one day.” Bruce decides, moving away when a reporter closes in on him.

Tony glares down the flock, trying to herd his two sheep away from the hungry wolves. “Haven’t
you got lives to live? He’s just eating! Go do something worthwhile!”

Some look bashful and go, others stay. Tony decides to ignore them.

“Matt, you don’t look well, doing ok?” Tony undoes the mask and slips it off his head.

Matt tilts one ear to Tony, frowning. “I was hungry.”

“Mnnhmm.” Tony murmurs, pulling him into a hug. “Well, your favourite dinner is just waiting to
be heated up at the tower.”

“I was… It’s not normal, I was looking for a normal food.” Matt explains, screwing his nose up.
The putrid stench of vomit reaches his nostrils as he regains concentration and he can taste the half-
digested remains of last night’s dinner on his tongue along with a sickening dose of stomach acid.

Tony makes a clapping noise with his hands. Matt looks confused despite the explanation.

Senses are Daredevil. Matt’s supposed to like a normal food. People don’t manipulate their taste buds for sensory stimulation. Matt tells Tony this.

“Brucie has his favourite tea that he likes because of the savoury taste, right? I like blueberries because they’re tangy and it makes my mouth feel weird but sometimes they’re sweet and it’s refreshing.” Tony objects, leading him along the stone path of the park. “How about we go shopping and pick up whatever seems tasty to you?”

“Even chilies?” Matt wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Especially chilies. The hottest we can find. Carolina Reapers if you want.”

Matt pays special attention to what everyone is eating.

It’s a new kind of family dinner. Everyone was encouraged to pick a meal – or just snacks – that they really like, no matter how odd it would be.

Steve is just eating chocolate. Apparently it was a luxury when he was younger.

Bucky’s filling up on various burned meats.

Maya’s eating bread that her mother used to make. She offers Matt a torn-off piece and he agrees that it’s delicious. Plain but filled with natural taste.

Bruce is actually eating some of Matt’s chili rice, which made him feel quite honoured.

Sam is eating homemade vegetable soup and cupcakes, which he dips into the soup like bread. Tony finds it revolting and comments on it greatly as he fills his mouth with blueberries and cheese.

Nat is eating something Russian. It smells like pasta.

Matt nudges the chilies on his plate. He’s not much in the mood for anything heavy so the spicy vegetables are whole, on their own. He lifts one and bites through the wrinkly flesh. He’s wearing gloves because it’ll irritate his skin like a rash.

He’s the main focus of attention but he grins as his cheeks light up red, savouring the bliss of fiery spice in his mouth.

Maybe ‘Matt’ can like chilies.

Chapter End Notes

2000 words!!! Didn't expect it to be this long but oh well. My limit is usually around 1700. Enjoy! :P
Tony is wary about giving Matt alcohol but the redhead is drunk before he can voice his opinions. They make an agreement that he can strip as long as he keeps his boxers on.

Matt is currently draped over Tony’s lap, humming a song he can hear on repeat several blocks away.

Bruce has made himself some ethanol and is drinking it slowly, making an attempt to get only slightly drunk. Hulkbuster is in the corner, prepped for action. Bruce keeps commenting on how Tony has prickly arms.

“Apple?” Tony nudges Matt, lifting his torso up from the couch so he’s sitting. A goofy smile and empty eyes meet him. “Tony!”

“Yup.” The engineer brushes his hair back. It’s considerably longer. “Think it’s time to go to bed?” Matt shoves at Tony and ends up on the floor, wondering how gravity shifted so suddenly.

“Murdock, are you alright?” Steve’s voice is laced with concern and it’s an offer he struggles to refuse.

His suit is crumpled in the corner and Matt almost wants to put it on because he’s strong, he’s Daredevil, but he was raped in that suit. That’s the suit that was peeled off of him and, God, it still smells like…

Steve picks him up, plops him down on the couch again. This time, his back is to the cushions so he doesn’t tip over when gravity decides it doesn’t like him. Matt wants Steve to stay, however, because he’s heavy and Matt wants heavy. Keep gravity from lashing out at him.

Steve’s compliant when he grabs the supersoldier’s arm and refuses to release.

“Cap, you got yourself a puppy.” Tony laughs from beside Matt.

“Swirly.” Matt claims. The world is La Nuit Étoilée by Vincent van Gogh, a starry night of brush stroke sounds and swirling smells.

Matt hums the song again, standing up.

Tony really seems to fuss when he walks on his hands, even though he only bumps into the wall once on the way to the kitchen. Plus, it was the doorway, which is more of a challenge.
Bruce laughs, more amused than worried, especially when Bucky and Steve right Matt, turning him around. He stumbles after the spin, feeling as if he’s still upside-down. When the change registers, he tumbles into the island, grabbing the granite worktop tightly.

“Dog, dog.” Matt beckons.

When Lucky runs over to him with a wagging tail and sits at his feet, Matt smells the trace of mint shampoo and hits the floor on his knees, burying his fingers in the dog’s fur and holding the disgusting mutt close.

He’s dirty and uncouth but he’s Clint’s dog. The smell of mint – he’s Clint.

Matt screws up his face when the dog’s tongue works its way inside Matt’s ear. He does, however, notice something on the dog’s face. A rough patch of skin.

Matt gently touches the furry face with his fingers, tracing it for the very first time. Slobbers coat his hands as the excited animal starts licking but, just above, Matt feels one eye and… Nothing. Matt feels one eye. The dog has one eye. The other has scar tissue, too, and seems to be somewhat scarred, also.

No wonder the dog is so clumsy and irritating, Matt thinks fondly before frowning.

“Luck has bad eyesight.” Steve says softly, crouching beside Matt.

“Clint never told me.” Matt slurs, his tongue not cooperating at the rate he wants it to.

“He doesn’t tell most people.” Steve explains, tying what feels like a hair band around the top portion of Matt’s hair to keep it away from his face. Matt is too busy to appreciate the lack of tickling.

Matt thinks deeply about the difference between ‘a blind man’ and ‘a man with blindness’. Thinks deeply about how Clint doesn’t feel the need to explain that his dog is partially blind because it doesn’t matter.

Matt’s faults don’t fucking matter to Clint because he’s his best friend.

Matt scrambles to the doorway, collides with the frame. His shoulder aches at the impact but his feet lead him directly to the circle of his friends. He locates Tony’s phone.

“Clint, Jarvis.” Matt commands, no time for manners.

He feels the heat in the phone screen as it lights up, switching between options before calling Clint.

Matt perches on the armrest of the couch, just his bare toes connecting with the furniture. Tony pushes his legs closed and moves him into a seat because apparently he’s not allowed to squat. Matt doesn’t understand but he doesn’t worry about it.

“Ring, ring.” Matt copies the phone several times until Clint picks up.

“Tony, is everything good? Cause I have two kids, you know, and it’s 2AM.”

“Clint.” Matt states, then hesitates. He doesn’t like phones. “Um, Matt.”

“Matty, hey.” Clint rustles before talking again. “Missed you when I was leaving, Bud. Everything ok?”
“Your dog has one eye.”

“Yeah.” Clint pauses. “Yeah, he does.”

“I love you.” Matt fiddles with the hem of his boxers, suddenly missing the various fiddle-points of his clothes. “You love me, too?”

Matt’s words are slow but Clint makes a happy noise before laughing softly. “Yeah, Matty, I love you, too.”

Matt drops the phone immediately, feeling accomplished.

Tony makes a sound, hurrying over to pick it up. “Clint… Yeah, he just put it down… Don’t blame me! He decided to call! Yeah, sure… Later, bye.”

Matt tilts his head, body following until Steve pulls on his arm.

“God of gravity.” Matt dubs Steve and proceeds to find Bruce, stumbling over to the other couch (Why, dear God, do they all feel the same?) and slumping against the other man.

“I can’t believe I ever asked you if you got the spins.” Foggy deadpans from the opposite couch. Matt giggles, finding Bruce’s arm so he can hug it like a baby monkey with its mother.

‘Matt’ has friends.

Chapter End Notes

This actually reminds me of chapter 107 or 106 (I can't remember which) because I was writing it while tipsy *blushes* but don't worry because I didn't upload it until I checked it over. Thank goodness for autocorrect!

I just imagine Matt having no phone etiquette (eg, just hanging up when he's finished talking) because he can only sense the voice of the person and they don't feel real to him.
Goose

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Matt wakes up with a headache but the scent of food drives his stomach into fitful rumbles.

He even let Lucky sleep in his bed so the excitable thing is rather pleased with himself, from the sound of his tail.

Dice hops onto the bed when Matt starts petting Lucky, waiting patiently for some attention of his own.

Matt embraces Dice for a long moment before climbing out of bed.

Steve is in the second bed in his bedroom, sleeping away. Matt has no doubt he stayed because he’s a ‘responsible adult’. He finds himself grinning at that as he leads the dogs from his room towards the newly-stocked kitchen.

He spends a second in front of the open fridge, sniffing its contents, before grabbing bacon, eggs, and tuna.

It takes a while to become familiar with the stove but he manages it with the help of the braille labels. Steve joins him in the kitchen when he grabs a knife to start cutting up the raw bacon into smaller strips.

“Good morning, Matt.” Steve greets him, sitting at the table. He sounds tired in that kind of half-asleep-but-not-exhausted way.

Matt breaks a couple of eggs into one pan, then the rest of the packet into a second for Steve. The bacon slices are sizzling in a second pan. The tuna cut he heats up in the microwave.

“You didn’t have to make my anything but thank you.” Steve smiles, leaning on the table. “Do you have a hangover?”

Matt checks each body part in turn, realising when he reaches his head that he might be dehydrated. His hands snakes into the fridge, returning with a bottle of water. “Thirsty.”

“I didn’t want to join you in bed since you were unaware.” Steve checks his phone, types something with his thumbs on the flat, motionless screen. Matt hates technology. There’s variations in how hot the screen is but it doesn’t create any kind of mental image so he dismisses it.

“That’s alright.” Matt turns over the bacon strips, checking just how cooked each one is. They’re heating up quickly so Matt calls on the dogs by name.

When the tuna is heated, Matt removes the fish from its bag and places it on a chopping board. He scans the cupboards behind him with his right ear before grabbing couscous.

Steve watches as Matt alters between flipping their omelettes, stirring the bacon strips, and readying couscous in boiling water.

The dogs eat their bacon first on plates because Matt isn’t really sure where the bowls are – Clint was the last to feed them and he’s too lazy to look.
The tuna slice is split open over boiled couscous.

Matt’s omelette is laced with chili slices, whilst Steve’s has milk, cheese, and salt. It’s big and he splits it in two down the middle, creating three omelettes.

“Jarvis, Bucky and Nova…?” Matt asks, rolling on his heels. He moves each plate into the correct position.

Bucky is fairly tired when he enters. His hair is brushing over his shoulders, unkempt as if he just woke up. Nova’s claws are pushed out, scratching against Bucky’s solid arm playfully.

Matt readily takes Nova from the man and places the cat in front of the plate of tuna. She purrs against Matt’s arm before she starts eating the meat, tearing it apart with tiny fangs.

“Thanks for breakfast, Pipsqueak.” Bucky yawns, leaning over to steal a pinch of Nova’s fish. The cat swipes in annoyance.

The dogs are heartily licking their plates. Lucky starts licking Matt’s bare foot as he slides into his chair at the island which, gross, but he appreciates the gesture.

Dice wags his tail like a classy dog.

Nova’s fur is significantly thicker around her neck – puffed-up and smooth. She avoids digging her claws into Matt as he carries her around the tower, as if realising he won’t like it. Her tiny paws are velvety and equally fluffy against Matt’s cheek.

She’s not an affectionate cat, but Matt must be making himself a good heat source because she’s snuggling against him with her bristly face, vibrations rolling up her throat from her chest.

“Hey.” Natasha goes to prod his side but he twists out of the way. She seems unhappy but Matt is too sweet with his innocent smile and fluffy hair to hate, so she deals with it. “Walk. Outside. Fresh air – let’s go.”

It’s not passing Matt’s attention that they’re keeping him occupied until Charles arrives tomorrow but he doesn’t mind being fussied over.

“But it’s hurt.” Matt insists, looking like a lunatic (in Natasha’s ever-correct opinion) as he chases after a bird. Matt can hear the creak of its broken wing over the frantic flapping as it makes a futile attempt to fly away.

“You’re turning to tower into a zoo!” Nat scolds him, gently.

The little bird tweets and caws as Matt inspects the injured limb gingerly. Broken and bleeding.

“Give me your scarf.” Matt wiggles his hand out to Natasha, who watches him carefully. “I swear, the things I do for you boys.”

She slowly unravels her scarf and hands it to Matt, watching carefully as he presses the fabric to the wound.

“Shh, you’re safe.” He coos to the bird (A sparrow?), standing up with it cradled to his chest.
He wanders over to a grass patch, crouches again. Nat doesn’t even know how to react when Matt digs his fingers into the dew-laden dirt and plucks free a worm but it’s not incredulity because this is Matt we’re talking about.

“Ok, Dr Doolittle, let’s bring him home.”

“Her.” Matt corrects, pointing at the animal’s midsection.

“Let’s just go home before I regret my life choices.”

“Ok, no-one is allowed to eat Goose.” Matt tells Nova, Dice, and Lucky from where he’s perched on the arm of the couch, a shoe box in his lap. Natasha’s scarf is now bedding (plus some cotton balls) for Goose the sparrow.

“Is that thing clean?” Tony asks from a distance. Matt tilts his head up to the engineer.

“Poop and dirt.”

“Sudden fondness for birds or another gift?” Tony leans on the couch, peering into the box.

Matt strokes the feathers tenderly with his thumb, offering a shot glass full of sunflower seeds to the noisy creature. Another shot glass is filled with water.

“What the hell is going on here?” Maya’s footsteps lead her towards Matt, peering into the box.

Matt hears her heart flutter in sadness at the poor bird’s broken wing and his grin widens. He carefully shift the shoebox into her hands. Her fingers brush against the rigid feathers, barbules fluttering back and forth with each kind stroke.

“Maya, this is,” Matt readies his hans, slowly working his fingers through the motions. “G-O-O-S-E. She’s yours, now.”

“Goose.” Maya repeats, her lips broadening into a sweet smile. “You know you’re an idiot?”

“I try.”

Chapter End Notes

I have this amazing headcanon where Matt is loved by animals and I WILL write about it if it’s the last thing I do! One more animal, I think, later, then that’s it. I’m not going to overload on random animals. :D

My email for anyone who wants to contact me: eearthiana@gmail.com
It’s on my profile in the bio. :D
Tony wakes up in his bed to find that he’s not alone.

“Jarvis, you let Hot Rod in?” Tony raises a lazy eyebrow at the lump at the end of his bed, then at the two dogs snuggling on the floor. Dice’s tongue is in Lucky’s ear, cleaning him. Obviously the dog agrees that Lucky is a fluffy mess.

“Mr Murdock did arrive on this floor upon my suggestion.” Jarvis confirms, slowly turning up the lights. “A problem, Sir?”

“A heads up would be nice, J.” Tony eases himself gingerly into a seated position, the arc reactor jostling in his chest painfully. “A man has needs.”

“Of course, Sir.” Jarvis drawls. “Company being one such need.”

Tony ignores his AI’s quip and reaches forward to nudge the lump. “Apple? Plum? Cherry Pie? Wake up, already, you’re on my foot.”

“I know, it stinks.” Matt murmurs in response. A second later, his head pokes out of the opposite end of the duvet. “I’m suffocating.”

“Oh, haha.” Tony scowls, playfully kicking him. “Get up, my leg’s tingly.”

Matt flops backwards so he’s lying parallel to Tony. Tony shuffles to the edge of the bed, a sudden awareness of his heartbeat making him nervous. Heart palpitations.

“Is everything alright?” Matt is beside him in an instant, a hand gently brushing across Tony’s chest. It’s a little too close for comfort but Matt must be feeling his heartbeat through his chest cavity.

“Yeah.” Tony breathes out. “No pain. I just get a little tired when I get up in the morning.”

“But you’re ok?” Matt turns his head, for some reason, making Tony look at his unfocused eyes and concerned pout.

“You’ll be the first to know if I’m not.”

Step 1: Feed Matt.

Tony isn’t certain what he’s supposed to feed a Matt but he presents apple slices and, like any good scientist, observes the results.

He's in charge of Matt today since the others are leaving for some SHIELD meeting and he's planning on doing a good job. Of course, Bruce is hiding in his lab but the other Avengers have left.

Matt sniffs around the table, lazily reaches a hand for the apple slices, and slips one into his mouth, chewing slowly.

Tony grins at his success.
Note: Matts like apples.

Step 2: Walk your Matt.

“Alright, Sugarplum, how about we go to the park?” Tony stretches an arm above his head and bends it, touching his shoulder with his hand. The other, he stretches along his side. “Take the woofers, look at trees.”

“I'm up for looking at trees.” Matt grins, popping another sweet slice of fruit into his mouth.

“So are you missing Birdbrain?” Tony scuffs his foot against the concrete path. Matt's wearing his clothes, usually a sure sign that he needs some reassurance. Tony pretends he doesn't notice.

“Clint deserves a break.” Matt replies and it sounds like something he's been repeating to himself but Tony nods anyway because, yeah, Birdbrain needs a break. Not a break from Matt, just a break from seeing Matt in pain. There's no point in him hurting himself trying to help Matt if a few days off can help things.

“Yeah, he does.” Tony claps a hand on Matt's shoulder. “And he’s proud of you for understanding that.”

Matt gives a weak smile. “I'm sorry for… for acting the way I did. Getting angry.”

“You can be angry all you want.” Tony corrects, kicking a pebble across the path. “Just tell us instead of ignoring Clint and running into battle when you're on the bench.”

“Wanted to help. I helped.” Matt protests, following Lucky when the dog starts pulling towards the grass in need of excreting his waste. Tony screws up his nose at the smell, glad Matt is the one picking it up.

“You did help.” Tony shrugs. “But it could have gone a lot worse.”

Matt finds a nearby bin, getting rid of the dog bag. “I guess. I'm sorry.”

“It's ok.” Tony pats him on the head like the good Matt he is.

Matt looks confused.

Step 3: Socialize your Matt.

Tony guides Matt into his lab, pushing him towards Bruce.

Then he finds his own desk and sits, watching carefully.

Matt jumps into the edge of Bruce's desk, perching precariously on one corner. Tony’s heart jerks suddenly in the worry that he might fall but all seems good.

Matt's sense of balance is impeccable.

“Watch you don't fall.” Tony warns him anyway and the little shit leans backwards into a horizontal position, the only thing connecting him to the edge of the table being his toes.
Tony doesn't know what to do with his Matt anymore. Thankfully, he pulls himself back up and grins like a hungry cat before Tony can grab him.

“Matt, do you want to play Scrabble?” Bruce asks, pulling out a board game after finishing the last equation on his board. It looks like a mess of numbers to Tony, disorganised and irrational, but he's known Bruce long enough to realise he has his own order of doing things. Especially mathematics.

“Ok.” Matt shifts onto his backside as Bruce sets up the game on the right side of his desk.

*Note: Matts are far too flexible for Twister.*

Tony scowls from the sidelines because it’s really just unfair that Matt is besting Bruce and himself time and time again when he can’t even see the colors. The way his body moves is simply unnatural, like a contortionist.

“You do gymnastics as a kid?” Tony asks, prodding Matt’s shoulder. It appears disturbingly out of shape, but not dislocated, as he reaches under Bruce to where Tony is pointing out a red circle. Tony’s convinced that Matt is double-triple-quadruple jointed.

“No.” Matt smiles slightly. “Dad struggled for money so he could only buy me books and then, after the accident… Braille books are expensive.”

“Sorry, Apple.” Tony spins the dial again, telling Bruce to move into position. He wobbles but stays up. “I’ll buy you all the braille you want. Hell, Stark Industries could always expand.”

Tony grimaces slightly when he realises that he might seem insensitive but Matt seems to understand that Tony only wants to give his friend the things that will make him happy. He has money to give and what better to spend it on than his friends’ happiness?

“Thank you, Bot.” Matt responds, flopping onto his stomach, allowing Bruce to win. He stretches out his arms and legs before nuzzling his face into the wooden floor.

“Bot?” Tony raises an eyebrow, sparing a glance to Bruce when he shuffles off of the game sheet. “Nice attempt.”

Matt pouts, reaching out for Bruce’s sleeve when he starts to stand up. “Bedtime?”

“Sugarplum, remember Bruce isn’t big on hugs.” Tony reminds Matt, pulling him up into a side-hug. He turns to Bruce, carefully avoiding looking directly at his eyes because he’s aware of how uncomfortable it is for the man. It’s difficult to avoid eye contact but Tony makes a good attempt for Bruce. “Brucie, up for snuggling or will we see you tomorrow morning?”

“Tony’s bed?” He asks, grabbing the sheet. He begins folding the plastic, which scrapes against the wood. Matt covers his ears, twisting his head into Tony’s neck. His foot jerks out in a reflexive kick at nothing.

Tony takes the plastic from Bruce, who relents it easily, and tosses it onto the couch.

Matt doesn’t uncover his ears until Tony starts stroking a hand through his hair, asking if he’s alright until Matt replies.

“M ok.” He murmurs, then grabs Tony’s hand and stands up. “I want to go to bed now.”
“Sure thing.”

**Step 4: Ensure your Matt gets a good night’s sleep.**

Tony can’t even remember the last time he was in his lab for more than an hour but he can’t find it in himself to get annoyed when he sees Bruce and Matt playing checkers on his bed. Matt has to be reminded which disks are his but Bruce is being exceptionally helpful by periodically pointing them out.

However, when Tony finishes up in the bathroom and joins his two favourite people in his bedroom, Matt and Bruce end their game and pack up the pieces.

Matt seems insistent on sleeping on the left and Bruce argues for the left, so Tony is stuck in the middle, just knowing he’s going to burn up during the night.

Tony leans close to Bruce, nudging his shoulder. “Hey, Brucie, if you want to leave you can, just tell me or Jarvis if I’m not up, ok? Just so I know you’re taking a breather.”

“I’m fine, Tony.” Bruce frowns, shuffling in his spot. “Leave the light on, though?”

“Sure thing.” Tony pats his arm with a smile, then turns his head to Matt. “And, Cranberry, wake me up if you’re upset or anything, h’m?”

“Tony’s the dad.” Matt corrects his much-earlier argument about Clint, making Tony scoff.

“No way!” He drops his chest onto the pillows and stares up at the ceiling, giving his heart some time to relax. The bed is spacious so there’s enough room but Matt is snuggled into Tony’s side, head on his chest, and Bruce is lying close but not cuddling.

Matt smiles into his ribs, then squeezes Tony’s waist. “Thanks for spending the day with me.”

Tony rolls his eyes, running a hand through Matt’s hair and fluffing it up.

“My pleasure, Apple.”
Matt wakes up to Tony’s bedroom. It’s empty but Matt hears something whirring in the corner. His head lifts as he becomes aware of the long mechanical limb.

“Good morning, Mr Murdock. It is currently 3.17PM... This is Dummy.” Jarvis introduces. “Sir and Dr Banner are currently working on a project and are available if required. However, your breakfast is prepared in the kitchen area and the Avengers are scheduled to arrive for 4PM.”

“Dummy?” Matt crawls on his stomach to the end of the bed and tilts an ear to the machine. “Can you talk, too?”

Matt hears another whir at a different volume, speed, and in a different order.

“You can talk, but not like Jarvis.” Matt hums thoughtfully, reaching out a hand to pet the machine gently. “You don’t eat, but… come join me for breakfast.”

Matt grins, scrambling out of bed. Then, he hesitates, sniffing himself discreetly. “Breakfast, then shower.”

Bruce had prepared a bowl of fruit for Matt to eat, which was waiting on the fridge for him.

The gooseberries are his favourite and he located them first. Now, he's eaten the best berries and is picking at the chunks of hard mango in distaste.

Dummy whirs as Matt stands up.

“I need a shower.” Matt pats the metal claw, tracing his fingertips over the cool metal.

A sneeze makes his heart stutter and jump. Matt lazily rests his head against the metal, humming softly. The coolness is soothing against his forehead.

“Mr Murdock, do you require assistance?” Jarvis asks in concern.

Matt shakes his head against the hard surface, then lifts himself to his feet. His nose aches as if it's been punched but he chalks it up to nothing important.

“Jarvis, c’n you turn down the heating?” Matt asks, stripping out of his onesie in the kitchen. The fridge suddenly feels like a good hiding place, if only there were room.

“You appear to have a fever, Mr Murdock.” Jarvis tells him as Dummy follows him back to Tony's bedroom.

“It’s jus’ warm in here.” Matt yawns.

Suddenly everything seems very warm and Matt seems to sink, slowly lowering himself to his knees and then into the fetal position. The wood flooring is a comfort and Matt feels his core churning angrily like Hellfire but his limbs can't find the energy to spread out.

Dummy is prodding his waist but his senses quickly become muddled when the stench of salty sweat overcomes him.
“Easy, easy.”

Matt can't find the will to move but an uncontrollable sneeze jerks his body. When he moves, he can feel a sweat imprint on the sheets underneath him. He's soaked through, smelling putrid and unclean, if only to his own nose.

The rancid taste of sickness and decay wafts through the air around his languished body, like Hell’s sulfur fumes. Bitter. Hot.

A cold cloth is placed on his head but it BURNS and Matt cries until the horrid thing is removed. “You'll feel better with an ice pack.” Steve is suggesting and he's vaguely aware of Tony's scent both on the bed and in the room. He's in Tony's bedroom. The sheets have been replaced with something thin but it grates against his legs, despite being silk.

“Get it off.” Matt whimpers, shaking. He doesn't want to touch the sandpaper material, not when it's both slick and bristly.

“Matt, you're feverish.” Bruce tells him, as if he doesn't know. “If your fever gets any higher, I'm taking you down to the med bay.”

“He doesn't like being cold, you have to work down from lukewarm.” Foggy pipes up as he enters the room, Karen on his heels.

Matt's never been any more thankful in his life.

“Fog.” Matt beckons.

“Hi, Matt.” Foggy brushes his hair back gently, feeling the heat radiating from his forehead. “Yeah, you need to get him into a bath.”

It’s Bucky that bathes him, since Clint isn’t here.

He rests Matt into the lukewarm water, hesitating when Matt whimpers in pain.

His boxers act like swim trunks under the water, tickling Matt’s upper thighs as they sway back and forth. Bucky grabs a fluffy facecloth and dips it into the water, using his flesh hand to db it across Matt’s forehead.

The comfortable water may not seem cool to any other fever-stricken person, however Matt’s body is sensitive to the shift in temperature and the bath is pleasantly cool in comparison. A relieved moan passes his lips.

Bucky smiles in amusement, wiping beading sweat from Matt’s forehead with the cloth. “Stevie always liked bread when he was sick, how about eating some after?”

Matt’s eyes don’t open as he smiles – they haven’t opened since Matt awoke. “Cool.”

“You agree or are you talkin’ about the water?” Bucky asks, rising the cloth in the bath because the redhead is sweating profusely, his skin tinged with more red than can be seen on his head.

“Water.”
Bucky dunks him under with a hand on Matt’s chest, only playfully. Matt seems to enjoy it and doesn’t resurface while Bucky grabs the plastic bucket behind him and angles it under the tap, running the cold water.

