None So Blind
by prettybirdy979

Summary

They say when you assume you make an ass of you and me.

Matt wishes that the Avenger's assumptions about his seeming inability to read the written word did something as benign as making an ass of him and them. Being called illiterate shouldn't hurt, not when he knows he's not, and it's not like he can tell them the truth.

Not that the truth would make much difference. He's just going to have to grin and bear it.

If he can.

Notes

This... this is a monster. It ran away from me. I don't even know how close I got it to what the OP wanted but it is a monster anyway. Written for this prompt and the Repost Madness Challenge.

I'm throwing this chapter up today, so I make the (now defunct) due date of the 15th. I have an epilogue of sorts I'm working on that should be up by the 18th or the 20th.
Thanks to PipMer for betaing, and Zwaluw for their betaing but also their cheerleading, poking and ableism check. I wouldn't have managed this monster without you guys.

**WARNING:** This deals pretty heavily with various issues of ableism. A few times the 'R' word is used. I've tried to be as careful and respectful as I can be but I'm not disabled and if I've screwed up, PLEASE let me know.

The Avengers also don't come off so great in this fic. It's a fic about ableism and they're the ones stuck in an ableist world view - even when they do get it, they screw up. We all do. I've done everything in my power to keep them in character and this is, in my opinion, their in-character reactions.

**EDIT** The AMAZING Badfinch has made a Podfic for this fic, available [here](#)!
Chapter 1

Matt senses the arrow coming from nearly the moment it’s released with the distinctive ‘twang’ of a bowstring. He instantly realises it’s not aimed at him but the man he’s currently trying to get a location from; whose stubborn refusal to talk has lead to the blood that currently coats his hands and the man’s face; and the teeth littering the ground. The remaining human traffickers in Hell’s Kitchen are actually better at their work without Fisk around.

He also realises it’s either going to be a kill shot or so disabling that he won’t get the information he needs tonight. So he does the only logical thing, dropping the man and bringing his sticks up to knock the arrow off course. It breaks from the forces on it as it hits his stick and he tracks the pieces as they fall to the ground around him.

Carefully, he locates the archer by his breathing and heartbeat and tries to move so most of his body is covering the dazed trafficker on the ground. Unless this archer is exceptionally confident they - he maybe? Matt hates to jump to conclusions if he doesn’t need to - shouldn’t make another shot.

The archer is exceptionally confident. The second arrow is in the air nearly before Matt turns around. Again he tries to figure out the arrow’s path and realises it’s still aimed at the man at his feet. This must be the most confident marksman he’s ev-


He knocks the second arrow out of the air and lifts his head in Hawkeye’s direction. ‘Are you willing to do this all day? Because I refuse to let you kill this man in my city.’ Matt flinches internally at the slight slur to his words but the trafficker had managed a few good punches to his jaw before he subdued him enough to consider an interrogation.

‘I wasn’t going to kill him.’

‘I don’t believe you,’ Matt says, easily picking out the lie in Hawkeye’s heartbeat. ‘I need him alive.’

Hawkeye hops down from his perch, the thump of his landing on the fire escape loud enough Matt’s sure it’s audible to the whole world. His next jump, onto the ground of the alley is nearly as loud and Matt grits his teeth. ‘You are aware who he works for, right?’

‘Just because he’s Hydra doesn’t mean I have the right to kill him.’ State sanctioned murder is still murder , Matt thinks but does not say. Foggy can attest to his ability to argue for hours on the death penalty and he’s not fond of the implicit legitimacy the government has given the Avengers’ anti-Hydra spree, complete with resulting deaths. ‘And he’s my only link to the men trafficking women out of New York. I know you’ve no care for individual lives but I have a duty to my city.’

With a sigh, Hawkeye moves towards Matt, who tenses at his movement. ‘Hey, I promise. No killing.’ There’s no lie in his heart and Matt slowly nods. ‘He dropped his phone you know; it’s right there.’

Matt narrows his eyes and nods. ‘I’m aware.’ He heard it drop earlier but had ignored it, aware that while it might have information on it he has no way of accessing it that’s faster than beating the answers out of the trafficker. Who seems to have lost his battle to stay conscious. Damn it. ‘What does that have to do with anything?’
Hawkeye carefully picks it up and passes it to Matt. ‘These guys are good at their jobs but idiots with technology. Tony keep complaining about it - and he’s not wrong. Who the hell sets four, nine, three, seven, two as their passcode when they’re a member of a secret Nazi group?’

‘Four, nine, three, seven, two?’ Matt asks, trying to figure out why that number has any meaning.

‘Spells Hydra on a standard telephone keypad. Not exactly rocket science.’ Matt hears the beeps as Hawkeye fiddles with the phone. ‘And he’s left a bunch of addresses in his notes. Will that help?’

Shit. Yes but Matt has no way of accessing it unless he gets Foggy or Claire to read it and that’s only going to take time he doesn’t have. But there’s no way he can tell Hawkeye that. Not without admitting why he can’t read the screen.

Time to see how his improvisation skills have held up. ‘Probably. Any close?’

Hawkeye takes the bait. ‘Couple. 41st and 11th; 43rd and 12th; and 40th and 10th. But 50th and 12th is underlined so that might be important.’ Matt smiles internally at his cunning and nods.

But then Hawkeye ruins it. ‘Here,’ he says, holding out the phone to Matt, ‘what do you think?’ Matt’s half sure the phone’s screen is facing him but it doesn’t matter because he can’t read it.

‘Looks… looks right to me.’ He takes the phone and makes sure to lower his head in a way that’ll appear to Hawkeye like he had a quick glance at it. His next move is to shove it in his pocket, next to his burner phone. ‘I’ll check them out.’ At this feet, the trafficker groans but remains unconscious. ‘What are you going to do with him?’

‘Take care of him.’ Meaning finish the job from before.

Matt frowns. ‘No. Call the police.’

‘He’s an ex-SHIELD agent. I’m not sure the police can hold him.’

Carefully Matt moves so he’s between Hawkeye and the trafficker and close enough to make firing a bow difficult. He’s not sure of Hawkeye’s hand to hand abilities but from the way his heart starts to race, Matt’s sure Hawkeye is very aware of his and is nervous. Good. ‘I will not let you kill him.’ Legal arguments come to mind and are instantly discarded. Matt’s not trying to convince a court, he’s trying to convince a single man. ‘It’s not right.’

‘Says the man who was beating him up earlier.’

‘But I didn’t kill him.’

Hawkeye takes a deep breath then sighs. ‘Okay. I’ll call the cops.’

He’s not lying. ‘I’ll know if you don’t.’ Before Hawkeye can reply, Matt’s gone; climbing the fire escape and darting over roofs.

For a moment he pauses and listens to Hawkeye make the call. Good.

Matt never thinks about the strange note in Hawkeye’s voice nor the unusual tick in his breath after he’d failed to read the screen. It was only a moment after all, and hardly worth noticing. Odds are Hawkeye wouldn’t have remembered much about it anyway… if not for what came next.

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‘Daredevil.’
Matt nods at Captain America, trying to keep any of his childish glee out of his voice and body. ‘Captain,’ he says smoothly and congratulates himself internally. He’s perched on the edge of a roof, waiting for the Hydra men he tracked to this warehouse last night to return and Captain America just climbed up the other side of the building to talk to him. It’s a miracle he managed to sound so calm. ‘Any reason you’re in my city?’

‘Heard you have a bit of a monster infestation. I’ve got some skill at wiping ‘em out; thought we’d come lend a hand.’

‘Am I right to guess a little bird told you about my ‘infestation’ problem?’

Behind the Captain, Hawkeye snorts. ‘Little bird? Original.’

‘I aim to please.’ Matt focuses, counting the approaching heart beats. Three; none of which sound slow enough to be the booming Thor or the raging Hulk. So Iron Man, Black Widow and one other? They’re walking, almost silently in the case of two, but he can hear that two of them - one of which is still somehow managing to move quietly - are carrying something. ‘Who else is coming with you on this… thing?’ If they lie, he’s going to refuse their help. But… well he’s not one to ask for help but when it’s freely given it might be rude to refuse. And, though he hates to admit it, he’s beginning to think he could be in over his head. Human traffickers and gangs are one thing. Highly trained and well armed Neo-Nazis with a death wish… not really his area of expertise.

‘Three more people. Ah, do you know our names or our,’ Captain America sighs, ‘media given ‘code’ names?’

Matt shrugs. ‘Code names mostly.’

That gets a surprised sounding huff from Hawkeye. ‘Seriously? Our names are all over the internet since SHIELD… I thought everyone knew them by now.’

Oh right, Matt had forgotten about the SHIELD info dump. He’d been busy both with setting up Nelson and Murdock and beginning his vigilante activities at the time. Foggy had downloaded a lot of the files but Matt hadn’t really cared; especially once he realised a lot of the files were photocopied images of actual paper files and would have required a lot more effort to read than could be justified for simple curiosity.

Besides, Foggy had read the funniest and most interesting files he’d found out to Matt. None of which had involved the Avengers’ actual names.

‘I didn’t follow that too closely. Not exactly relevant to my work and it was quite a lot of things to read for curiosity.’

‘Right,’ Captain America says. ‘Well we’ve got the Black Widow, Iron Man and a friend of mine, Sam Wilson.’

‘Sam wants everyone to call him Falcon,’ Hawkeye says, a laugh in his voice. ‘Says it’s not fair he doesn’t have a nickname.’

‘Well it’s not,’ a man says, climbing off the fire escape. He’s the one who was moving near silently despite carrying something. Behind him a woman jumps lightly onto the roof making nearly no sound. They’re followed by a man, who can only be Tony Stark judging by the amount of noise he’s making. ‘I deserve my own code name if I’m going to run with people as nuts as you guys.’

Matt smiles despite himself. ‘Falcon, I presume?’
‘See! That man understands code names.’

‘I understand not wanting to use your own name,’ Matt corrects gently and it gets a soft laugh. He rolls his eyes and tilts his head. Still no signs of life in the warehouse but he’s certain they’ll be here tonight. It seems to be their meeting place and they’re going to have to meet to discuss all the damage he did last night. He’ll be able to strike then.

They’ll be able to strike then. ‘Is there a plan then?’ Matt asks, cutting into Falcon and Hawkeye’s fight over code names.

‘So you’re going to work with us?’ Stark - Iron Man but Matt can’t help but think of him as the name he knew first - says, surprise in his voice.

‘If I don’t, I’m certain we’ll just end up in each other’s way. Is there a plan?’

Captain America steps forward. ‘Sam and Tony are on air support, scouting out their arrival and making sure no one leaves. Clint and Natasha will start on the roof and work their way down, making sure no one uses that as an escape. And I thought you could come with me, to be the loud and obvious ground attack.’

It’s not a bad plan actually. ‘I’m not usually one for loud and flashy,’ Matt warns.

‘That’s okay. Cap is, so they’ll all be looking at him. You can be all ‘I am the night’ and hide in shadows.’ Stark sounds highly amused and Captain America only sighs at his co-Avenger… friend maybe? Matt decides he doesn’t want to know and ignores them, returning his focus to the idea of a… a team-up really.

This could work out perfectly. There’s just one thing… ‘I don’t kill,’ Matt says, a warning in his tone. ‘And working on a team that kills is the same thing.’ Hundreds of legal arguments jump to the tip of his tongue but he holds them in, aware he doesn’t have the time for it.

Everyone seems to tense but Captain America nods. ‘We’ll hold ourselves back. Non-lethal force; except in self-defence.’

It’s probably the best deal Matt’s going to get and Foggy will kill him if he gets himself seriously hurt or killed working alone when he has this offer open. ‘Then yes. Seems like we’re working together for this one.’

Everyone breathes a sigh of relief and the atmosphere on the roof seems to relax. ‘Thank you,’ Captain America says. ‘Okay, Sam, Tony, I want you in the air now. Tony go high, make as little noise as possible. Sam can you drop Clint and Nat on the roof before you go?’

‘I can take Legolas,’ Stark cuts in.

‘Without making a noise?’

‘Legolas?’ Matt mouths under his breath as Captain America and Stark start to argue about how quiet Stark can be.

Clint slides up to him. ‘As in the Lord of the Rings? The archer?’ The connection sparks in Matt’s mind, though he’s not sure how Clint could be linked to the elf from the book or the movie - he sounds nothing like the actor who played him and surely there’s more to a connection than uses bow, must be like that archer in that book.

‘Right.’
'Not seen the movies then?'

Matt laughs. ‘No I haven’t.’ Seen no. But Foggy’s narration had made what would have otherwise been a normal Saturday amazing as they marathoned the movies. He heard every moment of it.

‘Books?’

Is Hawkeye trying to bond with him? ‘I’m not much of a reader honestly. No time.’ Not exactly a lie; Matt doesn’t tend to read braille books due to the often unjustifiable expense and he’s not had a lot of time to listen to any of his novels since becoming a vigilante. It tends to cut into one’s spare time.

‘Not everyone is.’ Yeah, he’s trying to bond. Matt nods and moves to crouch by the edge of the roof. He listens, certain he heard…

Yes. ‘If you don’t finish your fight soon,’ Matt cuts into the arguing. ‘We’re going to miss our moment. There’s a car coming this way and I’m sure there’s no one else using this pier but Hydra.’

‘Right,’ Captain America says, snapping into action. ‘Tony take off now.’ Stark is in the air a moment later. Falcon grabs Hawkeye and takes off too. Matt tracks them to the other roof and Falcon returns a moment later, to take the Black Widow as well.

Then it’s just Captain America and himself left, crouching out of sight on a roof. It’s only then it dawns on Matt that Captain America took his word as absolute truth, without questioning him at all. He shifts, unsure of how to ask why.

Captain America beats him to it. ‘Where’d you see it?’

‘I didn’t. I can hear the engine… if you focus…’

‘Got it. I can see the lights from it now.’ He huffs in disbelief. ‘Not even bothering to turn them off. They’re not exactly stealthy.’

‘There’s no one around,’ Matt says, aware of how empty this place is.

Captain America nods, then hands Matt a small item. ‘A comm piece. You can keep it or get rid of it afterwards; we don’t care. But you’ll need to be able to hear us.’

Matt doesn’t need it to hear them - he can hear Stark chattering away on Captain America’s comm from here - but he can’t admit to that. He nods and slips his hand between the mask and his ear. Captain America does a very obvious head turn so Matt can get the comm in. Therefore he doesn’t see Matt remove his hand and slip the comm into his pocket with his phone. He doesn’t want anything in his ears.

‘It’s Hydra alright,’ Captain America whispers as the car - probably a van - pulls up.

‘How can you tell?’

‘See how it says ‘Home Hazard Intervention’?’ Matt nods vaguely, cursing that for all his abilities, he can’t actually read writing on the side of a van. ‘That was a SHIELD shell company, used for surveillance. A lot of these Hydra groups are using SHIELD property right now.’ Captain America seems a little quieter but Matt barely notices.

‘At least five guys in there,’ he says. ‘And there’s another two cars coming.’
'Okay. We wait for ten minutes after the last car before we go in. Tony, you let us know if more come later.'

Matt feels like bouncing on the spot. He hates waiting but this will be worth it.

Anything to get Hydra and their human trafficking out of his city.

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It all goes to plan, right up until it doesn’t.

Captain America storms in, his apparently obnoxious costume drawing the attention of the ten arguing Hydra grunts in the bottom level of the warehouse. Matt escapes notice as he slips in behind the Captain, knocking out a man on his way to the stairs. Above him he can hear the twang of Hawkeye’s bow and the sounds of the Black Widow fighting her way through the few ‘leaders’ of this group. Matt’s starting to think he’s not actually needed here; they have this down to a fine art.

They’ve also not killed a single person since they arrived. He’s a little pleased about that.

Aware he’s having no impact on this battle as Captain America is more than holding his own, Matt works this way through the shadows to a corner of the warehouse. It sounds… off, the noises of the fight bouncing wrong and a few steps over it tells him why. There’s a trap door here, some kind of secret space under the warehouse.

It takes all of a minute for him to open it and duck inside, down the stairs carefully into an empty room. He can smell papers on the desk to the right; probably important. Slowly he moves towards it, vaguely annoyed at the strong smell of glue and metal. What the hell are they using as wallpaper?

But he freezes before he’s halfway across the room to the desk. Why does he smell plastic? The gunpowder is to be expected; this must be their armory but there’s an awful lot of plastic and is th-

Trinitrotoluene. TNT. He can’t believe he’s taken this long to recognise it.

And there’s a ticking clock. Shit.

Matt fumbles for the comm in his pocket as he continues his slow steps. He grimaces as he shoves it in his ear and starts to gather as many of the papers as he can carry. ‘We have a problem,’ he says.

‘Daredevil?’ Captain America asks as Matt grabs the last of the papers and heads back for the stairs.

‘Place is rigged to blow. There’s at least a hundred kilos of TNT here and a ticking noise.’

‘Got a timer?’ Stark cuts in. ‘I could disable it probably, if there’s enough time.’

How the hell is Matt going to be able to tell that? ‘Not sure,’ he lies.

‘Where are you?’ the Black Widow asks. Matt focuses as he races up the stairs and yes, there she is, just coming to the ground floor. She should spot him in three, two, on-

‘Got you,’ she says, her voice echoing in his ear a moment later. Flinching, Matt pulls the comm out, glad it’s small size allows him to do this with ease. ‘Downstairs?’
He nods and she’s down there in a flash. ’Got a timer Stark. We’ve got over an hour on it. There’s a collective sigh of relief. ’And they’ve got some very interesting wallpaper. Seems our Hydra pals have been tracking down Project Insight targets; there’s lists of names and addresses all over these walls.’ Matt flinches again, annoyed at himself. Of course he should have checked the walls but there wasn’t time.

‘Why on the wall?’ he muses aloud, aware only Captain America is in the room to hear him. Or at least, the only one awake in the room.

Captain America turns to look at him. ‘Good question. What have you got there?’

Matt holds out the papers. ‘Not sure. They were on the desk and I grabbed them and got out of there in case... well.’

‘The bomb.’ Captain America’s voice is understanding and sympathetic. It sets Matt’s teeth on edge. He’s clearly jumped to the conclusion that Daredevil saw the bomb and panicked, missing everything of importance.

He’s… he’s not wrong about the missing everything of importance part but it still grates at Matt that it’s being assumed he’s far less competent than he is. Especially since he can’t defend himself; not without revealing why he missed the timer and the words on the wall.

‘Something like that. You’re going to have these men out of my city by daybreak.’ Matt can hear how Captain America’s heartbeat picks up at the cold tone in his voice but he’s beyond caring. The ring of Hydra human traffickers in Hell’s Kitchen has been broken and Matt isn’t - can’t - going to stay near these people any longer.

