she's black coffee (in a world in love with cheap, red wine)

by GrimRevolution

Summary

There's no financial office across from Nelson & Murdock; instead, there's Alias Investigations with its partially drunk owner who has a loving relationship with whiskey, foul language, and denying the fact that she's (maybe) a little bit of hero.
Chapter 1

The office was nice, Matt assumed, with its spacious floor plan and four different rooms. Hinges barely creaked when he opened it, the walls were thick enough that he had to focus (just a bit) to find the neighbours, and the sound of the street rose up slowly to the windows. Sunlight was filtered through the blinds, warming up old wood and new paint while the smell of dust rose from the corners.

Matt took another deep breath through his nose, filtering out the burn and clog of old renovations and found the faint husk of whiskey that slowly oozed beneath the crack of the door, marinated with leather, bitter black coffee, and cheap makeup. Susan Harris spoke with Foggy in the corner, but their voices were drowned out by the argument rising in the office across the hallway.

Tilting his head, Matt turned his attention to that as bubbling, aggravated anger met bulldozing rage. He was still deciding where to point his focus when a glass was knocked off a table by a palm and shattered against the floor. Liquid spilled, splashing against ice cubes that slid until they hit thick rubber.

The conversation between real estate agent and lawyer stopped.

“Oh,” Susan said, tittering like a nervous blue jay. “That’s just the, uh—”

Heavy boots stomped across glass and a rug without much of a care, and the door across the hall swung open with a brutal, pine tree-on-fire snapping.

“—the neighbours,” Susan finished softly.

Matt followed the heavy footsteps and the low cussing of the man as he was tugged over a threshold with very little effort despite his struggles.

“Listen here, dipshit,” the woman’s voice was a kiss from a semi truck. “You’re gonna fucking pay me because I found your cheating boyfriend—which is what you asked—and then I’m going to never see you again. Got it?”

Cheap cotton rubbed against itself as the man nodded, his heart hammering to the tune of the renovations throughout the city and the smell of his fear overpowering everything else on the floor.

“Great,” the woman said, “get the fuck out of my sight.”

Matt’s eyebrows had raised high onto his forehead and he tracked the man and his frantic scramble through the hallway, down the stairs, and out the building. The woman sighed, walked back into her office, and shut the door—in softer, more controlled irritation—behind her.

With no clients, no reputation, and a soon-to-be office, Matt found himself smiling.

“We’ll take it,” he said.

Foggy, his attention half on retelling what Brett had told him over the phone and half on walking backwards out of the office, didn’t notice the door across the hall opening or the boots that stepped into the hallway. Keeping his face blank, Matt heard their collision and the prompt clatter of a phone
hitting the floor.

The screen didn’t crack—the case made of rubber and plastic to absorb the fall—but the woman muttered ‘Jesus, shit,’ under her breath with enough snap that it might as well have.

“Oh!” Foggy took a step forward as if to help her and promptly froze. Matt wondered what kind of look could have gotten that reaction. “I didn’t see you there.”

“Clearly,” she drawled, straightening with her phone in hand. Her voice was an inch lower than Matt’s lips—shorter than he thought with the force she managed to convey with every military-marching footstep—but was just as biting as it had been earlier.

Matt smiled to himself as the soles of her boots squeaked against polished flooring and she headed towards the staircase. He followed behind Foggy as the other man hurried to catch up.

“I’m Foggy—Foggy Nelson. We’re in the office across from you.”

She grunted, sliding the phone into her back pocket and muttered something that sounded like ‘that’s unfortunate’.

“My partner and I just started up—”

Stopping at the edge of the stairs, she turned, sighed, and shifted her weight onto her heels. “Look,” exasperation tinged every single molecule of her voice and, without the walls between them, it was black and white with whiskey twists and turns. The kind of voice that could monologue over the rain falling and slow, smooth jazz. “You just started, you’re looking for clients to go lawyer-ing for, but I’m busy and need to get to work.”

Matt waited for the tip of his can to bump against Foggy’s leg before he stopped and held the metal in both hands. “How did you know we were lawyers?”

Her hair slid through the teeth of her jacket and the leather creaked enough that he could tell her arms were crossed. There was a bag over her shoulder; some canvas thing that smelled like rust and rain. It bumped against the back of her thigh, metal and plastic clinking, liquid sloshing in a thermos. “Are you shitting me?”

He blinked behind his glasses.

“You have a sign on your door, jackass,” she told him and, before either man could respond, her footsteps were echoing across the walls as she practically fled from the conversation by leaping down the stairs.

Matt waited until she was storming out the door before smirking and turning to his friend. “You put a sign on the door? Isn’t your handwriting garbage?”

The laugh that spilled out of Foggy was star struck. “It is,” he admitted, “I’m surprised she could even read it.”

It had already been late when Brett had called and, by the time Foggy and Matt got back to their office, most of New York was in bars or bed. The smell of black coffee filled the hallway and there was the clink of a mug catching on the grooves of a battered desk, tapping of wool covered toes, and clicking of a laptop keyboard.
“I guess she came back,” Foggy whispered.

Matt jerked out of his thoughts. “What?”

“The lights are still on.”

So they were. He could hear the buzzing of the bulbs, pictured the outline of a sofa, chairs, and at least one table. Foggy unlocked their door and Matt reached forward to touch the pads of his fingers against the glass. It was frosted with black lettering across the bottom. All capitals.

“Alias Investigations.”

“Hmmm?” He turned to Foggy.

“That’s what it says; Alias Investigations.”

Matt turned to tap across the hallway and follow Foggy through the door. The name ticked something in his memory; like a passing thought or a word on the tip of his tongue.

It would have to be a mystery for another time.

Karen Page wandered around their office for a bit, staring blankly at the unpacked boxes and looking out the windows to trace the faces of the people wandering past. Foggy, in a moment of daring, was standing across the hallway, shaking out his shoulders, and kept pausing each time he raised his hand to knock.

There was so much anxiety on the floor, it was no surprise that the door opened before knuckles could even brush against wood—but it wasn’t the woman standing there. It was a man smelling of shaving cream and detergent. There was the faint bitterness of coffee grinds sticking to his button up, ink on the back of his hand, and traces of sticky note glue on the pads of his fingers. He walked quieter than the woman in shoes made of thin canvas and thin rubber.

“Uh,” and there was less of the drawl to his tone. It was open, welcoming.

Confused.

“Can I help you?”

“You—” Foggy paused, blinked a couple of times, and then shook his head to refocus. “Sorry, you wouldn’t have any tea, would you?”

Matt turned half his attention to Karen who managed to finally get herself to sit in one of the conference room chairs. It was one of the many works in progress but it held as she hid her feet behind the legs and placed her head in her hands.

“Yeah. Yeah, we might—” The man ran a hand through his thick, curly hair and sighed. “Give me a second?”

“Sure.”

The door stayed open and Foggy leaned on his toes, peeking to see what was inside. Matt wondered if it was painted in black and white like the films his father used to watch. Could he walk in there and find the woman with her feet on the table, glass of whiskey sitting in one hand, cigarette in the
other?

(Which was ridiculous because there was no sickly stench of burning tobacco. Just bitter coffee and cheap alcohol.)

“Here,” the man returned and handed a packet to Foggy. “Nothing special. Jessica—my boss—only keeps it around for clients anyway.”

Jessica. Matt rolled the name around in his thoughts. There was nothing terribly striking about it, nothing extraordinary. It was a name. One among many and he probably wouldn’t have paid attention to it if there wasn’t a ringing around the syllables as if someone was opening a switchblade in an alley. Slide, snap, pop. The sound of it burned along his mind but he couldn’t quite catch it. Not just yet. He was supposed to be focusing on their client and her case, anyway. The rest could come later.

“Perfect,” Foggy sighed that relieved little sigh of his. “Thanks, I owe you.”

There was a mumbled acknowledgment, the door closed, and Matt listened to Foggy’s footsteps cross over their threshold and the ruffling of hands fishing around for a mug in the mess that was their office. He plugged in the microwave, filled the mug with tap water, and brought lacklustre tea into the conference room.

Matt waited until it was in Karen’s hands before he started talking.

“Please, Miss Jones—”

Matt perked up at the sound of heavy boots in the hallway and the voice—desperate, pleading, and broken by breathlessness—that followed closely behind. Rubber clunked against the wood, with a thunk, thunk, thunk, timed with the faint scuffle of a shoe. Something thin and metal groaned as weight was placed upon it while the faint stench of copper and antiseptics hit his nose. Crutches, injuries. The guy—whoever he was—had been the victim of a pretty brutal assault.

“—Please; I’m willing to pay you anything just. My son. He’s missing. They took him.”

“Did you contact the police?” Jessica—and the man had called her a Miss Jones, hadn’t he?—paused in front of her door, keys jingling in her hand as she searched for the right one. There was a faint layer of irritation across the surface of her voice, but Matt realized that it was just a habit more than actual attitude. “Because I can guarantee that they have a better success rate than some second-rate Private Investigator.”

The man sucked in a breath. “You saved those people on the dock,” he said, heart steady even as Jessica’s roared. Everything clicked; Alias investigations, the docks, and a woman fuelled in desperation that killed a metahuman in self defence. “Please, I just—I just want my son.”

“Told him?”

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Jessica sighed, her breathing steady enough to mask the turbulence underneath. “The first twenty-four hours are crucial,” she said, metal clinked as the key was forced into the lock. “I’m going to need everything you gave to the police, every detail you can remember.” Her hand was turning the doorknob before she paused, sucked in a deep breath, and softened her tone just enough that the edges didn’t seem so glass-like. “I can’t promise that I will find him. I can’t promise anything.”
“I know.”

Matt heard the her hair slither across leather as she nodded. “Then we better get started.”

“Yeah,” the man—Malcolm, according to how he had introduced himself some thirty minutes earlier to the distraught father—sat heavily on the couch in the middle of Alias Investigation’s office, crossed his ankles, and drummed his fingers on his thigh. “I know a little about it; human trafficking ring. Run by the Russians. Some guy’s been fucking up their operations.”

Jessica grunted, unscrewing the cap on a bottle of liquor. “Kids their usual MO or was this one just lucky?”

“Last I heard they were more into underage women.” Malcolm shrugged.

She poured a shot into a glass, took a sip, and hummed in the back of her throat.

“What’re you thinking?”

Jessica snorted, downed the rest of the alcohol, and stood. “I’m thinking that this is some vigilante bullshit,” She said, grabbing her bag off the coat hanger.

“You’re a good person, Jessica Jones.”

Her scoff sounded too broken to be bitter.

Matt followed across the rooftops, keeping a fair distance from Jessica as she made her way through Hell’s Kitchen. The streets accepted her, let her fill the holes and crevices as if she was water and it was a sponge. Her boots blended seamlessly with the heels, work shoes, and sneakers even as the thudded across concrete and asphalt. She stopped at the corner where the man claimed the kidnapping had happened, took her own photos and walked with a purpose. He assumed she was following a trail that he couldn’t distinguish from the mix of oil, gas, and rubber.

At some point, she ducked into a nearby store front and, with a polite helpfulness he was sure surprised her, they led her to the back to look at their computers and, more importantly, the camera footage from the front. Matt settled down to wait, listening as she watched the footage over and over, pen scratching on the paper on her notepad. He was on the verge of dozing off when she left, full of a new, more dangerous purpose.

Spreading out his senses further than Jessica, Matt focused, tuning out the buzz of the city for the smaller sounds; children crying, men talking, weapons, arguments. Most of it was just Hell’s Kitchen; the lost, the broken-hearted, and the drugged. The direction narrowed it down a bit until there was the sniffling, muffled sobbing of a boy surrounded by too many men for it to be a coincidence.

Matt dropped from the rooftops, down the fire escapes, and landed solidly on the balls of his feet. “Miss Jones—”

She was fast—fast than he had ever thought possible—and had wrapped her fingers in the front of his shirt and slammed him back into the wall of the nearest building. Her heart was thudding,
breath whistling between clenched teeth, and his shoulder blades stung.

“I won’t hurt you,” he said, voice carefully low to soothe over the porcupine spikes of her rage.

“You’ve been following me,” the words slithered around them like a warning. “Why?”

The mask hid the surprised blink. “We’re looking for the same thing,” he said.

Jessica’s scoff burned and she pressed him harder against the wall. “And what, exactly, are we—” she mocked, “—looking for?”

“A little boy,” Matt gambled, throwing the dice between them and hoping it wouldn’t get him a fist to the face. “He’s scared and misses his father.”

Her grip loosened, just slightly. Enough that her nails weren’t digging into the cotton of his shirt. “You know where he is.” Jessica didn’t question and her breath was hot against his skin. “Tell me.”

“It’s dangerous.”

She lifted him to his toes and knocked his shoulder blades against rough brick one more time. “Fuck off with the macho bullshit.” Her snarl could have ripped the teeth from a wolf. “We can skip the ‘I have a penis and you don’t’ conversation and just get to the useful information you have that I need.”

Matt wondered if it would be worth arguing that it was more of an ‘I have powers and you don’t’ kind of conversation before swallowing the words and forcing different ones out. “They’re in a closed off office building three blocks from here. About twenty men, all of them guarding the boy.”

“Twenty?” Jessica leaned away from him, her hand loosening but still hot against his chest. “Any weapons?”

“Knives, probably. Guns.”

She cursed under her breath and let him go to rub her hands down her face. “I knew it,” Jessica muttered. “I knew this was going to turn into some vigilante bullshit.” Her attention snapped back to Matt and he stayed still, like a gazelle under the eye of a tigress. “You’re the douchebag fucking up their trafficking ring, aren’t you?”

The shrug he offered was stiff mostly because it was true.

“So, this is because of you,” she said, not accusingly but as a fact. “They set the hook, the kid’s the bait, and you’re the fish.”

“That’s—” probably true, Matt realized. They knew he would come for the kid. “You’re right.” He tilted his head to the side. “We need a plan.”

Jessica Jones was a one-woman wrecking crew. She tore through the doors as if they were paper and left the men to Matt’s fists and feet. The ones that dared to get close enough to her hands were slammed into walls and left, dazed, as she stormed past.

Twenty men fell around them.

Twenty men didn’t stand a chance.
Matt listened for anyone else in the building or on the surrounding streets as she ripped the door hiding the boy off its hinges and dropped it on one of the groaning guards.

“Hey,” her softened voice was so juxtaposed against the violence of her strength that Matt turned an ear towards her, careful to make sure it was real.

The kid had been left in a wet, hole filled nest of blankets on the floor.

“My name’s Jessica,” she said, kneeling in front of him, “Your daddy sent me to take you home.”

“My daddy?”

She hummed an affirmative and reached out her hand, palm up, for him to take when he was ready.

“Yeah. He really misses you.”

There was a moment where Matt counted the beats of all of their pounding hearts. Hell’s Kitchen stilled, the night settled like a large cat in a tree, and the boy placed his hand in Jessica’s. Her gentle arms pulled him close, lifted him to sit against her hip, and stepped out of the closet-like room. She walked past Matt, stomping unapologetically on bodies that were in her way, and he kept his own kind of look-out as they headed back to the street.

Four blocks later, Jessica paused outside of a bodega and turned her attention to Matt.

“Miss Jones?”

Jessica grunted. “Stay out of trouble,” she said. The closest thing to a thank you he was probably ever going to get.

“You too,” Matt said and fled into the darkness. He didn’t go too far; just enough to stay out of sight but close by to listen to her call the police.

Only when he saw the cop car turn the corner did he leave.

It was slow going after their first case with Karen. The handwritten sign probably didn’t help much, but it was discouraging to hear the people coming in and out of the office next door and having no one walk into theirs.

Which was why the knock was a surprise. It came from a man that was more plastic than human, with false pleasantries masking his poisonous words. There was no lie—not a true one—but he didn’t tell them the full truth either.

Which was why Matt wanted the case.

And why he kept listening when the man was walking away from their office only to run into Jessica who had been carrying a cup of black coffee mixed with what smelled like a red bull and some whiskey. She didn’t move out of anyone’s way—probably hadn’t even been awake enough to pay attention—despite the fact that it was nearly noon—and they slammed into each other.

Coffee spilled with dark curses across ironed fabric and leather boots.

Between a man with a thousand-dollar suit a woman who chewed out asshole clients with a skill that was close to an art, Matt sat up and tried very, very hard to hide his glee.
“Were people always this stupid?” Jessica snapped, mostly to herself as she fixed the lid on her cup. “Or is today just a special occasion?”

“I’m sorry?”

Matt excused himself from the conference room, claiming he needed some paper from his office, and shut the door behind him. With his back to Karen and Foggy, he allowed the grin to completely take over his face.

Jessica’s boots squeaked on the floor as she made to go around the man, but he stopped her with a hand on her elbow. “Look, shithead,” she ripped herself out of the grip with more force than necessary and made the man stumble forward, “It took every single ounce of my self control not to beat the shit out of my anger management support group.” the sigh that followed the words was long, as if the restraint had physically pained her. “I’m not allowed to beat them up. But nobody said anything about you.”

The man cleared his throat. “Don’t worry,” he said, voice sickeningly sweet. “I’m sure when the week passes and after you’ve had your coffee you’ll feel better.”