When the bucket is full and Matt has shown his face (what must be at least two minutes later), Bucky slowly pours the coldness in.

Matt grips the edge of the bath rather quickly, looking like a spider with the way his limbs push him away from the water.

“Pipsqueak, get back in.” Bucky taps down on his chest. Matt is arched above the water, his toes wrapped around the tap while his hands grip the handlebars.

“It’s cold, I…” Matt trails off, his arms wobbling. It shocks him – his stamina, his strength, should keep him in this position with ease. Alas, Bucky catches his back as it caves, two arms cradling him in mid-air.

His eyes close sleeping and the cold water seems rather far away, even as the chilling cold creeps around his body like ice bindings. Bucky’s hand is on his face, he can tell, but everything is tiring all of a sudden.

Something is being pressed into his mouth and Matt’s brain goes into overdrive. His heart spikes in horror and fear as something presses past his lips. Even the taste of plastic does little to calm him down.

“Pip, listen.” Bucky’s voice, gentle and soothing. “Not hurting you. I would never hurt you. Thermometer.”

Matt chews his teeth against the plastic taste, biting the smooth, thin surface.

“No biting.” Bucky scolds, cleaning his face again with the wet cloth. “Can’t have you getting worse on me. Don’t need Banner Hulking out.”

Matt tilts his head against the side of the bath.

His heart stammers around another sneeze. It’s dry, thankfully, but the water around him ripples fitfully.

Bucky is pouring in more cold water.

“Pouting.” Bucky points out, tapping the underside of his chin with a solid finger. “Last time.”

Matt feels several, but not an overwhelming amount of, ice cubes. His body jerks away, curling up in one end of the bath. His head tips involuntarily at the sudden movement and the splash of water against his cheek is enough to inspire Matt to right himself.

“Ice.” Matt complains, flicking away an offensive cube.

“Here.” Bucky pops one in his mouth and Matt prepares himself for a protest when he realises it feels quite nice against his cheeks, cooling down his head from within.

Bucky scolds him for chewing on it.
Black Widow?

Chapter Notes

Warning: Description of handling a spider.

(I'm petrified of them and this didn't make me squirm writing it... but just so you know.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Avengers quickly find that even a minor cold wreaks havoc on Matt’s body. For one, the high temperature and sniffles have him unable to regulate how often he sniffs, meaning that vomiting is sporadic and, frankly, disgusting with the stuff Matt eats.

Today’s stomach acid is laced with chilies and wadded lumps of half-digested bread.

Matt listens unhappily as Natasha cleans it up.

“Murdock, I’ve seen better shit come outta a dead man.” Bucky calls from where he and Steve are playing a game. Matt’s annoyed because he’s sick and shouldn’t that mean Bucky has to spend time with him?

A burp causes everyone to look at him anxiously; a collective sigh echoes in the living room.

“Yeah, well, he had a bath and—EW!” Tony leaps away from the acrid mess on the floor. Natasha glares at the engineer but doesn’t comment, seeing as he’s on the phone.

Matt can’t find the energy to avoid Lucky’s licking tongue.

Ever since he first sneezed, the animals haven’t left him alone. Lucky is on the couch, rubbing against his arm, while Dice huddles between his legs. Nova has her fluffy mane against Matt’s knee, curled on his lap, and Goose is hobbling around on the coffee table, giving him side-long glances (even though Maya denies leaving his box there).


Matt doesn’t extend his hand so Tony settles it on his shoulder.

“I hear you’re sick, Bud. Want me to come home?” Clint offers and Matt almost cries at the sound of his voice. Hearing Clint call the tower ‘home’ makes him happier than he’s ever felt, but he can’t help but worry that Clint won’t want to return.

“M sick.” Matt agrees, his nose blocked. No amount of blowing his nose has cleared his sinuses and he can feel the blockage like a bullet to the face. “You should stay.”

“Well, you know I’m free if you need to talk to me.” Clint offers, pausing for a moment. “Apparently Tony sucks at Twister?”

They talk for a while about inane things before Matt interrupts Clint.
“Did you want me to want you to come home?”

“Yes.” Clint murmurs, then clears his throat. “But I’ve missed my family so much, Matty, and I’m glad you’re giving me this time. They’re asking about you, by the way. About Uncle Matt and his bouncy ball hearing.”

Matt smiles slightly, then chokes around a wet cough. His throat aches for no more than a moment. “Tell them I said hi.”

“Will do. Hey, Matty, I didn’t want to do this over the phone but, uh.” Clint takes a long pause. “Look, you’re my best friend and if I have to do this in person then I might not have the guts, so…”

“You can tell me.” Matt sits up straight. What does Clint have to be nervous about? Clint is the perfect best friend.

“Laura—Our baby’s a boy and… I think it’d be really cool if I could name him Matthew.” Clint says, growing slightly louder near the end of the sentence, as if he worked up just enough confidence halfway through.

“You don’t need my permission.” Matt buries his hand in Nova’s mane, scratching her neck lightly.

“No, Matt, I-I want to name him after you.” Clint explains hesitantly. “You can say no if you don’t—”

Matt’s heart leaps into his throat and stays there until he swallows it down again. “You want to name your baby after me?”

This is a thing.

Oh, Lord, this is a thing.

This means Clint will stick around, that he must love Matt because you can’t just rename your child willy-nilly.

Clint wants Matt to really be a part of his family. Matt will have a family.

“I want that.” Matt says, promptly before sneezing and shocking Lucky. The dog brushes it off and slumps against his arm again. “I really want to be a part of your family.”

Clint makes a sound that suggests he might be crying but in a happy way.

Matt spends a long time on the phone talking to Clint, which Matt suspects is breaking the rules of his holiday. He even talks to Laura – enquires about the baby and finds out that she has a craving for chilies. Matt suggests his favourites.

It’s only after he hangs up that Natasha (who left mid-conversation) runs into the living room with a nervous smile. “Don’t freak out because I just cleaned up Matt’s sick and you men owe me.”

Matt pouts.

Another sneeze leaves him sniffing but he notices something. He shifts Nova to the side so he can sit in a wobbly crouch, flicking his head from side to side in search.
“Remember the no pets rule Tony put up last year?” Natasha clears her throat, crossing her arms.
“Well, Tiny got out of her terrarium.”

It’s venom, Matt reasons with himself, yet unlike any snake he’s encountered.

Oh. Oh.

Tony screams and literally climbs onto the table. “WHERE THE HELL IS IT?”

Matt points a finger at a heated blob on the underside of the table.

Tony darts away, making terrified noises.

The others are keeping a wary distance. Sam, however, approaches the table and hits it’s underside.

Matt stands up in horror as he hears the thump of flesh on hairy exoskeleton. Natasha starts hitting Sam on the arm while Matt creeps towards the heated blob.

His fingers slip underneath the blob and lift it up slowly. His thumb grazes the bulbous abdomen before realizing that this thing sheds like crazy, so he leaves it alone in his palm instead. It slowly makes its way up Matt’s arm with curious legs and rests on the inside of his elbow. Matt sniffs it, decides it’s not especially interesting.

The sturdiest part seems to be the tarantula’s body, so he lifts it by its middle and carries it to Natasha, who sounds thankful.

“At least one of you isn’t a coward.” Nat says and Matt recognises it’s her way of thanking him. The dangling legs graze against his fingers as he deposits it back on Natasha’s palm.

“Lock that thing up!” Tony screams after Natasha.

Matt wiggles his fingers, brushing away the hair.

Chapter End Notes

I have one more animal planned but who knows? Matt seems to attract fuzzy, feathery, and scaly cuties.
Tony cradles Matt in his lap as his throat squeezes acid in the wrong direction. His head is tucked inside the rim of a bucket, bobbing up and down as he vomits.

“It’s better out.” Tony tells him soothingly, offering a bottle of water. Matt takes it in his free hand, coughs up again at the smell radiating from his digestive system. He’s much too aware of the invading virus, ripping its way through Matt’s stomach.

“Clint’s coming home tomorrow.” Tony bounces his leg to get Matt’s attention.

Matt tilts his head up, grabbing at the wall for a towel. His hand finds nothing, despite Matt being positive there’s a towel where his hand is. Tony nudges his arm to the left and, in the ‘empty space’, there’s a towel.

He brings it back to his mouth, frowning intensely. Everything is slightly askew.

He rinses with the water, spitting it out, before drinking from the bottle heartily. Too much vomiting makes his head ache from the dehydration.

“It’ll be over soon.” Tony coos, pulling Matt to his feet.

The man walks for the doorway and hits the wall with his shoulder.

Fists come flying at the plaster, breaking through it with angry knuckles. His knuckles burst open, smearing blood across the wooden frame as he hits it hopelessly, using his general sense of proprioception (Not that it isn’t also messed up; his legs are somewhere beneath him, numbed but working. He’s already twisted his left ankle twice.)

“Strawberry, that’s not going to help.” Tony moves between the boxer and the doorway, serving as a mediator. His arms lightly push Matt’s down.

“It’s like only seeing peripheral.” He tells Tony furiously, swinging a fist behind him and missing the wall; the mirror cracks under his hand but not enough to shatter as Matt’s attention was redirected to the sink he bumped into.

“Matt!” Tony shouts unhappily. The word seems slow and he suspects this counts as hurting himself.

“I’m sorry.” His head ducks as he lightly makes an attempt to inspect his knuckles but his right hand struggles to find his left. It takes a moment.

“Wow, your senses are really messed up.” Tony comments. “A normal person knows where their body is unless, for example, they’re paralysed or something.”

“I’m taking in too much, some of it gets—gets shifted around and misplaced because I’m not reading it properly.” Matt hisses, mostly at himself.

“Your brain isn’t reading it properly. You’re not choosing to do this so it’s not your fault.” Tony corrects him, then hesitates. “Would it be offensive if I lead you back into your room?”
Matt huffs, fed up with this nasty sickness. “Not just now.”

Tony puts his hands on Matt’s shoulders and guides him from behind to his room. He smells his bed a moment after his knees lightly bump into it.

“Anthony! Matthew!” A booming voice makes its way through the door. Thor.

“Matt’s not feeling great, Big Guy!” Tony shouts through the door.

Thor opens it slowly, peeks in, and then joins them in the room. His hair is tied up, so he, Bucky, and Matt all have the same look right now. Gone is the armour – Thor looks like a normal guy in his sweater and pants. Well, he would if the yellow sweater didn’t depict a lion wearing glasses. Tacky, in Tony’s opinion.

“But that is why I wish to pay Matthew a visit.” Thor presents a rock in his palm. “I have brought my Shield Brother a healing stone.”

“Healing stone.” Tony raises an eyebrow.

Matt also raises an eyebrow, but in curiosity. The stone seems to produce some kind of energy not unlike electricity. Hot but in a different way from fire.

“This one is for illnesses of the core. It is small and is to be consumed.” Thor holds the pebble in front of Matt.

Curious, he finds Thor’s hand and puts the thing in his mouth.

It’s difficult to describe how it tastes so potent but also like nothing at all. He tests his teeth against the surface, listening to the pleasant clacking noise of bone on rock. Then, he moves it to the back of his mouth and prays he can keep it down.

Matt tracks the thing’s fall into his stomach. The lining of his stomach burns and throbs painfully as its contents cool down drastically, then the temperature shifts and the lining heats up while his stomach acid cools. The smell of decay is still there, until Matt gives a small burp and it dissipates into the air.

Matt almost weeps because everything is loud at first, but then the world calms down and Matt remembers where he misplaced his body.

Thor seems happily surprised when the devil climbs onto his back from behind and wraps himself around the god like a baby bilgesnipe.

He rests his head on Thor’s shoulder until he asks about the backward-hug and is informed that it is a ‘back of piggies’ used for carrying. Thor vaguely recalls doing such a thing when his brother suffered from heat stroke. It happened so often and, now that he considers the events, his frosty skin may be of significance.

“Come, Matthew, let us ride the flying box!” Thor calls out eagerly, running from the room to the elevator.

“On my latest trip from Asgard, I did bring a creature you will find most interesting!” Thor booms, setting a golden crate easily on the kitchen island.
“Whoa, how do we know it won’t bring diseases?” Tony backs away, glaring at the box.

“Ah, I consulted a number of scholars and I am assured that this creature is the most clean.” Thor wiggles his fingers for effect as he hauls off the lid with one hand. “I present: turtle.”

Tony snorts as Matt reaches into the box. The hand-sized animal is in a spiky shell. The sharp spikes don’t hurt but they seem unusual for a turtle.

“Spud.” Matt says, flicking his head towards Bruce. He extends the animal.

“Spud? What, like a potato?” Tony asks, taking the pet instead. “I guess he’s potato-shaped…”

“Bruce.” Matt persists, pointing at the man, and then the pet. “Green.”

“It’s brown, actually.”

Thor seems exceptionally disappointed. His brow creases as he considers the small reptile. "Turtles are familiar on Midgard?"

Matt huffs, getting up and taking the pet from Tony. He hands Spud to Bruce, who hesitantly takes it in his hands.

Matt nods as if everything’s been agreed.

Chapter End Notes

So I thought Brucie would enjoy a docile animal and I know I promised one more (which should be Nat's tarantula) but I already have another planned... Matt is just Cinderella mixed with Snow White and... I guess what I'm trying to say is that's he's a Disney Princess and animals flock to him. Don't blame me, it's his fault for being cute.
Matt hasn’t been more nervous about anything in his life.

Clint is coming home.

“—upset and maybe take him out something?” Bucky says as Matt exits the elevator.

“You know, you’re allowed to spend time with him.” Tony’s voice accompanies his in response.

“Are you talking about me?” Matt asks from the doorway as he goes to collect a drink. The entire contents of the bottle disappear in a matter of seconds. Matt grabs for another.

“Buckster was fussing over you.” Tony shrugs, plucking the empty bottle from Matt and tossing it at the recycling bin. “Thinks you’re sad about Birdbrain coming home. ‘Sat true?”

“I don’t want him to be mad.” Matt shuffles. He hadn’t expected to be questioned about anything on his journey for water. His knuckles ache as he rubs the scabs nervously. “Because I hurt myself. But it wasn’t like that.”

“Being negligent with your health and wellbeing is also self-harm, Sugarplum.” Tony says slowly. “And I don’t think Barton will be happy but he won’t get angry at you. Promise, I’ll tell him off if he does.”

Matt smiles shyly.

“Let’s go shopping!” Tony sticks a finger up for emphasis. “Buckaroo, you too! We’ll get all pretty for Clint coming back.”

“Pretty?” Bucky raises an eyebrow. He gives Tony one of his ‘I have too much self-respect for this’ looks.

“Pretty isn’t just for girls, Barnes!” Tony crosses his arms haughtily. “I, for one, want a pedicure and Matt needs new clothes.”

“I have enough clothes.” Matt protests, but then he considers that Tony might buy him some toys if he joins them. Plus it wastes some time until Clint returns in the evening.

“You need softer clothes.” Tony amends, ruffling Matt’s hair.

They don’t bring Dice because, for once, Matt feels bad about the concept of leaving Lucky without a canine companion. His cane with suffice.

“Just saying, you could have made an effort with your hair.” Tony points out to Bucky as they strut into the mall. “Even Matt’s is somewhat straight and combed.”

“I tied it up.” Bucky grunts, sending a glare to a casual passer-by.

“And it’s a bird’s nest.” Tony huffs.

“I think it’s nice.” Matt offers his input sincerely. He can’t see it but he figures Tony’s being a bit short-tempered. It seems close to Bucky’s head and he can’t hear an awful amount of stray hairs, so
that’s good enough for him.

Matt does feel the urge to braid it.

Matt doesn’t know how to feel about the fish eating his feet.

He never expected this situation in his life but it’s *happening*, he’s got his feet in a fish tank having his flesh eaten. The noise of tearing skin is disconcerting but his feet are being kissed by tiny fish and Matt is elated. The brushing of tiny scales on his feet make his fingers squirm.

“Enjoying yourself?” Tony nudges his arm.

“Can we get a pet fish?” Matt asks. Matt thinks Sam would like a fish. Or perhaps a fish for everyone to own? An Avengers fish.

“You’re already turning the tower into a zoo.” Tony groans. “So much for no pets.”

“Emotional support pets?” Matt suggests.

Tony chuckles. “I guess we’re fucked up enough to need them.”


Matt pouts and returns to the kisses on his feet.

Matt thinks he loves Tony.

A braille bookstore. Matt doesn’t know how he knows about this place but he guesses that it’s why they spent an hour driving to this mall.

They have printed books, too, but a larger braille section than most stores. It’s beautiful.

In his excitement, he grabs Bucky’s hand and drags him along, then regrets his actions when he realises he’s tugging on his metal hand.

“Sorry.” Matt shrinks and Bucky rubs his shoulder thoughtfully before gesturing for Matt to go ahead.

They bypass the store clerk, who is probably used to offering assistance to blind customers, and go straight to the books.

Matt scans the law section, where he finds nothing explicitly exciting.

Tony’s over in another aisle, staring at nothing in particular, so Matt drags Bucky over to him. He finds out that this is the fiction side. Matt’s interest is peaked, despite not really having an interest in fiction previously.

One hand zooms over the blurb of a book Tony’s holding. Apparently it’s white and Tony finds it ‘surreal’ to see so many blank books. The story depicts a fantasy world where there are two kinds of elves. Matt figures it has a fantasy-racism vibe going on with morals and a lot of stuff to think about. He’s never liked double meanings.
The next book is about dragons and how cool they are. Matt likes this one.

Tony finds pretty quickly that braille books are heavier than printed books because even ten are making his arms ache. He’s watching Matt scan flyleaf after flyleaf, dreading the inevitable weight to fall in his arms. Bucky helps him out, taking the majority of the pile.

“They all have this in the titles, what does it mean?” Tony points something out.

Matt inspects with one hand while another searches the titles on the shelves. “Dragon.”

“You like dragons, huh?” Tony asks.

“This one’s about a wizard.” Matt points out. “Who has a pet dragon.”

“Alright, enough for now. We can look online tonight, too, if you want, but remember we have to carry these.” Tony huddles his pile into one arm and pets Matt’s head with the other.

“I-It’s ok to get them all?” Matt asks tentatively as Tony waddles with Bucky in the direction of the counter.

“Sure, Cherry Pie.” Tony flashes him a grin. “It’s only books.”

Matt pauses, clutching the only book he’s holding tightly. He remembers going to school hungry because his father had to use money on his books. And his father tried, he really tried, but sometimes they just didn’t have enough. He was a good dad, but that didn’t make him less hungry.

“Strawberry?” Tony sets down the pile. He turns to Matt with a confused look.

“This is generous, Stark, but you’ve never had to struggle with money.” Bucky says, not harshly. Actually, it sounds as if he’s trying to be nice to the other man.

“Oh, it’s… Matt, I didn’t mean anything by it, y’know. Fuck, I’m an asshole.” Tony turns away slightly, rubbing the back of his head. Then he turns to Matt. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t need to.” Matt tilts his head down. “You didn’t mean anything by it, I just…”

Matt takes a deep breath, then picks up Tony’s pile with a smile.

They don’t need words to explain it. Apologies don’t make poor people richer and rich people poorer. Matt’s fully aware that people will always have more or less and you can’t blame others for what you don’t have. He touches Tony’s arm, as if the touch will convey this.

It seems to work because Tony squeezes his shoulder.

Matt stretches out his back, cracking each bone in turn, as they sit for dinner.

Bucky glances at him, turns his head down to Matt’s back-area, and then at his menu.

“They didn’t give you a braille menu.” Bucky says, muscles stuff.

“They probably forgot.” Matt trails his fingers across the wooden surface of the table. Slowly, because too quickly will burn his nerves.

“You’re holding a God damned cane.” Bucky growls.
“Just leave it, Tony can tell me.” Matt whines, tilting his head to the other man in support.

Tony calls the waitress back, however, because he’s a mean jerk. “Excuse me, my friend needs a braille menu.”

“Sir, your friend is Daredevil.” She clears her throat, clearly not a fan of the Avengers. “I doubt Daredevil needs a braille menu.”

“Well you should know he can beat the shit out of you.” Bucky murmurs.

“Would you…?” Tony snaps at Buck, then glares down the waitress. “A blind man can’t be a superhero? You should also know I have a whole department of lawyers who’d be happy to explain to a judge why your ableist ass isn’t complying with ADA requirements, so go get him a fucking braille menu.”

Tony’s drawn some attention and Matt really wants to go home. He dips his head and holds his breath because he wants to go home now.

“Now she’ll get a menu for the next blind person that comes in.” Tony clears his throat, clasping his hands in front of him. “Plus you can’t read ink if it’s a laminated surface, right? Plum?”

Tony frowns at Matt.

Matt’s eyes close and a tiny breath sneaks through his lips. Nothing is making sense.

Not when Tony’s getting everyone’s attention and Matt has to deal with the eyes he knows are looking at him.

“Oh, this is a…” Tony shuffles his chair closer when Matt starts rocking on his chair since he can’t do it on his heels while sitting. It’s not the pleasant rolling of bone, however, it’s sharp and erratic and I want to be happy again because I hate this.

“Hey, Sugarplum.” Tony ever-so-slightly grazes his fingertip against the back of Matt’s hand. When he doesn’t pull away, Tony eases his limp hand into Tony’s own. “What don’t you like right now?”

Matt’s face floods with blood, causing his cheeks to heat up.


“Right.” Tony nods, takes a glance around the room. “I can’t force them to stop looking. We can go outside or, if there’s anything you’d like right now…”

“Outside.”

Tony nods, gently urges Matt up by pulling on his hand. They get up and Matt’s fast to move in the direction of the door.

They don’t talk until Matt is outside the restaurant and around the corner. Matt crouches down on the floor, breathing harshly into his knees. There’s less people here, there shouldn’t be a problem. But Matt hated the shouting and the harsh—

“Strawberry.” Tony coaxes Matt’s hand out of the warm pocket of air between his thighs and his abdomen. Matt doesn’t want to be in the world right now. “It’s alright to be upset, but maybe you
can talk to me? I might be able to help.”

“I—I didn’t like—I didn’t like that.” Matt explains in a shuddering breath, his eyes closing hard. “I want to go home. Tony, home.”

“Slow down, you’re getting ahead of yourself.” Tony hushes him. He moves from his own kneeling position and sits on the floor against the wall. “Tell me why you’re feeling bad, then we work up.”

“Too many people,” Matt insists angrily, hitting out at Tony’s arm once, then his leg twice.

“Too loud or just people?” Tony asks patiently, gently brushing back Matt’s hair when he dips his head again.

“People.” Matt shakes, sits back on his bottom. “Home.”

“Alright, how about we go back to the car with Bucky just now, yeah?” Tony suggests.

Matt nods eagerly, his hand twisting. The noise of his joint rolling is much more preferable to the horrible sensation of intimidation at being in a crowd.

Something shuts off in Matt’s head. He stops talking when Tony asks him if he’s ok or when Bucky wraps an arm around his shoulders.

His voice doesn't work as they get in the car and start driving. In fact, everything moves so quickly that they’re at the tower before Matt can think. He's not thinking. Like a blurry photo, he's stuck in one moment, the world a smear around him.

Tony and Bucky leave him in the car with Happy, their driver. Happy also leaves when a new body approaches the car.

The door opens to the scent of old mint and oranges.

Clint climbs in the car, sitting beside Matt in the back seat. He looks at Matt, moves his mouth. Matt can hear but he's not really listening.

“...ok, Matty?” Clint is saying when he pays attention.

Matt trails his fingers across the leather seat. He wants his bed.

“I hear you're feeling overwhelmed?” Clint shifts his weight, leaning on the door so he can face Matt more easily.

Matt kneads the leather, pressing the heel of his hand into it rhythmically.

Clint is here.

“I kinda miss your cooking. So maybe we could go upstairs and you can make your favourite dinner?” Clint suggests. “I’ll eat it with jalapeños.”


“Buddy?” Clint asks. He's carefully not touching Matt, not making him feel crowded.
“Dinner.” Matt agrees, twisting his head against the window. “Bed?”

“Yeah, we can go to bed afterwards.” Clint takes his hand slowly, just like Tony had done. Testing the water, so to speak, then holding it laxly. Very little pressure.

“Missed Clint.” Matt explains. The concept of speaking is difficult when his words are getting muddled in the back of his head. Pictures and sounds are forming the majority of his thoughts and translating that into speech is increasingly difficult when this intensity has its grip on him.

“I missed you too.”
“Looks great, Matty.” Clint rests his chin on Matt's shoulder as he peeks over at the boiling rice.

“You smell different.” Matt accuses in a whisper.

“Huh? Matt, Laura and I really missed each–” Clint starts explaining but Matt looks appalled.

“Ew, no.” He shakes his head, scowling. “You used different shampoo.”

“Oh.” Clint draws out the syllable. “Yeah, Laura bought this fruit one.”

“Go wash your hair.” Matt sniffs unhappy.

“What? But, Matty, I'm hungry.” Clint moans, plucking a slice of jalapeño pepper to eat without chewing.

“You don't smell like Clint.” Matt objects, walking over to where the dogs are sitting, patiently waiting for their dinner. He pets both Dice and Lucky.

“I believe Miss Nova is requesting dinner also.” Jarvis states as the elevator opens to reveal the grey cat, sitting on her own. She runs over to the island, hopping onto a stool. She wiggles her tail pleasantly.

“Hi, Nova.” Matt murmurs, running his hand through the bushy mane.

“Fine. I'll wash my hair.” Clint huffs, wandering in the direction of the hall. “But I expect fries, too.”

Matt smiles soundly and grabs a potato from the fridge.

“God, I missed your cooking.” Clint moans into his food.

Matt shuffles in his seat, pushing around his rice. He’s not particularly in the mood for eating but he knows for a fact that Clint won’t let him go to bed without a warm dinner in his stomach.

“Hey, Bud, I’d like to talk about what happened with Tony and Bucky today.” Clint says, swallowing hard on a mouthful of rice. He frowns at his plate but keeps his voice light. “Catch me up?”

“Tony wanted to go shopping.” Matt sits back in his chair. He’s pushed his single pile of rice into small clumps, hoping it appears like he’s eaten more. His hands rest in his lap as he details his day. “Fish ate my feet.”

“That sounds fun.” Clint chuckles, eating other mouthful before continuing. “And?”

“Tony bought me books.” Matt suddenly wonders where his books are.

“Matt.” Clint clears his throat. “Can you tell me about what happened at dinner?”
“The waitress didn’t give me a braille menu. It wasn’t a big deal.” Matt shrugs with one shoulder.

“Tony asked for one and made a scene.”

“Now, Matt, don’t blame Tony for what happened. That waitress was supposed to provide you a braille menu because you’re blind and you can’t read a normal menu. What if you were alone?” Clint presses. He puts his fork down. “Though, I understand that making a scene didn’t work out in the way Tony thought it would.”

Matt tilts his head down.

“He feels really bad about upsetting you.” Clint’s foot nudges Matt’s under the table. Matt’s lips quirk into a tiny smile when Clint leans across the table and tilts up his chin.

“Hey, Matty.” Clint whispers, smiling as well.

“Hi.” Matt whispers back, his voice shy.

“Bud,” Clint returns to his regular tone, “It’s important that you tell me how you felt. You know that. Be brave for me?”

Matt’s head tilts down when Clint returns to his seat. How is he supposed to explain something that he doesn’t understand himself?

“Too much.” He settles on.

