3 am

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/13102500.

Rating: Mature
Archive Warning: Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category: F/M
Fandom: Punisher, Marvel, Avengers, Defenders, The Punisher - Fandom, frank castle - Fandom, MCU
Character: Reader, Frank Castle, Peter Castiglione, Karen Page, Franklin "Foggy" Nelson
Additional Tags: Domestic Violence, Drug Abuse, Alcohol Abuse, Violence, Mentions of Death, Fluff, Angst, Smut
Stats: Published: 2017-12-22 Completed: 2018-03-09 Chapters: 9/9 Words: 21684

3 am

by WritingforTheAvengers

Summary

Frank Castle is trying to live his new life as Peter Castiglione, and it has worked quite well. He’s got a job and a new haircut, but his past and his new neighbors won’t let him sleep. 3 am seems late, but it’s the beginning of a new day.
3 am, and Frank was being haunted again by the memories of a life that would never come back. Not the warzone, not Afghanistan and not the merry-go round at the park; no, the memories that haunted him were before that inauspicious day. His beloved wife, waking him up for breakfast and then dying after a very clear gunshot. Frank gasped loudly in his tiny apartment, feeling the emptiness of a long lost life and a sudden thud on the wall. It must have been the apartment next door, but with the thud, came the silence, and then Frank was left alone again with his rambling thoughts.

He looked at the ceiling, feeling unsure at the momentary relief to know that at least, the miserable space he called home, was real, but none of the things he wanted were. He hadn’t heard from Karen in months, and he knew she didn’t want to either; she tried to move on and her last words were a cruel reminder.

*You’re dead to me*

It was so clear in his head; her voice, her slim figure covered by that black camel-coat and the vapor that came from her mouth as she took deep in and out breaths. She was one of the few, alive, things that were clear in his head. He was out of his skull, as he used to say to her, but he knew a few things about the real world. Sometimes he wished he could call her and tell her to meet for coffee or something similar, but he was not a fool. Karen was better off alone without him.

Sobs from the other side of the wall dragged him from his thoughts again; female ones most probably, mixed with yelling, growling and grunting. He rubbed his temple, knowing he was no hero to no one and thinking he shouldn’t involve himself with people in general. He looked at his hands, aching from an untreated open blister, and exhaled deeply, getting up and ready to go to the building he had started working at recently. He didn’t even have bandages to cover it.

Peter Castiglione didn’t have those.

He tried to sink in he was not Frank Castle anymore, or that he shouldn’t be. No more Punisher, no more vigilante work; just a regular man living on his own and making the most of the day, waking up at 3 am because of the nightmares and hearing his neighbors fight.

He hung a light jacket over his broad shoulders and closed the door behind him. In the hallway, he saw a petite woman crying next to a door. She was in very light clothing; just a pair of sports shorts and a loose top that looked more like a short dress from how oversized it was for her. She was crying, or at least in the last phases of it. She wiped the tears with the back of her shaky hands and in inadvertence, Frank saw a trace of dried blood from her bottom lip that seemed unnaturally plumped. He carried on with his walk and even though the guilt crept up and down his back, he pretended to not have seen a damned thing.

He didn’t see the girl again until late the next morning. He was coming back with groceries and she was in the same spot he saw he just hours earlier, only now she had changed position. She was lying in fetal position on the dirty tiles, which were most probably cold and humid, because the whole hallway felt like that too. He didn’t like injustice, that’s why he was the Punisher in the first place, but Peter Castiglione couldn’t get into trouble, not for Frank’s desire to make justice.

He stared for a while, holding the bags tightly in his hands until his knuckles whitened, and then he realized that this was not his problem; neither Peter’s nor Frank’s. He left some bread next to her because he thought she must have not eaten a thing in these hours and then he got inside both his apartment and his thoughts. He was alone with Moby Dick and the burning memories of his family.
The oldest of the Castle children, Lisa, playing guitar along with him, and Maria, waking him up in a white and blue dress and the brightest of smiles. Frank could’ve sworn she was there, kissing and touching him, and with that thought in mind, he fell asleep with the book in his hands.

Until it was 3 am again and the awful routine woke him up. It was the same dream; same start and same ending, and apparently, the same real sounds that accompanied it; instead, with the thud didn’t come the silence, but loud cries for someone to stop. High-pitched screams and the wall being punched for the hundredth time; it was usually at this hour, but it could repeat along the day a few more times. Both Peter and Frank had had enough.

He stormed inside the neighbors’ apartment, kicking the door open and looking at the painfully heart-clenching scene. The girl he had seen sleeping in the hall had a purple eye and more blood, fresh this time, coming from her lip; her hair was messed up as if it was forcefully pulled and bruises of all sizes and shades of severity adorned her uncovered legs and arms. She was shaking uncontrollably but it wasn’t cold what had her in that state. It was fear, pure fear.

The couple stopped the minute the splinters flew from the door being opened. The man was holding up his fist and the girl –because she didn’t look old at all— was curled up on the floor.

“What the fuck, man?” The attacker growled. His drunk self awkwardly turned to Frank and he walked, or tried to, towards the Punisher.

Frank was way bigger than him, in all aspects; his shoulders were broader and he was at least a head taller, and Frank had quite a big head himself. The man attacking was thin, so very thin that Frank might have broken him just like a twig. He easily dodged a wobbly punch and in a swift movement of hands, Frank punched him back and made him fall. It was a futile warning because it only made the slim man jump up and get another shot at fighting, but it only got him to a state of unconsciousness. Frank helped the girl that was still curled up on the floor.

She recognized him right away; the beard and long hair could not hide the face of New York’s most dangerous man, and what was worse, Frank Castle was a man that everyone thought dead. She knew there was nothing more reckless than going anywhere with him, but at least if he ever dared to hurt her, it would be a one time only, and then she’d be finally dead.

She crawled towards him and got up on her bare feet. Frank looked around him, the apartment didn’t have much, and it incredibly had less than his own. There was no sight of a bed and perhaps the torn sofa made up as one; there was no wardrobe, but instead, a few duffel bags that were also a useful replacement. Frank promised to not help anyone else, especially after what happened with Schoonover. It had cost one of the realest relationships he had had after his family’s death, and he lost it because of the untamable rage that ran through his veins.

But there she was, a tiny, apparently defenseless, girl that couldn’t be more frightened if she wanted to and Frank thought he would feel even worst if he didn’t do shit about it. At least, that would surely make him sleep a bit better at night.

“Pack your stuff, you can’t be with this douchebag anymore,” Frank said in a low voice as he looked away. “Do you even have stuff to pack?” He looked at the girl with the doe eyes, but she wasn’t looking at him; instead, she looked at the man lying with his eyes closed on the floor. “He’s just knocked out, he’ll wake up in a few hours feeling sore,”

“Why?” She spoke in a barely audible whisper. She couldn’t speak any louder, all the screaming for help had left her with a sore throat and a hoarse voice.

“You guys didn’t let me sleep at any time of the day,” Frank replied simply. “Now come on, I have
coffee and a bit of bread at my place,” he started walking towards the torn door and looked at a way
of fixing it. “I’ll fix it tomorrow, I think that, for now, you need a shower, and a place to get some
real rest,” she nodded silently and walked along with Frank back to his apartment.

She took a deep breath, looking at the man she knew she didn’t love anymore, and trying to get over
months of violence. She stopped in her steps and kicked him in the stomach; it was a weak kick, but
at least, she had some sort of payback.

Frank welcomed her inside and started making coffee. It was barely 3:30 and even though coffee
was a terrible idea, he didn’t have anything else that was warm to offer. He had some bread and jam
to eat and he started making sandwiches for both while his neighbor entered the bathroom.

She looked at herself in the mirror, touching her hollow cheeks with her bony fingers. It had been a
while since she last saw herself in a mirror. She traced her swollen lip with a bruised hand, thinking
about how long her former partner would have taken before he killed her. She would become just
another number in the pile of women murdered and that scared her. She washed her face and swore
to herself that she would never let that happen again.

The smell of coffee made her smile and dragged her out of the bathroom; there he was, Frank Castle.
He seemed less scary with all that extra hair, and actually, the beard gave him a softer, nicer, look.
She looked at her feet and realized she hadn’t changed since that day they saw each other in the
hallway and she could feel the garments all stiff from the dirt and blood. Frank was sitting on a torn
armchair next to the table, which had only one stool that was obviously not matching. She took the
stool and placed her hands on the mug. It was so warm that she couldn’t help but to smile weakly.

Frank couldn’t understand how such an innocent creature like her could be trapped into such awful
situation. Never in his head would he have thought of hurting a woman, not even as the Punisher;
that was just out of the picture. He couldn’t quite grasp why or how any men would hurt women. He
saw her as she drank the coffee, how she sighed in relief; relief for the sudden safety found.

“So, do you have a name or something I can call you?” Frank asked in between sips.

“Yes,” she nodded; her voice sounded less raspy, “I’m (Y/N) (Y/L/N), and you’re…?”

“I’m Peter Castiglione,” he hurried to say.

“Yeah, right, and I guess that makes me Madonna,” she chuckled lightly and rolled her eyes. “Look,
I might have been beaten up and thrown against a wall a hundred times, therefore my brain has
suffered quite a lot, but I am not an idiot,” she looked at her coffee and sighed heavily. “The beard
looks cool, it terrifies me a lot less, if I’m allowed to add,”

“Smart mouth? Why weren’t you that smart to get out from there? If I’m allowed to ask…” he
repeated her words.

“It’s not that hard to explain,” she shrugged. “Abusive partners manipulate you until you have no
free will; that’s what Greg did to me, and although I knew I was being manipulated, I was made
believe no one would want me for being a coward,” she rose her eyebrows quickly and had one last
sip from her coffee. “It’s a normal behavior on them, but… I guess I was indeed an idiot for not
stepping out when he laid his hand on me for the first time,”

“And how do you know that?” Frank asked, his intrigue growing more and more each second. She
seemed so sensible that he really couldn’t sink in that she could have let anyone hit her. “You seem
quite aware of what an abusive partner does, yet you couldn’t stop it,”
“Yeah, my dad was sort of violent to my mom, well very, and that’s why she left him,” she exhaled heavily, “but it’s very different when you’re there, living it in first person,” she shook her head lightly. “Before everything happens you feel invincible, and you’re like ‘I will never let a man hit me, I am so much better than that’ and all that shit, but you’re not,” she said softly and gulped. “You don’t know what to do when your partner, the person who claims to love you the most, throws the first punch. You never see that shit coming, even though he’s been yelling at you and treating you like garbage for a while. You go along with it because it was just a slip, and they’ll never do that again,” her voice trembled. “And then it happens, again, and then you have to lie at work until your body hurts so much that you can’t go there anymore because you can’t stand the questions and looks,” she stayed in silence for a while. “And when you quit your job, they get furious. They blame you for everything bad that happens, and they hit you again, and you can’t go to any job interview because you’re all bruised and you’ll have to explain that you accidentally hit the cabinet’s door, but you didn’t and they all know you didn’t,” her voice cracked and her chin trembled. “And the cabinet hits you again and again, and then it’s not just the face, it’s your whole body and then you have to say you fell down the stairs over and over again, and you can’t ask for help, because everyone you thought was going to be there is also blaming you for not having enough self-respect, even people you don’t know will judge you, and you begin to question yourself: am I really this worthless?” Her eyes filled with tears and she was shaking now. “Am I really such a coward that I can’t leave a man who does not love me at all? And when you start believing what they tell you, you know there’s no turning back, and that your death will come eventually either as suicide or as homicide,” she burst into tears and hid her face with her hands as she cried all the tears and all the frustration kept for so long.

Frank was tongue tied and so shocked by the normalization of the violence lived that he wasn’t sure what to do, but he knew now that he had to protect her at all costs, even if it meant killing one more person. He himself was a violent person and he even got out of prison the hard way, but even his own carnage for personal revenge had its limits. He placed a hand on her back and gently rubbed it, keeping the silence until he was sure she was not crying anymore. When she got straight again and sniffled the last few tears, (Y/N) looked at Frank feeling a bit silly for spilling everything out with a stranger. She giggled and dried the tracer where tears had been with the back of his hand, wincing swiftly from the pain on both her cheeks.