Wincing, Matt wondered if he would have to step outside to make sure there wasn’t a murder in their building. To be fair, he was pretty impressed that she didn’t drop the coffee and take a swing.

Jessica pulled the lid off her cup and shifted forward on her toes, heart pumping in a fierce rage hidden just beneath the surface. The man hissed as hot liquid was splashed across his front, dripping down his jacket and tie to the floor. Just for good measure, she threw the cup at his head as she walked around him.

“Word of advice,” she said, stopping in front of her office. “It’s better to let people assume you’re an asshole than to open your mouth and prove it.”

Without waiting for a reply, she pushed the door open and slammed it behind her. All the glass in the building seemed to rattle and Matt couldn’t help the bark of laughter that managed to escape.

The sound of John Healy slamming his skull into the iron stake played in Matt’s mind over and over and over again until his dreams were splattered with a dead man’s brains. It stayed with him as he walked home, as he opened his apartment door, as he tried to make dinner. Food smelled like brain matter and his appetite fled with the ability to sleep.

Someone opened a bottle of Jack in the alleyway behind his apartment and the smell seeped through the night, coating the gore and smothering it until Matt could only think of booze, leather, and black coffee. He breathed it in, settled on his couch with his laptop on the coffee table, and clicked through academic papers.

The whiskey didn’t leave even after the man and his bottle were long gone. It stayed, whispering along the edges of his concentration.

Temptation eventually won and Matt typed ‘Jessica Jones’ into Google.

Alias Investigations’ website was the first result—no real surprise there—as well as the most recent rescue of the boy. Beyond that, there was something about Trish Talk, a few on some less prominent court cases, and, finally, the incident at the docks. Most of it had been covered up. Edited, most likely, by Jessica’s lawyers, but the comments were a flood of accusations and information.

Metahumans.

And through it all, Jessica Jones had snapped a man’s neck and was hailed a hero.

Nelson and Murdock got out slowly, gradually. Most of the time they relied on the scraps Brett managed to throw them. Which was fine, it worked. It’s how they ended up with an electrician who accidently set his house on fire. After sending Foggy home, Matt turned to head to the office with the hope that he might get the papers for the case organized before heading home. Dodging around people and cars, he made his way through Hell’s kitchen, soaking up the buzzing of the evening.

The crash of a window breaking caught his ears and his focus snapped to attention, following the descent of a body until it hit pavement. It took less than a second to recognize area.

Even less to recognize the woman.

Jessica.

She roared and shoved a man through her door. It broke under his weight, sending chunks of wood and glass across the floor.

Matt started running.

Metal hit the smooth leather over her back, boots fumbled in their grip on the floor, and Jessica turned with a snarl, ripping the bat from surprised fingers.

It groaned as she bent it in half.

A tidal wave of men crashed upon her, one man even managing to get through flailing fists to tackle her. Matt jumped over a fence and made his way to the rooftops as she elbowed the guy holding her in the face and kicked out at another who was wielding a knife.

Copper split through the air as steel sliced through denim, and flesh.

“You son of a—!” Her heel fell, useless for the moment, and blood splashed on the ground. She threw one of the men trying to hold her arm, sent him sliding down the hallway, and pushed off the floor.

The force made the wood crack and a jawbone shattered.

“Put her down! Put her down!”

The gunshot—silenced and more of a muffled whimper than a clap of thunder—split through the night. Matt almost tripped over pipes at Jessica’s scream. It didn’t matter how carefully they had tried to muffle the bullet, didn’t matter how much they tied to keep it quiet, because the sound of her agony and rage ripped through the night harsher and with more rage than he had ever thought was capable for a human throat.

Muscles barely held her upright, but she stood on mangled flesh anyway, ripping men off her as if they were made from paper. Her blood splattered across the floor and smeared against the wall, while her hands, full of desperation, broke wrists and arms and legs.
But the men kept coming and even a rock could fall under the timeless force of a wave.

She hit the ground.

Matt landed on the roof, slammed through the access door, and sprinted down the stairs as four men dragged Jessica Jones down the hallway. She ripped gouges into the flooring, broke the banister on the way down, and kicked a man through a wall. Hands tightened. Nails dug into leather. Her scream was more of a gurgle as a man slammed the heel of his bat against the gushing hole in her thigh.

The smell of blood saturated the hallway. Hers, the men’s. It was a war contained to the upper levels of a New York brick building.

Reaching the floor of their offices, Matt kept going, listening as they pulled her out to the street, shoved her into the back of a van, and took off down the street.

Tires burned against asphalt and he was left in the smoke.

Groaning, limp bodies peppered the hallway. Five men outside the office, four men within. The door was gone, broken down, and the window was a jagged yawning mouth letting the cold of Hell’s kitchen settle across the halved desk. Jessica had done damage—both to her workplace and to the men who came to get her. There was no doubt it would be counted as self-defence the lawyer in him thought before it was shaken loose.

That didn’t matter. Not right now.

Those men had wanted her desperately enough to send an army.

Matt tugged out his cell phone, ready to call the police and take one of the more unconscious men with him to find out where they had taken the private investigator when he paused.

A frantic heart beat thundered in the closet.

Coffee grinds and energy drinks.

*Malcolm.*

“Hello?” Matt called into the office, pulling his cane from his pocket and—quietly—snapped it back together. “Is anyone there?”

The door to the closet opened. “You’re—you’re one of the lawyers, aren’t you?”

Matt jerked, feigning his own surprise. “Yes,” he said and worked on keeping his voice carefully soothing and his tone light. “Matt Murdock. What happened?”

“She—I guess she heard them coming or something,” Malcolm stepped over broken glass and started digging through the pockets of one of the men on the ground. “Shoved me in the closet before they came in.”

“She knew them?”

Malcolm shrugged and stood back up, a wallet in his hand. “Maybe? They asked her where a man in black was.”
Shit. Matt straightened. “What did she tell them?”

Laughing softly, Malcolm ran a hand through his hair. “Not much,” he said and his humour soothed the bite of the wind coming through the window. “Just told them where to bend over and how they were going to take it.”

Yeah, Matt smirked. That sounded about right.

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Chains clinked together, hanging from the ceiling while the smell of motor oil, rubber, and paint didn’t do much to mask the harsh chemical stench of bleach and the bitter metallic of blood. Both guards dropped, unconscious, and Matt made his way further through the long shadows cast by buzzing florescent lights.

The garage with its makeshift taxi factory wasn’t as much of a secret as the Russians thought it was. A shitty, well known secret by the underground no one really dared to talk about but never really had to. The sounds, the foot traffic. It wasn’t exactly hidden. Matt had known about the operations for a while and left it be. No one was harmed; it was just a way to get money while scamming the taxi companies of service.

When they had taken Jessica Jones, he could find very little reason to pretend that he didn’t know it existed.

There were worse places to fight than a small, enclosed space that echoed so beautifully. Harsh panting bounced off the walls and cars, highlighting the men, their guns, and the baseball bat that swung through the air.

Jessica grunted when it hit her ribs and Matt winced at the sound of her bones cracking under the force. Fractured. Probably. With anyone else, he was sure that something would have broken.

“Think I did more damage to your bat than you did to me,” the back of her head rested against the car they had shoved her chair against. Her legs were free, one laying still and limp, pretending to be useless even as the muscles knitted together, pushing the bullet closer to the surface. It wasn’t remarkably fast healing—not like that one guy who could survive a bullet to the head—but it was enough to be unnatural.

Handcuffs were wrapped around her wrists, bending centimeter by centimeter each time she shifted. No one had noticed yet; too busy with her front than her back.

The man threw the dented metal to the side where it clattered and rolled into some chains. “What kind of freak are you?”

She laughed, gargling on her own blood. “The kind that’s seen the devil,” Jessica shifted her shoulders. The handcuffs bent just a little more. “And you don’t even come close.”

Matt ducked behind one of the cars and slipped around the men, heading towards the wires buzzing with electricity.

Fingers tangled in blood matted hair and pulled, wrenching Jessica’s head up so she and her torturer were almost nose to nose. Her pants ripped through Matt, her fear and rage blistered through his veins.

“We don’t have to keep you here,” the man’s voice was serpentine kind around the violence in his
grip. “Just tell us the man’s name and we’ll let you go.”

Jessica’s breath shuddered over cracked, bleeding lips. “His name?”

Close to the breaker, Matt froze. Every heart in the garage beat in anticipation. Waiting like wolves in the forest trees.

“That’s it?” Her voice was breathlessly hopeful. So gently broken. So cleverly false.

The Russians shifted their weight, eagerness thrumming through their blood, hunger making their mouths salivate.

“That’s it, sweetheart.”

Matt lunged for the breaker.

Metal tore apart in a single heave and Jessica was out of the chair, pushing forward on her good leg, fist slamming into the man daring enough to get so close to her face. He went down with a howl, blood gushing from his nose, jaw broken beneath her knuckles.

The lights died and she scrambled, blindly, beneath one of the cars. Her thinness was her advantage as the rest of her captors scrambled, flicking on the headlights of the cars, walking past her hiding place.

“Where the hell is she?”

Jessica’s breathing slowed and she swallowed, her palms against the ground, eyes flicking to trace her single escape route. The smell of her blood was heavy in the air, mixing with the man who was groaning on the floor.

Matt slunk over a toolbox, grabbed one of the wrenches, and tossed it into one corner. Men moved to investigate, picking up weapons as they went.

The hunt begun in a flurry of gunfire, sparks, and the stench of fear. Matt dragged the first behind a car, dropped the second with a crowbar. The third fell to friendly fire, and the fourth—

The fourth ran when taillights rose higher and higher.

Jessica, her leg oozing blood, ribs heaving, teeth gritted, hoisted the fake cab above her head. Her arms shook from blood loss and pain, but they held and Matt scrambled out of the way as she threw it into the remaining men. They scrambled to get out of the way but were caught, cornered, and fell beneath metal, plastic, glass, and leather.

One was killed on impact, two others were pinned, and Matt listened to the remaining hearts as they pounded in the aftermath. In the eye of the destruction, Jessica stepped over her groaning torturer on the floor and made it a few feet before her leg gave out. Tools clanked to the ground as she tripped over wrenches and the tall box they were in, sending her stumbling into one of the many tables. Spray paint clattered to the floor, beer bottles rolled on the wood, and she tried to force both legs back into cooperation.

Blood covered fingers wrapped around the handle of the dented bat.

“Watch out—!” Matt lunged forward.

Jessica picked her head up enough for metal to slam into her skull. Her forehead smashed through
half full glass and splintered wood. Alcohol mixed with the blood in her hair and she hit concrete with a bone shuddering *thud*.

The bat rose for another swing and Matt hit the torturer—shoulder into ribs—and wrapped both hands around fragile wrist bones. They snapped beneath the right amount of force and a howl echoed around the garage.

Tossing the whimpering man to the side, Matt kneeled beside the woman on the ground, careful not to cut himself on the glass. “Miss Jones? Jessica?”

She placed her hands on the floor, not caring for the blood spilling from cuts on her palms, and slowly forced herself up. Matt hovered, not sure if he would get a fist to the face if he helped, until her elbows gave out. With no choice, he lunged forward, grabbing her by her shoulders. The vibrations of each injury punched him in the stomach.

Bullet to the thigh, splinters in her lip, cracked ribs, multiple lacerations in her hands, arms, and legs.

Glass in her *eyes*.

Her heart fluttered, lungs stuttered, and, with one last groan, Jessica went limp.

Matt took her to the emergency room at Metro-General himself and let the nurses take Jessica. The smell of sickness, blood, and chemicals made his stomach turn and he stayed long enough to make sure she was getting medical attention before turning around. A woman tried to get a hold of him before he left, but Matt ducked around her hand and fled into the night, heading back to the office building.

The night seeped through the holes of his shirt to send shivers down his spine. Blood itched against his skin, but he dropped through the broken window to Alias Investigations anyway.

There was no groaning and the men were gone. Glass and broken wood were swept into piles and Malcolm was sitting at an unbroken table with a mug of coffee. He jumped up when Matt landed, fingers tightening around porcelain, muscles singing in their sudden tension.

“Who the—”

“Miss Jones is in the ER of Metro-General,” Matt said, cutting the assistant off. “She’s just gone in for surgery.”

Malcolm didn’t give a shit about the man covered in blood standing in the middle of the office; he gathered his coat, picked up his phone, and was through the yawning doorway before Matt could do his own disappearing act.

He took the sound of her screams, of her cries, of her pain out on the criminals in Hell’s Kitchen. Dragged rapists through the alleys, snapped a gangster’s arm, forced drug dealers to cower behind doors.

The next morning, she was out of the hospital, bandages wrapped around her eyes, arms, and legs. Matt grinned when she was only marginally rude to the young woman that was trying to get her to sit
in a wheelchair.

The Alias Investigations website had been updated with the new office address, but it wasn’t difficult to find the old one. A mistake, maybe, because it was that easy to find Jessica’s apartment. If he had found it, anyone with some minor computer skills could also find it.

5th floor. 46th street.

One floor beneath the roof.

Matt sat upon it, leg hanging over the ledge, his fingers tapping old piano songs on the concrete as he listened to her limp unsteadily around her apartment and the feet of people passing. The Russians could come for her, strike when she’s vulnerable, but so far the only thing of concern was Jessica’s accelerating breathing. She flinched from shadows she couldn’t see, cursed at the whiskey she couldn’t have, and tried to burrow under the blankets until she was more mole than human.

Malcolm and the other woman (Trish, Matt believed her name was) were gone. Scurrying off to their own lives after Jessica’s coyote teeth got too close to their throats. Not forever; he had tuned into their muttered conversation at the elevator where they had both made plans to check on the ruffled PI the next day.

Jessica rolled out of her bed, ran her hands through her hair, touched the bandages around her eyes like she was going to rip them off—and knocked over her lap with her elbow. It was already turned off but the sound sent her scurrying over her mattress.

Wincing, Matt closed his eyes under his cloth mask as her hand ran out of surface and he crashed backwards with a yelp. The stitches on her arm ripped open, blood smearing across the wood as she rolled over to push herself up.

“Main Street,” she stumbled into the bathroom, knocked her hip against the sink, and pressed a bloody hand against the mirror. “Birch—” Jessica flinched away from something, her hands raised as if to defend against a blow. None came, of course; she was alone.

An ache settled in Matt’s chest.

She was alone.

“Stop,” Jessica gasped. He couldn’t tell if it was directed at herself or the ghosts she was drowning in. “Stop!”

Her fingers were wrapped in bandages and the thick fabric protected the back of her hand as she swung it. The mirror shattered, falling to the floor in pieces. “Shut up!”

Matt dropped to the fire escape and she stepped on a piece of glass. It sliced through her heel, forcing Jessica to tumble into the sink. Porcelain broke under her grip and water sprayed upwards, raining upon her head.

Desperate fingers clawed at bandages, ripping at the fabric just as Matt reached her window and forced it up. He crawled into her apartment, rolled to his feet, and reached the bathroom as she smeared blood across her cheek and forehead.

“Miss Jones—”
She lashed out with all the speed of a crocodile and the force of a rhinoceros. It was only her blindness that saved Matt from being hit hard enough to go through the wall. Instead, it was her fist that punctured plaster. Jessica panted, pressed her palm against the paint, and heaved her hand out of the ruins.

Matt stepped back, out of her range, and wondered if it was wise to stay for if he should find someone else. Someone that would be more welcoming and less of a stranger.

Pawing at her bandages, Jessica managed to push them up to her forehead. Getting onto her feet was a task in itself; the hole in her leg healing the fastest but also still the worst and the fall off the bed had made it start oozing blood again. She walked (limped) on it anyway, fumbling for the light switch. He could hear her blinking, listened to her nails catch on peeling wallpaper.

The bulb came to life.

“Jesus, shit!” She covered her eyes with an arm and fumbled with the pipes beneath the skin, turning the water off with fumbling fingers.

“Miss Jones?”

Jessica jerked away from him. “Who the fuck are you?”

“It’s—” Matt paused, “—me,” he said. And it sounded just as pathetic aloud as it had in his head.

“Oh,” she drawled, all sarcasm and bared teeth. “Good job, genius. That really narrows it down.”

Yeah. He deserved that. “The Man in Black,” he said and winced at that, too. “I—”

“What are you doing in my apartment?”

Good question. Matt opened his mouth, closed it, and wondered why he had to dig the hole so deep. “I came to apologize.”

She snorted, her legs trembling, blood dripping down on false tile. “Why?”

“They took you.”

“Oh, God. You’re one of those,” Jessica shook her head and pressed her hand against the wall to steady herself.

Matt reached for her and paused halfway. “You need to sit down.”

“Fuck off,” she snarled with more venom than he’d ever heard come out of her mouth. Her chest heaved, her hands shook, but the muscles in her legs tightened in preparation to run.

He had no doubt that she would go straight through him, too. Matt offered his open palms, unsure if she could even see him, and stepped back.

Jessica wasn’t looking at him. She wasn’t looking at anything. Each ragged inhale trembled and each exhale felt like an earthquake.