“Like when you’re studying for an exam and you get stressed about it?”

Matt shakes his head. He doesn’t want to do this – to revisit the memory. It was painful and just…

He’s not sure.

“No. No, no, no.” Matt stammers, gripping the table. Clint taps a rhythm on his knuckles and Matt copies it with his own fingers against the table, speeding up the beat. It’s an inane distraction.

“Like an–Like an overflowing cup.”

“Ok. And what was bad? In that situation, for you.” Clint clarifies.

“Tony made a fuss and everyone—I could hear them talking about me and—” Matt paws at his face when his eyes threaten moisture.

“Oh, Matty.” Clint sighs, rounding the table. He presses Matt’s head against his abdomen and gently smoothes a hand through his hair. “It’s over now, you’re home. Everything’s ok.”

Matt sniffs against Clint’s shirt, breathing in the strong scent of mint past the horrible orange undertones.

Matt thinks he might be overly attached to Clint because he can’t think of any other person that makes him feel this safe.

“I’m too clingy.” He tells his friend in short sobs, wiping his wet face with both hands. Clint crouches beside his chair and removes his hands. Matt bites the inside of his cheek, hoping that he’ll stop crying and sniffling if blood pools in his mouth.

“Bud, look at me.” Clint squeezes his hands. “Do you know how strong you’re being? You’ve been treated so badly, you deserve a friend who cares about you. Hell, you have a whole team of them. All of us, we’re here for you.”
“But I m-missed you.”

Clint chuckles and swings Matt’s hands from side to side in opposite directions. “That’s because I’m awesome.”

Matt snorts and ducks his head. “I need—need to take care of you.”

“Yeah, you do.” Clint stops the swinging and crosses his legs. He rests his elbows on Matt’s knees. “And I’ll take care of you, too, Matt. That’s how friendships work.”

Matt feels the inside of his cheek burst and fill his mouth with metallic tang. He should know this. He should know how friendships work. He should be more *functional*. Why is he so different? No, why does being different make him feel so terrible?

“I wanted to hurt myself.” Matt confesses. “I shouldn’t want that.”

“No, you shouldn’t. But we’re working on it.” Clint lifts his hand up for Matt to hold. When he does, Clint starts pushing his thumb around. “And you told Tony, Bud, I’m proud of you.”

“What are you doing?” Matt moves his thumb away from Clint’s, keeping his hand in the awkward hold.

“Thumb war – you’re supposed to hold the other person’s thumb down.” Clint explains, reaching forward with his thumb to nudge Matt’s. “C’mon, let’s fight.”

“Push your thumb down?”

“Yeah, like tha—Ow!”

“Am I winning?”

“Mercy! Mercy! I give up!”

“You’re bad at this game.”

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**Chapter End Notes**

So I just finished watching Moana (finally!) and now I've finally finished this chapter! It's 02:43AM and I have to get up at 9AM :(  

But I loved writing this because Clint is just the best! So it's worth it :P
“Bud.” Clint shakes Matt's shoulder. He keeps his eyes close as awareness slowly returns to him. His arm continues shaking so he draws it away from Clint and under the warm duvet. “Matty, I know you're awake.”

“Go 'way.” He moans into the pillow, squeezing his eyes closed.

Clint laughs at him, sitting up. The duvet lifts and a cool blast of air hits Matt's midsection, making him squirm away.

Clint runs a hand through his hair, gently brushing the stray strands away. “Matty, we slept in. It's 11 o'clock, you have to get up.”

Matt decides Clint should take another holiday as he wriggles under the covers.

Clint pulls the covers away and Matt almost cries at the sudden temperature change. Jarvis turns up the heat on his own, however, and soothingly welcomes him to the new day.

“Good morning, Mr Murdock. It's 11:23AM; the weather is sunny with partial clouds. Sir has requested to speak with you and he is on his way to this floor currently. Coffee is prepared and ready in the kitchen.”

“I love you.” Matt hums into his pillow. He begrudgingly lifts his head when Clint tickles his ear.

“There you are.” Clint comments as Matt climbs out of bed. “I can't have you sleeping in on my first day back! I have a great day planned, you'll see.”

“That does sound miraculous.” Matt comments dryly.

Clint runs over his words in his head before scowling. “You know what I mean. But you'll really enjoy this!”

“I want to go to bed.” Matt complains, regardless. There's nothing so amazing that he won't want to go back to sleep in his cosy bed.

“Really? So you don't want to go horse riding?” Clint asks innocently and, wow, is he just the biggest jerk because he knows Matt wants to go horse riding.

He jumps to attention before wiggling out of bed. “Now?”

“Ok, I can see I told you a tad early.” Clint holds up his hands in surrender as Matt's face falls. “Horse riding this afternoon. Don't look at me like that.”

Matt dejectedly fiddles with the sheets before a knock rings from the door.

“Come in, Tony!” Clint calls, grabbing something from Matt's wardrobe. He tosses sweats and a t-shirt onto the bed for Matt to put on. Matt's too upset about having to wait for the horses to move.

Tony opens the door.

He makes his way over to the bed hesitantly and takes Matt's hand, very slowly. “Hey Strawberry Shortcake. You upset with me?”
Matt rests his head against Tony's shoulder. He understands that the man only had good intentions. “Love you, Tones.”

“You sap.” Tony scoffs, putting both arms around Matt and squeezing lightly. His heart flutters at the nickname.

“Clint’s taking me horse riding.” Matt stage whispers. “On real horses, right?”

“Naturally.” Clint pats his thighs thoughtfully. “Breakfast, let's go.”

Clint watches Matt eat with his right hand, his left fingers trailing over the snowy pages of his book.

“Mr Murdock, your mobile phone is ringing.” Jarvis alerts him.

Matt tilts his head, searches with his hearing. It must be on silent. He checks the table beside the elevator and, thankfully, it’s in the wicker bowl. He answers it, returning to his stool at the island.

“'Lo?” Matt murmurs softly, closing his book.

“Matthew?”

Father Lantom. Matt chokes on his toast, coughing harshly until his mouth salivates enough to swallow the dry lump.

“Matthew, are you alright?” Matt hears the phone but his throat is scratchy.

Clint pushes forward his apple juice and Matt frowns, pondering if Clint’s throwback is a worse option than suffocating. He takes a large gulp, wipes his eyes that watered during the scenario. Clint pats his back, then rubs it gently, as he stands to get Matt a bottle from the fridge.

“I’m ok.” Matt clears his throat into the phone. “Father Lantom, I didn’t expect you to call. Is there a problem?”

“No, thank goodness. I was concerned – you typically appear for church on a Sunday by Sunday basis. I only worried that you were prevented in some manner.” Lantom’s calm voice explains in a way that makes Matt feel like the worst person on Earth when he asks:

“It’s Sunday?” Matt grimaces, shuffling. “I’m ok, Father, thank you for your concern.”

“You forgot.” Lantom seems amused. “Well, I feel silly for calling.”

“No, no, I... Um, I’ve not been very good Catholic recently.” Matt sighs, standing up to pace the room. How could he forget Sunday mass?

“I doubt it’s cause for condemnation, though I fear bringing up the issue.”

“I’m glad you’re amused, Father.” Matt deadpans, stopping by the coffee table. He nudges it with his toe. “I’m busy this afternoon, actually, or I would have made the journey.”

“That seems healthy. Anything exciting?”

“Clint – my friend from Midnight Mass – he’s taking me horse riding.” Matt grins, his voice happy. It must convey to the priest.
“I do recall a pony being brought to St Agnes’ one Christmas. Sister Anne truly didn’t expect the children to riot as they did, I’m sure.”

Matt chuckles – he remembers that Christmas. The little thing has no idea what it was walking into when the children at the orphanage bombarded it with attention.

Matt wasn’t supposed to be near it – it was dangerous or something with his ‘condition’ – but he tiptoed out when the pony was getting picked up by its owner and the woman took pity on him, allowing Matt to pet the small horse.

“Yeah, but I’m allowed to go near these horses.” Matt verifies. “They’re big horses.”

“Matthew.” Lantom sighs across the phone, sounding horribly sad all of a sudden. “I do hope you enjoy yourself.”

“Thank you, Father.”

Matt hesitates with the rather large animal he senses across the pen. It’s hooves are loud, like a thundering storm as the bigger horse gallops in their direction.

Matt slips behind Clint as the animal approaches, grabbing the man’s arm.

“He’s very gentle.” The trainer tells them. “Go ahead, you can pet him.”

Matt really isn’t fond of the way the horse is following him around Clint. He presses his face into Clint’s shoulder as the animal blows hot gusts of air against his head, burning at his scalp in the cool air.

The male horse’s muscles are impressive. One kick could easily kill Matt and he’s very, very aware of this fact.

He’s doubting this trip.

“Matty, it’s ok. Give him a carrot, he’ll like it.” Clint presses the food into his hand, which Matt hides from the horse. What if it bites his hand? No, he doesn’t like the idea of that.

But the horse is sniffing his head with intrigue.

Matt slowly sticks out his hand, presenting the carrot. He holds it by the leafy ends, hoping the animal won’t bite him out of excitement.

His shoulders tingle, sending shivers down his back, as the animal laps up the carrot with velvety lips. It’s soft and furry, carefully avoiding Matt’s hand as it takes the food.

Ok, nice animal.

“It didn’t bite me.” Matt whispers to Clint, who smiles and throws an arm around Matt’s shoulders.

“He’s not going to bite you.” Matt is suddenly being pushed forward by Clint, towards the hulking beast.

Matt cringes when a wet tongue inspects his face, rough and bumpy. He wipes away the spit, deciding the animal might not be so bad. It’s like a big, deadly Lucky.
“Do you want to ride him?” The trainer, Jess, is putting something over the horse’s face. He’s already wearing a saddle and Matt assumes that he’s supposed to get on it now.

Matt nods quietly and the woman tells him how to mount the horse. She’s fully aware of his capabilities so there’s no blind issue.

He vaults onto the horse easily, but the animal is large and, once he’s up, he immediately wants off. The helmet strap digs into his throat as he ducks his head.

“Matty, you’re doing real well.” Clint reaches for his hand. “It’ll be lots of fun.”

The looped reins are supposed to be controlled with both hands. He holds the reins with his pointer, middle, and ring fingers, hands in loose fists.

The horse starts moving and Matt wobbles, feeling the lumbering animal’s weight shift terribly underneath him at a walk. It’s uncomfortable for his hips, having to endure the constant shift in movement. It’s unnatural and Matt is just starting to get overwhelmed when the trainer and Clint mount their own horses and the horse is encouraged into a trot.

Trotting is much easier. He’s lifting and raising his weight on the horse, using more of his muscles than his joints. It’s comfortable – natural – as the horse bobs up and down.

“Very well done!” Jess commends him on the movement, as does Clint when he guides his smaller horse to Matt’s right side.

“Fun?” Clint asks, grinning at him.

Matt smiles nervously, tilting his head down to the animal’s heat. The warm shape is majestic. Long legs, aerodynamic features. The muscles alone, Matt can’t stop thinking about.

It’s a beautiful animal and it’s allowing Matt to sit on it, which makes him feel a little guilty. But the horse doesn’t dislike it, so the feeling quickly fades away.

He’s not going fast enough to really feel like he’s a knight in armour, galloping towards his foe on a shiny horse. The horse is a little old and he gets tired more easily than Clint’s. In fact, the majority of their trip is walking and his hips ache in the aftermath.

It’s the best day ever.
“Matty, Charles just called me.” Clint announces as he walks into the communal living room. Matt is huddled beside Tony, who is engrossed with his phone.

“I know.” Matt snuggles in, pressing his face against Tony's shoulder. The tower seems cold, but Matt suspects it's just him.

After cancelling his last visit because Matt fell sick, Charles has been MIA. No contact, no explanations.

“Well, he's been dealing with another mutant threat but everything's sorted now and he can come here on Thursday.” Clint explains.

It's Monday, Matt notes. He nods softly against Tony's arm, a little annoyed that he's being ignored. A hand squeezes his and he realises that Tony isn't completely engrossed. He doesn't look up, however.

Matt settles down again. That is, until Tony suddenly stands up and Matt finds his face hitting the couch pillows.

Clint's heart is trilling in amusement as he stifles laughter.

Tony leaves his phone as he strides to the kitchen. Matt picks it up and tries to locate the app Tony downloaded for him. It's funny audio and the gameplay includes tapping the screen and tilting the phone. Something about a blind warrior.

Bucky arrives via the elevator and makes his way towards Matt. He sits beside the man, peeking at the phone. “Pipsqueak, what’cha up to?”

“Tony's phone.” Matt waves the device at him and accidentally touches the wrong part of the screen. He pauses, trying to figure out what he's done.

“Hey, lemme fix that.” Bucky says hurriedly, practically grabbing the phone from him.

“What was it?”

Bucky pauses. Opens his mouth, closes it again. “Uh, Tony’s… search history. You ain't wanting to see that.”

Matt hears the lie and frowns. He tilts an ear at the phone.

“Jarvis, why is Bucky lying?” Matt asks, his jaw locking.

“Sir is working on a confidential project, of which I am not permitted to disclose to those in the room.” Jarvis explains.

Matt thinks it's the truth because Jarvis doesn't lie, except by omission. He's not dishonest or deceptive.

“Pip, don't get mad, I can't tell you about it.” Bucky sighs.

Matt gets up, stuffs his hands in his pockets. He doesn't like lying. He doesn't always notice it. It's not omniscient, Matt only knows what an individual believes is a truth or a lie. If they believe their
own lie—

“You want this. Look at you, you little…”

—Matt doesn't always pick up on lies. It's difficult for him to judge by tone so he has to rely on heartbeats.

“You lied.” Matt accuses, stepping away from Bucky.

“Matty.” Clint reaches for his hand but Matt doesn't like that so he jerks away. “He’s keeping Tony's secret. Buck doesn't want to hurt you.”

“Lying hurts me!” Matt shouts, then shrinks on himself. He hurries to the elevator, needing to find someone else to spend the day with.

Matt leaves the tower because apparently all of the Avengers are busy. No, they're with Tony — Matt can hear them — keeping his secret.

He isn't fond of this feeling because he knows it well.

Jealousy.

So Matt's in New York, wandering street after street in anger, in jealousy, because he's being left out.

Matt figures he might be overreacting but it's difficult not to be a little selfish in this moment. His feelings are difficult to ignore.

He's not supposed to be alone in the city without someone because of the Stick fiasco but Matt's more worried that he doesn't have his cane and, now that his emotions are dwindling, he's not sure where he is.

It's ok. Because he has his watch.

Matt took a shower that morning. He doesn't have his watch and he has no clue where he is.

Panicking, he keeps going straight. However, straight is too straight and he trips off the edge of a road.

Cars screech around him as he gets to his feet, hurrying back onto the sidewalk. He trips on the curb but manages to stay upright this time. He can't hear much, with how stressed he is, but there's the flickering of a heartbeat somewhere close so he hurries after it, hoping it won't jump in front of traffic.

His shoulder connects with several people until he can follow the heartbeat closely enough.

However, he's a man following what he realises is a woman, wearing dark sunglasses and pushing past people, so she naturally runs away.

Blood is pumping in Matt's ears. He has no idea where he is and his phone — the stupid thing — is nowhere to be seen.

With his hand, he gropes his way to the nearest wall. Heavy-set cracks meet his hand and the whole thing feels as if it might cave in.
Matt steps away.
The footsteps of New Yorkers are gone and he's alone in what might be an alley.
Matt sniffs, his eyes watering.
How is he supposed to get home? It would take *hours* for Tony to find him in the suit.
Matt slides his way down the wall.
He feels something bumpy. The ground is cobblestone.
It reminds him of Foggy’s parents’ house. The paths around it were terribly uncomfortable to walk on. Each step was inconsistent.
Matt wonders if there's a possibility that they haven't seen the news.
Foggy's father is Edward Nelson. He married Anna after Foggy's mother abandoned them. As far as Matt's aware, Foggy's half-sister, Candace is in Europe for her gap year.
“What are you doing in there??” An angry man’s voice makes his heart lurch. He winces when the man swings something against the wall. A baseball bat?
“Rory! Calm down, I'm sure he'll be happy to leave you alone without any of…” A voice comes to his aid and he turns his face to it hopelessly. “Matt?”
“Mr Nelson?” Matt chokes out, breathing raggedly. “I'm sorry, I got lost and—”
Edward takes his arm slowly and guides him away from the other man, who sends pretty confused. Matt thinks Edward gave him a look.
It's three houses down to Foggy's parents house, where Edward invites him in.
Perhaps, somewhere in his memory, he knew where he was running.
But, now, his face is blushing as Edward has to lead him into the house.
Why did he have to run away like a stupid child? None of this would have happened! He wouldn't have got lost if he just took some time to think in his room. Clint would have left him alone if he had actually asked him.
“Matt, Son, sit there and I'll get you something to drink.” Edward tells him, paying his shoulder. He doesn't mention the crying — it's something that Anna Nelson seems more equipped to deal with.
He can't hear any other heartbeats in the house but, then again, it's difficult to even hear the kettle being turned on.
Matt buries his face in his hands, sobbing softly.
He just feels so *stupid*. He's going to need Edward's or the Avengers’ help getting home and Clint is going to shout at him for being childish. He knows it was selfish to run away, but he just wanted to be included like the others.
It's like the orphanage all over again.
“Dry your face.” Edward offers a box of tissues when he returns, placing a glass of water on the table for Matt.

Matt does so, taking off his glasses. He wipes his tears away and blows his nose before putting the glasses back on and lowering his head shamefully.

“So… We have a lot to discuss.”
Haunting

Edward Nelson stares Matt down – the man doesn’t need sight to know that. He feels horrible, like a child with his hand caught in the cookie jar.

So he explains everything to the man, crying under the pressure several times as he stammers through his words. He doesn’t mention the ra—He doesn’t mention Stick.

Crying anew, Matt takes off his glasses and grabs another tissue to clean himself up. He must be a mess.

“I’m disappointed that you didn’t tell us any of this. I’m even more disappointed that you put yourself in harm’s way.” Edward scolds him. “But you haven’t even visited in months, Young Man.”

Matt ducks his head. “I-I know, I… um…”

Matt can’t tell Foggy’s dad about all of this. It’s not as if he has any obligation to in the first place, but Matt suspects it will just burden them and he doesn’t want that.

“Got lost, then?” Edward sighs, leaning back on the couch. “Your senses don’t help with that?”

“I was just—” Matt explains, cutting himself off when he realises that ‘having emotions’ is not a reasonable explanation to anyone other than him. “C-Can I borrow your phone?”

“Um, I-I’m looking to speak to Tony Stark and I lost my phone.” Matt rambles. It’s not as if he has any idea what Tony’s phone number is so he’s talking to the reception.

“Do you have an appointment?” The fake-polite voice recites.

“No, m-my name is Matthew Michael Murdock. Can you just tell him?”

“Please hold.”

Matt frowns at the phone, then fidgets as he waits. Edward is still staring at him and Matt’s not sure if he’s angry but his disappointment is evident.

“Matt! You’d better have a good reason for running off because I swear to God we’ve been looking for you all day!” Clint shouts over the phone and Matt moves the loudness away from his ear hurriedly.

“I got lost.” Matt shuffles. “Can Tony send his car?”

“Like Hell he’s sending his car, he’s tracking the phone and heading over in the suit. Hope you like being carried.” Clint huffs angrily.

“But I’m..., I’m at Foggy’s dad’s house.”

“I thought you got lost?”

“I did get lost. But I don’t think my feet did?”
“…I’ll send a car.”

“Cherry Pie, I am going to kill you.” Tony says as he drops outside of the house in his suit.

“Clint’s already shouted at me.” Matt tells him, because Tony doesn’t really have to repeat anything.

Tony emerges from the suit and shoves his phone in Matt’s face, as if he’s able to look at the screen, and he hears a car screeching. “You almost got hit by a car.”

“Please, don’t shout at me.”

Tony examines the red streaks on Matt’s cheeks before nodding shortly. “Clint and Nelson are driving through. Want to tell me what all this is about?”

“Dad, hey, this is Clint and you’ve clearly met Tony Stark.” Foggy leads Clint into Edward’s living room. Matt is curled up on the couch, trying not to cry any more than he already has.

“Young Man, we need to have a discussion about what is a family matter and what isn’t.” Edward says sternly, then gestures to the couch. “But not now.”

“I know, I’m sorry.” Foggy slumps into a seat of his own. “I’ve just been busy with Matt’s case lately.”

“Case? I thought the court case finished?”

Matt’s breath catches in his throat. He throws a hand to Clint’s arm when his stomach churns.

“This way.” Clint grabs his arm and leads him to the kitchen, where Matt vomits up the contents of his stomach into a metal bin.

Clint pulls back his hair and places his head against Matt’s temple.

“You’re ok, everything’s ok.” Clint whispers in his ear.

“What happened?” Matt hears Edward asking and he retches again, bringing nothing up.

Matt’s head is pounding, both from the effort of vomiting and from the phantom conversation in the living room.

“I want to go home.” Matt tells Clint, not bringing his head up from the bin. He wipes his mouth, hand shaking violently. He chants the instruction several times before Clint hushes him.

“Shh.” Clint brushes back his hair. He lifts Matt up onto his weak knees and holds him tightly against his chest. “We can go home.”

A figure looming in the forefront of his mind, just behind Clint. Waiting. Waiting for Matt to let go so he can approach.

“Daddy.” Matt pleaded for help as Stick pressed him against the wall of St Agnes’ basement, knotting a rope tightly around his wrists.
Matt screamed until Stick covered his mouth with the leathery skin of his hand. “Stop fighting me.”

Matt fights against the hug, clawing at Stick. No, Clint.

“Let me go!” Matt shoves Clint, hard.

“Not touching you.” Clint holds up his hands. “I won’t touch you, Matt. We can go home, Buddy, let’s go out to the car.”

“Don’t c-come near me!” Matt screams, attracting the attention of those in the living room. Foggy stands up while Tony rushes to the door.

Matt’s hand grapples at the counter and finds a knife block. He grabs the butcher’s knife and grabs Clint, standing behind him with the knife at his neck.

Clint’s pulse remains calm.

“Get away from me! Don’t hurt me.” Matt’s head turns to hear the others, yanking Clint so he covers Matt like a shield.

“Matt. Sugarplum, you’re ok.” Tony takes a step back, gestures something at Edward and Foggy.

“No, he’s going to—he’s…” Matt gestures with the knife at the looming figure in the corner, weeping into Clint’s shoulder. “No, stop it!”

“Matt, this is a flashback.” Clint says, unnaturally calm for someone who has a knife to his throat.

“He’s going to hurt me.” Matt sobs in Clint’s ear, hiding behind his taller frame.

Clint makes a gesture to Tony, who immediately calls his gauntlets to his hands. Matt’s ear turns in the direction of the metal slates grinding over one another and locking into place.

“There, Matty, Tony won’t let anyone hurt you.” Clint assures him but Matt’s doubtful. He slowly releases Clint but keeps a tight hold on the knife. He listens carefully to where he hears the figure standing.

It seems vaguely human, but not so much like Stick. He listens to it carefully, positioning the knife to throw it or use it if he has to.

“Matty, I don’t see anyone trying to hurt you.” Clint says, carefully.

“There.” Matt points the knife, jerking back when the sound shifts slightly to the left. The knife shakes in his hand.

There’s no heat signature. No heartbeat.

Matt slowly takes a step closer to the figure, pointing with his knife. When he reaches the spot, he slashes his knife through where it should be but hits nothing.

Matt drops the knife and bolts over to Tony, worming his way between the positioned gauntlets.

He wants to go home.
“His, um… Mentor – the one that taught him all this ninja stuff.” Foggy lowers his voice as he looks at his parents. “The man, Stick, he raped Matt as a kid and also about a month ago.”

Anna gasps, covering her mouth as tears swell in her eyes.

Matt’s only ever visited with Foggy and he’s been the perfect gentleman each time, sometimes bordering on impassiveness, but he’s been a welcome member to the Nelson family ever since Foggy would bring him home on Thanksgivings and Christmases during college.

Foggy hadn’t wanted to leave his best friend in the dorms during the holiday. Firstly, Matt would study all day long, sparsely eat or drink, and most likely not leave his dorm. Secondly, Matt deserved a place where he could feel welcome.

Foggy wants Matt to know that he’ll always be there for him, even if Foggy isn’t what Matt needs right now.

Matt’s in his dragon onesie, toying with the edge of his left wing, as Clint brushes his hair.

Matt typically hates having his scalp touched in any manner but Clint is taking extra care to be gentle with the soft brush, so he’s trying to enjoy it.

“Are you guys close?” Clint asks as he slowly runs the brush over a small tug. Matt makes a fist but Clint’s hands move up to rub his scalp, soothing the pain, before he can complain.

“Foggy brings me to his parents’ home for most holidays.” Matt explains. He reaches for the necklace Bucky gave him, which is hanging from his neck, and places the end in his mouth. The metallic tang is unlike blood, but somewhat similar at the same time. It’s curious.

“That’s sweet.” Clint smiles, patting his shoulder. “I guess we kinda stole you for Christmas, huh?”

“I liked Christmas.” Matt murmurs shyly but Clint squeezes his hand to encourage him.

“Me, too.”

The door is knocked from the other side, making Clint look up suddenly. “J?”

“Mr and Mrs Nelson, Agent Barton, for Mr Murdock.” Jarvis explains.

“I didn’t mean to scare you.” Matt grabs Clint’s hand and pulls the man towards him. He doesn’t want to talk to Edward after he saw Matt looking so… And after Foggy told…

“Hey, it wasn’t your fault. Flashbacks happen.” Clint stands up, rubbing a hand across Matt’s arm. He squeezes his hand for the last time before opening the door and gesturing for Edward and Anna to go inside.

“Matt, just call if you need me.” Clint tells the redhead, then leaves, closing the door behind him.

Anna approaches slowly and sits on the bed. Edward stands not two steps away from her.

“Matt, Sweetie, it’s Anna.” She sniffs, placing her hand out for him to hold. She doesn’t narrate the
action but Matt takes it anyway, his fingers stiff and unwilling to move.

“Oh, Honey, you’re so cold.” She whispers, taking both of his hands in hers and heating them up. The tips of his fingers are icy but the warmth from Anna’s hands seeps into them. “Matt, about what happened, Ed and I are here for you. Whatever you need.”

“You and Foggy have grown into fine young men and we’re extremely proud of the both of you.” Edward says as he crosses his arms. “But you have to understand that your body isn’t going to work if it has too much pressure.”

“I’m ok.” Matt says softly because he’s having a good day, despite the drama and getting lost and fine, maybe he’s not having a good day but he hates the sound of their hearts thudding worriedly.

“Sweetie,” Anna breathes, then pulls Matt into her embrace.

Matt doesn’t do much in the hug, but he rests his head on Anna’s shoulder. He’s not sure what he’s supposed to do with his arms when he doesn’t initiate it. Matt shifts a little so he’s facing the door, Anna hugging him from the side, and works his fingers along the hem of his wing.

A scratch at the door grabs his attention. It’s not slobbering and pushy, it’s a polite knock from his classy dog. Matt stands up and hurries to the door.

Dice’s head tilts up at him as he opens the door and lets the dog in. He hops onto his bed and watches Matt, calculating.