“I think you need some sleep,” Frank announced just like a dad; it was around 4 in the morning and the night had been quite intense. “Do you have stuff that you need from your old place? I can get them for you while you get a shower or something… And then straight to bed.”

“A white duffel bag inside one of the cabinets, and there’s some money under the sink, it’s all cash,” (Y/N) yawned, stretching her purple arms as if she hadn’t done it in a hundred years. Frank rose an incredulous eyebrow at her, making the question quite obvious. “What? The man was too stoned to remember where he put all his money, besides I was thinking to buy a gun with it,” she shrugged carelessly.

“But then you would’ve gone to prison,” he said matter-of-factly.

“It would have been completely worth the damn,” she smiled weakly and feeling more exhausted than ever. She yawned again and headed towards the bathroom again. “Thank you… Peter,” she nodded. “If it wasn’t for you…” she bit her bottom lip and shrugged, slowly disappearing inside.

Frank shook his head and walked back to (Y/N)’s old apartment. Greg was trying to wake up, and when the Punisher noticed he was awake, he grabbed him by the neck of his shirt and easily lifted him from the floor, pushing him to the wall, making way less noise.

“Listen to me, you little piece of shit,” Frank growled as he placed his forearm under Greg’s throat.
and a hand on his mouth to keep him silenced. “You will not lay a hand over (Y/N) ever again, you get me? Nod if you do, cause if you yell I’ll throw you out the window,” the scared man beneath him nodded rapidly. “Now pack your bags and leave this shit hole, and if you ever dare hurting another woman I’m going to know, and you wouldn’t want the big, bad Punisher behind your sorry ass, now would you?” Greg shook his head nervously. “Good boy,” Frank let him go at watched as he ran away down the stairs.

He took the duffel bag and the small Tupperware from the places he was told and carried them back to his place. (Y/N) was sleeping, but shaking from the cold because she was not under the cover. Frank scoffed and placed one of his huge jackets over her. She sighed and slowly opened her eyes.

“Peter?” She mumbled sleepily. “What happened?”

“You shitty ex will not bother you again,” he whispered softly as he sat down next to her. “And he will never hurt anyone else; that you can be sure of,” he smiled weakly; (Y/N) replied the smile and snuggled under the warm garment.

“Thank you, Frank,” and after those words, she fell asleep again.
Chapter 2

3 months had gone by and (Y/N)’s health was improving, there were no more bruises and the beatings were just terrible memory that she coped with every day, and with Frank by her side, she was invincible, both mentally and physically speaking, because Frank didn’t want her to be defenseless when she decided to leave his side; secretly he hoped she would never do it, but he knew she had to move on, and his apartment wasn’t in the best of places. It was just a matter of time until she packed her belongings and left. She didn’t have much; a few oversized shirts—and most of those actually belonged to Frank—a few sports bras and pants. She had bought new things, well Frank did it with her indications; she needed a fresh start, and clothing was the first thing.

“I think we need a bigger place,” (Y/N) said in absentmindedness, but to Frank, those words sounded like heaven. “You can’t keep sleeping on that chair,” she sounded like a mom, or more like a wife when she worried so much about him and everything else.

“I can, as long as you stay here I’ll sleep on the chair, and that’s about it,” Frank tried to put an end to the discussion, but he knew there was no winning with a woman like that; she would get her way because he would eventually give in and without even putting up a fight. “I just don’t wanna push your boundaries, and I snore a lot,”

“Well,” (Y/N) crossed her arms over her chest, giving her a bossy aura, “I bet my ass you’d snore a lot less if you slept on a real bed, now wouldn’t you?” Frank chuckled and looked away, with one of the biggest smiles he had in years. Once he had put himself together, he dared to look at (Y/N) again, who had quite an unfriendly face. “I don’t get it, what’s so fucking funny, Frank?” She shook her head quickly. “Look, I worry about you, Castle,”

“And I totally appreciate it,” he conceded in a hoarse chuckle, “but I think I can take care of myself pretty well,” shrugging, he walked towards the door for a small walk. Before he grabbed the knob, a soft hand grabbed him instead. He looked down, and his heart skipped a painful beat when he saw Maria reflected in (Y/N)’s eyes. It’s not like he never thought of her anyway or that she didn’t haunt him every day whether awake or asleep, but it was the very first time he’d seen her in somebody else. Not even Karen was like Maria. Frank was now torn between the love of his life and the girl he had just saved, and he didn’t like the course this was taking. “Look—”

“No,” she said in a severe voice, “shut up and listen to me,” her grip was tighter, but not enough to even make him uncomfortable. “You saved me and that’s pretty fucking cool, but you have let me stay here for months without accepting anything in return, and I can’t let that happen. I cannot let that go,”

“Yeah, you’ve got good intentions and everything,” Frank reluctantly admitted, “but where can we go? Where can I go? We don’t have much money left either,”

“I can see if my old job can take me back, or maybe look for some other thing to do? You know I am still pretty resourceful—I don’t know!” She breathed heavily and completely exacerbated when she saw Frank scoffing a laugh and looking away again. “I’m trying to do some good for the both of us, Frank, can’t you just see that?”

“(Y/N), don’t,” Frank shook his head and smacked his lips. “Really, just don’t; if you wanna do good, do it for you; get out of here and do some good shit for yourself because you deserve it; I don’t,”

“Now what is that supposed to mean?” She inquired, letting go of his arm and placed both hands
over her waist. When she didn’t get an answer, she asked a second time. “Frank Castle, what the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing, just—” he stammered and groaned in vexation when he couldn’t find any words to fight her—“Ugh,” he groaned, “I’ll be back soon,” Frank said coldly and with a slam, he left the apartment.

(Y/N) followed Frank down the hallway but he wasn’t there anymore. Feeling suddenly helpless, she came back and searched in the newspaper for any available job; she was not even trying to get all picky with the offerings, but the many ads on women needed for gentlemen’s clubs although money-wise tempting, were not her first go-to option, and not even the second, third or last. Throwing the paper away, she headed for the bathroom to have a quick shower and head outside to see if there was something available.

She got out the apartment and walked without direction, turning on random streets and going inside every store with a wanted help sign, but they were very kind to say that she didn’t really fit the profile they looked for. Feeling the terrible cold, she was more hopeless than she had ever been and ready to give up on everything when her phone vibrated inside the pocket of Frank’s hoodie.

“Yeah, hello?” She said doubtfully. “Who’s this?”

"Is this (Y/N) (Y/L/N)? My name’s Karen Page, I’m calling from the Bulletin, the paper, and I would like an interview with you, is tomorrow okay with you?”

“Sorry, how did you get my number—and why are you calling again?”

“For a job interview, please, come to the Bulletin at around 4 and ask to talk to me, I’ll be waiting for you, so I guess I’ll see you tomorrow then?”

“Uhh—sure, yeah,” (Y/N) shook her head in bewilderment. “See you tomorrow, then,”

The other line hung up and (Y/N) was left alone with her thoughts. She knew about the connection that Karen and Frank had, so that fortunate coincidence was bound to happen, but she felt grateful for the opportunity anyway. She did feel a sort of anger; did Frank really think she couldn’t get a job on her own? And why calling Karen? He could’ve just bought another paper and look for more jobs there. But no, he had to get away with everything and had to take care of things his own way.

She walked for a few hours more until the sun almost finished setting; it was about time to go back home. As she walked up the stairs, she found her old apartment. It had a new door now and she could hear noise from within. She sat next to the door where she had fallen asleep so many times before, and she could even feel the same pain from then. What she heard inside was quite different from the ones she knew, and feeling a strange relief, she continued her way towards Frank.

She opened the door and found him there, fast asleep on the bed; he looked so peaceful, even with the short hair and beardless face, that she couldn’t help but smiling at the sight, forgetting all the bad blood and petty feelings she had. She laid next to him keeping a reasonable distance, because she knew Frank would probably raise a storm in a teacup just because. His rambling was senseless to her most of the time, and he was too precautious. True, she was a victim and survivor of abuse, but she was not traumatized, at least, not with the normal human contact.

Personal defense helped her a lot with trauma and so did martial arts. (Y/N) was seeing this girl who had a small Dojo in Chinatown, Colleen Wing. She knew how the world could get for the many women out there in New York, so this Colleen girl wanted to contribute to the safety by providing it herself. It paid her bills at least, and (Y/N) got better at it each day; physically and mentally.
Grabbing her torn copy of her favorite book, she let the words carry her away to an extraordinarily familiar world. The characters always made her feel better, even if they had demons of all sorts, these helped her to cope with her own, with the demons of a past that although left her skin, they still remained as if they were engraved to her heart and soul. After some pages, she looked at Frank, his now beardless, short haired, violent guardian angel that laid so calmly next to her. She sighed and called it quits to the book. She snuggled next to him, calling it quits for the day. She was right after all, Frank did snore a lot less when he slept on a bed. Just when she wanted to record him, she sighed heavily and gave up on that petty feeling.

At around 2, and after having had lunch, (Y/N) started to get ready for her interview with Karen, which of course was thanks to Frank pulling a few strings. She hadn’t told him that she was going out, so when he saw her putting on some make up, it was a bit strange. She wasn’t terribly dolled up, but her attire was certainly quite different from the oversized t-shirts and gym pants she usually wore.

“Where are you going?” Frank asked, looking form over his shoulder as he sipped his coffee almost vigorously and quite loudly.


“No—nothing,” Frank shook his big head, “by the way, where were you yesterday? Didn’t find you when I came back,” he nodded his chin trying to keep it cool.

“Controlling much?” (Y/N) jokingly cocked an eyebrow. “Nah, I was looking for a job and walked for a long time instead, I just needed some time alone to think,” she sighed heavily. “Anyway, I gotta get going,” she pointed at the door. “I’ll be back in a few hours or less, I guess… I don’t really know, I’ll call you,” and grabbing her bag and keys, she was out the door. She felt a bit guilty for not telling him, but she couldn’t shake away the feel the terrible feeling that she was being controlled.

Karen Page was everything (Y/N) thought she was. The blondie was the tallest woman she had ever seen and (Y/N) only felt smaller; the journalist also had a great sense of fashion whilst the interviewee only wore black jeans and an oversized checkered shirt inside them; the latter was courtesy of Frank Castle, of course. Even though all that, Karen was still very kind to her.

“Can I get you some coffee?”

“Yeah, thank you,” (Y/N) smiled.

“Look, I guess you already know who got you this interview and being completely honest, if it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t even have considered calling you,” she said, pouring the dark liquid in two white cups, “but I owe him a lot so… I needed to pay some debts, but if I am to hire you, I’m gonna need to know more about you and how you got to… Peter,” (Y/N) liked right way that she was quick to cut to the chase; no unnecessary introductions or bullshit of the sort. “He didn’t say much except for—” she placed both cups on her desk and left the sugar right in between them.

“I’d rather not tell you, Miss Page,” (Y/N) nervously played with her fingers and fidgeted on her seat, which became more and more uncomfortable. “I’m not really proud of who I used to be,”

“Just Karen,” the journalist shook her head. “Although Frank did mention something about you…”

“Good grief, do you actually get to trust someone these days, or what?” (Y/N) rolled her eyes. “I was beaten by my former partner and Frank got me out of there, that’s about it,” she said as if it was the most normal thing for a person to go through. She had it so normalized and internalized inside her, that at some point in her mind, it truly was just a regular thing.
“That’s a very interesting story,” Karen commented, “and if you want to, we can tell it to the people… just imagine how many lives we could change, or even save with your experience,” the blonde’s eyes sparkled with hope and the thirst of a thrilling new story to tell.

“Look, I’m sorry, but the last thing I want is to tell women what they already know and what they’ve been told a thousand times,” (Y/N) shook her head; she was very secretive, and writing on a newspaper was not exactly keeping a secret, not even close. “We—I mean, women know they have to leave their partners if they’re abusive, that if they get hit once, they’ll get hit twice and a hundred times more before they get killed, and most importantly, women know violence is not love, but they don’t want to hear it from a stranger, and especially on a newspaper,”

“But you’re a survivor, (Y/N); besides, I really think this can be a huge story,” Karen urged as she ran a slim hand through her almost platinum hair.