He’s out the door and on the neighbouring roof before Captain America can even word a comeback. But he lingers for a moment, to listen.

‘Well,’ says Hawkeye, dropping down to the ground by the sound of the thump. ‘That was abrupt. What did you say, Cap?’

‘I’m not sure.’

They start to look through the papers - all about Hydra cells outside the Kitchen and therefore useless to Matt - and, realising he’s not going to get any more insight into their thoughts, Matt leaves.

If he’d lingered a few moments more he might have heard Hawkeye noting out loud some of the oddities of his behaviour and linking it to a barely remembered observation from the night before, but well… he didn’t linger.

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Matt’s main police contact as Daredevil, much to the man’s displeasure, is Brett Mahoney. If Daredevil needs to warn the police or deliver someone to them, he goes to Brett. Who then complains to Foggy about ‘damned vigilantes thinking I’m their, I don’t know, Jim Gordon or something,’ something Foggy finds hilarious. He takes great pleasure in relaying Brett’s every word to Matt.

But while Brett is the main contact, he isn’t the only contact he has with the force. Daredevil occasionally leaves crooks in the path of police or will scribble down a relevant address and leave it at a crime scene. But unlike with Brett, Matt never really sticks around to see them get his ‘gifts’ as even months after the police purges he’s still uncertain of everyone but Brett on the force.
This time he’s not actually sticking around to watch them get his note about the gang’s headquarters - on the other side of Manhattan or he’d investigate himself - really. He’s just, taking a quick breather before going home. Getting his breath back, making sure his broken ribs haven’t punctured a lung. Necessary break time.

Foggy’s going to be so mad.

‘Daredevil left a note,’ Matt hears one of the officers say, from his resting place on the roof above the crime scene.

The other officer groans. ‘Can you read it?’

‘Can anyone ever?’ her partner replies. ‘I’ll give it to Mahoney or the forensic guys when we get back. They’re about the only ones who can read this nightmare of a chicken scratch.’

‘I swear,’ the other officer says, ‘this guy might be able to bash shitheads up like no one’s business but he should leave writing to those of us with the brains to spell Manhattan right.’ Shit he must have missed the strike through of the ‘t’s. Again.

This somehow gets a laugh out of her partner even as Matt finds his ability to breathe has suddenly been reduced again. Their words are nothing; they are water on a duck’s back to a warrior. They are nothing. Nothing.

They’re not much different to what the kids - and occasional teacher - used to whisper about the blind kid behind his back. Like neat handwriting has anything to do with intelligence.

Matt struggles to his feet and, as silently as possible makes his way home to where he’s sure an anxious Foggy is waiting.

Maybe next time he’ll skip the note and just do the job himself. No matter how far out of his way it is.

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Two days later Matt’s out monitoring Hell’s Kitchen - and it is not patrolling, not with two broken ribs and Foggy’s stern disapproval facing him if he dares patrol - when he runs into Captain America. Seemingly relaxing on a rooftop, probably watching the lights of the city. Matt creeps up on him slowly until he can hear the scrape of a pencil. Right, drawing.

But… why is he drawing in Matt’s city? Since when does *Captain America* draw anyway?

His heartbeat jumps for a moment before settling back into its even rhythm. He’s spotted Matt. Silently cursing under his breath, Matt abandons stealth in favour of getting to the man as soon as possible.

‘Daredevil,’ Captain America calls out as soon as Matt’s in what most people would consider hearing range.

‘Captain,’ Matt answers, leaping onto his roof as the Captain closes his book and slips it and the pencil into his pocket. ‘Care to explain why you’re here?’

‘Call me Steve, please. I’m just admiring the view.’

Matt rolls his eyes, aware the man can’t see it. ‘Try that again, without the lying please.’
Steve huffs a slightly disbelieving laugh. ‘Huh. You picked up on that.’ Matt just stares, waiting for Steve to get to the point. ‘I might also have some files; from that Hydra base last week. Thought they might be relevant to you.’ He grabs a bag that must have been leaning against the wall beside him and sifts through it. Moments later he pulls out a handful of papers. ‘Want to take a look?’

Shit. Shit. Shit. ‘Sure,’ Matt lies, holding out a hand for the documents. He shuffles through them, nodding on occasion. ‘Thanks. Can I take them for a closer look?’

Matt can hear the muscles in Steve’s face moving as his expression changes but can’t actually figure out what the expression is. ‘Sure. I hope it helps.’

When Matt gets them home, he’s not surprised to find they’re a bunch of addresses of Hydra’s targets. Useful to him only in terms of people he might not have to watch out for.

Especially as three of the names on the list are Foggy’s, Karen’s and his. Making a note to warn Foggy and have him read over the list for something Matt’s fingers - and thank goodness for the fact the lists are handwritten - missed, Matt goes to grab a few hours sleep before work.

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‘If you’re going to follow me, you’ll need to be a lot quieter,’ Matt finally snaps, tired of Hawkeye’s ridiculously loud presence on the rooftops behind him. ‘I could hear you coming a mile away.’

‘Shit.’ The man loudly jumps onto Matt’s roof as he turns to face him. ‘I thought I was being quiet.’ He pulls something out of his ears and gently taps it. Hearing aids. Well that explains the noise.

Matt’s being ungenerous though. He’s certain no one but he would have heard Hawkeye’s movements. Guilt flooding him, he sighs. ‘Your aids are working. I’m just particularly hard to sneak up on.’

‘Oh. Thanks man. Thought I was losing it for a second there.’ There’s a smile in his voice and a relieved sigh in his breath. Matt feels even guiltier.

‘Are you following me for a reason or just looking for entertainment?’

‘Can’t it be both?’

Matt tilts his head, aware Hawkeye can’t see his raised eyebrow. ‘Probably not, Hawkeye.’

‘Call me Clint.’ There’s an expectant pause. ‘Do… could I get a name from you?’

‘I’ll answer to Mike if you have to,’ Matt drawls, to match Ha-Clint’s relaxed tone.

Clint laughs. ‘It’ll do.’

‘You’re also very good at avoiding answering my question.’

That gets another laugh from Clint. ‘That I am.’ He fumbles in his pocket for a moment before pulling out a - Matt sniffles - phone. ‘Saw you running and decided to come give you my number. Just in case you need it.’

‘I don’t,’ Matt says, any previous playfulness or friendliness out of his voice. He turns to leave,
trying to quell the sudden fire in his veins at the hint he might need help to protect his city...

‘And if you run into Hydra again?’

That gets Matt to pause. With a sigh, he turns back around, holding a hand out. ‘Give me the number then.’

‘Ah. This was an impromptu thing. You got a pen?’ Matt just stands there, ‘staring’ at Clint in disbelief at the question. ‘Taking that look as a no. Okay then. Umm. I’ll read it out to you?’

Matt fishes in his own pocket for his burner phone, even as he smiles. ‘You don’t know your own number,’ he teases.

‘Who does in these days?’ Clint snaps back, but with a hint of laughter in his voice. ‘You’re not saying you do?’

‘I have to.’ Realising what he’s said, Matt hastily adds, ‘I give out my number a lot for work. It’s easier to know it by heart than to have to look it up.’

‘Clever,’ Clint says before rattling off a series of numbers. Matt tries to fix them in his head but Clint’s speaking too fast and even after hearing it twice, he’s not managed to remember more than two.

So he lightly tosses Clint his phone. ‘Put it in there; that’s easier.’ Matt pauses then adds, ‘Only use one letter and you’d probably be best off not using C. I’ve already got a contact under that name.’

‘H’ it is then.’ Matt can hear the beeps of the buttons as Clint adds the number to his phone.

‘Yours?’ Matt hesitates for a moment then rattles off his burner phone’s number. ‘Got it. That right?’

Realising Clint is holding his phone out for Matt to inspect the number he nods carefully. ‘Should be.’

‘Thanks. I’ll leave you to it then?’

‘If you could,’ Matt says before taking off for the nearby roof. Clint doesn’t follow him, for which he is grateful. He’s busy enough as it is without trying to figure out how to work with another person.

But Matt doesn’t hear the way Clint sighs as he leaves nor the start of his phone call.

‘Tony? I think your theory might be right…’

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Matt’s barely been on the rooftops ten minutes when Tony Stark - in the loud armour he wears - lands on his roof. A part of Matt wants to keep going, to ignore the man and keep patrolling, but he’s very aware of Stark’s reputation as a stubborn son of a bitch. There’s no way he’ll leave Matt alone until he gets what he came for.

That doesn’t mean Matt’s going to make it easy for him. ‘I wasn’t aware that working together once was an invitation for you all to bother me. I’d have said no to it if I’d known.’

A hiss of air and Matt can hear Stark’s breathing. He’s taken the faceplate off? ‘Side benefit. We might be a bunch of loose cannons following an out of time icicle in a pantomime of a team but we
get to bother each other so no one complains. Much.

‘And I count as a loose cannon?’ Matt says, unable to keep the defensiveness out of his voice. ‘I wasn’t aware I’d joined your team.’

‘Matter of time,’ Stark says, sounding absolutely dismissive of the mere thought Matt might want to stay independent. Matt’s hackles rise and for a long second he feels like growling or punching or doing something to express his displeasure but he manages to bury it. Barely.

‘Is there a point to you being here?’

Stark nods and waves the briefcase he’s carrying in the air. ‘Yes and you should be excited.’

Matt puts on his most unimpressed look. ‘I am so excited.’

‘I hear your sarcasm and I am ignoring it because you will be excited.’ Hisses fill the air as Stark fiddles with his gauntlets and Matt can smell the sweat the moment his hands are exposed to the night air. ‘Because this? This is awesome.’

‘It’s a briefcase,’ Matt deadpans. ‘Very exciting.’

Silence fills the air for a moment before Stark says, ‘You know, you’re really a smartass. How did we not know this?’

‘No one has bothered to talk to me for longer than a minute.’ Not that Matt would let them talk to him for longer than a minute anyway, but they don’t have to know that.

‘Point,’ Stark says, pointing at Matt with the hand not opening the briefcase. ‘Very good point huh. Movie night.’

‘What?’ Matt had heard about Stark’s infamous tangents but it’s one thing to hear about them and another to experience them.

Stark sighs. ‘Movie nights. Thursdays. Jarvis’ll let you in, you can even bring the mask.’ Before Matt can gather his wits for a reply or a thought, Stark opens the briefcase. ‘Got it. And voila,’ he says, holding out something flat. Matt sniffs and realises it’s some kind of tablet… a StarkLet? Matt knows enough about the man to know that if it’s a tablet, it’ll be one from his company at least. Stark’s too proud for anything else.

‘A tablet?’

‘Okay, the doubt? That can go now. I don’t appreciate the doubt when I have something amazing for you.’

In spite of himself, Matt finds a smile quirking at his lips. ‘If you don’t like my doubt, you’re welcome to leave my city and it behind you.’

‘No - and good distraction there. Here, take it.’ Curious, Matt takes the tablet and runs his gloved hands over the screen. ‘Password is currently three three eight four five but you can change that. Fingerprint lock - and before you ask there’s no internet connection on it so I won’t be able to use it to get your fingerprints and identity.’

Matt has barely had time to form a thought let alone start to worry about his identity. For a moment he finds himself marveling at the speed of Stark’s intelligence. Hearing about his genius is nothing like being confronted with it. Matt’s smart; he knows he is but compared to Tony Stark… he’s an
idiot.

Grimacing at the thought, Matt gathers himself. ‘I wasn’t worried about that.’

‘Uhuh. You don’t have to lie to me. So. What do you think?’

Matt moves his head so he’ll appear to be glancing from the tablet, to Stark and back again. ‘It’s a tablet?’ he repeats. ‘I’m still not excited.’

‘Okay, point.’ Stark facepalms. ‘Now I know this might not look like much but it’s better than like, everything on the market right now and it’ll help with your little problem. Totally fix it which is a thousand times better than what most of the bullshit people are selling will. Probably faster than most things but that’s not something I can measure.’

Something cold is creeping through Matt’s veins. ‘My… my problem?’

Stark waves a careless hand. ‘Issue, thing, circumstance, whatever you want to call it. This should fix it right up.’ he takes a step towards Matt then pauses, ‘and you’ve not even turned it on. No wonder you’re so confused. Okay, here.’ Before Matt can voice a protest, Stark tugs the tablet from his hands and taps at it, unlocking it with a click. ‘There.’

Matt takes it gently and tries not to give away the way his stomach is trying to sink into the ground. ‘Oh?’

‘...Okay this is worse than I thought. Look, I get it’s embarrassing but reading is, apparently, awesome and this is going to help you learn it.’

The coldness in Matt’s veins runs into something warm that burns through his body and mind. ‘Reading?’ he says in as mild a voice as he can.

‘Yeah! Reading! Look, if you press this it’ll read out the word; and that’ll read out words letter by letter. Oh and this will bring up a picture of the word because I’ve heard that’s a way people learn. It’s not so great on abstract ideas but by the time you get to those you shouldn’t need the pictures.’

It’s going to teach Matt how to read. The Avengers think Matt can’t read. Any fire in his blood freezes as he tries to figure out how they could have reached this conclusion. What did he do? How did they get this idea?

What should he do?

‘So?’ Stark finally asks after having explained every feature that Matt’s never going to be able to use. ‘What do you think?’

For a moment Matt considers telling Stark what he actually thinks, that it’s a piece of useless shit that’s aimed at solving the wrong problem. But there’s a note in his cocky voice; a hesitant sound in the way he asks that makes Matt pause. Somehow, he has some kind of power over Stark in his acceptance of this… this thing.

And what can he say if he rejects it? It’s not like he can say that yes, he can read so long as the letters are raised, handwritten or braille? Hell’s Kitchen is a small part of New York, it won’t take them long to track down the blind man that matches Daredevil’s description.

‘It’s… it’s certainly something,’ Matt manages to say. ‘I’m not sure what to say. I… I really don’t need it.’ But there’s a waver in his voice, some of the frozen fury and hurt he’s feeling creeping into his voice. It makes him sound like he’s lying.
'Take it anyway,' Stark says, putting the briefcase at Matt’s feet as his gauntlets slip onto his hands. ‘Gift from us all.’

‘You all?’ Matt can’t keep the outrage from his voice.

Stark waves his hands around. ‘Hey, we’re not judging. You do good work even with your issue, we barely noticed it.’ His face piece slips back onto his face with a hiss. ‘Good work,’ he repeats, in a robotic voice. Then he’s gone, blaring off into the night sky with a roar of his repulsors.

Matt does the only logical thing he can think of. He packs the tablet up and runs to the safest place he knows.

Foggy’s apartment.

********

‘The Avengers think you’re… what?’

Matt continues pacing up and down Foggy’s living room, running his hands through his hair. His suit is all over Foggy’s floor, lying wherever he threw it in his angry attempts to get it off while trying to explain to Foggy that yes he’s uninjured and here for a reason other than help with patching himself up.

‘Illiterate. They think I can’t read, Foggy.’

Foggy, as the best friend Matt could ever ask for, manages to swallow the laugh that’s in his voice. ‘You. They think you’re illiterate. Mr Matt ‘I read my Criminal Law textbook for fun years after we stopped needing to use it’ Murdock? Mr Matt ‘I graduated summa cum laude’ Murdock? Mr-’

‘Mr Matt ‘I’m blind and can’t let them know it’ Murdock,’ Matt cuts in and Foggy hisses in realisation.

‘But… can’t you fake that? With your senses?’

Matt sighs. ‘I’m still blind Foggy,’ he says in a defeated tone as he collapses into Foggy’s couch. ‘I can’t read a screen. I need my hands to read a piece of paper and that’s very obvious. Not many ways I can fake reading something held up to my face.’ He nudges the briefcase. ‘This is completely useless.’

‘Huh,’ Foggy says as he gets up to grab the briefcase and pulls out the tablet. ‘Oh man this is a StarkLet. Duuude.’

‘Aimed at helping me learn to read,’ Matt says bitterly. ‘Go nuts but it’s basically a one purpose device from what Stark said.’

Foggy puts the tablet down and moves to sit beside Matt on the rather small couch. ‘You’re not okay.’

Matt huffs a laugh. ‘I’m fine.’

‘You’d say that if you were dying. You’ve said that while dying.’ Foggy places a gentle hand on Matt’s shoulder. ‘Excuse me if I don’t believe you.’

Matt thinks about moving so Foggy’s hand falls off his shoulder but decides against it. It’s kinda comforting where it is. ‘I am fine.’ He tries to give Foggy a reassuring smile but can feel how
brittle it is.

And Foggy’s always been able to read him. Even when Matt was knee deep in lies to him, Foggy could tell what Matt was thinking. ‘This is really hurting you,’ he says, cutting straight to the heart of the matter. ‘Are you going to correct them?’

‘I can’t.’ Matt slams his head into the back of the couch. ‘It’s the perfect cover. They’re looking for a man who can’t read, probably a high school dropout. Someone… someone too stupid to be able to spell Manhattan. Not a blind lawyer who, as you put it, graduated summa cum laude and reads difficult books for fun. I could tell them to their faces I’m a lawyer and they’d just think I was lying.’ Matt bites his lip and ducks his head so he’s looking away from Foggy. ‘It’s fine. It’s perfect.’

‘But- Matt. Matt. Matt!’ Foggy places a gentle hand on Matt’s chin and turns it so they’re facing another. ‘But can you live with it?’

With another brittle smile Matt says, ‘I’m going to have to, aren’t I?’

Foggy sighs and pulls Matt into a hug.

Matt carefully notes how he doesn’t say Matt is wrong.

********

It’s nearly too easy for Matt to avoid the Avengers for the next week. Even the sneakiest of them - the Black Widow - makes enough noise for Matt to hear coming and none of them know the Kitchen like he does. None of them know that this church leaves its doors unlocked or that this dumpster is emptied Thursdays and never filled until Wednesday. Matt knows the details of a city he can’t help but hear and disappearing into its shadows is child’s play.

He does note that Clint is the only Avenger not to stroll Hell’s Kitchen in search of the Devil. Matt’s vaguely… something about that, even as he ducks out of sight of Iron Man for the third time tonight, hiding near a boiler so if Stark has some kind of heat signature detector or whatever, he won’t see Matt. Man really is stubborn.

Clint appears on the ninth night, the first one Matt’s not had to play hide and seek with an Avenger since Stark’s gift. He doesn’t chase Matt down to talk or force him into playing hide and seek to avoid meeting him. Instead, he just takes a seat on the edge of a rooftop near abouts the center of Hell’s Kitchen and sits there.