“This is my—I got a dog.” Matt clambers back onto the bed and rests his weight partially on Dice’s back. The dog sits calmly. “His name is Dice, he’s very helpful. He can get water, do you want water? Dice, drink.”

The dog slides out from under Matt and bolts from the room. When he returns, seconds later, a bottle of water is in his mouth.

“Thank you.” Matt tells the dog, petting his head between the pointy ears. Matt then reaches for his watch on the bedside table and runs his fingers over the tactile face. “It’s dinner time. Dice wants dinner. Are you staying for dinner?”

Anna gently pets the dog’s back before taking Matt’s hands again. “You’re a part of our family, Matt, you know that we love you, don’t you?”

Matt looks down, hesitates. Dice starts licking his face when thinking becomes difficult.

“It’s dinner time.”

Matt crouches in his chair beside Clint, not really eating anything.

It’s a family dinner and both of his ‘families’ are here – Foggy’s parents and the Avengers. Matt’s not sure what to think so he’s thankful when Tony lightly pushes a glass bottle to him, keeping a hand on his shoulder. Tony isn’t happy but he knows Matt is even less happy. He’s willing to compromise by keeping an eye on their resident goofball. God knows they don’t need another alcoholic in the tower.

“Not too much, Matty, you haven’t eaten anything all day.” Clint tells him as he eats a bowl of Matt’s rice, jalapeños instead of habaneros.
Matt frowns at Clint, his lips reaching the bottle of the Scotch.

“This might take some getting used to.” Anna says to Foggy.

Matt is on his hands, balancing with his legs dangling in the air. Clint’s heartbeat is speeding, unrelentingly quick, as Matt wiggles away from him.

“Matt, you’re going to fall and hurt yourself!” Clint snaps, gasping when Matt flips backwards onto his feet. He grins cockily, bowing with open arms.

“You jackass.” Clint mutters as he grabs Matt’s abandoned onesie. “At least put your PJ’s back on.”

Matt scowls at the thought, flipping back onto his hands so he can use them to walk around the room in a circle.

“Would you have left me alone?” Matt pauses near Clint, still upside-down. “Today, if—if I’d asked.”

“Matt.” Clint crouches so he can look at Matt’s face. “We spend a lot of time together. If you ever need a moment alone, don’t be afraid to ask. The only time I would say no is if I think you’re going to hurt yourself.”

Matt thinks about gravity and its strange swirling. He vaguely remembers something about Steve being God.

“Just talk to me next time, ok?”

Matt nods, which makes him quite lightheaded as a result. He slowly rolls his body back onto the ground, lying in his underwear on the rug.

“This is your home, Matty. You shouldn’t have to run away from it.”
Matt shuffles in his sleep, nudging Clint awake.

The archer sits up and glances around the room before shifting his gaze to his companion. The smell hits him slowly and Clint pulls the covers away from Matt.

“Buddy, wake up.” Clint shakes his shoulder, causing Matt’s eyes to flutter open lazily. Then his face turns from one of peace to a grimace.

“I’m sorry.” Matt says into his pillows, not moving.

Clint kneels on the edge of the bed and reaches over to pat Matt’s shoulder. “Let’s discuss it once we get the sheets changed, h’m? I know you don’t want your bed smelling like anything other than my own fragrance.”

“You smell gross.” Matt smiles weakly into the pillow. “I like your shampoo.”

“Not gonna lie – that hurt. I’m wounded, Matt.” Clint huffs, climbing off the bed.

Matt hesitantly creeps out of the covers and shifts awkwardly as warmth heats up his inner thighs.

“Need me to be in the bathroom or are you ok being alone?” Clint asks, as casually as he would ask about the weather, as Matt strips down to his boxers.

“J-Just wait at the door?” Matt stammers, lowering his head.

“Sure, Bud.”

Clint sits in the doorway to the bathroom, petting Dice (who seems rather concerned about his owner). His back is to Matt, giving him privacy while still being near enough to help out if he needs anything.

“I haven’t, in a-a while.” Matt murmurs in the shower.

Clint hears him sliding down to the floor of the cubicle, resting his head against the wall.

“It doesn’t stop all of a sudden, Matty, it’ll take time. You’re doing really well.” Clint tells him, trying not to turn his head. He should give Matt privacy; eye contact isn’t important when Matt can’t engage, anyway. Then, a thought occurs. “Can you use your radar in a circle around you? You don’t need to turn to ‘see’ someone?”

“No, that doesn’t matter. Easier to turn my ear if it’s further away.” Matt mumbles. He taps his fingers into the water on the base of the shower, uncomfortable. He wants to stay low.

“Can you get my chair?” Matt asks softly, shifting to one side of the shower.

Clint looks up, scans the room. It’s against the cabinet under the sink. Clint grabs the plastic chair and brings it over to the shower, placing it in the space Matt created.

“Thank you.” Matt shifts onto it, closing the door, but he doesn’t move.
“Bud, it’s still early. Can you get washed?” Clint asks because Matt doesn’t seem very bothered right now.

His mouth moves but Clint misses it, what with the door being closed and steam fogging up the glass panels.

“Speak up, Matt?”

“I don’t want soap.” Matt tells Clint, wiping away the steam from the glass. Clint walks around to the door and opens it again.

“Matt, I’m tired.” Clint reasons. “Doesn’t it smell bad or something?”

“But I don’t want it.”

Clint watches Matt’s face carefully, then nods. “Ok. Why don’t you want the soap?”

“Dry.” Matt pokes the bar off of its holder and listens to it fall onto the base of the shower.

“There’s moisturiser.” Clint moves over to the cabinet and rummages around, finding the little tub. He waves it to grab Matt’s attention.

“I don’t want to touch it.” Matt closes his eyes and directs his head under the stream of water, allowing it to slick back his lengthening hair.

“Just use this afterwards and you’ll be fine.” Clint offers the tub but Matt shakes his head.

“I’m not talking about the soap.”

“Oh, Matty.” Clint sighs. He rubs a hand over his face, then turns to his friend. “Ok, we’re going to talk about this.”

“I don’t want to talk about it!” Matt shouts angrily, hitting his fist against the wall. “You are scared of yourself! Of-of your body.”

“Matt.” Clint hushes him, then clears his throat. “The male penis serves as an excretory organ for urine. It’s used to direct pee from the body. Just like your bladder and kidneys, it’s a part of the urinary tract. Just because it can be sexual doesn’t mean it is.”

Matt doesn’t face him. His head is tilted away at the wall.

“Matty, people touch their bodies all the time for non-sexual reasons. Cleaning is one of those reasons.” Clint pushes Dice away when the dog starts whining.

“Can you give me some time alone?” Matt asks in a small voice, not meeting Clint’s face.

“If I leave, are you going to hurt yourself?”

“Maybe.” Matt breathes. “I don’t know.”

Clint watches Matt’s face. He’s being honest and, if Matt can build up the courage to do that about the sensitive matter of his self-harming tendencies, then Clint can leave him alone under Jarvis’ watch.

“Ten minutes, at most.” Clint tells him. “I’ll leave Dice.”
“I really wanted to.” Matt opens the en suite door, pausing as he faces Clint. “But I didn’t do anything. I-I done the meditation thing you showed me.”

Clint remembers Matt lying on the couch, Clint telling him to tense his muscles and work his way up.

“I’m proud of you, Bud. I really am.” He sighs a breath of relief. He reaches out a hand, taking Matt’s and squeezing it. “Go get your PJ’s on and we can go back to sleep.”

Matt mourns the temporary loss of his dragon onesie and searches the braille tags on the hangers in his wardrobe for the cow onesie.

Drying himself off is uncomfortable but the soft material of the onesie soothes his skin.

Clint checks his phone as Matt climbs into bed. He quickly taps away at it, perhaps sending a message? Matt faces the phone and silently waits for Clint to finish.

When he does, he turns over and wraps his arms around Matt, shuffling them into a hug under the covers.

“G'night, Matty.”
Matt's eyes open slowly. His awareness hasn't quite returned and everything is quiet in the tower. It's just him and the smell of mint.

"Clint, wake up." Matt reaches out, shaking the other man but he finds that the archer is sitting up, quiet. His arm is bare.

"I shouldn't have let you get so attached to me."

Matt’s mouth opens part way, then closes again. What is he supposed to say to that? Clint is Matt's friend, that's what he keeps saying. Right?

Clint turns his head to Matt, then strokes his fingers across his cheek. It doesn't feel wet but Matt feels like he's crying inside.

"Look at you." Clint grinds out, his forehead creased as he presses it against Matt's, bringing their faces close.

Clint's hand slams down on Matt's shoulder, pressing him against the bed.

"How can you expect me to watch you, naked, and not make a move?" Clint tsk in his ear.

"I-I don't like this. Clint, I want to be alone." Matt whimpers, squirming underneath Clint's weight.

"It's like you're asking for it."

Clint's naked. Matt is aware of this fact in the back of his mind, like a horror story's narrative being told in his head.

And then he's between Matt's legs, touching him everywhere it hurts.

"Stop!" Matt shouts, twisting over.

"Matt." Clint moans in his ear, hot breaths as his body presses against the younger man, forcing him to--

"Matt, Matt, Matt." Clint chants as Matt falls limp, tears falling from the corners of his eyes down his temples and into his hairline.

Clint's hands are grabbing at his arms, pressing him down and shaking him so--

_Shaking him?_

"Matt!" Clint shouts in his ear.
His eyes open quickly, but everything just feels so slow. Clint's hands are on his arms, just like then, and he's holding Matt tightly, but he doesn't feel himself being pressed down.

Regardless, miners are digging away at the pit in his stomach for sensations he doesn't want. Baring then. Stripping memories naked and splaying them in the forefront of his mind.

“Get–Get away!” Matt pushes Clint's chest away, doesn't pause at the feel of his pajama t-shirt, and promptly falls off the bed.

“Matty?” Clint calls from the bed, his voice much softer. “Matt, it was a bad dream.”

“Get away! Don't touch me!” Matt screams, his feet moving in the direction of the door.

“No, no, no.” Matt chants in whispers, gasping as he runs to the elevator.

Tony. Tony likes him. Tony will be nice to him.

Matt crashes into the elevator and he doesn't hear Clint following him.

“Mr Murdock?” Jarvis asks, his voice filled with what might be emotion. Then, softly: “Matthew, can I help you?”

“Tony.” Matt sobs, his breaths sharp and sudden. “I want Tony, I want…”

“I will wake Sir.” Jarvis replies as the elevator starts to move.

“I want Tony.” Matt sobs, curling up into a ball on the floor.

Tony's there when the heavy, metal doors draw open. He steps into the elevator and sits on the floor but Matt's not in the mood; he grabs Tony and weeps earnestly into his shoulder.

Tony guides Matt so they're sitting beside each other, Matt's head nestled between Tony's neck and shoulder.

“You're safe, Sugarplum.” Tony whispers against his head, rubbing his back and squeezing him at the same time.

“It wasn't real.” Matt cries, gripping at Tony's waist.

“No, but it can still be scary.” Tony places a little kiss against his head, nothing more than chaste, and Matt appreciates it.

“Clint was, 'n the dream, he h-hurt me.” Matt shakes in Tony's arms. His hands aren't being very cooperative, trembling as they are. But he locks his arms around Tony's midsection as if the other man will slip away given the chance.

“Clint will never hurt you.” Tony tells him, his hand resting on the back of Matt's head. “By hurt, you mean…?”

“He was on top of me.” Matt swallows, closing his eyes. He feels sweaty and dry at the same time. Like his skin is dry but his hands are clamming up.

“Clint will never hurt you.” Tony reiterates in his ear.

Matt nods because he knows that.
It doesn't make him feel less nauseous.

Matt returns to his floor with Tony and Bruce (who isn't in a good mood himself and, therefore, isn't speaking often). Matt makes his way to the couch and curls up against the armrest.

Clint walks towards him sometime later, a sweet-smelling plate in his hand.

“Hey, Matty.” He stops in front of Matt, kneeling on the ground. “I made you some toast.”

Matt reaches past the toast and touches Clint’s shoulder. “Can I touch your face?”

“I thought the whole face-touching thing was a myth.” Clint comments, placing the plate on the coffee table with a click.

“Not for me.” Matt says.

It’s true, there’s nothing much that a visually impaired person can gain from face-touching, other than a basic idea of a hairstyle, any facial hair, and other minor details. Nothing extreme.

But Matt’s hypersensitivity extends through touch.

“Suuure.” Clint says, drawing out the sound. He sounds unsure, in fact, but Matt rolls with it.

“Close your eyes.” Matt tells him, moving his hands up to Clint’s forehead.

“You’re the boss.” Clint chuckles but Matt senses that he’s nervous.

Matt’s fingers trail across Clint’s hairline. His hair is mostly one messy swoop to the right, reminding Matt of a bird’s nest with its interlocking twigs. His hairline is somewhat naturally symmetrical, leading into tiny hairs that cover the rest of his face as Matt’s fingers traverse his forehead.

The top of his head is average sized but with Clint’s hair swiped back, it seems larger. His face, overall, is wide, Matt feels as he stretches his fingers along Clint’s temples.

As his index fingers draw down, Matt feels two wrinkles – mostly from the tension Matt feels in the man’s facial muscles. His fingers draw down to Clint’s eyes, shocking the archer when he trails his fingers across Clint’s eyelids, feeling his eyes rolling underneath and scrunching at the contact.

“Relax.” Matt hums. His lashes aren’t particularly long or short. “Look up.”

Matt removes his fingers and trails his fingertips under Clint’s eyes, feeling the slight bags underneath. He needs to sleep more. Matt might be at fault for that, waking twice last night.

Clint has thin eyes, Matt finds.

His nose is wide, like his face, and there’s nothing particularly interesting about it, other than the fact that Clint’s pores are filled with sebum. Matt sometimes squeezes the natural moisturiser out of his pores – it grows uncomfortable having his skin oily and filled with the waxy substance. Mainly his nose, sometimes his chin.

Matt checks Clint’s chin which, like most men, also hasn’t seen any kind of skin treatment recently. It’s also fairly small, but his overall jawline is sharp and square.
Matt’s surprised that Clint has a light goatee but no-one comments on it. In comparison, it’s a well-known fact that Tony has a goatee.

The redhead slaps his hands on Clint’s cheeks lightly but enough to startle him.

“You brat.” Clint grabs Matt under his arms and messes up his hair.

Matt smiles against his best friend’s shoulder. “I love you.”

“Well, aren’t you sweet?” Clint laughs, then squeezes Matt. “Love you too, Buddy.”

Chapter End Notes

GUYS GUYS GUYS this chapter is 1234 words :D Just saying.

Remember to kudos and comment! I love you all so much for leaving over 500 kudos!!! You guys are the best <3
Lunch With The Nelsons

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Matt, you have to get out of your PJ’s.” Foggy tells the redhead as he nibbles on toast. “Mom and Dad are meeting us at 12, remember?”

Matt wants to go to lunch with Foggy’s parents but he’s not excited at the idea of getting ready.

“Yeah, we tried that.” Clint pipes up from the couch.

“Strawberry doesn’t want to wear shoes.” Tony agrees, flicking through blueprints on his holographic phone.

“Matt, you can’t go outside barefoot.” Foggy reasons but Matt twists his body away. His feet are huddled under his body like chicks under a mother hen, protected eagerly by the rest of him.

“Matty, how about wearing the boots Tony got you? They’re fur on the inside.” Clint suggests but Matt shakes his head.

“I’ll buy you marshmallows?”

Matt hates Clint and Matt hates his boots but Matt loves the prospect of marshmallows and their fluffy texture.

“Matt, how are you, Honey?” Anna hugs him tightly and Matt soaks up the warmth quietly until she releases him.

“Foggy made me wear shoes.” Matt says because that perfectly sums up how bad his day is.

His feet are sensory being, taking in the heartbeats of millions of insects. Feeling the shifts in the earth’s surface as millions of people pitter patter across it like tiny ants. Matt’s feet are beings of their own right and they deserve freedom from the confines of a leather shoe or a fluffy boot.

Matt aches to rip off his shoes and spread his soles across the cool surface of the restaurant floor, feeling the sharp grain of wood and the vibrations of bustling customers.

“Matt, you have to wear shoes outside.” Foggy argues defensively. “Doesn’t it feel better than the ground?”

“I can walk on hot coals.” Matt mumbles, tilting his ear to the wind blowing against the glass windows. “I don’t have toe-prints.”

Foggy doesn’t say anything as his heart picks up.

Matt shuffles his feet in his boots, wondering how Foggy can really stop him from just taking them off.

“Why don’t we sit down?” Edward suggests, his voice sounding angry. Matt supposes he should stop arguing and just behave.
They sit at a booth against the far wall of the restaurant, where Matt tries to unbutton his jacket. His fingers are stiff from the cold and it’s difficult to push the buttons through the small holes. He makes three out of four but his hands are starting to ache from pressing on the metal.

“Here.” Foggy reaches over, helps him with it, and he’s finally able to slip off the jacket.

Clint picked out his clothes since he was less than enthusiastic about getting dressed – the hems are digging into his hips and wrists like blunt blades – so he’s wearing a soft jumper as long as he can put up with the jeans. Together, he guesses they look somewhat casual but more formal than his sweats and onesies.

“Thank you.” Matt says. He rubs his knuckles against the edge of the table, shifting one leg up under himself to sit on. The grating of wood against his tight flesh is satisfying – like scratching an itch.

“Here are your menus.” Matt suddenly hears a male voice handing out flat surfaces. “Sorry, I had to go in back.”

Matt smiles when he feels the bumps on his. “Thank you.”

“I’m sorry – I have to ask – you’re Daredevil, right?” The man asks eagerly. They’re in Hell’s Kitchen now and Matt wonders if that makes a difference.

“I’m Daredevil.” Matt says, continuing to rub his knuckles.

“Could you sign an autograph for my sister? She really loves you.” The man holds out the pad and pen he’s supposed to use for orders.

Matt takes the pad and judges the size of it before holding the pen.

“Her name’s Bree. B-R-E-E.”

Matt scrawls his name, focusing on getting the capital letters right. The letters seem somewhat spaced out but, to Matt’s fingers, he can make out the large, albeit wonky, letters.

“TO BREE, ARE THE HORNS TOO MUCH? – MATT MURDOCK” is scribbled on the pad, making the waiter beam.

“Thanks, Man, she’ll love it.” He says, shifting his weight. “She, uh, she got lost and you found her, brought her back to the house. I’m not sure if you remember, but… Who knows what would’ve happened. Thanks.”

Matt frowns, tilts his head back before bouncing just a little. “She had a teddy – a pig? She told me it was blue but she was lying.”

“Mr Piggles. Yeah.” He laughs before clearing his throat. “Sorry, sorry. Can I get you guys any drinks?”

“He seemed appreciative.” Anna comments softly to Matt as he sips his lemonade.

Matt tilts one ear towards her. “Bree was lost a couple of blocks away from her house. I brought her home. But she also lost Mr Piggles so I had to find him first.”

“Her heartbeat tell you the pig wasn’t blue?” Foggy asks as he takes a mouthful of soda.
Matt gives him a look, as best he can with his glasses on, and scoffs. “Pigs aren’t blue, Foggy. She was testing me but I remember what pigs look like.”

Foggy snorts into his drink, ending up choking with laughter. After he stops coughing on the bubbly liquid, which Matt promptly steals and takes a small sip of, testing the liquid. He pushes it back, not in the mood to deal with chemicals and splashing bubbles.

“How’d she know you were blind to ‘test’ you?”

“I showed her my face.” Matt shrugs, twirling the straw around in his glass. The ice clacks against the glass.

“You what? What happened to the secret identity?” Foggy demands.

“Franklin.” Anna warns him, a force not to be reckoned with. When Fogy relaxes, Matt tilts his head down.

“She was scared of the costume at first. Kids usually are so I show them my face instead. Cowl’s to scare murderers and pedophiles, not kids.” Matt murmurs into his drink. “I also showed her a couple of flips and let her wear my mask.”

“I think it’s sweet.” Anna comments pointedly. She glares at Foggy before turning to Matt again. “Sweetie, we know that you’ve not been feeling so well lately…”

“I’m fine.” Matt says hurriedly. “Ma’am.”

“Matt, you’re our family, too. No need to be so formal.” Edward scolds him, reaching across to pat his forearm. “We just want to know that you’re getting the help that you need.”

“I’m fine.” Matt repeats.

“Yes, but your senses must make it even more difficult when you have meltdowns. Are the Avengers – Mr Stark and Clint – they’re making sure you’re getting the help that you need?”

“Meltdowns?” Matt asks, pausing in sipping his lemonade. He lifts his head and frowns, then tilts his head to Foggy. “Like Bruce? Tony calls Bruce’s bad days that.”

“Well—” Foggy starts but Matt turns back to Edward and Anna. “You think I’m autistic?”

This isn’t like May. May doesn’t know him. Edward and Anna have spent holidays with Matt for years and he’s visited alongside Foggy for just as long, yet they think he’s…?

“I’m not autistic.” Matt states curtly.

“Look, it’s my fault.” Foggy sighs, raising his hands in surrender. “Matt, when we first met, you… You were a little shy.”

“Shy.”

“Yeah, shy. Awkward with talking to people in the dorms. What was I supposed to think when you refuse to wear socks or cried when you had to get dressed?” Foggy asks and Matt opens his mouth, then promptly closes it.

“Matt, autistic or not, we don’t care.” Anna clears her throat, sounding angry at Foggy. “There’s no denying that you have bad days and good days. Ed and I want to make sure that your bad days don’t turn into bad weeks or months.”
Matt’s face is screwed up, however, he’s frowning and trying not to cry at the same time. *Why doesn’t he seem functional? There’s nothing wrong with him!*

“I can do things you find difficult.” Matt points out angrily. “Why is it wrong when I can’t do things you can?”

“Because most people can’t jump off of buildings but most people can introduce themselves.” Foggy puts a hand on his shoulder but Matt shrugs it off.

“Matt, don’t be mad.” Foggy takes his hand but Matt stands up.

“Apparently I don’t know what I am and what I’m not.” He snaps. “I’m going home.”

Matt leaves the restaurant and steps into the cold streets of Hell’s Kitchen with no jacket and shivers at the cold. He picks a direction and starts running.

He needs to figure out what’s going on inside his head.

**Chapter End Notes**

Matt and Foggy’s relationship is really like a brotherly relationship to me. Siblings fight pretty much all the time (typically) but they do love each other. So even though Foggy and Matt fight so often, it’s because they have a sibling-like bond.

Remember to leave feedback and let me know what you think :)

- Again, no ableism, just that Matt feels insulted because he doesn't want to seem anything less than perfect.
Matt sits in an ally, bunched in behind a dumpster. He allows his breathes to flow freely into his chest, calming him.

“Jarvis?” Matt taps his watch.

“Yes, Matthew?” The soft voice responds.

“I just need a moment alone. Don’t tell Foggy,” Matt shuffles. “But maybe you could send Tony? I-If he’s not busy?”

A pause, then Jarvis speaks up. “Sir is on his way to your current location.”

“Is he mad ’cause I ran off?” Matt asks warily but Jarvis tell him he doesn’t think that’s the case so he can finally breathe.

“Jarvis?” Matt speaks up, his voice catching in his throat. “Do you think there’s something wrong with me?”

“I believe that you are a unique situation with a unique set of difficulties, like Sir, Sergeant Barnes, or Dr Banner.” Jarvis says carefully.

It takes several moments for Tony to drop down but, when he does, Matt shuffles out of sight.

“Cherry.” Matt hears Tony’s faceplate sliding off and the bunching of the metal dumpster as Tony leans on it. “Called for a lift?”

“I’m s-sick of people deciding who I am.” Matt says from his spot on the ground.

“Fair point.” Tony nods, then gestures to the ground. “It’s filthy down there. Want to go for a fly?”

Matt hesitantly gets to his feet and Tony lifts him princess-style. Matt rests his head on the reactor, closing his eyes and listening to the familiar hum as Tony’s rockets power up.

It took a while to fly to the tower (Tony was flying fairly slowly for Matt’s safety) but, when they arrive, Matt’s hair is a complete mess.

He bounces it into a sloppy bun with the band around his wrist, then runs into Tony’s floor, claiming the couch immediately.

Matt’s hearing tracks through the tower, funnelling sound to his ears like hurricanes of noise being stirred up.
There’s angry movements coming from the communal room. Sparring? Fighting?

Matt hurries back out to the Helipad, where Tony is having his suit removed by a horrible, looming machine.

When he finishes, Matt takes his hand and starts leading him in the direction of the elevator.

“Crimson, what’s up?” Tony asks as Matt tells Jarvis to take them to the communal room.

Matt bounces on his toes, mimicking boxing against Tony’s arm with some harmless punches.

“In the communal room?” Tony winces. “That might be angry fighting. No sparring allowed in there.”

Matt frowns, pausing to listen. He slumps against Tony until the doors open, at which point Matt’s heart rate spikes when he smells blood and Clint. Clint’s blood, to be exact.

He’s gesturing angrily at Maya, who is also responding in sign language. They don’t seem happy.

Matt’s concern is that Clint is being hurt.

Matt lunges for Maya when she steps towards Clint, blocking her path.

She tilts her head up towards his face, glaring, then makes a move to go around him but Matt grabs her arm and flips her onto her back, then holds her down with his foot.

“Murdock.” She grinds out. “Is that how you treat a lady?”

“You’re not acting very ladylike, hurting my friend.” Matt frowns.

Maya slips out of his grasp and flips onto her feet, then sends a punch for Matt. It moves like boxing, unlike how she was fighting in their last sparring session. Her movement is centered more in her hips, feet light as she steps towards him and dances back with grace.

Matt dodges her hand, but only just.

Her second punch, he doesn’t miss and it hurts. Maya has unseen strength, all of which is laid onto Matt when he raises his fists to block her.

His elbows twist down to protect his midsection as he rams his weight into her, then punches hard against her ribs.

She throws Matt, quite unexpectedly, past her. He tumbles into a forwards roll and uses his 360 degree ‘vision’ to roundhouse kick at her head when she turns on him.

“Should we…?” Tony hesitates, gesturing towards the brawl.

“Are you kidding? We’re just a couple of humans.” Clint scoffs, pointing at the duo. “Ninja and badass.”

She charges, punching, but he ducks and holds her from behind. She elbows him in the face, twisting his arm behind his back as she frees herself, then knees him and throws him to the ground. She punches but he grabs her wrist. She strikes with her free hand and he grabs it as well. Breaking loose, she hits him down with a spin kick.
Matt lands, dazed. He braces himself on his knuckles, blood dribbling from his nose.

“You’re upset.” He breathes, sitting back on his haunches. “Tell me why you’re upset.”

“And why should I tell you?” Maya presses her shoe against Matt’s chest, offsetting his balance in the slightest as she pushes him slightly. The high heel remains against his sternum.

“Because I care.” Matt replies.

The foot falls. Maya breathes.

“They’re treating you like a child because you were raped.” She grinds out, throwing a finger at Clint. “What does he know?”

Clint makes an offended squawk.

“Clint knows nothing.” Matt lifts himself to his feet, shifting over his weight. “Sometimes I get overwhelmed… Soft clothes, soft toys, something to keep my hands occupied with – it helps.”

Maya tilts her head away and there’s the rustle of fabric as she crosses her arms. “You’re gay?”

“I’m not gay!” Clint exclaims. “For the millionth time, I have a wife!”