“I’m really not; if anything, Frank took me out of there because he couldn’t sleep from all the noise my former partner and I used to make,” she shrugged. “I am way less than you think, but I do need the job. The apartment is getting small for the both of us,”

“Oh, you live with Frank?” Karen’s curiosity rose up and if (Y/N) didn’t knew better, her jealousy was rising up too. “He didn’t mention that…” she whispered quietly. “Anyway, what kind of relationship do you have with him? Just out of curiosity, of course,” she smiled uneasily.

“I would call it a symbiotic one; he gives me shelter, hoodies and food and I give him laughs, meals and occasional anger, but I’m afraid I feel like we’re getting a bit off topic,”

“Yeah—you’re right, I’m very sorry,” Karen shook her head and sighed heavily. “Well, I need you to keep my agenda in order and sometimes I’m gonna need you to come with me to get some reports, statements, and pictures, like an assistant,” she explained. “You won’t be on your own, for safety,”

“I don’t have much choice, Miss Page—Karen,” she chuckled but more in exhaustion than because she was actually entertained; it was the most awkward job interview she had ever had, “I really need the job,”

“Well, then that settles it,” she clicked her tongue and smiled widely. “I’ll see you tomorrow,” she stood up and extended a hand arm towards (Y/N). “I usually start at 10, but the calls and good stuff don’t come up until like… 11? So you could come at 9:30? I don’t really ask for coffee, but if you want to bring me one I’ll be very happy, besides the paper will pay you back each coffee,”

“Thank you, thank you so much,” (Y/N) shook her new boss’s hand with too much energy and excitement.

“One thing before I forget, I assume you don’t have much of… anything, so I’ll let it pass for now, but if you can, with your first salary I’d like you to get some more… formal clothing,” she twisted her lips, knowing it was an uncomfortable topic for both. “I’m cool if you’re here at the office wearing shirts and what I suppose are Frank’s clothes,” she chuckled, “they are so not your size,” the two laughed, “but when we go out, because sometimes we get to, I’m gonna need you dress a bit more formal, not in a suit, but…” Karen shrugged.

“I know, and I’ll try to get something for the meantime, but really, thank you,”

(Y/N) walked back home with a bag of donuts and cheerful heart. Even if Karen had made her quite uncomfortable, her disposition to have her over everything was great, so it was only fair to thank Frank for it, and food was always the way to a man’s heart; especially when the man to eat like an elephant but couldn’t do it because there wasn’t much to eat at home.
“Can you come to the station and pick me up? I think I saw Greg on the train and I’m getting a bit scared, you’ll be rewarded because I’m coming with something delicious to eat later. I’ll be at the station in like 30 minutes, please try to be there earlier. –(Y/N)”

Frank didn’t need a second thought or text to put on his jacket and go out where he was needed, and the message included food, so there he had another reason to come to the rescue. He didn’t need to walk fast because the station was not really far. Outside there was a man selling coffee, so he bought two cups and took them inside to wait for (Y/N). He saw many trains go by, but (Y/N) came out of none, Frank tapped his foot on the dull tiles anxiously and rubbed his hands; the coffee inside the cups that were on the seat next to him moved and some droplets made their way out of the edge.

Castle was about to call her when she appeared in between people holding the bag close to her and fearfully looking out for him; he could see the sigh of relief and the whiff that came from her barely open lips, result of the cold, winter air and the heat from all the people around her. Frank narrowed his eyes trying to focus on the person who was supposedly following (Y/N) and there he was, and he surely looked as if he followed his former partner.

(Y/N) hurried her steps towards Frank, and buried herself in his chest. She was trembling, and it was not entirely due to the cold; she was terrified.

“It’s okay,” Frank hushed, stroking her hair with his big and warm hands. “You’re safe now.”

“Frank, kiss me,” (Y/N) spat shakily. “P—please, just one kiss,” she held on to the collar of his jacket and desperately stepped on the tip of her toes.

Before Frank could refute or even put up a fight, (Y/N) had already reached his lips with hers. It had been long ever since Frank had actually kissed a woman, and the feeling had his heart torn in two. On the one hand, it was nice to kiss someone again, to feel that intimacy with another person, and (Y/N)’s lips were a good opportunity to get that for many reasons; on the other hand, his repeated nightmare was from the day Maria and the kids were murdered and it always started the same; she woke him up with a tender and loving kiss, a kiss that only ended up in blood and a cold sweat running down his spine.

(Y/N) wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders, dropping the bag and forgetting why she was even kissing him, but it still felt right, as if it was meant to be; Frank sneaked his hands to wrap around her waist almost instinctively, pulling her closer and trying to shove the guilt inside a box that seemed too small; he loved the taste of her lips; they were so fresh, so sweet and so tender that for that infinite moment, Maria was left aside too, but it was him the one who broke the kiss.

Panting, the two pressed their foreheads against one another and were unwilling to open their eyes and let it end, but cold and the observing eyes of a man from the past took him back to the present. Before the magic ended, Frank cupped (Y/N)’s face and kissed the top of her head; at least, that way, it would look a lot more real. He weakly smiled at her and picked up the bag from the floor. He offered one of the coffees he had bought, and taking the other one, they walked back home in complete silence.

“So,” Frank awkwardly said as he closed the door behind him, “how was your interview?”

“The donuts are obviously to celebrate that I got the job!” (Y/N) cheerfully squealed as she clapped her hands. “Your friend Karen is really nice, I’m very excited to start working with her, she looks like she’s tough,” she bit her bottom lip, “and she’s so damned pretty…” she sighed. “Thank you for talking to her,” (Y/N) reluctantly admitted, “I swear I hated you at first, but truth is, we need the money,”

“I just hope she treats you well,” Frank shrugged casually.
“If you don’t mind me asking,” (Y/N) said as she placed some biscuits on a plate and Frank made some coffee, “what’s the whole story about you two? She was a bit… well, very inquisitive whenever the conversation was focused on you,”

“We’re just… I don’t know, I don’t think we’re friends, but I care about her and she cares about me, kinda, I guess, we care in our own very strange way about each other,” he shrugged again, and after a long pause, he said again. “Hey, about the kiss…”

“I don’t think I have the energy to even think about that, honey,” (Y/N) sighed tiredly, “let’s talk it over later, okay?” Frank sighed in defeat; (Y/N), just like his wife, was not the type of woman who lost an argument or started one when she didn’t want to. “Is coffee ready? I’m dying to try one of these,”
Chapter 3

Not many days went by without Frank bringing the kiss up, this time it was a day off for both, and so they decided to take the talk outside. They headed to a park full of families. It wasn’t snowing anymore, but it wasn’t completely clear. (Y/N) and Frank sat down on a freezing bench.

“You never talk about your family,” (Y/N) sighed as she leaned her head on Frank’s shoulder. “Also, I suppose your nightmares have to do with them, right?”

“Sometimes I forget how smart you are,” Frank chuckled, looking away at the people enjoying the day with their families. “Yeah, the thing is that I don’t know what to say about them, I’m not good at sharing,” he shrugged with his free shoulder. “So, ask away and I’ll tell you,”

“How was she? Your wife… How was she with you?”

“We didn’t really get to spend much time together, I was out for most of our marriage, but she was great, she had this ability to make everything work even though my kids were a pain in the ass sometimes, though I could be to blame for that, because I indulged them too much when I was around but… She was something else, I can’t really describe her,” he smacked his lips and looked away again.

“What was harder, to leave her or to come back home?”

“Those were two different things,” Frank shook his head. “I remember being anxious to see them, the first time I saw Lisa, after she was born I was dying; I jumped all over the place, everyone teased me about it, the same happened when Frankie was born,” he stopped for a minute. “Coming back was a whole another thing; I didn’t do it for the country, but I had a family back there, a family that I longed to see just as I longed to see Maria and the kids; but I lost both,” it was hard for (Y/N) to not notice the pain in his voice, and she silently scolded herself for asking so many deep questions; she wanted to know more, but not if it meant to see him all broken. “What about you?” He asked after an awkward silence. “How was your family like?”

“I’m an only child from a split marriage,” (Y/N) said simply. “Mom has a bunch of money, you know? She’s pretty rich, like a house in the Hamptons and the Upper East Side for the everyday kind of rich; holidays out of the country and shit kind of rich, and we left my dad when I was very little and I think booze helped her to get through it all, so I had to take care of myself and that’s kinda how I met Greg, I mean, we were neighbors and we spent a lot of time together, he was older so he helped me with school and shit like that,” (Y/N) sat straight and crossed her legs on the bench. “At first he was so charming and so great… and he helped me a lot when my dad died, because even though he hit my mom, he never laid a hand over me and he was very… caring and loving all that shit, but little after Greg and I moved in together things started to change and… well, you know the rest story,”

“This is kinda personal and you don’t have to answer if it’s awkward or something, but how did he get to hit you the first time?”

“I can’t really remember the how, because the first few times he hit me were very much alike. We were talking—arguing really, and then the argument heated up and next thing I know, he just… slaps me,” she made the movement with her hand. “Then he would say he’s sorry and leave the apartment for a few hours; then, he would always come back with my favorite cupcakes and things to take care of my bruises and shit,” she smiled. “After a while though, it was only beating and no cupcakes, no taking care of me and not even an apology,”
“You know, I’ve always admired how lightheartedly you take it,” Frank commented, looking at (Y/N) with loving eyes. “People tend to block traumas away, but… you seem to just live with it,” 

“I’m glad we’re not like that, I guess,” she chuckled. “No, but I can’t cry over spilt milk my whole life; I mean, the man beat me to shit and I’ve moved on from that. I have to thank the opportunities that my violent guardian angel gave me,” (Y/N) smiled at Frank, placing a hand on his rough cheek. “You gave me this new life, Frank, and I can’t waste it by whining over a guy that does not deserve anything but a good kick in the balls and perhaps a bullet to the head,” she lovingly caressed his cheek, feeling the same tingling from when they kissed. “I have to move on, and I have to give you something back…” she sighed lightly. “I know I’ve been avoiding the whole kiss thing, so if you wanna talk about it, and I guess you do, fire away,” she made a finger gun and pointed at him.

“I just wanna know why. Why did you do it?”

“I was desperate and… you were there…” (Y/N) stammered nervously, running a hand through her hair as she tried to get the right words. “It’s not like I did it to play with you, or just save my sorry ass from a beating, please, don’t think that, but…” she sighed heavily. “I’m sorry, I really shouldn’t have,” she conceded, shaking her head.

“It’s okay, don’t dwell too much on that,” Frank assured her, placing a soft hand on her knee and gently stroking it. “I only needed an explanation because you really took me off guard,” he shrugged. “But I saved you once, and don’t doubt I’ll do it again,”

“I know, and I’m so sorry… it won’t happen again,” (Y/N) bit her bottom lip. “I really don’t know what I’d do without you, Frankie,”

“One more question,” Frank suddenly said. “I don’t mind you living with me, for the record, but, why don’t you go live with your mom? I’m sure she must live in a bigger place than the apartment, you’d be more comfortable there,”

“I don’t know if she’d want me back, besides I don’t have her number to call her and say ‘hey, what’s up, remember you had a kid? Well, it’s me’, I don’t know where she is either, and I swear I’m not making up excuses—” she rolled her eyes and stopped. “Look, if you don’t wanna live with me, you could’ve just said it,” she said coyly.

“It’s not that,” Frank stuttered nervously. “I’m just saying that life with me doesn’t get better than this, at all; I am probably stuck in that apartment forever, and I don’t want you stuck with me, knowing you’re all good and capable of being a better person,”

“You’re being too kind right now, I don’t think I can improve my fucked up self, Frankie,” she smiled lightly, “so as far as I’m concerned… you’re stuck with me,”

“Oh well,” Frank shrugged casually, “I guess I’ve got myself a pretty good roommate,”
Chapter 4

“Karen, I need your help” Frank said on the phone. “(Y/N)’s got very high fever and it doesn’t seem to go down,” his voice was impatient and on the very verge of cracking. (Y/N) was lying on the bed with a wet towel on her forehead, obviously distressed and uneasy but in a slumber that looked more like a near dead bed. “Can you please come and bring her something? I’ve got nothing here and I don’t wanna leave her alone… Yeah, I’ll wait, thanks,” he hung up and hurried next to (Y/N)’s side on the bed. “Hey doll, do you want me to change your towel?” She shook her head, and quickly looked at him; she looked paler than usual, and Frank couldn’t help but to blame himself; they lived on ramen and all the cheap, unhealthy food that their salaries could buy. “You’ll be fine in a minute, Karen’s gonna help us, okay?” He held her hand and kissed it repeatedly; (Y/N) groaned unintelligibly and rolled off on her side with a heartbreaking expression of pain.