“Main Street,” she murmured, “B-birch Street. Higgins D-drive. Co-cobalt Lane.” Her legs were shaking and, when they couldn’t hold her up, Jessica slid to the floor. “M-main Street. Birch Street. Hig-higgins Drive.”

He left her there, keeping an ear on her mantra as he dug through the drawers for a washcloth,
soaked it under the faucet, and returned. She had her face in her hands, fingers digging into the edges of her hair.

The mantra had been traded for careful, measured breathing.

“Miss Jones?”

Jessica’s head snapped up, air caught in her throat, heart pounding out the rhythm of her fear. Trauma clung to every part of her being and the demons were wrapping their hands around her neck, prepared to strangle the last dredges of her fight out of her.

Exhaustion settled into every cell and Matt was sure that, if he could see, not even her blood would have bothered being red. It was just too much work. The smell of her pain filled his nose until there was nothing except Jessica Jones on the floor of her bathroom, damp from the sink water and limp enough that he was sure she would pass out at any moment.

He offered the small towel to her, water dripping over his palm and onto the floor. Jessica didn’t take it, but also didn’t move as he inched closer to wipe the blood off her face. Each brush over her brow made her hum and the pads of his fingers found the already fading scars around the bridge of her nose and the corners of her eyes.

They sat together on the floor of the bathroom, leaning against the ruined wall as the water dried and the night grew long.
Chapter 2

Matt woke up to an arm wrapped across his waist, a head on his chest, and a leg thrown carelessly over his own. Hot, damp breath brushed across his skin, fluttering the swirling kraken tendrils of hair that had managed to spread over his shoulders and sternum.

It took only a moment of drowsy thinking to recognize the woman against him. Matt ran his fingers down the back of Jessica’s cotton tank top and over her stegosaurus vertebrae. She hummed in her sleep and curled closer, muttering something that was dusted with dreams. There was a cat in the alleyway, digging through the trashcan it just knocked over, a group of young tourists hailing a taxi, and a few night workers coming home.

Above it all was the buzzing of that massive billboard.

They had sat on that bathroom floor for hours or minutes or years until Matt had managed to get Jessica to her feet and out to the bedroom. He had wrapped fresh bandages around her eyes and heel, replaced the stitches in her arm, and placed new gauze against the wound in her thigh.

(“No matter who they are,” Jack Murdock told his son in distant memories, his arm warm and like a blanket of safety from where it was wrapped around Matt’s shoulders. “No matter what they do. People are never more honest than when they’re in pain.”)

Inebriated on her exhaustion and agony, Jessica’s touch had been so brutally hesitant, her confusion violently heart breaking. She never reached for him—her fingers twitching with the desire but her instincts keeping her still to avoid being hurt—but Matt felt his own hardened edges soften as she pressed into the warmth of his skin.

(‘Who taught you that you should be used to violence instead of care?’ he wanted to ask, but stayed silent, keeping a heavy palm on the back of her neck. She stood by while he gathered clothes into a bag, swaying as if she was about to fall asleep on her feet and jerking awake when his touch wavered.

Books called it skin hunger and Jessica was starving.)

Matt had gathered her into his arms, slid out the window, and ran away from the demons in her apartment. The east coast night bit into exposed skin and her hold around his neck was tight enough that a single squeeze would have been dangerous. Despite the thrashing of her heart to escape its cage of bone and the nervous way her finger twitched against his shoulders, she was careful.

Not a single bruise had been left behind.

Having taken the fastest route home, he had dropped through the skylight into the apartment where his offers of taking the couch had been met by voiceless agreement and silent terror.

Which meant being in the bed. Together.

Jessica murmured something that sounded too close to an apology against his chest and he pulled her closer, ignoring the waspish buzzing through his dozing muscles. She turned boneless, humming against his ribs—the vibrations so close to a cat’s purr—and sighed in contentment. Matt smiled and closed his eyes, ready to drift back to sleep.

God, she was going to kill him when she woke up.
There was no murder in the morning. No violence of any kind. Matt woke up, instead, to Jessica’s breath hitching as her fear tapped like a woodpecker against his bones. Fingers sprawled on his abdomen tapped against skin one by one; index, middle, ring, pinkie, thumb. Index middle, ring, pinkie, thumb. Over and over before she was satisfied and switched hands. Her toes joined in, creating a small crackle of bones and muscles. It was such an odd thing. She was awake but some part of her mind was buried in a graveyard, fighting the phantoms that had buried her alive.

An hour passed before Jessica shifted her legs, rolled away from him, and inhaled a shuddering gasp against his mattress.

“He’s dead,” she whispered. “He’s dead. He’s dead.”

Matt pulled away like a hiker on a trail with a rattlesnake and she stopped breathing, stopped moving. If it wasn’t for the thundering of her blood he would have assumed she was a statue.

“Miss Jones?”

She jerked away from his voice, scrambling to get up to her knees. “Who—”

“Do you remember last night?” Matt made sure not to move—not even to shift his weight—in case the dip of the mattress made her topple backwards.

Jessica paused and he listened to each subtle hitch in her chest. “You were there,” she admitted. Palms ran over sheets, found the pillows, traced the bed frame. “Where am I?”

“My apartment.”

“Why?”

Swallowing down his first response (something that was more on par with ‘because you didn’t seem to feel safe in yours’) Matt spoke slowly, measuring each word before it crossed his lips. “I didn’t want to leave you alone.”

She tilted her head to the side and he heard the stretch of her throat, the extension of each muscle. Her hair sounded like silk as it fell across her shoulders. Each subtle shift was like a prowling tigress, prepared to fight her way to safety if it came to that.

Matt didn’t want it to come to that.

“Your bathroom was flooded and there was broken glass all over the floor.”

Her cut heel was a souvenir. Finger pads dragged over the bandages wrapped around her foot, catching on the thin weave.

The sound of the morning settled between them; cars honking, people talking, the wings of birds flapping as they moved from rooftop to rooftop. A man down on the corner was buying a donut, a woman in heels walked beneath the window with an unlit cigarette in her hand.

Surrounded by it all, Jessica Jones blazed across Matt’s thoughts and he wondered if shooting stars wished upon her.

“Fine,” she sighed, her words slicing through the morning to settle on the sheets already cold from the lack of body heat between them. Her fingers rose for the bandages around her eyes.
Matt almost reached out to stop her but stopped halfway. The fabric was pushed up and off, landing on the bed with a faint rustle. He held his breath as she winced, blinked, and raised her hand to block the sunlight coming into the bedroom.

Jessica snorted and the sound twisted through his bones like a shot of caffeine. “Well,” she said and Matt wanted to trace her lips to see if she was smiling, “I can’t see shit.”

It turned out that her eyes were still healing, twisting the world into a too bright abstract painting filled with blurry smears of colour. Matt dug through her bag for the prescribed drops, helped her get one into each eye, and left her cursing at the bandages with a promise of making them breakfast.

She made no promise to eat it, sitting cross legged on the bed, fumbling with tying the fabric back around her head.

Sitting at the table, in a too-large t-shirt and pair of blood stained sweatpants Jessica’s shoulders were drawn in, feet hooked around the legs of the chair, while her nails tapped the slightly bent handle of her fork. The pancakes were sliced, one section oozing syrup from the four puncture marks. She had lifted it up to her mouth like a child dared to eat wet cat food and put it back down with a nauseas twist of her lips.

That was better than the spoon she had managed to crush in her palm when she tried to eat the yogurt. Or the sudden hyperventilation with the eggs. He wanted to tell her that it was alright to fall apart. Wanted to tell her that it wasn’t her fault. But he couldn’t; not because he didn’t want to (and oh, did he want to) but because Jessica didn’t want to hear it.

Matt heard the flexing of the soft muscles in her stomach, the contracting of her neck as she tried to swallow down the ghosts that had settled in her throat, and couldn’t help but feel a burst of pride.

Because Jessica was trying. She was trying. Whether it was because she was so hungry that there were no other choices or because she actually wanted to eat; it didn’t matter.

He wondered how long it had been since she had gotten her calories from something other than pizza or alcohol (and another side of him wondered about her strength and metabolism before deciding that it was none of his business).

Jessica slouched further into her chair when he reached for the plate.

“It’s alright,” Matt dumped the food into the trash. “We’ll find something.”

Even if he had to go through ever single ounce of his groceries to do it.

Jessica chewed on a fried, cinnamon banana and Matt felt like throwing a goddamn parade.

Even blinded, she snooped. Matt heard her run her hands over brick, pat down couch cushions, dig
through the medicine cabinet. She sniffed at his shampoo (unscented), judged the amount of toothpaste left in the tube from the weight alone, and tugged at his silk sheets with a scrunched nose.

He didn’t stop her and some part of him didn’t want to. She was a private investigator searching through his life but there was some measure of secrecy to it. Matt Murdock but with the mask over his life rather than his face.

Jessica sat down with a huff on his bed and wrapped a blanket over her legs.

“So?”

She frowned and tilted her head. “‘So’, what?”

“You’re a detective,” he shrugged even knowing that she couldn’t see it. “What have you detected?”

Her palms smoothed over his sheets while her thoughts ignited until Matt could almost see their shadows dancing across her skin. “You live alone,” she started slowly, “and you don’t really expect to have people here because all the stuff in the bathroom is for you.” Jessica paused, picked at the hem of her shirt, and shrugged. “Someone thinks you have people over, though, because you have some fancy smelling soap that’s never been used under your sink.”

Matt blinked, feeling impressed despite himself.

“Expensive taste,” she picked up the corner of the sheets, “but not for expense itself. You’re very minimalistic. So, either you like silk—which might be the case judging from your closet—or,” Jessica paused.

“Or?”

“Or you have sensitive skin,” she said.

Matt felt some part of him—some instinctual creature curled in the back of his brain—lift its head and bare sharp teeth. He pushed it down slowly, calming the strange panic that mixed with the awe rising in his chest.

“You have a big apartment but all the furniture is old—probably second hand,” Jessica continued absently, like an unwilling speaker in a college communications course at eight in the morning reading off their notes. “So, there’s something wrong with the apartment or you know the owner of the building.”

Silence settled between them. Her waiting for confirmation, him simply grinning.

Jessica muttered something and scratched at the bandages on her arm.

“I can see why you’re one of the most sought-after private detectives in New York,” Matt said because no matter his own feelings about having his life picked apart in front of him there was something incredibly impressive about the information she had gathered.

She snorted. “I think that’s more because of the fact that everyone thinks I’m some sort of hero for hire.”

“Maybe you are,” Matt said.
Jessica’s groan rumbled through the entirety of her being and she fell back onto the pillows.

A plastic plate hit the floor, spaghetti splattering across wood. Jessica stumbled out of her chair, head in her hands as she chanted out street names around each ragged breath.

Matt added Italian food to the ‘definitely not’ list.

Three barbeque chicken tostadas and an hour later, Jessica curled up on the couch while Matt cleaned the kitchen. She pressed her nose into the pillowcase and breathed in as much as she could each time oxygen went from a gas to a solid in her throat or her muscles grew too tense. The detergent was enough and, by the time all the dishes, pots, and pans were back in their places, she had fallen asleep.

Jessica rolled off the couch sometime around four and woke with a start, shooting up and knocking the coffee table on its side. Sitting at the counter, Matt looked up from his work, folded the corner of the page he was on, and started gathering it up.

“Alright?” he called to her as she fumbled, reaching for the side of the couch.

Grumbling something that might have been positive, might have been negative, Jessica managed to pull herself back onto the cushions. She scratched at the shoulders of her top, touched the bandages to make sure that none had been dislodged, and pushed herself to her feet. “I didn’t break your stupid table, did I?”

“No,” Matt said, placed his briefcase by the wall, and took her reaching, grasping hand in his before she could trip over anything. “Its ego is just a little bruised.”

“Good,” Jessica used him to guide herself to the kitchen counter where she fumbled with the cabinet and groped for a glass. “I bet it deserved it.”

Matt righted the table with a low chuckle. “I’m sure,” he said and perked his head up at her sudden cursing. “Watch out for the chair.”

“No shit,” she shot back at him, toeing forward to not kick anything else. She got her glass of water and made her way back towards the couch.

“I have to go get groceries,” Matt got out of her way and listened as she lowered herself to the couch. “Will you be alright?”

“Jesus,” she snapped, “I don’t need a fucking babysitter.”

Matt lifted his hands in surrender and went to get his coat.

No matter how much time he gave himself or what he was looking for, grocery shopping was one of
the most exhausting tasks in his week. By the time he was dragging five or so bags of food up the stairs to his apartment, Matt wondered if it was really worth it to pay the extra amount to just get it all delivered. Shouldering through the door to his apartment, he toed off his shoes and paused.

“Miss Jones?”

The sound of the city were dampened through the walls and windows so finding her—sitting on the floor with her back against the bedroom wall—was easy enough. Matt placed the groceries on the counter and listened to the hummingbird flutter of her heart and the panicked, threadbare gasps. She had tilted her head to the side, staring at his dresser with the bandages still wrapped around her eyes. Each beat of silence twisted with the sound of her hands curling into fists and the rising sneer on her lips.

“Shut the fuck up,” Jessica told the drawers.

“Miss Jones?”

She flinched at the sound of his voice, opened her mouth to say something, and shook her head. The back of her hand wiped across her mouth.

Matt sat on the floor. “I brought back groceries,” he started tentatively. “Is there anything you want for dinner?”

Each word seemed to escalate her breathing and Jessica swallowed. “I—” Something made her swallow and she jerked away from both him and the devil whispering in her ear. “What?”

“Dinner,” Matt kept his voice carefully controlled, pleasant. Just another day, just a normal conversation. “How do you feel about rice?”

Jessica breathed in, breathed out. “Rice is fine,” she ran her palms over her thighs and flinched. “As long as it’s not sticky. Or fried.” Her nails caught on the thread of her sweat pants.

“That’s fine,” Matt said, adding curry, various Asian, and a few Middle Eastern dishes to the no list. He listened to each subtle shift and twitch that happened underneath the surface of Jessica’s skin. “Do you want to join me in the kitchen?”

She licked her lips, tongue catching on chapped skin. “Yeah,” her voice was hoarse. “I—yeah.”

He didn’t touch her and didn’t know if he should offer her help when she was so close to the edge. It was Jessica who decided: moving into his space, grabbing his sleeve, and used him to lead her through the apartment. She didn’t quite touch him skin to skin, but she was close enough that she soaked in his presence. Matt put the groceries away one by one, handing her the milk, eggs, and fruit to keep her hands busy.

Digging out utensils from his drawers, Matt handed them, one by one, to Jessica and she guessed which one they were by touch alone. It turned into a game where he gave her the vegetables and then the spices. Her brow was furrowed in concentration as she sniffed at the cayenne pepper and Matt laughed as she promptly turned to the side and sneezed.

“Ugh,” she wiped her nose, handing the bottle back. “That was horrible.”

“Was it, really?” Matt’s snicker became a laugh as she levelled an unimpressed look in his direction.

She turned from him with a huff, rested her chin on her arm, and drew little shapes on the counter.
with her finger. Her toes brushed against the floor, the tension in her body had loosened, and there hadn’t been a single hitch in her breath since she had traced her fingers along the top of his silicone spatula.

To keep the demons at bay, he kept the game going, pulling out things from the cabinets and drawers until the rice in the skillet was done and the smell of spices filled the apartment.

And then he sat back and watched her eat everything except for the single helping on his plate.

Full and happy, Jessica sat on the silk sheets as he checked the cut on her heel. It was mostly just scar tissue and the laceration on her arm was scabbing over, no longer in need of stitches. Cracked ribs were fully healed the gunshot wound still working on closing, and the small cuts on her hands completely gone.

“That’s amazing,” Matt told her, dumping the rest of the bandages in the trash and placing a fresh square of gauze against her thigh. “Is it normally this fast?”

Jessica, dressed in a pair of boxers, a new tank top, and with her hair pulled back into a messy bun, rubbed her arms. “Not usually,” she admitted.

“Huh,” Matt settled next to her, “imagine that.”

She didn’t have to see him to shove him off the bed.

Matt jerked awake, his senses ebbing and flowing like the tide as he took in the smells and sounds of the city. He shifted through it with fumbling awareness until his focus landed on the bite of nails digging into his ribs, the arm tightening around his waist, and the staggered just-ran-a-marathon breathing across his chest. Jessica pulled him closer (despite the fact that she had curled up in a ball on the opposite side of the bed) and muttered something against his tank top.

With careful slowness—afraid that she would reach up and smack him—Matt splayed his fingers across her spine, fingers brushing over her shoulder blade.

She huffed, tilted her head, breathed out, and settled against him.

Matt unwrapped Jessica’s arm, his fingers brushing over the skin where there had once been torn stitches. It was smooth, soft, and unmarred. Her fingers twitched under his touch and he felt her pulse spike. “That’s amazing,” he said, letting her go. “What about your leg?”

Jessica’s shrug was half hearted but she leaned back and allowed him to reveal the gauze and peel it off. The wound itself was scabbing over; like it had been nothing more than a scrape. In a few hours, it, like the others, would probably be gone.