And sits there. For three hours, not moving once while Matt patrols; even when Matt deliberately takes a path that goes past his rooftop. Clint waves as he passes but doesn’t move.

Confused and a little bit pleased, Matt eventually makes his way to Clint’s roof. He takes a path that puts him behind Clint, relying on his abilities to help him sneak up on the archer.

‘I might not be able to hear you sometimes,’ Clint says and Matt pauses a step behind him, ‘but I can see your shadow.’

Matt laughs and takes a seat beside him. ‘If I’d snuck up on you, you might have fallen. Only fair to give you some warning.’

‘Keep telling yourself that, Devil.’

‘I thought I said I’d answer to Mike?’
Clint shifts in his seat then sighs. ‘Wasn’t sure I was still welcome to call you that.’ Matt tilts his head questioningly and Clint sighs again. ‘Heard about what Stark did. And how you’ve been avoiding everyone since.’ Something cold rushes through Matt’s veins, causing him to freeze in place after a massive flinch. ‘Yeah. Sorry. But it's not hard to figure out you’re ah. Not happy with us.’

‘I… I’m not overly impressed,’ Matt lies, ready to leave.

‘Yeah. Like I said. Not sure if I still have the right to call you Mike.’

‘Do what you want,’ Matt says as he gets up, moving across the roof as fast as possible.

Clint stands too but doesn’t leave the side of the roof. ‘Don’t be embarrassed. Please. Don’t be embarrassed. I get it.’

Matt pauses on the other side of the roof. ‘You get it?’

‘I’m a deaf carnie that never managed to attend high school let alone drop out of it. Trust me, I understand.’ He fiddles with something in his hands - a knife by the scent of metal and faded blood. ‘Tony told us what he’d done after he did it. Nearly punched him when he said he’d come out here to fix you. Like you need fixing.’

He touches his ear and turns around, so he’s not facing Matt. Which Matt is grateful for as it means he can’t see the look of… well whatever look is on his face.

Slowly Matt makes his way back across the roof. He stops at Clint’s side and steels his spine. ‘You’ve not lost the right to call me Mike,’ he finally says. ‘Unless…?’

‘Yeah, there’s something I’m not saying.’ Clint sighs again. ‘I’m the one who figured out you might be… well that words aren’t your thing.’ Matt takes a deep breath at the confession, the bottom of his stomach dropping at the thoughts in his head. Clint doesn’t seem to notice and shrugs. ‘I didn’t realise Tony was going to be such an ass about it. Wouldn’t have said anything if I’d known.’

‘Would it have made much difference?’ Matt says in a monotone. ‘It’s not like they wouldn’t have noticed eventually that I have issues…. I have issues with reading.’ It’s not a lie; it’s not a lie, Matt repeats in his head.

It feels like a lie.

‘Probably not but let me have my guilt. I kinda deserve it… Mike.’

Matt smiles. ‘Maybe.’ A woman’s scream cuts through the night and Matt cocks his head to track it down. Two blocks away.

He turns to Clint. ‘How’s your hand to hand?’

‘Decent,’ Clint says, the smirk in his voice giving away that his lie is underestimating his abilities, not exaggerating them. ‘Why?’

Matt smirks back at him. ‘Bit of trouble two blocks away. Wanna help?’

‘Lead the way.’

***********
Clint’s company almost makes up for the whole, Avengers think I’m illiterate and stupid thing. Almost.

Okay, maybe only a little. A tiny bit. Silver lining and all that. While sometimes it’s all he can do to find a bright side of things, Matt’s a somewhat optimistic idealist - something he’s well aware of even without people continuously pointing it out to him - and that means he can usually find a bright side. This is no exception, and he’s almost grateful to Clint for making it easier.

Almost still being the key word.

But two days after Clint helps him knock out a pair of rapists, Matt overhears something that destroys even the tiniest bit of silver lining to this thing.

He’s hiding out in the shadows of a fire escape, waiting to see if the police recognise the gangster he caught for them. It’s easier to hear now, from the horses’ mouths so to speak, than to try and con the information out of Brett or read it in a newspaper later. If there’s a new gang in town, Matt wants to know now.

‘Daredevil again?’ One cop asks, her voice unfamiliar. Rookie by the smell of the polish on her badge and gun. There’s a lot of them in Hell’s Kitchen right now. Matt’s heard that’s because the precinct is getting most of New York’s recruits for the next few years, in hopes of replacing those lost in the purges.

An older man, one often found behind the desk with Brett, sighs. ‘Looks like,’ every bit of his weariness in his voice. Matt feels vaguely guilty. ‘Got himself one of the Veles gang by the looks of it; someone Fisk didn’t manage to wipe off the earth.’

One of the Russians. Matt nods in satisfaction and goes to leave.

He pauses when he hears one of the other rookies on the scene giggle. ‘Did you just giggle?’ the female rookie asks, her tone disbelieving.

‘No!’ her fellow rookie declares, outrage in every line of his voice. ‘Just. Daredevil left a note.’

Matt frowns, sure he’s done nothing of the sort. The female rookie seems to agree with him. ‘What the hell do you mean? That’s some useless scribble on a piece of rubbish. Bet you got it from the ground.’

‘You gotta know what’s important,’ the older cop agrees and Matt scrambles to remember his name. Johnson, that’s it. Sergeant Johnson. ‘And I can tell you, that ain’t it.’

‘But ain’t you heard, Sarge?’ the male rookie asks. ‘Daredevil’s a retard. I got a friend who got a friend that works for the Avengers and he said they’re working on teaching him how to read. To read.’

Female rookie starts laughing even as something heavy and cold settles into Matt’s stomach. ‘No way,’ she says. ‘Dude brought down Fisk, no way he can’t read.’ She slaps the other rookie lightly on the shoulder as something catches in Matt’s chest, making breathing impossible. ‘Just a rumour.’

The other rookie starts to argue that his information is genuine as Matt gathers himself enough to stumble away. He can’t be here. He doesn’t want to be here. He needs to be somewhere else. He has to go and get his confused thoughts in order.

Matt focuses on the mantra running through his mind.
Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. Sticks and stones may break my bones but words… but words…

Stumbling into his apartment, he can’t stop a stray thought. I think I’d rather the sticks and stones.

********

It’s only later, when Matt’s thoughts are organised enough to think, that he realises one of the Avengers must have let their ideas on his illiteracy slip to some worker in the tower. And like all rumours, it’s spread like wildfire. There’s a chance it’s only made it to the police so far but Matt’s well aware of the effect of rumour and slander. Lawyers make a living off lawsuits related to them for a reason. Once an idea is out there, there’s no stopping it. You can’t kill an idea after all.

It’s the perfect cover and Matt can’t figure out why the very thought has his chest feeling tight and his eyes wet. Daredevil is not Matt Murdock, no one thinks Matt Murdock is any less capable now than he was before. And, despite what Foggy might think, Daredevil is just a mask Matt hides behind; a means to an end. What people think of him doesn’t matter because he’s not real. In fact, it’s better for Matt’s cover if they do think he’s a complete idiot; a high school dropout barely capable of stringing two words together, who is better at fighting than thinking. No one will look twice at Matt Murdock, Esquire, when trying to find a Daredevil like that.

Why then does it feel like he’s just faced a thousand opponents and barely gotten away with his life? Why does every cell in his body feel absolutely defeated because of a few simple words?

Words have no power, they’re only words. Words have no power, they’re only words.

Even if Matt wasn’t a lawyer whose entire livelihood is words, he’d know he’s only lying to himself.

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The leak must have come from the Avengers. Therefore, Matt reasons once he’s finished with his damned pity party - that only makes him feel so guilty for letting a few stupid words get to him -, if he avoids the Avengers and stops working with them, there’ll be nothing to leak. They won’t be able to come up with any more ridiculous theories if there’s no evidence to base them on and they’ll stop trying to ‘help’ him if they stop seeing him.

Okay, he’ll have to dodge Avenger patrols of Hell’s Kitchen for a while longer but that’s never been a problem.

Of course, Matt didn’t factor in the Avengers and their secret, collective ability to generate chaos and suffering on a level Matt can barely imagine. Alien invasions; secret Nazi groups and now…

Well, now it’s still the ‘secret’ Nazi group but they’re doing something very out of character. Well even more out of character than the human trafficking had been. Matt is hovering on a rooftop, feeling the temperature drop as the sun sets behind him and listening to the scene below him. He’s pretty sure he’s the only person here getting the full story.

On one side of the street is a group of Hydra grunts, apparently from Midtown by the streets one seems to be referencing, arguing with their leader over his choice to rob a bank for funding instead of continuing to rely on trafficking their would be victims. The fact that they’re holding this argument inside said bank, with their many hostages listening makes Matt sure that they’re not
planning on letting anyone out alive so it doesn’t matter what they overhear.

And on the other side of the street using the building Matt’s on top of as cover and a base of operations, are the Avengers. They’ve managed to convince the very reluctant cops of Hell’s Kitchen that this is an Avenger matter and shooed them back a few buildings - out of range of most guns, if not out of sight. Matt’s pleased with their foresight to protect the already diminished police force but annoyed at the fact they’ve been here ten minutes and have no sign of a plan yet.

If it wasn’t for the weapons he can occasionally hear clicking or shifting around, Matt would have already gone in.

‘Look, we can get in no problem,’ Steve growls, tapping on a table - probably pointing at something? - ‘through this window. Or at least, Clint and Nat can.’ Okay, yes pointing at something. Building plans? Matt thinks as he works his way into their briefing room, being quiet as he slips into the back of the room.

No one’s heartbeat spikes nor does any one of the seven people in the room address him, so Matt thinks he’s managed it.

‘But,’ Steve continues, ‘there’s no way we make it into the lobby undetected.’

‘Can we be fast then?’ Thor asks, in a slightly softer version of his usual boom. ‘Seek and find them before they slaughter our innocents?’

Steve shakes his head. ‘Nat might make it but she’s just one person. Even if the rest of us provide a big, flashy distraction outside, we’ve no idea of numbers. I’m not running the risk of them shooting everyone before Nat can subdue them.’

‘Can we get numbers?’ Clint growls. ‘Stark?’

‘No cameras and they’re all muddled up with the hostages for heat signals. I can tell you how many people are in that back but not how many are hostages not Hydra.’

‘You could ask,’ Matt says mildly and takes pleasure in the way everyone - bar the Black Widow - jumps. I’ve a bit of information on the Hydra cell in there.’

‘Holy shit, how’d you get in here?’ Clint says, moving to Matt’s side. ‘I thought the whole, stay in the shadow thing was for effect not because you could teleport or something.’

Matt gives him a disbelieving look, that he must get even through the cowl as he laughs. ‘I’m very good at being silent,’ Matt eventually says. ‘Do you want to know what I know or not?’

‘Go ahead,’ Steve says but there’s a note in his voice that makes Matt want to raise his shoulders and leave. It’s the same note he’s heard a thousand times before, when the blind kid dared to put his hand up to have an opinion and the teacher had to call on him. It’s that note that seems to say ‘I’m letting you speak but my expectations are low’. It’s usually followed by a surprised tone, when Matt proves his blindness did nothing to his intelligence. Almost like the two aren’t related.

Matt hates that he’s hearing it from Captain America of all people. ‘They’re a Midtown cell of Hydra and they’re much smaller than the one you helped me with. Dozen men at most, looking for a quick buck.’

‘Hydra is actually robbing a bank?’ Stark says, confusion in his voice.

‘Well, SHIELD’s not exactly paying them a wage now,’ Matt says with a crooked smile. ‘I’ve
heard it’s a bit hard to run your illegal operation when you haven’t got funds coming in.’

Stark hums in acknowledgement, as does the man by his side - his deep, thundering heartbeat has Matt thinking this is the Hulk’s human form - while Steve and the Black Widow nod in agreement.

‘Where’d you get this information?’ Falcon asks and there’s a note of confusion in his voice. Like Matt should be incapable of collecting information if he can’t read.

Though maybe Matt’s reading too much into it. ‘I listen. There’s lots to hear out on the street for a man who keeps his ears open.’

‘Ah, that makes a lot of sense,’ Falcon says and Matt resists the urge to bristle.

‘Thanks Daredevil,’ Ste- Captain America says, and yes, there’s that note. It’s a tiny thing, but hearing it feels like a stab to the gut. Maybe two stabs to the gut, Matt’s had one and that wasn’t actually that awful. He lived.

‘I’m going in after the hostages,’ Matt declares. ‘With or without you-’

‘Daredevil-’

‘- the people of Hell’s Kitchen are not going to suffer because you can’t keep your wars out of my city.’ He turns to leave but the Black Widow steps in front of him. He cocks his head at her. ‘Yes?’

‘The two of us slip in quietly while they all do their loud and noisy distraction.’ Her voice is soft and sweet but Matt can hear how measured each word is and sense how her body language is as submissive as possible. She’s trying to manipulate him.

But if it gets those people out of there, away from the Avengers and their stupid ideas and battles… ‘I don’t need help,’ he says just as soft, as if he’s trying for bravo and missing.

‘Never said you did. But I can be known to be useful.’

Matt stands there for a long moment then turns and walks out; his silence the only approval he’s willing to give. The Black Widow appears at his side a moment later, as he climbs onto a neighbouring roof and begins to work his way through the shadows to get across the street. She keeps up with him, nearly silent to his sensitive ears.

‘Not bad,’ he whispers, as they land on the roof of the building beside the bank.

‘Not too bad yourself,’ she says in a voice almost as quiet.

‘What’s our entry point?’ She doesn’t reply, just pointing at the bank. Matt draws together his senses and figures out she’s either pointing at the window just above the dumpster or the one to the left of it, two stories up. ‘Okay. I’ll follow you.’

She freezes for barely a second but the panicked flicker of her heart echoes in Matt’s ears. The Black Widow doesn’t trust him to watch her back? Or… or doesn’t think he’s up to watching her back… capable of watching her back. ‘I would have thought you’d prefer to be first in,’ she says, none of her body’s reaction to be found in her voice.

Matt gives her a charming smile, even though all he wants to do is scream at her. ‘I’m willing to admit that of the two of us, you’re probably the better fighter.’ From what he’s heard and sensed, it’s not a lie.
She nods anyway, accepting his words or at least deciding not to argue with them. Again, she hardly makes a sound as she jumps onto the fire escape of the bank’s building, then carefully works her way along the window sill of the floor above the window she may have indicated. Right, it was the second option then. Matt’s a step behind her, listening as she picks the lock of the window and slips into the building. It takes Matt a little bit of work - she made walking along the side of the building seem easy, but he’s right behind her.

Neither of them comment, but Widow gives him a sharp nod as he slips in through the window. Having not had a chance to feel the building plans - and Matt’s half sure they wouldn’t have been readable to him anyway - Matt follows her lead as they advance through the building. They’re silent as they move, but there’s little need to be; Matt can hear that everyone in the building is gathered in the lobby and these offices are all empty.

Finally they reach the stairs to descend to the lobby. But Widow pauses at the top.

‘What?’ Matt hisses.

‘I’ll go down first. Wait here.’ Before Matt can protest, she’s down the stairs and slinking into the back of the cashiers area, taking out the man pacing there before he even manages a breath.

Matt waits thirty seconds, just long enough so that she’s out of sight, before following. He immediately tries to sense out the light switch, aware he’s about to screw Widow over but well… if she’d not run off alone, he would have told her his plan. Lights out is his biggest advantage; she’ll have to cope. It’s his damned city after all.

Outside, Stark begins to scream obscenities at Hydra via a loudhailer of some sort and Matt has to smile as it causes a steady flow of gun wielding men moving towards the front of the building. He can hear Steve’s voice joining in, sans loudhailer but somehow louder, and Matt’s vaguely impressed when Steve begins to outswear Stark. So Steve’s identity as a soldier was stronger than whatever part of him that caused the whole ‘pure, idealistic icon of America’ he’d been in Matt’s textbooks. Good to know.

Finally Matt detects a box on the wall, about the level of a light switch. Grinning at the fact he doesn’t have to try and knock out the dozen lights he can hear buzzing by hand, he hits the closer button.

And nearly drops to his knees at the alarm siren that rings out. A long moment passes before Matt can gather himself to focus past the noise - something he realises is high pitched and probably beyond regular human hearing - and push the button again, cutting it off. Growling at his mistake and ignoring the slight ringing and pain in his ears, Matt presses the other button. Finally, he gets a reaction from everyone else in the room as they cry out in fear.

The lights must be out. Good.

Angry at himself and Widow for putting him in this position, Matt throws himself at the nearest man, the smell of gunpowder and metal giving away the gun in his hands. He’s stumbling around in the darkness, so it’s more than easy enough to subdue him; knocking him out with his own gun.

In fact, all the Hydra men are stumbling around, causing chaos in the darkness and Matt can smell and feel the outside air as a few quick thinking hostages take advantage of the situation to stumble into the street outside. He listens and smiles when he hears Clint herding them to safety. One of the Hydra grunts must notice the fleeing hostages because he starts to make his way towards the door.

Matt’s on him in an instant, blocking his path and knocking him to the ground. His eyes must be
beginning to adjust because he manages to land a hit to Matt’s stomach. But then again, it might have just been a lucky punch, as his next attack is a tackle in the wrong direction that ends up being more of a belly flop at thin air. Matt has no trouble knocking him out after that; a well trained attack guided by his senses.

The Black Widow also seems to have adjusted to the darkness well, if the ever growing number of men groaning on the ground is anything to judge by. But Matt can hear how she’s breathing, and the way she’s gritting her teeth. She’s mad and Matt…

Well he’d be more sympathetic if she hadn’t left him behind. But this is something to deal with later. Right now there’s still a few Hydra men to deal with.

******

Sadly for Matt, later always comes. This time in the form of the post mission debrief that Steve all but drags Matt to, citing his lack of attendance last time.

‘I don’t do debriefs,’ Matt growls as he walks into the room they’re still using as headquarters, followed by the politely insistent Steve. There’s a thumping feeling in his head and he’s sure his hearing isn’t as keen as usual - and maybe ringing slightly. He really just wants to get out of here right now. ‘There’s no need for me to be here.’

Steve sounds like he’s swallowing a smile. ‘You don’t do debriefs because you work alone and you only got out of the one last time you helped us because you took off on us.’

‘For good reason,’ Matt grumbles, quickly noting who else is in the room. It seems like they’re the last to arrive because Stark and the Hulk’s human form - whose name begins with a ‘B’ or ‘V’ maybe? - are sitting on one side of a table, Falcon and the Black Widow at the other. Clint is perched on top of the table, beside the Black Widow while Thor seems to have claimed the side furthest from the door as his own. There’s two seats left on the free side of the table, clearly an invitation for Matt.