Frank didn’t know what to do, or at least, he didn’t know how to improvise something other than the wet towel on her forehead. After about 30 minutes, Karen finally arrived at Frank’s apartment, bringing with her the required medicine. She gave it to (Y/N), who seemed to get better a while later. The journalist stayed a few more hours, making chicken soup and just looking after her assistant.

What they didn’t realize was that (Y/N) started to slowly open her eyes. The medicine had lowered her fever and she was now much more conscious of what happened around her; unfortunately, a muffled fight was taking place right before her heavy lids.

“She’ll be much better in a few hours, but give her these every 8 hours,” she handed Frank a box of tablets, “and once she’s awake, feed her the soup,” she said coldly. “Frank, I know I’m no position to say this, but you can’t keep her here,” Karen sighed heavily and rested her hands on her hips. “What kind of life do you think you’re giving her? I mean—what are you gonna do if she gets sick again? Or worse? Are you going to call me every time?”

“Do you think I haven’t thought of all of the things you mention? I have tried to talk her out, so many times, of staying here, but she doesn’t listen,”

“Oh god,” she scoffed and rolled her bright blue eyes, “get your shit together for once, Frank; she’s a little girl, and I’m not gonna let you stain her with your shit, or let you take advantage of her,”

“Stain her? Do you think we’ve—?” Frank furrowed his brow. “I really appreciate what you did for her, but I’m gonna ask you to leave, Karen,” he said, trying to keep as much calm as he could. Karen pursed her lips, with her eyes filled with tears and looked away.

“I worry about you, Frank,” she said in a creaking voice. “Believe it or not, I do. And trust me when I say that I don’t want you to be alone, but this is not how you break the loneliness, not with a girl that can barely keep herself together, you need some stability,”

“How can I get that, Karen?” Frank asked in a husk, stepping closer towards her until their faces were just centimeters apart. “Karen, I lost everything I had, don’t talk to me about stability because I don’t have it anymore, and I don’t think I ever did,” (Y/N) opened her eyes for a second and saw Karen wrapping her arms around Frank’s shoulders and pulling his head closer to her lips, melting in one longing kiss. (Y/N) was aware that she was the third wheel there, and closing her eyes tightly, she forced herself to fall asleep once again. Frank gently pushed Karen away and the blonde left the apartment in silence.

After a few hours, when (Y/N) was fully awake and feeling much better, she headed to the bathroom to have a nice shower; standing under the warm water only made her more and more frustrated. Why
did Karen have to stick her nose in what she didn’t have to? (Y/N) was a grown up woman that could make her own decisions, or at least that’s what she chose to believe. Did Frank not want her around anymore? She needed to hear it from him, to at least have some peace of mind.

When she got out of the bathroom, she walked towards the depressingly empty fridge, waking up Frank, who was sleeping on the armchair next to it. He looked at her and smiled gently, stretching and standing up to greet her.

“How are you feeling?”

“Better, thanks,” (Y/N) replied coldly. “Do we have anything to eat? I’m starving,”

“Yeah…” Frank said hesitatingly. “There’s some chicken soup there, let me get you some and then you’ll take something,”

“Do you have the newspaper?” She asked carelessly as she took the stool under the table. Frank left a bowl with warm soup that, to (Y/N)’s misfortune, looked and smelled amazing. “I wanna look for an apartment, maybe it’s time to live on my own,” she shrugged, “I don’t wanna be a burden to you, or anyone, really,”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Frank cocked an eyebrow.

“Well, I heard you two talking about me like I wasn’t there,” (Y/N) rose her eyebrows quickly. “Am I really that much of nuisance, Frank? Am I really such a pain in the ass that you need to call Karen to solve any problem that I cause?” She accused. “Cause if so, I’d rather just get away from here and pretend like we never met,” she shook her head.

“What Karen said does not represent what I think—look,” he sighed, “she cares about me, and I care about her too but…”

“I don’t wanna hear about that,” (Y/N) rolled her eyes in irritation. “Tell me, do you really want me to leave?”

“Of course I don’t,” he tugged at his bottom lip harshly and rubbed his temples with both hands, “but I don’t want to keep you here, stuck with me. I have no future, (Y/N), nothing at all. I am not a free man and I’m not even alive to the public knowledge. Fuck, I’m not Frank Castle anymore, and this new name means jack to me. Where do you think that gets me? Where do you think that’ll get you? You can’t live the rest of your life hiding, you don’t even have to. You didn’t kill anyone, you’re free,”

“You really think I’m free?” (Y/N) snarled. “I didn’t know that walking on the street with the constant fear of bumping into the guy that beat the shit out of me was being free. Damn, I must be very lucky then—you know what? You shouldn’t have rescued me,” she shook her head; the tears started to pool in her tired eyes, “you should’ve just let me die, you could've looked the other way, then we wouldn’t be here, and I wouldn’t be interfering with your life and none of this would be happening,” she broke down into streams of non-stopping tears that fell into her lap. Frank moved her on the stool, standing right in front of her and grabbing her shoulders tightly, but not harshly.

“(Y/N), listen to me very carefully,” he said in a stern voice. “Meeting you has been, undoubtedly, the best thing that’s happened to me; after all that shit, you appeared into my life and everything changed for the better. If you want to stay here, I will let you and we’ll never discuss the topic again because, truth is, I don’t want you to leave, but I want you to understand that life really, really,” he repeated so as to bring emphasis to the word; (Y/N) looked at him with a trembling chin and blurry eyes, “really doesn’t get better with me, but if you stay here, I will try to be a better person
because…” Frank’s hands moved to (Y/N)’s cheeks and cupped her face lovingly; his eyes were like the ones of a lost puppy that longed for a home and someone to love him. He couldn’t carry on.

“Because what?” (Y/N) asked in a barely audible sigh. Her eyes darted from his melancholic eyes to his partially open lips, feeling the urge to break the distance between them. “Frank?”

“Nothing,” he looked away, letting go of (Y/N) with a heavy heart. “Finish your soup, though I hope it didn’t get too cold,” he stood up and walked towards the front door; he was running away from his feelings, and (Y/N), sick and everything, did not have the time for that. She followed him immediately and grabbed his hand, to make him turn around.

She pulled him with enough strength to make his lips land on hers; they had the same feeling as when she asked him to kiss her at the station, but this time she wasn’t under any pressure to do so, and she could feel how he was less reluctant to kiss her than before. (Y/N) sneaked her hands up to his neck, intertwining her fingers behind it and making sure he wasn’t going anywhere.

But Frank wasn’t going anywhere. He wanted to be there; god, he longed to be there in her arms again. He wanted to have her close, he wanted a taste from her sweet, refreshing lips, to feel her heart beating like a drum through her chest, to touch her skin with tiny goose bumps; he had all of that again and he loved it; he loved her and he loved everything about her. Her lips timidly open, allowing him enough space to slide his tongue inside. She hummed in pure bliss when their tongues swirled together.

Frank held her tightly in his arms and spinning, he gently pressed her body against the door; a sigh of delightful pleasure escaped from (Y/N)’s lips as she felt the weight of Frank’s body, his torso molding and melting with hers; she threw her head back, allowing Frank to dig deeper into the newly found desire and longing for her. He was in utter ecstasy, to put it somehow, and he only longed for more of her, but in a single second of adjusting to the new position, he saw Maria writhing under him instead of (Y/N), and then he stopped and took a step back, gasping for air as he looked away, and then again to (Y/N), who was now standing there, trying to catch her breath too.

“Frank?” she dobiously asked and walked towards him. “Is everything alright?”

“No,” he shook his head swiftly, “I screwed up, I’m sorry—”

“Frank, you’ve been completely honest with me today, and I hope you can still be honest right now, I want to know what happens,” she said.

“It’s her…” Frank gulped, fearfully looking at the girl that reached out for him, “I saw her, Maria, she was standing right where you were for one second as we were… well, you know, and I saw her and… I’m sorry, I didn’t meant to do this but—”

“Don’t be sorry, if anything,” (Y/N) sighed heavily, “I should be the one that’s sorry, I pushed you into this and, it’s so wrong, because you’re married, but…”

“But?”

“But it felt so damned right—I know, I know,” she rose her palms in a defensive manner, “you’re married, and you carry an emotional baggage that’s very overwhelming, and I was beaten to shit, abandoned as a child, therefore I also have a big ass emotional baggage of my own, but that doesn’t mean that I am unable to feel something,” she pursed her lips in a thin line and groaned. “God, I screwed up,” she groaned and rubbed her temples, “and if it wasn’t enough, you’re gonna get sick too,” she whined, running a hand through her hair and tugging at it.
Frank placed a hand under her chin and made her look at him. “It’ll be worth the damn, and for the record, it did feel right to me too, but, there are a few things I need to settle first,” he kissed her forehead and caressed her cheek. “Reheat that soup, it’ll make you feel better,” he took one of his jackets from the wall hanger.

“Where do you think you’re going?” (Y/N) rose an inquisitive eyebrow at him.

“I’m going to make peace,” he smiled. “It’s about damn time I do, don’t you think?” And he finally disappeared behind the closing door.
Chapter 5

The next few days, (Y/N) spent her hours at the apartment until she fully recovered. She needed to make peace too with some people. It was not unusually early, but Frank was still in bed; he awakened with the noise of the water running. He lazily got up and prepared some coffee for breakfast in the meantime.

“Oh, you’re awake sleepy head,” (Y/N) gleefully said as she dried her hair with her towel. She took a deep breath, inhaling the glorious smell of coffee that came from next to him. She left the towel on the wall hanger and wrapped her arms around Frank’s torso and leaned her head on his back. She sighed, relaxed at the warmth that his body provided. “How did you sleep?”

“Great,” he caressed the back of her hands that rested on his stomach. “You gotta go to work?”

“Yeah, but I don’t know if I’ll stay there,” she inhaled sharply and let go of him; walking towards the table, she let herself fall on the stool next to it. “I don’t think I can work with Karen anymore, at least, after what happened—”

“Between us?” Frank cocked an inquisitive eyebrow at her, placing the cup with the dark, warm liquid right in front of her.

“Well… kinda,” she shrugged, “but mostly for what you guys talked about. I get it, she worries about me and so do you, but, I think I can take care of myself now, right?” she pursed her lips.

“Are you sure about this? I mean, what are you going to tell her?” He asked in a concerned voice.

“The truth, of course,” she furrowed her brow in a puzzled expression. “That she doesn’t need to worry because we are not… together,” Frank looked away, taking his hand away from her. “Are you serious right now?” She chuckled in bewilderment. “Frank, let’s get real honest here, what are we?” She pushed the cup away from her. “And no, this is not a trap question and I’m not trying to force an answer from you, but tell me, what are we in reality?” She waited patiently for an answer, but the only thing she got was a dead silence. “You see? That’s exactly what I mean, we are nothing; I mean, yeah, we’ve kissed a couple times, and the last one being quite recently, but apart from that we are… we’re just roommates,” she shrugged.

“Do you want us to be something else then?”

“No—I mean, I don’t know,” she stuttered. “I like you Frank, I know I do, I’m not stupid, and I’m not blind either… but I don’t know if this is because you’ve been nice to me these past 10 months or if because I truly feel things for you, but when we kiss it just feels right… Ugh,” she groaned, “I’m being too complicated right now and I need my mind straight if I’m gonna go talk to Karen,” she tapped her lap once, and quickly got up. “Don’t wait for me for lunch, after that I’m gonna go somewhere else,” she leaned forward to kiss Frank’s forehead and grabbing the keys, she was gone.

She headed to the Bulletin’s office, and then straight to Karen’s office. The blonde was talking to a man whose hair was darker than hers, but not enough to be a brunette; he was chubby looking, which gave him an incredibly adorable appearance, (Y/N) thought she had seen him somewhere else before. Karen welcomed (Y/N) with a hug and she introduced her to Nelson.