“Wasn’t asking you.” Maya snaps, tilting her face wholly to Matt’s so she can’t see Clint or Tony’s lips.

“No, I’m straight.” Matt shifts awkwardly. “I don’t like sleeping alone, not just yet.”

Maya draws her eyes over Matt before walking directly past him to the elevator and leaving without any further comment.

“Crazy likes you. Likes-likes you.” Tony smirks, prodding Matt in the side.

Matt’s mouth opens, closes, and then opens again, all while his cheeks heat up. “No, she doesn’t!”

“She does.” Tony cackles, wrapping his arms around Matt’s waist and resting his chin against his shoulder. “Your super senses don’t tell you that?”

Matt hadn’t sensed anything particularly sexual about the encounter, which is usually the first hint. The second is a racing heart and, alright, Maya might have had a quick heart rate but they’d just been sparring.

“No.” Matt shakes his head. “Maya’s my friend.”

“Kinda seems like she wants to be more than friends.” Tony grins but Clint slaps his arm.

“Stop it, Stark, you’re freaking him out.”

“Maya?” Matt pops his head into her room, figuring privacy isn’t exactly an essential thing when Matt knows she’s sitting on her bed.

“Murdock, I’m busy.” She raises an eyebrow.

Matt steps in and closes the door behind him. She’s doing something with… Maya’s shaving her
legs. Ok, now Matt regrets his decision. At least she’s not in a towel or anything.

Matt, rolling with it, sits in the chair at her dresser and rests his head on the chair’s back.

“Tony thinks you like me and—and I’m not sure how I feel about that. Do you?” Matt trails his fingers across the dresser top, coming across some smelly bottles. They’re small and glass, so Matt taps his fingers against them.

“I don’t know. I don't want to find out.” Maya shrugs, then sniffs. “I’m asexual. So you know.”

Matt breathes a sigh of relief that he didn’t know he was holding in. The prospect of sex is the last thing he wants, at least for now.

“You’re not horrified at the idea of a woman not wanting sex.” Maya smirks, then continues running the razor up her leg. It sounds grating and sore, but she wipes her leg with something so Matt guesses that she’s done. “It’s not because of the rape. Well, maybe it is, but I don’t believe that.”

“Sex is gross.” Matt huffs, unscrewing the top on the tiny glass bottle. “What is it?”

“Blue nail polish.” Is the reply.

Like painting, Matt figures, and closes in on Maya’s outstretched foot, figuring it’s a challenge. He likes painting, though the colour thing is harder than he thought it would be. Memory is a large aspect.

“Don’t mess up my nails.” She tells him sourly, but puts up with Matt’s interest in the stinky paint.

“You have tiny toes.” Matt grins, wigging one with his fingers. She kicks his hand before resting her foot on the bed.

“You have large man feet.” Maya huffs in response, spreading her toes. Matt wipes some of the polish on the bottle rim, then starts on Maya’s toes.

“I have small feet for a man.” Matt defends himself, huffing out a short breath. “And, anyway, I’m making your feet look beautiful. Be nice.”

Maya snorts, resting back on her elbows. Matt draws the brush across her toenail, spreading the liquid evenly. It smells but paint does, too, so he puts up with it.

“Most deaf people can’t exclusively read lips.”

Matt tilts his ear. He puts the brush back in the jar, then takes off his glasses. He sets them to the side, carefully, tilting his head up to Maya.

“I—I can copy things, if I watch someone do it. I can play any instrument, do any fighting style, so long as I can physically accomplish the task.” Maya says clearing her throat.

Matt taps his foot against the chair excitedly. “You can play the piano?”

Maya rolls her eyes before wiggling her toes again to spur him into continuing.

“You're such a dweeb.”
Desires Of A Damaged Heart

Matt hears the scream just before Jarvis calls out to his maker.

“Dr Banner may require assistance, Sir.” Jarvis tell Stark who runs to the elevator, where Matt is already waiting.

When they get to Tony’s floor, Bruce is destroying the lamp in Tony’s living room. He smells no more like chemicals than usual but his blood is a river rapid and his heart is a beating drum.

“Brucie, Brucie Bear.” Tony hurries over, grabbing Bruce and turning him into a hug. Bruce, typically calm and collected, hits out at Tony, trying to squirm away and return to hitting the lamp off the ground. “Brucie, deep breaths.”

“Stop touching me!” Bruce shouts, shaking his hand in a poor attempt to calm himself down.

“I’m going to let you go and you’re going to stop hitting things, ok?” Tony hums, lessening his grip on the other man. Bruce jerks away instantly and shakes his hands, backing away from Tony.

Matt frowns, not understanding why Bruce is behaving so differently. He doesn’t seem like Bruce. In fact, he’s acting more like Matt does when he’s upset.

“Bruce, what’s wrong?” Tony asks slowly, holding up his hands in surrender. “Do you want something to stim with?”

“Get away from me. Get away, stop it!” He sobs in uneven bursts, shaking violently with each step Tony takes towards him.

“What’s stimming?” Matt tugs at Tony’s arm. He’s not enjoying this – something about listening to Bruce act out of such fear makes his own heart race anxiously.

“Not now, Matt.” Tony moves around him but Matt tries to pull back on his shirt.

Tony looks back at Bruce, then turns to Matt and lowers his voice to a whisper. “Matt, Bruce is having a meltdown. Go downstairs and talk to Clint, ok?”

Matt feels a pang of something horrid in his chest when Tony pulls away from him. It’s irrational because he can’t expect Tony to focus on him when Bruce is upset and possibly about to hurt himself or Hulk-out. He knows that in his mind.

But Tony’s heat slipping away from Matt leaves him feeling jealous. In that moment, he wants Tony and Bruce and cuddling on the couch and he’s aware that it’s selfish but Matt wants to grab Tony and pull him back.

He listens, unsure what to do, as Tony approaches Bruce hesitantly and starts talking in the tone of voice Matt likes to hear.

It’s selfish to want the attention. It’s selfish to have a tower full of people who want to hug him yet still feel jealous because Bruce is getting some attention of his own. No, that’s not it. It’s that Tony pulled away from Matt to give Bruce attention.

Matt ventured up to this floor with a plan of helping Bruce, just like he occasionally does with Matt. Not to steal Tony away from him.
With a tight throat and stiff shoulders, Matt takes the first step towards the elevator. Each step after that is more and more painful but easier to make.

Tony doesn’t call after him and that shouldn’t hurt as much as it does.

“Is Bruce ok?” Clint pats his shoulder once he gets out the lift, offering a glass of his water. They’d been planning on having a movie night before therapy tomorrow.

Matt’s hand finds Clint’s arm and locks around it.

“Ow, Matt?” Clint wiggles but Matt refuses to let him go. “Matty, what’s up?”

The warmth is returning to Matt’s chest but only somewhat. Tony’s rejection is understandable but not to his boy, which grabs Clint and demands ongoing and undivided attention. His jaw clenches, hoping Clint will start to pay attention to him.

He knows it’s irrational.

“Matt, are you ok? Buddy?” Clint wiggles in the grip, trying to hug Matt without the vice around his bicep.

Matt’s not releasing him under any circumstances.

“Why don’t we go watch the movie?” Clint suggests, trying to move in the direction of the couch.

Matt pulls him back. His mouth has disappeared, for all intents and purposes, because he barely notices that he has one in the moment.

“Matt, I can’t help if you don’t tell me what’s wrong.” Clint insists, then, after a moment, he gives a glance around the other Avengers that earns him a tug from Matt. “Let’s go for a nap, h’m?”

Some part of Matt is starting to get angry because it shouldn’t be this difficult for Clint to get it right. He just wants some attention, that’s all. It’s reasonable, right? Right?

But Clint keeps looking away or suggesting that they go to sleep and it’s making him impatient.

Clint knows this.

“Matt, I can’t read your mind. Tell me what you want.” Clint huffs after Matt draws him away from Dice and Lucky, who he spared no more than a glance to. It made his blood boil with envy and hurt.

“I wanted Tony. I want Clint.” Matt hisses, tugging his arm again because Why can’t Clint just tell Matt that he loves him a couple of times? Or a lot.

“You’re angry because Tony sent you away?” Clint guesses. “Because—”

“I know!” Matt grinds out. “Bruce was upset, Bruce needed help.”

“Tony can’t do everything at once.”

Matt gets up and paces the room. Clint isn’t doing anything right. He’s not helping. Matt feels
drawn to Clint but also repelled.

“Matt, it looks like you’re finding this situation really difficult and I want to help but I really don’t know what to do when you keep getting angry with me.” He explains, slowly so that Matt can work his head around the words.

Matt doesn’t know what he wants.

He wants to hug but it doesn’t feel like enough.

He wants to feel loved but he’s not sure how that works.

He doesn’t bring it up.
“Matty?” Clint’s voice echoes along the corridor. “Where are you, Bud? Jarvis?”

Matt huddles up in the shower cubicle, sniffing against his knees.

When Clint steps into the room, he slowly walks over and turns off the shower head. He crouches on the floor, glancing down at Matt's dripping clothes.

“I had a bad dream.” Matt explains himself in shivers, tilting his head against the wall.

“Charles is coming today. Want to wait until then to talk about it?” Clint offers, reaching for Matt’s arm. He watches the redhead snuffle and blink away some tears before nodding. “Ok, let's get you dried.”

“I'm sorry.” Matt clambers to his feet and follows Clint into the bathroom mat.

“You're sad. That's ok.” Clint offers a towel, rubbing most of the wetness from his friend's hair. It puffs up, despite being damp, and makes him look like an adolescent lion.

“Clint, I want to go to bed.” Matt complains, peeling off his sopping shirt and then his sweats. He waddles from the room, the hairs on his arms prickling at the cold, and makes his way into their bedroom.

“Buddy, you have to talk to Charles today.” Clint reiterates. He offers a onesie from Matt's closet while Matt searches for a fresh pair of underwear. “But how about we cuddle on the couch? That's fun, right?”

Matt’s hand trails across the top of his dresser, lax, as he nods. The sad look on his face makes Clint's chest ache but he knows how important therapy is for Matt.

“Good morning!” Clint calls out to the bald man when he wheels from his jet. “Nice flight?”

“Matthew is downstairs.” Charles says, pausing in his movements to stare at Clint and, Man, does it make him feel uncomfortable knowing this telepath could see all the thoughts in his head. Most of them aren't even sincere.

“Yeah, he's not feeling great today.” Clint winces. “He wants to talk about a nightmare.”

Charles nods gently, then pats Clint's shoulder. “Then let us make haste.”

When the duo arrive downstairs, Matt is gone from the couch. Hits blanket is trailing across the floor in the direction of the bedroom and Clint frowns.

“Wait here.” He tells Charles, moving towards the hall.

He knocks on the door before stepping inside, which lets Matt know he's angry. Clint never knocks, there's no need to.

“Matt, you're not supposed to be in bed. Charles is here.” Clint says through the door. When Matt doesn’t shift, he opens the door and glowers for his own benefit. He belatedly crosses his arms to convey his disapproval to the lump on the bed. “Matt, Charles is here.”
“I want to stay in bed.” Matt whines, nestling his face into the covers.

“Matt, I told you earlier that you can’t stay in bed all day. Especially when Charles flew all the way here to see you.” Clint approaches the bed, peeling off the covers.

Matt grabs at them, fighting, but Clint doesn’t entertain him and drops the sheets, sighing. He takes a deep breath to center himself, then clears his throat. “I’m not asking you to write your memoir for him. I’m asking you to try.”

“You’re not being fair!” Matt shouts in protest but Clint hits one side of the bed, causing Matt to jump back.

“I’m not the one who isn’t being fair.” Clint says evenly. He sighs, standing up properly. “Matt, no, I didn’t mean to…”

He gestures to the bed, then extends an arm to Matt but he jerks back.

“Get out.” Matt whispers, jumping back against the headboard. “Charles!”

Clint suddenly finds himself frozen in place, standing completely still.

The door opens behind him and Clint struggles in a futile attempt to turn his head but nothing happens. Charles wheels past Clint, carefully approaching the bed where Matt is pressed against the wall.

“You weren’t going to hurt him.” Charles’ head doesn’t turn to Clint. “But you scared him, so turn around and return to the communal floor.”

Without any volition of his own, Clint spins around and walks from the room, completely silent.

Charles turns to Matt, who is crying quietly, a growing dark patch between his legs. Charles takes a deep breath, then smiles at the redhead. “Matthew, I can’t be of much physical help, but perhaps I can call someone else who is? Would that be alright with you?”

Matt closes his eyes, takes off his glasses and rubs a hand over his face, then nods shakily. Then his hand grabs out for Charles’ shoulder. “Don’t leave.”

“Shall I call one of the Avengers, Mr Murdock?” Jarvis offers from the ceiling.

“Bucky.” Matt listens as Charles re-positions his chair in order to lean over and hug Matt. He leans into Charles’ warmth, a little upset that Clint wouldn’t even let him explain himself, somewhat upset that Clint would hit the bed, and very upset that he embarrassed himself.

“Come in.” Charles calls as Bucky’s footsteps grow nearer. The door swings open slowly. Matt, as an afterthought, draws the bedsheets up to his chest. “James, I could use your assistance.”

“Uh, sure.” Bucky steps in, closing the door behind him.

“Matthew.” Charles taps his hand but Matt’s not a baby, so he takes away the sheets and shuffles out of bed.

“Could—Could you get the sheets?” Matt turns his head, shakily wiping a hand across his face as he heads to the bathroom.

“You don’t need help?” Bucky offers but Matt’s closing the door on him.
“Shall we discuss what happened?” Charles suggests from the couch – his wheelchair is within reach. Matt’s wearing his sweats and one of Tony’s Metallica shirts. “Or, of course, a topic of your choosing.”

Bucky’s scent is hovering in the utility room, fumbling with the washing machine.

“I do it, sometimes, if I’m scared like… like when it happened.” Matt turns his head, then moves to perch on the couch. “Clint thinks I had a nightmare.”

“You didn’t?”

“I did.” Matt draws up his legs, snuggling into them. “But it was more like a dream.”

“I see.” Charles nods patiently, waiting for Matt to elaborate. “That seems quite the misinterpretation.”

Matt tilts his head down, gulping. He takes a deep breath before lifting his face to Charles and gritting his teeth.

“It was about my dad.”
“Maybe if I go to bed, go to sleep, I can dream about him again.” Matt tilts his head downwards, squeezing his hands into fists. “I’ve never dreamed about him before…”

Charles nods from beside Matt. He's an old man, yes, and it's easy to find the youth in those around him, but he's never quite seen Matt as small as he is right now. Matt is hunched over, his smile trembling, as though he's on the verge of crying, and his mind is calling out.

“Daddy, Daddy, Daddy.”

“Alright.” Charles pats the couch cushions, deep in thought. “There's a theory I have and I should like to discuss it with you.”

Matt looks up warily, his eyes falling somewhere past Charles’ elbow. An ear is tilted in his direction, listening.

“You've lived with a lot of different people. Moved often.” Charles clears his throat. “Separation from a primary caregiver can cause what is known as an attachment disorder—”

“My dad loved me!” Matt growls out, standing up suddenly. He grabs at his head as Charles can sense, he grows minutely lightheaded. Then, the anger sets in. “He was a good dad!”

“That's not my point.” Charles extends a hand, which Matt hesitantly takes and curls up on the couch again, leaning his head on Charles’ shoulder. “I should like you to listen to my explanation, Matthew.”

Matt dips his head, hiding it between Charles' shoulder and the back of the couch. “Sorry.”

“Now. Your mother left when you were very young, I'm aware. And I suspect your time at the orphanage wasn't especially personal.” Charles clears his throat, carefully keeping an eye on the swirl of emotions in Matt's head. “It provides an explanation for your lack of social understanding. The need to be so intimate with your friends.”

“Clint likes cuddling.” Matt whines.

Charles breathes a deep sigh, a thoughtful noise. He moves his hand to Matt's shoulder, gently patting his arm.

Matt's thoughts switch almost immediately to calm sensations of heat and warmth, his worries expelled instantly. In fact, his sensory input decreases as he focuses solely on the gentle touch.

When Charles moves his hand away, Matt thinks only of coldness and emptiness. His thoughts turn worried as loneliness plagues his thoughts.

“Your father, how was he after your mother left?” Charles sends the thought to Matt’s mind, allowing him to ignore it if that’s what he wants.

“Sad.” Matt says, nothing more.
“Matt, about earlier—” Clint bombards him when he exits the elevator to the communal floor with Charles behind him. Instead, Matt clambers onto the couch and sprawls across Clint’s lap.

“Mr Stark, a moment of your time?” Charles gestures and they leave via the elevator.

Matt shuffles in Clint’s lap.

“What’s going on?” Clint prods Matt’s side, making him squirm. However, Matt slaps his arm away and curls his face into Clint’s stomach.

“Cuddle.” Matt murmurs.

“Alright, Bud.” Clint leans down, gently kisses his head. “Again, I’m sorry.”

“Matty?”

His father moved towards Matt’s blue bed, with his old woollen blanket and lumpy pillow.

Matt extended his arms, reaching out for his father’s chest. Instead of picking him up, Jack took his thin, tiny hands and held them in his. Matt, frustrated, wiggled one hand free and reached up for his dad’s neck, but the man refused to lift him.

“What’re you doing?” Jack hummed, situating him back under his covers. Matt gathered up the blanket instead and, like a baby monkey, wrapped himself around it and clings to the soft material. Jack petted his soft hair. “My boy.”

“Daddy.” Matt reached, once more, but Jack didn’t reciprocate.

“Look at me, Matty.” Jack beckoned, holding Matt’s head between his hands. Matt’s glance wavered across the bloodstained shirt, the broad shoulders, then focused on his father’s face. Matt planted his hands on his father’s cheeks, tracing the lines of the midnight shadow and the bumpy nose.

“Matty, look at me.” Jack frowned then, dropping his hands from Matt’s head to his shoulders. One hand patted his chest before both drew back. When he found Matt’s gaze, a small smile tugged at his lips. “My boy... I love you, Matty. I’ll do good for you.”

“Daddy.” Matt cooed again, as if it was some roundabout game that would end in affection. His father wasn’t especially affectionate, at least physically.

“Yeah, Daddy.” Jack agreed, squeezing his son’s hand.

Matt’s face scrunched up when Jack stood up, erupting in pathetic weeps, the lack of shame expected in a prepubescent boy.

“No, no, Matty.” Jack frowned, trailing his gaze across the walls before shifting to a corner of the bed, not really focusing. “Stop that.”

Matt reached out, tugs on Jack’s arm, but it was replaced with his blanket. Matt was still while his father’s arms slipped underneath him and lifted him onto a set of legs, cradled in his lap. With a calloused thumb, Jack stroked Matt’s cheek tenderly.

“Matty, my boy.” Jack whispered in his ear, situating the blanket in Matt’s lap for him to cuddle instead of Jack himself.

So Matt cuddled his blanket, while Jack cradled his son.
“Daddy.” The word rolls from Matt’s lips, like a prayer – something sacred. He vaguely feels something shifting but Matt’s too aware of how warm he feels, cradled like a small child. “Daddy, Daddy.”

“Buddy, it’s Clint. You remember me?” The warm body asks but it feels wrong. His dad was just – Daddy.

Matt grabs the shirt against his face, moves himself up, and takes a small sniff of Clint as he leans against the strong chest.

“No, Daddy—Dad, where’d—Dad!” Matt calls out, tilting his head frantically because he has to be here.

He pushes himself off of Clint, chasing something non-existent because his father was just here, right here, and now he’s gone, without a trace. How can that make sense? How can…?

“Dad!” Matt screams, throwing open the door of a meeting room. When he finds nothing, Matt brushes past Clint, who tries to grab him. Matt opens another door and another and another—

Clint grabs Matt’s arm and draws him back, pulling against Matt’s frantic attempt to search. Why isn’t he helping? Why isn’t Clint helping?

“Bud, stop.” Clint presses him against the wall, forcing a knee against the wall between Matt’s legs so he can’t run away as his arms hold Matt’s head in a firm hug.

“I have to find him, I have to—” Matt chokes out but Clint is stroking his hair and Matt can’t smell mint anymore because he’s smelling—

“Daddy.” Matt wails, his hands fisting the scratchy hoodie and pulling it closer. He buries his face in the warmth of the body before him and openly wails, snotty and loud, against the figure’s chest. “Daddy – no, no – Don’t leave me!”

“Bud, I—”

“Dad.” Matt whispers into the warm and, for a long moment, there’s nothing.

Then a hand pats his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

God, I feel bad for Matt but I also love the angst. I need the angst! Enjoy :)
When Matt’s nose picks up wafts of mint, his eyes open. Everything is bleary, as if shrouded in thick fog. Matt remembers he hates fog, mists, and clouds (unless the clouds are filled with fluffy snow).

His nose leads him to a body, one he’s sitting upon.

“Matt.” A hand smoothes through his hair. “Bud, how’re you feeling?”

It comes rushing back. Crying on Clint like a baby, searching for his dad – his dead father – and just making a complete and utter fool of himself.

“I’m sorry.” Matt jerks away from Clint – he called him ‘Daddy’ -- and turns away, wiping a hand over his face. There’s some crust in the corner of his eyes, he must’ve passed out whilst crying.

“Matt, I’m not angry at you.” Clint clarifies.

They’re on his floor. Matt sniffs himself; Steve carried him up here. He sniffs again, trying not to cry because he’s a man, a grown man.

“Can we talk?” Clint pats the couch cushions.

Matt slumps back into the seat farthest from his friend, pointedly not aiming his face in Clint’s direction. He tilts it slightly to the left, instead, but not enough to be considered rude, he hopes.

“Allright, then.” Clint shifts in his seat, lifting a leg onto the cough so he can face Matt. “Here’s the deal, I have two kids and another on the way. I am a dad. I just want to be clear that you don’t want me to be anything more than I am because I love you, Buddy, but more in a friend way. I’ll still give my all for you but I’m not responsible for you, do you get me? I just want to know if this was, like, a Freudian slip-up.”

Matt tilts his head further away, blatantly ignoring Clint for a good minute. To his credit, Clint patiently waits for him to reply.

“You’re not my dad, that’d be gross.” Matt sniffs, wiping at his nose.

Shocked, Clint lets out a little laugh.

“I had a dream last night.” Matt faces forward, allowing Clint to look at half of his face. “About him. I just wanted him back and—”

Matt’s throat cuts him off, his voice stopping because he’s simply used it all up. No air, nothing left to twist into words, things that Clint can understand.

“I’m sorry.” Clint sighs, bending his arm up to scratch at the back of his head noisily. “I guess that was presumptuous of me, huh?”

“No – not after what I… I’m sorry.” Matt shakes his head emphatically.

“I guess we’re just a pair of sorry bastards.” Clint gives a small laugh, then frowns because Matt is
a bastard and he’s punched Tony before for pointing it out. Apparently it’s a Catholic thing. More like a Catholic-Matt thing, he gathers, instead. Clint sighs. “Brothers?”

Matt’s lips quirk as he extends his fist, which Clint bumps excitedly. “Don’t worry, Bruce and Stark fight like this all the time and they’re good. They’ve had more awkward moments than you can dream of.”

“They’re good friends.” Matt acknowledges but Clint grabs him, squeezing Matt’s shoulders in his arms. “Well, so are we! We’re Dumpster Bros, Matty, nothing beats that. Not even Science Bro-hood.”

Matt grins against Clint’s shoulder.

Matt is awoken by Clint that night and, after a long day of therapy, the redhead doesn’t appreciate it.

“Get ‘way!” Matt moans into his pillows, kicking at the hyperactive man. Whatever his phone told him seems to have excited him greatly.

“Matt, you have to wake up because we’re going on a journey!” Clint shouts, laughing giddily. He’s even giggling, which is almost exclusively a Matt thing. Matt kicks at Clint for waking him up.

“Buddy.” Clint whispers, crawling onto the bed and lying beside him. “Buddy, I’m gonna be a dad.”

Matt’s eyes open lazily but Matt figures his ‘nephew’ might be worth waking up for. Wait. Laura?

“Baby Matthew?” Matt tilts his head curiously, sending Clint into a fit of giggles.

“Matt, I’m gonna be a dad for the third time, get your ass out of bed!” Clint swats at him with his favourite pillow (which he unkindly stole from under Matt’s head) until he lifts onto his backside, frowning. Clint is really ruining the mood with all of his happiness. It’s too early for this shit.

“We’re going to Laura?” Matt yawns, stretching.

“Well, she’s flying out here with the kids but we have to go to the hospital because she’s there with my baby boy, Matty, be less tired!”

He’s not less tired but he does get out of bed.

Matt gets to bring Tony to the hospital, as well as Dice, as someone to spend time with while Clint is busy with Laura and her labour.

Clint’s kicked out pretty quickly.

“Apparently I worry too much. Laura’s asking for you, Matt.” Clint nudges him, frowning at the white Rubik’s cube in his hands, being shifted around. He notes the braille writing and turns his gaze to Tony with a slight smile. The engineer extends his middle finger.

Matt gives his cube to Tony, telling him to leave it alone because, dammit, he keeps ‘giving advice’ (Read: acting like a complete and utter asshole).
Clint leads Matt to the private hospital room, where he immediately goes to the flowers and sniffs cautiously. Dice is quiet at his side, but the dog wags his tail when Laura greets him.

“Thanks for coming with Clint.” Laura smiles, seeming quite relaxed if her heart is anything to go by.

“You’re not very dilated for two hours in.” Matt frowns. “Is that normal?”

Clint punches his arm, crossing his own promptly afterwards.

“Everyone is naked to me, get over it.” Matt complains, rubbing the warm patch where Clint impacted with him.

“Clinton.” Laura scolds him, brushing sweaty hair out of her face. “Labour can fluctuate, Matt, it’s nothing to worry about.”

Matt giggles to himself at ‘Clinton’, glad his name is something more normal. Then he approaches the bed, frowning at the uncomfortable sheets. “Can I touch your stomach? I want to feel the baby.”

“Human ultrasound.” Laura shrugs. “Go ahead.”

Matt doesn’t really want to make too much contact because babies are fragile and this is Clint’s baby – Matt isn’t especially lucky and he’s sure Clint would kill him if something happened. So he lightly trails his fingertips across Laura’s stomach, feeling for the thrumming of a young excited heartbeat. Matt smiles, just slightly, at the reminder that he has a family now. He supposes the growth – Matt’s finding it difficult to understand the baby as anything less than an organ with a heartbeat – is his nephew. Tilting his ear, Matt hears the small thudding.

Then Laura’s heart rate shoots up and Matt darts back, ripping himself away in a fluid jerk.

“Contraction, Matt, it’s ok.” Clint rubs his back lightly. “You were being really careful, good job.”

Matt listens and, sure enough, there’s the spasming of flesh. It’s squelchy and Matt returns to the flowers, burying his nose in the pocket of smell surrounding the fragrant petals.

“You’re gonna be a great godfather.” Clint pats him on the back and, wow, that’s new. Two roles seems like a lot of faith Clint’s putting in Matt.

“I get to witness the baptism?” Matt asks, then touches the rim of his glasses. “I’m not sure if I can, with, um—I can’t see.”

“Huh?” Clint stares at him blankly.

“I’m not sure what the rules are about blind godparents because they seem to care a lot about transgender godparents which doesn’t really seem fair but maybe I should call Father La—” Matt starts but Clint cuts him off.