His palm touched down on her thigh, feeling the thin but wiry muscle just below the surface, trailed just on the hem of the wound, and brushed the edge of her boxers. Jessica jerked back, breath hitching in her throat, fingers curling into the bed sheets. Matt pulled back before he was knocked
onto his ass. “Maybe eating something other than coffee and whiskey does help,” he teased instead.

Her healed foot landed on his shoulder and pushed him away. *Gently.* Not even knocking him back.

“Watch yourself, Mr. Black.”

“Mr. Black?” Matt took her ankle in hand and tilted his head to the side.

“The Man in Black,” Jessica flopped back on the pillows and wiggled her toes close to his cheek.

“Mr. Black. You didn’t exactly offer me your name.”

She pushed the door open between them, neither pulling him through nor walking over the threshold herself. A smidgen of tease bled over the words and Matt knew that she wouldn’t judge. Everyone had their secrets and, while she was paid to discover other them, Jessica Jones wasn’t the kind of person to really care unless it directly affected her and her clients.

“Mr. Black is fine, Miss Jones,” Matt said.

The hum that left her throat was unsurprised.

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The secret to making her food was to stay away from anything fancy. Something fried, something sweet, something loud. Matt placed a plate piled high with French toast. It was swimming with strawberries, powdered sugar, and enough whipped cream that he was sure she would have gotten sick from the sweetness alone. Eyebrows rising higher and higher on his forehead, Matt added more and more to the pan but Jessica kept eating, coming back for more until he was sure she had eaten her bodyweight.

By the time he got his own breakfast, she was spooning the strawberries out of the pan with her finger.

“You good?” Matt grinned as he scooted out of her way.

Hand outstretched, Jessica felt her way around the counter and dumped the pan, her plate, and the silverware into the sink. The clanging made both of them wince. “I need to brush my teeth,” she grumbled and he laughed.

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“Why don’t you have a television?” Jessica, sprawled across his couch, tapped her fingers against her stomach. “Don’t most men have a television?”

The laugh that escaped Matt was a surprise. “Isn’t that stereotypical? Besides; you don’t have one.”

She shrugged as well as she could laying down. “Yeah, but I don’t really have a life.”

“And you think I do?”

Sitting up, she crossed her arms over the back of the sofa, curled her legs underneath her body, and turned her head in his direction. “I suppose you’re right.”
“Shit!”

Matt snickered as the empanada fell back to the plate. “I told you they were hot.”

Muttering something unpleasant under her breath, Jessica poked the pastry with her finger like a kitten with a toy. Humming under his breath, Matt spooned more beef out onto dough just in case she decided she needed to eat enough for three men again.

That was exactly what she did.

Matt tapped one of the clean plates gently against the side of Jessica’s hand and she took it from him to dry, placing it with the others before moving to find the right cabinets. By the time the forks and knives were away a heavy silence settled between them that he wasn’t quite sure he should break.

The decision wasn’t up to him, however, and Jessica was never one to beat around the bush.

“You need to take me home,” she told him, holding onto the counter, head lowered as if she was avoiding his gaze.

“Miss Jones?”

She breathed in, sighed softly. “My eyes,” One finger tapped the edge of the bandage. “They’re almost healed.”

A sudden fierce warmth grew in Matt’s stomach, rose in his chest, surrounded his heart. She could have stayed, could have sat on his couch and taken a peak. In a single instant, she would have known who he was, what he could do.

But she didn’t.

*You’re a good person, Jessica Jones.*

“We could leave now,” Matt offered, carefully swallowing down the roughness in his throat. “If that’s what you want.”

She turned to him, hair sliding across cotton. “Yes,” Jessica said, voice like a stone standing strong in a pounding, punishing river. “I want that.”

Matt knew that she couldn’t see it, but he bowed his head with a small, pleased smile anyway.

“As you wish, Miss Jones.”

Jessica groaned as if his words caused physical pain.

Taking her back to her apartment was harder during the day, but a fog had swooped in with the chill. Wrapped in his arms, smothered mostly in heavy sweatpants, sweatshirt, and a pair of almost too fluffy socks, Jessica hung on. Rooftop from rooftop they went, her bag bouncing with ever jump,
breath hitching with every second of weightlessness.

By the time he got her to her apartment (going through the window, of course), Jessica was biting down on her shivering. As she readied a mug of coffee, Matt swept up the glass in her bathroom and did his best to fix her broken sink.

“Its fine,” she waved off his worry, almost smacking the back of her hand into the doorframe. “I’ve broken far more in this place than that.”

Matt winced, remembering the holes in her walls not so subtly in the shape of fists. How many times had she been in one of her episodes and lashed out? How many clients hadn’t taken no for an answer so she put them through the wall? “Should I close the blinds when I leave?”

Her nails tapped against the chipped mug and she grunted neither a positive or negative as an answer. Heaven forbid she ask for any help when it came to herself.

Sighing, Matt stepped past her, out of the bathroom, and tried to find anything else that needed to be done. Besides the unsurprising lack of groceries, the rock music vibrating through the floor, and a draft coming from the left wall, there wasn’t much in her apartment, and even less he could help with.

“Do you need anything else before I go, Miss Jones?”

The sigh that spilled from her was mostly teasing but very little mocking. “For fuck’s—call me Jessica,” She said.

Matt grinned, heading back towards her windows and lowering the blinds. Lifting one up, he paused before slipping through the window. It felt strange to smile with the black mask over his eyes, and he realized that the weekend with her had brought more laughter than pain. Something in his chest rebelled against that. Another part howled to the moon.

“IOf course, Miss Jones.”

“Asshole!” She called after him, laughter weaving in between the letters.

He thought about her when he tried to read over his paperwork, thought about her when blood sprayed across his fist. His feet betrayed him, taking Matt to her apartment where he grinned as he listened to her putter around. A few bags of groceries were placed on her rickety table and she grumbled to herself as she shelved the bananas and placed a loaf of bread next to an old toaster.

An unopened bottle of whiskey sat on her desk, forgotten for the moment.

Matt sat down on the ledge of her roof and laughed to himself as she googled recipes and cursed her way through cooking.

At midnight, he knocked on her window and left three massive ziplock bags filled with frozen empanadas on her fire escape and a burner phone that matched his own. There was only one number in the contacts—a ‘Mr. Black’.
She shoved three of the empanadas into the microwave and paced through her old office as they cooled.

Matt didn’t know what he was expecting Monday morning. His stomach tried to crawl into his lungs as he walked up the stairs to his office. Jessica wasn’t waiting outside of it, wasn’t holding his secret hostage. He could hear her through the newly replaced door of Alias Investigations, talking (arguing) on the phone with someone who sounded like a contractor about the taped over broken window.

Most of the furniture had already been replaced; the blood cleaned away, glass swept up. Jessica paced across her office, still smelling of coffee and leather and fruity shampoo. Matt just shook his head and let himself through the Nelson & Murdock door.

That night he found out that, somehow, during the very busy hours of his weekend, Vladimir’s brother had been beheaded. And that he had done it. The Russians had placed a bounty on the Man in Black.

Dead or alive.

“Jess—Jess!”

Clacking heels followed scuffing boots and Matt picked his head up from reading over the complaints Brett had managed to fish up for him after the chaos at the station had calmed. Foggy and Karen were still out—perhaps that threat about sharks had merit after all—and it was just him on the floor.

He tilted his head to the side, frowning. Her voice sounded familiar, but like he had heard it in passing.

“Look,” the woman put her hand out, stopping Jessica from opening her door. “You vanished over the weekend, alright? We found your phone on the desk. I—we thought—” She swallowed. “We thought they’d gotten you again.”

“They didn’t,” Jessica said, not pushing the other woman aside. Her irritation was only on the surface—like a frosting to the cake that made up the rest of her emotions. “Look, not calling was my fault, alright? It wasn’t really on my top list of priorities.”

Matt thought about her scrambling over her mattress in panic, falling to the floor. It would have been amazing if she had spared a thought about calling anyone to tell them where she was going seeing that she barely made any cohesive words during their flight over Hell’s Kitchen.

“Wasn’t—okay,” The other woman pulled back and crossed her arms over her chest. The jacket sounded new—or expensive—and the bracelets on her wrist jingled against each other. “Then where were you?”

Jessica breathed in, breathed out, tapped the pads of her fingers on the door knob, and sighed. “I was safe,” she said, tone softer than Matt had ever heard it. “Safe from the Russians, from anyone who
might have been looking for me—I was safe, Trish. I promise.”

Trish. The woman he had heard leave, who had made plans with Malcolm to check on Jessica in the morning once their patience had run out and they needed to bandage their own wounds from her sharp, coyote words.

“Safe? With who, Jess?”

Jessica stayed silent but she shifted and there was something telling about it. Something Trish could see in each subtle movement and slight expression.

“No way.”

“Shh!” Jessica hissed.

Matt grinned and ducked his head down out of habit in case anyone decided to peek inside the office.

Tish’s voice dropped to a whisper. “Was it him?”

Fingers fumbled with keys and Jessica grumbled something under her breath when she dropped them.

“It was, wasn’t it?”

“I will pay you to stop talking. Actual money. Fifty dollars. Right here.”

Trish laughed. “Okay, okay,” she bumped her shoulder against Jessica’s. “But you have to tell me everything later. Deal?”

Finally managing to get her door open, Jessica groaned. “Fine,” she said.

Their conversation turned to other things like Trish Talk (which was another surprise all in itself; that Jessica Jones knew Trish Walker), what colour they should paint the walls, and something about horrible taste in men.

Some part of him (some ridiculously daring, stupid part of him) wanted to walk across the hallway, knock on Jessica’s door, and hire her to find what she could on Armand Tully. He didn’t even know if their firm could afford to hire her but, but. The idea sang to him and his blood felt alive.

Matt sent a text message to Foggy, asking him what he thought about the idea.

‘Are you out of your goddamn mind?????’ was the fast and quite appropriate response.

Matt ran into her when they were both leaving for the night. She had her bag over one shoulder, thermos in one hand, and something in the other. His shoulder hit hers and he winced, backing up to make sure the cane didn’t catch on her ankles.

“Sorry, Miss Jones,” he said and then, with a small smile, added; “I didn’t see you there.”
She paused for a moment and he listened as the leather of her jacket shifted and her hair drag over the teeth in the zipper. He felt like a zebra under the eyes of a lioness as silence settled between them for one beat. Two.

The smile on Matt’s face drooped just a little.

Jessica grunted. “It’s fine,” she muttered. “I mean, I have working eyes and managed to knock into you,” she waved her hand between them and Matt realized she was holding a cinnamon banana muffin. “What hope would you have had?”

For a split second of thought, he focused on the food and the pride that ballooned in his chest threatened to push words he shouldn’t say out of his mouth. And then, with a sound very much like car wheels skidding on asphalt, he realized what she had said.

The laughter that spilled from Matt was a surprise and a welcome. “Very true,” he said, grinning. “I suppose you’re right.”

Her hum was a bit too pleased and he shook his head, chuckling to himself as she headed towards the stairs.

The burner phone rang as he was walking home and Matt blinked behind his glasses and fumbled with it. “Hello? Miss Jones?”

“Guess it works,” she said. He heard something tapping in the background; plastic on wood. A pen?

Huffing out his amusement, Matt ducked into one of the alleyways. “No emergency, then?”

“Every building tests their fire alarms before using them,” He could hear her smirk. “You should know that.”

Fire and force wiped out the Russian’s armoury and knocked Matt off his feet. The weight of the door and the man drove the air from his lungs and he coughed, pushed them off, and tried to shake off the buzzing in his limbs. A ringing echoed through his head, making the world warped like it was under water. Hissing, he touched the back of his skull and rubbed the hot, copper liquid between his fingers.

Hell’s Kitchen ignited and the sins of the borough burned, bright and heavy beneath the night sky. He could hear screaming, crying, and sirens howling past.

Foggy. Karen.

Jessica.

He scrambled for the burner phone and froze, listening as Vladimir and one of his lieutenants stumbled past. Licking his lips, Matt made a decision.
Matt heard the gunshot and the Russian’s final, gasping breath. He gritted his teeth, hoisted Valdimir over his shoulders in a fireman carry, and ran. A fire truck passed three streets over, wailing as it turned a corner and headed towards one of the bigger blazes. The burner phone buzzed in his pocket. Once. Text message.

A squad car was approaching and Matt ducked into one of the nearby abandoned buildings. His skin felt hot and stretched along his back, the muscles aching from his original fall. By the time he reached the second floor and closed the metal door, his body was ready to dump Vladimir down on the nearest available surface.

Which he did.

The Russian groaned and Matt fumbled with the phone.

“Text Message from J,” the pleasant, robotic voice said. Matt ignored Vladimir’s groans. “Hope you’re not dead.”

Matt shook his head, snapped the phone shut, and turned to the rousing crime boss.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph better be fucking dying,” Jessica said when she answered the phone. He could hear shouting in the background, someone crying, and her cursing would have made a fourteenth century peasant faint.

“I need your help.”

She sighed and something that sounded like aluminium but was probably steel crunched. The background noise lessened and he could pick up the slight heaviness in her breathing. “This should be good, because your city is burning.”

Matt tilted his head to the side and pinpoint the way she moved across floor that squeaked against her boots. Everything that came through the phone was jumbled, broken. ‘Where are you?’

“Hospital.”

“Good. Cause I have a man bleeding out in front of me.”

Jessica groaned, licked her lips, and leaned against the wall when some people (nurses?) passed her. “Call a fucking ambulance.”

“Seeing that the cops shot him, I’m not sure that’s such a great idea.”

She muttered something that sounded like a question about her sanity and a second door opened then closed. She put the phone down on a counter, switched him to speaker, and turned on the water. “What do you need?”

“Do you know how to stabilize someone?”

Jessica’s laugh was more brutal than the bullet in Vladimir’s side. “Me?” she snorted. “You do realize that I normally slap duct tape over my injuries and call it a day, right?”

Wincing, Matt turned to the unconscious man on the ground, the blood that oozed across the floor, and the slowing beat of his heart. “He’s dying.”
“Okay,” Jessica slapped soap on her hands and scrubbed her palms clean. “Jesus, alright. He’s bleeding out? Shot?”

Matt heard her rinse and almost rip the paper towel holder off the wall. “Yes.”

She cursed and he flinched away from the noise as she fumbled picking up her phone. “Okay, fine. Gunshot, gunshot—I’m not fucking qualified for this; I’m a fucking PI—”

“I appreciate it,” Matt offered and grinned at her mumbled ‘fuck off’.

Jessica shouldered her way back out of the bathroom, the sound coming in and out of focus on her phone as she walked. “Okay, you gotta stop the bleeding.”

Calmer than he ever would have thought possible, she read him the instructions off her screen, guiding him through sealing the wound shut with some dusty, old-as-hell flares. At some point he heard doors slide open and the sound of distant sirens before she was walking away from the hospital.

A cop entered the warehouse. Matt thanked Jessica and hung up before she could say anything else.

He fell through one floor, two, three. The weightlessness ripped away the world for a moment so by the time he hit the ground, everything was already black.

“There’s a manhunt for you. They say you shot those cops.”

Matt opened his mouth to deny it before the words caught in his throat. What could he do if she believed it? If she looked at him and saw nothing but danger?

Jessica continued before he could exhale. “You didn’t,” she said in that same, rough, black and white voice. “I know.”

A tongue licked bloodied lips. Gratefulness welled in his chest until his lungs felt as though they would pop. Matt didn’t say his thanks; didn’t even know if she would accept it. “Look, Miss Jones. If I don’t—”

“Shut the fuck up.”

Vladimir, still weak and bleed, coughed out a laugh before groaning and pressing his hand to his side.

“I—”

“I told you,” the sound of bone against bone managed to make it through the grainy sound piece as she gritted her teeth, “to shut the fuck up. You’re not dying in there.”

It was harder to decipher someone’s emotions over the phone. With Jessica, who he could barely piece together in person, it was next to impossible. Matt breathed in the dust and blood that hung heavily in the air. His own pulse thundered in his ears, the cops outside just on the verge of setting off alarm bells in his veins. “There aren’t many options.”
“I could punch them all,” Jessica said. “In the face. Heard I was good at that.”

His laughter burned like the taste of her whiskey. “That’s a lot of officers to punch,” Matt said before adding, quietly; “Thanks, Miss Jones.”

“Whatever. And,” Her inhale crackled over the speaker. “Meet me at the park on 10th.”

No option, no way to argue out of it.

He felt like saying ‘yes ma’am’ but knew there would be hell to pay when he saw her.

(And wasn’t that a revelation; when. Everything seemed lighter with hope on the edge of the horizon.)

Matt tilted his head up and prayed to make it out. Prayed to survive long enough to smell which alcohol she had decided to invest in that week. “I will.”

“And don’t do anything stupid.”

He grinned. “Never do.”

Matt left Vladimir behind, the sound of gunfire ringing through his ears. It echoed through the tunnels and he walked, then jogged, then ran. Through the dark and the twists and the turns he went until the officers were far behind and the world was quiet enough that his thoughts grew their own fangs.

He fumbled up a ladder, ignored the way his gloves caught on old metal, and pushed his way to the surface world. The city was still dark, still cold, still empty, and he stumbled his way through the empty streets.