But Matt’s not going to take it. Sitting at the table would be a clear sign he considers himself a part of their team, when he really really doesn’t. And there’s nothing on this Earth right now would make him want to be a part of it. So he slips past the table and stands by the open window, fairly sure he’s in the sight line of everyone but Stark and Hulk, folding his arms over his chest and trying to give off the best impression of ‘reluctantly there’ he can manage.

‘Oh hey, you did get Hornhead here,’ Stark says, twisting in his chair. ‘And you’re not going to sit, I didn’t know we didn’t have to sit. Is sitting optional? Because I can tot-’

‘Tony,’ Steve says with a sigh. ‘Daredevil, there is a chair there-?’

‘No,’ Matt says simply and refuses to say more, leading to a long and very awkward silence.

Finally Steve gets the hint. ‘Okay. Right.’ He starts the debriefing, getting everyone to talk out what happened; where they went wrong that can be worked on; and where they did well, starting with those who had stayed outside the bank. Matt tunes out, aware Steve’s probably delaying his part of the debrief to try and keep him here for the whole thing.

‘Nat your turn. Inside the bank, any issues?’ Matt’s attention snaps back to the table when Steve turns to the Black Widow.

She sighs. ‘Nothing that can be improved as of now.’
Matt frowns. ‘What do you mean by that?’

Every head in the room turns to look at him as she steadies her spine. ‘I checked the switchboard you touched. It was clearly labelled, you should have had no problems activating the alarm instead of turning the lights off.’ Her heart is a touch faster than usual, something Matt’s sure means she’s furious and her tone has a mild note of confusion. ‘You created chaos that complicated our mission because you refuse to improve yourself.’

What? Matt thinks before registering what she said about the labels. If she thinks he was going for the alarm and missed… Oh. This is about the reading thing. ‘I don’t need improving,’ he snarls, ready to offer a passionate defence. They might have the wrong idea but that’s no excuse.

‘You turned the lights off and made everyone’s job a thousand times harder because you couldn’t read the label?’ Falcon asks and something in Matt drops at the tone he’s using. ‘Man… I mean, I get being fine as you are, that’s cool but sometimes you gotta take one for the team. And dude, we can help.’

‘I have helped!’ an outraged Stark says. ‘Have you not been using the Starklet I gave you? You should be a thousand times better now than you were.’

‘Hey, not everyone learns at the same pace,’ Clint snaps. ‘Or needs to learn at all-’

Matt stands there frozen, as the conversation descends into bickering over how fast a person can learn to read (fast, so long as they’re willing to work at it it seems to be the consensus) and if they should be forced to do it at all (yes as the consensus, but Clint and the Hulk are the only ones really arguing that maybe forcing is an awful idea, though Thor is saying nothing at all). They’re all a moment away from shouting at another and no one is even talking to him. It’s like he’s invisible.

Like his opinion doesn’t matter.

Steve puts his fingers in his mouth and whistles, a piercing noise that shuts everyone up and has Matt’s hands flinching towards his ears. ‘That’s enough!’ The room falls silent at the whistle and Matt can hear everyone shifting in their seats. Feeling guilty maybe? He hopes they are at least. ‘Daredevil? Steve says, turning to him. ‘You okay?’

‘I’m fine,’ Matt says in a deadpan voice. ‘Are we going to debrief or just argue my personal life?’

Stark sighs. ‘You wanna be a hero, you don’t get to have a personal life.’ He sounds weary and defeated but Matt has to bite his tongue to stop himself screaming at him. ‘Not for things that affect others. Not for things you can fix.’

‘Good thing I work alone and don’t need fixing.’

‘Why are you so hesitant?’ Falcon asks as he stands. ‘I get that it’s scary and new, but reading, reading is awesome. You’ll open so many doors for yourself, be something better.’

‘And you won’t cause chaos for your teammates by hitting the wrong switch,’ the Black Widow adds dryly, but Matt can still detect a hint of anger in her voice.

Matt stops leaning against the wall and takes a slight step right, placing himself directly in front of the window. ‘I don’t need to be fixed,’ he repeats, to a general sigh from the room. Biting his lips, he faces the Black Widow. ‘And for the record? I hit the switch I was aiming for.’ Tension seeps into the room as everyone either sits up or stands. ‘If you hadn’t left me behind, you would have known what I was planning.’
And with that, before anyone can move, Matt turns and throws himself out the window, already reaching out to grab the fire escape under it. It wrenches at his shoulder, but he gets a grip on its railing. From there, he’s able to drop down onto the stairwell below it and in a few seconds, he’s on the ground in the alleyway and running.

The Avengers will probably take to the roofs to track him down. That’s fine, Matt doesn’t need to use them tonight. He knows the route to where he’s going by heart for any level of the city he chooses to use.

It is, after all, the safest place he knows. You should always know your way to where your home is.

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Foggy doesn’t even let Matt get past two knocks on his window before he’s opening it and trying to help Matt through. Of course, since Matt’s not injured (okay, maybe his ears are a little sensitive from the alarm earlier but he’s been pushing past the pain for ages now so it doesn’t count), Foggy ends up being more of a hinderance than a help. They end up in a tangle of limbs on Foggy’s floor but hey, Matt’s through the window and inside so he’ll give Foggy the victory he’ll probably want here.

‘Oh man oops,’ Foggy says as Matt untangles himself from his friend and helps him up. ‘I thought I was helping.’

Matt gives him a mild smile. ‘You were.’

‘Uh huh. You do realise that now I know your secret, you’re a shit liar?’ Matt can’t help the flinch at the sting but just gives a small nod. ‘Okay. You hurt?’

‘I’m fine.’

Foggy sighs and buries his face in a hand. ‘You’ve said that so much, it no longer has meaning. Are you bleeding?’

Matt considers. He can smell the faint scent of copper but it’s probably from the men he beat up. ‘No?’

‘Right. Take that mask off and I’ll get us beer to cel - HOLY SHIT! You said you weren’t bleeding!’

Pausing halfway through taking his mask off, Matt cocks his head. ‘I’m not?’

Before he can protest further, Foggy’s hands are on his, wiping the trail of blood from the side of Matt’s face. A second later and Matt can feel the heat of the flashlight in his hands as he shines it into Matt’s ear. ‘No blood in your ears. Ah, that’s good right?’

‘Probably?’ Matt shakes his head a bit but Foggy doesn’t let go.

‘Right. Um, any pain or headache or anything? That could be important?’

With a smile, Matt gently moves Foggy’s hands off his head. ‘I got a sudden alarm siren in my ears for a moment but other than that I’m-’

‘-fine,’ Foggy interrupts with a sigh. ‘You know what? That word is banned. No more ‘fine’ in my apartment. Yours too. Can’t happen, no more. You’re not allowed to say it.’ He stops and seems to
consider for a moment. ‘Unless you mean fine like, F.I.N.E.’

Matt blinks. ‘I can hear the difference in those ‘fine’s but I’m not sure what you mean by it.’

‘F.I.N.E. Fucked up. Insecure. Neurotic. Emotional. You’re F.I.N.E.’ Foggy leads Matt to the couch; a familiar motion from their early days of living together in the second year of law school. ‘That’s how I’m going to take it every time you use that word from now on buddy. So you have a choice. Either accept the new definition—’

‘Or stop using the word,’ Matt says with a soft smile. ‘You drive a hard bargain counselor.’

They’re sitting close enough on the couch that Matt can feel Foggy’s shrug as well as hear it. ‘I do try my friend. So,’ he says after a moment of silence, ‘if you’re not hurt, why are you here?’

The memory of what the Avengers said, complete with the icy fury burning in his veins, springs to Matt’s mind. But here, safe by Foggy’s side in an apartment that smells and feels like home, there’s a dimness to the memories. Like he’s feeling them through a pane of glass instead of in real time. And Matt has an awareness that while sharing his experience might add even more panes of glass to his emotional windows (okay, his metaphors might need some work), it’ll add a burden to Foggy. He’ll get mad; he’ll get upset. He’ll want to comfort Matt and as nice as that sounds…

Matt’s not to ask Foggy to feel anything negative just for a few moments of comfort.

‘Maybe I just want to spend time with my best friend?’

‘At two in the morning?’ Right, Foggy’s always been able to see through Matt’s bullshit.

Matt shrugs. ‘Thought it was earlier. I lost track of time. Not like I wear a watch as Daredevil.’

But Foggy’s no idiot. ‘And you said you can hear every television, radio and clock in Hell’s Kitchen. No way you don’t know the time every minute that you’re out there.’ He fumbles down the side of the couch with his right hand, the one furthest from Matt, and pulls out a remote. Before Matt can comment, he’s turning his crappy, second hand T.V. on.

It’s on a news station, though Matt doesn’t recognise the woman speaking and thus can’t identify which one. ‘Coming up next, more breaking news on the Avenger’s dramatic showdown with Hydra at a bank in Hell’s Kitchen; including rumors that our local vigilante was seen at the scene. Is he working with the Avengers? Is this a sign that they approve of the Devil of Hell’s Kitchen’s actions? Do they think vigilantism is a viable solution to our crime problem? More on these questions, when we return.’ Foggy flicks the T.V. off again and turns slightly, so he’s facing Matt.

‘So this has nothing to do with the fact you may or may not have fought aside the Avengers, people so moronic they both think you can’t read and seem to think that matters?’

Somehow, Foggy always cuts to the heart of an issue. It’s part of what makes him such a great lawyer - and what had caused their fight to be as huge as it was. He doesn’t allow for loopholes or lies disguised as truths. He just says it like it is, like he sees it, and it’s up to you to refute him. If you can.

Matt rarely can, when he’s like this. ‘I may have fought alongside an Avenger tonight.’

‘And?’ Foggy prompts, when Matt says nothing else.

With a turn of his head, so Foggy can’t see his face, Matt admits, ‘And they may have been ah, upset, when I seemingly mixed up the labels on a switch in the bank and hit the lights instead of
The only reason Matt knows Foggy is blinking in confusion is because he can hear his eyelashes fluttering. Okay, and because he knows his friend, although facial expressions aren’t usually something he bothers to imagine. Matt processes other people’s emotions in voices and heartbeats, not faces.

‘But why would you want the ala- ohhh.’

So it’s dawned on him too. ‘Yeah. They couldn’t imagine a reason someone would want to hit the lights so they… they jumped to a conclusion.’

‘And insulted you, I’m sure.’ Foggy’s tone is as emotionless as his lawyer training can make it but Matt can read his anger in the way his heart is pounding and the stiffness of his body. He’s pissed.

‘What did they say?’

‘No-’

‘Matt.’

‘No Foggy. I don’t need you to know, or to say anything. It’s f- okay. It’s okay,’ Matt lies. But Foggy’s only ever bought one of Matt’s lies - a big series of lies, but a single lie really - and that is because he never could have imagined it. He sees through this as well as he does everything else Matt’s ever lied about. ‘No it’s not.’ Matt looks away, a wordless admission Foggy is right.

‘You can’t keep this up. Something is going to give.’

‘I know.’

Foggy continues as if Matt didn’t speak. ‘And I’m worried… Matt, promise me you won’t let their stupidity get you killed. Please don’t let them kill you. Leave them alone if you have to, stop the team ups, but don’t let them kill you.’

‘I won’t,’ Matt says and is glad Foggy can’t hear the way his heart flutters at the half lie.

But from the way Foggy sighs, Matt thinks his friend caught the lie anyway.

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It’s not just the Avengers who are out in full force the next few nights, as Matt spends half his nights beating various men and women to unconsciousness before they can kill themselves. Hydra is just ridiculous sometimes. But at least they’re not looking for him, unlike the Avengers who seem determined to talk.

Matt’s not willing to talk. It’s not like they’re listening anyway.

Of course, to his displeasure, the Hydra assholes he’s beating on seem equally as reluctant to talk. Considering Matt’s absolutely sure he chased the last of the Hydra cell in Hell’s Kitchen out of town, he spends most of the time beating them trying to get some form of information out of them.

Tonight this woman is so far as tight lipped as her counterparts and Matt’s continuing to beat her, regardless of the grating feeling in his soul every time a punch lands. He’s being ridiculous and vaguely sexist, she has information and this is the means to get it out of her.

Finally she tries to go for her tooth and Matt lands a carefully aimed punch to the jaw that breaks it,
stopping her moving it. Brutal, but effective as a means of keeping her alive. Course it’s going to make getting to talk impossible but at least she’s alive.

Slowly Matt moves the now whimpering woman into the street, positioning her under a streetlight as he hears sirens in the background. They’re getting louder, and they should pass by here in a minute. If they’re any sort of cop they’ll stop for the injured woman and figure out she’s Hydra fast.

Matt searches through her pockets, looking for the little pin they all seem to carry. Just having it pinned to her shirt should be enough to get her handcuffed to a hospital bed and put on suicide watch. She’ll not escape her punishm-

He pauses as he feels a slip of paper, folded in her pocket. Printer paper, by the smell of it, not high grade but not scrap either. It’s a familiar scent to Matt, after all his years working in various office like situations. He unfolds it gently and hears her outraged and slightly terrified whimper as he does.

Perfect. ‘Thank you for the information,’ he says with a bright smirk and races for the rooftops as the police cruiser turns the corner. They stop a moment later with a squealequel of brakes and are out of the car in nearly the same moment, guns drawn and pointed where Matt had been.

But he’s already gone, a shadow on the rooftops, out of their sightline even if they’re still in his earshot. He listens until they realise the woman is Hydra and organise transport to the nearest hospital before slipping further away. He needs somewhere a touch more private to examine what he’s found.

Once he’s on a deserted roof, alone but for a couple of rats and a sleeping cat, he carefully pulls off his gloves and takes out the piece of paper. He runs his fingers over it, not surprised to realise that whatever is on it is printed. If he focuses he can… nope. There’s nothing to feel, the ink from the printer has left no indents or raised ink or anything he can sense. He knows there’s something on the paper; the smell of the ink and the slight greasy feel of the paper under his fingers is enough to tell him that. But there’s no way for him to tell what’s on it without asking for help.

Matt grits his teeth at the thought of having to ask for help.

His fingers brush the bottom half of the page and he pauses at the indents he feels there. Quickly Matt finds the beginning of the indents, not surprised to realise it’s a handwritten address, probably responsible for the bulk of ink he can smell. Focusing, he feels out the address.

30th and 12th. Outside Hell’s Kitchen but only just.

Normally the ‘only just’ would be enough for Matt to decide to pass it on, to leave a note or the paper itself for the police or Avengers so that others can take this fight. He wants to help people, but he’s aware of his limits. ...Okay, somewhat aware of his limits. If he tries to protect everyone, to defend the whole of New York, he’s going to burn himself out and get himself killed. When he started this, he chose to defend his city, his people and for the most part he’s stuck to that. They’re the ones who needed it most after all, the people left behind by people like the Avengers who don’t care about the little guys.

But it’s only a few streets over. Barely out of his range. He can check it out, see what it is and return to get Foggy to help figure out this piece of paper. More information is good and it’s not like he’s going to engage. Just look.

Well listen. But what could go wrong?
The address is not an abandoned warehouse, as Matt’s come to expect from these fractured and scrambling Hydra cells. No, this time it’s some kind of office building that’s close to the water but not right on it and a few stories high but only a few. It’s almost ordinary, the sort of thing you’d expect of a mid-sized company that’s too big to be at risk of failing but too small to be noticed easily. Completely unremarkable in every way. A good disguise, if Matt’s honest, for a secret Nazi-death cult.

He perches on the roof of the building next to it and focuses his attention on the building, pushing all his senses towards it. Voices are coming from the third floor, some sort of meeting. Matt can pick out the voices of at most a dozen people, a couple of whom have drowned themselves in so much perfume he can taste it through the open window. They seem to be discussing - no negotiating, that’s a raised voice - some kind of consolidation de-

A consolidation deal. Matt’s breathing picks up as a man calls for silence in the room, getting it instantly. These are leaders of various Hydra cells in the city and if they consolidate into a single Hydra…

Well, it’s bad news for Hell’s Kitchen. And New York.

Matt’s jumping across to the Hydra building’s roof even before he’s quite processed what’s happening. They’re a floor below him now but Matt didn’t hear any movement beyond those moving around in the meeting room. But if these are a bunch of Hydra leaders they’re all going to have bodyguards or something similar around. This has all the trappings of a bad situation to walk into alone.

So he should walk away. Get help. Be reasonable about this. It’s what Foggy would want him to do, it’s the smart thing to do.

On the other hand… if he’s fast, if he only takes out that room full of people and calls the cops the moment they’re all down… He might be able to use the police to create an ambush for any guards that are there; keep them stuck in the building with their bosses and at his mercy. It’s risky but it’ll make sure that these monsters end up behind bars tonight without any chance for escape.

Matt nods to himself. It’s a good plan. A solid plan. He can make it work.

He can.

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He can’t.

Matt gets to the third floor with minimal problems (two broken jaws and minor scratch on Matt counts as minimal problems, right?) and hovers outside the door to the meeting room for a long moment. Focusing, he’s sure there’s eight people in the room, two women and six men. He can’t be sure if their backs are to this door so his first step is going to be to take out the buzzing light he can hear.

He can do this.

Bursting through the doorway, Matt throws his stick with the uncanny precision that Stick relentlessly drilled into him. He’s surrounded by cries of shock as the lights go out with a smash and for a moment Matt has to smile at how well his plan is going.
The smile slides off his face a second later as it begins to dawn on him how badly he’s miscalculated here. In an almost coordinated movement every person in the room is on their feet and stumbling towards Matt; their progress only hampered by the presence of the table in the centre of the room. But three of them are already on top of it and Matt has to dodge out of the way of their jumping tackles. They take out three of their own people but everyone is on their feet a moment later, managing to trap Matt in the centre of a circle.

It should be chaos, body parts everywhere with Matt at its heart and exploiting them falling all over one another. But every person in this room is well trained, and Matt’s barely managing to dodge the attacks he’s facing. There’s no space for him to attack, no time for him to think, and he’s sure he’s only avoided any fatal hits because of his abilities. A split second warning of an attack is still a warning and Matt knows how to exploit that at least. He takes advantage of one woman’s bloody punch - is it his blood he tastes or hers? - to dodge towards the wall, eager to have a side of him not facing an enemy.