“Matt—baptism?”

Matt tilts his head. “Godparent – someone who witnesses the baptism.”

“We just mean, y’know, someone who… What does a godparent do?” Clint stammers, turning to Laura.
“Take care of the baby if we die.” Laura clears up.

Matt’s chest immediately starts aching, feeling ready to burst because—

“No—I can’t take care of a baby!” Matt squeaks in horror. “They—They’re messy and I can’t even see and I’m alone, it’s not as it would have a new mother or—Clint—I—No—”

“Ok, whoa, calm.” Clint puts his hands on Matt’s shoulders. “You don’t expect us to die, do you?”

“YOU FIGHT ALIENS!” Matt screams erratically, then points at Laura. “AND YOU’RE MARRIED TO HIM.”

“It’s not really that big of a deal, Matt. You don’t have to, you’ll just be the first person called if anything were to happen to us.” Clint clears his throat.

Matt exhales deeply. He can live with that. However: “You’re not baptizing the baby?”

“We didn’t plan to.” Clint looks at Laura. “I mean, we’re not religious.”

Matt tilts his head. “My dad wasn’t really, but I still was.”

Clint shrugs. “Some people do.”

Matt tilts his head towards the baby, then his mouth falls open. “Wait, are you baptized?”

Clint shakes his head. Matt gulps, shuffling on his feet. “Ok, I’ll pray extra hard for you.”

“You do that, Buddy.” Clint smirks, patting Matt’s shoulder.

“The—The malefactor who hung beside Jesus wasn’t baptized.” Matt clears his throat after a moment of thought. “It’s not a problem.”

“I’m tainted.” Clint wiggles his fingers teasingly at Matt, who punches his arm.

He has a lot of praying to do.

Chapter End Notes

Three short things:

1) Matt is so obsessive about Catholicism because he knows that, at any point, the Avengers could die and that worries him because he wants his friends to live in the company of God and goodness. He's not trying to convert anyone or anything.

2) Of course you can go to Heaven without being baptized. Matt knows, however, that the others don't share his religion and, therefore, he's not going to insist on anything that they don't believe in. Similarly, Clint doesn't argue with Matt over baptism, he just states that it's not what they believe so it's not what they'll do. Matt agrees with this because he knows that Clint is entitled to his own belief system. The bit at the end is a joke, not serious :P

3) Matt's definition of a godparent is the Catholic definition.
Side note: Anyone know if a blind person can be a witness to things like a marriage or baptism? Obviously they can experience it (no ableism here) but is ‘witnessing’ based on a visual definition? As in, to prove that an event happened, not being present. Other than being informed by others, someone would hear the water but how would they know everything is actually happening through the other senses? Would this be valid? Would hearing/other senses be sufficient? I imagine a blind person can be a witness but feel free to hit me up with answers on this because a blind person can be a witness to a crime but it's not quite the same, so... Yeah, anyone know? Plus, transgender people can't be godparents? 2015 - Vatican? I don't see how that would be any kind of problem but...

Remember to kudos, bookmark, and comment <3
“Thank you, Matt.” Laura pants as Matt offers the cup of ice chips. Clint isn’t doing much to help, other than talking Laura’s ear off. Matt can sense he’s being appreciated, bringing ice when she gets too warm.

She’s hungry but she’s not supposed to eat anything so Matt keeps the ice supply updated regularly.

“Can I get some?” Clint asks, peeking over at Laura’s cup.

“You did this to me.” Laura grunts unhappily, spooning ice into her mouth.

When she lies down, Matt adjusts the reclining bed to a more suitable position for his back. He gets more praise, followed by Clint receiving complains about how he’s less helpful.

Matt’s quiet during that part.

“Oh, why am I on babysitting duty?” Tony stomps into the room, Cooper and Lila trailing behind. “I’m only supposed to be entertaining Matt, who cleared off, by the way.”

He huffs, taking a seat in a chair against the wall.

“Uncle Matty!” The children run at him all of a sudden, surprising him when they spontaneously grab him in a hug.

“Cooper, Lila.” Matt acknowledges, wiggling his legs. He reaches out to Tony, who gives him his cube to play with. “Come watch me finish this.”

And they do; Matt is followed to a chair where the children take great interest in him finishing the cube.

“Should’ve married Matt.” Laura pouts, laughing when Clint scowls at her.

“I’m a delight.” Matt agrees.

Matt returns to the hospital room after the nurse leaves. Then, he scowls. “I don’t know why I have to leave.”

“Uh, Bud, do you know what the nurse was doing?” Clint asks hesitantly, to which Matt slumps into a chair unhappily, extending a new cup of ice chips.

“Yes, I do.” Matt crosses his arms even as he starts blushing. “And I’m blind. Plus, my radar goes through walls so I might as well have been here.”
“Can we stop talking about my wife’s—” Clint hesitates. “Body.”

“Baby.” Matt says suddenly, frowning. Tilting his head, he ignores the spiking of Clint and Laura’s heartbeats, then smiles lightly. “It kicked.”

“I hate you.” Clint sighs in relief. Matt ignores him.

“What does he sound like?” Clint nudges Matt’s arm as they sit in the waiting room.

Matt considers.

“A scab.”

“Uncle Matty, where to babies come from?” Lila asks as she and Cooper play with the disgusting toys in the room.

“Tummy.” Matt points at his own.

“How does it come out?”

Matt’s not allowed to answer any more questions, Clint tells him quite sternly.

Matt doesn’t understand the big deal – he didn’t lie about anything. Though, maybe Clint was one of those parents who tells his children about the tooth fairy and Santa.

He’ll ask Clint about it.

Matt’s not allowed to talk.

Matt’s ears perk up suddenly as they’re sitting in the waiting room.

“Baby.” Matt pokes Clint’s arm. The tired man (it’s been eight hours) looks up in his direction.

“I’ll tell God to send you ‘downstairs’ if you tell me he’s kicked one more time.” Clint hisses, too tired to have any real malice in his voice.

“Coming out.” Matt explains.

Clint’s mouth falls open as he darts to his feet and runs in Laura’s direction.

Matt has swapped Tony for Bucky, who is sleeping, so he has no-one to fist bump. Pouting, Matt slumps in his chair.

Perhaps the anatomy lesson was a bad idea.

At least the kids know why their mommy is having contractions.
Matt swallows a mouthful of ice chips, deep in thought.

Godfather. That’s a big responsibility, especially for a Catholic.

He’s supposed to provide spiritual guardianship to this baby for the rest of his life. How exactly is *Daredevil* supposed to be a living example of the Catholic faith?

He munches on some hard ice, listening to the slow grating of it against his teeth.

*Godfather.*

Matt supposes that Clint and Laura being secular does count as ‘neglecting to teach their child the Catholic faith’ but Matt’s not sure if they want him to raise a child with a religion.

Matt’s not sure he can be a godfather and not fulfil his duties as a good Catholic. He can’t teach the child – Baby Matthew – to pray if his parents don’t want him to. That wouldn’t make him a very nice person – pushing his faith onto someone who cannot himself consent. Matt supposes waiting until he’s old enough isn’t doing his job properly, either.

But Clint wants him to be the godfather.

Matt shuffles, scooping up more ice as his chest aches in his chest.

He doesn’t want to choose between Clint and his faith, he can’t do that. Because he’ll choose Clint and it’ll break him.

Perhaps Clint will understand? He’s pretty good at that.

Clint doesn’t understand how important of a thing this is to a Catholic, however. Matt’s being called the most spiritually mature and holy of Clint’s loved ones and he doesn’t even know he’s doing it.

It’s a big deal.

Matt swallows a chip, following the coolness into his stomach.

“I just, I-I can’t be something that you’re not letting me be.” Matt struggles to choke out the words, tears on his cheeks because he really needs Clint to understand.

Clint studies him, then breathes a deep sigh.

“I get it.” He extends an arm to Matt’s shoulder. “I can’t make you do something that doesn’t align with your faith. I can’t make you do something. Period. I’ll tell Laura later.”

Matt nods, pawing tears away from his face as the hospital throbs in his ears, women screaming in all directions as they go into labour.

“Bud, thanks for speaking up.” Clint slings an arm around his shoulders. “And, hey, if my kids ask for spiritual guidance, I’ll send them to you. But, seriously, this was tough for you to say but I’m super proud that you did.”

Matt nods shakily, taking off his glasses to properly dry his eyes. Dice’s nose nuzzles his hand.
lightly until he pets the animal.

“Come see my progeny.” Clint leads him in the direction of a new room, where Matt has the dog wait outside the door. He wants the baby to stay safe and healthy, so he’s taking as many precautions as he can.

“Matt.” Laura whispers, her voice slightly slurred from her tiredness. Her body seems weary and alight with nerves, the remnants of pain evident in her body. Matt’s suffocating in the room, sweat and hurt and fear all around him.

But Clint and Laura are both so happy right now. So, so happy.

“This is Matthew Barton.” Laura rocks the shuffling baby in her arms, then extends the bundle to Matt, who sniffs it in disgust. It smells horrible and, really, Matt doesn’t understand the appeal.


“He’s gross. Just hold him.” Clint chuckles lightly from Laura’s side. He pointedly ignores their kissing.

Matt figures that newborns are gross but it will become less gross as time moves on, so that’s something to look forward to.

“Baby Matthew.” Matt whispers to the bundle of heat nestled against his chest. He’s suddenly aware of just how ignorant and helpless this thing is. An empty vessel that will fill with a personality, experiences, knowledge. Maybe some faith, if Matt’s lucky.

Matt thinks faith is a wonderful thing, so he changes his outlook. The baby will have faith in something, that’s for sure. So Matt makes that his goal as ‘the best uncle ever’ – bring faith to the child. Whether it’s in Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, or just humanity and the goodness of the world, Matt is going to show it to this ignorant bundle of snot and poop.

Babies are gross.

Chapter End Notes

So Matt doesn't like the aspect of lying to your kids in terms of the tooth fairy/where babies come from. Matt experiences things very anatomically, so this seems deceptive to him. In my opinion, I also believe that children should simply be told where babies come from if they ask. Why not? There's nothing to lose by telling a child that women have a womb that makes a baby with a man's help. I just believe that it's biology and kids should be told if they ask. However, I do understand what many people prefer to address this at an older age and that's fine. Teach how you want.

As for Santa, it's a personal choice that I have no opinion on, really. I'm not opposed to this lie because it has the positive benefit of giving a child something magical to believe in but I still think you could just... not, if you get me? Anyway, my opinion holds no relevance in your lives so DO WHAT YOU WANT :)

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Imagine Matt just meeting a newborn, though. Still smelling like the various aspects of
a woman's reproductive system and filled with that horrible newborn poop and completely unable to control it's various messes... My headcanon is that Matt only starts liking kids when they're old enough to clean themselves, at least to the degree of potty training and snot control. :D
Bucky tickles Matt's ear again, trailing his fingertip across the sensitive earlobe and wiggling against the tiny hairs.

Matt flicks his head fitfully in his sleep.

“Don't annoy him.” Clint scorns Bucky. He's exhausted. Despite Laura staying with her parents, he's been busy with calls and organising various baby-themed things. Such as a party, it seems, for the runt.

Matt's eyes draw open when Bucky tickles his ear for the umpteenth time. He slaps the man away, then pounces.

They tumble onto the ground, Matt pinning Bucky against the floor. Bucky raises an unamused eyebrow.

“Look ok, Brucie Bear?” Tony's in a suit, when he strides into the living room.

The biologist tilts his head up then screws up his face. Empathetic discomfort; Tony looks horribly overdressed.

“I'll take that as a yes.” Tony grins, messing up Bruce's hair. “You brought my notes?”

“Tony?” Matt clambers to his feet, then approaches cautiously.

“I'm due at a meeting, Plum.” Tony gives him a sorry look but Matt ignores the slight facial shift.

“Can I come?” Matt reaches out, tugging at his friend's sleeve.

“Crimson, this meeting’s really formal.” Tony pats his shoulder and takes a step to leave but Matt pulls on his sleeve once more. He gulps at the idea of Tony leaving. What if he doesn't come back?

His heart races anxiously in his chest, set on beating it's personal record.

“Ok.” Tony says when Matt's breathing becomes hitched. “You can come. But you're waiting outside during the meeting. Bring something to play with.”

Matt scans the room before approaching his ball of fluff (Nova) and carrying her towards Tony with a shy smile.

The man gives Matt's sweats and v-neck a once over before gesturing to the elevator doors.

Matt doesn't especially like the clinical feel of the SI establishment but he really doesn't like the idea of leaving Tony unattended, just in case he disappears.

So he snuggles against Nova as they ride an escalator. At the top, Tony nudges his arm and they step off.

“Now, very important meeting. You're going to be on your best behaviour and play with Nova in the reception.” Tony tells him, adjusting his cufflinks. His heartbeat is pacing anxiously in it's awkward beat.
“Ok.” Matt nods, then sits down when Tony leads him towards a row of chairs.

“Jarvis is in your watch, and you can ask the receptionist if you really need anything but– Matt, this is a really important meeting.” Tony holds his shoulders, then smiles at him. “Pet the cat.”

“Pet the cat.” Matt agrees, then turns his ear. “You'll be in there?”

Matt doesn't point so Tony assumes he's referring to the meeting room in the direction of his head tilt.

“Yeah, just in there. Listen in if you need to. But don't make trouble.” Tony reiterates, then gathers himself with a deep breath.

Matt's surprised at how anxious he is – doesn't Tony regularly have meetings? He reaches out and squeezes the engineer's hand. “You're Tony Stark. You're awesome.”

Tony laughs a wet laugh before patting Matt on the head and leaving. He steps into the room, the door lying ever so slightly ajar.

“Meow!” Nova opens her mouth at Matt, making him frown when the receptionist looks over. It's been an hour and it's almost 5PM.

“Are you hungry?” Matt asks her, tilting his head as he lifts her by her middle and listens to the rumbling emptiness of her stomach. “I didn't bring any food. Tony won't be long.”

“Meow!” Nova exclaims.

“No, we're not supposed to make any trouble.” Matt scolds her, petting her fluffy scruff as the cat is placed back in his lap.

“Meooow!” Nova leaps from Matt's lap, sniffing around before running down the corridor.

“No! Nova!” Matt hisses quietly, darting after her. “Come back!”

Nova slips through a cracked door and Matt bustles after her, chasing the animal three steps into the room before catching her.

“Bad cat.” Matt huffs, very disappointed.

“Excuse me, who is this?” A man asks, making Matt shudder. He hadn't even noticed that Tony was in here with his (hopefully new) supplier.

“Matt!” Tony hisses under his breath.

“I'm sorry, Nova ran away and she's hungry, Tony.” Matt explains desperately, turning to go when quiet footsteps round the oval table, approaching Matt from behind.

He shudders, backing away nervously.

“What a beautiful feline.” A heavily accented voice comments, reaching out a hand to stroke Nova. Matt feels her purring in her chest, then adjusts his hold on her so that the mystery man can pet her more easily.

“A Maine Coon?” He asks. “Silver. She's majestic.”
“I found her in the street as a kitten.” Matt explains proudly and the man sounds horrified at the thought, so he continues. “She was hurt so I ran to the vet and she was fixed. Now, she's healthy again. The vet thought someone abandoned her.”

The hand continues petting the cat, gently stroking her fur.

“Yeah, Matt's a real hero.” Tony pipes up nervously.

Unfortunately, so does one of the other men. “Perhaps we should resume the meeting, my–”

“I'm in the middle of something.” Mystery Man snaps, then coos at Nova. “Poor, hungry dear, shall we find you something to eat and fill your little tummy?”

Matt smiles happily because a hungry Nova is a claw-y Nova.

Tony spluttered for some reason as Tony offers Nova to the man, who fusses over her immediately.

“She feels like a lion.” Matt comments, feeling for an empty chair near Tony so he can join in.

A meeting about cats seems very enjoyable.

“Do you have any cats?” Matt asks, screwing up his face in confusion when the man sniffs sadly, just a little.

“So beautiful.” He hums, then turns his head to Matt. “I own many cats. The most majestic of cats – the panther – is my favourite.”

“You own a panther?” Matt gasps excitedly. “Tony, can we get a–”

“No.” Tony cuts him off, making Matt scowl.

“I founded a feline sanctuary, though it grows overcrowded.” He frowns.

“My king, the sanctuary is very spacious.” The other man objects and Matt's mouth falls wide open.

King?

“I plan to import a pair of Ligers. You have seen this new breed?” He's talking to Matt now, this king, and all he can do is try not to stammer.

“I'm blind.” Matt murmurs awkwardly, waving a hand at his eyes. “It’s a–It’s a long story.”

The man laughs however, when Matt shuffles. “Do you have a crown?”

“Indeed.” The man places Nova on the table and bows, not that Matt is supposed to be able to see it. He thinks it's a nice gesture. “King T’Challa of Wakanda. T’Challa, to my new friend.”

“Matthew Michael Murdock.” Matt beams, lifting Nova back into his arms. “You can call me Matt.”

“I freaking love you.” Tony grabs Matt’s had in his hands as T’Challa orders drinks from the bar, kissing him chastely on the lips.
Matt blows a raspberry, then wipes his face. “You taste like pancakes – did you have pancakes without me?”

“What Matt, you got King T’Challa to agree to my deal, do you know how often I’ve been refused by his guys?” Tony wraps an arm around his neck and beams proudly.

“He likes cats.” Matt says after a moment, not sure what Tony wants him to say.

T’Challa returns, placing wine glasses down for Matt and Tony, who politely refuses.

“I can’t.” Tony smiles ruefully. “Recovering alcoholic.”

Matt squeezes his hand supportively but accepts a glass of his own, grinning. “Smells like a mushroom.”

“I favour corked wine.” T’Challa pets a hand along Nova’s back as he rips into a plate of sushi.

Matt smiles shyly.

As T’Challa pulls out the cork, Matt notices something absorbing the screech the cork makes as it draws slowly from the bottle.

“You have… Um…” Matt struggles for the word, then reaches up to his neck. He undoes the tie on his necklace and dangles it from his hand for T’Challa to see. “You have the metal.”

“Vibranium.” T’Challa pauses, then reaches out to touch the necklace.

Matt is about to warn him that it’s been in his mouth but he thinks it won’t cause for the best impression, so he listens quietly as T’Challa touches the small shard.

“You are exceptional, my friend.” T’Challa narrows his eyes at Matt, slightly lowering his head. “How did you come of this?”

“Tony.” Matt points his thumb at Tony, who chuckles nervously.

“I took it from my friend’s arm – it’s made in Russia.” Tony raises his hands in defence but T’Challa doesn’t find the humor in the situation.

“It’s ‘made’ in Wakanda.”
The Climb

“Where’s Wakanda?”

T’Challa rests his head against the couch, deep in thought.

Matt’s frozen stiff, standing with his head tilted because *T'Challa is covered in Vibranium*. Plus, he has adorable cat ears. Matt’s initial urge is to rub up against the metal but he doubts the king will appreciate that.

“North-eastern Africa.” T’Challa flexes his cat claws and Matt can barely stop himself from squealing in delight. “North of Lake Turkhana.”

“You’re a panther.” Matt bounces on his heels, reaching out hesitantly. T’Challa offers his hand, watching closely as Matt trails his fingers over the strong claws. “So cool.”

T’Challa’s lips quirk up.

“C’n I put the helmet on? You can wear mine!” Matt eagerly drags his trunk over from where he set it on the rug, fishing inside for his mask.

They swap helmets, Matt sliding the cat mask on excitedly. From inside, everything is silent. Matt grins, stepping forward and walking into the couch. Bad idea; he can’t hear anything except blood pumping throughout his head. Nerves aching and synapses lighting up in his brain.

“—can’t see anything.” T’Challa is saying when Matt pulls off the cat mask, making him grin.

“Sight is overrated. I can’t hear in yours, though.” Matt shrugs, handing it back. He puts on his own mask and hops onto the arm of the couch, balancing. “Hey, you wanna go to the gym? There’s stuff we can climb down there and I bet I’m better at parkour!”

T’Challa’s eyes narrow as he stands up. “You’re on.”

“Do, do, do.”

Matt swings his body up onto a ledge, casually walking across the wire between the platform and a tiny cubby hole near the highest point of the gym. Tony’s been working on a gymnastics studio but it’s not completed yet.

“Do, doo, dodo, do.”

Matt flips onto his hands, walking along the strong wire upside down his palms focusing his center of gravity.

“Daredevil!” Matt sings to the tune he’s been humming. “Daredevil and Black Panther! Fighting crime – do, do, do – super parkour crime fighters, at it again!”

T’Challa is struggling with the wires, it seems, but Matt thinks he’s pretty good.

“Hey, I’m also friends with Spider-Man.” Matt calls down to him. “But he cheats ’cause he has tiny spider hairs and can walk on walls.”
T’Challa grunts as he leaps across a wire instead of walking on it, an impressive distance across.

“You must have strong legs.” Matt hums thoughtfully, then touches his own bicep thoughtfully. “I’m a boxer, mostly. It’s my favourite.”

“Boxer?” T’Challa slips on a platform but manages to claw his way up like a clumsy kitten. “If we fall…”

“I won’t fall.” Matt grins proudly, then points downwards. “But Tony made nannybots to rescue Clint – Hawkeye – when he falls. Which is a lot.”

T’Challa grins, puffing out his chest. “I haven’t fallen, yet.”

“No.” Matt nods, then focuses his hearing on the 10 meter long wire between them. “But no-one has walked this one.”

The ledge T’Challa has planted himself on is far too small to get a running start and, even if it was, there’s no way he could jump that far.

The thin wire hurts too much to shimmy across.

Tauntingly, Matt steps out onto the wire and balances on one foot, swaying from side to side. His sense of balance is impeccable, T’Challa allot.

But the man is determined to find a way across the open expanse of, well, nothingness. The wire is his only way to the cubby hole Matt is currently crawling back into.

“Try not to fall, the nannybots are made of uncomfy metal.” Matt calls across as T’Challa places a foot on the wire.

It sinks underneath him, not pulled taut. He moves back, knowing there’s no way he can walk this thing. Matt wins.

“Give up?” Matt leaps, literally, in the general direction of the wire, landing perfectly in a squat on its middle. He smiles cheekily.

“Matt!” Bruce calls suddenly from the ground below. Matt hops back onto the platform, crouching with his head sticking over the edge, as if he’s looking downward.

“Bruce!” Matt chirps, propelling himself from his squat onto a leap that drops him onto a thin cable below. He crouches, then walks along it on his hands and feet like a monkey.

“It’s dinner time.” Bruce calls, looking between Matt and T’Challa.

Matt tilts his head up, then whistles at Jarvis. One side of the wall retreats in thick blocks, leaving a ladder-like pattern for easy climbing.

Matt grins up at T’Challa, who sighs in relief. He giggles and chases the other man down the criss-cross pattern, listening in joy as his vibranium suit grates against the metal surface in delightful silence.

“Rest of my suit is red, too.” Matt pipes up, just for clarification. “Our ears sound similar but I’m the devil.”

Matt puts his fists on his hips, striking a not-so-menacing pose. Then he smiles bashfully, nudging T’Challa’s shoulder as lightly as physically possible. “That was fun, right?”
T’Challa regards his hand carefully and Matt thinks that, perhaps, he shouldn’t be hitting a king. However, the African royal pounces on him, leaving them scrambling on the floor, throwing playful punches.

Matt shoves at T’Challa when the king pins his foot down a draws a gloved finger along its underside. The redhead yelps, cackling involuntarily, before kicking fitfully at T’Challa, who eventually relents and releases his foot.

Matt pounces, this time, hopping onto T’Challa’s back with the intention of dragging him to the floor. He remains still, however, as Matt sits on his shoulders. After a silent moment, Matt tugs backwards, to no avail.

Instead, he rides on T’Challa’s shoulders, narrowly avoiding low doorways, on the way to the elevator.

Inside, Matt dangles over his new friend’s shoulder, inspecting the impressive claws. The suit isn’t pure metal, but his claws are singing to Matt.

“I admit you are an adept climber.” T’Challa grumbles as the doors open. Matt grins, sticking his head back up. He climbs down T’Challa, wrapping his legs around three strong waist and holding onto the broad set of shoulders.

“It’s easier when you can pinpoint exactly where to balance.” Matt finds something bumpy on his collarbone and traces what feels like a claw, but pinned down to T’Challa’s neckline. “Necklace?”

“Somewhat.” He looks down at his chest. “Teeth, made of vibranium.”

“Cool.” Matt grins, resting his head on the shoulder. His weight is shifted when T’Challa reaches back to support Matt’s legs, walking into what smells like a chili farm.

“My horns aren’t too much, right?” Matt pouts.

T’Challa’s head tilts and one hand reaches up to touch his own ‘ear’ self consciously. “Not too much.”

“Exactly!” Matt exclaims, hopping off at the couch, where Black Panther grins at him.

“I think they’re just jealous because they don’t have cool head-spikes.” Matt shrugs, slumping over one arm of the couch. He touches his mask thoughtfully. “I could’a been a bat. I could have been…"

Matt sits up, pretending to draw out large wings from his perched position. “Red Bat. Vigilant and mysterious, hearer of all.”

He snorts a laugh, poking Matt’s pointy ear. “Red Panda. Fluffy and auburn.”

Matt pouts, slumping back on the couch. He crosses his legs, then, leaning forward. “You should stay for dinner.”

“American food.” T’Challa grumbles unhappily while Matt spreads his arms excitedly.

“American means extra portions! And that means more chili.”

“Ah, I enjoy spice.”

From Tony’s stunned spot behind the island, he’s never seen Matt move faster than he did in that
moment. Grabbing the gloved hand, he drags T’Challa into the kitchen and rummages in the cupboard and fridge, gathering all of the peppers he can find. To Tony's surprise, the man doesn't look terrified.

“This is the hottest.” Matt presents a bag of Carolina reapers, wiggling it excitedly.

“I'll take that challenge.” T’Challa grins widely, taking off his mask.

Matt bounces on his heels, reaching eagerly for a chopping board.

Tony immediately vacates the premises.

Matt's facing T'Challa, his cheeks lit up redder than his hair. Similarly, Matt can smell the blood pounding in the king's face as they struggle with the next pepper.

Matt's on 7, T'Challa is on 9.

For one, he's aware that what goes in must come out and he's facing the scenario with trepidation. T'Challa is faster but Matt is faring better.

Meanwhile, the Avengers are gathered around the duo, various bets being implemented.

Matt's more sensitive but his control allows him to shove two peppers into his mouth, one after the other, and chew slowly, savouring the flaming spice warming his tongue.

T'Challa gags, nothing coming out, from the spice. He leans forward, holding his stomach, but keeps it in.

Matt grins, swallowing a mouthful of lava.

“Fun, Buddy?” Clint nudges his shoulder.

“It's so good.” Matt moans, then his stomach rumbles unhappily. “Not going down so well, though.”

T'Challa shoots him a glare. “I will not lose a second time.”

“Yes, you will.” Matt sticks out his tongue, frowning when T'Challa grabs another.

Matt burps softly, then catches a whiff of his own breath. Immediately, he grabs the bucket at his side and retches up his hard work.

T'Challa sighs in relief, retching voluntarily now that he's won in an attempt to expel the hotness before it reaches anywhere lower in his gut.

“Ew.” Matt hands Clint the bucket, who turns his nose away but does remove it from the room so Matt doesn't induce any more vomiting.