Well, not quite empty. The park on 10th avenue had long been abandoned by the kids, but there were familiar boots tapping out a rhythm that belonged to no song he knew of. Matt breathed in the rubber, the fading flowers, and the overused plastic. One of the hoops was rusting, the torn net hanging limp as a small breeze tugged playfully at the ends.

Sitting against the fence was Jessica. There was a faint tinge of copper beneath her nails, covered by the stench of antibacterial soap. Her leather jacket had a smear of oil on the sleeve, the knees of her jeans were torn, and her hair smelled of sweat, smoke, and fading conditioner.

Matt groaned as he sat down beside her, the fence cold against the bruises on his back.

She offered him her flask, keeping silent as sirens continued to wail.

Sipping the whiskey, Matt let his head fall back.

“So,” Jessica said, taking her alcohol back. “I had a pretty shitty day with shitty people and even shittier clients.” He felt her shift, toes pointing inward, boots catching on the cement. “What about you?”

The laughter hurt his ribs. It hurt his throat and his back and his legs.

But the thread of Jessica’s humour stitched together the hole that was that night and he breathed in her steadiness like it was some sort of whiskey salvation.
“I think I’m alright,” he said.

Her snort was hot against his arm.

“Yeah?” She said, “me too.”
Chapter 3

Stick came back, wrenched the rug out from under Matt’s feet, and left leaving everything broken again. There was work in the morning. People to see, papers to read.

He ducked out into Hell’s kitchen, hoping that the biting night could awaken him enough for everything to stop feeling so damn numb. Metal settled in his mouth, his cells sung for a fight, and he ran and ran and ran until his thighs burned.

Stumbling to a stop on one roof, Matt almost hip checked a fence and breathed in the smell of meat, bread, cheese, and tomatoes mixed with the sharpness of aluminium and bitterness of whiskey. Stretching out his senses felt like pulling on a frozen rubber band. He worked slowly in case they snapped back, tracing out the heartbeats, the gasps and pants and sighs—

Glass clanked against concrete, a greasy, cardboard box rubbed against bare knees, and leather caught ever so slightly on brick. Matt followed it, prowling over vents and chimneys until he was sitting above an access door with Jessica Jones sitting beneath him.

She was looking at the wall of the building across from her, no windows to reveal any cheating spouses. One leg hung over the ledge, dangling over the forty-some foot drop and her bag sat next to her hip reeking of the chemicals that came from printed money.

Just paid, then. Another client for another day.

Matt frowned and reached farther—past the banging of cars, past the human voices, and there. A fan. Small but the sound of it spun around an overhead projector. “Good movie?” He dropped down, landing silently. The makeshift walls blocked most of the cold and he breathed in.

Her sigh echoed around her metal water bottle. The sound highlighted the edges of her face in blazing stardust blue. “It’s alright,” Jessica said with a shrug and bit into a slice of pizza. “Guy played a couple of weeks ago.”

He sat next to her, cross legged on the rooftop, and ignored the biting chill that tried to get through his pants. The movie was silent but he tilted his head towards where she was looking and focused his senses on Jessica. Tension buzzed underneath her skin like a slumbering wasp—just a constant thing that never fully left—and her hair was heavy with the musk of the city.

“Long day?”

She huffed and offered him the half open pizza box. He took a slice, holding his hand under the tip in case any of the toppings decided to jump ship. “Sure,” the word came out as if it was merely an afterthought. “Stupid people with stupid problems.”

“I bet they pay good money.”

Jessica snorted. “Oh, they do,” she drawled and took another gulp of her whiskey. “And it’s still not enough to deal with their bullshit.”

He hummed his agreement and they settled into the black and white movie of their life as the world spun on beneath them. Matt finished the pizza and stretched back to lean against brick.

“What about you?” Jessica split the silence in half like an axe. “Anything new for the Devil?”
Matt sighed. “I didn’t choose the name.”

Her hum was lazy. Uncaring. “Could’ve been worse,” she said.

He wished he had his own flask so they could both drink to that. “Could have been better.”

“Ain’t that the truth,” leaning further over the side of the building, she took the last slice from the box and tossed it. He followed the sound of the cardboard down into the alley, wind whipping past folded corners until it landed in the dumpster with a clunk. She stretched her legs out, soles pressing into his thigh. “Didn’t answer my question though.”

He grunted and turned his head towards Jessica as her gaze blazed across his skin. “It’s just been one of those nights.” Aluminium sung as it flew through the air and his gloves fumbled but managed to catch on the smooth metal before it fell into the alley. “Wha—”

“You look like you need it,” she said, shrugging.

Matt unscrewed the lid and poured a generous mouthful down his throat. It warmed the back of his tongue, washing the bitter taste of Stick and blood away with something that stung like citrus. “Not your usual,” he said, tapping his fingers along the round stickers.

“Famous Grouse,” Jessica took the alcohol back and swallowed the rest. “Something classy.”

He grinned and felt the mask stretch around his face, fabric rubbing across his nose. “You? Classy?”

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The two halves of his life were being shaken together like some martini and Matt found himself torn between leaning towards the whiskey warmth of Jessica or curling in the hearth heat of Foggy and Karen. Union Allied was on both sides, burning both ends.

It was only a matter of time before the flame met in the middle.

“All I’m saying,” Matt said, fingers paused over Braille, “is that we have a perfectly good private investigator as a neighbour.”

“Do you think we could even afford her?” Foggy leaned over his own books and papers. “The three of us who can barely afford our own rent?”

Matt felt his lip itch up in a smirk. “You never know,” he said, “if you tell her that Fisk was the mind behind her kidnapping, she might waive her fees.”

A bark of a laugh escaped Foggy. “Yeah, sure,” he said. “And maybe she won’t take my head as payment instead.”

Detective Blake was murdered in his hospital room.
Wilson Fisk stepped out of the shadows. Ben Urich deleted his story.

Life moved on.

Outside Alias Investigation’s door, Matt tightened his fingers around the handle of his cane, made sure the smile was fitted on his lips, and knocked. The feeling of his leather bag and the papers inside of it (as well as the duplicate drive) burned against his thigh.

It was early enough that Jessica Jones was still in and the coffee machine in her office was on its second brew. Papers shifted on the desk and he listened as she pushed her chair back and stomped across the floor. The door opened with a burst of wool and chemicals and she was before him, shoulder slumped, hair hanging limp, and leaning a bit too much against the doorframe.

“Mr. Murdock,” she said, voice rough from insomnia and a lack of use. “Have another poor, sobbing client in need of tea?”

“Miss Jones,” he leaned a little on the cane and hoped his glasses hid his wince. “I was wondering if I could talk to you.”

She groaned, ran one hand through her hair (he heard the way her fingers slid through it, how oil had settled into the strands), and stepped back. “Couch is two feet ahead of you.”

Lowering himself down to the sofa took more effort than he was expecting and he gritted his teeth against the flare of bursting agony that raced through his ribs. It was leather and soft—heaven for his battered, aching bones—smelling already of her shampoo. A blanket was tossed over the back; some knitted thing made of heavy wool with clumpy stitches.

Matt placed his cane to the side and settled his bag across his lap.

Sitting back down in her chair, Jessica ignored the way metal groaned and leaned back. “What can I do for you, counselor?”

“I—we want to hire you.”

Her sigh was heavy and Jessica gathered up all the papers and pictures in front of her, moving everything to the side. “Hire me?” Cotton rubbed against wood and he could picture her hands folding on top of her desk. “I don’t tend to like lawyers,” she said, her heart unfaltering, “in fact; I’ve always enjoyed overcharging them.”

“Something Jeri Hogarth didn’t mind as long as you delivered, I’m sure,” Matt offered her a small grin and heard her stretch out like a massive cat. “I heard you were the best.”

“She was exaggerating.” Truth. As much as she believed it, anyway.

He tilted his head to the side. “Jeri Hogarth doesn’t exaggerate.”

“And who does,” Jessica drawled, tracing her index finger around the rim of her mug, “the esteemed Mr. Murdock want me to look into?”

Matt pulled the papers and thumb drive from his bag and placed it all on her desk. “Wilson Fisk,” he said, smile dropping to the serious, emotionless facade of his second persona.

“Wilson Fisk,” her mouth wrapped around the name like a python’s around an egg. Jessica picked
up the pile and slid it into a extendable folder. A band snapped against plastic and she placed it in her bag. “Give me until three to think about it,” she said. “I don’t take clients when I’m running on two hours of sleep.”

“Thank you, Miss Jones,” Matt braced his hand against the arm of the sofa. “We appreciate it.” He pushed himself up, swallowing the soft noise that tried to escape when his body severely objected that idea.

“You okay?”

He fumbled for his cane and laughed softly. “Ah, yeah, sorry; I just had a rough morning.” Matt felt her eyes burning against the back of neck long after he returned to his office and she headed home.

Something thick and mostly paper landed on Matt’s desk and he pushed his book away with a frown to reach for it. “What’s this?”

“Dunno,” Foggy said, walking back through the door. “But it’s for you.”

“Oh?” Matt opened the top of the envelope and pulled out the heavy paper. It took him a moment before realizing what, exactly, it was; a contract written completely in Braille. One finger ran over ‘Alias Investigations’ and he couldn’t help the slow growing smile that was carefully taking over his face.

“I don’t believe you went to see this woman for insight on how to kill a man. I think, maybe you went looking for a reason not to.”

Matt could feel himself splitting apart at the seams, tugged in too many directions; the man he wanted to be, the man he thought he had to be, and the man he was afraid of becoming. Father Lantom’s words carved their way through his thoughts, dripping into the night like blood upon cement. He let his feet go free, taking him wherever they pleased as Hell’s Kitchen opened its gaping, hungry mouth to swallow him whole.

Foggy and Karen were on the edges of his mind, spilling through his grasp like sand.

They didn’t know about the mask; just saw the Devil as a terrorist, as a figure, as some sort of rage that snuck through the shadows with its teeth bared.

But there was Jessica sitting in her apartment. A child-like scribble of black crayon across newspaper, blocking out the words she didn’t want to read until it was poetry. Matt ducked down her fire escape and paused outside her window. She was in the kitchen, digging through her freezer for something and cursed when it wasn’t there.

Matt sat down on the metal grating and leaned his head back against the wall. The knot from the mask dug uncomfortably into his skull and he focused on that, tracing the indentations it made in his skin, on the way brick caught on the fibres.
“You gonna sit there all night or did you actually need something?”

He turned his head to the opened window. “How did you know I was here?”

“Jesus,” Jessica grunted and pulled back into her apartment. “You’re some weird ass fucking ninja but that doesn’t mean I can’t see your fucking shoe, asshole.”

Matt leaned over, placed his palms on the windowsill, and paused. “Uh—”

“I didn’t leave the window open for a nice, city breeze,” she snapped, placing a heavy bottle down on her lopsided kitchen table. There were other things on it; her water bottle, a thermos, scarf, jacket, camera, and a case of rechargeable batteries.

He smirked and ducked through, closing the window behind him. “Miss Jones—”

She pressed a glass into his hand. “Whatever it is,” Jessica said, “I’m sure it can wait until after I’ve gotten through the bottle.”

“Tough day?”

Her grunt echoed around the glass. “Not yet,” she muttered, and swallowed down the shot. “What do you want?”

“I—” The alcohol was cold against his hand and he could hear the faint tink of the ice cubes bumping into each other. They echoed the thumping of Jessica’s heart, the subtle shift of the floorboards under her weight, and the buzzing of electricity in her cell phone. “This might have been a mistake.”

“Why?” Her voice was brittle beneath its roughness. “You just sitting outside my fire escape for the thrill of it?”

Matt licked his lips and ducked his head, hoping it would look like he was staring into her ambrosia. “I think I came looking for advice.”

Jessica sighed and her frown saturated the silence. “You came to me? For advice?”

“Yes,” he said, standing straighter because it was true. Beyond everyone else—Foggy, Karen, even Father Lantom—she was the only one who could possibly understand. “Yes, I—“ Matt swallowed. “Why... why did you kill him?”

She froze. A crystal sculpture in the middle of Hell’s Kitchen made of sudden, sharpened edges. She moved with careful slowness, placing the glass on the table even though he could hear her bones straining not to break it. “Kill who?”

“Kilgrave,”

Jessica’s pulse sped up. She dragged in a deep, shuddering breath. “That is,” she snarled, “none of your god damn business.”

Matt raised his hands and took a step back. The tension ran through her coiled muscles until she was a jungle cat waiting for a misstep to dig her teeth into his throat.

“It’s not,” he agreed. “It’s not, I’m—” Matt licked his lips. “You’re right, I just—what if? What if I have to kill him?”

The words made her pause momentarily, nails digging into her palms hard enough to draw tiny
droplets of blood. “Kill who?”

“Fisk,” Matt whispered. “What if I have to kill Fisk?”

“Then you kill him,” she told him, all blunt knives and chipped hammers. “And you fucking live with it. For the rest of your goddamn life.”

Matt closed his eyes under the mask and let his shoulders drop.

She sighed and the sound settled like a punching bag between them. “Listen,” Jessica said, paused, breathed in. “Listen, okay, because—” she swallowed. “Because it’s shit. It’s all just shit, alright? I tried. I tried to find ways around it. I did.”

He lifted his head, listened to her voice shatter like an icicle on pavement.

“But sometimes you can try and try but some people—some god damn fucking people—give you no other choice. He gave no other choice.” Her breathing was ragged and dragged along his skin like the biting, winter wind. “But you have one.”

Matt took a jagged step forward but she pulled away and wrapped her arms around her heaving ribs.

“Because, because. You do. You have a choice. And you have to make it.”

It dawned on him, like being underwater for so long and finally being pulled up to the surface. “You knew nothing else would work.”

Her laughter was loud and broken and dying. “Of fucking course it wouldn’t!” She leaned against the counter, one hand pressed over her mouth. “He walked into the police station and made them point their guns at each other. He could control other people with just his words.”

Matt tasted salt on the air.

“So you have a choice to make, Matthew Murdock,” Jessica said, her words snapping across his thoughts, “you have to decide whether Wilson Fisk is as dangerous as Zebediah Kilgrave. And then you have to convince yourself that you had no other choice for the rest of your life.”

She knows, was the first, panicked thought that arched through his thoughts before it was boxed away for another time. With the glass still in his hand, Matt took a step forward, then another when she didn’t pull away. “Miss Jones,” he said, his voice soft. He heard something wet land against the counter. “Thank you.”

The words felt hollow, felt like just a waste of air compared to the wounds she had bared. Broken parts of herself were laid out like the paintings in the gallery. That didn’t stop them from being sharp, from digging dangerously into his skin.

Broken? Maybe. Fragile?

Never.

He stood still as she swiped the alcohol out of his hand and downed it.

“Yeah,” Jessica muttered, voice hoarse. “Be better than me, Devil boy.”

“That might be hard,” Matt said, smiling pleasantly and, without looking, grabbed the bottle off the table and handed it to her. “You’re the bravest person I know.”
Groaning, Jessica took the alcohol and drank straight from the bottle. “Fuck you,” she said, flipping him off and knocking her hand into his sternum so he could feel it. “Do better. Cut down on the dumbassery.”

He stood to the side as she poured the rest into her water bottle and packed up everything into her bag. “Got somewhere to be?”

“Oh, yeah,” Shrugging on her jacket, Jessica passed him and headed towards her door. “Some dumbass lawyer gave me a shitty new case. Figured I should get started on it before he decides to do something stupid.”

“He’s lucky you decided to take it.”

Jessica snorted, turned off the lights, and opened her door. “You have no idea,” she muttered and wood slammed behind her, leaving Matt standing alone in the middle of her apartment.

He let himself out.

Holding the sign—their sign—in his hands was like feeling a dream finally come to life. Finally solidify into something that mattered. Matt took the hug from Foggy and grinned into his best friend’s shoulder.

The phone rang and everything crashed down around them again.

Brett met them in the lobby of the police station, sitting beside Elena Cardenas. The smell of copper soaked through the spices that always seemed so sure in her presence, fingers wringing each other out and trembling in her lap. Matt counted her heart beats—sure and steady—and followed behind Foggy and Karen. There was always a heavy smell of cotton and cleaning chemicals that settled in his sinuses like a blooming headache just taking root.

“Miss Cardenas,” Karen kneeled, uncaringly, on the floor of the station. “Are you alright? Que pasó?”

Rapid fire Spanish spilled from the woman’s mouth and Matt tilted his head to listen. Asalto, una mujer en negra, un chuchilo.

“Do you know who it was?” Matt directed towards Brett. “The woman who stopped the mugging?”

“Yeah,” the officer snorted. “Jessica Jones—said she was in the neighbourhood on a case.”

Matt heard both Karen and Foggy shift their weight, probably looking back at him. He ignored them and leaned just a bit of his weight on his cane. “Where is she now?”

Sitting outside the women’s locker room, Matt tapped his fingers against his thigh and kept his head down. he could hear Jessica brushing out her hair with her fingers, head beneath one of the blow dryers. She was dressed in the same outfit that he had seen her leave in the night before—only the sweater had blood dotting torn seams were a blade had managed to catch her waist.
The air died and she grunted, leaned forward to check her face in the mirror, and grabbed her bag from one of the hangers. Matt stood up as she approached the door and was almost smacked into the wall.