Two men are down, felled by attacks from their own men which shows at least some weakness in their training, and one of the women has stepped away. Matt can hear her requesting backup from a nearby Hydra cell - hers probably - and for a second he recognises the steady, calm drawl of the voice on the other side of the call, even with its note of panic. But then someone gets a punch through his defences and Matt can’t help the cry he makes, forgetting all about the voice as his breath leaves his body. He can hear the man laugh and uses that to direct his punch into the man’s jaw.

The man goes down but Matt’s still facing five people, plus what sounds like another half dozen thundering up the stairs. Their footsteps pound together in Matt’s head as he resists the temptation to clutch at his ribs. He ducks under one punch, the thump of it hitting the wall behind him ringing in his ears. Drops of his blood drip down his cheeks and coat his tongue. Matt’s not sure if that’s from his split lip or somewhere else. It might not even be his blood.

How long has he been fighting? He lands a solid kick to one of the women’s ribs and feels them break; the crunching noise doing nothing to distract him from the feel of bones giving when they should not. Has it been hours? The second woman punches him on the cheek, the scent of her nail polish almost as awful as the pain of his skin splitting under the force of the punch. How many enemies does Matt have left? Five? Eleven? None?

He falls to his knees to avoid a punch - kick? - aimed at his head. Every limb is heavy, begging him to keep falling and rest on the floor. He’s a Murdock though. Murdocks always get up. So he locks his knees and moves out of the way of a kick. Grabbing the man’s knee gives him the leverage he needs to rise to his feet, with the added advantage of making the man scream in pain; a sound that rings through the room with an unfading echo.

Echoes and echoes, showing Matt he’s got a lot of work to do. He can do it. He can do it.

He has to do it. He’s dead if he doesn’t.

Dodge, punch. Punch, dodge. Punch... no that’s more of a flail, though a flail directed at a nose that cracks under his hand, causing a flash of heat in his knuckles that Matt pushes aside as much as he can. Sloppy. Sloppy. Sloppy.

How many left?

He can taste the air outside, New York’s finest smog and polluted river water sitting on his tongue. The window is open, he knows this. Why is he focusing on it-
The distinctive ‘twang’ of a bow.

Matt gives into his weakness and falls. Blood falls with him, from the shoulder of the man whose hand was an inch from his throat. It coats the floor and clouds Matt’s senses as a second twang breaks the night air.

A roar outside as Stark’s loud *too loud* repulsors sound by the window. A roar inside as Captain America - Steve - charges into the room, perfume and blood by his side and fighting far better than Matt ever could.

And through the chorus of pained cries and creaking, snapping bones, a calm, soft voice to go with the firm, steady hands at his throat. Only the familiar voice stops him lashing out at the hands as their owner checks his pulse. Matt groans to let him - Falcon, has to be Falcon, scent of oil and metal - know he’s still alive. And awake.

‘Holy shit, how are you still awake?’ Falcon says, and Matt realises there’s been words flowing around him since the Avengers arrived.

‘I’m a Murdock,’ Matt tries to say but it gets caught somewhere between his brain and his lips, coming out a groan instead. Still, Murdocks don’t stay down and the groans and cracks of the fighting are dying down. Matt has to get up, be on his feet when they win.

Be on his feet when he loses.

He pushes up to his hands and knees, mourning the loss of the hardwood floor. So much softer than he remembered hardwood being, smooth and cold against his skin. A force on his back tries to push him down but lightly, barely touching his aching back. Matt can ignore it and the throbbing in his gut, to fall back onto his heels.

‘Holy fuck, you’re a stubborn son of a bitch,’ Steve says in a Brooklyn drawl, so much stronger than usual, that’s coloured with concern and admiration. ‘Sam, Nat, help him.’

The hand on his back is moved to rest under his arm and Matt puts grateful weight into it so he can rise, moving his own hand to rest on Falcon’s shoulder. Another hand, this one softer with the hint of nail polish and blood, is placed under his other arm. The Black Widow.

Together, they haul him to his feet. Fiery pain races through him, released in a groan that echoes in his ear and his head and his chest. Legs wobble under the pressure of standing, the pain of standing and every bone aches.

Blood drips down his nose, falling to the floor with a relentless drip. He’s sure it’s his this time.

‘Home,’ he grunts and something warm ruses through the few bits of him that don’t ache when it comes out a word.

‘Dude, you need a doctor.’

‘No.’ Matt tries to push away from the strong, steady arms that want to drag him to a doctor. The grip they have on him tightens and he barely swallows his panicked whine. ‘No,’ he whispers, and it is as panicked a noise as his whine would have been.

‘Okay. Okay,’ Falcon says and he starts to move forward. On Matt’s other side, the Black Widow follows suit and he tries to match their sure steps with sure steps of his own. His traitorous legs manage only wobbling steps but maybe that’ll do. Maybe? ‘No doctors. Can Bruce look you over at the Tower?’
Scrambled thoughts manage to piece together the man with the deep thundering heartbeat and barely remembered flashes of green grass. The Hulk. ‘Okay,’ Matt manages. ‘Mask… mask stays on.’

‘Promise,’ Falcon says and the relief steals the last of Matt’s fighting power.

He loses the battle to stay conscious.

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Awareness brings with it pain and a part of Matt shies away, desperate to return to the peace and comfort of the darkness. But he’s never been one to run from pain - more one to run to pain if you ask Foggy - so he gathers his shaky thoughts and claws through the darkness.

He’s lying on a soft surface, in an unfamiliar room. Hasn’t he been here before? Only the overwhelming scent of disinfectant and echoing glass makes him sure he’s not back on Claire’s sofa.

But it’s not a hospital either; it’s lacking… lacking the cries of the injured and the scent of the dead.

Groaning, he takes inventory of his body, while reaching his hands up to check… yes, he still has his mask on. There’s a stabbing pain in his side and another in his head. Okay two stabbing pains, he finds as he tries to move. That can be dealt with. He can hear the groan and creak of old ships in his ribs but only one or two are grinding. He’s had worse. There’s no grinding anywhere else that’s moved. Silver lining.

All in all, Matt’s been closer to death than this.

He takes a deep breath and expands his focus. Room is empty but there’s a deep heartbeat just outside, there’s a taste of copper coming from the bin in the corner meaning his wounds were treated here, and he’s certain he’s never going to get the scent of disinfectant out of his nose. This must either be a regularly used first-aid room or the world’s most sanitised lab. Matt’s been in dirtier hospitals.

With no reason to continue lying around, he tries to rise. Lifting his head and shoulders causes something sharp and painful to race through him and for a moment the stale room vanishes and he is on Claire’s soft couch, her gentle hands trying to keep him still. It fades, leaving only the memory of that pain to compare to this; similar but somehow worse without the comfort of Claire’s now familiar presence.

A light swish is the only sound the door makes as the man with the deep heartbeat makes his way into the room, talking to someone who is not there, ‘...amount of blood he lost, no way he’s cons- oh.’

‘I did say, Dr Banner,’ a British man says, the speakers distorting his voice and adding a slight crackle to it. ‘Mr Daredevil is conscious and attempting to leave his bed.’

Matt ignores both voices until Banner reaches his side, placing both hands on his shoulders and trying to gently push him down. Matt groans at the flash of pain that rips through his chest and Banner’s hands are gone. Good. He continues trying to sit up and hears Banner’s sigh.

‘Steve wasn’t wrong, you really are stubborn.’

‘I try,’ Matt grits out.
'You lost a lot of blood, have at least two broken ribs and probably a concussion though I’d need to take your mask off to t-,' Matt flinches at the thought, ‘-ell and I know how you’d feel about that,’ he finishes. ‘And I’m not a doctor, not really. You should seek medical advice.’ His words are undermined by the fact he’s placed his hands on Matt’s back and is helping him sit up.

Matt smirks at him. ‘I’m fine. I’ve had worse.’

‘...You know, I think you’re not lying and that is terrifying.’ Matt manages to shift so his legs are over the side of the bed, just brushing the floor. ‘What are you doing?’

‘Leaving.’

Disbelieving silence greets Matt’s words. Used to the sound of doubt, he pushes off the bed and stumbles as the pain hits him, feeling as if he’s walked into a brick wall. His knees wobble, bucking under his weight but he manages to lock them. Focusing past the pain is hard but he’s fought with injuries worse than this; he can walk it off. Slowly it comes together and he’s left standing - on shaky limbs but standing nonetheless. He flashes a quick smirk at Banner and takes his first step.

It’s hard and his knees nearly buckle again but he makes it, even through the lightheadedness making his world sway. With a deep breath, he takes another step. And another. Another.

He’s halfway across the room before Banner seems to find his voice. ‘Okay, you really are stubborn. Probably the stubbornest hero I’ve had to marshal.’ Matt ignores him again, too focused on the glass door he’s ninety percent sure is right in front of him. ‘Are you going to walk out wearing that?’

Banner’s words cut into Matt’s mind, a crash of thunder through the clouds in his thoughts. ‘What?’

‘Your suit. It’s not exactly subtle.’

That causes Matt to turn, to give the appearance of looking at Banner. That’s important to sighted people right? ‘I wasn’t after subtle. Needed a symbol.’ He rocks a bit from the sudden spin but doesn’t stumble.

With slow measured steps, Banner moves across the room to stand before Matt. ‘Good symbol. And good suit; it kept out the worst of the damage. You’d be dead without it.’

‘I know.’ Matt turns his head, so Banner will think he’s looking away. ‘I need to leave.’

There’s a long silence before Banner hums. ‘Okay. Okay.’ Relief floods Matt as he is finally listened to. He hears the shift of muscles as Banner looks him up and down. ‘You’re about Clint’s height, I’ll grab some of his clothes. Leave the mask on until you get to the street and you should be okay.’

‘Thank you,’ Matt says softly as Banner moves past him.

He pauses in the doorway. ‘Don’t thank me yet. You’re going to have to make it past the team first, before you can leave.’

He’s gone before Matt can say that that’s not what he’s thanking him for.

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Dressed in what Banner informs him are Clint’s oldest and darkest clothes, Matt grabs the bag with his suit and stumbles his way towards the elevator. Every step is a touch easier than the last, his momentum doing as much to move him as his legs are. Sounds are bouncing off the glass along the hallway, the weird echoes this causes making his already swaying world a confusing mess of noise.

He’s almost at the elevator when a pounding heart registers at the edge of his hearing. Sniffing, Matt picks up sweat, graphite, and metal. Steve. He half turns back, reluctant to stop but aware he might have to.

‘Daredevil!’ Steve calls and Matt completes his turn with a sigh.

‘Captain.’

‘You’re awake.’ There’s a note in Steve’s voice, the same confused, disbelieving wonder that had coloured Banner’s voice their entire conversation.

‘Obviously,’ Matt snaps out, spinning back to face the elevator and patting the wall for its button. He swallows a growl when he can’t find it, realising he might be looking on the wrong side of the door for it.

Steve takes a step towards him. ‘Look, you’re swaying. Can… can you come with me? Rest for a second? We… we want to talk. Please?’

The please cuts into Matt, right at the heart of the recently blinded little boy that read about the hero of the century who’d been born more disabled than him and wanted nothing more than to be him. Even with everything Steve’s done, or allowed to happen… Matt can’t help but want to help his childhood hero.

He’s going to have to talk to the Avengers eventually. At least this way he’ll get it over with and he might keep them out of Hell’s Kitchen. ‘Okay.’

Turning back to Steve causes the walls to spin with him, his head as heavy but yet light as it is when he’s been drinking. He stumbles, the dizziness in his head somehow turning the muscles in his legs to mush.

Someone’s hands are on his arm, and he blinks as he realises he didn’t hear or feel anyone moving. Steve, his mind provides, the scent of graphite combining with the feel of strong hands holding him up. Steve who moved down the hallway in the space of a stumble. How fast is Steve?

‘Whoa, you okay?’

‘I’m fi-’

‘Uh huh,’ Steve cuts him off. ‘Come on, I’ll help.’ Steve throws the arm he’s holding over his shoulders and Matt has no choice but to rest some - all - of his weight on Steve as they walk down the hallway together.

Matt can hear the five heartbeats in the room Steve leads him to but none of them speak as he’s helped to the leather couch on the far side of the room. Banner with his deep heartbeat is sitting on one of the armchairs, while the perfumed Black Widow has the other. Stark is by the bar with a glass of whiskey in hand, Clint is perched on top of it, and Falcon is behind it, pouring himself a drink by the scent of the open bottle of vodka. Only Thor is missing but Matt’s not certain he was ever here tonight and sure anything he says will get passed along to the alien God. It’s not like the Avengers can keep anything to themselves.
‘How is he walking?’ Falcon finally says, breaking the silence. ‘He was half dead when he got here, how’s he walking?’

‘Forget walking, I wanna know his secret as to how he’s awake,’ Clint says.

‘I can hear you, you know,’ Matt snaps. ‘I’m b- I’m not deaf.’

Silence drops over the room, smothering and heavy. Matt knows everyone is staring at him, the heat of their gazes boring into him but he just holds his heavy head as high as he can and waits. He’s not going to make this easy for them.

‘You’re not deaf,’ Steve says softly, ‘but you made a bad call tonight.’

‘And that’s coming from someone who’s made a few dumbass moves in his time.’ Stark holds up his drink and toasts Matt. ‘To Daredevil folks! The man who lived up to his name and made Captain America look sensible in the process.’

Steve whirs around to face Stark as Matt bristles and tries to rise. ‘Tony!’

‘Shutting up.’

The Black Widow rises from her seat in an almost silent movement, with only the click of her heels a sign she’s moving. She pushes Matt back into his seat and takes a position on the couch beside him. He shuffles over, trying to put as much space between them as he can.

‘You went in blind,’ she says as she moves onto the arm of the couch. ‘Willingly and knowingly went in blind, in unfamiliar territory and never once asked for backup. That’s a ridiculously stupid move for a fighter and despite everything you’re not a stupid fighter.’ Matt feels his shoulders rising at the accidental insult in her words and consciously forces them down, swallowing the hiss as the movement pulls at a bruise. ‘So there was another reason you went in.’

‘Pride.’ Stark gulps down his whiskey and slams the glass on the bar bench with a bang that’s as loud as a gunshot to Matt’s senses. ‘You were too proud to ask for help and too proud to just walk away and leave a note like you’ve done be-’

‘How do you know that?’ Matt can hear the collective beat of confusion in everyone’s hearts. ‘That I leave notes for the police,’ he clarifies. ‘How do you know?’

‘J.A.R.V.I.S,’ Stark says with a wave of his hand. ‘My AI. He knows all. Looked up a few files related to you for me.’

Fire races through Matt at Stark careless disregard for the law he loves and whose spirit he defends with his blood and fists. ‘That’s illegal.’

‘Just because I choose to act outside the law doesn’t mean I condone others disregarding procedure and basic privacy laws.’

‘Says the vigilante.’ Clint’s disbelief is echoed in near silent laughs around the room.

‘You know, for an illiterate guy, you have a way with words.’ Stark’s words feel like a blow and Matt turns his head away. ‘Good redirect there though. How about we let the good Captain get back to chewing you for risking your life over your damned pride.’

‘I knew what I was doing,’ Matt lies.
Steve sighs. ‘No you didn’t. We… we found this in your pocket when we pulled you out.’ He unfolds a piece of paper and Matt can smell the blood - his blood probably - on it. ‘If you’d been able to read this you’d had know you were walking into a massive meeting of some of the highest ranking Hydra members that survived the fall of SHIELD.’

‘It says that?’

Falcon is the one to shrug. ‘Basically. A bit of reading between the li- oh. Sorry.’ He moves out from behind the bar, to lean against it instead. ‘Look man, I get it’s embarrassing as hell. But we’re not judging. And if you’d just trusted us you wouldn’t be here.’

Trusted them.

TRUSTED THEM.

‘Why?’ Matt manages through the devil roaring in his veins and squeezing at his chest. ‘Why should I have trusted you?’

‘What?’ they say, almost as a single voice.

Matt struggles to his feet and holds his head as high as it can go. He clenches his fists in the hopes it’ll hide the way his body is shaking with the effort needed to keep the devil down. ‘What reason have you given me to trust you?’

‘We could have help-’ Clint starts.

But Matt’s had enough of being talked at. Time for them to learn to listen. ‘No. My turn to talk. What reason do I have to trust you? You,’ he points at Stark, ‘treat me like I’m something broken that needs fixing. You,’ he says to the Black Widow, ‘think I’m incompetent because my skills are different to yours. None of you can manage to treat me like a person, now you’ve come to the conclusion I’m not like you. And all of you somehow think you know what’s best for me despite knowing near nothing about me.

‘So tonight, why would I have any reason to trust you? Why would I leave a note for police knowing I’d be mocked and ridiculed for it and that they wouldn’t act on it immediately because of your rumors? Why would I ask for help knowing I’d be left behind at the first sign of danger because of your beliefs? Why would I expose myself to working with you knowing you think I’m a complete idiot… a retard, because of something I cannot help?

‘Why would I trust you to listen to me tonight when you’ve not listened to me at all since you came to this conclusion?’

Matt’s voice hasn’t risen; he’s not yelling. Instead he’s been speaking with the steady but forceful voice he was trained to use in court, aware that a calm voice cuts far deeper than screamed words. But how he wishes he could scream, break the dead silence of this room with more than his measured words.

‘You don’t listen to me,’ he repeats in a near whisper. ‘So why the FUCK would I trust you,’ he roars, the devil finally crawling free and raising his voice, ‘when you can’t even manage to listen to me about my needs and my abilities.’

He collects himself, forcing the devil back into his soul. Grabbing his bag, he races for the door as fast as his still shaking legs can manage.

‘We’re trying to help buddy,’ Stark says, his voice a thunderclap in the silent room.
‘Well don’t,’ Matt snaps, not slowing his sprinting steps. ‘You’re not helping because you’re not listening to what I want and need. You’re assuming you know best and it’s even worse than if you hadn’t helped at all.’

‘But—’

To Matt’s surprise, Steve cuts Stark off before he can. ‘Stop Tony. Let him go.’

Relief floods Matt, followed by anger at the fact he’s relieved. He reaches the doorway and pauses. ‘Besides,’ he says, a bubble of amusement rising in him, ‘you’re not even addressing the right problem.’

‘What do you mean?’ The Black Widow asks in a tone as measured as Matt’s was.

‘I’m perfectly capable of reading.’ With that last grenade lobbed, Matt stumbles to the elevator.

The moment he’s on the street, he pulls out his burner phone and presses at buttons with a prayer in his throat. ‘M-Daredevil?’ Foggy says as he picks up and Matt releases the tension in his limbs with his heartfelt thanks to God. ‘What’s wrong? It’s nearly 4am!’

‘I fucked up,’ Matt whispers as he staggers to where he thinks there’s an alleyway. ‘Foggy I fucked up.’