“Wait a second, Franklin Nelson,” (Y/N) said, “aren’t you one of Frank Castle’s lawyers? From The People vs. Frank Castle, right? That’s why your face was so familiar to me!” She smiled with excitement.
I don’t usually follow these criminal cases, and trials, and stuff, but you were really great; that opening statement thing you did there, oh god,” she took her hand to her lips. “I was truly starstruck,” she giggled nervously.

“Oh thanks!” Foggy timidly replied. “It’s nice to know that I’ve done at least one good thing in my career, but I gotta get going,” he sighed, “Hogarth gets really mad if I come in late, I don’t know why, I have a meeting in like 2 hours,” he shrugged and kissed both girls cheek’s goodbye.

“Well, I wasn’t expecting to see you until next week, is everything alright?” Karen said taking her seat behind the desk, (Y/N) sat right in front. “How’s your cold going?”

“I’m feeling much better, thanks, but I kinda got bored at home,” (Y/N) shrugged casually. “Can we talk? As in… really talk?”


“I want you to know that I heard you guys talking the other day, and I didn’t really like where that conversation was heading, at all,” (Y/N) bit her bottom lip nervously. “I appreciate that you worry about me, but I just don’t think it’s your shot to call…”

“You’re taking me off guard, (Y/N),” Karen scoffed, “I mean—I never meant to go off limits, but you’re right, I do worry about you, because I know Frank, and he’s not as good as he shows,” she said in a concerned voice. “I’ve known him enough time to understand how screwed up he is and you don’t need any more of that shit, what you’ve been through—”

“That’s not important,” (Y/N) shook her head. “I can still make my own decisions without someone meddling. I appreciate the efforts, the worries, the job, but I don’t think I can do this if there’s going to be some weird vibe between us all,”

“Us all?” Karen asked.

“You can’t deny that you hate that Frank and I are living together, I can smell it,” (Y/N) sighed and shook her head to both sides. “You hate it, and this has shaped the way we work together; you barely bring him up and when you do, is only to ask something regarding the way we live, and I don’t think it’s because you’re worried about our lifestyle… Karen, you’ve got to admit your feelings for him,”

“What?” The blonde one scoffed again, chuckling and covering her mouth with her pale, bony hand. “And what makes you think that?”

“It’s pretty obvious,” (Y/N) shrugged. “I saw the way you looked at him, and the way you talk about him when you do… and I saw you two kissing. Look, I don’t want Frank to be an awkward thing between us, especially while I’m still working here, I don’t wanna fight for him, do you?”

“Truth is, I don’t either,” Karen leaned back on the chair, sighing heavily and rubbing her temples in evident exhaustion. “I’ve got too much on my mind to be thinking about him; there’s another guy; we have a strange thing but nothing too important,” she shook her head in a careless manner. “Okay so, can we come to an agreement?”

“I just need a something to do, and some financial stability and this job is giving me both, I don’t wanna lose it. Can we leave Frank out of the picture? Enough I have with him being everything I see every single day,” (Y/N) chuckled and shook her head.

“And you won’t, lose the job (Y/N), don’t worry” Karen sighed, “besides you’ve been a great assistant and I can’t thank you enough for being here,” she tugged at her bottom lip with her teeth.
“You know, I used to be very jealous of you two,” she admitted, “because for a while, we shared a lot and he saved me a few times, but he was never at ease with me, or not as he is with you. Everything I know about him is because I either found out elsewhere or I forced him to tell me for the sake of the case… I’m really glad you’re still with him, in any way that you guys may be together,” she hurried to add, “I was always afraid of Frank ending up completely alone,”

“But he had you,” (Y/N) chimed in.

“But I never had him,” Karen pursed her lips into what could be described as a smile, but (Y/N) knew she was not close to happiness. “He was a case, barely, and not even my own case,” Karen’s chin trembled, and for a while, she couldn’t say a word. “Now that we’ve settled that,” she carried on, “I want to give you something back, but I don’t know what that could be so… ask away,”

“This has been in my head for a while now… I want to find my mom. I haven’t seen in a few years and I just wanna catch up, see if she’s okay,” (Y/N) shrugged.

“Take another sick day and call Foggy,” Karen handed her a post-it note with a number written on it. “I’m sure he can help more than I can,”

After leaving the Bulletin, with her job still intact and her heart feeling lighter, (Y/N) headed towards the cemetery; there was one last person she needed to make peace with.

“Franklin Nelson? This is (Y/N) (Y/L/N), we met at Karen’s office earlier today and she told me you could help me with a little something; thing is that I need to find someone and I don’t know how or where to start…”

“Give me the name and I’ll do the rest,” Foggy said from the other line.

“Beatrice (Y/L/N); Beauchamp is her maiden name, is that all?”

“Yes, that’ll do,” he replied, and hung up.

New York was starting to get really warm by this time of the year, and after that heart to heart talk to Karen, it was time (Y/N) made peace with someone else. She headed for the cemetery and bought the prettiest bouquet that her money could afford.

As summer was on its early stage, families gathered around the stones of their loved ones bringing flowers with them; some brought baskets with food and blankets, and not far away, she spotted an old man with a bottle of champagne and two long glasses. He talked to the grave as if it was the most normal thing in the world, and so, following the stranger’s actions she crossed her legs on the grass right in front of the grave that she looked for.

“Hey Maria, this is (Y/N)... Frank told me these ones were your favorites,” she placed the bouquet in front of the grave, next to some other flowers that didn’t seem to be old, “so I brought you a bouquet, though I don’t know if you actually like this color or not,” (Y/N) bit her bottom lip nervously. “Anyway, I’m here to talk to you because there’s something you ought to know…” she sighed heavily. “I’m living with your husband, and I have been for almost a year… he took me out of a bad place and I can’t look for another place to live because I don’t have enough money to pull such trick. I know it must be weird that a strange teenager comes by and tells you this, but truth is, I am in debt with him, I owe him my life and the only way I can pay him back by staying with him and watch that he get enough sleep and just take care of him like you would,” (Y/N) shrugged lightly. “By no means I wanna replace you, Maria, I swear I don’t, but I do want him to feel better. I wish you could see him; he wakes up at 3 am, sweating and panting, desperate because his nightmare is always the same... He loves you with all his life, girl, but I don’t want him to be stuck
in something that’s not coming back, you know?” Her voice cracked. “He’s got a new life, and he’s really trying to live it but it’s been really hard, and if you allow me, I wanna help him with that. I promise I’m not going to let him forget about you, or your children,” (Y/N) looked away and pressed the tears with the back of her hands. “I don’t want him as a boyfriend—I mean, I truly don’t know if I do,” she gulped a terrible lump down her throat, but it didn’t seem to go away at all, “all I know is that I want him in my life, and I want to make his better, but I need a sign, I need to know if you’ll let me stay with him—it doesn’t have to be right now, I understand you might need some time to… to take in the news,” she chuckled nervously. “Well,” she said, uncrossing her legs and standing up, “I gotta get going, or your husband will start eating crap,” she placed a hand on the warm stone. “I hope you can see how Frank’s doing now, I don’t mean to brag, but I think he’s happier now,” she patted it, sighing heavily and started her way back home.

Her heart had never felt lighter than now.
Chapter 6

After searching far and wide for her mom, (Y/N) finally found her; well, it wasn’t exactly her who found the lady. Foggy happened to work in a place that happened to know a private investigator, and with (Y/N)’s information, said P.I easily found the woman and her whereabouts, and without any further delay, (Y/N) and her mother, Beatrice (Y/L/N) set up a small meeting on a café at broad daylight. The place was too fancy for (Y/N) to pay, so her only thought was to ask for the cheapest thing in the menu, and pray for her mom to release the still existing cash.

(Y/N) was there a bit early, but the woman she longed to see was already there and expecting her. With a careless turn of her grey-haired head, she saw her daughter for the very first time in years; the tears didn’t take long to fill her tired eyes. (Y/N) lightly waved her hand at her, just like she used to do when she saw her mom from the window of their old house in the Upper East Side.

“Hello stranger,” (Y/N) said with a note of uncertainty in her voice. That was her mom, without a doubt, but the woman had gotten very old, even when she was not really old, she looked terrible but still in fancy clothing. For Beatrice (Y/L/N), style was one of the most important things in the world, even if her world was torn up. “It’s been a while, isn’t it?”

“Oh, (Y/N), darling,” her mom said with a cracking voice, “you’re always taking things so lightly, come here! Give your mother a hug!” The two held each other for long seconds before sitting and ordering something; fortunately, it was all on (Y/N)’s mom.

They stayed in silence as they had some delicious coffee and breakfast; in their minds played the images of a life that seemed so far away in the past that it was almost as if it wasn’t theirs. It was clear and obvious that alcohol had its toll on (Y/N)’s mother. The younger wondered if it was because they left her father, or because the many years of abuse were too much to handle on a sober basis. And then she thought of herself and how she could have gone down that exact same path if it wasn’t for Frank.

“So, mom,” (Y/N) started, “how’ve you been? I haven’t seen you in a few years,”

“I’d dare say I’ve seen some better days,” Beatrice said in a sigh, “I can’t remember exactly when these better days were, but I’m pretty sure I’ve been better…” The grey-haired lady pursed her thin lips. “This is not the kinda thing you want to hear from your mom, or anyone really, but I am in rehab…”

“Shit, mom,” (Y/N) gulped. “Still booze? I can tell that’s been one tough relationship, huh? And don’t we know about that shit, am I right?” (Y/N) smiled teasingly.

“Yes,” the older woman chuckled gloomily. “Why is it that you’re always so cold about everything, honey? Anyway, enough about this drunk old woman, how are you?”

“Well, I think we can agree that we’ve seen better days, and now I think I am kinda in those better days, but do you remember Greg? He used to be our neighbor back at the Upper East Side,” Bea nodded excepting to see the turns of the story. “Well, long story short, we were together for quite a while, but then he started hitting me until… very recently, just a few months ago actually,” the older woman took her hands to her mouth and her eyes filled with tears again. “Yeah, it’s like a goddamned pattern the females in this family have, don’t you think?” (Y/N) chuckled. “But I’m okay, I got out of it too, or… I was taken out of it, that’s a whole other story,”

“I’ve got nothing to do, and I do hope you’ve got the time, honey,” Beatrice rose her brows quickly,
“because I want to hear that all you’ve got to say about it. You see? That’s the kinda story I need to hear,”

“Well, Greg took me to live in this shitty apartment in Hell’s Kitchen, and we had a neighbor, his name’s Frank Castle—yeah, as in the real Punisher, the crazy guy that shot gangs? Turns out he’s not a bit crazy and he’s actually real nice…” (Y/N) shrugged.

“How’s that? How did that happen?”

“One night he just punched Greg and knocked him out and I’ve been staying with him since then, he’s very respectful, you wouldn’t believe it,” (Y/N) chuckled. “He even helped me to get a job, not by punching someone, just so you know,” (Y/N) laughed heartedly. “No, he has a friend who works at the Bulletin and she got me a job,”

“I imagine you still live in Hell’s Kitchen in a seedy apartment, right?” Beatrice cocked an accusing eyebrow. “Why don’t you come live in the Hamptons, I think you could use some fresh air?”

“I don’t want to lose my job; I quite like it, if I’m honest. Besides, it keeps me busy and I have some money to spare,” (Y/N) shrugged and munched a biscuit. “I don’t think Frank would actually like living there; I just need a place that’s better and that’s near the journal,”

“You seem very fond of that Frank guy, wouldn’t you happen to have feelings for him, right?”

“He saved my life mom,” (Y/N) smiled fondly, “thanks to him I am here now. Do I love him? I don’t know,” she shrugged. “I don’t know if I’m capable of that thing anymore, but do I want to be with him? Hell yeah, of course. He’s so interesting, and he’s so nice—”

“I just hope you’re not with him because you feel in debt,” Beatrice said in a stern and too motherly voice. “(Y/N), sweetie, listen to me, you don’t owe him anything. He took you out? Well, that’s great, and I really appreciate that he saved you, and you should appreciate it too, but he could’ve looked away and that doesn’t mean that you would’ve hated him for that. I will help you get a new place because you’re my daughter and I’m glad to see you still remember me and you’re doing so great after that awful shit that happened to you, but I want you to be sure that you’re still with this man for the right reasons,”

“Mom,” (Y/N) breathed deeply, “I don’t think I’ve ever told you this, but I love you; you’re so fucking great, man. You deserve to get better, and if I can help you with that, then here I am, and I’m not going anywhere… just don’t get lost, like ever again,” (Y/N) blinked quickly, trying to keep the tears in place, “I’ve needed you for so long that I got used to not have you at all; don’t make me feel like that again,”

“Never again sweetheart,” Beatrice took her daughter’s hand and held it dearly.