“Fucking Christ, Murdick!”

“Miss—what?” They stood there for a moment, Matt blinking as he went over what she said. “What did you call me—?”

Jessica huffed and readjusted her bag. “You heard it loud and clear, asshole.”

Matt couldn’t stop the small grin that came, unwilling, to his face. “I don’t think anyone’s called me that before.”


“Not that one, either.”

She shifted, turning to head down the hallway. “Shame. They were going easy on you.”

Tapping after her, Matt tilted his head to the side as she paused long enough to wait for him so they could leave side by side. He didn’t reach for her arm (he wasn’t quite sure yet if she’d throw him through the wall or not), but Matt did offer her a wide, toothy smile.

“Ugh,” Jessica said, “fuck off.”

Opening his mouth to say something, Matt paused. “You’re bleeding.” The metallic smell wasn’t as strong, but it was fresher than the dabs of it on her sweater. He breathed it in, felt rage bubble in the quiet corners of his body like bared, canine teeth in the shadows.

Some part of him—the black devil that hunted through the city—wanted to hunt. Wanted to break bones and cartilage and make a small time mugger think about his decisions each time the sky grew overcast.

“Shitbag caught me by surprise,” Jessica’s finger against the torn wool made a strange type of sound—like metal against fabric where it was more of a feeling than an actual noise—that sent a shiver through Matt’s bones. “It’ll be gone in a couple of hours.”

Even less, judging by the way her cells were rapidly multiplying. “Did you see his face?”

“Better,” she snickered, pulled something leather from her bag, and waved it in front of Matt’s nose. “I nicked his wallet.”

It’s not hard to find the mugger, not hard to beat him until blood soaks Matt’s gloves and drips to the ground. Hell’s Kitchen blazed in an act of purifying flames and Matt was dragged into the beast-hunger that burned in his veins.

A coyote hunting bears.

Only the bears were ready.
Matt was half conscious when hands finished dragging him through the window. He felt a moment of regret, knowing that blood was smeared across the wood frame like some sort of offering to the woman who lived there. The smell of spiced whiskey and wool and something fruity brushed over him. It felt like safety and security and *home*. Small fingers tugged at his shirt, ripped the fabric away, and brushed over his skin with a tenderness that belayed their strength.

“Christ,” Jessica whispered above him, heartbeat strong and rapid. She looped one arm under his legs, one beneath his back, and lifted him like he weighed less than a cat. “I don’t—” grunting, she placed him on the bed, fingers fumbling against his neck to check for a pulse. “I don’t know—*fuck.*”

Pulling back, she spread some dust-smelling blanket over him and brushed her palm over his forehead. “Don’t you fucking die on me, Murdock. You understand?”

He tried to answer—took a deep breath and everything—but then she was gone and he was being swallowed into her lumpy, old mattress and thin, stretched sheets.

He dreamed of lips pressed against his cheek and hair that smelled of coconuts across his shoulder, of a leg draped over his and fingers tapping across his abdomen.

“Jessica?”

“Shh.”

Matt was in a lap, fingers brushing across his jaw and cheeks, running on the edge of the mask. Her life thundered through him, vibrating around every edge, filling his bones. He breathed in her and almost gagged on the smell of antiseptic. There was someone else. Someone who moved on the edges, blurry and twisting and was too much, too much, too much.

“Who—”

Leaning over him, Jessica breathed out and her hair tickled his chin, “This is Claire,” she said, “Claire Temple. She patched me up in the ER.”

Steady hands stitched up the wound on his side.

“Okay,” Matt said.

Boots stepped onto the elevator. Cheap but shined to look expensive. The world was weaving back and forth but he could make out the shift of a flashlight against tactical belt, the clink of bullets in a gun, and the faint stench of cigarettes.

“There’s someone coming,” Matt murmured. Jessica had moved out from under him and was holding an icepack against an ache in his sternum. “A police officer.” Maybe. Probably. Real or fake didn’t matter. It wasn’t really a secret that he had gone to help Jessica. Smart of them to check here.

His senses wavered and he couldn’t focus past the throbbing roar of Metallica some floors below
them to see if the building was being watched. Stupid.

Jessica cursed. The mattress bounced when she pushed off the bed and he followed the bare slap of her feet as she fumbled through her closet. Stitching stopped, the needle hovering just above Matt’s torn flesh. He heard hair shift and scrubs rub together. The elevator moaned upwards. One floor. Two floors. Three.

Jeans hit the floor, the brass button bouncing off wood.

“What are you doing?” Claire’s voice was sharp, bouncing with enough effectiveness to balance out the whirlwind that stormed through the apartment.

“Answering the door.” Reaching over her table, Jessica picked up the bottle of Jack, tore off the lid, and took a long gulp like it was a glass of water.

Claire tilted her weight forward, making Matt’s thighs press against her knees. “Without pants?”

Matt blinked as the elevator stopped and the officer stepped into the hallway.

The whiskey was placed back on the table. Jessica rolled her shoulders and cracked the bones in her neck. “Wouldn’t be the first time.”

Knuckles rapped against glass and Matt sucked in a deep breath. Claire’s heart matched his in tempo, beating out a symphony as Jessica opened the door.

“What the fuck do you want?” She snapped at the man in uniform.

There was a beat of silence where Matt could only imagine the officer looking at the tousled, smeared make-up face of the private investigator in a tank top and panties. He wondered if she still had blood on her hands or if she had wiped them off during the time he had been unconscious.

Careful fingers went back to stitching up his side, moving faster but no less efficiently. “Woman has balls of steel,” Claire muttered, mostly to herself.

“You have no idea,” Matt managed back, keeping his voice low but unable to stop the low groan that ripped up his sternum. A hand laid across his lips, muffling the sound before it could fully escape. The latex tasted like chemicals and blood. He fought not to gag.

“Miss Jones, may I come in?”

“No.”

Matt breathed in through his nose and Claire pulled back with a murmured ‘sorry’. The world came in and out of focus, people sparking in time with their heartbeats. He focused on Jessica’s—steady but rising.

“Miss Jones—”

Jessica sighed. “Get a warrant,” she snapped, “and you can come in. Until then? Stay. Out.” She tried to close the door and was stopped by a foot in the way. “What the—”

Claire moved off the bed and ducked down, moving closer to the wall. Matt tangled his fingers in the covers and held on, gritting his teeth against the flairs of pain rising over his ribs. The neighbour switched to Nirvana and he could feel each vibration in every single damn cell.

“I thought I heard a sound,” the officer said, nudging his way forward. “You might be in danger.”
Wood groaned as Jessica kept the door from opening with one hand while the police officer put his entire weight against it. It took him less than a second to realize that he wasn’t going to get anywhere.

“Maybe you should get your hearing checked out,” Jessica drawled, “can’t be good in your line of work if you can’t hear someone shouting they’re unarmed.” Her voice dropped a few degrees. “Oh. Wait.”

Matt breathed in slowly through his nose and back out through his mouth.

The officer stood up straighter as if his height would somehow change the unmoveable wall in front of him. “Is someone in there with you, Miss Jones? Are you being threatened?”

Jessica snorted. “Yeah,” she said, “someone’s in here with me. But I’d say it’s the opposite of being threatened.”

The other two residents froze. Panic settled in each, burning wound and Matt’s chest tightened until there was nothing but the no, no, no, chanted in the back of his mind.

“What is she doing?” Claire muttered, mostly to herself. Her voice somehow sounded louder than everything else on the planet.

Matt wondered if he had enough strength to make it to the window, if the blood had been cleaned off from earlier. What are you doing, Jessica Jones?

“Look you stupid son of a bitch,” her voice rose, spilling into the hallway and back into the apartment. “Who I fucking have in my apartment is none of your goddamn business so if you don’t have a fucking warrant then I would like to get back to my evening pleasures.”

What?

Across the room, Claire cursed and pulled off her gloves slowly to keep the latex from snapping. She undid her bun, shook out her hair, and tore off her scrubs. Balancing on one leg (and almost falling over the first couple of tries) she managed to get one sock off. The second was kicked away when she left the bedroom.

Matt followed her footsteps across the scratched flooring, heard her take a deep breath. Skin brushed over skin, breath fluttered across cotton, and Matt traced the blazing fire of both women as they pressed together, back to front.

“Honey?” Claire said. Her heart was pounding, her voice soft and low enough that any hitch in her words could be blamed on drowsiness. “When’re you coming back to bed?”

Oh.

Oh.

The officer’s heart thudded. Matt listened to his sudden inhale, swallow, and the way he shifted back in his shoes. “Uh, I didn’t—”

Jessica dragged her hand over Claire’s arm, the pads of her fingers tapping along the other woman’s skin as she leaned back into the cradle of warmth. They were so close together that their bodies echoed each other’s sounds and Matt took a moment to find where the line between them was.

“Of course not,” Jessica said, her own amusement cold and deadpan, sitting on her tongue like oil,
“bye, officer.”

She shut the door. Glass shuddered in wood.

Matt dug his nails into already ragged sheets. The officer stood in the hallway, unmoving, hand raised as if he was about to knock again. Both women must’ve been able to see his silhouette through the glass. Their hearts were still pounding out a crescendo that could deafen him.

Turning in Claire’s arms, Jessica hooked her hands under bared thighs and lifted so long legs could wrap around her waist. Sinews expanded, contracted, moving the bones encased within their hold. Flesh and silk pressed against wood and glass. The subtle drag of it made Matt’s breathing hitch. He traced the outline of whiskey and wool before it collided with the spun thread of antiseptic and cotton.

“Okay?” Jessica whispered. She was strong and resilient, unmoving, unbreaking. A thing of intergalactic, interwoven, incredible rarity.

Wrapping her arms around strong shoulders, Claire leaned down so their bodies ignited like two colliding stars that blazed across Matt’s mind. “Yeah,” she breathed, leaning down. Their noses brushed together, fingers dug into thigh, and Matt heard bones in ankles shift as they pushed up.

Nails plunged into hair, gasps fled from lips. He tried to ignore the way palms brushed over Jessica’s waist, pushing the edge of her top up over her smooth stomach. A heel dragged down thin, powerful thighs, hooking and holding on. Hell’s Kitchen moved on outside, lives ticking and passing and growing while time wavered in the apartment.

“Fuck,” Jessica gasped as she leaned back, nails digging into her shoulder. She returned, lips and teeth and tongue on a bared throat.

Matt opened his mouth, choked on his words, and was forced to swallow. There was the roll of Jessica’s hips, the creak of the door, Claire’s breathless gasp.

“The officer is gone!” He called as loud as he dared.

Pulling away from the collar she had been exploring, Jessica hummed. “Pity,” she said into Claire’s heaving chest, words dragging along the top of a clothed breast.

The laughter that spilled from the nurse was breathless and she sighed as strong hands lowered her gently back to the floor. “Well,” she licked her lips, “that—that was something.”

Jessica leaned back and brushed one hand through her hair. “Got rid of him, didn’t it?” She backed off enough to let Claire gather her clothing and tug it back on. The gloves were tossed in a bin, new ones snapped on.

“It’s going to be all over the news later,” Claire settled back on the bed and picked the needle back up. “Jessica Jones; Lesbian.”

Not bothering to pull her pants back on, Jessica settled at her table and poured a glass of whiskey. “They’d be only half right,” she sipped the alcohol and Matt heard it slide down her throat. “But no news will ever admit that bisexuality is actually a thing.” Saluting the ceiling with her glass, Jessica leaned back in her chair. “I’m a motherfucking unicorn, baby.”

Matt laughed and the pain dropped him back into unconsciousness.
Fingers edged the fabric over the top of his face and Matt reached up with a moan.

“It’s okay,” Jessica murmured above him, fingers soothing the creases between his eyebrows. “It’s okay. Claire’s gone. Go back to sleep.”

Matt woke to cursing and beeping and grinned as Jessica almost ripped the door off her microwave.

“Piece of shit,” she grumbled, pulling a bowl out and placing it on the counter.

Trying to sit up—and deciding quickly that it was a bad idea—Matt swallowed down the gunk in his throat. “Everything okay?”

She jerked and spilled broth across her hand. “Mother—!” Water spilled from the faucet, cooling her hand before it was off and Jessica entered the bedroom. The bowl was in one hand, spoon in the other. She placed both on the side table and helped him sit up against the pillows.

“What’s that,” he nodded towards the bowl, making out the chicken broth, what he was sure was carrots and noodles.

“Microwaved soup,” she said, practically shoving it onto his lap. “Eat up.”

“Thank you,” he said softly when the soup was gone and she was peeling away the bandages on his side to check his wounds. “You didn’t have to help me.” Didn’t have to bring a stranger into her home to patch him up. Didn’t have to deal with him ruining her mattress with his blood.

Matt promised to himself that he would buy her a new one.

“Shut up,” she huffed but there was warmth beneath the gruffness. “Can’t get paid for a case if my client kicks the bucket.”

There was a towel that smelled of honey soap and blood in Jessica’s hand and she wiped down his face and neck. The cut across his nose stung and her fingers wiped away the hair that clung to his sweat-slicked forehead. “Why would you fight him?” She said, her voice hot against his skin.

Matt swallowed. He hurt you, roared his veins even though the wound on her side was long gone. He hurt you, he hurt you. And you’ve been hurt enough.

“I’m sorry,” he said instead. “I’m sorry, I—”

Jessica laid her forehead against his, hair creating a curtain around them to block out the rest of the world.

“Men are so fucking stupid,” she told him.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Glass clunked against the floor, the slim keys of a computer clacked, a dog barked, a woman sighed.

Matt woke up, he fell asleep.

Hell’s Kitchen moved on around him.

“Rise and shine, jackass.”

Fingers tugged the heavy blankets (scratchy wool, thin cotton, chemical-smelling acrylic) and Matt jerked from dreams to wakefulness. His ribs ached, his chest hurt, and, before he could sit up, a hand pressed against his shoulder and shoved him back down into the squeaky, half broken mattress.

“What—”

“You smell like shit,” Jessica Jones said, ripping around him with manic tornado energy. Cheap aloe soap clung to her skin, swimming with the artificial mix of scents that draped over her hair. Behind her, the windows were open, letting in the faint dredge of cigarette smoke and the Hudson. Her heater groaned and clunked, grunting in broken effort as a small breeze tried to even out the temperatures in the apartment.

Matt’s hair was damp against the back of his neck and he sucked in a breath as an arm wrapped beneath his back and another under his knees. “What are you doing?”

“You’re not allowed to walk,” Jessica said above him, managing to balance his larger frame against her chest. “Nurse’s orders.” She brought Matt into the old office part of her apartment and laid him out on the couch. Leaving him there, she walked back to the kitchen—bare feet slapping against the wood floor—and soaked a rag in the sink.

Someone sobbed a few streets over. A woman groaned in the apartment above them.

Matt focused on the sound of fabric swaying around Jessica’s ankles, on the way the cotton of her tank top rubbed against her skin. She blew air out between her teeth and wrung out the washcloth. Hinges squeaked as she opened a cabinet, her fingers wrapping around a plastic cup and filling it with water before she returned, hesitating at the back of the couch.

“I can do it,” Matt said, lifting his hand toward her.

Huffing, Jessica pressed the glass into his fingers. “Drink,” she grumbled and dropped the rag on his stomach.

She ripped off the sheets from the bed, shoved them all into a laundry bag, and replaced them with familiar silk ones.

“Did you break into my apartment?” Matt asked, leaning against a pile of pillows, plate in his lap. There was somewhat burned toast in his hand topped with peanut butter, banana slices, and honey.

“I plead the fifth.”
Matt woke to the door opening and Jessica moving through her apartment. She dropped the bag of laundry on the couch, pulled a bottle of whiskey from a drawer in the desk, and sat down in a chair beside the bed. The heater had died sometime when he’d been asleep and the chill from the open windows had settled heavily in the walls even as the blankets kept him pleasantly warm.

She didn’t bother closing the windows; still in jeans, scarf, and leather jacket.

After a few minutes of silent drinking, Jessica sighed, placed the bottle on her side table, and ran a hand through her hair. “Went to the offices,” she said as if the words were slowly dragging themselves out of her mouth. “Your friends—” the word was stated more as a question (almost as if she wasn’t quite sure what Nelson and Murdock were), “—are worried.”

“What did you say to them?”

Jessica shrugged and turtled further into her scarf. “Nothing,” she said. “It’s none of my damn business.” The chair groaned as she reached for the bottle.

Matt turned his sightless eyes to the ceiling. “But you think I should tell them.”

Whiskey slid down her throat and glass groaned as her fingers tightened. She swallowed and the sound grated with the shift of leather and whisper of her hair. “Doesn’t matter what I think,” Jessica told him, the words clinging to her teeth, snapping across wounds he couldn’t see. “And my advice is shit anyway.”

“You make money off people’s secrets,” Matt breathed in as deeply as he dared. The stitches across his chest rubbed into silk and he winced at the hiss of pain that tightened around his ribs. “What do you think I should do?”