“You win.” Matt breathes.

“Neither of us are winners here.” T’Challa grabs his stomach, grimacing.

“Milk?”
“Milk.”
“So… you're a king.” Clint leans forward on the table, watching T’Challa carefully.

Steve is panicking while no-one else seems to care. Tony’s accustomed to Matt and T’Challa's new friendship after the day they’ve had.

“Yes.” T’Challa nods his head once.

“Of a country?” Clint tilts his head.

“I’m not sure which part confuses you.” T’Challa turns his head to Tony. “My negotiation with Mr Stark went soundly and I expect to stay in America until this is complete.”

“Really?” Tony glances up. “That’s… six months…”

“My father recently passed.” T’Challa tilts his head down, frowning deeply. He moves his head lightly to one side, looking away. “My advisors can handle Wakanda.”

A little sob causes the others to glance to Matt, who quickly removes his glasses and paws tears from his face. Before really cleaning himself, he turns to T’Challa’s side and wraps his arms around the other man, squeezing him tightly. He hears T’Challa reaching up to subtly wipe tears from the inside of his eyes, then pat Matt’s back gently.

Matt doesn’t say anything but the moment shared between them is filled with understanding.

When Matt pulls away (he’d been careful not to soak T’Challa’s suit), he wipes his face properly and sniffs, then bounces in his seat. “You can stay here, right, Tony?”

“Uh…” Tony gapes at the man – the king – who is looking at Matt impassively.

“Why not?” Matt whines, clasping his hand in T’Challa’s, setting them on the table. “He’s a superhero, too! And he’s the chili king! Tony, you can’t say no to the chili king.”

“Matt, you shouldn’t ask people things like that.” Bruce raises a finger wisely. “They feel pressured.”

Matt twitches his ear between T’Challa and Tony, then quietly removes his glasses – again – and his face crumples into a sad frown.

“I mean, if he wants to stay…”

“I suppose it would be efficient…”

Matt sniffs, nodding slightly; he keeps up the sad act, knowing T’Challa wants friends and Tony doesn’t really care.

Clint smirks from behind his face, shaking his head in amusement.
“What fighting styles do you know?” Matt’s trailing from box to box, sniffing the various contents. Matt can decipher spices and plants predominantly, wafting from most of the various packages.


“I know boxing, silat, kali, wing chun, jeet kune do, Muay Thai, tae kwon do, wushu, and judo.” Matt lists off, then hums thoughtfully. “I’m a good marksman, too.”

“I don’t use guns.” T’Challa screws up his face unhappily.

“Neither do I.”

Matt moves towards a new box. He taps one surface curiously before sticking a free hand in. T’Challa’s heart remains calm so he figures it’s alright.

“Smells like grass.” Matt comments as he sniffs the inside of a vase. He shakes it, curiously. “There’s a lot of grass in Wakanda.”

“We have many skyscrapers, however we tend to keep heavy greenery amidst the city.” T’Challa tells Matt, approaching quietly on are feet. Another reason why Matt likes him – no horrible shoe prisons.

“The view’s nice.” Matt suggests, pointing to the window, just in case T’Challa wants to spend some time looking at it. He rummages through a nearby bag, finding some cologne. When he sniffs it, he almost throws it away violently. Instead, he restrains himself and places it carefully in the bottom of the bag.

“That bad?” T’Challa sniffs himself cautiously.

“The kind of stuff people buy because it’s expensive.” Matt giggles, finding something flat and shiny. A picture? It stinks of ink. “What’s this?”

“A photograph of my father.” T’Challa kneels quietly. Matt gently hands it to him, then pats his arm lightly before rummaging again.

“Pretty?” Matt finds a bracelet, fingers its round globes.

“They’re Kimoyo beads.” T’Challa indicates to the largest. “Prime bead added since birth. Beads can be added for any situation: cellular, security, geotracking, audio/visual technology. You can text via voice or sign language.”

“You know sign language?” Matt gasps, grinning. “Clint has hearing aids and Maya, she’s my friend, is deaf. Clint taught me some fingerspelling, but I can’t read it very well…”

Matt spells out a quick greeting, but T’Challa shakes his head, making a series of different motions. “Xhosa sign language.”

Matt listens for a moment before struggling with the sound. “Kuh…”

“Xhosa. Wakanda’s national language.” T’Challa clears his throat, then starts making noises, clicking occasionally with his mouth. There’s three different ones, Matt gathers. When T’Challa quietsens, he slowly moves his mouth, trying to figure out how he done it. Slowly, he sounds each click, moving his tongue and teeth into each position.
“Ah, well done.” T’Challa grins. “Xhosa is a tonal language.”

He glances up when some more men (all Matt knows is that they have the same African accent as T’Challa and they’re obeying his every command) set T’Challa’s things around the room. Matt starts clicking his mouth, practicing the noises. Perhaps T’Challa can teach him some phrases?

“Is Wakanda warm?” Matt tugs T’Challa’s sleeve. The man crouches beside him, rummaging through his own bag as if he doesn’t know what’s inside. He might not.


Matt smiles nervously, then shifts into a cross-legged position. “Is this your first time in America? Because I’ve heard we have a certain reputation…”

T’Challa sniggers, tilting back his head. “I had expected overweight creationists, if I must be frank. I see that not to be the case.”

Matt pouts because he isn’t overweight, but…

“I’m Catholic.” He points out, rummaging more in the bag. He finds various items, nothing memorable. A small statue of a panther makes him grin.

“God?” T’Challa rolls the word off of his tongue before frowning in deep thought. He rests his chin on his knees. “I worship the Panther god.”

Matt doesn’t ask but he figures it’s a cultural thing – Wakandans really seem to like cats – so he nods along.

“I wish my god was a panther.” Matt laments in a sigh. T’Challa shoves him teasingly before standing up. He says something in his own language to the men, causing them to leave.

“Forgive me: can I ask a question?” T’Challa holds out his hand, helping Matt up when he takes it.

“Shoot.”

“Why are there so many squirrels?”

Chapter End Notes

For Daredevil’s fighting styles: https://youtu.be/SpOYbAEWb5E

People can argue others but it's not really a focus or something I have any knowledge about, so I'm just going with this.
“But we have to bond.” Matt complains as T’Challa wraps a tie around his neck and fumbles with the knot.

“Bond.” T’Challa repeats, giving Matt a once over.

He’s even wearing a suit. The black, single-breasted one. There’s no tie but his shirt is light grey and Matt thinks he probably looks fantastic.

“I’m dressed, too.” Matt points out, tightening his grip on Dice’s harness. The dog isn’t wearing his vest, but the harness is obvious enough, labelling him as a guide dog. “I want to come. Clint’s busy today and I’m bored.”

“Alright.” T’Challa relents, cocking an eyebrow. “Bring your beast.”

“Dice is a good dog.” Matt reaches down to run a hand over the furry head. “Be a good dog, Dice.”

Dice presents a paw to T’Challa, grinning toothily.

“He is intelligent, for a dog.” T’Challa comments as they stop in Tony’s convertible at the barrier before Pym Technologies.

Matt absent-mindedly strokes the car door with his fingertip while T’Challa talks to security. The car quickly pushes onward. T’Challa parks in front of the building and hands his keys away – someone seems to be expecting him – and they step through a set of double doors.

“Excuse me, that dog can’t be in here.” A voice says from Matt’s left side. He cocks an ear, then turns his face to the voice.

“He’s a service animal.”

“And this is a place of technology, we cannot have animals—” The voice argues but Matt’s hands curl up into fists.

“You’re sighted?” Matt cuts him off, frowning slightly in curiosity.

“Well, yes.”

“Ah, then you can see I don’t give a damn. He’s a guide dog, piss off.” Matt snarls. Internally, he smiles as he walks over to where he can smell T’Challa’s expensive cologne.

The man places a hand on his shoulder, squeezing him as he looks over Matt’s head at the offending character (Why must he be so short?). “This way.”

“I know.” Matt smirks, encouraging Dice to lead him to the next barrier.

T’Challa joins Matt at the disability gate, avoiding the turnstiles to their right, since Dice won’t fit through.

“ID?” The man asks.
T’Challa provides his own and Matt fumbles for some identification. T’Challa backs him up with the clarification that Matt is his guest and they’re given visitors passes.

The gate is opened for the trio and Matt urges Dice through, now relying on T’Challa for where to go. Apparently there’s a framed map on the wall.

“The elevator.” T’Challa hesitates with his hand close to Matt’s elbow.

“You can lead me by my elbow or I’ll take yours – that’s usually easier.” Matt explains, since he really has no idea where he’s going. There’s a swarm of scientists and businessmen around them, with Matt trapped in the haze of footsteps and heartbeats.

T’Challa offers his arm so Matt takes it and allows the man to lead him through a corridor, where they reach an elevator.

“Floor 14.” T’Challa tells Matt as they step inside. For once since entering the building, alone.

Matt reaches for where he hears the hum of an electric-powered panel and touches the buttons. 14 is much higher up on the grid than it is in Tony’s elevator, not that he ever uses the buttons with Jarvis there.

He presses the button, trying to remember not to light the whole thing up like a skyscraper at night when there’s no Jarvis to control where they actually go.

Dice sits patiently – on Matt’s foot, like the lovable scamp he is – while the elevator rises, depositing them on a near-empty floor.

Matt’s senses reach out, lazily interpreting rows of empty rooms.

“Where should I wait?” Matt asks when he can’t find a lobby.

“You can sit in. As long as you amuse yourself quietly.” T’Challa gestures to a door, which they enter through.

An old man – his heartbeat is slow, like Charles’ – stands to greet them after scribbling something down.

“King T’Challa, thank you for meeting with me.” The man offers his hand and they shake professionally. “And this is…?”

“Matthew Michael Murdock.” Matt greets in his usual way, rolling on the hells of his feet. “Matt. You can ignore me if you want.”

The man doesn’t answer for several seconds but, when he does, he offers his hand. “I’ll do anything but. Daredevil, am I correct?”

Matt pouts at the idea of actually having to contribute in any conversations T’Challa may have with this man, but he shakes the hand anyway. “Yup.”

“Hank Pym – nice to meet you.”

Matt touches the back of a chair, then its base, before sitting. T’Challa sits at his side, fixing his suit. “Dr Pym, as for the negotiations about my vibranium…”

Matt stops listening to the business talk and starts undoing Dice’s harness to let him know he can relax. Matt pets the dog’s head and buries his fingers in the clumps of thick fur, nestling his fingers
T’Challa’s suit is quite thick, Matt notices sometime during the conversation, and he figures the man is probably cold if he’s used to an African climate. Then again, Matt isn’t exactly sure how warm Wakanda is.

Matt hears a noise in the hall, like clipping hooves. No, something else. The **click, click, click** of… plastic? Bone? Something crunchy and thin. He swivels his head, noticing in the movement that Pym’s heart rate has increased into an anxious hum.

His head tilts again, hearing the noise slowly stop. It moves mechanically, then, in a more controlled manner. Six repetitive clicks of something against the corridor flooring.

Then, something disturbing.

Matt’s heard footsteps his entire life. Next to heartbeats, it’s one of the most common noises he hears. So he knows the tiny sound is the footsteps of miniscule feet in miniscule shoes but he can’t understand why.

“Psst.” Matt makes a noise at T’Challa, who was in the middle of talking.

With the quiet and Matt’s increased attention, he can hear something different about the hearing aid in Pym’s right ear.

“Matt, is something wrong?”

Matt shifts his head hopelessly between T’Challa and the door, realising there’s no real way of him communicating what he hears. Unless…


“I do not speak American sign language.”

Matt hopelessly jumps to his feet. Pym touches the hearing aid and creates some kind of high-pitched, almost tickly, frequency that makes Matt bolt to the door.

“Chase!” Matt shouts at Dice the Devil-dog, who leaps into action and starts running alongside Matt.

A group of scuttling, much smaller and insect-like, starts following him in a hurry.

Generally freaking out, Matt bolts towards the noise he hears in one of the spare conference rooms.

He throws open the door in a hurry and…

It’s a bug.

A freaking giant bug.

Matt pauses, then tells Dice to stop. He listens carefully for the animal, which seems alarmed by his presence.

“Sit.” Matt tells Dice, who plops down onto his backside. He watches the bug, a growl almost making its way out.
Matt slowly approaches, lowering himself to his knees so the animal doesn’t grow more frightened. It shuffles, watching him with intent.

“You’re big.” Matt comments curiously, then frowns. Tony probably wouldn’t like a giant bug in the tower. “It’s ok, I’m friendly.”

He stretches out his hand, which the bug pulls away from. Then, slowly, it creeps towards his hand.

A glossy-feeling surface bumps against his palm, rubbing gently against his hand affectionately.

“Come meet Dice, Dice is friendly, too.” Matt calls his dog forward, holding his collar.

Dice seems more frightened than the bug, which is mostly curious at this point, but Matt pets his back to let him know that the large insect is harmless.

The strange, flittering heartbeat is almost too fast for Matt’s ears to keep up with.

Matt moves his head closer, cocking an ear at the bug’s thorax. Something smells like sweat – human sweat. His nose twitches, leaning in to search for the new smell.

He trails his fingers across the animal’s exoskeleton, feeling for anything that might help. This time, Matt sniffs properly, a loud inhale that causes something on the large ant to shift.

Matt locates the small thing instantly and closes a hand over it. That is, until what feels like a punch lashes out at him from the tiny thing. Matt picks up the thing – Insect? – carefully, sniffing more and more curiously. Then: a tiny heartbeat.

“Hello?” Matt asks warily because it sounds like a tiny, tiny, tiny body.

“Hey.”
Matt jerks back when the body rapidly grows, lungs swelling up like balloons, even as the man holds his breath. Muscles stretch and pump filled with blood, throbbing fitfully around creaking bones and under stretching skin.

“T’Challa!” Matt shouts hesitantly because this man is getting bigger and Matt really doesn’t like that.

“Whoa, shit, ok.” The man grabs his arm but Matt swiftly throws him against the wall through the hold. Then, his feet dart into the hallway, where he thunders past Pym to T’Challa, who readily catches him in a secure hug.

“What have you done?” T’Challa directs over Matt’s head.

Matt feels himself trembling against T’Challa, willing himself not to cry as his eyes fill with tears. He buries his face in the man’s strong chest, shuddering breaths wrecking his body

“Scott.” Pym turns his head, his voice low and accusatory.

“I might’ve been small?” The voice laughs nervously. “I didn’t do anything!”

“Was that stupid ant—?”

“Matt, what is the problem?” T’Challa moves him back slightly, looking down at his face, meeting eye contact.

“He’s just—I’m fine, I just got a fright.” Matt hesitates, grabbing T’Challa’s hand as he controls his breaths.

“Scott, meet Daredevil.”

“Shit, so you’re the guy with the horns.”

Matt licks his way around a mint chocolate chip ice cream cone, Dice licking a vanilla scoop from a paper dish at his feet. T’Challa is enjoying a strawberry shake, but apparently Scott doesn’t like Baskin Robbins.

His large ant is on a leash, making an attempt to slurp from Dice’s dish. The dog sneezes on his face.

“Daredevil, yes.” Matt licks a long line across the ice cream. “He’s Black Panther – big claws, really fast.”

Matt hears T’Challa presenting the vibranium claws attached to some kind of mechanism hidden under his sleeve.


“He’s an ant.” Matt touches the bug’s back, tilting his head at Lang. The glossy bone is slightly hairy for Matt to touch, but the hairs are small, even with the animal enlarged.
“Yeah, he’s called Anton.” Scott grins, then nudges T’Challa with a goofy smirk. “Get it?”

“I get it.” T’Challa’s eyes narrow, not quite having forgotten how scared Matt was in Pym Tech. Something wasn’t right and he’s going to get to the bottom of it.

“Ant-on. Ant.” Scott pats the insect’s back. “’Cause he’s an ant.”

Matt giggles into his ice cream.

“He gets it.” Scott stretches out, looking up at the sky with a squint. “So my daughter loves Anton and I’m not allowed to shrink him again because tiny bugs are, and I quote, icky, but massive creepers are A-ok. Daddy’s got to take care of this weirdo.”

“He’s cute.” Matt deems as two antenna explore his knee, bumbling around.

“Mr Murdock?” Jarvis pips up from his watch. Matt lifts his wrist to his chest, listening. “Sir requires your presence at Avengers Tower as soon as possible.”

Matt frowns at his watch, then turns his head to Scott. “You should come with us. I’m sure the others won’t mind Anton. If they do, they can stop being scaredy-cats.”

“This is the communal living room. There’s a nice view.” Matt explains as he and T’Challa lead Scott out of the elevator and into the seating area.

“Matt, Matty, c’mere.” Clint is waiting for him with a racing heart, making Matt frown in confusion.

“Is something wrong?” Matt takes Clint’s arm, dropping Dice’s harness. He traces the man’s pulse over his wrist, almost as if he’s reading braille.

“No, nothing bad. Something really good, actually.” Clint tries to move him away from T’Challa and Scott but Matt stands his ground, tugging against Clint. It doesn’t escape him that only the other council members (Bucky, Tony, Bruce, and Foggy) are in the room.

“What is it?” Matt demands because he can’t understand what can be so good yet make his friends feel so bad.

Clint looks back at Scott and T’Challa, then clears his throat. “Buddy… Stick is in custody.”

Matt slips back from Clint’s hold on his hand, his mouth falling agape. No, he shouldn’t feel as if his heart is about to stop. This is what he wanted, isn’t it?

But his heart is racing in his chest and Matt is convinced that there’s no blood in his body, just in that little ticker in his chest.

“Logan, Matty, he helped get Stick – no-one’s hurt. He’s in some kind of holding cell and—” Clint hurriedly makes an attempt to reassure Matt but, alas, heat is pooling in his stomach, swirling his intestines in a hot whirlpool of acid until…

He vomits up onto the floor, his stomach completely emptying itself before Matt can even think – he wants time to think – and it reeks so much that his feet start moving, hurriedly, back into the elevator before anyone can stop him. No-one tries.

“Jarvis, make sure Strawberry doesn’t do anything stupid.” Tony sighs, running two hands through
his hair, dishevelling it.

“Stick?” T’Challa advances a step. He strides readily towards the vomit when no-one answers. What could have spurred such a reaction?

“Who the fuck are you?” Bucky flicks his head up at Scott, eyes without malice.

“Ant-Man. We met today. He ‘shrinks’.” T’Challa answers for Scott, who at least provides his real name.

“Scott Lang.”

“Matt picked up another stray.” Clint chuckles somberly, without humour, then gestures emptily to T’Challa. “We might as well, they’ll find out eventually.”

“Shouldn’t Matt be the one to tell them?” Foggy pipes up uncertainly. “I mean, I’m all for the honesty, but it should come from Matt.

“Right now?” Clint gestures back at the elevator, then drops his hand, placing the over his forehead in thought. “Look, if Matt’s about to do something, it’d be helpful if they knew. Or, y’know, in general! They’re both men.”

“Sure, sure.” Foggy relents.

“Know what?” Scott addresses the elephant in the room, causing the group to look back at them as if they’d forgotten Scott and T’Challa even exist.

“Matt was raped.” Clint sits down, closing his eyes for a long moment before continuing. His hands rest on his knees for support. “His mentor – Stick – was sexually abusive when he was a kid. It happened again a couple of months ago.”

A fire ignites in T’Challa’s eyes. Even Scott looks horrified.

“He has been found?” T’Challa hisses dangerously, his eyes glinting as his left fist curls up.

“Yeah, we got him.”

“Good.” T’Challa turns and walks to the elevator, telling Jarvis to take him to the gym.

Scott stares at an empty spot. Matt. I mean, sure, he doesn’t exactly know the guy but he likes animals and cuddling and ice cream – he’s an oversized, hyperactive kid, who’d want to hurt him?

Scott felt the brunt force of his weight – who could hurt him? But that’s unfair, he chastises himself.

His eyes shift to the elevator, where Matt bolted to.

A heavy breath escapes him – time seems to have slowed down, if not stopped completely, and the air seems thicker. Difficult to swallow.

Clint recognises the look of utter revulsion twisting Scott’s features and smiles pitifully. “You have kids?”

“Daughter.” Scott shakes his head, glares out the window. “I’ve been in the joint, too. Pedophiles, rapists… Those dirtbags got the shit beaten outta them.”
Bucky remembers how Steve would react when he caught a boy and a girl, boy holding her a little too tightly, and nods in understanding. “Lowest of the low.”

“Who’s going to talk to Matt?” Tony asks. “’Cause, Birdbrain, you look like you’re about to collapse.”

“I can go.” Clint defends himself but the black bags under his eyes say otherwise.

“No need.” Bucky stands up, strides silently in the direction of the elevator.

Tony twitches his lips into a relieved smile, then looks at Scott.

“So you shrink?”
“Matt? Pipsqueak, no use hiding.” Bucky calls out as he leaves the elevator, quickly learning how futile his words are when he hears Matt sobbing from his room. Exhaling deeply, Bucky ambles towards the door, his fingers grazing across the handle hesitantly. Focusing on taking controlled breaths, he steps into the room.

Matt is huddled on his bed. The adjoining bed is missing its duvet, which is instead wrapped around Matt, cocooning him in the thick covers. His blanket pokes out of his breathing hole.

“Stop that.” Bucky sighs fondly, approaching the bundle. He climbs onto the bed, kneeling beside Matt’s duvet-body. “Where’s my goofball hiding?”

Matt shifts, sobbing into his blanket, smothering it with the sad scent of salty tears.

“Matt.” Bucky peeks into the lump, finding Matt’s bright red hair quickly. “Do I need to tickle you? ‘Cause I’ll do it. I’m not afraid to take drastic measures.”

A pause in the sniffling.

“That’s it.” Bucky reaches inside, avoiding the clawing hands that try to sneak into his cubby hole.

Matt squeaks rather girlishly when Bucky’s fingers poke at his hips, causing tingling to creep across his sides. Giggles and indignant squawks make their way out until Matt’s head emerges in a rush. His cheeks are streaked with tears and his nose is bright red from sniffling.

“There ya are.” Bucky catches his cheeks, tilting Matt’s head to face him. “Pipsqueak, talk.”

Matt’s uneasy smile fades slowly into a straight line, not quite sad but not quite happy.

“Stick’ll be angry at me.” Matt explains hesitantly.

“Yeah, probably.” Bucky shifts, sitting back against the pillows. He plops Matt’s head on his lap, gently running his metal hand over the auburn fluff.

“I know I’m not s’pposed to and that it doesn’t make sense but I love him ‘cause sometimes h-he’d be really nice to me and now he’ll be mad at me and come find me and, Buck, I really don’t want him to come find me.” Matt sniffs, burrowing into Bucky’s lap. The metal hand continues to pet Matt’s head.

“I get it.” Bucky sighs. “And I’m afraid there’s not much I can do. Gotta be honest with you.”

Matt shifts slightly, nodding.

“Baldy is holding him in some kind of metal prison – he called in a favour or something to have it made for him – and there’s apparently no way out.” Bucky recites what Cap told him. “He’s naked in a big, metal sphere and your friend can control his mind at will. We’re doing the best we can to keep you away from him, away from harm.”

Matt’s hand reaches up, tapping Bucky on the cheek. “Can I ask a favour? Friends do that stuff and —and you’re my friend, right?”

“What do you want, you little shit?” Bucky prods his waist, making Matt jerk away from the tickly touch and giggle involuntarily.
“Can you rub my shoulders?” Matt asks, twisting his back to Bucky for him to look at.

“Brat.” Bucky guides him into a seated position with Matt in between his legs. He cracks the joints of his flesh hand, then tugs at Matt’s shirt, wordlessly telling him to remove it.

Matt hesitates before working his way down the buttons.

Bucky looks absent-mindedly around the room, that is, until he gets impatient waiting for Matt.

“Everything cool?” Bucky elbows his back, peering over his shoulder. He frowns when he sees Matt still struggling with one of the first buttons. It almost seems as if he’s been out in the cold, fingers too stiff to coordinate.

“The buttons are…” Matt grunts, his finger slipping past the disk, undoing his work.

Bucky spins him around. He spares a moment to feel the temperature in Matt’s hands – they feel fine – before tugging out each button in turn. He repositions the man, watches him pull out his arms from the sleeves.

“Ok.” Matt seems almost as if he’s proud of himself, wiping his wet cheeks.

Matt’s back is a mass of scars. Thin lines across his muscles, some more pronounced, and jagged, while others are light paint brushes. A particularly nasty one spans across Matt’s lower back, like a lightning bolt. Pink and upset. Bucky can’t help but trace the thing lightly with a single fingertip, causing Matt to flinch.

“Daredevil?” Bucky hopes and please, God, let it be—

“Training.”

They don’t talk about it. Bucky’s hands move to his shoulders, pressing down hard on the muscles. He slowly works across the bulging shoulders, admittedly marvelling in how powerful Matt’s arms appear. Bucky’s strong, really, but he’s not particularly muscled. His time as a guinea pig gave him all the strength he needs. Matt’s arms, however, are far more pronounced than any other part of his body. Arms made for boxing; for lifting himself and flipping.

Matt whimpers, sounding relaxed, when Bucky finds a knot. Working into it, he feels Matt’s body starting to slump against him. Is he really falling asleep right now?

“Bucky? Make me really happy?” Matt wiggles fitfully, clambering towards Bucky’s ear. He leans on his shoulder and whispers into Bucky’s ear, giggling through his request.

“Don’t.” Bucky holds up a single finger at Tony. Three guesses as to which.

“Bu—” Tony starts but Bucky flexes his metal hand in warning.

Matt skids into the room in his dragon slippers, zooming past Bucky and onto the couch.

Bucky rolls his eyes, wondering how he can convey such a powerful eye roll to his friend. Figuring it’ll have to do, Bucky pointedly huffs.

“You look pretty!” Matt objects, nudging Scott (who seems to be hitting it off with Sam). “ Doesn’t he look pretty?”
“Super pretty.” Scott grins devilishly, then gulps because Bucky really looks like he’s about to dismember somebody.

“This isn’t funny.” Bucky gestures to Cap. “Stevie, tell ‘em. This is bullying.”

Steve, himself, can’t speak around laughing.

Bucky’s dolled up in a kangaroo onesie, curtesy of Matt. Everyone, just waiting for someone to say —

“Hey, Buckaroo—” Tony starts with some quip but Bucky lunges (not uncharacteristically for a kangaroo, Matt thinks) at the engineer.

If Matt lies on Bucky’s lap, playing with the little joey in his pouch until the bad feeling in his chest goes away, no-one comments.
“So I’m in the bath and he turns on the tap, no idea that I’m…” Scott tells Matt, crunching cereal between his teeth as he talks.

Matt is in his dragon onesie, playing with the wings in one hand and feeding bacon to Dice in the other.

“…and do you know how difficult it is to swim in a suit that’s part metal? ‘Cause it’s difficult. Metal helmet ‘n’ all.” Scott swallows, then chugs milk from the carton. It’s Tony’s milk. Matt doesn’t care.

“Uhh… Matt?” The man in question asks from the living room. “Our guest is still here?”

“I told Scott he could stay. Is that cool?” Matt scratches his head. He must’ve forgot to tell Tony.

“It’s fine, Strawberry, just some warning would be nice.” Tony bumps his fist lightly against Matt’s head as he approaches.