‘Where are you?’ Foggy understands what he needs before Matt even finds the strength to voice it. I fucked up, come save me. Come be my hero.

‘Tower.’ Matt half walks, half falls into the alley, collapsing behind the dumpster. Not in it for once, go him. ‘Alley.’

‘Avenger Tower, nearby alleyway. Got it. On my way.’

‘Foggy—’

‘Yes?’ And Matt could weep in joy, he caught him before he hung up.

‘Wear a mask. I… I think they have cameras. I fucked up.’

‘That is extremely worrying buddy. Who’s they?’ Matt shakes his head, the devil that had been keeping him upright and focused has finally left and he feels like jelly, every limb sagging into the ground. He can’t make himself explain, not through the weight on his chest. ‘Okay, I get it. You’ll talk later.’

Later. Yes. Later. When Foggy is here and he’s finally safe. ‘Oh Buddy… I’m coming. I promise. Just got a taxi, I’ll be there so soon.’

Through the foggy (ha!) haze of his thoughts, Foggy is a ray of sun, whispering in Matt’s ear that he’s coming and he’ll be there soon. It’s a comforting thought, like he’s lying on his silk soft bed in the morning sun, Foggy’s snores from the bed across from his…

Okay, he might have lost track of that metaphor.

‘You don’t say Buddy,’ Foggy says. It dawns on Matt that he heard that with both ears. Instinctively he opens his eyes and swallows the panic at his dark world; still there after all these years. Then Foggy’s putting his hands on Matt’s shoulders, slipping down to grab his back. Matt mirrors the movement, clinging to Foggy as he pulls Matt to his feet with a groan from them both.
‘You’re heavier than you look.’ Matt pats at Foggy’s face in reply, relieved to feel the cloth of his old mask there. ‘Yeah, I took your advice. Get this off,’ he tugs at Matt’s cowl and shoves it in the bag still hanging off one of Matt’s shoulders, ‘and we’ll get you home.’

Home. Sounds nice.

‘Yeah it does Buddy.’

*********

For the week Matt’s forbidden by Claire to do any patrols - argued down from two and halfway to five days before Foggy stepped in - there’s no sign of any Avengers in Hell’s Kitchen. Sure it’s only a temporary thing, as they lick whatever minor wounds his words made to their conscience, Matt is careful the first night he steps out as Daredevil.

And even more careful the next. And the next.

When another week passes with no sign of an Avenger, he feels himself starting to relax. Maybe they’ve decided he’s too much of an idiot to work with? Could he dare to hope that much? As grating as it is to be considered stupid, he’ll take any excuse not to have to work with them.

Course it’s then Steve tracks him down.

*********

He finds Matt on a roof, listening to the city.

Matt hears him coming blocks away, the steady heartbeat and metallic taste too distinct to be anyone else. But while some of the memories of that night have a fuzzy haze over them, the memory of the speed with which Steve can move is not. Running is pointless, Matt might be able to out hide Steve but he doubts he can keep moving long enough to outrun him for the rest of his life. Better to get this over with now.

‘Captain,’ he says and feels Steve pause, his sigh like a roaring wind in Matt’s ears. ‘I thought I asked you to stop helping.’

‘You did.’ There’s guilt in every inch of Steve’s body; from the way he’s holding his shoulders to the soft breaths he’s taking. ‘And I’m sorry I’m ignoring your wishes. I just… I have something to say and then I’ll go.’

Matt turns to face him, an eyebrow raised. ‘Say it then.’

‘We’re sorry. ...I’m sorry.’

‘Is that it?’ Matt manages to say over the hammering of his heart.

Steve’s heart is hammering away too, almost sounding like a band of drums by itself. ‘I know. It’s just words. And we all realise we fucked up.’ Matt huffs in disbelief. ‘We do. I… I remember what it’s like to be ignored. To not be listened to… I remember being in your place and I’m disgusted at myself for forgetting.

‘And I just want to say… I’m listening now. What do you need?’

Matt tilts his head, hearing no lie in Steve’s voice nor sensing no lie in his body. He’s telling the truth. Which is… interesting.
Maybe Matt can work with this.

‘Nothing,’ Matt says and he senses Steve’s nod. ‘I need nothing from you. Right now there’s nothing you can do for me I can’t do myself and I don’t trust you to help me beyond that.’

‘Okay,’ Steve says and there’s no fight in his voice. ‘If that changes, let us know.’

‘I have Clint’s number. Unless I call, stay out of my city.’

With a final nod, Steve walks away leaving Matt to follow his heartbeat out of Hell’s Kitchen. He doesn’t look back, he doesn’t make a call and he goes straight for the boundary of the city.

In short he obeys both the letter and the spirit of Matt’s request.

If they all do, Matt can definitely work with this. Work with them.

Time will tell.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Okay folks, I meant to have this up before season two dropped but I didn't quite make it. Either way, here it is, the (very long) epilogue. Very long.

Same warning as the last chapter; I'm still an able bodied person and while I've tried to be respectful, I might screw up.

But as this is the comfort almost, to the hurt of the last chapter, most of the ableism has gone - though some has stayed because we're all ableist arseholes sometimes.

Ringing silence reigns in the room as Daredevil storms out, his last words a late gunshot after a volley of gunfire. Clint can see how everyone’s chests are heaving, as the force of Daredevil’s words… no, the power of Daredevil’s anguished voice, leaves everyone breathless. And sitting in Clint’s mind are flashes; the split second of blind panic on Daredevil’s face when asked to read a screen, him staring at a wall as they fought over him in that debriefing, silent as the grave...

A figure in red seemingly about to be held up by a bloody hand around his throat, his arms loose and unmoving by his side, and his knees already starting a fall towards the ground as Clint’s arrow leaves his bow.

‘What the hell does he mean he’s perfectly capable of reading?’ Tony’s voice is a whipcrack through the silence; loud and making everyone unprepared for it flinch. ‘Seriously, what the hell?’

‘Of the things he said,’ Clint finds himself saying, his voice soft but a cutting edge that has Nat giving her equivalent of a wide eyed look, ‘that’s what you’re focusing on?’

Tony blinks at Clint, his jaw creeping towards the ground. ‘What do you mean? Out of everything he said that was th-’

‘It was our fault,’ Bruce interrupts, causing everyone’s attention to snap to him. ‘Daredevil’s injuries. They were our fault. That’s what you should have taken from what he said.’

‘How’d you figure that?’ For all Tony’s arrogance, there’s a note of confusion in his voice. ‘It’s not our fault he made a stupid choice.’

‘It is our fault he was in a position to make that choice in the first place,’ Bruce snaps, and Clint takes an instinctive, sharp breath, dropping down from his perch on the bar so he can move back. Like a wave, his movement spreads through the room as everyone backs a step away from Bruce; standard practice in the risk of a Hulk event. Bruce insists.

But he seems to have it under control, not even a hint of green in his face or body. He just stares at Tony for a long moment, then turns on his heel and storms out much like Daredevil did not minutes earlier.

Maybe not so under control after all.

Steve sighs, his body sagging as he collapses back onto the couch. ‘We fucked up,’ he says in a
voice that should be a whisper but it carries in the silent room.

‘Well, we might have made some unfortunate assumptions.’ Tony says.

‘We. Fucked. Up,’ Steve says in his confident, frozen Captain America voice. He’s pissed. ‘We fucked up and to not admit to it is as bad as what we did in the first place.’

‘Steve-’

‘Do you know what it’s like to be ignored?’ Steve asks in a quiet voice, quieter than Clint’s ever heard, that seems to echo in the room. ‘Do you know what it’s like to have your worth as a person, as a human, judged not by what you can do but by what you can’t? Have you ever had anyone, subtly or overtly, tell you your skills and abilities are worth less because you’re not capable of doing what everyone else is doing?’

There’s a tension in the room, everyone holding their breaths at the depth of emotion, of empathy and pain in Steve’s voice. ‘I do. And… and I forgot. I let you make assumptions… I made assumptions myself, and that caused a good man, an ally… it caused Daredevil to experience what I swore I’d use my new body to exterminate. So yeah. We fucked up. I fucked up and we’re going to make sure it never happens again. We’re going to make sure he gets what we denied him.’

‘What was that?’ Nat asks, her voice softer than anything Clint’s ever heard from her.

‘Respect. Respect for him, with no changes and no denials; no matter how hard we find it. Maybe then, we’ll actually be the heroes we all claim to be.’

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Steve’s speech - dramatic, yet to the point - knocks any fight out of Tony… of all of them. They drift to their floors to think, to remember…

To wait.

Clint takes his aids out, fiddling with them as he sits on his bed and thinks. This is all his fault…

‘Seriously though, what did you say to Daredevil Cap? He took off like a bat outa hell.’

‘You’re not funny Barton.’

‘I’m hilarious Stark.’

‘I think he was embarrassed about being nervous of the bomb and misreading the timer.’

‘Geez, Daredevil seems to have bad luck with written things…’

Words have power, Clint knows that. Voices and sounds can make people do and think so much and for a lot of his life, he never quite got that. Spoken words are sometimes denied to him, even if he can work around the problem. The written word is and always been a sanctuary for him. But what does it mean to have that sanctuary and yet seemingly not be able to access it?

He made the assumption Daredevil has issues with the written word. They made the collective assumption this was because he was illiterate. But he’s not, he’s said so. Which leaves only one option…

Clint’s not the only ‘superhero’ with a disability out there.
And he’s the reason the other person is suffering.

If he hadn’t first put voice to an assumption, would it have lead to a theory? If he’d not helped find evidence, would they have called it a conclusion? If he’d spoken up a little louder, would Tony have been as obsessed with ‘fixing’ the ‘problem’?

If he’d been decent and stopped, just for a moment, to think, would he have realised he’s not the only disabled superhero around in time to spare Daredevil from the cruelties of the ignorant?

His hearing aids have no answers and turning them over and over in his hands only makes them warm.

********

Daredevil made it clear the moment he stormed out despite being barely able to walk, what he thinks of the Avengers. Clint doesn’t blame him at all; even he screwed up, presuming to speak for the man despite knowing basically nothing about his needs. Just because Clint’s deaf, doesn’t mean he has the right to speak for anyone else. He might not have been as ableist as the others but he did still screw up.

Leaving Daredevil alone until he’s ready to talk is the hardest thing Clint’s ever going to do. But he’ll do it, because it’s been made clear any other action is not helping.

So walking into the common room the morning after Daredevil’s dramatic exit, Clint feels something hot and heavy running through his veins at the sight of what Tony has on the screens.

‘What are you doing?’ He asks, in a voice he usually reserves for dangerous and insane marks.

Tony barely glances at him, caught up as he is in the many images on the various screens that make up their ridiculous and somewhat over the top home entertainment system. ‘Security camera footage. Cellphone photos. Artist renderings.’

‘Daredevil,’ Clint sums up, examining a photo of Daredevil in his old black suit, clearly taken from a dodgy security camera.

‘Daredevil,’ Tony confirms. ‘He said he can read but somehow he can still figh-’

‘You’re an idiot,’ Clint says with a growl and Tony turns to look at him outraged. ‘Firstly, you’re doing exactly what he called you out for last night and invading his privacy illegally.’

‘He’s a vigilante, that’s not exactly a position he can argue legalities from.’

Clint swipes the picture he’s examining away, pulling up one of the ‘Information Wanted’ posters that occasionally pop up, asking to bring in Daredevil. ‘Are you going to turn him in? Because that’s the only vaguely justifiable reason for you to break the law in pursuit of his identity.’

‘I don’t want to know who he is,’ Tony lies, his eyes giving the deception away. ‘I just want to know how he does his job.’

Wait, how he fights? ‘Like I do?’ Clint says, confused. He buries the slight pain in his heart, not letting a flicker of it into his voice. He’s not going to be hurt by Tony assuming disabled heroes need something extra to do their jobs, even when the problem doesn’t affect their work.

Tony blinks and gives Clint a perplexed look. ‘What do you mean like you do? You can read, you’ve never put your life in danger for pride. You’r-’
‘Disabled. Like he is. Did you miss that point last night?’ Clint can’t keep the note of complete disbelief out of his voice. He knows that sometimes Tony can be oblivious to things, can overlook the obvious when making enormous leaps of genius, but this has to take the cake. He’s looking for something that doesn’t exist in order to solve the wrong problem.

‘Wait what? Disabled? But he’s nearly a superhe-’

Disgust sinks into Clint’s stomach and he turns with all the speed and grace his years of training can give him. ‘If you think you can’t have a disabled superhero Tony, you’re not the man I thought you were, deep down.’

Behind him, he can almost hear the sound of Tony’s brain whirring away, processing what must have been a bombshell to it, but Clint can’t find it in himself to care.

He walks into Steve on the way to his room, a collision only minor because of Steve’s reflexes. ‘Clint? You okay?’ Clint raises an eyebrow at him and he smiles. ‘Okay, bad question. What’s up?’

‘Stark. He ah, missed the implications of last night’s little talk with our resident vigilante.’ Steve’s face drops and a hard glint comes into his eyes. ‘He’s looking over footage, trying to figure out how someone could both be able to read and not able to read; but also how they could fight in spite of it.’ He laughs, a dead and unamused sound. ‘I also think he’s trying to track Daredevil down.’

The glint is now a glare. ‘I’ll talk with him. I’ve already talked with Thor this morning though he at least seems to realise we screwed up.’

Clint bites his lip then adds, ‘I think we should talk to Daredevil… make sure he realises we got it, what he said last night. And… and that we’re going to change.’

Steve turns that hard glare onto Clint and for a moment he fights the urge to fidget under the patriotic glare of Captain America. Then his eyes lower and he nods. ‘Yes, we should. I know he’ll not want to see us but…’

‘But we need to talk to him.’ Clint considers it then swallows. ‘You go.’ At Steve’s raised eyebrow he elaborates, ‘You’re faster and I doubt he’s going to be in the ‘come and chat’ mood. No way can I catch him in Hell’s Kitchen, but you might have a shot.’

To Clint’s relief, Steve gives him a careful nod. He manages to keep his shoulders raised and not sagging in delighted relief at the realisation he doesn’t have to face Daredevil.

Face what he did.

********

It takes Steve nearly three weeks to track Daredevil down.

The first week is the worst, with no sightings of the horned vigilante leading Clint to internally panic about having killed the man. Only once he starts surfacing in the second week does this panic dissipate. It’s probably the first time in Clint’s life hearing about violent beatings and terrified crooks is a good thing.

Okay, the terrified crooks are always a good thing. Violent beatings, not so much.

Steve comes in the ninth night, practically marching with the resolve in steadiness of his shoulders and measured steps. Somehow it’s a signal to the team, with everyone assembling in the common room - the very same one Daredevil had chewed them out in.
'You found the hornhead?' Tony asks, his eyes tight as he ignores everyone’s stares.

'Yes. He had a message for us, about what he wants.'

'Finally! Give it to us.'

'Leave him alone.' Steve’s words are like a lightning bolt into the room, everyone pausing and holding their breath as they wait for the thunder. ‘He needs nothing from us, so we’re to stay out of Hell’s Kitchen unless he calls.’

It’s silent for a long moment, two. Then the thunder comes, in the form of Tony speaking. ‘So wait, what if we have business in Hell’s Kitchen? Do I have to avoid that whole ten blocks on my commute or is that a free pass?’

'He means,’ Nat says, her words precise and bitten off, ‘that he wants the Avengers to stay out of Hell’s Kitchen. Tony Stark can go as he pleases; Iron Man is not welcome.’

Tony opens his mouth to speak but Thor beats him to it, his booming voice one no one could speak over. ‘It is a difficult request to honour, to ignore a shield brother we have caused such pain to but it is his request?’ Steve nods and Thor returns it. ‘Then it would be a dishonour if we were to ignore his desire. What form shall the call take?’

‘Clint’s phone,’ Steve says.

‘Ah, the cellular devices. Reasonable.’

With that, Thor walks out. It’s clear he sees the issue as simple and solved. Until Daredevil calls, leave him alone. Easy.

Clint just hopes it is.

********

It’s not easy.

It’s not about not being able to follow Steve’s orders - Daredevil’s really, just passed to them by Steve - and staying out of Hell’s Kitchen. Staying away from Daredevil. It’s about the personalities they have, and how they deal with problems. Namely that waiting to confront one is not a solution any Avenger would think of.

Clint’s never been one to think much on his decisions or actions, much to his teammates’ displeasure. Given a choice, Clint would rather act than choose to wait.

An odd mindset for a marksman and a sniper but Clint’s never claimed to be ‘normal’.

And he’s not alone. None of the Avengers are the type to run from a problem; if they were they probably wouldn’t be here. Bruce runs to protect people from himself, taking the problem with him to solve alone; Tony will seem to ignore the problem until either he has a solution or it’s no longer a problem; Steve and Thor have never heard of this ‘running’ you speak of; Sam does everything Steve does but slower; and Nat… well Nat causes problems or solves them, she doesn’t run.

Clint, he’s just too dumb to run and too impulsive to think of it anyway..

But Clint knows this time confronting the problem isn’t going to help unless they confront the right one. And right now, Daredevil - he has no right to call him Mike, not anymore - has made it clear
it’s all of them.

Well, that’s what Clint thinks until he gets the call a month after Daredevil’s demands.

********

Clint doesn’t check the caller ID before answering, aware the only people with his number are his teammates who are all here, as far as he knows. ‘You know I’m in the kitchen right? Just ask J.A.R.V.I.S where I am, I’m sure he knows.’

Nothing but silence greets him, so complete that Clint finds himself checking that yes he has his aids in and yes there’s a call, he’s not ima- Oh.

The caller ID reads Daredevil. ‘Daredevil? You there?’

‘Ah, yes. I am. Guessing from that you’re not busy then?’

Confused delight spreads through Clint, a warmness that has him smiling. ‘Not overly, no. Just debating if stealing Tony or Nat’s food will be more amusing.’ Both are notoriously territorial over their food and likely to kill Clint for stealing it. Well, Nat is. Hmm, maybe better to steal Tony’s then; less risk of bloody death. ‘What do you need?’

‘I have… I got word,’ he says, frustration clear in every syllable, ‘of a shipment into Hell’s Kitchen. Old weapons and technology, stolen during the fall of SHIELD.’ Something cold races through Clint’s veins at the thought of half of the things SHIELD had in their armoury loose on the streets of Hell’s Kitchen. ‘I interrupted it,’ Daredevil continues and there’s an amused note in his voice at the understatement, ‘but now I have containers of items I cannot leave but there’s too much for me to take.’

‘What do you need then?’