She tapped the bottle against the top of her boots and blew out a breath. “Christ,” Jessica muttered, took another long drink like a frat boy chugging beer on the night before graduation, and placed the rest of the whiskey (it wasn’t much) on the floor. “Fuck. Okay. If Froggy—”

“Foggy.”

“—Jesus, that’s even worse.” She dragged both hands down her face. “Look; if he finds out? You’re in deep shit. Friendship ending kind of deep shit.”

Matt swallowed. “So—”

“So you should tell him before he finds out,” Jessica said, her voice sharp. “Because he will; they always find out.”

Jessica dropped his phone onto the mattress before she left, bag over her shoulder, camera in hand. “Call him,” she said, smelling of whiskey and laundry detergent, “and stop being such a fucking dumbass.”

“No, Foggy, I’m alright,” Matt said into the phone. His heart thundered in his chest and his palm sweated against plastic. “Sorry I didn’t call I,” he swallowed, “I left my phone in my apartment. Sorry.”

“Where are you, man? At least tell me you’re safe.”

Matt closed his eyes. “Yeah,” he said. “I’m okay. Look, we can meet up sometime tomorrow,
Alright? I—” the words caught in his throat and he pressed his hands against them like they were a 
triangle shaped cube and forced them through that circular hole. “I have something I need to tell 
you.”

And Foggy—good ol’ Foggy who’s heart was the size of the god damn ocean—spoke with a voice 
that was soft and kind and soothed over the wounds that burned in Matt’s soul.

“Anything you need, Matt. Just let me know where, okay?”

Jessica helped him to the office of Nelson and Murdock. She had dressed him in the loosest clothing 
he had in his closet to not aggravate still healing wounds, shoved a cane in his hand, placed the 
glasses on his nose, and told him she’d be across the hallway if he needed anything.

As Foggy walked down the hallway towards him, Matt focused on her. She was leaning out her 
brand new window, camera clicking as she took the occasional picture of the city and strangers that 
wandered below. A mug of black coffee sat by her elbow and she took the occasional sip.

The door to the office opened and Matt fought the urge to stand up. Straightening his back pulled on 
his ribs enough and he groaned, easing back into his slouch. He could only map out Foggy’s 
footsteps as he walked past Karen’s desk and the still stubborn fax machine, past the shitty coffee 
machine and into the conference room.

A deep, sudden inhale.

“Jesus, Matt,” Foggy placed his bag on the table and walked around, kneeling by the chair. His 
hands hesitated at Matt’s shoulder, not quite know if they could (or even should) touch. “Who did 
this to you?”

Matt closed his eyes behind his glasses and breathed in shakily. Emotion stung the back of his eyes 
and he couldn’t stop the tear that escaped, dripping down his cheek. “It,” he swallowed and tried to 
speak around the clog that had found its way in his throat. “It w-was Fisk.”

Foggy sat, silent, as Matt spoke. The truth flowed, the dam was broken, and each word came faster 
than the last. At some point, his voice was ragged, his choked off sobs breaking each syllable so 
completely that he was sure if anyone else had been in the room besides his best friend they wouldn’t 
have understood anything.

But it wasn’t anyone.

It was Foggy.

The wound that had grown so festered in his very being was finally drained and exhaustion settled 
deep in Matt’s bones. He laid his head down on the table as the last words disappointed into the air. 
Thin metal bit into the side of his head but he was too tired to remove his glasses. Fingers pulled 
them away and he blinked blearily, wanting to know the expression on Foggy’s face.

But he couldn’t. He could only bury himself in the dollar store aftershave and unwavering heartbeat.

Foggy sighed. “You’re such an asshole,” he said with such a tired fondness that it almost brought 
tears back to Matt’s eyes. “All those years in college you could have told me when the RA was 
coming but you just decided to let me suffer instead.”

Matt laughed.

Matt laughed.
He laughed and laughed until he was crying.

Jessica was waiting outside her office when they finally left. She was going through the pictures on her phone and smelled windswept even though Matt knew she had been only twenty so feet away the entire time. Foggy paused in the hallway, his hand tightening around Matt’s waist before he breathed out the tension.

“Thank you,” he said, “for, uh, helping him.”

Turning off her camera, Jessica placed it into her bag and tilted her head. Her gaze burned as it moved over them before she sighed and pushed off the wall. “Whatever,” she said, waving away their gratefulness. “Let’s just take that asshole down before he can hurt anyone else.”

“Why, Jessica,” Matt turned his smirk to her. “I didn’t know you cared.”

“Get fucked,” she said, spinning on her heel to walk down the hallway.

Foggy snickered. “She rolled her eyes at you,” he said, paused; “do you even need me to tell you that?”

“No,” Matt said, warmth spreading through his chest. “But you don’t have to stop.”

Sitting on his couch, legs curled beneath her, Jessica flipped through pictures on her laptop. Foggy sat in one of the arm chairs, his back to the window, and shifted through various papers.

“Attacking him did nothing,” Matt fought the urge to touch the new bandages against his side and scratched his cheek instead. “He was wearing some... some sort of armour.”

“Like, what,” Jessica didn’t bother lifting her head up from her work. “Police Kevlar? Or did he thump around in some Medieval Knight bullshit?”

Sighing, Matt sunk into the cushions. “No,” he said, “it was like his suit was made of some sort of protective material. Not bullet proof.” Pausing, he frowned. “At least, I don’t think it was.”

Jessica finished her glace of water and he could feel her grimace. It made Matt smile. “One damn step at a time, I guess,” she muttered, closed her laptop, and reached for her jacket.

“Wait,” Foggy stood. “Where are you going?”

She swung her bag over her shoulder. “Someone has to find Fisk’s tailor in this goddamn city,” Jessica headed towards the door, not looking back. “And it sure as hell ain’t gonna be you.”

The door closed behind her, wood rattling.

Matt reached for his own water and laughed softly as weight landed back on the sofa. “Don’t worry,” he said to Foggy, “she’s always like that.”

“Is she?” Foggy said, mock surprise on his tongue. “Wow, Matt. I never would have noticed.”

Matt woke in the early hours to someone picking his lock. It only took a moment for him to recognize the mix of smoke, alcohol, and leather before hinges creaked. Jessica was gentle when she closed the door, quiet when she toed off her boots, and set down her bag on the table.
He kept his eyes closed, breathing in the night time smells of Hell’s Kitchen’s rooftops as she climbed into one of the arm chairs. Minutes later, curled into a ball on the cushions, Jessica drifted off into a heavy sleep that eased Matt back into his own dreams.

The smell of chorizo, eggs, and cheese dragged Matt from his sleep and he groaned as he sat up. Jessica was already awake, sitting on the floor with a foil wrapped burrito thicker than her forearm in one hand and a second sitting in her lap.

“Good morning!” Foggy half-sang with enough volume that Matt was pretty sure that he was going to be paying for all his secret keeping. Not in a painful way, but more in a Franklin Nelson worried and the mother henning was coming kind of way.

Groaning as he sat up, Matt rubbed the stickiness from his eyes. “What time is it?”

Jessica grunted, took a massive bite out of her breakfast, and went back to clicking through something on her computer.

“Around ten,” Foggy offered. “I called Karen, asked her to meet us here.”

“Really?” Matt reached for box of burritos in the middle of the coffee table, his brows rising. “What did you—?”

Jessica snorted. “You were beat up by a mugger,” she said, not looking up. “Didn’t see his face for obvious reasons. I found you in some shitty fucking alleyway while I was drunk as fuck and took you back to my place. Luckily, one of my neighbours saw us and patched you up,” Another bite of a burrito. “Foggy picked you up yesterday once I found your phone in the trash.”

Foggy shrugged, “it’s better than ‘I fell, guys. Even though the bruise on my face looks like a fist’.”

“Maybe it was a fist shaped sidewalk,” Matt said. “How would I know?”

Rolling his eyes, Foggy slumped back into his seat. “You’re a little shit, you know that?”

“To be fair,” Matt tilted his head to the side, “who punches a blind man?”

“My,” Jessica muttered with her mouth full. “I would.”

Truth.

With a grunt, Foggy unwrapped the top of his own burrito. “I’m thinkin’ about it,” he said.

Lie.

There was a knock on the door.

“Jesus, Matt,” Karen said as she walked around the wall, pausing before she fully entered his apartment. “Tell me you at least got one punch in.”

“He didn’t,” Jessica said from her place on the floor. “It was pretty pathetic.”

Matt sighed into his breakfast. “Thanks, Jessica,” he drawled.

“She’s barely mentally aware on a good day,” Matt said from his place on the couch, ignoring the
way his side burned. “No one will believe her or even allow her to testify.”

Karen rested her head in her hands.

“Not to mention,” Jessica said, “men like him would turn it around anyway.” She drummed her fingers against the table. “Oh no,” her voice had become high, mocking. “Look at my poor mother; abused by her husband until I stepped in to protect her.”

“He’d become a hero,” Karen sighed.

Shifting her weight back, Jessica turned towards the other woman. “And then there will always be people who see him as a martyr once he is taken down; a man with a dream who was victimized by the city he loved. Your evidence has to be absolute with no way to be exploited in order to expose him.”

Foggy groaned. “It’s not quite what I was expecting in our first year after passing the exam,” he said.

“Really?” Matt reached forward for his water. “I thought you were getting bored with the other cases.”

Karen laughed as Foggy muttered something about Matt’s character under his breath.

“I need to go,” Karen said after a few hours. “I’m meeting with Ben.”

Foggy walked her to the door and stuck around long enough to hover around Matt before Jessica chased him out of the apartment with a ‘Jesus Christ; you’re making me nervous’. He made promises to come back (with an underlying threat of talking more—not just about the cases but about his night activities) in the morning and hesitated a couple of times on the stairs before leaving the building.

Matt laid back down on the couch, closing his eyes as Jessica continued clicking and muttering and writing in a small notebook. She must’ve been wearing some old wool sweater and the sound of the fabric rubbing against itself mixed with the soft huff of her breathing and the clink of the bottle of whiskey she had managed to find in his cabinet.

“How did you know?”

“What?” She looked up from her work, tip of her pen still pressed against paper.

Matt turned his head towards her. “About me. How did you know?”

Snorting, Jessica turned back to her computer and finished writing. “It wasn’t that hard to piece together,” she said. “And there’s only one person stubborn enough to keep calling me ‘Miss Jones’ in the same, damn voice.”

“That can’t have been the only thing.”

She bit down on an ice cube. “No,” Jessica shrugged. “Malcolm told me how you ran into the office after,” her words trailed off before she just sighed. “After the kidnapping. And then you were in pain when you sat down on my couch though you clearly tried to hide it. The man in the mask had no television, Matt Murdock was too hesitant when trying to talk to me. The list goes on.”

His eyebrows had lifted high on his forehead. “So I’m just bad at hiding is what you’re saying?”

“No,” Jessica rubbed her palms over her thighs, “I dunno. I’m a PI. It’s my job.”
“Foggy never guessed.”

She snorted. “That’s because he believes in the best of people.”

There was something in her tone. Matt frowned. “And that’s a bad thing?”

Her sigh was heavy and tired and sad. “No,” Jessica said. “No, that’s—they’re rare. People like that.” She drank some of the whiskey. The bottle was placed on the table. “Most people don’t really consider the freak factor anyway.”

“Weird, Matt couldn’t stop the small grin that slowly grew on his face.

“Yeah,” Jessica motioned between them. “I mean, look at us. Damn freaks.”

Halfway through the bottle and back on the couch, Jessica turned to Matt and just stared at him in silence. He lifted his head and turned sightless eyes to her.

“I found the tailor;” she said, voice tired but not slurred.

Matt sat up straight. “Where?”

Jessica wiped the back of her hand over her forehead. “I’ll tell you,” she said and hesitated.

“What is it?”

Turning away from him, she took another swing of her alcohol and gritted her back teeth. “You’re too much of an asshole to wait until you’re healed,” Jessica said as if the words were dragged out of her by barbed fishhooks. “So I’m going with you.”

Opening his mouth to argue, Matt paused, listening to the steady pulse thrumming beneath her skin. The ache across his chest and back eased.

“Alright,” he said.

Melvin Potter picked Jessica up by the collar of her jacket and slammed her through a work table. The howl of rage that followed didn’t come from her.

“The hool of rage that followed didn’t come from her.

“Stop it!” Fingers wrapped in the back of Matt’s shirt and ripped him off the floor, shoving him back to one corner of the work shop. “That’s enough!”

He grimaced around the ringing in his ears and blinked, focusing on the woman standing between him and the tailor. Jessica favoured one leg, her breathing shallow, and he wasn’t quite sure if the metallic smell came from her or his own, bleeding nose.

Melvin managed to get to his own feet and took a shaking step forward. Matt curled, bracing to jump forward.

“I said,” Jessica snarled, fingers closing into a fist, “Enough!” Her hand went through one of the sheets of steel and metal groaned, folded in on itself, and collapsed. The clatter of it hitting the ground rung throughout the workshop, highlighting everything in such stark detail that Matt could have sworn he could picture every stitch of her sweater, every strand of her hair.
Ragged breathing was the only sound left behind.

Matt swallowed. “Jessica—”

“Shut up,” she snapped and pointed at Melvin. “You. Sit.”

“I—”

“Sit.”

Melvin sat.

“That goes for you, too,” Jessica said, turning to Matt.

He lifted his hands in surrender and grabbed one of the old, workshops stools next to Melvin. They were practically bumping elbows but all their attention was on the woman in front of them.

She took in a deep breath, shook out her hand, and paced in front of them. “Now that we’re all ready to talk like fucking human beings,” her voice dripped between them; tired and completely done with their shit. “Shall we get started?”

Okay, so. Maybe Matt felt a little bad about punching Melvin Potter.

*Maybe.*

In his defence; he didn’t start it.

Jessica, leaning her torso across the top of the work table, listened to Melvin talk with her chin resting on her bicep. Her expression never really changed from her unimpressed stare, but she hummed and sighed and asked questions. There was enough gruff truth to her that the tailor opened up, piece by piece.

“I’m good at making things,” Melvin told her. “And he wants a lot of things.”

“If we’re going to take Fisk down,” Matt said softly, “then we’re going to need your help.”

Jessica sighed and brushed her hand through her hair. “Only when he’s gone will you and Betsy be safe,” she said. “But it will take time. It will take *effort.* More effort than just him, than just her. Than just Foggy and Karen and Jessica’s assistant who he couldn’t quite remember the name of at that moment.

“But you can help?” Melvin said, turning to look at each of them in turn.

“Yes,” Matt said, “that’s all we ever wanted to do.”

Jessica shifted her weight, but didn’t say anything.

They stopped by Ben Urich before heading back to Matt’s apartment and Jessica stayed on the roof, watching through the lens of her camera as information was traded. He heard her snap a couple pictures of them, of the rooftops, of the dark horizon.

Once Ben had gone home, he joined Jessica in the hidden perch. She didn’t move for a long time and stayed there, watching the lights of the city.
To Matt, Jessica drowned out the rest of Hell’s Kitchen.

The two of them split up in the morning; Matt to go follow a blind woman to a heroin factory and Jessica to do whatever it was she did for her cases.

Or to sleep.

He was pretty sure she hadn’t gotten a lot since lifting him—bruised and bloody—through her window.

Heroin burned, Brett hit the pavement, and Matt vanished into the night.

Jessica’s apartment was dark and she was curled up on her freshly washed sheets, hair sprawled across the pillow, still dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. He left without trying the window, not wanting to wake her.

Instead, Matt went the offices where Karen and Foggy sat at the conference table, flipping through papers and murmuring quietly to each other. The door was locked and he had to knock, swallow down the smoke that clogged his throat, and grin wearily when it opened.

“Guess we all couldn’t sleep, huh?” He said, moving around Foggy and placing his computer in an empty spot.

Karen sniffed and her heart jumped a few paces. “Right,” she pushed her chair back and stood, heading for the coffee machine.

Matt followed her footsteps with a frown. “She alright?”

“Dunno,” Foggy shrugged. “Guess she’ll tell us when she’s ready.” There was something in his voice. A tiredness that hadn’t been there before.

Ducking his head, Matt ran his fingers over his keyboard but didn’t quite open anything yet. “Look, I’m,” he swallowed. “I’m sorry it took so long to tell you—”

“Nope,” Foggy cut him off. “Nope, not talking about that. Not right now.”

“Oh,” Matt said, and dragged his fingers over the side of the laptop, fumbling with the USB to plug the Braille reader in. “Right.”

Foggy sighed. “Look, Matt, I’m still. I’m just.” He groaned and leaned backwards. “I’m getting used to it, okay? And I worry about you, dude. Like. All the time.” Fingers brushed through already day-wild hair. “So, instead of me freaking out we should probably talk about something else.”

“Like the case?” Matt typed in his password.

“Hell no,” Foggy said. “No, we’re definitely gonna talk about some personal stuff. Like your feelings for Jessica Jones.”

Matt almost choked on his own tongue. “My what?” He sputtered. “I—there’s nothing between Jessica and I. She’s a friend, Foggy.”

“Sure,” leaning on the desk, Foggy’s grin was almost shark-like. “Because you look at all of your friends like they’re the only human being on the face of the planet.”
“I don’t look at anyone,” Matt said with a sly little smirk.