After spending some more hours catching up with their lives, it was time Beatrice went back to her healing center. They promised to see each other, and exchanged addresses to be more in touch. Beatrice promised her daughter she’d get her an account of her own, but for the meantime, she handed (Y/N) her own credit card to get by in the meantime. With the newly acquired money and password, (Y/N) stopped by a near store that was as fancy as the café she had just been in, and bought some bagels to tell Frank the new news.

“So I have news…” (Y/N) bit her bottom lip nervously.

“What kind of news? Good or bad?” Frank asked from over his shoulder as he took out the bagels (Y/N) had bought with her new card. “These smell so fucking good, I swear, I’m starving… Can I
“Interest you in some coffee?” (Y/N) nodded and in the meantime, she set the table for both. “Okay, so… you seem uneasy, and you didn’t tell me what kind of news they were, so why don’t you just fire away?” He shrugged simply once he settled on his seat.

“For now, they’re just news...” she sighed. “Thing is, I met up with my mom today,” (Y/N) pursed her lips; Frank rose his eyebrows in curiosity, “and we talked about a lot of things, a lot of catching up really; she can’t have me back because she’s not at her place right now, she’s in rehab… again,” the youngest looked down at her hands for a quick second, “but she gave me her credit card and some more money to move out from here, soon I can have my own credit card,”

“Wow, my folks wouldn’t give me a penny,” Frank chuckled. “Okay, so you need to look for a place, somewhere safe and pretty,”

“I—I was thinking that we could move in… together,” (Y/N) said slowly and sighed. “I really don’t wanna go anywhere without you,” she finally admitted as Frank looked away and smiled lightly. She thought about her mom’s words and how she should’ve feel like she owed him anything, and then she realized what it was all about. “Look, for starters, the apartment is way too small for the both of us, let alone for you, big guy,” (Y/N) complained when she didn’t get any answer from him, “and my salary at the Bulletin is really taking us nowhere but upgraded meals, and don’t get me started on your salary,”

“I can’t take your mom’s cash, it’s not fair,” he protested. “By the way, you’re still with the idea of moving?” The Punisher asked, but he knew the answer and he knew there was no way could be victorious. (Y/N) was the kind of woman that never lost a fight, just like his own Maria. He smiled at the resemblance and let her win, again.

“You can and you will, because I say so, and unless we do something about the money, the idea’s not going away,” she replied cockily, knowing that with a mere smile, she had just won the whole thing.

“Hey Frankie,” a familiar voice startled Frank, and with it, the sound of bottles clacking. “This is different, right?”

Frank was sitting on the porch of a house that didn’t belong to him, but that still felt like his own. Dreams were a strange thing, and he couldn’t remember how he got there in the first place. The sun was shining up high, and the lawn was perfectly cut. He looked to his side but the only thing he could see was a very American house with the flag wavering proud, but no wind hit his face. “Physics in dreams is some weird shit.” Frank thought to himself.

“What the fu—?” Frank blabbered. Maria was there, holding two bottles of beer in her pale and slender hands. She wore the same dress from his nightmares but the scenario was, just as she described, different. “Am I still asleep or did I die?”

“Of course you’re asleep, silly,” she chuckled lightly, and sitting next to him, she handed him the bottle. To his surprise, it was his favorite brand. “But this is nice, it’s so different,” she sighed and leaned her head on his huge arm.

“Why are you here? I mean, what did I do to see you here, like this?”

“Dreams are an odd thing, Frankie; I dreamt about you a lot when you were gone, but that’s not really the point,” she shook her head. “I’m actually here to talk about (Y/N), she’s a good girl, right? I’ve seen her, I’ve seen you… it’s amazing what she can do,” she took the bottle to her lips and indulged herself with the cold liquor. “Do you like her? Or… do you really like her?”
“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well, you obviously do like her,” she cocked an accusing eyebrow. It hurt Frank to see her, especially when she talked about his feelings for (Y/N), which he also knew they existed, “and if you have any doubts, she likes you back, but you’re hurting her so much that she’s on the verge of leaving you, honey,” her expression softened to a concerned look. “Giving her these mixed signals will only get you alone. Come on, you were never the kind of guy who’d fool around. You didn’t do that with me, you shouldn’t do it with her either,” she said in a severe voice. “Man up and tell her what you feel,”

“What about you? I don’t want to let you go,” Frank looked at her with teary eyes and cupped her face with his free hand.

“Frank, baby,” she said in a whisper, “I’m dead, and nothing can change that,” she shook her head and pursed her lips. “But you’re not, and you still have a life to live, and this girl wants to share hers with you, even after going through so freaking much. It’s about time you let me go, Frankie, ‘cause if you keep this, you’re gonna end up all alone and I wouldn’t want that for you,” Maria cupped his face and looked at him right in the eyes. “If you want to remember us that’s perfectly fine, but don’t live you whole life holding onto something that won’t come back. We’re gone, and I’m really sorry that we can’t come back, but you’re missing a chance of a lifetime with this girl and I really don’t want to see you living your life full of regret. You were a good husband to me and while I’ve been gone you’ve been good too,” she sighed and pulled his head closer for a yearning kiss, “you deserve to be happy again, baby,” she pressed her forehead with his and it was almost as if she was about to cry. “Let me go,” she pressed, “you need this,”

“But the kids… you’re my life,” Frank stuttered. “I love you…"

“Oh I know that,” she smiled fondly, “but you love her too, so this is us making peace, because I want you to move on and I want you to be happy again, come on, a little smile?” Frank complied as the tears ran down his cheeks. She kissed him again for short seconds that seemed eternal. “Before you wake up promise me you will be happy and that you’ll quit blaming yourself for what happened, if not I’m going to come back and haunt you, and you won’t like that,” she said in a bossy voice. “I love you Frankie, I’ve loved you ever since I saw you killing that guitar in the park…” she leaned forward to kiss him one last time before slipping away from Frank’s grasp.

Frank woke up little after that, but he didn’t wake up scared or panting, and not even on the verge of a panic attack as he did most of the times; instead, he woke up with a feeling of calmness and peace that he hadn’t had in years. He looked to his side and (Y/N) was still lying next to him in a t-shirt that she had borrowed from him; a shirt that was obviously too big for her and that with the normal movements of a sleeping person, it had gone up to her hips. He pulled it down and covered her with the beddings just like Maria would have done with him when it was winter and he was sleeping with no cover on top. (Y/N) groaned and rolled off on her side to face him.

“Maria again, honey?” She cupped his face consciously, but her words were sloppy and her eyes didn’t even bother to stay open.

“Yes,” he placed a feather-like kiss on her forehead and sighed, “but it was nothing, so go back to sleep,” Frank smiled lightly.

“That dream?” Her voice got lost in a yawn.

“No, this one was different,” he pulled her closer to him and kept a hand behind her head to make sure she wouldn’t go anywhere. “Good night, (Y/N),” he leaned forward, but instead, he kissed her
partially open lips. “Thank you,” he said, looking up at the ceiling; (Y/N) nodded lazily and dozed off in his arms.
Chapter 7

“Mom, this is Frank—I mean, Peter Castiglione, my lord and savior, a.k.a, my roommate-ish,” (Y/N) nervously said as she introduced her mom to her man she was living with. “Frank, this is Beatrice Beauchamp, she’s my mom,” the two newly acquainted shook hands in a cold manner. “She’s staying with us for tea,”

The two women chatted about their past for most of the time while Frank silently observed them; he was happy that (Y/N) finally got the family she deserved and the smile on her face was inerasable, but he could tell that Beatrice looked at him with distrustful eyes. With good reason, he was known for terrible things and even though he didn’t go under the name of Frank Castle anymore, its legacy preceded Peter.

Just before tea, (Y/N) realized she hadn’t bought the biscuits she liked from a store just down the street and she quickly slid one of Frank’s hoodies to go out.

“Behave, you both,” (Y/N) took the keys, her phone and some money and closed the door with a great smile on her lips.

“Listen to me, Peter, Frank, whoever the hell you are, I don’t really care,” Beatrice said in a hostile voice as she shook her head. She waited for a minute in complete silence, making sure that (Y/N) wouldn’t come back. “When (Y/N) first told me she was living with you I said fine, because I’ve always believed my daughter could make her own decisions without any intervention from me or any other adult, but I was proved wrong in the past, and she got beat the shit out of her due to my irresponsibility as a parent for all of those years; that won’t happen again,” she stated. “I am not capable of taking care of her as she deserves,” she said, avoiding Frank’s look, “but I can make sure her life is safe and with better things than this… whatever you want to call it,” she looked around her with disdain. “Why do you keep her here?”

“I’ve answered this question so many times,” he rolled his eyes, sighing heavily, “but you wanna know why? Because it’s her who doesn’t want to leave. Your daughter is very stubborn, and I love that about her. Yes, I love her, and if I could buy her a house in the Hamptons, I would do it, damn I could build it for her! Without a second thought, because you’re goddamned right, she does deserve it,” Frank’s voice was calmed, but his words carried all of the things he wanted to say to (Y/N) herself, but that felt too afraid to do so. “You don’t know how I felt the first time I saw her, curled up on the tiles in that exact same hallway you went through; she wearing a shirt and a pair of shorts. It was winter, and she was crying, bruised, beaten up inside and out…” his breath got caught in his throat as he played the images in his mind all over again. “She was terrified, and I’ve seen terror in first person; I’ve lived it,” his voice cracked, “but she came out of it, and she’s been doing great, and I’m very proud to say that I’ve been there to witness her greatness, what about you? Where have you been?”

“I didn’t know how to find her,” Beatrice stuttered. “I hadn’t seen her in years, besides my health hasn’t been the best lately.”

“Well, I’m sorry if this offends you, lady, but that’s just bullshit,” he spat. “My family got killed and, what did I do? I went out there and got even. For (Y/N) I’d do the exact same thing, because she may not be my family, but I swear to god she means the world to me. You can’t even imagine how much I’ve hated myself for not giving her what she deserves, but at least she has a roof over her head, food and some company. You’re giving her money and that’s great because she definitely needs it, but are you going to stay in her life? Are you sure you can do that after all these years?”
“Don’t you dare talking to me like that,” she snarled. “I may be a drunk and a neglecting mother, but I know damn well what’s like to be beaten up by the man who’s supposed to love you the most, and I’ve lived it twice,” she growled, “and you, Frank Castle, look just like them, plus the army shit and the murderous rampage. So, I’m asking this for real, are you really going to keep my daughter safe, or this good guy show you put up is just to hide your madness? Does she know how many people you’ve killed?”

“I’m sure she, and everyone, can read all about it in the news, but yes, I’ve been completely honest, and there’s something you’re missing, I don’t do that anymore. I am not even Frank Castle,” he rose his eyebrows quickly, as a cocky smile spread on his lips. “But you can mark my words when I say that if somebody dares to hurt (Y/N), I’d go all Punisher again and rot to death in jail, because she’s worth it and more,”

“Sorry, but I don’t buy all that crap,” Beatrice said simply. “I will play my part, and not interfere in you guys’ lives because I want to see my daughter happy, even if it’s with you,” she conceded, “but if I ever find out that you’ve laid a hand on her, or that you’ve raised your voice, or that you did something to hurt her, I will end you and your sorry little life,” she threatened.

“I hope you don’t spend your whole life waiting for me to do something wrong,” Frank sighed and turned his back to her to make coffee. “Want a cup?”

“As long as you don’t poison me,” she reluctantly sat on a stool and accepted Frank’s coffee.

They remained in a deadly silence until (Y/N) arrived 10 minutes later. They ate together, and just as Beatrice had promised, she played her part and pretended to have a normal conversation with Frank. She left after they dined.