A long pause then, ‘Someone… someone trustworthy to help me destroy as much of this as I can without risking lives.’

Clint has to grin. ‘You want me to come destroy shit? Hell yeah! Where am I going?’ He can’t keep the delight out of his voice and doesn’t try to. This, this is definitely his thing.

Daredevil rattles off an address, right in the centre of Hell’s Kitchen. Which tempers Clint’s delight… quite a lot actually. Some of the SHIELD tech is dangerous and prone to blowing up; SHIELD always kept their weapons secured. And now it’s sitting in the middle of an urban population, guarded only by a guardian devil.

‘I’m there. Don’t move anything if you can.’ Clint pauses then adds, ‘It’ll just be me, un-’

‘That’s all I want.’

‘Then that’s all you’ll get.’

********

Daredevil’s left the door to the apartment - one of maybe ten in the building, one of the nicer and definitely not abandoned ones around - ajar. Clint slips in, having made it to Hell’s Kitchen in record time.

‘Took you long enough,’ Daredevil says, his back to the door as he runs a careful hand over one of
the many boxes crowding the apartment. It’s a nice place; bare of any furniture in order to have space for all the boxes. So many boxes. Clint didn’t think SHIELD had this much tech lying around to be stolen honestly.

‘Well, you know traffic this time of night,’ Clint quips back. ‘And you’d have looked a right idiot if that wasn’t me.’

Daredevil cocks his head, giving Clint the distinction impression he’s smiling. ‘Knew it was you.’

‘Bullshit,’ Clint jokes as he kneels down beside Daredevil. ‘What have we got?’

‘This crate is guns, I think,’ Daredevil says as he stands. ‘Most of them are. Those I can deal with myself, or leave for the police.’

‘Lead me to what you need my help with. That’s why I’m here. To help.’ Clint straightens too, reading over the labels on random boxes. He pauses, noting a pale blue label on a black background. Why does that look familiar?

‘Clint?’

‘What’s that one, labeled lab parts?’ Daredevil shifts to stand beside it and together they get it onto the floor and open. Clint hisses in anger at the sight of glass vials, sitting innocently and wrapped only in bubble wrap.

Daredevil cocks his head. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘Biological samples. In bubble wrap. Are they nuts?’ Clint can’t help the anger racing through him leaking into his voice. Oh God this has suddenly become a thousand times worse. As far as he can see none of the vials have been broken, but that’s only what he can visually confirm; the sheer amount of bubble wrap is distorting everything to the point where he can barely tell that the liquid in the vials is a deep, dark red. He’s going to end up in a decontamination shower, he knows it. Or worse.

‘Wouldn’t they be dead without refrigeration?’ Surprise races through Clint at Daredevil’s insightful comment, followed quickly by shame at his surprise.

‘Not if they’ve been engineered to not need it. Which-’ Clint trails off, shame choking at his words.

‘Which SHIELD did,’ Daredevil finishes. ‘Get them out of my city,’ he growls.

Clint nods. ‘I’ll call… I’ll call the FBI; the CDC. Everyone. Your choice if you stay or go…’ If these have been opened we’re both dead, he thinks but doesn’t say.

Somehow Daredevil knows what he’s thinking. ‘They’re not broken.’

‘What?’

‘The vials. None of them are broken. And this is the only box in here that doesn’t hold some form of weapon.’

Blinking in confusion, Clint turns to stare at him. ‘How can you tell?’ he asks in a mild but confused voice. A second later he realises he just doubted Daredevil and his heart picks up in fear and disgust.

To his surprise, Daredevil just smiles. ‘I can tell. I’ll… I’ll leave. Get myself decontaminated.’ He
bites his lip, looking uncertain, then rises.

He’s halfway out the door before Clint can get an answer to his lips. ‘You have a decontamination shower?’ he manages to say and that gets Daredevil to pause.

‘No, but I’ll do my best anyway.’

*********

It’s five in the morning, a mere half hour from sunrise before Clint manages to escape the clutches of the CDC. Daredevil’s claim proves to be true; none of the other crates have biological samples and none of the ones they do have have broken. They’re also, on a second examination, blood samples not viruses. Still dangerous but not as dangerous as first thought.

Clint manages to avoid a decontamination shower.

Pleased with his luck and skills, he decides to take the short way back to the Tower, racing along the roofs of Hell’s Kitchen. It’s been too long since he used his Parkour skills and he’s starting to see why this is Daredevil’s prefered method of transport. The roofs here are a lot more fun to play on than the ones near the Tower - and with less grumpy rich people.

Two blocks from the building he spots a figure in black, hiding from the rising sun in the last shadows of the night. He finds himself stopping even before it fully registers in his mind, slowing his movements so he stops on that roof.

‘Daredevil?’ He asks and the figure half steps out of the shadows. It’s enough for him to see it is Daredevil, wearing his old ‘Devil of Hell’s Kitchen’ get up. ‘Gone back to the old days?’

‘Figured I didn’t need my suit right now. I’m not expecting a fight.’ His voice is soft and nowhere as deep as usual. ‘You’re alright?’ There’s also a note of amusement in his question, as if-

Clint groans. ‘You knew it was blood not viruses, didn’t you?’

Daredevil shrugs but his lips twitch. Asshole is seconds from smiling, Clint can tell.. ‘I had an inkling.’

‘I was worried.’

‘I know.’

‘This is revenge, isn’t it?’

It’s the wrong thing to say. Daredevil’s shoulders stiffen, his head tilts up and his breathing picks up. ‘Revenge?’

‘For fucking up,’ Clint says. ‘Because I seriously fucked up and you’re welcome to as much revenge as you want because I deserve it.’

Daredevil’s head tilts, his shoulders dropping slightly. ‘You know what you did wrong.’

It’s not a question but Clint answers anyway. ‘Yes. I know. I might… I might not have done what the others did but I spoke for you and I fucked up.’ He gathers all his courage into a deep breath and whispers, ‘I’m sorry.’

‘Okay.’
He turns on his heels and walks directly towards the rising sun. Clint tries to follow his path but the sun bites at his vision and he throws up an arm to shield himself. By the time he gets his arm into a position where he can see what’s happening and still have shade, Daredevil is gone.

Thus starts a somewhat unusual period of Clint’s life.

Well almost as unusual as the period of his life where he’s the deaf, ex-carnie on a team of superheroes who regularly save the world. Though since he is still that life period, does this count as being a part of that period of his life?

Okay, metaphor got away from him there. Anyway, things get odd. Daredevil - ‘call me Mike, Clint, I said that was fine.’ - doesn’t call a lot but he does call. Most of the calls boil down to: ‘I’m about to go beat someone up who’s bigger than me and my people worry. Wanna come beat them up with me so my people will worry less?’

Clint’s not one to say no to beating people up in the name of justice. It’s a hell of a lot better than killing them, and he’s done his fair share of that; sometimes for the wrong people (SHIELD is now the wrong people, and it hurts more than anything so Clint ignores it). No one comments on his bi-weekly or monthly disappearance act, but Clint’s not dumb enough to think it goes unnoticed.

He doesn’t care though. He’s too busy hanging with D- Mike, who turns out to both have a wicked sense of humour and possibly be a complete dork.

Clint’s never felt so delighted to be making a friend. Even when it leads to situations like this.

‘You alive down there?’ Mike asks, amusement in his voice as he peeks over the lip of the dumpster to look down at Clint.

‘Laugh all you want, I’m where I meant to be.’ Struggling to sit up, Clint takes the hand offered to him. ‘Better in the garbage than a pancake on the ground.’ With a groan, Mike hauls him out of the dumpster and they stumble to the ground.

‘Man, I’m glad we’re alone right now.’ Looking around, Clint realises he’s not actually sure that’s right. ‘We are alone right now, right?’

Mike lowers his head for a second, a moment Clint’s seen a thousand times before then nods. ‘We’re alone.’ He tilts his head then adds, ‘Well except for the assholes you let sneak up on yo-’

‘I did not let them sneak up on me!’

‘Then why’d they push you off the roof?’

Clint sniffs, outraged. ‘I wasn’t pushed, I jumped. Be-’

‘Yeah, I know. A piece of garbage than alleyway pancake.’

Smirking, Clint goes to throw an arm over Mike’s shoulder but the man dodges away in a smooth and rapid motion. ‘Oh no. Your garbage self stays over there.’ Smirking even more, Clint takes another step towards him.

Mike’s halfway up the fire escape in the next breath, Clint right on his heels. It turns into a game of chase that Mike easily wins, vanishing into the darkness of Hell’s Kitchen.
Defeated, Clint takes a seat on the edge of a roof and starts talking. He knows Mike’s not far off but he’s beginning to think Mike’s hearing is such that he’d hear him even if he wasn’t close.

Clint’s vaguely envious. ‘So I’ve been thinking a bit recently - don’t laugh, I know you’re laughing. Don’t need to see you to know you’re laughing. Anyway, I’ve been thinking that, if you want and I understand if you don’t, but maybe you should meet Thor. I know you’re still mad at them and they deserve it - I do too - but Thor’s a golden retriever in human form and he… he doesn’t judge.’

‘Mostly because I don’t think Asgard has some of our world’s hangups about abilities and disabilities for warriors - what he calls us, not my word - but it’s kinda refreshing anyway.’

‘Bring him,’ Mike says, and Clint jumps. Mike’s there though, grabbing his shoulders and stopping him making a second roof jump tonight.

Heart pounding with his near escape, Clint smiles up at him. ‘Thanks.’

‘Welcome. Bring him,’ Mike repeats. ‘I’ll meet him.’

He’s gone in the next second, sprinting across the next roof. Clint doesn’t chase him this time.

********

Thor takes one look at Mike and beams. ‘Ah, you are the warrior Daredevil! I have heard your skill in battle is matched only by your skill with words!’

Though the mask hides his eyes from view, Clint gets the impression Mike is blinking in confusion. ‘Ah. Thanks?’

‘You have no need to thank me, I speak only what has been spoken to me. Now, are we to find a glorious battle in this Kitchen of Hel’s or pass our night in the glorious exploit of ‘Parkour’.’

Clint bites his lip to try and help swallow the laugh bubbling up his throat. Sometimes he could swear Thor plays up the ‘alien from a warrior culture’ just for the reaction he gets. But then sometimes he seems genuine and Clint starts to doubt himself.

Mike seems thrown. ‘Ah, battle? Though you’re not exactly subtle-’

‘Says the man wearing horns.’

‘It’s a symbol,’ Mike snaps, a smile on his face at the familiar argument. ‘And Thor, call me Mike?’ He starts to run for the next roof. Without prompting, Clint follows.

‘Michael. You honour me with your name.’ Thor’s thunderous steps follow them and Clint steps aside so he can pass and Clint can see what happens next.

It’s not what he expects.

Mike stumbles, his usual grace disappearing at the sound of his full name in Thor’s booming voice. He’s fortunate that he’s still a few feet from the edge of the roof, but it’s still the most thrown Clint’s ever seen him - well, since that night.

‘Mike,’ he corrects, turning to face the confused Thor.

‘Michael, yes.’
Frustration appears in Mike’s voice. ‘No, Mike. Please listen to me.’

‘...I have dishonoured your wishes. My most sincere and deepest of apologies… Mike.’

Mike’s shoulders drop and his chest heaves; he seems relieved. ‘Okay.’

‘Why not Michael? If I can ask?’ Clint asks, drawing Mike’s attention.

He shrugs. ‘It’s… it’s a loaded name for me. I’d prefer not to answer to it.’

‘But it’s not your actual name.’

Mike smirks. ‘Not even close,’ and Clint… Clint somehow gets the feeling he’s lying.

‘Come on then,’ Mike says, ‘if I’m to find you a glorious battle.’

The sight of the three of them ends up scaring off every criminal they come across, often before they’re even in speaking distance. Finally a laughing Mike sends Clint for what he calls ‘decent pizza’ which they eat on the edge of a building that Mike says no one’ll care they’re on.

It’s a good night.

********

Pizza nights with Thor become a weekly ritual when possible - Thor won’t let it be anything less. Mike jokes that he appreciates the break as every criminal in the city seems to disappear into their bolt holes the moment Thor enters Hell’s Kitchen. No one wants to face an annoyed thunder God - even if Mike and Thor sometimes end up arguing about religion.

It turns out that Mike is a devout Catholic. How the fuck that works, Clint’ll never know but it leads to some interesting conversations. Whatever issues Mike has with written words, it’s clearly not stopping him reading a variety of things - he has a fondness for twentieth century political figures, especially this one judge - that he loves to quote when arguing. Completely lost on Thor, who’s still working his way through Disney movies, but making Clint more and more sure the Avengers did Mike a huge disservice when they made the ridiculous leap from ‘has issues reading screens and words’ to ‘illiterate’.

More than a disservice, they were ableist assholes.

It’s heavy thinking and Clint’s starting to make his peace with the fact that Mike’s probably never going to trust them ever again.

And that’s fine.

*******

‘Mike! Thought we agreed pizza night tomorrow?’

There’s a dazed silence on the other end of the line, one so similar to the first call that Clint’s already reaching to check his aids are in. ‘Clint?’

‘Mike. What’s wrong?’

‘I...I think I need a doctor,’ Clint can barely hear him and he’s not sure if that’s his hearing or because Mike’s actually that silent. ‘I’m... I need a doctor.’
Clint’s already moving through the Tower, headed for the labs. ‘Thought you said you had someone to patch you up.’

‘Did. Gone.’

‘Gone?’ Clint’s veins must be full of ice, judging by the cold racing through him.

‘Family. Out of town.’

Relief floods Clint, so strong it makes his legs wobble for a moment. ‘Okay Mike. Would you like Bruce to come?’

A considering silence fills the line. If he says no, Clint’s going to go himself because Mike sounds awful and he’s asking for help. That never happens. ‘Okay.’

Clint’s knees couldn’t hold a feather right now, let alone him. At least not by the way they’re wobbling, almost making him too weak to stand. He staggers into the lab, where Bruce looks up from an experiment.

‘Clint? What’s—’

He holds out the phone. ‘Daredevil. He needs a doctor, wants you.’

Bruce takes the phone without pausing. ‘You know I’m not a licenced practitioner, right?’ His face spasms as Mike speaks. ‘Okay, I can be there in fifteen minutes. Your friend’s conscious? Okay, keep doing that and make sure you don’t neglect your own injuries - yes, I can tell you’re injured too. I know your type.’ He hangs up and passes the phone to Clint.

‘You’re going?’

‘Alone,’ Bruce says, a hint of the Hulk’s growl in his voice.

Clint holds his hands up. ‘Hey, not arguing that. I’ll be distraction, you go save our Devil.’

********

It turns out Bruce didn’t really need Clint to play distraction as later, after hearing about the call, Tony tries and fails to track Bruce on various hacked cameras. He’s a ghost though, disappearing almost as quickly as Mike can and his stubborn refusal to even reveal the address he went to, let alone the injuries Mike had means Tony gets absolutely no new information for his search.

Neither does Clint, but he can’t be assed to care. If Mike wants to tell him, he will. Something he tells Mike, three pizza nights later, when asked if he’ll be dropping in unannounced at Mike’s place of work.

‘That would mean I knew where you worked,’ Clint says through a mouth full of the best pizza he’s ever had.

‘But if you know where I live, surely you can figure out where I work?’

‘Don’t,’ Clint grunts, annoyed at having to give attention to this talking thing when pizza. Beside him, Thor is happily hacking his way through his third pizza, charged straight to Tony Stark’s credit card. Clint wonders if he even notices the weekly charges.

Mike stops. ‘You don’t?’
Clint swallows his pizza and resists the urge to eat more before he’s said his bit. ‘Nope. Bruce won’t tell anyone anything. We’ve not even got confirmation you live in Hell’s Kitchen as Bruce lost any camera trails Tony threw at him within a block of the Tower. He’s good.’

‘Did you want to know?’

With a shrug, Clint steals the last slice of pepperoni from Mike’s box. ‘Don’t care. If you wanna tell me, you will but until then, I’m happy so long as you keep finding pizza like this, sweet baby Jesus.’

‘Blasphemy,’ Mike mocks but there’s more delight in his voice than their usual joke could ever generate.

‘I’m a heathen,’ Clint agrees through another mouth full of pizza.

‘Your manners certainly are.’ He pauses then adds, ‘If Dr Banner wants to come into the city, I’m not going to chase him out.’

Clint pauses. ‘Want me to pass on the message?’

‘If you could.’

A part of Clint really wants to know what happened that night, to make Mike so accepting but he’s also certain asking will get him nowhere. ‘I’ll invite him to pizza night.’

‘Only if your manners improve; you’re not fit for civilised company.’

‘And what’s Thor then?’ Clint roars, slapping the Norse God on the shoulder.

Thor looks at Mike over Clint’s head. Then they both look at Clint and say, ‘Uncivilised company.’

Clint’s laughter startles a flock of sleeping pigeons into a nighttime flight.

********

The only downside to Mike removing his restriction on Bruce, is the effect it has on Steve. Of all of them, he’s the one person who seems to be taking what happened as more than the personal failure it was. To him, it’s not just a personal failure but a sign that perhaps he’s allowed the power of his transformation to go to his head.

He’s been moping around the Tower. It’s kinda awful.

‘Seriously awful.’

Mike ducks under the punch of the mugger he’s fighting and kicks his legs out from under him. Another punch delivered to the face, and the mugger is out for the count. ‘And [I? bye?] care?’ he calls up to Clint, tilting his head to make his lips visible. Clint, perched on the side of the building above Mike so he can watch for cops, is grateful. Tony’s repairing upgrading his aids tonight which is good for tomorrow but bad for right now. At least his skills in lipreading are still (mostly) intact.

‘Oh you shouldn’t,’ Clint calls back, sure his voice is near silent. It doesn’t seem to matter to Mike, who’s responding no matter how loud Clint tries to pitch his voice, so he’s been speaking faintly to avoid accidental yelling. ‘Just saying. I never realised a grown man could be so guilty.’
You’d think he was Tony not Steve, in terms of what he thinks he did.’

That gets a heaving chest that’s probably Mike laughing as he climbs up to Clint’s level. ‘Police’ll?? [be bee?] here [in] a minute. Sirens,’ he adds, after Clint’s bemused look. ‘Okay [maybe?] five minutes. [They’re? There? Their?] not hurrying so [we?? we’ll?] have time [to?] escape.’

‘Nice of ‘em,’ Clint mutters as he follows Mike over the roofs.

Mike doesn’t reply until they’re seated on a different roof - the same one they had their first and honestly the majority of their pizza parties on. Clint’s sure it’s near Mike’s home but hasn’t bothered to ask. ‘Some of [them?] like [me? be?],’ he says from his seat on the edge of the roof, sitting sideward so he’s facing Clint. ‘A [few? ewe? you?] less since your rumours, but some.’