A groan. “Enough with the blind jokes, man!”

“And,” he continued, “We just got close because of the case. We’re colleagues at the least. Friends at the most.”

“Uh huh,” Foggy said, “And just cause you’re ‘friends’ you rescue her, take her back to your apartment, care for her, check on her afterwards, go to her for advice.” He waved a pen in Matt’s direction. “Dude, you’re so in love it's disgusting.”

Karen came back with her coffee and the conversation ended. Matt couldn’t focus on anything else, having to read sentences once, twice, three times before simply giving up.

Do I? He wondered as the hours passed, thinking about crawling through her window, broken and bleeding. Trusting her when he couldn’t defend himself, the rage that powered through him each time she was hurt. Do I?

He thought about it when they left at six in the morning to all get some sleep. He thought about it on the walk home, thought about it while he washed the smoke out of his hair, thought about it when he spread out on his bed.

It was four in the afternoon when he woke up a phone call from Brett.

Ben Urich had been found, dead, in his apartment.

And all that anger came roaring back.

The service for the funeral was done by Father Lantom. It was beautiful.

Matt hated every second of it.

His arm was wrapped in Jessica’s, her weight warm and solid to his left. The fabric of her trench coat was heavy, thick, and went down past her thighs, stopping just above her knees. Drizzling rain had bounced over her shoulders and thick scarf until he had offered an umbrella. Water only amplified the wool of her sweater and the fact that she had tied her hair up into a messy bun. He could pick out the sound of her new jeans in old boots, the smell of cheap lipstick and eyeliner, and the rose she rolled loosely in her gloveless fingers.

Even now she didn’t leave her bag behind, but there was the camera, the bottle, and something wrapped in paper and twine that he couldn’t quite figure out.

The rain had stopped during the service. How kind of it.

Matt breathed in. Her arm tightened around his.

To be honest, he wasn’t quite sure why Jessica had offered to come; she and Ben had only met a couple of times. Maybe once, maybe never. They were warriors in the same war, fighting the same fight.

Ben had just fallen first.

Karen left his right side to speak to Mrs. Urich with Foggy and Matt closed his eyes, listening to the damp squelch of the grass as footsteps approached.
“Father,” he said.

“Matthew,” Lantom said with a gentle sigh and turned to the woman at his side. “I’m afraid we haven’t met.”

Muscles tensed ever so slightly (startled?) before they relaxed. “Jessica,” thick cotton shifted as she lifted a hand. Her bare skin sounded slick against leather gloves and Matt wondered if it was because of the rain.

“Jessica,” Lantom said, testing her name out for himself. “Thank you for coming.”

She shifted, boots digging into the dirt before turning her head towards the group of people around Mrs. Urich and Karen.

“I’ll be alright,” Matt told her.

Jessica squeezed his wrist before sliding away, making her way across the grass. Matt listened to her go join Karen, listened as she pulled the small parcel out of her bag.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” she said, tone soft even as it was carried by the silence of the gravesite.

“What was in your bag,” Matt asked later when they were riding back to the offices in a cab. The silence that had been between them had let thoughts fester and burn until he couldn’t take it anymore. “The gift you gave Mrs. Urich.”

Her head thumped softly against the window and a sigh fogged up the glass. “Just some pictures,” Jessica murmured. “From that night you met up with him.”

They went a few more blocks before she spoke again.

“He was laughing,” Jessica said, all the shattered glass and growl fleeing from her voice until there was nothing but the broken rise and fall of her words.

Matt brushed his hand along the car seat until he found hers. Giving her enough time to pull away, he wound their fingers together and squeezed. She was a beautiful, brash, brave, drunk of a woman who seemed more cactus than flesh at times. But she was kind.

Christ, was she kind.

I’m in love with you, he thought but it wasn’t with a spark of realization or a sudden piece falling to create the full picture of a puzzle just out of sight. Nothing changed; not really. It was more like he was sitting in his apartment, reading a book and loosing track of time until he checked his phone and was pleasantly surprised by how much time had gone past.

They arrived at the office, Foggy and Karen getting out of the cab in front of them. Jessica helped him out, paid the driver, and turned towards the building with their fingers still entwined. She tugged him into Alias Investigations and everyone else followed to sit on the couch and chairs while she busied herself with a coffee machine that ‘didn’t taste like shit’.

The rest of them were silent until she came back, handing out mugs and sitting next to Matt.

“So,” Foggy said, his voice hoarse. “What do we do now?”

Karen looked up. “We make him pay,” she said.
Foggy left to go talk with Marci, Karen went back to their offices to go through Ben’s files again, and Matt stayed on the couch with Jessica, their finished mugs sitting in front of them. At some point, she had tugged off her boots and brought her legs up beneath her, curling further into the cushions. Her jacket was hung by the door, her hair was still pulled up, and the overcast sky seemed to have drawn the energy out of her limbs.

“Have you decided?” Jessica said after what felt like a millennia of silence.

“Decided?” Matt lifted his head.

She grunted. “Whether or not you need to kill Fisk.”

It felt like a test. Some sick, screwed up true or false exam where both answers felt right and both felt wrong.

“No,” Matt said, “I’m,” he bit his bottom lip, dragged the already chapped skin beneath his teeth. “I’m not going to kill him.”

*I don’t think I’d ever be strong enough to live with myself if I did.*

Jessica shifted, sighed. One leg moved from beneath her so her toes brushed against the floor. “I need a drink,” she said.

“Yeah,” Matt said as she stood to go raid her own cabinets. “Me too.”

They went through a third of a bottle of Speyburn before deciding to leave the offices behind. Jessica took the alcohol with them as they walked down to Fogwells. Arm in arm, they created an illusion of her leading him even though they both knew full well that it wasn’t necessary.

There was something about not pretending—about being just enough of himself—that made some tight cord in his chest ease. He was a knitting project and she had taken a loose end and pulled, unravelling him stitch by stitch, row by row, until there was nothing but a long line of twisted up yarn.

Sitting on one of the benches at Fogwells, they drank the rest of the bottle in the dark, talking about nothing and everything.

The day had been shitty. The whole damn year had been a big pile of trash, but she sat across from him, surrounded by the blood, sweat, and tears of his youth. Somehow, the smell of her scotch and the sound of her snickers fit right in.

Matt walked her home even knowing she didn’t need it. Jessica humoured him and didn’t call him out for his bullshit.

(But only for that day. He had no expectations for the tomorrows that followed.)

A ringing woke Matt up. He grumbled, fumbled around on his night table, and realized that it was the old burner phone hidden away in the drawers. There were very few people that had its number. Just one, in fact. “Hello?”

‘2:45am’ his alarm clock said helpfully behind him.
There was a deep, shuddering breath on the other side of the line. “Murdock,” Jessica said in a harsh whisper. “I—” She went silent.

Matt sat up. “Jessica?”

“Shh,” she hissed and there was a scraping as she set the phone down. He could make out the sound of her camera shutter clicking, of each soft, hurried breath. Through the grainy speaker, a couple of car engines started and sped away. Jessica took a few more pictures before picking up her phone, the plastic scratching against concrete, her breathing harsh over the line.

“I was following Fisk,” she said.

“You—” That was dangerous. And stupid. And so ridiculously brilliant. “Are you safe?”

Jessica snorted and he listened as she shifted, sitting. “Yeah,” she said, dark giddiness bleeding over her words. “I think I got him.”

His heart thudded in his chest. “Got him?”

“I got evidence of him murdering Leland Owlsley.”

It wasn’t as easy as that.

God, Matt wished it was; but Fisk owned half the police force and who knew how many lawyers, judges, and others in the legal system. “If you walk in there with this,” he told her, “they’ll probably drag you to one of the back rooms and shoot you.”

_Like they did the Russian._

But the photos and the videos were evidence they hadn’t had access to. A stepping stone in getting revenge for Ben and all the others Fisk had hurt.

“They were fighting over something,” Jessica said after a particularly drawn out sigh. “Something personal. Owlsley thought he had the upper hand before Fisk just snapped.”

“So he had something over Fisk,” Foggy rubbed his forehead and reached for the box of donuts. “Any idea what that might have been?”

Jessica shrugged. “People only kill each other over three things,” she said, raising her hand to count them off. “Love, money, and power.”

“Owlsley was in charge of Fisk’s financials,” Karen looked up from the package of papers she was looking over. “Maybe he was stealing.”

Matt sighed. “He probably was,” he said, “and Fisk probably would have been fine with it.”

“But?” Foggy said.

“Remember that benefit?” Leaning back in his chair, Matt let his head fall back. “Vanessa was poisoned.”

Karen frowned. “And you think Owlsley was behind it?”

“Maybe not just him,” Jessica said, “or maybe it wasn’t him at all. What he did or didn’t do doesn’t matter.” She sighed and brushed her hair back out of her face. “What matters is that Fisk _believed_
Owlsley did something and killed him for it. And then he ordered his men to go out looking for something."

Matt sat up. "Which means," he said slowly, "that he’ll be using the police force."

"Just like last time when he was looking for the Russian," Foggy pushed back from the table and stood.

"Wait," Karen watched them, "where are you going?"

Shrugging on his jacket, Matt grinned. "We’re going to go bribe an officer," he said.

Brett was a good man, a good cop.

It meant he didn’t know much.

That was alright, though, because nobody really expected a blind man to be able to listen in to their not-so-private phone conversations.

Malcolm arrived with a tower of pizzas and accepted the pile of papers Jessica handed him with more grace than any assistant Matt had ever seen.

"What am I looking for?" He asked, popping the lid off a highlighter.

"Shit that doesn’t belong," Jessica said, claiming a whole box for herself. "Unexplained increases, decreases."

Malcolm snorted. "The usual sketchy bullshit."

"Exactly."

Karen found the missing building. Time was running out.

Foggy followed Matt to the door and was stopped by Jessica’s hand on his elbow.

"I’ll look after him," she said softly, knowing full well that Matt could hear her.

He didn’t say anything as Foggy breathed out and nodded.

"Hey! Assholes!" Jessica shouted from the third floor, waving her arms to catch the attention of the officers below. They turned their attention towards the noise, guns pointing upward, and she ducked behind the wall.

Escaping from the hold of the shadows, Matt broke bones and knocked men unconscious with swift brutality and even harder blows. One of them—a man wearing some sort of minty deodorant—was the officer who had tried to push his way into Jessica’s apartment.

Matt hit him in the nose and felt cartilage break beneath his knuckles.

Carl Hoffman, sitting at his cheap fold out table, never moved. He wasn’t injured (though the smell of blood seemed to have settled itself on him like a lounging cat) and Matt dragged out the chair across from him.
“You have an opportunity here, Detective.”

Jessica dragged Hoffman through the streets, pushing and pulling when necessary. There was no way he could have escaped her hold, but Matt followed above them on the rooftops just in case.

“I need to make a statement.”

“My name is Jessica Jones,” Jessica said, looking into the eyes of the FBI agent that sat across from her. “I’m a registered and licensed private investigator in the state of New York.”

Matt shifted in the chair next to her.

“Six months ago, I was hired by Christopher Norton to find his son.”

Matt breathed in the night air of Hell’s Kitchen. A few steps to the side, Jessica walked with her hands in her pockets. “You were right,” he told her, a smile—a true, real, open smile—on his face after what had felt like a lifetime of stress and pain.

“Yeah?” She turned what felt like half her attention to him. “Right about what?”

“This feels better,” Matt said, “More—” he paused.

Jessica grunted. “Freeing?”

“Yes.”

She sighed softly, the sound soft enough that the city almost swallowed the sound before he caught it. “Good,” There was a mix of pride and sadness in her voice.

Matt turned to her. “Thank you,” he said, all the humour dropping away. “Thank you for—” for being honest, for showing me your pain, for helping me even though it hurt you. “—the advice.”

It sounded lame even to his ears.

Jessica kicked a can across the street. He listened to it skip across the asphalt before hitting the curb.

Celebrations were cut short as the news reported Fisk’s escape.

Matt grabbed Jessica’s arm as Foggy hailed a cab. “I—” he swallowed. “Keep them safe?”

Her breath was hot against his cheek, pulse pounding beneath his fingers. Sirens wailed in the distance, people were rushing around them trying to get home.

Jessica nodded.

“Thank you,” he said and it took every single ounce of his self control to let her go and turn to Foggy. She grabbed him at the last second, pulling him into her space. Matt froze.

“Don’t be a dumbass,” she told him, hair brushing up against his scarf.

His heart rate matched hers. “I won’t,” Matt promised.
Jessica released his arm, boots scuffing against concrete as she walked to the cab. “Budge over,” she snapped at Karen, claiming the middle seat.

Some sort of Catholic poet inside of Matt basked in the fight against Fisk. Blood spilled over his lips, burned in his arteries, blazed in his veins. Some part of him—dark and hungry—relished in the fact that the man who claimed he loved the city gave up on her in the pause between inhale and exhale.

“You never loved this city,” Matt gasped, standing over the man unconscious at his feet. His ribs ached, his thighs could barely keep him upright. Every bit of skin felt like it had been hit once or twice with a crowbar and he swallowed down a mix of saliva and blood. “You only loved the idea of what you could turn it into.”

And ideas were a dangerous thing to love.

Matt limped across the rooftops and headed home. He stripped off the helmet during the walk and felt sweat slicked hair stick to his skin. Sirens still blared up and down the streets, people talked in their kitchens and living rooms, on their beds and in bars. The city would move on without Wilson Fisk. It would swallow his crimes like it swallowed so many good and horrible things.

“Dude,” Foggy said, arms crossed over his chest as Matt finished shedding the armour and pulled on an old t-shirt and sweatpants. “No offense, but isn’t there someone else you should be with first?”

Wiping the blood off his nose, Matt frowned. “What do you mean?” He threw the rag in the sink and touched the cut below his eye.

Foggy’s sigh was exhausted. “Honestly,” he grumbled and laid his hands on Matt’s shoulders. “I don’t know much about superheroing, but there’s definitely a woman of fairly questionable character that you should be talking to. Not—” waving around awkwardly at his apartment, Foggy sighed, “— be here.”

“You’re my best friend.”

“And I’m grateful,” Foggy said, “even though you’re bleeding all over my carpet.”

Matt winced.

“But, for real; a call would have done it.”

Tugging at the hem of the sweatpants, Matt frowned. “I’m not,” he paused, “I don’t really know what to say.”

“God, you’re useless,” Foggy sighed and pulled back. “Get her some flowers—no. She’d hate that. Get her some whiskey. Nothing cheap. Then go, knock on her door, and tell her you’re okay.”

Whiskey. Yeah. He could do that.

Matt knocked on wood with his cane and stood in the hallway outside Jessica’s apartment. She was inside, rummaging through her drawers, and paused at the sound. He followed her steps, counted each one before the door was opening.

For a moment, they both stood there. Her gaze moved over his skin, cataloguing the red on his
cheeks, the bruise that crept up his collar.

“You look like shit,” she said, paused, frowned. “What the fuck is that?”

Matt held up the bottle. Liquid sloshed against the glass. “Whiskey.”

“No shit,” Jessica muttered and reached, instead, for the small clay pot in his other hand. She cradled it between her palms, lifting it up to eye height. “What the hell, Murdock?”

“It’s a cactus. A, uh, Queen of the Night.”

She picked up the small tag tied around the base by a ribbon. He had asked the florist to write ‘Sorry I’m such a prick :(’ on it. Based on Jessica’s snort, that was exactly what it said.

“If you don’t like it—”

“Shut the fuck up,” Jessica told him and almost seemed to hug the pot protectively to her chest. “I hate it.”

Lie.

“I’ll take it back, then,” Matt reached for it and she slapped his hand away, ducking back into her apartment. He followed with a small grin and closed the door as she placed the cactus—gently—on her desk. His heart grew in his chest as Jessica stepped back, hands on her hips, and nodded. With careful slowness, he placed the bottle of whiskey down on her couch, shed his jacket, and reached out.

She didn’t pull away when his fingers brushed her elbow and, instead, moved ever so slightly to look up at him. “What?”

“I—” his mouth grew dry and Matt swallowed because he hadn’t really thought of her feelings. Hadn’t given much thought for his own. He wanted to sit beside her, wanted to listen to her talk and move and laugh. *Chin up, kid.*

Jessica shifted, crossed her arms over her chest, and frowned. “Christ, Murdock. Spit it out.”

*Like ripping off a goddamn Band-Aid,* a voice said in the back of his mind. It sounded eerily like Stick.

“I want to kiss you,” he blurted with all the grace of a bulldozer. Matt winced and the words kept coming, spilling like an upended bucket; “which, if you don’t want me to is fine! It’s fine! I’m—”

A hand grabbed the collar of his shirt, yanked him forward. “Jesus,” Jessica said, her smirk centimetres from his lips. “Do you ever shut up?”

His eyebrows rose. “Well,” Matt grinned. “I can think of a way you could get me to stop.”

Jessica Jones was a blazing supernova unlucky enough to be born with a soul and, when she kissed him, her lips tasted like coffee.

No milk.

No sugar.
Just her.

Chapter End Notes

it's done which means i can focus on other things!
thanks for reading

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