“She’s a tough one, right?” (Y/N) said as she helped Frank with the dishes. “She’s always been like that, I mean, after what happened with dad she’s now wearing this shell around her,”

“(Y/N), can we have a serious word? Frank turned around and leaned on the sink. “I’m really having a hard time accepting your proposal of living together… I mean, it’s not a new thing, but you really haven’t gave me many chances to explain myself,”

“Was it my mom? Did she say something?”

“No,” he shook his head, “I mean, yeah, kind of. Thing is that while you were gone, she did say something, but it’s just something I’ve been thinking about a lot, and it’s something very logical… what if I hurt you one day?”

“Hurt me? How?” (Y/N) folded her arms over her chest.

“You know,” he shrugged lightly, “what if someday I go crazy and I yell at you, or worse. What if I lay a hand over you?” His voice was soft, and it hurt him to put those thoughts into words. “Would you still stay with me knowing it can happen?”

“I just don’t think you’d do that because I don’t think you’re crazy,” she shrugged. “I’ve seen crazy, all kinds of it, and I know you’re not like that… Frank, is there something else? Because I don’t think this is it,” she sat on the bed and crossed one leg on top of the other. “Spit it out,” she pointed her chin quickly in his direction.

“I’m just… I fear that what happened to Maria and the kids might happen to you too,” he sighed, letting himself fall on the seat. “I am a magnet for tragedies, and I honestly don’t think I could take it if you got hurt by me or because of me,” he looked down at his hands; (Y/N)’s heart clenched inside
her chest. “There haven’t been many good things in my life, (Y/N), and you being one of those after all the shit that’s happened just makes me even more wary. I don’t want to hurt you with my shit. Your mom was right, I look exactly like an abuser, and I am double fucked because of the army and the carnage, and perhaps it’s worse because of the injury I was left with—I—I can’t afford to think about it—I don’t wish to hurt you, but I’m a fucking time bomb (Y/N)—I am,” he stammered as the tears pooled in his tired eyes; his voice was cracking but he couldn’t stop. “And you… you don’t deserve to have someone that’s as fucked up as I am—you need someone who can give you the shit you deserve and you need someone to spoil you and treat you like a princess—not me, I’m barely a half of a normal man… get away from me while you can,” his breathing was erratic, and his body shuddered from all the sorrow and fear contained.

She quickly rose from the bed and went to sit on his lap, wrapping her arms tightly around his shoulders. She was there to hold him, to support him just like he had done with her so many other times. She stroke his back tenderly, almost motherly, humming a soft melody that she grasped from her past to make him feel better.

“That’s it baby, you can cry all you want, I’m here,” she breathed softly, leaning her head over his. “Frankie, I’m right here, right here with you and I’m not going anywhere, because, you know why? I trust you,” she kissed the top of his head. (Y/N) contemplated the past months in her head. She knew she was in too deep with Frank Castle; she was heads over heels for him, and as much as she tried to deny or undermine her feelings, they only proved to grow stronger and utterly painful. He wished to tell him all about it but she knew that Frank had other things in mind, and no matter how many times they kissed, he always slipped away with a guilt that exuded from his pores. But it was time to give the leap of faith, no matter what happened later. “I trust you because I love you, Frank Castle,” she sighed, feeling a heavy backpack fall from her shoulders. She tried to rest her head atop of his, but Frank was looking up at her with glimmery eyes full of hope. Kindly, she thumbed away Frank’s tears and kissed his forehead. “I’m not going to leave you, Frankie, no matter what anyone says; mom loves me but she really hasn’t been there to show me good from bad, I learnt that shit the hard way,” she said in a hum, “and you’re not bad, if anything, you’re the best that’s ever happened to me. I already told you that you’re stuck with me,” she smiled, eliciting a breathy smile from him too.

Frank cupped her face and pulled her closer for a real kiss, one that he did not feel guilty with, but instead, it felt completely right for the very first time. As if it was truly meant to be. Since he had last dreamt of Maria, all the interactions with (Y/N) felt finally right. The kiss heated up when one of the hands on her face sneaked down to her sides. He rubbed circles with his rough thumb on a spot where the shirt couldn’t reach, prompting a soft whimper from her lips.

He effortlessly stood up with her in his arms and led her to the bed where they both fell. Frank was overpowering her, grabbing her hands and pinning her wrists against the sinking mattress right above her head. He was dominant, possessive and needy, and as he thrust forward he felt (Y/N) twitching beneath him in distress. He snapped out of his state and saw her staring back at him with fearful eyes. “Go easy, boy,” she said in a cracking voice.

“Yeah,” he smiled and kissed the tip of her nose; he rolled away and looked up to the ceiling. “We’ll cross that bridge if we get there,” he sighed peacefully.

“Not if,” she said, propping her elbow on the mattress and holding her head up with her hand and lovingly looking at him, “when,” she leaned her head on his chest and they stayed in comfortable silence for a while.
Chapter 8

Not many days after seeing her mom, (Y/N) closed a deal for a new place to live. The new apartment was notoriously bigger than their old one in Hell’s Kitchen. Thanks to (Y/N)’s mother, they got a good deal for a great place. The living room had a glass door that lead to a small balcony with enough space to put a few chairs and plants, and it had a gorgeous view of part of the city and Central Park.

But as any previously rented place, it needed some painting; neither (Y/N) nor Frank expected it to end in a war paint, but it all began when (Y/N) accidentally sprinkled some drops of ivory paint on Frank’s black shirt. It was all laughs and apologies until Frank dipped his hand in the can of paint and ran in along (Y/N)’s cheek.

“Not fucking fair!” She squealed as she tried to get as much paint off from her face. “This is gonna dry and it’s gonna get stiff and it won’t come off, Frank!”

“It’s water-based,” he said in a matter of factly voice, “it’ll come off when you get a shower,” he scoffed. “I’m guessing you don’t have much experience with refurbishing houses, right?”

“Clearly, I do not,” (Y/N) rolled her eyes, “now come here,” she mad a beckoning sign and he obediently complied. After submerging both hands in the can, she cupped his face and leaned towards him to place a soft kiss on his lips.

Frank returned the kiss lightly as he ran the paint roller down her back. She wrapped her arms around his neck, massaging the back of his head with her dirty hands. He helped her jump and wrap her legs around his waist and deepened the kiss. He walked towards the nearest unpainted wall and (Y/N) whined softly at the pressure of his body.

“Do most remodelings end like this too?” She panted, rolling her hips against his.

“Only when the partner allows it,” he replied as he left a path of kisses on her neck. He was enjoying this enough to feel the guilt of an untold truth creeping down his spine, so with a soft kiss on her lips and two pats on her butt, he ended the momentary passion.

Once the living room was finished, it was time for the master bedroom to be painted. Frank became more silent and he even offered to put some music to fill in the silence. After some more hours and some nap breaks in between, they decided to call it quits for the day and get a very much deserved rest on their old mattress. It had been a long day and they weren’t even close to be finished, but at least the apartment and its colors were on their safe way.

“You seem off, Frankie,” (Y/N) was running her fingers through Frank’s short hair. “What’s going on?” She asked in a soft voice. For the very first time in what it seemed like an eternity, Frank was curled towards (Y/N) being the tiny little spoon.

“It’s just that—I remember when we were setting up Lisa’s nursery, and Frank’s nursery too; this is all too familiar and I’m afraid it’ll end the same way with you,” he hid his face under (Y/N)’s neck and held her tightly. “I don’t want that to happen to you, I don’t want anyone to take you away from me as they did with Maria and the kids... I’m sorry for bringing them up so much, and the whole topic too but—”

“There’s no need to apologize, sweetie,” she gently caressed his cheek with her free hand. “They are your family and they will always be your family, and no matter what happens, they are going to be
with you as long as you remember them with the same love as you’re doing now,” (Y/N) kissed the top of Frank’s big head and continued. “I’m sure none of them would want you not living your life,”

“You mean moving on?” To Frank, the words sounded familiar, but they still hurt a lot all the same.

“Yes, but not as harsh as it sounds,” (Y/N) hesitated. “What I mean is that neither Maria, nor the kids would want you to dwell on a life that’s gone; you love them, and I’m sure they all loved you, I mean, you spent years with them so… but you can’t stay stuck in a past that’s not coming back, honor their lives by living yours to the fullest. You’ve got a great opportunity at life, Frank, don’t waste it…”

“Wow, for someone so young you seem to be very wise and shit,” Frank chuckled. “Is there a thing I don’t know about you?”

“So many,” (Y/N) sighed. “But I had a child too, if that’s the kind of information you wanted to get from me,” she admitted with a breathy chuckle. “Her name was Amelia, like Amelia Earhart, and even though I had her for a few hours, she rocked my whole world,”

“What happened to her?”

“Greg already hit me by them, and he didn’t apologize for it…” (Y/N) said in a soft voice. “I hadn’t told him that I was pregnant, and my belly hadn’t grown at all, so this one day he hits me so hard that I start bleeding, but he never tells so it’s not him who takes me to the hospital…” she fell silent, but carried on after a few seconds. “I got to have her but she died in my arms just a few hours later… One of the nurses, her name was Claire, she looked right through me; she knew what happened and the only thing she wanted, was for me to get out of there… I hope to see her one day, to tell her that it took me a while to leave him, but I did and I am more than happy now, as much as I don’t deserve it—”

“No,” Frank looked up at her with teary eyes. “You deserve to be happy, because you know what? You’ve been through so much shit that I won’t allow you to be anything less than happy, not on my watch,” he shook his head, and cupped hers with one hand. “I love you, (Y/N), and I wish I hadn’t waited until just now to tell you,” he sheepishly admitted. “But I do, and I am free to tell you,”

“This must be it then…” (Y/N) said in between teeth. “Frank, do you remember a few nights before moving in here, in the old apartment; you said you had dreamt of Maria again, but that your dream was different. You didn’t tell me what that was,” Frank nodded, but he wasn’t really certain of where she headed. “Can you please tell me now?”

“We were in a front yard but it wasn’t ours, and we were having a beer, just like we used to do before Lisa was born,” he chuckled lightly, “she was wearing that goddamned dress, and we were just talking and… it was like she was saying goodbye, but not quite… She wanted to be remembered, but still wanted me to let go of her—” he shook his head lightly—“she told me to be happy, but with you, that she trusted you,” he sighed heavily. “She said we both deserved to be happy and that you had feelings for me too,” he looked up at her and they both smiled at each other.

“Thing is that after I went to talk to Karen, I stopped by the cemetery too, I left Maria some flowers and I told her that I wanted to be with you, but that I needed a sign of her approval, and I think that might be just it,” (Y/N) tugged at her bottom lip fretfully. Frank gave a chortle and rolled away from (Y/N); his laugh was so cheerful that he took a hand to his chest and it took a deep breath finally regain composure.

“You really did that?”
“Yeah… why?” (Y/N) felt smaller and sillier each passing second. “Stop laughing, Frank!” She pouted.

“I just think it’s cute! I never thought you’d do something like that. I didn’t take you for the kind of person who goes to talk to the dead,” he shrugged. “I mean, you two have nothing to do with each other, dead or alive,”

“Of course we do!” She objected in a high pitched voice. “I am living with a dead woman’s husband, and she might come and haunt both of us… I really wanted us to be together,” she admitted, “and I needed her approval, and I guess she gave it to me,”

“You never cease to amaze me, (Y/N),” Frank looked her with kind eyes and snuggled closer to her again, letting himself be protected by her once more. “You’re a wonder,” he conceded.

“First you laughed, and now you’re calling me a wonder? I’m gonna need some more ass kissing to feel less offended, Castle,” she replied in a petty manner.

“Will food and kisses do the trick?” He looked up to find her evasive eyes.

“Maybe,” she pouted, knowing that food and kisses was all it took for her to give in.
It was just like in the movies, when two people are lying on the bed watching a movie and then things get heated up. (Y/N) had reluctantly agreed to watch a horror movie, although she found them painfully ridiculous because the characters were “obviously retarded” and they couldn’t stay out of trouble even when their lives actually depended on it. She kept quiet about it for the sake of a healthy relationship.

But it wasn’t long after that the attention on the movie was completely lost. (Y/N) was straddling Frank’s lap and as they kissed, she used one of her hands to grab the remote and turn off the TV, because the screams and merciless killing were not what she would’ve expected as sexy background music for such a special occasion.