His elbows sit on Matt’s shoulders as he leans on the redhead, his face beside Matt’s. “How’re you doing, h’m?”

“Fine.” Matt murmurs. Tony hands him something and a small amount of exploration causes Matt to realise that the twisted plush in his hands are the horns of his toy goat.

“‘Good’ fine or ‘I’m-really-struggling-but-I-don’t-want-to-admit-it’ fine?” Tony double checks, stealing an already-cut slice of Matt’s pancake.

“In between.” Matt ducks his head, then draws his legs into a squatted position. “Is Clint busy?”

“He’s calling Laura.” Tony threads a hand through Matt’s hair – gently, so it doesn’t hurt his scalp. “What do you want him for? I can get him if you really want.”

“Can you come lie down with me? I want to go to bed.” Matt twists his head, worrying the hoof of his goat by picking at the fur.

“I’m due at a meeting.” Tony explains apologetically, but he does wrap an arm around Matt as he checks his watch. “Tell you what, I’ll cancel. Stay here if you need me.”

“You don’t have to do that.” Matt sniffs, even as he paws at his eyes under the glasses.

“What am I? Chopped liver?” Scott snorts, stuffing his mouth with more sugary crunch. “Go do your thing, I have nothing to do all day.”

When Matt doesn’t object, Tony ruffles his hair. “If you’re ok with that, I’ll leave you to it.”
“Good luck.” Matt squeezes Tony’s arm before the other man scoffs.

“I don’t need luck.” Tony grins. Matt can hear the subtle relaxing of his heartbeat.

“So movies, music, dancing, crochet, what kind of stuff do you like?” Scott is rummaging around in Matt’s room, stopping to inspect his top hat. He places it on his head, bowing dramatically. “Theatre?”

“Boxing. Gymnastics.” Matt shrugs. “But I’m tired. Movies are ok but, y’know, I’m blind.”

Scott nods at that. “No visual input. Got it. Podcasts?”

Matt’s curiosity is peaked. He shuffles over when Scott excitedly removes his phone from his pocket but Scott pushes him back. “Get all cosy while I set this up.”

Matt, pouting, slips under the covers. Scott starts an audio file and places his phone on Matt’s bedside unit, then moves into bed beside Matt. He’s wearing his shirt and jeans, so Matt isn’t concerned.

Anton bumps into the bottom of the bed, then gropes the structure with his antenna before climbing up. He stumbles around before finding Matt and Scott, then curls up over their legs.

“He’s pretty clumsy.” Scott comments, to which Matt frowns.

“Ants don’t have very good vision. They can only tell if it’s light or dark, like worms.” Matt pets the round head, smiling fondly. Two antenna bounce off his arm, tapping curiously. “Cute.”

“He’s pretty cute.” Scott agrees, patting the ant’s thorax. “Hey, were you born blind?”

So Matt recites the whole story, which Scott deems as ‘Awesome!’ before they resume listening to the podcast.

“Don’t argue, Sugar and Spice.” Wade rolls his eyes at Peter, dragging him into the tower with a stern expression on his avocado-looking face.

“Hey! I’m beautiful!” Wade complains, saluting briefly at Dice (who is curled comfortably in his red bed) as they stomp into the communal living space.

“Hi, Wade!” Matt pipes up eagerly at the smell of old death and decay.

“You know you’re just pouty that this isn’t smut ‘cause my sexy self would make this a rollercoaster ride!” Wade mumbles, grabbing a glass of water from the counter.

“Into position, Spidey.” Wade gestures to the teen, who shuffles slightly under Wade’s instructions. Wade crosses Peter’s arms, then turns to Matt and dramatically throws the water in his face, making him blink in disbelief.

Scott stares from beside Matt in confusion. “Uh…”

“Matt, my beloved, not cool. You’re cheating on us with a Paul Rudd lookalike!” Wade snaps, flicking a droplet from his finger.
Matt takes off his wet glasses to wipe his face. “Huh?”

“Wade hasn’t been taking his meds again.” Peter mumbles. “Wade, you’re being manic again.”

“Oh, hush.” Wade turns unhappily on Scott. “You! You think you can just join Team Red whenever you feel like it? We aren’t hero-whores, Bugboy, we have standards.”

“Wade, can you explain without being mean to my friend and, well, confusing me.” Matt tilts his head.

“You’re cheating on Spidey and I. I won’t have it!” Wade raises a single finger. “Plus, y’know, filler chapter.”

“Is your costume red, by any chance?” Matt whispers to Scott, who nods, dumbfounded.

Spidey offers Matt a tissue from the holder on the coffee table. He uses it to dry his face, smiling innocently. “Then you’re invited to Team Red, an exclusive division of the Avengers.”

“Sir has adamantly stated that Mr Wilson is not an Avenger.” Jarvis emphasises, which Wade ignores as he climbs onto Matt, straddling his lap, face-to-face. He strokes Matt’s cheek, sighing.

“What happened to our threesome, Matty?” Wade pouts.

“He’s not usually this manic.” Matt whispers to Scott, who nods.

“Gotcha.”

“So new friend?” Peter asks, much sweeter than Wade. His eyes light up curiously.

“New friend.” Scott shrugs, holding out his hand. “Ant-Man.”

“Spider-Man.” Peter shakes the hand, both of them ignoring Wade, who seems exceptionally disappointed by this.

“Horns, I read that the antagonist has been caught.” Wade wraps his arms around Matt’s neck, looking humorously love-struck to an observer. “I’m going to miss you.”

“Wade, I need you to take your pills.” Matt clears his voice, then gently pats Wade’s upper arm.

“I’m not sick.” Wade objects and he’s not going to cry for kudos, God damn it, so he ducks his head and makes an attempt to control his breathing.

“I know.” Matt smoothes Wade’s glove, squeezing his hand through the material. “Remember what happened the last time you visited?”

“The readers missed that, you’ll need to catch them up.” Wade turns his head away. “See? I’m a nice guy.”

“Wade, you shot yourself in the head because The Lion King bored you.” Matt explains, then shifts Wade into the seat beside him.

“Yeah, well, I promised no more.”

“That’s not healthy, even if you can heal.” Matt scorns him, wrapping a comforting arm around Wade. “Stay for movie night, take your meds, and we can spend some time getting to know Scott, ok?”
Wade eyes the new guy warily before shrugging. He pulls out his katana but Matt removes it before he can do anything.

“Party pooper.”

Chapter End Notes

SO I'm playing around with a sequel to this story, if you guys are interested. I'm only planning on making it 50k or something. I'm also toying with the idea of a Team Red mashup -- a road trip or something. I'm not sure, but that'll only be about 10k. Just keeping you guys updated! They'll be in the "Watch Out, Everybody, I'm Blind Matt Murdock!" series, so keep an eye out.

Let me know if you have any suggestions/questions (Suggestions mainly for the Team Red thing and who else could possibly be introduced as a new member. Thinking of Gambit? Not sure.) and be sure to comment <3
Sleepover

Chapter Notes

I've been working on setting out a plan for the sequel to this (which will have several chapters up immediately after the end of VT because I have some saved drafts already) and will be part 9 in the Watch out, Everybody...! series. It has a romance plotline along with the regular story (I'm not going to give out spoilers!) and some of my inspiration has been from Defenders (no, Elektra is not back). The pairing might surprise you but have an open mind because it's canon divergence in character (kinda).

I'm trying not to ruin it but you get the gist. More information on the VERY LAST CHAPTER of VT. Until then :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey, Red, let’s watch something else!” Wade objects, curled up in Matt’s lap.

“But she thinks Flynn abandoned her!” Peter objects, hanging above Matt’s head. Scott is minuscule, straddling the arm of the couch, stuffing his mouth with popcorn that must appear to be humongous.

Matt wonders where he finds these people.

“We were fighting.” Wade states blandly, resting his head in the inside of Matt’s elbow. “Flashback time!”

“I’m getting rid of Daredevil.” Wade stated, as if it was obvious. His hands and feet were bound together in the knotted bindings of Matt’s billy club. “Try to make it sound less like a bad porno.”

Daredevil turned his head from where he was trying to escort away several anxious citizens.

“Sometimes, to make an omelette, you have to break a few fingers.” Wade called out, his fingers snapping in turn. Slowly, he wiggled his hand out of the bindings.

Unconcerned, Daredevil turned to the bystanders. “There’s no danger, but please leave this immediate area.”

“Hey, Hornhead, where’s the nearest hospital?” Wade called from over Matt’s shoulder, slipping his second hand free. His fingers lolled at odd angles.

“Mount Sinai Medical Center is about five blocks away.” Matt sighed, turning back to face Wade, just as he heard a gun being cocked.

“Well, you'd better get going.”

“Don't! No!” Daredevil lunged towards one of the bystanders but the bullet broke through the skin of his thigh. He collapsed to the ground, blood gushing across the sidewalk. Matt hears the pulsing wheeze of blood through ripped flesh. “What did you do?!”

“I shot him.” Deadpool immediately wiggles one leg free, hopping around as he makes an attempt
to release the second. “Thought the amazing senses would pick up on that.”

“You're sick.” Matt applied pressure to the man’s wound, quickly coming to the conclusion that Wade ‘wins’ the fight if Daredevil can no longer fight him, for example, in the case of him having to attend to a civilian.

“That is correct.” Wade cackled, throwing his head back like a cartoon villain.

“His femoral artery is damaged.”

“Good news:” Wade leaned down, bringing himself face to face with Daredevil, “I hear Mount Sinai Medical Center is only a few blocks away.”

“What are you talking about?” Matt asks, causing Wade to tilt his head.

“Uh… I thought you were a demon, you vomited when you shook my hand, I shot that guy. Good times, huh?” Wade recites, blowing a raspberry at the screen. “These fuckers own Marvel Entertainment?”

The speakers spark into song and Wade reaches for his katana. Really, seppuku is more fun than this.

“Don’t even remind me of that.” Matt takes his blade, throwing it far enough away that it can’t immediately be reached. “Plus, you smell like a corpse, Wade.”

“That’s ‘cause I’m a big tumor.” Wade shrugs but Matt sends him a look, even while not being able to see.

Sends him a face? No, that sounds like two cannibals exchanging recipes.

Matt turns his ear to Wade when he starts giggling. “You remember our deal, don’t you?”

“Yeah, no killing innocent people.” Wade immediately pouts as he sits up, moving so he can straddle Matt. “I pinkie promised, didn’t I? I’ll cut it off if I kill one. You can keep it as a gift.”

“That is the last thing I want.” Matt snorts. Wade starts hugging him tightly, resting his cheek on Matt’s chest. It’s an intimate cuddle, one that Matt doesn’t mind.

“Wade has a healing factor.” Peter shoots a web onto the ceiling and crawls down it to reach Scott’s height. “He can regenerate limbs ‘n’ stuff.”

“Eloquent.” Wade smirks into Matt’s chest, then shuffles closer so he can bring his mouth to Matt’s ear, his hands cupping around it in a whisper. “I don’t do that stuff anymore. I promised.”

Matt rubs his back, nodding. “I know. I trust you. Against my better judgement.”

Wade snorts, then kisses Matt’s cheek affectionately. “How about we boost up the rating on this fic, huh?”

“I don’t know what you mean but you can behave or sit over there.” Matt gestures at the other end of the couch, giving Wade a stern expression.

Wade huffs, turning himself around and curling up in Matt’s lap again. Much like an insistent cat.
“Do I even want to ask?” Hank Pym looks at the scene before him.

Tony shrugs, scratching his head in thought.

Matt is sleeping on the couch, curled up into Wade. Peter is hanging above them in a web hammock and Scott is sprawled out on the arm of the couch, buried in a small pile of popcorn.

“J.” Tony waves his hand at the bunch, who jump to attention when *Highway to Hell* blares over the speakers.

Scott disrupts the pile of popcorn, tumbling to the edge of the armrest. Matt lunges, grabbing him before he falls off the edge.

“Sleepover party is finished, Daddy’s here to take you home.” Tony directs at Scott, who grows larger steadily until he’s the same size, if not a few inches taller, than Matt.

“Kinky.” Wade musters up a quip, but there’s no real enthusiasm in the remark. He climbs up Matt like a tree, settling himself on his broad shoulders in a clingy piggy back. “Mush. Pancakes.”

Matt carries Wade over to the island, sitting him at the breakfast bar, where he finds great delight in spinning on his stool.

“Hey, it’s fun, ok?” Wade murmurs in defense of himself.

“See you later, Scott.” Matt yawns, brushing back his hair with one hand.

“Duty calls.” Scott touches his ear and Anton scuttles out of an overhead vent, crawling across the walls and onto the ground, where Scott pats his back. “See ya.”

Wade gives a lax wave while Peter’s effort is focused on climbing down from the ceiling. The couch creaks under him when he uses it as his landing pad.

“I’ll take you home.” Tony addresses Peter. “Get your stuff, it’s a school night.”

Matt laughs into his hand, causing Peter to shoot a glare at Wade. “He dragged me here!”

Wade smirks as Peter grabs his rucksack and locates his mobile phone. When ready, Tony leads him towards the elevator.

“It’s 11PM.” Wade tells Matt, who hums thoughtfully.

“I swear, Wade.” Matt starts, holding up one finger. “If you do anything—”

“I’m not a complete asshole!” Wade exclaims, getting up. He hurries over to his own backpack, pulling out a fluffy onesie, complete with a rainbow mane and tail, then a sparkly horn. “See?”

Matt’s lips quirk up. “Fine, we can cuddle.”

Wade fist pumps the air.

Chapter End Notes

Jgdkuyrloiglikj! I have had the WORST writer's block for the last two chapters! This
one was especially bad. Anyway, I'm off college for the next week and I don't go back until the following Wednesday so I expect to get VT finished by then. It should only be another 15-20K maybe? Anyway, I'm just glad I managed to write something tonight. I hope you enjoyed.

Wade's encounter with Matt was based off of this:
https://static.comicvine.com/uploads/original/10/102593/3107015-0+%2818%29.jpg
Guard

Wade is curled into his chest when Matt wakes up. His body seems so much smaller when sleeping. Tightly tucked into a compact ball, Wade shudders in his sleep, whimpering against Matt’s chest.

Wade’s a little touchy about his skin, sometimes. Matt’s solution is to bundle the slightly older man in his blankets, then wrapping his arms around the bundle.

“Can we make pancakes?” Wade whispers, his voice small against Matt’s shoulder.

“Sure.” Matt nods. Wade’s scalp is against his cheek, feeling rough and bumpy under his sensitive flesh. Each short movement is like a bear scratching itself against bark. As far as Matt can tell, Wade’s skin feels like the scar tissue of a burn.

Wade shifts in his arms, so Matt seizes his opportunity.

“Wade, schizophrenia can be managed.” Matt starts but Wade pushes him away, moving to the edge of Matt’s bed. He sits with his feet dangling, pulling up his unicorn-head-hood before responding.

“I don’t like taking my pills.”

“Don’t they help?” Matt shuffles closer, resting his hand on Deadpool’s shoulder. “Wade, if you can tell me that they don’t help—”

“They do, ok?” Wade mutters. “Just shut up about it already.”

“Ok.” Matt moves back, sitting up against his headboard. He listens carefully for Wade’s heartbeat, erratic and jumpy. Matt’s heart nearly copies the frantic beat when he recalls Wade jumping from a skyscraper, insistent that he could fly.

“No… stupid idea…” Matt hears Wade mumbling to himself, shifting in his spot, before turning on Matt. “I like my brain! We’re awesome!”

“Wade,” Matt starts, a fresh argument in his head when he hears Wade swatting away wetness around his eyes. Gently, Matt places a hand over his friend’s shoulder, “you’re the awesome-est.”

“Hey, Shades?” Wade pipes up from Matt’s bed. They haven’t left it all day, not since Wade cried, just a little.

Matt tilts his head to attention, giving Wade the opportunity to climb onto the pillows, hugging Matt’s shoulders and neck. His mask is somewhere on the floor.

Wade’s rough skin rests against Matt’s head in the form of his cheek, quite skin and expressionless. Unlike Wade’s typical hysteria, there’s no laugher or wild grinning, just tranquillity.

“Is everything ok with your brain?” Wade mutters, almost sullenly at the sheer seriousness of the question. Wade isn’t exactly one for deer conversations, not unless the mood strikes him, which it
almost never does.

Matt shifts in his position but Wade locks his arms in, squeezing him insistently in his arms.

“Wade.” Matt sighs, lightly shoving the man out of the way, sitting up in order to rub his forehead in thought.

“I’m your friend; you don’t think I care about how some fucker messed you up?” Wade hisses, grabbing Matt’s arm. “You won’t even let me cut him up!”

That strikes a chord. Matt grabs his arm back, shoving Wade harshly. “Don’t touch me, Wade.”

Deadpool stares angrily for a moment before grabbing Matt’s pillow. He tosses it across the room before standing up, watching its new spot on the floor.

“Why can’t you just treat me like them?” Wade mutters to himself, more than to Matt, who hears it anyway.

“Maybe because you say things like he ‘messed me up’!” Matt grabs his other pillow, throwing it past Wade to join its companion on the floor. “He didn’t mess me up, Stick has no precedence over what I do with my life!”

“Bullshit!” Wade spins to face Matt. “You’re just as messed up as the rest of us! Must take a great deal of sanity to dress up like a religious figure and inflict justice!”

“At least I don’t meddle in matters of life and death.”

“Last time I shot myself in the head, I really was disappointed that I hadn’t fell off a rooftop instead. Quick deaths really are boring.”

“Fuck off, Wade.”

“You just don’t want to think you’re as bad as the rest of us.” Wade accuses, fiddling with the sheathed knife in his pocket. “Because you’re the epitome of all that is holy.”

Matt grabs the nearest thing and hurls it towards the pillows, hearing it shatter against the far wall. Wade watches the projectile, then watches Matt thump his fists against his chest of drawers. A couple of angry hits starts the flow of blood from Matt’s knuckles, something Wade watches silently for a moment, too caught up in what is happening to actually intervene.

“Matt, I really don’t want an arrow through my face because those things are a pain to take out so if you could just… stop doing that.” Says Wade when his brain catches up.

“I’m not fucked up.” Matt throws his fist at Wade next, who refuses to dodge it. The power behind the throw does decrease when Matt notices this but bloody knuckles connect with Wade’s cheek, making him stagger left.

“I’m fucked up.” Matt breathes, listening to Wade as he hesitantly approaches Matt once more, not speaking or even trying to come close enough to physically bar him from punching the wood. “Why does he—How can he be trapped in some cell, completely trapped, but I still feel like he’s… fucking me?”

“’Cause he messed you up.” Wade murmurs. “I just wanna help. You get like me sometimes and – everyone knows it – I’m a special, psychotic snowflake.”
Matt lifts his head, allowing his fingers to graze over his aching knuckles, seeping blood harshly. “I get paranoid ‘n’ stuff, so why can’t you let me try to help?” Wade asks, lightly tapping Matt’s cheek – it’s more like a slap – to get his attention.

“Because the whole world knows I’ve been raped, Wade. They will, anyway. You’re like my stupid, little brother that constantly sets the house on fire whenever I’m watching you.”

“Heh. Watching.” Wade half-attempts a smile. His shoulders slump. “You talked to Peter. He told me.”

“That’s what this is about? You’re jealous?” Matt huffs, sinking onto the bed when his knees wobble. It sinks beneath him, almost as depressed as he feels. “Wade, I didn’t want you worrying about me. Peter’s not got schizophrenia or bloodthirsty villains to worry about.”

“Shit excuse.” Wade claims, but he does perch beside Matt on the bed. “Hey, can you start telling me stuff ‘cause that’d make me less worried.”

Matt tilts his head, then nods slightly.

“Everything ok with your brain?”

Matt tenses, his hands burrowing under his thighs, hiding under his weight. Blood seeps into his sheets but Matt can’t quite find himself caring.

“I don’t feel safe.” He lowers his head. “Ok? I just, even with him locked up—he’s just Stick, it’s difficult to imagine him…”

“Want some pancakes?” Wade asks, moving his head away, somewhat distracted.

“I’d rather sleep.”

“Want to sit in the kitchen so I can keep watch while I make pancakes?” Wade offers again, rummaging around in his pockets. He manages to find his mask, slipping it over his head eagerly. Matt finds himself warming to the suggestion, barely keeping tears from his eyes when he nods.

“And, don’t worry, I’ll be the good kind of sentinel.”

Chapter End Notes

Pleeeease don’t hate me for taking so long to update. I’ve been busy with college assignments and probably will be for another two weeks but I’ve got lots of free time after that! (At least until mid-Jan)

Anyway, Wade was suppose to be gone at the end of the last chapter but I’ve been working on A Stolen Soul and Team Red (the two sequels to Vacation Time) so I’ll have lots of chapters to pay you guys back with!

I recently found out that something happens to Remy (Gambit) in the comics and it intrigued me... I will say no more! You’ll love Team Red though. Much more light hearted (At least I hope so!).
Thank you for being so patient with me <3
Here it is: the last chapter of VT!

“Matty?”

Clint’s voice travels from the roof entrance to Tony’s penthouse, just outside of which Matt is squatting on the edge of the helipad, looming over the city. Clint approaches with illuminating steps, the gentle *pat pat* of his soles against the rain-slick surface pinpointing his path.

“Buddy, aren’t you cold?” Clint grunts as he crouches beside the redhead, slightly further from the edge than Matt, who seems perfectly comfortable in his precarious position. Matt flicks his head as if only notices the droplets of rain jumping from his red locks to his rosy cheeks.

“I’m listening.” Matt huffs because that should be obvious.

Clint’s heart aches dangerously when Matt leans forward, barely supporting his weight on the roof.

“Matt—”

“They’re pretty.” He interrupts, pushing himself all too quickly into a standing position, arms spread as he leans over the edge, looking dangerously ready to fall. “The stars.”

“Matthew!” Clint snaps, grabbing Matt’s T-shirt in a hurry and pulling him to relative safety.

“What?” Matt shivers in the new warmth of Clint’s firm grip, turning his head to the blank canvas of night sky, probably seeing just as much as Clint in the dark night.

“Don’t do that, you might fall.” Clint releases the thin wrist, only to have his heart stutter when Daredevil leaps into a somersault, passing over the edge of the roof. Clint’s heart doesn’t calm down when he spots two pale hands holding the edge, and doesn’t calm down until Matt lifts himself up and crawls to a safe spot, sitting on the wet ground.

“I’m going to kill you.” The archer breathes, slumping to the ground.

Matt, damn him, starts chuckling. Barely audible, low giggles that grate on Clint’s nerves until he, too, starts laughing.

“The stars are pretty, y’know.”

Matt turns his head, the smile slipping away for Barton to see. His head tilts upwards, as if looking at the shrouded pinpoints of dim light.

“Clint, what happens now?”

“So you heard about Stick.”
“I hear everything.” And it’s not funny.

It’s not morning walks, or runs, in the hot sun, Dice giving Lucky disdainful looks as the golden mutt lucks his own backside. It’s not spicy lunches, Matt leaning over the table to sneak a bite of Clint’s perpetually tasty meals. It’s not warm evenings in their side-by-side beds, snuggled under the covers, and never-ending sleepovers. It’s not even hiding under the bed, Clint’s hand poking under the frame, squeezing Matt’s back to rationality.

It’s Matt staring up at a sky he can’t see, looking painfully hopeless.

“What happens now.” Clint says the words, rolls his tongue over them. Each word in turn, it’s barely a sentence. Sighing out a puff of steamy air, he scans the stars for anything distinguishable. “Life goes on. Sunrises, sets, repeats. Breakfast, lunch, dinner – maybe brunch if you’re feeling extravagant. Want to get really crazy, well how about sup—”

“It’s not stopping, Clint.” Matt tugs at his hair, not really hurting himself. His hair is a clear pathway to what must be answers trapped inside his own brain. Handles to be pulled; the jumble of thoughts in his head will come free as unwound fortunes from the cookie of his skull.

Alas.

“It doesn’t stop when he gets imprisoned, Matty, not when he dies. Hell, Bud, he stopped hurting you months ago. It’s not him.” Clint reaches for his friend’s hands, taking them away from the damp, auburn hair. “It’ll stop when you heal. Your head, your body, everything. You’ll reach a point where everything stops being so difficult, Matt, I promise. And would I lie to you?”

“Yes.” He smirks, the corners of his lips tugging up. Then: “No. I don’t know, Clint. I don’t feel like I’m healing. I feel like I’m giving up.”

“Bud.” Clint slumps back into his seated position.

“Stick killed himself.” Matt mulls over the words in his mouth. “And I’m the one who feels dead.”

“Stop being sad.” Clint taps his head in a faux admonishment, then grabs his shoulders. “Brace yourself because I’m about to get really sappy.”

“Braced.” Matt nods, determination etched onto his face.

Clint gives him one look then, in a broad grin, points at the sky. “Lots of stars, one’s gotta be brighter than the others, right? Well, you’re going to go out into that hellhole of a world and find a lot of stars but there’ll be one thing that makes you happier than all the little things. I swear to God, Murdock, if you don’t find that bright star and grab onto it, I’m going to shoot it down and haul its ass back to you, got it?”

“Got it.” Matt nods slowly, shaking his head.

“Hey.”

Matt tilts one ear at Clint, frowning slightly.

“You’re my best bud.” Clint presents his fist, which Matt considers before bumping his own knuckles against it, solidifying their brotherhood in the only way possible.

Fist bumps.
Clint gives Matt a hand to his feet, tugging him up from the wet ground, the duo well and truly soaked.

“You’re going to get a cold, Bro, and I’m the one who’ll get complained at when you get the sniffles.” Clint moans, anguished. Matt makes a face, then raises his nose slightly. He waits a long moment, two sets of sopping footprints making their way through Tony’s floor to the elevator.

As soon as they step through the metal doors, Matt sniffs.

“And it begins.”

~~~~~~~ FIN ~~~~~~~

Chapter End Notes

So it isn't my longest chapter but I do think it sets up "A Stolen Soul" nicely. I had planned to go into a little depth about the trial but I reasoned with myself that this was a better ending. ANYWAY to make up for being absent for so long (1 exam, 3 essay assignments; I'm so done with college bleh), I'm going to update the FIRST EIGHTEEN CHAPTERS OF STOLEN SOUL right away (I'll have to put in tags, etc, so it might take about 20 minutes or so until I'm fully done). This won't be anywhere near as long as VT and I like to think I'm at least 40% finished. Then, Team Red will start to be updated after I'm finished SS.

There is a lot of romance and fluff in SS but it's very similar to VT in that Matt is still coping (though much better) with the aftermath of Stick and there's a new antagonist on the scene oooh. So there are some differences but I would recommend reading a couple of chapters if you're not quite sure, you might end up liking it (i hope!).

THANK YOU ALL for being such great readers, I love youuuu <3 See you in Stolen Soul!
"Stolen Soul" is 100% complete!

"Team Red" is up now as the 10th part to the "Watch Out, Everybody!" series. It's very similar to Vacation Time and will focus mainly on Matt, Wade, Peter, Scott, and X-Men's Gambit (he is introduced as a new character and is OOC, so no need to know him already). Please check it out if you liked Vacation Time. Despite coming after Stolen Soul in the series, you can read Team Red without reading Stolen Soul. Any info from Stolen Soul will be added in if it's crucial to know.

Thank you all for reading this series to this point, I hope you will continue to enjoy!

~Earthiana

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!