Clint doesn’t manage to hide his flinch at the reminder of what they did. ‘If I said sorry again would it be annoying or what you want to hear?’

‘Bit of both,’ Mike admits, his lips quirking upwards. ‘But [by? bye?] all means, feel [free? tree?] to apologise endlessly.’

‘If I wanted to do that, I’d get Steve in here. He’s the one feeling a world of guilt right now.’

‘Are [you? ewe?] trying to [guilt maybe?] trip me?’ Mike asks, his shoulders hunching forward and his nostrils flaring.

‘Shit. No. No, no, no. I’m going to shut up now.’ Clint waves his arms round and isn’t surprised when he starts to signs what he’s saying. Mike’s already mentioned he can’t seem to get the hang of sign, apologies in every part of his body, so Clint barely cares that Mike doesn’t even look at the gestures.

‘Good.’ There’s a long pause that leaves Clint fidgeting on his ledge while Mike taps his fingers on the knee of the leg dangling over the edge. ‘[How’s?] Steve’s Parkour?’

A smile starts to creep across Clint’s face. ‘Pretty good for a ninety year old.’

‘We’re better [though? bow?] [?]’

‘ Loads.’

‘Better bring him to check then.’

********

The first thing Steve does when they’re on the same roof, two days later, is march up to Mike and say, ‘I’m sorry. We-’

‘Don’t apologise for your teammates Captain,’ Mike snaps, cutting Steve off. ‘If they’re not willing to say it, they don’t get you to say it for them.’

Steve looks down, nodding. ‘I am still deeply regretful of my actions.’

‘Good.’ Mike walks towards the edge of the roof, keeping his back to Steve. ‘One day I might trust you mean that.’

With that, he takes a few steps back then charges at the edge of the roof, jumping moments before he runs out of space. Landing on the next building with a neat somersault, he’s on his feet in a
graceful move that always makes Clint envious.

‘Come on then Steve,’ Mike calls and Steve stands taller, his eyes brightening. ‘show us what you’re made of!’

*********

Parkour with Steve only happens once in a blue moon, when Mike’s feeling a bit playful and Steve’s available to do it. Steve loves every moment of it, often saying various versions of: ‘This is like the assault courses we had to do in training! With less mud.’ and somehow not sounding like a grumpy old man when he says it.

Sam comes along once, at Mike’s request. He goes to copy Steve’s apology but Mike cuts him off before he starts.

‘I told Steve, and I’ll tell you. Your words are meaningless and you have to stop taking the blame for your teammates.’

Holding up his hands, Sam says, ‘Hey, I’ve said before, I do what he does just slower, apologies included.’ He lowers his hands slowly with a sigh, ‘And I do need to majorly apologise. I’ve been trained to deal with this stuff, to realise when I’m being ableist. Shouldn’t have left my training at the door when I got involved with this mob.’

Mike eyes him, as if examining his insides. Clint’s not a hundred percent sure, but he thinks whatever disability Mike has, it’s something to do with his vision. Little things, like his occasional failure to track movement with his eyes, and the way he rarely seems to react to facial expressions, combine with the almost opaque eye coverings, to form this conclusion. He’s not going to voice it aloud; he’s already made that mistake and isn’t going to repeat it. Clint tries to avoid repeating mistakes.

Course, Clint could be wrong and it’s something completely different. Doesn’t matter, he’s not going to change his behaviour either way. Been there, fucked that up spectacularly.

Anyway, Mike finally stops eyeing off Sam, for whatever amount of eyeing he’s capable of. ‘Feel free to come into the Kitchen then,’ he says. ‘There’s a bunch of homeless Vets that hang out round 53rd and 10th, since no one wants to own the Fisk building that brought him down. Our local VA counselor doesn’t give a shit; maybe you’ll do better.’

‘I’ll certainly try.’

That’s how Sam finds himself in Hell’s Kitchen weekly, trying to fix another man’s mistakes. Clint’s certain he’s having a ball doing it and one of the local law firms, a Nelson and Murdock, offers free legal advice.

It’s kinda awesome, honestly.

*********

Of the entire team, Clint’s sure that Nat would have been the one to push a loophole in Mike’s instructions and enter Hell’s Kitchen. Tony might’ve just bulldozed his way in but everyone’s made it clear if he does so, he faces the consequences alone and Daredevil has enough of a reputation as a brutal and unforgiving vigilante to make even Tony Stark think twice.

That and Pepper’s on his case, keeping him out of the Kitchen even if she has to make him take a longer route home. Between that, and Mike’s reputation, Clint’s not been worried Tony might
ignore Mike’s wishes.

But Nat. Nat’s entire life is living in loopholes and manipulations. If she’d decided to enter Hell’s Kitchen, Clint has no doubt she would have found the justification for her actions.

Thankfully she’s seemingly decided on a different path.

‘Have you noticed our little spider problem?’ Mike asks, breaking a long silence. Well, speaking silence as beside Clint, Thor’s thunderous snores are their own rock concert. Clint’s not sure how he’s going to get Thor home; the God ate an unholy amount of pizza just to prove he could - much to Mike’s amusement - and drifted off to sleep minutes later, using Clint’s jacket as a pillow.

But that’s not what Mike’s commenting on. ‘I might have, yes. Bit of a deadly one.’

Mike’s lips quirk in his usual half smile. ‘At least it seems Hell’s Kitchen is spider free. The problem hasn’t crossed the border.’ He tilts his head south, to where Clint can’t see Nat but is one hundred percent convinced she is. ‘The borders might be having some issues but technically not the city.’

‘A technically good enough for you?’

‘I get the feeling that’s more than anyone else would get.’

Clint smirks at Mike’s astute observation and nods. ‘She’s not normally one to be told not to do something, if she wants to do it.’

Mike just hums in agreement before leaning over Clint to poke at Thor. ‘He’s definitely out,’ he says with a smile.

‘Oh yeah. I’m going to have to carry him home, just watch.’

The smile on Mike’s face is now a grin, but not the dangerous one Clint often sees. This one makes him look young and dorky, despite the intimidating horns. ‘That’ll be a sight to see.’

‘What, me being crushed? Great sight I’m sure.’

Laughing outright now, Mike nods towards Nat. ’Why not ask for help?’

‘You’d allow that?’

‘Might as well.’

Nat’s at their side minutes after Clint calls, her steps across the roof clipped and slow. She’s nervous, Clint realises, though he doubts Mike has the skill to tell - even Clint’s struggling to notice it and he knows Nat as no one else alive does.

‘Hey boys,’ she says in a light voice. ‘Heard you needed someone big and strong to move something around.’

‘Do you understand why I’m angry with you?’ Mike asks, his voice dropping into the deep register he uses while fighting. Clint’s not heard it directed at him in months.

‘Yes,’ Nat says, her voice losing every drop of its lightness. ‘I treated you like the woman I manipulate men into thinking me to be. I underestimated you, and that’s my mistake. I shouldn’t have assumed I knew… that I was best.’
Mike just stares at her, until she shifts minutely. It’s a movement so small Clint only just catches it but Mike’s shoulders relax. ‘That was nearly a genuine, one hundred percent apology. How much do you usually give and mean?’ There’s a hint of amusement in Mike’s voice that has Clint relaxing.

‘Nothing.’

With a hum, Mike turns his back and walks away. ‘Get Thor home,’ he calls over his shoulder. ‘I don’t trust you Miss Widow, but I’m not going to stop you entering my city.’ He lands his jump, perfect as always, then calls over his shoulder, ‘You’re not completely awful.’

Nat turns to him, a single raised eyebrow conveying her surprise. ‘That’s quite a compliment,’ Clint says. ‘He’s not normally so forward.’

Laughing, Nat hauls Thor to his feet and gets one of his arms over her shoulders. Clint takes the other side and together they start to drag the still snoring man to the fire escape.

‘I hope you brought a car.’

‘If we don’t somehow wake him getting down from here, I’ll pay for the taxi.’

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Nat pays for the taxi.

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‘I don’t get you,’ Clint says, wrapping the last bandage around the wound on Mike’s arm; a lucky strike from a mugger. Clint had matched the injury on the attacker, before putting a second arrow in his side.

He’ll live but it’ll hurt.

They’re on their usual roof now, with a box of first aid supplies Mike ducked into the building to ‘borrow’. Clint’s fairly sure this is Mike’s building but he’s not going to press.

‘What do you mean?’ Mike hisses, biting his lips against the pain.

Clint finishes his work, grateful it wasn’t bad enough to need stitches. ‘You’re a Catholic-’

‘I’ve said before-’

‘No,’ Clint cuts in, ‘not the vigilante stuff. That’s a contradiction I’ve figured is just you.’

Mike smiles, shifting his arm and pulling on the hoodie he’d also ‘borrowed’ from inside. The top part of his suit rests beside him and Clint grabs a wet wipe to try and get some of the blood off it before it stains. ‘You don’t know the half of it,’ he says with a smirk. ‘Oh, don’t bother. You’re missing half of it.’

‘The fact you can tell that while not looking should be more disturbing than it is.’

‘I know you.’ Mike shifts the suit, so it’s on the ground before swinging his legs around to dangle over the edge of the roof. ‘What did you mean then?’

Oh yeah. Clint closes up the first aid box and takes a seat beside Mike. It’s not early enough for the sun to be rising but it’s late enough for the night’s darkness to be fading. ‘You’ve never said you
forgive us.’ Mike tenses, a motion he feels more than sees and Clint adds, ‘We don’t deserve your forgiveness and you have no obligation to do so. It’s just, I thought Catholics had to or something.’ He shifts and sighs. ‘My grip on religion is shaky at best.’

‘I did get that. Heathen,’ Mike jokes and Clint huffs a soft laugh. Then it’s Mike’s turn to sigh. ‘I should have. Forgiven you all. If I was a good Catholic but then… I’m not really.’ Clint goes to protest and Mike holds up a hand. ‘No, please don’t. I’m not… but that’s the point almost? No one deserves forgiveness, not on this Earth. But God gives it to us anyway, because he loves us and we’re supposed to follow his example.’

‘But we fucked up so bad-’

‘And forgive us our trepasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,’’ Mike quotes and Clint frowns as he tries to place it. ‘Lord’s prayer,’ Mike adds, reading Clint’s confusion somehow.

‘Yeah, that.’

Mike laughs, a soft sound that Clint’s not sure he actually hears. ‘I think I’ve mostly forgiven you, well ‘you’ as the collective Avengers,’ he says. ‘I just don’t trust most of you.’

‘That’s fair. I wouldn’t trust us either.’ Clint takes a deep breath then adds, ‘If you’re ever free Thursdays-’

‘Movie nights?’

Surprise floods Clint at the words. They keep their movie nights a secret, so no one can take advantage of the information that they’ll all be in one spot on a schedule. ‘Yeah. How’d you know?’

‘Stark mentioned it. Before… before giving me a tablet I can’t use to fix a problem I don’t have.’ Making a face at Mike’s tone Clint says, ‘Right. Well, if you ever want to come, you’re welcome.’

‘Stark’ll be there.’

‘I know,’ Clint says with a sigh. ‘And I get that you don’t like him. You have every right to, he’s been awful and ableist and a jerk - which honestly sums up the worst of Tony - but… movie nights are for the team. And you’re one of us Mike, or near enough to it.’

‘…Matt.’

Clint blinks. ‘What?’

‘It’s Matt. Not Mike.’

The name ‘Matt’ sounds familiar in connection to Daredevil but that’s not what Clint’s focused on. ‘…Fuck I knew you were lying when you said it wasn’t even close to Mike.’

That gets Mike- Matt to laugh, an open, delighted noise. ‘Michael’s my confirmation name though,’ he adds through his laughter.

‘You fucking liar.’

Matt pitches forward a bit and Clint grabs him so he doesn’t fall off the roof. ‘Oh no, I didn’t lie. Bent the truth a bit maybe.’
‘If that’s what helps you sleep. You liar.’

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Matt turns up to movie night three weeks later, dressed in his old black clothes but wearing the new mask.

‘Nice choice,’ Clint says as he leads Matt upstairs. ‘I’m still not sure how you saw out of the last mask.’ Mi… Matt turns his head slightly and Clint adds, ‘Which would make watching a movie hard.’ He eyes Matt’s get up. ‘We’re watching The Princess Bride by the way.’

‘Oh?’ Matt says, a laugh in his voice.

‘Oh yeah,’ Clint says, walking into the already full common room. There’s a pair of seats left right in front of the T.V. just for them. ‘Steve and Thor haven’t seen it and no way are we passing up the chance to watch it with a real Dread Pirate Roberts among us.’

That gets a full laugh from Matt and Tony, walking into the room startles. ‘Holy shit, he laughs.’

Matt cocks an ear in his direction. ‘Well, you’ve not given me much of a reason to laugh Mr Stark.’ He goes to walk past him but Tony steps in his way.

‘Look, I… I want to start again. Tony Stark, Iron Man and man who made an ass of you and me.’

‘Yes you did Mr Stark,’ Matt says, ignoring the hand Tony’s holding out. He steps around him, taking one of the spare seats.

Tony shrugs and perches on the arm of Pepper’s chair. ‘Okay Hornhead. I get it. Call me Tony.’

‘Of course Mr Stark,’ Matt says with a touch of his usual humour in his otherwise cold voice. ‘And I’m sorry miss, you are?’

Pepper raises an eyebrow at Matt’s failure to recognise her. ‘Pepper Potts.’

A genuine smile appears on Matt’s face as Clint sits down beside him. ‘Mike,’ he says and holds himself still as if… as if waiting to be corrected.

Well joke’s on him, Clint’s keeping his name to himself. ‘So Mike, you ever seen this?’

‘Used to watch it as a kid with my Dad,’ Mike says softly, turning his head so Clint alone can see his lips. ‘Haven’t seen it since then.’

‘Well you’re seeing it now,’ Sam says as he turns the T.V. on. ‘We can’t let Steve exist one more hour without seeing this.’

That makes Matt grin for some reason, like he’s laughing at a private joke. ‘Yeah, can’t have that.’

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While he’s not there every movie night, Matt starts to make it to at least one a month. Tony takes care to not talk to him unless talked to - Steve’s many talks on what he did wrong seem to have sunk in - and they’ve almost fallen into something of a truce. A truce that might not be the friendliest - Matt taking a seeming pride in calling Tony ‘Mr Stark’ no matter how the man protests - but it is a truce.

It’s six movies in, when Matt drops the bombshell Clint’s sure he’s been hiding.
‘What are we watching this time?’ he asks as he walks into the room, the last to arrive as usual.

‘Some Pixar movie!’ Clint calls from the kitchen, throwing the last of the popcorn he’s cooked into a bowl. ‘What some?’ He offers as he passes Matt on the way to the couch.

Matt wrinkles his nose as he follows. ‘Not if you paid me. Which movie is it?’ he asks Steve, who’s certain to know or at least know who knows.

‘Good Dinosaur?’ Steve asks, turning to Sam. Sam nods and Steve turns back to Matt. ‘The Good Dinosaur,’ he says with more confidence.

Clint finishes pass the bowls of popcorn around and drops into the seat beside Matt. ‘If you’ve seen it no spoilers.’ So far Matt’s somehow seen all the movies they’ve watched, though to be fair as they’re trying to catch Steve and Thor up on pop culture the choices have always been commonly seen movies.

‘No, I’ve not seen it,’ Matt says, that note of amusement back in his voice.

‘That’s a first,’ Tony says as he takes the final seat. ‘Pixar not your thing?’

‘Just a new movie I’ve not had time to see.’ Sam picks up the remote to start the movie but Matt holds up a hand to stop him. ‘I’ve ah, not seen it yet.’

Everyone in the room is looking at him now and something is poking at Clint. Wait… ‘So?’ Nat asks in a soft voice.

‘Does this have audio description?’ The note of amusement in Matt’s voice is basically a laugh now.

‘Oh,’ someone says, or maybe everyone says, as what Matt’s asking for - what he needs - dawns on them. Though he can see the surprise in the faces of his teammates, Clint’s barely feeling any. Matt being blind makes everything Clint’s noticed make sense and he just feels relief to not have to reach a conclusion based on the evidence he has. He’d probably get it wrong. Again.

As the knowledge settles, Clint finds himself remembering the figure in red, falling to his knees as an arrow buried in his attacker’s shoulder.

No, the figure in red dropping to his knees before the arrow hit. How keen must Matt’s hearing be to compensate for his blindness and let him hear an arrow fire when he’s half dead.

‘Blind,’ Tony breathes and Matt tenses. ‘Blind. I can’t- no.’ He cuts himself off before anyone can comment, looking at Matt’s tense body. ‘Okay. Blind. Cool. You need anything; tell me. Stark industries is at your disposal.’

Matt beams, there’s no other word for it. ‘I’ll keep it in mind Tony.’

A light enters Tony’s eyes and he opens his mouth a couple of times, clearly unable to speak.

‘Oh good work,’ Nat says. ‘You’ve got him gaping like a fish and completely silent.’

‘Didn’t think that was possible,’ Steve adds.

Tony finds his voice. ‘Oh screw you two. And you too. I can be silent.’

‘No you can’t,’ Bruce says mildly as Sam flicks through the audio options. ‘J.A.R.V.I.S., any audio description?’
'There will be momentarily,' J.A.R.V.I.S says, a note in his voice that Clint takes a moment to place. It’s the same note Tony gets when he says ‘There will be’ but actually means ‘There will be soon because I’m going to either make it myself or find it for you’. ‘My apologies Mr Mike, for not having it ready earlier.’

Matt lowers his head, hiding his smile from the room. ‘It’s fine Jarvis. Usually Fo- a friend of mine does the description.’

A mini fight breaks out as Steve, Thor and Tony all declare they can do the commentary. Watching the fight, Clint starts to wonder. Blind and named Matt rings a bell…

Daredevil’s take of Fisk had involved a law firm, Nelson and Murdock, and Clint remembers the endless articles and media reports on blind Matt Murdock, who’d become a lawyer despite all the odds against him. Become a lawyer good enough to help bring down a crime lord even; look at how awesome he is. Best kind of inspiration porn; the type the media ate up.

Smiling himself, aware he knows everything he needs to about Matt and isn’t going to say a word, he turns to look at his friend. ‘Think they’re getting the hang of this?’

‘Maybe,’ Matt says with a shrug. ‘Time will tell.’

Works inspired by this one:  
[None So Blind [podfic]] by [badfinch (Badfinch1)]

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