She tugged gently at the hem of Frank’s shirt, hinting that she wanted to peel the fabric off and away from his torso; he selflessly obliged by raising his arms. (Y/N) opened her eyes in delight to see him in such a close up, but her breath choked at the sight of the many scars that roughly decorated his chest. But she didn’t flinch or back away; if anything, the scars only made her more eager to give and make love to him.

“I always knew you were a bad ass,” she whispered as she traced one that went like a straight line on his bicep, “but I think you stitched this shit all by yourself, right?”

“Busted,” he chuckled, thumbing her jawline with enviable patience, as if he was discovering that spot of skin for the very first time when, in fact, he’d been there with his fingers and lips in previous opportunities. “Did it in front of a mirror, with my less fucked up arm,” he chuckled. “David wasn’t really the most skillful one for this, besides he loathed blood with his life, so I had no other choice but to do it myself,” he shrugged. As his fingers roamed down the back of her neck, he found a bump that he hadn’t noticed before. “You’re gorgeous, (Y/N),” he exhaled heavily. “I’m really glad you’re in my life,” he shook his head lightly and smiled.

“Thank god it’s dark,” she giggled timidly, “otherwise you’d be seeing me blushing and shit,” she rolled her eyes, and Frank reached out his hand to turn on the light on the side table. “Turn it off!” She pouted, but Frank was faster and cupped her face with both hands, thumbing at her cheeks. They gazes met for a short, but intense second.

“You’ll see it’s much better like this,” he breathed, flicking his eyes from her own and to her mouth, pulling her closer for a deep kiss.

Their lips melted with one another, lingering as much as the urge allowed them. They needed to have each other, but they wanted it slow, with no hurries and no worries; the time for that was gone and, for Frank, it was time to enjoy the delights that her soft lips could offer. His hands roved down her neck, but instead of continuing along her shoulders and arms, Frank changed paths and decided to let his hands fall through her chest and sides.
Having reached the hem of her shirt, Frank pulled it upwards and carefully slid it up, giving (Y/N) enough time to say no, but no sound came from her, assuring him that she was still ok with all of this. Under the fabric, another piece of clothing covered her chest, and to Frank’s surprise, it was the most gorgeous thing he had ever seen. A piece of some intricate, black lace that wrapped around her chest; it was the very first time he had seen her like this, and he was mesmerized by every tiny detail her skin contained. She was so new, but felt so familiar at the same time.

His hands peeled off the wide lacy straps, and effortlessly, unclasped her bra, baring her torso completely. His fingers traced circles around her nipples, eliciting soft moans that rolled from her lips like a sinful symphony. (Y/N)’s head fell on the crook of his shoulder, allowing her to moan right to his ear as if she encouraged him to continue. She sucked different spots on the skin over his collarbone with enough pressure to leave a bruise, and as she sucked, she dug her teeth on his shoulders. Frank groaned in delight, tightening the grip on her breasts.

She found relief when his lips replaced his hands on her chest, and then she was left with no place to hide. She dug her nails on his skin when his teeth tugged at her skin roughly. She whined loudly, throwing her head back; she soon realized she was rolling her hips because of a bulge growing beneath her. With all of her might, she pushed Frank towards the headboard and trailed a path of wet kisses from his lips again and down until she reached the button of his jeans.

Frank grabbed her wrist, but she soothed his unspoken fears with a naughty smile, and worked to unmake the button. She pulled the thick fabric down with contained excitement, as it was the first time that she’d done this out of pure will. She wrapped her hand around his shaft and gently pumped it, but her eyes were fixed on Frank the whole time. She found it amazing what the right pressure could do in a man like him; she was in full control, and for a man like Frank, who couldn’t live without having everything in check, it killed him to not have control of his own body.

She bobbed her head down on his hard-on, hollowing her cheeks and hearing how loudly his breath hitched. It was hard for her to reach deeper down, but judging by the over-muffled sounds and the way that he tugged at his fingers to prevent any word, she knew she must have been doing something right.

“Frank, relax,” (Y/N) chuckled, using a hand to keep her hair away from her face. “I’m not gonna bite your head off,” she stayed in silence for a second, realizing what she had just said, “any of ’em, for what it’s worth,” she held back a burst of laughter and Frank didn’t have much other choice but to give in at the awful joke. “Close your eyes if you need to, but relax, okay?” He nodded quietly and did as told.

(Y/N) went down again, helping herself with her hand and her lips. Frank exhaled heavily, feeling much more relaxed under her touch. He placed his hands on both sides of her head, tangling his fingers with her hair strands to keep them in place. His hips rocked ever so slightly, but he was conscious that any wrong movement could make her leave in any minute. He decided to let his head rest on the headboard and enjoy the rest of the ride.

He massaged her scalp with the tip of his fingers, feeling how she swirled her skilful tongue around his length; he wasn’t fond of eye contact, but he melted inside and out each time their gazes met. Her motions were sloppy, but her pace was still very steady and but as he came closer to the climax, he gently pulled her away from him. He caressed her swollen lips with his thumbs and helped her get on top of him again. They kissed for eternal seconds, swirling their tongues around the other, moaning and breathing each other’s hot breaths.

Frank wrapped his arms tightly around (Y/N) and, together, they rolled off until she was under him. The kiss grew ardent and more passionate, and with a free hand, Frank grabbed her thigh and helped
her hook her leg around his waist. He thrust forwards, growling deeply as he groped (Y/N)’s ass; she gasped in bliss, wanting to get rid of the clothes that were still keeping her prisoner.

Letting her upper leg fall onto the mattress, she hurriedly tugged at her jeans, frantically unmaking the button and the zipper; Frank slid hers, and what was left of his, down and both garments rested on the floor with the others.

And then it hit them.

It was the first time that they were completely naked in front of each other. Other times they wandered around their old apartment in a towel wrapped around their bodies, nudity didn’t come natural for them, but now, they wondered why they had spent so much time without admiring their bodies. They giggled in amusement; (Y/N) splayed her hands through his chest, feeling every detail of his skin, and she looked up at Frank with a wide smile on her lips.

Frank’s hand roamed down in between her legs, feeling the dampness of her folds. (Y/N) cried in ecstasy, throwing her head back, deeper onto the mattress and shaking and twitching under the Punisher’s broad frame; his fingers circled her clit and toyed at her entrance, teasing just enough to make her beg. Her words didn’t take long to roll from her lips in a breathless utterance.

With both hands on the sides of (Y/N)’s body, Frank traced a road of kisses from her lips down to her hipbones, but he stopped right at her lower abdomen, where a pale line on her skin adorned her front. (Y/N) fidgeted in distress and quickly covered the spot with her hands, but almost immediately, Frank pulled her hands away, leaving feather-like kisses on what, he knew, was a birth scar. To his eyes, (Y/N) had never seemed more fascinating. There was so much mystery surrounding her and he wanted to discover everything, and her body was willingly offering an insight to some of the secrets she held.

Frank carried on kissing down her hipbone and onto her inner thighs, encountering the source of her wetness. His hands firmly held apart her legs, allowing him a comfortable space in between them. He slithered his tongue in between her folds, evoking a loud whimper and making her arch her back away from the mattress. He didn’t stop there, though; he circled her clit with his tongue while his fingers slid effortlessly inside her. She muttered unintelligible curses that, if the walls weren’t as thick as they were, the neighbors would’ve definitely called the cops for the noise.

She twisted in pleasure, feeling igneous waves spread all over her body. She euphorically mewed, screaming Frank’s name along with encouraging words. Her hands had the mission of grabbing his head and keeping it well secured, making sure he wouldn’t go anywhere but there. She ran her fingers through his short hair and raked gently on his scalp.

“Fuck—yes!” She cried. “Oh god, baby, oh yes!”

From all the excitement, Frank slapped (Y/N)’s ass, and just a second after, they looked at each other with eyes wide open. (Y/N) wasn’t into going rough, she had gone rough for years in a relationship but she couldn’t deny that this was completely different. She knew he didn’t mean ill, and it was most probably a thing born out of the heat of the moment, so in order to repair things, Frank lifted her lips just above his head and leaned to kiss the stinging spot and carried on with his task. She came before she could even think about having an orgasm.

“Frankie,” she purred, still lying under him. He stroke her cheeks lightly and looked at her with adoring eyes. “I want you, right now,” she breathed.

“You sure?” He asked in a hum.
“I’ve never been so sure about anything, Frank Castle,” she chuckled. “I’m yours, so take me how you please,” be tugged nervously at her bottom lip. Frank peeled his torso from hers and helped her up too, and after a few minutes of enjoying those reddened lips, he turned her around and gently laid her down again on the mattress, but facing the beddings.

He wasn’t a sucker for rough sex either, but the lust took over him more than he wanted to admit, and in a swift movement, he grabbed (Y/N) from her hips and pulled her closer to his own. He teased her with her manhood, and slowly pushed himself inside. (Y/N) gasped loudly for air, but took him in stoic silence. The slow pace didn’t get to last very long, and in a matter of minutes, Frank was pounding hard against her.

He fondled her ass, holding back the urge to spank her again, but as if she read his mind, she spanked herself, way lighter than he would’ve done, giving him the green light to do it again, making the hit echo inside the room. Taking the opportunity, Frank grabbed her forearms and helped get straight and loosely wrapped a hand around her neck; in that position, (Y/N) was able to rest her head on his shoulder, moaning and panting as she was fucked into oblivion.

She grabbed her own hand against his wrist, as she begged for more right to his ear. Frank tried to tighten the grip just a little, making her moan in delight as she moved her head against his body. He pulled out from her, provoking an unpleased whine from her, but without hearing her complaints, he laid her on the bedding again, this time way more gentle than he had done and taking care that she was perfectly comfortable.

Positioning himself in between her legs again, he slid inside and kept a steady pace that would sent both of them over the edge in no time. (Y/N) held on to his body, feeling the hotness of his skin melting her own, but she didn’t have enough strength to moan loud anymore, instead, weak whimpers rolled from her plump lips as she felt the orgasm taking over her whole self.

Frank grunted almost savagely, keeping his forehead pressed to hers as he came in such a peaceful manner, that he thought he died right there in that bedroom. Light kisses were spread on (Y/N)’s face, and as he pulled out for the last time, he looked at her and realized that saving her was the best decision he had made in years.

He let himself fall next to her, panting and trying to get his breath into a normal state again; he cupped her face with one hand and tried to sink in that a year ago, she was holding her legs to her chest and crying because some idiot that obviously didn’t deserve her, had hit her. He thumbed her cheek with such adoration that he thought his heart would jumped right off his chest.

“You were right,” (Y/N) hummed, taking Frank out his daydreaming, “the lights on were quite a nice touch,”

Still panting, (Y/N) propped herself on her elbow and looked down to Frank, giving him a weak smile. She stroke his rough cheek gently, brushing away the shiny droplets of sweat that gathered over his skin. Frank had his hands intertwined with her soft hair, so he started to massage her scalp lovingly.

“I love you,” they both said at unison and chuckled at the silly coincidence.

“I still wish I’d been the one to say that first,” Frank made her lean forward to kiss her. (Y/N) looked to the clock on the other side table, the one behind him, and chuckled again. “What?”

“It’s 3 am,” she said. “We should go to bed, it’s getting kinda late, don’t you think? Oh, and I think I’ve got work tomorrow—”
“We met last year by 3 am,” he chimed in, speaking in absolute in absentmindedness. “I don’t think I’ve ever thanked you for saving me,” Frank stared deep into her shining eyes. The only things that brought light into the darkened room were the city lights and the bright numbers on the clock on Frank’s side. “You turned my world upside down and I love you for that,” he smiled with a sense of peace in his heart. “I love you, and I ain’t getting tired of telling you that,” he thumbed at her bottom lip.

“Oh, is it so?” (Y/N) gently bit both her lip and his finger, eliciting a soft chuckle from him. “Well, let me keep you awake for a bit more, Frankie. I think I can take a day off,” she smiled naughtily.

With ups and downs, and people who only wanted to tear them apart, (Y/N) and Frank managed to live a most normal life. The Punisher was just a shadow in the past, and the past of abuse was exactly that, just the past.

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